

HUMANITARIAN POWER OF CULTURE AND THE LIMITS OF MUSICAL ART AUTONOMY IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC EDUCATION

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Summary

This article examines the place of musical art within the humanitarian hierarchy of culture and questions the widespread assumption of its full autonomy in the context of professional music education. The central argument is that culture functions as a humanitarian metasystem that precedes and conditions artistic practices, while music operates as a subordinated yet highly expressive form of cultural discourse. From this perspective, values, meanings, and ideals articulated through music are not immanent musical properties but culturally constructed coordinates that shape artistic sense-making. The study aims to conceptualize the limits of musical autonomy by situating music education within broader cultural power relations that define normative horizons of interpretation, evaluation, and legitimation. Methodologically, the research relies on philosophical and cultural-theoretical analysis, drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from cultural philosophy, aesthetics, and the humanities. The article advances the idea that professional music education serves as a key institutional mechanism through which cultural priorities are stabilized and transmitted, thereby reinforcing the humanitarian authority of culture over artistic forms. By reframing music education as a space of cultural mediation rather than purely artistic self-realization, the paper contributes to contemporary debates on the role of the humanities in shaping artistic consciousness. The results open perspectives for further research on cultural authority, symbolic power, and the reconfiguration of artistic autonomy within modern educational systems.

Key words: cultural authority; humanitarian hierarchy; symbolic power; artistic meaning; value formation; professional education.

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1. Introduction

The question of artistic autonomy has long occupied a central position in aesthetic theory and philosophy of culture, particularly in relation to music, which is often regarded as the most abstract and self-sufficient of the arts (*Goehr, 1992*). In professional music education, this assumption of autonomy is frequently reproduced implicitly, positioning musical art as a closed system governed primarily by internal stylistic, technical, and expressive laws (*Adorno, 2002*). However, such a view becomes increasingly problematic in contemporary humanitarian discourse, where culture is understood not as a neutral background for artistic activity but as an active system of power, values, and meanings that frames all forms of artistic production and interpretation (*Williams, 1981; Geertz, 1973*).

The relevance of this study lies in the need to reconsider music education within a broader cultural and humanitarian perspective, one that acknowledges the primacy of culture as a metasystem shaping artistic sense (*Hall, 1997*). In this context, music appears not as an

isolated aesthetic phenomenon but as a culturally mediated form of discourse that reflects and transmits non-musical values, ideals, and symbolic structures (*Bourdieu, 1993*). The scientific novelty of the article consists in articulating the limits of musical autonomy through the concept of humanitarian power of culture, shifting the focus from pedagogical techniques to the ontological and axiological foundations of professional music education.

The aim of the research is to substantiate the thesis that musical art, within the system of professional education, functions under the determining influence of cultural hierarchies and humanitarian priorities (*Bourdieu, 1993*). The objectives include clarifying the role of culture as a normative authority, defining music as a subordinated humanitarian form, and outlining education as a mechanism of cultural legitimation (*Small, 1998*). The methodological framework combines philosophical reflection, cultural analysis, and interpretative approaches that allow for a holistic understanding of the relationship between culture, music, and education.

2. Result

Culture as a Humanitarian Metasystem

Culture in contemporary humanitarian thought is increasingly interpreted not as a secondary environment surrounding artistic activity, but as a metasystem that organizes and hierarchizes the entire field of human symbolic production (*Williams, 1981*). Within this perspective, culture precedes individual artistic forms and determines the conditions under which they acquire meaning, value, and social legitimacy (*Geertz, 1973*). Culture operates as an integrative framework that unites ethical, philosophical, historical, and symbolic dimensions, forming a coherent space in which artistic phenomena become intelligible (*Hall, 1997*). This metasytemic status of culture implies the presence of normative power, through which certain meanings are authorized while others are marginalized or rendered invisible (*Bourdieu, 1993*).

The humanitarian power of culture manifests itself through its capacity to establish value hierarchies that extend beyond aesthetic criteria (*Williams, 1981*). Artistic forms, including music, are embedded in broader cultural narratives that define what is considered significant, progressive, or exemplary (*Bourdieu, 1993*). As a result, artistic meaning cannot be reduced to internal formal structures or purely sensory effects. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of sound organization and culturally mediated interpretative frameworks (*Geertz, 1973*). From this standpoint, music is not an autonomous realm of expression but a culturally conditioned mode of articulating humanitarian experience (*Goehr, 1992*).

