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A *Different* Story of the History of Western Music and the Aesthetic Project

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I. *Introduction: The word aesthetic – everywhere and nowhere.*

For a long time, I have been fascinated by the concept "aesthetic". As undergraduates in Sweden we read in Ingemar Bengtsson handbook (1973) about aesthetic values, functions, experiences, and communication. Included in the aesthetic, it was said, were all eternal and new questions about the meaning of music, its soul, its content, and teachings of and views on the concept. Also stressed were the inner intention of the aesthetic message, and the nature of the human encounter with the intentional aesthetic message. If the act of understanding leads to a value judgement, it was said, there occurred a transgression from hermeneutic to aesthetic, but only if the assessed music was properly understood. On the other hand we also read Allan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964). Merriam listed six factors that together made up the aesthetic concept: (1) Psychic or psychical distance; (2) manipulation of form for its own sake; (3) the attribution of emotion-producing qualities in music conceived strictly as sound; (4) the attribution of beauty to the art product or process; (5) the purposeful intent to create something aesthetic; and, (6) the presence of a philosophy of an aesthetic.

Merriam held that the aesthetic concept in its Western sense was not to be found among traditional peoples. That was also what I found when writing my dissertation (1977) about the *Joik* culture of the Sami (the Laplanders) up through the 1950s. Sami music was almost exclusively vocal, *jojk* being the indigenous word for singing a traditional Sami song in the Sami's own way. There seemed to be no such thing as an aesthetic *jojk*. Since then, however, Steven Feld's research (1982) among the Kaluli in New Guinea has changed our views on the possibilities of aesthetics within a traditional oral music culture. However, we found that the concept of aesthetics was often used as weapon against the music of the Others, generally being reserved for Western Art Music. As I played in the symphony orchestra in Göteborg, arranged Big Band Jazz, and played at

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dance halls (Swedish dance band music), the concept of aesthetics was also something of a problem.

Today, the concept "aesthetic" commonly appears not only in major histories of Western music, but also in writings about Jazz or Rock or even Swedish old-time dance music. A recent work states that, for the elderly, there is an "aesthetically clearly marked border against the music of the ghetto-blasters," and that the "'aesthetic preferences' of the elderly are different from those of preceding generations" (Lundberg et al., 2000). Indeed, a search for the concept on the international music database, RILM, will produce more than 17.500 items.

If we turn to the use of the concept in everyday discourse, we find a different story, however. Searching a database containing all the words in Swedish daily newspapers in 1997, I found that, out of 13 billion words, "aesthetic" popped up 355 times, only 25 of which dealt with music. I also found that it was used more often in articles discussing fine art, architecture, and literature. However, the concept had also spread to some other unexpected areas. Three examples are typical:

"That he uses the aesthetics of horselaugh when he portrays this society doesn't make the picture less valuable."

"Popular music is situated at the bottom. I believe the new modernists take this for granted. The aesthetic elitist, however, is not the worst."

"The last scoring of [ice hockey star] Patrick Carnbäck was no aesthetical highlight."

All in all, then, it seems that "aesthetic" is seldom used in the mass media, and to my knowledge, almost never used in everyday discourse. In a project at my department of musicology, we have found no trace of the concept after having listened to one hundred hours of taped conversation with teenagers discussing ten music examples (Lilliestam 2001). Paradoxically, then, in contemporary written discourse, it seems as if the word can be applied to almost anything, but that it seldom appears. The reader is usually left on her

own, then, when it comes to interpreting the word. Furthermore, in everyday discourse the word is an extremely rare bird.

Although it is easy to find the word 'aesthetic' (aesthetics, aesthetification, aesthete and related compounds) in contemporary scholarly discourse, what the word stands for in such discourse is also highly problematic. This semantic ambiguity seems to be as old as the word itself; it seems to suffer from an eternal indeterminacy. It also qualifies under Walter Gallie's definition of an "essentially contested concept" (1956); that is, a concept that inevitably involves endless disputes about its proper use on the part of the users (ibid., 169).

As this preliminary discussion shows, there is a confusing abyss between the preference within musicology and other scholarly discourse for the concept of aesthetic and the use and frequency of the concept in daily discourse. If this is so today, it is likely that the situation was so much different 100 or 200 years ago? This question made me wonder whether, if the term was not known, it really had the impact and importance it was said to have had. It made me wonder if it would not be worthwhile to look at the concept from an ethnomusicological point of view; that is, to discuss the matter from a bottom-up perspective by looking into how music was actually *used* by people and what it meant to them. It became interesting to compare the use and function of music with whatever the concept of "aesthetic" was supposed to mean to those who knew about it. To answer these questions I wrote a study (Edström 2002) using the aesthetic concept as a key to a partly different story of the history of Western music as it is usually still told. In what follows I can only summarize the most important trains of thoughts analysed in greater detail in my monograph.

