

Tempting of Speech in Music Education: Reflections on Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*

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Abstract

The article deals with the temptation of speech in the teaching of music, as highlighted in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. Within the framework of the teacher-pupil, pupil-narrator and narrator-reader dialogue in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, a new perspective on the perception of music is formed without a single note being played. Words are meant to take us to imagery. Correspondingly, is it possible to talk about the music that exists, to construct ideas logically, but to be distant from the identity of what is heard? Such questions are the basis of the hermeneutic spiral of analysis-interpretation and the subject of teacher-pupil dialogue, where true insight can be born.

Keywords

Thomas Mann; education; philosophy of education; music theory; composition.

Introduction

Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1943–47) contains inexhaustible suggestions inviting music education or education in general – this novel deals with the life of the fictional composer Adrian Leverkühn (1885–1940), who studied composition and theology in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century.

Complexity of philosophical dialogue is a definitive trait of Faust material – Radim Palouš discussed it in detail with the example of the theatre play *Pokoušení* (1985, Eng. *Temptation*) by Václav Havel. Doctor Foustka (or 'Faust') attempts to bewitch Markéta. This is a situation which takes place at least five levels – (actual) philosophical speech itself, Foustka's intention to acquire something that he desires, the influence and mysterious power over the speech of Fistula (or 'Mephistopheles'), Markéta, who is astonished at the speech, and a spectator who, in her capacity as an actor, perceives this complex whole. (Palouš 2011, 86)

Based on this example, one can even describe the musical education outlined in *Doktor Faustus* at various levels. For starters, one can interpret the description as following the path of the education of Adrian Leverkühn, alias Doktor Faustus. However, the narrative is provided by his friend, the philologist Serenus Zeitblom. As a passionate connoisseur of music and an occasional Viola da Gamba performer, he has attended a number of lectures about music with Leverkühn, and he wanted to broadcast and analyse his friend's music from his own perspective. But, in the background, it is also possible to observe the third level – the private thoughts of Arnold Schönberg and Theodor W. Adorno about contemporary music,

even if they are not quoted in the book. In addition, the speech of Mephistopheles in Chapter 25 is largely based on a quote from Theodor Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* (1940–47), without mentioning it explicitly. The fourth level represents a musical education of the reader, for the musical terms are often extended with lexical explanations, e.g., 'the double counterpoint' like 'two simultaneous voices, each of which could be upper or lower voice, and this makes them interchangeable.' (Chap. 9) The reader is inconspicuously educated in this way. The final level of education embraces the reader's contemporary thoughts on music pedagogy – the book generates them in the reader's head based on experience and knowledge appropriate to the reader's epoch.

These levels of musical education may be existent not only in a book, but also in the teacher's monologue, or in dialogue with a pupil, for whom recognition of the various levels of conversation, and acknowledging such influences for themselves, is of major significance. Then an attempt is made to exert these influences and thoughts in *Doktor Faustus* from the perspective of music theory and musical pedagogy: 1) The influence of Theodor Adorno and its dialectical conception of music history, 2) the influence of Arnold Schönberg as a teacher, who has been involved with 'arts' and 'crafts' as well as aesthetic categories, 3) the inspiring thoughts on philosophical dialogue originating from the philosopher Radim Palouš and the music theorist Ulrich Kaiser.

Dialectical conception of music history

A music pupil has become accustomed to dialectical comparisons of Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Händel, Richard Wagner and Johannes Brahms, Arnold Schönberg and Igor Stravinsky. This being the situation, these antipodes only partially reveal the truth, but they speak deeply about the ones behind their concepts. The composition students at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, during the first year of their studies, go into more depth studying the *Philosophy of New Music* of Theodor Adorno, which pits two musicians against each other: Schönberg as 'progress' (Adorno 1975, 36) and Stravinsky as 'Regression' (Adorno 1975, 152).

