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The imagological approach in art theory and its musical-pedagogical potential

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The article examines the imagological approach as a conceptual and methodological basis for musical interpretation, focusing on the intentional activation of imagination to address problems related to the concretization of a musical work's artistic and imagistic plane in the musical and performative process. The aim of the article is to define the main functions of the imagological approach that enable it to provide such a basis, and to specify the features that determine its musical-pedagogical potential. An analysis of studies addressing interpretation as a space for investigating and understanding artistic meanings confirms the functional role of imagination as a key resource that, when intentionally activated, allows performers to analyze the artistic and figurative content of a musical work, transform and vary representations of artistic images in order to create an artistic narrative, and select musical means of expression for its interpretive realization (Cook, 2013; Bachelard, 1960). The functional analysis identifies two principal functions of the imagological approach: (1) mental-imaginative mediation, whose implementation contributes to transforming an understanding of the artistic meaning of musical signs into multimodal mental representations (auditory, kinesthetic, emotional), which in turn become the basis for choosing interpretive solutions and performance techniques (Zatorre & Halpern, 2005; Keller, 2012); and (2) narrative structuring of the artistic and imagistic plane of a musical work, whose action aims to construct musical interpretation as a space of interaction among images within a sequence of artistic events (Almén, 2003). The findings reveal the musical-pedagogical potential of the imagological approach, which can serve as a basis for developing skills that enable the targeted activation of imagination in order to create internal representations of the artistic image, as well as abilities to ensure the artistic integrity and expressivity of interpretation and to create a pedagogical interpretation of a musical work as an artistic narrative. Future research should specify how the imagological approach can provide a basis for interpreting musical works of different styles, drawing on diverse interpretive traditions.

Keywords: art theory, artistic image, imagological approach, music performance, interpretation, imagination, mental representation, musical narrative, music pedagogy, hermeneutics.

Introduction. Questions related to the interpretation and artistic realization of the content of a musical work remain at the center of attention of art theory (Cook, 2013; Шип, 2024) and music educators (Gullaer et al., 2006). This is due to the fundamental role of these processes in artistic communication (Bilova et al., 2020), within the context of the creative transformation of the imagistic plane of the musical text into an auditory narrative (Almén, 2003), that is, a succession of musical events identified as carriers of a certain meaning (Meyer, 2024). This transformation is studied as a process of semiosis, in which musical performance interpretation is aimed at creating signs focused on embodying the imaginative plan of the musical work, the perception of which can contribute to understanding its artistic content (Atkin, 2023; Nattiez, 1990).

Thus, an important goal and meaning of musical performance can be considered the embodiment of an artistic image based on an understanding of musical symbols – graphic (which make up notation) and referential, which connect a musical work with the cultural horizons of the composer and performers (Gadamer, 2013).

Imagination plays a special role in this process, as it is precisely its functioning that makes it possible to establish a connection between the understanding of the musical text and its sound embodiment in interpretation (Zatorre & Halpern, 2005). By studying

the signs of the score, the performer forms a coherent internal representation of the work, combining the perception of form, emotional content, and cultural context (Cook, 2013). Through the intentional creative work of imagination, this internal representation stabilizes as an artistic image, that is, a sensory configuration integrating auditory perception with visual, kinesthetic, and abstract representations grounded in experience. The identified artistic images then become a conceptual reference point for further interpretive work, which consists in examining the images, highlighting the links between them and the signs of their development on the basis of analysis of musical language, and guiding the search for musical means of expression capable of embodying the identified artistic meanings (Carvalho, 2001).

Thus, by engaging creative imagination, the performer recreates, on the basis of analysis of the author's text and its cultural and aesthetic connotations (Nattiez, 1990), an artistic image that in turn serves as an object for the production of a new sign in musical interpretation. In this way, active creative imagination allows interpretive and performative work to become a creative process, when the musician, without limiting themselves to the sole intention of transmitting the meanings intended by the author, integrates their own understanding and their own meanings into their interpretation (Gadamer, 2013).

It is appropriate to examine this process from the perspective of imagology (Wunenburger, 2012), a field within cultural inquiry that studies images, particularly the features of their transformation in different cultural contexts. In turn, the imagological approach makes it possible to study the processes by which artistic images are formed, function, and are transformed, including within interpretation, at the moment when the cultural horizons of the composer and the performer are brought into relation (Gadamer, 2013).

Understanding the processes by which artistic images are formed and transformed through the activity of imagination is also supported by reference to Bachelard's concept (1960), according to which one of the main characteristics of the artistic image is its variability, as a potential to generate new images (Bachelard, 1960). The principal condition for realizing this potential is the action of imagination: through associations, attributions, and subjective analyses, imagination adds additional meanings to the initial image, relating it to new contexts, which leads to a transformation of the image and generates a series of derived images (Wunenburger, 2012).