II. *The ground – and aestheticI*.

My starting point is the supposed beginning. At the time I was an undergraduate, this theme was of high interest to East-German scholars in the 1970s. Among others, Georg Knepler (1977) wrote a lot about our aesthetic roots. They relied on subjects as linguistic, neurology, biology, etc., and built many of their theories on such disciplines. However,

since then the increase of research within these sciences has greatly changed our knowledge.[1] I also gained much insight from anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake's work *Homo Aestheticus - Where Art Comes From and Why* (1992). For Dissanayake, the type of human behaviour we call 'artistic' or 'symbolic' has many parallels with animal behaviours known as rituals. Accordingly, when certain occasional behaviours and expressions led to experiences of satisfaction, then some of these behaviours and expressions became permanent during man's evolution and were subsequently experienced as symbolic. By calling "art" behaviour, she suggests, art-inclined individuals quite simply survived better in the evolution of the human species. Moreover, symbols that are culturally transmitted from generation to generation will be closely related to what is signified. There exists, then, a close connection between the signifier and the signified; as she goes on to say, "the statue *is* the god…as the word *oak* is an oak" (1992, 207).

To Dissanayake, what feels good to human beings in most cases is what *is* good for us – and, accordingly, such satisfactions are also usually a clue concerning what we *need*. Man quite simply invests time and energy in these universal behaviours since it has become evident that these behaviours are adaptive; that is, they were necessary and utilitarian. Thus, she says, it is not what we today call "art" – with all its burden of accreted connotations from the past two centuries – but *making-special* that has been evolutionary or socially and culturally important. These kinds of activities – 'making-special' – are things that exist beyond the ordinary. They will be noticed as '*special experiences*'. So the "aesthetic" dimension is not something added – learned or acquired, like speaking a second language – but it *is the way we are: Homo aestheticus*. Thus I start our aesthetic journey with special experiences or *making-special experiences* that I symbolise as aestheticI (aeI).

Moving forward in time, we approach the Ancient Greeks. Here Plato was the first great philosopher to speak from a fully literate perspective when he demonstrated how images *contrast* with reality. We find an arsenal of Greek terms that we still struggle to translate or understand: *Techné, empeiria, epistéme, mousiké* and, not least, *aisthesis*. The

latter term referred to both sensation and perception and meant, in general, 'knowledge gained by means of the senses'. As Ancient Greek was a pitched language, melody can be understood an outgrowth of the natural inflections of the spoken language. Greek songs could thus have been experienced as a 'second language'. Instrumental music was regarded for its *mimetic* possibilities, but since the artist only created a musical depiction of an *illusion* of the noumenal world, his social status was very low.

The time of Plato and Aristotle was a time of dramatic social protests, upheavals and wars that led to serious crises in culture, as respect for all social norms – both moral and juridical – was undermined and an (up until then) unknown individualism swept forward. Cultural life lost its sense of balance and more emotional traits – but also more realistic views – came into the foreground, instead. To me, these facts must be related to the writings of Plato and Aristotle.

III. *On the way to aestheticII.*

There seems, thus, to be two different ways to understand descriptions of song/music and aisthesis or aesthetics in ancient Greek and generally in Greek music history. On the one hand, some scholars say that *mousiké* developed into "*aesthetically* liberated music – – and that 'the poems and music developed according to their own inner laws" (Moberg 1973, 30). For example, in Riethmüller (1989), Aristoxenos's writings on music theory is compared with Johann Mattheson's introduction to his *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* from 1737 and is found to be very similar. You just wait for the question, "Did they think in the same way?!" Riethmüller thus points out that on the surface in both Plato's and Mattheson's time, analogous changes seem to happen: instrumental music grew in importance and prevalence, song was regarded as a more emotional form of expression and, in a general way, the rules of the musical game slowly changed. Even if it is tempting, to my mind it is epistemologically false to believe however that an identical or similar process was going on, or that it meant the same. Whatever we consider, it is said, thought, or done differently in its own time and context. The same word – 'aesthetic', for example – thus always has different meanings, the presumed "same" behaviour has

different functions, abstract ideas, meanings, etc. This, of course, is more or less what Karl Mannheim said:

> Each idea acquires a new meaning when it is applied to a new life situation. When new strata take over systems of ideas from other strata, it can always be shown that the same words mean something different to the new sponsors, because these latter think in terms of different aspirations and existential configurations. This social change of function, then, is…also a change of meaning. (1968, 188)

For Plato then, the *beautiful* did not exist in itself; neither did concepts such as 'free art' or 'beautiful art'. *Aisthesis* was thus not a super-concept for some special forms of song or music or art.

