

Marcel Cobussen

Introduction

Seven times around a future of musicology, seven times around music and ethics

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This introduction, as well as the texts that follow, came out of an international meeting entitled 'The Future of Musicology: Towards Music(ology) and Ethics' that took place at Erasmus University, Rotterdam on January 11, 2002. The meeting followed as a result of the defense of my Ph.D. dissertation, *Deconstruction in Music*, held the previous day.

'The Future of Musicology: Towards Music(ology) and Ethics'. It would not have been odd nor superfluous to have added a question mark. After all, it is only a proposal and, of course, the future is often unpredictable to a great extent. However, as a proposal, it is also a first effort in determining this future in a particular way, to take the future into the present; to organize a meeting on this subject can also be regarded as an attempt to give (a new) direction to some musicological agenda, an attempt to fix thinking on music (otherwise). Therefore, I was extremely flattered by the contributions of these four keynote speakers at the meeting: Susan McClary, Lawrence Kramer, Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, and Geraldine Finn - four very competent and creative academics who continue to leave their marks on musicology and (music) philosophy for quite some time now. Here, in this issue, their thoughts on the future of musicology and the ethics of music are commented on by some of the most scholarly Dutch thinkers on music: Rokus de Groot, Joke Dame, Sander van Maas, and Ruud Welten. A promising combination indeed!

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The future of musicology, the future of thinking on music. Let's sidetrack for a moment, and take a detour through another art form, literature. Dutch critic Arnold Heumakers proposes to consider literature a refuge or sanctuary, a domain of 'unlivable truths' in which all that bourgeois society represses - lust, desire, ecstasy, hatred, rancor - can be indulged freely. This 'valve function' of art, art as a way of release, is safe and advantageous for both art and society. Heumakers: 'The writer/artist who aims at a revolution does not understand his own position very well'.

In 'Dichter tegen historicus' [Poet Against Historian], an essay from *De inwijkeling* (2002), Flemish writer Marc Reugebrink opposes Heumakers' thesis, stating, 'The critic who turns literature into a risk-free, fenced-off playground, digs one's own grave'. If art no longer takes issue with reality, it becomes marginalized, a reserve for linguistic handymen or melancholics; it reduces literature to an historical phenomenon¹.

Are we encountering some specters of Marx and neo-Marxists like Adorno or Habermas here? Are we re-entering the long-familiar discussion on the (non)autonomy of art? Without dwelling on this discussion, it's noteworthy to point out that both Heumakers and Reugebrink seem to maintain a preconceived (hierarchical?) opposition of art versus society/reality in their debate. If we are to stay within this line of thought it should be clear that art does not simply passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which many aspects of social life are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated. Better yet, social reality is constituted within artistic discourses and practices; it is here that the ongoing work of social formation occurs². Art signifies; it has meaning. Art is not (only) a reflection social reality; it *is* (a part of) that reality, constituting and

¹ Cf. *De Volkskrant*, March 29, 2002.

² Cf. McClary, S.; *Feminine Endings. Music Gender, and Sexuality*. Minnesota, 1991, p.8 and p.21.

transforming it. Art is a means by which we orient ourselves in the world. Like so many other discourses, it structures our cognition and our affects. Indeed, it is a powerful social and political practice. Art and the social world are inseparable; the one constantly functions as background for the other and vice versa.

Back to music. 'Music has a formative role in the construction, negotiation, and transformation of socio-cultural identities ... Music can variably both construct new identities and reflect existing ones,' Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh write³. Music gives meaning. It means. Music generates meaning 'in a number of different, simultaneous forms: as musical sound, and this mediated by notations, by technological and visual forms, by the practices and sociality of performance, by social institutions and socioeconomic arrangements, by language in different guises (lyrics and dramatic narratives, theoretical and critical exegeses, and other discourses) and, relatedly, by conceptual and knowledge systems'⁴. Thereby it constantly transgresses the borders of what is considered the purely musical (cf., for example, Eduard Hanslick's noted formalistic theory on music).

These collected essays deal with the techniques and codes through which music(ology) produces (ethical) meanings. Music(ology) and ethics. An unsuspecting pair? A bold connection? A challenging question is whether or not music(ology) can tell us something about ethics that cannot be found or is less accessible through another medium or discourse. That is, can music teach us something about ethics in a way other social fields cannot? And how would it influence, shape, and transform ethical discourse?

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It is within the space opened above that the relation between music and that discourse called ethics can be investigated and elaborated. Music *and* ethics. The ethics *of* music. Ethics *in* music. Music *as* ethics.

