

Κέρκυρα, 27-29 Απριλίου 2012

Corfu, 27-29 April 2012

ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ  
ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΜΟΥΣΙΚΗΣ  
«Θεωρίες του Χρόνου και Μουσική»

PHILOSOPHY  
AND MUSIC CONFERENCE  
«Time Theories and Music»



# Time Theories and Music Conference

Ionian University / Corfu, 27-29 April 2012

## Proceedings

ed. by Panos Vlagopoulos

Ionian University - Department of Music Studies

Corfu, 2013

Antonia Soulez\*

## **Does a theme say something else than itself?**

Let me first start with Valéry's own views on the autonomy of poetry, to which, as Carl Dahlhaus suggests, autonomy of music should be compared. In "L'univers poétique, et l'univers musical", with Mallarmé's poetry in mind, Paul Valéry refers to «absolute poetry». Carl Dahlhaus (*The Idea of Absolute Music*, Chapter X) remarks that the use of this expression echoes a view that has become a common place throughout the twentieth century. If we try to reduce all our sense organs to one and the same faculty, say, hearing, using the ear as the only sense, then we would ultimately perceive every sensorial aspects as sounds against a background of noises. The contrast between noise and sound amounts to the contrast between the pure and impure, order and disorder. This realization has made music possible. Music has made a world for itself that is absolutely its own. The world of musical art, the sound world, is separate from noises. This crystalline idea of music forms a system. The sound suggests a universe closed in itself, which is the musical universe. Imagine, writes Valéry, you are listening to a concert. Suddenly chairs fall down. The charm is broken. The world is broken. Valéry here draws an image of what is autonomy for music from a point of view similar to that of absolute poetry. My suggestion here is to separate the autonomy from the absolute. Note that a similar unfortunate event happened once to a John Cage concert. Cage complained about the disturbing effect of that noise. He did not realize that his conception was exactly one that should have led him to integrate the noise in the musical performance, as part of it, even though it was neither expected nor wanted; in so far, as Cage's music presented itself as a rebellion against absolute music and the kind of attention it requires.

In fact absolute music is endowed with something ethical. It seems as though absolute music and its autonomy is the aesthetic version of ethical autonomy Kant is said to have «invented»;<sup>1</sup> or rather the ethical autonomy of the subject has sort of migrated to music. This is of course paradoxical in so far as Kant had a rather poor idea of music and placed it below in the hierarchy of fine arts, at the level of arts looking only for the immediate sensorial pleasure. At the highest place, Kant put poetry. Therefore, an important move had to be done

which in fact could leave everything in place as Kant conceived it. Just substitute music to poetry, and you have an idea of autonomy shifting at the benefit of music, without loss. That means that the idea of the absolute is saved in spite of the shift. It remains so much the same that music reveals itself able to take on itself the very attribute of ethical, yet emancipated from the idea of a moral subjectivity incarnated by the ethical agent. Peter Kivy for instance, the champion of absolute music today, or «music alone», has done the step towards such a view without rejecting a Kantian point of view. Far from that, he declares himself as a Kantian, in favor of a theory of «a musical pure experience». It is clear that this reversal is unexplainable without taking into account an intermediary stage represented by Schopenhauer's view on absolute music as a moral Idea.