I also find, then, that it is wrong to use the this concept in connection with the Middle Ages; at the time there was no relation between *aisthesis*, art, and beauty, because artistic creation was not understood to be a form of individual and subjective conduct. In 1735, Alexander Baumgarten, first defined the modern understanding of the term as we know it:

> *Things known* then, are those known by the superior faculty ... *Things perceived* come within the ambit of the science of perception and are the object of the lower faculty. These may be termed *aesthetic*. (Meditationes philosophicae 1735 § 116)

Baumgarten lectured on this in the 1740s and wrote a whole book on the subject in 1750. At that time the socio-cultural process called the Enlightenment had been going on for a long time, of course. It was those changes that lead Baumgarten to seek a new concept to establish the rational basis of the connection between aisthesis and art. It was not at once accepted as a helpful term, though. Immanuel Kant wrote in 1781 that:

> The Germans are the only ones who now employ the word 'aesthetics' to designate that which others call the critique of taste. The ground for this is a failed hope, held by the excellent analyst Baumgarten, of bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason, and elevating its rules to science. But this effort is futile. (1998, 156)

As true and certain as it is that the structure of music and its form stands in a functional relation to the social contexts for which music is considered suitable, it is also as true and certain that the ways in which the music is understood and valued stand in a close relationship with the total life-world of people; i.e., how the individual thinks and

acts as a social being. If we study and listen to music composed in and before Baumgarten's time we find that, as a rule, Baroque music was music for the court and church. It is thus a kind of functional music written, of course, for those in the highest social strata of that period. As Norbert Elias (1983) describes it, the court society of the time fostered specific personality traits; you had to manoeuvre in full openness, control your feelings, and behave strictly according to etiquette. Prestige was everything. Elias writes:

> The fetish character of every act in the etiquette was clearly developed at the time of Louis XIV. […] Etiquette and ceremony increasingly became…a ghostly perpetuum mobile that continued to operate regardless of any direct use–value. (1983, 86)

Art or music, then, meant less in themselves than as a means in the ever-ongoing game of prestige and power. As Elias also points out (100), while we like to objectify or reify everything personal, court people *personified the objective* for it was always with people and their positions relative to each other that they were primarily concerned.

The way music was actually used or listened to in the court society thus had a direct bearing on the structure of the music. Since music – as art – was understood both as an object and a means within the etiquette world at the court and its ongoing social games, it was paramount that no unexpected musical structures be suffered and that, therefore, the music predictably followed certain rules. The craftsmanship of the composer almost made him disappear as an individual; the music was just there. Each movement had one single expression and was well controlled by the "doctrine of musical affections" (*Affektenlehre*). These musical formulas for characteristic emotions were part of the prescribed etiquette and, thus, were subjective only to a very limited extent. As the music went on, different musical voices came smoothly in one after another. The soli and tutti sections changed in a regular way. The music fit court society like a hand in a glove.[2]

As we know, so much changed after Mattheson's time: The decline of the court society, the slow consolidation of the bourgeoisie, the general social changes in the societies from the Enlightenment, etc. In two different contexts, the way music was used also slowly changed: one is the rise of public concerts, and the other is the role and function especially of song in private salons in the homes of the bourgeoisie.[3]

If we start with the latter, during the last half of the eighteenth century taking part in cultural societies of different kinds became increasingly popular. A new literate and musically inclined bourgeoisie audience read aloud and sang the odes of Klopstock and the songs of Reichard and Zelter, among others. Individuals also played the new type of instrumental pieces, for instance Carl Philip Emanuel Bach's sonatas for women (*Six sonates pour le clavecin à l'usage des dames*, 1770). Song lyrics and readily singable melodies with simple accompaniment matched the dreams and thoughts of this new social class. To my mind, the role and importance of this tradition has always been underestimated in musicology. This oversight is strange since the voice is one of the most natural ways of artistic expression. We carry the instrument with us and practice singing from our early youth. For every instrumentalist I assume there have always been ten singers.

This is, of course, not the impression you will get when reading a general history of Western music. Instead you might believe that the music most listened to and loved was the instrumental music of Beethoven, Brahms, Schoenberg, etc. The *re*-construction of what *really went on* in music history thus has a long way to go.

In the Age of Enlightenment, then, we witness the renaissance of the word 'aesthetics'. We find that there was a gradual change in the nobleman's ways of looking at art and of thinking and acting and that a bourgeois economic and rationally goal-oriented thinking slowly spread in concert with societal changes due to the socio-cultural effects of the Enlightenment project. In a society subject to constant transformation, new bourgeois forms of acquiring music appeared – playing and singing during spare time with family and friends, but the higher strata also listened to music in the contexts of public concerts. We find that the seeking of music is a personally motivated and voluntary act. The forum of public concerts further develops the musical fundament lain partly by music making in the church, partly through the opera tradition, two separate traditions of different importance in different parts of Europe.

