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## **Elektronischer Artikel**

**Frede V. Nielsen: Quality and Value in the Interpretation of Music from a  
Phenomenological Point of View – a Draft**

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## **Quality and Value in the Interpretation of Music from a Phenomenological Point of View – a Draft**

This text dealing with *Quality and value in the interpretation of music from a phenomenological point of view* is a revised version of a lecture given at *Norges Musikkhøgskole (The Norwegian State Academy of Music)* in Oslo in May 2000. It was then part of a seminar under the doctoral programme of this institution. I still call it a draft because I hope to get the opportunity to go much further into the huge problem of quality and value as related to music and music interpretation, an issue that is also of the greatest importance to music education.

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### **Introduction**

During the latest decade both politicians and various professional groups have been increasingly preoccupied with concepts like "value", "value norms", "quality", "quality development", "quality measurement", "quality appraisal", "quality assessment". This also applies to artistic, scientific and pedagogical, including musical and musico-pedagogical, activity. It is rare, however, for the basic assumptions and criteria of this type of discourse as well as of concrete appraisal and evaluation to be systematically and comprehensively elucidated. In what follows I am going to attempt an explicit formulation of such fundamentals within the aesthetic area, particularly that of music, and the attendant activity of an artistic, scientific and pedagogical nature.

The concept of value is often bound up with a higher-level discourse concerning the values underpinning society, human worth, life value, and so forth (cf. e.g. the Norwegian Commission on Values), but also with art, science and pedagogy, which are partly supposed to contribute to the realization of super-ordinate values. They may also, on the other hand, possess more or less value intrinsically, i.e. in relation to some internal structure and coherence or to some internally posited set of rules, e.g. in terms of aesthetics or scientific methodology. The concept of quality (in the sense of a concept linked with the value concept) is to a higher degree related to concrete appraisal, assessment and its underlying foundations (e.g. evaluation and evaluative criteria, but also to the form of critical activity that 'reviewers' of literature, art, music, theatre, etc., practise). There is an inherent connection, however, between the two concepts, because quality has to be appraised in relation to, among other things, over-arching values or aims, and because values have to be embodied and made operational in quality-oriented activity.

Let me interpose an introductory note on the quality concept. I want to distinguish between qualities in a "narrow" ("descriptive") sense as designations of attributes of some phenomenon, such as size, weight, coloration or timbre on one hand, and on the other hand quality in an "extended" ("normative", appraising) sense, appertaining to the evaluation of the phenomenon, such as its truth, authenticity, suitability, adequacy, or expressive richness and originality. In a current Danish encyclopedia of philosophy (Politikens filosofi leksikon 1983: 253), a distinction is made between "primary qualities", which things possess irrespective of our perception (e.g. extent and size), "secondary qualities", which depend on our perception and experience (e.g. colour, smell, taste), and finally the less widely current entity "tertiary qualities", which pertain to the value of things (e.g. their beauty or expressive power). When I speak of quality in the "narrow" (describing) sense, I refer to both "primary" and "secondary" qualities, which, in phenomenological reasoning, may be difficult to keep consistently apart - quite particularly so in relation to aesthetic phenomena. On the whole there are problems in the philosophy of science bound up with this distinction. By quality in the "extended" sense I refer to aspects within the sphere of value. At the same time it is my intention to contend that there is an inner cohesion (i.e. one immanent in the phenomenon) between quality in the narrow and in the extended sense.

In the following I take as my point of departure the quality concept (primarily in its extended sense), yet with the underlying intention of partly suggesting an elucidation of the concept also in relation to higher-level value conceptions, partly linking it with qualities in the narrow sense. In my view, this may contribute to a differentiation and concretization of the quality concept and thus to a clarification and an improved understanding of disparate criteria of appraisal and assessment.

Art (including music), science and pedagogy are distinct phenomena and fields of activity with distinct criteria of quality - of whatever kind they might be, currently or historically. It is in itself important to shed light on that. Yet it is also important to elucidate what quality and the grounds of appraisal are like when their mutual relationship is the point of departure. For instance research and development as related to pedagogical activity in the artistic (musical) sphere. Here criteria of quality associated with art (music), science and pedagogy respectively are bound to overlap, possibly giving rise to new, integrated quality concepts and criteria of concrete appraisal.

Perhaps one might say that a three-dimensional approach from art (music), science and pedagogy can, or should, appeal especially to musico-pedagogical research, because such work - reasonably broadly conceived - is charged with the very task of embracing these three aspects and, in so doing, studying their potential and actual reciprocity and cohesion.

I realize that so widely as all that I cannot range today. Accordingly, for a start I shall merely suggest the outline of a large-scale conference, which I made a proposal for earlier, but which has not yet been carried out. This was done in a proposal for conference arrangement under the auspices of the European Culture City Year 2000. In the proposal it was suggested that the quality concept and its relation to a more fundamental value concept were to be dealt with from various angles, such as

- (1) A perspective in terms of philosophy and the history of ideas, with special reference to value, quality and quality criteria in artistic (particularly musical) activity and in research directed at aesthetic phenomena;
- (2) Quality concepts viewed in relation to creative musical activity (composing, improvising) and works of music;
- (3) Quality concepts in relation to performative musical activity giving rise to the question: what can characterize good performances of particular musical works?;
- (4) Quality concepts in the activity of critics and reviewers: what criteria of appraisal are employed, or can be employed, by music critics, and what criteria when the spotlight is directed at the critique or review itself?;
- (5) This may lead up to the question of quality concepts in terms of language and rhetoric, e.g. criteria for the appraisal of texts on music and musical activity;
- (6) Quality concepts and quality criteria viewed in the light of pedagogical theory and the history of pedagogical ideas, with special reference to aesthetic (musical) education and learning;
- (7) The question of quality in relation to music education in general as well as to the education of musicians and music teachers;
- (8) Quality in relation to scientific research activity directed at art (music) and aesthetic or art education (music education);
- (9) Quality concepts in the perspective of educational and cultural politics: What are the quality criteria of politicians in relation to music culture and music education and why?