It would be too quick to understand the shift of the absolute in ethics to music, as a direct migration of the moral Idea, because the transition is not only relevant to philosophy. It also owes much to the history of music. The later crisis of melody as being the important thing in music shows that ethicizing music and idealizing melody were first seen as constituting one and the same thing. Without *Uralinie*, or upper voice, no autonomy holds true. The slow decay of melody at least in its classical shape of a phrase or sentence, after Schoenberg, was followed with a growing interest in the sound material, at the turn of the century, that Schoenberg himself transmitted to his pupils and successors, through his famous so-called «futuristic fantasy», the *Klangfarbenmelodien*. Schoenberg still favors the *melos* (or theme) as a principal melody. For him, it incarnates the *musicalischer Gedanke* as a complete whole having comprehensibility and coherence, but at the expense of the affective dimension. Thus emerges the idea of a relational or organic Idea, overshadowing the earlier meaning of *Gedanke* as melody generating an *Affekt*. The study of Schoenberg's fragments on Musical Idea by P. Carpenter and S. Neff (1995) shows a shift of the *melos*-paradigm, away from the traditional view, towards a conception of the *Gedanke* in relational terms of whole and parts, a *Gestalt* with a logic resting on the musical coherence of a motive (a motive is identified with features of a motive which are intervals and rhythms). This shift is accompanied with a less strong hold of metaphysics on music, as well as with a tendency to get down in lower layers of music, closer to the material components of sound. While metaphysics has to loosen its grip, the musician is getting down deeper and deeper into the structure of sound.

This move of the composer is encouraged by a new trend in scientific investigations that is sometimes labeled «downward aesthetics» («esthétique du bas») at the end of the nineteenth

century. While remaining under the spell of the tonal paradigm of music, Helmholtz's investigations in the 1860s, could be seen as a great contribution to this transformation which ended in the new grammar of music of the Vienna School. It is not a surprise if Schoenberg, engaged into the investigation for the essence of sound, declares at the end of his *Treatise of Harmony* that he is indebted to Helmholtz. Hence my question: what happened then to the criterion of the autonomy of the musical, if the model of *Urfinie* or upper voice which was the musical embodiment of the moral idea, was disappearing while music was becoming less and less 'speaking'? I will show that, far from having disappeared, this criterion of autonomy changed. It has been molded according to new conditions in which autonomy has displayed various meanings. This is what I call the semantical problem. I will point out some of these changes in meaning which show us how absolute, then pure, then autonomous but impure, then specific but autonomous as a language are gradually brought to light in a way that suggests us the hypothesis that even today in contemporary music or musics, which many a musicologist or philosopher would consider as deprived of autonomy, a certain kind of autonomy is to be grasped.

## 1. Schopenhauer: Absolute music in relation with a moral Idea

For Schopenhauer, melody is the upper voice that directs all. The philosopher has reformulated the famous Leibnizian definition of music, replacing arithmetic with metaphysics. The definition has become: music is an exercise of metaphysics of the mind (*animi*) which, without knowing it, makes philosophy (Leibniz wrote: *nescientis se numerare*). The purely moral idea, as Schopenhauer writes, finds itself expressed by music when it overcomes the physics of harmony but also the pleasure it gives. Music expresses the intimate essence, the *an sich* of all appearance, of the Will itself. Nietzsche who criticizes Wagner's theatricalization of music has retained Schopenhauer's absolute conception of music. According to the analogy drawn by Schopenhauer between the hierarchy of voices in a musical score and the hierarchy of beings in the world, music, that Kant in his *Critique of judging* placed at the lowest step of the ladder of the fine Arts, is elevated at its highest level. For Kant music is a part of heteronomous arts like cookery, just made for bringing agreeable sensations.

The prominence of voice and its status will be put into question at the turn of the nineteenth

century, after 1800, when absolute music is opposed to applied music. It is the moment when the idea of purely instrumental music, not supported by the voice or the narrative of a text, imposes itself. Such is J. G. Herder's claim (1793) for a meditative listening, in fact, of a religious kind free from words and gestures. Words are no more than an auxiliary help, external to the sense of music, and added to it. Music is in itself a kind of articulated prose with its proper logic. The sense of music does not rely on words as it is a language of a different sort. Being self-sufficient, it ignores any compromise with external factors (E.T.A. Hoffmann). Understood in these terms, the ideal of absolute music, writes Dahlhaus, has become a dominating «aesthetical paradigm» in the German culture of the nineteenth century. So conceived, music such as Beethoven's *Fifth*, labeled «instrumental opera», including his quartets, became emblematic of a music freed from the voice. In so far, music was said to be a manifestation of the absolute.