And it is necessary to open the doors of musicology's formalistic tradition and conventions in order to avoid the isolation of both music and musicology. McClary and Kramer in particular do not fail to emphasize how most thinking on music still tries to avoid these contacts with 'extra-musical' discourses, thereby maneuvering itself in a generally cloistral and deeply insular position⁵. 'Music, and above all western music, should not be pestered with ethical questions. Such questions have nothing to do with its essence as music,' Kramer writes in his contribution to this issue summarizing opinions about music in recent times. Talking about the future of musicology, McClary ends her essay as follows: 'As an ethicist, the only thing I will not countenance is the suppression of open debate. I would like to see musicology of the future leave behind its insulated refuge to examine the place of music within the much larger cultural world that shapes it, but that also is so powerfully shaped by it'.

And although Veselinović-Hofman presents the argument that musicology from its start ensued from its relationship toward other disciplines, she also sees the (ethical) future of this discipline in a freedom of creative choice among various (multimedial or multidisciplinary) interpretations of music: 'The future of musicology relies on its fractal structure, which implies one of the most ethical

³ Born, G. and Hesmondhalgh, D.; *Western Music and Its Others. Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*. Berkeley, 2000, p.31.

⁴ *ibid*, p.37.

⁵ Cf. Kramer, L.; *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*. Berkeley, 1995. Cf. McClary, S.; *Feminine Endings. Music Gender, and Sexuality*. Minnesota, 1991. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh write in *Western Music and Its Others. Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley, 2000) that there is the 'continuing reluctance in the core music disciplines to consider the political dimensions of musical cultures and of music scholarship' (p.7).

matrices: openness to the other and tolerance.' In order to achieve this openness, Finn argues in perhaps the most severe attack on current musicology in this issue, that the institutionalized categories of this discipline must be unmade or de(con)structed. She wants to put it out of play. Rather than the idealized abstractions of music history and theory, she likes to take the concrete phenomena of music and our lived experiences of it as a point of departure.

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Is there a relation between music(ology) and ethics? Does music(ology) address ethical questions? Is there a musical ethics? Can ethics be music(al)? These are questions at hand in this issue; these are the questions that gave rise to the conference; these are the questions that continually arose in my dissertation on deconstruction and music.

Let's start with the question 'What is ethics?' and let's take contemporary, continental philosophy - in which deconstruction finds its place or might take (a) place - as a point of departure to think of some possible answers. Why contemporary, continental philosophy? Perhaps, because it is most near to me, both geographically, and with respect to time. Perhaps because I am most familiar with it, because I feel at home in its language, because it is a safe and familiar residence - all descriptions of the Greek word *ethos*. However, if these prudent and cautious answers could hold some truth, I am in a paradoxical situation. Speaking about ethics, this contemporary, continental philosophy asks me to be open to the uncanny, the unfamiliar, 'the other' that is not reducible to more of 'the same'. This philosophy proposes that I pay attention to relationships with the other or otherness beyond or between categorical imperatives, beyond and between classifications and identities (man/woman, Christian/Muslim/Jew, music/noise/silence, jazz/pop/classic, etc.); it appeals to a hospitality and asks me to open the doors and windows of my house. 'Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner of which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality,' writes Jacques Derrida in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*⁶.

While Modern Man tried to secure his identity - an identity based on rationality, activity, and progress - by ignoring, concealing, or eradicating the other or its others (irrationality, passivity, decline), late 20th century theories develop different relationships towards the other. In combination with contemporary experiences of indeterminability, fragmentarization, hybridization, pluralism, and the questioning of old canons, grand narratives, and superseded conventions, the other is (re)discovered and approached in a different way.

But let's make clear immediately that it is not my aim to (re)think the other as a clear and stable identity, a fixed, permanent, even transcendental phenomenon, solidly existing in opposition to a Self, or The Same. Considered as such, this other(ness) would simply be a re-presentation of a pre-conceived, pre-scribed, pre-determined and thus pre-dicative category and class, and thereby more of the same: The Other⁷. When Derrida writes about hospitality and German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk says in his book *Weltfremdheit* that paying attention to the other means opening oneself, admitting and regaining wonder, this doesn't mean that one can still rely on already instituted categories, classes or identities. What much contemporary, continental philosophy emphasizes is the relationship

⁶ Cf. Derrida, p.16-7.

