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The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 5, No. 4. (Jun., 1947), pp. 301-308.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8529%28194706%295%3A4%3C301%3ANOCOTM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-I

The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism is currently published by The American Society for Aesthetics.

said to be a study of "inner" relations, and ecology said to be the study of "outer" relations. And it may be that the terms do more damage in the field of criticism than they could do in biology, where organic relations are recognized as not confined to the separate organism.

The suggestion offered here is that relational contexts and their bearings on each other cannot be successfully dealt with in the philosophy of criticism if a wall is built around the aesthetic situation, whether by those whose interests lie within the wall or by those whose interests lie outside.

4. The philosophy of criticism has a further major problem in clarifying the nature of evaluation and judgment from the relational standpoint. Judgment by judicial standards is closed to the critic who has found the yardstick approach to be sterile for the understanding of creative intent, over-confident in its designation of "correct" artistic procedures, and fruitless as preparation for experiencing new kinds of artistic technique and content. In the past the critic, so disenchanted, has frequently reacted by cultivating his own aesthetic experiences, abandoning all evaluation, subscribing to the doctrine of "every man to his own tastes", and telling his readers about *his* tastes. For rigidity of aesthetic standards he has substituted aesthetic anarchy. Parallel reactions could be found in ethical theories and conduct. However, there seems to be no necessity for a choice between ethical absolutism and ethical subjectivism, or between aesthetic absolutism and aesthetic subjectivism. The relational approach has the immediate appeal of suggesting an escape from the dilemma.

But the relational approach also puts before us a real problem,—that of discovering the kind of discriminating evaluation which would be consistent with a non-absolutist view. At the present time, relational theories differ considerably in their descriptions of the nature of values, and on the question of value judgments. Such differences need to be explored in connection with criticism if the relational viewpoint is to be fully useful in that field.

While problems in the philosophy of criticism seem to require more precise statement, and while current theories seem most inconclusive, there is much to be hoped for in new ideas which come from the examination of those problems by fundamental philosophical techniques, and by the application of the results of value inquiry.

NICHOLAS OF CUSA ON THE MEANING OF MUSIC

KATHI MEYER-BAER

It is not easy to be sure that musical works coming down from earlier centuries, for example, those in the early polyphonic style, are now heard as the composer intended. Sometimes the difficulty lies in our lack of knowledge; for instance, in our inability to interpret the notation. But it may also lie in the actual difference between the normal intention of musical communication in that day and

in our own time. To learn what meaning music was supposed to carry in earlier epochs we must seek help from various writings of the time: theoretical treatises, descriptions of festivals, etc. The descriptions of festivals give us, of course, a certain amount of general information about the mood and function of music in popular celebrations. But the terms used in the accounts (joy, enthusiasm, etc.) are often too vague to help much. The theoretical treatises suffer from the opposite defect. They consist of such strict definitions and technical analyses that only part of the sense of the music is dealt with. One hitherto neglected source of information that may sharpen for us the ideas of the historians and supplement the analyses of the musical theorists is the writing of philosophers.

It is the purpose of this paper to show that such help may definitely be received for the music written between 1420 and 1450 from the writings of Nicholas of Cusa. Nicholas was not only one of the greatest philosophers of the fifteenth century, but was trained and talented in the arts. The passages in his works that relate to music are therefore of significance for the interpretation of music in the days when the Netherlands' *a cappella* style flourished.

Nicholas's contribution to our knowledge of the meaning of music will be discussed under the following heads:

A. General characteristics of Nicholas as a thinker.
B. Nicholas's musical experience and the evidence in his writings.
C. Enumeration and characteristics of the mental powers concerned with music.
D. Musical apprehension: sense, reason, memory.
E. The two bridges: rapture, symbolism.
F. The creative process.
G. The subjective center and the passions.

