



Geraldine Finn & Marcel Cobussen

This com-position was originally written as a conversation between the two of us in response to *Intermezzo* and intended for oral presentation along with the music.¹ It should be emphasized that the music was the point of departure and remained the point of reference and return throughout, so it is not an optional extra—an auditory illustration or example—for an essentially discursive “argument” about “intermezzi.” Each section was written explicitly in response to, alongside, and in the spirit of the music selected and the text which immediately preceded it (as in a performance of *Intermezzo* itself). So the reader is encouraged to listen to the music when and as it is indicated—to read/hear it as part of the same performance. We have chosen to retain the format of the oral presentation as much as possible precisely in order to retain the tone and address of the original—the tonality and address of the “intermezzo” (undecidable between music and text) which motivated it.

1. **Intermezzo** (Vloeimans/Reijseger #17)

(Online Musical Example)

MC: Wat betekenen deze openingswoorden in het Nederlands voor u? Waarom deze waarschijnlijk vreemde taal voor u? Terwijl ik iets wil communiceren, iets wil delen, mede-delen. Wat voor ervaring kan een tekst in een taal die u niet verstaat teweeg brengen? Wat voor ervaring als de inhoud u grotendeels zal ontgaan? Wat kan ik delen of mede-delen wanneer het begrijpen op het spel komt te staan? Misschien is het juist dat; dat begrip tekort schiet; dat er geen grip mogelijk is. Misschien is het aandacht vragen voor de materialiteit van de taal, voor dat wat Derrida omschrijft als “non-discursieve sonoriteit.” Misschien heeft het iets te maken met muziek, met creativiteit, met ethiek. Misschien heeft het iets te maken met dat wat steeds ontsnapt wanneer we spreken over muziek, wanneer we muziek in woorden willen vatten.

2. “Intermezzo”

GF: We decided to call our presentation “Intermezzo” after the music that inspired it and for which it was written as a kind of accompaniment or response. After the music. Reversing (or at least confusing) the more familiar order of events where music is written afterwards (after words) as (if) a supplement, accompaniment or response to words. Soliciting the logocentrism of the musical text (the text of music, the music of text) “in the sense that *sollicitare*, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety” (Derrida, “Différance” 21),² we are already engaging (engaged in) the play (the work) of creativity and ethics in deconstruction in music.

For the music you have just heard is from *Intermezzo* “composed” by Marcel and “performed” in this selection by two professional musicians Eric Vloeimans (trumpet) and Ernst Reijseger (cello). Later you will hear selections from a different recording of “the same” piece performed by students from the Rotterdam School of Music (SKVR).

What you have not heard however, and perhaps will not (cannot) hear, are the quotation marks with (in) which the words “composed,” “performed,” and “the same” are (always already) written in this “Intermezzo,” or the various punctuations and parentheses which organize its articulation on this page. Ma(r)king the distance (the difference, the *différance*) between what the words seem to affirm and what they are being called upon to (un)do here, in *Intermezzo* (with or without punctuation marks): the identity and difference of (the) (a) composition or performance of the same. (Re)marking, that is, the deconstruction always already at work in a work. In any work. In this work. In the space between words, meaning, sound, and *sens*. Between the saying and the said. Between the inverted (inverting) commas (and parentheses) which (re)mark the written (re)marks. Which makes *sens(e)*.³ *Intermezzo*. In between.

How do we translate these written (re)marks, these punctuation marks, these quotation marks (around “composition,” “performance,” and “the same,” for example) into sound, into speech? How can we let them, and the deconstruction they at once designate and perform, be heard? How do we speak this space between the saying and the said? How do we let it resonate on/in its own terms, its own tones. This unstable suspension of *sens(e)* between the inverted (inverting) parentheses and commas of written (re)marks? This play of *différance*

(of differentiation and deferral of *sens*) in the space between the parentheses and punctuation marks of writing? How can we let it be heard? And how do we respond to its call? ⁴

Soliciting the logocentrism of the (a) musical (con)text (in the sense that *sollicitare*, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety) we are already engaged in (engaging) the work (the play) of creativity and ethics in deconstruction in music. In the space between words, meaning, sound and *sens*. *Intermezzo*. In between.

