

The Review as Bakhtinian Rejoinder: Edward W. Said as Music Reviewer / *A crítica como réplica bakhtiniana: Edward W. Said como crítico musical*

(in memory of Pierrette Malcuzyński)

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ABSTRACT

The article reads the work of the postcolonial theorist Edward Said through a Bakhtinian lens. Although Said and Bakhtin engaged differently with the politics of their time and had different ideas on the relationship between ethics and politics, their wide-ranging writings have been adapted and their ideas appropriated by scholars in many different fields—often the same ones. They shared a passion for dialogue, for exploring otherness and outsideness, and for believing in response-ability. What the novel was to Bakhtin, pianism was to Said, the music reviewer. Said never played the role of consumer guide or gate-keeper. He was more the peer reviewer or the grade-assigning professor. The multiple possible responses of the audience always conditioned his own. Said thought like Bakhtin all his musical life, perhaps without knowing it. Said's music reviews are, by definition, responses or rejoinders. They are hybrid, double-voiced narrations and transmissions, but also appropriations, as was the novel, in Bakhtin's eyes. Said's writings on music are analyzed in light of several key Bakhtinian concepts: dialogism, addressivity, response-ability, and the role of context.

KEYWORDS: Dialogue; Answerability; Addressivity; Context; Pianism; Reviews; Novel

RESUMO

O artigo propõe uma leitura do trabalho do teórico pós-colonial Edward Said por meio de um olhar bakhtiniano. Ainda que Said e Bakhtin tenham se engajado de forma diferente na política de suas respectivas épocas e que tivessem ideias distintas sobre a relação entre ética e política, seus escritos abrangentes têm sido adaptados e suas ideias apropriadas por estudiosos em diferentes áreas – com frequência, as mesmas. Eles compartilharam a paixão pelo diálogo, explorando a alteridade e a exotopia, e acreditando na resposta-habilidade. O que o romance era para Bakhtin, o pianismo era para Said, como crítico musical. Said nunca desempenhou o papel de guia do consumidor ou de guardião. Era antes o par crítico ou o professor que atribui menções. A variedade de possíveis respostas do público sempre condicionou as suas. Em toda sua vida musical Said pensou como Bakhtin, talvez sem saber disso. As críticas musicais de Said eram, por definição, respostas ou réplicas. Eram híbridas, narrações e transmissões bivocais, mas também apropriações, como eram os romances aos olhos de Bakhtin. Os escritos de Said sobre música foram analisados à luz de vários conceitos-chaves de Bakhtin: dialogismo, endereçamento, resposta-habilidade e o papel do contexto.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Diálogo; Responsividade; Endereçamento; Contexto; Pianismo; Críticas; Romance

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Why read the work of the postcolonial theorist Edward Said through a Bakhtinian lens?¹ After all, Said rarely mentioned Bakhtin in his writings on any subject. He certainly had a different life and career trajectory than the man whose fruitful ideas have provoked publications like this one. Unlike Bakhtin's marginal and marginalized professional life, Said's was spent as a respected, if controversial, star in the international academic world. As Caryl Emerson has reminded us, "like many scholars of the Stalinist Soviet period who had something profoundly their own to say, Bakhtin was often obliged to route those ideas through disciplines not of his own choosing" (2003, p.297).

Said, though a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, faced no such restrictions. If he ventured into other disciplines, it was by choice, and when he chose music as his field of interest, it ended up informing his literary and political writings both conceptually and rhetorically. These two men lived in such different worlds that it isn't surprising that they would have had different engagements with the politics of their time, and arguably different ideas on the relationship between ethics and politics.

Yet, in both cases, their wide-ranging writings have been adapted, and their ideas appropriated, by scholars in many different fields—often the same ones. Their politicized visions have made them both attractive to those working in areas where inequality - gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or historical circumstance—has dominated. The scholarship on Said, like that on Bakhtin, has been, to use Michael Holquist's distinction, both intrinsic and extrinsic: their theories have been studied in and for themselves, and they have also been applied (HOLQUIST, 1990, p.185). From

