

Towards a Philosophy of the Musical Experience: Phenomenology, Culture, and Ethnomusicology in Conversation

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TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF THE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE:
CULTURE, PHENOMENOLOGY
AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY
IN CONVERSATION

by

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ABSTRACT
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This dissertation engages the questions and methodologies of phenomenology, the philosophy of culture, the philosophy of music and ethnomusicology in order to investigate the significance of music in human life. The systematic orientation of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms provides the overarching framework that positions the approach in chapter one. Following Cassirer, art in general and music in particular are not regarded as enjoyable yet dispensable pastimes, but rather as fundamental ways of experiencing the world as intuitive forms and sensations. Establishing the ontological significance of music entails unpacking the *sui generis* experience of time, space and subjectivity that characterize the musical experience.

Phenomenology, in particular the thought of Alfred Schütz, provides a point of departure for thinking more concretely about the musical experience. The turn to phenomenology is motivated both by its systematic consanguinity with Cassirer's project as well as its insistent focus on the details of lived experience. However, bolstered by what is argued to be a more holistic description of the musical experience gleaned from the work of ethnomusicologists, Schütz's phenomenological account of the music is challenged on a number of key issues such as music's ontological status and the tendency to equate "music" with "musical works."

Despite the blind spots of his writings on music, Schütz's phenomenology of the social world proves to be a useful framework for thinking about the multiplicity of ways in which music is experienced as meaningful and how the equivocality of the concept of musical meaning brings the social nature of the musical experience into view. Sociality also figures into a discussion of improvisation, an important theme that has only relatively recently begun to receive philosophical attention. Arguing that an adequate philosophical treatment of music must account for both the variety of musical cultures as well as the variety of musical practices, a consideration of improvisation helps philosophy think outside of the work-paradigm that was critiqued in chapter two.

By incorporating ethnomusicological theory and ethnographies as well as downplayed musical practices like improvisation, this dissertation offers an enriched account of the ways that music shapes human life.

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J Tyler Friedman, B.A., B.S., M.A.

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Introduction:

Considering its ubiquity and significance in day-to-day life as well as the diverse functions that it serves, music has received comparatively little philosophical attention. In fact, a survey of the history of thought would seem to suggest an inverse correlation between the passage of time and the significance accorded to music. Plato so respected, if maligned, music's bewitching power that the Socrates of his *Republic* banished the art, with a few exceptions, from the walls of the ideal city. Some two and a half millennia later, cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker would characterize music as "auditory cheesecake,"¹ pleasurable but unnecessary and perhaps a bit indulgent.

Such wildly divergent outlooks suggest that music's status vis-à-vis the human condition is still undecided. Is music of utmost political and ethical significance or is it a trifling divertissement? This dissertation will not argue for either extreme but will instead contend that music represents a *sui generis* type of experience through the lens of which we catch sight of a unique mode of consciousness that furnishes us with a richer conception of the human being. One of the central contentions of this dissertation is that a clear-eyed evaluation of music has been hindered by the philosophy of music's limited approach to its theme, which has traditionally been oriented by the Western classical tradition of the past few centuries. This dissertation will thus bring interdisciplinary resources to bear on the philosophy of music while situating such an expansion within the framework of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of culture.

The philosophy of culture is a philosophical project with deep historical roots that determine its scope and methodology. In his presentation of the significance of Immanuel Kant's critical

¹ Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 534.

philosophy, Cassirer regards Kant's prioritization of "the problem of accessibility" over the "problem of objectivity"² to be the move that makes the introduction of the theory of transcendental idealism an epochal moment in the tradition of philosophical idealism in particular and Western thought in general. Concretely, this reprioritization of philosophical method entails that philosophers investigate first the conditions for the possibility of knowledge – or, more broadly, experience – before staking positions on the objects that are thereby known or experienced. To adapt Clifford Geertz's claim that "art and the equipment to grasp it are made in the same shop,"³ the critical idealist seeks to understand the object of research through the equipment necessary to grasp it.

Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms is well understood along such lines. Each distinct cultural domain is to be submitted to such an analysis: how is the experience of language, myth, religion or art given its particular shape? Cassirer's approach to this question is broadly phenomenological in its shape. Moored to concrete cultural products, Cassirer seeks to describe how these products embody a distinctive experience of the world; how fundamental forms of relation like space, time and the experience of oneself are co-extensive with experience yet change character according to the domain of experience, or symbolic form, currently 'inhabited.'

Doing so is important not only for the philosophy of music but also for Cassirer's project. The "critique of culture"⁴ that Cassirer undertakes in his multi-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (PSF) entails a systematic study of art, which Cassirer, in no small part due to the turmoil of the times, never wrote. But his scattered writings on the subject make it clear that "art" names

² Ernst Cassirer, "Critical Idealism and a Philosophy of Culture," in *Symbol, Myth, Culture*, edited by Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 69.

³ Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *MLN* 91.6 (1976): 1497.

⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 1: Language*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 84.

one of the fundamental ways that experience takes shape. Music is a particularly interesting subject to consider since Cassirer most frequently opts for examples derived from poetry and painting than music. But music – which in contradistinction to much poetry and painting is neither referential nor representational – differs in marked respects from the other arts and thereby challenges a univocal approach to the theme.

Just as studies of art that restrict themselves to representational arts are impoverished by their myopia, many philosophical studies of music commit a similar sort of *pars pro toto* mistake. The philosophy of music is frequently vitiated by an inordinate emphasis on the Western classical tradition, which historical and cross-cultural scrutiny reveals to harbor particular aesthetic values and to represent an extremely limited body of musical practices. Such a limited focus calls into question the universality of the insights gleaned. Thus, one of the central claims of this dissertation is that the philosophy of music must become ethnomusicological; that is, the philosophy of music must not equate “music” with any particular tradition but instead must contend with the unruly variety of ways that human beings relate to sound. To this end, this dissertation will cite a broad swath of ethnomusicological sources treating particular musical cultures located in Papua New Guinea, Sub-Saharan Africa, Tuva, the Solomon Islands and the United States.

Not only does ethnomusicology study a variety of musical cultures, the discipline knows better than to reduce music to a purely auditory phenomenon. In Alan Merriam’s classic three-pronged formulation of the ethnomusicologist’s task, the discipline studies music as concept, behavior and sound.⁵ That is to say, while the ethnomusicologist may analyze the purely acoustic properties of music (i.e. music as sound), this aspect is always contextualized by the ways in

⁵ Cf. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 32.

which the culture in question speak and write about music (i.e. music as concept) and perform music (i.e. music as behavior).

This broad-minded approach to music is well suited to be brought to bear on Cassirer's approach to culture, which is ultimately geared towards a philosophy of human nature insofar as it strives to understand the constructive role of human consciousness in the shaping of experience. What should be the method for reaching this lofty goal? Kant undertook a similar project but was criticized, for instance, for deriving his table of categories from logic textbooks of the day. Cassirer, on the other hand, defends the necessity of an empirical approach: "[a]ll the so-called definitions of man are nothing but airy speculation so long as they are not based upon and confirmed by our experience of man. There is no other way to know man than to understand his life and conduct."⁶ Or, in a pithier formulation: "'being' can be apprehended only in 'action.'"⁷

This conviction gives Cassirer's work the occasional character of a literature review. Impressive swaths of intellectual history are trotted out and placed into conversation, often not in service to any explicit agenda or in defense of an explicit thesis put forth by Cassirer. Indeed, in a 1972 lecture course devoted to Cassirer, Aron Gurwitsch claims "The basis of Cassirer's theory is laid down the Intro. to vol. I of PSF [i.e. the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*]. All that comes later is more or less elaboration – necessary to be sure, but the principles are laid down here."⁸

The empirical material on conceptualizations of music, musical behaviors and analyses of

⁶ Cassirer, EM, 16.

⁷ Cassirer, PSF I, 80.

