

Electroacoustic Music: reflections and prospects:

Music – For the Head or the Heart?

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At the beginning of the 1980's, the German new music scene witnessed a dispute between two German composers. One of them had already received world-wide recognition for his compositions for many years, and the other one ranks nowadays as one of the most important composers in the sense of *avantgarde* in Germany. I am speaking of Hans Werner Henze and Helmut Lachenmann. A dispute between two composers would not be worth mentioning – this can be observed every day – if it did not represent a fundamental problem in music, a problem with which composers, musicians, musicologists and music journalists are frequently confronted: What is the essential content of music and which criteria make music so immensely valuable to us? The dispute between Henze and Lachenmann focused on two main criteria that should be found in so-called *good* music: the intellectual and the emotional elements. Each of them accused the other of neglecting one of these criteria in their compositions within the context of music history. But at the same time, each claimed to be aware of both criteria. The German new music scene sided with Helmut Lachenmann, while Hans Werner Henze was surely the winner in Great Britain, one of his chosen places of *exile* at that time.

We can certainly observe two criteria in the composition and reception of music: the intellectual and the emotional elements. The former is the basis for a huge amount of musical literature. The practice of thinking in systems and structures, in historical contexts as well as in philosophical, psychological, and sociological realms has made music become a science that can be studied in many universities in the world. The scientific investigation of the historical development of music during the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe on an intellectual level necessarily led to a theory of cognition in which music, like science, seems to be dominated by parameters. The development of music throughout history could be compared with scientific research. Today's musical specialization, including many different styles and techniques, was predictable and seems to be a typical result of this phenomenon. Centers of thought and institutes of research like the Darmstadt *Ferienkurse* or IRCAM in Paris were founded in the 1950s and 1970s, respectively. Compositional styles became *schools*, philosophical ideas became *religions*, and the word *avant-garde* became a nightmare for many young composers.

When we look at the emotional element of music, we are generally confronted with helplessness. There seems to be no public discussion about the existence of this part music, this special element which makes an extraordinary experience out of music, which seems to be responsible for its original meaning, and which often leaves us deeply moved. There seems to be a power that makes us feel that music is an irrevocable part of our lives, a power that makes it possible to experience ourselves in a unique way, unequalled by any other art form. But to label this effect *emotional experience* does not suffice, because it implies a differentiation between intellect and emotion, between *head* and *heart*. And in fact, to think in these classifications, as we have done above, is pointless because each part cannot exist without the other. They constantly influence each other and must be seen as one entity, or at least as a symbiosis.

I think that it is impossible to find words to describe this special experience we sometimes have while listening to music. Globally speaking, we know that language is a common code for transporting information. But we also know that the impression we have while listening to music is always an individual process, specific to the music, the place, and the time. We can only scratch the surface when we mention the possible variation caused by associations, memories, moods and so on. These are all insufficient descriptions of a very personal or individual musical experience.

Investigations of these phenomena in psychology and sociology have tried to identify common criteria in this area. With the help of statistics, it was attempted to formulate possible theories about the complex effect of music. This led to the conclusion that hens lay more eggs when they listen to Mozart, for example, or that the productivity of an assembly line could be increased when the workers heard a particular kind of music. These results are comparable with the measurable effect on subjects when they are in rooms painted red or in

blue, for example. These studies produce empirical results but cannot predict the effect of music on one given individual. Statistically based results about the quality of music are just as misleading. Based on statistics, the Rolling Stones would be rated the best contemporary composers, Leonardo di Caprio the best actor and Claudia Schiffer the prettiest girl in the world.

What does all this mean for a composer at the end of the twentieth century? If we use the *Janus head* as a symbol for the above described two main criteria in music, we are in the special situation of only being able to look at one of the faces at a time. Unfortunately, the part which gives music its extraordinary place in our lives is situated on the other side of the head, which we are unable to turn. It shimmers through the face we can see, but we can only imagine how the other side could look.

Ultimately, this situation is a real opportunity for every composer because he or she has the freedom to choose the means, the freedom to learn, the freedom to decide how to compose. He or she has the freedom to decide whether to follow tradition or to look for an individual path. Experience with the term *avant-garde* has shown society trying to regulate the evaluation of new music in general. But the history of music shows us that discoveries were always made by individuals. The development of music will continue with or without the word *avant-garde*, but the evaluation of music remains a very individual process for each listener. So, in the end, the composer's criteria of evaluation are the only ones that are valid for him or her.

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