

# MUSICOLOGY AND THE FORCE OF POLITICAL FICTION: THE DEBATE ON POLITICALLY ENGAGED MUSIC AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1970S

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**1. THE DEBATE ON THE IDEA OF POLITICAL MUSIC AROUND 1970.** At the end of the 1960s, within the course of the general politicization of events around 1968, new leftist avant-garde composers felt driven to contribute to the political upheaval by means of their music. This attitude of clearly articulating one's own political ideas, ideologies, and biases was in utter contrast to the avant-garde climate of the 1950s, when European composers had avoided any nonmusical, especially political, association with music by availing themselves of serial techniques such as parametric predetermination, numerical codification, and permutation. In contrast, new-leftist intellectuals and artists at the end of the 1960s considered an apolitical attitude to be irresponsible in light of the societal reconfiguration thought to be underway. In the opinion of the new-leftist musicians, composers, and music writers, everybody was supposed to contribute to the desired sociopolitical change. The best-known case of political engagement among avant-garde composers is certainly Hans Werner Henze and his political about-face in the mid-1960s: Having consolidated his status in the so-called bourgeois concert hall in the 1950s, he now wrote decisively politically engaged music such as *Das Floß der Medusa* (1968), *Der lange Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha Ungeheuer* (1970–71), and *We come to the river* (1974–76). Moreover, he actively participated in the student movement by supporting demonstrations and hosting the wounded revolutionary activist Rudi Dutschke in his villa in Marino, Italy, after Dutschke was shot by a young fanatically anti-communist worker.

In keeping with this politicized climate that was shaping the contemporary music scene, German musicology was stirred by a debate about political—politically engaged or politically effective—music. Leading musicologists such as Carl Dahlhaus, Reinhold Brinkmann, and Vladimir Karbusicky as well as composers such as György Ligeti and Helmut Lachenmann explored the inner logic of the idea of political music. They focused on contemporary—mostly radical modern, avant-garde—music, in which the new-leftist political climate manifested itself particularly clearly. At conferences such as Über

Musik und Politik in Darmstadt in 1969,<sup>1</sup> Musik zwischen Engagement und Kunst in Graz in 1971,<sup>2</sup> and in the same year, Erster Internationaler Kongreß für Musiktheorie in Stuttgart,<sup>3</sup> and in a collection of interviews edited by the music writer Hansjörg Pauli,<sup>4</sup> musicologists and composers investigated questions such as the following: How does political music work? What kinds of effects does it produce? To what degree does music serve political purposes and change? What are the characteristic features of music that can be categorized as political?

However, even though the debate was undoubtedly carried out with intense engagement, it did not really proceed forward. To say it more bluntly: It did not succeed in clarifying the phenomenon. Reinhold Brinkmann, for instance, delivering a paper at the aforementioned conference Musik und Politik in spring 1969, began by announcing that he would examine the practice and theory of Hanns Eisler. He emphasized the importance of this investigation by claiming that Eisler represented the only serious, relevant approach to political contemporary music:

In the second part (B) the problem of the popularization of esthetic creations that is central for the political effect of music, will be taken up again. This problem manifests itself in the practice and theory of Eisler as *the only relevant approach* appropriate to uniting avant-garde music and folklorism on the basis of decisive political maxims. [my italics]<sup>5</sup>

Despite this program outlined at the beginning of his paper, within the course of his talk Brinkmann proceeded to demonstrate that Eisler's practice as well as his theory had failed: "Hanns Eisler's attempt, based on political-social maxims, to realize a folklorist music that, at the same time, should correspond to contemporary developments [auf der Höhe der Zeit], failed—in compositional-practical as theoretical terms."<sup>6</sup> However, if the only serious and relevant approach to political contemporary music, that of Eisler, proved to be ineffective, then it had to be concluded that there was *no* workable theory and practice of modern music and politics at all.