Understanding culture as a metasystem also implies recognizing its regulatory function in relation to education (*Hall, 1997*). Educational institutions do not merely transmit technical knowledge or artistic skills; they reproduce culturally sanctioned models of perception, evaluation, and judgment (*Bourdieu, 1993*). In professional music education, this process becomes particularly evident, as students are introduced into historically established canons, aesthetic norms, and value systems that reflect dominant cultural priorities. These norms are rarely neutral, as they encode specific conceptions of artistic significance, social function, and cultural identity (*Williams, 1981*).

Within such a framework, the authority of culture operates implicitly, shaping artistic consciousness without explicit coercion (*Bourdieu, 1993*). Cultural power is exercised through normalization rather than prohibition, through the internalization of criteria that appear self-evident within educational discourse (*Hall, 1997*). Consequently, music education functions as a space where cultural hierarchies are naturalized and perpetuated. The metasytemic role of

culture thus defines not only the external conditions of artistic practice but also the internal horizons of artistic thinking (*Geertz, 1973*).

Music within Cultural Hierarchies

When music is situated within cultural hierarchies, its status as an autonomous art form becomes fundamentally reconsidered (*Bourdieu, 1993*). Musical structures, styles, and expressive models acquire meaning only insofar as they are interpreted within culturally established frames of reference (*Goehr, 1992*). What is perceived as artistic value in music is inseparable from historically and culturally formed expectations regarding expressiveness, emotional depth, and symbolic resonance (*Williams, 1981*). These expectations are not inherent to music itself but are the product of long-term cultural sedimentation (*Geertz, 1973*).

In professional music education, cultural hierarchies are reflected in the selection of repertoires, the prioritization of certain genres or stylistic traditions, and the criteria used to evaluate artistic achievement (*Bourdieu, 1993*). Such choices implicitly affirm particular cultural narratives about artistic excellence and legitimacy. Music, in this sense, becomes a medium through which cultural authority is articulated and reinforced (*Hall, 1997*). Its apparent autonomy masks a deeper dependence on cultural norms that regulate both creative intention and interpretative reception (*Adorno, 2002*).

The recognition of music as a subordinated form within the humanitarian hierarchy does not diminish its artistic significance. On the contrary, it allows for a more precise understanding of its function as a carrier of culturally meaningful content (*Small, 1998*). Music translates abstract values and ideals into sensory experience, making them emotionally accessible and socially communicable. However, this translational function presupposes a prior system of meanings that music itself does not generate independently (*Geertz, 1973*). Cultural hierarchy thus defines the semantic field within which musical expression operates (*Williams, 1981*).

By acknowledging the hierarchical relationship between culture and music, it becomes possible to critically reassess the role of professional music education (*Bourdieu, 1993*). Rather than cultivating an illusion of artistic self-sufficiency, education reveals itself as a mediating institution that aligns musical practice with prevailing humanitarian priorities (*Hall, 1997*). This alignment underscores the limits of musical autonomy and highlights the decisive role of culture in shaping artistic meaning (*Adorno, 2002*).

Limits of Artistic Autonomy

The idea of artistic autonomy has historically served as a foundational principle for understanding music as a self-contained aesthetic domain governed by its own internal laws (*Goehr, 1992*). Within this paradigm, musical meaning is often interpreted as arising exclusively from structural relations, formal coherence, and expressive immediacy (*Adorno, 2002*). Yet such an interpretation obscures the extent to which autonomy itself is a culturally produced concept rather than an ontological property of art (*Williams, 1981*). Autonomy functions as a normative ideal that emerges within specific cultural and philosophical contexts, reflecting broader humanitarian assumptions about individuality, freedom, and creativity (*Bourdieu, 1993*).

From a cultural-philosophical perspective, the autonomy of music appears inherently limited, as musical sense is always articulated within pre-existing symbolic systems (*Geertz, 1973*). Even the most abstract musical forms presuppose culturally stabilized listening practices, interpretative conventions, and value judgments (*Small, 1998*). What is recognized as artistic innovation, authenticity, or depth is inseparable from historically conditioned criteria that are legitimized by cultural authority (*Bourdieu, 1993*). Consequently, musical autonomy can be understood not as independence from culture, but as a relative freedom exercised within culturally defined boundaries (*Hall, 1997*).

Professional music education plays a decisive role in establishing these boundaries. Through curricula, assessment standards, and institutional traditions, education formalizes specific interpretations of musical value that are presented as universal or self-evident (*Adorno, 2002*). Students internalize these norms as natural components of artistic competence, rarely questioning their cultural origins (*Bourdieu, 1993*). In this way, the discourse of autonomy paradoxically becomes a mechanism of regulation, guiding artistic behavior while concealing its normative foundations (*Williams, 1981*). Autonomy thus operates as a symbolic construct that legitimizes cultural priorities under the guise of artistic freedom (*Goehr, 1992*).

