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Jürgen Vogt: Music Education and Ideology Critique – a New Approach

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This is an English version of the already existing “15-vogt1.pdf”. It was originally designed as a chapter in a book on Critical Music Education, which was never realized. “English version” means a mixture of translation from the German original (which is never a brilliant idea in the first place) and some remarks and explanations for non-german readers. A genuine English paper would have been written in a different way, and the author alone is responsible for all linguistic flaws which result from the attempt to translate a somewhat scholarly German paper into decent English.

Jürgen Vogt

Music Education and Ideology Critique – a New Approach

Part 1

Facets of the Term and its Use: The Dispute on Music Education as Aesthetic Education

If we look at recent discussions within Music Education, neither the concept of *ideology* nor the one of *ideology critique* seem to play an important part. If we look at the *history* of Music Education, however, this situation used to be completely different not so very long ago – at least in Germany. As Martin Weber has elaborated in his commendable historical study some years ago, ideology critique even used to be central for German Music Education and its development between 1965 and 1973 (see Weber 2005, p. 454ff.). We can, of course, only conjecture why this marginalization has actually happened. In another paper, Weber (2010, p. 172) sees a general consensus on central assumptions on Music Education in general or the „postmodern“ tendency to proclaim an end of all ideologies as possible reasons. In both cases, ideologies of Music Education would be considered as historically outmoded phenomena, which, together with ideology critique, could be easily thrown in the dustbin of history. In any case, within the historical period which was examined by Weber, the concept of ideology was used in a hardly elaborated, rather vague marxist way, which cannot be the basis for a renewed form of ideology critique any more. In a certain way, it seemed to be just too easy to criticise German Music Education and its theories after World War II: Its ideological orientation was too obvious to make the development of a well-founded concept of ideology critique necessary¹. Therefore, the success of ideology critique was the reason for its disappearance at the same time – at the moment when critique has clarified and corrected the „wrong consciousness“, it has lost its *raison d' être*. As Lucy Green put it, ideology

„became unfashionable at the end of the twentieth century. It was somewhat dismissed as a crude and inflexible way of explaining only a one-dimensional power-relation between social classes, incapable of accounting for the variety of relationships, perspectives and social groupings that mark the contemporary world (Green 2003, p. 2).

However, there is no reason to believe in such a rigid connection between ideology critique in general and certain historical forms of ideological phenomena in Music Education. Authors like Regelski (2003), Green (2003) or Weber (2010) suggest the enduring existence of ideolo-

¹ A rough overview of this time for international readers is given by Kertz-Welzel 2005. Generally speaking, the critique, initiated by philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, concentrated at first on the fascist character of German Music Education even after 1945. After that, the class character of Music Education was at the centre of critique in the 1960ies and early 1970ies.

gies within Music Education, which, however, cannot be so easily criticised as it used to be some years ago. Obviously, new kinds of ideology in Music Education need new kinds of ideology critique as well. In order to develop some ideas in this direction, however, we need to know some basic traits of ideology and ideology critique in general. In view of the endless specialist literature on this topic, I will mainly concentrate my theoretical considerations on the concise and rather undogmatic account given by Raymond Geuss (Geuss 1981) and will only touch upon other authors². Following Geuss, the term „ideology“ can be used in a *descriptive* and, most of all, in a *pejorative* sense (ibid., pp. 4ff.)³. With regards to the pejorative sense of the term, one can identify three basic qualities – or rather the lack of qualities –, which make ideologies „wrong“: There must be certain *epistemic*, *functional*, and *genetic* properties of a theory (ibid., p. 13ff.), without which it could not be called an ideology. This could be considered as the minimal basis for all ideology critique, and I will use it in order to unfold at least some characteristics and problems of ideology critique in Music Education after the alleged end of all ideologies.

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I would like to illustrate the concept of ideology and ideology critique within Music Education by means of a prominent debate, which used to be formative for large parts of the anglo-american and the international Philosophy of Music Education⁴. The target of ideology critique was Bennett Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Reimer 1970, 1st edition) and its concept of Music Education as Aesthetic Education (= MEAE). The details of this concept can be safely ignored here. It may suffice to note that Reimer supported a kind of Music Education, which centers on music as an object of „aesthetic“ experience. A specific aesthetic experience implies a specific kind of aesthetic perception (mainly listening) as music-related action and specific musical objects (mainly musical works of art), although other musical actions and objects are not principally excluded. Since the 80ies and 90ies this concept has been severely criticised, and it is characteristic for this debate that the criticism never concentrated on the logical soundness of Reimer's argumentation alone. MEAE was criticised not least of all, because it was considered as *ideological*. In *Music Matters* from 1995, his programmatic *New Philosophy of Music Education*, David J. Elliott uses the term „ideological“ first of all in a quite neutral way:

„By the term ideology I mean a set of beliefs and values that is held tacitly and/or verbally by members of a culture“ (Elliott 1995, p. 185f.).

According to this definition, ideologies are mainly ideas (values, beliefs etc.), which exist in a given community (society, culture etc.). These ideas are (a) organized in a systematic way and possess the shape of „theories“ and they have (b) a considerable practical effect on the lives

² Among others, recommendable books on this topic are Lichtheim (1967), Larrain (1979) or Eagleton (2007).

