Musical Hyperrealism: Exploring Noah Creshevsky's compositions through Jean Baudrillard's ideas

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While a familiar term in art history, philosophy and cultural studies, 'hyperrealism' is rarely applied to music. This is despite Noah Creshevsky's use of the term to describe his unique compositional process and aesthetic approach. A composer of electroacoustic music and founder of the Brooklyn College Center for Computer Music, Creshevsky has described his musical hyperrealism as a 'language constructed from sounds that are found in our shared environment ("realism"), handled in ways that are somehow exaggerated or excessive ("hyper")'. In this article, I summarise the ideas behind Creshevsky's hyperreal music and compare them to philosopher Jean Baudrillard's theorisation of the hyperreal. Numerous similarities between Creshevsky and Baudrillard's ideas will be made evident. The first half of this article focuses on Creshevsky's sampling of sounds as 'simulacra' and how the interweaving textures and melodies that Creshevsky makes out of these samples are similar to 'simulations'. In the article's second half, Creshevsky's creation of disembodied 'superperformers' is addressed and related to Baudrillard's transhumanism. Towards the end of the article, Creshevsky's aesthetic more broadly and what he calls 'hyperdrama' are linked to Baudrillard's 'transaesthetics', before a concluding note addressing Baudrillard and Creshevsky's different dispositions towards hyperrealism.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is hyperreal music? Although a familiar term in art history (Taylor 2009) and cultural studies (Eco 1986; Borgmann 1992), hyperrealism is rarely applied to musical composition or sound.[1] This is despite composer Noah Creshevsky's use of the term to describe his unique compositional and aesthetic approach. Born in 1945, Creshevsky studied with Nadia Boulanger, Virgil Thomson and Luciano Berio before joining the faculty of Brooklyn College, CUNY in 1969 – where he later helped found the Brooklyn College Center for Computer Music (retiring in 2000). Creshevsky died in December 2020 at the age of 75, after being diagnosed with cancer.

This article explores Creshevsky's music through the ideas of philosopher Jean Baudrillard, one of the key theorists of hyperrealism as a cultural and philosophical concept. In doing so, it will elucidate Creshevsky's unique compositional approach (hopefully encouraging further discussion of his work) and will also contribute to the transdisciplinary study of hyperrealism by applying Baudrillard's ideas to music and sound.[2]

Creshevsky very succinctly defines his musical hyperrealism as 'an electroacoustic musical language constructed from sounds that are found in our shared environment ("realism"), handled in ways that are somehow exaggerated or excessive ("hyper")' (Creshevsky 2007a: 66). Influenced by Pierre Schaeffer's musique concrète, as well as Andy Warhol's pop art, Creshevsky's hyperreal music is a direct response to our contemporary consumer-oriented, mass-mediated and information-rich society. As a reaction against the outdated 'economy of means' that he claims is still present in Western art music – its incessant reliance on the same forms, instruments and 12 tones – Creshevsky borrows sound samples from all available sources, including classical, popular and folk music recordings, as well as noises and sounds taken from mass-media and everyday life.

As a composer of electroacoustic music, Creshevsky began releasing his work in the 1970s;[3] compact disc recordings followed in the 1990s with the albums *Man & Superman* (Creshevsky 1992) and *Who* (Creshevsky 1993) – both of which offer good overviews of his work from this period. The composer's adoption of digital technology resulted in smoother sounding transitions between samples, as heard on later collections such as *Hyperrealism* (Creshevsky 2003) and *Hyperrealist Music, 2011–2015* (Creshevsky 2015). Additionally, Creshevsky has released albums on John Zorn's

[1]Although, the term has some coinage is discussions on music that either use (Çamci and Granzow 2019) or is in (Ivnescu 2015) new media. Luc Ferrari has also used the term to refer to his *Presque Riens* works (Caux 2012), although he does so with reference to the painterly style rather than to any philosophical concept.

[2]Baudrillard's notion of 'simulacra' – discussed further later – has previously been used to refer to samples in hip hop (Manuel 1995) and in mashups (Maloy 2010). Baudrillard's ideas on globalism, meanwhile, have been used to address debates around 'world music' (Erlmann 1996) and musical orientalism (Bloechl 2005).

[3]Creshevsky's early tape works were later re–released on EM Records, as *The Tape Music of Noah Creshevsky, 1971–1992* (Creshevsky 2004).