During the same lecture series, Tibor Kneif sought to specify the political-ideological character of music. As a first step towards achieving this, Kneif rejected the well-known thesis that music mirrors social and political constellations:

Music is no imperative correlative of a social and political constellation.<sup>7</sup> ... The idea that music is based on an image of reality is a sociological thesis. However, in order

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Stephan, ed. *Über Musik und Politik* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Otto Kolleritsch, ed. *Musik zwischen Engagement und Kunst* (Graz: Universal Edition, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Rummenheller, Friedrich Christoph Reininghaus, and Jürgen Habakuk Traber, eds. *Bericht über den 1. Internationalen Kongress für Musiktheorie 1971* (Stuttgart: Ichthys-Verlag, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Hansjörg Pauli, *Für wen komponieren Sie eigentlich?* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> The quote is grammatically incorrect and insofar not directly translatable: "In einem zweiten Abschnitt (B) wird das für die politische Wirkung von Musik zentrale Problem der Popularisierung ästhetischer Gebilde noch einmal aufgegriffen[: die] Praxis und Theorie Eislers als der einzige relevante Ansatz in der Geschichte der neuen Musik, Avantgarde und Volkstümlichkeit aufgrund dezidiert politischer Maximen zu vereinen". Reinhold Brinkmann, "Ästhetische und politische Kriterien der Kompositionskritik – Korreferat", *Ferienkurse '72*, ed. by Ernst Thomas. Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1973) 28–41, here 28. Brinkmann uses the terms "avant-garde music" and "new music" synonymously for modern music.

<sup>6</sup> "Hanns Eislers auf politisch-sozialen Maximen basierender Versuch, eine volkstümliche Musik zu verwirklichen, die zugleich kompositorisch 'auf der Höhe der Zeit' sein sollte, ist gescheitert, – kompositorisch-praktisch wie theoretisch." *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> "Musik [gibt] kein zwingendes Korrelat einer gesellschaftlichen und politischen Konstellation ab." Tibor Kneif, "Ästhetischer Anspruch und Ideologiegehalt im Musikalischen Kunstwerk", *Ferienkurse '72*, ed. by Ernst Thomas.

to make the ideological character of music evident, this thesis requires proofs, far too complicated, and speculative.<sup>8</sup>

These assertions did not categorically deny that an isomorphic relationship between music on the one hand and social and/or political constellations on the other existed. Yet the musicologist made clear that whether or not this kind of mimetic relationship existed, it could not be proven. On the contrary, it amounted to pure speculation. Kneif strengthened his thesis by investigating the practice of musical censorship in nondemocratic societies. The censor who decides whether a piece of music has to be forbidden or not does not know "from the beginning, what kind of political interpretation the listener will assign to the music".<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the same musical piece could in principle be attributed to either a leftist or a rightist orientation or to both; thus the ideological interpretations of music were fully undetermined. Building on this observation by Kneif, one reaches the following inescapable conclusion: Music is obviously no more or less politically dangerous than any other *non*-political medium. It can be the object of projection and attribution, the content of which however does not depend on the object itself but on the mere arbitrary act of the attributor. Despite this conclusion, Kneif still insisted that music is in fact not politically harmless:<sup>10</sup>

Because music appears to be apolitical, it could be misused and manipulated for political purposes.... Music's message which needs to be interpreted, stimulates interpretation that can include political ideologies.<sup>11</sup>

Even Carl Dahlhaus, who can be considered as the epitome of a clear thinker, got into logical trouble: In his paper titled "Thesen über engagierte Musik", delivered at the conference *Musik zwischen Engagement und Kunst* in October 1971, he began by defining the different meanings of the term *engagierte Musik* (engaged music). To clarify his extended definition of the term, Dahlhaus constructed two pairs of opposites. The first of these contrasted "music that dedicates itself to the means of a political, social or moral purpose",<sup>12</sup> i.e., music that has a specific political *purpose*, with a "subjective moment of the political or social engagement to the expression of which a composer felt driven".<sup>13</sup> The second contrasted music that possesses a specific, politically related *quality*: with, again, music that has a specific political *purpose*.<sup>14</sup> "The engagement of the musical work can be deciphered by means of signs and traces, i.e., the engagement is inscribed, incorporated into the musical work and thus is a kind of quality of the work".<sup>15</sup> In this light, the two

Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1973) 67–85, here 89.

<sup>8</sup> "Dass ihr... ein Wirklichkeitsbild zugrunde liegt, ist eine soziologische These, welche dazu, um die Ideologiefähigkeit der Musik evident zu machen, allzu komplizierter Beweise und noch mehr Mutmaßungen bedarf." Ibid., 88.

<sup>9</sup> "Von vorneherein...., welche politische Deutung der Hörer der Musik unterlegt." Ibid., 94.

<sup>10</sup> Music is "nicht politisch so harmlos, wie sie nach alldem den Anschein erweckt." Ibid., 89.