⁷ Cf. Finn, G.; *Why Althusser Killed His Wife. Essays on Discourse and Violence*. Atlantic Highlands, 1996, p.172.

between two or more identities in which the difference, or space-between, is not given with or through these identities; it is the jeopardizing of identities that presents one with, puts one in the presence of, that which has never been there before: the other in all its singularity and immanence. I am pointing to what can be describes as an ethics as the space-between where the engagement with the other becomes possible. An ethical relation with others, with otherness, occurs between and beyond the categorial imperatives of regulated institutionalized thought. So, the other doesn't simply stand in opposition to the same; otherness happens in the space-between the same and the other, the inter-esse, the remainders, redundancy, and noise of the forming informing; we as *interviduals*⁸. The other or otherness as the Derridian supplement, the Deleuzian rhizome, Lyotard's differend. In short, the other is (always) another other.

... Otherness ... the uncanny, the unknown (the unknowable?) ... different ... strange ... an interfering factor, disturbing a deceptive rest ... a challenge or provocation that brings about discomfort, even distrust ... The other: not good, not evil; beyond or before good and evil ... not better ... not worse ... but it can turn out to be one of them ... Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Das Erbe Europas*, writes, 'We have to learn to respect others and otherness. This includes that we have to learn to accept injustice. We have to learn to lose a game.' And according to Emmanuel Levinas, it is the openness to the other that allows for a wound ... Encountering the other, the ethical encounter with the other as other (and not more of the same) demands a response-ability that is not already pre-scribed and therefore un-response-able to the possibilities of difference and change; it is the space where we put 'ourselves' into question, which challenges and changes us, as well as the other (to claim the self-identity of a subject is thus an act of irresponsibility, an effort to close off one's fundamental vulnerability to the other) ... Ethics as a praxis of a singularity for which there can be no rules, no codes, no principles, and no guarantees; a praxis of risk and response-ability⁹ ...

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How far removed are we from music(ology) here? Ethics as hospitality in music(ology)? Ethics as the space-between musical categories and musical reality? Ethics beyond music(ology)?

Of course, if social and cultural identities and differences come to be constructed and articulated in music, music's construction of its own identity may involve the exclusion or repudiation of other musics, other cultures, others; perhaps certain musics are even constructed through the purposive or ambivalent absenting or mastery of other musics and cultures. Music has often played a leading role in disciplinary socialization and ideological conditioning, and despite changes, the contemporary music world is still structured by divisions of status and discourses of differential values that are reproduced by subsidized, public, and authoritative institutions that continue to play a leading role in the legitimizing and canonization of certain musics¹⁰. In *Noise*, French thinker Jacques Attali apparently develops a similar outlook. According to Attali, the history of music can be seen as the history of the ordering of noise in codes. However, the impact of music goes beyond this. Attali regards the ability of music as bringing about discipline among its major functions. Music can be regarded as an affirmation of the possibility of establishing order in the social. Music is used and produced in an attempt to make people *forget* the general violence, to make people *believe* in the harmony of the world, and to *silence* and censor all other human noises.

⁸ I borrow this term from Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling.

⁹ Cf. Finn, G.; *Why Althusser Killed His Wife*, p.174-6.

¹⁰ Cf. Born, G. and Hesmondhalgh, D.; *Western Music and Its Others*, p.1-32.

When music banishes noise, it (symbolically) proscribes violence in a more general sense. Thus, music simulates the accepted rules of society.

But Attali also sees another side of music: 'A subversive strain of music has always managed to survive, subterranean and pursued, the inverse image of this political channelization: popular music, an instrument of the ecstatic cult, an outburst of uncensored violence ... Here music is a locus of subversion at odds with the official religions and centers of power ... Music ... is simultaneously a threat and a necessary source of legitimacy.'¹¹

The subversive element is no less characteristic of music. In other words, music is not only disciplining, structuring, canonizing. At the same time, music exceeds its own categorization, its own constructions of identities, of self and others ... the space of music beyond music ... are we approaching an ethics of music here?