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Tzadik label: *To Know and Not To Know* (Creshevsky 2007b), *The Twilight of the Gods* (Creshevsky 2010) and *The Four Seasons* (Creshevsky 2013) – the last being a highly idiosyncratic contribution to a tradition of programmatic music dating back (at least) to Vivaldi's famous concerti (Oteri 2013). Creshevsky has also contributed an essay, explaining his aesthetic approach, to Zorn's *Arcana II* collection – but aside from this and a few overviews in the popular press (Gann 2004; Báthory-Kitsz 2007), his work has received surprisingly little attention in musicological or sound studies to date.[4]

Responding to similar social surroundings as Creshevsky, Baudrillard uses the term hyperrealism to diagnose contemporary society – where communication technologies have created experiences that although heightening or emulating certain facets of reality, are in fact more 'intense and involving' than real life ever could be (Kellner 2019). As a result, subjects lose their grounding in reality as it converges with its own artificial emulations, coalescing into a single plane. In the hyperreal there is no longer 'any distinction between the real and the imaginary' (Baudrillard 1994: 3), since 'every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle' (Baudrillard 1993a: 2). In this article, I borrow numerous concepts from Baudrillard to address different facets of Creshevsky's music; yet it should be stated beforehand that Baudrillard initially developed these ideas to make broad sociological and ontological claims; they hence undergo some alterations when used to illuminate the more limited realm of Creshevsky's music.

According to Creshevsky, his hyperreal music has two primary features: the first is the use of diverse sounds as samples in what he calls 'sound palettes', and the second is the use of vocal and instrumental samples to create 'superperformers'. As I show early on in this article, the samples used in Creshevsky's sound palettes are comparable to the 'simulacra' Baudrillard claimed constitute hyperreality. The interweaving textures and melodies that Creshevsky makes out of these samples are, in turn, similar to 'simulations' (which, according to Baudrillard, simulacra make up). Additionally, Creshevsky's use of samples from numerous cultures is comprehended via Baudrillard's linkage of hyperrealism to globalisation.

In the second half of this article, Creshevsky's creation of superperformers from past vocal and instrumental recordings is linked to Baudrillard's thoughts on transhumanism. Creshevsky's vocal superperformers and his common eroticisation of their voices are specifically related to Baudrillard's concept of 'transsexuality'. Creshevsky states that together his two forms of musical hyperrealism create 'hyperdrama', which I link towards the end of this article to Baudrillard's 'transaesthetics', concluding with a note on Baudrillard and Creshevsky's different dispositions towards hyperrealism.

[4]As an exception, Bob L. Sturm addresses the technical aspects of Creshevsky's sampling, relating it to a broader compositional technique that he calls 'micromontage' (Sturm 2006).

2. SOUND PALETTES

In his hyperreal compositions, Creshevsky uses what he calls 'sound palettes'. Each palette is a unique set of sounds collected for use in a single composition; each work therefore has its own unique palette. Some of these palettes are what Creshevsky calls 'extended' – implementing a diverse range of sonic material (as in *Canto Di Malavita*, for instance) – while others are 'restricted', incorporating only a small selection of sounds (as heard in *Variations*). All sound palettes are what Creshevsky calls 'open', meaning that sound-types are not excluded due to their origins: Creshevsky obtains sounds from various musical styles as well as from non-musical sources – a sonic pluralism that clearly adheres to John Cage's famous credo that composers must confront 'the entire field of sound' (Cage 1973: 4).

Creshevsky likens his non-hierarchical use of 'musical' and 'non-musical' sounds to the use of non-painterly materials by visual artists such as Robert Rauschenberg. He also compares it to the sound editing in film and television, admiring the combination of 'sound effects' (or 'non-musical' sounds) with music and dialogue commonly found in these mediums. As Creshevsky states:

> Soundtracks and commercials are the best examples. That's where hyperrealism is found routinely. If you take the best moments from good movies and you close your eyes, you're hearing a collection of music, sound effects, subverbal utterances, verbal utterances – the whole soundtrack. (Báthory-Kitsz 2007)

In the following, I apply Baudrillard's terms 'simulacra' and 'simulation' to Creshevsky's music and his sampling process. The sounds Creshevsky abducts from past recordings to use in his work are considered simulacra, while the new compositions into which these samples are placed are simulations. Creshevsky also considers his use of samples a type of universal sonic language – something I connect to Baudrillard's understanding of hyperrealism as a conjunct of globalisation.

2.1. Simulacra

According to Baudrillard, hyperrealism is 'produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models' (Baudrillard 1994: 2), where signs become simulacra: copies with no originals; or with originals that are

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no longer recognisable; or originals that no longer exist. The idea that simulacra are copies without originals is, at face value, contradictory or paradoxical (how can something be recognised as a copy if what it is a copy of is unknown?); yet this contradiction is precisely what makes the term appropriate for Creshevsky's samples. Creshevsky's samples are simulacra because they are taken from elsewhere and are recognisable as copies, although their precise sources – or what they are copies of – often cannot be fully determined.