A. General Characteristics of Nicholas as a Thinker

Nicholas of Cusa occupied himself with almost all the important fields of interest of his day: theological, legal, scientific and philosophical. Like many great thinkers, he at once stood within tradition and advanced toward new ways of viewing things. In most of his writings he developed and transformed the ideas of his predecessors. Thus he has been called a reformer before the reformation, and a herald of Copernicus, Giordano Bruno, and Leibniz. Leonardo da Vinci is known to have read his works, and been influenced by them. This power of innovation he possessed makes him often seem strikingly modern and sympathetic with our own way of thinking, in music as elsewhere.

The freshness of his thought was probably due in part to his empirical habit —the capacity of direct observation. "We have to look in the streets for truth,"[1] he said. However, he was by no means an innovator throughout. His statements are not based on the familiar roads of daily life alone, but in many respects follow the trends of scholarly tradition. The ideas and methods of the earlier Middle Ages and of the fourteenth century pervade his writings; for example, in his treatment of number, where he uses mathematical notions as emblems of theological truths. In this connection he cites those ancient and medieval

[1] *Idiotae lib.I. Opera*, Basel 1565, 137.

writers, Greek philosophers and Church Fathers, who had taken the emblematic method of conveying their thought.

We thus note in general that Nicholas's intellectual temper led him to graft new turns of method and idea on old modes of philosophizing. We shall be particularly concerned with his innovations, but shall see them against the older background.

B. Nicholas's Musical Experience and the Evidence in his Writings

For Nicholas's ideas on music we have to consult especially his philosophical treatises: *De Docta Ignorantia*, *De Mente*, *De Conjecturis*, *De Ludo Globi*, etc., though he often uses illustrations taken from music in his sermons and other writings.[2] Since the principal passages are in works appearing in 1440 and 1450, the music present to his consciousness in forming his judgement must have belonged largely to the period 1420–1440. But one may add that the music he heard and enjoyed as a young man between the ages of fifteen and thirty (1415–1430) probably set the direction of his taste, as this has been found to be the decisive period for a layman. It is probable that he heard compositions in the early *a cappella* style in Deventer where he went to school and in Trier near where he was born, and in Cambrai, the seat of a famous choir, which is also in the neighborhood of his youthful home. As a great ecclesiastical prince of the Renaissance, Nicholas of course travelled widely later in life, and he must have heard music in his maturity in Holland, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. Though in certain of the fine arts, architecture and literature, Nicholas's interest surpassed the usual range, in music he always remained a layman with such knowledge as belonged to the generally cultivated humanist.

C. Enumeration and Characteristics of the Mental Powers Concerned with Music

In various places in his writings Nicholas mentions the mental faculties operative both in the apprehension and in the creation of works of art. His usage of terms is loose and inconsistent. The following variants occur as lists of the faculties concerned: (1) Sense, understanding, and imagination; (2) Sense, understanding and reason; (3) Soul or sensuousness (the body) and reason (God); (4) Imagination and understanding; (5) Feeling, understanding, imagination, reason; (6) Fancy, memory and subjectivity; (7) Sensuousness, calculation, power of apprehension, i.e. imagination and intelligence; (8) *Cogitatio*, *consideratio* and *terminatio*. We must now pass on from these bare lists with their minimum of significance for us to Nicholas's freer and more concrete handling of the mental functions. By anticipation we may note that he sets off animal receptivity from the human capacity for measurement and distinction; that the mind's power of converting its data into imagery reveals for him two kinds of musical symbolism; that the experiencing of music is made effectual, in his view, by a doctrine of the passions and of ecstasy; and finally, that he

[2] Nicholas's writings are quoted after the following editions: D. Nicolai de Cusa . . . *Opera*. Basileae 1565, F. A. Scharpff, *Des Cardinals . . . Nikolaus von Cusa wichtigste Schriften*, Freiburg i.B, 1862, and *Liber de Mente*, publ. as supplement of E. Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*. Studien der Bibliothek Warburg. Leipzig 1927.

postulates a subjective center of the soul from which power to organize all elements flows out and to which all meaning returns once again. It is obvious that certain of these mental relations and elements reflect traditions, and that others face forward to our modern picture of the mind.

