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What Is the Meaning of Musical Substance

I. The Problem

Music has an immanent problem of reference. What does music refer to, what does it mean, what does it say? As long as music was conceived of in analogy to aspects of the world, this question did not arise. Music gained its meaning from the texts it accompanied, from its functions in practical life or a standardized vocabulary. Instrumental music, however, as known since the late sixteenth century, increasingly emancipated itself from these references and developed what was later termed "absolute" music—a music that had "separated" itself from those references. Hegel called it "independent music."[1]

Music has this problem of reference more than any other art form. Even the most abstract form of painting, even autonomous sculpture and silent dance, point far more strongly—at least associatively—to the world than music can. For in nature there are no instruments, no constant frequencies, hence no pitches and above all no pitch systems, nor any rhythms that are ordered in simple numerical relationships and thus iterable. In short, there is no musical material in nature—apart from the song of birds, which admittedly appear in the manner of musical subjects. Musical material is thoroughly artificial, and therefore historical.

Depending on one's point of view, music that is purely instrumental seems either to develop no semantics of its own or—the other side of the same coin—a unique one, a language *sui generis*. The latter was encapsulated by Schopenhauer when he described a music that can exist entirely independently of the world as "an *unmediated* objectivation and copy of the entire *will*, just as the world itself is," a "*copy of the will itself*,"[2] and hence the "soliloquy of being" of which George Steiner emphatically speaks.[3] Both positions are difficult to convey to those with no understanding of such "absolute" music—which means the majority. Popular music predominantly features text, or is connected to a generally understandable function such as a dance or march; problems of reference do not arise among such listeners. But what reference and meaning do we find in the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in A Major KV 311? In the last, the famous *alla turca*, one could point (albeit somewhat helplessly) to the "Turkish"

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 951 ff.

2 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, ed. & trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman & Christopher Janaway (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 285.

3 "One might define music as the soliloquy of being," in George Steiner, *Errata: An Examined Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 75.

or “march-like” aspect. But in the first movement, a sequence of variations that redefines the character of a theme from each section to the next? Depending on one’s point of view, this music either has no semantics—what would it then be saying, what would it be denoting?—or a linguistic character of its own that manifests itself in *the way* it deals with the theme.

In this latter situation, it is common to fall back on formal-aesthetic categories and describe the music in technical terms: what Mozart does with the starting material *is* the music’s meaning. Musical meaning is thus the development of a musical idea in time. The musical idea, as Schönberg writes, is initially the theme on which a piece of music is based. We can call it an idea, even though it cannot be formulated in human language, because it stems from human thought; humans can also think in notes. For Schönberg, however, the musical idea is also the work’s whole, and hence the unfolding of the theme over the work’s total duration. Thus the idea is the mediation between the theme and the complete form, the relationship between part and whole.[4]

II. Immanence

The foremost exponent of a formal aesthetics—or despiser of an aesthetics of feeling [*Gefühlsästhetik*]—in the nineteenth century was Eduard Hanslick. He famously rejected the hasty equation of musical content with intrapsychic states or processes, which is to say feelings. Correlations are irrefutable: everyone experiences them, and brain scientists confirm them. Even Hanslick did not deny this. It is precisely in brain research, however, that an old fundamental problem repeats itself: are the feelings triggered by music identical to real-life ones? If so, they would be the music’s content [*Inhalt*]. We must be careful, however: a surprise such as an interrupted cadence to the submediant or a disturbance such as an obvious performance error are musical surprises and musical disturbances; the surprise of seeing a friend on the street after decades is a different matter. Such an encounter is connected to the emotional and cognitive complex of all experiences with and memories of this friend, a mixture that no music in the world could recreate. That is why Hanslick states that music only represents the “dynamic,” and hence the formal side of a feeling.[5] Hegel’s aesthetics is not far from this. According to his classification, music belongs to the group of romantic arts that represent subjectivity, and accordingly “apprehends itself in its subjective inwardness as feeling.”[6]

4 I have examined this approach using one of Schönberg’s most prominent works; see Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, *Gestalt und Stil. Schönbergs Erste Kammersymphonie und ihr Umfeld* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994).