On the one hand, the samples Creshevsky collects are generally very short (often less than a second) – 'so terribly tiny as to defy identification even by the original composers and performers' (Creshevsky 2001: 97) – and this makes the precise origins for these samples difficult to ascertain (for an example of just how brief the samples in Creshevsky's works can be, listen to *Talea* from the album *Man and Superman*). Creshevsky explains how the brevity of his samples is enabled by 'a digital environment' that allows 'durations of borrowed musical fragments [to] be *decreased* to a point where … no-one can identify their origins' (Creshevsky 2001: 94).[5] Despite these claims, Creshevsky also frequently (though contradictorily) maintains that recognising sound-origins is important to an appreciation of his work.[6] Indeed, the instrumental and even stylistic or cultural origins for his samples can be easily determined at times, even if the compositions or songs they came from can rarely, if ever, be traced.[7] According to Creshevsky, something 'Essential to the concept of hyperrealism is that its sounds are generally of natural origin, and that they remain sufficiently unprocessed so that their origin is perceived by the listener as being "natural"' (Creshevsky 2007a: 67); Creshevsky claims that the sounds he uses are 'familiar to nearly all of us', being taken from 'our' shared environment (ibid.: 67).

Creshevsky's sampling of sounds does not, therefore, entirely eradicate a sense of their origins; nonetheless, there is a diminishing in the associations and extra-sonic information that is obtainable from these samples once they are extracted from their source-recordings and placed by Creshevsky in a new composition. The somewhat contradictory claims Creshevsky has made regarding his samples, and the relationship they have to their origins, makes the term 'simulacra' suitable for them. For Baudrillard, the hyperreal comprises signs that have been abducted from their original contexts and forced into a free exchange. In hyperreality, nothing is ever produced anew but is only ever reproduced, instigating a 'meticulous reduplication of the real … through another reproductive medium' (Baudrillard 1993a: 71). Whereas 'representations' are copies that clearly relate back to an original – which then acts as a representation's referent or meaning – hyperreal simulacra are copies taken out of their original contexts, losing most of their relationship to an original that could act as a referent or meaning. Creshevsky's short sound samples are similarly recognisable as copies even if information regarding what they are copies of is largely effaced due to their brevity and because they are 'reassembled in ways that have little or no discernible relationships to the original sources' (Creshevsky 2001: 94). A listener can grasp just enough information from these sounds to tell that they are copies of something, yet not enough to ascertain *what* exactly they are copies of (beyond some broad causal or stylistic type – discussed further later); this is the 'liquidation of referentials' that Baudrillard claimed is at work in hyperreality (Baudrillard 1994: 2).

Creshevsky's sampling does not liquidate all referentials equally, however; certain types of origins (which act as referents or meanings) are effaced from Creshevsky's samples more easily than are others. The origins least susceptible to liquidation are 'causal' origins, particularly when the sample is of a traditional, easily recognised instrument; for instance, the atonal melody that begins *Canto Di Malavita* is clearly made up of samples taken from a sitar recording (Creshevsky 2003). At the other end of the spectrum are compositional origins – a knowledge of the precise piece a sample is taken from – which are very rarely discernible. Closely related to compositional origins are syntactic origins: knowledge of the musical syntax a sound had in its source-recording (a chord initially used as part of a plagal cadence takes on its role in this cadence as a syntactical meaning, but it loses this meaning once extracted from the cadence and placed elsewhere). Between the extremes of causal and compositional/syntactical origins are stylistic and cultural origins, which are reliant on either recognition of an instrument or a sample's distinct timbre (many sounds can be heard as 'popular' or 'classical' music, even if little else is discernible).

Yet very often, stylistic, cultural and even causal origins are totally effaced from Creshevsky's samples, along with compositional and syntactical referents. These samples – where all indices of origins are lost – are pure simulacra. These sounds are nonetheless still

[5]That Creshevsky's music relies on digitisation is itself a link to Baudrillard's conception of hyperreality, where signs are also 'digitised' into non–hierarchical components, entering a 'system of equivalences' to be 'resurrected' as simulacra in the space of simulation (Baudrillard 1994: 2).

[6]This tension between an unprocessed use of samples, so that they refer to their origins, and their decontextualization and manipulation, where they lose all indices of their origin to become absolute or pure sonorities, was already played out by Schaeffer in his musique concrète experiments (Kahn 2001: 110).

[7]That the original songs or pieces for Creshevsky's samples are rarely ascertainable sets his hyperreal approach apart from the 'plunderphonics' of his contemporary John Oswald (2006).

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heard as samples, or as copies of something (a sample is always a copy) – as opposed to newly synthesised or computerised sounds (and this appears to be what Creshevsky means when he says that a sound is to be heard as 'natural' – that it is not synthetic) – but there is no indication of what they are samples of. Like Baudrillard's simulacra, these samples are copies with no discernible origins.

