The Musical Addressee

From a societal point of view, when does being a musician become a selfish activity? When it both exceeds the category of hobby, and fails to demonstrate use-value, verifiable by tangible evidence of having been sufficiently listened to. (A hobby is defined as any activity that is subordinated to a different, substantially income-producing activity).

How then to justify one's creative activity in this case, how much acknowledgement (or consumption of one's "product") is sufficient? Moreover, what is ideally the aim? To communicate something, it seems. But if we accept that all communication is open-ended and without completion, how can we measure our success? And what if there is no evidence that any substantial communication has taken place at all?

The question becomes how to *believe* in a self-convincing way, against the internalized opinions of Society and even in painful defiance of its demands, in the validity of one's work, which comes down to believing that you have been *heard* even when no "real" response is evident.

One could make a pragmatic argument, that for the self-compelled creator/composer, music supplies a sense of meaning, or order, or progress, or something else of psychological and emotional value. I remember a quote of the composer Iannis Xenakis, "I was unhappy and music was the only thing that calmed me down". Music does not need any extra justification in this case, since it allows at least one person to function better, bring more positivity to interactions and being in the world—but only if it doesn't bring with it any over-balancing negative social (or financial) effects.

Often lurking in the implication of selfishness or illegitimacy in the self-proclaimed composer is the specter of class—as in, the dubious privilege not only of doing "useless" things, but feeling good about it (i.e., attaching objective cultural importance to it, thus justifying the prioritizing of this activity over the pursuit of income). Rich people more often do useless (i.e., non-exchangeable) activities, since it is generally easier for them, and it also (intentionally or not) demonstrates their privilege. They are often encouraged in useless pursuits, by way of a sort of aristocratic nostalgia. Creativity for its own sake then becomes another target of class resentment, envy, ethical critique, etc.—not least because the creative person in many cases doesn't need to accept the burden of job- and money-related pressures that most people cannot avoid, taking advantage of and feeding into a blatantly unfair situation. Creative pursuits are left free to fill the gap left by the absence of a financially compelled profession.

For the creative person (rich or not) it may simply be a way of having things be the way you want them to be, in at least one area of your life. But it's not enough, because you need other people, preferably en masse, to acknowledge this desired reality, to understand you, and benefit from that understanding (how?)—the same old need to be loved. Should they be entertained? Liberated? Yes, I think liberation is what I'm after. But apparently people aren't (or don't want to be) liberated in this way. Hence the need for a listener who hears "correctly": The ultimate other.

What form could this "other" take? Is it just a phantom, an invention of the doubt-ridden artist to justify the use of their time, quell childish emotional needs or satisfy a sense of self-importance? Is it a mere psychological mechanism, once again

demonstrating the human mind's endless capacity for indulging its weakness, in the form of mysticism, elitism or some other mental refuge? Against these reflexive critiques, one strives to develop an *internally* verifiable consciousness of an ideal listener, who exists outside and above the tangible reception of one's musical product. So then, how to achieve this consciousness? Is it not just another aspect of faith?

A secular model for such an auditor can be found in the linguistic and literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically his concept of a "superaddressee". Any supernatural aspect in this definition lies within his idea of the word, which is essentially bottomless and eternal. Given this premise, it is simply inferred that there must by definition be an indefinite third party (in addition to an immediately present second party) to whom the word or utterance is addressed, because the word can never be limited to its immediate context. This third party can take many forms, depending on the viewpoint and historical context of the speaker; it is not a mystical entity, although it can be conceived as such. In any case, we cannot speak, in general, without implicitly positing this third party, whether we are aware of it or not. It is the word itself that manifests this principle and desire.

The open-ended quality of music is, if anything, even more evident than that of the word. This quality, which always reaches out to something beyond its immediate context, can be expressed as the desire for an imaginative dimension in life—the need for there to be "more" (in common with religion, Symbolist art, depth psychology…i.e., the world of the unseen). Music can give form and substance to the life of the imagination. But where does this leave the social purpose of music?

