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WHAT IS MUSIC?

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE VERSUS MUSICAL PRACTICE

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The praxial philosophy of music education was created in opposition to the philosophy of music education as aesthetic education (MEAE). Among the shortcomings of the earlier “aesthetic” music educational thinking which it claimed to overcome was the underlying concept of music as aesthetic art. In fact, this was regarded as the core problem of MEAE and it is here that the fundamental difference between the two approaches really lies. David Elliott, the primary proponent of praxial philosophy, declared this concept of music to be utterly untenable and building upon the most recent findings in a number of dependent disciplines undertook to replace it with, in his view, a completely different one.

There is no doubt that the concept of music, in both its productive and receptive aspects with which the theory of music education as aesthetic education operates, does not suffice as the significant part of contemporary artistic practice and is vulnerable on more than one side. In the face of its inadequacy as a conceptual basis for music educational philosophy music educators have more than one option to choose from. They can, for example, undertake to improve it¹ or to employ heuristically a radically new strategy. Elliott’s decision was the latter. He pointed out what he considered to be the principal errors and inconsistencies within the

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aesthetic concept of music, calling for its *total* abolishment and replacement with the praxial view, which he considers to be the only viable alternative presently available.² This is a strong stand against MEAE with far-reaching consequences for music education discourse and practice. To accept his position we need to be persuaded that the aesthetic paradigm has really no explicative potential.

I will begin with a consideration of Elliott's criticism of the aesthetic concept of music and demonstrate that the arguments against it have yet to be made. Following Elliott's advice, I will do this with "a sincere effort to hear and believe what others are trying to explain."³ This enterprise is important for a number of reasons. First, the point of departure for praxial philosophy is criticism of the "aesthetic way of thinking" and so this criticism directs the development of the praxial approach and is in a sense fundamental to it. Second, if Elliott's dismissal of the aesthetic concept of music proves inappropriate, a re-evaluation of the quantitative dimension of praxial philosophy's validity would be needed. Third, the praxial approach is potentially fruitful but it demands melioration and further effort to realize its full potential. In this respect the examination of Elliott's negative thesis can reveal the genesis of the weaknesses and problems in the praxial philosophy and enlighten us about possible ways toward their resolution. The paper concludes with a critical inquiry into Elliott's positive account of music education philosophy in the light of this metacritique.

THE AESTHETIC WAY OF THINKING

Let me begin with the presentation of Elliott's arguments against what he calls the "aesthetic way of thinking." According to Elliott, the aesthetic concept of music is based upon four assumptions: (1) music is a collection of objects or works; (2) these works are created to be listened to aesthetically (that is, by focusing on their aesthetic qualities under a "disinterested" attitude); (3) the value of musical works is intrinsic; (4) the aesthetic perception brings about aesthetic experience, "a special kind of emotional happening or disinterested pleasure that supposedly arises from a listener's exclusive concentration on the aesthetic qualities of a musical work apart from any moral, social, religious, political, personal, or otherwise practical connection these qualities may embody, point to, or represent."⁴ The first assumption concerns the ontological status of music and the other three the nature of musical experience, primarily the problem of its intra- and extra-musical contents. The quotation makes clear that aesthetic experience is in a sense a resultant of the first three factors. Aesthetic object, perception, experience, and qualities are key concepts, or in Elliott's terms, "eighteenth-century axioms," of the aesthetic way of thinking. The first three, he believes, affect music education directly and so he focuses his attention on them.

The point of Elliott's critique of the first axiom, "music-as-object," is that it fails to explain the processual and performing aspect of music and "encourages an educational emphasis on musical consumption rather than active and artistic music making."⁵ He cites the leading proponents of MEAE for demonstrating the unhappy neglect of performance and an undue emphasis on the consumption this philosophy has initiated. His discussion of aesthetic perception pivots around two basic claims which I shall call "puristic" and "universalistic." In MEAE, Elliott argues, an aesthetic perception of music is a perception of the aesthetic qualities, that is, formal parameters of music *alone*, and this is thought to be the *only* proper way of listening to music regardless of the specific cultural and historical diversity of the works of music and the individual backgrounds, interests, and motivations of the listeners. His objections to the concept of aesthetic experience arise from the supposed disinterestedness of the aesthetic experience which he sees as a source of depersonalization; the logical contradiction between the theses of the self-sufficient immanent character of the aesthetic experience on the one hand and its primary educational value to provide insights in the subjective reality on the other hand; the untenability of the latter contention, stemming from Langerian philosophy, which the theorists of the aesthetic movement have used to explain the alleged value of the aesthetic experience.

There is much to agree with in Elliott's arguments. He rightly points out the lack of consistency and coherence in the MEAE philosophy. At the most fundamental level these shortcomings can be seen to be the result of an inadequate interpretation of the underlying aesthetic theories, the weaknesses of these theories themselves, and of a combination of unresolved opposing approaches. Unfortunately, Elliott does not stop here but goes on to discredit the aesthetic concept of music *per se*. But do the arguments he advances as a case against this concept really do that? It should be noted that Elliott made no attempt to analyze the aesthetic doctrine itself but has appealed to some contemporary aesthetic approaches to support generalized contentions. This could be a legitimate strategy, but upon close inspection it turns out that the theories themselves do not justify the conclusions he has drawn from them. I hope that the following consideration of Elliott's arguments against the background of the views of Arnold Berleant and Lydia Goehr will reveal the inappropriateness of his inferences and, more importantly, the core problem of his praxial concept of music.

