

Original Article

Toward a New Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Generated Music: Husserl's Intentionality and Levinas's Ethics of the Other

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aims to explore the ethical dimensions of listening to AI-generated music by introducing the concept of ethical intentionality. The goal is to investigate how emotional and moral responses are integrated within the listener's experience, and how AI challenges traditional notions of authorship, agency, and aesthetic reception. **Methods:** A qualitative philosophical methodology was employed, grounded in conceptual analysis and interpretive phenomenology. The study draws on Edmund Husserl's theory of affective intentionality and Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the Other to construct a theoretical framework. This framework is used to analyze how AI-generated music functions as both a medium of emotional resonance and a site of ethical encounter. **Results:** The analysis shows that ethical intentionality operates as a dual structure in which the listener simultaneously constructs emotional meaning and responds to the music as a moral presence. Listening is thereby reconceptualized as a complex act involving both affective interpretation and ethical responsiveness. **Conclusions:** The study concludes that AI-generated music can serve as a catalyst for ethical reflection and offers a posthuman perspective on creativity and musical subjectivity. Future research is encouraged to empirically explore how ethical intentionality manifests in actual listening contexts.

Keywords: AI generated music, Alterity, Artificial Intelligence, Ethical Intentionality, Husserl, Levinas

Received 31 March 2025

Revised 22 April 2025

Accepted 23 April 2025

Citation: Lim SG. Toward a New Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Generated Music: Husserl's Intentionality and Levinas's Ethics of the Other. *The Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*. 2025; 9(1): 35-42. <https://doi.org/10.22685/jts.2025.9.1.35>

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has expanded the scope of musical creation in unprecedented ways. In particular, AI-based generative music technologies now offer accessible tools for musical creation and listening, not only to professional musicians but also to the general public, thereby accelerating the widespread democratization of music creation [1]. While these developments maximize efficiency and accessibility in creative practices, they also demand deeper philosophical reflection on the essential nature of music as an art form and on the inner human acts involved in musical experience. Traditionally regarded as an expressive medium for inner emotions and human communication, music is now increasingly generated by machines and algorithms raising new philosophical and ethical questions about shifts in

creative subjectivity [2].

Concerns about the ethics of creativity have been rapidly expanding both domestically and internationally, moving beyond discussions of mere technological innovation. One of the primary issues involves the copyright status of the original data used to train AI music models, as there are currently no clear ethical guidelines or legal frameworks governing ownership of music recreated through such systems [3]. Given that most large scale data sets for AI-generated music rely on pre existing musical works, there is a growing demand for ethical standards and institutional safeguards to address the use of copyrighted materials [4]. Furthermore, questions have been raised regarding authorship and ownership of AI-generated compositions specifically, who should be considered the rightful creator or owner of the work [5].

In addition, ethical debates surrounding the autonomy,

creativity, and intentionality of AI-generated music are intensifying. Scholars have questioned whether AI should be regarded as a creative agent in its own right or merely as a tool for musical composition [6]. Other studies have addressed the potential negative impact of AI music on employment in the creative industries, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that respects both technological innovation and human rights and creativity [7]. In this context, a new philosophical and aesthetic perspective has emerged one that views AI-generated music not merely as an object of passive listening but as a relational Other that calls forth ethical engagement from the listener. This approach marks a significant turning point in contemporary discourse on musical ethics and artificial creativity.

Historically, music has emerged and been shared within emotional, mnemonic, and social contexts unique to human beings. Prior studies on AI-generated music have primarily focused on technical innovation, aesthetic evaluation criteria, or legal and societal issues such as copyright. However, such approaches often fail to address the more fundamental philosophical and ethical implications of AI's impact on musical creation and listening. Given that music creation is deeply connected to emotional and social relationships as well as ethical judgment [8], the development and proliferation of AI-generated music systems inevitably give rise to new ethical questions. These include the authenticity of emotional meaning in AI-generated compositions, the ethical responsibilities of the creator, and the nature of the relationship between the listener and the musical work [9].

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the ethical intentionality of AI-generated music through the philosophical frameworks of two key thinkers: Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas. Husserl's phenomenological approach starts from the premise that all consciousness is essentially intentional—that is, directed toward something [10]. This suggests that both the creation of AI-generated music and the listener's experience are not passive acts of reception, but active processes of meaning-construction rooted in the listener's experiences, emotions, and memories. According to Husserl, even if the music is generated by AI, the listener can project their inner world onto it, imbuing it with emotional significance and elevating it into an artistic experience. This secures the possibility of maintaining emotional authenticity through the creative participation of the human subject.

