

Innovation, Art, Society, and Life: Deliberations on Music Criticism's Past, Presence and Future

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By the time of the controversy between Giovanni Maria Artusi and Claudio Monteverdi, as well as in the *Querelles des anciens et des modernes*, and up to the aesthetical debates in the 19th and 20th centuries, critical disputes concerning music have dealt in particular with the question of artistic innovation. Whereas initially it was mainly theoreticians and composers involved, during the 19th and 20th centuries philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche or Theodor W. Adorno prominently came up. And it is their texts in particular which make clear that deliberations on music are always motivated by social values and certain attitudes not only towards art, but towards life in general. The danger of an ideological usurpation of music and its critique became dangerously evident during the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.¹

Today music criticism seems to be endangered for different reasons. On the one hand the ongoing transformation of public media deeply affects traditional cultural practices; on the other hand, nobody seems to be convinced any more of an obligation to fight for the “truth” of an aesthetical position or a certain form of art.² In addition, high quality pub-

- 1 For an excellent overview see: “Criticism,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 5, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 670–98, resp. *Grove Music online*.
- 2 For this aspect see amongst others: Susanne Kogler, “‘Wahrheit’ und ‘Dichtung’ als Paradigmen der Kritik: Robert Schumann und Hugo Wolf,” in *KünstlerKritiker. Zum Verhältnis von Produktion und Kritik in bildender Kunst und Musik*, ed. Michael Custodis et al. (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2006), 28–43.

lic debates appear to be generally in decline. Thus, the problematic situation of music criticism seems to correspond with a broader crisis of critical thinking and Western culture. Taking this view as a point of departure, I will first illuminate the socio-political dimensions inherent in music criticism with the help of historical and topical examples. Second, I will discuss which role music criticism might play and which forms it might adopt in our days and in the future.

Historical Deliberations

What is the innovation that critics fight about? If it were about musical structures and purely musical and artistic ideas only, it would not be made so much fuss about, we might suspect. Indeed, as different studies show, the organization of art has always been related to the social organization of life. A very illuminating example amongst others is the connection between the quarrel of the Buffonists in the 18th century and the French Revolution.

Even if the debate concerned the primacy of melody or harmony, it can be traced back to ideas regarding how people should live together. Whereas harmony can be connected to a social model that involves many voices fitting together in a sort of democratic order, the idea of melody as an accompanied leading voice is connected to the idea of an origin which constitutes the basis of one unique voice commanding the whole society. In 1767 Rousseau published an article entitled “Unité de Melodie” where the term *unité* is used in this sense. His idea of regaining an ideal origin is bound to the idea of society as one collective body with many limbs, as he stated in *Contrat social*. According to Rousseau all members speak one original language.³ The songs of the French Revolution represent this unitedness musically. The Marseillaise is the most famous of them. Its melody prepared the soldiers to follow one original inner voice that should at the same time be the shared basis of the new state.

In 1840, Robert Schuman cited the hymn in his song *Die beiden Grenadiere* op. 94 no.1, which is based on a text by Heinrich Heine. The melody which originally should represent the strength and the loyalty of the French soldiers, is ironized through a grotesque combination with Heine’s words.⁴

3 Cf. Hans Georg Nicklaus, “Rousseau und die Verurteilung der Mehrstimmigkeit,” in *Zwischen Rauschen und Offenbarung. Zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Stimme*, ed. Friedrich Kittler et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 161.

4 Cf. amongst others: Markus Winkler, “‘Die Grenadiere’. Heine und Schumann,” in *Übergänge: zwischen Künsten und Kulturen. Internationaler Kongress zum 150. Todestjahr von Heinrich Heine und Robert Schumann*, ed. Henriette Herwig (Stuttgart:

Regarding the 18th and 19th centuries we may also speak of a dialectical relationship between the social and the aesthetic dimension of music criticism.⁵ Depending on the readership in the different journals, the critics focused either on the one or the other side.

Some Case Studies

E. T. A. Hoffmann

If we look at critiques written by one of the most famous critics in history, the composer and poet E. T. A. Hoffmann, we can also find some characteristic features which show the interconnection between art and life that he was fighting for.

Concerning the *Ouverture à grand Orchestre*, “*du jeune Henri Chasse*” par Étienne-Nicolas Méhul, published in Leipzig with Breitkopf und Härtel, his ideals of what a composer should do stand out: as Méhul does, the composer should dominate the fantasy, the imagination of the audience in such a way that a certain image taken from life would be projected directly in front of the inner eye. The effect aimed at is for the audience to become directly involved in the colorful chaos of fantastic events.

