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The notion of nature in modern music theory and history as seen by Carl Dahlhaus and Karol Berger

ABSTRACT: Modern music theory, ignoring the problems connected with the subject's auditive experience but referring to the objective laws of nature, was criticised by Carl Dahlhaus, although he accepted – to a certain extent – the hypothesis of historical determinism. Dahlhaus links this turning point in the history of reflection on music with the transition from the 'ontological contemplation' of the Tonsystem to the 'aesthetic contemplation' of the Tonkunstwerk, the fundamental characteristic of which is the idea of 'wholeness' (*die Idee der Ganzheit*).

The new conception of the discourse on the theory and history of modern music proposed by Karol Berger in his book *A Theory of Art* (2000) bears testimony to crucial changes in the contemporary humanities linked to the so-called 'cognitive revolution'. According to Berger, the fundamental characteristic distinguishing modern art from premodern art is its autonomy. Berger distances himself from the modern tradition of theoretic-aesthetic discourse treating the work of art, including the work of music, as an axiologically neutral entity independent of 'human nature', that is, of the functioning of our memory, imagination and cognitive mechanisms, and also not having a specific social function. At the centre of Berger's theoretical interests is aesthetics, as broadly understood, coupled with ethics and history, poetics and hermeneutics. He is not interested – like Dahlhaus – in considering 'what art is' or 'what music is' , but poses the question: 'What should the function of art be, if art is to have a value for us ?'

KEYWORDS: music theory, music history, aesthetics of music, theory of art, the notion of nature

The new conception of the discourse on the theory and history of modern music proposed by Karol Berger in his book *A Theory of Art*[1] bears testimony to crucial changes in the contemporary humanities linked to the so-called 'cognitive revolution' and the search for new tools for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon of human creative activity and the functioning of the products of this activity within a given community.[2] The

[1] Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (New York and Oxford, 2000).

[2] See Albert S. Bregman, *Auditory Scene Analysis: the Perceptual Organization of Sound* (Cambridge, 1990); John A. Sloboda, *The Musical Mind* (Oxford, 1986); David

cognitive approach focuses on the subject, accentuates the specific nature of the 'human factor', our senses and mind, in coming to know ourselves and in conceptualising sensory phenomena. Modern learning about man, meanwhile, including that about music, shaped under the influence of the philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) and the 'scientific revolution' linked to the advancement of the natural sciences, has accepted the positivist postulate of axiological objectivity and neutrality (indifference), positing an impersonal approach to scientific study. Characteristic of positivist philosophy, as Leszek Kolakowski writes, is 'the radical destruction of subjectivity [...], the abandonment of the subject, which is now seen as an extra-cognitive construct, attributed illegitimately, or merely for the purposes of intellectual convenience, to the content of cognition. This subjectless subjectivism attempts, above all, to formulate ideas of purified experience.'[3] According to modern learning about music, the musical work is an entity determined on one side by the laws of nature discovered in the natural sciences (physics and biology) and on the other by the 'historical necessity' suggested by idealist philosophy.

Modern music theory, ignoring the problems connected with the subject's auditive experience but referring to the objective laws of nature, was already criticised by Dahlhaus,[4] although he accepted – to a certain extent – the hypothesis of historical determinism. Berger, however, decidedly breaks both with the positivistic paradigm of *Philosophie der Natur* and also with the idealistic concept of the history of music (or art) determined by the impersonal forces of pantheistic nature and its dialectic development.

Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford, 1996); *A Companion to Cognitive Science*, eds. William Bechtel and George Graham (Oxford, 1998); *Kognitywne podstawy języka i językoznawstwa* [The cognitive foundations of language and linguistics], ed. Elżbieta Tabakowska (Kraków, 2001); John A. Sloboda, *Exploring the Musical Mind. Cognition, Emotion, Ability, Function* (Oxford, 2005).

[3] Leszek Kołakowski, *Filozofia pozytywistyczna. Od Hume'a do Koła Wiedeńskiego* [Postivist philosophy. From Hume to the Vienna Circle] (Warsaw, 1966), 113. In musicological reflection, too, we encounter the idea of 'experience cleansed of subjectivity', the notion of the ideal work (as an intentional entity), the ideal listener (as a competent analyst isolated from biological cognitive conditions and cultural context) and the concept of abstract 'pure form' or 'pure sound', disregarding the properties of the subject.

