

# Difference and Identity in Piano Performance Information <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> The Fourth International Conference on Philosophy of Information, Berkeley, CA, USA, 2–6 June 2019.

Published: 2 June 2020

**Abstract:** With the arrival of the information society, the research on the philosophy of music art has been paid more and more attention to, and the difference and identity in the information of piano performance is worth our deep thinking. In the new era of social information, it is a timely topic which breaks through the traditional research methods of piano art and utilizes the research system of information philosophy. Based on the perspective of information philosophy, this paper attempts to reveal the difference and identity of the main body of piano performance information by observing the ontology and law of music art research and applying the basic principle of information philosophy theory. Thus, the guiding significance of information philosophy in piano performance is discussed and further analyzed.

**Keywords:** information philosophy; piano performance; difference; identity

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## 1. Information Philosophy

Information theory is a basic discipline which is widely used and its influence is almost universal in all application fields. Claude Shannon, an American scientist and the founder of information theory, believes that information is something used to eliminate uncertainty, and the amount of information is quantifiable (the amount of information is equal to the amount of uncertainty eliminated). The information philosophy system founded by Professor Wu Kun, known as “the pioneer of Chinese information philosophy”, has realized the fundamental turn of the basic philosophical problems, due to the redefinition and division of “being”. Information philosophy believes it is not material (objective) plus spirit (subjective) that builds the concept of existence, but the objective and not real information (indirect existence) as a way of general existence, recognition form, value dimension, evolution principle, and from the level of metaphilosophy, to construct new information ontology, epistemology, etc. In the sense of ontology unique characteristics and value of information, is precisely the basis on which information philosophy can be called “metaphilosophy”, “first philosophy”.

Any true philosophy is the quintessence of its own time. In the era of information, information philosophy has become a philosophy reflecting the essence of the spirit of the times, which profoundly and comprehensively demonstrates its significant and far-reaching significance and value [1]. Because of the information relationship between people and the outside world, as well as the basis of possibility caused by “in-itself information” activities, it is the basic path for the development of people’s cognition activities to move from “information for-itself” to “regenerated information”. Therefore, it is of great significance for promoting people’s interpretation of musical works to analyze the difference and identity of people in piano performance activities from the perspective of information philosophy!

## 2. Information Phenomenon in Piano Performance

When the philosophical thinking method is applied to tangible and practical fields such as politics, history, science and technology, art, etc., the corresponding branch philosophy will be generated like political philosophy, historical philosophy, philosophy of science and technology, art philosophy, etc. We have gained insights into these branches of philosophy in the general history of philosophy. However, the application of philosophical thinking of information to the intangible music, especially to the art of piano performance, for philosophical thinking and theoretical interpretation, rarely comes into sight for philosophers.

With meta-philosophical characteristics, information philosophy unfolds the dual existence of the world. As an information phenomenon, piano performance is obviously an operation and creation of social information. People always revel in beautiful music, but rarely think and ask, what is the nature of music? What does piano performing mean? How does the playing information we hear generate? Is it a wave of air vibrating? Is it a physiological process during which sound waves are produced by the auditory nervous system? Is it a psychological experience caused by the sound act on the human heart? The following stages can be revealed by analyzing the progressive construction of humans' information activities with the theory of information philosophy: the assimilation and alienation of the information of various kinds of sound that the creator has been exposed to before, as well as the transformation to the information state of "subjective presentation"; to establish the information encoding of temporary connection by recognizing the perceptual information of all kinds of sounds; the subject subjectively transforms the memory storage of information and then decomposes and combines it, and then creates playing information subjectively; from further judgment, reasoning to logical deduction, an "external object" is transformed into purposeful and planned information; the action instruction generated by the subject's mind control acts on the object through finger movement, thus achieving the artistic practice process of the subject's information creation. Therefore, we should understand that there is a difference between the subject and the object, and this is between the finite and the infinite.