⁸ Aron Gurwitsch, *Unpublished Transcript of a Lecture Course at The New School For Social Research* (1972), 18. The status of this text is problematic, but I cite it nonetheless, albeit not in defense of any essential points. I received the text from Professor Sebastian Luft, who in turn received it from William McKenna, who did his doctoral work at the New School. To the best of my knowledge, the text is a transcript of tapes that recorded Gurwitsch's lectures.

musical sound that are derived from ethnomusicological research thus serves as a necessary foundation for a critique of musical consciousness.

The initial task of chapter one is to situate Cassirer's critique of culture historically and systematically. I take two approaches to doing so. First, the critique of culture is situated within the tradition of philosophical idealism, in which Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the decisive text for Cassirer's project. In Cassirer's telling, Kant's decisive gesture was to prioritize the "problem of accessibility" over "the problem of objectivity."⁹ Stated differently, Kant inaugurates a new focus on the boundaries and conditions of human knowledge as opposed to the objects of knowledge themselves. This approach to metaphysics, epistemology and philosophical anthropology more generally is the direct predecessor of Cassirer's emphasis on the role of symbols in human existence.

Utilizing an unpublished draft manuscript of Cassirer's *Essay on Man*, I propose a second approach to contextualizing Cassirer's critique of culture, which I call the philosophical-anthropological approach. What Kant is to Cassirer's idealistic approach, Montaigne is to Cassirer's philosophical-anthropological approach. The epochal consequences of Copernicus' cosmological revolution were not lost on Montaigne who did not shrink from the philosophical implications stemming from a new picture of the universe in which a benevolent divinity could not be taken for granted and human beings were no longer the geographic or teleological center of the universe. Montaigne is thus the first philosopher to take seriously the insights that can be gleaned from so-called primitive cultures, which Cassirer takes up in his many treatments of myth. Montaigne's discovery of "the problem of individual life"¹⁰ also leads him to emphasize human beings' *becoming* and opposed to *being*. This orientation is also present in Cassirer's

⁹ Cassirer, SMC, 69.

¹⁰ Cassirer, "Dogmatism and Scepticism," 35-36.

thought in his emphasis on the genealogy of ideas, understanding them in light of their predecessors and progeny.

With this understanding of the background of Cassirer's project, chapter one turns to the manner in which the critique of culture unfolds in Cassirer's multi-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The goal is to flesh out Cassirer's schematic writings on art in order to attain a clearer view of how art fits among the other symbolic forms, but doing so requires a preparatory consideration of what constitutes a symbolic form as such. For Cassirer, following Kant, experience is the result of a unity of consciousness, whereby a manifold of stimuli becomes synthesized. This synthesis is brought about through different types of relation: space, time, thing, number, subjectivity. These categories are what Cassirer calls the "quality" of a relation.¹¹ In different symbolic forms, however, these relationships take different forms, yielding different types of synthesis, which account for the different nature of aesthetic, theoretical, religious and mythical experience: "The synthesis by which the consciousness combines a series of tones into the unity of a melody, would seem to be totally different from the synthesis by which a number of syllables is articulated into the unity of a 'sentence,'" writes Cassirer. "But they have one thing in common, that in both cases the sensory particulars do not stand by themselves; they are articulated into a conscious *whole*, from which they take their qualitative meaning."¹² Cassirer calls the different manifestations of the relational categories their "modality."¹³

Thus an elaboration of the symbolic form of art entails unpacking the modalities that characterize aesthetic experience. Stated differently, this involves answering questions about the unique form that space, time and other such categories take in the experience of art. Along the

¹¹ Cassirer, PSF I, 95.

¹² Cassirer, PSF I, 94.

¹³ Cassirer, PSF I, 97.

way, questions arise about the validity of speaking about 'art' as a unified category as opposed to the plurality of 'arts,' the relationship between art and myth and the relationship between art and knowledge.

