

Musical Morphology

New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century

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Musical Morphology

Published in Collaboration with the
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Foreword

Following upon the first volume in the series *New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century*, dedicated to the theme *Polyphony & Complexity*, the second volume deals with an issue that has long been neglected in the discourse of contemporary music, namely *Musical Morphology*. While in common-practice music concepts such as theme or motive, phenomena such as line or melody, and systems of syntax and rhythm are generally taken to be self-explanatory, the question concerning corresponding means in post-traditional music (i.e., new music since 1945)—that is, sufficient to shaping the musical surface in a potentially meaningful manner—is rarely reflected upon and more commonly suppressed. Although there is an abundance of dogmatic approaches—whether formalist systems or restorative mythology—asserting that the problem has already been solved, the question, whether welcome or not, continues to arise. This avoidance can clearly be traced back to one defining moment of post-WWII new music, the “zero-degree” of pointillism. This was admittedly an extreme position, but one which could at most postpone the difficult, but unavoidable basic questions concerning a musical typology of shapes. This issue is all the more important in view of both the differentiation of composing styles in the last decades and the vital search in many different locations for a new morphology: what can “figure,” “gesture,” “melody,” “motive,” and so on mean *today*? It is a question of that which is more than mere sound, but not quite expression or meaning.

This book arose out of the *bludenzer tage zeitgemäßer musik* 2002, which was dedicated to the theme “Morphology in Music Today” and offered a series of lectures, symposia, and concerts. An international group of composers was invited to consider the musical phenomenon of morphology in light of their own work. In addition to their contributions, an essay on musical deconstruction offers a theoretical perspective which, it is hoped, can lead to a more productive formulation of the entire question.

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The Editors

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