<sup>11</sup> "Gerade deshalb, weil sie sich ideologisch unverfänglich gibt, zeigt sich die Musik für Manipulation und Missbrauch besonders anfällig.... Ihre gleichsam interpretationsbedürftige Mitteilung [fordert] Deutungen heraus...., die ihrerseits politische Ideologie enthalten können." Ibid., 89.

<sup>12</sup> "Musik, die sich zum Mittel eines politischen, sozialen oder moralischen Zwecks macht", Carl Dahlhaus, "Thesen über engagierte Musik", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 133/1 (January 1972) 3–8, here 3.

<sup>13</sup> "Subjektives Moment des politischen oder sozialen Engagements, zu dessen musikalischem Ausdruck sich ein Komponist gedrungen fühlt." Ibid., 3.

<sup>14</sup> "Das Engagement [besteht darin], dass sich ein Stück Musik einem Zweck unterwirft" ["the engagement manifests itself in the musical work's submission to a specific purpose"]. Ibid., 3.

<sup>15</sup> "Zeichen eichen und Spuren eines bestimmten Engagements [, die vom musikalischen Werk] ablesbar [sind]." Ibid., 3.

oppositions reveal themselves as a triad, constructed from (a) the composer's intention to write engaged music, (b) the music's engaged function, and (c) the music's engaged quality as possible extended meanings of the term "engaged music".

Pair 1

**b: the music's function**

*"music that has a political purpose"*

**a: the composer's intention**

*a "subjective moment" of political engagement to which a composer feels driven"*

Pair 2

**c: the music's quality**

*"music that possesses a specific, politically related quality"*

**b: the music's function**

*"music that has a specific political purpose"*

In the next paragraph Dahlhaus implicitly corrected himself, by talking about these *three* different criteria: "The intention a composer seeks to achieve, the aesthetic character that adheres to the musical shape, and the social function it fulfills ... must be distinguished from each other."<sup>16</sup> However, the initial confusion was by no means reduced. The renowned musicologist went on to investigate the three criteria of "engaged music" without making explicit which criterion he was talking about at any given moment.

He further obscured the goal of his arguments by introducing additional dimensions of music that might harbor an engaged quality, e.g., "the sense of the compositional artwork". This criterion can be read as synonymous with the music's function (b) or the music's quality (c); and Dahlhaus indeed related it to all three criteria at the same time—the intention, the character (equivalent to the quality), and the function (equivalent to the purpose):

The discovery that, first, the political or apolitical effect of a work contradicts the intention of the composer and that, second, it is possible to enforce any social function upon a piece of music which contradicts its aesthetical character, should not lead to the exaggeration that intention, character and function are independent of each other. The sense of music is variable, but not voluntarily distortable.<sup>17</sup>

With all the ambiguities and contradictions of the debate on "politically engaged music", it was Dahlhaus who, in a lecture series of the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt of 1972, advanced an argument that in my opinion was suitable for closing the whole fruitless discussion. In his paper "Politische und ästhetische Kriterien der Kompositionskritik",<sup>18</sup> delivered before radically modern and for the most part highly politicized composers, Dahlhaus argued:

<sup>16</sup> "Die Intention, die ein Komponist zu verwirklichen sucht [a]), der ästhetische Charakter der dem musikalischen Gebilde anhaftet, [c]) und die soziale Funktion, die es erfüllt, [b]) müssen... voneinander geschieden werden", Ibid., 3.

<sup>17</sup> "Die Entdeckung, dass... die politische oder unpolitische Wirkung eines Werkes der Absicht des Komponisten zuwiderläuft oder dass einem Stück Musik eine soziale Funktion entgegen seinem ästhetischen Charakter aufgezwungen werden kann..., sollte nicht zu der Übertreibung verleiten, Intention, Charakter und Funktion seien unabhängig voneinander. Der Sinn von Musik ist zwar variabel, aber nicht willkürlich verzerrbar." Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, "Politische und ästhetische Kriterien der Kompositionskritik", *Ferienkurse '72*: 26. internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik ed. by Ernst Thomas. Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik 13 (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne. 1973) 14–27.

Politicians who avail themselves of music—as the New Left proclaims—have to be reproached in that they alienate music from its individual aesthetical, supernal nature. They are also suspect of trying to conduct politics, actually a serious business, in a dubious way in the medium of art instead of in everyday reality.<sup>19</sup>

To summarize this passage in my own words: Politics is a serious business and music is the wrong place for it.