³ There is a *positive* sense, too, which is not object of this paper.

⁴ I have no intention to take sides in this debate, because I will use it merely as an example. For an historical account of this discussion see e.g. McCarthy & Goble 2005. With Reimer's death and the new edition of *Music Matters* this controversy has subsided, perhaps with the exception of Regelski 2016.

within this community. This very broad definition corresponds to Raymond Geuss' description of „ideology in the descriptive sense“ (Geuss 1981, p. 4f.). If we follow this definition, then there is no community, no society and no culture without ideologies at all. In this sense there are, of course, ideologies of Music Education, too, and Elliott's own „praxial approach“ is just as ideological as Reimer's „aesthetic“ one. It goes without saying that the critics of MEAE did not have in mind a critique of ideology in the descriptive sense. For its critics, MEAE is ideological, because it claims to present a universal theory of music and music teaching, whereas it is not universal at all, but historically and socially situated. Moreover, this asserted universality is used in order to gain a certain kind of theoretical (and practical) hegemony over other theories. As Elliott put it:

„To perceive music aesthetically is, in fact, to adopt a socially embedded ideology of music and listening that owes its implausible tenets to a small group of dead, white, European male thinkers. What could be more cultural, ideological, referential, or external than an eighteenth-century theory that instructs all people everywhere to listen to music in exclusive relation to absolutist concepts?“ (Elliott 1995, p. 193, emphases JV).

Or in a similar way:

„In summary, the underlying the aesthetic concept of music belong to a particular period of Western assumptions history and a definite ideology that saw its full flowering in the Romanticism of nineteenth-century Europe“ (Elliott 1995, p. 24, emphasis JV).

First of all, Elliott stresses that basic ideas of philosophical and musical aesthetics, which are crucial for MAEA, have their roots in 18th and 19th-century Europe. This does not mean, however, that these ideas are wrong simply because of their historical origin. MEAE is ideological (and therefore wrong), because a theory with particular traits (european, white, male etc.) is enforced in a universal manner on every human being (especially pupils) as the one and only way to deal with music properly. Thus, MEAE is not just any other theory (or ideology in the descriptive sense), which could argumentatively or empirically be right or wrong, but, in the first place, an exertion of *power*: A certain theory (or philosophy) of Music Education gains an unduly dominance over other approaches, which could not be achieved by empirical or argumentative evidence alone. Thus, this theory must possess at least some attributes, which are more than or at least different from mere empirical or argumentative plausibility for its supporters. An ideology, therefore, is not just some kind of totalitarian rule, but requires a certain kind of agreement and consensus. Obviously, ideologies can maintain, because they correspond with certain needs, which are easy to exploit or at least appear to be utterly harmless on the surface. Thus, it is not enough for ideology critique to criticise some theory because of its epistemological shortcomings. If ideologies exert power, then ideology critique always attacks this power as well as the ideology-as-theory.

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It is a striking feature of ideology critique that in this kind of critique description (or analysis) and critique always fall into one, or, as social philosopher Rahel Jaeggi put it:

„Ideology critique is a form of critique that is characterized by understanding or decoding its object as ideology. You cannot tell whether something is an ideology or ideological, before a critique of ideology occurs“ (Jaeggi 2009, p. 81f.).

In other words: As soon as the analysis of a theory reveals its ideological character, this analysis is already a ideology critique. Therefore, before the critique sets in, there must be a kind of primary suspicion, which can not, or at least not exclusively, be aroused by some epistemological feature of this theory. This trait of ideology critique resembles what French philosopher Paul Ricœur called the „hermeneutics of suspicion“, and its „masters“ are Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (Ricœur 1970, chapter 2). There is no ideology critique without an initial wish to understand the theory in question (the hermeneutical aspect), but this intention is refracted by the suspicion that there is something behind the surface of this theory, something which can not be immediately derived from the theory itself. If ideologies are always an exertion of power, then this suspicion can only be triggered by a foregoing experience of power and dominance. Therefore, at the very beginning of ideology critique we have to assume some moral oder emotional intuitions, which may not even be known by the critic himself. It goes without saying, that those intuitions and personal experiences do not suffice in order to justify ideology critique, but most probably there is no ideology critique without them.

If we want to establish ideology critique on stabler grounds, we can neither rely on the falsehood of its epistemological shortcomings, nor on our moral intuitions alone. Therefore, it is common to criticise ideologies because of the falsehood of its *functional* properties (Geuss 1981, p. 13). According to Geuss

„a form of consciousness is an ideology in virtue of its function or role it plays in supporting, stabilizing, or legitimizing certain kinds of social institutions or practices“ (Geuss 1981, p. 15).

Quite obviously, critics like Thomas S. Regelski bear this definition in mind while attacking MEAE:

“Ideology arises when certain socially constructed realities that serve the interests of one group are advanced by that group as being in everyone else’s best interest, even if others disagree or don’t understand why it should be so. For example, until recently public school music education consisted of an orthodox and doctrinaire advocacy of Western European art music. The challenge to this ideology of what music is and is good for has important consequences that, unfortunately, are not being pursued” (Regelski 2005, p. 6).