The relation of space is first dealt with in the context of art as such. The point of departure is Cassirer's most explicit treatment of the theme in the essay "Mythic, Aesthetic and Theoretical Space." With the assistance of this essay, the particular character of aesthetic space is distinguished from the modality of space for mythic and theoretical consciousness. In contrast with theoretical space, both mythic and aesthetic space are concrete, which means that they know nothing of theoretical abstractions such as Cartesian grids. Instead, concrete spatial experiences are characterized by the always already being positioned of one's lived body (as in the everyday experience of space), felt qualities such as holiness and profanity (as in the mythic experience of space) and the contemplative disinterestedness of aesthetic space. The artistic concept of space is further determined with reference to sources that Cassirer mentions, such as Adolf Hildebrand's *Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst*, as well as artists who were working and thinking contemporaneously with Cassirer, such as Wassily Kandinsky and his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

Considered in the context of music, "space" becomes a problematic concept. In fact, many thinkers have argued that music involves merely metaphorical spatiality. The origin of this skepticism is a matter of ontology. The common ontological characterization of music as an ideal, or non-empirical, phenomenon displaces music from the realm of literal space. If music is not to be conflated with the sound waves that constitute the condition for the possibility of perceptible sounding; if, in other words, music is not a physical phenomenon, then it cannot

partake in the physical sense of spatiality that is commonly held to be the literal sense of the term.

Despite this skepticism, several thinkers offer compelling defenses of the meaningful spatiality of music, although this sense of spatiality is not necessarily co-extensive with the common understanding. Don Ihde diagnoses skepticism about music's spatiality as a symptom of "sensory atomism,"¹⁴ the misleading tendency to regard the senses as divorced from one another. While the ears may not provide as robust a spatial experience as the eyes, this should not lead us to overlook the genuine spatiality of audition. Viktor Zuckerkandl argues that the ear's ability to differentiate between simultaneously sounding tones militates in favor of the sound as spatial. If space were entirely absent from auditory perception, then simultaneously sounding tones would blend indistinguishably together as do colors on a painter's palette.

The second chapter turns from Cassirer's philosophy of culture to the phenomenological movement. The reasons for this shift of focus are manifold. First, Cassirer conceived of phenomenology and his project mutually beneficial, with phenomenology's rigorous description of phenomena finding broader significance under the theoretical umbrella of the philosophy of symbolic forms, which is itself protected against the encroachment of untoward theoretical prejudice by the close, phenomenological description of concrete phenomena.

Having established the consanguinity of the philosophy of symbolic forms and phenomenology, the latter comes under explicit consideration. Prominent phenomenological treatments of music are then brought under consideration, with an emphasis on unpacking the ontology of music that will be seen to belong by the general phenomenological outlook.

¹⁴ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 60.

This ontology comes under a critical scrutiny in the second major section of chapter two and is subjected to a two-pronged critique. The conception of music as an ideal object is questioned both on account of its ideality and its objectification. Conceiving of music as ideal proves to harbor some problematic assumptions about the musical experience of the listener. Music makes sense as ideal when it is supposed that there is one correct, inevitable manner of constituting the work across the consciousness of all actual and potential listeners. A few considerations, however, cast aspersions on such a universal claim. First, this seems to ignore the perceptual agency of the listener; the fact that attention can be directed to different aspects of the musical event, rendering different component parts more salient than others. In short, supposing a musical work is not a bare bones monophonic melody, it admits of multiple possible constitutions. This conclusion is illustrated with reference to multistable acoustic phenomena, an auditory equivalent of well-known visual illusions such as the duck/rabbit or the face/goblet illusion.

The second prong of the critique of phenomenology's musical ontology takes aim at the reduction of musical phenomena to works. The work-paradigm is shown to be a historically contingent view that has emerged and achieved 'common sense' status only in the past few centuries of the Western tradition. Formerly, and still in the case of many musical events that are overlooked by philosophers, music was essentially functional. This functional status had material implications for the composition and performance of music, which run counter to essential assumptions belonging to the view that 'music' is equivalent to 'musical work.'