## 3. Difference and Identity in Piano Performance Information

Identity is regarded as the principle of speculative philosophy (the relation in contrast). Hegel's speculative philosophy says that

the idea, as we have seen, is in general a concrete spiritual unity. But the character of understanding consists only in its recognition of the abstractness of the categories or concepts, that is, one-sidedness and finitude. Therefore, the concrete spiritual unity is regarded by understanding as an abstract, unspiritual identity, in which everything is one and there is no differences, and in other areas even good and evil are the same.

Therefore, it is important to understand the similarities and differences. True philosophers teach us about differences in different ways, but the mere recognition of differences is not enough to realize the understanding. Therefore, we should not only see the "differences" but also see the "connection", especially find the intermediate links (mediations) so as to truly reach the understanding.

Roman Ingarden (1893–1970), a Polish philosopher and aesthete, pointed out in his article *Musical Works and Their Identity* published in the 1950s that music is a "purely intentional object", which is different from the usual "actual object". The music itself is neither the sound waves that reverberate in a concert hall, nor the music book on the shelf, nor the psychological feeling of the audience. These are all real things, while music is "non-real things", "intentional objects", and the product of intentional activities of creators, appreciators and performers; its existence depends on people's intention activities. From Ingarden's point of view, the proposition that music is "intentional object" not only explains the essential characteristics of music, but also the unique mode of existence of music; that is, the intentional existence of non-reality (information).

As music exists in the form of non-real intentional information, its different characteristics are shown in piano performance. According to Michel Foucault, the purpose of recognition is not to find out the common factors under differences, but to understand differences "differentially", that is, to

focus on the study of different thoughts. In terms of self-expression and musical text, which is responsible for the criterion of interpretation? Is there an identity between them in the language of philosophy? If the problem of identity exists, can it be used as a criterion for piano performance? Is a piece of music the same as the performance of the piece? In fact, the artistic style originally has the characteristics of diversification and identity; different players, even the same player, perform the same work differently. The comprehension of Hamlet varies from reader to reader. However, the dimension of interpreting works cannot be measured simply from the level of playing techniques, but also from the psychological, physiological and cultural levels, such as thinking, consciousness and feeling of playing.

The generation of any reasonable sound presentation mode is the result of the performer's exploration of the music book and himself, reflects the harmony and unity between the music book and the performer [2]. In "Difference and Repetition", Gilles Deleuze proposed that "existence is difference" and difference is everywhere. What piano performance pursues is to grasp its diversity, difference and identity, rather than what Hegel said about "Absolute indifference" etc.

Therefore, piano performance itself is a highly complex system that integrates differences and identity.

From the angle of general aesthetics and philosophy, technique is the performer's ability to represent the level of his thoughts through "material". This is the ability to drive the players to reach the professional level; a kind of ability to make the performer realize his idea and "materialize". The complexity of piano performance itself also reflects its unity as social information, and its individual differences are also reflected in the process of creative thinking. The emergence of some conclusions is often unexpected without the clarity of the process of thinking consciousness, which is what people call "inspiration", "intuition", etc. As the nature of the reasoning process of "inspiration" and "intuition" is not clear, people often make some mysterious explanations, or name it "divine revelation", but if we look at it in the way of information activity, "inspiration" or "intuition" is not a magical thing [3].

Piano performance, to some extent, belongs to the realm of pure meaning; that is, a variant of emotion expression. As the non-logical difference of meaning, performance is in constant decomposition and combination, and all musical elements (melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, mode, tonality, etc.) are permeated and inseparable from each other. The increments of infinite possibilities are as closely related as mathematics. Therefore, musical art is the integration and unification of external differences, while piano performance is the integration and unification of fluid or successive differences, which is the unity of existence and non-existence, logical and non-logical things.