It is natural to assume that the "aesthetic axioms" presented by Elliott were borrowed from an article of Arnold Berleant in which the author set out to demonstrate the inadequacy of eighteenth-century ideas that still dominate aesthetic theory.⁶ Berleant identified three basic principles which underlie traditional aesthetics: "art consists primarily of objects;" "art objects possess a special status;" and "art objects must be regarded in a unique way." Berleant claimed that these

tenets are anachronistic and “manifestly unsatisfactory” in accounting for the arts in general and especially for the artistic practices of the past century. I will consider Berleant’s arguments against the first and third axioms to which Elliott explicitly refers.⁷

OBJECT AXIOM

The contention “art consists primarily of objects” was challenged, according to Berleant, by twentieth-century movements such as Dada, Conceptual, and Performance Art. Dissolution of the art object, which has been transformed in the realm of meaning or in process/event, finds concrete manifestation in happenings, in Duchamp’s ready-mades, and the works of LeWitt, to give a few apt examples. What Berleant is in effect suggesting here is that avant-garde art of the last century questioned the traditional concept of art object as a self-sufficient autonomous entity, thus extending the art canon. There can be no objection to this claim but it certainly does not evidence the disappearance of the object of some kind and structure as such. Notice, by the way, that Berleant does not give examples from earlier periods at this point, though he maintains that all axioms fail to describe adequately traditional art as well.

If Berleant departs from the practice of art itself (that is, proceeds inductively), Lydia Goehr, who is actually the main authority for Elliott in discussing the first axiom, is not immediately concerned with what musical works might be; she endeavours to overhaul the concept of musical work and the ways it might be related to practice.⁸ Goehr’s research is here more relevant since she is dealing not with art objects in general but specifically with musical ones which *per definitionem* have a special ontological status as instances of allographic art.⁹ Goehr’s overall position is that the art-work concept began to function as regulative¹⁰ and acquired institutionalized centrality in musical practice around 1800 while in earlier centuries music had been “truly a performance art.” This means that neither composers nor performers considered music as work completed in every structural component and free from extra-musical function.¹¹ The change was prompted, *inter alia*, by the beliefs that fine arts are self-sufficient and autonomous by their very nature and that they are the motivation for, and the aim of, the pure aesthetic experience.¹² Goehr labels the pervasive persistence of the work concept in the field of music despite its obvious irrelevance to most recent avant-garde or non-European musical practices as conceptual imperialism.¹³

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Goehr’s thorough and illuminative research, but the following comments need to be made here. What seems to be indisputable at the most general level is Goehr’s thesis about the historicity of the concept of musical work.¹⁴ The thesis is by no means new. It was articulated

by, among others, the Polish musicologist, disciple of Roman Ingarden, Sofia Lissa in the 1960s.¹⁵ It is also beyond doubt that work-based musical practices have only a restricted validity being in no way universal or absolute. However, Goehr's ideas of the work concept's "imperialistic influence" and a "global paradigmatic shift" to dismantle it appear to be somewhat of an exaggeration. To say the least, it is counter-intuitive to admit that people remain committed to the work concept, as she believes, because they are unaware of its misleading and almost reactionist character. A more plausible explanation seems to be that the work mode corresponds to the psychological constitution of human perception and thinking with its immanent striving for order and coherence. This is not, however, to exclude that the global change she is dreaming of will take place in the future and will bring the work concept paradigm to an end, but her suggestion to bring about this change per force or by decree, so to speak, is rather suspicious.

Making use of Goehr's arguments, Elliott has failed to identify and explicitly articulate one important nuance which distinguishes his position from Goehr's project.¹⁶ Namely he developed his *positive account* in a way Goehr would consider an unsatisfactory "half-measure": a rethinking and modification of the work concept instead of its total abandonment. To be exact, Elliott admitted that musical works are central to the nature and significance of music and pleaded for the abandonment of one particular kind of work concept: the aesthetic concept of musical work. What does this mean? Summarizing Elliott's remarks on this subject we come to the following characterization: according to the aesthetic concept of musical works, these are physical objects/abstract entities not susceptible to definitive performances; and their structural properties (melody, harmony, and so on) are aesthetic qualities (that is, directly noted, not supplied or constructed by listeners and context-transcendent). Challenging this definition, Elliott rejected both theses (the ontological status and the nature of properties of musical works) and proposed the following alternative: musical works are physical events, their structural properties are artistic by nature, and they are culturally and context determined. Since musical works *qua* physical events can be also thought to possess aesthetic qualities, the crucial point here is the opposition aesthetic qualities/ artistic qualities.