5 Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), p. 9.

6 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (see footnote 1), p. 795.

Hegel's theory requires a definition of what exactly this subjective inwardness means. So decidedly anti-sentimental a work as Stravinsky's *Le Sacre* should, to follow Hegel, be something that essentially takes place inside the inner ear. Even non-expressivist music would remain bound to the region of subjective inwardness. This is because "what alone is fitted for expression in music is the object-free inner life, abstract subjectivity as such. This is our entirely empty self, the self without any further content. Consequently the chief task of music consists in making resound, not the objective world itself, but, on the contrary, the manner in which the inmost self is moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul."[7] This is not far removed from Hanslick's "dynamic" of feelings and Schopenhauer's statement that music expresses emotional states "*in themselves*, abstractly, as it were, the essential in all these without anything superfluous."[8] Hegel puts it in the following terms: "This object-free inwardness in respect of music's content [*Inhalt*] and mode of expression constitutes its formal aspect. It does have a content too, but not in the sense that the visual arts and poetry have one; for what it lacks is giving to itself an objective configuration whether in the forms of actual external phenomena or in the objectivity of spiritual views and ideas."[9]

I shall describe as "immanentism" that position which takes into account this non-referential status of music. It has a history. In parallel with the process of musical modernization starting with Beethoven (with Haydn as its forerunner), compositional thought emancipated itself from conventional practices and developed autonomous means of construction that expanded material—first of all in harmonic terms (nineteenth century), then as non-tonality, and later serialism with its total rejection of traditional morphology. Here Webern is the interface between tradition and an denucleated [*entkernten*], almost purified musical language limited to note relationships; he is the bridge spanning the cultural rupture of the twentieth century, which affected music as much as other areas. The renunciation of meaning, semantics, comprehensibility and language character typified many of the tendencies that developed in the decades following the Second World War.[10] Though it often assumed an exaggerated form, it shaped that music and musical thought itself.

Nowadays there is more immanentist music than one would think––in fact, everything that calls itself "non-intentional," many works by Cage, Feldman and Xenakis, much computer music, and in general algorithmic composition, sound art and installation, as well as much spectralism and complexism. Indeed, most of what we call "New Music" today is immanentist if it is not connected to a text,

7 Ibid., p. 891.

8 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1 (see footnote 2), p. 289.

9 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (see footnote 1), p. 892.

10 See the discussion of this in Albrecht Wellmer, "On Music and Language," trans. Wieland Hoban, in *Identity and Difference: Essays on Language, Music and Time* (Leuven University Press, 2004), pp. 71 ff.

is not meta-music or does not engage with outside "content." Immanentism is one of the logical consequences of a process of musical autonomization that has been in progress for over 200 years.

Hence there are many indications of immanentism in music. Its "content," then, consists of sounds organized in time according to what we call "musical logic," whereby works can be described and understood. No more than this—but neither any less.

III. Content

But is this argumentation of mine really correct, or merely one half of the truth? Despite many convincing reasons for immanentism, doubts do arise. If music reaches people in such a quantitative and qualitative way, it is fairly unlikely that, in the apparent absence of references, it is no more than "tonally moving forms" [*tönend bewegte Formen*], which Hanslick deemed the "one and only content and topic of music."[11] The billions of people who love music and make it their daily companion experience it as meaningful. My claim is this: music is not, or only in exceptional cases, heard immanently, defined as "within and only within the respective work or piece." [12] It can certainly happen if someone consciously adopts this attitude, for example by listening to a bagatelle by Webern as a totality of internal relationships. This is what Schönberg meant when he said, "There are relatively few people who are capable of understanding, purely musically, what music has to say."[13]

So is this non-immanentist listening automatically "pathological," as Hanslick believed?[14] Or does it rather offer access to the meaning of music beyond its formal-aesthetic definition? If music were no more than charming, intelligent form—as Kant, despairing at his inability to understand it, supposed—it would not enjoy such great cultural significance and, above all, a kind of appreciation that gave rise to a philosophical discourse around it. Music would then be comparable to good food and drink—also appreciated and a form of high culture, to be sure, but without a philosophical discourse. It was none

11 Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* (see footnote 5), p. 29.