¹ The invocation of two deceased friends in my title is meant to be in celebration of their lives, as well as in memory of their deaths. Pierrette Malcuzyński was well known in Bakhtinian circles; Edward Said was known more generally through his field-establishing writings on Orientalism and post-colonial studies. But my two late friends shared more than this—they shared music. Pierrette's engagement was certainly familial: her father, Witold Malcuzyński, was one of the greatest Chopin pianists. But it was also a political and intellectual engagement: for her, music was always part of social discourse. And, of course, it was a big part of her social life with her friends. I dedicate this article to her, then, because we actually had many conversations not only about Bakhtin and music, but also about the person who is the major focus of this article: Edward Said. Edward was a Julliard-trained pianist who never lost his love for the piano (or his ability to play it expertly), and after becoming (to use his wife's word) "obsessed" with the eccentric and brilliant Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould, he began reviewing piano performances (and then opera) for New York magazines such as *The Nation*, beginning in the 1980s. In his last years, this Palestinian activist joined forces with Israeli pianist and conductor, Daniel Barenboim, to bring young Arab and Israeli musicians together to play music - as a step toward (and a metaphor for) political harmony.

Wayne Booth to Tzvetan Todorov, we have all, over the years, remade Bakhtin in our own image. We are in the process of doing the same to Said, to the extent that “Whose Said?” can join Peter Hitchcock’s “Whose Bakhtin?” as an important question to ask (HITCHCOCK, 1996, p.257). Both critics have been canonized, in a sense, and both may now be facing, at home, what Caryl Emerson, in this volume, calls a “re-reception.”²

While this is all true, my particular reason for bringing the two theorists together is less their parallel reception than their shared passion for dialogue and its multiple contexts, for exploring otherness and outsidersness, for believing in answerability (or response-ability). What the novel was to Bakhtin, pianism was to Said, the reviewer of musical performances. The “subject-subject relations” between novel characters and readers that Bakhtin saw as the “end-point and triumph of the novel” (EMERSON, 2003, p.305) find their correlative in the relations between musical performers and audiences for Said, whose ideas about the impact of reception echo Bakhtin’s. To use Holquist’s summary wording (with a little supplement): “for those who have experienced novelness [or pianism], the world will not look [or sound] the same” (1990, p.163).

However, Said-the-music-reviewer covered more than New York piano recitals; he was also an astute and very demanding opera reviewer. All of these reviews (written over 25 years) have been posthumously collected into a volume, tellingly entitled *Music at the Limits* (2008). The book also includes feature articles for magazines, such as *Vanity Fair* and *Harper’s*, and a few book reviews of works on music and musicians from *The London Review of Books* and the *Observer*. But most of them are from *The Nation*, the New York weekly periodical of culture and politics that calls itself the “flagship of the left,” offering (as it puts it) “unconventional wisdom since 1865.” Though a gifted pianist, Said came to music reviewing (if not music) through and *after* his literary training. In other words, he wasn’t someone like Paul Bekker, the prolific Weimar music reviewer, who had to publish a book on Beethoven before becoming the music critic of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. By the early 1980s when he began reviewing, Said had already written his books on Conrad, on “beginnings,” on Orientalism, and on the “question of Palestine.” He was already deeply involved in the politics of the Middle

² Editor’s Note: see Caryl Emerson’s article, entitled “Creative Ways of Not Liking Bakhtin: Lydia

East - and of the academy. So, in his music reviews, too, he openly engaged the so-called “political correctness” debates of the early 1990s, because, in his words, “not enough notice is taken of how the neoconservative attack on the literary and pictorial arts has also taken a significant toll in the world of classical music” (SAID, 2008, p.134).³

In his music reviewing, Said’s literary background made its appearance in different ways. He framed a 1987 review of two Metropolitan Opera productions with an excursion into what he called “the great outburst of intellectual energy in recent literary criticism” on the “difficulty, even the impossibility, of interpretation” (SAID, 2008, p.62). Surveying all the critical schools involved in the (then) new expansion of notions of textuality and performance, of authenticity and fidelity (schools that range from feminism to psychoanalysis), he moved into his argument that musical performance, too, is an art of interpretation and that

even so apparently harmless and ‘correct’ a notion as faithfulness to an original is itself already an interpretation, in which a slew of unverifiable entities (the composer’s intention, an original sound, etc.) are set up and bowed to as if they were facts of nature” (SAID, 2008, p.63).

