

CONTEXTUALITY OF MUSICOLOGY

In one of its branches contemporary musicological thought¹ concentrates on the change of the methodological approach, due to the novelties in philosophical practice and human sciences, in modernity. The change of the scientific standpoint that had originated from enterprises such as semiotics, deconstruction, or feminism² stimulated critical reinvestigation of hierarchical relationships established on the logocentric basis of the modernistic consciousness. Poststructuralist critical optics to which subject, historicism, meaning and philosophy are submitted,³ crystallized their new status upon the primacy of categories opposed to identity, autonomy, causality, truth. Thereby “emerged” a decentered subject, history without diachrony and progress, meaning without precise location, philosophy without “transcendental signified.” Deconstructive inversion undertaken within the hierarchy of the metaphysically located contrary notions enforced, therefore, “a shift of focus from identities to differences, unity to fragmentation, ontology to philosophy of language, epistemology to rhetoric, presence to absence,”⁴ finally, from the creation to the interpretation.⁵

Contrary to philosophy, human studies and arts, in which the above mentioned shift sets an essentially new problem circle, in music, however, it is recognized as a phenomenon inherent to its very nature. We could almost say that this transfer is *built into* musical identity. Its two strata of which the first is understood as Dahlhaus’ “relative autonomy,” presuppose its sound appearance, which can be both kept “in silence” (in a text) or realized in sound within an unlimited quantitative span. In it, the first stratum of musical identity, otherwise strictly “centered” in a score, appears to be “decentered” into infinite sound differences of which every single tends to come near to this notated but never

¹ The concept of musicology refers in Serbian literature to the exploration of the history of music, and together with ethnomusicology defines the sphere of musical science.

² Cf.: Richard Leppert, Susan McClary (Ed.), *Music and Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, XI

³ Cf.: Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 1–4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵ Cf.: *Ibid.*

attainable essence. Moreover, a poststructuralist critical model, more precisely, deconstructive procedure, can be discerned from a certain communication which is inevitably established among the works of music themselves, in their diachronic order.⁶

Perhaps fact very that the type of autonomy of music bears considerably deconstructive nature, determined less initiative of the study of music regarding its own endeavors in identifying the theoretical shift to poststructuralist criticism. My thesis is that the deconstructive inherence of music stipulated the post-structuralist inherence of musicology, that exerted as dominant in the moment when poststructuralism – and yet in some elements already structuralism – began with a radical reinvestigation of the metaphysic binary conception. In effect, criticism of musicology *waited for* postmodernity, that is, for the appropriate spiritual and theoretical context, in order to designate its poststructuralist nature.

Therefore, Lawrence Kramer is probably right when he claims that “it would be fair to say that music criticism becomes postmodernist when it proceeds by deconstructing the concept of the extramusical.”⁷ Thereby, on the one hand, he appreciates criticism as a concept that is not unknown to musicology, and on the other hand, implies that criticism has genuine reasons and conditions for its full rise just in postmodernity. Indeed, in many recent musicological treatises, the authors⁸ generally support the re-readings of the autonomy of music. They demonstrate how the opinion according to which music embodies everything that is intangible, figuring “as an acoustic image of pure interiority,” is to be withdrawn before the understanding of music as a primarily socially caused fact, and in general, before the considerations of music “from every possible perspective,”⁹ “from extra-musical positions,”¹⁰ that is, from the aspect of everything that belongs to “the rubric of context.”¹¹ In effect, it means a defining of the position opposed to positivism conceived as pure factographical registering within some utmost narrow, or, no matter how large musical territory. Contrary to this, contextuality in musicology advocates precisely a showdown with the *relationships* implied by those facts,¹² regarding both their internal order and

⁶ My idea about the deconstructive nature of the autonomy of music is displayed in a study *Music and Deconstruction (An Inscription on the Margins of Derrida’s Theory)*, (in): *Exclusivity and Coexistence*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 1997.

⁷ Lawrence Cramer, *Music and Representation, Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996, 67.

⁸ For example, Madan Sarup, Lawrence Cramer, Peter Franklin, Simon Frith, Joseph Kerman, Richard Leppert, Susan McClary, John Mowitt, Rose Rosengard-Subotnik, John Shepherd, Ruth Solie, Steve Sweeney-Turner, Janet Wolff.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, XI–XII.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ *Cf.*: *Ibid.*

¹² Rose Rosengard-Subotnik, *On Grounding Chopin*, (in): Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Ed.), *op. cit.*, 111.

the relations with the questions that do not directly belong to the formal level. Demonstrating this thesis in her musicological output, Rose Rosengard-Su-botnik emphasizes that she does not see any “fatal contradiction between the acceptance of autonomy (underlined by M. V.-H.) (...) as one sort of paradigm for interpreting structure, and the rejection of autonomy as an epistemological ideology,”¹³ guiding her treatises by the conviction that “the structure of art and the experience of life support each other in ways that affirm the value of serious contextual studies.”¹⁴ And their final aim is – as Susan McClary metaphorically explained – to explore everything that lies beyond the last door in Bluebeard’s castle;¹⁵ that is, behind the “ban” and in spite of it.