[4] See Alicja Jarzębska, 'Dialektyczny dyskurs Dahlhausa' [Dahlhaus's dialectic discourse], *Ruch Muzyczny* 53 (2009/6), 36–38; Alicja Jarzębska, *Systematische Musikwissenschaft w ujęciu Carla Dahlhausa* [*Systematische Musikwissenschaft* as seen by Carl Dahlhaus] in: *Muzykolog wobec świadectw źródłowych i dokumentów.* [The Musicologists and Source Documentary Evidence], eds. Zofia Fabiańska, Jakub Kubieniec et al. (Kraków, 2009), 779-802.

Carl Dahlhaus's critique of modern music theory

A crucial influence was exerted on modern reflection on music by the philosophy of nature generally understood as (animate or inanimate) matter.[5] *Philosophie der Natur* treated nature as the source and foundation of invariable and objective laws regulating the mutual relations between objects and the idea of the integral whole (*Die Idee der Ganzheit*), as variously understood, and also as a force not only causing the growth of biological organisms but also – according to the ideology of progress – determining historical changes in the development of human thought and the principles of social organisation.[6] Thus modern thinking about music was suspended between physics (acoustics), studying the stable and objective laws governing 'sonorous matter',[7] and historicism, accepting the determinism of the changes in compositional means isolated from their social and ideological context[8]. Additionally, it was bound up with the terminology of idealist philosophy and with the concept of a pantheistic Absolute, Schopenhauerian Will or 'spiritual matter' (*Empfindungsmaterie, Geistfähigem Material*). Therefore, music was treated either as an acoustic 'sounding body' (*corps sonore, akustische Sub-*

[5] A distinction of matter into 'organic matter' (dynamic, the source of the growth of diversified organisms) and 'non-organic matter' (stable, non-developmental) was proposed by Count George Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788) in *Histoire naturelle* (1749), which in the eighteenth century became a bestseller (in France, around 250 popular editions of this work were published around that time). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of an organic pre-substance was used by Wolfgang Goethe, who in his *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (1790, pub. 1802) put forward the notions of the *Urpflanz* (pre-plant), an *Urphänomen* (pre-phenomenon) to which Heinrich Schenker, Arnold Schönberg and Arnold Webern referred, among others. See Severine Neff, 'Schoenberg and Goethe. Organicism and Analysis', in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, eds. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago, 1993), 409–433; William Pastille, 'Music and Morphology: Goethe's Influence on Schenker's Thought', in *Schenker Studies* ed. Heidi Siegel (Cambridge, 1990), 29–44.

[6] *Music Theory and Natural Order from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century*, eds. Suzannah Clark and Alexander Rehding (Cambridge, 2001).

[7] A central notion in the music theory of Jean-Philippe Rameau is the *corps sonore*. See Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1993).

[8] In *Tableau de la musique et de ses branches* (1770), presented by the French composer Nicolas-Étienne Framery (1745–1810), learning on music encompasses the acoustic (divided into metaphysics, physics and mathematics), the practical (understood as both the composing and the performance of music divided into the sacred and the secular) and the historical. See Carl Dahlhaus, 'Musikwissenschaft und Systematischen Musikwissenschaft', in *Systematische Musikwissenschaft*, Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft 10, eds. Carl Dahlhaus and Helga de la Motte-Haber (Wiesbaden, 1982), 26.

strat) or as an '*opus methaphysicum*', the result – as Edward Hanslick wrote – of 'the work of the spirit in material fit for the spirit' (*Arbeiten des Geistes in Geistfähigem Material*).

The division of learning into *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft* proposed by Wilhelm Dilthley[9] (1833–1911) had a crucial influence on defining the subject, aims and research methods of *Musikwissenschaft* as a subject of university study. The German philosopher held the overriding, binding principle in the human sciences, to which *Musikwissenschaft* was ascribed, to be thinking in terms of history, and in the name of historical change he rejected aesthetics which referred to supra-historical criteria for the assessment of artistic value (e.g. to the notion of beauty).[10] Yet modern music theory continued its attempts to adapt the notions and methods of *Naturwissenschaft*, 'partly', writes Dahlhaus, 'for prestige, partly through its own blindness, which prevented it from seeing the difference between ancient and modern notions of nature'.[11]