For people who don't or can't find this "imaginative dimension" in music, music with this orientation is not likely to have value… maybe it even lacks value for those who are disposed to expend such an effort (aside from the artist in question), due to its individual character. It is even less likely to inspire this type of engagement in one who is not already inclined towards it.

The ethical principle here is then involved with the idea of individuality (and individuation). What needs to be established is that this is an ethical good in itself. The principal objections to this have to do with the view that the (over-) cultivation of the individual is at odds with the needs and justice of the community. Individuality in this case is seen as a historical phenomenon that engenders and feeds on social inequality, recurring in diverse places and times, while communal cohesion is seen as the ideal organization of society, to which the better impulses in mankind always aspire. What seems to be implied here is that no individuality should be allowed to develop itself more than any other, in order to prevent unfairness, oppression, social irresponsibility and so on. This view pits the individual against the community. Most thinking people would say this is not an either/or question, or even necessarily an opposition. But the role of composer is particularly problematic, stemming as it does from an oligarchic system of patronage, together with a typically European Romantic stance. Lacking even the validation of patronage, what possible cooperation could a composer have with the community at large? The only way out, from a materialistic point of view, seems to be the allowance that some day, my particular music (or anyone's art, poetry, etc.) <u>may</u> have a general cultural significance (assuming one puts value in such a concept of culture— which is also sometimes debated).

Here the superaddressee appears again, this time in its historical costume. In this view, although judgment may still not be favorable, only history has the ability to hear infallibly.

From here one could make the philosophical leap that the two superaddressees—the imaginative/spiritual and the historical/cultural—are one and the same. This connects to Bergson's philosophy of a creative spirit bridging the gap between the individual and the whole, coordinating an overall evolutionary movement. Of course, if you follow the evolutionary concept, then you have to allow for the existence of dead ends, or the idea that certain "cells" of the "brain" die out without contributing any constructive purpose or developmental potential, very much like failed experiments. But again, this cannot be evaluated conclusively in the present, since the process is always projecting into the future. However, Bergson's bold intellectual assertions (which were criticized by Bakhtin as overly "aesthetic") seem ultimately to rest on a quasi-religious, comforting faith in the guiding hand of a progressive "spirit".

The mystical extreme of the superaddressee principle can be found in Henry Corbin's description of Sufism. He speaks of a "heavenly partner" or "eyewitness" who accompanies the meditating sage, and who is distinct from, yet identified with the earthly self. For each of us, this figure is completely individual (and unshareable), and is both our true (or "perfect") self and our judge. The entire spiritual journey in these traditions is a quest to be (re-) united with this personage. A successful completion of this journey results in complete enlightenment, and a consciousness of the entire cosmos within your self. This is a very urgent vision of transcendence—not something that one is justified in pursuing, but something that, once aware of, one must pursue, at the risk of spiritual death or imprisonment. Needless to say, here we have passed well beyond the need for outward validation. This is a complete immersion in the individual quest… but how can we reach this level without explicit appeal to the "Religions of the Book"? Could we attempt such an appeal from within our intellectually mandated agnosticism?

Heidegger's interpretation of pre-Socratic philosophy offers a related, less openly religious, concept. In this idea of Being, which reflects what he sees as the earliest philosophers' cognizance of the root of existence, "taking-heed-of" is the same as the "presencing-what-is-present". This is similar to how the existence of superaddresse (or "heavenly witness" in the spiritual sense) is identical with its evocation; he/she exists only insofar as we invoke him/her with the suggestive power of word or imagination, and this is implicitly the true purpose of the utterance. Paradoxically, in all of these cases, the thing that is called into being exists in some way a priori of the utterance, and is simultaneously engendered and recalled. A similar phenomenon exists in music: the more strange, personal, and alien a piece of music sounds, the more it suggests the existence of something unseen, the more it begs the question of why someone made this music in this way, and for whom. What frame of reference would give sense to it? The appeal of what (for want of a better term) we might call "weird" music is that, in its strangeness, it evokes a world, different from our own, where such things would make sense.