12 I define a "work" as a musical unity with a beginning and an end when it is worthwhile to follow the complete course of the work. The concept is therefore not dependent on the question of the work or non-work concept as this appears in the discourse of the avant-garde. I speak of a "piece," on the other hand, when sections or fragments are meant, as is often the case in areas of the media world, in the entertainment industry, and with music in the public sphere.

13 *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 141.

14 Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* (see footnote 5), p. 5.

other than Kant, in fact, who stated that art "occasions much thinking,"[15] and that is precisely what music can do.

The aesthetics of form also has its limits, and these borderline cases are the decisive ones. The slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is a double variation on two themes whose keys have a mediant relationship. At the end, admittedly, there are two orchestral fanfares that cannot be explained in formal terms; they are foreign bodies, and mean something that cannot be understood in a structural-immanent [*satzimmanent*] fashion. They refer less to the character of the two preceding movements than to the "fanfare of terror" that opens the fourth. From Hanslick's perspective, the two fanfares can be explained with reference to formal connections within the symphony as a whole. At the same time they signal something beyond pure form—perhaps because they are fanfares, but also because they are ostensibly in the wrong place. Beethoven was a genius in using formal methods to create meaning beyond form.[16]

There are several possibilities for giving music meaning:

1. Music is connected to text, and thus to propositional elements.
2. Music is augmented by performativity, visual elements, and via its performance practice.
3. Music reflects on and thematizes the conditions of perception.
4. Music shares in historically sedimented meanings via the reception discourse.
5. Music works with other music (music about music, music with music, metamusic, postmodern music).
6. Music is connected to concepts.
7. Music contents itself with its sonic (and formal) immanence.

The last case is that of immanentist meaning; cases 1-5 are non-immanentist. They participate in the world, or in existing music. Case 6, music as concept-related, calls for a semantics that is neither form-immanent nor content-oriented. We will encounter it in the context of musical substance.

So what does "non-immanent" mean? This term has two meanings: first, going beyond the boundaries of the respective work, and second, related to non-music in general, meaning the world. Let us concentrate on the former, as this is not usually given adequate consideration: non-immanent also means related to the virtually infinite supertext of all music. Before we listen to a work or piece of music, we have already heard a great deal of music. Thus, when we listen to a work or piece of music, we relate it to the totality of all our musical

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15 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 192.

16 I have shown this using the example of Beethoven's Grand Fugue; see Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, "Beethovens Grosse Fuge – Multiperspektivität im Spätwerk," in *Musik & Ästhetik* 8 (1998).

experiences since childhood; we relate it to our total knowledge of music; and we link it to all experiences and reflections we have undergone in connection with music. That may be subjective, but not exclusively so, for it is embedded in a general culture, a *sensus communis* in Kant's sense, in a discourse—in short, in a language about music. All this is ignored in brain research, for example, and in general in empirical music psychology.

IV. The Musical Supertext

Theorists usually attempt to show the sense and meaning of music in a work-immanent fashion: they examine a piece of music or a work according to the traits it displays. As inescapable as this procedure may be, it is limited in so far as it ignores that every music is part of the total musical supertext. The listener relates any music to the totality of all music—spontaneously.[17] In this respect, listening to music is like understanding language. We understand the meaning of a sentence because we understand the (native) language. Every verbally articulated statement is part of the virtually infinite supertext of language. In music it is exactly the same: music, most of all tonal music, develops a supertext that is generally comprehensible and permits an internal differentiation of its vocabulary; the content [*Inhalt*]-aesthetic orientation of Wagner and Richard Strauss would be inexplicable otherwise. The existence of the musical supertext is the reason why listening to music in a purely immanentist way is so difficult, if not impossible, and why immanentist understanding—the heart of a "structural" conception of music—cannot strictly exist.