There could be no objection to Elliott's suggestion to differentiate between these two kinds of properties. He is also correct in arguing that melody, harmony, and so on are artistic properties. The problem is that he misunderstands (or misrepresents) the concept of aesthetic qualities, regarding them as objective attributes which the recipient needs only to copy. In reality, aesthetic properties are *relational* by their nature which means that they are only constituted in the active interaction between the subject and object. As Alan Goldman maintains, "The limits of such faultless disagreements, the fact that one critic might find maudlin,

but not cheerful, what another finds poignant, indicates that these [aesthetic] properties have an objective component. But the disagreements themselves indicate that they also involve a response on the part of the subject, that they are indeed relational properties." He further points out (referring to the research of Monroe Beardsley) that they are *relative* as well: "Since subjects have different experiences of the same works and differ in their evaluations, non-aesthetic base properties must generate different aesthetic properties in relation to these subjects."¹⁷

The real problem, however, is that Elliott, in effect, seems simply to deny the existence of aesthetic properties. There is a conflict in his maintaining that there are "important distinctions between aesthetic qualities and artistic qualities" and his claim that "musical works are not aesthetic in nature."¹⁸ Namely the first assumption implies that there is such a phenomenon as aesthetic quality which is distinguishable from the artistic one, and the second contention suggests that musical works are devoid of aesthetic qualities which Elliott, in fact, never establishes.

AXIOM ABOUT AESTHETIC PERCEPTION

Elliott's main target in discussing the aesthetic perception is the idea of disinterestedness which, as he maintains, separates musical perception and appreciation from all human concerns focusing clinically on an object's structural properties alone.¹⁹ In contrast to aesthetic approaches he stresses the active procedural nature of music listening which consists of the nonverbal acts of constructing coherent musical patterns, comparing and chaining them together, and so on.²⁰ Elliott does not take pains to examine the doctrine of disinterestedness and to support his assertions, and one could assume he means them to be self-evident. This is, however, far from being the case, and Berleant's efforts to undermine the concept of disinterestedness provide the best evidence for the complexity of such an enterprise. His argument derives, again, from art practice: "much of the recent history of the arts reads almost like an intentional denial of the doctrine of disinterestedness, for the artists have shaped works in every medium in which the *active participation* of the appreciator is essential to their aesthetic effect" (italics added).²¹

How good is Berleant's argument? It would be entirely sufficient to call attention to the methodological error he makes confusing different levels of reflection. Indeed, he makes factual statements on the basis of experience against the notion of disinterestedness which has *a priori* status, as if he were dealing with an empirical concept. But even if we leave aside this difficulty, the argument cannot be accepted. Why? We need to clarify what "participation" stands for and what is the actual difference between participation and disinterested perception. Berleant identifies two kinds of participation/engagement. The first one concerns the overt

activity of the perceiver and is more characteristic of the forms of communication with modern art phenomena. These include “paintings that must be approached closely, which causes them to generate sounds,” sculptures “whose appreciation requires that they be walked into or through, climbed upon, or re-positioned,” music “which the audience must complete by singing or making percussive sounds,” and so on.²² In respect to traditional art Berleant speaks mainly about “subtle modes of participation.” What he has in mind here are “perceptual requirements and demands”: the distance and direction of viewers and their activating eyes set the forces of painting in motion; the reader is engaged as a person present at the events of the narrative; the music listener, as Stravinsky put it, “reacts and becomes a partner in the game initiated by the creator.”²³ What is it about these descriptions which contradicts the essence of aesthetic perception?

Berleant conceives the difference between disinterested perception and participation to be similar to the distinction between the reductionist “psychological model of appreciative enjoyment” and the physical psychological activity that involves the total subject. But this opposition is merely a result of his misrepresentation of the notion of disinterestedness which by no means suggests passivity on the part of subjects who simply take in the object as it presents itself to their perception. Kant, who is primarily responsible for developing the concept of disinterestedness in a systematic way, regards disinterested aesthetic perception to be a full exercise (“free play”) of our cognitive faculties: imagination and understanding. And it is highly implausible to argue, as Berleant does, that such engagement of our cognitive powers is asomatic. Rather it is more correctly to be understood as “covert physical engagement.” The significance of the physical component notwithstanding, without the “psychological” effort the unique rewarding experience that art can provide is not possible. This is the real challenge facing us in dealing with art, since climbing a sculpture or making percussion sounds is certainly much easier to accomplish than bringing our cognitive powers in harmony. In fact, the opposition of “disinterested aesthetic perception” to what Berleant calls the “subtle mode of appreciation” has no real validity and in the case of modern art phenomena which demand overt activity from the perceiver the difference that distinguishes it from disinterested perception is one of degree and not of kind.

What Berleant and especially Elliott both appear to overlook in addition is that “disinterested” does not mean “uninterested,” or showing a lack of interest, but seen positively this is a special kind of interest which is different from cognitive and practical purposes. This, however, does not mean that the latter are absolutely irrelevant to art appreciation but only suspended in the appreciative act, be it a purposeful, perceptive activity or a constitutive element of performance/production. Performing a Beethoven sonata to pass an examination is a practically motivated musical occasion. One can accomplish it successfully only if one sus-

pends this practical end during the performing act and concentrates on covertly and overtly constructing sound patterns, as Elliott suggests. Moreover, “disinterested” in its more basic meaning bears close affinities to “autotelic” which Elliott (following Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi) considers to be one of the crucial features of musical experience (see below).