3. **Intermezzo** (Vloeimans/Reijseger #2)

(Online Musical Example)

4. **Intermezzo**

MC: *Intermezzo*. 8 different motifs inspired by a certain jazz tradition. Eight motifs and a verbal elucidation. First, the composed musical fragments are proposed to the musicians. The motifs can be played in any desired order. The choice and order of the fragments, as well as any possible repetition of them, are left to the discretion of the musicians themselves. It is not compulsory to play all the motifs in one version of *Intermezzo*. The motifs can be played either after or on top of each other. This is possible because all the phrases (except one) share the one harmony. Improvisation can or may enter the work and seduce it into new directions.

These instructions can have one or more of the following effects. (a) Principal, sub-, and accompanying themes are not determined beforehand and can change, even within one version of *Intermezzo*. (b) The binary opposition and hierarchical relationship between solo instruments and accompanying instruments becomes less clear.⁵ More so than in a lot of other jazz music, their position can change within one performance.⁶ (c) Beginning and ending are arbitrary to a great extent. There is no apparent opening theme that is repeated near the end in order to close the circle, as is the case in jazz standards. In theory, the composition can be expanded infinitely. (d) The use of only one chord or harmony avoids the compelling linearity of the classical II–V–I progression found in so much jazz music. Viewed in this way, *Intermezzo* knows no development.

5. **Intermezzo** (SKVR #4)

(Online Musical Example)

6. **Différance**

Différance is neither (a) word nor (a) concept (Derrida, "Différance" 3, 7, 11, *passim*). But a movement of differentiation and deferral (of spacing and temporization) between concepts and words which make sens(e). Which produces events of meaning that do not find their cause, their origin or their end, in a(n) (intending) subject or a (determining determinate) substance. Events of meaning do not originate *as such* or end. Undecided between the active and the passive, recalling something like the middle voice, *différance* belongs neither to the sensible nor the intelligible order, neither to speech nor writing in the usual sense, but to the undecidable space-between "beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two" (Derrida, "Différance" 5). Intermezzo.

Between speech and writing. Music engages (enjoins and enjoys) the otherwise silent play of *différance* and turns it into sound. At once invention and intervention. Music (re)presents the play of *différance* as experience and event; as something we apprehend through our senses as sens(e); something we feel and hear; something which resonates with (as) our bodies our selves.⁷

Undecidable between the sensible and the intelligible (Derrida, "Différance" 5, *passim*). Recalling something like the middle voice. Neither simply active nor simply passive (Derrida, "Différance" 9, *passim*). Intermezzo. Event (experience) to which we cannot *not* respond, assume an attitude, a relationship, a de-cision: of solicitation, surrender, resistance, consent, submission, embrace, refusal, mastery, control. Creativity. Ethics. In the space between. Creativity as ethics.⁸ Intermezzo. In deconstruction. In music.

Between speech and writing music comes and goes. In the middle of what leaves and what arrives. Between what absents itself and what presents itself.⁹ Music comes to pass. Music comes as always already past (passed). Giving place to the trace of the other in its articulation of the play of *différance* in the space between concept and word, silence and sound, signification and *sens(e)*. Which is, I believe, *the* ethical space, that cannot *not* solicit a response. Intermezzo. A

response-ability in (from) those who hear, who are called to for by the order of the disorder (of the sens(e)) produced within it. “I mean that deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation—a response to a call” (Derrida qtd. in Kearney 18).

Intermezzo. A response to a call. Always already at work in a work. In this work. A positive response to a call. A vocation. Invocation. I mean that music is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls or motivates it.¹⁰ Music is therefore vocation. Invocation. A response. To a call. Creativity. Ethics. In deconstruction. In music. *Intermezzo*.