What constituted art, and how social taste was founded are questions that were much pondered by humans thirsty for enlightenment. As the conviction of the

omnipotence of a Christian God gradually lost ground, it fell upon the individual to decide and to find the causes for truths and held values. In a gradually developing process of change, not only was art separated from craft, but various levels of value also developed in art. In this process the contributions from newspaper critics played an important role; they educated their readers at the same time a mode a collective discourse took form (Morrow, 1997). As one reviewer wrote in 1792:

> Music is nothing more than a succession of tones intended to express certain sentiments, or to arouse them in others, or to entertain... Just as music is born through sentiment, in the same manner it affects only sentiment, the heart is the actual target of music. Words affect reason, producing in it special ideas, which can, of course, then produce feeling again. But music affects the feelings directly… Purely instrumental music can certainly make, in and of itself, a very lively impression: a beautifully performed Haydn sonata can do a lot. But in this type of music always lies a great deal that is vague, ambiguous, uncertain, and you have to have a certain amount of training to get true pleasure from it (as quoted in Morrow 1997, 2).

On what was held to be the most artful level, especially talented composers composed *works* that were meant to be listened to with an interested attitude and in a concentrated way.[4] Around the turn of the century (1800), an aesthetic discourse developed, as interpreted by a small minority of culturally and musically interested people. Several factors contributed to a complex interaction within a social system that gradually grew more market-oriented and capitalist – including the gradually appearing or developing domain or institution of public concerts in which writers and reviewers took on great importance in the development of new styles of music; changes in the forms and structure of music; as well as the appearance of a gradually larger bourgeoisie that possessed a developing appetite for music.

A greater demand for instrumental music and a slow change in views concerning what was considered the most valuable music led philosophers and writers to devote much attention to the internal value and life of textless instrumental music. A subjective power or force was projected onto the music, which in turn could transport the receptive individual to a transcendental artistic world, far from the demands of everyday life. On these occasions, I hold, listening ideally became a sacred labour. The new concert halls were likened to musical shrines. Within this cultural discourse the experience of an

aesthetic dimension, aestheticII (aeII) was added to the previous "making special" or ae**I.** This was only possible because the interest in the musical structure *per se* increasingly grew in importance. From this idea there is just a small step to consider a musical work an expressive 'subject', or even an intentional 'subject'. As Karl Philipp von Moritz wrote in 1771:

> When I contemplate a beautiful object, I deflect the aim from myself back on the object itself. I consider it as something that fulfils not me, but *itself*. It thus constitutes an entity in itself; affording me pleasure on *its own account*" (as quoted in le Huray & Day 1981, 186)

To Moritz the aesthetic pleasure in listening to music had to a large extent to do with his experience of the musical form.[5]

To sum up thus far the most important factors which mutually stipulated each other and generated the conditions for this experience (aeII) we find: (a) the view of music as art; (b) the belief in the autonomy of music; (c) that instrumental music expressed that which could not be spoken of; and, (d) that a new mode of listening was applied in the social contexts in which this music was performed.[6]

IV. *From aestheticII to aestheticIII.*

The aesthetic discourse originally found in a small intellectual and cultural section of the bourgeoisie gradually spread during the 19th century to larger socio-cultural areas and, due to general education, tutoring and social intercourse, it came to be an influential concept in the thoughts of a much larger group of the European bourgeoisie. A little later, it was also to become a cultural tradition acquired by the leading men and women of the working class – a tradition they also wanted their members to have access to in the near future. Within the bourgeoisie, a person interested in art was expected to have an opinion on the latest music and art, opinions that could conveniently be attained through reading the judgements of reviewers. In the course of this bourgeois-induced process of change, the idea of aesthetic experience was widened – from aestheticII – to aestheticIII, where a strong emotional element was assumed.

Most important, the concepts "aesthetic" and "artistically elevated music" were generally regarded as synonyms. The aesthetic project was not taking place solely within the field of music; but at various speeds among the other fine arts and, of course, at first

within the field of literature. The fact that the word aesthetic was used more and more as a synonym for all the different forms of art during the 19th century within the higher strata of society meant that it increasingly was used, if variously understood.

The point from a sociological perspective, of course, is that it was neither the structure of the music (arts) as such, nor the reception and understanding of music's structure that started this process, but both. As Pierre Bourdieu constantly reminds us, the aesthetic disposition, that is, the idea of "aesthetic experience", was formed by the same complicated socio-cultural process as were developments involving musical structure, etc. Thus the disposition to listen 'aesthetically' was itself the product of a long collective history. Thought patterns and knowledge can only exist as a result of the cumulative habits of human culture:

> The experience of the work of art as immediately endowed with meaning and values is an effect of the harmony between the two aspects of the same historical institution, the cultivated *habitus* and the artistic field. (1996, 289)

However, among the great majority – among farmers, the working class, sailors, etc. – music and song were used and sung and played as before, even as the styles of music slowly changed. There was, though, singing in an increased number of new social contexts: schools, Free Churches, national movements, etc. Secular choirs were formed by students, professional groups, and served national movements of all kinds.