The music willingly reveals its secrets to the composer; he [...] thereby dominates the listener’s imagination, so that at his call a certain picture from life appears before the eyes of the spirit, and he is irresistibly drawn into the colorful melee of fantastic appearances. [...] Melody, choice of instruments, harmonic structure, everything must work together, and it would be a foolish delusion if one wanted to achieve that purpose, to have a definite effect on the imagination, by imitating individual natural sounds without paying attention to the whole.⁶

Metzler, 2007), 275–88; resp. Bernhard R. Appel, “Die ‘Marseillaise’ bei Heinrich Heine und Robert Schumann,” in *Übergänge: zwischen Künsten und Kulturen. Internationaler Kongress zum 150. Todesjahr von Heinrich Heine und Robert Schumann*, ed. Henriette Herwig (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007), 289–304.

5 Cf. Ulrich Tadday, Christoph Flamm, and Peter Wicke, “Musikkritik,” in *MGG*, ed. Laurenz Lütteken (Kassel, Stuttgart, New York: s. n., 2016–2021).

6 “Dem wahren Komponisten enthüllt die Musik willig ihre Geheimnisse; er [...] beherrscht damit die Fantasie des Zuhörers, so daß auf seinen Ruf diesem ein bestimmtes Bild aus dem Leben vor die Augen des Geistes tritt, und er unwiderstehlich hineingezogen wird in das bunte Gewühl fantastischer Erscheinungen. Melodie, Wahl der Instrumente, harmonische Struktur, alles muß da zusammenwirken, und es wäre ein törichter Wahn, wenn man durch die Nachahmung einzelner Naturlaute ohne Beachtung des Ganzen jenen Zweck, bestimmt auf die Fantasie zu wirken, erreichen wollte.” E. T. A. Hoffmann, “*Ouverture à grande Orchestre*, ‘*du jeune Henri Chasse*’ par F.

Art thus functions as a bridge between the merely banal, daily world and the fantastic world. When doing so the music transcends so called tonal painting which is imitation of nature only and effects imagination directly.⁷

As the last passage of the quotation shows, for Hoffmann it is necessary that the artist is a good craftsman and knows his *métier* well. As a consequence, for Hoffmann it is also important to demonstrate the quality of the works he has considered successful through analytic remarks describing dimensions of the musical texture such as harmony, melody, the use of instruments etc. The poetic effect is based on the rational but poetically inspired use of musical means. Hoffmann is convinced that the effect of a well-made music would not only be felt by himself, but by everybody who is in general capable of letting himself be touched by music:

Without at least knowing the composer's intention beforehand, every listener whom the music is at all only capable of seizing will be transported by the overture into the joyful tumult of merry hunters: this Rez. boldly dares to assert.⁸

A vivid description of the scenery painted in music follows. It is at the same time a poetic description of the effect of the music on Hoffmann, of Hoffmann's personal musical experience:

The royal stag leaps out of a deep thicket, pursued, attacked by the hounds raging with hunting lust; the hunters rush after it on snorting horses; all at once the animal has disappeared, the hounds have lost the scent; they creep around searching and sniffing, the hunters keep still; then the hounds strike again, the animal sets over stone and bush, the horns sound, the hunters catch up with it, and merry fanfares announce the victory. All of this comes out in the most vivid colors - a proof of

Méhul. *Chez Breitkopf et Härtel à Leipsic*," in *Die Schriften über Musik*, in *Dichtungen und Schriften*. Gesamtausgabe in 15 Bänden, 12. Band, ed. Walther Harich (Weimar, Lichtenstein, 1924), 209.

- 7 For Hoffmann on Méhul see amongst others: Anja Pohnsner, "Wenn ich von mir selbst abhänge, würd' ich Componist ..." *Die Umwege des Musikers E. T. A. Hoffmann. Wechselwirkungen innerhalb seines musikalischen und literarischen Werkes* (Univ. Diss., Heidelberg, 1999), 85–6.
- 8 "Ohne im mindestens die Absicht des Komponisten vorher zu wissen, wird jeder Zuhörer, den die Musik überhaupt nur zu ergreifen vermag, durch die Overture in das frohe Getümmel lustiger Jäger versetzt werden: dieses getraut sich Rez. keck zu behaupten." Hoffmann, "Overture à grande Orchestre," 210.

how correctly the composer chose the means for the purpose once set, and how he knew how to hold the whole together in all its parts.⁹

At the end of the poetic description, Hoffmann again underscores that the composer was able to choose the musical means correctly. The impact of the music thus depends on the composer's knowledge and mastery and results directly therefrom. In the part of the text which then follows, Hoffmann even uses excerpts from the score to demonstrate his views and to convince his readers.¹⁰ We may therefore conclude that despite all romantic poetry, the critic argues rationally combining rational and analytic means with the reflection and description of his subjective impressions and aesthetic experience. By doing so he becomes a model for later philosophers and critics as prominent as Th. W. Adorno, for example.

