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Researching Ethics through Musical (or Artistic) Experience

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Introduction

There can be little doubt that art and artistic engagement can be powerful moral tools. Plato realised it and warned against its abuse, and both the philosophers Hume and Kant drew various connections between art and morality.[2] It is possible to ask many philosophical questions of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. For example: if art is morally flawed, can it then still be aesthetically good? Should we ban morally depraved art, or should we consider it in order to gain a greater understanding of various aspects of life? Can art enlighten us morally, and if yes, then how? Do artists have moral obligations to society? Or, indeed, if one holds a formalist view of art, is any consideration of ethics at all relevant to aesthetics? Whichever way you look at it, relationships between ethics and aesthetics, their overlap as well as their division, is an important topic within many theoretical debates today, whether in philosophy, critical theory, sociology and political science, gender studies, cultural studies, art history, theology, musicology, or artistic research.

This article is written for the purpose of introducing selected aspects from the scholarly area of 'music and ethics' to scholars and artists working within artistic research. Written by a music-philosopher working in musicology as a member of academia, the aesthetic focus is film music. Nevertheless, the approach and framework presented would also be applicable to other aesthetic and artistic areas: as will become clear as the text progresses, several concepts are of particular importance for the discussion and have wide artistic and aesthetic reach. Drawing in particular on the framework developed in Cobussen & Nielsen (2012), I account for 'engagement', 'agency', and 'responsibility' as conceptual tools with which we – be it the academic, the artist, or the everyday listener – can better account for ethical encounters experienced through music. Further, by drawing on film music scholarship, I engage with an 'ethical theory of spectatorship'[3] as a way to interrogate ethical aspects of film music and,

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[2] The common distinction between ethics and morality is that the first is mainly focused on 'the good' and 'the good life', whereas the latter pays more attention to 'the right' and to 'justice'. However, it needs to be recognised that a stable opposition is hard to maintain (cf. Nancy Fraser, 'Recognition without Ethics?' in M. Garber et al (eds.) *The Turn to Ethics*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), esp. pp. 97-99). In this article, the terms are used interchangeably.

[3] Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

accordingly, offer a brief analysis of Michael Haneke's film *The Piano Teacher* (2001). Before presenting this analysis, each of the three concepts – engagement, agency, and responsibility – will be further contextualised and clarified. I begin by giving a brief sketch of how an object-oriented philosophy of music has over time become a process-oriented musical philosophy, and why acknowledging that kind of *engagement* is vital to an ethics of musical experience.

The philosophy of music: from object to engagement

For many years, at least since the late nineteenth century, music has offered a special case for philosophy. In his *Philosophy of Music* (2004), philosopher Aaron Ridley memorably accounted for the particular music-philosophical challenge as a kind of 'autonomania': a stubborn preoccupation among philosophers with the 'autonomous' musical work as an object, removed from lived experience, as if it were from Mars.[4] To be sure, due to its non-representational qualities and abstract nature, music easily resists immediate understanding and therefore poses a philosophical challenge. Nevertheless, it does not need to be considered a philosophical *problem* that philosophers need to solve because of this. Rather, as more recent work has begun to show, music can be seen philosophically less like a problem and more like an opportunity, while still yielding interesting philosophical results. The opportunity, as philosopher Andrew Bowie suggests in his *Music, Philosophy, Modernity* (2007), lies in figuring out the kind of philosophy that *emerges* from music, rather than the kind of philosophy that seeks to determine the 'object' music. In a nutshell, the scholarly area of 'music and philosophy' has seen a welcome move from a focus on music as an object to music as process; from a 'philosophy of music' to a 'musical philosophy'. Neatly captured by philosopher Kathleen Higgins's perceptive statement in *The Music of Our Lives* (1991), this kind of musical philosophy would in most cases agree that: 'Music is, first of all, an experience.'[5] Music is first of all an experience because it is created by human beings, most often *for* human beings, and in human contexts. From baptisms to funerals, throughout our lives, music is closely connected with many aspects of living, with how we experience life directly.

[4] Aaron Ridley, *The Philosophy of Music: Theme and Variations* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2004).

[5] Kathleen Marie Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 113. Originally published 1991.