In what follows I shall discuss mainly those aspects of this comprehensive problem area that come under items 1 to 4 in the list. My working questions are: What are quality and value? What kinds of criteria can we operate with as related to aesthetic, especially musical phenomena and activity? In my opinion answers to these questions are of crucial importance also to music education.

### **Some principal positions concerning quality and value in a broad perspective of cultural theory**

It is a common saying, and presumably also a widespread notion, that „tastes differ“ and that „there is no disputing about tastes“.

But this conception is just one among several possible ones. In an article on questions of quality in relation to culture and art, Henrik Kaare Nielsen outlines four principal positions (H. K. Nielsen 1993), behind which it is possible to discern certain fundamental questions and attitudes, which have been reflected - and viewed divergently - throughout the history of Western European philosophy:

- Universalistic-normative
- Relativistic-normative
- Particularistic-normative
- Pluralistic-normative

The first principal position he terms universalistic-normative. As to culture, it is here a matter of a narrow, restricted concept of culture and of the notion of a unitary culture on common ground within the confines of a comprehensive historical and geo-geographical frame (e.g. Western European culture or still farther afield). "Culture" is here associated with the view that there exists one valuable culture, which establishes a norm for quality and assessments of quality. What is at issue is Culture with a capital C, which is to a large extent that which has enjoyed recognition and financial support through government grants in many countries (culture "proper", "high culture"). We recognize the fundamental attitude as the basis of educational and cultural policies in the democracies far back in the twentieth century (the dissemination of as much culture as possible to the greatest possible number of people, also known as the democratization of culture, which was in a way, I suppose, precisely what was not the case; rather it was the power of cultural capital).

The exactly opposite position is called the relativistic-normative one. It is from this point of view that there is no disputing about tastes, because after all one man's taste is as good as the next man's. Relativity forms the norm. We recognize a fair amount of this position in the "post-modern" view of culture and science. According to the latter it is no longer possible to achieve knowledge, understanding and to produce expressions of experience that have general validity. Everything of that kind is contingent upon locality and situation and in the final analysis upon the individual.

Between these extremes we find a third main view, which H. K. Nielsen calls the particularistic-normative one. About this he says that

*„the discourse on quality is attached to particular contexts, so that the question of good or bad quality can only be discussed within e.g. the universe of a definite genre or a definite group of recipients - never across its boundaries or from a superordinate, universalist angle“ (1993: 16).*

Thus within certain delimited frameworks it will be possible here to establish generally valid criteria of quality.

There is a fourth position, which is termed pluralistic-universalistic, which has a certain kinship with several of those already mentioned, and which is the one that Henrik Kaare Nielsen himself advocates. His comment on it is:

*„The main idea here is that the normative centre in such a (...) quality concept must be the question about the degree of differentiated elaboration on the part of some aesthetic product of the experiences of ambivalence and conflict that are general conditions of existence within modernity“ (1993: 17).*

So here it is attempted to retain at the same time both the pluralistic perspective and a criterion expressing a generally valid norm on value and quality in aesthetic objects, yet on the other hand this norm-expressing criterion is based on more or less topical (perhaps even "situated") conditions (experiences within modernity). Obviously, this, together with the 'paradoxical' linking of pluralism with something generally valid, must give rise to a discussion, which there is no possibility of carrying out here. However, a few aspects of this position I shall go into by another route later on.

I mentioned that behind the mounting of these positions it was possible to discern a fundamental philosophical discussion, which has been of more or less current interest throughout the history of our civilization. It is a matter of the overarching question of generally valid norms for the determination of value and quality in, among other things, the cultural sphere, over against the assumption that we have only relative or perhaps downright relativistic-tinged sets of values to relate to. And behind this lies in its turn the question about where one may possibly find the mooring of generally valid value norms and quality assessments.

In an interesting article on „value crisis and quality“, the Danish philosopher Hans Fink enters into this issue (Fink 1988a). He proceeds on the basis of two important accounts and interpretations of what is considered the value crisis of modern society, both representative in this respect of typical stances.

The first of these is the French author Alain Finkielkraut's book *La défaite de la pensée* from 1987 (Engl. translation: *The Defeat of the Mind*, 1995). According to this study, our crisis consists in the fact that - as Fink puts it on Finkielkraut's behalf -

„Culture in the singular and with a capital C is drowning in sheer culture“ (Fink 1988a: 105 f).

Only the greatest works of art and the spirit, only the profoundest thinking should be styled "culture" and enjoy the status of something we ought to draw our precepts from - i.e. something that establishes norms (here we find a point of departure for the idea of classically oriented education). Finkielkraut, then, is universalistic-normative, if he is to be enrolled within the categories I mentioned earlier on. In modern, or rather post-modern, society essentials are drowned in all sorts of other things that are also called culture, and which usurp our attention in an endless deluge of information. It perplexes our judgment. It muddies everything so that we lose our bearings. The result is a fundamental value crisis.