In contrast, Levinas grounds ethical responsibility in the relationship with the Other, especially through the concept of the face, which he sees as a manifestation of infinite ethical demand [11]. In this context, highly sophisticated AI systems capable of emotional interaction can no

longer be regarded as mere objects, but can instead be seen as autonomous Others that demand a response. Particularly, AI-generated works created without human creative context or emotional input may acquire the characteristics of a radically non-relational Other. The listener, when encountering such a work, is no longer a passive consumer but becomes a subject ethically called to respond.

Thus, the interpretation of AI-generated music must go beyond the passive consumption of a technological product. It requires a dual approach—engaging both emotional intentionality and ethical responsibility. This study aims to illuminate the ethical possibilities and limitations embedded in the experience of listening to AI-generated music, using the philosophical frameworks of Husserl and Levinas. In doing so, it proposes a new philosophical foundation for approaching the convergence of art and technology in the age of AI.

2. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative philosophical research methodology grounded in conceptual analysis and interpretive phenomenology. Rather than analyzing statistical data or empirical evidence, it aims to interpret the affective meaning making and ethical responsibility embedded in the act of listening to AI-generated music, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas. This approach aligns with the philosophical foundations of qualitative research, wherein the experiences and ethical consciousness of human subjects are understood not as static observations, but as dynamic processes of meaning construction.

The analytical framework is structured around the theories of two major philosophers. First, based on Edmund Husserl's theory of intentional consciousness, the study explores how listeners construct emotional meaning when engaging with music created by non human agents. Husserlian phenomenology views music not as a passive object but as a phenomenon constituted through layers of intentional experience, offering a foundation for analyzing how emotional meaning is formed within the listener's consciousness [10,12]. Second, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the Other, the study examines how AI-generated music despite being created without human subjectivity can function as a site of ethical relation, prompting a call for responsibility from the listener. In this context, music is interpreted not merely as auditory stimulus but as an ethical presence, analogous to the "face of the Other," which demands a response [13,14].

The literature review focused on philosophical and interdisciplinary sources published up to December 2024,

and was conducted between February and March 2025. Major academic databases consulted included JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the literature search included: "AI-generated music", "ethical listening", "Husserl phenomenology", "Levinas ethics", "intentionality and music", "music and the Other", and "artificial intelligence and aesthetics". Selection criteria prioritized studies that focused on emotional intentionality and ethical relations in listening, rather than purely technical or legal discussions.

This methodological approach goes beyond a simple literature survey and operates as a qualitative interpretive study integrating phenomenological and ethical philosophy. It frames the listening experience of AI-generated music as a composite phenomenon involving both affective meaning making and ethical responsiveness. Ultimately, this study positions itself as a philosophical qualitative inquiry that critically examines how the structure of human subjectivity is being reshaped within technologically mediated artistic environments.

3. Results

3.1. Husserlian Perspective on AI-Generated Music

From Husserl's phenomenological perspective, music is constituted as a meaningful emotional object within consciousness [15]. This provides a foundation for understanding how music especially music generated by AI without the subjective emotion or intent of a human composer can still offer emotionally meaningful experiences to listeners. Husserl's theory of intentionality holds that all acts of consciousness are inherently directed toward some object. He regards this directedness as an essential structure of consciousness, through which the subject experiences and understands the world [12]. However, Husserl emphasizes that not all acts of consciousness possess the same form of intentionality; rather, they exhibit distinct stages and modalities. He explains this by categorizing conscious acts into three types: non intentional Erleben [10], abstract intentional Erleben [16], and concrete intentional Erleben [17].

Analyzing AI-generated music from this perspective, the listener's initial stage of musical experience corresponds to the stage of non-intentional Erleben. At this level, music appears as a purely sensory stimulus to the listener, devoid of concrete meaning or emotion. Since music generated by algorithms lacks a human composer's subjectivity or intention, it is received by the listener's consciousness merely as a physical and physiological auditory stimulus. At this point, the music does not directly suggest any emo-

tional intentionality to the listener. It merely offers fundamental sonic phenomena—such as pitch, dynamics, and rhythm—which serve as the groundwork for the listener's internal state of non-intentional experience. This foundational stage becomes essential for subsequent formation of intentional meaning, providing the conditions necessary for conscious and active emotional interpretation during AI music appreciation.

