From Ideology to Music: Leonard Meyer's Theory of Style-change

Leonard Meyer. ***Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology.*** Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989. xi, 376 pages. Studies in the Criticism and Theory of Music.

Leonard Meyer's splendid new book, *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology*, provides a rich feast of food for musical thought and (inevitably) for musical controversy. Theorists will, of course, be drawn to the author's nuts-and-bolts functional analyses of the various musical passages he discusses in making his argument; and music historians, doubtless, will find much to stimulate them, as well as to argue about, in his historical characterization of the Classical and Romantic periods in music and of their relevant social, political, and philosophical backgrounds. But philosophers of art like myself will surely fasten upon Meyer's bold attempt to connect the pure musical parameters of syntax and structure to the reigning ideologies with which they co-exist. Nor, I think, will it be out of place to concentrate on this attempt in the present review essay; for it is the major theme and argument of Meyer's book.

I call the attempt to connect music and ideology "bold" because—and I think Meyer would agree—this is one of the most difficult and contentious things to make out in the "philosophy of music." In my view, it is one of the two master problems of the discipline, the other, to which it is obviously related, being the problem of making out exactly what the nature is, in the first place, of the aesthetic satisfaction we take in absolute music, given that such music seems, at least on the surface, bereft of semantic or representational content, and, yet, has come to occupy a place in the pantheon no less prominent than that accorded the semantic and representational arts.

It may sound like a platitude, but the central thesis of Professor Meyer's book, as I see it, is that *musical composition is a process of choice-making.* Such compositional choice-making is of at least two distinctive kinds: choice among the alternatives that a given style allows and choice determinative of styles themselves, that is to say, choices that cumulatively change a style, as, to take the style change most important to Meyer's book, the compositional choices that eventually traversed the passage from Classic to Romantic.

Composing within a style is a matter of choosing available possibilities, hedged in by a set of constraints that make the given style identifiable as just that style. "The constraints of style are *learned* by composers and performers, critics and listeners." But such *learning* is seldom the result of self-conscious instruction; it "is largely the result of experience in performing and listening rather than of explicit formal instruction in music theory, history, or composition. In other words, knowledge of style is usually 'tacit': that is, a matter of habits properly acquired (internalized) and appropriately brought into play" (p. 10).

Working within a style is, furthermore, a matter of devising what Meyer calls "strategies." "Strategies are compositional choices made within the possibilities established by the rules of the style. For any specific style there is a finite number of rules, but there is an indefinite number of possible strategies for realizing or instantiating such rules" (p. 20). The spelling out of these strategies—in terms of the possibilities open to the composer, the constraints laid upon him or her by style, and the reasons for consequent compositional choices made—is the goal of music theory and style analysis. Specifically, style analysis asks, "*Why* do the traits described 'go together'?" To explain this, it is necessary to relate the strategies employed both to one another and to the rules of the style, including the particular ways in which the several parameters interact." And: "Because such relational sets are understood as being synchronic, style analysis need not consider parameters external to music—ideology, political and social circumstances, and so on" (p. 45). In a word, style analysis is completely self-contained, completely within the pure musical parameters themselves, as, indeed, conventional, "formalistic" wisdom would have it. So far, then, there need be no appeal to anything beyond the "game" of music itself.

But what of style changes themselves and the compositional choices involved in effectuating them? Here matters are very different. Analysis within a style may be an autonomous discipline. "But the history of style," Meyer writes, "cannot, in my view, be explained without reference to aspects of culture external to music" (p. 45). Why should this be the case? To answer this question we must first observe that the "history of style" is, of course, the history of *style change.* For if style did not change, it would not have a history at all. Second, we must ask ourselves why a perfectly obvious, and often cited "explanation" of style change, which does not require the controversial appeal to extra-musical causes, will not wash. The explanation of which I write is simply appeal to the desire (the innate desire?) for novelty. And it will not wash because in explaining everything, it in effect explains nothing. Any change, one would think, can be explained as the satisfaction of the desire for novelty. But since there are innumerable ways in which a musical style may change—innumerable directions in which innovation may go—the simple desire for novelty tells us nothing about why a musical style changed in the particular ways that it did. Classical style could have evolved in countless ways, and the desire for novelty could "explain" all of them. But the question is, Why did it evolve into the style we call Romanticism rather than a hundred other possible styles? This the desire for novelty or innovation cannot explain. And, on Meyer's view, we must reach for factors external to the "game" of the pure musical parameters for such an explanation: in a word, to "ideology."