However, the label «absolute music» was disputable. Two conceptions were in conflict, each one claiming prominence. One was defended by Wagner, the defender of the voice, and, opposed to Wagner's view, the conception of Eduard Hanslick. Hanslick was a contemporary critique and historian of music, who wrote about *the Beautiful in music* (1854), a violent pamphlet written against Wagner. As Dahlhaus puts it, Wagner ignored «the concept of purely musical».<sup>2</sup> So, the «Absolute» that Wagner was the first one to coin, here gets divided into two. Hanslick's use which in fact is also a re-appropriation turned against its first representative, shows that the purity of music can be separated from absolute music. If for Wagner, it is Beethoven's *Ninth*, rather than the *Fifth*, that came to illustrate absolute music, it is because the voice - rather than the meaning of the words that are sung- comes back at the end of the work in order to put an end to instrumental music (see his *Beethoven*). Wagner expressed his conception of «absolute music» found in Beethoven's *Ninth*, in Schopenhauerian terms : “The Master (Beethoven) has found the melody as the Idea of the world without getting out of music”, he writes in his *Beethoven*. If, distancing itself from feelings and affects, absolute music finally succeeded in taking its independence from such a view dominated by the religious ideal of «the familiar song of the choral in which we feel invited to participate to serve the divine» (Wagner), this is largely due to Hanslick's influence. Through his so-called «formalism» which in fact was a war declaration against Wagner, one has to realize that Hanslick's conception was too modern for his own times. It is indeed only much later that its legitimacy could be fully recognized. In this conflict between the two opponents (Hanslick in favor of the living totality of an instrumental choir, Wagner

of the «infinite melody of the voice» [Wagner influenced by Rousseau]), one can acknowledge a semantical problem. Yet does it make sense to argue on who is right about the true sense of absolute music? Certainly not. The fact that Hanslick has made the expression his own, against Wagner's conception, is not a proof of misuse, but the sign that pure music can be freed from voice. Yet this freedom could be obtained only by taking into account the fact that music is a kind of language, moreover, a language of its own. The idea of such a «language» was not completely new since Forkel's great biography of Bach. Yet, one could not fully realize that music is like a language before the linguistic turn. In a way, one could venture to say that the linguistic turn has been profitable for Hanslick's view in the hindsight.

As the most eminent objectification or mirror of the Will, Music, above all arts, for Schopenhauer, is rather above all hierarchy of the arts because it stands beyond all classification. Through music, as a show within a show, the Will apprehends itself in an act of reflection without knowing itself as a subject, because in this case reflexivity is not self-apperception of oneself. So far, music offers the Will a kind of specular detour so that its autonomy instantiates the autonomy of the Will which as the Thing *an sich* does not know itself. Schoenberg who read Schopenhauer will inherit this conception of the Will, which, without consciousness, imposes itself as a necessary anonymous pulsation exerted on the musician. Its meaning -closer to Freud's conception- contradicts the idea of a natural necessity. In such terms autonomy, identified with the self-sufficiency of the artist's Will, is to lose its metaphysical garb for a different kind of expressive constraint. It works in the depths of an unconscious pulsation, striving for forms the order of which has a rationality of its own, detached from the leading upper moral idea. Like in Helmholtz' conception of symbols for sensations, formalism could then emerge but combined with the unconscious (inferences in perception). This unconscious dimension finds itself prolonged into the «unintentional character» of composition which is an aspect of autonomy. The critique of the metaphysical subject the reader can find in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* strengthens this unintentional character of the creator at the source of the work of art, which was first the character of Schopenhauer's Will.

