



HAL
open science

Can an "Anthropological Ontology" Supply Music with an Adequate Semiology?: A Philosophical Appraisal of Musicology According to Jean Molino and Jean-Jacques Nattiez

Fionn Bennett

► **To cite this version:**

Fionn Bennett. Can an "Anthropological Ontology" Supply Music with an Adequate Semiology?: A Philosophical Appraisal of Musicology According to Jean Molino and Jean-Jacques Nattiez. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 2013, 44 (1), pp.119-136. hal-02640561

HAL Id: hal-02640561

<https://hal.univ-reims.fr/hal-02640561>

Submitted on 28 May 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives | 4.0 International License

Can an »Anthropological Ontology« Supply Music with an Acceptable Semiology?: A Philosophical Appraisal of Musicology According to Jean Molino & Jean-Jacques Nattiez

Fionn Bennett
Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne
CIRLEP EA 4299

Introduction

Confronted by the blooming, buzzing profusion of everything that has been going on in music theory for the last decade or so, the casual observer might be forgiven for thinking there is no longer anything *sui generis* about it. He or she might even suspect that centrifugal tendencies have already propelled it beyond the disintegration point. But that – *pace* Patrick McCreless (MCCRELESS 1997: 295) – is just an appearance. In any event, there exist factors which lend it a discursive unicity and impose discernable orientations upon it. One such is the »*Ouverture*« of Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1964 opus *Le Cru et le Cuit*. This work in effect faced music theory with a stark choice.

The first was to accept Lévi-Strauss's view that it is music's vocation and finality to be in a subservient, 'homological' and 'referential' relationship to 'structures' in non-musical media and that there is something subversive about any attempt to deny it (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1964: 29ff. & LÉVI-STRAUSS 1971: 578ff.). The alternative was to find credible reasons for dissenting from this view.

Though having to choose between these two positions did in effect divide musicologists into »referentialists« or »absolutists« (FELD & FOX 1994: 52), generalisations based on the assumption that this is actually the case are difficult to make and at best of limited utility. There are a couple of reasons why this is so. First, few commentators or theorists define these terms in exactly the same way.¹ Secondly, the pitfalls of adhering too explicitly or categorically to one position or the other are by now known to all sides in the controversy and as a result everyone hedges and conditions their position in ways and to a degree which makes it difficult to accuse them of being unambiguously in one camp or the other. Finally, even when any two commentators are clearly in one camp or another, that is no guarantee that they don't oppose one another on every other point of musicological importance and consider that what separates and opposes them is more important than the view they share on whether music is by nature referential or absolutist.

Still, despite the caveats that are required to take facts like these into consideration, the split in the musicological community we are speaking of here does

¹ For example, absolutists subdivide into »formalists«, who maintain that affect and emotion play no role in musical meaning, and »expressionists« who maintain they do (cf. NATTIEZ 1990: 107ff., COOK 2001:174-75 & DAVIES, 2003:65-67, 126ff.). Likewise, referentialists subdivide into »structuralists« who link musical meaning to *denotata* in the external world and those who make music refer to the interpretive activity of an author or listener (as per Riffaterre & Kivy) or of society (as per Adorno & Kramer).

apply and the differences between theorists within each of the two camps do not obscure the fact that in each we find reactions and positions on the views raised by Lévi-Strauss which are clear, consistent and eminently comment worthy. This is especially true of the works of Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Jean Molino.

In a series of landmark critical and theoretical works which are literally encyclopaedic in scope, they have frontally assaulted Lévi-Strauss's structuralist musicological 'referentialism'. And not alone do they do so adroitly, with erudition and an impressive array of data and insight drawn from a plurality of disciplines and sciences, they have made sure that their discourse is credible, comprehensive and »fondé« by supplying it with an ontology, a semiology, an aesthetics and a historiography. More than that, they justify their eagerness for our attention with the claim that their musicological theorising is »pour le XXI^e siècle«, by which they mean that it responds to and lives up to what our epoch might reasonably expect of a musicology with a legitimate right to speak in its name.

This of course is a boon for the would-be commentator and layperson. First, because making the case that one's musicology responds to what *nostrum aevum* ought to expect of a theory of music which is sensitive to epochal issues opens the discussion up to non-musicologists. Second, it relates musicological matters to extra-musicological considerations. Finally, it makes appraising the differing views easier. For to the extent that the expectations of the 21st century is a criterion, it suffices to identify those expectations to be in a position to judge which musicological discourse – Nattiez and Molino's or some other – best satisfies the stipulated criterion.

However, before we look at what *does* matter to our epoch, and which music theorising best measures up to such a criterion, let's look at the way Nattiez and Molino subject music and its meaning to an »anthropological ontology« and why they feel this is necessary and useful. Let's start with a summary review of their »semiology of symbolic forms«. To simplify, let's refer only to Jean Molino for it is he who is credited with the paternity of this semiology.

