

# Thinking through music with Nicholas Cook

Organized by the

*DFG-project group "Moving Music. Meaning, Space, Musical Transformation"*  
Musicology Department  
Georg-August University Göttingen

In cooperation with

*The Center of Modern Humanities, Georg-August University Göttingen (ZTMK)*

and the

*Graduiertenschule für Geisteswissenschaften Göttingen (GSGG)*

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2013

Time: 10.00 – 17.45

Location: Georg-August University Göttingen

Tagungszentrum an der Sternwarte

Geismar Landstr. 11

D-37083, Göttingen, Germany

## **Content of the Workshop**

The "Thinking through music with..." workshop is dedicated to discussing the work of one particular thinker in the broad field of cultural musicology. The purpose of this day is to critically engage with a selection of the invited thinker's body of work – directly or indirectly – related to music. Respondents, both junior (doctoral students) and senior scholars (from post-doc level onwards) with a broad range of academic backgrounds, will provide concise commentary on selected writings in order to facilitate a dialogue between participants and guest thinker. Touching upon major issues within the chosen work, "Thinking through music with..." aims to create a space for stimulating and constructive discussion across inter-disciplinary boundaries. The day is open to all those interested in the event, but aims mainly at participants working within the humanities from the doctoral level onwards. All registered participants will receive the preparatory texts two months in advance of the workshop, which facilitates thorough preparation and will fuel discussion.

This year, we will spend the day discussing the work of Prof. Dr. Nicholas Cook, 1684 Professor at the University of Cambridge, who will be present during the workshop. Nicholas Cook's extremely diverse academic work has been of fundamental importance for the development of the broad field of cultural musicology, but reaches far beyond the discipline's fluid boundaries. His early work focused on different forms of music analysis, the crucial question of musical meaning, as well as the critical questioning of taken-for-granted ontologies and epistemologies of music within the different sub-disciplines of music studies. In his recent work, Cook has broadened this focus; he has worked on questions central to the field of performance and theater studies, has done innovative work in (multi)media studies, and has engaged with theories of race, identity and culture. As such, the relevance of his work reaches far beyond the, already permeable, boundaries of cultural musicology.

## **Workshop's structure**

The day is divided into four sessions, each touching upon one major theme derived from Cook's work. For each of these sessions, two of Cook's texts relating to the session's theme are chosen and read by all participants in advance. These texts form the basis for discussion. In addition, during each of the sessions, one junior and one senior scholar have been invited to prepare a 10-15 minute response to these texts. These responses engage with the texts in a critical fashion and are meant to raise overarching theoretical issues and questions. Immediately following these responses, Cook will have the opportunity to reply, after which the floor will be open for discussion with all participants.

## **Session 1: Music Analysis**

Music analysis has for many years been one of the core practices that defined and divided musicology's sub-disciplines. Seeking to overcome this divide, Cook proposes music analysis as a "significant opportunity for disciplinary renewal". Critical of a music analysis that mainly engages with sheet music, which reduces musical experience to a text, as well towards a music analysis that seeks to explain musical meaning based solely on an analysis of musical structures, Cook has proposed a mode of music analysis that is embedded within the situational experience of the musical phenomenon. In this session, we critically explore what *kind* of knowledge can be accumulated through analysis as proposed by Cook. Asking *how* the types of analysis we use to understand the phenomena we study forms the knowledge we have about these phenomena, we reflect upon the relation between knowledge production and methods of analysis, which is of central importance to the humanities.

### **Preparatory texts:**

- 'Computational and Comparative Musicology'. In *Empirical Musicology: Aims, Methods, Prospects*, ed. Eric Clarke and Nicholas Cook (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 103-26.
- 'Analysing Performance and Performing Analysis'. In: *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 239-61.

## **Session 2: Music as Performance**

Music is commonly perceived of as something that is performed. This conception leaves the aspect of music's political potential by the way side. Focusing on the question of music's agency in the construction of musical meaning, this session explores Cook's proposal to think of music not only as that which is performed, but of music *as* performance. This mode of comprehending music as performance, occupies itself with music's capacity to produce meanings. In addition, it explores music's agency in ordering these meanings in such a way that they become part of those involved in music making, while at the same time situating them. The session's emphasis is on music's role in the construction of identity, thereby placing Cook's work within discussions on the multilayered processes of identity construction.

