

## **Workshop “Musical ‘Meaning’, Social Interaction, and Teleofunctionalism”**

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Institute for Musicology and Media Science

Research Area “Systematic Musicology”

July 13-14, 2018

### Confirmed Speakers:

Prof. Dr. Ian Cross (University of Cambridge)

Jun.-Prof. Dr. Jin Hyun Kim (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Prof. Dr. Uwe Seifert (Universität zu Köln)

Prof. Dr. Elizabeth Tolbert (Johns Hopkins University)

Prof. Dr. Matthias Vogel (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)

### Call for Participation:

How do we experience certain sets of sounds as music? What makes a musical event a meaningful event? Most scholars who discuss the possibilities and problems of musical ‘meaning’ (including musicologists and philosophers of music) conceive of music as non-representational, whether from a causal/informational theory perspective or in taking an inferential account of referential success. Since we support the thesis that music does not have a representational semantics, we use the term ‘meaning’ with a single quote. Given that theories of representational semantics are therefore not readily applicable to music, this workshop addresses an alternative question, tying in with a different approach taken from the philosophy of mind: teleofunctionalism—namely, whether a musical event can be considered meaningful by virtue of having a certain kind of proper function. Thus far, the tenability of teleofunctionalism has gained little scholarly attention in developing theories of musical ‘meaning.’ This workshop therefore brings together music researchers interested in the biological and cultural evolution of music with philosophers of mind to discuss the possibility of a teleofunctional explanation of musical ‘meaning.’

Sometimes we immediately react to musical sounds, for instance when they are experienced as loud. This kind of reaction can be seen as rooted in animal communication, in which certain sounds—e.g. a bird’s alarm—act as communicative displays. Musical sounds do not serve such communication, acting rather as honest signals that music constitutes to apply Ian Cross’ term. Attributing this kind of natural ‘meaning’ to musical sounds involves what Ruth Millikan refers to as pushmi-pullyu representations.

Other times, we assign emotional qualities to musical sounds, not only when a performer is expressing a present emotional state, but also when musical sounds do not serve as expressive signs. A teleofunctional explanation of how we attribute affective ‘meaning’ to musical sounds—which addresses dysfunctional traits—would allow us to suggest a further dimension of musical ‘meaning.’

Moreover, a pragmatic function that can be assigned to music in discussing the dimension of musical ‘meaning’ referred to by Ian Cross as “socio-intentional” deserves careful discussion. To what extent does musical ‘meaning’ derive from social interaction? What precisely is meant by “social” if sociality is assigned to music-specific interaction? What are minimal conditions for social interactions in the course of which certain sets of sounds are experienced as music? These questions need to be elaborated on in a proximate and ultimate manner. To give a teleofunctional explanation, our discussion will also address the question of whether a pragmatic function related to musical ‘meaning’ concerns a proper function.

The workshop aims at an intensive discussion of the topic in a small group. Submissions focusing on your motivations for attending the workshop, of 300 words or less, should be sent in PDF format to [jin.hyun.kim@hu-berlin.de](mailto:jin.hyun.kim@hu-berlin.de) by 30 April 2018. Please provide your name, postal and email addresses, and any institutional affiliation. Invited participants may indicate their desire to present a poster; selected proposals addressing the topic of this workshop—in all its variety and complexity—might be integrated into the program of workshop as statements (talks).

All applicants will be notified of their application outcome by mid-May 2018.

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