It is Meyer's working hypothesis that "a musical style changes precisely because some of its constraints do not reflect (are not congruent with) some of the dominant parameters of the culture in which it exists" (p. 118). I am going to call this Meyer's *global* hypothesis of style change, and contrast it with two less ambitious hypotheses: the *limited* hypothesis that some musical styles have changed precisely because some of their constraints did not "reflect" (were not congruent with) some of the dominant parameters of the cultures in which they existed; and the *particular* hypothesis that Classical musical style evolved into Romantic because some of its constraints did not reflect (were not congruent with) some of the dominant parameters of the culture in which it existed. Meyer's major argument for the global hypothesis is a detailed attempt to establish the particular hypothesis. My own suspicion—something beyond a gut reaction but certainly short of firm belief—is that the global hypothesis is false, the limited hypothesis at least a possibility, and the specific hypothesis quite plausibly defended by Meyer, although there seem to me to be gaps in the argument that need filling in. My reasons for all of this will emerge as the discussion proceeds.

How does ideology "explain" style change? In general, the explanation goes this way. If ideology and musical style get out of phase—that is to say, if prevailing musical style ceases to reflect prevailing cultural ideology—then the prevailing ideology, presumably shared by the composer, will influence him or her to make such compositional choices as counter the prevailing stylistic restraints or tendencies in a way to bring style and ideology back into phase and make the former again reflect the latter: thus old style gives way to new under the pressure of changing ideology.

Of course it is one thing to enunciate such a hypothesis; quite another to convince anyone of it. For it is just here that the skeptical eyebrow will be raised. How can ideologies, of all things, be reflected in musical notes—in the pure parameters of musical structure and syntax? Meyer is well aware of how crucial the question is. As he puts it, "if economic, political or other [external] circumstances are to influence the history of musical style, they must be translated into real, nuts-and-bolts compositional choices in such a way that they can affect the choices made by composers" (p. 145). And so a large portion of his book is devoted to making such "translations," showing how, in musical detail, ideology, for the most part Romantic ideology, was translated into real, nuts-and-bolts compositional choices. These nut-and-bolts translations are extensive and rich in analytic detail. And one cannot possibly give any but the most sketchy idea of Meyer's piling up of detailed examples in the abbreviated format that is all a review allows. I shall have to make do here with just a small sampling.

The over-arching ideological principle of the Romantic movement, according to Meyer, is egalitarianism. "At its core," he writes, "was an unequivocal and uncompromising repudiation of a social order based on arbitrary, inherited class distinctions. This rejection was not confined to the arts or philosophy; rather it permeated every corner of culture and all levels of society. It was, and is, Romanticism with a capital *R*" (p. 164). But if, as Meyer believes, "a crucial question for the history of music is how ideological values are transformed into musical constraints and specific compositional choices" (p. 218), then clearly the crucial question at hand is how the ideological "repudiation of a social order based on arbitrary, inherited class distinctions" can be "transformed into musical constraints and specific compositional choices." What, in other words, is the real musical pay-off, in the coinage of the pure musical parameters, of a basically political ideology.

According to Meyer, as I read him, the link between ideology and the pure musical parameters in the Romantic era is disdain for the established conventions. In the over-arching political and philosophical ideology it is disdain for the unjust establishment of social classes and conventions, the most obnoxious symbol of which being the inherited nobility. In musical practice, this is reflected in the fact that "ideologically, whatever seemed conventional (familiar cadential gestures, commonplace melodic schemata, stock accompaniment figures, and so on) was anathema to Romantic composers" (p. 219).

