

Hyperreality of Virtual Music Ensemble

Zakaria Mohammad^{1,*} Kun Setyaning Astuti²

¹ Graduate Program, Yogyakarta State University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Faculty of Languages and Arts, Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. Email: zakariam108@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined the phenomenon of a virtual music ensemble. This virtual music ensemble was performed by students at a high school in Yogyakarta. They collaborated remotely from their own places to produce a compilation video shown on YouTube. This activity was carried out to present the results of the music workshop program held by the school. This study used a qualitative method to describe a virtual music ensemble as hyperreality formed through simulation. The performance is a simulation designed to present an image that can be considered to represent the success of a virtual music workshop. The hyperreality in this virtual music ensemble obscures the true meaning of an ensemble. In a real ensemble, the players will play together at the same time and in the same place. However, even though they appeared in a frame of a virtual music ensemble, they were not actually playing music together. Therefore, the virtual music ensemble did not present reality but hyperreality.

Keywords: *Hyperreality, Ensemble, Music, Virtual*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the efforts to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic is the imposition of social restrictions that affect all sectors, including education and arts. In the world of education, a teacher is required to manage learning in a virtual form. Meanwhile, in the world of art, especially music, musicians adapt to the situation by holding concerts of virtual music ensembles. This is not only performed by professional musicians. We can easily find such shows performed by school students on YouTube, both formal schools and music course institutions.

The word 'ensemble' comes from the French language, which means 'together'. On this basis, ensemble can be interpreted as a musical presentation performed together using one or various types of musical instruments [1]. According to Banoe, an ensemble is a musical group playing music in small units of musical instruments [2]. Meanwhile, according to The Great Dictionary of Indonesian Language, an ensemble is a group of musicians/singers who play together regularly [3]. Meanwhile, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word 'virtual' is being on or simulated on a computer or computer network [4]. Therefore, a virtual music ensemble can be concluded as a simulation of a group of people playing music in cyberspace.

A school in Yogyakarta has an annual program, such as a music workshop. However, due to the pandemic, this year's workshops must be conducted virtually. Based on the information stated in the program proposal, the virtual music workshop has several objectives, including (1) providing students with knowledge and skills in playing music, (2) facilitating students to actualize their talents and interests in music, (3) arousing students' motivation and enthusiasm, and fostering a spirit of togetherness during online learning situations due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and (4) fostering a belief in students that everyone can play/compose music.

The music workshop is presented on a video shown live on YouTube and can be assessed by everyone. One of the target audiences is the student guardian. This is intended to demonstrate the success of the music workshop program. However, the student skill in the video is different from the real conditions. In this case, the virtual music ensemble performs a simulation, as mentioned by Baudrillard.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted in a high school in Yogyakarta. The research employed a qualitative approach. This research's object is the virtual music ensemble played by 119 students. The researchers played a role as the research instrument. The researcher used a qualitative method to describe the virtual music ensemble as hyperreality in music education.

Qualitative research is a study that emphasizes the process and meaning of a social reality, which is not tested or measured strictly in terms of quantity or frequency [5].

The focus of this research was to explain how social phenomena were formed and completed with meanings. This cross-sectional research was conducted in a certain period for two months, from May to June 2020. There were two types of data used in this study, namely primary and secondary data. The primary data was obtained by conducting in-depth interviews with four informants. The first informant was AF, the person in charge of the event; the second was NA, a student; the third one was MR, a student guardian, and the fourth was AP, an audience outside the school community.

The interview with the first informant was conducted face to face at the school. Meanwhile, the interviews with the second, third, and fourth informants were conducted online to obey the physical distancing. Apart from the interviews, the data were also collected through observations, journals, literature, and books. This study used inductive thinking logic, which drew general conclusions from specific things.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Hyperreality and Simulation

One of Baudrillard's notions is about hyperreality and simulation. According to Baudrillard, *hyperreality and simulation are a deterrent of every principle and every objective against the power the deterrent used so well for such a long time* [6]. Based on this statement, hyperreality and simulation are concepts where something real is distracted by the new reality that happens to it through a simulation way. Thus, what happens is covering real things to reach its goal.