Another text taken from Hoffmann's writings shows how he operates in the case that he is not convinced by the piece even if it's a composition by a very well-known and otherwise appreciated composer, even appreciated by Hoffmann himself.

An example for such a critique is the text concerning the "*Grande Sonate pour le Pianoforte* comp. - - par J.G. Reichardt, Maître de Chapelle de S. M. le roi de Prusse à Leipsic, chez Breitkopf et Härtel." Right at the beginning the author makes clear that the quality of the composition he is writing about, from his point of view, is not at all comparable to that of other pieces by Reichardt. In the following he describes how Reichardt's genius was capable to write impressionable music characterized by deeply expressed and heartfelt sensations, by, in all respects, even in the highest, true declamation, by a genius-like understanding of the most impressive musical means. In genres such as a simple lied or even a gorgeous opera, Reichardt's music presented both every detail, as well as the entire character of a given poem in an emphatic way. As a consequence, he succeeded in touching every mind and inspiring it to emphatically engage with the music.

9 "Aus tiefem Dickicht springt der königliche Hirsch hervor, verfolgt, angefallen von den in Jagdlust wütenden Hunden; auf schnaubenden Rossen stürmen die Jäger nach; auf einmal ist das Tier verschwunden, die Hunde haben die Fährte verloren; sie schleichen suchend und schnuppernd umher, die Jäger halten sich still; da schlagen die Hunde aufs Neue an, über Stein und Busch setzt das Tier, die Hörner schallen, die Jäger ereilen es, und lustige Fanfaren verkündigen den Sieg. Alles dieses tritt in den lebendigsten Farben heraus – ein Beweis, wie richtig der Komponist zu dem einmal vorgesetzten Zweck die Mittel wählte, und wie er das Ganze in allen seinen Teilen zusammenzuhalten verstand." Ibid.

10 Ibid., 210–13.

As a precondition for these achievements Hoffmann considers a balanced relationship between rationality and fantasy. Concluding these considerations, Hoffmann states that Reichardt, when writing a sonata, missed the support of poetry, which proved to be essential for him. Only real heroes of music are capable of writing autonomous, instrumental music, he stresses. For this task, not only are insights into the artistic and harmonious structures necessary, but also a perfect understanding of the individuality of each instrument, in order to use it according to its highest potential. These requirements concern in particular the piano, which had recently undergone so many changes, it could be considered a completely novel instrument. What Hoffmann reproaches in the following is not being conscious of these technical innovations by comparing Reichardt with someone lost on an island, and thus isolated and not in connection with current artistic practices anymore:

It could be imagined that a brave piano player and composer from the time of Bache, Wolfe, etc., by some coincidence would be transported to an island (in the Indian archipelago or elsewhere), while saving his grand piano and Sebastian Bach in solitude. Now he diligently composed sonatas and toccatas, entirely in the artful, but with regard to the splendor, which now came from the increased virtuosity of the players and the magnificent instruments, which replaced those clattering, clanging pianos, poor manner, as it existed at that time, and would, as a passing ship took him up, bring over the fruit of his labor. The appearance of his works would be, if not exactly pleasing, yet certainly strange [...].¹¹

With this comparison Hoffmann becomes ironic, but he doesn't stop here. Rather he accuses Reichardt of not even having known the historical innovations concerning his instrument, the piano.