In doing so, Bachelard not only examines imagination as such, but also emphasizes the need for the performer to be in a certain state of intentional creative "reverie," in which internal mental representations actively form new connections, enriching and mutually transforming one another (Bachelard, 1960).

Thus, from the standpoint of the imagological approach, the perception, analysis, and generation of artistic images are processes that require intentional actions on the part of the performer, in particular the use of mental techniques such as self-adjustment (auditory and motor imagery), self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-correction (Gullaer et al., 2006). This feature determines the potential of the imagological approach in music pedagogy, as a methodological basis for forming the ability of future musicians to understand and embody artistic images in the interpretation of musical works (Gullaer et al., 2006).

Literature review. When examining the specific features of the imagological approach in the context of art history, it is first necessary to determine the conditions under which its application is appropriate for addressing problems of musical interpretation (Cook, 2013). Among these conditions, the most important is the recognition that the artistic and imagistic plane of a performed musical work is not produced solely by the concretization of the composer's intention as fixed in notation. In their attempt to broaden the analysis of artistic meaning-making beyond the author's text, art historians conclude that "the relationship between writing and performance or listening can never be direct and <...> meaning is contextual and historically

contingent" (Cook, 2013, p. 286). At the same time, in musical art, beyond the multiplicity of contexts embodied in the artistic sign, the meaning "created in the act of performance" (Cook, 2013, p. 1), that is, interpretation and the act of execution, constitutes a space in which the artistic image is formed as a result of the performer's mental understanding of the text, the understanding of the multiple meanings of its artistic signs, and their consequent embodiment in performance (Cook, 2013, p. 286). Thus, the performer's mental representations of artistic events, grounded in subjective perception (Schaefer, 2015) and prior experience of artistic communication (Cook, 2013; Schaefer, 2015), become a significant object of musicological inquiry.

The study of the role of subjective understanding in interpretation justifies recourse to hermeneutics, which provides a conceptual basis for examining understanding as a process in which the performer relates artistic signs to personal history and the current cultural environment. In Gadamer's framework, this process is described as a fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) between author and interpreter, within which the act of application (*Anwendung*) takes place, that is, a form of mental "carrying-over" of cultural codes and meanings identified in relation to the interpreter's cultural horizon in order to understand them (Gadamer, 2013; Malpas, 2025).

The importance of understanding, and of the corresponding formation of the performer's mental representations, supports the relevance of examining the main stages of the interpretive process from the perspective of the imagological approach. It is noteworthy that even at the stage of analyzing interpretive traditions, it is precisely understanding, formed with the participation of imagination, that enables the cultural translation required for the rapprochement of horizons. From a hermeneutic perspective, this is due to the perception of interpretive tradition as a cultural system of reference points encompassing conventions and stylistic markers, yet not determining the choice of artistic means of expression. Between these reference points and concrete execution, interpretive tasks remain that can be accomplished only on the basis of understanding (in the hermeneutic sense) and by activating imagination in order to grasp and embody the artistic image (Malpas, 2025).

Accordingly, the performer relies on understanding and rethinking cultural contexts and interpretive traditions in order to find artistic signs that convey the author's intention and, at the same time, embody the meanings comprehended by the performer in the process of interpretive analysis (Шип, 2024). However, thanks to the intentional activation of creative imagination, artistic meanings can become perceptible and traceable over time, thus forming a

coherent story – a musical narrative (Almén, 2003).

Art theorists view the process of creating a musical narrative as a reinterpretation of the elements of musical language through the representation of their development and artistic interaction in time as a sequence of events (Almén, 2003). Therefore, in this process, the imagological approach becomes particularly important, because due to the absence of a verbal component, the perception of the musical flow as a sequence of events is mediated by the work of the imagination.

However, studies devoted to cultural translation and narrativity (Almén, 2003) describe problems of mediation and cultural understanding, but they do not examine the key process by which a performer can transform understanding into a sonic artistic image. This process should be examined in light of Bachelard's conception (1960), in which imagination is analyzed as the capacity to transform images consciously. In other words, imagination in the interpretation of a work of art is not chaotic: it is a resource that enables an artistic image to be brought to life, provided that an appropriate method is used (for example, the technique of intentional reverie), in order to understand the meaning and the dynamics of interaction among artistic images (Bachelard, 1960).

This is confirmed by studies of the functioning of musical imagery and purposeful mental practices in musical performance. In particular, the study of musical images demonstrates that purposeful activation of imagination directly influences the formation of musicians' internal auditory representations (Zatorre & Halpern, 2005).