## 2. Away from metaphysics: self-sufficiency, a criterion re-visited (Helmholtz)

That's how music passed from the material as a result of the objectification of the Will on

which, according to Schopenhauer, the artist is working, to the sound material from the logical point of view of an unconscious kind of rationality ruling the succession of dissonant chords at the lower level of the sound essence as Schoenberg conceived it. One can show that, far from putting an end to the concept of autonomy of the musical, this transition, being also the effect of the crisis of metaphysics, rather modified its application by re-orientating the criterion of self-sufficiency. Not self-sufficiency of the moral idea embodied by music, but that of emancipated forms out of the sound material that result from the artist's investigations. Schoenberg mentions once or twice in his *Treatise of Harmony* that for Helmholtz this important move could only be done if one comes to consider aural sensations as the real «matter for art», as the latter writes in his book *On the Sensations of Tone* (1863). Dealing with sensations, and the realm of such an «inferior grammar» as he qualifies it, Helmholtz was conscious of the impact of his method against metaphysics in favor of an empirist view. That's why the positivists of the Vienna Circle (namely Schlick) recognized Helmholtz as an «*Erkenntnistheoretiker*» and were even ready to make him one of their forerunners. Yet this is not exactly the point I want to press here. What I am pointing out is rather that this is the consequent aspect of the transition from one sense of «material» to another, which is concomitant with the crisis of metaphysics: the idea that autonomy is no longer identical with the Absolute, but with self-sufficiency of the formal in the inferior realm of sound essence.

Not only did this semantical change induced the dissociation of autonomy with the moral idea, but it turned autonomy into an immanent kind of independency at the lower level of the rematerialized material. «Rematerialized» because in fact one can show that «matter» has not ceased to be dematerialized by philosophers who wanted to explain or define it. That «dematerialization» of matter starts with Aristotle for whom matter was unconceivable as such, if deprived of *eidos*. That's why it is a crucial step for the posterity of music, that in the end of the nineteenth century, a man of science like Helmholtz has been able to bring to the musicians the materiality of music. Autonomy could thus be designated to the sensory material (as in Helmholtz) or to the sound material for the musician in absence of any upper reality, ideal or external. Its brand being the Form and its logic, autonomy became that of the content itself independently from an external object of reference, for a kind of enjoyment that is not reducible to a sensorial pleasure. Thanks to such ideas, and without being completely in favor of Helmholtz's physiological point of view, one can understand that Hanslick's formalist view, potentially promising and in advance on his time, will find in the future a late familiar ground in the Vienna School of music.

### 3. Hanslick's heritage: Wittgenstein as a link of the chain

The *Tractatus*, especially 6.13 (on Aesthetics and Ethics, with the notion of *Spiegelbild*), but also 6.45 (about seeing the world *sub specie aeterni*), offers a view of the philosopher that is often taken to show that he was marked by Schopenhauer's conception of the transcendental. This is not wrong. But I think it is an easy and loose way of appreciating things. And perhaps, too quick. Wittgenstein was more indebted to Hanslick's conception of autonomy. His critical attitude towards metaphysics, though less sharp and destructive than the one of the Vienna Circle, could not make him endorse an absolute point of view. My suggestion, corroborated by studies published in 2000 by the Brenner Archives in Innsbruck, on *Wittgenstein und Musik*, is rather that Wittgenstein found himself half way between Hanslick's formal conception of moving sound-forms (*tönend bewegte Formen*) and a logic for a musical prose that could, if constructed, extend to atonality (although he was reluctant to it), a view defended by Aldo Giorgio Gargani's brilliant work on Wittgenstein and Schoenberg.