2.2. Simulation

If the samples Creshevsky uses are considered simulacra, then the new compositions into which they are placed can be called simulations (which is what Baudrillard claims simulacra make up). Creshevsky arranges his collected sound-fragments into new orders, and sometimes electronically manipulates them slightly, to form new melodies and harmonies. As the composer himself states:

> The overall sound of my music is predominantly made by the linear and harmonic ordering of found objects. The consecutive linear juxtaposition of sample fragments produces melodies (I call this process 'integration'). The simultaneous striking of two or more sample fragments produces harmonies (I call this process 'fusion'). (Creshevsky 2001: 96)

Together, these two processes form interweaving textures familiar to Western classical music. Creshevsky considers his suturing of samples an updated form of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, since these sounds are melodically unified despite timbral dispersion (even if the melody is atonal). As with simulacra in the realm of simulation, the removal of sounds from their original context and the so-called liquidation of their referentials allows them to enter a 'free exchange', to associate with sounds they never could have associated with in their original context.

Creshevsky's *Klangfarbenmelodie* can be heard very clearly in the middle of *Fanfare*, where a repeated violin run is intersected by minute fragments of popular songs, along with other nondescript sounds, to form a repetitive but timbrally scattered motif (Creshevsky 1993). Creshevsky's *Jacob's Ladder* is also exemplary, featuring an operatic female vocal line that is seamlessly intersected by piano runs, expressive cello playing, deep male vocals and numerous other sampled sounds (Creshevsky 2003). Creshevsky's use of samples to simulate the flow and texture of Western classical music is taken to an almost parodic level at the end of his piece *Et puis*, where tiny sound-fragments are used to reconstruct the melody and texture of Modest Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* (Creshevsky 1993).

Once in their new compositional environment, these sound samples have a new context and meaning presumably dissimilar to that which they had in their original environment. This further emphasises their status as simulacra, since what little information may be left regarding their origins is now made rather irrelevant to an understanding of how they work in their new setting. This is particularly prevalent regarding musical syntax: the new position of a sample in Creshevsky's *Klangfarbenmelodie* imbues it with syntactical meanings different from those it would have had in its source-recording. Cultural and stylistic referents, on the other hand, can actually multiply thanks to Creshevsky's recontextualising of samples; for instance, the sitar melody that begins *Canto Di Malavita* takes on stylistic connotations of Hindustani classical music, Bollywood soundtracks and 1960s psychedelic pop – even though only one of these styles would have been directly relevant to the samples in their original context. Here, the liquidation of referentials results in what Creshevsky calls 'an environment with indefinite but abundant historical and emotional links' (Creshevsky 2001: 96): the vacuum of uncertainty regarding a sound's cultural or stylistic origins is filled in with all plausible possibilities. Even causal origins can become confused, so that a listener considers a sound to have a source that it does not in fact have (as is the case with the voice samples in *Borrowed Time*, discussed in the next section). This projection of causality onto a sound – which may or may not be its actual cause – is what Michel Chion calls 'figurative listening' (Chion 2016).

2.3. A global musical language

Creshevsky believes that his use of 'naturally' recognisable sounds comprises a 'new and versatile' musical language (Creshevsky 2007a: 66). He claims that his

> intention is to integrate archetypal sonic elements to produce a natural and expressive musical language. This is a language whose vocabulary is an inclusive, limitless sonic compendium, free of ethnic and national particularity. (Creshevsky 2001: 96)

Creshevsky acknowledges the obvious difficulties in constructing this all-inclusive, universal language of sound, knowing that 'the sounds of our environment vary from year to year, generation to generation, and culture to culture', which makes it 'impossible to isolate a definitive encyclopedia of "natural" sounds' (Creshevsky 2007a: 67). Nonetheless, he believes that there are still 'a great many sounds that are familiar to nearly all of us', and it is these sounds which he aims to isolate as 'the most basic building blocks in the formation of a shared (if temporary) collective sonic reality' (ibid.: 67).[8]

[8]This brings Creshevsky's intent close to the myth of a 'pure language' (a language that communicates directly by defying the

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While Creshevsky has tied this wish to create a universal musical language to 'social and political models that embrace the many as opposed to the few' (Creshevsky 2001: 91), the very idea that an all-encompassing musical language 'free of ethnic and national particularity' could be possible presupposes globalisation. Creshevsky partly attributes his dream of a shared musical language to his own residency in the global city of New York, where the sounds of numerous cultures can be heard in a relatively compact space (although New York is hardly unique in this sense). Consequently, Creshevsky argues for the removal of the prefix 'ethnic' from terms such as 'ethnic music' or 'ethnic instrument', believing that all instruments and sounds should be placed on an equal plane. He also argues for the dissolution of ethnomusicology, given that musicology should include the study of all music (something recently advocated for by Stephen Amico 2020). This attitude is evident in *Canto Di Malavita*, which includes sitar and tabla in its opening (instruments that have themselves been globalised through their use in Western popular music and Bollywood soundtracks), alongside snippets taken from recordings of Western popular songs and classical music. The title of this work is additionally shared with an album, released a few years prior to Creshevsky's composition, of music associated with the Sicilian mafia, adding yet another layer to the cultural hybridity of the piece.

