

BEYOND URTEXT: A DYNAMIC CONCEPTION OF MUSICAL EDITING

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ON NOTATION AND TIME

When considering the musician's relation to notation in the Western music tradition a fundamental distinction between two strongly connected but indeed different approaches should be made. On the one hand, there is the composer, who engenders a structure, which he encodes according to the codes of his own time/space; on the other hand, there is the performer, who decodes the message of the composer, rendering the structure that was given to him. The first approach deals mainly with writing, the second with reading. The first creates the bases for future performances; the second — while keeping the piece alive through different time/spaces — refers to, and relies on past compositions. The composer lives and works in a given historical time; the performer (and the listener) lives in a different environment, being surrounded by different rules and codes, which include specific 'performing codes' as well as changeable 'listening expectations'.

The time/space of the composition (time A) is historically fixed; the time/space of the performance/reception (time B) is movable, consequently time continuously expands between the two points. 'Time B' tries to hold 'time A' in its hands, but the unappealable wind of History pushes it forward, creating a steady growing gap between them both. 'Time A' and 'Time B' are connected by two chains. One is not notated; it's called 'Tradition', and aspires to guarantee a correct transmission of performance codes through dozens of generations, pretending to ignore not only that different times have different codes, but also that any form of oral transmission unavoidably infects the original information with codes and perspectives inherent to its current time. The other chain is based on the composer's notation(s). This chain tries to make the original signs and symbols understandable for the notational system of the performer, and it is called 'edition'. It constitutes the element in which both times converge (A and B), making that the most decisive communication between composer and performer happens via the score. 'Time A' is fixed and 'Time B' is movable, so that the score — in order to adequately fulfil the demands of 'Time B' — must also be movable (i.e. changeable), thus surpassing the once dominating illusion of a definitive, perennial, exempt from doubts and unquestionable musical text.

The present essay aims to bring into the foreground the complex issue of music editing, emphasising

and deconstructing its historical rooted essence, and placing it in the realm of History. Before considering such immaterial and/or subjective elements such as 'tradition', 'analysis', 'intuition', 'mimesis' or even 'performance', a thorough discussion on the 'edition' of music is of primary importance for a deeper understanding of our musical heritage. Arguing that no edition — existing, projected or future — can pretend to be definitive, this article points toward a dynamic conception of musical editing. A conception very much inspired by the writings of James Grier (1996) and Peter Gülke (2006), and where the editor and the performer are invested with an unavoidable authority over musical texts of the past, an authority they share with the composer and that they should assume without complexes. 'Editing consists of series of choices, educated, critically informed choices; in short, the act of interpretation. Editing, moreover, consists of the interaction between the authority of the composer and the authority of the editor.' (Grier 1996, p. 2). Each musical sign carries a significance dependent on context and convention. When the historical moment of writing has passed, the specific context and ensemble of conventions at work at that time will change; new observers (editors, performers, and listeners) will use their own conventions to interpreting signs and symbols. Moreover, as Adorno suggests, the score needs 'to be read as memorial signs for past sounds, not as the fixation of enduring meaning' (Adorno 2001, p. 13, translation Max Paddison).

Beyond the concept of Urtext — meanwhile transformed in a commercial hallmark or label — another model is increasingly imposing itself: that of transitory historical-critical editions, where the editor and, moreover, the performer himself has to make choices and take decisions. Such editions are simultaneously witness and makers of a new attitude towards music from the past, an attitude that creatively considers the historical relationship between composer and performer, and where diligent performers and philologists converge and work together. In this perspective, the innumerable editions of past music — originary from different times and spaces — might now be seen as a fascinating 'pile of debris', historical documents not anymore in use, obviously dated, but containing precious information on the entangled history of a given piece. A creative wandering through different sources, sketches, autographs, first prints, but also through diverse pre-existing editions might be a very enriching path in order to achieve new editions and new, challenging interpretations of 'old' works. At this point, the surpassed but still active concept of Urtext should be briefly addressed.

THE URTEXT ERA

The first musical editions carrying the label Urtext date back to 1895, when the Königl. Akademie der Künste Berlin published its Urtext-Ausgaben *Classischer Musikwerke*. Those editions — inspired by nineteenth century editions of literary, philosophical or biblical texts — claimed to present a musical text free of editorial intervention, a 'clean' text, with no performance instructions added by editors (as opposed to former musical editions, particularly of the second half of that century). Their original aim was praiseworthy, since they intended to present the composer's notation in 'crude' state, letting it speak for itself, and allowing performers, especially students, to build up their own interpretation, free of predetermined aesthetical directions. However, two basic objections soon troubled this idyllic vision, indicating that Urtext-editions could not achieve what they purported to do. Gustav Henle himself noted in 1954 — on his statement on the term 'Urtext' (Henle 1954, pp. 377-380) — that sometimes an autograph and a first edition differ considerably in which case the editor must decide what to print (*ibid.*, p. 379); such a text ceases to be an Urtext and becomes the editor's interpretation of the available sources. On the

