

Call for Papers

Music Theory and Interdisciplinarity

8th Congress of the Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie (GMTH)

Graz, October 9-12, 2008

University of Music and Dramatic Arts Graz (KUG)
in association with the Austrian Society of Musicology (ÖGMW)

Conference Chairs: Christian Utz, Andreas Dorschel, Clemens Gadenstätter

The polymorphism of music theory as a scholarly and artistic discipline offers great potential for interdisciplinary musical research and practice. In current developments, music theory seems to temper its traditional objective of defining a consistent, ontological, generalised “theory of music”, and find its meaning and functions primarily by discovering common ground with music history, music aesthetics, musical interpretation, composition, ethnomusicology, and (systematic) musicology. In these in-between spaces, the disciplines have the opportunity to challenge, doubt, cross-fertilise each other, and thus to contribute to the differentiation of musical knowledge and musical perception. This congress aims to shed light on this basic interdisciplinary character of current music theories in six sections, each focussing on the dialogue between music theory and one of the related disciplines.

Opening Speech

Clemens Kühn, Dresden

Panel Discussions

Michael Gielen, Salzburg / Paul Fiebig, Baden-Baden (section 3)
Helmut Lachenmann, Leonberg (section 4)

Keynote-Speakers

Nicholas Cook, London (section 1)
Berthold Hoeckner, Chicago (section 2)
Michael Tenzer, Vancouver (section 5)
Helga de la Motte-Haber, Berlin (section 6)

Conference Sections

1. Limits and Potentials in the Reception of Historical Music Theory

The increasing relevance of historicization in 20th century music theory discourse has made available abundant theoretical concepts of music in past centuries. However, one might ask what advantages and disadvantages this knowledge actually provides for current theories of music. This section primarily asks for case studies that either discuss chances and limits of an explanation of historical styles via contemporary theories, or explore whether theory formation of new music after 1945 would also profit from an intensified critical reception of historical theories of music.

2. Music Theory and Music Aesthetics – on the Disciplinary Organisation of Knowledge

Since the 18th century music aesthetics has claimed the constitutive role of music listeners’ subjectivity against the ontology presupposed by music theorists. The 19th century saw musicology’s emergence as a historical discipline within the humanities: It attacked traditional music theory’s putatively time-transcending and universal structures which even aesthetics, in its philosophical tracks, had not completely abandoned. This critique was mounted first by historical and shortly afterwards by relativist ethnological means. Music theory and music aesthetics have neither remained indifferent towards these impulses, nor did they declare themselves superfluous. To concentrate on the condition of and relationship between these two disciplines might help to clarify the ways in which knowledge of music is presently organised.

3. Composition – Analysis – Interpretation: Music Theory and Musical Practice

The foundation of “authentic” performance practice by a critical assessment of sources seems to be a field in which music theory hardly needs to justify its merits. It is beyond question that research on historical modes of performance, of musical listening and criteria of value judgement can offer significant impulses for today’s performers, and are not limited to historicizing reconstructions. By means of musical analysis, moreover, theory can also open up new perspectives for performers that are largely independent from tendencies of historicization. What kinds of analysis, then, do performers and listeners today require or expect from music theoreticians? And – vice versa – which ways of (non-verbal) interpretation do musical analysts hope or expect to result from their writings?

4. On the Relationship between Conception and Realisation in the Compositional Process

The emphasis on conceptual, “pre-compositional” stages of the compositional process has increased tremendously in the 20th century, resulting in exceptionally elaborate compositional plans, sketches and algorithms. A structural decoding of many contemporary works can therefore hardly be achieved without a detailed knowledge of these stages. Conceptual thinking of composers always encompasses implicit or explicit forms of “theory”. The challenge for music theory and music analysis might be not merely to document the path leading from earliest sketches to the completed score, but also to reflect whether in particular cases compositional “theory” and compositional result actually stand in a pertinent relationship to one another.

5. Music as “System” vs. Music as “Culture” – Music Theory and Ethnomusicology

The process of globalisation, similar to historicization, has been a principal challenge to fundamentals of traditional music theory since the late 19th century. Not only are theories based on bluntly eurocentric presuppositions (as with Riemann or Schenker) challenged, but the general claim to describe music in purely abstract and systematic terms is also met with serious doubts in the face of the confrontation and overlap of musical contexts and systems that are culturally diverse in origin. This situation has recently triggered fruitful synergies between music theory and ethnomusicology. Considering the increasing significance of culturally hybrid manifestations in current art and popular music, an intensified dialogue between these two disciplines, especially within the field of musical analysis, seems inevitable in the future.

6. Music Theory and Systematic Musicology: Convergence / Divergence

German musicology discourse has traditionally subsumed music theory under the category of “Systematic Musicology” and often neglected the pedagogical and artistic aspects of the discipline. This section aims to work out common areas of research and application as well as to discuss critically methodological differences. In recent decades, natural sciences orientated research in Systematic Musicology has developed in directions that could be especially relevant for music theory. Music psychology, for example, has intensely focussed on questions of perception and the cognitive processing of musical information, thus converging with tendencies in music theory that are concentrated on listener expectancy and “implication” of musical structures. Music sociology also increasingly resorts to fundamental problems of music theory, whereas “New Musicology” connects sociological and structural dimensions of musical works in an unprecedented manner.

7. Free Papers

The duration of each paper is limited to 20 minutes. Conference languages are English and German. Proposals of no more than 300 words and indicating the conference section should be sent by **Monday, May 05, 2008** to: musiktheorie2008@kug.ac.at

All submitted proposals will be reviewed anonymously by an independent jury consisted of professors of the University of Music Graz, members of the GMTH and external experts. About 50 proposals will be selected for presentation at the conference.

Additional information: www.kug.ac.at/musiktheorie2008 and www.gmth.de

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