Interestingly, in order to voice this argument, Dahlhaus claimed to present not his *own* opinion but rather to outline the *bourgeois* attitude toward political music. By choosing the term *bourgeois*, Dahlhaus strove to signal his own distance from that attitude, a signal especially necessary in the strongly leftist-intellectual climate of 1972 that also held sway in Darmstadt. Despite this distancing, however, Dahlhaus proceeded to align himself with the so-called bourgeois opinion:

The distinction by means of which music and politics are intended to be kept apart from each other is undoubtedly too severe. However the suspicion of politicians that avail themselves of music in order to cover their weaknesses, is by all means reasonable.<sup>20</sup>

According to Dahlhaus, the bourgeois demand to separate music and politics clearly was reasonable not only for political but also for musical reasons: Music that wanted to be politically effective had to address the masses, meaning it needed to be stylistically popular and—because of its irrational, i.e., emotionalizing quality—operate demagogically. The idea of a critical music, Dahlhaus continued,

is powerless in face of the fact that, under the present conditions, music which tries to make politics with popular means—and with unpopular means it is not able to achieve this—has not a consciousness-raising, but a thoroughly irrational effect.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, politically engaged, avant-garde composers such as those Dahlhaus was addressing at Darmstadt were really aiming to square the circle. For they were using avant-garde compositional techniques that are defined as being in opposition to popular taste for the purpose of writing political music that of necessity had to be popular. In Dahlhaus's words:

Political music which does not want to yield to the seduction of musical demagoguery, speculation, and irrationality [that is caused by the emotive dimensions of music], is faced with the dilemma, that it is meant as art for the masses, but remains esoteric [that is, incomprehensible, unpopular, just avant-garde] music. It leads a paradoxical or pseudo-existence as folk music for those initiated.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Der Griff der Politik zur Musik, wie ihn die Neue Linke proklamiert, setzt sich... nicht nur dem Vorwurf aus, dass er die Musik ihrem ästhetischen, jenseitigen Wesen entfremde, sondern auch dem Argwohn, dass die Politik, die ein ernstes Geschäft sei, unsolide in der Kunst statt solide in der Alltagsrealität betrieben werde." Ibid., 15.

<sup>20</sup> "So borniert die starre Grenzziehung sein mag, durch die [von seiten der Bourgeoisie] von der Musik die Politik und umgekehrt von der Politik die Musik ferngehalten werden soll: das Misstrauen gegen eine Politik, die der Musik bedarf, um ihre Blößen zu bedecken, ist durchaus begründet." Ibid., 15.

<sup>21</sup> "Ohnmächtig gegenüber der Tatsache, dass unter den gegenwärtigen Bedingungen von einer Musik, die mit populären Mitteln Politik zu machen versucht – und mit unpopulären kann sie es nicht –, nicht ein bewusstseinserhellender, sondern ein durch und durch irrationaler Effekt ausgeht." Ibid., 15.

<sup>22</sup> "Politische Musik, die es verschmäht, der Versuchung zu musikalischer Demagogie, zur Spekulation mit dem Irrationalen nachzugeben, gerät also in den Zweispalt, dass sie als Massenkunst gemeint ist, aber in Esoterik eingesperrt bleibt. Sie führt die paradoxe Existenz oder Pseudo-Existenz einer Volkskunst für Eingeweihte." Ibid., 20.

The arguments that Dahlhaus voiced in 1972 are certainly less then electrifying. They are actually fairly obvious. In light of this evidence of the impossibility of political music in a narrow sense, especially of political avant-garde music, this question arises: What are the reasons for the persistence of the idea of political music? Or more to the point: What is the fascination of the idea of political music for composers of modern and especially of avant-garde music?

To answer this question, I will draw on a theory by Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *Ce que parler veut dire*, published in 1982, Bourdieu analyzed the functioning of discourses. Among other criteria, Bourdieu pointed to two. First, that of mythical coherence: Mythical coherence results—unlike logical coherence—from mythical and thus law-like figures of thought that lend a discourse plausibility.<sup>23</sup> Mythical coherence is based on “the network of oppositions and mythical equivalences, a truly fantasmatic structure as the fundament of the whole ‘theory’”.<sup>24</sup> A paradigm for mythical coherence is the biblical Genesis for instance, which possesses a powerful authority because of its religious origin and its sublime age.