In another review, he compares the music recital to the genre of the literary essay: both are occasional, re-creative, and personal forms (SAID, 2008, p.22). But the influence worked both ways: music informed his literary and cultural theories, most obviously and most powerfully in his later notion of what he came to call “contrapuntal” analysis, as we shall see in more detail shortly - both in his and (I hope) in my own practice.

Music, however, is a problematic art for text-oriented literary sorts - or perhaps simply for people who have to review it *in words* - and Said knew it: music’s lack of precise semantic meaning and its self-referential nature - or, as he put it: “the notes [...]

Ginzburg and Mikhail Gasparov”, in this issue.

³ See also his attack on critics of the opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* who found it “too ideological” (SAID, 2008, p.137) and on the controversies over both “West as America” at the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of American Art and also Oliver Stone’s film, “JFK” (SAID, 2008, p.140). His strongest statement on the impossibility of separating ideology and politics from music states that “all of the great composers in one way or another were political, and held quite strong political ideas, some of them, in the case of the early Beethoven, who adulated Napoleon as a great conqueror or Debussy, who was a right-wing French nationalist, quite reprehensible from today’s perspective” (SAID, 2008, p.294).

refer back to themselves or to other music” (2008, p.280) - made it, in Said’s terms, the “most silent of the arts,” yet “the most directly affecting and expressive as well as the most esoteric and difficult to discuss” (2008, p.307). Nevertheless, by focusing on the *performing* of music and its social and historical context, Said, indeed, did find a very effective way to discuss it in words. The concerts and opera performances he reviewed were what he called “evanescent happenings, unrepeatable, usually unrecordable, non-recuperable” (SAID, 1991, p.6). In other words, reviewing live musical performances is like theatre reviewing (with its near-immediate articulation of response to a single event); it is not usually like book reviewing (with its more leisurely pace and its time to check and ponder).⁴ And yet Said’s particular reviews were not published in daily papers the morning after the performances. Given the irregularity of his contributions and the weekly nature of *The Nation*’s publication, it was often weeks later that they appeared. In other words, he did have time to check and ponder, but he also had to record his immediate reaction to one single live experience. There was no going back to hear the concert again, the way a film critic might revisit the cinema - for it would be a different concert. A hybrid genre, then, in his hands, the music review was a thoughtfully remembered account of a visceral as well as intellectual experience.

As reviewer, Said never played the role of either consumer guide or gate keeper. He was more the peer reviewer or the grade-assigning professor. The intellectual as well as the creative nature of the piano or opera performance mattered immensely to him. Programming had to be thought through intelligently; works had to be selected and ordered, either based on an “inner” narrative (SAID, 2008, p.16) or organized along thematic and argumentative lines that focused audience attention on common elements in the works presented (SAID, 2008, p.208). Of course, he also commented in these reviews on the technical ability of performers, as well as their interpretive strengths—and weaknesses. Conductors and directors of opera came under the same kind of scrutiny.⁵ Said’s reviews reflexively acknowledged the reality that they were interpretations of interpretations. As second-order interpretive acts, reviews require of their writer a double competence: knowledge of both the work performed and the historical tradition of its interpretation. This was the double focus of all Said’s music reviews. He always historicized what he heard and saw for his readers. As he listened

⁴ See Hunt, 1972, p.86 on theatre vs. book reviewing.

and watched, he was always aware of the triangulation of the experience of performance, among music, performer, and audience. The multiple possible responses of the audience always conditioned his own response - and his sense of his responsibility and responsibility as a reviewer.

This is what brings me to Bakhtin. For Said's music reviews seem to me to be Bakhtinian to their core: like Molière's M. Jourdain who spoke prose all his life without knowing it, Said thought like Bakhtin all his musical life - likely without knowing it. But Bakhtin wrote about the novel, not the performance and certainly not the review. If he *had* specifically discussed the form of the "review," as we know it today in North America, I'd guess that Bakhtin would have thought it a genre of discourse, like the novel, with its own conventions and expectations, which are collective and social, and therefore always related to the socio-historical context.⁶ He might, however, have called the review a "secondary (complex) speech genre [...] [of] cultural communication" (BAKHTIN, 1986a, p.62), for it does indeed "absorb and digest" other genres. Based on the inherent sociality of language, the review (in my fantasy Bakhtinian definition) involves the interaction of reviewer and reader as people in a particular social and cultural context. As an intentional act, however, the review is directed toward *several* different readers: the performer (in this case) as well as the reader (or consumer-to-be). It anticipates responses, objections, evaluations, thereby showing itself to be a link in that chain of communication Bakhtin taught us about.