D. Musical Apprehension: Sense, Reason, Memory[3]

In five of the eight lists of mental faculties, Nicholas mentions sense and reason. As to which of these two mental powers precedes the other, Nicholas holds a position midway between Plato and Aristotle. He thinks it impossible to determine any absolute order. Effectual sense-impressions presuppose a basis of right apprehension and arrangement, furnished by reason and education; and yet no apprehension is possible without the original impression on the senses, the actual hearing. Impressions are mediated to us by the senses—in music through the ear; we clarify these impressions brought to us through the senses by using our reason and the discipline of our education; and then we transform these into mental imagery. Senses, reason and training mutually supporting each other, pave the way for the appreciation of a work of art. "Our ear collects tones and sounds of voices;"[4] we preserve these in our memory; then through mathematical and musical education we become able to compare and differentiate these memories. Technical and mathematical knowledge is the means by which we recognize the similarities.

The most important passage on the subject from our philosopher is the following: "While listening, we perceive with our senses the concordant parts; we measure the intervals and concordances with our reason and with the help of our musical training. This faculty (of reason and the power to profit by education) we do not find in animals. . . . They therefore cannot learn music though they perceive sounds (through the senses) as we do and take pleasure in sounds that agree together. On this account we are entitled to call our soul reasonable: *viz.*, because it is a measuring and numbering power which grasps whatever requires precise distinction. Our ears are favorably inclined upon hearing beautiful musical concords. Thus reason, seeing that concord is based on number and proportion, invented the rational theory of musical chords, based on the theory of numbers."[5] What initial facts do we learn from this passage that throw light on the problem we have set ourselves—the problem, namely, of how the intelligent layman in the period between 1420 and 1450 heard music—what it meant to him? We learn that such a person simultaneously grasped the distant parts of polyphonic music, and that he used the separate categories of consonance, harmony and dissonance. Moreover, he used the measuring capacity peculiar to man for the apprehension of these harmonic relations.

[3] *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I cap. 10 and lib. III cap. 4; *De Ludo Globi*, lib. II; *De Conjecturis*, lib. I cap. 6 and 14, and lib. II cap. 14, 15 and 16.

[4] *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II cap. 2

[5] *De ludo globi*, lib. II; Scharpff p. 253.

E. The Two Bridges: Rapture, Symbolism

In the fields of the fine arts—according to Nicholas—the cooperation of sense with reason and the other mental powers proceeds through the aid of two bridges. One is rapture. This is the bridge that connects the senses with feeling or "soul." "Without rapture, the ear of reason cannot hear even the most perfect harmony."[6] This bridge leads from the senses to reason, and then on to feeling, that is, to the inner region of the mind. This turning inward upon the soul itself is very important for our author, and we shall recur to the subject later. Rapture, then, is the bridge peculiar to the apprehension of art. Giordano Bruno later referred to the same thing as *entusiasmo*. This handling of the psychic functions is an attempted analysis of the immediate impressions made by art. The other bridge, the symbol, is built by reason and imagination. In this case reason must first have stated the similarities in the impressions delivered by the senses. Then the imagination represents the arranged impressions as mental images. Later it recognizes the mental images as symbols. By way of the symbol, the likenesses are transcended. The recognition of mental images as symbols means to Nicholas a higher form of understanding.

Over the bridges of "rapture" or of "symbol" we are able to go from one sphere of our understanding to another. In the field of music rapture leads from sense to feeling; the symbol from the understanding of the mathematic and acoustical measurements of the sounds to mental image and artistic understanding (*ratio* to *imaginatio* and *consideratio*). "Thus does man shape in his fantasy images and reflections of the world of senses. For he is that unity which at once compares and combines. He orders the images he has shaped and preserves them in his memory. All this material he relates to himself that he may understand, guide and preserve himself."[7]