Whilst in pre-modern times (antiquity and the Middle Ages), nature was associated with music understood as a synonym of harmony, cosmos (instituted by the biblical Creator) and order, which itself was associated with a parallel between mathematical proportions and pleasurable sensory phenomena (the personal experience of pleasure that resulted from the combining of various sensory phenomena into a harmonious whole), in modern times (from the Renaissance to the close of the twentieth century), music was held to be 'natural', and the theory of music (understood as works produced by man) was legitimised by reference to the 'laws of nature' formulated in the natural sciences or declared by philosophers as part of *Naturphilosophie*.[12]

Dahlhaus links this turning point in the history of reflection on music with the transition from the 'ontological contemplation' of the *Tonsystem* (mathematical proportions within the tonal system) to the 'aesthetic contemplation' of the *Tonkunstwerk*, the fundamental characteristic of which is the idea of 'unity' or 'wholeness' (*die Idee der Ganzheit*). Although the subject of theo-

[9] Wilhelm Dilthley, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften. Versuch einer Grundlagung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und der Geschichte* (1883).

[10] For example, in his introduction to a source documented edition of *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (1893), Philipp Spitta wrote: 'To regard works of art as primary documents and to wish to exert every means for the purpose of reading and interpreting them correctly, above all, without regard to esthetic enjoyment, this I see as one of the most important steps forward in recent times'. Spitta, 'Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst', *Die Grenzboten. Zeitschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst*, 52/2 (1893); cit. after Carl Dahlhaus, *Aesthetics of Music*, trans. William W. Austin (Cambridge, 1982), 69 [Ger. orig. *Musikästhetik* (Cologne, 1967)].

[11] See C. Dahlhaus, 'Was heißt „Geschichte der Musiktheorie"?', in *Geschichte der Musikheorie*, ed. Frieder Zaminer (Darmstadt, 1985), vol. 1, 18.

[12] *Music Theory and Natural Order*, eds. Clark and Rehding.

retical contemplation was still the 'nature of music', from the point of view of philosophy the term 'nature' was understood in a distinctly different way. Dahlhaus emphasises the idea that this change of paradigm in European modernity was connected with the fact that

> 'all the underlying principles of the ancient understanding of music theory were rejected [...] [since] the contemplation of the tonal system expressing the ethical idea of *bios theoretikos* ontologically rests on the premise that beyond the realm of the transient [...] would be hidden a realm of the invariably existing (expressing an objective logos, accessible to subjectivity). [...] Whilst the nature of music – according to the ancient conception – was represented by a tonal system delineating the area of that which was sensible in musical practice, the interpretation of music theory as contemplation informed by natural philosophy means nothing less than that one regarded nature – in strict opposition to modern natural science as developed in the seventeenth century – as "understandable from within". In other words, one was convinced that nature could be understood by "empathising"'.[13]

Dahlhaus also rejected the idea that the 'laws of nature' discovered by the natural sciences could determine the theory and aesthetics of music, defining the means employed by composers as in keeping with nature or not, and so proper or not. He considered that 'between modern natural science [...] and the reflection on composing and compositional theory which forms the central theme of music theory, there arises an unbridgeable gulf'.[14] Dahlhaus's musicological reflection is dominated by a clearly emphasised doubt as to whether

> 'between the physical explanation of acoustic phenomena and the historical-hermeneutic understanding of those phenomena it is possible to sensibly construe a causal link, the existence of which was assumed for two hundred years. Music theory, irritated by the fact that the harmonic series contains only the major chord and not the minor chord as well, invoked for its justification a succession of new hypotheses. However, not for one moment did it doubt the basic premise of "physicalism", that music as intentionally understood [as auditive experiences ordered in time, A. J.] was based on [...] physically explainable facts'.[15]

So Dahlhaus did not accept the hypothesis posited in modern learning about music of a causal relationship between natural science, focused on determining the laws governing the occurrence of sensory phenomena, and music theory, understood as reflection on the art of composing, taking account of some criterion of excellence and social function. But he did link freedom of

[13] Dahlhaus, 'Was heißt „Geschichte der Musiktheorie"?', 4–5.
[14] Ibid., 18.
[15] Ibid., 18–19.

artistic choice to the watchwords of the artistic avant-garde, accepting the concept of historical necessity and the ideology of progress. He considered that 'negative elements represent the driving momentum in musical progress [...]. A negative that leads forward is positive.'[16] The history of music as dialectically conceived, particularly that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was at the centre of Dahlhaus's research interests in respect to both particular composers and their works and to methodology, as is attested by many of his works, including *Zwischen Romantik und Moderne*, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* and *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*.[17]