In *Style and Music* Meyer considers two ways of "making the claims of [Romantic] ideology compatible with the inescapable conventions of tonal syntax." The first strategy was to use syntactical constraints and conventions but to "disguise" them. "The second . . . involved the use of means less definitely dependent upon constraints and ones less patently conventional" (p. 222). In other words, Romantic composers reflected the ideological rejection of convention, in the nineteenth century, not merely by rejecting musical convention in kind but (more cleverly) by using it in camouflage.

The camouflage was of two kinds: what Meyer calls "disguise through emergence" and "disguise through divergence." An example of the former will have to suffice.

The last cadence of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* is "not surprisingly, the most decisive closure" in the piece. "Closure is articulated by an ostensibly normal ii-V^7-I progression that accompanies two coordinate melodic closing gestures" (p. 223). The first cadential gesture is compared to another "instance of such a gesture, from the second movement of Mozart's String Quintet in E♭ Major (K. 614)." Debussy's is "disguised" by its organic connection with what goes before, whereas Mozart's is just an out-front conventional tag, tantamount to *finis* at the end of a film. "For Mozart's cadential gesture, unlike Debussy's, does not grow out of earlier events. Indeed, nothing resembling it occurs earlier in the movement, or does it complete a process begun before. The gesture signifying closure is not essentially part of the intra-opus style of this movement, but rather part of the dialectic of Classic music. As such, it is unequivocally and unashamedly conventional." But in Debussy's cadence: "because the gesture grows out of the melodic, orchestral, and textual process that precede it, its identity and integrity are masked. And so, as a result, is its conventionality" (p. 224).

Going from the disguise of conventional syntax to its outright rejection, Meyer opines that: "the gradual weakening of syntactic relationships, coupled with a correlative turning toward a more natural compositional means, was perhaps the single most important trend in the history of nineteenth-century music." (p. 272). Of this weakening, and even rejection, Meyer has many carefully worked-out examples, each of which not only supports his thesis but invariably casts new light on the music he discusses. Of particular importance in this regard is a whole class of nonsyntactic features of music which Meyer calls the "secondary parameters." I shall confine my remarks to these.

Of the distinction between the primary and secondary parameters, Meyer writes:

> The primary parameters of tonal music—melody, harmony, and rhythm—are syntactic. That is, they establish explicit functional relationships. . . . Secondary parameters, on the other hand [e.g., "louder/softer, faster/slower, thicker/thinner, higher/lower"], are statistical in the sense that the relationships to which they give rise are typically ones of degree that can be measured or counted. . . . [T]he syntax of tonal music, like other kinds of syntax, is rule governed, learned, and conventional. The secondary, statistical parameters, on the other hand, seem able to shape experience with minimal dependence on learned rules and conventions. (P. 209)

Thus, a musical structure based on the secondary, rather than the primary parameters would seem more appropriately to reflect the Romantic ideology, with its negative attitude towards social stratification and conventions, than would a musical structure based on the primary ones. And so, as Meyer maintains, it would be altogether expected that "complementing the trend toward syntactically weakened harmonic and tonal relationships [in the Romantic era] was an increase in the relative importance of secondary parameters in the shaping of musical process and the articulation of musical form" (p. 303).

At this juncture, with Meyer's general argument well in tow, we can step back and take a critical look at it. I have two major points to make, the first concerning what I have called the particular hypothesis, the second concerning what I have called the limited and global hypotheses.

The particular hypothesis, it will be recalled, is that the parameters characteristic of Romantic musical style can be explained by appeal to the regnant ideology of the times. The appeal is by way of the concept of *choice.* The argument is that composers have been influenced by their beliefs in this ideology to choose those musical parameters that reflect, that are in accord with the ideology. And because the Classical parameters ceased to be seen by composers as reflecting, as being in accord with the Romantic ideology, they chose other strategies that were so seen.