- 11 *“Es ließe sich denken, dass ein wackrer Klavierspieler und Komponist aus der Zeit der Bache, Wolfe etc. durch irgendeinen Zufall auf eine Insel (etwa im indischen Archipelagus oder sonst) verschlagen würde, indessen seinen Flügel und den Sebastian Bach in die Einsamkeit hinüberrettete. Nun komponierte er fleißig Sonaten und Tokkaten, ganz in der kunstvollen, aber rücksichtlich des Glanzes, der nun aus der gestiegenen Virtuosität der Spieler und dem herrlichen Instrumente, das jene klappernden, klirrenden Flügel ersetzte, hervorgegangen, ärmlichen Manier, wie sie damals bestand, und brächte, als ein vorbeisegelndes Schiff in aufnahm, die Frucht seiner Arbeit herüber. Die Erscheinung seiner Werke würde, wenn auch nicht gerade erfreulich, doch gewiss merkwürdig sein [...]”* Cf. E. T. A. Hoffmann, “Grande Sonate pour le Piano-forte comp. - - par J.G Reichardt, Maitre de Chapelle de S.M. le roi de Prusse. à Leipsic, chez Breitkopf et Härtel,” in *Die Schriften über Musik*, in *Dichtungen und Schriften*. Gesamtausgabe in 15 Bänden, 12. Band, ed. Walther Harich (Weimar, Lichtenstein, 1924), 335.

Mr. R. was indeed on an island, but if not without a grand piano, certainly without Sebastian Bach. Not even historically does he seem to have been aware of the tremendous progress that was made in composition for this instrument after Mozart and Beethoven had given pianoforte playing a completely new, high, powerful impetus; otherwise, he would not have composed the present sonata, or at least not have brought it to a large audience. Without Seb. Bach, Mr. R. was on the island, because otherwise he would have known how to give his work some interest, at least with regard to the harmonic structure.¹²

Finally, before explaining his views in detail on the basis of the score, Hoffmann stresses his obligation to charge severely according to his insights and the truth. In addition, he explains his goal to indicate to the composer which paths he should follow in the future, namely singing “*some jovial and glorious lied*.”

In conclusion, as the critic's view is concerned, we can say that Hoffmann judges the pieces he writes about in detail and with respect to their overall effect. He speaks at the same time as both an artist and a specialist, and as a part of the public, as a listener. His main concern is the effect of music, which should have an impact on the audience and thus change the listener's daily life through establishing a pathway to the land of fantasy.¹³

Claude Debussy

If we compare now briefly Hoffmann's critiques with the critical writings of Claude Debussy entitled *Monsieur Croche*, we will notice a totally different attitude: Whereas Hoffmann is writing emphatically from the standpoint of a critic, Debussy gives the impression that he does not want to consider himself a professional critic at all. Rather he is skeptical about criticism it-

12 “Herr R. befand sich in der Tat auf einer Insel, aber wenn auch nicht ohne Flügel, doch gewiß ohne Sebastian Bach. Nicht einmal historisch scheinen ihm nämlich die ungeheuren Fortschritte bekannt geworden zu sein, die, nachdem Mozart und Beethoven dem Pianofortespiel überhaupt einen ganz neuen, hohen, mächtigen Schwung gegeben hatten, in der Komposition für dies Instrument gemacht wurden; denn sonst würde er die vorliegende Sonate nicht komponiert, wenigstens nicht ins große Publikum gebracht haben. Ohne Seb. Bach befand sich aber Herr R. deshalb auf der Insel, weil er sonst doch wenigstens rücksichtlich des harmonischen Gefüges seinem Werke einiges Interesse zu geben gewusst hätte.” Ibid., 335–6.

13 For a more detailed view on Reichardt's aesthetics and Hoffmann's critique see: Stefan Keym, “Musik von einer einsamen Insel? Reichardts Grande Sonate f-Moll und die Kritik von E. T. A. Hoffmann,” in *Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814). Zwischen Anpassung und Provokation*, ed. Manfred Beetz et al. (Halle/Saale: s. n., 2003), 145–62.

self. Several times he stresses that he does not want to write and behave like a critic. By doing so he criticizes the critics of his time and the genre of critique itself. Correspondingly he is skeptical about the classical genre of the symphony, which he considers to be outdated. It is not astonishing that a symphony composed by M. Witkowski, which Debussy wrote about does not find his approval:

A symphony by Mr. G.-M. Witkowski was received with enthusiasm. It seemed to me that, since Beethoven, the proof of the uselessness of the symphony was made. Also, with Schumann and Mendelssohn, it is only a respectful repetition of the same forms with already less force.¹⁴

His remarks on composers he considers as geniuses and their “holy works” show that from his point of view, a genius does not need any approval by a critic. *“I will speak very little about works consecrated, either by success or by tradition; once by all, Meyerbeer, Thalberg, Reyer ... are men of genius, it does not matter otherwise.”*¹⁵ What a composer should develop, according to him, is a distinguishable, individual handwriting. If the influence of another genius is discernible, as for instance with Schumann’s *Faust* or the Overture *Le roi Lear* by A. Savard, he is not interested in the piece.