Karol Berger's concept of the nature of the musical work

According to Berger, the fundamental characteristic distinguishing modern art from pre-modern art is its autonomy, which obliges us to pose the question of the function of art, particularly of music, and at the same time makes it is so difficult to answer this question. As he enquires, 'Once art has been emancipated from the context of social practices that gave it is significance, what is its point? What is the function of functionless art?' He goes on to consider 'whether art still has a worthwhile role to play in our private and public lives'.[18] Berger distances himself from the modern tradition of theoretic-aesthetic discourse treating the work of art, including the work of music, as an axiologically neutral entity independent of 'human nature', that is, of the functioning of our memory, imagination and cognitive mechanisms, and also not having a specific social function.

Contrary to the modern tradition of theoretical discourse on music, Berger is also interested neither in notions from acoustics or mathematical set theory nor in the concept of 'historical necessity'. The central notions in his considerations on the subject of art are such categories as aesthetics, poetics and hermeneutics, and so notions connected with the cognition and interpretation of the products of man from the perspective of some model of perfection and value.[19] Also understood in a new way is the notion of nature, since

[16] Dahlhaus, *Aesthetics of Music*, 95.

[17] Carl Dahlhaus, *Zwischen Romantik und Moderne* (Munich, 1974); *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1980); *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* (Cologne, 1977).

[18] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 5, 11. According to Berger, 'premodern art was addressed to groups of people assembled for purposes other than aesthetic ones. [...] Modern art [...] is produced for [...] anonymous buyers [...]. It addresses not groups, but a public of isolated individuals, and its function is specifically aesthetic', 5.

[19] The author divided his book into two parts (aesthetics; poetics and hermeneutics), framed by a prologue and epilogue: Prologue: The function and value of art; part I. Aesthet-

Berger considers 'nature' from the point of view of our cognitive capacities and conditioning linked to visual (he differentiates between two- and three-dimensional visual phenomena) and auditive (acoustic phenomena) perception, and also of our ability to verbalise these (real or imagined) experiences, that is, to formulate ideas in some language that functions as an auditive (speech) or visual (writing) phenomenon. Thus the notion of 'nature' is associated with the 'human factor', with the functioning of our senses (hearing, sight) and minds (memory, imagination) in the process of creating culture. 'Nature' understood in this way is connected with 'cultural media', which – according to Berger – have three features: (1) we do not create them, but inherit them, (2) they serve the representation of ourselves (the subject's 'inner' world) or of our perception of objects (the 'outside world'), (3) they can serve the encoding not only of our real experiences, but also of those only imagined. Thus the discourse on nature and culture proposed by Berger concentrates on man, on ascertaining our 'natural' biological conditioning and our need to create works of art, and so the objectivisation of the subject's experience – the communicating to others of our 'inner world' and our perception of the 'outside world'.

At the centre of Berger's theoretical interests is aesthetics, as broadly understood, coupled with ethics and history, poetics and hermeneutics. In the last century, aesthetics – the origins of which, associated with Aleksander Gottlieb Baumgarter's term 'aesthetica', date back to the mid eighteenth century – was marginalised and, according to Dahlhaus, 'came to an end around 1900, surrendering its constituent parts to historical studies or philosophy of history, to technology or psychology or sociology of art'.[20] Berger, meanwhile, links reflection from the field of aesthetics on the purposes of art with the questions of poetics and hermeneutics, analysing the means which serve the realisation of preferred aims and considering in what way works ought to be interpreted. He is not interested – like Dahlhaus – in considering 'what art is' or 'what music is',[21] but poses the question 'What should the function of art be, if art is to have a value for us [...] if art is to be considered a worthwhile

ics: The ends of art works (1. The nature of art; 2. The uses of art; 3. The genealogy of modern European art music); II. Poetics and Hermeneutics. The contents and interpretation of artworks (1. *Diegesis and mimesis*: the poetic modes and the matter of artistic presentation; 2. Narrative and lyric. The poetic forms and the object of artistic presentation; 3. Hermeneutics. Interpretation and its validity); Epilogue: The power of taste .

[20] Dahlhaus, *Aesthetics of Music*, 2. Enrico Fubini (*A History of Music Aesthetics*, trans. Michael Hatwell (London, 1990), trans. Zbigniew Skowron as *Historia estetyki muzycznej* (Kraków, 1997), 520) also considered that 'music aesthetics in the narrow sense is breathing its final breath, if it did not altogether cease to exist some time ago'.