Now I said at the outset of this essay that the central thesis of Meyer's book, platitudinous though it may sound, is that musical composition is a process of choice-making. We are now about to see how crucial, and how unplatitudinous this thesis really turns out to be.

If we want to *explain* why someone is behaving—or had behaved—in a certain way by saying that he or she *chose* to do it, we must fulfill certain necessary conditions for such an explanation. First, we must be able to rationally reconstruct a plausible *practical* argument leading from thought to choice. So, for example, if I explain why Rudolph is now waddling around on the floor like a duck, going "Quack! Quack!" by saying that he *chose* to do so, and is not (say) under post-hypnotic suggestion or simply a nut, I must make good my claim by reconstructing a rational argument from what Rudolph believes and wants to a practical conclusion to the effect that waddling around on the floor, quacking like a duck, is, under the circumstances, the (or a) rational thing for Rudolph to be doing. My explanation is: He wanted to entertain his five-year old niece, who was crying; so, since he knew she liked ducks and had left her rubber duck at home, he decided on the present (undignified) strategy.

One important thing to notice is that a necessary condition for making the rational reconstruction plausible is that the chooser be just the sort of person for whom the particular reconstruction, whatever it might be, would seem appropriate. Thus if, for example, we knew that Sarah was an extremely selfish person, a rational reconstruction of the deliberations leading to her choice to give a million dollars to charity involving benevolent motives might be rejected in favor of one involving considerations of tax advantage, on the grounds that Sarah is not the sort of person whose deliberations would be likely to involve benevolent motives at all.

Of course, in giving a rational reconstruction of a practical argument leading to choice, we need not necessarily be suggesting that, in the particular instance, the chooser actually went through the steps laid out. Alice *chooses* to run to her right, rather than her left, in order to answer Jim's overhead smash, because she knows that if she does so, she will have a fifty-fifty chance of returning the ball, whereas if she stays in center court, and waits to see whether Jim hits to the right or the left, it will be too late to return the ball at all, no matter which side Jim hits to. But, clearly, there is no time for Alice to go through this argument in the heat of the moment. Rather, as we say, she has "internalized" this strategy, made it "second nature," so that she can act, in the event, instantly, without thinking at all. Nevertheless—and this is crucial—if Alice *never* went through either the reasoning process that the rational reconstruction lays out or one like it, then I think we would be loath to call her behavior a matter of *choice.* Presumably, there was a time when Alice was taught to go randomly to her left or right, and not get caught in center court, because doing that would raise her chances of returning a smash from zero to fifty-fifty. She understood that this was the rational thing to do, and chose to internalize that mode of behavior. On the basis of her once having made this conscious choice, we say now that each time she behaves in this way, she *chooses* to do so, for just the reasons cited. However, had she never entertained any practical argument leading to this mode of behavior as its conclusion, had she been born doing this, then, clearly, we would not explain her behavior as the result of choice, but in some other way: "instinct," or whatever.

Armed with these common-sensical preliminaries, let us now ask ourselves if Meyer has indeed made it appear plausible to explain the musical parameters of Romanticism as the result of compositional *choice* predicated upon Romantic political and philosophical ideology. I have chosen examples of this compositional choice not only to illustrate the nuts-and-bolts of Meyer's argument, but to now suggest that there is a gap in the argument, which one of them exhibits but the other does not.

Let us take the successful example first. Meyer's explanation for the increasing tendency in the nineteenth century to choose secondary rather than primary parameters as structural features was that they more accurately reflected the ideological rejection of conventions and class distinctions and the endorsement of egalitarianism. For the primary parameters are rule- and convention-based, while the secondary ones "seem able to shape experience with minimal dependence on learned rules and conventions."