Baudrillard mentions globalisation throughout his theorisation of hyperrealism, although the philosopher has a much more negative take on the phenomenon than does Creshevsky. For Baudrillard, the global is distinguished from the universal, the latter being a system of values that hierarchically orders differences but nonetheless allows for their mediation and recognition as singularities; contrarily, the global is a non-hierarchical flattening out and eradication of all differences (Baudrillard 2002: 155–9). An accusation of eradicating differences may indeed be levelled at Creshevsky's work, since the cultural origins of his samples are often lost or skewed once they enter his *Klangfarbenmelodien*. Creshevsky's wish to embrace the many over the few may be at the expense of diversity, resulting in a homogenising of the many into the same.[9] Creshevsky's composition *Borrowed Time* on the album *Auxesis* (Creshevsky/Amirkhanian 1995), for instance, uses excerpts from recordings of 'Middle Eastern, Asian, and Western sacred and secular music (including opera)', seeking 'to integrate a vast spectrum of sources to form a unified musical fabric' (Creshevsky 2001: 91). However, as a result of this 'integration', the original sources for these sounds are often confused or lost. Creshevsky himself has stated that the opening of *Borrowed Time* 'sounds Eastern or Asian to me, although, as I recall, it was made of single-note samples of Gregorian chant' (Creshevsky 2001: 96–7).

Creshevsky nonetheless intends for his musical syncretism to be positive, constructive and progressive – at odds with Baudrillard's more cynical take on globalisation. Creshevsky's blending of sonic cultures is meant to show that 'a harmonious co-existence of widely disparate musical elements is also a viable possibility' (ibid.: 92). Between Creshevsky and Baudrillard's positions we see in miniature a fairly typical pro-and-con debate around globalisation, as something that either accommodates for or eradicates differences (see, Appadurai 1990; Hesmondhalgh & Born 2000: 25). I consider the conflict between Creshevsky and Baudrillard's approaches to hyperrealism a little more closely in my conclusion, but as I have noted here, both composer and philosopher link globalisation – its 'evening out' of cultures, and by extension their sounds – to their broader conceptualisations of hyperrealism.

3. SUPERPERFORMERS

The second key feature of Creshevsky's musical hyperrealism is his formation of 'superperformers'. Creshevsky rearranges sounds taken from previous instrumental or vocal recordings into unperformable sequences and combinations, and often runs them at speeds beyond that of human dexterity. Influenced by the nineteenth-century virtuoso tradition of Paganini and Liszt, as well as the player-piano experiments of Colon Nancarrow,[10] Creshevsky creates superperformers to explore 'the possibilities that become available once instruments and voices are liberated from the limitations of human anatomy' (Creshevsky 2007a: 71). The aptly titled *Breathless* is a case in point, where snippets of vocal recordings form a melody, the timbral diversity of which exceeds that of any singular voice (Creshevsky 1993); the speed this work is 'sung' at is also beyond the capabilities of any human diaphragm, throat or tongue. *Red Carpet* meanwhile provides excellent examples of instrumental superperformers, due not only to the excessive speed and fluidity of the violin and trumpet runs in this

arbitrary division between signifier and signified) – a notion that was notably deconstructed by Jacques Derrida (1976).

[9]Bjorn Heile (Heile 2009) has linked the eradication of cultural differences in Stockhausen's supposedly 'universal' music to Western cultural imperialism. Creshevsky's work could be similarly labelled, since the end products (the 'simulations') he makes out of his multicultural samples ('simulacra') sound predominantly like Western art music.

[10]Glenn Gould's well–known experiments in the recording studio could also be added to this lineage (Gould 2006), and Simon Emmerson (2007: 85) highlights the virtuosic, superhuman quality of the 'impossible drum sound combinations' in Electronica and IDM tracks by Aphex Twin, Squarepusher and Autechre.

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piece but also to their tight interaction with one another (Creshevsky 2007b).