On the Semiology, Ontology and Aesthetics of Jean Molino's Musicology

For Jean Molino, musical signs are »tripartite«. That is to say they are constituted, first, of a material, sonic substrate which is semantically or semiologically »neutral«. This 'neutral' sonic raw material becomes meaningful when the creators and consumers of music »interpret«, either »poietically« or »esthetically«, the musical sounds they fashion or hear. This they do with the help of the meaning of other, pre-existing signs. But the meanings of these other signs are not conferred on them by a »signifié«. Pursuant to Peirce's »*omne symbolum de symbolo*« principle (PEIRCE 1998:10), they derive from interpretations of yet other signs originating inside or outside the domain of musical symbolism. For even if musical symbolism and the semiosphere it describes is »*sui generis*«, it is also – as per Marcel Mauss – part of a »*fait social total*« and as such only one of the myriad of inter-impacting and inter-enriching symbolisms man uses to give meaning to his world, to things, to himself and to others (MOLINO 2009:18, 76 & 114).

Now because none of these signs or their meanings ever refer to anything except *other* signs and meanings and these *other* signs and meanings are generated »poietically« or »esthetically« by *anthropos*, »the symbolising animal«, the resulting semiology is dependent on an »anthropological ontology«. In other words, signs and meanings »are« nothing but what human interpretants make them »be« *qua* signs. Alternately, without the meaning they receive from *homo symbolicus* they do not »exist« *qua* signs (NATTIEZ 1990:7 & 22; MOLINO 2009:17, 86ff.).

Foremost among the arguments marshalled in defence of this semiological doctrine is the fact that it supplies symbolisation and the symbol synthesising faculty with an »*enracinement physiologique*«, i.e., they are rooted in man's biological and physical conditions (*Musiques V*:356, 379, 1175 & MOLINO 2009:129, 143, 410-12). Necessarily so, for if anything can supply music and musicology with »*unité*« and »*universalité*« it is »*les capacités physiques, perceptives et cognitives de l'espèce*« for as much as these capacities constitute »*un cadre dont il est impossible pour l'esprit humain de sortir*«. And because musical symbolism has no other condition of possibility, purpose or *raison d'être* than the one prescribed for it by man's physiology and psychology, it is in reference to them that Molino develops his theory of aesthetics or »*jugement de goût*«.

As portrayed in *Le singe musicien* (MOLINO 2009: 127, 143-44), the aesthetics which results from the human faculty of *jugement de goût* is essentially an *Aufhebung* reflecting the »*goûts*« of the individual interpretants inventoried in it. However, as personal tastes are »variable« and »relative«, it is not the *goût* of an interpretant *qua* 'individual' which counts for aesthetics. What counts for that is a *jugement de goût* reflecting something common to *all* interpretants. Namely a physiology capable of interfacing with musical sound and a neuro-cognitive apparatus capable of interpreting it. On this inter-subjectively grounded basis, one's aesthetics is 'anthropological' without being arbitrary, relativistic or idiosyncratic.²

Now with all due respect to anyone whose *jugement de goût* is gratified to hear these things said about music and its vocation, its ontology and its semiology, it nonetheless has to be said that the idea is vulnerable to doubts about its viability, applicability and desirability. Rather more than it is feasible to discuss in a single paper. To give an idea of just one of the more substantive matters we cannot go into here but which would merit a full inquiry, let us consider a problem we see in what could be meant by invoking an »anthropological ontology«.

² In addition to this biologico-physiological and aesthetic rationale, there is a utilitarian rationale: with symbols (musical, artistic or other), man liberates himself from the condition of »animality« to which he would otherwise be condemned because with his symbols he is the master not the slave of the »*immédiateté de l'ici et du maintenant*« (MOLINO 2009: 121-22).

Is Human Physiology an Adequate Ontological Basis for Elaborating a Musicology?

If it were one's intention to make *anthropos* the *fundamentum inconcussum* of one's ontology, and one wanted the idea to be taken seriously, presumably one would at some point or another ask thematically about the *ontological* status of one's founding value. In any event, this is what every other thinker in the world does today when they propose an ontology. For doing that is the only way they could hope to avoid the trap Aquinas, Suarez, Descartes and Kant found themselves in when Martin Heidegger, so to speak, drew a circle around the *fundamentum inconcussum* in each of their respective ontologies and then asked: »What is the ontological status of this *ens*? In other words, why do you think that the *presupposition* of the *existence* of this *ens* all unto itself provides your ontology with an adequate foundation? For if an ontology doesn't account *ontologically* for the value which founds it, then its *fundamentum* is just a presupposition. And if a presupposition suffices to found an ontology, why *this* one more so than any other?« (HEIDEGGER 1927:24-25, 109).

The trap of being unable to answer these questions in any ontologically satisfying way is the one Nattiez and Molino get themselves into by simply presupposing that, independently of any other factor, *anthropos* and his bio-neurocognitive faculties constitute a sort of *ens causa sui* or »autopoietic system«, and then on the basis of that presupposition, conjure into Being all the other things that couldn't be there if their presupposed *fundamentum* wasn't there. And lest it be objected that it is being unfair to Nattiez and Molino to hold them up to a standard of ontological credibility as stringent as the one Heidegger used in assessing Suarez or Descartes, that wouldn't deprive us of other, far simpler arguments against their ontology. For example, by assessing how well this »*ontologie anthropologique*« withstands the argument Nattiez uses to demonstrate the »*invalidité*« of earlier, rival »*conceptions ontologiques de la musique*«. For if it suffices to identify the founding proposition in each of them and string them together end to end to conclude »*la juxtaposition de ces propositions suffit à invalider la portée universelle de chacune d'elles*« (Musiques V:1208), why wouldn't it be enough to stick the founding proposition of his own ontology on to the list to say *its* pretensions to a »*portée universelle*« are as invalid as all the others?