According to Fink, Finkielkraut's account affords a blueprint for the understanding of the history of the world with French Enlightenment philosophy as its pivotal point. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to turn us into free and independently reasoning human beings. It was the competent and critical thought-potential of liberated humanity that was to be activated. The necessary correspondent part to this was to be a culture that was universally valid, supra-individual and supra-national - and based on human and universally valid reason and its quest for insight into ultimate truths. Consider this in relation to modern scientific and technological development. The educational ideal was reason, enlightenment, self-reliance, independent and critical competence - i.e. qualities that are occasionally associated with the idea of "the modern" when this idea is pitted against the concept of "the post-modern" and more or less radical forms of the

concept of constructivism. (In the concept world of the German "Bildung"-tradition the aim would be to obtain "Mündigkeit").

Already at the time this model provoked criticism. The philosophy and poetry of German Romanticism (with reference here to Herder) found that such universally valid reason was an abstraction, and that what the Enlightenment philosophers regarded as generally valid culture was merely their own culture. By contrast it was asserted that culture is always local and rooted in tradition (in modern terms, "situated" or "situationally conditioned" in a historical-sociological manner). Thus relativism had acquired its spokesmen as opponents of the Enlightenment philosophers. According to this thinking it is not the aspect of human nature constituted by reason that the groundwork of values must be founded on, but, on the contrary, the emotions.

Finkelkraut's solution to the problem is a return to critical reason and judgement rooted in Enlightenment thinking, as the decisive arbiter. Consequently, the meeting with and the creation of significant intellectual products within science and art, the well-founded critical stance based on insight ought to be the proper challenge for education and "Bildung". That Finkelkraut is not alone in this view is manifested by current publications (in Denmark e.g. by a book by Jørn Lund with the portentous title *Sidste udkald* (= *Final Call*) published amid much media attention a couple of years ago).

The other study that Hans Fink deals with is American Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981). He too regards the cultural relativism as an outcome of the value crisis of modern society, and he too deplors the absence of common norms that may contribute to settling disagreements as to values, moral or otherwise. According to this line of reasoning, it is a fundamental problem that ultimately all momentous decisions are afloat in a void as far as values are concerned. He does not look upon Enlightenment philosophy as a sheet anchor, however, but on the contrary as the onset of a decline as to values, which later accelerated, thus characterizing the latest 200-year history in Western civilization.

For actually a pervasive feature of this entire development has been the fact that it is actual human nature - even though disparate aspects of it - that has been proposed as the decisive authority for the value basis. MacIntyre finds his solution by reverting to Aristotle's idea about the unity of actuality and potentiality. Something that also points beyond man's actual state and understanding of himself. But this line of reasoning need not occupy us here.

The disparate aspects of human nature that are mentioned - and which are thus in fact criticised as uniquely authoritative value bases - are, for one, and first, reason. That was the project of the Enlightenment and the position adopted by Finkelkraut. The other aspect is human emotions, which are the authority that the Romantics, among others, refer to. But seeing that actual emotions are individual, this position becomes relativistic at the core. As Fink writes:

*„The value judgment here becomes an expression of what pleases me or some particular group. Quality is a question of the objective ascertainment of subjective attitudes to an objectively given and quality-voided universe. Hence quality is always relative to the emotions of one or more individuals. And the task of reason is to act as servant to the emotions with a view to the greatest possible satisfaction“ (Fink 1988a: 111).*

Over against these bases the existentialists propound a third argument founded on faculties (qualities) of human nature. They want to set up will as the authority that is to be the basis of morality, value and quality. Man is free and thus chooses freely, and at his own discretion, his conception of what constitutes value and quality. It follows that this basis is also subjective and relativistic. Man chooses to attribute to things a value that they do not possess in themselves. Hans Fink sums up the situation in this way:

*„In the history of philosophy of the last 200 years the battle between Kantianism, utilitarianism and existentialism has been swaying to and fro as a struggle between objectivism and more or less radical subjectivism, between absolutism and more or less radical relativism“ (Fink 1988a: 111 f.).*

As mentioned before, the three authoritative arbiters of norms and values in question are at one in building on ascertainable aspects of human nature. Hence, if on this basis alone human beings determine norms of morality, value and quality, they can also themselves alter them, so that they conform to new needs. This is, as Fink has it, „not just selling elastic tape by the yard, but using elastic tape as the yardstick“ (Fink 1988a: 112).

Hans Fink himself is unable to fall in with Finkielkraut's or MacIntyre's proposed solutions in their attempts at re-establishing firm footholds. Against those he posits a factuality morality and a factuality conception of quality. He claims that it is within the fact of the matter itself or in the factual area itself that we can find grounds for appraisal (assessment) attached to the fact. He writes as follows about the topic:

*„We have to learn that only concrete assessments in relation to explicit criteria are genuine assessments. That presupposes, as I see it, a more radical version of the idea that MacIntyre suggests when he emphasizes that particular forms of practice set up their own involuntary and inflexible standards of good and bad. I believe that processes and sequences contain their own criteria of success, which are quite independent of (and, more profoundly conceived, preconditions of) man's preferences, ideals and norms ... And finally, and most far-reachingly, I believe that it is exclusively in relation to such processes and sequences that it makes any sense at all to ask questions about quality“ (Fink 1988a: 115 f.).*

Viewed in our present context, one factual area and one form of practice are music and musical activity. So, I shall now try to take another, more concrete route in my circling around the value and quality concepts. For I do believe that to some extent it is possible to operate with explicit and rationally reflectible criteria that are linked with the fact of the matter itself and thus are of a subjective nature only within limitations and in special ways.

