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Musicology in the "Vestibule" of its Conceptual Change

The question of the status of musicology in the circumstances that have come about with the development of the computer medium should be raised, first of all, because this development, alarmingly, has led musicology into the 'vestibule' of its conceptual change. The essence of this vestibule lies in the intimations and initial achievements in accomplishing a hierarchical turnabout in the articulation of a musicological text, in other words, the hierarchical inversion of the categories of its principal and marginal content and unfolding.

Namely, every musicological text in principle, like every other kind of scientific text, relies on a specific balance between its primary and secondary structural layer. The primary is considered here as the stratum which in effect characterizes the whole text, representing the sum of its relevant features in the span from the thematic, over the methodological and formal, to the features of the language and style. The secondary layer, however, refers to the documentation conceived here in the broadest sense of the word: to the amount of available information which, originating from the most diverse sources, constitutes the factographical stock and map on the basis of which the primary, that is, essential textual stratum is built. In the appropriate moments of its unfolding, the documentary material appears, which fragmentarily, more precisely, in the function of footnotes, acts as the architectural element of the textual whole. Regarding the possible range of its content, this material functions either in the form of documentary footnotes, or cross references, or explanatory footnotes. While the first two cases refer to information about particular sources, the third one pertains to a text of the supplementary type. Still, it does not c u t i n t o the main unfolding of the text as its d i r e c t extension either in the sense of thoughts or sentences; as a rule, it bears a consistency and its own, parallel autonomy, belonging to the main textual course in the measure in which this course treats it as the e s s e n t i a l l y s u p p l e m e n t a r y item.

However, this balance between the essential and the supplement can be disrupted. For example, the referential material can be insufficiently utilized, which can convey the impression of uncorroborated investigation and of withholding information, and consequently of the possibility for checking. In the absence of the mentioned balance, which is ultimately caused by diminishing the presence of the scientific apparatus, the scientific textual genre in itself can be brought into question and directed to the features of some other textual kind. Also, a musicological work can tend to a change of genre for quite opposite reasons: when it contains a glut of referential material, and especially when this repletion at the same time implies its direct intrusion into the main textual unfolding. This, regardless of the fact that such material formally and, as

a rule, orthographically[1] belongs to the sphere of remarks, whether or not they are indicated as foot- or endnotes.

Like the "travellog" of an immoderate lateral thinking, such a text offers a myriad of incidental explanations which "separate" themselves from the textual whole, in effect neglecting it by becoming an interesting reading selection in themselves. Hence, the side-text acts as the main cause of the thematic, compositional and genre decentralization and destabilization of the entire text. Therefore, the s c i e n t i f i c physiognomy of the musicological whole is brought to the verge of being converted into, let us say, an e n c y c l o p e d i c a l physiognomy.

In this possible state of its own referential "suffocation," the musicological text is not far from the problem circle in which a text is located in general today, under the influence of new computer technology.

We refer here to the phenomenon of hypertext. Seemingly, in terms of its features, the hypertext finds one of its closest l o g i c a l assumptions exactly in the kind of text burdened by numerous side remarks. Namely, in the basis of the hypertext lies the idea of shedding light on the chosen object of the writer's attention from the aspect of everything that, directly or indirectly, could be of interest for this object, that is, which could mean its context.[2] The crucial methodological and technical base of that idea is the system of linking afforded by the computer medium. This linking relies on the computer's multimedial abilities which enable it to realize both the visual and auditive component in their individual and in their simultaneous appearance. Therefore, the visual comprises both the verbal and the kinetic because it mediates their visibility. More precisely, the visual component of the computer medium embraces the presentation of any and, in any sense, structured semantic or non-semantic verbal content, and the realization of movement created in the most complex relations and forms. In the same sense, the auditive component involves not only the presentation of sound of any origin and type of organization, but also of loudly performed verbal content. Be-

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[1] Theoretically, there is a possibility of grouping and writing the footnotes according to their types, as well as directly including them in the main text that can be marked with brackets, some other font, etc.

[2] On this occasion it is important to say that the development of poststructuralist thought, on the one side, and the contextuality (of musicology), on the other, can be conceived as the preparatory and existential conditions of hypertext. George Landow, for example, finds the common plane of the idea of hypertextuality and poststructuralism in their mutual disaffection with the phenomena of the printed book and hierarchical thought. In connection with this, he stresses that the mingling of creative and discursive moods, which in various ways occurs with R. Barthes, M. Foucault, J. Derrida and J. Kristeva, simply happens in the hypertext. Cf.: George P. Landow: *What's a Critic to Do?: Critical Theory in the Age of Hypertext*, in: Hyper/Text/Theory, ed. by George P. Landow, Baltimore and London 1994, p. 1.