But now we must note that there are actually two symbolic bridges for Nicholas. That is, he recognizes the difference between symbol and allegory. Though he does not develop this distinction methodically, he makes explicit mention of it. The methodical interpretation involves the separation of the intrinsic symbols of musical thought: high, low, types of motion, etc. from music's capacity to stand for something outside itself: for example, for spiritual harmony and eternal bliss. The musician uses the first kind of symbol when he conveys his own musical ideas and images and nothing beyond this. Musical sound is here a symbol for music's very essence. There is no way of stating this intention—this type of meaning—except through music itself. As Nicholas puts it: "The very spiritual things which we cannot comprehend directly are investigated through the bridge of the symbol," meaning here the natural sign-language of music. "All the sages and saints and holy teachers have agreed that all visible things are images of the invisible, that cannot be perceived otherwise than as if it were through a mirror and through an enigma. But even if the spiritual things remain inaccessible to our understanding, and if

[6] *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II cap. 1
[7] *De conjecturis*, lib. II cap. 14

they never can be perceived otherwise than in the parabolic, the emblematic way, there should be at least no doubt and nothing unclear about the image, the symbol itself," meaning here once more music's natural symbols.[8]

In the second place, "signs derived from musical harmony" are used as allegories for religious and other external ideas. Nicholas knows that "those signs of joy derived from musical harmony . . . which came down to us from the writings of the Church Fathers as known signs to measure the eternal bliss, are only remote material signs, which differ infinitely from those spiritual joys that are not accessible to our imagination."[9] Here Nicholas does not mean signs and symbols which are inherent in music, or which help toward the realization of musical ideas, but he speaks of special musical terms which are used as parables of heavenly harmony. These musical terms could be replaced by terms drawn from other disciplines, for example, from mathematics. That Nicholas makes this distinction seems important for our knowledge of how music and the fine arts were understood in the middle ages and the fifteenth century, for in modern musicology and history of art, the difference is often blurred. The writers of the fifteenth century were conscious that terms derived from music had been used in the theological treatises since the time of the Church Fathers, and that this method was based on an old tradition, but at the same time that these comparisons and terms need not necessarily have corresponding to them actual musical elements and relations.

F. The Creative Process

Nicholas treats the motivation and sequence of functions in the creation of art as very like that in apprehension. Sense and reason, memory and imagination cooperate here also, the only difference being that the importance of memory and imagination is emphasized. The artist collects impressions of sounds and tones; he preserves them in his memory; he arranges them, and selects from them certain ones from which he forms in his imagination the pattern of the work of art which he wishes to produce. To produce, in fact, the artist must have the special talent of expressing and forming (*pandendi* and *fingendi*).[10] How exactly Nicholas understood the creation of a polyphonic composition and how much he admired it, we can learn from the following words of praise: "For the eternal mind creates as does the musician who wishes to express and represent his inner images; for he takes the variety of musical parts and imposes on them rules of measurement which result in harmony, so that the harmony resounds in sweetness and perfection. For here harmony is in its very own place."[11]

That Nicholas sees an artist as an analogue of the Divine Creator, and not as a mere tool, shows him to be imbued with humanism. There came in with the Renaissance the conception of individual artistic talent. Only then was it generally acknowledged that a single human being might be a creator in his

[8] *De docta ignorantia* lib. I cap. 11; Cassirer p. 56.
[9] *De docta ignorantia* lib. III cap. 10
[10] *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II cap. 2; De ludo globi, lib. I.
[11] *De mente*, cap. 6.

own person. Nicholas mentions this creative character of the artist in several places. A work of art, he says, depends on the ideas of the artist alone. The artist forms his work on rules of reason, and in accordance with the image which he has formed in his imagination.

G. The Subjective Center and the Passions

In the course of his description of the artist's processes, Nicholas penetrates to the inner recesses of the artist's soul. He does the same in the case of the appreciative response. Here Nicholas was a true pioneer. His forerunners, Dionysius the Carthusian as well as Ulrich Engelberti had seen the beauty of a work of art in the harmony of diverse parts, as indeed did Nicholas also.[12] But Nicholas looks behind the work of art to discover the artist himself and the sensitive and fit spectator. His predecessors had based the possibility of creation and comprehension on divine inspiration, and for this reason did not probe the human springs of art. But Nicholas not only puts sense, reason, memory and imagination to work with each other, but also with the soul at the center. He says: "All these (powers) he—the artistic personality—relates to his inner self in order to understand, guide, and preserve himself."[13]

