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CARL DAHLHAUS

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One of the most influential German musicologists of the post-war era, Carl Dahlhaus (1928-1989) earned a graduate degree in 1952 in Freiburg with a major in musicology and specific studies in philosophy, German literature, history, and art history. Although the coupling of musicology and philosophy was typical of the German academic tradition, the scope of his interests as a student anticipated one of the characteristics of this future scholar: grounding musicology in the debate about the current methodological foundation of the humanities. Unlike most musicologists of his time, Dahlhaus was an insider of the operatic system (from 1950 until 1958 as a Dramaturg at the "Deutschen Theater" in Göttingen) and musical journalism (from 1960 until 1962 as music editor at the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*). In 1967 he became a professor of musicology at the Technische University in Berlin. Until his death in 1989, his teaching continuously attracted students nationally and from abroad. In addition to his academic activity, Dahlhaus supervised several editorial projects, which impacted musicology significantly.

AESTHETICS AND MUSICOLOGY

One of the central commitments of Dahlhaus' musicological research was the re-establishment of aesthetics as a major musicological discipline. In Guido Adler's articulation of systematic musicology from 1885, musical aesthetics was one of its four pivotal branches, assisted by general aesthetics as an auxiliary discipline. According to Adler, the task of musical aesthetics was to evaluate and compare "the highest law in the individual branches of tonal art", referring them both to perceiving the subject and the criteria of musical beauty. About a century later, together with Helga De La Motte-Haber, Carl Dahlhaus edited a new handbook of systematic musicology. This publication allowed him to redefine the role of music aesthetics when the discipline was under attack by the critics of ideology and undermined by the dawn of the universality claim of aesthetical systems. Therefore, his peculiar theoretical move was to accept the radical historicization of musical aesthetics linking it to music historiography. Aesthetic theory would perform the task of clarifying the intentional dimension of art through a hermeneutic-phenomenological

interpretation. This, in turn, would prevent historiography's dissolution into a loose collection of interpretation works or art sociology or psychology. To avoid both the competition among the philosophical systems and the anarchic coexistence of aesthetical projects or manifestos, Dahlhaus suggested the project of aesthetical dogmatics, according to the model of legal dogmatics, i.e., a systematic account of the legislation in place; or the theological dogmatics understood as a synthesis of the Christian religion. Despite the idea of a comprehensive and normative systematic, which this term suggests, Dahlhaus's intention was more restrained: it referred to the investigation of a limited number of historically emergent aesthetic concepts. Dahlhaus never did realize this project as a systematic undertaking. Nevertheless, this plan highlights the inner logic of his countless investigations into several key concepts of musical aesthetics, among them the concepts of musical work of art, absolute music, musical logic, and the temporal structure of music. On the other hand, the theoretical clarification of the concepts, which is the silver thread of Dahlhaus musicology, implies the mediation of musicology in the scrutiny of aesthetic ideas. His theoretical horizon is deeply rooted in the constant dialogue with philosophy and literary theory, notably with Gadamer's hermeneutic, the group "Poetics and Hermeneutics (*Poetik und Hermeneutik*)", and also Adorno's aesthetic theory.

The intertwining of historical and systematical perspectives also impacts the method of music aesthetics, understood as a specific field of musicology. Instead of providing an overarching narrative of music aesthetics (such as that developed by Enrico Fubini in Italy in various versions since 1968), Carl Dahlhaus tackles aesthetic questions or problematic concepts through their historical developments: "The system of esthetics is its history: a history in which ideas and experiences of heterogeneous origin interpenetrate" (Dahlhaus 1982: 3). His *Esthetics of Music* explores key phases and topics in the history of music aesthetics, such as its origin, the emancipation of instrumental music, the changing stages of the aesthetics of emotion, the discussion about formalism, program music, tradition, and reform of opera. The scrutiny of these historical chapters plays a key role in discovering the forgotten premises of the present debate. Dahlhaus acknowledges that music aesthetics represents the spirit of cultivated bourgeois music lovers, which in the 20th century was on the verge of collapsing. He claims, however, that until the repertory of concerts and operas of the past three centuries would be performed, "there is no reason to regard as obsolete and extinct the thinking of an epoch whose works belong to the living present" (Dahlhaus 1982: vii). This observation is only one side of the coin that pertains to the cultivation of the past heritage through education. Every investigation in past debates and concepts, at the very end, represents a powerful tool to discuss and clarify a specific thorny issue of the present. Theoretical crux and paradoxes, which are the driving force behind Dahlhaus's thought, are addressed by investigating musical practices' developments and the unfolding of reflexive concepts.