As a lumped-together drawn-up concept: the assembly of Schönberg and Stravinsky presented by Thomas Mann is employed with a composer who has entered into a contract with the devil, i.e., Leverkühn alias Doktor Faustus. This composer has at his disposal a 'strenger Satz' method (inspired by Schönberg) as well as Stravinskian concepts relating to folk and prehistoric music. Exactly how this synthesis has a stimulating influence on a composer can be seen in music by Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998). The merging of the identities of Stravinsky and Schönberg, the combination of old and new music (polystylism) only became relevant in the second half of the 20th century. For Alfred Schnittke, *Doktor Faustus* became a source of lifelong inspiration, which transferred not only Mann's 'montage' concept, but also the complexity of the various historical forms of the German language present in *Doktor Faustus*, into his music. (Godár 2012, 51–52) Moreover, German composer Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012) writes his *Third Violin Concerto* in 1997 following 'Doktor Faustus', where the violin represents the fate of the individual and the orchestra – his social connections.

Thomas Mann further employed Schönberg's revolutionary idea in another dialectic pair: Wagner-Brahms. Brahms was selected as a more progressive figure, although back in his time this claim was more true of Wagner. However, Schönberg wanted to present Brahms' 'Developing Variation' technique as a precursor to his 'Twelve-Tone Technique' (Schönberg 1989, 33), such that Schönberg himself could be classified in the same category as Beethoven and Brahms in the context of German music history. However, one thing that has remained unmentioned is that Brahms himself (possibly) was able to view this construct only as a 'stupid gimmick and always an indication of the poorest kind of invention'¹ (Brahms 1915, 216) – similar attempts at analysis came from him. The fact that Schönberg is not quoted in Mann's novel could make it harder for the reader to deal with the information in a critical fashion. However, one question that keeps coming up is whether or not a quote which is correct is capable of generating the feeling of a violation of the artistic integrity of the work (see Mann 1949, Chap. III), the likes of which occurred initially at the end of the novel and appeared only in the second edition at the instigation of Schönberg:

It does not seem superfluous to inform the reader that the method of composition presented in Chapter XXII, known as the twelve-tone or row technique, is in truth the intellectual property of a contemporary composer and theoretician, Arnold Schoenberg, and that I have transferred it within a certain imaginary context to the person of an entirely fictitious musician, the tragic hero of my novel. And in general, those parts of this book dealing with music theory are indebted in many details to Schoenberg's Theory of Harmony. (Mann, 534)

Arts and crafts as aesthetic categories

The challenge posed by the dialectical perception of music is embodied by the abstract categories which were particularly emphasised in *Doktor Faustus*: 'arts' and 'crafts'. Thomas Mann represents concrete personalities in this way – an 'artistic' French school represented with Jules Massenet (1842–1912) and a German school of 'crafts' with Anton Bruckner (1824–1896). Massenet encouraged his composition students 'to commit to their own production, regardless of whether their technical ability was sufficient to write a flawless sentence'² (Chap. 37). On the other hand, with Bruckner, students were required to compose 'the sacred craft and the basic elements of harmony throughout the year, and practice the strict compositional practice method, before their work would be admitted'.³

The difference between one's own production/'art' and technical ability/'craft' is very debatable in the modern day. Historical Compositional Practices, such as the Renaissance motets of Palestrina or the baroque chorales and fugues of Bach, need to be taught, preferably as pseudo style copies – only such a fixture could be rated with such pseudo-rules. (Schröder

¹ 'dumme Spielerei und immer ein Zeichen armseligster Erfindung' (Brahms 1915, 216)

² 'zu eigener Produktion, ganz gleich, ob ihr technisches Können ausreichte, einen fehlerlosen Satz zu schreiben' (Chap. XXXVII)

³ 'Jahrelang das heilige Handwerk, die Grundelemente der Harmonie und des strengen Satzes üben, bevor ihnen erlaubt war' zu komponieren. (Chap. XXXVII)

2015, 21) The same applies for simple harmonic exercises. In modern day music pedagogy, ‘crafts’ have an unacceptable function recognised with them, although one could argue not just about the pseudo-rules but also the reasons as to why one is required to imitate the style of concrete composers and not other ones. These questions on the topic of meaning are also related to the stylistic pluralism of postmodern art – if ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’ are no longer as closely associated as they used to be. (Jeßulat 2015, 7) However, in this sense, one can delve further into the subject of the relativity of historical hermeneutics.