At the end Debussy criticizes the institution of the concert as a whole by ironizing the behavior of a singer presenting orchestral songs by Fritz Delius and the way in which the audience demonstrates approval.

It was ineffable as anything, this music! It was sung by Miss C. Andray-Fairfax with a dreamy and melancholy voice. Miss Andray-Fairfax devised, while the music was lamenting, a game of comparison between the audience and the chandelier, which turned, I must say, entirely to the glory of the chandelier. This charming game seemed to defend the delicacy of the melodies from the barbarous noise of the bravos.¹⁶

14 “Une symphonie de M. G.-M. Witkowski fut accueillie avec enthousiasme. Il me semblait que, depuis Beethoven, la preuve de l’inutilité de la symphonie était faite. Aussi bien, chez Schumann et Mendelssohn n’est-elle plus qu’une répétition respectueuse des même formes avec déjà moins de force.” Cf. Claude Debussy, “Le ‘Faust’ de Schumann. – Overture pour ‘Le Roi Lear’ d’A. Savard. – Le troisième acte de ‘Siegfried’. – Une Symphonie de Witkowski,” in: Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. Francois Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 25.

15 “Je parlerai fort peu des œuvres consacrées, soit par le succès, soit par la tradition ; une fois par toutes, Meyerbeer, Thalberg, Reyer ... sont des hommes de génie, ça n’a pas autrement d’importance.” Ibid., 24.

16 “C’était ineffable comme tout, cette musique ! Elle fut chantée par Mlle C. Andray-Fairfax avec une voix rêveuse et mélancoliquement distinguée. Mlle Andray-Fairfax imagina, pendant que se lamentait la musique, un jeu de comparaison entre le public et le

Disregarding the political background and the specific idea of the new that emerges here, with Debussy we see that the function of the critic within the bourgeois cultural life gets precarious. Taking his standpoint as an example we can thus conclude that at the beginning of the twentieth century art was considered able to express itself sufficiently without any help and professional mediation. The gap between the artist and the bourgeois institutions appears to grow, and in the course of this development, the gap between art and those same institutions also widens. The comments on the reception of the *Dreigroschenoper* by Brecht and Weill also underscore this process. Bertolt Brecht explained in a self-interview in 1933, from his point of view, what caused the success of the *Dreigroschenoper* (Threepenny Opera):

I'm afraid all the things I didn't care for: the romantic attitude, the love story, the musical. When the Threepenny Opera had been successful, they made a film out of it. For the film, they took everything that I had mocked in the play, the romanticism, the sentimentality, etc., and left out the mockery. There the success was even greater.¹⁷

What was important for him was the critique of society inherent in the piece:

I had tried to show that the world of ideas and the emotional life of the street bandits bear an immense resemblance to the world of ideas and the emotional life of the solid citizen.¹⁸

Art critique becomes cultural critique. It might seem astonishing, that the critic now seems to change sides and is defending novel artistic developments against a more traditionally oriented society. Theodor W. Adorno writes in 1929:

lustre, qui tourna, je dois le dire, tout à la gloire du lustre. Ce jeu charmant semblait défendre la délicatesse des mélodies du bruit barbare des bravos." Cf. Ibid., 27.

17 "Ich fürchte, all das, woraufes mir nicht ankam: die romantische Haltung, die Liebesgeschichte, das Musikalische. Als die *Dreigroschenoper* Erfolg gehabt hatte, machte man einen Film daraus. Man nahm für den Film all das, was ich in dem Stück verspottet hatte, die Romantik, die Sentimentalität usw., und ließ den Spott weg. Da war der Erfolg noch größer." Bertolt Brecht, "Autobiographische Notizen 1921 bis Juni 1938," in *Bertolt Brecht: Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 26: *Journale 1*, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Berlin, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1913–1941), 299.

18 "Ich hatte zu zeigen versucht, dass die Ideenwelt und das Gefühlsleben der Straßenbanditen ungemein viel Ähnlichkeit mit der Ideenwelt und dem Gefühlsleben des soliden Bürgers haben." Ibid., 299.

