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Grenzen van het hoorbare: over de meerstemmigheid van het lichaam
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Summary

Thresholds of the audible starts with the shift in vocal music of the last half century to make harmonics audible as seemingly independent musical objects, with a technique called overtone singing. The almost total absence of this idea in European music of previous centuries partly explains why the experience of this hidden musical territory is often accompanied by bafflement. While the early, nineteenth century receptions, mostly outside musical circles, stressed the acoustic fact of overtones, the more recent musical applications are almost routinely accompanied by spiritual claims and interpretations. In this dissertation the author is wondering if it is possible to transcend this dichotomy: to find a language that neither objectifies harmonics nor subjectifies (or spiritualises) the singer or perceiver; but that speaks from the position of the sounds themselves, as it were. While listening to someone singing overtones may be a new phenomenon for many listeners, the polyphonic template of periodic sound waves itself is not new: it may be seen to presuppose or pre-exist the human voices, bodies and consciousnesses that inhabit an auditory reality.

The subtitle 'about the multiphony of the body' points to one possible outcome of the question of dichotomies. It shifts the focus of listeners, singers and speakers toward concrete patterns of sonic interaction that move beyond what is normally conceived to be music (or musical performance). It reverses the idea that an individual can learn to master auditory reality by singing overtones, and begins with the circumstance that the template of the harmonic series from the earliest times on have left their imprint on man's being in the world. The foremost artistic tool for this claim is a series of compositions called *Nulpunten* ('Zero' or 'Zero-points'), which make this harmonic template audible in a rather reductionist way, as a series of intervallic permutations: there is no preference for specific harmonic numbers or constellations; all possibilities are systematically explored by two voices. *Nulpunten* are explained in the main text as structural exercises where sound can be heard as quantity (specific numbers) and quality (harmonies).

Other musical material, performed by Parafonia, is presented in between the chapters of the main text, as musical interludes in between verbal discourses, breaking away from the discursive arguments. Some of them push musicians and listeners onto further thresholds of the audible, for example by pointing out the almost imperceptible role played by harmonics. Four chapters discuss cultural applications of vocal overtones: two older musical traditions within the larger scope of Tibetan and Sardinian religious music, and two approaches to overtone singing as a fairly new phenomenon in Western music. Though all of them may wholly or partly be understood from religious and/or spiritual contexts, I emphasise, where possible, the embodied mediation to counterbalance a one-sided spiritual interpretation.

In the final chapters, the verbal discourse itself is considered, particularly in its spoken form, to be as polyphonic in nature as the voice of an overtone singer. Several alternatives for experiencing and for talking and thinking about vocal harmonics are offered, which first stretch the quality-quantity dichotomy

to extremes. However, the author sees possibilities to transcend the disentanglement of fundamental versus harmonics, singer versus listener, body versus mind, self versus sonic object, and quality versus quantity. It is particularly in the creative effort of concentrated listening to the voice, and in sounding the voice in a similarly creative and concentrated way, that the seemingly fixed boundaries of these dichomoties become blurred. This kind of listening and sounding develops an alternative take on the more or less straightforward human exchanges of meaningful sounds in music and language. These sounds become part of a densely integrated network in which sensory input, the material body and consciousness are constantly mediated and transformed. With the composition cycle *Nulpunten* and other works presented on the accompanying cd, the musicians of Parafonia contribute to the creative fields where vocal timbre and harmonics are explored. In the text, the author offers new interpretations of these sonic domains and new integrations with other spheres of human life, such as speech.