7. **“Intermezzo”** (Vloeimans/Reijseger #11)

(Online Musical Example)

8. ***Intermezzo***

MC: Is *Intermezzo* an intermezzo? Is *Intermezzo* an “intermissio,” a break in a continuity, a temporal or spatial cessation, a pause? Is it an interruption of the main story? An ornamentation? A hors d’oeuvre? A parergon? A supplement which is added to an already complete whole?

Or is *Intermezzo* not an intermezzo? Not an intermezzo in the sense stated above. Perhaps we are not talking about music. Perhaps we want to talk beside music, or better yet, with music. Perhaps we even try to talk musically. Perhaps that is part of our responsibility, part of our response to an alterity, part of our invitation to that alterity. To talk musically with music, trying to avoid too much appropriation, too much denoting, fixing, framing. Perhaps this is our response to a call. To the call of the other that is not just an intermezzo. Why is *Intermezzo* an intermezzo? Why is it called *Intermezzo*? Let’s investigate two possibilities, two directions.

(1) During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the intermezzi underwent a change in position. Intermezzi became independent compositions.¹¹ An independent intermezzo. What does that mean? A piece of music that is situated in-between, a time-span or space coming between (inter-medium, inter meaning “between,” medius meaning “in the middle”). But between what? The serious parts, the main parts, the parts around which everything revolves, the *works*

themselves have disappeared. What remains is the supplement, the addition, the non-necessary addition. The supplement has substituted for the main work. The supplement has become the main work. The parergon has become the ergon. The intermezzo deconstructs the intermezzo, deconstructs itself. In music history. In music. Deconstruction. Always already at work in the work, in the work that wasn't a work.

(2) Strange word, intermezzo. "Inter" means "between." But "mezzo" also signifies "between;" for example, in "mezzosoprano," the voice between the soprano and the alto, the voice halfway (mezzo) between the soprano and the alto. What about this *Intermezzo*? Let's say it is between composed and improvised music, between (post)modern jazz and (post)modern chamber music, between free and conventional jazz. Between, however, is by no means an average here. It does not mean going from one thing to the other and back again. It is a transversal movement in which the two ends are never touched; the music never coincides with either one of the two poles (Deleuze and Guattari 25). I am talking here about an unfathomable interval or space-between that refuses definite demarcations and conceptual analyses (see note 8): "meanwhile," "in the meantime," "in between," and not "symbiosis," "integration," or "coherent whole." This "inter" designates neither median nor average but rather a movement between all positions. It is not a genre that can be fixed; it is not subject(ifiable) to the law of genre. However, although the "inter" doesn't exceed nor coincide with a medium, it cannot do without a medium in order to be perceived. Perhaps one could say that it is itself a medium as it (in)forms medial reflections.

To put it differently, *Intermezzo* is like a hymen: it is a fusion that bridges differences but also the membrane that keeps them apart (Derrida, "The Double Session" 212–215). Regarded this way, *Intermezzo* deconstructs or displaces former binary oppositions. It is an undecidable.

9. **Intermezzo** (SKVR #2)

(Online Musical Example)

10. **Intermezzo—Creativity—Ethics**

MC: *Intermezzo* is not a linear composition, but rather an associative network, a *rhizomatic* composing and performing that opens up

several directions, an infinite web of possible routes. I could call it *unstable* music. Where stable music is aimed at laying down, certainty, and permanence (for example, in musical notation), unstable music is transient, fleeting, intangible, and playful.¹² The result is impossible to predict. *Intermezzo* is in a constant state of evolution, a constant becoming, never solidified, never definitely fixed. This means that every version is a premiere, a voyage with an unknown destination. For the musician, this means that it is primarily the process of exploration, the constant exploration of musical space, and not the product, that is important. I would like to emphasize the process of creation over the finished art object. *Intermezzo* is meant to set out on a voyage of exploration that has no end, and thus, no goal. The musician might not know where s/he is going until s/he gets there. The outline of the project only emerges with any clarity as s/he progresses with it.