Following this non-intentional stage, consciousness transitions into the stage of abstract intentional Erleben. This refers to a mode of consciousness in which generalized, conceptual categories of emotion are formed, even without clear and concrete object reference [10]. During this stage of listening, the listener forms abstract and generalized emotional categories of the music through their own inner experiences and sociocultural context. For instance, AI-generated music with slow tempo, low pitch, or minor tonality may be associated—based on the listener's prior experience—with the abstract emotional category of "sadness" [18]. The listener unconsciously connects such elements with their culturally embedded emotional codes and memory, thereby constructing an abstract emotional intentionality. Even if the music does not contain a specific or identifiable compositional intent, it acquires meaning through the listener's personal and collective emotional framing, progressing toward an intentional Erleben.

This stage of abstract intentional Erleben then leads into the more concrete and specific stage of intentional Erleben. Husserl emphasizes that this final stage is characterized by a clear and determinate intentionality toward a specific object or event [10]. At this point, AI-generated music no longer remains in an abstract emotional category within the listener's consciousness, but rather takes on clear meaning within the context of the listener's personal experiences, memories, and relationships with particular Others. In listening, the listener recalls vivid emotional events or people from their past, and through this process, the music acquires meaning as a concrete emotional object. For example, a specific melody or harmony might evoke a cherished memory and elicit a distinct emotional response. In this way, listening to AI-generated music becomes not a passive act of reception, but a creative and active process of meaning construction.

The importance of this intentional stage becomes even more pronounced in cases where AI-generated music is created without any human emotional background or subjective intention. While such music contains no emotional intent, the listener's consciousness can still construct specific and vivid emotional meaning through their own inner activities. According to Husserl's theory, musical meaning does not reside inherently within the work itself but is instead constituted through the internal consciousness and

lived experiences of the listener. Ultimately, the meaning and emotional value of AI-generated music are completed within the structural interplay of the listener's active interpretation and intentional consciousness.

This analysis suggests that even in the absence of a human composer's intention or emotional expression, AI-generated music can still provide rich artistic and emotional experiences. In the process of engaging with such music, the listener evolves from a passive receiver of non-intentional sensory input into an active subject who creatively constructs emotional meaning based on their own inner world and past experiences. Husserl's theory of phenomenological intentionality thus provides a deep methodological framework for exploring the unique aesthetic and philosophical value of AI-generated music.

3.2. Levinasian Perspective on AI-Generated Music

Today, the development of generative music technology demands a fundamental rethinking of subjectivity in musical creation [19]. Traditionally, music has been understood as an artistic act formed through the emotions, intentions, and social contexts of human composers [20]. However, AI-generated music—created through algorithms—challenges the very concept of authorship, and accordingly, the act of listening also gains new philosophical and ethical significance. These changes can be more deeply explored through the ethics of the Other proposed by Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his concepts of the “Other” and the “face,” which offer a powerful philosophical framework for analyzing the ethical structure embedded in the act of listening to AI-generated music.

The face of the Other is not a mere external appearance but a being of irreducible alterity that cannot be represented by any concept or visual form. It reveals the vulnerability and uniqueness of the Other while simultaneously demanding infinite ethical responsibility from the subject [21]. This perspective can also be applied to musical works generated by AI. Because AI-generated music lacks the intention or emotion of a human composer, it may actually confront the listener more directly and absolutely as the face of the Other. Music that is not mediated by the context of a human creator is reconstituted through the listener's own subjective emotions and internal experiences. In this process, the work provokes a kind of ethical summons within the listener.

The moment AI-generated music is regarded as the face of the Other, the listener is no longer a passive consumer of a technological product but becomes a being situated within an ethical relationship with transcendental alterity. Listening to music is no longer confined to aesthetic enjoyment; it becomes an ethical situation that demands a

response. AI-generated music continually stimulates the listener's mode of being and emotional structure, and through this process, the listener reconfigures their own ontological foundation within a relationship with the Other.

However, as Levinas's philosophy points out, ethical responsibility to the Other inherently involves an infinite and unachievable task. This becomes even more complex with the intervention of the Third [14]. At the moment when the listener deeply immerses themselves in a specific AI-generated musical work and attempts to respond ethically to it, responsibility to other musical Others is inevitably restricted or excluded. This paradox implies that the act of listening to AI-generated music fundamentally entails ethical dilemmas, which—independent of the music's technical perfection—become a core element in deepening the aesthetic experience.