However, this deeply motivated movement for the contextuality of musicology should not be conceived as the absolute, as a situation without roots and previous results. Because, in addition to its considerably rich formalistic and positivistic experience, musicology was directing to the problems of context, almost from its very foundation. Already various classifications of the musical science (e. g. Framery, Forkel, Adler)¹⁶ testify to this by directing the attention also to the hierarchy of the disciplines which are borderline, “sister” or auxiliary to the history of music. For, *contextuality of musicology* and *contextuality within it*, meaning, as a trait of its nature and methodological procedure, *ultimately stem from its relationship toward the other disciplines*. Regardless of the fact that many ramifications can be sketched in the sense of sciences which function as borderline, “sister” or auxiliary to the history of music, and many concentric circles circumscribed – as the mentioned authors (after all, not only they!) proposed directly or indirectly – the fact is that in musicological practice one same discipline can act as unavoidable under certain circumstances, and under others, as completely marginal. In other words, the hierarchy of disciplines, which act as the borderline, “sister,” auxiliary... to the history of music, can never be notated precisely. And that the preceding notion of hierarchy should therefore be necessarily deconstructed is clearly shown by the interpretative dimension of musicology.

Namely, an “extract” from the factographical plethora of the history of music as a field of investigation, submits to the individual standpoint of the author, that is, to his way of thinking, educational radius, creative “gesture,” etc. And it is this that determines the author’s choice of disciplines relevant for his work on a specific subject, regardless of the fact that in connection with certain themes,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings. Music, Gender and Sexuality*, Minnesota, London, University of Minnesota, 1994, 5.

¹⁶ Let us mention such as by N. E. Framery in *Tableau de la musique et de ses branches* (1770), J. N. Forkel in *Theorie der Musik, insofern sie Liebhabern und Kennern notwendig und nützlich ist* (1777) and *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (1788), G. Adler in *Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft* (1885) and *Methode der Musikgeschichte* (1919).

some of the disciplines are considered more or less as basic, or, as we used to say, craftwork. For example, whether the scientific research and interpretation of the output of a composer will take into consideration not only the relevant facts from the history of music, general history, or analytical practice both in terms of every single component of a work (form, melody, rhythm, harmony, instrumentation) and in their relationship in the concrete situation, but also the psychology of creation, general and sociology of culture and art, history of philosophy and aesthetics, mathematics, acoustics, etc., depends not only on the research subject, but on the interpretative style of a musicologist as well. The situation is identical in the branch of systematic musicology¹⁷ which, as the fundamental research, aims at the phenomenon and not the event, meaning, according to Wiora, at musical phenomena considered in the synchronic and not the diachronic way.

Hence, every musical phenomenon can be examined potentially from the aspect of all disciplines, particularly those for whose scientific apparatus and kind of argumentation a musicologist feels the most affinity; and by which – founded on the analytical level – that phenomenon can be expounded in the most appropriate way.

That is why I attempted – on quite another musicological occasion – to reveal some flexible tenet that would supercede the model of the preceding “quantitative” schemes, by designating a mechanism of establishing and functioning of an “open” table, which can be valid under the circumstances of any conceivable cooperation and interaction of the main and subsidiary disciplines. The basic assumption of this is that all fields of knowledge that stand outside the history of music are considered to be equally potential concerning their function within musicological research, and not as borderline, “sister,” auxiliary.

On the basis of the analytical procedure, which I established according to a double criterion (on the one hand, concerning the factographical fund from the spheres relevant for the certain investigation, and on the other, referring to the usage of the optics and methods of the scientific areas that are inherent to those spheres!), and applied on a great number of musicological texts of Serbian and foreign authors, I concluded that the aspects of the relationships between the history of music and the disciplines outside it, are analogous to those relations that act among various arts, more precisely, different media, in the framework of mixed media, poly-media and inter-media.¹⁸

¹⁷ For example, the phenomenon of thematic opposition being the root of the sonata form, can be rendered not only at the purely formal level, but from the aspect of psychology, philosophy, individual theories of art, sociology, mathematics, biology... that, naturally, depends on the intention, decision, affinity or the scientist's global orientation.