Creshevsky's formation of superperformers notably abandons live performance, privileging the mediatised realm of recorded music over that of the concert hall. Creshevsky notes how most 'new music' concerts are 'attended by audiences so sparse that participants are frequently embarrassed to count' (Creshevsky 2007a: 69); yet he opines that this is not much of a loss, and that 'The future of music and the future of concerts are not the same issue' (ibid.: 70). Creshevsky writes directly for home audio, and in doing so he works with, rather than against, the current sociocultural shift away from the concert hall – which can be considered a move away from the 'desert of the real' towards the hyper-mediatised hyperreal.[11]

In what follows, I take a closer look at Creshevsky's superperformers, noting how the sounds of superperformer pieces are attributable to a body even though this body is non-existent – a paradoxical situation that is similar to the one already outlined for Creshevsky's samples more generally and which I relate to Baudrillard's discussions on transhumanism. I then focus on Creshevsky's vocal superperformers in particular, discussing the composer's eroticisation of vocal samples and how this relates to Baudrillard's notion of transsexuality.

3.1. Transhuman disembodiment

Creshevsky's use of machines to create performers who surpass humans in their virtuosic prowess is relatable to the transhumanism Baudrillard regularly observed in hyperreal society. A link can, in fact, already be drawn between the nineteenth-century virtuoso who pre-empts Creshevsky's experiments and the human–machine hybrids Baudrillard discusses throughout his texts – notably the Formula One race driver who fuses with their automobile (a comparison between Baudrillard's race drivers and the twentieth-century rock virtuoso has previously been made by Mueller 2013). Like these drivers, a virtuoso instrumentalist

> is a rather good example of the era of performance, in which the heights achieved are the work of man and machine simultaneously, each propelling the other to extremes without it being really clear which is the engine of this meteoric advance and which merely the other's double. (Baudrillard 2002: 166)

For Baudrillard, 'technology is an extension of the body' and machines 'are relays, extensions, media mediators of nature ideally destined to become the organic body of man' (Baudrillard 1994: 111).

Creshevsky takes this transhuman conjunction of body and machine a step further with his superperformers. In a sense, the body is expunged from Creshevsky's superperformance pieces; or more accurately, the bodies of Creshevsky's superperformers 'in their biological, mental, muscular or cerebral manifestations' now float 'free in the shape of mechanical or computer-aided replacement parts' (Baudrillard 1993b: 33). Yet, as opposed to purely synthesised or computerised music, Creshevsky's samples still evoke a performing body of some sort: a body is still present, but it is a paradoxically disembodied body; a ghost in the machine; or a de-subjectified corporeality.[12] Creshevsky's superperformers are constructed from dismembered, allotransplanted parts of recordings initially made by real performers, who as a result are partly resurrected through Creshevsky's sampling. This electro-thaumaturgy results in a Frankensteinian superperformer, who like the undead has uninhibited drives and a performing capacity exceeding that of any real performer. As Creshevsky states: 'A singer who does not breathe will perform but a single phrase before dying, but by cutting and pasting, he or she can croon on for as long as we like' (Creshevsky 2007a: 71). In *The Supermale* – a novel by Symbolist writer Alfred Jarry – a competitor in a Trans-Siberian bicycle race dies, only for his bike to speed up and for his performance to become better than it was when he was living. Baudrillard's description of this passage from Jarry's book – discussed in relation to the dwellers of hyperreal cities such as New York – is likewise applicable to Creshevsky's superperformers: '*Rigor mortis* is replaced by *mobilitas mortis*, and the dead rider [performer] pedals [plays] on indefinitely, even accelerating, as a function of inertia. The energy released is boosted by the inertia of the dead' (Baudrillard 1993b: 117).

The neutralisation of causal and cultural origins in Creshevsky's *Klangfarbenmelodien* can, hence, in some instances, insinuate a new 'origin' or figurative source – the phantom-body of a superperformer. However, the relationship between the real performers Creshevsky samples and the superperformers made with these samples is itself similar to the simulacra/simulation relationship found in the composer's sampling more generally – where an origin, context or meaning is diminished and altered through recontextualisation – though here the origin and meaning is a distinctly

[11]Baudrillard has explicitly linked the realer–than–real quality of stereo to hyperreality, pejoratively referring to it as a type of aural pornography (Baudrillard 1990: 28–36). Yet, despite writing directly for the recorded medium, Creshevsky's work makes surprisingly little use of the surround sound effects of stereo (as opposed to the psychedelic electronic music of artists such as Brian Eno or Boards of Canada), making Baudrillard's accusations less applicable to Creshevsky's work than it might at first seem.

[12]Paul Sanden has discussed (with relation to Gould) how a type of corporeal presence can still be evoked through supposedly disembodied recordings (Sanden 2009).

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corporeal one.[13] Creshevsky's compositions evidently emanate from a vocalist or instrumentalist of some sort, but the original body – or rather, bodies – are no longer locatable; what is more, no (single, real) body is capable of producing what is heard. The subjectivities of performers are eliminated through Creshevsky's sampling, but the sense of a performing body remains – forming the paradoxical (dis)embodiment of a superperformer.[14]

3.2. Transsexual eroticisation of the voice

Creshevsky's use of easily recognisable, 'natural' sounds often leads him to favour the human voice for inclusion in his sound palettes. Creshevsky notes that while all other sounds depend on cultural conditioning, the voice is arguably the only universally recognisable sound – one that even children readily acknowledge: 'What is a natural violin to a kid who has never heard a violin? I don't know. The only thing that everybody universally recognizes as being natural is voice' (Báthory-Kitsz 2007).

