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Critical Questions About Deconstruction or About De-Centring Of The Relation Between Philosophy And Music

Kritična vprašanja o dekonstrukciji ali
O razsrediščanju razmerja med filozofijo in glasbo

Ključne besede: dekonstrukcija, glasba, muzikologija, filozofija, estetika, *difference*, pravica do filozofije, pravica do glasbe, kanon

Keywords: Deconstruction, Music, Musicology, Philosophy, Aesthetics, *Différance*, Right to philosophy, *Right* to music, Canon

POVZETEK

Povsem različna prizadevanja problematiziranja kanoničnega pozicioniranja glasbe, muzikologije, estetike in filozofije skozi samo-umevanje *dela-kot-vira hoc et tunc* je peljalo h kritiziranju dekonstrukcije 'samo-umevanja' in 'objektivne avtonomije' glasbe kot umetnosti in glasbenega dela kot nosilca ali osrediščene vira glasbe kot umetnosti. Te redke pristope je mogoče določiti pri Adornovi kontekstualizaciji kritične teorije, razvijanju teorije izmenjave pri Jacquesu Attaliju in kritikah Nove muzikologije, usmerjenih k študiju kulture, kot so ga podali Richard Leppert, Susan McClary ali Rose Rosengard Subotnik, ki poudarjajo avtonomijo glasbe in jih je mogoče prepoznati v psihoanalitski teorizaciji materialistične funkcije/učinka glasbe in opera, denimo pri Mladenu Dolarju in Slavoju Žižku. Po nauku dekonstrukcije filozofa Jacquesa Derridaja so posredno ali neposredno izpeljani povsem različni pristopi in aplikacije, ki zadevajo hibridna in pluralna dejanja interpretiranja kanon-

ABSTRACT

Entirely dissimilar endeavours of problematizing a canonic positioning of music, musicology, aesthetics and philosophy through self-comprehensiveness of a *piece-as-a-source hoc et tunc*, have led to criticism or deconstruction of 'self-comprehensiveness' and 'objective autonomy' of music as an art, and of a music piece as a carrier or a centred source of music as an art. Those scarce approaches can be specified from Adorno's contextualization in critical theory, Jacques Attali's developing the theory of exchange, to the New Musicology critiques oriented towards studies of culture, such as those of Richard Leppert, Susan McClary or Rose Rosengard Subotnik, which emphasize autonomy of music, or can be recognized in the psychoanalytical theorization of materialistic functions/effects of music and opera, such as of Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek. From the teachings on deconstruction of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, directly or indirectly entirely different approaches and applica-

ičnih pozicij glasbe, muzikologije, estetike in filozofije.

V nadalnjevanju se ukvarjam z identificiranjem in interpretiranjem problemsko zasnovanega pristopa h kanoničnim razmerjem med glasbo, muzikologijo, estetikom in filozofijo.

tions are drawn, concerning hybrid and plural acts of interpretation of the canonic positioning of music, musicology, aesthetics and philosophy.

In the further text I shall dwell on identifying and interpreting of a problem-oriented approach to the canonic relation of music, musicology, aesthetics and philosophy.

A problem and performing a problem

An entirely traditional and therefore stabile relationship between philosophy and music has been established in the European cultural tradition, from Hanslik, then Schenker and Adler, Busoni, Janklevich or Focht, almost to our days. This relationship is based on aesthetical and musicological centring of a musical piece as a determining sensual source in the midst of an autonomous and self-comprehensible – yet always anticipating – context of the Western music art. A canonic relation of a quadrangle: music, aesthetics, musicology and philosophy, is certainly founded in, one could say, phenomenological emphasizing of objectivism (Lippman 1992: 393-436) of a musical piece – e.g. as in the famous statement of Eduard Hanslick:

Music consists of scalar and other figures and shapes composed of notes, and these have no other content but themselves, again recalling architecture and dance, both of which similarly present us with pleasing relationships that have no definite content. Everyone is free to experience and describe the effect of composition in his own individual way; but the actual content of the work is nothing but musical shapes, since music does not simply speak by means of notes; it also consists of nothing else but notes. (Hanslick, quoted from Buić 1988: 34.)