Thus, purposefully activating the imagination to analyze, transform and embody artistic images in musical performance is a way of mediating between understanding and interpretative-performative action. The fact that such activation is a capacity that can be developed (Brown & Palmer, 2013; Meng & Luck, 2024; Реброва, 2023) underpins the musical-pedagogical potential of the imagological approach. At the same time, research in music education emphasizes that activating imagination in teaching and working with images requires specific adaptation, including attention to the performer's level of preparation, emotional and perceptual characteristics, and the understanding that imagination is a complex mechanism that develops and whose features evolve in synergy with the formation and development of musical and interpretive skills (Gullaer et al., 2006; Реброва, 2023).

Purpose of the article. The purpose of this article is to define the main functions of the imagological approach that determine its ability to provide a conceptual and methodological basis for interpretation in the context of understanding and embodiment in the performance the artistic-imaginative plan of a musical work, as well as to clarify the characteristics

that determine the musical-pedagogical potential of this approach.

Research methods. The study is grounded in the imagological approach, which allows us to consider the artistic image as a dynamic phenomenon that is formed and undergoes transformations thanks to the purposeful activation of the imagination (Bachelard, 1960; Wunenburger, 2012). In order to determine the functions of the imagological approach, in particular, to study its musical-pedagogical potential, the method of functional analysis is used. In conjunction with theoretical analysis of art history and music education research, this method allows us to identify and systematize the relevant functions by revealing the possibilities of the imagological approach to provide the basis for the interpretative and performative process, in particular, in the context of promoting the creative comprehension of the artistic images of a work and the search for appropriate means of their embodiment in performance.

For each of the functions, art theory and music-pedagogical contexts of implementation are defined. At the same time, the art theory context provides the basis for understanding artistic processes, the peculiarities of the formation and transformation of artistic images, as well as the conditions for ensuring the authenticity of interpretation based on such understanding (Cook, 2013; Malpas, 2025).

In turn, the music-pedagogical context is responsible for orienting the functions towards the formation of the skills necessary to fulfil such conditions through the use of appropriate methods and techniques, such as the practice of mental construction of audiovisual images for building an interpretative concept, controlled use of images in musical performance, etc. (Gullaer et al., 2006; Keller, 2012; Zatorre & Halpern, 2005).

Results and discussion. To achieve the aim of the study, we employed functional analysis, which made it possible to identify the important role of two main functions of the imagological approach in musical interpretation (Jabareen, 2009).

First, the function of mental-imaginative mediation between understanding and interpretive/performance action. The main purpose of this function is the formation of internal imaginal representations (in particular auditory and motor representations associated with emotions, as well as visual images) that the performer intentionally constructs during artistic analysis, transforms, and accepts as an artistic object to be embodied in sound through the selection of appropriate means of musical expression (Cook, 2013; Keller, 2012; Zatorre & Halpern, 2005).

In order to understand the mechanism of implementation of this function, it is necessary to clarify the essence of the phenomenon of mental representations. In cognitive theory, mental representations are treated as intentional experiences

that refer to an object in its absence and can undergo targeted manipulations by the subject (they can be maintained, compared, enriched, transformed) (Pitt, 2022). A musician's mental representations are internal (often multimodal: auditory, kinesthetic, emotional) experiences that enable the performer to anticipate and guide performance (Zatorre & Halpern, 2005). Among the functions of mental representations in musical performance, ensuring the functioning of working memory, calculating the trajectory and strength of movements are often considered (Keller, 2012).

Within mental representations, it is useful to distinguish those that directly support the control and prediction of performance (audio-kinesthetic) from those that form an artistic image, i.e., a configuration of meanings and affects that orients interpretation. In the context of the imagological approach, the analysis focuses on mental representations of the artistic image, understood as multimodal experiences that relate musical/sonic phenomena to meanings that exist beyond the space of the musical text (stylistic and cultural references, historical and social contexts, etc.) (Cook, 2013).

The implementation of mental-imaginative mediation in this process is manifested in the performer's intention to identify within the musical fabric features of form, intonation, meter, etc. that connect the work to extra-musical phenomena and contexts (cultural, emotional), thereby actualizing meanings that are significant for the performer (Cook, 2013). This understanding is transformed into internal imaginal representations (auditory, kinesthetic, artistic, emotional) that become the basis for interpretive decisions and the selection of specific performance parameters (Zatorre & Halpern, 2005; Keller, 2012).