There is, however, a marked difference between Geuss’ and Regelski’s definitions. If we follow Geuss’ quotation alone, every kind of theory or philosophy of Music Education is an ideology, since it tempts to support, stabilize, or legitimize a certain practice of Music Education (= ideology in the descriptive sense)⁵. These theories become „ideologies in the pejorative sense“ (Geuss 1981, pp. 12ff.), only if this support is not justified and/or not legitimized with regard to the needs and interests of people (or groups of people), although or even just because it claims to do so. At this point, a crucial problem arises: If we consider Regelski’s definition of ideology, a theory is only an ideology, if it supresses not just any personal needs, because these needs are contingent and cannot be justified as objective, but only if it suppreses „real“ needs and interests - I will come back to this point later on.

With regards to the *logic* of ideology critique, this is the reason for the impossibility to name general characteristics of ideologies – ideologies *as* ideologies can only be identified in relation to specific situations or structures of oppression and dominance. There are, of course, some symptoms or signs of ideology. For example, Terry Eagleton characterizes ideologies as

⁵ P. O’Toole criticises Elliott’s „praxial“ approach for exactly this reason (see O’Toole 2005).

„unifying, action-orientated, rationalizing, legitimating, universalizing and naturalizing“ (Eagleton 2007, p.45). Quite similar, Lucy Green suggests that ideologies tend to reify originally dynamic entities or relations, which means „to attribute an abstract concept with thing-like properties. This attribution involves suggesting that the abstract concept exists, like a thing in the world, and that it is unchangeable, universal, eternal, natural or absolute“ (Green 2003, p. 4). Of course, these attributes might be quite helpful for anybody, who wants to establish a theory as an ideology, and they may be useful for a first suspicion against theories, which work like that. But you only know if a theory falsely has attributed thing-like properties to abstract concepts *after* ideology critique has set in. Otherwise, these attributes could be easily identified as mere epistemological flaw, and obviously, not every flaw of this kind is automatically ideological.

Most of all, Regelski and other critics of MEAE aim at the „orthodox and doctrinaire advocacy of Western European art music“ (Regelski 2005, p. 6). It is characteristic for this critique to concentrate on the historical and social embeddedness of the „aesthetic“ approach. By doing so, the critics stress another aspect of ideologies on the pejorative sense, which is called the „genetic“ one (see Geuss 1981, p. 13). According to this kind of critique, a theory may be called ideological, whenever (a) it can be traced back to its historical origins (and thereby loses its claim to be „universal“, „timeless“ or „natural“) and (b) this origin reveals the real interests, which lie at the bottom of the theory in question. Within this context, it is quite illuminating to take a look at the controversy between Regelski and Philip Alperson, who can be considered as a moderate critique of MEAE. Alperson (2010, p. 186) tries to relativize the genetic critique of MEAE by hinting at the fact, that the historical origin of a theory does not qualify this theory as wrong or ideological as such. The same holds true for the „aesthetic“ basis of MEAE: Even if it is true that this basis was developed by white, male and bourgeois persons in the 18th century, this does not automatically mean that the approach is automatically wrong or inadequate. In other words: Alperson tries to strengthen the epistemologically true elements of MEAE, in order not to discard it as a whole, but to include certain aspects of it in a possible concept of Music Education.

Regelski (2011, p. 66ff.), however, rejects this attempt vehemently by stressing part (b) of the genetic argument: According to Regelski, the aesthetic approach was ideological from the beginning, because it always used to be a hegemonical instrument of the bourgeois class and nothing else. In contrast to Alperson, Regelski weakens the *epistemological* content of MEAE and emphasizes its *functional* properties on the basis of the genetic argument instead. Thus, in terms of the theory of ideology critique, the critique of MEAE is total: It attacks not only the *epistemological* content of MEAE, but also its *genetic* background and, combined with that, its hegemonical *function*. But obviously, the different *aspects* of critique require different *forms* of critique as well. The epistemological critique seems to be the easiest one in this context, because it operates within the usual theoretical framework of „right“ or „wrong“. It goes without saying that this kind of critique requires a very precise and convincing analysis, and perhaps the epistemological critique of MEAE is the least convincing part of the whole

endeavour⁶. The genetic critique, however, and most of all the functional one need different criteria for „right“ and „wrong“. In other words: When can we call the function of a theory – and certainly all theories of Music Education do have a function – ideological and thereby „wrong“? This problem can be illustrated by a comparison between Regelski's critique of the „aesthetic ideology“ and the following position, held by German Music Educator Wolfgang Martin Stroh:

“As ideology music can be a form of right or wrong consciousness. It is ‘right’, for example, if in the 18th century the middle classes snatch the privilege of art music away from the aristocracy and organize public concerts themselves. It is also ‘right’ whenever the working classes sing proletarian and prostitutes sing popular songs (“Gassenhauer”). It is ‘wrong’, whenever common people praise the Lord in chorales, proletarian men's choirs sing about the German forest or whenever the masses gather in threequartertime, following Metternich's wish to amuse themselves rather than to assemble” (Stroh 2002, p.1. My translation, JV)⁷.