As musical philosophy moves away from a focus on the 'object' music, and more towards 'music as process', it also moves closer to exploring the ways that music – and our engagement with music – is capable of clarifying important aspects of what it is, means, and feels to be human, and thereby how music and ethics are interconnected. Consider the act of listening, which has been granted increased attention in current musical philosophy (here I am suggesting an all-encompassing idea of listening that includes hearing). We can shut our eyes but we cannot close our ears. The listening human being is physiologically in a state of openness, and the trained *musical* listener will have especially developed an advanced ability to pay acute attention to tone, dynamics, structure, rhythm, and – in addition – a reflective sensitivity to how music has an impact on, or plays a role in particular contexts: political, embodied and otherwise. Lest we forget, however, 'being musical' is not for the few but for the many: babies quickly develop a sensitivity to tone, loudness, rhythm, and so on, and so-called 'tone deaf' people still sing along or dance to their favourite songs and clearly sense music in powerful ways. Musical listening seems to be a fundamental human trait, and explaining how and why we listen requires a capacity to respond in a reflective way to the experience of listening. As is a general tenet of this article, music often *demands* the responsible and responsive engagement of critical agents who commit themselves to explanation.[6]

A process-oriented musical philosophy can offer valuable perspectives on musical engagement because it takes seriously the abundant ways that human beings can pay attention to the sounding world and are capable of deciphering multiple responses in a variety of contexts. Now consider how music might inspire empathy, through reflective, attentive engagement. The philosophical imagination is a powerful sidekick for musicologists here, and musical listening can – for example – be connected in many ways to imaginative moral engagement. A potent case is that most horrifying of scenes in *Schindler's List*, in which a German soldier plays J.S. Bach's Prelude from the English Suite no. 2 in A minor to accompany the killing of Jews hiding in the Kraków Ghetto. It might be tempting to think (as suggested in Kivy, 2009) of this scene as 'proof' that music – even what might be thought of as 'great' music (it is Bach, after all) – cannot be considered a moral force in the world. When approached in this way, however, all the example can do for the music-as-object philosopher is help make the

[6] For further discussion of this point, see Marcel Cobussen and Nanette Nielsen, *Music and Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2012).

simple point that music that possesses the aesthetic feature of harmoniousness does not *necessarily* motivate us to seek harmony in our interactions with other people; be more tolerant; and behave in a morally improved manner. But the relation between music and ethics is much more rich and complex than that: the scene says much less about whether the absurdity of the situation offers 'proof' that music cannot be said to inspire moral behaviour in general terms, and much more about whether and how the scene – for which music is central – could potentially elicit a moral response in the spectator, and what that might mean.

To place what in film music parlance is called 'anempathetic music' in a scene that is otherwise laden with possibility for empathetic response is a powerful way of contrasting the inhumane with the humane. As in those aesthetic experiences where actively imagining possible implications – moral and otherwise – is germane, so too in our engagement with the real world: the narrative power of film music is not all that dissimilar to the narrative power of the music that constitutes the soundtrack of our lives. Engagement with art and music can cultivate empathy on many levels, including – as philosopher Martha Nussbaum has shown in *Not for Profit* (2010) – through the notion of play. For our *Schindler's List* example, the German soldier plays the Bach piece as part of the life-world of the film (also called *diegetic* music), and the playing seems desensitised partly because he does not appear to register his surroundings, and partly because the performance is staccato and mechanical. The attentive listener would have noticed that the playing begins in sync with the machine guns; the music thus closely mirrors the business-as-usual killing, with chilling effect. The example also helps to emphasise how, unlike more static art forms such as a painting, dynamic musical performance offers a particular instance of inherent 'playfulness': once we encounter musical performance, we also tend to expect the involvement of some kind of *human* play. Experiencing the German soldier's play as mechanical, i.e. 'robotic', makes him appear less human, and possibly easier to understand. In other words, the way in which the piece is performed offers the spectator a chance to establish a critical distance from the terrifying thought that a human being would be able to do such a thing. As a counter example, consider the humanising effect of HAL 9000 singing 'Daisy Bell' at the end of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in the final moments before he is deactivated ('killed'): the fact that he sings has the capacity to evoke empathy because it makes him seem more human than ever.