But, again, our doubts about their ontology, and a few other matters of equal gravity, fall outside what it is feasible for us to discuss here. Indeed, even if we limit ourselves exclusively to semiological considerations, it will be difficult enough to cover all there is to say on that score. But if 'semiological problems' really do beset this musicology, what are they? Let us start by identifying the risks that, ostensibly, we are likely to incur and the opportunities we are likely to miss if we fail to embrace this musicological discourse.

The Arguments for Adopting Molino's & Nattiez's Musicology

Basically, by embracing the ideas of Nattiez and Molino on music and its »meaning«, we can ...

1. Strike a blow for artistic freedom,
2. Resist elitist attitudes in musical discourse,
3. Counter »culturalist determinisms« or »particularisms« *à la* Franz Boas (cf. *Musique V*:340-41),
4. Combat Eurocentric prejudices about music and prepare musicology to become a domain for theorising about the emergence of »world music« (cf., *inter alia*, MOLINO 2009:385ff.)
5. Prevent musical discourse becoming a Trojan Horse for theorists bent on making music subservient to some 'absolutist', totalising 'ideal', 'system' or 'metaphysics',
6. Make victory over Absolutisms and Systems the occasion for instituting a musicology which lends itself to celebrating the dignity and felicity of *anthropos* and consecrating his rightful status as *homo symbolicus*.

Now, because aspirations 1 to 4 raise issues and involve stakes which are more ideological than anything else, we will leave it to others to decide whether or not and by how much the world gains by allying musicology with their realisation. Besides, even if we limit ourselves to points 5 and 6 there is plenty to say. Especially about the fear they reflect that anyone who counts on the issues we are discussing really is striving for the ends Nattiez and Molino warn us about. After all, who today *isn't* in favour of the dignity and felicity of *anthropos*? And who, either inside or outside the art world, is aiming at allying music theory with some sort of totalitarian system?

But graver than the inexistence of theorists striving for what Nattiez and Molino oppose are doubts that their discourse lends itself to advancing its ostensible goals. Consider just three of the conditions which need to be satisfied to be sure that their strategy is workable.

First it shouldn't be possible to argue that the biggest threat to the dignity and felicity of *anthropos* is *anthropos* himself and that *anthropos* is all the more a threat to himself the more he is allowed to pursue his »*jugement de goût*« without any countervailing or moderating outside influence or limit. *Second*, it shouldn't be possible to argue that the best way for musicology to help us avoid this sort of danger is to ally itself with an ideal of music which sees its vocation as that of being a siren which incites *anthropos* to co-operate in controlling his impulses and in channelling them not just towards non-destructive ends but towards ends which are genuinely and sustainably constructive. *Third* it shouldn't be possible to say that, contrary to what Nattiez and Molino contend, the theories and theorists they stigmatise for their 'totalism' don't just as well or even *better* protect and promote the dignity and felicity of *anthropos* as what they recommend in their stead.

Well Nattiez and Molino satisfy us on none of these conditions. In truth, man *does* pose a threat to himself and, as we shall see, this is true even if we make no mention of 'human inhumanity to humans' to prove it. What's more, the alternatives for

avoiding the threat *anthropos* poses to himself are more feasible than that proposed by Nattiez and Molino without withal being one jot less »anthropological«. To show why, we will begin with a critical analysis of their semiology and do so in a way which will pit us not just against them but also against all 'post-structuralist', 'neo-pragmatist' and 'social constructivist' discourses on the sign and its functions, finality and *modus operandi*. Specifically we will ...

1. Challenge the *doxa* that significance depends exclusively on human interpretants and their symbol forging talents
2. Maintain that it makes good semiological sense to say that other-than-human agencies (*e.g.*, primal nature) can »afford« significance too,
3. Contend that it is in the interests of *anthropos* to cooperate with these agencies in synthesising symbols and sense, and finally
4. Reiterate the point made by R. Murray Schafer and his *World Soundscape Project* collaborators that to negotiate an *entente cordiale* with other-than human agents, no code is as appropriate for the task as music.

To get this analysis underway, let us consider a key implication of this semiological doctrine and the way it – improbably – makes *anthropos*, all unto himself, the foundation, fulcrum, lever, power source and beneficiary of significance.

On the Untenable 'Under-Inclusiveness' of Molino's Semiological Engineering

To put our views bluntly, this semiology is liable to the criticisms others have made of theorists like Humberto Maturana, Gilles Deleuze and Niklas Luhmann who proclaim the viability of »self-dependent autopoietic systems«. Namely that it constitutes a dangerous »autism« or solipsistic delusion which is all the more dangerous in that it is a pan-anthropocentric intersubjective delusion. It boils down to (a) a refusal to hear anything except what anthropic interpretants *want* to hear and (b) to an insistence upon this privilege to the point of defending the »ontological« claim that nothing exists except what it pleases *anthropos* to hear. Alternately, this semiology makes no allowance for the possibility that other-than human agencies or »actants« can participate in *semiosis*.

Of course, Nattiez and Molino would express surprise that anyone feels they have the right to say this. After all, didn't they give their semiology and musical »*formes symboliques*« a »*fondement*« in »*les bruits du monde*« and the »*environnement immédiat*«? More than that, don't they tell us that the »*contexte sonore*« provided by »*les bruits et musiques du monde*« is a »*trait universel des musiques humaines*« and has always been accommodated by *anthropos* both in how he practiced music and theorised about it? (*Musiques V*: 357-58).