Society has many ways to deal with inconvenient works. It can ignore them, it can critically destroy them, it can swallow them so that nothing remains. The Threepenny Opera has whetted its appetite for the last. Meanwhile, there is still the question of how the meal will be digested by her. For even as a means of enjoyment, the Threepenny Opera remains dangerous: no ideology of community occurs there, neither materially nor musically, since nothing noble and transfiguring is set as collective art, but rather the abrogation of art is suspended, in order to find the sound for the abrogation of society. And those who here interpret the thrown-off, collective contents are quite lonely, only with themselves; perhaps they only like it so much because they can laugh at their loneliness like that of a clown. With no melody of the Threepenny Opera reconstruction can be played; its hollowed-out simplicity is nothing less than classical. It would rather be played in bars, whose half-light abruptly illuminates it, than sung in the meadow. It is utility music, which today, since one is in the safe, can be enjoyed as a ferment, but not used to cover what is. Where it turns from interpretation into direct language, it openly demands: 'For it is cold. Consider the darkness and the great cold.'¹⁹

This change in the critic's view can be explained by societal and political changes. In the same year in the *Völkische Beobachter* published in Munich on July 23rd one could read with respect to the premiere of the *Dreigroschenoper*:

- 19 "Viele Wege hat die Gesellschaft, mit unbequemen Werken fertig zu werden. Sie kann sie ignorieren, sie kann sie kritisch vernichten, sie kann sie schlucken, so, daß nichts mehr übrig bleibt. Die *Dreigroschenoper* hat ihr zum Letzten Appetit gemacht. Indessen, es ist noch die Frage, wie ihr die Mahlzeit bekommt. Denn noch als Genussmittel bleibt die *Dreigroschenoper* gefährlich: keine Gemeinschaftsideologie kommt da vor, stofflich nicht und auch musikalisch nicht, da nichts Edles und Verklärendes als Kollektivkunst gesetzt, sondern der Abhub von Kunst aufgehoben wird, dem Abhub der Gesellschaft den Laut zu finden. Und wer hier die abgeworfenen, kollektiven Gehalte deutet, ist durchaus einsam, nur bei sich selber; vielleicht gefällt es ihnen nur darum so gut, weil sie seine Einsamkeit wie die eines Clowns belachen können. Mit keiner Melodie der *Dreigroschenoper* kann man Wiederaufbau spielen; ihre ausgehöhlte Einfachheit ist nichts weniger als klassisch. Eher könnte sie schließlich doch in Bars gespielt werden, deren Halbdunkel sie jäh erleuchtet, als auf der Wiese gesungen. Es ist Gebrauchsmusik, die heut, da man im sicheren ist, zwar als Ferment genossen, nicht aber gebraucht werden kann, das zu verdecken, was ist. Wo sie aus Deutung in unmittelbare Sprache umschlägt, fordert sie offen: 'Denn es ist kalt. Bedenkt das Dunkel und die große Kälte.'" Theodor W. Adorno, "Zur *Dreigroschenoper*," in *Musikalische Schriften V* [Ges. Schriften 18], ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), 539–40.

The muck swamp particularly concentrated in some corner of every big city can be just good enough for the cinematic romance of climbing max culture, and for the rest, however, is really just a matter of police street cleaning procedure.²⁰

Criticism Today

As we have seen, music criticism is a phenomenon strongly linked to the bourgeoisie. Thus, in the late 20th century music criticism faced a decline which, to a certain extent, was due to the decreasing importance of classical music and its institutions for a broader public that is no longer a bourgeois one. Despite this pessimism critics are still present today. And they are still the object of artist's anger as a recent startling event in Germany shows when a performer, the director of the ballet in Hannover, attacked a FAZ-critic, Wiebke Hüster, with dog poop.²¹ Politer is the attack by Hugo Wolf, who in the well-known song *Abschied* based on a text by Eduard Mörike expressed the artists' anger at critics ironically. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that the critic's description in the song follows antisemitic stereotypes, as does Wagner's portrait of Beckmesser.²²

But how do successful critics fulfill their role today? I'd like to take Wilhelm Sinkovitz, Austrian's most prominent critic as an example, who writes for the traditionally conservative newspaper *Die Presse*. He comments regularly on all aspects of the classical music market: he reviews CDs, writes concert critiques, and comments on public debates in the cultural life, such as the development of opera staging, for instance. His voice serves a well-informed, interested public. According to this mission he occasionally organizes musical saloons where he presents the upcoming highlights of the cultural life in Vienna. By doing so he also takes up some concerns characteristic for musicology, such as promoting compositions by

20 "Der in irgendeinem Winkel jeder Großstadt besonders konzentrierte Drecksumpf kann für die Kinoromantik der Klettermaxekultur gerade noch gut genug sein und ist im übrigen aber wirklich nur eine Angelegenheit des polizeilichen Straßenreinigungsverfahrens." *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 23, 1929 [München]. Cf. Bertold Brecht and Kurt Weill, "Die Dreigroschenoper" (Kammerspiele der Josefstadt, Programm 2021/22), 12.