From what we find in Bakhtin's writings on genre, I believe that he would very likely have linked reviews with "argument, polemics or parody" as "the externally most obvious, but crude, forms of dialogism" (BAKHTIN, 1986b, p.121). For reviews are indeed secondary, reactive texts. They are perfect examples of Bakhtin's "framing text," responding overtly as they do to other texts or, in this case, performance-texts. Though reviews are secondary and responsive, they are not inferior for all that, given Bakhtin's belief in the active responsive nature of all understanding,⁷ (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.69). If all speakers expect (in the form of a rejoinder in dialogue) "response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.69), then performers

⁵ For more on music reviewing, see HUNT, 1972, pp.136-9.

⁶ This is where Bakhtin differed from the formalists, as Clive Thomson has argued (1984, p.22).

⁷ Editor's Note: For more on this, see Medvedev, Medvedeva, and Shepherd's article, entitled "The Polyphony of the Circle," in this issue.

expect desire, fear the rejoinder of the review, and the reviewer likewise, the rejoinder of the reader. In Bakhtin's terms, the worst fear, however, is silence: in his words, "there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response*" (1986, p.127; author's emphasis). The same is true for "reviewees." Reviews can represent, interpret, comment upon, and evaluate; they may refute, agree with, or support. But they are always, by definition, responses, rejoinders. They are always hybrid, double-voiced narrations, always transmissions, but also appropriations - as was the novel, in Bakhtin's eyes (1981, p.341). As with anything Bakhtin would call a genre, they always have a double orientation: to the object and to the interlocutor.⁸ They are also, by nature, evaluative or axiological.⁹

Said's music reviews were all these things - and more. Because they were not written on the fly, but carefully considered over time, they are more like serious articles on particular performances. In trying to describe them, I find myself reminded of a kind of policy statement of the theory journal, *Diacritics*, about its attempt to

push the art of critical reviewing away from a parasitic relation to the work of another author toward the more 'dignified' position of supplemental or superinductive writing, toward the practice of expanding upon representation and evaluation through the composition of a self-sustaining or insubordinate text that somehow commands respect by virtue of its own argumentative thrust and formulative power (LEWIS, 1982, pp.221-222).

This describes well Said's reviewing practice. His extensive musical knowledge and his respect for performers and their artistic aims gave these reviews their depth and breadth.

In order to examine the particulars of that depth and breadth, I want to pick up on a number of key Bakhtinian theoretical concepts that are explored in considerable detail in other articles in this collection, but I do so here much more briefly: specifically, dialogism, addressivity, response-ability, and the role of context - obvious ones, perhaps, but ones I feel can be fruitfully deployed. As we know, dialogism is based on the concept of otherness. Said, the theorist of Orientalism, thought constantly about

⁸ See Todorov, 1981, p.127.

⁹ See the glossary definition of "tsennostnyj" in Bakhtin, 1981, p.428.

dialogue with the Other.¹⁰ For him, as for Bakhtin, dialogic *relation* was all: manifold, dynamic, based on difference, requiring “outsidedness.”¹¹ Alterity, for both, was crucial to understanding.¹² I focus here on Said’s reviews, however, because reviews, I would argue, are a special (if overt) form of Bakhtinian rejoinder, linked to other “word-utterances, with those whom it answers and with those who answer it,”¹³ to again use Bakhtin’s language. Others - readers, performers - are essential to the review. The already triadic communication that is the dialogic review in effect “dialogizes” the performance that is its subject, rendering it relativized (compared to others).¹⁴ But Said, who certainly practiced what Don Bialostosky would call “dialogic criticism,”¹⁵ saw performances themselves as triadic: “the performer traffics between composer and listener” (SAID, 2008, p.20), he argued.