Let's turn briefly to Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the *differend* (although he only situates it in language). According to Lyotard, it is the linking of phrases that opens a space of thinking, judging, communicating, existence. Now the differend, the fundamental dispute among phrases, presents an ethical demand against phrasal violence that represses the opportunity to link differently, that makes it seem as if there is no differend at all. The differend is the locus of what Lyotard calls *ethicality*. Ethicality rests in the space for concatenation, with an opportunity to link in either direction, rather than in the elimination of that space that would thus determine the outcome. The ethics of the differend is a generic obligation towards the excluded in which there is a continual release of suppressed meaning through the invention of new idioms and new genres of discourse thus exposing and celebrating the contingency of linkage. The concept of the differend may not give any moral guidance, but in the particularity of artistic discourses the ethical call (same as above) placed through the differend is to address the unsaid, to reformulate, to make current again, to rephrase. It is aimed against discourses that in one way or another silence or are forgetful of the differend, that obfuscate, dispense, transcend, mend, close, or solve the differend. Lyotard's ethicality invokes a non-normative ethics that instead of prescribing one's responsibilities, calls upon them; it is an ethics that poses an appeal without settlement, that creates a space for a response-ability¹².

If ethics means the opportunity or possibility to link in either way, to go beyond or between categorical imperatives, does this clear the way for saying that anything (yeah...we mean everything here) goes? We must not dream of the pure and simple absence of any border, category, frame, classification; crossing borders automatically means constituting new ones. So it is not so much about the removing of frames and categories as it is a matter of questioning them, questioning their status, their ethico-political functioning and effects, a matter of entering that uncertain and uncomfortable space between category and reality. Ethics as a process of formulation and (self-)questioning that continually re-articulates boundaries, norms, selves, and others.

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In *The Turn to Ethics*, Beatrice Hanssen asks herself: 'How to combine a commitment to the universal recognition of others - whether it be a matter of ethical, cultural, or legal recognition - with a respect for the concrete particularism, difference, or asymmetry of others? ... how not to rarefy the otherness of the other to such a degree that she is turned into an abstract alterity

¹¹ Attali, J.; *Noise: the political economy of music*. Manchester, 1985, p.13-4.

¹² I thank P.W. Zuidhof for helping me to formulate these thoughts.

(slipping from the position of the other, or *autrui*, back into the reified, objectified, *autre*)?¹³

How? What could be my prudent answer, my cautious attempt? Perhaps telling stories, vernacularism, building contingent, local histories that include an awareness of alternative histories on their horizons (Hayden White's *tropology*); perhaps a restating and altering of the tropes of (earlier) texts, thereby reshaping, in the very act of enabling a text, a conception of the tradition in which these texts occur, all this in contrast to transcendentalism, universalism, and essentialism¹⁴. What I am pointing to is what Derrida calls *intertextuality* and *repetition-with-alterity*, writing and reading strategies that traverse the space between self and the other. What I am pointing to is a strategy by which a text (a music, a voice, a history, a story) finds its place among differing discourses, thereby irrevocably fixing meaning temporarily, but simultaneously emphasizing heteroglossia and multi-vocality. Could this be a possible future for musicology, a future that moves towards a cross-fertilization of musicology and ethics?

How? Let's listen to some music. Let's hear what it can tell us, teach us, how it confronts us. With ethics? Response-ability? Otherness? Singularity?

I heard ... no, I experienced this concert by Dutch musicians Eric Vloeimans (trumpet), Ernst Reijseger (cello), and German drummer Dirk-Peter Kölsch ... It is the beginning of the concert ... the musicians enter the stage ... people in the audience quiet down and end their conversations ... the last tuning of trumpet and cello ... only cello now ... three highly concentrated musicians ... someone moves a chair ... someone; a listener ... a rasping, creaking sound ... irritating? disturbing? ... Reijseger moves his stool ... again ... again ... imitating, responding, playing along with, making music: rhythm ... the stool is suddenly a musical instrument, or an instrument that can produce sounds that we may regard as music ... the cello joins in ... a duet for cello and stool ... then the drums take over the rhythmic part, extending it, elaborating it; the trumpet starts producing thin, empty sounds from which a theme originates ... almost as a relief, at least for me: now it is all right again, now I can understand, now I am in control again - of the music, its conventions, its frames, and of myself, some moments ago lost in this space between categories and reality ... between music and non-music (not yet music or not music anymore) ... between music and its frame; on the border, its border ... or, between music and music, that is, between music as a category or convention and music as a process, constantly exceeding and shifting its 'own' frames, a process of transformation and (re)formulation, an active openness towards otherness, towards 'an other' of music: sounds that do not seem to belong to music ... a blurring of boundaries, not to get rid of them but to question them, to see (hear) their limitations, their ethico-political working, and a confrontation with one's own expectations and ideas ... hearing as an ethical practice, a site where a practice or the self has not been entirely or easily subordinated to already existing and firmly embedded codes, or rendered solely an instrument of knowledge ... hearing for pleasure, as an end in itself ... for pleasure? ... is it a pleasure to expose yourself to certain risks, to open yourself for what is yet to come? ... is it a pleasure to leave the safe and secluded space of the self, of fixed ideas and opinions to put yourself at stake, to encounter otherness, to be hospitable to the other?