Music was felt to fit in well with the developing bourgeoisie culture, not the least because music and singing responded in a compensatory way to needs often denied by a social climate that was focussed on competition and the attainment of economic goals. Singing and music were simply close to the hearts of people, both cognitively and emotionally.

In our histories of Western music there is again comparatively little to be found about the everyday music of the bourgeoisie – i.e., salon music, ditties, folk songs, Lieder, favourite arias from operas and operettas, etc. However, the same authorities who paved the way for the social construction of the aesthetic disposition looked down upon almost all of these everyday forms of music! The process of belittling such music by authorities ran side by side with its neglect by commentators and historians. Very early in

the 19th century, however, it was noticed that people bought neither the literature nor the music they were supposed to buy.[7]

On the contrary, music publishers soon found out that the demand was for salon music, most often short pieces with worldly titles, such as "A Virgin's Prayer" (*Das Gebet einer Jungfrau*, by Thekla Badarzweska) or "The Sunday of the Mountain Pasture Girl "(*Säterjäntans Söndag*, by Ole Bull), both having pleasant melodies, preferably edited with easy accompaniment. If the composer could add some virtuoso-sounding figures, the impact of the music made it even more à la mode. These types of music were considered to be of lesser value, however; for instance, reference was made to 'higher' and 'lower' forms of music. The use of music among the popular majority, and their access to new forms of music, was only slowly – and, at least in Sweden, marginally – changed during the 19th century. Thus, the expectation – implicit in culture and explicit in education – of assimilating and understanding 'higher' art was not fulfilled in the intended manner. To give one example of the situation in Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city, Bedrich Smetana in a letter to Franz Liszt, wrote in 1857 that Mozart was an idol to the bourgeoisie, but his music was not the least understood. Moreover, whereas Mendelssohn's music was declared impossible, they feared Beethoven's music (Berg 1914, 90).

Ideally then, high music and culture, good customs, and sound sentiments functioned for the bourgeoisie as contrasts to the struggles of everyday life and the antagonistic economic and political forces within society. It was only the highest forms of music that could erase the felt dualism between nature and culture. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, for one, considered art music to be the happy middle point – die glückliche Mitte – in the strivings of man.[8]

Art music as both an object and a means of solace thus held a key role in the cultural upbringing of bourgeoisie children and also in the education of the lower social classes. In both cases one is reminded of the old saying, "if you can't beat them, join them". Because the lower forms of music were not considered "art" music they could not by definition have *any* aesthetic value. It was, however, *not easy* for musicologists or

theorists of music to find objective criterion by which true, high, or aesthetically correct music could be separated from the rest, so this was done with the help of class power and cultural authority in combination with purely ethical considerations and moral concepts. As David Lloyd (1990) has pointed out, aesthetics represented a forestalled politics, an opinion that at least goes back to Schiller. The aesthetic addition (aeII) was one important tool to use to separate those who just loved music, *die Liebhabern,* from those who knew music, *die Kennern*, or as Schiller wrote in a similar situation discussing the popular poetry of Gottfried August Bürger: "There is now a great gulf between the *elect* and the masses" (quoted in Woodmansee 1994, 74).

From the 19th c. and onwards musicology and music theory have, in addition, been also important players in this process. Within music theory many different methods evolved that supposedly analysed music's structure in an objective way. As a consequence it was easy for those in 'musical power' to refer to these scholarly analyses and disguise their value judgments as objective aesthetic opinions.

V. *aestheticI, aestheticII, aestheticIII, and….*

In the beginning of the 20th century, in the course of this process, the number of people equipped with the prerequisites for experiencing aeIII in various musical contexts increased significantly within the bourgeoisie. To the true seekers of aeII, namely, those favourably disposed to the latest art music and, of course, to modernist music, the more general, emotional form aeIII was a dilution of the genuine, concentrated, aesthetic experience (that is aeII). However, as was the case during the 19th century, the large majority of the population in the 20th century was influenced only to a very small extent by the aesthetic theorizing conducted by the bourgeoisie during this century.

Moreover, the group of people interested in art who sought to experience aeII when listening to the latest art music did *not* increase in a corresponding manner, partly due to the increased complexity in that sort of music (Schoenberg is one example). Many modernist art music composers during most of the 20th century felt it was more important to be true to one's self and one's own art than to pay any attention to one's listeners.

Genuine art music, they believed, spoke the truth. To the *élite* and *avant-garde,* aesthetics was experienced as *an eternal category* rather than as the socially constructed one revealed by history. As Jay Bernstein (1992) his written, there was a dilemma of course:

> If art is taken as lying outside truth and reason then if art speaks in its own voice it does not speak truthfully or rationally; while if one defends art from within the confines of the language of truth-only cognition one belies the claim that art is more truthful than that truth-only cognition. (1992, 2)

There are three evident ways out of this dilemma: (a) to believe that (aesthetic) art music is true only if it criticizes society; (b) to posit that (aesthetic) art music from the start developed within a system of its own that runs in parallel to other systems in society; and, (c) to hold that every man-made object is aesthetic, i.e., to implode the whole question. We associate Theodor W. Adorno with the first position, Niklas Luhmann with the second, and, among others Benodetto Croce with the third.[9] Within the two first positions there is often a belief that music must or should be listened to in a special mode, and that art music has an autonomous or a relatively autonomous position in relation to society. These views, however, are nothing more than a way to mystify the relation, or a way of putting a label on the relation that is still left unexplained by the tools available.