It should be clear that the critique of the axioms considered above lacks reasoned grounding. As we shall see, the notion of aesthetic experience to which I turn now survives the attacks of its opponents as well.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND MUSICAL PRAXIS

It is rather obvious that the axioms of the “aesthetic way of thinking” identified by Elliott are principally inter-definable and that having defined the first three of them we inevitably arrive at the concept of aesthetic experience. Elliott, as we have seen, stated unambiguously his intention to dismiss all four axioms. Berleant, on the other side, advanced a less radical argument attacking the doctrines of aesthetic object (from the ontological and axiological points of view) and aesthetic perception. It appears startling that emphasizing the significance of the latter principle, which is a fundamental condition of aesthetic experience, Berleant in contrast to Elliott does not state a similar claim against the concept of aesthetic experience itself. The explanation for Berleant’s not conferring on it a status of an “anachronistic axiom” alongside aesthetic object and appreciation is that he needs it as a basis on which to build his alternative account. How is this possible? To be sure, Berleant is aware of the central role of the notion of aesthetic experience in the tradition that he purports to dismantle: “Through a historical understanding we may be able to place eighteenth-century aesthetics in perspective, recognizing in it a theory that identifies a distinctive mode of experience called aesthetic.”²⁴ However, he does not choose to give up the concept of aesthetic experience but to use it for his own purposes. It is clear that he needs first to modify it so he starts with the issue of its status. Eighteenth-century aesthetics, Berleant argues, conceived of aesthetic experience as a distinct mode of experience, but a distinction is not a separation, as Aristotle taught us: “To give aesthetic awareness an identity does not warrant making it ontologically discrete.”²⁵ His intention is thus to develop an alternative in which aesthetic experience, though a distinctly identifiable mode of experience, stands in continuity with ordinary experience. His alternative account can be summarized in the following way: art consists of aesthetic situations in which aesthetic experiences occur and it is a “unified field of interacting forces involving perceivers, objects or events, creative initiative, and performance or activation of some sort.”²⁶ The question now is what makes an experience an aesthetic one? The simple presence of the above factors is not sufficient. Con-

sider, for instance, a situation in which a student is playing a chain of intervals or accords as a part of his examination task. We have here a performer (the student), a perceiver (the professor), and a musical event which demands at least a minimum degree of creativity on the part of its participants. The experience of the student and professor would be correctly described as cognitive (covertly and overtly constructing the intervals or accords) and practical (to pass the exam with a good grade or to evaluate the student's presentation). So although all the factors identified by Berleant are present, a truly aesthetic experience may not have happened.

There are two possibilities for distinguishing an aesthetic mode of experience from a non-aesthetic one: either the components of the experience possess aesthetic quality or they are connected to one another in a specifically aesthetic way. Unfortunately, Berleant is very unclear at this point which makes it difficult to estimate which of them he favors. At first glance he seems to reject the former option: "Art objects are not necessarily different in kind from other objects." But he hastens to add that "they possess features that, by virtue of their properties (for example, their qualities, degree, interrelationships) render such objects particularly effective for functioning in the aesthetic situation."²⁷ In other words, art objects are not distinct from ordinary, non-art objects but identifiable by some features which transform them into aesthetic ones; that is, if they have certain qualities or intensities or stay within certain relationships. Berleant omits to name these features and their properties and gives not the slightest hint where to look for them. I suspect that this is because he would otherwise have found nothing other than the notorious aesthetic qualities.

Perhaps what Berleant has in mind is a concept of the aesthetic as a relational quality. He identifies two basic principles that underlie his view of the aesthetic: the principles of continuity and engagement/participation. It is clear that the first cannot serve as identity criterion. The second seems to be a more proper candidate: "a principle of engagement which stresses the active nature of aesthetic experience and its essential participatory quality . . . stands most opposed to the traditional aesthetic, yet it is reflected in the actual functioning of the arts and therefore must be central to an alternative theory."²⁸ But engagement and participation as such cannot transform a situation/experience into an aesthetic one. Singing and making percussions at a concert do not guarantee that the audience is doing or having an aesthetic experience (that is, is experiencing the musical event aesthetically). What is lacking here is the specification of the special kind of engagement or participation that makes up the aesthetic experience (whatever the meaning of this might be). It is logical to assume that if the aesthetic quality of experience is supposed to be a result of a participative activity, this activity must be an aesthetic one. Here again the principle of disinterestedness conceived as interest in the artistic process of engagement/participation itself seems to be indispensable.

To recapitulate: Berleant did not provide a reasoned defence of his claims against aesthetic axioms, and his effort to give an alternative to the concept of aesthetic experience failed. In effect, the real revision of the concept of aesthetic experience he undertook consists in emphasizing the performative-active dimension without offering any viable alternative explication of the specific quality of this kind of experience. This is exactly the problem with Elliott's definition of music but here it is not so easily identified. As mentioned earlier, Elliott argues, in contrast to Berleant, for a more radical position. He has declared aesthetic experience to be the fourth axiom of the aesthetic way of thinking which he proposed to abandon altogether. Instead he offers a praxial concept of music and musical experience which he claims to be beyond aesthetic principles. As we will see, this claim does not stand up to examination, and Elliott's approach is in reality nothing but hidden aesthetics.