Creshevsky's voice samples often have a noticeably erotic quality. This is present in *Sha*, for example, where the voice samples are often so small that they become a series of gasps, groans and moans, rather than singing (Creshevsky 1993). An erotic quality is even more evident in the female vocals of *Psalmus XXIII*, which accompany a man singing the titular psalm (Creshevsky 2007b). These samples (provided by soprano Beth Griffith) sound pornographic, aurally resembling the overblown sex-sounds of a faked orgasm.

These vocal samples – of singing voices broken down into non-signifying, purely corporeal utterances – bring to mind Roland Barthes's 'grain of the voice' concept; yet the 'grain' Barthes famously considered is a distinctly subjective phenomenon, which manifests a particular body and that body's *jouissance* (Barthes 1977). This is applicable to Creshevsky's vocal 'redux' works such as *Free Speech*, *Lisa Barnard Redux* or *Tomomi Adachi Redux II* – where sound palettes are made up of the voice of only one individual (similar to his teacher Berio's treatment of Cathy Berberian's voice in *Thema: Omaggio A Joyce*) – but more often, Creshevsky's supervocalists are conglomerates of samples taken from numerous bodies. There is hence a de-subjectivised (though not de-corporealised) quality to most of Creshevsky's supervocalists.

[13]Lawrence Kramer has referred to his own computer–emulation of a virtuoso performer as a 'simulacrum' (Kramer 2012: 243).

[14]Miriama Young notes something similar regarding the virtual band Gorillaz that while 'the listener will unwittingly use timbral clues to create a visual imagining of the physical entity they hear … this imagining process produces a certain disjuncture or tension because the audible data has … been grafted to the entirely fabricated' (Young 2015: 32).

A concept more appropriate to understanding these vocal works is Baudrillard's notion of 'transsexuality'. Baudrillard's use of the term 'transsexuality' keeps its usual connotations, referring to a movement across, or general blurring of, the line between sexes – indeed, Creshevsky's supervocalists are often made up of samples from both male and female bodies (hear *Jacob's Ladder*); yet, Baudrillard's concept encompasses a much broader meaning, for it also refers to the transversal of sex into other realms – including politics, economics and aesthetics – and of these realms back into the sexual. For Baudrillard, transsexualism is particularly evident in the prevalence of pornography in contemporary society, where sex has infiltrated the media and art not only through pornography proper but also through a general sexualisation of advertising, film and television. This hyperreal sexualisation of media in turn conditions the public's perspective of what sex is and how it should be played out, so that the realm of pornography and that of real sex are flattened into a single plane (Baudrillard 1993b: 22–7); the representation of sex becomes sex itself, in a typically hyperreal fashion. Transsexualism is relevant to the female vocals of *Sha* or *Psalmus XXIII*, where Creshevsky's initially non-sexual samples are (trans) sexualised into ecstatic moans through their recontextualisation – or more specifically, into the exaggerated, hyperreal sex-sounds of women in pornography (the pornographic sounds of women are among the most easily recognisable sonic-markers of sex, partly thanks to their common use in popular music; see Corbett and Kapsalis 1996). In these cases, Creshevsky's sonic manipulations condense indices of sex, pornography and song in a manner akin to the transsexuality that Baudrillard claimed is present in hyperreal society.

4. TRANSAESTHETIC HYPERDRAMA

Together, Creshevsky's two forms of hyperrealism – his creation of dematerialised superperformers and his combination of all available sound samples into *Klangfarbenmelodien* – create 'hyperdrama'. Creshevsky's hyperdrama is 'characterized by a steady level of heightened sensations' and the 'attempt to consolidate and compress intensified states' (Creshevsky 2007a: 67). Creshevsky relates this exaggerated aesthetic to a special type of everyday life 'realism' – one that is contaminated by mass media and its tropes (in other words, hyperreality). Creshevsky explains how:

> A guest on a television talk show once described his surprise and disappointment that there was no music to accompany his first romantic kiss. He had seen so many films abounding with the music that generally accompanies such momentous moments. A silent kiss is a slice of real life, but a kiss with music and the crashing waves of an incoming tide is a slice of hyperdrama. Movies are

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> filled with moments that are 'beyond' life. We need only focus to notice them. Hyperrealism is an inevitability. Indeed, it already exists in many moments of our lives. (Ibid.: 67)

Numerous Creshevsky pieces borrow sounds from film soundtracks to aid this sense of hyperdrama: the melodramatic strings behind a Hollywood kiss are heard throughout *Novella* (Creshevsky 2003), while *To Know and Not To Know* makes extensive use of sound effects from *kung fu* and *wushu* films (Creshevsky 2007b).

