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A Review Essay:

Paradigm War: Lessons Learned from 19th Century Piano Pedagogy

Graca Mota

Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal

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Piano Pedagogy has been, as rightly pointed out at the beginning of the introduction of the book by Lia Laor, “the center of unparalleled critical dialogue and scholarly discourse in 19th century Europe” (p. xv). However, and to my knowledge, there are no publications that have attempted to systematically capitalize on the wide diversity of contributions through a both thorough and innovative approach made concrete through the presentation of one as clear as profound framework of analysis.

As the author points out, in the 20th century (and I dare, through the 21st century) artificially constructed divisions led to a situation where performing artists and composers are placed on the opposite side of pedagogues and researchers. Despite the literature that has been produced in the last decades on artistic research, with the constitution of specific societies¹ and a meaningful number of publications, a conceptual analysis is missing that builds upon the philosophies of the 19th century as the time where indeed today's piano pedagogy to a great extent is still drawing. In that sense Lia Laor's book represents a significant contribution not only to fill in that gap but also to help piano pedagogues and piano students to comprehend a number of issues relevant to make choices regarding pianistic options and directions to follow. Being myself a trained pianist, mostly within the German tradition, I believe that nothing is more important than a deep understanding of the philosophical basis behind the pedagogical orientation that is being conveyed to you in your professional training as a concert pianist. In that sense I am convinced, with Lia Laor, that pedagogy *can not* be external to music.

In the introduction, Laor explicates her paradigmatic framework and immediately gains our attention by mapping the diverse approaches to piano pedagogy, and its concomitant impasse, under two opposite traditions – mechanism versus holism, briefly ascribing mechanism to the Enlightenment period and holism to the Aristotelian science and Romantic philosophy. It continues by drawing our attention to the present volume's elaboration of the work of Robert Schumann as “breaking through the paradigmatic methodological polarity” (p. xviii) and even transcending it through an integration based on Jean Paul Richter's ideas on aesthetics and education.

The book comprises three parts. In the first part, “Intellectual Context,” the author elaborates on two major areas, education and aesthetics, each one being object of a chapter. The second part, “Mechanistic and Holistic Paradigms in 19th Century Piano Pedagogy” presents the new conceptual framework for overcoming the opposing pedagogical traditions based on the previously elaborated philosophies of education and aesthetics. It includes three chapters, respectively on the search of a context for piano pedagogy, on the mechanistic, and on the holistic traditions of piano pedagogy. The third part, “Conclusions and Implications” gives us a remarkable perspective towards a liberal piano pedagogy which rounds up the whole rationale of the book.

I consider the first part to be the ‘*pièce de resistance*’ of the whole book. In the educational chapter, Laor systematically reviews the theories of Kant and Rousseau, under The

¹ (see for example <http://www.societyforartisticresearch.org/society-for-artistic-research/>)

Enlightenment philosophical vision, and Hegel under the Romantic perspective. In what concerns early modern educational theory she grasps to Pestalozzi as a mechanistic case study and Jean Paul Richter for what she terms as the modified holistic one.

I would like to stress in this part the significance of the following ideas. Firstly, the sharpness revealed by the author in relationship to Kant's contradictory views of the child (children should be allowed 'perfect liberty' but only as long as they did not impinge on the freedom of others), and consequently the assertion of education as occurring through a process of passing on information to passive recipients that have no input unless his or her reason has already developed up to a certain extent. As for Rousseau the idea that he might be responsible for the birth of a free space for liberal education, both philosophically and psychologically grounded, and in the sense that the child is respected as a human being in struggle, like adults, for her own development.

Secondly, I want to stress the importance given to the substantial analyzes of the views of the great educators of the time as to lead us both through an understanding of the way in which teachers ought to be prepared either in terms of a mechanistic approach to teaching (Pestalozzi) and of a 'modified holistic' Romantic worldview (Jean Paul Richter). Particularly regarding Jean Paul's writings and pioneering insights Laor asserts that "children's autonomy and teachers' non-authoritarian pedagogy could go hand in hand" (p. 24). That is how she arrives at stating that Jean Paul's worldview should be specially termed as '*modified holism*'. This is extensively developed in chapter two, on Aesthetics, by elaborating on his methodological perspective that she believes had a significant importance for arts education and, as she also contends, for the field of piano pedagogy. Here she poses the seminal question: "should artistic insight be trusted on its own account or must it nonetheless rely on science for validation?" (p. 29).