Dialogue functions in yet another way in Said’s music reviews, however. Said was obsessed with the pianist Glenn Gould, as I noted earlier, mostly because of how Gould changed how he (and many others) *heard* and understood Johann Sebastian Bach’s musical counterpoint. Said’s counterpoint is obviously the same as Bakhtin’s polyphony: a single “voice,” when added to another, is said to be in “counterpoint” to that other, and these voices have meaning both in themselves and in their combination into a coherent texture. Glenn Gould was not just a consummate virtuoso performer—in fact, he withdrew from the live concert stage in 1964 at the age of 32 to concentrate on recording - he was also an intellectual.¹⁶ For Said, Gould was “a mind at work, not just a fleet pair of hands” (2008, p.14), to use his words. If you’ve ever tried to play this music, you know that Bach’s counterpoint *demand*s the engagement of the mind as well as the hands. A comparatist by training and by temperament, Said was fascinated by counterpoint’s “simultaneity of voices,” voices that are “always continuing to sound against, as well as with, all the others” (2008, p.5). He was intrigued by Bach’s multiple

¹⁰ See, for example, his comments on Israel and Palestine (SAID, 2008, pp.174 and 295).

¹¹ See Bakhtin, 1986c, p.7; Holquist, 1990, p.35. See also the glossary in Bakhtin, 1981, p.423–42, on “*čuzoj* vs. *svoj*” [another’s vs. one’s own].

¹² See Todorov, 1981, pp.145–72 and Wall, 1995, p.69.

¹³ Bakhtin, 1984, quoted in Emerson, 1984 p.146; compare Wayne Booth’s comment that “in all reading worthy of the name persons meet persons” (HERNADI, 1982, p.276).

¹⁴ See glossary to Bakhtin, 1981, p.427.

¹⁵ “Dialogic critics believe that individual voices take shape and character in response to and in anticipation of other voices” (BIALOSTOSKY, 1989, p.214).

¹⁶ The highest compliment Said could pay to a performer was to call him or her “intellectual.” His most vociferous critique was consistently aimed at performances that were “poorly thought-out” (SAID, 2008, p.34), while his greatest praise was for music “steeped in thoughtful reflection” (SAID, 2008, p.40).

musical voices in counterpoint, each imitating the others “with minute differences in rhythm, inflection, melodic variation” (SAID, 2008, p.251), combining musical lines ingeniously, polyphonically. (You can perhaps see why I said Said thought like Bakhtin all his life, perhaps without knowing it.) Said saved the word “contrapuntal” to describe only the most positive things he valued: Simon Rattle’s virtuosity as a conductor (2008, p.177), the technical dexterity of the fugue in Richard Strauss’s *Deutsche Motette* (2008, p.164), the “many voiced self-articulation” of Gould (2008, p.226), or, simply, the “genius” of Bach (2008, p.253). In his 1993 book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said would transfer this positive term to define the kind of reading and analysis he wanted to undertake: the literary comparatist argued that we needed to move beyond “insularity and provincialism” and to see several cultures and literatures together, or rather contrapuntally (SAID, 1993, p.43). In a late article in the *Raritan Review* (published in 2000), he did just this, reading Gould’s critical writing contrapuntally with the intellectual critical tradition of Theodor Adorno (pp.269–77).

The essence of contrapuntal analysis lay, for Said, in the notion of comparativity. In his music reviews, he compared pianists, conductors, careers, points in a career, particular performances, and programs. He compared popular and “high” culture to often amusing ends (SAID, 2008, pp.99, 106, 180). He compared styles of interpreting Richard Wagner’s music dramas (p.179). He compared the different versions of Beethoven’s only opera (SAID, 2008, pp.229–41). He compared the libretto and score of Berlioz’s *Les Troyens* to an actual production (SAID, 2008, pp.184–5). And so on. It is no exaggeration to say that Said thought and even listened comparatively, contrapuntally. As he sat in the audience at a production of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* and Bartók’s *Bluebeard’s Castle*, he would hear the music of Wagner and of Strauss’s early operas, *Salome* and *Elektra* (SAID, 2008, pp.78–9). Trained as he was academically, he could not resist making comparisons between music and literature. His reviews were peppered with insightful references to Proust (SAID, 2008, pp.21, 38, 262) and Mann (SAID, 2008, pp.21, 38, 286), Hopkins (SAID, 2008, pp.45, 227) and Rimbaud (SAID, 2008, p.71), Forster (SAID, 2008, pp.57, 154) and Stendhal (SAID, 2008, p.127). The role of narrative in the music as well as libretto of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle (SAID, 2008, p.38) or Beethoven’s *Fidelio* (SAID, 2008, pp.238–9) was a subject of great interest to him, and he wasn’t shy about bringing literary

criticism to bear on operatic texts (SAID, 2008, pp.200, 241). In short, Edward Said's mind worked comparatively, contrapuntally; we could say that he thought dialogically. Polyphony was certainly his ideal.