In turn, the imagological approach provides both (a) a conceptual basis for understanding this mediation and (b) an orientation toward activating the performer's intention to identify features of musical language, seek extra-textual connections, and work with meanings for the formation, transformation, and enrichment of artistic images (Bachelard, 1960; Wunenburger, 2012). This orientation determines the musical-pedagogical potential of the imagological approach, namely its capacity to provide a methodological basis for fostering such an intention in future musicians and transforming it into an ability to form, vary, and stabilize internal images in relation to features of musical language and corresponding interpretive decisions (Gullaer et al., 2006; Keller, 2012; Zatorre & Halpern, 2005).

Next, we will consider the function of narrative structuring of the artistic-imaginative plan of a musical work. The main focus of this function is to ensure the creation of a palette of artistic images that interact with each other and to organize this interaction as a sequence of events that are perceived and interpreted as a coherent narrative (Almén, 2003).

To understand the mechanism through which this function is realized, it is necessary to characterize the performer's actions in the process of interpretation that allows musical expressions to be organized as a sequence of artistic events. First, the performer segments the musical flow by identifying key elements (formal components, articulatory constructions, changes in texture, register, dynamics, etc.) and determines their roles in the creation of a narrative (introduction, presentation of images, their conflict, resolution, etc.) (Almén, 2003). Among these elements, whole and recognizable musical constructs, such as themes and leitmotifs, are identified in their artistic interaction. Such constructs function as recognizable 'carriers' of artistic images, capable of embodying ideas about characters, abstract forces (such as the theme of love in Liszt's *Préludes*) and even objects, natural phenomena and locations (such as the leitmotifs of the ring, the spear, the Rhine, Valhalla, etc. in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*).

The leitmotif/theme may be understood as a musical idea sufficiently stable in its fundamental characteristics to preserve its identity and its strong link to a particular image, despite modifications introduced in different parts of the work. Such modifications (e.g., rhythmic organization, harmonic plan, register disposition) contribute to an impression of character development. Because of its recognizability, a leitmotif embodying an image of a character, object, or place can also interact with other themes, creating an impression of event development or indicating narrative and semantic connections (Almén, 2003), for example, like the theme of Rheine, based on the leitmotif of nature (or genesis) in Wagner's 'Ring of the Nibelung'.

A thematic development of this kind, in which recognizable themes are transformed, enables the construction of a musical narrative provided that intentional imagination is involved. Close analysis of musical language supports the formation of associations between musical events and extra-musical meanings through affective and aesthetic experience (Juslin, 2013).

Intentional activation of imagination also contributes to self-regulation and self-correction during performance, for example, through internal 'playing' of possible versions of artistic events to select the characteristics of musical expression that best correspond to the goal of revealing the context of the work and embodying the artistic image (Bachelard, 1960; Wunenburger, 2012). This orientation determines the musical-pedagogical potential of the approach, in particular its capacity to contribute to the development of key competences in future musicians and educators, ensuring the ability to:

- construct and maintain temporal coherence of interpretation (segmenting, hierarchizing, articulating artistic events) (Almén, 2003);

- demonstrate interpretive flexibility by using imagination to transform and vary artistic images (Bachelard, 1960; Wunenburger, 2012);

- anticipate and regulate interpretation in accordance with an interpretive concept through targeted activation of mental representations (Keller, 2012);

- verbalize and explain to students, in an image-oriented way, the logic of interpretive development, thereby shaping their understanding of music's artistic language (Gullaer et al., 2006).

Thus, two main functions of the imagological approach were identified: (1) mental-imaginative mediation between understanding of the work's artistic meanings and interpretive/performance action, and (2) narrative structuring of the artistic and imagistic plane of a musical work. The first function concerns the formation and transformation of mental representations of the artistic image, often characterized by multimodality (integrating auditory, kinesthetic, and emotional experience), which shapes key artistic and interpretive decisions (Cook, 2013; Zatorre & Halpern, 2005; Keller, 2012). The second function concerns the organization of musical flow as a succession of artistic events by interpreting elements of musical language as embodying images whose interaction over time can be understood as narrative development (Almén, 2003).

These functions are presented as the most relevant based on the theoretical corpus mobilized: musical interpretation as performance and meaning-making (Cook, 2013); hermeneutics of understanding (Malpas, 2025); theories of imagination and image dynamics (Bachelard, 1960; Wunenburger, 2012); musical narratology (Almén, 2003); mental representations in musical interpretation (Pitt, 2022; Zatorre & Halpern, 2005; Keller, 2012); and the activation of imagination in music education (Gullaer et al., 2006). It is assumed that further research on the conceptual and methodological foundations of musical interpretation will make it possible to identify, specify, and classify additional functions of the imagological approach.

