Postcolonial polyphony

*Edward Said's work on music*

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EWSP 49-2. Edward Said. n.d. Handwritten draft of Chapter Five of *Out of Place*.


Appendix 1: Said’s Miller Theatre Speech, 1993

Edward Said delivered this speech as an introduction to his piano recital with Diana Takieddine at the Miller Theater on April 27, 1993. The speech is transcribed from a recording of the concert, preserved on audiocassette and on Digital Audio Tape in the Edward W. Said Papers (EWSP 187a and 187b).

I thought I might say a couple of words about the program. The [program] notes that are supplied for you are really excellent. They’re written by wonderful authorities on the pieces, and I … [Interruption from members in the audience that cannot understand him.] Sorry, sorry. I was saying I thought it would be worth mentioning that the program notes are extraordinarily good and written by authorities on the various composers and pieces that we’re playing tonight. But one thing I wanted to say that might be of interest is that two piano recitals are not very frequent these days – most pianists I think tend to wanna play alone, understandably [laughter from the audience]. There is a wonderful ensemble quality of playing with another pianist and the complexity and richness of the music, in most cases, is a wonderful pleasure. In tonight’s program we’re really playing, I think, among the absolute summits of the literature for two pianos. The first piece, for example, the Brahms, was originally written for two pianos and then orchestrated [after] the summer in which he wrote the piece for two pianos. Two piano work of course is associated in the minds of many people with teachers, because when you study the piano very often your teacher will have a piano next to you, and will play along with you to teach you how to play better, to illustrate, to show you the mistakes you’re making, and so on and so forth. But there’s also the chamber music aspect of playing two pianos, which is that you play in an ensemble, together, frequently at home. Although the logistical problems for us of finding two pianos, two grands, next to each other [to rehearse for this concert] has been very great. But one hears of great pianists playing together – I mean [Vladimir] Horowitz and [Rudolf] Serkin used to play two pianos together, but no one ever heard them in recitals, as far as I know. In any event, the program tonight is a study in contrasts, for the most part. The Brahms is very very different from the Mozart, which is a very gallant and exuberant piece. The Brahms is extremely complex and (I think) one of his greatest pieces ever, and probably the greatest of the two piano works written. The Chopin and Britten go together, in that the Britten is a homage to [Ignacy Jan] Paderewski, who is a great Chopin specialist. And the last piece we’re playing is for four hand on one piano: the Schubert Fantasie which was written in the last few months of his life. The last point that I want to make is that Diana [Takieddine]
– who is a real pianist [laughter from the audience] – and I are both from the Middle East and from the Arab world, and we’re playing an entirely (as the jargon has it) a “Eurocentric program” [laughter from the audience]. But I’d like to think of it as the best kind of multiculturalism [laughter and applause from the audience].
Appendix 2: Barenboim’s Speech at the United Nations, 2015

Daniel Barenboim delivered this short speech at the Human Rights Council Room of the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, after his performance with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra of Mozart’s three final symphonies, on October 31, 2015. The speech is transcribed from the video recording of the concert, available online (Krause 2015, from 1:31:45).

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I hope you will allow me just a few words. Because it is a very special occasion for us. We played at the United Nations in New York, nearly ten years ago, and it is a very special honor for us to be able to play here today.

You know, we musicians are citizens of the world; we don’t know borders. We play German music, we play French music, we play Spanish music, we play [music from] everywhere. But of course we all have our identities – sometimes multiple identities – and they really inspire us or make us think.

Tomorrow would have been Edward Said’s eightieth birthday. He, as you know, co-founded the orchestra with me. And this was for him, as it is for me, really our lives work. You have seen in this orchestra musicians from Israel (both Jews and Arabs), Palestinians from the diaspora (Palestinians that have lived and worked in Jordan, or at some point in Syria, or in America, everywhere), Lebanese, Syrians, Egyptian, Sudanese, Turks, Spanish, and Iranians. I think I have to say no more. [applause from the audience]

Except maybe express a wish that all these countries – from Lebanon in the north, to the Red Sea in the south; and from Israel in the west, to Iran in the east – should be able to live according to the principles of the French Revolution. First, liberty; then, together with that, equality; and the third (for me) is a result, fraternity. (I’m perfectly willing to settle for the Middle East now without the fraternity to start with.) But let us all really work and fight for that. There’s too much injustice and there is too much suffering. And what we do in the music in a way is maybe an inspiration, but it’s also for us an escape.

