

Will Musicology Survive?

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As of 2006 there are no departments of musicology in Denmark. Though the term does survive at the University of Aarhus, it is only a Section of Musicology within a larger department named the Institute of Aesthetic Studies. At the University of Aalborg, the former Department of Music and Music Therapy has been split between the Department of Communication and Psychology and the Department of Language and Culture. And as the last of these departments, the Department of Musicology in Copenhagen has since 1 January 2007 been a section of the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies. After more than a century with musicology as an academic discipline at Danish universities – during most of the period organized as independent departments – this is indeed remarkable.

The reason for having departments of musicology (or history or literature) was the idea that research in a scholarly discipline should be organized under guidance of members from that particular academic environment. This idea has been abandoned, partly because of a new philosophy of professional leadership which values leadership as a profession *per se*, partly due to an economic model of ‘big is beautiful’ which facilitates running the business according to professional management theories. Furthermore, the idea was that an academic discipline would carry out research and at the same time would establish an education in the field. Hence, there was a board of studies at each department which was responsible for the degree of musicology. In addition, academics from the discipline would decide on the teaching and define a state of the art education within the field. The boards of studies have also been merged into larger bodies responsible for either the whole education in a large department (as in Aarhus and Copenhagen) or a major part of the educations in a department as in Aalborg.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that musicology cannot survive merely because the departments of musicology did not. However, it might be worth considering in what form musicology will be able to survive under these new conditions, and not least who will make the decisions. It changes some very fundamental conditions for the practice of musicology and thus for musicologists. It affects the structures of decision-making in some very crucial ways and changes the ways in which one has to act as a musicologist – that is, if one wishes to retain a major degree of independence. Strategic decisions have always been made to determine the type of research to be carried out, but it was a tool employed in order to decide how many

researchers should be employed within a specific field. Thus, based on discussions in the scholarly community, they would be free to choose the kind of research to be carried out and how to perform it.

Though this freedom has not been annulled, it is nevertheless being challenged by demands for fast and expedient results in areas which politicians and media – or the other way around: media and politicians – choose to focus on at any moment. The major issue is not the few instances when politicians decide in detail that something needs to be done. This happens quite openly, and what you see is what you get. I find it more disturbing, however, that general buzzwords employed in politics, such as globalization and integration of foreigners in western cultures, tend to take control over the discourse on research, making it difficult to find out what is happening. More funding is placed in strategic research programmes and consequently it is of the utmost importance to be able to communicate using the same language as the awarding authorities in order to obtain a share in the available financial resources. What happens if really independent research of true value to the society is not carried out because of the established agendas? Could it be that what society really requires from the universities are genuine, independent, and critical discussions of great significance and the ability to ask better questions?

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND DISCIPLINARITY

It might seem I am opposing the calls for interdisciplinarity which have been raised by former ‘viewpoints’ in this journal as well as elsewhere; however, this is not the case: I am convinced that large areas of research need to be done as cross-disciplinary studies and that we have to keep abreast of results in other subjects as well as our own. Furthermore, I have been looking forward to becoming acquainted with new colleagues in a larger department, hoping for improved conditions for working across traditional borderlines. But I am also convinced that interdisciplinarity presupposes disciplinarity. When working with academics from other areas, the optimal setting is that everybody takes the point of departure from within their own discipline with an awareness of its traditions and with a profound knowledge of the field, its theories, and its manners of posing questions. Other views based on thorough contemplation and knowledge, and confronted with your own serious efforts to cope with a problem is what makes the relationship interesting. This requires researchers from different traditions to start the preparation of common projects from the bottom.

If structures are not established so that musicology can join in discussions on equal terms with those representing interdisciplinarity, the lack of departments of musicology could cause serious problems. Rights are a requisite for confronting power. Otherwise those who claim to represent the interdisciplinarity will have the power to decide the framework, and members of the academic disciplines with no power are forced to accept doing research on those terms or lose the quest for funding. As a matter of fact, the claim that someone could represent interdisciplinarity

as such is an ideology in the old fashioned way of ‘false consciousness’. The disciplines claiming to represent interdisciplinarity are similar to those who used to fight for superiority in the field of theoretical thinking. It is the same old story about that particular claim stating that it is universal. Recognizing your own distinctiveness and that each scholar is part of a tradition of academic disciplining needs to be established before interdisciplinary work can be done. But lacking structures that back up disciplinarity, while establishing new leadership on the multidisciplinary departments, makes it possible to define strategies, topics, questions, and ways of working from outside the disciplines. Problems emerge when interdisciplinarity becomes the goal itself.

ORGANIZING MUSICOLOGY

Musicology, I think, is well prepared to join interdisciplinary projects formed by joined efforts of researchers from different areas. During the last decades, musicology has developed approaches informed by various traditions, leaving the battlefield of the 1970s when one approach by definition seemed to exclude others. In Denmark, there is a tradition of collaboration between – and the coexistence of – distinct areas such as traditional music history, music theory, the study of popular music and musical cultures, and ethnomusicology in the same department at the universities. This might be the case in some other European countries too, but is quite different from US traditions. To suggest that the departments of musicology until recently have been operating as they did thirty or forty years ago is simply not true.

Musicology should then be able to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century. The point is that it is crucial to establish ways of decision-making that provides the possibility to do this from within the discipline, not leaving it to others to define how and when. It might require more professional means of organizing the decision-making. I have, to a large degree, been committed to the idea of increasing efficiency and taking leadership seriously at the universities. It should be remembered that modern leadership is concerned with providing results based on the potential of the organization as such, not about taking the largest number of decisions.

Strategic plans for research mean using long-term perspectives. What should be avoided is short-term politics and media interests defining future fields of research. First, these interests would be long gone before the results could be presented. Second, if the questions are too constricted, the answers might be predictable. This is not to say that we should not care whether the results are of interest to the community. However, it is important to consider means of developing strategies for research that provide interesting and useful knowledge which might even surprise us. How to achieve this is a difficult question, but to my mind the point of departure should be to ensure that interdisciplinarity is acknowledged as consisting of the cooperation of researchers from different traditions and disciplines.