The second criterion advanced by Bourdieu involves permission to participate in the discourse in question, meaning that discourse formation is influenced not only by the individual participants who each contribute his or her ideas and “Denkfiguren” to the discourse. It is also—even more importantly—governed by the socially based power relationship that determines who is *allowed* to participate in a specific discourse community in the first place:

This censorship operates by means of sanctions of the field, functioning like a market on which the prices of the different modes of expression configure themselves; it imposes itself on all the producers of symbolic goods without making an exception to the authority whose authorized speech *has to be submitted to the norms of the official manners more than those of the other participants of the discourse...* In order to understand what can and what cannot be said in a group, it is necessary to consider not only the symbolic power that governs the group and which hinders singular individuals from speaking at all (for example, women) or fosters them to fight for the right to speak, *but also the laws themselves of the formation of the group* (the logic of conscious or unconscious exclusion, for instance) that operate as preceding censorship. [my italics]<sup>25</sup>

Both criteria constitute a kind of “social magic”, as Bourdieu dubbed it elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> “La théorie des climats est en effet un remarquable paradigme de la mythologie ‘scientifique’, discours fondé dans la croyance (ou le préjugé) qui louche vers la science et qui se caractérise donc par la coexistence de deux principes entremêlés de cohérence: un cohérence proclamée, d’allure scientifique, qui s’affirme par la multiplication des signes extérieurs de la scientificité, et une cohérence cachée, mythique dans son principe.” Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire* (Paris: Fayard, 1982) 228.

<sup>24</sup> Mythical coherence is based on “le réseau d’oppositions et d’équivalences mythiques, véritable structure fantasmatique qui soutient toute la ‘théorie.’” Ibid., 231.

<sup>25</sup> “Cette censure... s’exerce par l’intermédiaire des sanctions du champ fonctionnant comme un marché où se forment les prix de différentes sortes d’expression; elle s’impose à tout producteur de biens symboliques, sans excepter le porte-parole autorisé dont la parole d’autorité est plus que toute autre soumise aux normes de la bienséance officielle... Pour rendre raison de ce qui peut et ne peut pas se dire dans un groupe, il faut prendre en compte non seulement les rapports de force symboliques qui s’y établissent et qui mettent certains individus hors d’état de parler (par exemple le femmes) ou les obligent à conquérir de vive force leur droit à la parole, *mais aussi les lois mêmes de formation du groupe* (par exemple la logique de l’exclusion consciente ou inconsciente) qui fonctionnent comme une censure préalable.” Ibid., 168–69.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 111.

These same two criteria also influenced the course of the debate on politically engaged music around 1970. This I will demonstrate by reconstructing the origin of the mythical coherence of the idea of political avant-garde music.

**2. THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF POLITICAL MUSIC.** The idea of music's potential sociopolitical effect is a music-theory episteme that can be identified already in Plato's *Laws*. Here Plato defines specific types of music—sober and ordered versus vulgar and cloying—that influence the ethos of man positively or negatively and thus support or threaten the stability of the state. This music-theory episteme would manifest itself with unusual strength in connection with avant-garde music and thus, within the context of “1968”, lay the foundations for its—almost obsessive—zeal in the service of political change.

Immediately after the emergence of avant-garde music in 1908, a discourse developed that continually sought to link the typical characteristics of avant-garde music—atonality, disharmonious sound and instrumentation, fragmentary, dissociated style—with a specific, potentially destructive political impact.

Eckhard John and others have recently shown in detail that as early as 1918, only ten years after the birth of free-atonal music, right-wing music critics and musicologists had already attributed political—or more precisely, leftist—connotations to atonal modern music. They related it to the term “bolshevism” as a pejorative synonym for all sorts of communism. Accordingly, Adolf Diesterweg, who referred to avant-garde music in general as “the futurist tendency”, emphasized that he favored the term “musikalischer Bolschewismus”:

that I call the futurist direction [i.e., avant-garde music] musical Bolshevism! I feel that the spirit of decay, as it is created by the futurists, is alien to our innermost nature. I call this spirit Bolshevik because the foreign heresy of Bolshevism threatens to indulge an orgy of cultural destruction in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