They do, but this objection is overruled by the fact that they don't allow these other-than-human entities to express *themselves* and to participate in the process of synthesising sense. If they did they wouldn't maintain that sense is conferred 'poietically' or 'esthetically' by a human interpretant or doesn't occur at all. Besides,

the supposition that non-human agencies can signify is a semiological corollary of the »naturalism« they specifically abjure (cf. MOLINO 2009:78-80, 409-10; NATTIEZ 1990:120-23). So, again, they do not allow non-*anthropos* to participate in *semiosis*, either through music or through any other medium.

Now obviously there would be no point in criticising this semiology and the »anthropological ontology« governing it if man's control over his environment was so great that there was no risk he could ever encounter anything around him except what he wanted to be there. But he does not have that power. Granted, *anthropos* isn't as badly off today as he was in earlier times when the content of his surroundings were less dependent on what he wanted to be there than on agencies and forces which were as obscure as they were dangerous to ignore. But even today the semiosphere man creates for himself through his symboling is not coextensive with what can affect and happen to him. As we are reminded every time an earthquake or tsunami strikes, man's »mesocosm« or »phaneron« is subject to undecidable events erupting *into* it *from* someplace *outside*. For despite all the advances seismography has made, and we hope will continue to make, there is something intrinsically unpredictable about earthquakes and phenomena like it. They are connected with imponderables lurking further away from the space of the known than a *homo symbolicus* can discern even if that *homo symbolicus* is the world's acutest seismographer standing guard on the very edge of the seismologically known and trying to make potential earthquakes submit to his symbolic forms. Which is important here because, paradoxically, the imponderability of phenomena like earthquakes is semiologically significant. It tells us that the space of significance is susceptible – sometimes dramatically – to events that do not depend solely on being interpreted by *homo symbolicus* to be real and significant. They are instead what theorists in ethology, sign system studies and ecological psychology have been saying for some time now, namely the products or »affordances« of non-human agents located *outside* the space created by our symbol systems *signalling* their presence and telling man that their presence and agentivity have repercussions *inside* this space (GIBSON 1986: 127 *sq.*; HOFFMEYER 1996: 32, 42 & *passim* & DEELY 2003: 7-9). Which suggests that our semiological engineering isn't inclusive enough if it fails to give theoretical respectability to the idea that non-human agents contribute to the process of synthesising symbols, signs and significance. Not by passively receiving the significance *anthropos* gives them, rather as agents whose participation is required to synthesise events whose significance for *anthropos* is undeniable.

Obviously this is something which should matter to semiologists and music theorists, and for some it does (SCHAFER 1994: 205ff & 260ff; COOK 1996: 106-123; COOK 2001: 173ff.; TARASTI 2002: 59 & CLARKE 2005: *passim*.). But should it or could it matter to anyone else? Could it matter to *non-theorists*? A question which is important to ask because we are assessing if Molino's theorising is a musicology »for the 21st century« and judging if it is or isn't from a theoretical *and* from a more than theoretical perspective. So could the 'under-inclusiveness' of Molino's semiology matter to non-semiologists?

Presumably not. Presumably it could only matter to them if (a) the under-inclusiveness of a theory of the sign entailed *concrete, tangible* negative consequences and (b) the solution for these tangible negative consequences was to make our theories of the sign more inclusive than Molino's. But no matter how inclusive semiologists make their theory of the sign, that by itself will never make what is imponderable about earthquakes less imponderable and therefore less dangerous.

So in practical terms, no one is better or worse off if Molino does or doesn't give a semiological status to agencies or phenomena whose dynamics are inscrutable.

Things are quite different, however, when semiology, by design or by default, *allies itself* to an indifference or deafness toward the outside of the human mesocosm and through that deafness poses a threat not just to that outside *but also to anthropos himself*. Where that is the case and can be avoided by assuming the non-human can signify and can use its signifying powers to inform *anthropos* about what needs to be done to avoid calamity for all concerned, but semiologists tell us there is no point listening because only humans can symbol and create significance, then semiology allies itself to a danger for *anthropos*. So is this the case? Is Molino liable to the reproach that his »anthropological« semiology and the musicology governed by it are in league with factors which, in the final analysis, pose a threat to *anthropos*? If »eco-critical theory« can be given any credit, we would have to say he is.

An Anti-Ecological Semiology?

For what its proponents tell us is that, by virtue of a reckless pursuit of collective self-gratification, *anthropos* has become a threat to the viability of the global eco-system and that this recklessness is dangerous to man in as much as the equilibrium of the planetary eco-system is critical to the well-being and even the survival of *anthropos*. In other words, the damage *anthropos* does to the environment is, ultimately, damage he inflicts on himself.

Now if such reasoning is valid – and few doubt that it is – the ecological *souci* is one which ought to matter at least as much and in fact *more* than the causes Molino promotes through his semiological theorising. After all, the stakes involved in assuring our ecological flanks and rears are potentially of the order of existing or not existing. Combating Eurocentrism, elitism, holisms and totalising systems are not. But let us not criticise Molino for his choice of priorities or the *jugements de goût* which led him to them. All that matters to us here is whether or not and in which ways his semiology is relevant to what is arguably the paramount *souci* of the age. When viewed in this way, *i.e.*, in an »eco-critical« light, we draw two conclusions, both negative.