At home with the first one, Wittgenstein who discussed the view that sentiment could be the expressive content for art (see for instance, his remark about Tolstoy), could nevertheless, as an adept of tonal music, feel ill-at-ease with the second although the identification of musical content with affect was no longer typical for him. Of course, Wittgenstein cannot be put on the same foot as musicians or theoreticians of music. Yet I hold him as a meaningful link in the chain of the filiation of the autonomy, and as a unwilling witness of its semantical change I am stressing here, from absolute to pure, meaning «purely instrumental» music, away from metaphysics, although undetached from an ethical point of view (what has value is ethical) if understood *sub specie aeterni*. Fascinated by the sound, and the way an instrumentalist can perform it (for instance the Austrian well-known organist Josef Labor), he had apparently no idea of the problem raised by the so called equal temperament presupposing a division of the scale that cannot be completely rational since it always leaves an irreducible rest out of the division. This is the reason why Schopenhauer himself, the best advocate of absolute music, and a *connaissanceur* of acoustics through the acoustician Ernst Chladni (*Akustik*, Leipzig, 1802, quoted by Max Weber in his *Sociology of music*), considered there is impurity in music, physically speaking. Yet Wittgenstein was probably not concerned because his favorite



musicians belonged to the romantic tradition. It was, as he confesses in a remark of 1929, part his «cultural ideal» represented by Schumann, besides the contemporary culture he is not sure to be in tune with.

#### 4. The future of autonomy after the collapse of the absolute: semantical changes of a criterion for a self-sufficient language

So far, it was not enough to replace poetry with music in the Kantian pyramid of Fine Arts, which was of course the first step to make. Further steps were necessary which changed the meaning of «autonomous» into autonomous but impure, formal rather than absolute, or better «specific», then immanently autonomous, although deprived of absolute reference, materially autonomous if considered from the point of view of the sound essence, including the sound components, overtones, timbres, non periodic sounds, and even noises, etc... Little by little, one sees music becoming an art of propagation of acoustic waves that can remain music without pitches, just with rhythm and beats as in the oldest times when the musicians started to play music with «idiophones» (Claude Fatus, quoted by John Pierce, 1999). Was autonomy lacking in such experiences? Not necessarily. It depends upon the meaning we give to «autonomy». In fact «autonomy» is a polysemous expression which can have a different meaning according to the circumstances, given the historical context.

If so, as I believe, autonomy is not just what we should say of the music at the end of the nineteenth century, in the time of German romanticism, in relation to the debate about «purity» with or without voice. Does the turn of the nineteenth century, when music could not do any longer without the sound material, as Dahlhaus himself acknowledges, mean the end of autonomy? In fact, it rather means that the material has taken its revenge against the tonal grammar in which it had been previously shaped at a time when pure music, that is purely instrumental, was still considered as the only bearer of autonomy. Now separated from the ideology of absolute music, the debate upon « autonomy » should be extended forward towards our time but also revisited retroactively since the turn of 1900. One thing is sure: a. autonomy is maintained when music is substituted to poetry after Kant. And it still holds true when b. the musical is understood less as absolute than as a «specificity»: a Hanslickian expression meaning that the musical «Beautiful» does not borrow its character from another art in a hierarchy but holds true in absence of words in so far as the music leads the words,

and not the contrary. «Specificity» assigns music a privileged place outside the hierarchy of arts. But the way Hanslick puts in evidence this «specificity» marks a further step away from absoluteness, through the critique of the musical content as emotional.

Peter Kivy has analyzed this critique which underlies a strategy: in Gluck's *Orphée and Eurydice*, there is a famous aria that should make the auditors break into tears «Che farò senza Eurydice?». What is striking then is the contrast between the sounds chosen to express the sentence and the emotional context. Hanslick notes that the sound dynamic is specific, and unrelated to the representational content of the text. The sounds do not incite us to cry. But the words do. This is a proof of music's specificity that escaped Kant's attention. Peter Kivy in his *Fine art of repetition* (dedicated to Arthur Danto) concludes that Hanslick should have made something with Kant's «arousing emotions» argument in the *Critique of Judging* §§ 53-54 that would have enriched his strategy of mere denegation of sentiment with a new cognitive concept of expressiveness (Kivy, 251). Hanslick's point is that this specificity is of an expressive kind, yet not sentimental. He should have also recognized the cognitive dimension of expression of aesthetic ideas. When Wittgenstein, in a remark that one can find in *Culture and Value*, says that music is the most refined of all arts, it is, according to Hanslick's spirit, doubtlessly this conception of «specificity», and not absoluteness, that is envisaged. We must remember that he was an admirer of Josef labor who had been Hanslick's student. In this respect, Wittgenstein forms a link in the chain of Hanslick's heritage.