Or, as in a poetically projected performance of a modernistic vision of *music as music*, by Ferruccio Busoni:

music is music, in and for itself, and nothing else, and [...] it is not split into classes (Busoni 1965: 21).

Or, as in a philosophically self-annulling relation of knowledge in the name of uncontrolled fascination with music, by Vladimir Jankelevich:

Let's conclude: music is not beyond law, nor is it spared from limitations and dependence which are inseparable from a human position in the world, and if ethical nature of music is a verbal illusion, the metaphysical nature of music is very close to being but a rhetoric figure. (Jankelevič 1987: 40.)

Entirely dissimilar endeavours towards problematizing a canonic positioning of music, musicology, aesthetics and philosophy through self-comprehensiveness of a *piece-as-a-source hoc et tunc*, have led to criticism or deconstruction of 'self-comprehensiveness' and 'objective autonomy' of music as an art, and of a music piece as a carrier or a centred source of music as an art. Those scarce approaches can be specified from Adorno's contextualization in critical theory (Adorno 1968), Jacques Attali's developing the theory of exchange (Attali 1985), to the new-musicology critiques oriented towards studies of culture, such as those of Richard Leppert, Susan McClary (Leppert / McClary 1987) or Rose Rosengard Subotnik (Subotnik 1991), which emphasize autonomy of music, or can be recognized in the psychoanalytical theorization of materialistic functions/effects of music and opera, such as those of Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek (Dolar / Žižek 2002). From some teachings on deconstruction (Subotnik 1996; Hofman 1997: 11-17; Mikić 2005: 113-117; Cobussen 2002) of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, directly or indirectly entirely different approaches and applications are drawn, concerning hybrid and plural acts of interpretation of the canonic positioning of music, musicology, aesthetics and philosophy.

In the further text I shall dwell on identifying and interpreting a problem-oriented approach to the canonic relation of music, musicology, aesthetics and philosophy.

An inherited fashion/procedure

We always depart from the found – the inherited. I am / we are already caught in the world/language which existed before me or us. In this found-ness a fatale and promising *always* is performed, which is non-existent outside the individual intervening act of *différance* on the found fragments of the actuality: to be caught among traces whose edges aren't sharp, whose surface is not quite transparent, and whose presence is disturbingly uncertain. If a deconstruction exists everywhere, wrote Derrida, *it* exists as well, wherever there is something¹; so, there's nothing left for us to do but to think what is happening in our world today, in our contemporaneity, when deconstruction is becoming a motive with its meanings, its privileged themes, its mobile strategy etc.!? Derrida couldn't give a simple answer to this question, an answer that would formalize it all. All his attempts may be explicated by this extraordinary question and the uncertainty which initiates this question of an époque of a *being-in-deconstruction*.

There was, though, one privileged moment for the deconstruction, when *it* was in fashion, which means that *it* produced uncertainty, *it* was open to interpolations and prone to transfiguration of *atmospheres* of intervenient performing in different hybrid contexts of society, primarily of culture, in fact of art. Deconstruction was a kind of a flourishing fashion or a set of fashions between theoretical post-historicism and political globalism. Therefore there are greatly different interpretations of deconstruction. Jacques Derrida operated with this term in various situations, or simultaneously in different ways disturbing its defining with potentialities of interpretations: "One of the main roles of what in my texts is called 'deconstruction' is exactly

¹ *It* is not limited to only a thought or a text, in a casual or a literary sense of the last word.