¹⁸ The ample treatise of this problem is the content of my study *The Principles of Mixed Media, Poly-Media and Inter-Media in Musicology*. From this text I am using here the shortened explanations and schemes of these genres. The study was written and exposed within the project of the Academy of Music and Theater of the University Rostock, in late 1997.

Thus, like mixed media that rely on the changeable hierarchical relations among the media of relevant arts, being recognizable in the entire course of the work, according to the specificity of their competence and kind of "argumentation", on the basis of which they participate in the whole collage-dramaturgy of the work, consistently advocating its artistic thesis, a musicological text implies the mixed-medial relationship between the history of music and the other disciplines whenever it follows the identical logic. In other words, a discipline can be identified as one which methodologically shares in the genesis of a musicological text conceived according the mixed-medial principle, only if it travels along the same path as the history of music does in that same text from its (hypo)thesis/"theorem" through the argumentation up to the final level of investigation. Thereby, it is characteristic that the way of exposing the thesis, the kind of arguments and of deduction, that belong to this discipline, remain recognizable by the features of "their" science, regardless of the degree of their coordination with the approach from the aspect of the history of music. (Scheme No. 1)

Such a relationship can be found between the history of music and of visual arts (in some respect the history of the theater too), in the study by Roksanda Pejović, *The Mocking of Christ and Other Scenes From the Cycle of "The Sufferings of Christ" As Illustrated by Musical Instruments in Southern European Art*.¹⁹ Regardless of the fact that in this text we can identify the rich presence of corresponding factographical material belonging not only to the history of music, history of visual arts, and history of the theater, but also to the general history, ethnomusicology, the history of literature and social psychology, we must say that the author's interpretative style chose precisely the history of visual arts to be the science which methodologically functions in the study, consistently conducting the comparative procedure throughout the entire investigation and course of the work.

If in such mixed-medial situations the extramusical disciplines achieve the equal intensity of participation in musicological examination and exposition, as well as the persistently polyphonic texture, it is about a musicological treatise built upon the principles of poly-media.

Perhaps the best example of this can be found in the study by Vlastimir Peričić *Josip Slavenski and His "Astro-acoustics."*²⁰ The author displays his thesis about the linkage between the "protoscientific" and artistic creation of the composer Slavenski, with an equally intense approach from two directions, attaching the same importance from both aspects: of systematic musicology on the one hand, and astronomy and physics on the other. The writer's thought in itself here bears a consistently *counterpoint* contrapuntal nature; hence, the process of argu-

¹⁹ The text was published in the International Magazine for Music *New Sound*, (Belgrade), 1993, 2, 71-93.

²⁰ The study is printed in *Zvuk*, (Sarajevo), 1984, 4, 5-14, and in *Musiktheorie*, 3. Jg. 1988, Heft 1, 55-69.

mentation of the thesis is projected from both directions, and carried out in a polyphonic way up to the end of the study.

In other words, musicological and astro-acoustical aspects build their contrapuntal union in the mentioned text, in the status of recognizable and autonomous disciplines in themselves. Thereby, they justify the given scheme of mixed media concerning all points of the scientific inquiry, confirming their equal importance. Due to the polyphonic procedure and entire musicological result, the scheme of mixed media is to be specified as poly-media. (Scheme No. 2)

And when the subject of scrutiny, the way of its elaboration, the genre to which they both belong, merge – due to the musicologist's intention and realization! – into a unique whole in which the musicological result (combined with all its mixed-medial or poly-medial assumptions) acts as part of the subject, and the subject as part of the musicological result, it is about the conception of inter-media. (Scheme No. 3)

I shall give an example from my book *Art and Beyond*,²¹ that refers to the explanation of the project *Four Figments* by Vladan Radovanović. At one point, I intentionally left a musicological discourse of the book, that rests upon the logic of mixed-media/poly-media, by creating a figment of my own, in order to give the explanation of Radovanović's achievement and the possible example of its functioning, at the same time. Thereby, the text about the subject matter became its part, and the subject matter, a part of the text. If we try to separate them in the mentioned example, nothing would remain either of the subject or the discourse: namely, the *musicological* idea in itself arose *in the core of the idea of the project* at whose explication it was aimed. As this idea stems from the midpoint that stands *among*, among music, psychology, literature... thus, in the midst of the creative "doing" whose nucleus is intermedial in its nature, the musicological thought which aspires to render the idea, had to be of an intermedial character too.

Therefore, the particular disciplines cannot be identified in the mentioned text, as its recognizable layers (like in mixed media or poly-media), because the "investigative ray" projected from each of the angles of other disciplines (here, psychology, literary and a scientific discourse on music) reverts to the angles from *every* point of the subject to be examined, and from all phases of the investigation as well.