Now if we are to find the choice explanation plausible, we must be able to give a rational reconstruction of a practical argument that leads from ideological belief to compositional choice. And we must be able to plausibly imagine the composer as the kind of person who would be likely to have gone through, at one time or another, such a reasoning process. The second condition will become crucially relevant when I come to consider the limited and global hypotheses. But for now I will put it aside, assuming that it is met in the present instance (which I happen to believe is true), and concentrate on the first condition. Can we make a rational reconstruction of a practical argument that leads from belief in the Romantic ideology to the compositional choice of secondary over primary parameters? I think the answer is yes, and here is how I think it goes, as implied, I believe, in what Meyer says. Romantic political and philosophical ideology was against class and convention, and basically egalitarian. The Romantic composers shared this ideology, wished to write music that reflected their ideological convictions, and tried to do so. So they chose, among other things, to reject the primary, rule- and convention-governed parameters in favor of the secondary ones. But what made this a *rational* choice, given their ideological commitment?

Well, to put it bluntly, if you are ideologically egalitarian, then it is reasonable to assume that you endorse music for the masses, not music for the elite. But the masses will not have the musical education and experience of the elite; so, if the music you write is to be accessible to the masses (more exactly, in Meyer's terminology, the audience of "elite egalitarians"), it must be music that can be enjoyed without any considerable learning or experience. The favoring of the secondary over the primary parameters now follows as a natural egalitarian strategy. As Meyer points out, the primary parameters, being syntactical (which is to say convention- and rule-governed) must be learned and can only be appreciated by an elite, musically sophisticated audience, whereas the secondary parameters, being more "natural," do not depend for their appreciation upon learned rules and conventions. Thus, given their egalitarian sentiments, the choice of secondary over primary parameters on the part of Romantic composers seems an entirely rational one. Can the same be said for the choice of "convention disguised"? Here I have problems.

Can we derive from Meyer's text a rational reconstruction of a practical argument that goes from Romantic ideology to the use of such disguised conventions as are illustrated by the close of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*? If we cannot, then with regard to these numerous and important parameters of Romantic musical style—of which the example from Debussy is but one representative instance—the explanation Meyer gives of the change from Classic to Romantic style is incomplete and in need of fleshing out. I do not say, I hasten to add, that such a fleshing out is impossible. I certainly have no argument to that effect. All I am going to suggest is that with regard to the Romantic compositional strategy of disguised conventions as Meyer describes it, there is a crucial step missing from the practical argument connecting ideology to compositional choice that it may or may not be possible to provide, and without which the rational reconstruction necessary for a plausible choice-based explanation is impossible.

The problem is this. I see no rational connection between embracing Romantic ideology—in particular, the rejection of social rules and conventions—and the choice, as a compositional strategy, to use and to disguise rule- and convention-driven musical parameters. Indeed, if one pursues the line of argument just outlined to explain the choice of secondary over primary parameters, the choice of disguised primary parameters seems positively to contradict Romantic ideology. For if the secondary parameters are egalitarian, disguised primary parameters are even more elitist than undisguised one, since, one would think, they require even more musical sophistication to appreciate. Whatever musical learning and experience an undisguised musical convention may require for its perception, a masked one cannot require less; and, common sense suggests, it must require something more, for the result of camouflage is, obviously, to make things more rather than less difficult to make out. It would be rational for an adherent to Romantic egalitarianism to choose as few conventional formulae as possible. But to disguise the ones chosen would not soften the blow; it would, on the contrary, rub salt in the wound.

What has gone wrong here? The culprit seem to be the use of such vague words as "reflect," "compatible," and the like for expressing the relationship between musical parameters and ideologies. *Why* should it be a rational strategy for a composer to choose parameters that reflect or are compatible with his political and philosophical ideology? Well, that all depends upon what the cash value of "reflect" or "compatible" is. For under some interpretations of these terms, it would not be a rational, which is to say plausible, understandable strategy at all, and hence the rational reconstruction of a practical argument from ideology to compositional choice could not go through, leaving a gap in the explanation. To illustrate what I am getting at, let me suggest two possible interpretations of "reflect" that do make for rational strategies, although, in the event, neither seems an acceptable one for disguised conventions.