The question again is, how is this relationship, or alternate reality, verified, other than by faith? It can be reinforced through reasoning, but this is not enough. There must be something in the utterance itself (in this case musical) that contains/conveys this awareness. This consists not in any explanation, but in a particular orientation to a listener that is not physically present—whether this listener is conceived spiritually, historically, or in some other manner. It is a personage that dwells partly in the utterance (where it is bonded with the utterer), and partly somewhere else. This awareness, which initially evolves from an orientation to oneself as one's primary listener, must be built using intuition and sensitivity toward the various elevations of consciousness which

music can invoke. When these "elevations" occur, they are unmediated, and therefore self-verifying. The goal then becomes to build these moments into a general approach.

Of course, for the creative musician, the issue is never simply aesthetic; there is also the problem of (social) life, and justifying your life as a musician/composer, which may entail poverty/financial dependence, exploitation of others, neglect of social responsibilities and many other things that raise ethical questions. The question is, to what "judge" do you grant the ultimate authority? It's easier to accept external authority on these matters. Maybe in some sense, this is necessary. It is also this position of (external) judge that the superaddressee occupies—but it is the best of all possible judges; in fact, the only one you can trust. But where does he get his authority (=exteriority)? Again, there may be no other answer than (one's own) intuition. We pursue certainty through intuition, and the sensations attached to it.   However, this intuition is not formless, but directed—it takes the form of an address. The more focused and directed it becomes, the greater the certainty—and the more clear is the addressee.

This manifests in practice in many ways, and on different levels. Not least, in attaining a sense of humility that is not oriented toward the judgments of other people and the perceived judgments of society at large. This happens on the basic level of life choices, facing consequences, evaluating success or failure, and so on. But it also reflects on issues of technique. Formal and aesthetic decisions do not come out of nowhere, but are mediated through one's contemporary situation and experiences. Navigating these decisions is a complex task, involving rationality, taste, and ultimately intuition (which conditions the other faculties). In the daily, craft element, this intuition takes the form of energy—i.e., an energetic response in oneself, which is elicited by particular decisions and actions on the formal and aesthetic levels. One must recognize and acknowledge this energy as concrete and significant. Of course, one's predilections and choices will bear the marks of the social and educational experiences that were necessary in developing technique, and these marks of experience never fully relinquish their links to social realities (a point I will return to).

In general, this inward focus does not seem well adapted to a social way of life. "If everyone behaved this way, society would fall apart". Perhaps—if you assume that all people want "deep down" to devote their lives to purely creative pursuits, but choose not to, due to an inborn sense of social responsibility or the constraints of "reality". From a socially oriented point of view, it may be impossible, at some point on this path, to refute a charge of elitism. But who issues this charge? Other individuals, at times, who have their own reasons for raising such an issue. But also, more importantly, something akin to a Freudian superego, who stands in opposition to the superaddressee. The superego frames in psychological terms something analogous to what mystics might call a demiurge. The demiurge generally takes on a socio-economic guise—sometimes protestant-capitalist, sometimes quasi-Marxist (or a more archaic Catholic-Jewish style, etc.). These characters share in a philosophy of guilt; guilt, moreover, that can never really be absolved or denied. It is a social organizing force. Music, in this context, plays a more satanic role (although the demiurgic forces attempt to coopt it).