Having problematized the conception of music as an ideal object, we turn to several accounts that offer alternative ways of thinking about what music essentially is, and whether 'music' itself even constitutes a unified category. The alternatives considered argue that, contrary to the work

paradigm, music is fundamentally an activity; that, contrary to the view that musicality is a province restricted to the talented or the trained, musicality names a faculty of human consciousness; and that, contrary to the terminological tendency to regard 'music' as a unified object, the term in truth encompasses an indeterminate number of importantly distinguishable activities and products. These alternative conceptions of music are then put into conversation with Schütz's account of the musical experience in order to determine the extent to which his phenomenological account is able to accommodate salient considerations that Schütz either brackets or fails to acknowledge.

The third chapter picks up on themes addressed in the second chapter. The account of the musical experience that Schütz presents in FPM and MMT appear to downplay the social dimension of the experience to a troubling degree. In MMT, the title of which all but promises a robust phenomenological account of the activity of making music together, the social dimension of making music takes an unusual shape. While one first encountering the essay would likely expect a description of multiple musicians engaged in the process of playing music with one another, Schütz downplays such manifestations of making music together. Instead, Schütz devotes the most attention to the social relationship that obtains between a beholder, which in Schütz's parlance encompasses mere listeners, musicians playing instruments and individuals reading a musical score without hearing externalized sound, and the composer of the musical work in question. While such a relationship may include the social interchange of co-performers, it holds equally well for the relationship between a listener and a composer who is absent or has even been dead for centuries.

A reader interested in the social dimension of the musical experience may find this presentation of the sociality of the musical experience interesting and provocative but ultimately

dissatisfying. This conception of the social dimension of musical experience is irreproachably grounded in Schütz's foundational, phenomenological claims about the ontology of music. As an ideal object, music is subject to "the principle of the relative irrelevance of the vehicle,"¹⁵ which holds that because, in essence, 'music' names a series of polythetic processes performed by the consciousness of the beholder, then all means of effectuating these processes are equally valid manifestations of the musical work in question. Thus, reading a musical score and thereby performing the same polythetic processes that the composer performed yields a "quasi simultaneity"¹⁶ of consciousness that is inherently social.

Schütz's treatment of the sociality of the musical experience is ingenious but not the final word on the subject. The account of sociality offered by post-Schützian musicologists, such as Christopher Small, offers a richer picture of the intersubjective character of music making and pushes one's intuitions about what the sociality of music entails by arguing that ostensibly insignificant figures such as ticket-takers and janitorial staff actually figure importantly into the musical experience.

As has been noted, one of the central claims of this dissertation is that a philosophical investigation of human musicality is incomplete without incorporating the evidence of varied musical cultures. The fourth chapter treats a hitherto unaddressed aspect of this claim. While earlier chapters consider conceptualizations of music that challenge prevalent Western ideas about the boundaries of what constitutes music, chapter four more explicitly focuses on a particular form of musical praxis that is frequently overlooked by the philosophy of music; viz. improvisation.

The nature of improvisation has frequently been misunderstood, so the chapter begins with

¹⁵ Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 303.

¹⁶ Schütz, MMT, 171.

an examination of the concept. With reference to the term's etymology, the history of Italian poetic improvisation, and the pedagogy of improvisation, certain generalizable characteristics of improvisation as such are gleaned: improvisation involves the performer's submission to the onrush of time, an engagement with the context of performance and creation within the paradoxically liberating limitation of a theme or framework.

The method of learning to improvise put forth by renowned pianist and teacher Lennie Tristano yields a provocative question: if, as Tristano was convinced, the practice of improvisation is best learned through the analysis, memorization and reproduction of exemplary improvisations – which, in effect, treats an improvisation as though it were a composition – then how are we to defend the unicity of improvisation vis-à-vis composition? If improvisations strive for the character of a composition, what is valuable about improvisation as such? This question becomes an impetus for considering the relationship between improvisation and composition as well as the literature that thematizes and valorizes the imperfections endemic to improvisation.