11. **There has to be a decision.
(Creativity and ethics in the space between).**¹³

GF: So where do I go from here? Not knowing where I'm going until I get there. In this *Intermezzo* which is not one (See Irigaray). Following the detour, the materiality, of the sign. The deconstruction always already at work in a work. The in(ter)vention of the other (See Derrida *Psyché*). The (in)vocation of his call. The order of the disorder produced there (Derrida, "Différance" 4).

There?

Where?

Here.

Where?

Hear.

In this work. Which is not a work. But a network. Full of (w)holes. A net work: free from deduction. Remaining after necessary deductions. Undecidable. Unstable. Unpredictable. Without destination, development or end.

At this very moment. In this (net) work. (Full of holes). Here. Hear. I am. *Intermezzo*. Between. What absents itself and what presents

itself. Undecidable. Between. Speech and writing. Work and play. Improvisation and composition. Beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they (that we) are two.

So, where *do* I (we) go from here? Not knowing where I'm (we're) going until I (we) get there?

Here

There

Where

We're

Going

Not-knowing

A de-cision—a cut through (off) this network of possibilities and (w)holes—cannot not be made and response-ability assumed. (For what I am not responsible for.) For what is to come. For what comes to pass. For what is present(ed) and (as) past (passed). In this Intermezzo. This space. Between. Music and words. *Sens(e)* and sound. Necessity and chance. Neither simply active nor simply passive. Undecidable.

Not knowing. I'm going.

But where?

There has to be decision. A cut. A passage through. A response to the solicitation, the (in)vocation, the in(ter)vention of the other. Hear. Here. At this very moment. In this work. Which is not a work. This Intermezzo. Which is not one. Undecidable. There has to be de-cision. Response-ability. Both. Creativity and ethics. Neither simply one nor the other. Creativity as ethics. Ethics as/and creativity. Undecidable.

There has to be decision. Not knowing where. I'm going. To give place to the other in the space between the saying and the said. Intermezzo. "A space that is not given in advance but that opens as

one advances" (Derrida, "There is No One Narcissism" 207).
Undecidable. In deconstruction. In music.

Where do I (we) go from here? Not knowing. We're (I'm) going.

12. **Creativity in the space between**

MC: Where do we go from here? There has to be a decision. "A space that is not given in advance but that opens as one advances."

Let's say that *Intermezzo* is a space-between where certitudes must be abandoned and creativity and change are possible. In addition, working with phrases that can be played in random order after each other or in random quantity on top of each other demands more attention to the contribution and performance of the other(s). Freedom and "unfreedom" at the same time. Each player is free to choose the motif s/he wants to play, but in accepting responsibility towards the other(s), s/he is unfree at the same time: what is demanded by the other(s) is a radical generosity, a constant interrogation of oneself, an unremitting orientation towards the uncanny. However, there is a freedom in this unfreedom as well. The other makes me free because s/he confronts me with a possibility that I could not have chosen without her/him.¹⁴

I teach. I teach jazz music. Combo lessons. At a music school in Rotterdam (SKVR), the Netherlands. And I use *Intermezzo* as teaching material.

What does this mean for my students? I hope it is a plea for creativity or invention. Not without concepts, but by going each time beyond the concept (jazz, composition, form, structure, theme), without any guarantee or certainty. It is about risks; that is, it both traces and invokes risks—where things do not go according to a preconceived plan.

Invention. A shift of emphasis from reproduction to that of translation or transformation. This is not necessarily a matter of a student's "genius" or originality, but of searching through the places or topoi to find materials for one's own text/music/improvisation/contribution (Ulmer 177 ff.).