We might say that musical parameters reflect an ideology just when there is a practical connection between the parameters and the ideology: when the ideology implies a musical strategy for effectuating an end that the ideology endorses or recommends. The choice of secondary over primary parameters, because it makes music more accessible to the masses, is an example of just such "practical reflection," as, in a later day, and reflecting a similar ideology, was Hanns Eisler's proletarian musical style. But, as we have seen, that particular mode of reflection will not work for the strategy of disguised conventions. Indeed, from the point of view of accessibility, it would seem that the strategy of disguising conventions reflects, on the contrary, the elitist ideology and indeed reflects it even more strongly than the Classical employment of conventions out front.

There is, however, a second, obvious way of construing "reflection," staring us in the face, that might indeed provide a very plausible practical connection between Romantic ideology and the disguising of conventions. Why do we not say that the disguised conventions present us aesthetic "symbols" or "representations" of the ideological rejection of class distinctions, and the ideological endorsement of natural Man? What better way, after all, of symbolizing these things in music than by weaving a musical fabric that, although held together by convention-driven parameters, gives the *appearance* of being purely natural and conventionless because those parameters have been artfully hidden? And by undertaking the aesthetic symbolization or representation of the ideology—since it can be seen, at least if certain other conditions obtain, as a rational strategy aimed at promulgating what is symbolized or represented—the reconstruction of a practical argument from ideology to compositional choice is accomplished, and the explanation completed.

But, alas, the step to symbolization or representation where pure instrumental music is concerned is a dangerous one that no music theorist of Meyer's sophistication is likely to take very cheerfully. Indeed, I would venture to guess that one of Meyer's reasons for choosing such vague and noncommittal words as "reflect" and "conform" is just to avoid making a commitment to anything so dangerous and problematic as either symbolization or representation, especially where "pure" instrumental music is concerned. For the problems that arise in making such claims stick are legion. To make the practical argument from ideology to compositional choice complete, one must at the very least prove that composers *intended* to symbolize or represent, even if they did not succeed. And, so far as I can see, Meyer provides no such proof. So we are again at a loss for a rational connection between espousing the Romantic ideology and making use, in musical composition, of disguised conventions. Without such a connection, the explanation, based on ideology and choice, of how these parameters became prevalent remains importantly incomplete, although, as I have said before, perhaps not necessarily so.

At this point, I imagine, the lure of the "unconscious" will strongly beckon. One will be tempted to claim that, although there seems to be no plausible reason why an adherent to the Romantic ideology should consciously choose disguised conventions as a compositional strategy, there is an unconscious desire, or compulsion, perhaps, impelling one to use them, driven by some unconscious set of "reasons" and "motives" that connect the two. Might the disguising of the musical conventions be the expression of guilt feelings due to a mistaken (and unconscious) belief that to use musical conventions is to betray the ideological directive against social conventions? We could then liken Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* to the compulsive washing of hands thirty times a day by a gentleman who unconsciously believes that he is responsible for the death of his mother in childbirth and is driven to useless, even damaging behavior by the unconscious and mistaken belief that the washing of hands is the cleansing of sin. (You don't have to take my example seriously to get my point.)

But such a path, the path of the unconscious, is not open to Meyer. For it is the very heart and soul of his book, as I understand it, to divert us from such causal explanations based on the paradigms of natural science and to direct us to explanation based on the assumption, which I share, that "human behavior is the result of intelligent and purposeful—though not necessarily deliberate, fully-informed, or even judicious—choice" (p. 76). An individual choice may indeed not be "deliberate," and in this perfectly innocent and non-technical sense be "unconscious," as is Alice's choice to instantly run to the right rather than the left to maximize her chance of returning Jim's smash. But that is not "unconscious causation" in the Freudian or any other psychologically deterministic sense. And in order for Alice's response to be correctly described as "choice," there must have been some point in her past, as we have seen, before such responses were internalized, when Alice's choice was "deliberate."