If we follow Stroh here, the establishing of art music in the 18th century was not ideological in the pejorative sense, but a historically necessary step in the process of bourgeois emancipation from aristocracy. Of course, this step has a hegemonical character, because it is part of a struggle for power. It is somewhat confusing however, that Stroh draws a distinction between „right“ and „wrong“ ideologies; bourgeois art music, then, is ideological, too, but „ideologically right“⁸. In contrast, the „non-aesthetic“ musical practices of „common men“, which are so important for Regelski and others, are – at a given historical moment – „ideologically wrong“, because they cover up people's real interests and help to disguise them. It is not even necessary to force these ideological practices on somebody, because they are self-imposed. According to Stroh, however, these practices are against the „real“ and „true“ interests of the „common men“ and therefore must be considered as ideological. On the other hand, bourgeois art music (and its practices) is not ideological in a certain point of time. Here the question arises again, if there is any kind of objective criterion, which helps us to decide, if the musical „wants, needs, preferences, and desires of the members of a society“ (Geuss 1981, p. 35) are „real“ and „true“ or if they are ideological. This is crucial question for any kind of ideology critique, which has not been solved at all:

⁶ For a much more differentiated analysis of the „ideology of the aesthetic“ see e.g. Eagleton (1990), who emphasizes the ambiguities of the aesthetic discourse: „It is (...), that the idea of autonomy (...) provides the middle class with just the ideological model of subjectivity it requires for its material operations. Yet this concept of autonomy is radically double-edged: if on the one hand it provides a central constituent of bourgeois ideology, it also marks an emphasis on the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which becomes, in the work of Karl Marx and others, the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility. (...) Any account of this amphibious concept which either uncritically celebrates or unequivocally denounces it is thus likely to overlook its real historical complexity“ (ibid., p. 9).

⁷ German original: „Als Ideologie kann Musik eine Form richtigen oder falschen Bewusstseins sein. ‚Richtig‘ ist beispielsweise, wenn das Bürgertum im 18. Jahrhundert dem Adel das Kunstmusik-Privileg entreißt und öffentliche Konzerte selbst organisiert, ‚richtig‘ ist auch, wenn Proleten Kampflieder und Straßenmädchen Gassenhauer (...) anstimmen. ‚Falsch‘ ist, wenn die kleinen Leute in Kirchenchorälen Gott lobpreisen, Arbeitermännerchöre den deutschen Wald besingen oder die Massen sich nach dem Wunsche Metternichs im Walzertakt ‚zerstreuen anstatt sich zu versammeln‘“. Klemens, Fürst von Metternich (1773-1859) was Austria's foreign minister and chancellor from 1809 to 1848.

⁸ The crucial question, if music as such can be ideological at all, lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Possibility 1: Based on empirical and/or theoretical insights, ideology critique claims to have objective knowledge of the „true“ and justified wants and needs of social groups or individuals. In this case, ideology critique informs the social agents „from the outside“ about their real needs and interests, hoping, that this critique is convincing and leads to a change in thinking and in action. This kind of critique is generally considered as paternalistic, particularly if it is put forward in the name of the agent`s autonomy. There is reason to assume, that ideology critique has lost much of its attractiveness, because especially in more or less marxistic approaches like Stroh`s, the critic always knows beforehand what is right and what is wrong (see e.g. Ellsworth 1989 or Latour 2004).

Possibility 2: If the social agents speak out their interests and needs themselves, these may well be unjustifiable and mere subjective wishes. Moreover, such wishes could be the result of certain social conditions and therefore ideological themselves. Critique „from the inside“ may only try to repair existing conditions, without touching their ideological core. However, critique „from the outside“ or „from above“ is much more likely to fail, because it tends to ignore the agents` interests and motives. It seems to be more convincing to develop a „critique from the inside“ which does not merely reproduce the agents` perspective, but looks for objective evidences for ideology as well.

Raymond Geuss has suggested four situations, which represent the basis for a critique, which does not ignore the agents` perspective:

- „(1) agents are suffering and know what social institution or arrangement is the cause;
- (2) agents know that they are suffering, but either don`t know what the cause is or have a false theory about the cause;
- (3) agents are apparently content, but analysis of their behavior shows them to be suffering from hidden frustration of which they are not aware;
- (4) agents are actually content, but only because they have been prevented from developing certain desires which in the ‚normal‘ course of things they would have developed, and which cannot be satisfied within the framework of the present social order“ (Geuss 1981, p. 82)

In situation (1) ideology critique is simply unnecessary – the agents know everything about their situation and how to change it themselves. In situation (2) and (3) ideology critique is both possible and necessary. If, for example, most dissatisfied american music teachers⁹ teach according to MEAE, ideology critique could help them to find the cause for this situation in their pedagogical approach – and not in the lack of pupils` motivation or other reasons. Obviously, critics of MEAE like Elliott or Regelski hope that this could be possible. In situation (3) music teachers would appear to be content at the surface, but something in their behavior, something they utter in interviews etc. shows the observer, that this is not really the case and that there is some connection with MEAE. Evidently, it would be much more difficult to con-

