

ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom LXXII, zeszyt 12 – 2024



ZESZYT SPECJALNY / SPECIAL ISSUE

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18290/rh247212sp.2>

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INTERPERSONAL SEMIOTICS OF MUSIC AFTER SEVERAL DECADES

INTERPERSONAL SEMIOTICS OF MUSIC

In 1965, a study by Ferdinand Knobloch (1916–2018), Milan Poštoľka and Jiří Srnec appeared in the journal *Hudební věda (Musicology)*, published by the Institute for the Arts. A psychiatrist, a musicologist and a psychologist teamed up and verified by experiments in large groups that music also, among other things, acts interpersonally, in such a way that individual respondents are able to distinguish which interpersonal tendencies are involved, and these distinctions are not random. The basis of the hypothesis—subsequently following further research by Knobloch and his team—was published in the journal *Kybernetika (Cybernetics)* in 1968 as the theory of small social group and system of interpersonal tendencies.

MY OWN USE

I found the study interesting and learned about the theoretical background and the actors in the text. I started working with the hypothesis and the first results appeared. Moreover, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with the GUHA (General Unary Hypothesis Automaton) method and its inventor, mathematician, and organist Petr Hájek (1983): this method was then used to evaluate the results of experiments with different groups of respondents over the following years.

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THE CONTEXT OF MUSICAL ANALYSES

It was necessary to find a triggering moment that would validate this type of interpersonal analysis in the context of other, more traditional types of musical analysis. Such a moment emerged in the context of the project of comparative analyses of the **Alban Berg's** *Violin Concerto* (1885–1935; the *Concerto* was composed in 1935) initiated by the Music Section of the Institute of Art History in 1968. Ten musicologists—Czechs, one East German, one Swiss, and one Russian colleague, presented their analyses across a wide range of existing possibilities.

It can be assumed that for musicologists and musicians this choice will be clearly motivated by the outcome of the watershed year of the Prague Spring of 1968 and the subsequent absolute change in domestic and foreign policy: after the democratization of the situation, the previous totalitarian regime returned in the form of the so-called normalization. The deep disillusionment corresponded with Berg's *Concerto*.

AN INTERPERSONAL ANALYSIS OF BERG'S *VIOLIN CONCERTO*

The analysis through interpersonal tendencies published in the Institute's *Hudební věda* with a German resume like all other analyses then showed both the character of the work and its form, reliably distinguished the music cited, and formed the basis for the reconstruction of a *fantasy plot* (one of the categories of interpersonal theory):

Berg's violin concerto appears, from an interpersonal point of view, to be a document of an internal and external situation that was determined by losses of certainty, freedom and faith in the future. The fantasy plot develops these basic motifs in images of a beautiful but distant past and an actual but frightening present. Deep melancholy alternates with an ironic look at it all. Changes in interpersonal behaviour are manifested in the discontinuity of context and its contrast. The work presents a model of behaviour in which distance and a high degree of self-awareness prevail. (Doubravová 1972, 137)

The analysis of the work through interpersonal tendencies has been accepted by the colleagues as enriching the spectrum of traditional analyses of musical works.

OTHER APPLICATIONS OF THE INTERPERSONAL THEORY

I then turned to interpersonal analyses of works by other authors, but with different professional goals and different professional uses. These were prominent works of *Art Nouveau*, not only Czech but also Finnish, namely by **Josef Suk** (1874–1935) and **Jean Sibelius** (1865–1957) (the results were presented at a Helsinki conference in 1990 and published in 1995). The works of **Béla Bartók** (1886–1968) were analysed through the interpersonal hypothesis, considering the distinctive character of his works in terms of the use of characteristic interpersonal patterns, including those works produced in the USA; the results were applied at the Tihany Conference, 1974, and then at the 2nd IASS/AIS Congress in Vienna (published in 1984).

An important publication appeared in 2005 in *MINT*.¹

The anniversary of **Bohuslav Martinů** (1890–1959) opened up the possibility to address the special surrealist character of his work (not only the directly surrealist theme of his opera *Julietta aneb Snář* (*Juliette or The Dream Book*), based on a text by Georg Neveux (1938) under the title *Seeking for the Lost Self*; the results were directly presented at a conference in Saint Louis in 1990; subsequently published in French (1991) and Slovak (1992). The congress of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Semiotik* (the author was a member of the society) in Tübingen turned the author's attention to works of Czech music of the 20th century and especially to the work of **Miloslav Kabeláč** (1908–1979) due to the special organization of the material and musical time and interpersonal tendencies.

Both the 3rd Congress of Musical Signification in Edinburgh and the 5th Congress of IASS/AIS in Berkeley and similarly the 6th Congress of IASS/AIS in Dresden opened up the possibility for evaluating and generalizing the long-standing work on research on the interpersonal effects of music, including experiments with different types of respondents in terms of nationality, age and social class (Doubravová 2002).

THE WORK OF LEOŠ JANÁČEK

I paid special attention the works of **Leoš Janáček** (1854–1928). The distinctive and peculiar “world” of this composer directly called for interpersonal

¹ MINT stands in German for Mathematik, Informatik, Naturwissenschaften, Technik.

analysis, among other things due to the stylistic feature of interrupting the musical flow with sharp contrasts of small motifs or speech melodies, understood thematically. Particularly in connection with the category of *I—the Other* interesting results could be expected—based on the analysis of interpersonal tendencies, it was possible to determine that some works of different genres referred to the same interpersonal background: they were probably created on similar impulses.

