



REVIEW ESSAY

Francesco Giannattasio & Giovanni Giuriati, eds. 2017. Perspectives on a 21st Century Comparative Musicology: Ethnomusicology or Transcultural Musicology? Nota Intersezioni Musicali Book IM 05. Istituto Interculturale di Studi Musicali Comparati. Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Udine: NOTA.

This compilation of articles resulting from papers given on the occasion of three different seminars in three consecutive years from 2013 to 2015 (*Perspectives on an 21st Century Comparative Musicology: Ethnomusicology or Transcultural Musicology?*; *Living Music: Case Studies and New Research Prospects, and Musical Traditions in Archives, Patrimonies, and New Creativities*) is an interesting mixture of very updated and at the same time well-grounded insights into the core problems of a discipline that starts to question itself: Ethnomusicology or transcultural musicology? It is not by accident that the title of the first conference is also the general topic of the publication, whether there are sections on local music practices, historical research activities or general anthropology. The central question seems to be the denial of purity in cultures and the consequences for anything ethnomusicology has achieved so far.

The discussion starts off with an intense discourse delivered by Giannattasio in “Perspectives on a 21st Century Comparative Musicology: an Introduction” (10-29). This opening article is already summarizing very urgent questions to be discussed, among them the question of “what constitutes the specificity of ethnomusicology today” (11). Calling for a review of methods and goals, the author says that “This review is so crucial that it could call into question the very name of our field of study.”

Going further, Giannattasio questions the fact of abandoning the term comparative musicology, criticises the notion of multicultural or cross-cultural investigations since those terms are based on an implied authenticity of relatively closed cultures. By doing so, the author offers the subsequent articles a wide field of approaches that were taken up with different intensity.

The next article, “Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today” (30-49), by Welsch, an experienced philosopher with anthropological connections, takes this discussion up to another level. It is a pleasure to read this text since the author is straightforward and does not fear any disciplinary hierarchies. It is indeed this article which delivers most of the essence of the main topic. Following Adorno (1984: 192), he comes directly to the point, saying “The classical model of culture is not only descriptively unserviceable, but also normatively dangerous and untenable. What is called for today is a departure from this concept and to think of cultures beyond the contraposition of ownness and foreignness” (33). Not surprisingly, he is also drawn to re-introducing Wittgenstein’s ideas though some of the claims are not substantiated with clear examples. About nationally or regionally grown cultures, Welsch writes that “They want to distinguish themselves from one another and know themselves to be well accommodated in a specific identity” (43). However, he continues to think in relative terms by adding “The concept of transculturality goes beyond these seemingly hard alternatives. It is able to cover both global and local, universalistic and particularistic aspects, and it does so quite naturally, from the logic of transcultural processes themselves. The globalizing tendencies as well as the desire for specificity and particularity can be fulfilled *within* transculturality” (44). Finally, he admits being caught in his own arguments by using explanations such as “relation between cultures”. If the singular culture as such does not exist, it seems to be the underlying logic that relations

Jählichen, Gisa 2018. Review Essay on 'Perspectives on a 21st Century Comparative Musicology: Ethnomusicology or Transcultural Musicology?'. AEMR-EJ, 1: 65-69.

between cultures might be just measured in the density of certain features, not in any absolute ownership that could be nationally or locally claimed.

This article is followed by Rice's "Toward a Theory-driven Comparative Musicology" (50-65) that operates with the terminology familiar to most ethnomusicologists. However, the author is well aware of the necessity to change perspectives and to think in relative terms. He is promoting a new approach to comparative methods: "First, it could be comparative within our local idiographic, ethnographic studies. Second, it could be comparative between our local studies, that is, interculturally, cross-culturally, or transculturally. Third, it could be comparative beyond the general field of music studies, however labeled" (53). His second level of comparison within actual issues is in many cases not applicable from the viewpoint of other perspectives. The author's third level is closely related to the second one. Later, he adds, while protecting the field of ethnomusicology, that "We could, and in rare cases have, contributed to transdisciplinary themes and issues such as gender, media, and medical studies" (54-55), taking a discussion of Alan Merriam's contributions on music and identity as an example and supporting this with views from Nettl (1983) and Myers (1992). He is elaborating on what ethnomusicology is doing or not doing, then naming six different approaches to the core field: "(1) music is a resource; (2) music is a cultural form; (3) music is a social behavior; (4) music is a text; (5) music is a system of signs; and (6) music is an art" (59). Also, through following Turino's (1999) reasoning on the essential function of music in any human society, he could not take up the strong implications of the philosophical perspective given by Welsch.