⁹ Of course, pupils, parents etc. are agents as well – the teachers` perspective is just one aspect out of many.

vince these teachers that they are dissatisfied at all, and moreover, that this dissatisfaction has to do with their pedagogical approach. Especially in this case, the similarity of ideology critique and psychoanalysis becomes apparent – people have to know that they suffer, in order to begin a therapy, which might help them to find the cause for their suffering. Ideology critique (and psychotherapy) is doomed to fail in situation (4): „Case (4) is the nightmare which haunts the Frankfurt School“ (Geuss 1981, p. 82). Seen from the outside, the agents ought to suffer in this situation, but, due to a perfect control and a perfect ideologization, they do not at all – „a society of happy slaves“ (ibid., p. 84). In this case, the teachers would not even understand why MEAE should be criticised at all, and the controversy between Reimer and his critics would only be a mere academical one.

It is, however, highly improbable that such a kind of total ideology exists, without any cracks or fractures which reveal its ideological character. This is not even the case with Adorno or Marcuse, who suggest the existence of such a total ideology on the one hand, but open possibilities to overcome it, on the other (see, for example, Marcuse 1964/1991 and Marcuse 1969). If this would not be the case, ideology critique itself would be completely impossible. It is, however, highly disputable, how these fractures or cracks can be identified in a somewhat methodological way. German social philosopher Rahel Jaeggi, for example, suggests to analyse theories and practices with a special emphasis on the „*internal inconsistency* of reality itself and the norms that constitute it“ (Jaeggi 2009, p. 75). These internal inconsistencies are different from mere mistakes, which could rather easily be eliminated within the given theory or within the given practice – ideology critique does not aim at reforms. The inconsistencies in question have to be „necessary“ and inherent parts of the theory or the praxis itself. Of course, these parts would have to be justified elements and not just practical habits: ‚That’s the way we have always taught music’ is not a necessary inconsistency which could be taken seriously. Such an „immanent critique“, as Jaeggi suggests, could e.g. be able to point out that the *universal* musical norms, on which MEAE claims to be founded, are not only non-universal in theory, but generate *particular* forms of educational practice, which put certain groups of children at a disadvantage. By doing so, MEAE would not be replaced by another theory and other „universal“ musical norms, which are „true“ (because MEAE is not), but first of all MEAE would be criticized in a way that respects its internal theoretical ambitions. Of course, this kind of critique does not necessarily imply another „philosophy of music education“. As Rahel Jaeggi puts it: Ideology critique is merely „the ferment of a *practical process of transformation* that pertains to both (social) reality and its interpretation; in its course, both social reality and its interpretation must change“ (Jaeggi 2009, p. 69). In other words: ideology critique in music education can only be the starting point for a new concept of education or be a part in the process of developing such a concept; it can never be this concept itself.

Another variety of ideology critique, which tries to avoid the bad alternatives „either external or internal critique“, has been suggested by German philosopher Axel Honneth. Here, the analysis searches especially for „normative paradoxies“ (see Honneth & Sutterlüty 2011) within theories and practices. According to this suggestion, normative paradoxies are not a necessary part of an ideology, but come into being whenever a theory (a practice or an institution) produces unintentional results, which are not compatible with its original normative

aims or are even opposing this aims (see *ibid.*, p. 73). A famous example for such a paradox is the pedagogical and political aim of equality of opportunity. As French sociologists Bourdieu & Passeron have shown, even so the demand for equality can be normatively justified perfectly, it produces inequalities in the course of time, when it is turned into practice (see Bourdieu & Passeron 1970/1990). In the same way we could ask, if MEAE (and its normative basis) was not normatively justifiable in the first place, but had produced unintentional results in the meantime, for example the neglect of certain kinds of music and the pupils' feeling, that their experience is not as valuable, as it is promised by MEAE. In a certain way, this kind of „immanent critique“ resembles the „genetic aspect“ of ideology critique, because it includes a temporal aspect of ideologies, but the search for normative paradoxes looks for the consequences of certain developments and not for its origins in the first place. Still, both inconsistencies (Jaeggi) and paradoxes (Honneth) have to be reflected by the agents' „normative irritations“ or at least in a kind of „uneasiness“ (see Honneth & Sutterlüty 2011, p. 83) – otherwise they would not have an empirical, but a mere theoretical basis. These irritations, however, can not be the only criterion for ideology critique; there still must be a difference between the theoretical and/or empirical knowledge of the critic and the agents' knowledge. Without communication and mutual understanding – at least to a certain degree – ideology critique remains without any effect.

Part 2:

Invisible Ideologies – Musical Standards and Competencies

If it is correct that only ideology critique reveals „ideologies-as-ideologies“, then, of course, ideologies do not appear as ideologies in the pejorative sense in the first place. In a certain way, theories might be even be particularly suspicious of being ideological, whenever they claim to be completely ideology-free and objective. A telling example of such an ostensibly „anti-ideological“ theory can be found in recent efforts to orientate all school subjects – including music - to so-called (national) educational standards and competencies (for Germany in general see Röhner 2014, for Music Education see Knigge 2014)¹⁰. The orientation to competencies is supposed to be normatively neutral, because it is designed to „secure and enhance the quality of the work done in schools“ (Klieme et al. 2004, p.) – and whoever could say anything against more quality of teaching and learning? This seeming neutrality, however, can be analyzed as a part of a normative program, which may roughly be marked as „neoliberal“.