CZECH MUSIC OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The International Congress on Dialogue 1996 and the Vienna Symposium of the Austrian Semiotic Society, enabled me to focus thematically on Czech music of the 1950s, considered both as music for the times and, in another part, as so-called shadow music: the sharply different images of interpersonal tendencies were of course manifested here to all intents and purposes. The works that communicated the aesthetics of the time did not always communicate the tendencies that were in their programme: thus, for example, dominance became “wanted” dominance and affiliation became mere self-presentation, etc.

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971): *PSALM SYMPHONY*

The analysis of the five top performances of the great work naturally dealt with other parameters of performance than just interpersonal tendencies. The criterion mentioned there, however, came “out of the background”. The recording of Stravinsky and then of Ančerl, Ansermet, Horenstein and Friscay showed that the work can be interpreted differently on a scale from elegy to thanksgiving, naturally in different relationships of movements and tempi and with different pauses—and, after all, different interpersonal tendencies.

RELATION TO THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT OF THE INVENTOR

It is natural that Ferdinand Knobloch was more interested in the many special aspects of his interpersonal theory than it was in its musicological use. Nevertheless, this inventor was familiar with my work, and in Edinburgh

(1992) he gave a speech entitled *Musical Experience as Interpersonal Process: Revisited*. This paper was then published together with my study “The Interpersonal Analysis of Music” in *Music Review* in 1996. For Knobloch and Knoblochová (1999), however, the interpersonal theory of music was a marginal part of his integrated psychiatry.

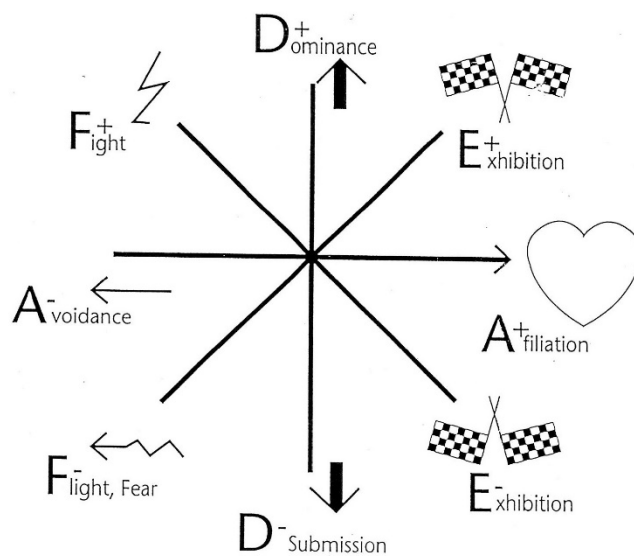


Figure 1. Interpersonal tendencies (Knobloch and Knoblochová 1999)

WHAT THE INTERPERSONAL THEORY HAS BROUGHT TO MUSICOLOGY

It has already been mentioned in connection with the project of analysing Alban Berg’s *Violin Concerto* that this was a new type of analysis. But what is its purpose? It reveals the “fantasy plot”—which is the *action of the meaning of the work*. But there is another aspect of the matter: when listening to music we have the possibility to identify with it (“I like it” or “It is ‘my’ music”), but also to distance ourselves, not to accept a type of music. Recognising why people distance themselves means that as listeners they learn both something about themselves and about the “object”—the other music; interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of our experience invoke both. Such listening can, over time, lead to an understanding of difference and thus to

empathy: it is the possibility of developing *emotional intelligence*. But this is a benefit more general than a narrowly artistic one.

CONCLUSION

It seems possible to argue that interpersonal theory of music is a possible analytical approach. There are, of course, many other possibilities, more traditional and more recent, addressing compositional, aesthetic, or historical issues. This is natural considering the very nature of a work of art among other human works. The potential gain of its analysis can contribute to the development of emotional intelligence and to understanding of difference. Decades of work with the hypothesis culminated in the publication of my *The Hidden Unity. An Experimental View on Aesthetics and Semiotics of Music* (2014). It contains a complete bibliography on the topic.

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INTERPERSONAL SEMIOTICS OF MUSIC AFTER SEVERAL DECADES

Summary

Interpersonal semiotics of music belongs to the sphere of musical anthropology. It is based on introspection and experiments with different types of music and different groups of respondents. Its theoretical principle represents the theory of small social group and system of interpersonal tendencies by Knobloch and Knoblochová (1999). This is used in relation of I/Other in which 'Other' means music. Some works of B. Bartók, A. Berg, L. Janáček, B. Martinů, J. Sibelius, I. Stravinsky and J. Suk were analysed and described, among others, on this ground, i.e. from the point view of my interpersonal testimony. The interpersonal analyses of Czech music of the 1950s by several groups of respondents confirmed that such testimonies are distinguishable. The presented survey represents results of long work as part of my diverse semiotic and aesthetic activities.

Keywords: interpersonal effect; musical experience; experiment; fantasy plot; I/Other