Besides Diesterweg various other writers on music including Walther Krug, Adolf Weißmann, Ludwig Riemann, Max Chop, and Willibald Nagel propelled a discourse forward which described atonal music as a radical and negative art form rejecting valid orders and laws. In their opinion, it was not only left-oriented, but also revolutionary, threatening the stability of the state; it implied socialism, chaos, and anarchism.<sup>28</sup> Thus Walter Niemann, music writer, pianist, and composer, described expressionist music as “Extremely *radical* expressionism of the Schoenberg circle of the *leftists*”. [my italics]<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, the composers of modern music themselves, first and foremost Arnold Schoenberg, declared that music, all music, is in principle *apolitical*. This earlier passive defense—the composers' insistence on music's apolitical nature—was followed by an active strategy when certain composers, instead of rejecting modern music's political connotations, availed themselves of the conservatives' critique and transformed it into

<sup>27</sup> Diesterweg emphasized “Ich empfinde es nun einmal so, dass der Geist der Zersetzung, wie ihn die Futuristen predigen, unserem innersten Wesen fremd ist. Ich nenne diesen Geist bolschewistisch, weil die fremdländische Irrlehre des Bolschewismus auch in deutschen Landen eine Orgie der Kulturzerstörung zu feiern droht.” Adolf Diesterweg, “Aufbau oder Zerstörung”, *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* 17/16 (April 1920) 235–36, here 236.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Eckhard John, *Musikbolschewismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994) 47, 51, 60ff and more.

<sup>29</sup> “Extrem-radikalen Expressionismus des Schönberg-Kreises der *Linken*”, Walter Niemann, “Vom wahren und vom falschen Fortschritt”, *Zeitschrift für Musik* 88/7 (April 1921) 181–82, here 182.

a positive quality. In the second half of the 1920s, Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler, among others, proclaimed that they were indeed writing “political music”. They defined their political music as a sociocritical, politically revolutionary music that actively fought for the workers and for the socialist-communist movement.<sup>30</sup>

Not surprisingly, National Socialist policies after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 drew on the conservatives’ arguments. They—repeatedly if not continuously—aped the conservatives’ idea of modern music’s destructiveness and its (National Socialist) state-threatening character in order to justify its persecution and elimination. Thus Hans Severus Ziegler, organizer of the exhibition *Entartete Musik* (Degenerate music), explained:

The exhibition presents a picture of a veritable witches’ Sabbath portraying the most frivolous intellectual-artistic Cultural Bolshevism, and the triumph of subhumanity, arrogant Jewish impudence, and complete mental gagaism.<sup>31</sup>

As I have demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>32</sup> the political connotations that had been introduced and established before 1933 lasted even after the capitulation in 1945. The Allies, especially the Western Allies, assigned modern music (and avant-garde culture in general) an important role within the postwar reeducation program, drawing on the image of modern music as it had been constituted during the previous 25 years. The persecution and suppression of modern music by the National Socialists indicated that these fascist rulers must have recognized modern music’s inherent potential for political education as a threat to their power. And if modern music possessed this antifascist potential for political enlightenment—so the reeducational logic went—it could also serve as a perfect tool for a reeducation that aimed not at communism and revolution, as the conservatives and National Socialists of the 1920s and 30s had argued, but at tolerance and democracy.

How was this discourse on the political impact of modern music relevant to the idea of political music around 1970 in German musicology? The answer is fairly simple: The same impetus for political change and democratic improvement, inhering in the idea of radical modern music ever since its naissance in 1908, was also operative in the 1960s and thus was easily revived within the context of the post-1968 politicized leftist climate.

**3. MYTHICAL COHERENCE AND DISCOURSE PARTICIPATION AS DETERMINING FACTORS OF THE 1970 DEBATE ON POLITICAL MUSIC.** This rough history of modern music’s political image that I have drafted on the basis of writings by Albrecht Dümmling and Peter Girth (1988), Michael Meyer (1991), Eckhard John (1994), Erik Levi

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<sup>30</sup> John, *Musikbolschewismus*, 318 and 319.

<sup>31</sup> “Was in der Ausstellung ‘Entartete Musik’ zusammengetragen ist, stellt das Abbild eines wahren Hexensabbath und des frivolsten, geistig-künstlerischen Kulturbolschewismus dar und ein Abbild des Triumphes vom Untermenschentum, arroganter jüdischer Frechheit und vollständiger geistiger Vertrottung.” Quoted in Albrecht Dümmling and Peter Girth, eds. *Entartete Musik: Dokumentation und Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: der kleine verlag, 1988) 135.

<sup>32</sup> Beate Kutschke, “Die Huber-Gottwald-Kontroverse: Die Inszenierung der Neuen Musik als politische Manifestation”, *Die Macht der Töne: Musik als Mittel politischer Identitätsstiftung im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Tillmann Bendikowski, Sabine Gillmann, Christian Jansen, Markus Leniger, and Dirk Pöppmann (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2003) 147–69.