THE CONCEPT OF EXPRESSION

An emblematic example of Dahlhaus's method is the concept of expression. Instead of giving an historical account of different conceptualizations of this term, he comments on some definitions rooted in very different historical contexts: from Christoph Nichelmann to Aristotle, from Jean-Baptiste to Hrabanus

Maurus, with a bold leap reaching the 20th century. The result is confusing because definitions are different, but “often they flow into each other imperceptibly”. To find a thread, Dahlhaus switches to the systematic order, borrowing from the linguist Karl Bühler the threefold function of sentences: triggering, representation, and testimony. According to this scheme, actions are triggered, states of affairs are represented, conditions of the heart are attested. The history of the term “expression” unfolds the possibilities inscribed in the systematic order: music can trigger an effect or move an affect, as attested to in music theory from Johannes Tinctoris, Nicola Vicentino, and Gioseffo Zarlino, as well as in more recent musical aesthetics by Eduard Hanslick and Kurt Huber. Music is a representation of passions, according to the mimetic theory of the 18th century (Charles Batteux, Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, and, to some extent, Jean-Jacques Rousseau). In music writers like Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Daniel Schubart, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Wilhelm Heinse, expression means “nothing else than testimony”, in the sense of “letting one’s passion gush”.

The more recent history of musical concepts has corrected the duality implied in this classification, highlighting a more nuanced use of the term’s representation and expression in the 16th and 17th centuries by music theorists like Zarlino, Vicentino and Galilei as well as in the discussion about the “prima e seconda practica”. Nevertheless, Dahlhaus’s clarification represents a historical landmark of this concept, although still embedded in the traditional history of ideas and without references to actual musical practices. Dahlhaus’s intention was to rescue this concept “for serious use” after it has become “so ambiguous, vague and all-encompassing” (Dahlhaus 1982: 18). However, in order to achieve this goal, history alone does not suffice. In a very Hegelian way, the deeper sense of expression could be inferred only from the dialectical logic of the historical development: “Expression, then, is paradoxically yoked to convention, the particular to the general. If expression, being subjective, is unrepeatable, yet at the same time, in order to make itself clear, it yields to a compulsion of becoming established. In the moment when it is realized in any tangible existence, it sacrifices its essence. But, precisely in its dialectic, the principle of expression has become definitive for an historical consciousness and activity in which progressive and conservative traits mutually condition each other. The paradox of the art of expression forces both the production of novelties in steadily accelerating change and the preservation of works from past phases of the development. [...] Progress and historical memory belong together, as two sides of the main thing” (Dahlhaus 1982: 23-4).

MUSIC AS A WORK OF ART

Among the concepts encompassed in Dahlhaus’s *Aesthetics of Music*, that of musical work of art was already problematic at the time when the book appeared. The short chapter “Music as Text and Work of art” does not mention the questions opened up by avant-garde music, but tackles the history of the concept from the vantage point of the 18th century theory of the arts, and precisely the distinction between the arts of space and the *energetic* arts which work in time as music does. The distinction stems from Herder (and remotely from Aristotle) and is akin to the modern definition of performative arts. Dahlhaus, however, captures in this distinction a duality which not only distinguishes music from visual arts, but dwells at the