A humanistic idea of Culture attempts to reconcile this opposition. Bakhtin makes reference in his literary criticism to culture, as a self-evident good, or principle, that undergirds the validity of his critical enterprise. His literary examples come from the echelon of European classics. Of course, it is not his intent to evaluate the ethics of striving to enter this canon. But in his more philosophical writings, he does take up ethical subjects—there his focus is on the theme of engagement, or "answerability" in

the terminology of his translators. This maybe cuts more directly to the ethical issue involved in living a creative life. By committing to an isolated, personal creative cloister, one runs the risk of exempting oneself from any consequences of one's actions, aesthetic or otherwise. This leads to a denial of accountability, or answerability, which is the foundation of an ethical act. Conversely, by Bakhtin's own reasoning, the counter-argument can be made that seemingly more socially-oriented people also deny their personal engagement and investment in life by following prescribed paths, and by occupying defined "domains" instead of authentic, autonomous individualities. For Bakhtin, the essential quality of an answerable act is the "signature" of the individual—the acknowledgement that this act was done by a unique individual with a specific orientation and investment in a situation, and therefore marked by his or her "emotional-volitional tone". It is this tone, and the wholly personal involvement that it verifies, that marks an act as fully owned and situated in a particular, real and unrepeatable event. For the individual, this means both facing the consequences of one's actions, and also investing oneself fully and actively in the choices one makes, without recourse to an "alibi" in either case.

The problem is not a simple one, then, but at least the issue becomes clearer—true guilt lies not in the utilization of privilege per se, but in the refusal to actualize on a real, lived, level. What then would be the measure of this actualization, in this case and in this day and age? Crowd-funding? Grant applications? "Branding"? Cultivating a social media presence? The options are grim, not to mention profoundly unconvincing. They lead back into counterproductive dilemmas around pernicious, socially enforced ideas of success and failure. In effect, these ideas *are* the currently prescribed paths. Simple documentation of one's efforts seems a logical way to register the creative act. But it also seems somehow insufficient to surmount the "rough draft" syndrome, to definitively break the surface of one's creative bubble, especially since in the case of music, recording, as a medium, has itself become less socio-economically oriented than in the past. The idea of making a recording solely or even primarily for yourself was fairly alien in the golden age of the recording industry; nowadays, the idea of the "demo" has been swallowed up by a broader category of what constitutes a "release", and beyond that, there exists a vague category of non-commercial recordings which are incompletely detached from a commercial mechanism of production and concept. All this has degraded the legitimacy of recorded music as a valid participation in social life or cultural discourse (let alone the market). There is a hint of nostalgia for the enlightened gatekeepers of the music industry (with their exclusive access to massive machineries of production, distribution and promotion) in the second half of the 20th century (which, albeit, whitewashes a history of exploitation).

This seems to leave live performance as one of the only self-evidently valid avenues for participatory musical acts. Indeed, performing seems like the mode *par excellence* for expressing an emotional-volitional tone in music. In this instance, music seems to offer an ideal medium for realizing the "Janus-faced" quality of the utterance that Bakhtin observes: one face turned toward the "once-occurrent" moment of reality, and the other toward the "domain of culture", which we can read as a stand-in for the superaddressee (which he coined in a later essay). The musical performer has the opportunity, in a concrete way, to orient his or her "utterance" simultaneously toward physically present others (incarnation) and also toward the spiritual self/domain of culture/superaddressee. However, this double orientation may necessarily be hierarchized, a problem which presents another layer of moral choice or priority.

The central issue is the relation between practice (as experienced internally) and its product. In the creation of original music, what does "I-for-myself" consist of? A process, or a search. A search for what? For the right form—therefore the projection of a product is built in at the base. What determines the choice or direction of the form is essentially intuitive; this intuitive element, in its form-producing (product-oriented) quality, can be conceived (ideally) as a dialogue with the superaddressee.

The "emotional-volitional tone" enters into this form-producing process at the moment the activity enters the social (incarnated) world. It results from the tension between I-for-myself and I-for-the-other. The creative actor is forced to take a position vis-à-vis the non-idealized others who can hear the music. This leads to pitfalls; the result can be "impoverishing"—putting one's intuition primarily in service to public acceptance, and cultivating an exchange value—or equally well discouraging and isolating, impelling one towards the margin of the social venue.