### **Factually oriented point of departure 1: The object area of musical and musically related appraisal and some internally given criteria**

I am going to try to draw a picture of what I take to be the object area of music and musically related quality and quality assessment, i.e. that which we subject to an appraisal of value and quality (Figure 1). I must emphasize that what follows is a first attempt on my part.



According to this model there are three objectival sides for the attention to latch on to. At the meeting-points between these sides (the reference points) there appear characteristic forms of expressing interpretation (which may imply quality judgment), and which may themselves be assessed as to quality, too.

On one side we have the musical object ("the music work"), which is something different from realizations (performances) of the music in sound. The latter are what we find on the other side of the triangular model. The meeting-point between the music work and the performance of it (the sounding realization) constitutes the musical interpretation, termed by Jerrold Levinson (1996) the „performative interpretation“ (PI).

Behind my presentation lies firstly the assumption that we are dealing with such works of music as by dint of their notation retain their identity regardless of different reproductive realizations of them. Thus this brief presentation leaves out of account the special problems of an ontological nature that improvised music and other kinds of aleatory music raise. Secondly, it is taken for granted that we are able to distinguish between the music work and its sounding realizations. That in itself implies a complicated set of problems, which I cannot enter into here. These presuppositions correspond to what has been stressed by prominent phenomenologists (e.g. R. Ingarden, N. Hartmann, M. Dufrenne). It will contribute to the opening of further perspectives to read Eco (1967) as well, for instance the chapter on „the poetics of the open work“ that is found in a Danish translation in Dehs, ed. (1984): *Æstetiske teorier*.