[21] Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Was ist Musik?* (Heinrichshofen, 1985).

occupation?'[22] He considers that in our times this is a key question; furthermore, he is convinced that 'music represents the central features and dilemmas of the social and historical situation of art today in a particularly radical, acute, and clear fashion'.[23]

In Berger's conception, the work has a sensory-mental nature: on one hand, it is a physical object; on the other, it is a mental object. For Berger, the dividing line between artworks and ordinary objects is historically variable and culturally conditioned. According to his theory, works produced by man are real 'physical objects' arising as a result of the encoding of the subject's experience in a medium accessible to our senses, that is, as a visual or auditive phenomenon. Thus works are destined to be 'read' by receivers from the point of view of their poetics, function and significance within a particular culture. The function of works is the objectivisation of the subject's real or imagined experiences and the way he/she perceives reality. However, works always function within established 'social practice', and 'to describe and understand a practice involves specifying the goods it attempts to make and the standards of excellence in terms of which such goods are evaluated'.[24] Berger understands the notion of social practice similarly to Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre:[25] he links it to some standard of value.

The author of *A Theory of Art* distances himself from ontological considerations of the way in which a musical work exists. He does not accept Roman Ingarden's concept associated with the notion of the 'intentional entity'. He firmly states that 'A musical work [...] is a real (or imagined) sounding object, identical with what is usually called a "performance"',[26] and so an impermanent object or event. For this reason, he considers that

> 'all we have and all we are ever likely to get are necessarily works-performances and, optionally, scores-texts. The ideal "work" is the result of a typical seduction by language, a concept with no useful job to do (apart from providing an entertaining metaphysical puzzle for professional philosophers and a shortcut for musicians)'.[27]

However, in the musical culture of the post-Beethoven period, with its clear distinction between the composer and the performer, this notion gained credence. Therefore, claims Berger, such 'loose talk' is not harmful, 'provided it does not put us on a hopeless chase after this nonexistent entity, the ideal

[22] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 9, 12.

[23] Ibid., viii.

[24] Ibid., 113.

[25] See Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1985); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, 1984).

[26] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 53.

[27] Ibid., 54.

"work" distinct from both performances and scores'.[28] It is worth stressing that a similar view was held by Igor Stravinsky, who in his *Poetics of Music* distinguished two forms of existence of the musical work: (1) as a real sensory phenomenon that is the result of performance and (2) as an imagined relationship of sounds (including on the basis of the score).[29]

According to Berger, works (i.e. visual and auditive phenomena produced by man and the ideas encoded in them) exist to be decoded, that is, conceptualised from the point of view of their aim (aesthetic), poetic (the means employed) and hermeneutics (their signification in a given culture). In his opinion, their purpose is to enhance our knowledge with the experiences of other people and to create community. Since the function of works is the objectivisation of a person's inner experience and the outside world perceived by them, we may speak of two kinds of function – self-presentation and reference. Both these functions are fulfilled in an indirect way by works of language and in a direct way by musical and visual works. Self-presentation, that is, the presentation of the subject's 'inner' world (in particular, the dynamics of his/her emotions or 'desires') in a direct way, is served above all by musical works, whereas the function of the direct and more precise presentation of the objects of our interest (i.e. our perception of the 'outside' world) is discharged by visual (plastic) works.

According to Berger, what distinguishes linguistic works from visual (plastic) and musical works, besides the possibility of the indirect (through notions) presentation of both the dynamic of a subject's 'inner world' and also the objects perceived by him/her (the 'outside world'), is that the medium of language allows us to argue our aesthetic convictions and ethical opinions. This is because 'a fully developed ethical life involves not only choosing both the aims and the means of our actions, but also justifying the most important choices'.[30] Avant-garde art, meanwhile, gained autonomy but – as Berger states – lost, together with the other humanistic disciplines, any kind of practical justification as an element of ethical and political instruction, since the authority of judgment was deprived of authority and taste deprived of power.

Berger also rejects Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between the abstract (impersonal) *langue* and the concrete (personal) *parole*, since the term 'language' refers to thoughts verbally formulated by some person which may be transmitted through both visual (writing) and auditive (speech) media. For this reason, he highlights the differences between music and language, since

[28] Ibid., 55.