the limiting of ontology, and in the first place of this the present indicative of the third person *S is P* (Derrida 1988: 1-5). Avoiding a precise definition of deconstruction is performed for two reasons: (1) deconstruction can be interpreted as a form of translation (transferring, decentring, exchange, substitute) of language and textual representations of the concepts of Western metaphysical ontology, in which way it (ontology) also transforms in a conceptual way, or gets *différance* or disassembled through representation and the offer of different textual advocacies of thinking and writing, and (2) deconstruction is not explicitly an explanatory model of a philosophical discourse, but it is also an accelerated productive (quasi-epistemological) model of practices which constitute worlds of philosophy, theory of literature and art history, partly taking over the functions of productive social work, whose outputs are not only explanatory-epistemological, but also aesthetical, literary, behavioural, i.e. culturally intervenient. Deconstruction is argued as practices of intervention within the Western philosophical rhetoric, and as productive offers of new or different rhetorics. Derrida has explicitly set the interventionism of deconstruction: "Deconstruction, I have insisted on this, is not *neutral*. It *intervenes*" (Derrida 1993: 87). Characterization of deconstruction is establishing relations of rhetoric and aesthetic outputs of performing of the writing and the text, within the complex contexts of representing and *différance* of the traces of other writings/texts. Derrida wrote that deconstructing presents a simultaneous structuralistic and anti-structuralistic act (behaviour, performing, practice, action, intervention). It displays hybridity and ambivalence of every cultural order in its arbitrariness and the motivations for arbitrariness. When an order in its self fragmentises, decomposes, relocates in a trans-figural way, divides into layers, decentres, marginalizes, hegemonizes, centres, homogenizes, in other words when it disassembles, differentiates and deposits – then an order displays laws (presuppositions, hypothesis, regularities) and an atmosphere of an order as a complex archaeology of alluvia and strata of cultural synchronic and diachronic meaning. In that sense, deconstruction is the philosophy of *alluvia* or *strata* of meaning, but as well a philosophy which concerns layers of traces resisting to meaning:

But the paradox, as far as the effects of the deconstructive jetty are concerned, is that it has simultaneously provoked in the last twentieth years several absolutely heterogeneous types of 'resistance to theory'. In trying to classify their 'ideal types' I will try to conceptualize both what 'theory' means in that context and what is here the strange and disconcerting logic of resistance.

There is to begin with, I would say, the *destabilizing* and *devastating* jetty itself, a 'resistance to theory'. It is a resistance which produces theory and theories. It resists theorization *first* because it functions in a place which the jetty questions, and destabilizes the conditions of the possibility of objectivity, relationship to the *object*, everything that constitutes and institutes the assurance of *subjectivity* in the indubitable presence of the *cogito*, the certainty of self-consciousness, the original project, the relation to the other determined as ecological inter-subjectivity, the principle of reason and the system of representation associated with it, and hence everything that supports a modern concept of theory as objectivity. Deconstruction resists theory then because it demonstrates the impossibility of closure, of the closure of an ensemble or totality on an organized network of theorems, laws, rules and methods. (Derrida 1994: 85-86.)

Texts which can be classified under the term 'deconstruction' do not only have a task to bring a new understanding of order and its decomposition or reconstruction on the base of traces of decomposition or relocating, but also –performatively and interveniently – to demon-

strate the manner of disintegration and integration of writing of the Western metaphysics, by which texts enter a problem of the basic form of writing, more basic than the philosophic writing: writing in literature or writing as art. Deconstruction obtains characteristics of a post-philosophical activity, though it does not renounce philosophy as an open field of certain rights. Derrida very decisively speaks of the right to philosophy (Derrida 1993: 62-65) though he disproves the seemingly *natural* permeating of philosophy and science, problematizing the non-self-understood *naturalness* of an episteme by releasing textual potentials of literary and any other artistic writing.

Let us focus on a transition from a verbal writing (*écriture*) to an auditory (acoustic and, then, musical) system of writing (a *sound* and then a *music image as writing*). In the premises of deconstruction, potential analogies of the writing and the musical can be noticed. Presupposing an auditory and, later, a music-image as a field of confrontation of texts of different character, a deconstructivist debate: (1) locates a network discourses which are different, and which appear in an audible record, and (2) interrupts normalized signifying (linguistic) economies, displaying how meanings become constituted and transformed, producing *différance* (structural and temporal relations). In deconstruction the illusion is problematized, of a self-comprehensible, metaphysical or nominalistic determination of hybrid relations of the signifier and the signified of an acoustic and, then, a musical image and of music as practice. As a matter of fact, through a deconstruction of a compatible team of philosophy, aesthetics, musicology and music, we cease to protect music from the world. We violate its specificity, i.e. we deconstruct the epistemology of *music itself*, in the name of external epistemologies of music, being concerned at the same time not to lose the 'power' of understanding music through its real or potential structural order. This position of obvious transgression and concern, with all potential contradictions, was provoked by Rose Rosengard Subotnik, who brought us back to confrontation of 'external' and 'internal' discussing of music:

All of us who study music are caught in the Western dialectic. To an extent, all of us in the West who study anything are caught in that dialectic. Against the values we can protect by insulating abstract modes of thinking from the contingencies of concrete experience, we have to measure the risk, well symbolized by Schoenberg's paradoxical career, of coarsening through over-refinement our sensitivity to other responsibilities of knowledge. But music offers a special opportunity to learn, for it confronts us always with the actuality of a medium that remains stubbornly to strategies of abstract reduction. In this respect, it provides an ideal laboratory for testing the formalistic claims of any knowledge against the limits of history and experience. To ignore such opportunity is to handicap musical study needlessly, and to consign music itself to a status of social irrelevancy that it does not deserve. (Subotnik 1996: 175-76.)

Which stands quite close to the Derrida's constantly developed belief that renouncement of metaphysics is impossible, that it is only deconstruction which is possible, of the relation between the centre and the margin in regard to the prevailing and hegemonic metaphysics which enables us to systematize knowledge, values, even the anticipated expressions through tactics of *différance*. In philosophy, aesthetics of music and musicology, the deconstructivist quest for differences of textual (and with them analogous visual, acoustic, spatial, temporal) aspects and characterizations of an auditory and then music image, becomes a discursive production of meanings, i.e. a production of 'differences' and '*différences*' which are consequences of the confrontation of complex and arbitrary, culturally led discourses of Western

music (metaphysics of a musical piece as a constituent of music art). Let us inspect a characteristic case: John Zorn's composition *Spillane* (for a mixed orchestra, after a text by Arto Lindsay, 1987, duration 25:12). Zorn is 'inspired' by a film-performed character of the private detective Mickey Spillane. But his inspiration is based not on his inner impression of the one who precedes music, but on an analytic archive of the traces of culture which enable anticipation of a concept of the detective's character as a source of *inspiration* for music. Zorn writes:

Because I write in moments, in disparate sound blocks, I sometimes find it convenient to store these 'events' on filing cards so they can be sorted and ordered with minimum effort. After choosing a subject, in this case the work of Mickey Spillane, I research it in detail: I read books and articles, look at films, TV shows, and photo files, listen to related recordings, etc. Then, drawing upon all of these sources, I write down individual ideas and images on filing cards.

For this piece, each card relates to some aspect of Spillane's work, his world, his characters, his ideology. (...) Sorting the filing cards, putting them in the perfect order, is one of the toughest jobs and it usually takes months. Picking the right band is essential because often just one person can make or break a piece. (Zorn 1987.)

What are the *filing cards* of Zorn's and what is their relation to the *sound blocks*? According to the early works (Derrida 2002) of Jacques Derrida, it is possible to distinguish a relation of a *trace* or an *erased trace* or a *preceding trace* in the locus of a subjective experience of a composer. As if a composer sees himself on the *scene of writing* which precedes an experience itself, being a set of selected and moved traces which promise a drama of writing, performing and listening to music which appears after the film, i.e. from the film as an erased and thus of a *différance*.

The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance. An unerasable trace is not a trace, it is full presence, an immobile and uncorruptible substance, a son of God, a sign of parousia and not a seed, that is, a mortal germ. (Derrida 2002: 289.)

A film, photographic, verbally-narrative, journal character of detective Spillane disappears in Zorn's music. This disappearance is not total disappearance, but erasing by moving, where crossing from one medium into another causes a listener to become a kind of archaeologist rather than a phenomenologist. To reconstruct traces, connect them into a momentary and apparent whole. To walk through a character who is transferred from verbal descriptions or visual presentations of a figure into a music course of hybrid sounds.