core of music itself and its historical developments. "When Herder calls music an 'energetic art' (*energetische Kunst*), he means that it is essentially activity (*energeia*), not a product, a piece of work. [...] Hence the idea that music is exemplified in works, no matter how firmly rooted it has become in the past century and a half, is far from self-evident" (Dahlhaus 1982: 10). Dahlhaus traces back the emergence of the concept of work of art to Listenius's definition of *opus perfectum et absolutum* in his *Musica* from 1537. It represents the first testimony of a trend which counters the idea of music as the transitory, fleeting product of an activity. Music as *opus non stabile* was a longstanding *topos*, attested to in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, notably by Bonaventura, Adam da Fulda, and Leonardo, which survived until 19th century Hegelian aesthetics. Despite its recent origin, the concept of the musical work of art has proved to be historically more resistant. Dahlhaus cursorily reminds us that even Benjamin in *The Origin of the German Baroque Drama*, defines "the supreme reality of art" in terms of "isolated, self-contained work". Dahlhaus pinpoints two important turning points in the history of the concept: firstly, the classical theory of art, exemplified by Karl Philipp Moritz, which acknowledges the existence of an object that exists and endures "for the sake of its inner perfection"; secondly, romanticism, which ascribed metaphysical value to such a work. According to Dahlhaus, the concept of the musical work of art developed along with major and intertwined transformations in the practice: the separation of music handicraft since the 18th century; the emancipation of music from external goals which marked the transition to its aesthetical autonomy; the increasing importance of individual works as compared to the genres; the developing of techniques for writing music.

The last two points are of paramount importance in Dahlhaus's agenda in proposing a viable definition of the concept. The reversal of the rankings of individual works and genres testifies to an irreversible historical process. According to Dahlhaus, in older functional music, "a work was primarily an example of the genre, as an individual person fits into a succession of generations that extends far beyond him and survives him [...]. But since the late 18th century all genres have rapidly lost substance [...]. The concept of genre is no longer established in advance for individual works. Rather, every genre fades to an abstract generalization, derived from individual structures after they have accumulated; and finally, in the 20th century, individual structures submit only under duress to being allocated to any genre" (Dahlhaus 1980: 15). The impact of written music on the sedimentation of the concept requires, conversely, a theoretical stipulation, equating the written score with a literary text. "It would be an exaggeration – Dahlhaus claims – to deprive written music of the status of a text, and to see in notation nothing but a set of instructions for musical practice. The meaning of music can be specified – in a crude oversimplification that neglects emotional characteristics – as inner coherence of the relations among the tones constituting a work. Tone-relations and tone-functions, however, are a third aspect, extending over and beyond notations and its realization in sound [...]. Musical meaning is 'intentional': it exists only insofar as a listener grasps it" (Dahlhaus 1980: 12).

The intertwining of the functional musical theory and Ingarden's ontology of the work of art (the German version was published in 1962), offers a theoretical legitimation of a historical process and a solid argument to defend this concept against his detractors a few years later. In one of the following articles about this topic (Dahlhaus 1969) he takes the opportunity to test the coherence and validity of aesthetic

theory facing the challenges posed by the anti-art of 20th century avant-garde, in a way akin to that of Adorno in his writings of the late 1950s early 1960s. The goal, however, is different. Dahlhaus's *Plädoyer* focuses primarily on the historical and theoretical legitimacy of the concept of the musical work of art as a tool for musicological research instead of questioning the aesthetical legitimation of post-serial music. Whereas the criterion of coherence (*Stimmigkeit*) is reaffirmed for the sake of retaining an objective reference for the value judgment. Compared to the former normative theory of art grounded on rules, coherence means for Dahlhaus that each aesthetical moment should be related to a technical and compositional setup. This method's goal, which Dahlhaus calls "immanent criticism" (developed by Dahlhaus in 1983), would allow for distinguishing between right and wrong, without returning to abstract and ahistorical rules, while preserving the link between aesthetical intention and compositional output.