After surveying different approaches to the question of improvisation versus composition, we elect a different approach to the question of the uniqueness of improvisation. The previously considered approaches to the question are offered from a reflective standpoint; they put forth conceptions of improvisation and composition and then argue for one's precedence. Ingenious though they may be, these approaches overlook the listener's experience; whether, and to what extent, a performance is heard *as* improvised. Ethnomusicologists Bruno Nettl and Thomas Turino offer the tools for addressing this question, leading to the conclusion that hearing an improvisation *as* improvised means listening with the appropriate context in mind, which entails a preexistent understanding of what "improvisation" means in the tradition in questions. Listening to music thus proves to be an activity that is deeply informed by the listener's frame of

reference. The consequent inability to assume uniformity among different listeners' experiences is another nail in the coffin of the conception of music as an ideal object, which presupposed the constitution of the same musical object across listeners, no matter their historical or epistemological position.

Next, the theme of improvisation is brought into conversation with Schütz's writing on the social situation of making music. As has been mentioned, a major motivation for chapter four's focus on improvisation is the fact that many philosophers have conspicuously overlooked the ubiquitous practice. Schütz is no exception.¹⁷ It is argued that the social situation we find in improvisation differs in important respects from Schütz's presentation of musical sociality. The social relationship of most interest to Schütz is that which obtains between the "between composer and beholder;"¹⁸ the beholder encompassing "the player, listener, and reader of music."¹⁹ The improviser, on the other hand, is involved in a plurality of relationships, which often includes a relationship with the composer but is by no means limited to it or even best characterized by it. Taking a typical jazz ensemble as a case study, the section then untangles the relationships that characterize an improvising group of individuals.

A consideration of the social situation of improvisation naturally leads to the theme of improvisation and ethics, since the fluidity and indeterminateness of the rules governing the interaction of co-performers leads to questions about the responsibilities that co-performers owe to one another and other such ethical questions. A survey of the literature reveals many different

¹⁷ Accuracy demands noting that Schütz does in fact once mention improvisation. However the reference is brief and inessential. Schütz never gives improvisation the attention it warrants from someone whose focus on music stems from an interest in what making music has to teach us about communication, which, of course, is writ large when performance is a matter of co-performers negotiating indeterminacies. Cf. Schütz, MMT, 165.

¹⁸ Schütz, MMT, 169.

¹⁹ Schütz, MMT, 169fn.

approaches to the theme of improvisation and ethics, the most compelling of which do not offer any hard and fast directives but are rather interested in the ways that different musical contexts yield different sorts of ethical responsibility.

The aim of this dissertation is to achieve a better understanding of the significance of music in human life. Following Cassirer, music will be regarded as a distinct type of experience, the borders of which are broader than has traditionally been recognized in philosophical discourse. Building on the work of Cassirer and Schütz, we will piece together a view of the musical experience by critiquing and developing upon ideas drawn from an appropriately interdisciplinary cast of characters, including philosophers – both ‘continental’ and ‘Anglo-American’ - art historians, art pedagogues, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, sociologists, sculptors, composers, critics, prehistoric cave painters and non-idiomatic improvisers. Along the way, we will tilt at some windmills of the Western tradition of the philosophy of music by addressing intractable debates such as the ontological status of music, the nature of the relationship between the concept of space and the musical experience and the nature of musical meaning. We shall emerge with an enriched conception of what music is, what music does and what music reveals about our relation to the world and to one another.

Chapter One: Cassirer's Critique of Culture and the Position of Art

Cassirer's announcement, in the introduction of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Volume 1*, (PSF I) that "the critique of reason becomes the critique of culture"²⁰ is an apt inroad to the project that would occupy him for the remainder of his life. Contained in the phrase are both Cassirer's point of departure and the specific difference of his project from its Kantian origin.

This chapter will begin with a general presentation of Cassirer's project. Two ways of approaching Cassirer's mature project will be presented; one of which is the more or less standard account, the other of which has received almost no attention in scholarship. The traditional account of Cassirer's project will be characterized as the *idealistic approach*. Using an unpublished manuscript copy of an early draft of Cassirer's *Essay on Man* (EM), I will propose another way of approaching Cassirer's philosophy that will be called the *philosophical-anthropological approach*.