Apart from being linked to the cultivation of empathy, Nussbaum's point about play extends to its capacity to shape democratic citizenship. The 'play space' available through art

nurtures imaginative ways of connecting with others, and assists people in developing a greater sense of reciprocity and vulnerability. As Nussbaum writes, '[p]lay teaches people to be capable of living with others without control; it connects the experiences of vulnerability and surprise to curiosity and wonder, rather than to crippling anxiety'.[7] In a world ridden with anxiety, it is perhaps high time to refocus on the multiple ways that music – as an inherently playful art form – can cultivate the sense of the other and foster understanding of what a democracy is, and should be, about. It is not without relevance that one of the first music sociologists – Paul Bekker (1882-1937) – developed a concept of music's 'socially formative force' as a powerful response to the turmoil of WWI, seeking to rebuild a shattered and humiliated society through music. Music is undoubtedly capable of fostering a sense of community, and engaging with music – either through listening or performing – has the capacity to establish a sense of meaningful belonging. Turning our eyes back to the current climate: was Donald Trump's illegitimate use of The Stones' 'You can't always get what you want' during his campaign and at the end of his victory speech helping to establish a sense of meaningful, empathetic belonging? When Bekker was driven out of Germany in 1933, his assessment of the possibility (and impossibility) of democracy through music was as perceptive as it had been in the beginning of the Weimar Era: 'From the music of National Socialism comes nothing more than the hysterical cry. […] This cry no longer forms itself into a sound. National Socialism has no music. In this one should recognise that National Socialism is in reality nothing more than the name for an ultimate demise.'[8] (Nielsen 2017, 70). Conversely, once the Covid-19 pandemic took hold of people's lives across the world in 2020, a new sense of shared emphatic belonging quickly emerged through a variety of digital fora offering new platforms for musical engagement, from online concerts to sing-along televised performances. Apart from being potent examples of music as a playful (democratic) art form – connecting (in Nussbaum's sense) the experiences of vulnerability and surprise to curiosity and wonder, rather than to crippling anxiety – such instances of musical engagement offer potent possibilities for further discussions by artistic researchers and musical philosophers alike. Music invites a unique kind of engagement that involves both physical and cognitive capacities, and musical philosophy can explore and clarify how this kind of musical engagement can function as an active reminder of

[7] Nussbaum, Martha, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 101.
[8] Nanette Nielsen, *Paul Bekker's Musical Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 70.

what it is to be human, thereby enabling insight into vital relationships between ethics and aesthetics.

Agency and Responsibility: the case of film music

Although philosophy has long neglected to pay adequate attention to the various relations between art, ethics, and morality, this has been of little consequence for artists who endeavour to address ethical principles or moral dilemmas and taboos through their work. Two concepts continue to be particularly helpful for discussion here: agency and responsibility. Consider the following statement:

> '[F]rom the possibility for a variety of responses inevitably follows responsibility: agency is an important element within ethical-aesthetic tensions, and therefore, while considering the many possible contexts for art, we [should] also attempt to address the scope of agents' ethical choices.'[9]

Put differently, it is important to consider the possible ethical choices involved in our engagement with art, and once those engaged – the agents – are identified as players that can either potentially do harm, become victims, and/or take some kind of responsibility, the ethical potency of art reveals itself most clearly. One could choose any number of examples here, including from artistic research. Coming from my perspective of musicology and music-philosophy, I will now turn to film, and film music, as an example of how to understand the position of the listening subject in order to get closer to understanding important intersections between ethics and aesthetics, and music and ethics in particular. The discussion seeks to emphasise how film music might inspire the (listening) perceiving subject to ask: 'Who am I'? Music, and sound, can have some very powerful ways of telling us who we are. Through its focus on subjectivity, the example continues to interrogate the article's three key concepts – engagement, agency, and responsibility.

In order to clarify possible relations between music and ethics in film music in particular, we turn to film scholarship. A useful distinction has been made by Catherine Wheatley who suggests that film scholars interested in ethical issues can be ordered into two broad groups:

[9] Cobussen and Nielsen, *Music and Ethics*, 6.