On the other side, we can say that hypertext shares the same attitude with musicology towards the notion of the context, considering that, in concordance with its nature, musicology advocates interdisciplinarity. This is especially evident within its poststructuralist orientation, which explicitly demands the consideration of music from the perspective of anything that can be encompassed by "*the rubric of context.*" Cf.: Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman: *Contextuality of Musicology*, in: Poststructuralist Musicology (= International Magazine for Music *New Sound*, Special Edition), Belgrade 1998, p.13; also, cf.: Lawrence Cramer: *Music and Representation. Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1996, p. 18.

sides, the computer medium can also function as the "broadcaster" of all visual and auditive events.

We can say, therefore, that everything which can be understood as the possible side-content of a text can be joined in the conditions of the computer medium with the main textual unfolding through the kinetization of the vocovisual genre.[3] It means that it is the computer's multimedial nature that enables a text to realize a concrete turn-about from a Gutenbergian to an essentially different type of articulation and display, towards the hypertext.

It exists in a completely different form from a printed text because the manner of its composition, realization and reading is stipulated by the nature of the medium, being somehow "identified" with it. In effect, the hypertext is notated within the medium which is not the same one in which it is read – as is the case with paper in the genre of the printed text – but memorized either by analogous technology on a laser disc or by digital technology on a CD-ROM. Between two kinds of hypertext,[4] the stand-alone (e. g. read-only) functions as a certain data-base which belongs to the chosen thematic sphere. This involves a dense net of information, interwoven on the basis of associative threads with the question being examined and notions that figure in the text. The system of the associations is chain-like in principle; therefore, according to this logic, theoretically it provides the facts about all conceivable phenomena which directly or indirectly concern the text. Moreover, in its potential chain-like distances, the referential contents must not have almost any correspondence with the content of the main text. But, the extent to which the associative interventions will go, and what the above mentioned net will look like, depends exclusively on the decision of the author of the text. In the stand-alone kind of hypertext the author still figures as the signatory and holder of the "copyright" because he himself creates the principle "trunk" of the text as well as the entirety of the ramifications of all its "branches."

As we already emphasized, the close relation of this hypertextual type, with the traditional musicological work inundated by the number and ramification of the footnotes, is considerable and highly symptomatic. In effect, in the logical and practical sense, there is no more than one step to the genre of the read-only hypertext. The logical step would imply that a musicological text is thought out in advance as the rhysomatic whole, and the practical step, that it then "traverses" in the field of the computer medium whose technology would fasten its form, gives it new genre legitimacy, and thereby new axiological corroboration.

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[3] The vocovisual is considered here as the form of intersection of the initiative, activity and efficiency of the verbal (verbo), auditive (voco) and visual medium. Regarding the fact that the verbal medium is already encompassed by the visual, instead of the formulation "verbo-voco-visual," we use here the term "vocovisual." Cf.: Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman: *Art and Beyond*, Novi Sad 1991, p. 72. The problem of the vocovisual is the object of the artistic and theoretical attention of the Belgrade composer Vladan Radovanović. In his book *Vokovizuel* (Vocovisual), Beograd 1987, he also gives a historical survey of the development of this genre, its definition and the explanations of its relations with all other branches of art. A definition which is used here relies on his investigations.

[4] Landow.

Hence, a musicological stand-alone hypertext – let us say a monographic study of a composer – in the sense of its content and form, would work parallely and consistently according to the features of both the principal text and its supplements. This does not at all mean that the footnotes in the traditionally formed musicological achievement are in principle superficially thought out and elemental in character. On the contrary, we refer here only to a new formal logic which ensues from the abilities of the medium which is not that of paper.

Therefore, the above-mentioned musicological study would be chain-like in composition, meaning, it can be "opened" deeper and deeper, farther and farther according to the keywords. In the concrete case, they can comprise: the stylistic, social, economic, philosophical, scientific, technological… references connected to the time in which the artist in question worked. Also, they can pertain to his biographical particulars, as well as of the members of his family, of his predecessors, contemporaries, followers, also the facts concerning the analytical, documentary material, etc. And every of the keywords could branch out further, being opened theoretically according to an unlimited number of phenomena and events. Thereby the medial means would encompass vocovisual contents and their kinetization as well.