The expectations of the talk show guest in Creshevsky's quote above (that his first kiss would be accompanied by music) exemplifies Baudrillard's notion of the 'transaesthetic'. A key feature of hyperrealism, the transaesthetic is where art and life collapse into one another, meaning that there is no longer any differentiation between the two (Baudrillard 1993b: 15–21). As such, art – particularly mass-mediated art such as film and television – comes to condition the expectations individuals have of their own (hyper)real lives. Baudrillard notes that the confusion of life with its mediatised double is most evident in reality TV shows

> where, in the live telling of the story, the immediate televisual acting, we see the confusion of existence and its double. There is no separation any longer, no empty space, no absence: you enter the screen and the visual image unhindered. You enter your life as you would walk on to a screen. You slip on your own life like a data suit. (Baudrillard 2002: 177)

This confusion runs both ways, however, as Baudrillard considers so-called 'every-day life' to have 'already been rigged by all the dominant models . . . There is no need to enter the virtual double of reality – we're already there' (Baudrillard 2005: 181).

Creshevsky's anecdotal talk show guest could have easily fulfilled their own expectations had they used the common transaesthetic prothesis that is the MP3 player, which provides a soundtrack for many people's daily routines (iPod and MP3 player listening have been linked to Baudrillard's 'ecstasy of communication' by Arved Ashby 2010). In a busy city such as New York (where Creshevsky lived), an MP3 player is often not even required, for a walk down the street already has a hyperdramatic quality, given the constant barrage of diverse sounds that confront the walker. Creshevsky notes how, 'It's useful to substitute the word "soundtrack" in certain sentences in looking at what kind of a world we live in' (Báthory-Kitsz 2007) and it is our transaesthetically soundtracked lives that Creshevsky emulates with his hyperdramatic pieces.

5. CONCLUSION

I have discussed Creshevsky's hyperrealism with the aid of numerous concepts Baudrillard used in his discussions of hyperreality. Despite the connections made previously, Creshevsky and Baudrillard have notably different dispositions towards hyperrealism (as hinted at in my discussion on globalism). Baudrillard's understanding of hyperrealism is as a social and philosophical concept, which he primarily uses to criticise contemporary society; his disposition towards hyperreality is hence much more negative than Creshevsky's, who understands hyperrealism as a personal compositional aesthetic, which, while formed in response to the same world Baudrillard criticises, is approached in an ultimately positive manner. Creshevsky's compositions, which I have until now only compared to Baudrillard's ideas, could hence also be criticised using these ideas, given that Baudrillard generally implements them in arguments *against* hyperrealism, the very thing Creshevsky takes as a compositional ideal.

Yet, there is also another perspective: that Creshevsky's hyperreal music is like Baudrillard's proposed *response* to hyperrealism. Despite his admonishments of hyperreality, Baudrillard did not believe in returning to some pre-hyperreal society (arcadia being a simulacrum par excellence – the fantasised nostalgia for a past society that never actually existed); instead, Baudrillard felt that the only appropriate reaction to hyperrealism was to push forward with an even more 'hyper' disposition, to out hyper the hyperreal. This approach is present in a series of positively viewed concepts, such as 'symbolic exchange'[15] and 'seduction',[16] which are opposed, yet incredibly similar in definition to those terms Baudrillard implements negatively, such as 'globalism' and 'transsexualism'. While there is no evidence that Creshevsky had any such aspirations – in fact, he has stated that he does not consider his music political (Creshevsky and Fischer, 2012) – his work could be considered a reaction against hyperreal society, albeit one that occupies the same ground as hyperreality (this is what Baudrillard would call a 'fatal strategy'; see Baudrillard 2008). The avant-garde products of Creshevsky's compositional process are, after all, very different to the commercial pop songs and muzak that is the soundtrack of hyperreal living, even if Creshevsky draws heavily from this music in his sampling. Creshevsky's work can hence be seen as a further 'hypering' of the hyperreal against the hyperreal, a compositional approach that faces our information-laden, oversaturated and highly

[15]Baudrillard defines seduction as a process that diverts things from their identity (Baudrillard 2003: 21) – similar to Creshevsky's recontextualized sampling of sounds.

[16]Symbolic exchange is similar to globalism insofar as it is 'a symbolic circulation of things in which none has a separate individuality, in which all operate in a kind of universal collusiveness of inseparable forms' (Baudrillard 2003: 17).

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simulated musical world head on – providing an alternative to this world, though one that leads through rather than away from it.

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