The following contribution by Koch, "Tonsinn und Musik - Carl Stumpf's Discourse on the Mind as a Condition for the Development of Ethnomusicology and Erich Moritz von Hornbostel's Proposals for Music-psychological Examination" (66-81), is a complementary descriptive discourse on the beginnings of the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology. Partly trapped in the narration, he claims that "detailed knowledge about music of countless ethnic groups in all continents increased" (p?) at the advent of available technology and mobility. Koch obviously missed the point of the seminar as this paper reads like a lecture on the history of ethnomusicology and the role of the Berlin Phonogram Archive as already provided in other publications (Koch 2013). In his conclusion he modifies that his story shows "...Hornbostel's eagerness in everything concerned to psychology and questions of human perception. [...] In his further research he just couldn't follow it up because of the lack of data. Nevertheless he had a huge database on music recordings and he put intensive work into his transcriptions. Later this was definitely the main focus of his work and this created the image of comparative musicology" (79). This statement shows clearly that the discipline mirrors individual culture and perceptive patterns, too. It seems questionable if anyone who attended the seminar had ever thought of this image, when discussing comparative musicology. A clear distinction between the historical labelling of anything 'comparative' with what 'comparative' means in the context of this discussion could have been helpful.

Steven Feld's article "On Post-Ethnomusicology Alternatives: Acoustemology" (82-99) is in a refreshing way coming back to Giannattasio's "provocative and poignant introductory paper" (84), to which he relates. Feld argues that "At a time when one could embrace the musical cosmopolitanism of so many contemporary experimental fusions, as well as engage in research in remote and distant places that questioned the Eurocentric construction of 'music,' why follow the conservative path, policing the borders of what musics are to be deemed 'traditional,' or 'popular,' or 'art,' or 'Western,' or 'non-Western?'" (84). He articulates what a great number of colleagues may think of the "limitations of the dominant anthropology of music paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s: Alan Merriam's theorization of 'music in culture' (1964) and John Blacking's theorization of 'humanly organized sound' (1973)" (85). In clear words he describes neglected research domains and promotes them through his example: (1) language, poetics, and voice; (2) species beyond the human; (3) acoustic environments; (4) technological mediation and circulation. (ibid).

Guilbailt's article "The Politics of Musical Bonding. New Prospects for Cosmopolitan Music Studies Cosmopolitanism" (100-125) picks up a few very urgent perspectives that she describes in the context of Arbo's writings. She wants to point toward "hearing-as' as a point of entry to show how sound can be agentive in fostering cosmopolitan musical bonding" (108). In some parts, she offers a slightly unhistorical review of individual appropriations that are free of historical thoughts, too. Her inspiring suggestions and her engagement with popular music markets do not only just reflect about globalism or transculturalism, they also give evidence that the bias of powerful marketability as a criterion of quality works is unchallenged.

Another short but very strong article closes the circle of fundamental articles on the main topic, this is Amselle's "From Métissage to the Connection between Cultures" (126-135). He is an experienced senior anthropologist who says about one of his past experiences that "This fieldwork led me to deconstruct three

essential categories of anthropology: the ethnic group, culture, and identity categories” (127). This radical approach resulting from his comprehensive studies in West Africa leads him “To account for the existence of an oecumene specific to this region, I proposed the ‘chains of societies’ concept in my book *Au Coeur de l’ethnie* (Amselle 1985)” (127). Quite different from the insights distributed by postcolonial authors such as Homi K. Bhabha, Ulf Hannerz, Robert Young or Édouard Glissant, he is convinced that “no culture is pure and that in reality, all cultural groups are initially made up of bits and pieces, endlessly reflecting the notion of original purity...[...]... Pure entities are therefore initially necessary for *métissage* and this is where the paradox of this notion lies” (130). Therefore, he gave up the notion of *métissage* and uses ‘connections’ instead in order to imply neutrality. In his opinion, pure local culture does not exist and has never existed. However, he observed what many colleagues may object, which is, “Beyond the phenomenon of homogenisation, we can observe the promotion of singular cultural and ethnic identities which often result from the reappropriation of ethnology and colonial raciology. By some sort of cunning ethnological reasoning, the rejection of the West and the desire for emancipation which often emerges through indigenist or nativist claims reflects, in reality, the West’s perpetuation” (134). These are his words in his concluding remarks and they are worth more than a temporary thought.

After all these heavy philosophical thoughts, the compilation continues with no less heavy observations on the musical development of a region that seems to be crucial to and exemplary for many others working in the field of current ethnomusicology. Guriati starts with two articles, one introducing a panel about case studies on Naples under the title “Some Reflections on a new Perspective in Transcultural Musicology: the Area of Naples as a Case Study” (136-145) and one being one of the panel articles “The Music for the Festa dei Gigli in Nola” (146-157). He states right at the beginning that this is “a kind of research that, while keeping certain methodological tools of ‘classical’ anthropology of music or ethnomusicology, deal with music that are increasingly far from the ‘oral tradition’ and the ‘otherness’ as we used to know it, while keeping a great amount of orality in the process of music making and transmission of knowledge” (136). Then he discusses “classical cultural boundaries” that were and are imposed in different ways with different aims on social sciences and humanities in general. Therefore, he tries to escape the pre-installed notions that “...border-crossing must be intended here not in traditional geographic sense, since we are referring to a rather limited geographical area; rather, in the sense of crossing musical genres, performing practices, functions, styles, social levels...” (139). He argues about patronization, referring to Giannattasio and says that maintenance cannot be inherited and revival might be the only positive outcome. Then he asks whether ethnomusicologists are dealing with a living or a revived tradition. He calls the terms ‘tradition’ and ‘ethno’ in ethnomusicology a problematic issue since the disciplinary boundaries reflect confusion since they shift from one to another, probably more useful perspective. Giuriati further takes up Giannattasio’s remarks on otherness, diversity, and preservation and says that these thoughts might be also racist if they are seen as a doctrine. Instead he promotes the idea of “the pluralization of identities” (139) recommending Carpitella (176) who earlier advised the application of a specific differential analysis in order to explain the universe in its spatial and temporal changes. Guriati considers popular music as an impacting factor on differentiation and calls it “the pervasive influence of popular music” (143) which is finally contrasting “That of the aesthetic judgment, of the aura of the music” (154), which refers to an imagined authenticity.