Nor, I should point out as a caveat, can one translate this unconscious practical argument into a conscious one in order to evade the vagaries of the unconscious and solve the present problem, because the practical argument will not, if a consciously entertained train of thought, pass muster as a "rational" one, for the crucial premise that explains the *disguising* of the conventions cannot be plausibly thought to be held consciously—which is to say reflectively—by a rational, indeed sane person. Who could rationally, consciously, reflectively believe that guilt felt over breaking a rule can be expiated by hiding the breach from prying eyes (or, in this case, ears)? As Meyer points out, the composer's choice need not be either "fully-informed, or even judicious" for his argument to go through. But it must be within the bounds of what we can plausibly believe a rational and sane human being might hold in the relevant time and place; and to believe consciously what I have just laid out as a set of unconscious beliefs is not within those bounds.

The perception that there is some kind of "rightness of fit"—some kind, therefore, of rational connection between believing in the Romantic rejection of social conventions and choosing the compositional strategy of convention disguised—remains a beguiling one. But we should not be beguiled too soon. We are owed here, as in any other explanation of human behavior made in terms of choice, the spelling out of a plausible, rational scenario that makes it plain why a person who believes *p*, should be expected to choose *q*. I do not think that Meyer, either explicitly or implicitly, has given us a scenario to connect belief in the Romantic ideology with the compositional choice of disguised conventions. To that extent, his explanation of how Romantic ideology might "explain" Romantic compositional practice is incomplete, though not, perhaps, fatally flawed, if completion is possible.

This brings me to my second problematic. How successful has Meyer been in establishing the particular, the limited, or the global hypotheses? The particular hypothesis—that Romantic ideology can explain through the concept of rational choice the evolution of Classical to Romantic musical style—fails to be supported whenever there is a gap in the rational reconstruction of a practical argument from belief in ideology to choice of musical strategy, as there is, so I have argued, in the case of convention disguised. But, contrariwise, whenever that reconstruction is complete, as it appears to be in the argument from ideology to choice of the secondary parameters over the primary ones, the particular hypothesis is confirmed. In this particular regard, do Meyer's successes outweigh the failures? My own estimate is that more rather than less of the time some kind of plausible reconstruction can be made. So this part of Meyer's argument in support of the particular hypothesis appears to me to merit a cautiously favorable judgement.

But the rational reconstruction is not, it will be recalled, the only necessary condition for a successful explanation connecting ideology to musical parameters by way of choice. Another is that the choosers be the kinds of people who we can reasonably assume would go through the kinds of deliberation from ideology to musical choice that Meyer describes. How does the explanation fare against that requirement? Very well, one would think, given how articulate and how prone to aesthetic theorizing the Romantic composers were. As Meyer rightly observes, "artists as well as aestheticians believed in and fostered the ideology of Romanticism" (p. 180). And the composers were not laggard in this regard: not by any means mere followers, but in the forefront of Romantic speculation, at the cutting edge. Berlioz, Schumann, and Wagner (to name merely the most prominent of the musical "thinkers") were not content to receive the Romantic ideology as a gift from the philosophers, but helped in its forging through their voluminous theoretical writings and music criticism. Thus the Romantic composer represents just that type of artist-thinker that one can well imagine going through the kind of cerebration from ideology to compositional choice that Meyer's account seems to require. Here, without a doubt, Meyer holds a winning hand.