Thus, the musicologist has the opportunity not only to include a notated music example as an integral part of his text, but to give it, at the same time, in its sound form, as well as to attach the corresponding fragment of a live stage performance when it involves, let us say, an opera or a ballet. Such a hypertext would be unfolded and followed on a screen organized according to a collage-like principle, and the reader could "enter" as he wishes into the explanations of the processed keywords, activating himself as the viewer and listener at the same time.

This means that he would follow a kind of a collage-like dramaturgy in combining the different media of a hypertext, which we mark here as the mixed-medium.[5]

In this, the consumer (reader = listener = viewer) has a possibility analogous to the one he is offered during the reading of a traditionally formed musicological work.

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[5] The term "mixed-medium" figures in the analytical model of the possible classification of the musicological works that I established in order to define musicological interdisciplinarity more precisely, and on the basis of the genre analogies between the compositional and musicological production developed during the second half of the 20th century. I undertook this investigation entitled *Prinzipien der Mixtmedien, Polymedien und Intermedien in der Musikwissenschaft* (now in print!) in 1997, within the project/seminar *Neue Zusammenhänge in der kompositorischen und analytischen Betrachtung* at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater der Universität Rostock, where I presented it at the end of the same year. The similar problem circle is partly considered also in my further, here already-mentioned paper, *Contextuality of Musicology*.

Regarding the fact that the notions of mixed-medium and poly-medium are of special interest for the present research, I shall give their explanation in the way I summarized it in the above mentioned text. So, m i x e d - m e d i u m counts with the changeable hierarchical relations among the media of different arts that are always to be recognized after the peculiarities of their competence and kind of argumentation. At the same time, they take part in the entire dramaturgy of the work, consistently advocating its artistic idea. Analogously, a musicological work implies the mixed-medial relation between the history of music and other disciplines in every situation when it follows the identical logic. If such a logic parallely implies the realization of the equal intensity of presence of different media in a work, that is, analogously, of various disciplines in a musicological achievement, as well as their polyphonic texture, this refers to the principles of the p o l y - m e d i u m .

Namely, in both cases he can give up "entering" the footnotes completely or frag-mentarily, during his following a (hyper)text. And yet, the crucial difference lies in the fact that the medium of paper as the carrier of a musicological work cannot clarify any idea about the d e g r e e of the chain-like distances of the footnotes' contents. On the paper medium, every footnote is located at an "equal" distance from the principle text, excluding the situation when this involves its direct overflow into the footnotes, no matter which form they are written in. The reader cannot rank them until going through them. Hence, his not reading them can deprive him of many important facts and thoughts.

In the case of the hypertext, however, with the screen as its carrier, the type of relative connections among the side contents becomes rather comprehensive because it is systemic. Thus, the reader can quite easily choose to which extent he will deviate from the main text to pursue the hypertext. Therefore, it is possible that, attracted by the "lure" of the journey offered through notions, he goes so far from the "trunk" of the text that he loses the need and interest to go back to it.

When left to the reader's will, following the hypertext is, therefore, unpredictable even concerning the activation of its (mixed-)medial lines. Hence, the main course of the hypertext bears the function of a certain initial text for shaping the reader's free variants of the stored content, that is, his cybertext.[6] Therefore, to remain at the read-ing of the first referential level, meaning, to follow the "branches" which are closest to the "trunk," in principle is nearest to the features of the Gutenbergian text.

If the mixed-medial collage-like articulation were replaced by the polyphonic in-terdependence and inseparability of the visual and sound medial lines during com-posing a musicological hypertext, in other words, if the hypertext were structured in such a way that the realization of the one of these lines a u t o m a t i c a l l y provoked the activity of all the others at corresponding moments, we would be referring to a certain hypertextual poly-medium.[7]

At any rate, under these circumstances, the musicologist's activity would not only be the usual activity of the author of a scientific treatise in which he would express himself primarily as the analyst-theoretician-creator, but also the activity of an author, engaged simultaneously, or at least equally, in all phases of articulating the different, mostly encyclopedically defined contents by which the chain-like levels of the sup-plementary texts are presented.

All situations assumed here, that is, the factographical suffocation of the tradition-ally formed musicological text, as well as the musicological mixed-medial and poly-

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[6]   The principle of forming the cybertext can be compared to the functioning of the aleatory structure in music. Namely, both the reader of a stand-alone hypertext and the performer of a controlled aleatory composition have considerable freedom in the "usage" of the work, whereby the role of the author is not entirely invalidated. He still retains control of the whole by personally signing what he himself created, regardless of the fact that the number of appearances of this whole is equal to the number of the interpretations. It is clear enough that in such a case the reader/performer can never encompass the entirety of a work during only one reading/interpretation. See more in: Veselinović-Hofman, *Prinzipien*. Also, in direct conjunction with this, about the notion of "a readerless text," see: Espen J. Aarseth: *Nonlinearity and Literary Theory*, in: Hyper, p. 51.