AI-generated music also possesses an infinite interpretive openness, allowing for diverse forms of ethical response by the listener. The sonic output created through algorithmic processes merges with the listener's memories, emotions, and experiences, and through this interaction, the music is reconstituted not as a mere object but as a living ethical Other within the relationship. This multilayered interpretability emphasizes that the act of listening to AI-generated music is not a fixed or one-time aesthetic experience but an ongoing and reconstructive ethical practice.

Consequently, AI-generated music should not be confined to a mere replacement for human creativity or a product of technological advancement. It acquires its own alterity within the relationship with the listener and, through this, functions as a space of thought that prompts a reconsideration of human ontological and ethical identity. Analyzing AI-generated music through the lens of Levinas's ethics of the Other opens a philosophical possibility that goes beyond the fusion of technology and art, enabling an exploration of human ethical existence through a relationship with the technological Other. This approach suggests that AI-generated music is not merely a new object of appreciation but a turning point toward an ethical transition that transcends anthropocentrism.

3.3. The Ethics of Music through the Integration of Husserl and Levinas

The issues of creation and appreciation surrounding AI-generated music extend beyond mere technical or aesthetic dimensions to include questions of emotional participation and ethical responsibility by the human subject [22]. The phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the ethics of the Other by Emmanuel Levinas offer complementary philosophical frameworks for analyzing these emotional

and ethical dimensions [23]. Table 1 below compares how these two theories interpret AI-generated music.

By examining these two theories in an integrated manner, we can more multidimensionally understand the complex interplay of meaning construction and ethical response performed by the listener during the appreciation of AI-generated music.

Husserl's theory of phenomenological intentionality asserts that consciousness always has a directed structure toward an object [24]. This provides a theoretical foundation for explaining the listener's active process of meaning-making as they fill the expressive void present in AI-generated music. Since AI-generated music is created without a composer's emotional intent, it does not directly convey a specific emotion. Yet, precisely because of this, the listener actively mobilizes their own memories, emotions, and cultural contexts to endow the music with meaning. This process transforms the AI-generated work from a mere sonic stimulus into an emotionally resonant object connected with personal experience, and the listener shifts from a passive receiver to an active creator.

Meanwhile, Levinas's ethics of the Other expands this emotional meaning-making process into the domain of ethical practice. Levinas argues that when the human subject encounters the "face" of the Other, they are endowed with infinite ethical responsibility. The Other is a transcendent being that cannot be reduced, and it demands a response from the subject (Levinas, 1969). From this perspective, AI-generated music may confront the listener more strongly as an absolute Other precisely because it lacks the composer's emotional intentions or narrative. Through this encounter, the listener is called upon to respond ethically.

AI-generated music does not externally impose emotional or ethical meaning; thus, it more vividly evokes the listener's internal sense of responsibility. However, as Levinas points out, the subject cannot simultaneously

respond ethically to all Others. A response to one subject inevitably excludes or sacrifices a response to another. The appreciation of AI-generated music reflects this structural tension [25]. While the listener may form a deep connection with a particular piece of music, they cannot fully meet their ethical obligations to all musical Others, indicating that the act of listening to AI-generated music inherently involves ethical dilemmas.

By integrating Husserl's affective intentionality with Levinas's ethical alterity, AI-generated music can be re-defined not as a mere technological artifact, but as a site of "encounter with the Other," wherein human listeners emotionally engage and ethically respond. This reconceptualization transforms the listener from a passive recipient into a subject of ontological and ethical responsibility, reframing the act of listening itself as an ethical response to the Other.

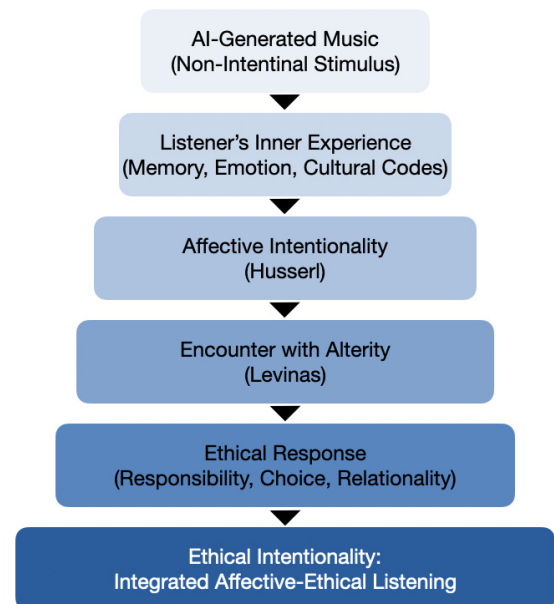


Fig. 1. Integrated Structure of AI-Generated Music Listening

Table 1. Comparative Framework of Affective Intentionality and Ethical Response in AI-Generated Music