those concerned with the ethics of a film's content, and those concerned with the ethics of a film's form. The former group focuses on plot, action, and character (for example the moral story of the protagonist), and for this camp, the spectator is in a position to *learn* something, for example about their own moral responsibility, as they empathise with characters and experience the suffering and redemption available from the characters' narratives. For the latter group, film is not simply content, but contributes in ethically relevant ways as a *medium*, not simply as some narrative illustration, but as an active participant as a cinematic institution, employing a distinctive, recognisable *form* in filmic productions. For these scholars the filmic institution can have its own implicit ethics (or lack thereof). An example is an institution like Hollywood, which can be regarded morally dubious, because it so often uncritically promotes and idealises specific political values and works in coercive ways, for example applying satisfying formal structures of unity, continuity, and closure when such aspects ought instead to be approached critically. Adding to this body of scholarship within film studies, Wheatley proposes constructing a 'new way of thinking about the film viewing experience: an ethical theory of spectatorship.'[10] Particularly welcome about her framework is its focus on subjectivity and experience. The perspective broadly fits with the former group of scholars, focusing on content, but it takes seriously the spectator's response to whatever ethical content is presented, as well as the role played by the director constructing this content. Further, the framework does so in moral terms: what is at play is analysis and understanding of the relationship between a director's aesthetic reflexivity and the spectator's moral reflexivity. Wheatley's directorial subject is Haneke, so we will return to her again in a moment.

Finally, some scholarship has proposed that film can itself *be* philosophy. In their book *Film as Philosophy* (2005), philosophers Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough show facets of this point. While arguing that films like *Blade Runner* and *Last Year at Marienbad* are themselves philosophy, Goodenough suggests that more than simply telling us about philosophical themes, or illustrating philosophical problems (although they do this too), films like these *force* the audience to *engage* with particular philosophical issues and themes. And during this active involvement, while the spectator is granted an opportunity, for example, to participate deeply emotionally, such films can challenge what we believe, and what we think we know, about our own lives and selves. For example in *Blade Runner* we encounter replicants who look and act

[10] Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 5.

like human beings, and with whom we get to empathise, as we as audience engage with them in a 'form of life' that makes it very difficult for us not to be drawn into their life-world, as if they were like us. In realising that these replicants are in fact closer to our real life than the humans we see in the film, we learn something about *our* world and ourselves. In *Last Year at Marienbad*, traditional cinematic techniques are to a great extent subverted, and the spectator is forced to engage with the narrative, scenery, and usage of flashbacks, in very different ways. The result of this challenging participation is that we get to understand better (and perhaps even acknowledge for the first time) what we can identify as our natural rationalist tendency to impose order. This suggests that film *as* philosophy can offer persuasive perspectives. Contrasting film with the written word, Goodenough says: 'Film brings the bare functional proposition to life, makes it plausible, in a way that mere argument on paper cannot do.'[11] There appears to be a cognitive move from being *told* something (in a novel) about, for example, emphatic behaviour, to seeing something (in a film) that forces deep engagement, and then arguably to *hearing* something that forces even deeper engagement.

This idea of a deeper engagement is key. In real life we can understand our musical responses and their ethical implications in a wide variety of ways. Musical associations are to some extent tied to the fictional spaces of film and opera, but by no means entirely. The link between art and life is easily made because we draw on situations and experiences from life (such as slow music at funerals) to shape our imagination. It is therefore desirable for an ethical criticism of music to account for multiplicities of listening, in order to achieve a more thorough understanding of instances of moral engagement, *i.e. instances of the ethical experience of music*. Regardless of the context, humans possess a complex capacity for mental imagery and emotional evocation. Most people are able to recall not only themes and other musical details, but also specific associations (images, emotions, thoughts) that accompany the recollection of the music. Simply put, music has the capacity to shape the narrative of our lives, and as we now also know, situate us experientially in 'the now'. Narrative film music is one example that draws on this capacity, because otherwise it would not be so effective. One objection might be that film music is music working 'as an accompaniment' to a story, not as 'pure music' on its own. But the point here is that music is *always* to some extent working like this, shaping our experiences of a series of 'nows': even if we sit alone in a room listening to music, we still have

[11] Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough (eds.), *Film as Philosophy: Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 23.

the context of our imagination. Music can work in powerful ways to prompt memories and ideas, and therefore engage our emotional and intellectual faculties.

Continuing the theme of subjectivity in connection with our key concepts of engagement, agency and responsibility, it is instructive to draw on Kate McQuiston's work on Stanley Kubrick's infamous 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*. In her 2008 study, 'Value, Violence, and Music Recognized: *A Clockwork Orange* as Musicology', McQuiston shows how the audience is forced to identify with the very violent and Beethoven-loving main character Alex. This merging of subjectivities happens especially through Beethoven's Ninth, which we always encounter through Alex's ears. Other music in the soundtrack, such as Rossini, belongs to the non-diegetic realm, that is *our* realm, but Beethoven is always an experience we share closely with Alex. That way, (McQuiston says) Kubrick 'builds spectator associations between Alex's experiences (and our reflections upon Alex's experiences) and the music'.[12] There is a particular climax in the film where this merging of subjectivities plays itself out very powerfully. It is a memorable scene: Alex is taken in to be 'cured' of his violent tendencies, and during this process he is tortured. The *real* torture, however, happens when he realises that his very favourite composer is being used as a soundtrack to accompany violent visual material.

