

Meditation 1

Where Is Music?

Thus, fiction does not mean: to make the invisible visible, but to reveal just how invisible the invisibility of the visible is.

(Michel Foucault)

First of all, let us simultaneously open up and demarcate, which in a way unavoidably implies closing off, the playing field by beginning with this question: how can that which music teaches us be taught? Like Judith in Bluebeard's castle, this question can open many doors. And one of them will lead unmistakably to the bottomless pit of pondering over: what 'is' music.

Music. In the first place a word. Six letters. Black on white. As word, already material. But also rising above materiality. As a word, it *has* meaning. As a word, it *gives* meaning. Take sounds for example: this sound *is* music. Which actually conveys: 'we' consider this sound as music; taking into account that the 'we' must be further specified as well as the possibility that some other sound is not music. Music - as word - frames, delimits, opens up, encloses. To call ('consecrate' as Pierre Bourdieu would say) something music is a political decision-making process. Music is a concept, and defining it part of a discourse. Writing about music is to write about what-is-written-and-said-about music. Consider a conservatory, for example. As a grammatical concept, 'music' is useful: using this concept, we differentiate between various sounds. We divide, classify, categorize, name, delimit: not every sound is music. Although, since Cage, no single sound is by definition banned from the musical domain. The word 'music' brings (necessary) structure and order into the (audible) world. A conservatory benefits from this: how else would we know what could be taught there? Because music can be named, it can (in principle) be taught, and that applies *mutatis mutandis* to every individual single part of music. Or - to posit it more sharply and clearly - that which can be named in and/or as music, that which can be grasped in words, can (in principle) also be taught.

But, there is also an other music; there is a 'musical dimension' that is much more difficult to capture in words. Calling upon the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, this dimension might be indicated as 'the sensual', something which can and should only be expressed in its immediacy. This immediate - perhaps one could also speak of 'the physical' - is erased at the moment when it, through reflection, would be conceptualized; it is by definition indefinable and therefore unreachable by means of language. There is thus something in music which can only be expressed through or as music. The moment that language tries to pinpoint this something, it dissolves and is lost. At the most language can approach, though remaining at a distance, this dimension (perhaps poetry achieves the most satisfactory results). If one considers the problem from another side, one might say that what one is aiming at is the acoustic dimension of music – or better - that which takes place between two vibrating bodies: the sounding and the listening.

Many more words, much more explanation would actually be necessary to fully convey what is briefly stated here: the fundamental impossibility of using language to reproduce what is expressed by music. Many who attempt in one way or another to describe music (musicologists, theorists, historians, philosophers, educators) will have experienced often enough in practice that music does not allow itself to be confined within verbal constructions. Perhaps that is one thing that music does teach us: there is a gap between language and music. But, how can that which music teaches us be taught? What kind of pedagogy, curriculum, educational strategy can point us at this paradox? In other words, how can practices that (mostly) make use of language show us via language something which escapes language?

What is music? Perhaps we can now better reformulate the question: *where* is music? A tentative, faltering, provisional answer might circumscribe (literally to write around) music as a *midfield*, an unlocatable space between acoustics and grammar. Unlocatable because it continually moves between these two (also continually mobile) poles without touching either one, thus avoiding a negation of the other.