Let us start with an analysis of his most general concept of music. It goes something like this: "MUSIC is the diverse human practice of overtly and covertly constructing aural-temporal patterns for the primary (but not necessarily the exclusive) values of enjoyment, self-growth, and self-knowledge. These values arise when musicianship is sufficient to balance or match the cognitive challenges involved in making and/or listening for aural patterns regarded significantly, but never exclusively, as audible designs."²⁹ This definition is a functionalist definition, *par excellence*: the nature of music is defined according to its function in providing certain values. Elliott makes clear that in addition other functions are possible but this one constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition for music status: "Musical sounds can be made for a variety of purposes and functions across cultures. . . . What this philosophy proposes, however, is that underlying or within these purposes and functions are the fundamental values of musicing and listening as unique sources of enjoyment and, whether participants understand it formally, self-growth, and constructive knowledge."³⁰

According to Elliott's definition, "music" in the classificatory sense is the activity of constructing sound patterns which produce values of enjoyment, self-growth, and self-knowledge. This implies the possibility of producing and perceiving musical sounds, which are not connected to the above mentioned values and, hence, are not music.

We should now ask: What are these values precisely of? Consider first the following definition of musical experience which is, according to Elliott, one of three fundamental concepts of praxial philosophy alongside the concept of music given above and the values and aims of music education:³¹ "Musical experiences tend to be characterized by intense absorption and involvement in the actions of musicing and/or listening. Musicians and listeners may also obtain a sense of personal wholeness, integration, and self-growth during (and/or following) their ac-

tive engagement in musicing and/or listening.” As a definition it is superficial and vague. One can, for example, ask about the reasons for giving preference to the criterion of “absorption” from the list of constituents of musical experience (see below). I am also puzzled about the rather accidental status of the values of musical experience in this definition of which the verb “may” is an indication. More revealing is the next passage: “Musical experiences are valuable in practical terms. Music makers and listeners achieve self-growth, self-knowledge, and enjoyment in the constructive actions of musicing and listening.”³² Taken together, these quotations suggest that the values of enjoyment, self-growth, and self-knowledge are, strictly speaking, the values of musical experience and this means that music as practice derives its value from musical experience and cannot be defined without this notion. (And vice versa: musical experience emerges from the musical practice of listening and musicing.). Elliott’s definition can be thus reformulated this way: MUSIC is the diverse human practice of overtly and covertly constructing aural-temporal patterns for the primary purpose of achieving musical experience. The reformulation reveals the crucial importance of the concept of musical experience for his praxial account of music as its ultimate end and value. Our question is now: What kind of concept of musical experience does Elliott advocate?

Elliott argues that “musical experiences are not rightly conceived of (or engaged in) as aesthetic experiences.” His arguments are that, first, musical experience is not impractical or self-sufficient but valuable in practical terms providing self-growth, enjoyment, and self-knowledge; second, it is not a result of disinterested perception but depends “on culturally and contextually determined understandings;” third, it includes “social realities of particular kinds of musicians and listeners;” and fourth, there is a wide spectrum of extra-musical meanings (for example, moral, expressive, didactic, politic, and so on).³³

The essence of Elliott’s criticism to the concept of musical experience as aesthetic experience can be expressed in the opposition “disinterested/immediate” versus “practical/socio-culturally determined.” The conflict between the right-hand and left-hand members of these oppositions is, however, only apparent and as such constructed by Elliott, who meets here the same difficulty as we have identified in Berleant’s argument against the concept of disinterestedness. Namely, Elliott fails to acknowledge the epistemological distinction between the principle of disinterestedness on the one side, and that of contextual determination/contamination on the other side, which have different logical status and, hence, are incommensurable. “Disinterestedness” is *a priori* a universal principle which rests not on observation but on the analysis of a subject’s constitution and in its broadest sense explains the mechanism of aesthetic perception and experience as different from cognitive and practical modes of relating to the world. That the concrete realiza-

tion of this principle in real situations by real (not transcendental) subjects is always shaped by divergent context-dependent factors by no means undermines the validity or legitimacy of this principle: the mechanism of this realization is not its business; it is subject to empirical research.

However, even if the above conclusion in respect of Elliott's critique of musical experience as being aesthetic is correct it does not say anything against his assertion that a praxial concept of musical experience lies beyond the realm of aesthetics. To find out whether it is so, we need to look at his own account.

The first thing to be said is that Elliott conceives musical experience as a subset of flow, or optimal experiences. The term was coined by the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi to designate a special kind of experience available in almost every sphere of human activity which is characterized by a sense of playfulness, a feeling of being in control, concentration and highly focused attention, mental enjoyment of the activity for its own sake, a distorted sense of time, and a match between the challenge at hand and one's skills. Extrapolating Csikszentmihalyi's model on music Elliott identified the following features of musical experience which he means to be constant under divergent subjective (namely, the contents of consciousness of musicians and listeners) and objective (namely, the kinds of information presented by the audible patterns of music in different practices) conditions: (1) A musical experience results from a matching relationship between a specific kind of musicianship and a specific kind of musical challenge;

(2) The fundamental values of musical experiences are self-growth, self-knowledge, and enjoyment; (3) During musical experiences, musicians and listeners often experience focused concentration and deep absorption; (4) In the process of musicing and/or listening knowledgeably, no other motivations are needed to sustain attention and effort apart from the experiences of enjoyment and integration that arise from one's goal-directed musical actions (overt and covert).³⁴