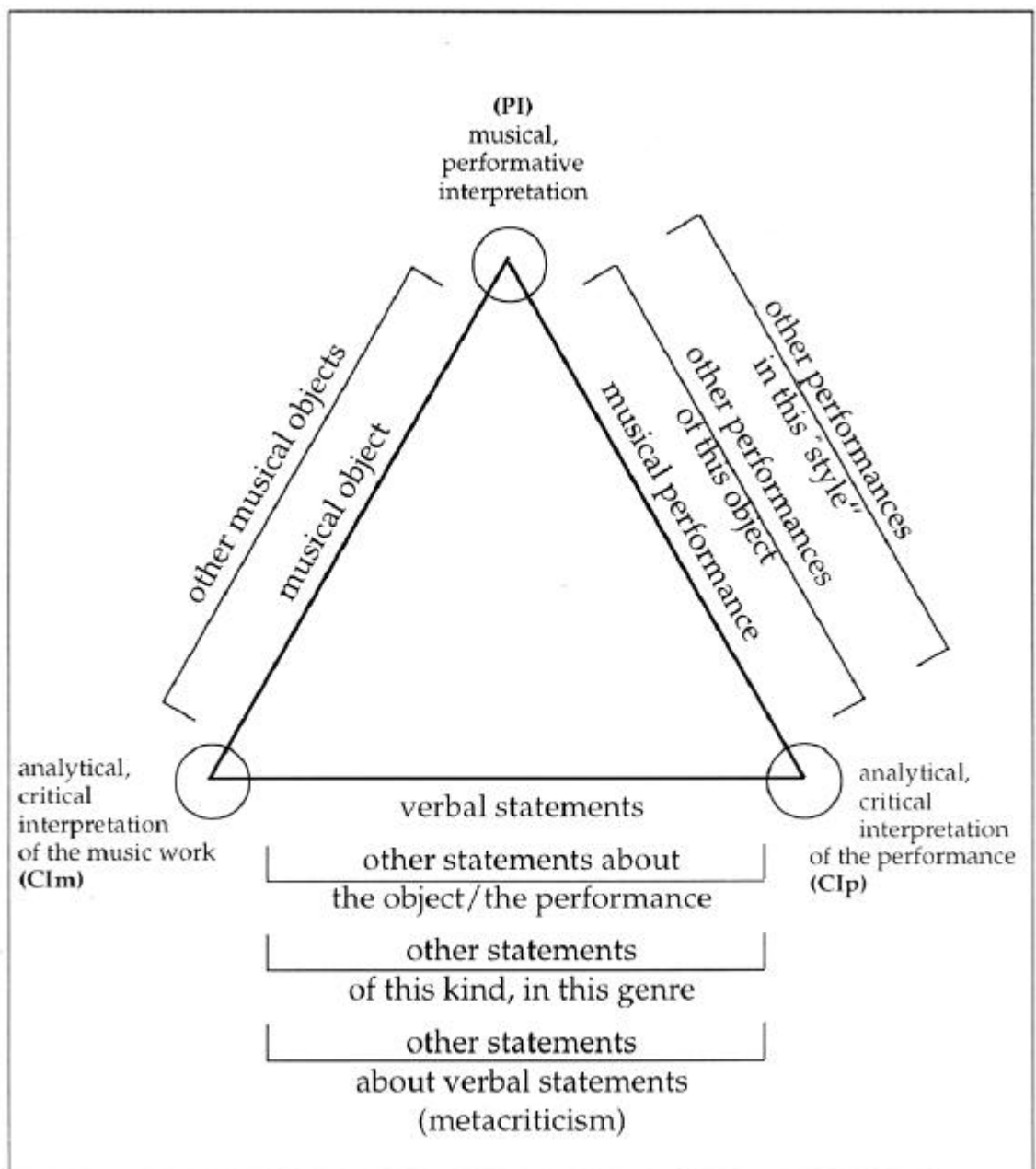


Figure 1 *The object area of musical and music-related quality appraisal*

On the third side of the model we find verbally expressed statements concerning the musical object and the musical realization respectively. At the reference points we find here on one hand what I call the analytical interpretation of the work (corresponding to what Levinson (1996) terms the „critical interpretation“, CI), and on the other hand the critique of the performance. For the purpose of the further treatment it may be expedient to elaborate Levinson’s symbols into CI<sub>m</sub>, concerning the critical interpretation of the music work, and CI<sub>p</sub>, concerning the critical interpretation of the performance, respectively. It is not least on this third side that the quality assessment (in an explicit form) takes place and is expressed, but, rightly considered, not exclusively so.

For it so happens that around the trilateral interior layer we find an „outside world“ of other works, other performances and other verbal statements that the

individual work, the individual performance and the individual verbal statement have to be perceived and viewed in relation to. Not only do they join in constituting the evaluative criteria, but they can also in themselves exercise the function of evaluative expressions.

I have two arguments in relation to this:

First:

In the first place it must be pointed out that the three sides of this "outside world" function with relation to the individual side in the interior layer. Thus, e.g., a quality-oriented attitude to some particular performance may find its expression in another performance. Comparable conditions apply to the object side: another music object can be created as the consequence of a (verbally silent) appraisal of the first object. And, in rather more complicated fashion, this applies to the verbal side as well. - What matters at the outset is the fact that over and above a verbal reflection there also exists, in my opinion, a factually founded "reflection" or discourse of a purely musical nature, which does not necessarily get expressed verbally. A factually oriented discourse about quality, as it were, on purely musical terms. I am aware that this is a moot point. Thus e.g. Jerrold Levinson holds that in this respect, among others, there is a fundamental difference between PI and CI. On the whole, the relationship between PI and CI is of major interest, as appears from Levinson's analysis. I shall not enter further into this here. But I can refer you to an article that I published in 1988 (*Musik som et mangespektret meningsunivers = Music as a multi-stratified universe of meaning*), especially the last part of it.

On the verbal side I distinguish between three types of 'other statements': (1) other statements about the object in hand and the realization in hand respectively, (2) other statements of a similar kind, in the same genre, etc., but not necessarily about the same object and the same realization respectively, and finally (3) statements about other statements in the exterior field and about statements in the interior field (i.e. metacriticism).

Secondly:

In the second place the exterior musical world of other phenomena plays an important part as regards the verbally reflected appraisal (transcending [= across] the three sides). The judgement about whether some performance or some work is of high or low quality will rest on, among other things, an implicitly or explicitly verbalized or imaginary comparison with other performances and other works.

To sum up: So far I have indicated that outside-world references for quality appraisal are found both on the object side, the performance side and the verbal side, and that quality appraisal in both musical and verbal terms exists.

But it is one thing to relate a work to other works, a performance to other performances, and a verbal statement to other verbal statements (including verbal statements about other works and other performances). That in itself can hardly form the basis or criterion of substantiated quality judgments. It is necessary to ask: what arbiter exists outside the individual medium of expression (the individual side of the triangle), which is able to contribute to establishing a factually oriented criterion of quality appraisal?

As I see it, the primary criterion for the assessment of a musical performance will have to be found in the musical work that is performed. So the fundamental question here is: is this a good, adequate, authentic, etc. performance (sounding realization) of something essential found in this work?

Something corresponding to this goes for the finding of the primary touchstones for an assessment of the verbal statements about the work itself (is this a good, adequate, authentic analytical interpretation of this work?) and of those about the performance of the work (is this a good, adequate, authentic description/ critique of the performance of this work?).

This points to the musical work itself as the ultimate arbiter - that is the factual centre of the whole thing. Within the delimitation of the model no further arbiter is to be found, leaving aside the reference to other works, that is. The possibility to find assessment criteria within the model simply stops here.

Consequently, we have to explore another avenue in order to make headway. We have to seek out some external criteria which can be applied in a factually oriented manner (in the factual field represented by my model).

### **Factually oriented point of departure 2: External criteria applicable on the internal level**

At this stage I want to distinguish between three kinds of criteria for quality assessment, viz. criteria which are

- externally functional;
- historicising;
- aesthetic.

I have found inspiration for this division in Carl Dahlhaus (1970): *Analyse und Werturteil*. Here the criteria pertain to the appraisal of musical works, as will be my main angle of approach, too, in what follows, but it is my opinion that the same type of criteria (with certain adjustments) will be able to function in relation to musical and analytical interpretations. I shall touch on this as we proceed. As regards analytical interpretations, aesthetic criteria would then have to be supplemented with scientific ones. That would in itself generate highly relevant problem formulations as to the relations between science and aesthetics.

#### *Externally functional criteria*

From this angle, quality in a musical work has to be determined on the basis of the question about whether it is suitable for achieving this, that or the other functionally determined aim outside the music itself. Is the music good for dancing to, for indicating working rhythm, for calming a child, for firing fighting spirit or inspiring the football team, for stimulating purchases, for political protest, etc.? Or pedagogically: for learning musical form, for forming impressions of tonal (timbral) potential, etc.? Such external criteria will more or less strongly influence, or be influenced by, the internal musical structure, depending on culture, historical period, etc. A thorough quality study will have to tackle this issue.