[29] 'It is necessary to distinguish [...] two states of music: potential music and actual music. Having been fixed on paper or retained in the memory, music exists already prior to its actual performance.' Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York, 1947), 125.

[30] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 74.

music is for him an exclusively auditive phenomenon, the experiencing of which may be conceptualised through words-notions. Thus the role of the sound in language and in music is decidedly different, since an understanding of music – differently to an understanding of language – is inextricably linked to the real or imagined experiencing of the qualities of a sound and the relations of its changes over time. The graphic fixing of the score serves – to his mind – only to assist our acoustic memory and imagination: it is derivative and optional, and the score is simply an instruction for the performer.

In the context of this differentiation of the 'nature of art' into 'representations' and 'arguments', Berger interprets its links with the 'tools of culture', such as history, art, science and philosophy. According to his theory, 'representations' may concern real objects, which are dealt with above all by history, or fictional objects, which are the domain of art. 'Arguments', meanwhile, can refer to the world 'as it is', which is the object of interest of science, or the world as it ought to be – that which, according to Berger, should be addressed by philosophy.

In his considerations of the poetics of the work of art, including the work of music, and its basic elements and forms, Berger takes account of the way in which we perceive things as figure-background and how we perceive time as action (narrative or dramatic) or as lyrical contemplation. He employs categories taken from literary theory, such as the voice (of the protagonist or narrator), the background to events, narration and lyricism, but these distinctions also appear in cognitive psychology.[31] In discourse on the poetics of the musical work, the notion of the 'voice' can be related, among other things, to a distinctive tonal figure called a tune, theme or harmonically-shaped melody (*Satz*), and the notion of 'background' may be linked to the term 'accompaniment' (*Gang*, in Bernhard Marx's theory) or 'sound layer' (in Józef M. Chomiński's theory).

Also drawn from literary theory are such terms as 'narrative' and 'lyric', but Berger understands these very broadly, relating them – as already mentioned – to our capacity for a dual experiencing of time: as action or as contemplation. Thus the terms 'narrative' and 'lyric' serve to distinguish the twofold way of shaping and experiencing time: (1) as a teleological process of change in the quality of the sound in a musical work or (2) as the contemplation of the 'colouring of the sound'. Hence his distinction of two basic forms of the shaping of the musical work: the narrative form and the lyrical form. According to Berger, the model of perfection of the narrative form comprises (1) a comprehensible temporal whole (with a distinctive effect of beginning,

[31] Cognitive psychology regards 'figure' and 'background' as fundamental categories in the conceptualisation of both visual phenomena and auditive, musical, phenomena. See John A. Sloboda, *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* (London, 1985).

middle and end), (2) a suitable size (a duration of the parts and the whole which is easy to remember), and (3) such a configuration in which the succession of parts is deliberate, subordinated to the drive towards culmination and subsequent relief. The lyrical form, meanwhile, is in a way atemporal, since neither the duration of the successive events or tonal 'forms' nor their sequence is of essence. In Berger's opinion, this dual way of shaping time – the narrative or the lyrical mode – inclines the receiver towards an active or a passive contact with music. Berger is convinced that the correlation of these forms reproduces the entire sphere of man's ways of being in the world: his actions and his mental-emotional states. In addition, the usefulness of this dichotomy lies 'in its ability to illuminate individual works and whole musical cultures in new and interesting ways'.[32]

Further categories which Berger proposes for describing the poetics of a musical work are 'feelings' and 'moods'. He posits that 'feelings' constitute a specific mental state connected with the cognitive or volitive sphere (i.e. their cause is some 'intentional object'), whilst a mood 'represents the most fundamental level of mental life, a "basic disposition" (*Grundverfassung*) which colors all of our mental states. A specific underlying mood gives all our experience a definite direction.'[33] We do not always have some 'feeling', whereas we are always in some 'mood'. According to Berger, the notion of mood is of fundamental significance in understanding 'absolute' instrumental music (i.e. music with neither text nor programme), and so the discovery that 'moods constitute a layer of mental life distinct from emotions [...] allows us to blunt the counterintuitive edge of Hanslick's conclusion',[34] according to which music cannot represent the content of feeling but only the motion, which 'is just one attribute' of feeling, 'the ingredient which music has in common with emotional states'[35]. Berger opines that vocal music can depict particular emotions, while instrumental music usually embodies a particular mood (or a scenario or succession of moods). The musical metaphor of 'tuning' is particularly apt here, and Ernst Theodor Amadeus 'Hoffmann's celebrated claim [...] that the content of instrumental music is not provided by any definite emotions, that music's "only subject-matter is infinity", becomes quite believable when it is stripped of its usual metaphysical pretensions, of [...] the Schopenhauerian Will, and seen in the context of the emotion-mood distinction'.[36]

Hermeneutics, according to Berger, is interpretation (employing metaphor and metonym) and its justification referring to persuasion or validity.