The limits of artistic autonomy become especially visible when music is examined as a communicative practice rather than a purely aesthetic object (*Small, 1998*). Music communicates meanings that resonate with ethical, social, and existential dimensions of human experience. These meanings are intelligible only within shared cultural frameworks that precede individual artistic acts (*Geertz, 1973*). The autonomy of music is therefore conditional, dependent on the humanitarian structures that enable interpretation and recognition (*Hall, 1997*). Acknowledging these limits does not negate artistic creativity but situates it within a broader cultural ecology (*Bourdieu, 1993*).

Education as Cultural Authority Mechanism

Within the humanitarian system of culture, education functions as one of the most effective mechanisms of symbolic authority (*Bourdieu, 1993*). Its power lies not in direct coercion but in the capacity to define legitimate knowledge, values, and forms of expression (*Hall, 1997*). Professional music education exemplifies this mechanism by translating abstract cultural hierarchies into concrete educational practices that shape artistic consciousness (*Williams, 1981*). Through education, culture reproduces itself, ensuring continuity of meanings across generations (*Geertz, 1973*).

Music education institutionalizes cultural authority by establishing stable models of artistic excellence and interpretative correctness (*Adorno, 2002*). These models are embedded in pedagogical traditions, repertory choices, and evaluation procedures that collectively define what counts as meaningful musical expression (*Bourdieu, 1993*). The educational process thus aligns individual artistic development with culturally sanctioned norms, reinforcing the primacy of humanitarian values over purely technical or formal considerations (*Hall, 1997*). Education becomes a space where cultural power is normalized and internalized rather than imposed (*Williams, 1981*).

This understanding challenges instrumental or technocratic views of education that reduce it to skill acquisition (*Small, 1998*). Instead, education emerges as a cultural practice that mediates between individual creativity and collective meaning (*Geertz, 1973*). In professional music education, this mediation is particularly pronounced, as musical training involves not only mastering sound but also assimilating symbolic codes that reflect broader cultural orientations (*Bourdieu, 1993*). The authority of culture is thereby enacted through educational structures that appear neutral yet carry significant normative weight (*Hall, 1997*).

By conceptualizing education as a mechanism of cultural authority, it becomes possible to reinterpret its role in shaping artistic identity (*Williams, 1981*). Music education does not simply support artistic autonomy; it delineates its permissible forms (*Adorno, 2002*). The humanitarian power of culture is realized through education as a subtle yet pervasive force that defines the horizons of artistic thought (*Geertz, 1973*). This perspective opens a critical space for re-evaluating the relationship between culture, art, and education, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing cultural hierarchy as an integral condition of artistic meaning (*Bourdieu, 1993*).

3. Conclusions

The analysis undertaken in this article allows for a reconsideration of professional music education through the prism of humanitarian philosophy of culture. Culture has been conceptualized as a metasystem that precedes artistic forms and determines the conditions of their intelligibility, value attribution, and social legitimacy. Within this framework, musical art appears not as an autonomous aesthetic domain but as a culturally subordinated mode of humanitarian discourse, capable of articulating values and meanings that originate beyond the musical material itself.

The limits of musical autonomy become evident when autonomy is understood not as an intrinsic property of art, but as a culturally produced norm that reflects specific historical and philosophical assumptions. Musical meaning, evaluation, and innovation are shown to depend on culturally stabilized interpretative frameworks that shape listening practices and artistic judgment. Professional music education plays a decisive role in this process by institutionalizing cultural hierarchies and translating them into normative educational forms that guide artistic consciousness.

Education has been interpreted as a mechanism of cultural authority rather than a neutral space of skill transmission. Through its structures, traditions, and evaluative criteria, it reproduces humanitarian priorities and aligns individual artistic development with culturally sanctioned models of meaning. In this sense, education does not merely support artistic practice but defines its permissible horizons, ensuring the continuity of cultural values within artistic domains.

Recognizing the humanitarian power of culture and the conditional nature of artistic autonomy enables a more critical and holistic understanding of music education. Such an approach shifts attention from technical or methodological concerns to the axiological and ontological foundations of artistic formation. Future research perspectives are associated with the analysis of transformations of cultural authority in the context of globalization, intercultural interaction, and changing humanitarian priorities within contemporary educational systems, which will allow for a deeper comprehension of the dynamics between culture, art, and education.

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