1. By its failure to accommodate significance originating in or 'afforded' by non-human agencies, Molino's semiology – *qua* semiology – disqualifies itself as a means for interfacing with nature and fruitfully coming to terms with it.

2. By encouraging *anthropos* to believe it is feasible and desirable to inhabit a space of meaning constructed of and answerable to nothing but impulses rooted in

his own physiology, Molino's semiology – whether intentionally or not – makes itself an accomplice to attitudes, practices and consequences which disserve and even endanger its intended beneficiary.

And lest a hasty reading of this *réquisitoire* failed to notice a key nuance or two, let us make it perfectly clear that no one is suggesting Molino can be held responsible for the eco-calamities everyone talks about so much or that he condones in any way the practices leading to them. Granted, he may have made disparaging remarks about »naturalism« (MOLINO 2009:78-80, 409-10). But nowhere does he specifically say that one has to be an enemy of nature to be a friend of *anthropos*. Still, semiological engineering can be an *accomplice* in practices which have negative effects on the environment without that being the intention of its artisan and that is what we object to in Molino's semiology. For in the way it is engineered it puts itself in the position of being unable to avoid having to choose between (a) the advantage of *anthropos* or (b) the advantage of nature when, from a semiological point of view, that choice is neither necessary nor, in the final analysis, tenable. Let us explain why.

Why Giving Nature a Voice and a Language Should Matter to Semiology

When Molino excludes non-*anthropos* from the symbol and meaning synthesising process and in addition allows man to use that power to any end he desires, as long, of course, as other humans are not prejudiced in the process (cf. *infra*), his semiology, willy-nilly, makes nature a victim and a victim which cannot possibly defend itself. For when *anthropos, qua anthropos*, is entitled to unilaterally pursue what suits him and he may *not* do so at the expense of other men, the fruit of his endeavours can only be obtained at the expense of »non-*anthropos*« or, more to the point, at the expense of nature³. And we do mean 'at the expense of nature'. For the only way such a relationship could yield the fruits it is entered into to produce and *not* be 'at the expense' of nature would be if nature in some sense consented to and cooperated in being exploited by men⁴. But Molino's semiology deprives nature of the prior, necessary condition of possibility of doing that because it doesn't allow non-*anthropos* to communicate or to engage in any sort of dialogue with its exploiter. After all, only humans can dialogue and nature isn't human.

Hence, this semiology is clearly liable to the charge that, willy nilly, it makes *anthropos* and nature enemies of one another in a war nature cannot win.

³ As Hegel put it, »In need, either man is made an object and is oppressed or else must make nature an object and oppress it« (*On Christianity, Early Theological Writings by Friedrich Hegel*, 1948, New York: 207).

⁴ Theorists of what is currently called »hybrid« or »produced« or »recombinant« or »social« nature would object to the »zero-sum«, »all or nothing«, »either or« logic we are using here. But such an objection could only be pertinent here if »produced nature« was instrumental in attenuating or averting the calamities we're speaking of. That, however, is something highly authoritative, well-researched studies and analyses tell us isn't happening (SONNENFELD 2002 & BENTON 2001). Moreover, it is irrelevant to Molino's semiology which nowhere discusses its ecological implications.

But, ultimately, neither can man. At least not unless there is something wrong with the reasoning employed by eco-critical thinkers. For they would have us believe that the gain man makes through this exploitative or »Swidden-type« relationship to nature is unobtainable without a deterioration of the apparatus which produces what man gains thereby. And the loss incurred by this deterioration doesn't have to be proportional to the gain that precipitated it. For if »tipping point« theorists are right, generating gain in this way is subject to the »law of diminishing marginal returns« in which yields can not alone decline exponentially to zero but even be incapable of ever yielding anything higher than zero due to a complete and irreparable collapse of the over-exploited resource (TAINTER 1988; ZIMMERMAN 1994; LEAKEY & LEWIN 1995; LOVELOCK 2000 & LOVELOCK 2006).

Saying which, once again, in no wise means we hold Molino responsible for eco-criminality or that we accuse him of condoning the practices leading to it. But not holding him to account on this score does not deprive us of grounds for being dissatisfied with his theorizing and considering it and its musicological implications to be unacceptable. For to be a semiology that merits our approval because it is *en phase* with the main, ecological *souci* of our age, it is not enough that its architect cannot be accused of conspiring to do harm to the environment. Semiologies merit such approval when (a) they correctly identify the real *soucis* of their times (b) make addressing them their priority and (c) submit all other considerations to the requirement that if they cannot play a positive role in furthering the priority issue, at least cannot legitimately be suspected of playing a negative role or even of being indifferent to the primary goal. Hence, if it is legitimate to gauge the merits of a semiology by how well it measures up to a criteriology like that and in addition it is accepted that the priority for *anthropos* today is ending and reversing the anthropogenic degradation of the global ecosystem, then Molino's semiology and musicology are unacceptable. For if one wanted to see what semiological theorizing looks like when it is pursued with the completest disregard for the environment and its importance for *anthropos*, one could scarcely find a better model than Molino's anthropological discourse. A failing which not merely disqualifies his discourse as one that measures up to the paramount challenge of the age, but also leaves one wondering why he doesn't see how it actually disserves *anthropos*. For, *in fine*, one cannot claim one is doing anything to help *anthropos* if man's indifference to the equilibrium of the global eco-system could be fatal to him and one nonetheless advocates a semiology which has the effect of aiding and abetting his deafness to nature by leading *anthropos* to believe there is nothing there to hear for as much as synthesizing signs and symbols is a prerogative of human interpretants and them alone.