Also a performance may in many cases be assessed functionally. Namely as regards the realization of the functional characteristics of the music in question. For

instance: does the dancing rhythm emerge in the playing? On the other hand, functional criteria of good performance on the terms of the performative level itself are hardly to be found. That would imply that one would have to admit the propriety of statements such as: it is good piano-playing, but it does not open the work to the listener. Nevertheless this sentence is thought-provoking, because it suggests that technique may be appreciated for its own sake, regardless of what it is meant to serve. Perhaps something of the kind underlies the fact that in the assessment of playing achievements in exams at academies of music a distinction is often made between the assessment of the achievement in artistic and in technical respects, possibly with separate marks awarded for either of the ‚two achievements‘. This makes it plain that in my view the musical work itself ought to rank as the final authority to decide whether a performance is a good one. A good performance must realize aspects of the work in sound, and an original one will draw to our attention aspects of the work that we have not recognized before.

I doubt whether a verbal statement can be functionally good independently of what the statement states. Occasionally one comes across pronouncements pointing in that direction. For example to the effect that a case of journalistically or pedagogically good communication (capturing interest) is in evidence, even though, properly speaking, nothing significant about the musical performance or the musical work is being conveyed. Right off, I should think that here we are dealing with the slick variety of journalism or the inane, methodology-fixated type of pedagogy. Possibly a kind of „aesthetizing“ of the verbal expression itself or of the teaching situation as such. I shall leave it to the reader to ponder this further. In a topical discussion on pedagogical principles this question is of great importance.

#### *Historicising criteria*

From this angle the question to be asked about the musical work is the following: is the music an expression of something essential in the epoch, in society, in ourselves, in our current process of self-comprehension, in our future prospects?

It is in relation to this quality criterion that one of Henrik Kaare Nielsen's previously mentioned positions, the pluralistic-universalistic one, is to be understood. I repeat his characterization of it:

*„The main idea here is that the normative centre in such a (...) quality concept must be the question about the degree of differentiated elaboration on the part of some aesthetic product of the experiences of ambivalence and conflict that are general conditions of existence within modernity“ (H. K. Nielsen 1993: 17).*

It is evident that such criteria are after all precisely historical (though probably not exclusively so), because what is to be expressed changes in the course of time. Assessed by this criterion, the valuable aesthetic expression must possess topical significance. But this does not mean that works from an earlier era cannot very well possess such topicality. They may encompass potential interpretations and expressions reaching beyond their own age and possibly only perceived and understood long after the first appearance of the work in question. Presumably, what we picture to ourselves as a ‚good‘ work of art does just that. It may be the very task of new musical interpretations to bring to light such previously unperceived or

unmanifested aspects of a musical work. This is a vast discussion, which cannot be carried on here.

Whether musical works from another age can have the potential of making topical statements depends not least on precisely their performance. Accordingly, from one point of view it is only to be reasonably expected - or, in fact, necessary - that performances of musical works should change over time. If they don't, they become historical in a different sense - a museum-flavoured sense, as it were. Yet from another point of view that, too, may form a criterion for quality assessment. So it probably makes sense to distinguish between (a) historical-topicalising and (b) historical-historicising criteria, which may apply to both the work and its performance. In the former case the work/the performance has topical interest for us now. I take it that the question of the "aftermath history" ("Wirkungsgeschichte", how it is perceived and understood over historical time) of the work (Gadamer) is one aspect of this set of problems. In the latter case the work is assessed by its topicality in another age and possibly also on the score of its historical 'correctness' (e.g. performance on original instruments) in accordance with the ideal of ascertaining „wie es eigentlich gewesen“.

Two important concepts are linked with the historicising criteria, viz. authenticity and originality.

The latter concept, at any rate, - the assumption that the value of a work and its performance increases in proportion to its originality - is in itself historical and more or less rooted in a conception of art dating back to the Romantic era. So it is in this sense 'modern', and so it probably remains, in a banal sense of the word. I think that something similar applies to the authenticity concept, as e.g. Adorno so emphatically asserted. This too is a vast discussion.

Without entering into that, I shall simply sketch out an idea about the relation between the two concepts in the form of a couple of hypotheses:

(1) If something is original without being authentic - which is perfectly conceivable - it will decrease in value. It will appear, "far-fetched", "artificial", perhaps also "fake".

(2) If something is authentic without being original - which may perhaps also be imagined - it will also decrease in value. I cannot hit upon an appropriate adjective here, and that might indicate that perhaps this constellation is not to be found after all. I have been thinking of „epigonic“, but probably that is not altogether adequate. Perhaps something may be authentic in terms of genre (e.g. a minuet, a sarabande), but not original as an individual work. "Conventional" might be suggestive in that connection.

In tandem these two concepts seem to furnish important evidence of quality by historicising criteria in modern times. But the concepts in question also play a part in quality assessment by aesthetic criteria.

#### *Aesthetic criteria*

Dealing with the question of quality assessment by aesthetic criteria will require an explicit formulation of the concept of aesthetics that forms the underlying foundation.

I am taking for granted a concept of the work of art, the aesthetic object, aesthetic experience and aesthetic perception that has its inspirational foundation in phenomenology. I shall put forward some suggestions on the basis of a model of the aesthetic object, figure 2, cf. Nielsen 1988 and 1998, chap. 4.