Hyperreality and simulation are circular processes. When the simulation brings a more real thing, the reality disappears and is replaced by a new one, which has a different purpose and principle from the original. In this case, according to Baudrillard, the production mode has been replaced by the consumption mode. Therefore, all aspects of human life are no more as objects. Through these objects, a person in a consumer society finds meanings and his/her existence. The functions of consumer objects lie in symbols or signs disseminated through the media. For example, someone who drinks "an iced tea" at McDonald's is considered classier than those drinking the same drink at a stall. This shows that in the hyperreality era, what people consume is a symbol or sign.

In this case, the virtual music ensemble plays a role as a sign. Because the signs are manipulative, the virtual musical ensemble can be claimed unreal; it is born from simulacra. Virtual music ensemble constructs imaginary thoughts towards a reality without essentially presenting the reality itself.

3.2. Sign Manipulation

In a consumer society, signs are considered equal to and even more important than reality. For example: in a course, a student expects to achieve an A rather than hopes to master the course knowledge. This is an example that in consumer society, message packaging is more important than its content.

Sign manipulation takes place in this virtual music ensemble. Based on an interview with the person in charge of the event, the video had been through a long editing process. Even the school recruited a professional editor to handle this virtual music workshop. The collected videos were not simply compiled but passed several manipulative stages.

3.3 Musical Composition of Virtual Music Ensemble

The virtual music ensemble is a video of students playing music from their own homes, which has been compiled through an editing process. The process of creating this virtual music ensemble consists of three main stages.

3.3.1. Preparation Stage

The process of making this virtual music ensemble video started by dividing all students into three groups. The melody group consisted of violinists, flutists, and vocalists. The harmony group consisted of guitarists, keyboardists, and pianists and the rhythm group consisted of students who played the percussive instruments they could find at home. Each group had a WA group to coordinate and consult with a coach. The coach made sure the videos that students make refer to the tutorials. The coaches were schoolteachers who did have musicality and was appointed by the music teacher based on observations.

After divided into three groups, the students obtained a master guide and video tutorials according to the predetermined sections. For example, student X played the intro, so he received a video tutorial on how the intro should be played using the musical instrument he chose. The school music teacher made both tutorial videos and master guide. The students studied the video tutorial approximately in one week. If the students found difficulties, they might consult and ask for guidance to the appointed coach.

3.3.2. Editing Stage

The video editing was carried out by an editor recruited by the school and supervised by the person in charge of the event, coaches, and the music teacher. The supervision was intended to prevent missing or unincluded student videos in the compilation. In addition, it aims to ensure the editing results meet the expectation of the music workshop team.

There were 130 videos collected from the students, which were divided into 15 scenes. The videos were given certain codes to make it easier for the editor to evenly distribute the number of videos in each scene.

The next thing to do was layout settings. At this stage, the editor set the layout for each scene. Quality videos in terms of visual and audio were emphasized by being displayed in a larger size than other videos in one scene.

The next was audio synchronization. At this stage, the editor was assisted by the music teacher to synchronize the audio by adjusting each student's audio position at the right timing according to the master guide. For example, Student X played the interlude part, and then the editor placed the audio at the minute where the interlude part started.

Not all videos that had been collected were in accordance with the video tutorials. The most common problem was an inconsistent tempo. If unchecked, the messy tempo would affect the quality of the compilation video. Therefore, at the audio synchronization stage, there were manipulations in spectrum cutting, spectrum rearrangement, and spectrum volume level adjustment. It aimed to fix the problematic videos. However, videos with fatal flaws, such as playing at a completely different tempo or melody, were muted. In other words, the videos were only displayed visually without any audio contribution.

The music with fatal errors resulted in student movements on the video, which were out of sync with the master guide. Videos with visual problems, such as hand movements that did not match the song rhythm, low lighting, low resolution, and wrong video formats, required a time-consuming editing process. There was a moment in Student X's musical performance for a sample case where his hand movements did not match the song rhythm. The editor then tried to find the best part of the video to be cut and played repeatedly (looping).

After going through the synchronization stage, the videos were given effects for each scene. The average number of videos included in one scene was 7-9. The effects of in and out animations were applied to create a smooth impression on each scene transition. In addition, the crossfade effect was used in certain parts to refine the audio transition.

3.3.3. Final Stage

In the final stage, the editor and workshop team evaluated the editing results. The editor directly executed inputs and suggestions from the workshop team. The findings at this stage are as follows. Some videos had not been included in the compilation, and the scene composition was less balanced; for example, Student X's video size was too big, so it covered half of Student Y's face.