Asymmetry of the right to philosophy and the right to music

Definitely, here will be discussed what is missing, what is already lost, and what seems entirely impossible, or, unnecessary. Music misses philosophy – *it* is sung and played without words that seek justification in thoughts about presence and existence (*being*). The 'playable' or 'singable' music creates an illusion that it doesn't need philosophy, that it exists as a joyful or sad event (of performing) of the music itself in space and time of a human body. As an

‘essential’ activity within the philosophical, music was lost for philosophy even before Socrates and Plato, in that horrific, alienating and traumatic post-Pythagorean partition of myth, man and universe, from which the culture of the West originated. Music lacks a ‘voice’ which becomes ‘theoretical speech’. Music lacks a ‘voice’ which would state its rights to what stays outside music (emotions, nature, humanity, sexuality, politics, religion, everyday life), and philosophy lacks what the voice of utilitarian speech (linguistically centred presentation of thoughts by speaking and writing) fails to provide to an *ornamental* (decorative) singing voice that still needs to become music². The fatal discrepancy of philosophy and music, or, fatal attraction of music and philosophy, is clearly demonstrated by the pianist Glenn Gould in his numerous versions of striving to confront a hypothetical and ever synthetic ‘will’ of a composer (Bach, Mozart; Gould 1990: 22-28 and 32-43) with an intervenient and ever analytical ‘intention’ of a performer (pianist). Those two incompatible *texts* have become a problem for him: a border line of confrontation with a border line of textual hypothesis which promise an abundance of human experience, and, what is even more important, of transferability of human experience through music performance which becomes an act of constructing on the voids of the absence of a composer and the ephemeral presence of a pianist.

Why should one create problems *bic et nunc*, and wonder about a hypothetic deficient right of music to philosophy, and an absolutely possible, yet remote, alienated right of philosophy to music? The response is simple, almost infantile: *a man is not a bee* (Derrida 1993: 87). Relations of music (art) and philosophy (theory) are not just there, without me or us who are in a certain local time and space of knowledge or ignorance within or outside music and philosophy. Relations between music and philosophy are set and displayed ‘via’ an iterative activating of local knowledge which needs to:

- (i) Be carried out from music into the field of social theories (as well as of philosophy) in order for the music technique to display itself in relation to concept, ideology or just to intuitions which are its unavoidable surrounding; and
- (ii) Provoke from philosophy – focused on a certain ‘broad’ field of generality (of entirely obvious speculative systemic hierarchies of interpretation and debate) – some uncertainties of particular localizations of music which are incomparable to other arts, formations or effects of culture, that is – philosophy activates from its generality, systemic nature and universality, potential of *local knowledge* from the field of music which appears vis-à-vis its promised hierarchical edifice of sense, meaning and values.

And as in the tradition of modernism (ideal of autonomy of disciplines), asymmetry of the right of music to philosophy and the right of philosophy to music appeared as a determining argument for understanding how unnecessary a discussion on the relation of music and philosophy was, today the heterogeneous views on local potentials or non-potentials of that relation identify the problem of asymmetry as a departing point for a discussion. The core reason is activating of local knowledge which builds a heterogeneous *field of differences* and which produces an effect of asymmetry of the right of music to philosophy and the right of philosophy to music.

Let us consider those questions of the right and asymmetry once again.

A ‘rough’ and ‘coarse’ question of interrelating of music and philosophy is posed, considering approaches which lead or resist leading from music towards philosophy and from philosophy towards music. It is an asymmetric relation through which two entirely different rights are being realized and thus two entirely different authorities being established:

² To become an instrumental sound, i.e. *music of music* in its autonomous sense: *absolute music*.

- (a) The right of philosophy – by its interpretative and speculative capacities – to present and represent music for philosophic knowledge and every other possible knowledge of sciences;
- (b) The right of music – by its particular musical means – to stand in relation to the texts of culture which externally provide its musical and extra-musical sense, meanings and values as a particular ‘social event’.

To speak of asymmetric rights of philosophy to music and of music to philosophy, does not mean to project a unique ‘joint’ (contact, stitch, seam) between philosophy and music, but to take interest and engage in:

- (i) Philosophy of music when music itself is immediately absent from its discursive presence, and
- (ii) Music ‘*of*’ philosophy when philosophy is immediately absent from, for example, its exclusively instrumental (absolute music) presence as an event of tones.