In effect, this involves the mechanism of establishing the intermedial connection between the type of discourse and its subject matter, as a phenomenon, which shows a clear analogy with the phenomenon of that creative idea which arises among the media.

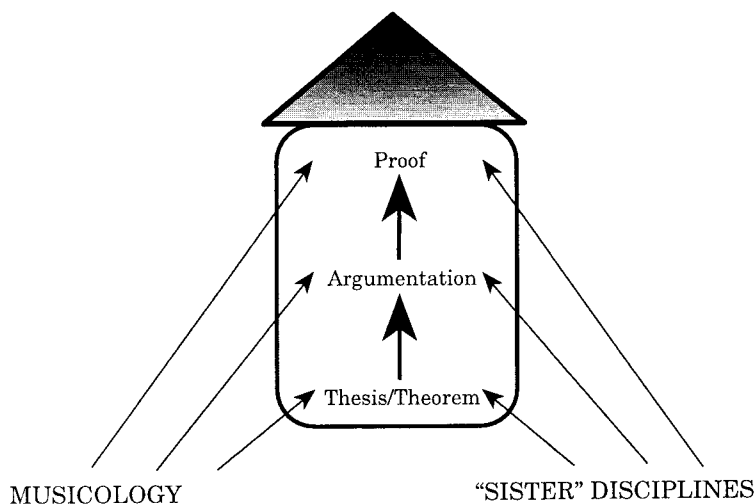
The opportunity of identifying the logic of multimedia genres within musicological achievements also points to the fact that the appeal for consideration of *music in context*, this characteristic endeavor of the so-called new musicolo-

²¹ *Art and Beyond. The Poetics and Creativity of Vladan Radovanović*, Novi Sad, Matica srpska, 1991, 40–42.

gy, does not bear the entirely new enterprise. It is already implied not only in the olden thoughts about the contribution of the extramusical disciplines to musicology, but also in each of the musicological works in which the formal and factographical level do not act as the initial point and aim, at the same time. But, what is indisputably new, is the *explicit* creative advocacy for “a serious musicological discipline of criticism,”²² the consciousness about the state of belonging to the new time as one’s own “theoretical position,” as the context in which the latency of a profession rises to its dominant request. And in this framework the new is – I shall take the liberty of saying this – the given interpretation of musicology, according to which *it is founded on the principles of mixed media, poly-media and inter-media*; that is, on the tenets after which we can easily identify which science, when and why can function as a “sister” discipline, sharing in a musicological examination. And it is of great importance because, thereby, the largest thematic span of the documented and creative musicological criticism can be *essentially* located, encompassed, and supported.

Scheme No. 1

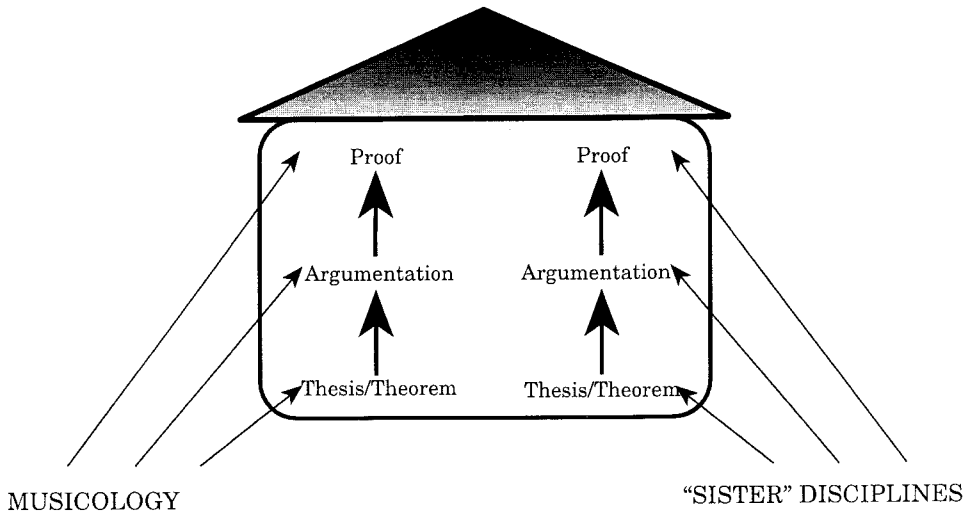
MUSICOLOGICAL RESULT = **MIXED-MEDIUM**



²² R. Rosengard-Subotnik, op. cit., 130.

Scheme No. 2

MUSICOLOGICAL RESULT = POLY-MEDIUM



Scheme No. 3

MUSICOLOGICAL RESULT = INTER-MEDIUM