other hand, Georg Feder stated in 1959 (Feder and Unverricht 1959, pp. 432-454) that Urtext-editions must be critical editions, thus underlining the necessity of source studies and broader research, opening the door to future developments. But when an Urtext-edition is superseded by subsequent scholarship it is no longer an Urtext. All these observations, among many others, underline the conclusion that Urtext-editions are not what they pretend to be. They do not present 'the composer's written text, but the editor's reconstruction of it' (Grier 1996, p. 11). Other difficult areas for the concept of Urtext are music previous to late eighteenth century (where there is no evidence that a composer was concerned that the autograph should be followed exactly or only in one specific way), and the theory of the 'Fassung letzter Hand' (which involves complex questions about when a composer considers a work to be complete). Moreover, few sources — even from the nineteenth century — can be transcribed into a modern notational system without editorial intervention. Therefore, the use of the word 'Urtext' in the context of musical edition is highly problematical, and its wide spread usage during the twentieth century should be primarily seen as a time bounded editorial response to the abuses of several 'interpretative editions' from late nineteenth century.

URTEXT-EDITIONS: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBSTACLE

In spite of the fact that Urtext-editions have commonly been criticised by scholars for decades, they kept an aura of authenticity and legitimacy among music pedagogues and performers — an aspect that goes far beyond a mere phenomenon of marketing. Not always aware of the aesthetical or philosophical implications of their choices and decisions, many performers undergo the mimetic illusion of an 'intuitive' understanding of the score — ignoring that intuition is historically (and educationally) moulded. Considering Urtext-editions as a valid counterweight to the interpretative editions of late Romanticism, music pedagogues and performing artists persist in ignoring the possibilities more recently offered by critical editions. Therefore, Urtext-editions became de facto — and using the concept of Gaston Bachelard — an 'epistemological obstacle': a thoughtless, unconscious, or simply comfortable structure, wherein a community recognised important elements of identity, without noticing that such a structure no longer applies to the environment around them. According to Bachelard the history of science consisted in the formation and establishment of such 'epistemological obstacles', and then the subsequent tearing down of the obstacles. This latter stage is an 'epistemological rupture' — where an unconscious obstacle to scientific thought is thoroughly ruptured or broken away from. If among scholars, such a rupture with the idea of 'Urtext' is consolidated (Grier 1996, Fellerer 1980, Feder 1987, a.o.), there are few practitioners doing the same (important exceptions are Peter Gülke, Robert Levin, Roger Norrington or Andràs Schiff, a.o.). Apparently, the majority of musicians accept, uncritically, what they believe to be a 'scientifically' thoroughly worked edition. Urtext-editions supposedly responded both to a utilitarian conception (for performers, who wanted an easily readable text) as well as to scientific demands (where musicologists imposed high standards on critical apparatus and comments). These critical tools were useful and trustful, ensuring performers a reliable text, where 'everything' was notated. The double task of, on the one hand, making appear reasonable the unavoidable provisional character of any given edition (apparently contradicting the scientific tenet of all the critical project) and, on the other hand, to stimulate performers to think and take decisions on their own is a difficult endeavour — a true fight against 'opinion' and 'common places'. Urtext-editions do in many different ways create a 'commodity' for the user: if the

written musical text is 'scientifically' correct, the performer does not need to make deeper considerations on it; if the fingerings are, at least to a certain extent, original from the composer (or suggested by an experienced editor), the reader trusts them, without exploring diverse fingerings; if there are double readings, but the editor decided on which to print in the main text, why read the critical notes and enter a world of doubt? To put it into a nutshell: the survival of Urtext-editions might be understood as being related to a commodity, to an aesthetical and technical security of traditional performers, who don't want to revisit their aesthetical categories, nor reconsider their 'universal' instrumental technique. The interest on new forms of editions, and its acceptance by the performer are, therefore, related to a curiosity and a mental disposition to face newness that not all practitioners have. In this sense, the 'epistemological rupture' from Urtext-editions to Post-Urtext-editions implies a political tenet, touching the sphere of being open to the unknown. Finally, the process of getting rid of the Urtext concept implies critical thinking, something that is not necessarily considered a quality by everybody.