In the modern day, the quote from Schönberg’s theory of harmony is also a debatable and amazing one: ‘I eliminated aspects of bad aesthetics from the composition students, but I have given them a good craftsmanship in its place.’⁴ (Schönberg 1922, 7) However, ‘good’ craftsmanship (in sense of apprenticeship) can be encumbered only as a result of the generation gap between teachers and pupils, as is implied in *Doktor Faustus*:

Teacher and pupil were essentially quite far apart in matters of musical instinct and intent – indeed, any aspirant in the arts finds himself almost by necessity dependent on the guidance of a master of his craft from whom he is already half-estranged by a generation’s difference. Things only go well if the master nevertheless surmises and understands these hidden tendencies – sees them ironically, if need be – but is careful not to stand in the way of their development. (Mann, 160)⁵

Which of the levels of philosophical dialogue can be present in the teaching of ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’ in music? The dialogue between pupils and teachers resembles the philosophical dialogue between Faust and Markéta, with multifaceted influence levels. The pupil can be in the position of Markéta, who listens to the philosophical speech uncritically enthralled. The risk recognised with Faust-like education is that, as a result, the music educator can be either grounded ‘in a metaphysical, sentimentalist, socio-critical or empiricist teleology’ (Koopal 2020, 103) or ‘would lose h[im]self in seductive tactics, leading the pupils astray by impressing them with h[is] own musical ideas and preferences.’ (Koopal 2020, 110)

Tempting of speech in music education

The discussion between teacher and pupil as the centrepiece of musical education is dependent on the consensus that music expresses the ‘unspoken’, which makes talking about music particularly difficult. Music itself is also ‘ambiguous’, and Leverkühn too acknowledged this in *Doktor Faustus*. (‘That music is ambiguity as a system.’⁶), (Mann 1947, 61) ‘Ambiguity’ in connection not just with discussion about music, but also with musical script, can also lead

⁴ ‘Ich habe den Kompositionsschülern eine schlechte Ästhetik genommen, ihnen dafür aber eine gute Handwerkslehre gegeben.’ (Schönberg 1922, 7)

⁵ ‘Lehrer und Schüler waren nach ihren musikalischen Instinkten und Willensmeinungen im Grunde recht weit auseinander, wie ja in der Kunst fast notwendig der Strebende sich auf die handwerkliche Führung durch ein generationsmäßig schon halb entfremdetes Meistertum angewiesen sieht. Es ist dann nur gut, wenn dieses die heimlichen Tendenzen der Jugend doch errät und versteht, sie allenfalls ironisiert, aber sich hütet, ihrer Entwicklung im Wege zu sein.’ (Mann 1947, 200)

⁶ ‘Daß Musik die Zweideutigkeit ist als System.’ (Mann 1947, 61)

to the thought that concrete sound reality with a performance/‘interpretation’ for the purpose of ‘analysis’ – is more suitable for the job; as is claimed by the contemporary composer Georg Friedrich Haas (*1953). (Haas 2012, 15) ‘Analyses’ which are based only on musical notation, are capable of highlighting facts which cannot be heard. (Janz 2018, 240) The question of analysis access – whether ‘musical notation’, ‘interpretation’ or ‘analysis’ itself is used for the purpose of talking about music – is also a matter of objectivity (based on musical notation) and subjectivity (based on the sound reality of the ‘interpretation’). Haas’ suggestion is based on the condition that this ratio has been inverted, and that only sound reality can work objectively.⁷ Music ‘analyses’ by Thomas Mann, in this case analyses of silent material which constitute a pure product in Thomas Mann’s literary fantasy, play around with the significance of the objectivity/subjectivity pair. And, because such ‘analyses’ cannot be falsified (reading the musical notation and listening to the music are obviously not possible), Mann’s analyses should be viewed as an artistic summary. However, seeing as it is possible to talk about music in such a colourful way as is the case in *Doktor Faustus*, does this mean that such discussion about music amounts to an insurmountable temptation to engage in discussion?