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[32] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 202.

[33] Ibid., 206.

[34] Ibid., 208.

[35] Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis, 1986), 11.

[36] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 210.

As interpreters, we have at our disposal only metaphors and metonyms. It is an illusion, Berger asserts, that in interpretation one can do without metaphor, that there exists something like the 'literal description' of a work (this is usually associated with the analysis of the notation of a score according to arbitrary criteria for its reduction). Musical analysis, if it is at all to grasp the way in which tonal phenomena are ordered over time, must be metaphoric. In Berger's opinion, modern analytical strategies making use of the notion of the series or the mathematical set and focused on the abstractly treated notation of pitch classes were created so as to neutralise criticism and eliminate the value system.

According to Berger, the meaning of a work is created by the interpreter in the same way that every scientific theory is formed: through the formulation and verification of hypotheses. Thus he distinguishes two competing interpretational approaches: (1) the fundamentalist approach, based on validity, and (2) the pragmatic approach, employing persuasion. In his opinion, an interpretation can only be valid (i.e. true or false) on the level of social praxis, whilst the interpretation of musical works can be only more or less persuasive (in respect to the arguments put forward).

So in Berger's conception, the nature of the musical work (understood as an ordered sensory phenomenon interpreted within a given culture) is conditioned by 'biology and culture', that is, by our universal cognitive mechanisms (limiting the distinguishing of the compositional means employed) and the aims motivating composers to undertake creative activity (within the social practices in existence within a given culture). This is because the history of music – in Berger's opinion – consists of individual actions within the framework of social practices and the change – noticeable, with hindsight – of creative goals and the artistic means connected with them.

The interpretation of the changes in modern music as seen by Berger

The theory of music history presented by Berger breaks with the modern concept of the evolution of 'musical material' and the concept of the 'historical necessity'[37] of changes in compositional means. He also rejects the ideology of progress in art. The history of music is understood as the manifestation of individual actions within the framework of social practices interpreted from the point of view of the transformation of aims and means. In Berger's opinion, it is aims which determine compositional means and not the other way around. Music history based on the positivist paradigm, meanwhile, focussed

[37] See Isaiah Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969).

on compositional means and ignored the aims and the ideological and social contexts of composed works. In his opinion, the historian should take into account both the means used by those composers who achieve specific aims and also the institutions which enable those aims to be achieved. According to Berger, there is some sense in characterising aims without speaking of means, but not in characterising means without speaking of aims.

The basic categories serving such a methodological approach are six ideal types: music that is autonomous, functional, mimetic, abstract, artistic or popular. Of course, the greater part of composed music falls 'between' these types. The notion of 'art music' and 'popular music' refer to Heinrich Besseler's distinction between the 'music of presentation' (*Darbietungsmusik*) and the 'music of participation' (*Umgangsmusik*),[38] but in Berger's theory they function as heuristically useful ideal types, since they are understood as different social practices: 'art music' is connected with the practice of the concert, with a clear division into the musicians, on one side, and the listeners, often immersed in 'pious contemplation', on the other; 'popular music', meanwhile, refers to the practice of joint music-making. In Berger's conception, the term 'mimetic music' is associated with the art of the performer and a passive mode of reception, whereas 'abstract music' refers to the refined art of the composer (which seems to demand an active, attentive mode of reception). Berger shows that the natural, usual way in which music exists is its popular form, as opposed to its artistic form, which is always susceptible to doubts and requires justification.