Is an »Eco-Friendly« Semiology of Music Feasible and if It Is Does It Have to Be Unfriendly towards *Anthropos*?

In fact, if it were important to you that your semiology and musicology be »anthropological« by *truly* serving the interests of humanity, you would make sure they do what Molino's does not do. In other words, you would engineer them so that they give »non-*anthropos*« a voice and the semantic and narratological resources they need to be able to tell *anthropos* that doing as he pleases against non-*anthropos* entails a price to pay *anthropos* would do well to reflect upon. And let no one suspect there is something irrational or impracticable about asking semiology to accept this and do something about it. For Molino's semiology may in many respects have the backing of the post-structuralist and social constructivist *cognoscenti sapientiae* on what the sign can and cannot do and how it can and cannot do it. But this consensus is not some sort of *summum nec plus ultra* of wisdom on the question. Other, 'eco-friendly' semiological models exist (HOFFMEYER 1997; DEELY 2003 & CLARKE 2005) and can be operationalised musically as is evident in numerous compositions by Messiaen, Stockhausen, Cage and Westerkamp (TARASTI 1979 & ADAMENKO 2007). In fact, in the final analysis, all that is reflected in Molino's postmodernist views on musical meaning is the »*jugements de valeur*« or »*jugements de goût*« of its partisans. Hence if one decided that post-structuralist *jugements de valeur* are trumped by those which are more appropriate for addressing the real *soucis* of our times, then trumped right along with those *jugements* are their co-relative theories of the sign. Which means that if we believe it is imperative that *anthropos* cease being so high-handed in his attitude and behaviour towards non-*anthropos*, we shouldn't hesitate to embrace the semiological corollary. In other words, we should (a) forswear the view that symboling or *semiopoiesis* is the prerogative of *anthropos* and he alone and (b) admit that it is in the interest of *anthropos* to cooperate with other-than-human agencies in synthesising signs and sense.

And if it is important to insist on this last point, it's because making the adjustments to semiology which satisfy this requirement does not entail making the latter less 'anthropological' or 'anti-anthropological'. For there are ways to be 'anthropological' in one's semiological engineering which do not exclude non-*anthropos*. For example, we can be anthropological in our theorising about semiology and the semantics of music the way theorists in the past were anthropological. Namely by *submitting anthropos and non-anthropos to a »kosmodicy«* (κοσμο-δί'κει) *which made facilitating the felicity of anthropos a function of facilitating the felicity of non-anthropos*. And in as much as music or *mousiké* was the principle expedient for attaining this *entente cordiale*, musicologists have no excuse for not knowing that this is the way *anthropos* in times bygone ordered his relationship with non-*anthropos*. Indeed, if the evidence of research in Indo-European Comparative Poetics is anything to go by, *this is what music was invented for*: harassing human appetite and volition to the goal of occupying a cosmically ordained time, place and destiny which was »appropriate« (ευ, -ήθης) because doing so concurred

with the cosmically ordained time, place and destiny it was »appropriate« for the people and things around one to occupy. And as concerns the folk who ascribed to this ideal of music's vocation and finality, far from believing that it entailed anything non- or anti-anthropological, it was simply *being* »anthropological« as efficaciously as possible. For that is all one does when one makes sure that man's dependence on nature operates *in favour* of man's felicity by making that felicity a by-product of a relationship to nature which respects rather than exploits it.

Obviously, what prompts us to bring this up here is the conviction that the musicology our age needs is the one which can claim to be the theoretical concomitant of this ideal of music's vocation and finality. In any event, if *any* musicology can be considered appropriate for this end, it would be one which resembles ancient musicological theories by admitting that the more music is amenable to the goal of allowing *anthropos* and non-*anthropos* to communicate, the apter it is for *anthropos* in coming to terms with nature – for the benefit of both.

But, alas, we will not have the space here to look at recent developments in Indo-European Comparative Poetics, Applied Semiotics or Homeric Studies which will help us see how men in times bygone believed that nature had a voice and that music was her language. Nor will we be able to see how these old ideas on the vocation and finality of music are making a come back through the theories and works of contemporary artists like David Dunn, Hildegard Westerkamp and Barry Truax. However, to see how ancient ideas on music are useful and important for the semiological issues we are discussing here, it isn't necessary to go into such recondite matters. It is enough simply to look at their utility for solving the aporias which riddle Molino's own musicology. For as strange as it might seem, Molino himself cannot do without a *truchement* which plays a role in his own theory that is analogous to the role played by the *kosmodicy* we referred to above. To explain why we say that, let's go back to the point we raised earlier about the futility of arguing against Molino's anthropological musicology by adducing examples of 'man's inhumanity to man' to say that *anthropos*, guided by nothing but his *jugements de goût*, is his own biggest threat.