21 Vgl. Thomas Kramar, "Die fäkale Attacke eines Ballettdirektors auf eine Kritikerin lässt sich nicht rechtfertigen. Auch nicht durch unfaire Kritiken. Auch wer 'Schas' schreibt, soll nicht gezüchtigt werden," *Die Presse*, February 15, 2023, 17.

22 On antisemitism in Vienna around 1900 see: Kay M. Knittel, *Seeing Mahler: Music and the Language of Antisemitism in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

women composers through talking to musicians who presented a topical CD featuring music written by women, for instance. The difference is that he always acts as an advocate of good music – from the listener’s viewpoint. Concerning women composers for instance he writes:

You almost never hear music by women in operas and concert halls unjustly: German cellist Raphaela Gromes has tracked down women composers who have been neglected for centuries. Her album proves how many women have composed and above all: how good their music is.²³

In an article on the occasion of the death of Friedrich Cerha this can also be observed, when he judges the quality of Cerha’s compositions by distinguishing them from other types of new music that do not find the critic’s approval. With respect to Cerha’s *Baal* he wrote:

Cerha had indeed opened the ears of music lovers with this coup. The so-called New Music had lost its threatening potential; from now on, people again followed with interest what the composers had to offer in the way of novelties. [...] Cerha had succeeded in conveying to listeners that his works, which were always highly complex, were after all comparatively ‘simple’ to decipher.²⁴

This is the position of friend of music, *der Musikfreund*, the critical consumer who wants to attend good performances and listen to interesting works according to his educated taste. In the end with critics such as Sinkovicz it is still a bourgeois position that appears to have survived until today, even if it is more an exception than the norm and does only cover the interests of a small public, which even gets smaller and smaller. The criterion behind his positive evaluation of Cerha is a well-known one going back to the 18th century: only if the composer manages to find the right balance

23 “Fast nie hört man Musik von Frauen in den Opern und Konzerthäusern zu Unrecht: die deutsche Cellistin Raphaela Gromes hat Komponistinnen aufgestöbert, die seit Jahrhunderten vernachlässigt wurden. Ihr Album beweist, wie viele Frauen komponiert haben und vor allem: wie gut deren Musik ist.” Cf. Wilhelm Sinkovicz, “Die vergessenen Komponistinnen,” *Die Presse am Sonntag*, February 12, 2023, 42–3.

24 “Tatsächlich hatte Cerha mit diesem Coup den Musikfreunden die Ohren geöffnet. Die sogenannte Neue Musik hatte ihr Bedrohungspotential verloren, Hinfort verfolgte man wieder mit Interesse, was die Komponisten an Novitäten anzubieten hatten. [...] Cerha war es gelungen, den Hörern zu vermitteln, seine immer hochkomplexen Werke seien ja doch vergleichsweise ‘einfach’ zu entschlüsseln.” Cf. Wilhelm Sinkovicz, “Friedrich Cerha: Wiener Avantgarde-Urgründe,” *Die Presse*, February 15, 2023, 17.

between tradition and innovation, can musical novelties be accepted by a broader public.²⁵

As we may read in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, musicology is considered to profit from the decline of criticism by taking on “*some of the broader ambitions that once were the province of music criticism*.”²⁶ But is it really musicology which should adopt the task of criticism? Recently, Frank Hentschel explored whether scientific goals necessarily go hand in hand with evaluations. According to him, we have to differentiate between unavoidable evaluations which do not do any harm to scientific objectivity, and a careless attitude that does no longer aspire to scientific objectivity - under the pretext that it is impossible to be objective anyhow. From Hentschel's viewpoint it is the task of science to remain as independent and objective as possible.²⁷

We can find a similar position when the question of the political impact of science is discussed in a more general framework. Recently, in the journal *Forschung und Lehre* for example, an author pointed to the dangers of an outward political engagement of scientists on social media, which would compromise science's standing and credibility.²⁸

Nevertheless, it seems to be important to discuss the quality of art and its role for today's society. And it is science which might work on aesthetic criteria and different types of judgement in order to provide information which such a discussion could be built on. With respect to the situation in art, Marc Jimenez stressed the need for theories of modern art that help to understand the new relationships between art, institution, the work of art, and the public. Only with such information, an artistic creation might be defended that is not only determined by the art market, he writes.²⁹

This position seems to correspond with the attitude that many artists expect from themselves today, namely a critical position towards society

25 Cf. amongst others: Michael Heinemann, “Kritik. Emanzipation des Hörers im 18. Jahrhundert,” in *Kleine Geschichte der Musik*, ed. Michael Heinemann (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013), 145–57.