The history of music is seen from the perspective of two ancient ideas which speak of its aims: 'the idea of music as the sounding embodiment of the intelligible harmony of simple numerical ratios, the same harmony embodied in the structure of the cosmos, and the idea of music as capable of stirring human passions and forming character'.[39] In Berger's theory, they are associated with the notion of abstract music (as the 'embodiment' of the harmony of the world, of the philosophical Absolute or of 'pure form') and mimetic music (as the 'embodiment' of human feelings and moods). Berger traces the shifting configuration of these basic aims and points to the causes of their changes. The fundamental aim of compositional work from the end of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century was the aspiration to perfect harmony. This did not preclude, of course, the composing of works with a huge power for expressing fervent prayer or ecstatic contemplation, yet their representation – according to Berger – was not the fundamental aim of creative work. Subsequently, the relations between these two ancient ideas changed. From the mid sixteenth century to the beginning of the

[38] Heinrich Besseler, *Das musikalische Hören der Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1959)

[39] Berger, *A Theory of Art*, 121.

eighteenth century, the second of the ancient ideas of music began to be treated more seriously, although the idea of music as the embodiment of the harmony of the world was still retained. The new compositional practice and means served two competing aims: the embodiment of harmony associated with numerical ratios, and the musical representation of feelings. But towards the end of the eighteenth century the idea of music as a mimetic art capable of imitating feelings became dominant. Berger points to two causes of this reorganisation of compositional aims and means. He considers that empirical research in the field of acoustics and discussion on temperament diminished the credibility of the idea of cosmic harmony, and the humanistic reverence for ancient ideas and practices assured music of an alternative 'ethical power' based on its inferiority to words. Thus the Aristotelian idea (*mimesis*) was the ground on which music could be compared with poetry and numbered among the fine arts. European musical culture of the eighteenth century favoured the mimetic and popular aspects of the new paradigm. At the forefront was opera, with its often dilettantish devotees, and the abstract legacy of *ars poetica* lost its central position.

What triggered a further change in the relations between these two aims of music was the appearance of the German 'metaphysics of instrumental music'. In Berger's opinion, abstract music again became important, because a substitute for cosmic harmony was found, namely the philosophical Absolute, guaranteeing the standing and significance of 'abstract music' – a substitute which Arthur Schopenhauer identified with the 'thing in itself' and defined as Will. The metaphysics of music became the new religion, with the theory of artistic autonomy as its theology. Thus during the nineteenth century there coexisted two aims of composition determining two musical cultures: the idea of mimetic music and the Italian-French operatic culture based upon it, and the idea of absolute music and the Austrian-German culture of symphonic music which it informed. Up until World War One, the idea of imitation held its own, yet the idea of abstract music 'shone with a new avant-garde light': music was to be the embodiment of 'pure form'. In the inter-war years, it was the idea of abstract music referring to classical proportion that was preferred and favoured, at the expense of mimetic music, whilst after World War Two there set in – as Berger puts it – a cold war between 'socialist-realist *mimesis*' and the 'avant-garde abstract'. Avant-garde critics disdainfully rejected the idea of imitation, which became almost exclusively the domain of popular music. In the mid twentieth century, only song and film music could be mimetic without losing face. Yet avant-garde abstract music, alluding to 'pure form', was deprived of its fundamental justification – metaphysical value. During recent decades, the politically conditioned 'cold war' between avant-garde abstraction and socrealist *mimesis* has lost its arguments, and the need for art with a metaphysical grounding has appeared.

Thus Berger proposes a new look at the history of music, accentuating on one hand the change of compositional and performance aims and means and on the other the stability of the aims of composed music, a stability linked to the supra-historical treatment of 'human nature', that is, the need to manifest human feelings and moods in the composed 'auditive phenomena', and also the ambition that they be realised according to abstract, refined and elaborate principles, referring to universal laws.

Art has – according to Berger – two general functions: (1) to educate and provide extra-aesthetic pleasure (in this case, we must consider the work in the context of life) and (2) to provide aesthetic pleasure, constituting the harmony of our cognitive faculties: imagination and intellect (in this case, we must consider the work in the context of other works). Art teaches us to listen and to communicate with others, and so it is a chief tool of multiculturalism, but – so Berger opines – not all cultures and works have the same value. We are consigned to choice, and so we must have some basic point of reference. Berger admits that he is fond of a vision in which art is capable of representing our most profound needs and cares and imparting to them an elaborate, sensuous form that arouses delight. He considers that contemporary artists fulfil this mission relatively rarely, and so the task of criticism should be to isolate those rare cases and 'glorify' them, just as the task of the critical historian is cogent interpretation.

Berger's theory, rejecting the positivist paradigm of learning about music, undoubtedly provokes principled discussion of the methodology of musicological study and the possibility of an integral approach to the phenomenon of man's creative activity within the context of universal biological conditioning and variable philosophical conceptions, and also the aims of social practices and the artistic means subordinated to them.

Translated by John Comber