This does not make matters easier, for explaining the sense and meaning of a work would demand relating all its characteristics to all similar music—an extensive, even interminable undertaking. Musical connoisseurs do this, in fact, albeit subconsciously; they understand the music as one understands language. Brain scientists assume that when we hear a word, our minds instantaneously summon up all the associations this word has for us into a form of current consciousness storage, making this knowledge present. Something similar happens with music: we compare the sounds, rhythms, melodic motifs and harmonic connections with what we have heard before—and if we are adults, we have heard a great deal. We understand because we recognize similarities and connect them to form a multi-faceted network.

This supertext itself is not immanentist, however; it contains too much non-immanentist music. Furthermore, a music can also accrue meaning historically. Taken on its own, the melody of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" is barely more than a simple tune with a single interesting moment in the form of an accented synco-

17 If one analyzes music down to the smallest level (rhythmic shapes, motifs, sounds, chords), one will find that all or almost all of these elements are unoriginal. They are identical or similar to what one finds at the same level in other music.

pation. Its location in the most famous symphony of all time, however, and its connection to one of the great texts on freedom and fraternity in world literature, charges it with meaning that it could never gain immanently. The reception of this symphony made it part of the cultural memory. Since it was made the European anthem, and thus has been heard on countless occasions, it has fully become an expression of existential emotion for millions, both in Europe and beyond. Schiller's substance of universal humanity has reached people via the music. For an unexpectedly long time, that melody has carried a meaning that could never be explained in immanentist or formal-aesthetic terms.

If we speak of music's "content" [*Inhalt*], then, we must take into account the entire body of music along with the entire musical discourse. We only find something comparable in literature, which already develops an analogous structure through its medium, language: a virtually infinite supertext and the accompanying discourse. In this respect too, music resembles language.

V. Content, Again

More than any other art form, music affects the whole human being, including the body: the movements, the emotions, the sensuality of perception, the memory, the language center, our imaginative associations and even the logic of our thinking. (If a final cadence leads into an interrupted one, it has to be repeated; everyone understands this, even if one is consciously unaware of it, just as one expects "either" to be followed by "or." This is structural musical grammar.) Generally speaking, each type of music affects all these areas, with individually different emphases and modalities. Some areas are more collective (bodily movements), others more personal (associations, memories). Traumatic, and hence negatively connoted or libidinous, and hence positively connoted listening experiences are difficult or even impossible to neutralize.

This reveals an analogy with language: we grow into language too, we learn to know and understand it without being aware of it, and if we are aware of it, we cannot assume a position before or outside of it; we are already in the language, the only one from which we can observe ourselves. It is the same with music: one can hardly describe it to someone who—hypothetically speaking—does not know it, just as one cannot explain the color red to who has been blind from birth. The former would have to hear it, and the latter would have to see it.

In this sense, even music that does not resemble language—and therefore rejects this topos of music aesthetics—still resembles language. Music is mediated by language in a further sense, however, or more precisely by knowledge: just as we have heard a great deal of music before we hear a particular work, we have also accumulated knowledge. One calls this musical education, sometimes practical and sometimes theoretical. This knowledge too forms a virtually infinite supertext, and it accumulates primarily in the historical process.

Accordingly, listening to and understand music will be more informed in future, at least in principle. Everything we know about music in general, and about certain music specifically, is part of what we hear when we listen.

VI. Substance

Musical content [*Inhalt*]—initially—comprises the sounds in their temporal disposition; at least, this is how Hanslick defines it. This is a classical form-aesthetic definition, and thus a rejection of a content-aesthetic perspective, which looks for namable, identifiable denotations, propositional content, and unambiguous world-relations. We find them in illustrative music such as Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* or Honegger's *Pacific 231*, in program music, the bleating sheep of Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote*, and in narrated tales such as Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* or Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*.

There is a reason why this form of musical content-aesthetics came into disrepute in modernity. In the post-traditional situation, and hence in emancipated non-tonality, all those units of musical vocabulary were lost; their further use was not compatible with the newer material, beside which they appeared as foreign bodies. Instead, other aesthetic principles embarked on successful careers, for example concept, structure, material and performativity. Questions of substance [*Gehalt*], narration, expression or meaning remained the background for a long time after the Second World War. There were differences, of course; they were always more important to Nono than to Boulez, for instance, or to Stockhausen until his religious turn.

