Making Things Louder: Amplified Music and Multimodality

PhD Thesis

Johannes Mulder

University of Technology Sydney

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Supervisor: Professor Theo van Leeuwen

Submitted April 2013

Certificate of

Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Johannes Mulder

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

List of tables

Abstract

This thesis looks at the use of electronic amplification at concerts of music. A broad introduction, constituting both a technological and a musical history, precedes a literature review that identifies the topic as under-researched in musical, technological and critical discourse. Proceeding from that broad approach which covers the first three chapters the analytical focus is narrowed by applying key concepts from social semiotic multimodal discourse analysis, as developed by amongst others Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen and rooted in the work of linguist Michael Halliday. In addition, elements of the work of sociologist Erving Goffman are explored; notably his use of 'decorum', the 'participation framework' and 'production formats'. Amplification is treated as a semiotic mode; the different meaning potentials of the use of technology are outlined and contrasted with the notion of reproduction technology as a neutral channel. Questions of the relation between original (or acoustic, ie the sound that is amplified) and the amplified sound are analysed using the concept of linguistic modality, so as to investigate how notions of musical truth such as authenticity or fidelity, are encoded in expressions. Music is considered as social action, and this encompasses both the music itself and the musical experience in which it is embedded. In social semiotics making meaning is an activity, and technological practices form an integral part of this. The final chapter therefore interrogates matters of agency in relation to the use of amplification and its use in musical performances.