The Role of Universals and Transcendental Forms in Molino's Musicology

This, of course, could be done in any number of ways and Molino no doubt knows it. In any event, we refuse to believe that Molino *the man* is unaware of and unappalled by how widespread human inhumanity to humans is and, alas, is likely to remain. But if Molino *the man* knows about this sort of thing and recognises how it constitutes a threat *anthropos* poses to *anthropos*, Molino *the theorist* does not recognise that this threat is something his theory should take into consideration and act upon in any 'practical' sense. In any case, his theorising comes no closer to addressing the risk that the differences separating men can result in discord or conflict than to advocate a policy of strict »pluralism« and to apply it across the board (MOLINO

2009: 200-02 & *Musiques V*: 1199ff.). Hence, whether we are speaking of semiology, of the musicology governed by it or of the ontology governing both, no »totalising« or »absolutising« interpretations or discourses can be tolerated.

But neither can »relativism«, an interdiction which likewise applies across the board (MOLINO 2009:200-02, *Musiques I*: 56 & *Musiques V*: 790ff.). Whatever the issue, be it ontological, epistemological, ethical or aesthetic, it is unacceptable to say that all interpretations are acceptable. Indeed to deal with the differences between men on these issues relativism is »*la pire solution*« for as much as it incurs the risk of legitimising criminal or inhuman *jugements de goûts*.

So, *à force*, the question becomes one of how best to »make sense« of this tumult of competing, mutually exclusive *jugements de goût* and dealing with the risk of conflict they entail *without* renouncing or compromising on one's policy of strict pluralism. Molino admits that for this there is no »logically satisfying solution«, but he offers one nonetheless. It boils down to a social constructivist variant of the solution used by the Scholastics in dealing with a similar problem. Namely instituting an intersubjectively grounded »transcendental determination« of »the One, the True, the Good and the Beautiful« and making these latter superordinating »Absolute Forms« we can use as a yardstick to measure by how much or little given *jugements*, discourses, interpretations or *goûts* approximate them. In this way we avoid the aporias of relativism because in the high court of the transcendental gold standard one creates by instituting ontological, epistemological, ethical and aesthetic Absolute Forms, not all interpretations or *jugements* are equivalent. We also avoid the danger of hegemonic totalising or absolutising »systems« because the adequation of particular interpretations to the Absolute Forms that ratifies their validity is only ever one of degree, never of complete conformity. Hence, as this is unattainable, no discourse can ever be in the position of claiming a hegemonic position or role relative to other interpretations.

Now there is a lot about this intersubjectively grounded 'eclectic pluralism' one could be troubled by or sceptical about. For example, it could well be that all one accomplishes by steering a middle course between the Scylla of the »relativism« and the Charybdis of the »totalising discourses« is to take on board the drawbacks of both and the benefits of neither. In any event, one has to suppose that if one invents a transcendental benchmark of musical or aesthetic or moral excellence, the purpose isn't simply to identify what derogates from it. It is also to *do* something about »bad« music, »bad« taste and »bad« morals. But if one »does« anything against bad taste and mediocrity, one cannot claim to be different from those Molino calls »*méléphobes*« because they advocate *acting* to stop music being an incitement to excess, unreason and disorder (*Musiques V*: 1155). On the other hand, if one is satisfied with doing no more against bad taste and bad music than to thank their defenders for the »homage« they render one by confirming the superiority of one's own *jugements de goût* (MOLINO 2009: 202), what is the point of complaining about relativism and »anything goes« libertinage?

More perplexing still is why Nattiez and Molino think it makes sense to borrow from Scholasticism the »*métalangage*«, »*procédures scientifiques de classification*« and »*cadre de référence général*« they use to impose »unity« on musical phenomena while at the same time berating »essentialist reductionism« and »*paradigmes explicatifs holistes*«. What is the point of criticising essentialism and metaphysics if the mode of inductive reasoning you use to propose an alternative was invented by metaphysicians to guarantee that nothing but essences, forms and other metaphysical entities can be signified by using them? And if one answers this question by saying that, unlike Scholastic *universalia post rem*, which are eternal, immutable and posited a priori, all that results from your »*observation de constants et de régularités*« are »*des domaines hypothétiques aux frontières floues*« or symbolic forms »*aux contours variables*« then the question arises as to what one means about being »scientific«.

Still there are things to like about Molino's appeal to a superordinating, transcendental »*cadre général*« for making sense of the *diversité de jugements de goût* among men and dealing with the problems which cannot be solved except by postulating a supra-subjective arbiter. Notably the fact that it creates the possibility of reconciling his theories with those he refutes but which we maintain are essential to a musicology which allows music to be something and to function in a way that makes it a resource for coming to terms with the principle – ecological – *souci* of our times. For if he can admit the utility of a »*cadre général*« consisting of transcendental »universals« or »Absolute Forms« to make sense of the *diversité de jugements de goût* among men, presumably he couldn't object to a similar »*cadre général*« being used to mediate between *anthropos* and non-*anthropos* and facilitate communication between them. A point which takes us back to that »*kosmodiké*« we referred to above.

All that separates the »*cadre général*« of this *kosmodiké* and the »*cadre général*« of Molino's transcendental universals is that the latter is nothing but a collection of *Aufhebungen* derived from purely and exclusively human, all too human interpretations (*jugements, goûts, valeurs*, etc.) and answerable to nothing else besides. The *cadre général* of the *kosmodiké* favoured by his predecessors, however, included all this but did not exclude everything else. It instead gave *anthropos* and non-*anthropos* interdependent and complementary roles within an all-incorporating cosmic order or '*systasis*'. One which allowed and even required *anthropos* and non-*anthropos* to communicate so they could discover what is in the interest of both.