Imagine that a piece of music that once gave you a wonderful impression is always beyond the melody of the performance. The performance would lose its pure meaning and separate the difference and identity in the performance information. Information philosophy holds that in people's cognitive activities, the mediation between the subject and object is complex and multipolar, and because of this multilevel mediation, which makes people's understanding, to a certain extent, dependent on the multistage intermediary activities, this understanding in the mediation is inevitably selected, changed, transformed, and constructed. It is in the corresponding meaning of the different relation of information, we emphasize that "discrimination is based on difference" and cognition is "construction based on mediation". Therefore, the interaction between subject and object is a complex multi-stage mediation process [4].

Music creation, performance, and the appreciation of three different text unifies and fuses mutually; artistic conception produced by piano performing, as a kind of intentional existence, faces the problem of reconstruction in the procedure of "first creation", "second creation", "third creation", however, for the music performance of "second creation", rebuilding resembles "empathy" (empathy); in psychology, empathy is object's subjectification, personification and contextualization. It is also the objectification, externalization and materialization of subject emotions (information). The

projection and transformation of subjective emotion in aesthetic transference is a process of mutual penetration and advancement.

Piano performance involves quite complex techniques, which is a natural and seemingly unavoidable requirement. Piano poet Chopin said, “Art is something with strict philosophy, enriched by geniuses, with a set of rules, and bound by superior laws”. This unspoken stipulation is included in general emotion experience and the industry technique method. However, even if Chopin himself plays his own work, each performance cannot be exactly the same. Bach, the “father of western music”, said of his creation,

through my music I try to show the world the construction of a new, harmonious social community. It is the civilization order and self-restraint of each component that spontaneously regulates the freedom of individuals to achieve the harmony of the whole society. That’s my message. It is not the dictatorship of a single monotonous and stubborn melody, nor is it an anarchy of chaotic sounds. It’s a delicate balance between the two, a freedom of civilization. This is the science of my art and the art of my science.

Like the stars in the sky (relatively independent and in harmony), this is the secret of Bach’s music. He developed his playing skills to an unprecedented level. Before Bach, music took vocal music as the main body, and pure “music” is the art of “sound”, which must be played with instrumental music. Just because piano works are like songs without “words”, their performance is more diverse, that is, with style and personality. For example, Mendelssohn’s piano piece “Song without Words”, although there are no lyrics, but the beautiful melody gives people a broader space for reveries, revealing a broader and profound thought. Mendelssohn thought his song without words was more explicit than the words. In a letter to a friend, he wrote:

if you ask me what I thought when I wrote this song, I would say: ‘just as what the song expresses’. Although I have specific words in mind when I write some of those songs, I still don’t want to tell anyone, because words don’t mean the same to everyone, only this song without words can say the same thing to everyone and evoke the same feeling [5].

It is worth noting that Mendelssohn’s piano works are always discernible in terms of the lyrical and honest style of the German folk tunes, no matter how abstruse and abstruse to the development of his piano works in depicting the complexity and diversity of musical images. Isn’t the difference and identity in the playing information? Therefore, the same work will have many different versions and playing styles, and specific playing techniques and emotional experience will also be personalized performance. Aaron Ridley, a British philosopher, believes that “performance is an adaptation or interpretation of a musical work that has been performed, and it itself is like a work of art that can be evaluated and appreciated aesthetically”. Therefore, there exists only “correct playing”, and there is no only correct ideal playing. There are no versions which could be the only classics. In fact, due to the seemingly incomplete notation system, the infinite possibilities of musical performance interpretation are brought to light.

#### 4. Conclusions

Piano performance itself has the unity of difference, independence and transcendence, and the recognition of the difference in performance does not mean the denial of the identity of the original work, as whether a work is successful and impressive or not is a manifestation of its difference. And the real great performance should be both rational and rigorous without losing the creativity of inspiration, withstanding the scrutiny of time. Therefore, no matter whether or not it relates to skill or emotion, the information of piano performance reflects the individual difference and the established identity paradigm. The true philosophy of performance requires us to grasp the identity in the difference, and at the same time distinguish the difference in the identity.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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