### **Preparatory texts:**

- 'Music as Performance'. In: *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (London: Routledge, 2003), 204-14.
- Scripting social interaction: Improvisation, performance, and Western "art" music. Forthcoming.

### **Session 3: Musical Meaning**

Within the humanities, meaning has been a central concern that remains difficult to grasp. The term “musical meaning” is just as slippery. Musicologists have defined it in a number of ways, ranging from psychological explanations to semantic models. Does musical meaning depend on music’s (cultural) context? Is it inherent in musical structure? Is it something experienced by the individual listener or is musical meaning formed in interaction with other musicians? Cook suggests a model of musical meaning that considers both, music’s inherent meaning and its socially constructed meaning, as well as the interrelation between these two. As such, this model provides a fruitful way to conceptualize meaning on a more general level. That is, it is definite and yet flexible enough to apply on subjects relevant for other disciplines within the humanities. The goal in this session is to discuss Cook’s model, but also to critically question the necessity of a general concept of, and model for understanding, (musical) meaning.

#### **Preparatory texts:**

- ‘Music and meaning in the commercials’. In: *Popular Music*. Vol. 13, No. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27-40.
- ‘Theorizing Musical Meaning’. In: *Music, Performance, Meaning. Selected Essays*, Nicholas Cook (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 213-240.

### **Session 4: (Re)Thinking Music(ology)**

Cultural musicology stands at an important historical juncture. This is fuelled by debates from what has come to be known as “New Musicology”, by discussions grown out of different notions of what music is and methods the discipline of Ethnomusicology should and should not incorporate, as well as by important theoretical notions derived from postcolonial theory and cultural studies. In the workshop’s final session, we seek to reflect upon, and think about how we can incorporate these different discussions within our thinking in and through music, without falling back on, often reductive, paradigms that seem to keep coloring our academic modes of engaging with music. In addition, this session critically engages with the academic discipline of cultural musicology as such. In what ways do our own needs, desires and fears as academics, whose mode of existence is entangled with our modes of doing musicology, tie in with the ways in which we define (and sometimes defend) the various boundaries of our academic disciplines?

#### **Preparatory texts:**

- ‘We Are All (Ethno)musicologists Now’. In: *The New (Ethno)musicologies*, ed. Stobart, Henry (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc 2008), 48-70.
- ‘Bridging the Unbridgeable? Empirical Musicology and Interdisciplinary Performance Studies’. In: *Taking it to the Bridge, Music as Performance*, ed. Cook, Nicholas & Pettengill, Richard (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2013), 70-85.

## Program

<i>09.30 – 10.00</i>	<i>Registration and Coffee</i>
<i>10.00 – 10.15</i>	<b>Introduction</b> Prof. Dr. Birgit Abels
<i>10.15 – 11.45</i>	<b><u>Session 1: Music Analysis</u></b> Respondents: Friedlind Riedel, M.A., University of Göttingen Prof. Dr. Martin Pfeleiderer, Hochschule für Musik Weimar Chair: Britta Lesniak, M.A., University of Göttingen
<i>11.45 – 12.00</i>	<i>Coffee break</i>
<i>12.00 – 13.30</i>	<b><u>Session 2: Music as Performance</u></b> Respondents: Charissa Granger, M.A., University of Göttingen Dr. Stephen Amico, University of Amsterdam Chair: Dr. Wim van der Meer, University of Amsterdam
<i>13.30 – 14.30</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
<i>14.30 – 16.00</i>	<b><u>Session 3: Musical Meaning</u></b> Respondents: Gerlinde Feller, M.A., University of Göttingen Prof Dr. Kopiez, Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover Chair: Prof. Dr. Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt, University of Hildesheim
<i>16.00 – 16.15</i>	<i>Coffee break</i>
<i>16.15 – 17.45</i>	<b><u>Session 4: (Re)Thinking Music(ology)</u></b> Respondents: Eva-Maria van Straaten, M.A., University of Göttingen Dr. Thomas Solomon, University of Bergen Chair: Prof. Dr. Birgit Abels
<i>18.30 – onwards</i>	<i>Optional dinner</i>