Thank you very much.

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1 On December 18, 2006, the WEDO performed in the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations in New York, as part of the ceremony for Kofi Annan’s retirement as Secretary-General (Barenboim 2008, 87).
Summary

In this dissertation, I analyze the intersections between music and postcolonial criticism as manifested in Edward Said’s work. I argue that in his texts, music variously informs, confronts, and defies his postcolonial criticism, thereby demonstrating the capacity of music to interfere in other disciplines and domains. More specifically, I argue that in his work, music challenges the predominance of text as the primary frame of reference for academic knowledge formation – a challenge that I believe is particularly pertinent to postcolonial studies, as a field of oppositional criticism against epistemic structures of domination.

In my study, I move beyond the consideration of Said’s prominent publications and also analyze his unpublished texts preserved in the Edward W. Said Papers at Columbia University. This archive houses an exceptionally large collection of drafts, lecture typescripts, interview transcriptions, personal correspondence, and teaching notes, and many of these documents relate to his musical engagements. Through a close reading of a selection of statements in his published and unpublished work, I regard his texts as dynamic and multivocal performances, as they act in and upon their worldly circumstances. Moreover, I consider his authorship as multivocal, where “Said” enacts several voices that frequently interact, collide, and coalesce in his work and its reception. While I argue that Said’s legacy epitomizes such textual and authorial multivocality, I also want to suggest that any text – or at least those of historical representation – contains alternative voices that are (to paraphrase Said) dominated and silenced by the textuality of text.

In Chapter 1, I analyze Said’s elaborations on concepts of multivocality and their travels to debates about culture and colonial history. I devote special attention to the “contrapuntal” perspective in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), which has drawn the attention of many scholars and is appropriated in different disciplines and debates. By juxtaposing his influential publications with his other texts and interviews, I argue that, rather than conventionally conceiving counterpoint in terms of overlapping voices, the variational structure of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* informs the theoretical perspective in Said’s work, even if this musical specificity is not explicitly addressed. In addition, I demonstrate that in unpublished drafts of *Culture and Imperialism*, the conceptual terminology alternates between two terms – namely *counterpoint* and *heterophony* – and in this context these concepts evoke Schoenberg’s dodecaphony and free atonality, respectively, instead of compositions by Bach. Inspired by Said’s unpublished drafts, I conclude Chapter 1 by arguing in favor
of a heterophonic rather than contrapuntal reading of the historical archive, since the main challenge of the humanities is not to determine coherent contrapuntal structures, but to adequately represent the variational heterogeneity of culture and history in the linear and static medium of text.

In Chapter 2, I examine Said’s work on pianism in relation to intellectual vocation and responsibility, especially with regard to the transgression between the private and the public domain. For Said, pianism – as a highly specialized instrumental artform that is often performed in solitude – provides a frame of reference to examine the solitary act of the academic author, the potential for public intervention, and the intellectual’s resistance to specialization and discipline. I discuss these parallels between musical and textual performance in Said’s essays about Glenn Gould and in *Musical Elaborations* (1991) to reconsider his Adornian theorization of the social alienation of professional performance. I argue, however, that the conditions of intellectual engagement are more clearly explicated by Said’s own activities as a pianist, or rather by the public staging of his musical amateurism. To this end, I analyze the representation of his amateur pianism in his published and unpublished texts, in two biographical video documentaries, and in an unreleased recording of his public piano recital in 1993. I conclude that these representations of Said as musician elucidate his reputation as a postcolonial intellectual by highlighting the interdependence between socioeconomic privilege, representative authority, and the opportunity to bridge or transgress disciplining boundaries.