CRITICAL EDITING OF MUSIC AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF EDITIONS

The present editorial landscape offers both the scholar as well as the performer a wide range of editions, from facsimile prints to complex and exhaustive critical editions. In modern practice, some basic assumptions have become fundamental for any serious edition. The first of such conceptions states that editing is a critical activity. Therefore, editions constitute 'interpretative' endeavours, and cannot claim to be definitive. According to this, no edition — existing, projected or future — can pretend to be definitive. Different editors, working on the same basic materials will unavoidably produce different editions; the same editor, working at different times will also achieve different texts. As Philipp Brett observed: '(...) editing is principally a critical act; moreover, it is one (like musical analysis) that begins from critically based assumptions and perceptions that usually go unacknowledged. If these assumptions were to be openly stated, if we began to recognize and allow for legitimate differences in editorial orientation, and if we ceased to use the word 'definitive' in relation to any edited text, then much of the polemics surrounding editing might subside.' (Brett 1988, p. 111).

Moreover, different repertoires require different editorial methods, leading to the evidence that no universal method is applicable to every piece of music. Given the fact that an edition always reproduces the historical relationship between composer, editor and performer, the editor should immerse himself in the stylistic, technical, and performing features of the composer's time/space. Such an 'immersion' could (and should, I believe) include real performance as an interpreter.

Currently, four basic types of editions are to be found:

- the photographic facsimile;
- the printed edition that replicates the original notation;
- the interpretative edition;
- the critical edition (including the so-called 'Commented New Urtext Edition').

The photographic facsimile is, in rigour, not an edition. It depicts one of the major sources of a given piece, allowing for immediate visual information and, therefore, enhancing a strong link to the composer's gesture of writing. Many nuances of the manual graphical representation that an edited text could not

represent become directly visible. In addition, facsimiles are generally easier to use than the manuscripts and autographs of the composer. On the other hand, however, facsimiles are very often unsuitable for general reading, since the handwriting might be legible only to a few specialists, as it is the case with Beethoven, just to name an example.

Printed replicas of the original notation are a form of facsimile, using printed fonts rather than photographs. Keeping in mind the case of Beethoven, such editions make the composer's sketches and autographs into legible sheets of music. Moreover, the editor has the opportunity to incorporate some of his critical findings, including revisions and corrections of the text, making such editions a first form of 'critical edition'. Therefore, editors include some kind of critical apparatus, explaining and giving insight into some of the decisions made.

The interpretative edition records aspects of the performing style of important performers. They transmit a kind of oral tradition and have an inevitable self-referential (and self-legitimizing) character — the editor (normally a famous performer) prints his own interpretative options and establishes them as a canon.

Such interpretative editions — particularly those of late nineteenth century — motivated, in reaction, Urtext-editions. During the twentieth century (especially in its second half) interpretative editions were reduced to a small number, but recent developments in the Urtext concept are giving them a new breath, even if limited to fingerings, bowings and explicitly assumed personal opinions. This type of editions will probably always exist, since they record in written form significant aspects of the performing style of a given era. By doing so, they produce a complex artefact where inherited 'tradition' and critical 'edition' somehow melt together: 'Great performers study with great teachers, who pass on insights into the meaning of the work from previous generations' (Grier 1996, p. 151). Given the fact that increasingly more performers have a solid academic training (enabling them to become artist-researchers, who understand how to critically tackle different kinds of sources), such interpretative editions could very well regain a certain importance — particularly among young students and performative colleagues.

The critical edition is defined by its basic intention of transmitting a text that more closely represents the historical evidence of the sources. This evidence is, however, open to interpretation and discussion, leading to different editions based upon the same sources. This aspect should not be understood as a problem, but rather as an enriching element in the fabric of music editing — an activity that finally remains in the field of human sciences. Such editions should look for clarity of presentation, allowing immediate comprehension and coordination of the many disparate elements that are being communicated through the score. If too much information is given on the face printed text the performer will be confused and, eventually, limited in his mimetic response to the score. Therefore a balance between fidelity to the substance of the music and ease of comprehension is of the utmost relevance. Furthermore, a detailed critical apparatus and individual readings or commentaries are highly desirable, for only they allow the performer to make informed choices. Finally, such editions should open a window to the faculty of judgement of the performer, not exempting users from thinking and taking decisions for themselves. An aspect that, once again, points towards performers that ought to be adventurous and open to novelty: 'Critical editions should generate critical users.' (Grier 1996, p. 181). That not all practitioners have or intend to have such qualities is another example of the political dimension of music editing and of the use of diverse editions in musical practice.

MUSIC EDITING AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE: A DYNAMICIC CONCEPTION

The ideas on music editing exposed so far seem to unveil the process of liberating the score from a static-fixed state into a state of permanent changeability. This conceptual shifting leads to a new understanding of the roles of both the editor as well as the performer. If, according to Jerome McGann's theory of the work of art as a social phenomenon (McGann 1983), every work is a social and historical artefact, this would also include every edition of music. If a final authorial intention (the composer as 'demiurge') is not to be asserted anymore than the process of editing changes from a psychological activity (where the editor ought to establish the author's intentions) into a historical endeavour. At this point the authority of the composer makes the acquaintance with two other authorities, even if of diverse hierarchical value: the authority of the editor and that of the performer.