While access to both music in the foreground of a social context (i.e., as a goal in itself) as well as music in the background of a social context (i.e., music as a means) increased during the 19th century, the latter form of music especially increased, and enormously so, during the last century.[10] Thanks to broadcasting media and recorded performances, gradually larger groups gained opportunities to hear music. I believe that from this point in time the prerequisites of the aesthetic music project definitely turned. Music came to be used in new situations and new contexts, which led to a more rapid change in the aesthetic project than in the previous centuries. As we have seen, one of the most important reasons for this rapid change was that the bourgeois project of musical 'education', or musical *Bildung*, did not achieve its intended success due to the accessibility of popular music, and the appearance of broadcasting media, and the accessible structure of the music.

Virtually all popular music in the first half of the 20th century was regarded from a stylistic point of view as *middle music*.[11] Until approximately the 1950s, *middle music* can be defined negatively as including *all* forms of music *except* traditional folk music and longer, complicated symphonic music – including, of course, modern art music, and opera. All other music – marches, the Vienna waltz, "classical favourites", characteristic pieces, overtures to operettas and operas, choral music, solo works for various instruments, songs, popular medleys, etc. – constituted the common, completely natural, musical diet for the great majority. Thus, from the 1920s onwards, as a result of mass media (gramophones, radio and sound-film) and general socio-economic change, new musical tastes and practices were gradually formed which divided people into distinct groups.

As often had been the case in the past, the performing artist was more important than the composer, and no one was expected to concentrate on the music in or for itself. And no one dreamed of or talked about what the aesthetics of *Schlager* (i.e. popular songs in the Tin-Pan-Alley-tradition) could mean, but Adorno had already started to complain in the late 1920s about the degenerate melodies of the German and Austrian *schlagers*, and that people – especially those in the German working class – were sedated by the 'false consciousness' of popular music. While Adorno discussed the loss of music's *aura*, because a record could be played many times in a social context, its familiarity reduced higher music's negative critique of society to point zero, the vast majority of people nonetheless happily listened to their recordings and to the radio. It seems as if Adorno and his friends never drank beer together and sang *Schlager*, or that he didn't even know what it meant to dance a "jolly waltz". As in the nineteenth century, the music industry once again noticed that what the music people bought and listened to was not the music authorities said they were supposed to buy or listen to. In sum, as music was increasingly used in different everyday social contexts, both its functions and meanings changed**.** And, as I analyse it, there was little time or inclination to develop an aesthetic attitude of the traditional type, or to consider the music heard in the 'background' as an aesthetic experience. Thus the attempt to musically elevate the working class did not succeed.

After the Second World War contemporary art music parted even more from the earlier forms of art, and, of course, it detached completely from *middle music*. In fact, the *élitist* hopes of modernism that true art would bring man into contact with a more real, transcendental world, had to give way to other views during the 20th century in general. The cautious curiosity of the educated bourgeoisie in the years between the wars, the spirit that inspired the enthusiastic adherents of the post-war era, was gradually replaced by other considerations in a period characterized by cultural theorists, philosophers and others as post-modern – the time *after* modernism, but which should rather be seen as an outcome of modernity itself.

Those who had earlier sought aeII in contemporary art music became fewer and fewer. Art music of earlier centuries – together with some moderately modernist music of the 20th century – continued to be the music which fulfilled the expectations of concert audiences for beautiful, delightful, and exciting experiences. Thanks to the music media, in less than 50 years this art music– still palatable to most people – has, along with all new stylistic varieties of popular music, gradually filled all spaces in the "listening field," or has come to be used in virtually all conceivable situations of life, such as "easy listening" and film. More than ever before, music and singing have become a dimension of social intercourse and life, rather than an intra-personal encounter with a sonic event.

VI. … *and aestheticIV and aestheticV – the present phase.*

On the other hand, those who encountered music grew in numbers and made it possible for more and more people to listen to music. Thus, aeI, 'making-special-experiences', became more common in everyday experience, and aeIII became a possibility for increasingly larger groups of people.