But there's the rub. For just that very special character of the Romantic composer and his penchant for theorizing and speculation that make him so plausible a subject for Meyer's account of the relation of ideology to compositional choice in the nineteenth century make one skeptical of finding his like in all music-historical periods or perhaps even in any except the one in which the prototype flourished. Given what we know about society, musical culture, and intellectual climate in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for instance, or in the fifteenth, can we plausibly picture to ourselves a J. S. Bach or a Johannes Ockeghem making rational compositional choices, regarding the pure musical parameters, based on serious consideration of philosophical, political, or other such over-arching ideologies? Indeed, in the case of Ockeghem, or any other composer who did not work in a period when pure instrumental forms were an important compositional option, it seems problematic whether Meyer's explanation of style change can be applied at all since, as Meyer himself points out in explaining why he concentrates for the most part on instrumental music in his discussion of the nineteenth century, "the connection between compositional restraints and ideological ones can be more easily traced when it is not complicated by the further, not necessarily congruent, constraints of text setting and theatrical performance" (p. 219). Furthermore—and perhaps this is just another way of putting the same point—no one thinks it difficult to show how a composer of any period responds in musical parameters to the meaning of a text he or she is setting. And no one thinks it difficult to show how the meaning of a text reflects the regnant ideology of its time, since it has the cognitive resources to express fully such an ideology. So that where a text intervenes between an ideology and the pure musical parameters, we are not accomplishing the really hard and controversial trick of showing how the pure musical parameters respond *directly* to ideological considerations, given that these former are bereft of representational or semantic possibilities.

But putting this added complication of text intervention aside, can we plausibly picture composers other than those of the Romantic era—who lived, after all, in an intellectual climate of just the right kind to nourish and nurture the "speculative" artist—going through the ideological deliberation necessary to make Meyer's account really work? This is not, I hasten to add, merely an idle, groundless question, aimed at raising a little skeptical dust. For there is at least some historical evidence to support the notion that before the late eighteenth century—just the time to which Meyer begins applying in earnest his explanation of style change through ideology and choice—the intellectual climate would not have been such as to either produce or encourage the necessary speculative composers, whereas the late eighteenth century is exactly the time when one would expect such composers to appear. I do not say the evidence is conclusive; but it is highly suggestive.

I have in mind here a seminal two-part article by Paul O. Kristeller in which he argued convincingly that what he called "The Modern System of the Arts" was a product of Enlightenment thought.[1] The relevance, for present purposes, of Kristeller's discovery, is that before the eighteenth century, music was not considered a "fine art" at all, and composers, by consequence, were not considered and did not consider themselves "artists." Of course this does not imply that before the eighteenth century music was not an art nor composers artists. But it does imply, I want to urge, that because composers were considered artists neither by others nor by themselves, they would not have had the training or the inclination, the encouragement, or the precedent to make them think about ideological questions at all, let alone to think them relevant to their compositional choices of the pure musical parameters. If you think of yourself in the social and intellectual class of jewelers and furniture-makers—which is to say, craftsmen—rather than in that of poets, you are hardly the sort of person likely to speculate in the grand manner, like a Berlioz or a Wagner, or even in the clumsy, somewhat illiterate, but nonetheless serious and sincere manner of a Beethoven. Indeed, you are not likely to "speculate" at all. Plumbers think about pipes, not principles.

Thus, it was a profound social and intellectual change during the eighteenth century that made the "speculative" composer possible. That, I argue, is why it seems unlikely that a composer living before this revolution took place would have the kind of relation to ideology necessary for Meyer's account to work (allowing always, of course, for exceptions and historical anomalies). And that is why, by consequence, it also seems unlikely to me that the global hypothesis could be true, or the limited hypothesis anything but very limited.

I do not think the argument I have advanced above is in any way conclusive, but merely suggestive. What we must do if we are to verify or refute either the global or the limited hypothesis is dig into the historical and musical materials the way Meyer has so splendidly done for the Romantics and see what we come up with. Indeed, it is one of the many virtues of Meyer's challenging book and one of its most valuable accomplishments that it leaves musicologists and analysts with a research program to pursue for many years to come. And I cannot summarize this aspect of Meyer's study more cogently or insightfully than Meyer has himself. Of his conclusions, Meyer writes:

> They are hypotheses. Some may be downright wrong, others will require refinement. All need to be tested through applications to genres and repertoires not considered here. It is a program of work to be done, of ideas and hypotheses to be evaluated and perhaps rejected, explored and perhaps extended. (P. 352)

—*Peter Kivy*

NOTE

[1] "The Modern System of the Arts," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–527; 13 (1952): 17–46.