Having defined musical experience as a case of flow, Elliott proceeds to argue that musical experience, despite its similarities with this class of experience, is unique by virtue of historied sound, which is the *sine qua non* of MUSIC. He reiterates that all components of musical experience—contents, challenges, and thought processes—are “entirely different from those required for any other endeavor.” The difference, according to Elliott, consists in the peculiarities of auditory experience in general which has an important advantage over the visual one: listening connects us with the world in the most intimate way.³⁵

We now turn to an examination of Elliott's account of musical experience, focusing on the issues of its explicative capacity and its factual relation to the aesthetic concept of musical experience. Let me begin by drawing attention to the difficulty that can be seen as a constitutive problem of the praxial approach in general. I refer to the conflict between the particularistic and contextualist em-

phasis of the praxial method on the one hand, and its explicit or implicit use of generalized statements on the other hand. As a praxialist Elliott disputes the universal character of aesthetic principles and suggests that the proper understanding of the phenomenon of music is that it is a human activity in concrete settings. However, in spite of his suspicion of ahistorical and acontextual definitions, he ends up putting forward a perfectly essentialist definition. As we have seen, he has argued that producing the values of enjoyment, self-knowledge, and self-growth is the criterion by which we distinguish music from those sound patterns which are not music. His remark that these values are not necessarily comprehensive indicates only that there could be other ones. However, those values are present in every aural occasion that can be justifiably called music. In other words, the values of enjoyment, self-knowledge, and self-growth have the status of necessary and sufficient conditions and build up the constant nucleus of the concept of musical experience, and respectively music. It must be stressed at this point that Elliott's attempt to take a balanced view which admits local cultural and historical conditions and at the same time acknowledges universal cross-cultural values of music raises no objection and should certainly be welcome. The problem is that the reconciliation of the relativistic and universalistic claims is not achieved in his theory. The latter suffers from the lack of an adequate methodological basis which Elliott made no attempt to develop and which will of necessity go beyond the boundaries of conventional praxialism. Without such theoretical grounding to provide an internal correlation of the premises of oppositional attitudes—the idea of praxialism and the universal psychological model of flow-experience—his theory proves inconsistent and hovers between these two polar positions. Moreover, as we will see in a moment, it stands very close to the aesthetic tradition that the author tried hard to dismantle.

As mentioned earlier, the values of enjoyment, self-knowledge, and self-growth which Elliott believes to be constitutive of music experience have their origin in something that transcends the cultural diversity of musical practices. If we look at Csikszentmihalyi from whom Elliott borrowed the flow model, we will see that this “something” is the fundamental constitution of human being. On the basis of a varied world-wide research series, Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues have come to the conclusion that the perception of high challenges and high skills can bring a person's consciousness to order and harmony. The efforts needed to achieve this state strengthen the self and stimulate its complexity and growth. A by-product of one's achieving this optimal condition is a deep sense of enjoyment. A crucial condition of “flow,” according to Csikszentmihalyi, is the autotelic (that is, for its own sake) character of the experience and the respective activity. This leads him to suggest that flow is most readily experienced in such kinds of activities as games, plays, and artistic pursuits which are by their nature self-determined.

To determine the theoretical assumptions that underlie Csikszentmihalyi's experiments, it is reasonable to look at the study which he carried out in cooperation with Ulrich Schiefele and which deals directly with the arts.³⁶ This study was designed to test the hypothesis that the quality of experience in the artistic realm and in sciences is different. For this purpose the experiences of two groups of high school students talented respectively in arts/music and science/mathematics were investigated through questionnaires, interviews, and the administration of the Experience Sampling Method.³⁷ The general conceptual framework of this project rested on what can be designated as aesthetic rationality. The starting point was the hypothesis that there are two complementary modes of cognition—the rational and the aesthetic—developed in the work of such thinkers as Robert Collingwood, John Dewey, and Howard Gardner. Rational thought, despite its indisputable merits, does not cover certain internal and external spheres of reality (feelings, relationships, ways of living, the meaning of life, and so on) which are of vital importance for human beings. These can be approached by means of artistic representation which provides models of the world, ambiguous and contradictory though they be. At the level of individual development aesthetic cognition in creating and responding to art is by definition a self-determined and intentional activity, and it is precisely these activities that supposedly help the “person to maintain the cognitive structure of the self.” As self-determined (in contrast to instrumental activities) they generate enjoyment and meaning independent of any future concerns. On the basis of the above considerations Csikszentmihalyi/Schiefele advanced their hypothesis: “If there is validity to these distinctions between rational and artistic cognition, then one would expect that the quality of experience is rather different in these realms.”³⁸ Interpreting the data obtained in their study they found that the results correspond with the theoretical assumptions they are built upon: “Our empirical data confirm that engagement in art activities provides more intrinsic rewards than engagement in mathematics or science.”³⁹