In the following, I shall distinguish between substance [*Gehalt*] and content [*Inhalt*]. Substance is what augments music so that it does not remain merely general inwardness. Hegel mockingly wrote: "On account of this lack of material not only do we see the gift for composition developed at the most tender age but very talented composers frequently remain throughout their life the most ignorant and empty-headed of men."[18] Such composers lack substance, for they overlook the second aspect: "[…] music must express the inner life as such, but this life can be of two kinds. To get at the heart of an object might mean on the one hand grasping it not as it appears in external *reality* but in its *ideal significance*; on the other hand, it can also mean expressing it just as it is living in the sphere of subjective *feeling*. Both modes of apprehension are possible for music."[19] Forms of substance are thus notional entities—ideas, poetic configurations, modalities and conceptions.

I will propose eight theses:

18 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (see footnote 2), p. 954.

19 Ibid., pp. 934 f.

1. Not all works have substance [*Gehalt*]; not all works are substantial.
2. Substance arises from individuation.
3. Individuation arises from decisions in the compositional process.
4. Decisions are decisions between several options.
5. Decisions require justification.
6. The reasons for these justifications lie in the aesthetic idea.
7. This aesthetic idea is the final authority for all decisions, and thus for all steps in the process of individuation.
8. The aesthetic idea thus realized is the substance.

These can be explained as follows:

1. It would be overly flattering to presume substance in all music, for substance is an advanced quality of which not all music is capable.
2. Because substance is the result of individuations within the work, and these must first be achieved, not assumed as self-evident.
3. Individuation in the work occurs through decisions at formally significant points—junctions, so to speak.
4. Decisions are not based on a proverbial gut feeling, however, but on an assessment of several precise, more or less equally valid possibilities.
5. Decisions are not based on the oft-cited composer's instinct, however, but on justifications; the options must therefore be examined.
6. If the composer has several possibilities, however, there must be a reason for choosing one option and rejecting the others.
7. This authority, which forms the point of reference for the process of reflection, is the aesthetic idea underlying the work. It offers a final justification, so to speak, for all decisions and considerations.

The composer makes many choices and decisions. One must choose the material, the compositional technique, the form, and then carry out internal differentiations. The more the post-traditional situation became historical reality, the more inevitable it was for one to make decisions incessantly. In the situation of aesthetic nominalism—i.e., the need for individual solutions following the expiration of traditional forms—compositional method consists not merely of technique, profession and "material," but rather necessitates a systematics for the combination of craftsmanship, form, and material in as work-specific a manner as possible.

The question is whether the composer actually wishes to justify these decisions, and whether the justifications yield an "overall meaning" and thus refer to an "aesthetic idea." If this is desired, the composer approaches what Schönberg called the "musical idea" [*musikalischer Gedanke*]. This was intended as the antithesis of style, which is established in a composer's output when a particular general compositional method is applied time and again—and indepen-

dently of the individual works' respective conceptions. The works then become examples of a style, but not of ideas, for those require a higher degree of individuation. The more a composer's works differ from one another, the more likely it is that they have substance, while works that are highly similar probably represent a general idea at a higher level: they are simply examples, not carriers of monadic conceptions. Substance thus arises when the style is individuated into the style-per-work. This is not possible simply through an individuation of the chosen material, but primarily through the individuation of the compositional techniques applied and of the formal decisions made. With given, and hence chosen material, it is chiefly the intervention in the form that favors the emergence of substance; form is not simply a general model, but through individuating interventions becomes narration, dramaturgy, a *concrete* course of events, action.[20]

This substance can be an intramusical one. The first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, for example, sets itself the goal of building an entire world with a single motif (and an extremely simple one at that), with the minimal imaginable material. But the substance can also have a world-relation; this is favored by the "philosophical" or "literary" composers. Such substance is far more difficult to realize, however; one must engage with this portion of the world and allow it to affect not only oneself, but also––this is the necessary level of engagement—the entire compositional architecture.