The usage of Beethoven in *A Clockwork Orange* offers the spectator a complex web of ethical aspects: Kubrick makes us encounter Beethoven as a 'locus of violence'[13], but it is likely that we began watching this film without any strong aversion towards Beethoven's music and the legacy of high culture it brings with it (an association that is so effectively contrasted with the violence in the film). Our possible resistance to this new violent association contributes to our anxiety and our 'sensitivity to the violence in the film'.[14] Crucially, it is through Beethoven that the spectator is invited to sympathise with Alex and with his violent acts, and the acts committed against him (as that particular scene shows, as well as Alex's later attempted suicide).

Turning in the following to the Austrian film director Michael Haneke's 2001 film *The Piano Teacher,* we encounter similar instances of engagement, agency, and responsibility through the theme of subjectivity. Here again is an example of music actively positioning the

[12] Kate McQuiston, 'Value, Violence, and Music Recognized: *A Clockwork Orange* as Musicology' in Gary D. Rhodes (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick: essays on his films and legacy* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008), 107.
[13] Ibid., 121.
[14] Ibid., 121.

listening subject, helping to construct the listener's subjectivity (*but* with real intersubjective ramifications), and influencing and shaping the ethical experience.

Towards an Ethics of Listening

Michael Haneke has been called 'the last moralist': his films are very well known for presenting ethical problems in relation to issues such as murder, conspiracy, rape, suicide, and violence. His underlying concern has to do with what we can identify as the 'moral emotions' of guilt and shame. Importantly, these emotions, and the sense of responsibility emerging from them, are not simply part of the narrative fabric of the film, but very much work on an extra diegetic level, that is, a part of the *viewer's* personal space. As Catherine Wheatley notes:

> 'These [ethical] problems revolve around the spectator's complicity with the cinematic apparatus and their tacit acceptance or denial of this complicity, and the key focus of Haneke's films is on the spectator's responsibility for their own involvement in the spectator-screen relationship'.[15]

In this, her aforementioned 'ethical theory of spectatorship', Wheatley recounts how Haneke constructs a powerful interplay between engagement and reflexivity: 'the space for reflection, arising from the conflict between emotional engagement and rational awareness, becomes concerned with morality when a moral problem is presented to the spectator for consideration.'[16] To put it bluntly, Haneke's films are *extremely* manipulative, but Wheatley has not considered the important role of the soundtrack in all this; what I suggest here is that the nature of this 'forced', deep spectator involvement that she identifies is to a great extent reliant on Haneke's treatment of music and sound. In the following, I consider accordingly a few excerpts from the beginning of the film *The Piano Teacher*.

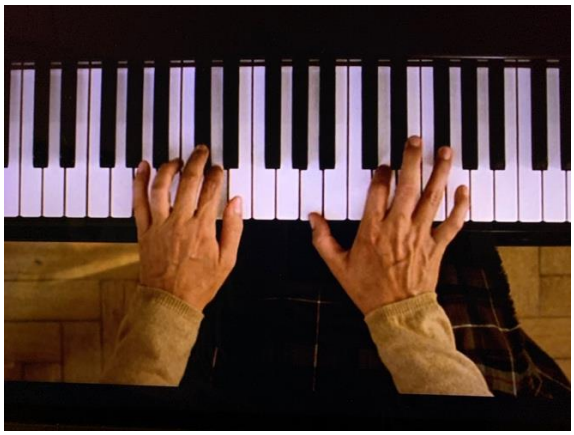
First, a brief summary of the plot of the film. The main character Erika is a successful pianist and piano teacher at the Vienna Conservatoire, and a specialist in Schubert. A woman in her 40s living with her mother, the plot develops around a narrative where she reluctantly takes on a 17-year-old student, with whom she subsequently has a less than successful affair. At first, he – Walter – is strongly attracted to her, but when he discovers her sexual preference

[15] Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema*, 4.
[16] Ibid., 106.

for sadomasochism he is repelled and rejects her. We witness how Erika does not deal well with the rejection, and also how she experiences extreme jealousy, which leads to mutilating the hands of a promising female piano student by putting broken glass in her jacket pocket. We also experience glimpses of Erika's sexuality as she, for example, visits a sex shop to watch a pornographic film. Erika and Walter have a couple of awkward sexual encounters, including one that ends in rape (as Walter plays along with her fantasy as described in a letter to him) and seemingly little satisfaction for either party. The violence we encounter extends to Erika's self-mutilation, and the ambiguous ending of the film highlights this theme, as Erika, attending a school concert where she is supposed to stand in for the pupil she hurt, stabs herself in the shoulder with a knife, before leaving the concert hall.