Through an extensive review of the literature, this chapter proposes a discussion of that question addressing our restlessness in issues such as the qualification of a work of art, talent versus genius, aesthetics and pedagogy, and a liberal theory of aesthetics and pedagogy. Laor's idea that Jean Paul's view of imagination can be understood in today's terms as creativity is rather exciting as she states that his "theory of art, genius, and imagination aimed to narrow the existing theoretical gap between genius and ordinary person, between creative artists and their audience" (p. 51). Given that these ideas are even today very much open to discussion, I believe that the way they are being systematically dealt with in this book are indeed enough to recommend its reading.

Part two of the book goes in detail into the study of piano pedagogy in 19th century Europe, pointing out right at the beginning of chapter three that piano pedagogy was then approached

in dialogical correspondence between pairs of composers such as Beethoven and Czerny, Mendelssohn and Moscheles and Clara Schumann and Brahms. Here it seems relevant to acknowledge the importance of the following statement: “in comparison, today’s music, musicology, and music education are socially compartmentalized, where performing artists, musicologists, and music educators seldom mingle, each adhering to their own separate podiums, journals, and professional associations” (p. 59). I would like to believe, however, that we are now beginning to understand that what unites us is infinitely more than what separates us and that there are multiple signs also in the academia that this might be true. Following on Laor’s reading of Bruno Nettl, it seems that we are now on the way to reposition pedagogy as internal to music. This chapter is supported by a rich data collection and analysis from which I would like to quote: “A major assumption underlying my analysis is that any piano method or pedagogical treatise reflects its author’s ideas regarding the nature of the music and the best method for developing musical skills – instrumental as well as interpretative” (p. 67).

Chapter four carefully reviews the mechanistic tradition while chapter five does so regarding the holistic tradition of piano pedagogy. While I would like to stress the so carefully and thoroughly designed arguments regarding both traditions, in what concerns the mechanistic one I would particularly quote what I fear might be still an existing problem in today’s piano pedagogy: “...mechanistic piano pedagogues warned music students against the premature introduction of art into their teaching; as a result, they ended up casting music itself out of piano pedagogy” (p. 70). Still, in this chapter, and acknowledging the deepness of the overall approach to Carl Czerny, I missed a concern with the issue of piano improvisation. Knowing that together with Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Clara and Robert Schumann, Czerny was a strong advocate of improvisation, it would have seemed appropriate to have dedicated more than a quote on page 95 on that matter. Furthermore, I would also consider worthwhile to point out that the advent of the Romantic period, by introducing the obligation of playing from memory, brought much pain to aspiring pianists, something that only in the end of the 20th and now in the 21st century is beginning to lose relevance, leaving to each musician the decision to play or not from memory.

From chapter five I retain the coming back to Piano Pedagogy as art through the approaches to Clementi and Beethoven. Finally, Robert Schumann’s ‘modified holistic’ piano pedagogy should catch the attention of the readers as maybe the primary source of today’s creative piano teaching. Based on Jean Paul Richter’s idea of developing ‘the educational sense’ Laor claims that his “works constitute an independent and unique example of Romantic aesthetics” (p. 123).

Part III situates the whole endeavor of this book on the plea for a liberal (modified) holistic piano pedagogy as manifested in Robert Schuman’s “unique combination of literary and musical pedagogical works” (p. 151).

I conclude by acknowledging Laor's critical stance towards Romantic thinkers that have been unable to be the innovators, here represented by Jean Paul, Schopenhauer and Heinrich Heine, and her wish that her work will "lead to professional self-awareness across the domains of music education, philosophy of music education, musicology, and ethnomusicology" (p. 157). May those in charge of teaching young musicians across these domains be aware of the importance of paying attention to the present Lia Laor's analysis and therefore contribute to "assist young children as they enter the world of music, to learn how small fingers and young minds artistically unite to discover the magic of music" (p. 161).

About the author:

Graça Mota (pianist, Master in Music Education, Boston University, USA, PhD in Psychology of Music, University of Keel, UK) has been for more than 25 years engaged in music teacher's education at the Music Department of the School of Education in the Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal. Currently, she is a senior researcher of the CIPEM (Research Center in Psychology of Music and Music Education), and a Board member of the international research platform SIMM (Social Impact of Making Music). She was Chair of the Research Commission (2008-2010) and elected member of the Board of directors (2014-2016) of the *International Society for Music Education*. She plays regularly in Piano duet.

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