Before rendered, fixed videos were watched repeatedly to make sure the video was appropriate to be shown on YouTube.

3.4. Virtual Music Ensemble as Hyperreality

We can easily find a virtual music ensemble on YouTube. This is a compilation of music videos of each personnel, put in one frame. The following are findings on YouTube with keywords of virtual music

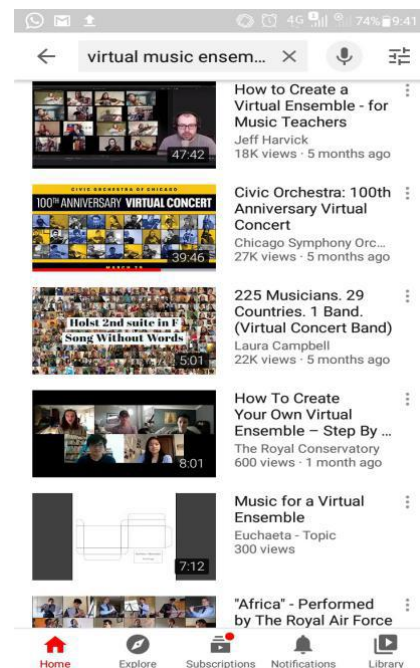


Figure 1 Search results of keywords: virtual music ensemble

ensembles:

In the world of music education, a virtual music ensemble is a form of presenting student learning outcomes. This is an adaptation to pandemic conditions that require us to obey the physical distancing. A virtual music ensemble is a simulation form of a real music ensemble.

The senior high school students' virtual music ensemble video shows a song played with musical instruments together. Even though the videos were taken from different places, they were put together in one frame. The following is a screenshot of the virtual music ensemble as the result of a music workshop organized by the school:

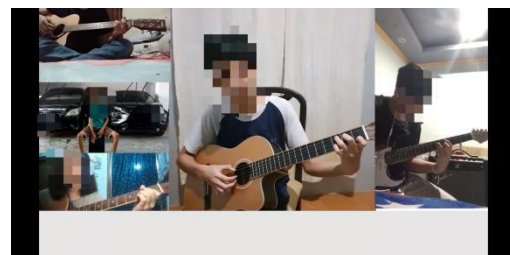


Figure 2 Prioritized high quality video

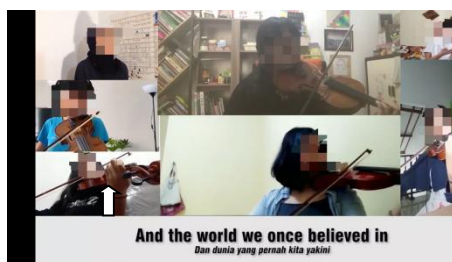


Figure 3 Low quality video shown in a small display

Based on an interview with the person in charge, the video's display must be made as good as possible. Although not all students' recordings were in good quality, they must be included in the video, as stated by the Informant AF.

"All students' videos must be included on the video. Do not let any parents complain that their child is not on the video."

(Interview with Informant AF, 8 June 2020)

Based on the information, students' appearance is the most important thing in this virtual ensemble. How students played music was not a priority. Furthermore, the Informant AF stated that:

"Those who play less well are covered by those playing well, and worse music playing is muted. The audio of good playing is used to cover those who do not play well."

(Interview with Informant AF, 8 June 2020)

It can be concluded that this simulation process has passed a sign manipulation, which creates a hyperreality.

The interview was continued with Informant MR as a student's parent. MR is a student guardian whose child was assigned to play a percussive musical instrument that could be found at home (wooden spoon, *kenthongan*/drum made from bamboo or wood which is struck to sound an alarm, glass, bottle, gallon, etc.). However, the parent was willing to look for a good-looking musical instrument. He tried to find a triangle. Based on the informant's statement, he assumed that his child would look better using a triangle. He stated that,

"I was borrowing a triangle, Sir, to make more interesting performance than only playing with glasses."

(Interview with Informant MR, 23 May 2020)

Based on this information, a sign is more important clue. The triangle is considered more significant than the rhythm it should produce. This is certainly not a priority for the musical ensemble's goals. Hyperreality has reconstructed the way of thinking in seeing the reality of a true musical ensemble. Informant MR further stated,

"I am a bit disappointed because my child only shows a short part in the compilation video, even though in his recording, he played the music using buckets in a longer duration."