Other related Bakhtinian concepts are also relevant to Said's music reviewing. Bakhtin's insight that an "essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity*" (BAKHTIN, 1986a, p.95; author's emphasis) illuminates not only Said's own reviews, with their strong sense of their audience, but also his attitude to what he was reviewing. Performances, for him, were utterances that had their own conception of their addressee, a conception that could be judged by the reviewer. So, conductor Carlos Kleber's work gave Said the sense that it addressed both score and listener ("rather than attacking the one or parading itself before the other" [SAID, 2008, p.115]). Daniel Barenboim was said to have "the uncanny instinctive gift for direct, unpremeditated engagement" with the audience—"its ears, mind, and heart" (SAID, 2008, p.262). Addressed audiences counted for this reviewer.

But Said himself also thought seriously about his own addressees, the readers of *The Nation*. Politics and culture were his focus always. He was critical of writers and performers who did *not* think about their audiences or thought only in a paranoid manner about them: Michael Tanner, in his book on Wagner, was accused of being

preoccupied by a whole series of imagined enemies—scholars who are too priggish, producers, conductors and directors who [...] don't have the right ideas, historians who are too concerned with Wagner's many foibles and obsessions. This preoccupation produces in his prose an unpleasantly disapproving sarcasm that adds nothing to his argument (SAID, 2008, pp.216–17).

Interestingly, the Bakhtinian "superaddressee" to whom Said turned for "absolutely just responsive understanding" (BAKHTIN, 1986b, p.126) was a triadic or triple one: J.S. Bach/Glenn Gould/Theodor Adorno. Hardly a review failed to mention Gould (and specifically Gould as an interpreter of Bach, the contrapuntal genius), and Adorno's intellectual presence hovered over many a musical meditation. Together they

offered a combined “loophole addressee”¹⁷ to whom Said felt answerable, intellectually, morally, and musically.

But addressivity was not only an aesthetic or ethical given for Said; it also had a specifically *pedagogical* dimension in his own reviews. What Bakhtin called the desired “responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (BAKHTIN, 1986a, p.94) took place in the classroom for Said, and, by extension, in all his critical writings, including his reviews. This was why he approved of well-planned concert programs that teach us something about a composer (SAID, 2008, p.26), of books about composers of the past that can be related to the actual performance practices of today (e.g., p.306): after reading Charles Rosen’s work, he believed that readers would listen to and play Romantic music with a much more alert understanding than they did before (SAID, 2008, p.205). His reviews often included explanations he felt his readers might need to understand his argument. For example, a pedagogical investigation of the distinctive qualities of the sound of the organ was introduced by the words: “Perhaps I should explain a bit more about organ sound” (SAID, 2008, p.251). More interestingly—and tellingly—his reviews often ended in exhortations to change (SAID, 2008, pp.42, 51). Said was a teacher, but he was also an activist.

This is where Bakhtin’s concept of “answerability” or “response-ability” becomes relevant, specifically the “mutual answerability” of art and life (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.1). Said would not, could not, separate art and life. This was obviously true in his literary and political writings, but it was also the case in his musical reviewing. He lived his life as if he were constantly repeating - though, I admit, perhaps in a different vein - Bakhtin’s words: “I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art” (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.1). Life and art had to connect for Said.¹⁸ His autobiographical experiences as a pianist and as an audience member were always linked to both the music he heard or read about and the life he led.¹⁹ The rejoinder by Said-the-Palestinian-polemicist to a book on Wagner’s anti-Semitism, for instance, offered a strong ethical statement: “In my opinion there are better ways to deal with

¹⁷ See, for example, pages 17, 80–81, 99, 100–1, 107, 146, 153, 168, 237, 241, and 301 for the more extensive engagements with Adorno’s ideas.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the one exception to this rule of Said may be Richard Wagner. Said wanted his readers to hold together in their minds “two contradictory facts, that Wagner was a great artist, and second, that Wagner was a disgusting human being” (SAID, 2008, 297).