The moral we should draw from this is that the underlying “flow” model is a distinct aesthetic mode of relating to the world which differs from the practical and theoretical, *prima facie*, by its self-determined autotelic nature. It proves not only compatible with traditional aesthetics but represents its direct reflection and confirmation at the level of empirical psychology. Indeed, to translate the main postulates of flow into the language of philosophical aesthetics of Kantian orientation would mean nothing else than that: (1) in aesthetic experience we attend to (art) objects for the sake of perceiving them while being detached from the interest in their practical use; (2) in doing so we bring our cognitive capacities—understanding and imagination—into an unusually balanced combination which gives rise to a strong sense of enjoyment different from the purely sensuous

gratification and pleasure that makes us aware of the usefulness of an object; and (3) the unique characteristic of this particular state of mind (that is, free play of imagination and understanding) is its reflective nature: we reflect upon our cognitive faculties and the effect of this reflection we experience “not as thought, but as an internal feeling of a purposive state of the mind.”⁴⁰

Among the variety of theories of aesthetic experience another even more direct correspondence to flow is undoubtedly Dewey’s model. I say this for the following reasons. First, for both Dewey and Csikszentmihalyi aesthetic experience *qua* artistic is central, it provides the qualitative measure for all kinds of experience with which it stays in continuity. Second, Dewey is possibly the only philosopher who thematized and strongly emphasized the moment of resistance which needs to be overcome in order for the individual to achieve harmony, which is the point where the aesthetic appears. This thought has explicit analogy in the “challenge-skills” postulate of Csikszentmihalyi. Third, an important characteristic of experience in both models is deep satisfaction; something is enjoyed for its own sake. Fourth, they share the feature that Dewey called “consummation”: aesthetic experience, he maintains, is brought about when “the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment.”⁴¹

Despite these obvious facts Elliott persists in his denial of the fundamental kinship between the concepts of flow and aesthetic experience, but his objections are not valid and cannot be taken seriously. He argued, namely, that flow shares with aesthetic experience only “the characteristic of intense absorption and concentration, the remaining characteristics of aesthetic experience do not apply to musical flow.”⁴² This is simply not true. In effect, all four items he specified as constant features of musical flow⁴³ apply equally to aesthetic experience. Even more decisive is the fact that the triad “enjoyment, self-knowledge, self-growth” which forms the identity condition of musical experience/music for Elliott plays an analogous role in traditional (but not contemporary) aesthetics. That Elliott makes use of this tradition is not at all surprising since it is very attractive exactly from the educational point of view.

It should be mentioned that Elliott raises the issue of the specific character of flow *qua* musical experience, and here I believe he had the chance to work out the unique features of musical experience/music, and maybe to go beyond the aesthetic model incorporating alternative explicative strategies. However, in my opinion, he failed to do this. His assertion, based on different hypotheses, that auditory experience has an advantage over visual, true though this may be, does not add anything to elucidate either the nature or the value of music.

That Elliott is tendentious demonstrates, for example, his attempt to “save” flow by amending its fundamental principle of intrinsic enjoyment. He writes: “While it is characteristic of enjoyment or flow that it arises in the actions of doing

something inherently or intrinsically rewarding, we cannot mean ‘intrinsic’ in the absolute or pure sense of something completely unrelated to all real-life concerns. It would be illogical to make such a claim. For constructive knowledge and enjoyment are essential *life goals*.⁴⁴ We may wonder why did he not undertake a similar effort in respect to aesthetic experience. However, here we have to do with something more fundamental than prejudice against aesthetic thinking. Like many other scholars, Elliott fails to see that to define the aesthetic experience and to establish its eternal values are different enterprises. Aesthetic experience must be *defined* intrinsically and not from the perspective of external goals, and only after we have accomplished this task can we pose the question of its value in broader contexts.

If there is validity in my analysis, Elliott’s definition of music should allow for the following reformulation: MUSIC is the human practice of overtly and covertly constructing aural-temporal patterns for the primary (but not necessarily the exclusive) values of enjoyment, self-knowledge, and self-growth, or musical *aesthetic experience*, whereby practice is meant a special kind of practice—an *aesthetic* one. It is clear that it does not fit in with Elliott’s initial aesthetically indifferent (or even inimical) project, but it reveals the real meaning of the alternative he has offered. The moral is that the realization of the praxial approach should begin by developing a tenable and distinctly praxial concept of music which presupposes clarification and elaboration of the notions of praxis and experience and which at this point in time is still a *desideratum*.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that if MEAE and Elliott’s praxial philosophy are to be considered as different paradigms, then aesthetic is not the relevant criterion for their differentiation since both are aesthetic, albeit the latter one representing a case of “hidden aesthetics.” I maintain that the proper way to grasp the specific identity of the philosophies in question is to contrast them as the *poiesis*-paradigm and the *praxis*-paradigm. This does not imply that the first neglects the performance dimension of music in music education. Neither does the latter deny the significance of musical products. However, in both cases the emphasis is clearly placed on different aspects of music which are decisive for how we construe their ontological status, and this circumstance makes such differentiation reasonable. Its further advantage is that it justifies the abandonment of one alleged dichotomy that has persisted in the history of music education—that of “education *through* music”—towards practical and useful ends and supposedly impractical “education *to* music.”⁴⁵

NOTES

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¹This is the position of Philip Alperson. See, for instance, “What Should One Expect from a Philosophy of Music Education?” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 3 (Fall 1991): 215–242; “Value Monism, Value Pluralism, and Music Education: Sparshott as Fox,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 2 (Summer 1997): 19–30.