Chapter 3 considers Said’s work on operatic performance. I analyze the social and interdisciplinary positionality of his texts on opera, where statements negotiate between his intellectual, political, and musical endeavors. I examine four case studies as they transgress boundaries between disciplines, between academic and public intervention, and between historical analysis and contemporary criticism. First, I discuss that the “contrapuntal” perspective in the influential *Aida* essay actually results in a relatively conventional historical analysis, while his argument – and possibly the analysis of any opera – is nevertheless positioned in a contemporary context that the text tries to exclude. Second, I turn to his review essays in *The Nation* about operatic performance and argue that these hybrid texts, positioned between music review and social criticism, in particular accentuate the ambivalence of his authorial and rhetorical positionality when writing about music. Third, I analyze Said’s work that is most firmly positioned within musicological debates, including his unpublished book *Authority and Transgression in Opera* (1997), to investigate his authority when transgressing disciplinary boundaries. Fourth, I discuss his publications about Wagner and the controversies that are generated by his authorial reputation as Palestinian intellectual, to conclude that his work (like Wagner’s) requires a multivocal
SUMMARY

perspective to contemplate the perceptual overlap between the discrepant themes in his legacy.

In Chapter 4, I investigate Said’s expressed disdain for popular and Arab music. I discuss how musical elitism, orientalism, and universalism permeate his subject position as postcolonial intellectual when commenting upon musical “Others.” His brief but revealing reflections on musical Others present an encounter between individual music appreciation and its public articulation, where aesthetic taste and intellectual intervention intersect in autobiographical representations. I argue that, by overtly proclaiming his discomfort when listening to popular and Arab music, these statements acknowledge the intellectual limits to Said’s work. With regard to Anglophone popular music, and rock and jazz in particular, these limits pertain to his elitist Adornian stance on popular music’s limited capacity for social intervention. In relation to Arab popular music, the articulation of biographical experiences confronts and constrains his subject position as postcolonial intellectual when criticizing orientalist stereotypical representation. The last theme discussed in this chapter is the relationality between musical traditions, as occasionally addressed by Said, and its friction with his universalist claims about European classical music. I argue that this friction again results from his multiple positionalities as public intellectual when alternating between and juxtaposing statements about music, politics, and scholarship.

Chapter 5 moves beyond Said’s work itself as the object of inquiry to study the impact of his legacy on the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and the Barenboim–Said Akademie. In its reception history, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is heavily criticized for the claimed universality of its Eurocentric repertoire and its normalization of Israeli–Arab relations. In my view, these controversies underline how an engagement with Said’s texts remains topical vis-à-vis current developments in Israel/Palestine. I juxtapose the foundation of the Divan project in the late 1990s with his contemporary appeal for a binational Israeli-Palestinian state, to explore whether the orchestra’s premise can provide an intellectual frame of reference to envision a one-state solution. In addition, I reevaluate the orchestra’s Eurocentrism in light of the intellectual potential to “forget” the questionable politics of such normative musical engagement. Lastly, I return to Said’s elaborations about counterpoint and its posthumous appropriation by the Barenboim–Said Akademie to contemplate the discrepancy between the multiple temporalities and positionalities of criticism. I conclude that the intellectual criticism of the artistic engagements under consideration demonstrates a limited capacity to productively interfere with neocolonial inequality in Israel/Palestine, although I suggest that scholarly texts can nevertheless fulfil their performative potential in the absent presence of the author.
Samenvatting

In dit proefschrift analyseer ik de interacties tussen muziek en postkoloniale kritiek in het werk van Edward Said. Muziek inspireert, confronteert en provoqueert op verschillende manieren zijn postkoloniale kritiek, waarmee zijn teksten het vermogen van muziek illustreren om zich in debatten in andere domeinen te mengen. Volgens mijn onderzoek confronteert Saids muziekgerelateerde werk bovenal de dominantie van tekst als het voornaamste referentiekader voor academische kennisverwerving – een confrontatie die in mijn optiek vooral urgent is in postkoloniale studies en haar kritiek op epistemologische machtsstructuren.