There is no doubt about this. It's what one would discern if one were able to decode the *hyponoia* in the verse of any Poet of note. In fact, it's something *every* artist and thinker of note strove through their works to expound. We see this, for example, in the *Symposium* where Plato speaks of a »*dialektos*« between *anthropos* and *théos*, we see it in the *Phaedrus* when he speaks of the reason why men in earlier times were wont to listen to Nymphs, Sirens and Muses in trees, rocks and streams and we see it in the *Ion* where he describes the vocation of the Rhapsode and the finality of his art as that of creating a »*homilia*« between man and agencies in the firmament or in subterranean vasty deeps. Notwithstanding the mystical overtones and the

mythopoeic imagery, Plato is speaking in these passages of something which was the heart and life blood of everything *anthropos* then believed was important to know about himself, his value and his well-being as well as of something he thought was indispensable for founding his arts, sciences, aesthetics and ethics. Namely tidings of things going on *outside* the semiosphere he creates for himself with his symbols. Intelligence about agencies and actants lurking *immanently* in the phaneron around him. Which is relevant to music and to a musicological consideration of its narratological and semantic powers because, formerly, it was in and as *mousiké* that this *dialektos* took place.

Why is it important to recall this in a discussion about Molino's semiology and his ideas on a musicology »for the 21st century«? Because the acceptance of music's semiology which best responds to what the 21st century should demand of it is the one which makes music a tool not just for pleasing man's *goût*, but also for interfacing hermeneutically with the extra-anthropic *Umwelt*, for deciphering its world-disclosive language, for learning from that language what we must do to restore a harmonious relationship to our more-than-human *Lebenswelt*. This is something ancient ideas on music's nature, vocation and finality did for *anthropos*. Molinos' and Nattiez's do not.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADAMENKO, Victoria 2007. *Neo-Mythologism in Music: From Scriabin and Schoenberg to Schnittke and Crumb*, Hillsdale N.Y.: Pendragon Press.
- BENTON, Ted 2000. »Environmental Sociology: Controversy and Continuity«, *Sociologisk tidskrift* 9(1): 5-28.
- CLARKE, E.F. 2005. *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- COOK, N. 1996. »Putting the Meaning back into Music or Semiotics Revisited«, *Music Theory Spectrum* 18(1): 106-123.
- COOK, N. 2001. »Theorising Musical Meaning«, *Music Theory Spectrum*, 23(2): 170-195.
- DAVIES, Stephen 2003. *Themes in the Philosophy of Music*, Oxford: Oxford UP.
- DEELY, John N. 2003. *The Impact on Philosophy of Semiotics: The Quasi-Error of the External World with a Dialogue Between a Semiotist and a Realist*, South Bend: St. Augustine Press.
- FELD, S. – F, A.A. 1994. »Music and Language«, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 25-53.
- GIBSON, J. J. 1986. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, London: L. Erlbaum.
- HEGEL, G.W.F. 1948. *On Christianity, Early Theological Writings by Friedrich Hegel*, New York: Harper & Brothers.
- HEIDEGGER, Martin 1927. *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: M. Niemeyer.
- HOFFMEYER, Jesper 1996. *Signs of Meaning in the Universe*, Indiana: Indiana UP.
- HOFFMEYER, Jesper 1997. »Biosemiotics: Towards a New Synthesis in Biology«, *European Journal for Semiotic Studies*, 9(2): 355-376.
- LEAKEY, R. – LEWIN, R. 1995. *The Sixth Extinction*, New York: Anchor Books.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, C. 1964. *Le Cru et le Cuit, Mythologiques I*, Paris: Plon.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, C. 1971. *L'Homme nu, Mythologiques IV*, Paris: Plon.

- LOVELOCK, J. 2000. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LOVELOCK, J. 2006. *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth Is Fighting Back — and How We Can Still Save Humanity*, Santa Barbara: Allen Lane.
- McCRELESS, Patrick 1997. »Contemporary Music Theory and the New Musicology: An Introduction«, *Journal of Musicology* 15: 291-96.
- MOLINO, J. 2009. *Le singe musicien, sémiologie et anthropologie de la musique*, Arles: Actes Sud.
- NATTIEZ, J.-J. 1990. *Music and Discourse, Towards a Semiology of Music*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- NATTIEZ, J.-J. 2003-2007. *Musiques. Une encyclopédie pour le XXI^e siècle*, 5 vol., Arles: Actes Sud.
- PEIRCE, C. S. 1998. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, 2 vol., H, Nathan (ed.), Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- SCHAFER, R. Murray 1994. *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester (Vermont): Destiny Books.
- SONNENFELD, D.A. 2000. »Contradictions of Ecological Modernization: Pulp and Paper Manufacturing in South East Asia« in MOL, A.P.J. & SONNENFELD, D.A. (eds), *Environmental Politics*, 9(1): 235-256.
- TAINTER, Joseph. A. 1988. *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TARASTI, Eero 2002. *Signs of Music, A guide to Musical Semiotics*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- TARASTI, Eero 1979. *Myth and Music*, The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.
- ZIMMERMAN, M. 1994. *Contesting Earth's Future*, Berkeley: University of California Press.