Where did the concert begin? Which sounds belonged to the music, which ones did not? Did it only start with the cello? Did it start with Reijseger, moving his stool in a rhythmic way? Did it start with this listener changing position and

¹³ Cf. Hanssen, B.; 'Ethics of the Other', in: Garber, M., Hanssen, B., Walkowitz, R.L.(ed); *The Turn to Ethics*. New York, 2000, p.130.

¹⁴ Cf. Tomlinson, G.; 'Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies', in: Bergeron, K. & Bohlman, Ph.V.; *Disciplining Music. Musicology and Its Canons*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p.66.

thereby producing certain sounds from his chair that were brought into the musical realm by Reijseger? But then, why didn't the other sounds of the audience, their talk, laughs or murmur, belong to the concert as well? And what does this imply? That the listeners are also musicians, active participants in the realization of the music? That we can never decide conclusively, when music starts and non-music stops? It is not a matter of deciding here, a matter of choosing the 'right' answer. Ethics demands from us a response-ability that cannot be legitimized. So these questions refer more to a certain space of undecidability where our ability to respond is addressed, to a space that is not a re-presentation of a pre-conceived, pre-scribed, and pre-determined category or morality; in short, they refer to a space-between, an inter-esse.

However, it is not only the audience that is challenged, that is left in uncertainty. Nor is it only about conventions, schemes, categorizations, classifications that are questioned, transgressed, or ignored by this music. It is Reijseger who puts himself in jeopardy here too. Let's say, (the beginning of) the concert is also an openness of the search during the course of which the musician exposes himself to the uncertainties of the outcomes. Let's say, along with American philosopher Gregory Ulmer, that it is about invention; not without concepts, but by going each time beyond them, without any guarantee or certainty. To invent means to interrupt, to disrupt already existing musics, to underwrite the possibility of an other music, an affirmative openness towards others and otherness¹⁵.

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Am I talking ethics here, an ethical space of music(ology), an ethical space between self (music, musicology) and other ((non-)music, (non-)musicology)? The uncertainty expressed through the many questions in this introductory essay is sincere: I don't know! Parts of my dissertation, the expert meeting, and this issue are attempts or initiatives to rethink music(ology) and ethics by bringing them together. (Were they ever separated? Maybe their interconnectedness was just out of focus for a time. 'Musicology has always had a code of ethics' is the opening sentence of McClary's contribution.) Both Kramer and McClary point to the urgency for musicologists to no longer ignore the ethical dimensions of music(ology) in light of September 11, 2002: ethics and topical politics intertwine here, providing us with new (?) questions. On another plateau, the contributions of Finn and Veselinović-Hofman take almost opposite positions: where Veselinović-Hofman argues that musicology can be ethical when its past (its roots) is taken seriously, Finn states that it can (only) become ethical when we go beyond it. The comments by De Groot, Dame, Van Maas, and Welten sometimes use different emphases: taking one of the main essays as their starting point, they move into other directions, opening new spaces, providing us with new insights. Responding to the essay of Veselinović-Hofman as well as my dissertation, Van Maas proposes a rethinking of the ethico-theological concept 'religio' instead of the term 'ethics' for which he relies on the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Derrida. Welten, using Merleau-Ponty and Michel Henry, thinks through Finn's contribution by emphasizing the corporeality of music and the importance of the body that experiences music. In a very direct reaction to Kramer's interpretation of Chopin's Prelude in B flat, De Groot introduces his ideas on music(ology) and ethics as precisely the possibility of bringing forward endless chains of (contrasting) interpretations. Finally, Dame further examines the proposal of a music(ologic)al ethics McClary brings forward, and expands her remarks with two Dutch examples: Dutch critics reactions to a recent stage setting of Rameau's opera *Platée* and the performance of a tango during the wedding ceremony of the Dutch crown prince and his Argentinian bride.

But although all the essays tell different stories, by approaching this difficult and delicate theme from various perspectives, they all make clear that there is much

¹⁵ Cf. 'Of Jazz Education', www.deconstructioninmusic.com

to be said on music(ology) and ethics. That this is going to be the - or better, a - future of musicology remains to be seen.