²Cf. “Praxial philosophy is fundamentally different from and incompatible with music education’s official aesthetic philosophy. As such, it offers music educators a clear alternative to past thinking.” David J. Elliott, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14.

³Ibid., 7.

⁴Ibid., 23.

⁵Ibid., 32.

⁶Arnold Berleant, “The Historicity of Aesthetics–I,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2 (Spring 1986): 101–111; “The Historicity of Aesthetics–II,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 3 (Summer 1986): 195–203.

⁷Berleant’s arguments against the second axiom seem rather to support it. Indeed, Berleant argues that such phenomena as *objets trouvés* which *qua* material things are indistinguishable from trivial objects, undermine the thesis of a special status of art objects. He overlooks that they not only really possess artistry—otherwise we would not treat them as art—but that it is exactly their status that makes them art; i.e., fulfills a function of *differentia specifica*.

⁸Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁹Nelson Goodman introduced this concept in his *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1969) as a name for the art “instantiated in performances or readings.” Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum*, 21.

¹⁰Here Goehr makes use of Immanuel Kant’s differentiation between regulative and constitutive concepts: “Regulative concepts differ from constitutive ones: the latter constitute the fabric of a practice; they provide the rules of the game. . . . In their normative function, regulative concepts determine, stabilize, and order the structure of practices. Within classical music practice we compose works, produce performances of works, appreciate, analyze, and evaluate works. To do this successfully we need a particular kind of general understanding. Every time we talk about individual musical works we apply this general understanding to the specific cases. This understanding focuses upon one or more regulative concepts.” Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum*, 102–103.

¹¹Ibid., 178–187.

¹²Ibid., 171.

¹³Ibid., 245.

¹⁴She is mistaken, however, about the date of its emergence. See, for example, R. A. Sharpe’s review of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 3 (July 1993): 292–295.

¹⁵On the basis of her analysis of musical phenomena of different historical periods and cultures (Indian Raga and Tala, ancient Nomos, twentieth-century avant-garde music, folklore, etc.) Sofia Lissa concluded: “The concept of musical work is a historical category, i.e.,

historically relative in the aesthetics and theory of music, analogously to the historic character of such concepts of the discipline ‘Harmony’ as ‘function’ or ‘cadence,’ or of the disciplines ‘Musical Analysis’ and ‘History’—‘sonata’ and ‘fugue.’ This means that in certain periods of the development of musical culture the human activity of sound expression is articulated in works, in other periods—on the contrary—in sound constructs that have different ontological *quality*. The latter belong undoubtedly to music, though not to a class of musical works. Music was different in different epochs and civilizations of the earth, and the thinking in terms of one civilization and one historical epoch calls for fundamental revision.” Lissa, “Ueber das Wesen des Musikwerkes” in *Aufsätze zur Musikaesthetik* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1969): 34.

¹⁶This omission caused much misunderstanding. See Elliott’s polemic with Bennett Reimer in *The Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* (Spring 1996): 59–89; (Spring 1997): 1–37.

¹⁷Alan Goldman, “The Aesthetic” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 184.

¹⁸Elliott, *Music Matters*, 90–91.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 85.

²¹Berleant, “The Historicity of Aesthetics–II,” 198.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*, 199.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 200.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, 201.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Elliott, *Music Matters*, 128. An objection can be raised against Elliott’s *qualifying* this concept of “music” as an open concept in the sense suggested by Goehr. Since this is not relevant for my purpose I want only to point out that the criteria Goehr developed for a definition of a musical work are not wholly applicable to the more general concept of music in which the work mode is only one of its possible modes.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 129.

³¹“The primary values of music education are the primary values of MUSIC: self-growth, self-knowledge, and optimal experience.” *Music Matters*, 129. It is reasonable to assume that the values in question are identical with those in other definitions and that “optimal experience” stands here for “enjoyment.”

³²*Ibid.*, 124.

³³*Ibid.*, 124–125.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 126.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Ulrich Schiefele, “Arts Education, Human Develop-

ment, and the *Quality of Experience*” in Bennett Reimer and Ralph Smith, eds., *The Arts, Education, and Aesthetic Knowing*, Part II (Chicago, IL: NSSE, 1992).

³⁷Ibid., 174. This method allowed the researchers to obtain information about students’ experience (what they were thinking about, how they were feeling, etc.) in eight randomly chosen moments during the day.

³⁸Ibid., 172–173.

³⁹Ibid., 179–180.

⁴⁰Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Haffner 1951): § 40.

⁴¹John Dewey, *Art as Experience, The Later Works. 1925–1953*. Volume 10 (Southern Illinois University Press, 1987): 42. Cf.: “[T]he experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing” in Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow. The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row), 49.

⁴²Elliott, *Music Matters*, 329.

⁴³See p. 16.

⁴⁴Ibid., 118.

⁴⁵I have developed this view in my forthcoming book, *The Contest of Paradigms: Western Philosophy of Music Education of the Last Four Decades of the Twentieth Century* [*Cpor paradigm: zapadnaya filosofiya muzykal'nogo obrazovaniya vtoroi poloviny dvadzatogo veka*] and in my article “On the Nature of Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts in Music Education,” forthcoming.