In the dialogue between Faust and Markéta, or Doktor Faustus-Leverkühn and Mephistopheles, or maybe Thomas Mann and the reader, one should differentiate between artistic summary and the truth, as it is with the quotes of Schönberg and Adorno which are explicitly not mentioned in *Doktor Faustus*. The same applies for the art of the dialogue between teacher and pupil, preferably characterised by mutual humble listening. It is always necessary to rediscover a true view, as Radim Palouš states. However, this arises not in a teacher-pupil dialogue; rather, the true insight is born only in the dialogue participants (Palouš 2010, 64) The tradition of Socratic dialogues makes such conversational distance achievable. From the perspective of music theory, the music theorist Ulrich Kaiser discusses the problems recognised with Socratic dialogues. The teacher asks questions so that the pupil can discover an answer by himself/herself; an answer which the teacher knows is usually required to allow the lesson to progress further, before crafting rules may be shared. A problem will arise if a pupil, by virtue of their creativity or autonomy, refuses an answer, or if the teacher’s body language is unclear, or if the question lies outside the pupil’s capabilities. Kaiser described as

⁷ This point would require a more elaborate discussion. Haas designed this solution primarily for the analysis of contemporary music, in which a musical score has a number of other possible functions than ever. A musical score can for instance only vaguely suggest a possible sound result (graphic score, aleatory techniques), or it can in certain cases be music itself (computer music, music for mixed tape). The music composer Dieter Schnebel (1930-2018) reached the very limit of the possibilities of interpretation, who published during the budding avant-garde of the 1960s the book-musical score *MO-NO, Music to read* (1969), where music is supposed to be created in silence in the mind of the reader. ‘The reading of the book is intended to stimulate music in the listener’s head, so that in being alone in reading – mono –; one becomes the performer of music, makes music for oneself.’ (Schnebel 1969, Introduction) This concept of inspiring musical scores is very close to that of the illusory narrative of music in *Doktor Faustus*. This has unfathomable consequences for the interpretation of contemporary music and for the contemporary music analysis. The sound reality is different for each listener, so the ideal and objective would be a group analysis as a method introduced by Ralf von Appen (Appen 2015, 3) including cultural and educational background, which could reflect the perception of music of each listener, rather than individual interpretations of brilliant analysts, which can always hide inside the tempting of speech in the intention of own interests.

an important experience, when the teacher tried only to ask questions in class that he himself did not know before: The teacher then ended up in a situation in which the birth of a new idea or thought could not be ruled out. (Kaiser 2010, 200–201)

This new idea – the new true view emerging in participants in the dialogue – should remain ‘unspoken’ in the case of musical education, and should ideally be recognisable to composers in their ‘compositions’ and to performers in their ‘interpretations’.

Conclusion

A reader of the novel *Doktor Faustus* may find themselves bewitched by the colourful representations of non-existent music while at the same time feeling that there is music education taking place. The complexity of the novel *Doktor Faustus*, with the various thoughts of music theorists, makes it particularly hard for the reader to appreciate the true view of things. Another point with a similar meaning: a music teacher who is burdened by various influences may hold a monologue which might impart something other than the speech itself. On the other hand, discussion about music is something which can stimulate creativity; for example, this was displayed by the composers Schnittke and Henze, who were inspired by *Doktor Faustus* in his compositions, or by the composer Schnebel and his *Mo-No, Music to read*.

The risk of Faust-style tempting of speech is an ever-recurring challenge in music pedagogy or in pedagogy in general, which is essentially based on the teacher-pupil dialogue. It would seem necessary to reinstate Socratic dialogues, without all the temptation. It is something that, along with Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, can resonate extraordinarily with contemporary music theory education.

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