It is beyond the scope of this paper, of course, to explain the concept of „neoliberalism“ in detail. Generally speaking, neoliberalism can be characterized as a „generalization of the economic form“ (Lemke et al. 2000, p. 16. My translation, JV). This means that in neoliberalism

¹⁰ As these discussions are slightly different in different countries, I concentrate on the German context. It is striking, however, to which extent standards and competencies have become important in advanced (post)industrial societies and school systems.

economical thinking and its standards, which may or may not make good sense within the economical field, is applied to all (or at least many) parts of society, which, like e.g. education, are (or used to be) quite different from economy in the first place. This economisation of society may appear in several different forms:

- (1) The economical system tries to influence the educational system directly: schools and universities act or at least try to act as if they were enterprises, following the same standards as any other firm.
- (2) Curricula of schools and universities are designed in order to fulfill the expectations of the economy. If subjects like e.g. music are estimated as „useless“ in this respect, they may be reduced or even taken out of the curriculum.
- (3) The impact on subjects (pupils, students) is much more indirect and subtle and has more to do with the „economic form“ of education.

Most of the time, the critique of neoliberalism in education concentrates on the variants (1) and (2). Especially traditional marxist ideology critique treats neoliberal approaches in education as „false knowledge“, which ought to be and easily can be replaced by „right knowledge“. Furthermore, critics complain the retreat of the state from institutions like schools and universities. Both critical strategies, however, – the replacement of „false knowledge“ and the re-institution of the state – are based on significant assumptions. First, there is the assumption of a „true“ educational knowledge. In Germany and in the Scandinavian countries, for example, critics tend to refer to the concept of „Bildung“ as the „true“ knowledge about education and growth, whereas competencies are considered as merely „utilitarian“ and therefore „wrong“ (see e.g. Varkøy 2010). Second, critics presuppose that the state has somehow lost some kind of fight against economy and therefore retreated more or less from its educational institutions. This assumption, however, ignores the possibility of a voluntary retreat as part of a neoliberal program, which embraces both political and economical strategies. Thus, both assumptions are debatable, as long as their own theoretical basis is not discussed as well. It is, for example, by no means clear, if „Bildung“ is still a seminal concept of education at all. Moreover, it ought to be discussed, what is actually meant by „utilitarian“ in educational context, especially in Music Education, and in which way competencies contribute to this economical orientation.

By asking these questions, ideology critique shows a lot of similarities to the „governmentality-studies“, as they were initiated by Michel Foucault (see Foucault 2002a)¹¹. Without going into detail here, the study of „governmentality“¹² enables critics to consider ideologies

¹¹ Of course, Foucault has to be very suspicious against the traditional concept of ideology (Foucault 2002, p. 119). First, as we have already seen, this concept usually differentiates between „true“ and „false“, whereas Foucault is much more interested in the „effects of truth“ (ibid.). Second, traditional ideology critique operates with a strong conception of an autonomous subject, who is the one who criticizes. For Foucault, however, the „subject“ itself is the product of discourses and does not stand outside of them. And last, for traditional ideology critique, ideologies belong to the „superstructure“, while Foucault insists on the intertwining of discourses, practices, and institutions.

¹² Within Music Education, the notion of „governmentality“ has hardly been used up to now (as an exception see e.g. Koza 2009/2010). Critics of the U. S. Standards for Music Education have so

not just as mere power, domination and „false consciousness“, but as a complex combination of theories, institutions and practices, in which the sovereign state and the autonomous individual constitute and determine each other (as a short introduction see e.g. Lemke 2002a). If we look at the neoliberal turn in (Music) Education from the perspective of governmentality, it is neither very surprising or new, that the educational system aims at the production of capacities for work – although especially Music Education traditionally tends to ignore this fact (see Kaiser 2012). As supporters of competence-orientation emphasize, however, competencies are much more than simple skills, which can be used in the labor market directly. Competencies, so it is claimed, are the realistic version of the utopian promise of „Bildung“:

„'Competencies', however, describe the same thing – that is, abilities of the kind intended and assumed by the term Bildung: abilities which are acquired, not inherent, which are experienced in and through particular aspects of societal reality, and which are suited to shaping this reality. In addition, these are abilities that are capable of being cultivated over a lifetime, enhanced and refined in such a way that internal gradations can be measured, such as from basic to more advanced general education. They are, however, also abilities that enable a process of self-directed learning, since the aim is abilities that are acquired not only in conjunction with tasks and processes, but can be detached from the original situation, meet the challenges of the future and are open to problems of all kinds“ (Klieme et al. 2004, pp. 59-60).