## 5. Autonomy as the feature of a grammar for a language

A new sense of autonomy is now emerging, different from absoluteness or purity, which has been made possible by Hanslick's conception of music as language and musical content as «form» (or «spirit» in an Hegelian sense, yet transformed). Form here is «already filled up», and is not the contrary of content. This conception of «form» is close to Wilhelm von Humboldt's theory of language as *energeia* that is the vital dynamic action of giving form to the sound material (Dahlhaus, *op. cit.*, 101) which we call meaning. It is autonomy of a language with a grammar allowing a formalism for sensations the meaning of which has no explanation or account to give for what it is or makes. It is self-justified. Note that one can find this meaning of autonomy in the case of Wittgenstein's grammar. The autonomy of grammar of a language is the capacity for it to hold true independently of any external reality or objectivity. That Wittgenstein conceived a grammar also for music is clear from a

comparison drawn in 1933 (in the *BT*) where he compares musical harmony and a language by saying that there is no meta-language, at least as little as there is a meta-harmony in music. In this respect, autonomy of a language can be maintained for sounds in whatever grammar, given that it is the grammar of a «language». The shift from forms as traditionally opposed to musical affective contents, then from forms as contents and contents as forms (Hanslick) to forms according to a principle of symbolization, even a crude and non-technical one, and finally from forms as contents and vice versa, to forms in a formalism of its own right, displays different ways of seeing autonomy. Yet all of these conceptions claim to qualify for autonomy in so far as they imply a language of some sort.

## 6. Autonomy as a *Kulturideal*. A Kuhnian move in the second philosophy of Wittgenstein

To this extent, impurity is no longer an obstacle to autonomy, as little as dissonances are unpleasant because they seem to be irrational. Once quantified, even imperceptible components of the sound previously held as incompatible with music or undesirable for composition become a material of immense resources for *Klangfarbenmelodien*. Under this new aspect, autonomy for a music with pitches turns into autonomy with timbres. Such is already "Farben", Schoenberg's third of his *Five pieces for orchestra*, op. 16 (1909). It extends into melodies of timbres Helmholtz' idea of a melody of pitches by which Schoenberg says he has been inspired. The logic remains although it relies on an unconscious latent substratum for sequences of dissonant chords derivable from *Grundgestalten* or sound axioms. Will without consciousness operates at this level, as Schoenberg says in a Schopenhauerian spirit. This logic has to be brought out through composition.

From this point of view, autonomy combines with impurity, dissonances, timbres. Even voice considered as quasi-instrumental could come into it.

When, in the early 1900's, the sound material therefore takes its revenge, under the influence of the «downward aesthetics», through investigations into the internal structure of the sound, what appears is a new impulse towards nuances and micro-tones or intervals that had been neglected beforehand as not worth being heard. Concomitantly, the older grammar one would have considered as «natural» until then reveals itself to be a conventional framework, hence changeable and perhaps susceptible of evolution. Other criteria become available for the

legitimacy of what is heard as a sound in a graded scale, given the syntax to which it partakes. So far, the transformation of the nature of the conception of a system of sounds is at stake. What was held natural reveals itself being conventional and thereby changeable. Schoenberg comments of this change of point of view of a tonal system into an atonal one confirms that a Kuhnian point of view is more accurate than an Adornian one in order to make it understandable. This is what Dahlhaus rightly believes. Hence a Kuhnian approach to history of foundations of music. In these respects, autonomy becomes a transient principle of self-sufficiency that can mean different things according to the context. Although this principle seems to impose objectivity in a sort of eternal present, it becomes «autonomy in context» like in Wittgenstein's second philosophy, applicable to values, aesthetical or ethical in this «muddy world of facts». For this very reason, autonomy of music is less *the principle* to which the aesthetics of German romantic music of the end of nineteenth century, considered as an unvarying ideal, should remain identified, than, as Wittgenstein writes in 1929, a «Kulturideal». Such a pre-Kuhnian expression allows an extended use of the expression «autonomy» to new musics and especially treatments of sounds as in today compositions.