This article is followed by Rizzoni’s “Tradition and Reframing Processes in the Madonna dell’Arco Ritual Musical Practices in Naples” (158-175), talking mainly about new practices, formally wholly foreign to traditionally adopted expressive codes, which become established because they convey symbolic implications somehow more effectively (171). Vacca’s article “Songs and the City: Itinerant Musicians as Living ‘Song Libraries’ at the Beginning of the 20th Century in Naples: the ‘Posteggiatori’” (176-185) goes one step further and discusses, beyond the many details he provides, interesting reasonings on transcultural musicology. He says “If ‘transculturalism’ is meant today as a paradigm of borderless traditions, ‘a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures’, to use the words of Wolfgang Welsch the *posteggiatori* are exactly what we need to understand” (182). Di Mauro’s article “Identity Construction and Transcultural Vocation in Neapolitan Song: a ‘Living Music’ from the Past?” (186-221) refers to Josep Martí Perez’ research (Barcelona), as a theoretical framework using the categories ‘cultural frame’, ‘social relevance’, and ‘hybridisation’. He says that his paper “will attempt to refer to concepts such as ‘identity’ and ‘transculturalism’, and, on the other, to try and provide my own personal idea of what may be meant by ‘living music’” (187). The author offers many text examples and concludes “I realised that while analysing the history of Neapolitan song in search of its ‘Neapolitaness’, I actually discovered a large number of non-Neapolitan models and how much therefore of ‘non-Neapolitan’ there was in Neapolitan song.” (191).

Agamennone's two articles that follow are "Current Research in the Salentine Area: an Introduction" (222-225) and "An Historical Perspective on Ethnomusicological Enquiry: Studies in the Salento" (226-247). He states rather plainly that "This section contains two papers on performance practices and the experience of studies concerning the Salentine area, the easternmost region of the Italian peninsula. The analysis and considerations are focused mainly on local music traditions and their influence on contemporary music making" (223). Both articles do not relate too much to the big topic, however, they deliver individual insights into the practice of contemporary research and music practice of a region. Some of his remarks may provoke some thoughts about the way research is understood and whether this might be a part of the main problem. He starts a paragraph with, for example, "The availability of many sound sources collected by authoritative scholars..." (223), and elaborates about the difficulties resulting for any critical editions of musical sources. These remarks can raise the question of whether writings are indeed sources in music. Other discussed areas are kept in a familiar tone of complaints about the distribution of financial support, governmental decisions, whether or not elements are authentic to local music traditions and how the efforts of local music schools are valued. The second paper includes some explanations and suggested clues to what could have happened during an important fieldwork in 1954, however, it was left unsaid for what reason this reconstruction might help in understanding the topic and how and for whom the revival benefits and why there is this need for getting back to one point in history which is often misinterpreted as "the" history. The value of these articles is the strong will of the author to go into details found through archival work, letters, recordings, and related items. He describes the re-enacting of a music therapy on stage, which was just invented in the 1950/60s, and looks at tarantism "from a strictly musicological point of view" (243) praising Attanasi's (2007) contribution to this field of work.

The final article of the book is Gervasi's "Rhetoric of Identity and Distinctiveness: Relations between Aesthetic Criteria and the Success of Salentine Musicians in the Contemporary Folk Revival" (248-270) who writes about the "music of the Salentine traditional scene" (249). She is dividing her research focus into 3 periods: 1) the ethnographic collections from 1954 to 1960, surveying practices still found in the rural communities; 2) a first revivalist wave in the 1970s, as a reaction to the progressive transformation of rural society and the consequent abandonment of music practices; 3) a second revivalist wave in the 1990s, experienced as a renewed interest in the culture and forms of knowledge of the rural past" (249). Also, she divides the *cantante* (singer) from the *cantori* (traditional amateur folk singers) (251) in order to clarify individual differences. The essence of her article is a listening test with a small group of high impact respondents. She says about recently active musicians that "They seem to be constantly trading between their status as actors on the international music market and that of *passseurs* of the practices and the various values of a socio-cultural rural context that no longer exists." (250). In a final realistic overview she finds that this "is the result of several factors: the biography of each musician and their musical training...[...]; their relationship and personal experience with the tradition; their subjective interpretation of the musical tradition; their artistic and musical skills; and lastly, the rules of the music market" (268). It would have been interesting to look closer at the rules of the music market from the same perspective in a consistent historical way.

In summary, this book is a very valuable contribution to necessary discussions and should be introduced to as many students in any field of musicology as possible.

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