The substance of a work, according to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, is something that only articulates itself through an interpreting reception, most of all in the shape of philosophy. Precisely because this notion is now generally accepted, an artist—a primary producer—can conversely base a work process, as with a working hypothesis, on a substance that is aimed for. This does not guarantee that the substance interpreted afterwards will correspond to the artist's personal intention, but at least the artist has a program guiding the concretion of the work's genesis.

Of course, not every composer will intend a substance. One could, for example, feel a desire to compose an orchestral piece beginning with the most diffuse sounds—pitchless noise—and gradually, using the given orchestral resources, transform it into the absolute opposite: the shortest possible single impulse. Even if this were executed masterfully, the execution would nonetheless remain general and academic. This musical idea would only gain substance if the composer incorporated individuations at certain points in order to turn this general idea into an individual one; one would then be telling a *particular* story. This is precisely what Beethoven did in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony with the seemingly incongruous oboe melisma over a second inver-

20 Regarding the concept of action in Hegel, see *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 217 ff.

sion chord sustained at the fermata––an irruption of individual animation into an otherwise logically consistent, almost automated process.

Adorno offers a precise definition of artistic substance. The "spiritual substance" [*geistiger Gehalt*] is that which "transcends the factuality of the artwork:" "The spiritual substance does not float beyond the work's facture; rather, artworks transcend their factuality through their facture, through the consistency of their elaboration."[21] That is exactly what Adorno meant by this "consistency of their elaboration:" the elaboration [*Durchbildung*] is the totality of all work-specific decisions, while the consistency is the authority of the aesthetic idea, which justifies them. The aesthetic idea enters the work by this route and, in successful, can be read as substance. In other words, the only possibility is to envisage the substance as something that must have guided the work's genesis. In this way, the composer communicates with reception. The clearer one's aesthetic idea, the more precise one's decisions are, and the more courageous one's consistency, the greater the chance that the substance will develop and, as it were, become the work's truth content.[22]

This can perhaps be clarified by means of an example. A composer conceives a piece with completely immutable musical material: pitchless (white) noise, filtered in whatever ways. There are very few possibilities for shaping it: dynamic level, duration, and perhaps spatial disposition. A single intervention, if one chooses to make it an interruption, will allow a moment of silence. Here there are only two options: the location of the pause, and thus the proportion between what precedes and follows it, and the duration—a further proportion. This decision has to be made; it can only follow in relation to an aesthetic idea. (Whether substance can genuinely—rather improbably—be attained in this way depends on whether the composer is a genius.)

The substance can take on a life of its own alongside the musical phenomenon. If one were to change the two melodies in Ravel's *Bolero*, it would scarcely change the essence of the work: the expansive, unflinching orchestral crescendo with its constant rhythm. The conception is clear—but what of the substance? The musical strategy remains unchanged, and the unfolding of the music merely indicates Ravel's technical mastery. He barely had to make any

21 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 170 (translation modified).

22 It would be a misunderstanding to believe that the precision of the substance is synonymous with its unambiguity, in the sense of a positivistic, verifiable, indeed provable general identifiability. This would be inartistic and contradict the nature of art (see Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. Neil Solomon [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998], in which it is shown that the substance of art always contains an interminable process of appropriating understanding, and hence the potential for discourse and dispute). For reception to approach the substance approximately, or deficiently and uncomprehendingly, that substance must first of all exist in the clearest and most intense possible form. That is precisely the case in masterpieces, for each masterpiece constitutes a successful maximum of individuation.

decisions—except for the ending. For how should one end? The abrupt shift to E major, this brief moment of stasis, points precisely to this question. And then comes the decision: enough, off with its head! The bolero—this dance form—is executed (*La Valse* is, as well).

If my reflections are not mistaken, substance appears to be authoritative in a manner that is directly opposed to immanentism. One the one hand, it exceeds the pure aesthetics of form, as decisions about the further development of the music are made within the form, but cannot themselves be justified formally—rather, in terms of their "content." On the other hand, it enriches the music precisely in its autonomous linguality, as advocated by Hanslick, Schopenhauer, Hegel, and also Adorno. Substance is thus the irruption of a non-formal element that is nonetheless not content. The aesthetics of substance is thus neither an aesthetics of form nor of content, but rather something qualitatively other.