The irony of this situation is that the context and new framework might well turn against the music to which one says is sensitive. Wittgenstein finds himself in contradiction when, defending a criterion of autonomy in context (for music, meaning, morals etc...), he confesses that he remains, if not exclusively devoted to, at least still attached to this romantic «Kulturideal» represented in the mid-nineteenth century by Schumann («Bach and Beethoven» tradition) and resists the spirit of the contemporary musical ideal of his time, against Schumann's conception, although this spirit might be considered as a continuation of the latter.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. The *Kulturideal* of Autonomy in the technological context today

There is an ambivalence in Dahlhaus' attitude towards the «newest music» as he says in 1969. On one side, he deplores the «dismantlement of the concept of work of art in contemporary music» (1970-71). This is the title of an article which is in fact a «plea» for «this romantic concept». On another side, Dahlhaus clearly looks beyond the very paradigm he has outlined in his 1978 book on the *Idea of absolute music* given the turn in 1900 of the sound material that no composer can ignore, as he also writes. If the concept of the work of art is young,

since it is only two centuries old, the tendency to «make» or «practice music» and its priority over writing music has generated a regrettable erosion of the concept of objectivity of art at the expense of its intelligibility. The autonomy of forms ruled by transcendent criteria of coherence has turned into an internal sort of adequacy according to which a work of art remains a totality of relations, now seen from within. Although it is no question of getting back to a romantic conception of the work of art (it is dead and consummated), it should not make us reject systematically all compositional attempt to «discompose» forms (S. Cavell). But it should not either make us conclude that the romantic ideal of autonomy should be entirely given up, as totally worn out. However, when one asks: «Are sounds and noises electronically produced still music?», history has its word to say in this matter. Dahlhaus has attended to the experimental electronical investigations on sounds at the Cologne studio in the 1950s, resulting in interesting synthesis of timbres, enlarging their traditional field beyond serialism. Composing not with sounds, but according a new trend in which the sound has become a *concretum* of emerging qualities. Two historical events have marked the history of music : 1. One belongs to the history of acoustics : the collapse of equal temperament. 2. The second one is the composition out of the partial components of sounds (or timbres) which in fact are not perceptible as serial structures, but interesting if treated with the means of electronics. These new aspects, Dahlhaus says, explain Ligeti's explorations beyond serialism, combining electronics with instrumental composition.

One should not then be surprised if the «exactitude» that was searched for in our tonal scale, is seen as something unattainable and even a kind of myth, since no division of the scale is rationally reducible to ultimate exact interval units of the sound continuum. So far, realizing the huge «fraud»<sup>4</sup> of temperament, the fact that a certain kind of exactitude of tune had to be searched for at the expense of our usual grammar led to a reversal of perspective: look for the exact scale meant to give up our usual grammar and expectations, modify our keyboards, build other grammars, like in constructivist compositions (Wyshnegradsky) using microtonal harmonies on keyboards of a different kind. Once one realizes that there is no way of conciliating these three requirements (H.F. Cohen: *Quantifying music*, 1984, 216): 1- obtain ultimately exact intervals, as shown by the unsuccessful investigations in view of better sorts of equal temperament, 2- freely transpose and modulate for instance playing C sharp and D flat so that C sharp sounds a little lower than D flat, and 3- have feasible keyboards on which to play, a choice has to be made entailing a sacrifice. Depending on the composer, the better choice is clearly the one that opens up new instrumental possibilities. Note that, in view of