GF: What does using *Intermezzo* as teaching material mean for the teacher? Working with this piece of music, the teacher cannot control

or master the outcomes. S/he cannot foresee the results. Thus, s/he cannot rely on what s/he already knows. The mastery that other forms of teaching and learning might incorporate is jeopardized as the position of the teacher is destabilized in the process. The result of this is that the position of the teacher is itself the position of the one who learns. The teacher becomes a student. Perhaps s/he teaches nothing other than the way in which s/he her/himself learns. Both s/he and the student are learning something about the music, but also learning something *from* it. Music is not a simple object of teaching; it is its subject. Music is the purveyor of the act of teaching. Perhaps thinking about the role of the teacher has to start with the question: "How can what music teaches us be taught?" (Lacan 439, Felman 75).

Misschien zouden we moeten eindigen met de vraag: "hoe kan dat wat muziek ons leert worden (aan)geleerd?"

Intermezzo (Vloeimans/Reijseger #21)

(Online Musical Example)

ENDNOTES

1. Parts of this text are also published in the section on deconstruction and music education of Marcel Cobussen's online dissertation *Deconstruction in Music* (www.deconstructioninmusic.com).
2. My work on deconstruction, music, and ethics draws upon and takes inspiration and direction from the phenomenological tradition in general and the writing of Derrida, Heidegger, Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty in particular. Since their writing is so extensive and at the same time so integral to my own I reference only those works which have most directly influenced this particular paper and attribute only the most literal citations of their words to their original source.
3. "*Sens* in French means both 'direction' (or 'way') and 'meaning,' as well as 'sense' as in the sense of touch, sight, sound, or time. Suggesting a much more concrete, embodied, active, and ambiguous sense of 'sense' (i.e. of meaning) than the equivalent English term. I use *sens* instead of 'sense' throughout this paper to emphasize the irreducible density, ambiguity, intentionality and force of sense/*sens* which is lost in the English translation" (Finn, "Music, Identity, and Différance" 49fn). For more on the relationship between *sens*, ethics, and the space-between, see Finn, "The Space-Between Ethics and Politics. Or, More of the Same" 177fn and *passim*. For more on the relationship between *sens*, *différance*, creativity, and the space-between in music, see Finn, "Music, Identity and Différance," and Finn "To Speculate—On Music—And/as the Sound of Différance."
4. See Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*
5. Probably the most important strategy at work in deconstruction is the displacement of hierarchical structured oppositions. According to Derrida, it has been a characteristic of the western philosophical and scientific tradition since classical times to think in binary oppositions. Presence opposes absence, speech opposes writing, philosophy opposes literature, the literal opposes the metaphorical, the central opposes the marginal, life opposes death, the real opposes the imaginary, the normal opposes the pathological, etc. Derrida shows how one of the oppositional terms is always privileged, controlling and dominating the other (dominating "the other"). "In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (Derrida, *Positions* 41). "Deconstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to a neutralization: it must, through a double gesture, a

double writing—put into practice a reversal of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system” (Derrida, *Limited Inc.* 21).

6. *Intermezzo* is still about (teaching) jazz music; it does not, nor is it about rejecting (traditional) jazz. It creates a new context for (traditional) jazz and thus creates a new music. *Intermezzo* juxtaposes the canon of conventional works used in jazz (education) with contrasting or supplementary alternatives. In that way, it broaches tradition even as it puts it into crisis, activating the critical potential of discipline. The canon is not rejected, but given pedagogical and cultural vibrancy.

7. For more on the relationship between music, identity, and “our bodies our selves” see Finn, “Music, Identity and Différance” 49–50, and *passim*.