We mean to say by this that a philosophical discourse about music does not require the presence of music, not even a memory of concrete music (of any particular piece of music). Philosophy can speak about music constituted from a philosophical hypothesis (conceptual model, abstract experiment, speculative constructions of a music piece, world of music and a system /style/ of music). Philosophy is in some way critical concerned with music, the musical or the art, though it has no concrete references to such-and-such music. *It* creates a concept of music (it wonders about it “What is music?” or “What is music for?”). Philosophy is established exactly through such questions as “What is music?” or “What is music for?”. (i) philosophy wonders about music by means of philosophical constructs of an intentional concept of music, (ii) philosophy wonders about music by means of specific sciences or theories of music, and (iii) philosophy wonders about music in order – indirectly, in a ‘relation of interchange’ – to pose the questions “What is philosophy?” or “What is philosophy for?”. On the other hand, music does not need to manifest in its auditory phenomenon and presence during the performing (or in a note writing of a sound order) that ‘it’ is of certain relations with philosophical suppositions (metaphorically speaking – with discursive *substances*) in order to claim uncertain right to philosophy. Music does not pose such questions as “What is philosophy?” or “What is philosophy for?”. It does not inquire by musical or philosophical means within music (musical piece) “What is music?” or “What is music for?”. Music creates an illusion that it is just music and that therefore it makes redundant all possible questions about music, philosophy or the world (nature and culture). But that is, actually, a stand which has its historical and local geographical reason. That is not an answer applicable to all historical and geographical music. On contrary! Music is the only art that, if we consider the history of European civilization, in the very beginning was philosophy (birth of music and philosophy from the Pythagorean cosmogonies, i.e. from myth and ritual). In the Middle Ages music was constituted as a science – the term ‘music’ signified the science of harmony. The ‘birth’ of modernity has simultaneously separated music as a skill of singing and playing from a scientific knowledge about music or the universe. Afterwards, music was established as an art, constituted as a relation of institutions of creation (music as an art of invention /composing/ and performing) and of institutions of displaying (systematizing, formalizing and interpreting).

This story from the side of philosophy looks somewhat different. Philosophy poses a question of its right to music in order to speak, in the first place, about the right to philosophy itself (philosophy is a single object of any philosophy – which means of advocating any individual knowledge for the thought about the general). It is only afterwards, indirectly from the discourse about philosophy and philosophy of music, that philosophy approaches music in its

hypothetical or historical sense. Philosophy speaks about what is outside philosophy in order to question and constitute what is inside it, but then, paradoxically, what it speaks about, however, is of philosophy, because prior to any question about philosophy being posed from philosophy, for the subject of philosophical disciplines it already exists as philosophy. This last statement is made in the sense in which Jacques Lacan claims that language exists before the subject crosses its threshold (Lacan 1983: 151). Music does not pose a question of its right to philosophy; it even apparently seems as if it conceals this right. For the sense of listening and for the body, music displays what is exclusively musical. For the possibility (motivation) of a discourse external to music to be constituted by music itself, it is necessary that the musical alone confronts the texts of philosophy, and then subsequently, through itself, to confront other texts of culture (to be in the field of inter-textual potentials). For, texts of culture are something existent prior to music and prior to philosophy in constructing one 'intimate' atmosphere where, in an utterly artificial way, both philosophy and music appear as separate worlds which have certain utterly different (asymmetric) rights. Therefore, resistance manifested by music towards philosophy, which demonstrates, *beyond* classical style, its particularity (autonomy, unspeakable-ness, absoluteness, objectivity), is not rejecting the right of music to philosophy. In the modern times music itself by its inner formally-technical structure rejects and prevents music as an art from being a function (or, more precisely, an auditory or sound illustration) of philosophy in a way it used to be a function or an illustration (from utilitarian to advocating, and from advocating to allegorical) of nature and the mythic in antique civilization, or of theology in the Christian epoch. Therefore, a critical right of philosophy (it is critical because it takes place on the very edge of the blade of a potentiality of *différance*) and the uncertain right of music (it is uncertain because it displays itself as a multiplicity of fragmentary and local potentialities in constituting one and the same piece as a religious, political, entertaining or autonomous artistic music) are not set and given rights once for all, conquered by philosophy or by music, they are changeable (in motion, mobile) rights which depend upon moving along the historical (stylistic, contextual) and geographical (contextual, functional) axes of potentialities.

Translated from Serbian by Sunčica Milosavljević

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