Staying with the ethically potent construction and merging of subjectivity, and the moral themes of shame, guilt, and responsibility, Haneke's invitation to moral participation via the aural landscape is evident from the very first scene of the film, and it is a technique that continues throughout. Further, it is in particular via the music that we – as listening, perceiving subjects – are invited to merge our subjectivity with Erika's. Given the subject matter, and her profession, it is not surprising that this happens via the music. Nevertheless, the way it is done is very telling.

In Scene Two, having just encountered an upsetting and violent clash between Erika and her mother in the first scene, we meet Erika on her own turf: the room where she teaches. Consider the following two frames from Scene Two:



First of all, this is close to being a 'point of view shot': we are very close to assuming the performer's point of view, looking down on our own hands as if we were playing. It is a physical

perspective, and we are invited to partake in a view that would be foreign to many of the spectators. Second, it is not a *perfect* point of view shot: it is too much from above to be the view of the pianist. But it could be the piano teacher looking over the shoulder, and we certainly have Erika's voice very close to our ears here. Indeed, the *aural* point of view here is without a doubt Erika's, and it is very clearly occupying our personal space. Third, this particular musical (performance) gesture of the camera angle helps establish the physicality of what is to come. It is slightly uncomfortable already, hovering over a piano, not quite being in charge, not quite being the performer, but nearly. It is strangely both connected and disconnected at the same time.

As the music and Erika's commentary compete for our attention, the aural takes precedence in this scene. And each time we hear a musical line, it is disrupted in some way, by Erika's voice, by a mistake, or by the abrupt switch to the next clip. There is something both fragile and upsetting about these disruptions to the musical lines, and most of all: the spectator is forced to *listen*. We are being drawn in, and this happens especially through the aural landscape. When we see and hear diegetic music on film (i.e. music that is happening in the world of the film), our attention is given a clear signpost, and we tend to listen. If we also assume the point of view of the performer, the engagement is only further deepened. For the remainder of the scene, the spectator is again allowed to focus on the hands, and also see Erika playing. We enter her thought space as she has lunch, where there is no other sound apart from the traffic,

a sound that very much occupies the space while, however, simultaneously allowing space for reflection in typical Haneke fashion. We then change perspective and see Erika listening to a student playing (see the frame above), and we are importantly listening *with* her. It is due to the music that what we are experiencing is both physical and mental at the same time, just like the violence we are about to experience together with Erika. As we slowly get the opportunity to merge our subjectivities with Erika's disturbed self throughout the film, we begin experiencing first hand how vulnerable and troubled she is, and we participate in her violent episodes. Music and sound, and sometimes deafening silence, deepen our emotional engagement and rational moral reflexivity. As with Beethoven in *A Clockwork Orange*, music is actively positioning the listening subject, helping to construct the listener's subjectivity. It is arguably through developing this kind of deeply engaged sonic sensibility that we can begin exploring further an ethics of musical experience, or an ethics of listening.

Like the examples from philosophically-informed research into intersections between music and ethics presented here, artistic research – broadly conceived – also has ample capacity to engage deeply and creatively with the abundant ways in which human beings can pay attention to the surrounding world and are capable of deciphering multiple responses in a variety of contexts. For artistic researchers to engage with ethical matters critically means to keep up with what it means to be human in a fast developing, technologically dominated, and environmentally challenged world. Through ethically-engaged research, scholars and artists alike have rich opportunity to explore the extent to which artistic engagement and understanding can contribute to making us more humane, continually shaping the fullness of humanity. While searching for those uncomfortable truths that become especially apparent when the world around us seems to be unravelling, the artist's responsibility is sometimes an ethical responsibility as she/he takes the opportunity to explain in no uncertain terms how aesthetic engagement might be ethically empowering.

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