8. “This space between category and experience, representation and reality, language and life, is, I believe, the necessary and indispensable space of judgment: of creativity and value, resistance and change. It is the ground of the critical intentions and originating experiences that enable us to call the status quo into question and challenge the already known universe and its organization into the predicative and prescriptive categories of practical reason. It constitutes the space and experience within which the conventionality, the contingency, the arbitrariness of the familiar realities of the natural attitude—of its categorical positivities and identities—can be seen and challenged. In another context I identified this space as the space and ground of ‘spirituality’ and ‘desire.’ That is, of our experience of and aspiration to ‘transcendence’: not of the *flesh* of the material world itself but of the categories that frame and contain it and the possibilities of our own being within it. It is as such *the* ethical space, the space of the specifically *ethical* encounter with others (with otherness) as *other* and not more of the same: as other-wise-than-being simply a re-presentation of a pre-conceived, pre-scribed, pre-determined and thus pre-dicative category and class—a re-presentation that relieves us of the ethical responsibility of attending to the particularity of the other and inventing our relationship with it (him or her). By contrast the space-between reality and representation presents me with, puts me in the presence of, that which has never been there before: the other in all its singularity as a visitation, an epiphany (to use Levinas’s term), an absolute exteriority that cannot, without violence, be integrated into the Same. It is a presenting, a presence, that puts me into question as well as the relationship, the world, and the common sense (*sens commun*) we may or may not share. It is an encounter that demands/commands me to think and be anew: to risk being-otherwise-than-being what I have already become” (Finn, “The Space-Between” 172).

9. See Finn, "Music, Identity and Différance" 49 and *passim*. Also see Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, *The State of the Debt*, *The Work of Mourning*, and *The New International* 25 and *passim*.

10. See Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*

11. The term "intermezzo" was used during the eighteenth century for comic interludes sung between the acts or scenes of an opera seria, literally the serious work, with subjects often taken from Greek or Roman ancient history and mythology. Intermezzi were meant to reconcile the public with the demanding music of the opera seria. Usually they had simple harmonies, homophonic accompaniments, a general melodiousness, and a symmetrical phrase structure. Could we not say that intermezzi were a kind of *parerga*, musical interludes besides or between the principal work? Could we not say that an intermezzo had the structure of a supplement, that which is added afterwards to an already complete whole? (But just how complete is this whole when you need a supplement?)

Since the early nineteenth century, the term has been used for movements or sections as well, generally within larger works. Here too, however, the name has some negative undertones or overtones. A contemporary of Haydn described his instrumental music as follows: "[Haydn] has likewise movements which are sportive, *folatres*, and even grotesque, for the sake of variety; but they are only the *entre-mets*, or rather *intermezzi*, between the serious business of his other movements" (Brown 490). Robert Schumann calls the middle section of the scherzo in his Piano Sonata, Op. 11, an intermezzo with the addition "*alla burla ma pomposo*," to be played in a burlesque manner. And in the operatic scores and theater music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, intermezzi may simply function as points of relaxation within a score with which they often have no musical or dramatic connection. Although less serious, less prominent, the supplement or *parergon* has entered the work as a more or less inextricable part of it.

More important is the change of position the intermezzi held throughout history. The eighteenth-century practice of separating completely the subject matter and *dramatis personae* of the *opera seria* and those of the intermezzo, so as to permit the latter's performance with a variety of serious works, made independent intermezzi possible. In the nineteenth century, Schumann and Brahms composed numerous independent intermezzi.

12. This distinction between stable and unstable music should not be thought ontologically nor as essentialist categories. I don't want to say that some music is stable and other music is unstable; every music is stable and unstable at the same time. However, the emphasis on stability or instability can change from one musical work to another.

13. See Finn, "The Space-Between Ethics and Politics," "Music, Identity and Différance," and "To Speculate—On Music—And/as the Sound of Différance."

14. Two comments need to be made here. (1) I am in no way suggesting that with *Intermezzo*, I have invented something very new. First, there is already a great deal of music based on more or less the same principles: some freely usable composed outlines combined with improvisational parts. Second, some people, such as George Lewis who teaches at the University of California, San Diego, seem to work with similar material and probably at a much higher and more professional level. (2) I do not advocate disposing of such jazz bibles as *The Realbook* but rather, learning to read them in a creative and responsive way. For this, students also need to be introduced to what is outside the dominant paradigm. Although new ways of teaching jazz music must be explored, I think that jazz and jazz education continually replace and transform themselves. Not a return of contemporary jazz (education) to its "roots," but a move in other directions. That is why the struggle is never simply for or against jazz (education), but between certain forces and their solicitations and implications, within and outside of the academic institutions. *Intermezzo*. Between.

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