The way in which the psychogenesis of younger generations, to use a term from Elias (1983), was changed – especially after the Second World War – has led to partly changed ways of using culture. In part, this process resulted in a mode of usage founded in everyday life and characterized by enjoyment, and we thus encounter the forth variant, aesthetic experience aeIV. This was a broadening of aeIII's emotionality, where the new

elements were clearly discernible aspects characterizing the experiences as ”fun”, ”irrational”, ”vulgar”, etc. These adjectives and descriptions are already found in the 1970s in the writings of rock fans and scholars like Richard Meltzer (1987), in Pattison's book, with a title that previously would not have been possible, *The Triumph of Vulgarity* (1987), and in Paul Willis' writings from the 1980s (1990). Among philosophers, the 'aesthetics of rock' has also been defined as the way music feels and affects the listener's body. As Bruce Baugh wrote in 1993:

> Where Kant prized free and autonomous judgment of reason, and so found beauty in form… an aesthetics of rock judges the beauty of music by its effect on the body… makes beauty in rock to some extent a subjective and personal matter. (1993, 26)

Rather similar views are found in the influential writings of Simon Frith from the same period and onwards. In an early publication he wrote:

> If the essence of rock is fun, it is a concept strangely neglected by sociologists. Analysts of high art are obliged to respect the autonomy of aesthetic judgements, but sociologists of popular art… don't confront fun, but describe the 'irrationality' of mass taste with aloof disgust, as if irrationality were irrelevant for popular culture instead of part of it. Marxists, in particular, have interpreted the fact that people *enjoy* mass culture as a reason for gloom… But the power of rock fantasy rests, precisely, on utopianism. (1981, 264)

Many scholars have since legitimised Rock and Pop as aesthetic music, whatever the adjective aesthetic meant to their readers.

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The cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1970, 1976) told us some years ago regarding semiotics that there is nothing on the outside or the inside of the sign. This is, of course, a rather hopeless thought. A more hopeful analysis has developed among German sociologists since the 1980s – for example, the writing s of Ulrich Beck (1986), *Risikogesellschaft*, [Risk Society] Thomas Ziehe (1975), and not least Gerhard Schulze (1992) *Die Erlebnis-Gesellschaft*, [Event Society]. Among these, Thomas Ziehe's writings (1975) have had a huge impact on German and Scandinavian pedagogy.

German philosopher Wofgang Welsch (1997) has also developed similar thoughts. Turning the whole idea of the aesthetic on its head, Welsch says that from now on, it is not

the inside of objects that counts but the outside. He thus holds that the changes in contemporary culture have not only probably brought about a surface aesthetification of everyday life but, in all likelihood, also more a profound, or as he describes it, a deeper form of aesthetification which has to do with the interface between human/software/machine in different forms of production of commodities and in the creation of objects specifically intended as works of art (imagery, music, etc).

There is little deeper or empirically founded knowledge concerning what this latter deep-aesthetic process means. Welsch speaks in general terms of an "immaterial aesthetification" and the fact that sensory aspects enter at an early stage in the creative process. Sociologist Scott Lash (1999), for his part, speaks of an erasure of the boundaries by which we have thus far always maintained an illusion of separation between, subject and object as well as between object and symbol. Material objects, in this view, become both symbolic and actively create consciousness. Lash also holds that in the global society based on information, the borders between human and non-human, between different cultures, and between material and immaterial are all dissolving.

The repeated search of self-reflexive man for yet another experience in an environment where all senses are bombarded with surface impressions has brought perhaps yet another aesthetic dimension, aestheticV (aeV). Even though all forms of aesthetic experiences are social constructions experienced individually with varying degrees of inter-subjective overlap, it can be emphasized that aeV has a greater intra-subjective and arbitrary or contingent profile.

As should be apparent, describing this ongoing process is problematic because aeV seems to be an open concept, expanding out and into all human activities and experiences (cf. Croce 1992). When attempting to enter this open room, it is all too easy to stumble on a threshold consisting of the social construction of knowledge. However, valuable contributions towards understanding aeV are found in the work of Michael Bull (2000) and Tia DeNora (2000). In DeNora's work, *Music in Everyday Life,* the concept of aesthetic, aesthetics, aesthetification, aesthete, and related compounds appear well over one hundred times in 170 pages! If I translate the multifarious ways in which the concepts

appear, her usage seems to vary across the entire range from aeI to aeV. As I understand DeNora, "aesthetic" stands for a predominantly everyday, sensation-based, entertaining and, to the individual, positive experience. In my view, however, such a broad usage of meanings is not very helpful.

The change in the conceptual significance of the word "aesthetic" has thus been shown to broaden and change concurrently with changes in Western societies and the related and pervasive spread of music as an element in virtually all human activities. At the same time, I am struck by the suspicion that we may have travelled in an enormous circle or, perhaps more appropriately, a spiral. For at the beginning of this story we met the idea of *experiences and actions of making-special* of aeI that are a part of our "original" human psychogenesis, *homo aestheticus*. Now, a few thousand years later, due to social change, we find that we may have entered a new room where everything is characterized by a hegemony of surface aesthetics where the prevalence of an "*always-acting"* aesthetic results in the "*always-aesthetic experience*" of aeV.