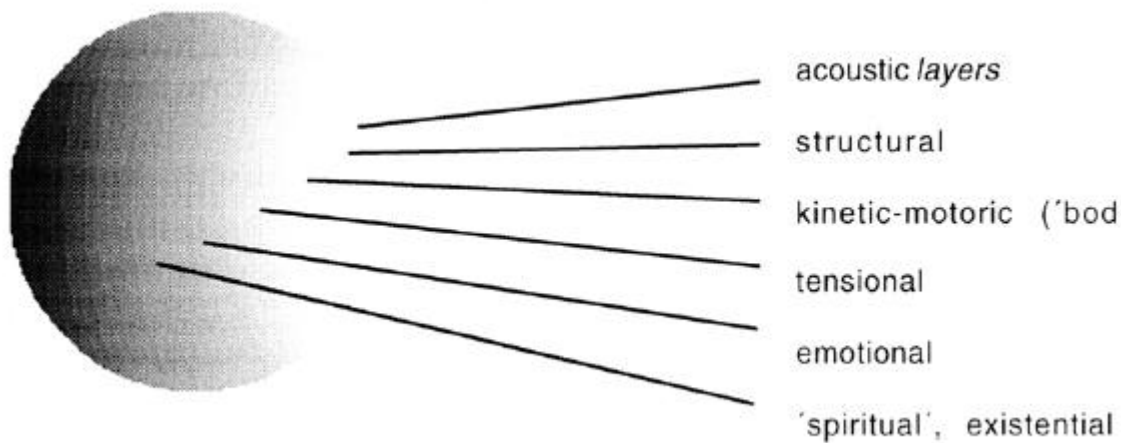


Figure 2 Sketch illustrating certain layers of meaning in the musical object

On this basis one can describe an aesthetic object (work of art) and its attributes by means of certain key concepts such as

- both structure and more than structure;
- multi-layered, multi-stratified;
- hence "deep" and
- multi-dimensional, multi-spectred, multifarious, (as to its meaning),
- hence ambiguous, and "open" (cf. Eco's notion of the open work);
- "inexhaustible" (Dufrenne),
- yet also cohesive (the layers intermingle, they belong together because they are heard together, the outward layers transcend themselves (cf. the concept of "unity");
- also cohesion (possibly "unity") within the individual layer, not least the structural layer;
- self-reflexive (e.g. chord refers to other chords, formal element to other formal elements);
- object-like, experienced as an object outside oneself, even though it is constituted as aesthetic in the meeting with a subjective entity,
- nevertheless, as an aesthetic object it is non-real,
- but on the contrary intentional (subjective-objective in an integrated way);
- expressive of cognition in a wide sense of the word, objectivizing (= expressive of) inner life within an outer form/structure;
- "corresponding" (cf. figure 3) with structures in our own psyche<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this context, reference should also be made to Steen Dahlstedt's interesting article Enhet och sammanhang. Något om musikanalysens estetiska förutsättningar (= Unity and cohesion. Some notes on the aesthetic preconditions of musical analysis) in STM (Swedish Journal of Musicology, Vol. 68,

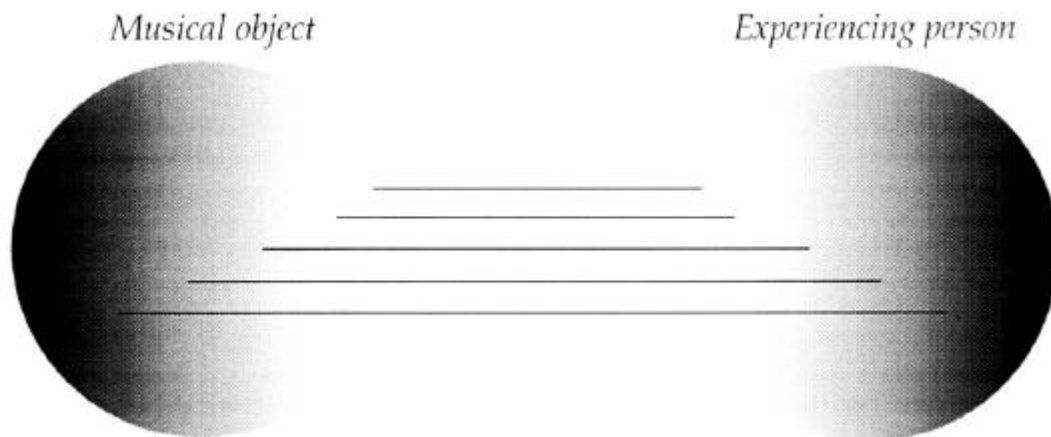


Figure 3 *Sketch illustrating the correspondence between layers of meaning in the musical object and layers of consciousness in the subject experiencing the object*

The more "authentically" and "originally" these attributes manifest themselves, the greater value and quality we are going, I think, to ascribe to the object on a factual assessment (and analysis). Elsewhere (Nielsen 1988) I have formulated the outline of a hypothesis to the effect that the more multi-spectred, 'deep', cohesive and authentic the object is in its volume of meaning, and the more multi-spectred, 'deep', cohesive and authentic experience and perception it accordingly conveys and thus also can give rise to, the more valuable and 'rich' we can consider the object to be by the standards of phenomenological aesthetic thinking.