¹⁹ See, for example, pages 100, 136, 157, 202, 249, 260, and 297.

others - even hated and feared others—than to wish they were not there, and expend a great deal of intellectual, political and military effort to get rid of them” (SAID, 2008, p.174).

In discussing newly published biographies of composers, Said would acknowledge that there was no easy or ready-made method for discussing the life and work of a musician, especially one whose art seems, as does Bach’s, so remote from his everyday duties or even his career (SAID, 2008, p.283). But he wanted biographers to try to find a way nonetheless to connect, in a meaningful manner, the experiences of composers’ lives with the actual music they produced (SAID, 2008, pp.189–90). Maynard Solomon, in his book *Late Beethoven*, was said to have succeeded in this task because of what Said called his “fearless way of connecting human concerns of the utmost importance with the exigencies of music” (SAID, 2008, p.305).

For performers, Said articulated the life/art answerability in a different way because all artists, be they composers or performers, need an audience. The problem, in Said’s eyes, was how to balance what he saw as the inner obligations to one’s art with what he called “the outer claims of a society whose demand for satisfaction, entertainment and excitement cannot really be ignored” (SAID, 2008, p.48). Some musicians succeed in achieving such balance perfectly: in a rhetoric that strikingly recalls Bakhtin’s, Said argued that Daniel Barenboim managed to gather together

so many strands, experiences, voices and urges in a contrapuntal web whose purpose in the end is to give all this diversity, all this utterance, all this complexity of sound and life the clarity and immediacy of a deeply human, yet transcendental presence [...]. There is [...] the sense finally that he makes one feel one’s humanity and, yes, one’s love and mortality as well, through an aesthetic experience that by means of a marvelously well-wrought sound connects the listeners to others, other selves, other musics, other utterances and experiences (SAID, 2008, p.263).

Pianist Maurizio Pollini, reviewed in 1985, was complimented for this same life/art linkage: “you are aware of him encountering and learning a piece, playing it supremely well, and then returning his audience to ‘life’ with an enhanced, and shared, understanding” (SAID, 2008, p.12).²⁰

²⁰ Said attacked later Pollini performances in 1992 (SAID, 2008, p.152).

The overlap here with Bakhtin's emphasis on the importance of social context to dialogue, addressivity and response-ability is a clear one. When reviewing opera performances, Said was adamant that productions should emphasize the connections between an operatic work and its immediate context, as well as self-consciously trying to restore an older work for a modern audience (SAID, 2008, p.117). Said, like Bakhtin, never forgot the importance of particularity and situatedness.²¹ The place from which we speak or act is crucial in determining both what we say and its impact, just as the meaning of what we observe is shaped by the place from which we perceive it (SAID, 2008, p.21). This is as true for Said the reviewer as for the performers he reviewed. He provided for his readers the historical and social context of everything from summer festivals (SAID, 2008, p.27) to Wagnerian performances (SAID, 2008, pp.38–9), from the virtuoso as an historical figure (SAID, 2008, p.267) to American musical politics (SAID, 2008, p.99). In addition, he consistently stressed the negative *economic* context of commercialized musical production: the price of seats and how this limits audiences (SAID, 2008, p.59); the “star system, its ballyhoo and advertising” (SAID, 2008, p.60); the commodification of the classical concert (SAID, 2008, p.82); the demands of sponsors, managers, and record companies (SAID, 2008, p.152), and so on. In the background here is Theodor Adorno, of course, so not even Said's much admired superaddressee, Glenn Gould, could escape the censure of complicity with the big recording corporations and, more generally, the capitalist market system (SAID, 2008, p.10).

Said's reviews betrayed a constant worry about the degradation of what he called “musical life” in the modern world, a world where musical composition is separated from performance and both are now distanced from audience reception (SAID, 2008, p.23).²² He evaluated and explained always with a sense of an addressed community, that of the particular social context in which he lived and wrote.²³ This didn't stop him from the odd bout of nostalgia, lamenting that there was little hope that composer, performer, and listener would ever again work together—without what he

²¹ On Bakhtin, see Holquist, 1990, p.12.