Critics may object to this equation of „competencies“ and „Bildung“, especially from a historical point of view. But even these critics have to admit that competencies indeed describe some elements, which are also crucial for the concept of „Bildung“ – of course, the educated („gebildet“) person has to acquire certain abilities in order to cope with present and future societal realities etc. The point is, however, that in this description *external* tasks and challenges (problems) fall into one with *internal* claims and tasks („Bildung“). All of a sudden, all tensions, discontinuities or even rifts between the individual and its societal environment cease to exist. Both, the individual and the society, have the same aims: Meet the challenges and solve their problems, just as if these problems were not the product of society, but of nature. The classical Bildungs-subject turns into a competence-subject, which is able to solve „problems of all kinds“ in an adequate way. The nature or quality of these problems is not discussed, mainly because future problems can not be anticipated by schools or curricula anyway. Moreover, because competencies are always the abilities of an individual, the competence-discourse seems to be compatible with child-orientated and constructivistic pedagogical approaches. The new subjectivity, which the competence supporters aim at, is „a new type of *(multi)functional resp. polycontextual* subjectivity“ (Höhne 2007, p. 37. Translation JV), and its anthropological model is the „Entrepreneurial Self“ (Bröckling 2007), which takes responsibility for itself, coping with the future creatively and dynamically.

This unity of subject and object, individual and society, however, does not come into being by itself. First of all, it requires much more evaluations and tests than the old exams ever did. This is necessary, because the ways to acquire the competencies are not as obligatory as they used to be in the old curricula. If, however, pupils (and students) do not reach the

far concentrated on their behavioral approach and their restriction to measurable goals (see e.g. Benedict 2006), perhaps because the National Standards do not even claim to replace more complex goals of Music Education like „Bildung“ like the competence-approach does.

standards, not the standards are to blame, but the teacher (and his lack of teaching-competence) and of course the pupil him- or herself. Everybody, so the new curriculum makers tell us, ought to be able to reach the standards, provided, he or she really wants to. In other words: The competence-orientation provides schools, teachers and pupils with new freedom concerning teaching and learning on the one hand, whereas on the other hand the aims of teaching and learning are not discussed at all and the amount of examinations rises. Therefore, competence-orientation in schools and universities represents the change from „disciplinary“ to „control societies“, as it was described by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (see Deleuze 1995): The gain of individual freedom is paid by a new regime of controls. These controls are much subtler than the system of punishments, which were typical for disciplinary societies. Societal power works very much on the level of individual self-regulation: If you fail to learn, you are to blame yourself in the first place (or: if their pupils fail to learn, teachers have to blame themselves), because you are responsible for successful learning and nobody else - especially not the standards and the experts, who developed them on a scientific basis. Because of this intertwining of individual freedom and societal control, competence-orientation is much harder to recognize as ideological. If certain individual needs are fulfilled by a greater amount of individual freedom, exactly this freedom has to be deciphered as ideological¹³. There are some signs, however, that the permanent pressure of self-optimization leads to what Alain Ehrenberg has called „the weariness of the self“ (Ehrenberg 2009), which might serve as a first step for a successful ideology critique (see again Geuss 1981, p. 82).

Apart from these very general considerations, the aim of pedagogical neoliberalism to replace the old „Bildung-subject“¹⁴ by the new „Entrepreneur-“, or „Competence-subject“ has to be specified with regard to Music Education. First of all, if we stick to the German situation for a while, there is a certain correspondence between competence-orientation and a growing tendency to consider musical actions („Handlungen“) and not „musical works“ as the content of Music Education – the „praxial approach“ by Elliott and others is not as new as it appears. First of all, this is due to the fact, that „music“ tends to appear not as an „object“ (e.g. as a work of art), but only by means of its realization (performance). Moreover, the great musical works of art have lost their importance for musical „Bildung“ during the last decades and a canon of music no longer exists. It is problematic, however, to consider a musical „object“ and its realization (playing, singing) as the same thing. At least two major systematical problems arise from this (see Kaiser & Nolte 1989, p. 34 ff.): First, competence-orientation belongs to what German theorist Wolfgang Klafki used to call „formal didactics“¹⁵: If Music Education concentrates solely on certain musical abilities, the musical „objects“ appear to be

¹³ As Deleuze noticed quite astonished as early as 1990: „Many young people have a strange craving to be ‚motivated‘, they’re always asking for special courses and continuing education; it’s their job to discover whose ends these serve, just as older people discovered, with considerable difficulty, who was benefiting from disciplines“ (Deleuze 1995, p. 182)

¹⁴ Of course, there are other candidates than the German (and Scandinavian) „Bildung“ outside of Germany. It would be a rewarding task to examine the different concepts of „subject“ (if there are any at all), which are now threatened by pedagogical neoliberalism.

¹⁵ For the context of „Didaktik“ („didactics“) see for example the highly recommendable collection by Westbury et al. 1999.

interchangeable and lose their individual importance. It does not make a difference for this approach e.g. whether certain pianistic abilities are acquired by practicing a Beethoven sonata or a folk song or any other piece of music. It is more than doubtful, however, if this perspective is correct at all. Second, the problem which content should be chosen, is not solved by this „praxial“ turn in Music Education. The fact, that there is a multitude of musical actions or competencies is not a sufficient legitimation for teaching (and learning) these actions – which of them is important from a pedagogical perspective, and which one is not?