26 Anon., “Criticism,” 698.

27 Cf. Frank Hentschel, “Zur Rolle der Wertung in der Musikhistoriographie,” in *Musik – Politik – Gesellschaft. Michael Walter zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Kordula Knaus and Susanne Kogler (Berlin: Metzler, 2023), 339–58.

28 Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, “Problematisches Phänomen? – Zur Politisierung von Wissenschaft durch Social Media,” *Forschung und Lehre* 30, no. 2 (2023): 92–3.

29 Marc Jimenez, *La querelle de l'art contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 9–37.

and towards art itself,³⁰ even if it is no longer the only and dominating one.³¹ Such a critical position is also requested from the critic who becomes in a way the artist's partner. The art historian, curator and critic Marie de Brugerolle for instance, Professor at the Ecole des beaux arts à Lyon, establishes a dialogue with the artists whose works she was interested in.³² By doing so she becomes a precious counterpart for them. Criticism in such a sense would provide an alternative to the public institutions and the art market and thus be an important part in the process of writing a history of art.

If we consider younger critical voices which appear, for instance on the web, we can find a similar ambition. *Quinte parallele* an Italian website dedicated to criticism³³ describes the objectives of the initiative as follows:

Why follow Parallel Fifths? 'Because we ask questions: Parallel Fifths is a place for sharing ideas, debating and critiquing issues related to classical music and art music in general, and it is always ready to baste new reflections and get involved, to follow new questions and new stimuli to rethink the way we understand our musical culture. [...] Because we are an alternative: we position ourselves as a new way for the dissemination of musical culture in Italy, to be able to finally make the voices of musicians and various workers in the field heard without academic filters and without fear of taking sides in the cultural chessboard of our country.'³⁴

30 Cf. Michael Lüthy, "Vorwort," in *KünstlerKritiker. Zum Verhältnis von Produktion und Kritik in bildender Kunst und Musik*, ed. Michael Custodis et al. (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2006), 8.

31 Cf. Hanno Rauterberg, "Wo sich Geist und Macht vereinen, hat es das wilde, das unhaltbare Denken schwer. Eine junge Künstlergeneration träumt von Heilung und Versöhnung. Für radikale Kritik von links ist kein Platz mehr. Eine Verlustanzeige," *Die Zeit*, no. 4 (20 January 2022): 46.

32 Cf. Philippe Vergne, "Quelques mots émanés de paroles," in: Marie de Brugerolle, *Premières critiques* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2010), 5.

33 I thank Irene Biancardi, who attended my seminar on criticism in 2020, for this information.

34 "Perché seguire Quinte Parallele? 'Perché ci poniamo delle domande: Quinte parallele e un luogo di condivisione delle idee, di dibattito e di critica sulle questioni legate alla musica classica e alla musica d'arte in generale, ed è sempre pronta ad imbastire nuove riflessioni e a mettersi in gioco, a seguire nuove domande e nuovi stimoli per ripensare il modo di intendere la nostra cultura musicale. [...] Perché siamo un'alternativa: ci poniamo come una nuova via per la diffusione della cultura musicale in Italia, per poter far sentire finalmente la voce dei musicisti e dei vari lavoratori del settore senza filtri accademici e senza paura di prendere posizione nella scacchiera culturale del nostro paese." Cf. Redazione, "Un Manifesto per Quinte Parallele," *Quinte Parallele*, September 17, 2023, <https://www.quinteparallele.net/2020/06/un-manifesto-per-quinte-parallele/>.

By doing so the authors appear to take exactly the third position mentioned above between scientific interest, the artist's intention, and the market. In addition, by appearing on the web they make their voices heard in a novel way – demonstrating possibilities new technologies offer the old genre of criticism. When they describe their aim, they stress – as we have seen it with critics since 200 years – the social and aesthetical values of music in which they are interested: “*to bring classical music and its many artistic and social messages and values to the widest possible audience.*”³⁵

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35 “*portare la musica classica, i suoi molteplici messaggi e valore artistici e sociali al più ampio pubblico possibile.*” Ibid.

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