(1994), and Friedrich Geiger (2004)<sup>33</sup> as well as my own findings<sup>34</sup> has shown that the continual attribution of a political, and first and foremost a revolutionary, leftist and/or world-improving character to radical modern music has made this political quality an integral component of the identity of avant-garde music. In this light, the impassioned debate around 1970 reveals itself as anchored—or better, bound up—in a long-stable *Denkfigur*. In consequence, the alternative, undoubtedly plausible concept—that radical modern music is per se apolitical—had become unthinkable.

Let us return to Bourdieu and his two criteria for the functioning of discourses: mythical coherence and permission for discourse participation. These criteria explain the contradictory and confusing debate on politically engaged music in the early 1970s: When Dahlhaus and his colleagues performed their tightrope-walk between exploring without bias the prospects of politically engaged music on the one hand and critically exposing the immanent weaknesses of this concept on the other, they were submitting to “social magic”, to the magical social power that also operates in the musical and musicological field.

The mythical coherence that imparted such unbelievable force to the debate on politically engaged music was based on the myth of modern music’s political impetus, a myth which, rooted in Plato’s theory, had developed since 1908. This myth is indeed based on magical modes of cognition, namely, on analogical thinking that, in aesthetics, survived under the label of *mimesis*: It is analogical thinking to suggest that modern music threatened the harmony and stability of the modern state just because it was formally and harmonically disharmonious, fragmentary, unstable, and dissociated. Such isomorphic figures of thought are far too familiar to be discussed in detail here. It is important, however, to be aware that the power of mythical coherence obviously paralyzed the majority of the musicological analysts and caused them to be caught up in contradictions.

Bourdieu’s second criterion—permission to participate in discourse—explains why established musicologists like Dahlhaus and Brinkmann had, officially at least, to defend the concept of politically engaged music even though they were not fully convinced of its plausibility. The powerful mythical coherence possessed by the idea of political music was obviously so strong that it drove even the authorities, the coryphées, to commit themselves to this discourse and its fictions—so as not to risk being punished with exclusion from the discourse community, according to the laws of discourse participation as Bourdieu outlines them in *Ce que parler veut dire*. Consequently, modern music’s political image could not be simply ignored, or rejected by better, more rational arguments. If Dahlhaus had directly questioned the idea of politically engaged avant-garde music without paying tribute to the mythical power of this idea and its advocates, he would have been behaving like Copernicus and Galileo who, in claiming that the earth revolves around the sun, hoped to convince the Church of their scientific insight with purely rational evidence—and who were punished finally with a ban. To avoid a similarly fruitless enterprise, Dahlhaus aligned himself with the discourse on political music. But he did so in order to change it. He argued carefully: He even accepted illogical arguments, pretending to commit himself to the myth of a political

<sup>33</sup> Dümmling and Girth, eds. *Entartete Musik*; Michael Meyer, *The politics of music in the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); John, *Musikbolschewismus*; Friedrich Geiger, *Musik in zwei Diktaturen: Verfolgung von Komponisten unter Hitler und Stalin* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2004); Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (Basingstone: Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Kutschke, “Die Huber-Gottwald-Kontroverse”.

music, in order to present real and logical arguments that revealed the impossibility of the idea of a political music. This is the reason for the unusually contradictory and diffuse rhetoric in “Politische und ästhetische Kriterien der Kompositionskritik,” still found in the following quote:

The idea of a “critical” or even “emancipatory” music is a daydream, realized in scattered attempts, but which almost never exceeds the esoteric circle. However, it is powerless in light of the fact that under current conditions music that tries to make politics by popular means—and with unpopular means this is impossible—produces not a clarifying but an irrational effect.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Die Idee einer ‘kritischen’ oder gar einer ‘emanzipatorischen’ Musik ist ein Wachtraum: realisiert in verstreuten Ansätzen, aber über esoterische Zirkel kaum hinausgedrungen. Jedenfalls ist sie ohnmächtig gegenüber der Tatsache, dass unter den gegenwärtigen Bedingungen von einer Musik, die mit populären Mitteln Politik zu machen versucht – und mit unpopulären kann sie es nicht –, nicht ein bewußtseinserhellender, sondern ein durch und durch irrationaler Effekt ausgeht.” Dahlhaus, “Politische und ästhetische Kriterien”, 15.