The question of performance medium, as mentioned, already connects the creative person with the social world. The choice of musical approach itself is of secondary importance to the fact that it must by its very fact, relate in some way (even if negative) to the lived experience of the musician. This lived experience is, by necessity, shared with others in the context of a common culture. The familiarity of an idiom to (some segment of) society should be enough to access a context for communication. Extra-musical promotion, remuneration, and all the other things we associate with the profession of music are, at best, inessential aids to this basic creative act. What the audience will witness is in some sense an internal dialogue, which (in large part) takes place on another plane. Nevertheless, it is important to offer up this process in a social context.

Perhaps the success or failure of this communication is not important either way. For Bakhtin, it seems that significance lies in the individuality of the act—the fact that it is unique, unrepeatable and answerable, and also that it is performed, i.e. that it is indeed an (incarnated) act.

There is an idea that music is a service, and that it is presumptuous to assume that anyone would be interested in anyone else's "personal" musical efforts. (Historically, this may in large part be the case.) In fact, people can get quite angry when confronted with music they don't like, especially when they feel that the music is somehow self-indulgent, or alien. But this should be of minimal concern to the creative musician. The act needs to be performed, in one context or another. This is also the way to confront the phenomenon of guilt; such accusations, whether leveled externally or internally, begin to lose their force when the musician becomes participatory, even when still refusing to fully accept the terms of the social consensus surrounding such activity. Performing is not likely to supply any evidence that one's music has some monumental socio-cultural value; one may still ostensibly occupy an insignificant space in the contemporary estimation. But if the act is realized, it gains an "objective" value in itself.

In practice, people do respond to a personal element in music. This is actually one of the most important aspects in music for listeners (albeit for most people, it also requires an acceptable generic gloss). The difficulty for the musician comes in extricating the two "addressees"; any response (positive or negative) that comes from an actual listener tends to immediately usurp one's internal listener. The question becomes, how is the actual listener's response important to one's creative process? On one level, not at all. But it is nevertheless important that the listener is present. This makes it clear why isolation, and

a self-pronounced failure, would be tempting—not only because of a fear of (actual) failure (or success, for that matter), but because it eliminates this ambiguity in evaluation. It is appealing, in a circuitous way, for the creative musician to be unheard, since this means the only possible addressee is "super". But it is the struggle with this ambiguity, in the form of doubt, which leads the artist both out of isolation and also ultimately into a closer and more genuine relationship with one's internal listener.

To a large extent, the challenge is simply to develop one's own criteria, or the ability to listen to one's own music. The issue is that from a subjective point of view, we experience our own music more as a feeling than as an audible artifact. The "abyss" that forms between those two poles is then quite understandable. Like children, after an initial phase of imitation, we proceed to do what feels right, until our behavior begins to be shaped by external evaluation. Eventually, these poles can coalesce into a personal aesthetic; this involves opposing this subjective feeling to one's (also subjective) evaluative judgments, which are conditioned by direct experience as well as exposure to the valuations of others. One can never become completely deaf to these external evaluations, nor would this be artistically advantageous—the interaction with the medium has to continue, even into artistic maturity, and this involvement is concrete and (therefore) social. But in order to develop a musical individuality, one has to continually jettison those valuations that are not internal(ized) while also maintaining fidelity to the direct, feeling-oriented values of the creative act itself. The role of the superaddressee, as I conceive it, is to guide this balancing of perspectives and the choices made in this process. This is also the process of creating form.

Once again, what could be the ultimate aim? In the fragmented, post-Existentialist world that Bakhtin (and we) inhabit, the communality of traditional societies has been damaged, and human fulfillment is difficult to attain. Such socially engaged yet individually authentic acts as the performance of original music may ultimately help call into being a new, genuine and participatory community.

READING LIST:

Mikhail Bakhtin:	Speech Genres and Other Late Essays
	Toward a Philosophy of the Act
Henry Corbin:	The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism
Martin Heidegger:	Early Greek Thinking
Henri Bergson:	Creative Evolution