Conclusions. The significance of this study lies in the fundamental role of embodying the artistic and imaginal content of a musical work in performance. Viewing interpretation as a space in which artistic meanings are embodied implies examining the role of imagination in this process as a resource that enables the performer to identify and reconstruct the imaginal content immanent to the score, to transform and vary the characteristics of artistic images in order to build a coherent artistic narrative, and to determine the means of musical expression capable of realizing the resulting interpretive concept (Cook, 2013; Almén, 2003). In this context, the imagological approach provides a conceptual and methodological basis for analyzing the artistic image as a dynamic phenomenon, formed and transformed through the

intentional activation of imagination (Bachelard, 1960; Wunenburger, 2012).

The aim of the study was to identify the main functions of the imagological approach that enable it to serve as a conceptual and methodological foundation for interpretation in the context of identifying and understanding the artistic and imaginal plane of a musical work, and to specify the characteristics that determine the musical-pedagogical potential of this approach.

A theoretical analysis of relevant studies made it possible to distinguish two principal functions. First, the function of mental-imaginative mediation, whose implementation is associated with transforming the understanding of the artistic and communicative functions of musical signs into internal representations (auditory, kinesthetic, emotional) that influence interpretive decisions and the selection of performance techniques (Zatorre & Halpern, 2005; Keller, 2012). Second, the narrative structuring function organizes the musical flow as a sequence of artistic events (Almén, 2003).

The functional analysis further clarified the orientation of the imagological approach, which determines its musical-pedagogical potential by providing a basis for developing:

- the ability to intentionally activate imagination to create internal representations of the artistic image, to use these representations to plan interpretive actions, monitor and regulate performance, and produce pedagogical explanations within educational practice;

- the ability to ensure the artistic integrity and expressiveness of interpretation, in particular by identifying and interpreting musical structures as embodiments of the work's artistic images, and by anticipating and regulating performance in accordance with an interpretive concept;

- the ability to develop a pedagogical interpretation of a musical work as an artistic narrative by explicating the logic of image development and its reflection in musical language.

The present study does not provide an exhaustive description of all functions of the imagological approach in the context of analyzing musical interpretation and training future musicians as performers and educators. The functions identified reflect two principal research directions in the relevant literature (mediation between understanding and performance; the creation of a musical narrative in interpretation). Additional functions may be identified by further specifying the possibilities of the imagological approach as a foundation for interpreting works from different stylistic contexts and within different performance traditions.

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Імагологічний підхід у мистецтвознавстві та його музично-педагогічний потенціал

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Статтю присвячено дослідженню імагологічного підходу як концептуально-методологічної основи інтерпретації в контексті активізації уяви для вирішення завдань утілення художньо-образного плану музичного твору в перформативному процесі. Мета статті полягає у визначенні основних функцій імагологічного підходу, що обумовлюють його можливості забезпечувати основу музичної інтерпретації, а також в уточненні характеристик, які визначають його музично-педагогічний потенціал. Аналіз досліджень, присвячених вивченню інтерпретації як простору пошуку та досягнення художніх смислів, підтвердив функціональну роль уяви як ключового ресурсу, що дає змогу, за умови її інтенціональної активізації, аналізувати художньо-образний зміст музичного твору, трансформувати і варіювати уявлення про художні образи задля створення художнього нарративу, добирати засоби музичної виразності її виконавського втілення. Проведений функціональний аналіз дав змогу визначити основні функції імагологічного підходу, якими є: а) ментально-образна медіація, що сприяє перетворенню розуміння художнього змісту музичних знаків у мультимодальні (слухові, кінестетичні, емоційні) ментальні репрезентації, які, у свою чергу, стають основою вибору інтерпретаційних рішень і виконавських прийомів; б) нарративне оформлення художньо-образного плану, що спрямоване на структурування виконавської версії музичного твору як простору взаємодії образів у послідовності художніх подій. У результаті дослідження виявлено музично-педагогічний потенціал імагологічного підходу, обумовлений його можливостями цілеспрямовано активізувати уяву для генерації внутрішніх уявлень про художній образ, формувати здатність музиканта досягати художньої цілісності та виразності виконання, а також сприяти створенню нарративної педагогічної інтерпретації музичного твору. Перспектива подальших досліджень полягає у конкретизації можливостей імагологічного підходу забезпечувати основу інтерпретації музичних творів різних стилів, з опорою на різні інтерпретаційні традиції.

Ключові слова: мистецтвознавство, художній образ, імагологічний підхід, музичне виконання, інтерпретація, уява, ментальна репрезентація, музичний нарратив, музична педагогіка, герменевтика.