In mijn onderzoek analyseer ik zowel Saids prominente publicaties als zijn ongepubliceerde werk, dat is bewaard in de Edward W. Said Papers van Columbia University. Dit archief herbergt een omvangrijke collectie van zijn persoonlijke correspondentie, onderwijsmaterialen, interview transcripts, en schetsen van lezingen en publicaties. Door middel van een gedetailleerde analyse van stellingen in zijn gepubliceerde en ongepubliceerde werk beschouw ik zijn teksten als dynamische en meerstemmige uitvoeringen die ageren tegen de sociaalmaatschappelijke omstandigheden waarbinnen zij opereren. Bovendien beschouw ik tevens zijn auteurschap als meerstemmig, waar “Said” verschillende stemmen uitvoert die in zijn teksten regelmatig op elkaar inwerken of met elkaar botsen. Hoewel ik beargumenteer dat Saids nalatenschap in het bijzonder een belichaming van dergelijke meerstemmigheid van tekst en auteurschap vormt, wil ik ook suggereren dat alle teksten – of in ieder geval teksten van historische verbeelding – alternatieve stemmen bevatten die (in Saids woorden) het zwijgen zijn opgelegd door de tekstualiteit van tekst.

In Hoofdstuk 1 analyseer ik Saids uitwerking van meerstemmigheid als theoretisch concept in debatten over cultuur en koloniale geschiedenis. Ik besteed met name aandacht aan het “contrapuntisch” perspectief in zijn boek Culture and Imperialism (1993), een perspectief dat veel wetenschappelijke aandacht heeft getrokken en is toegeëigend in verschillende disciplines en debatten. Ik beargumenteer dat de term “contrapunt” in Saids werk niet conventioneel wordt gedefinieerd als muzikale stemmen die met elkaar overlappen, maar dat zijn theoretisch perspectief is beïnvloed door de variatiestructuur van J.S. Bach Goldbergvariaties, hoewel deze muzikale specificiteit niet altijd wordt benadrukt in zijn publicaties. Daarnaast toon ik aan dat zijn muzikale terminologie in ongepubliceerde schetsen van Culture and Imperialism wisselt tussen twee concepten – namelijk “contrapunt” en “heterofonie”

Postkoloniale Polyfonie: Edward Saids Muziekgerelateerde Werk
SAMENVATTING

– en in deze context verwijzen de concepten niet naar composites van Bach, maar respectievelijk naar Schönbergs dodecafonie en vrije atonaliteit. Geïnspireerd door Saids ongepubliceerde teksten concludeer ik Hoofdstuk 1 met een betoog voor een heterofonisch in plaats van contrapuntisch historisch perspectief, aangezien naar mijn mening de voornaamste uitdaging van de geesteswetenschappen niet bestaat uit het determineren van overkoepelende meerstemmige structuren, maar uit het representeren van culturele en historische heterogeniteit in het lineaire en statische medium van tekst.


Hoofdstuk 3 beschouwt Saids werk over opera-uitvoeringen. Ik analyseer de sociaalmaatschappelijke en interdisciplinaire positionering van zijn teksten over opera, waarbij zijn stellingen balanceren tussen intellectuele, politieke en muzikale betrokkenheid. Ik bestudeer vier casestudies die de grenzen overstijgen tussen disciplines, tussen academische en publieke interventie, en tussen historische analyse en hedendaagse kritiek. Ten eerste bediscussieer ik dat het “contrapuntisch” perspectief in Saids invloedrijke essay over *Aida* resulteert in een relatief conventionele historische analyse, hoewel zijn argument – en misschien de analyse van elke opera – desondanks gepositioneerd is in een hedendaagse context die grotendeels door de tekst
wordt uitgesloten. Ten tweede beargumenteer ik dat met name Saids “hybride” essays in *The Nation*, gepositioneerd tussen de muziekrecensie en sociaal-culturele kritiek, de ambivalentie van zijn retorische positie als muziekcriticus benadrukken. Ten derde analyseer ik Saids werk dat het meest nadrukkelijk gepositioneerd is in musicologische debatten, waaronder het ongepubliceerde boek *Authority and Transgression in Opera* (1997), ter bestudering van zijn autoriteit om disciplinaire grenzen te overstijgen. Tot slot bediscussieer ik Saids publicaties over Wagner en de controverses die worden opgewekt door zijn reputatie als Palestijnse auteur, waarbij ik concludeer dat zijn werk (net als dat van Wagner) een meerstemmig perspectief vereist om de perceptuele overlapping tussen tegenstrijdige thema’s in zijn nalatenschap te beschouwen.

In Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoek ik Saids uitgesproken minachting voor populaire en Arabische muziek. Ik bediscussieer hoe elitisme, oriëntalisme en universalisme zijn positie als postkoloniale auteur doordringen wanneer hij commentaar levert op muzikale “Anderen.” Zijn korte maar onthullende reflecties op muzikale Anderen veroorzaken een confrontatie tussen zijn persoonlijke muziekwaardering en de publieke bespreking daarvan, waarbij muzieksmaak en intellectuele interventie elkaar kruisen in autobiografische uitspraken. Ik beargumenteer dat het vrijuit verkondigen van zijn afkeer tegen Arabische en populaire muziek de intellectuele grenzen van Saids werk erkent en benadrukt. In relatie tot Engelstalige populaire muziek, en vooral rock- en jazzmuziek, hebben deze grenzen betrekking tot zijn elitaire houding ten aanzien van het vermogen van popmuziek om sociaalmaatschappelijke kritiek te leveren. In relatie tot Arabische populaire muziek veroorzaken zijn autobiografische uitspraken een confrontatie met zijn positie als postkoloniale intellectueel wanneer hij kritiek levert op stereotype oriëntalistische representatie. Tot slot bespreek ik in dit hoofdstuk het relationele verband tussen muziektradities, zoals sporadisch behandeld door Said, en de frictie daarvan met zijn universalistische claims over Europese klassieke muziek. Ik beargumenteer dat deze frictie wederom voortkomt uit zijn meervoudige retorische positie als publieke intellectueel, waarbij hij schakelt tussen uitspraken over muziek, politiek en wetenschap.

In Hoofdstuk 5 verschuift mijn onderzoeksobject van Saids werk naar de invloed van zijn nalatenschap op het West-Eastern Divan Orchestra en de Barenboim-Said Akademie. In de receptiegeschiedenis wordt het West-Eastern Divan Orchestra sterk bekritiseerd vanwege het verkondigde universalisme van het Eurocentrische repertoire evenals vanwege de veronderstelde normalisatie van de Israëlisch-Arabische verhoudingen. In mijn optiek onderstrepen deze controverses het belang van een kritische behandeling van Saids teksten in relatie tot hedendaagse ontwikkelingen in Israël/Palestina. Ik bespreek de vroege ontwikkeling van het West-Eastern Divan Orchestra eind jaren 1990 in combinatie met Saids gelijktijdige betoog voor een
binationale Israëlisch-Palestijnse staat, waarbij ik de vraag vooropstel of het orkest een intellectueel referentiekader kan bieden om een eenstaatoplossing te verbeelden. Vervolgens bespreek ik de intellectuele mogelijkheid om het Eurocentrisme van het orkest en de politieke implicaties daarvan te “vergeten.” Tot slot kom ik terug op Saids theorearisering van het concept “contrapunt” en de postuum toe-eigening daarvan door de Barenboim-Said Akademie, wat ik beschouw in het kader van het spanningsveld tussen de verschillende vormen van temporaliteit en positionering in intellectuele kritiek. Ik concludeer dat de wetenschappelijke kritiek op de besproken artistieke en educatieve projecten over een beperkt vermogen beschikt om invloed uit te oefenen op de neokoloniale ongelijkheid in Israël/Palestina, hoewel ik desondanks suggereer dat academische teksten een productief potentieel kunnen vervullen in de afwezige aanwezigheid van de auteur.
Postcolonial Pol yphony - Wouter Capitain

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