This has happened at the same time as the use and meaning of the other words connecting with aesthetics have also changed, of course. As Paul Mathew, a former DMA student at Peabody Conservatory, recently wrote on the Internet:

> For my students the idea of just listening to a piece of music is totally alien. When I tell them that some concert goers [*sic*] in the Eighteenth century had an intuitive grasp of what happens in the sonata form, they are incredulous. Who could just listen to music and understand all that stuff? Without lyrics, no less! And when I teach my pop-music class, I find that they know little more about the music they claim is near and dear to them. Sure, they know the gossip and they've have memorized the rhyme, but they have no idea how the music is held together, and what's going on behind the singers. For most of my students, music happens in cars. Music comes out of headphones, facilitates dancing. It is not a thing to be contemplated solely. They are perplexed when they come back from ´seeing´ the Baltimore Orchestra and I ask them what they ´heard´.[12]

To the degree that this mode of responding to music is now the rule rather than the exception, then of course no one would deny that the aesthetics of music has taken on a whole new meaning.

VII. *At the end*

Within the gigantic field of music today there is a muddle of values and opinions today as regards the value of and need for different types of music. To an unprecedented extent, music is created, packaged, distributed, sold, listened to, played, taught, heard, and so on, in the background, locally as well as globally. New computer-based technology and software make it possible to create types of music where elements of sound and text are put together in new ways. In today's technologically expanded world, most things can be de-contextualized, taken apart, and tried in new contexts. In this post-modern world, the traditional (bourgeoisie) values and view of culture as a unifying force are challenged. The safe, conserving role of the researcher or cultural writer has been replaced by an interpretive or critical one.

As Adorno acknowledged, music is a latecomer among the arts. What he considered to be great music might be a type of music that was possible, that served a variety of intended functions, only during a short period of human history. Whether art will survive these developments is anybody's guess. We are approaching the 300-year jubilee of Baumgarten's concept. We still have the labels "art" and "aesthetic", though it seems that whatever semantic fields they covered in the past, their meanings are fragmented; thus no real consensus exists any longer among different layers in our societies concerning their meaning. Most of the time, hiding its bourgeoisie connotations, "aesthetic" seems still to stand in for 'artistic' or 'tasteful' style, thus implying some kind of fine inborn quality or essence in the object or action. More often than not, however, I suspect, that it is used because it usually is used, whatever it means. Thus we are usually left on our own when it comes to interpreting the word. I do think twice before I use it, and recommend my readers to do the same.

Notes

[1] Cf. *Dunbar, Knight & Powers* (1999) and *Wallin, Merker & Brown* (1999).

[2] Cf. Neitzert (1990) for an illuminating exploration of the relation between the structures of music, man's conception of the world, and society.

[3] Cf. Stoljar (1985).

[4] Cf. Lydia Goehr (1992), and the discussion between Goehr and Reinhard Strohm in Talbot 2000.

[5] Martha Woodmansee (1994) has commented that the mode of reception described by Moritz has a parallel in the Christian's contemplation of God: "God is an end in itself… we are thus enjoined to love God disinterestedly, for His own sake. An analogous relationship is established between the work of art and the 'aesthetic' attitude" (1994, 20).

[6] In the form of aesthetic experience Immanuel Kant spoke of in the late 18th century, there was a clear distance between object and subject. This cultural ability was (is) present as an ingredient in the aesthetic addition, eII. This objectified view of music already had its compositional prerequisite in the fact that composition was tied to written music, and therefore to a manner of working which was rationally controlled to a high extent. Here it is again possible to make a connection to one of Dissanayake's leading ideas on the differences between oral and literary culture; the ability to read facilitates objectification (1990, 203).

[7] Cf. Woodmansee (1994) on the development of a growing literature industry already in the second half of the eighteenth century. Among others, Schiller decried the public for wanting only to be diverted and entertained (ibid, 29).

[8] This, of course, is a recurrent theme in Eagleton (1989). Cf. for instance: "For the alarming truth is that in a social order marked by class division and market competition, it may finally be here [in art], and only here, that human beings belong together. (Eagleton 1989, 75)

[9] Whereas Adorno is well known, the contemporary German sociologist Niklas Luhmann seems to be rather little known to Anglo-American musicologists and music pedagogues (cf. Luhmann, 1995). For an introduction to his ideas, see Croce 1992.

[10] To give an economic measure: out of nearly 300 people who received more than 100 000 SEK each from STIM (The Swedish Performers Right Society) in one year at the middle of the 1990s, there were fewer than 15 composers of art music. The rest of the composers were consequently working in the field of popular music (Edström 1998, 371). These statistics are simultaneously a good indication of the primacy of vocal music.

[11] For discussion on the importance of *middle music*, see Edström 1992, 1997.

[12] Society for Music Theory – discussion list /Internet 022697/

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