Because these didactical problems are far from being solved, the competence-orientation enhances the tendency to consider musical abilities as the real content and the improvement of these abilities as the aim of Music Education. Other topics and contents lose their importance and shrink to a mere vehicle of competence acquisition: The more competencies can be acquired by means of a certain topic or piece of music, the better these topics or pieces of music are suited for Music Education. If this is true, then the curricular selection of content is hardly important anymore and can be left to teachers or even to pupils. On the surface, competence-orientation contributes to more individualization and to more learner-orientation, but in the end, the only thing of importance for teachers and pupils is, whether pupils can show the required results at a certain point in time.

As marxist German music educator Wolfgang Martin Stroh noticed, pupils may even consider the *fun* they have, while making music, as the real aim of musical actions (Stroh 1999, p. 7). For classical ideology critique this is a perfect example of „wrong consciousness“: Pupils are mistaken about their „real“ needs, and therefore the teacher has to act as a practical critic of ideology. It is rather unlikely, however, that this critique will be very successful. In a neoliberal setting, there is no tension whatsoever between *subjective* fun and *objective* increase of competencies. This is even more the case, if the contents of Music Education are or even ought to be chosen from pupils' everyday musical lives and experiences. The „nightmare of the Frankfurt School“ (Geuss) would come true, if in this case, there would be no discrepancies at all, for example between fun and measurement, or between fun and the pressure to expose oneself and one's musical abilities again and again.

Up to this point there are certainly a lot of correspondencies between neoliberal educational policy and competence-orientation in Music Education. It is doubtful, however, if these musical competencies can in any way contribute to a general employability by producing actual capacities for work. On first glance, Music Education could be considered as an ideal field for a generalized „creativity education“ which meets with the neoliberal combination of „creativity wish and creativity imperative“ (Reckwitz 2014, p. 12. Translation JV). However, at least in Germany, composition and improvisation are included in the curriculum, but play a relative minor role in practice. There is perhaps an easy explanation for this fact: The creativity imperative („be creative!“) is not restricted to Music Education or to Art Education in general, but has already become an integral part of other subjects – there is no privilege for Music or for Art Education in this respect any longer (see Reckwitz 2014, p. 20ff.). It is surprising, though, how much the field of musical reproduction is still stressed in the curricula, although Music Education is not supposed to produce future musicians. If we look at the more general aims, however, these *reproductive* competencies appear to be subordinated to general *social*

competencies, which shall be gained by making music together with other pupils in class¹⁶. These social competencies, however, do not correspond to the neoliberal education program very much: pupils shall learn to be part of a group, to put the aims of the group before individuals aims, to not compete with other pupils, to follow the teacher-conductor etc. Generally speaking, the musical „reproduction subject“ corresponds in his (or her) basic traits not so much with the „creativity subject“ (see Reckwitz 2010, p. 441ff.) of neoliberalism, but rather with the „executive subject“ (German: „Angestelltensubjekt“; *ibid.*, p. 275ff.) of the 20th century, who completely agrees with the aims of the organization and willingly tries to contribute to them. Seen from the neoliberal perspective, Music Education just takes on the rhetoric of neoliberalism, while in practice it tries to compensate its impositions. This leaves Music Education in an ideologically ambiguous state, trapped between two different forms of governmentality, without questioning either of them.

All in all, there is no reason to discard the concept of ideology critique in Music Education, albeit there is not an absolutely „true knowledge“ which enables us to criticize ideologies of Music Education once and for all. Ideologies are complex constructions, which are more than „wrong theories“, designed to be implemented in people’s consciousness with a hegemonical purpose. Most certainly, though, we have to assume a whole range of ideologies: There are theories in Music Education, which show massive signs of „ideology“, like e.g. the ontologization or naturalization of socially, culturally or historically constructed phenomena (the „nature“ of music, etc.). These theories, however, should be an easy target for ideology critique, although they seem to be rather alive even today. On the other end of the spectre, however, there are theories of Music Education, whose ideological character is much better disguised. These theories ought to be interrogated, in which way they realize the combination of dominance (hegemony) and individual freedom, and which impacts their immanent contradictions (Jaeggi) and paradoxes (Honneth) actually have. Obviously, ideology critique and its methodological options are being under new and promising discussion nowadays (see e.g. Celikates 2006, Boltanski 2011). Most of all, ideology critique in Music Education will have to be much more precise, for example regarding the specific forms of Music Teaching and Music Learning. And finally: As Terry Eagleton noticed, „ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has“ (Eagleton 2007, p. 2). Ideology critique in Music Education (and elsewhere) always has to ask itself, if it does not suffer from the same disease – or from quite a different disease – as it diagnoses in other theories.

¹⁶ This assumption – together with others – are based on publications like Bamford 2006, Winner et al. 2013 etc. In Germany, the so-called „Bastian-study“ (Bastian 2000) has been most influential in this respect. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the ideological content of these empirical (and therefore, of course, „non-ideological“) studies.

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