²² This is why he values most those who are simultaneously creators, performers and critics: Gould, Pierre Boulez, and so on (SAID, 2008, p. 207).

²³ In her essay *Value/Evaluation*, Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1990) reminds us that “the ‘force’ of our judgments in every sense - that is, their meaning and interest for other people and their power to affect -

thought of as the “distraction” of recording deals and prizes—in a real community, “the kind of community for which the Bach family has always served as an attractive model” (SAID, 2008, p.18). Yet he always looked for signs in the music world that there would be a re-establishing of links between musical performance and other human activities in the larger society (SAID, 2008, p.19). So, it would appear that Said really did think a lot like Bakhtin—perhaps, once again, without ever knowing it.

That said, Said’s values were distinctly his own. Many were products of his personality and training: for him, the best works were resistant (SAID, 2008, p.280), rebellious (SAID, 2008, p.286), going against the grain (SAID, 2008, p.86), unresolved (SAID, 2008, p.238), “unappeasable” (SAID, 2008, p.289). The words “contrapuntal” and “intellectual” were reserved for his highest praise; “thoughtful” and “seriously considered” came a close second. He scorned the routine and the safe (SAID, 2008, p.105), the half-baked (SAID, 2008, p.106), the exhibitionistic showiness of “idiotic bravura playing” (SAID, 2008, p.151). He respected the scholarly and the precise (SAID, 2008, pp.116, 126, 132, 238–9), and wouldn’t hesitate to be both learned and meticulous himself, whether in righting musical wrongs (such as the under-appreciation of Handel) (SAID, 2008, pp.72–5) or dissecting the politics and economics of an institution like the two-hour musical concert (SAID, 2008, pp.82–6). He was never afraid of politics, and admired this fearlessness in others.²⁴ He taught and he wanted always to learn: what he most appreciated about Gould’s performances was how they (in his words) “extend, amplify, make more explicit the scores he interprets” (SAID, 2008, p.7).

However, he also valued all those things Bakhtin taught us to value: dialogue and its complex contexts, the role of alterity and outsideness in understanding, and the “architectonics of responsibility” (HOLQUIST 1990, p.34). Said’s strongly felt (and strongly argued) concept of the “worldliness” of texts—and critics—was Bakhtinian through and through.²⁵ Not unlike others in this volume of essays—Stephen Lofts in linking Bakhtin and Cassirer in an “uncanny intellectual harmony” or Tatiana Bubnova in considering Bakhtin alongside Benjamin—I do not really want to argue *influence*

them will depend on, among other things, the nature of that [social and/or institutional] context and our relationship to the people we address” (pp.182–183).

²⁴ Especially the controversial opera director, Peter Sellars (SAID, 2008, pp.87–90).

²⁵ See Said, 1983, pp.31–53.

here (acknowledged or not), but rather *conjunction of concern*: aesthetic, political, ethical. Read contrapuntally, dialogically, the themes in the writing of these two different theorists intertwine and overlap. To borrow Said's words about Western musical counterpoint to describe what I have attempted to do in this essay:

various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is [I hope] concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work (1993, p.51).

Bakhtin's last words in his last article are said by Michael Holquist to be: "The contexts of dialogue are without limit."²⁶ Said's posthumously collected music reviews are entitled *Music at the Limits*. Neither of these theorists ever accepted limits, except as challenges—in life as in art. They are proof positive of the error of Schopenhauer's famous dictum that every man takes the limit of his own field of vision for the limits of the world (SCHOPENHAUER, n.d.). Theirs was an expansive vision of an expansive world.

The last word should therefore go to the young and decidedly resistant Alexander Pope, whose 1711 poem called *An Essay on Criticism* asks a series of questions, all of which I believe we can confidently answer with the two names: Bakhtin and Said. Here are the questions:

But where's the Man, who Counsel can bestow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiass'd, or by Favour or by Spite;
Not dully prepossest, nor blindly right;
Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;
Modestly bold, and Humanly severe? (. . .)
Blest with a Taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
A Knowledge both of Books and Humankind (POPE, 1963, lines 631–
6 and 9–10)

Bakhtin and Said.

²⁶ Holquist (1990, p.183), quoting from Bakhtin (1986d) in *Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences*.

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