finer distinctions (wanting for instance a D flat to sound a little higher than a C sharp) Helmholtz who wrote for the «artists» rather than for the aestheticians, had an harmonium specially built for him in order to be able to compare *ad libitum* the exact scale he was looking for with the tempered scale of a usual keyboard (see Pietro Blaserna, professor at Roma School, who first translated into French Helmholtz' *The physiological causes of musical harmony* (written in Bonn, Beethoven's original town), in his *Son et musique* ( Paris, Alcan, 1892, Ch. 6). He was convinced that if the musician took advantage of the extreme potential refinements of the sensitivity of his ear to nuances (sound colors), he would avoid adding superfluous and useless embellishments and then compose or play better music. Let us say in passing that these suggestions reveal Helmholtz' critical appreciations on the European music of his times. But this is another story.

Ligeti's explorations of limits between chords analyzable by the ear, and non analyzable timbres, use electronics as a means to a new conception of instrumental music. As to other new music such as the *Hörspiel* genre (Berio) or Cage's noise, Dahlhaus is reluctant of the utopia of the emancipated interpret. One cannot listen musically to a «noise» or a phoneme (non semantic sort of noise taken out of language) without isolating it from the external world. Then the listener has to reconstitute a «system of coherences» for the noise as a part of a totality, from the point of view of its internal relations. In absence of such an aesthetical endeavor of the listener, there is nothing interesting to grasp in terms of music or so-called music. One cannot give up completely the «category of relation», Dahlhaus concludes.

If Dahlhaus' view is convincing, it is nevertheless one-sided. It leaves us with a question: are we to renounce music, if even this category finds itself shaken? Isn't a limit imposed to history to consider that this category has to be saved in any case?

7. From the objectivity of the work, to the subjectivity of the listener: the last shift towards looking into the process of listening. Conclusion

It seems as though, as long as the category of relation is maintained, music can be saved, in which case the criterion of autonomy survives beyond romantic times, under different names and shapes. What happens if this category is shaken? That's the question we are faced with.

Dahlhaus remarks that the grasp of a system of coherences is the listener's task. Should we then, if so, from the ultimate criterion of the musical as self-sufficient, consider as non-

musical at all a composition that has renounced the category of relation? The very possibility of assembling features in a totality does not belong only to the work of art. Let's suppose it is also up to the listener to gather them from the point of view of qualities of «Aspekthören» (Wittgenstein). This is what happens when such qualities become a new material for composition, or when, in other terms, *the listening process becomes in turn a matter for composition*. This remark sheds a light on another shift of meaning of the autonomy principle, this time, passing from the objectivity of the work, to the subjectivity of the listener, or of the composer as an active listener working on the qualities of listening sounds. In these respects, the sounds could be said to «suffice to themselves». To such a conception Scelsi's «writing the vibration» around what he calls the «polar sound» is relevant, but also the spectral music by François Bayle's and J-J. Risset.

<sup>1</sup>\*Professor at Paris 8, responsible of seminars in the philosophy of language and music

Cf. J-B. Schneewind, *The invention of autonomy: a history of modern moral philosophy*, Cambridge U. Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See Lydia Goehr's *The Quest for Voice*, Ch. 3, 97 and footnote 21.

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes put in the mouth of Florestan – Schumann's double sometimes also called Eusebius -, Schumann wrote about Beethoven that he is the «poet of the celebration - of sounds», à propos of his Symphony in D (see Dahlhaus about this use of the word «poet» in Schumann's writings). Wittgenstein confessed in 1929 that this move has been led by «instinct rather than by reflection» (*Resultat einer Überlegung*). Does the word «reflection» indicate the role of rational construction in the Vienna School referring perhaps to Schoenberg ?

<sup>4</sup> An expression used for instance by Dr Eszter in Bela Tarr's film *The Harmonies of Werckmeister*, 2000.