Beside the central subjective spring, Nicholas notes and describes the passions or affects concerned with music. This marks the beginning of the famous theory of the passions that flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and acknowledges within the mental equipment of the musicmaker and hearer another source of energy. Nicholas relates the internal energy of the passions to the physical motion outside us. Motions outside us we best perceive through the flow of the sounds. Through the flow of tones we can understand that time in a melody is one as well as complex, that it is unity and at the same time has a beginning and an end. But Nicholas turns from the outer courses of sound to the inner self and the inner motions, i.e., the emotions. These inhere in man's nature; they are *concreati, non impressi ei.*[14] Moreover this motion is not set up by God, but keeps itself alive. In the world the motion of the soul is governed by the emotions and the passions, which arise through the contact with the senses.

Nicholas raises the question of how these motive forces are related to beauty. "The passions," as he says, "pass away, and sensuous impressions are beautiful only insofar as they mirror spiritual ideas or beauties."[15] Now spiritual ideas and beauties are understood in music through the medium of mathematics and acoustics, through what we can learn in the theory of music. Still we do not perceive beauty through measurement (*ratio pulchri*) alone. Through reasoning we do in part indeed understand the harmony of diverse parts. But there is more in a work of art. This we can only understand if we compare the whole rich flood of sound with the parallel motion in the soul. For "enthusiasm

[12] see: M. Grabmann, *Des Ulrich Engelberti Abhandlung de pulchro*, Muenchen, 1925; H. Zoeckler, *Dionys des Karthaeusers Schrift "De venustate mundi,"* Theol. Studien 1881.

[13] *De conjecturis*, lib. II cap. 14.

[14] *De ludo globi*, lib. I

[15] *De venatione sapientiae* cap. 5.

is a moving force."[16] Thus, knowledge of theory is important, and must be possessed; but it does not refer to the essence of music. "If somebody should hear the shouting of a whole army, he would not be able to single out the voices, though in this shout are contained all the single voices; neither would he be able to tell the number of them. Therefore, we are able to know that there is a multitude, even when we cannot tell the number of the constituent parts."[17] There is, in other words, another resource for the relevant apprehension of moving sound. This is feeling; feeling that can rise to transport and that commands symbols; for the flow, the motion in music is an image, a symbol, a metaphor of our passions.

This final recognition of the functioning of the two bridges completes our argument. The argument is that from the pages of the philosopher, Nicholas of Cusa, we may build up a conception of how music was apprehended in his time; and having done so, can see many analogies between the view stated by him in the fifteenth century and our own theory today.

THE PROBLEM OF MEANING IN MUSIC AND THE OTHER ARTS[1]

THEODORE M. GREENE

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the problem of artistic meaning in such a way that more specific questions relating to the meaning of music and the other arts can be asked and answered more precisely than they often are.

It is almost universally agreed that if a composition in any medium deserves to be called a "work of art" it has *some* meaning. The first major difference of opinion arises between those who insist that its meaning be restricted to its intrinsically satisfying sensuous pattern, and those who believe that this pattern *also* possesses an *additional* meaning. We can conveniently label those who hold the first of these views the "formalists," those who hold the second, the "expressionists." The question as to which of these positions is more correct can be decided only in the light of sensitive and informed response to works of art in the several media *and* by reference to the way in which the expressionists conceive of the additional meaning which they claim to find in art. Let us proceed at once to examine this additional meaning.

We will do well to restrict this inquiry to the claim of those expressionists who do full justice to what the formalists are most concerned to assert, namely, that a work of art does possess an intrinsically satisfying sensuous pattern, and, furthermore, that it is this pattern which is the chief vehicle for whatever additional meaning the work of art may possess. In short, the position to

[16] *Exc.* 591/94; Scharpff p. 539

[17] *De mente*; Cassirer, p. 282

[1] Presented at a meeting of the Southern California Section, Pacific Coast Division, American Society for Aesthetics.