(Interview with Informant MR, 23 May 2020)

Informant MR compared his child's duration with other students'. Even so, he did not deny that overall, the virtual music ensemble video on YouTube is good.

An interview was also conducted with one of the students as a participant in the virtual music workshop. An interview with Informant NA revealed that a song part that should be played twice could be played only once in the virtual music ensemble.

"I played the interlude section, which was just a line of melody repeated twice. I just played it once because I could edit it into two-time playing. It is better than playing it twice."

(Interview with Informant NA, 17 May 2020)

Based on the above interview, the formed simulations have manipulated the essence of a real musical ensemble. Hyperreality cannot be denied by the new fact that parts of songs with repetition can be played once, given that in the case of virtual music ensembles, this can be made through editing.

Furthermore, the Informant NA added that he was satisfied with the results. However, he preferred to play the ensemble live. He had missed playing a music ensemble with his friends in a music studio.

"Actually, I prefer to play music with my friends in the studio. It is more fun and exciting. We can play music while having a chat. If there is something wrong, we can laugh together and make it fun."

(Interview with Informant NA, 18 Mei 2020)

This shows that a virtual music ensemble cannot replace the essence of a real one. The virtual music ensemble is only a new reality that befalls the reality of it. Therefore, it is claimed as hyperreality.

Cohesiveness, communication, and socialization as common things in real music ensembles do not happen in virtual music ensembles. The meaning of physical presence is strongly felt in a real musical ensemble. Meanwhile, virtual presence is not capable of conveying the same feeling as a physical presence.

The interview was continued with Informant AP. The informant was an audience outside the school. The researchers asked an audience to give his opinion on the virtual music ensemble. In his statement, he mentioned that he was surprised how people in different places could play music together well. Then, after explained that it was through an editing process, he stated,

It is a good play. It is like playing together for real. I think that the students played together from their own places, and the play was recorded. "

(Interview with Informant AP, 30 June 2020)

Based on the explanation above, there is a possibility that the lay audience might think that the virtual music ensemble was performed together at the same time from different places. In fact, what actually happened was that the students recorded their music playing individually at different times. Hyperreality occurs due to time manipulation. The videos recorded at different times were compiled "as if" they were played simultaneously.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Virtual music ensembles have become an inevitable phenomenon in this era. The rapidly developing Information and Communication Technology, particularly in the pandemic condition that requires physical distancing, has made virtual music ensembles chosen as a strategy for music practitioners, both formal and non-formal, to do self-actualization.

Hyperreality in virtual music ensembles is an inevitability because the simulation process occurs in it. This simulation process started by recording a music video individually, editing, and then displaying on YouTube, since social media is the best space for hyperreality [7].

The hyperreality in this virtual music ensemble obscures the true meaning of the real one. In a real ensemble, the players play together at the same time and in the same place. Meanwhile, even though they appear in one frame in a virtual music ensemble, they are not actually playing music together. This will have an impact on students who will not experience values found in real music ensembles, such as tolerance, cohesiveness, socializing, togetherness, and the like.

REFERENCES

- [1] Tim Abdi Guru. "*Kesenian SMP Jilid 2 untuk Kelas VIII* [Middle School Arts Volume 2 for Class VIII]." Jakarta, Penerbit Erlangga, 2005.
- [2] Banoe, Pono, "*Kamus Musik* [Music Dictionnary]." Yogyakarta, Kanisius, 2003.
- [3] Diknas. "*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*. [Indonesia Dictionary]." Jakarta, Balai Pustaka, 2001.
- [4] Merriam Webster Dictionary
<https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/virtua>, diakses tanggal 27 Juni 2020
- [5] Neuman. W Lawrence, *Social Research Methods Sixth Edition*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2006.
- [6] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. United State of Amerika, The University of Michigan Press, 1981.
- [7] Fitria, Herlinda. "*Hipperealitas Dalam Social Media (Studi Kasus: Makan Cantik di Senopati Pada Masyarakat Perkotaan)* [Hippreality in Social Media (Case Study: Eating Beautiful in Senopati in Urban Communities)]." *INFORMASI Kajian Ilmu Komunikasi*, 45 (2) (2015).
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v45i2.7985>