Category	Husserl: Affective Intentionality	Levinas: Ethical Response	Integrated Concept: Ethical Intentionality
Understanding of the Object	Music as an emotionally constituted object through the listener's inner experience (<i>Intentionality, emotional projection, memory recall</i>)	Music is an absolute Other that calls the subject to respond. (<i>Alterity, ethical summons, relationality</i>)	Music is a relational Other that involves the interplay of emotional and ethical operations. (<i>Hybrid intentionality, ethical affective relationality</i>)
Role of the Listener	Active subject constructing emotional meaning (<i>Agency, internalization, interpretive subjectivity</i>)	A moral subject who faces the Other with ethical responsibility. (<i>Responsibility, asymmetry, ethical encounter</i>)	A practical subject who simultaneously engages in affective and ethical reception. (<i>Embodied ethical agent, emotional ethical integration</i>)
Nature of Listening	Creative intentional act of meaning-making (<i>Emotional construction, experiential interpretation</i>)	Ethical encounter requiring response (<i>Call of the Other, moral responsiveness</i>)	A dual-layered structure in which affective construction and ethical response are integrated. (<i>Dual intentional structure, affect ethics fusion</i>)

Accordingly, this study proposes the concept of “ethical intentionality” as a new framework for understanding the listening experience of AI-generated music. This concept emerges from the intersection between Husserl’s structure of emotional meaning-construction and Levinas’s ethics of response to the Other. In this context, the listener, confronted with the non-intentional sonic stimuli of AI music, actively mobilizes inner experiences to construct emotional meaning, while simultaneously being called to ethical responsibility through an encounter with radical alterity. This dual operation transforms listening from a merely aesthetic or cognitive activity into a complex ethical-aesthetic praxis that mediates both affect and responsibility.

“Ethical intentionality” thus offers a theoretical framework that unifies human capacities for emotional construction and ethical relationality within a single structure of listening. It functions as a philosophical response to the new ontological and ethical questions posed by AI-generated art, and serves as a critical point of reflection for rethinking listener-centered philosophical ethics in an era where technology and art are increasingly intertwined.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study approached AI-generated music not as a mere technological artifact or auditory stimulus, but as a relational Other that simultaneously invites affective meaning making and ethical responsiveness. To articulate this dual structure, the study proposed the concept of ethical intentionality, developed through the integration of Edmund Husserl’s theory of affective intentionality and Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of alterity.

According to Husserl, even though AI-generated music lacks the subjective intentionality of a human composer, it can still elicit emotional meaning through the listener’s intentional consciousness. The listener actively constructs affective meaning based on personal memories, cultural context, and emotional projection. In contrast, Levinas emphasizes that such music, created without human emotion or context, confronts the listener as a radical Other and calls for an ethical response. The absence of human authorship becomes the very condition through which the musical object provokes moral engagement.

By synthesizing these two philosophical perspectives, the study reconceptualizes listening as a complex act that involves both affect and ethics, rather than a passive or purely aesthetic experience. Ethical intentionality positions the listener as both an interpreter of emotional meaning and a moral agent who responds to the presence of the Other. This framework offers a philosophical foundation for understanding how human subjectivity is being re-

shaped in technologically mediated artistic environments.

The contribution of this study lies in its formulation of ethical intentionality as a concept that unifies inner affective interpretation and ethical responsibility within a single structure of listening. It provides a theoretical perspective for rethinking the relationship between humans and technology in music, and it advances a posthuman ethics of listening that challenges anthropocentric notions of authorship and creativity.

However, this study is limited to theoretical and philosophical analysis and does not include empirical data. Future research could examine how ethical intentionality is expressed in real listening experiences through interviews, surveys, or cognitive affective experiments. Comparative studies may also investigate how different AI composition models, musical genres, or collaborative methods influence listeners’ emotional and ethical responses.

Conflicts Interest

No author has any other conflict of interest to declare.

Funding

No funding was received for this study.

Author Contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, literature review, analysis of historical and contemporary data, drafting, and revising of the manuscript.

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