Not all aesthetic objects possess all the attributes described here, and in any case not to the same extent. Thus some objects may be rich and experimentally venturesome on the outward layer (the structure layer) and comprise very little on the inside (e.g. this can be due to certain types of avant-garde experimentation in sound and structure). Some may make great play with the inward layers without being properly anchored in a careful working-out and coherent design of the structure, which is thus perhaps convention pure and simple (that may cause the work to become sentimental, untrustworthy, intransigent). In the latter case the work is thus neither original nor authentic.

On the whole the structural aspect is central - also from the point of view of quality assessment. It is here that craftsmanship emerges, but that quality is in various ways bound up with the inward dimension. If not, the work does indeed become "superficial", "flashy" or "empty".

I think the assessment of the quality of a performance can be carried out on the basis of largely the same criteria that I have been discussing with regard to the musical object itself. As I indicated earlier, the work itself (that which is performed) will here be the final authority of appraisal. A differentiated and comprehensive assessment of a musical reproduction will therefore always have to relate to that

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1986). Cf. the idea about works of art that is often encountered, viz. that they express 'unit in diversity'. Quite probably this characteristic is widely regarded as a kind of fundamental aesthetic criterion, even if, rightly considered, it is probably historically conditioned.



which is reproduced and e.g. ask: what is it in the work that comes out in the playing, and is it essential? Perhaps even innovating?

It may be asked how things stand as to the verbal statements about musical works and performances of musical works respectively as viewed in the light of the said aesthetic criteria. I cannot enter further into this here, but would nevertheless like to refer to a thesis propounded by Tibor Kneif (1971). It states that the acceptability (adequacy) and the credibility of verbally expressed assessments of such phenomena are dependent on the degree of differentiation of the verbal statements and the degree of their rootedness in, and documentation as to, the phenomena they are concerned with. That is to say, their degree of differentiation and of factuality.

In several ways this thesis, then, does actually fit in well with the criteria that have otherwise been discussed.

### **Summing up and Conclusion**

What answer can now finally be given to the initial question: what are quality and value? What kinds of criteria can we operate with as related to aesthetic, especially musical phenomena and activity?

As has undoubtedly appeared, nothing unambiguous can be stated about it off hand. It depends on one thing and another. Yet a few clues come to hand:

(1) Etymologically, 'quality' first of all means an attribute of some phenomenon. According to what I have touched upon, a connection can be established between an extended concept of quality (also concerning evaluation) and a narrow concept of quality (attributes of some phenomenon) by identifying essential attributes peculiar to the phenomenon. In this sense, quality-seeking work means finding one's way into, and proceeding from, the essential properties linked with a phenomenon, a "fact".

(2) The assessment of value bears a relation to superordinate value conceptions of existential-philosophical and other kinds. Here we have various possibilities at our disposal. Attaching quality conceptions to factual properties which we can seek out and argue in favour of also means assuming a superordinate outlook.

(3) In terms of philosophy, within our own culture we are able to observe historical and probably also contemporary fluctuations between absolutistic and relativistic positions. Precisely this discussion may well be particularly relevant today. Our points of view in this respect will also influence value bases and value appraisal in relation to aesthetic phenomena and aesthetic activity.

(4) Concrete value assessment presupposes starting out from concrete facts, factual areas, phenomena and processes. For example, aesthetic objects, activities and experiences. Qualities in the sense of attributes of aesthetic objects and aesthetic activity are closely linked with aesthetic quality appraisal. If we fail to identify the essential attributes, we cannot use them as points of departure for, or make them subjects of, evaluation either. Quality in the narrow and quality in the extended sense cohere. That is embodied in our language when we talk of forming a "qualified

opinion” about something.

(5) We have attempted to identify the object area of quality appraisal in the artistic (musical) sphere. Here we have distinguished between the aesthetic object, the performative interpretation of the object (PI), and our verbal, critical statements about the musical object (CI<sub>m</sub>) and the musical performance (CI<sub>p</sub>) respectively. There also exists an "outside world" of other objects, other performances and other statements, which share in determining quality appraisal.

(6) We have emphasized the aesthetic (musical) object, in its capacity of final arbiter, as the evaluative basis on the factually internal level for quality appraisal.

(7) We have set up, and distinguished between, three kinds of external or general criteria, which can be applied as an approach to concrete quality assessment on the factually internal level: externally functional, historicising and aesthetic criteria.

(8) The employment of aesthetic criteria of a general kind presupposes an idea of what aesthetic phenomena are. We have stressed a phenomenologically oriented view of that issue. This view appears to match our perspective of factuality (cf. the phenomenological statement: „zu den Sachen selbst“).

Consequently, my final conclusion is that it is possible to carry out a factually oriented, factually based, explicit, substantiated quality assessment in the aesthetic (musical) field - at any rate to a certain extent.

Uncertainty arises when superordinate anchoring grounds are changing or expanding. For instance, when quite novel forms of expression crop up on account of quite new insight, perception, experience. That may entail uncertainty about both perception, expression and experience and conversely about the adequacy, significance, authenticity of the expression.

On the other hand, new perception in the aesthetic sphere is woven into, embedded in, immanent in the aesthetic expression itself. The decision as to the significance of the perception and the experience is therefore more or less passed on to an assessment of the expression itself, i.e. of the aesthetic phenomenon itself. The latter does not just express experience, it also creates experience, because - as Eco emphasizes - it adds something new to reality and to the world. Expression and perception in the aesthetic sphere thus tend to merge, and that entails special implications for the appraisal of quality and value.

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