ABSOLUTE MUSIC

The Idea of Absolute Music is the only book by Dahlhaus that is entirely devoted to a single aesthetic concept. Although the method is not different from that developed in his *Aesthetics of Music*, some features like the multiplicity of the sources scrutinizes, the clear and thorough articulation of the concept's history, the centrality of this idea in aesthetic debates of the 19th and 20th centuries, qualify this volume as the central output among Dahlhaus's aesthetic investigations. Absolute music represents for Dahlhaus an "aesthetic paradigm", in an analogous sense to Thomas Kuhn's use of this concept. From a historical and sociological perspective, it constitutes the foundation of the concert culture from the 19th century up to today. Retracing the process of its cultural establishment over the last two centuries is essential for Dahlhaus on three counts. First of all, the affirmation of the paradigm of the absolute is, at the very least, surprising. It, therefore, requires a historical explanation because – as Dahlhaus reminds the reader – "symphony and chamber music in the 19th century represented mere enclaves in a 'serious' musical culture characterized by opera, romance, virtuoso display, and salon pieces" (Dahlhaus 1989: 3). The second motivation is that current musical habits unconsciously rooted in this paradigm require critical scrutiny. However, there is more than an attempt to unveil the unreflected aesthetic opinions of conventional wisdom in Dahlhaus's investigation. For him, and this is the third and most important motivation, theoretical reflections about music are not derivative, in the sense of mirroring compositional aims, interpretation and receptions of the musical work. They belong, rather, to the music itself. In Dahlhaus's words, "for insofar as music does not exhaust itself in the acoustical substrate that underlies it, but only takes shape through categorical ordering of what has been perceived, a change in the system of categories of reception immediately affects the substance of the thing itself" (Dahlhaus 1989: 63).

The emergence and final establishment of this aesthetic paradigm is the result of complex dynamics in which the history of the concept (from Wagner, Hanslick, Nietzsche up to August Halm, Hermann Kretzschmar, Ferruccio Busoni and Ernst Kurth) plays only a secondary role. More important are the transitions and transformations of previous aesthetic paradigms, their coalescence around the emergent theory of instrumental music. Dahlhaus tracks down some of these conversions, from the aesthetics of sensibility to one of indefinite and elated sentiments; from the literary *topos* of ineffability to the romantic idea of music as a language of ineffability; from Schleiermacher's definition, "religion of the art" to the

living experience of ecstatic music contemplation in the writings of Wackenroder and Tieck. However, this paradigm would have been empty, Dahlhaus argues, in the absence of high value works and, moreover, without the powerful concept of musical logic, capable of accounting for the production of musical meaning in instrumental music. The final chapter of the book captures the moment in which the paradigm of absolute music converges with the theory of *poésie absolue* by Paul Valéry, as a tendency to retreat to the pure forms paired with a religion of the art. This last step turns the linear development of the paradigm full circle: "The paradox, that withdrawal means elevation, is the dialectic at the root of both *poésie absolue* and absolute music" (Dahlhaus 1989: 155).

CRITICAL DEBATE

Immediately after his death, two distinguished American musicologists, Philip Gossett (1989) and James Hepokoski (1991), harshly criticized Dahlhaus's historical and theoretical output. The former's attack was focused on the alleged misuse of Weber's concept of ideal type in Dahlhaus's account of 19th century music. Hepokoski's critique aimed to undermine the whole "Dahlhaus' project", grounding Dahlhaus's position within the epistemological crisis and sociopolitical ramifications in West German universities in the 1960s and 1970s. From this perspective, he interpreted the restoration of aesthetic categories like autonomous art, musical work of art, absolute music as part of Dahlhaus's plan "to shelter German Romantic canon for ideology critique" and defend the canon of Austro-German autonomous music (Hepokoski 1991: 225). Hepokoski's conclusion that Dahlhaus's writings are the late-postwar product of a divided Germany has been further elaborated by Schreffler (2003). She located the Dahlhaus debate in the concurring cultural and political strategies of the divided Berlin of the 1960s and 1970s, narrowing the focus to the ideological debate on Carl Dahlhaus and his alter ego beyond the wall, Kurth Knepler. In turn, Zagorski (2015) calls into question the outcome of the Dahlhaus's debate originated by his US reception. Drawing on Dahlhaus's critique of historiography's claim to be the account of all music worth considering in a period or a place, Zagorski reevaluates Dahlhaus's interpretation of the Austro-German musical canon. His focus on German culture might be seen "as an effort to rehabilitate that which had been abused and damaged by the National Socialist regimes, whose crimes and brutality he had witnessed firsthand" (Zagorski 2015: 263).

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