[7]   Cf.: footnote No. 5.

medial hypertext, are highly symptomatic because they directly prepare the hierarchical inversion of the categories of the principal and the supplement in a musicological (hyper)text. By pursuing the logic of overemphasizing the accompanying material, the mentioned situations establish the ground for shifting the focus of musicological activity from selection to quantification, and the focus of creation from the textual "trunk" as the representative of the author's exclusivity to its lateral "branches" as the "advocators" of the encyclopedic conventionality.

While the (musicological) stand-alone hypertext still remains in this fragile v e s - t i b u l e of the hierarchical inversion of the categories of the primary and the secondary, the (musicological) read-and-write hypertext would mean the crucial gesture in replacing them. That which would have priority in such a conception is exactly this secondary, supplementary, chain-like informative principle founded on an entirely open communication among all participants in the electronic "dialogs." They can directly intervene in a read-and-write hypertext in any sense: supplying it, changing…, entering into "live" and practically unlimited mutual communication. So, the participants of the "electronic chat" can, for example, insert additional bibliographical facts into the above mentioned monographic study, then, their disagreements with the presented assertions, their own thoughts of the same or a totally opposed direction, etc.. To paraphraze the words of a colleague from the symposia sharing my concerns on the topic, we can, starting from the study on the composer, easily reach the file even about the ways of the production of beer! Indeed, depending on the participants' interests, education and profile in general, the facts by which the participants of electronic communication intervene, can change the content and physiognomy of the initial text to such an extent, that it cannot be recognized as musicological any more, especially not as a concrete and unrepeatable author's achievement.[8]

The question I refer to here is not only of a hypothetical nature any more. The technology and – regarding education – highly valuable function of the CD-ROM, already have their history. This refers also to the "translations" of the already existing musicological studies into the computer medium,[9] meaning, into the form which is not primarily conceived as a hypertext but approaches it existentially. So, gradually, a new type of musicologist and musical science is already being formed.[10] Therefore it seems that it is only a matter of time before the logic of both kinds of hypertext, of

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[8] Analogously to the parallel between a read-only hypertext and controlled-aleatory composition, one can establish the parallel between a read-and-write hypertext and the total aleatory principle, meaning, musical indeterminacy. In both cases this involves such interventions by the "consumers," which are principally beyond the control of the project's author, consequently, of the whole, acting as the starting point for reading/reacting, e. g. for the sound realization. This whole is presented by the initial text, that is, the score (usually a graphic one).

[9] For example, William Reinwick, David Walker: *CD-Brahms: An Interactive Multimedia Program in Music Analysis*, with Schenker's analyses of *Variations on the Händel's Theme* by J. Brahms as its basis. The attained knowledge about the technical integration of the media, have flowed into the Multimedia Music Analysis Program (MMAP).

[10] For example, the doctoral dissertation *Deconstruction in Music* by Marcel Cobussen from the Erasmus University Rotterdam, sets the example of a musicological book already conceived according to the logic of the non-linearity of the hyperlink.

course stimulated by their best features and advantages (among which are the easy availability provided by the computer monitor, the span of the mixed-medial and poly-medial presentation, the opportunity for the professional exchange of thoughts and experiences, for the increase of knowledge, intensity of communication, etc.) will begin to conquer the field of the so-far musicological manner of activity, especially in forming the texts.

However, the extent to which this procedure will change its nature, whether it will be stopped in the sphere of controlled aleatory shaping or whether it will go further to indeterminacy, still depends exclusively on us, more precisely, on the fact of how we deal with this problem today.[11]

So, these lines are written just in order to caution about the necessity of establishing the measure and border in coordinating traditional musicological procedure and new technology; to warn about the danger that we, as authors, could easily become the agents, supporters and witnesses of our own extinction as well as of the disappearance of the science which we deal with.

Perhaps, this warning is unnecessary? Perhaps, in general, musicology is still too self-satisfied, self-confident and calm enough today, to feel the referring problem as a serious threat?

Actually, I am not sure which one of these two things – fear or indifference – would be worse, either for musicological science or for us who deal with it.

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[11] Cf.: Mireille Rosello: *The Screener's Maps: Michel de Cereau's 'Wandersmänner' and Paul Aus-
ter's Hypertextual Detective*, in: Hyper, p. 128.