The authority of the editor has traditionally been underestimated, neglected, or even considered as illegitimate. 'Music editors are often reluctant to assume authority over texts they print, wishing to give the appearance that they present only the text of the composer. Thus they rely, or appear to rely, on the sources themselves, instead of acknowledging their own critical initiative. Nowhere is this tendency more transparent than in the Urtext industry, whose products purport to reproduce the "original" text.' (Grier 1996, p. 4). Different from the composer's text, the final edited text inevitably reflects the editor's conception of the piece as it existed in its ecological (historical and social) environment.

The authority of the performer involves more complex issues, particularly related to the concept of 'style', a category which directly influences the effect (and the judgment) of a given performance. Style, however, is not completely extractable from the score, depending much more on the diversity of performing options each work generates. 'It is essential to incorporate the intermediary stage of performance into the concept of style because of the semiotic nature of musical notation.' (Grier 1996, p. 29). But the authority of the performer resides not only here; by placing the concept of music editing in the realm of History, the role of the performer becomes that of a meta-reader of the musical text, facing and studying continuously changing visions of one single work. An image taken from Walter Benjamin's Thesis on the Philosophy of History might help us clarifying this point.

In his ninth thesis on the Philosophy of History, Walter Benjamin expresses his concept of history with the help of imagery. An angel — it is the *Angelus Novus* by Paul Klee — looks staring to the past, while a strong wind pushes him irremediably towards the future, which he, however, cannot see. He gazes into the past, terrified: 'Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet.' He longs for piecing together what has been smashed, but the storm blowing from Paradise is so strong that the angel can no longer close his wings.

This *Angelus Novus* is the performer. It is the meta-reader of an infinity of musical texts. He is looking into the 'past' where uncountable pieces of music smile to him, hoping to be saved from oblivion. In addition to the documents — written down by the composers — he faces another 'pile of debris' — the innumerable musical editions originary from different times and spaces. In the impossibility of looking at (predicting) the future or of going back to (incarnating) the past, he has no better choice than to creatively wander through all those ruins of the past, studying autographs and first prints, consulting other sources, comparing editions, playing period instruments and, finally, taking decisions. Such decisions will in one way or another inevitably depict the historical relationship between the time of the performer and the time of

the composer, as it is understood in the time of the performer. That some of these decisions may contribute to new editions of a given piece is the logical and ineluctable consequence of this model of thought. 'This succession of events demonstrates that editing music, far from being an exact science, presents, in fact, a moving target. As our knowledge of repertoires and their sources deepens, and our critical appraisal of that knowledge continues, new editions are needed to keep pace with, and reflect, the latest developments.' (Grier 1996, p. 9). Such a dynamic conception — emphasising the process through which a musical work comes to being, instead of rigidly insisting on the reification of a particular state of that work (Grier 1996, p. 13) — requests creative performers, whose intelligence and sensibility could contribute to a permanent renewal of the editorial landscape. Editions represent, therefore, nodal points on the continually changing path of musical scholarship and performance. 'Performers and editors constantly make decisions in response to the same stimuli (notation) on the basis of the same criteria (knowledge of the piece and aesthetic taste). Only the results differ: performers produce sound while editors generate the written or printed page.' (Grier 1996, p. 6). The historically observed variations and differences in the written and performing traditions of a given piece make visible the limits of indeterminacy, without fixing them. Such limits will never be fixed because new performers will continue to challenge and redefine them. In this sense, the act of communicating a piece to an audience becomes a fully relevant part of the creative process, entering a dialogue where the context impinges on the final form and meaning of a work. Through all uncertainty and un-verbalised options, the performer conveys the invisible in the form of the invisible, never betraying it with signs and symbols. That is the paradox function of the editor — to rend visible what, in substance, is unutterable. If the editor is the daimon that imposes the tie of the 'thing' to the 'thing', the performer (the Angel) is the hermeneut of the opposite movement: the one that leads to the outside of the sign and symbol, the one that does not go from the idea to the thing, from the sign to the represented objects, but directly from the thing to the invisible. While referring to a written artefact the performer contests its apparent fixity by proposing other systems, other syntaxes, other rules. The contribution of the performer is that of an 'absent guest', someone in permanent movement and quest through the different times of our musical heritage, wandering and travelling through the diverse nodal points of the editorial universe. By doing so, he creates a heterotopy, a suspended region where the intangible essence of music making finds its deepest realisation. It is this author's aspiration that present and future editions of musical works contribute to the growth of such suspended and infinite universes.

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