Whatever the case may be, substance—no matter how hard we strive to grasp it through language and concepts—remains an aesthetic idea in Kant's sense: "[…] by an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible."[23]

VII. A Substance-Aesthetic Turn?

In 1998, in the context of the historical transition from postmodernity to a Second Modernity, I mentioned a substance-aesthetic turn; I went on to thematize this more strongly in subsequent years.[24] Two paradigms seem to have been exhausted: material progress and self-referentiality, with material progress as the presentation of new sounds as an end in themselves and self-referentiality as the enactment of partial aspects of the existence of art itself. Both paradigms continue, and indeed creatively so; in this sense, the exhaustion is only relative. But the question is: do these paradigms still take priority, are they relevant to innovations, or have they not themselves become epigonal or tradi-

23 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (see footnote 15), p. 192.

24 See Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, "Neue Musik am Beginn der Zweiten Moderne," in *Merkur* 594/595 (1998); "Politik und Neue Musik," in *Das Argument* 253 (2003) (also in Mahnkopf, *Die Humanität der Musik. Essays aus dem 21. Jahrhundert* [Hofheim: Wolke, 2007], p. 96 f.) and "Thesen zur Zweiten Moderne," in *Musik & Ästhetik* 36 (2005) (also in ibid.). In these earlier essays, I made no distinction between "content-aesthetic" [*inhaltsästhetisch*] and "substance-aesthetic" [*gehaltsästhetisch*]; I consistently meant the latter. My postulation of the re-semantization of contemporary music was immediately taken up by the philosopher Harry Lehmann in "Avantgarde heute. Ein Theoriemodell der ästhetischen Moderne," in *Musik & Ästhetik* 38 (2006), pp. 5-41 (also: "Avant-garde Today. A Theoretical Model of Aesthetic Modernity," in Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf [ed.], *Critical Composition Today* [= New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century, Vol. 5], Hofheim 2006, pp. 9-42).

tional? (Ascertaining this would require a cyclically differentiating philosophy of art history.)

The retreat of these two central paradigms of modernity and the avant-garde foregrounded an age-old question: what does music say and what does it mean? Postmodernity attempted to answer it with methods 4 and 5 in the list above (see Section III). Postmodernity was the final attempt to counter the imminent loss of musical meaning by establishing a musical metalanguage in which heterogeneous stylistic traits would be juxtaposed and which, alongside its inherent forms of semantics, would develop configurations of meaning.[25] If one does not desire this (any longer), however, and is equally unwilling to return to purely formal-aesthetic restrictions, let alone a content-aesthetic solution, one arrives at the question of substance in contemporary composition. I have attempted to formulate a theoretical model showing how substance in music can be envisaged. It rests on contemporary compositional experiences, but can also be applied to earlier music.

What, then, does the substance-aesthetic turn mean for contemporary composition? Let us summarize the findings. The aesthetic idea of a musical work must be focused more strongly on the substance. This is not content, in the sense of a reference to the real world, but rather an intellectual or spiritual component—a thought, a conception, an idea—that is *not only* musical. It enters the work via the consciously controlled compositional process, and if the work succeeds, this substance becomes manifest. It is experienced or recognized, or at least initiates a discourse. The substance-aesthetic turn therefore demands experience and insight—two factors that are precisely not only musical. Insight is always insight into the world and life, not only into music. In significant works, this insight will constitute an increase in knowledge rather than simply duplicating what is known anyway.[26] Unquestionably, the element of experience is initially a musical one. If the music is substance-aesthetically individuated, however, there is a chance that this experience will go beyond the music and become life experience.

Translation: Wieland Hoban

25 See Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, “Theorie der musikalischen Postmoderne,” in *Musik & Ästhetik* 46 (2008), pp. 5-32.

26 If one concedes this, it becomes clear why in most cases, “political music” does not offer any new insights, as it simply states what is already known.