Once Cassirer's motivation, aims and core terminology have been discussed and defined, we will narrow our focus from the philosophy of symbolic forms in general to the place and nature of art within Cassirer's system. Finally we will further refine our focus to consider how music fits into the picture. By raising questions and addressing ambiguities pertaining to an account of music that is true to Cassirer's theory of art, we will prepare the way for later chapters that will thematize music.

²⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 1: Language*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 80.

1. From a Critique of Reason to a Critique of Culture: The Idealistic Approach

The standard scholarly account of Cassirer's project of a philosophy of symbolic forms is based on Cassirer's place in the history of philosophical idealism, with a special emphasis on his fundamental adherence to the project that Kant inaugurates with the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR). Cassirer acknowledges this bequest in his Introduction to PSF I, noting that his specific contribution to this line of development consists in transforming Kant's critique of reason into a wider-ranging critique of culture.

In the lecture "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture," Cassirer situates his project within the history of philosophical idealism that traces its lineage back to Plato. Despite the terminological similarity, however, Kant's transcendental idealism, in Cassirer's view, marks a decisive departure from idealists past. Kant's epochal move is to place the "problem of accessibility" before "the problem of objectivity."²¹ Stated differently, an investigation into the modes of cognition that would render the experience of metaphysical objects such as God or the human soul possible – or impossible, as the case may be – must precede an investigation into the nature and essence of these objects. This initial consideration of human cognition is what marks Kant's idealism as transcendental. "I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge," writes Kant, "which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*."²² Thus, before speculating about the nature of God and becoming embroiled in long-standing theological debates, the philosopher must inquire into the possibility of metaphysics by way

²¹ Ernst Cassirer, "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture," in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture*, edited by Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 69.

²² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 132-133.

of an analytic of the understanding, that is, a determination of the “principles for the exhibition of phenomena.”²³

Kant’s prioritization of the problem of accessibility marks a new philosophical epoch. But according to Cassirer, Kant did not go far enough. If we regard Kant’s idealism “not from the point of view of its special historical conditions, but from the point of view of its general systematic tasks,”²⁴ that is, by remaining true to the spirit, if not the letter, of Kantian philosophy, we are led from a critique of reason to a critique of culture. Such a gesture in fact finds a precedent in Kant himself, who writes with reference to Plato:

I need only remark that it is by no means unusual, upon comparing the thoughts which an author has expressed with regard to his subject – whether in ordinary conversation or in writing – to find that we understand him better than he understood himself, in that he has not sufficiently determined his concept and therefore has sometimes spoken, or even thought, in opposition to his own intention.²⁵

In Kant’s case, it is on the basis of both his special historical conditions and his general systematic task that Cassirer understands him better than he understood himself and thus enlarges the scope of his critique of reason to encompass the whole of culture. With respect to Kant’s special historical conditions, the Marburg Neo-Kantian reading of Kant, to which Cassirer subscribes, emphasizes Kant’s intention to serve as “the philosophical systematizer of the Newtonian natural science.”²⁶ Thus when developments in modern physics problematize Newtonian physics, the status of Kant’s system is also thrown into question.

²³ Cassirer, “Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture,” 70.

²⁴ Cassirer, “Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture,” 70.

²⁵ Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 396.

²⁶ Ernst Cassirer, “Einstein’s Theory of Relativity,” in *Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, translated by William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1953), 355.

With respect to Kant's general systematic task, "the purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was not to ground philosophical knowledge once for all [sic] in a fixed dogmatic system of concepts, but to open for it the 'continuous development of a science' in which there can be only relative, not absolute, stopping points."²⁷ Kant's later critical works also demonstrate the "gradual unfolding of the critical-idealistic concept of reality and the critical-idealistic concept of the spirit,"²⁸ as in the *Critique of Judgment* in which Kant treats the objectivity that is correlated to an aesthetic and teleological mode of cognition.

How then does Cassirer get from "reason" to "culture," of which science is but one component? This move is made possible by the realization that the human being is an "animal symbolicum;"²⁹ that, despite philosophy's ancient search for some ultimate material or principle undergirding all phenomena, human cognition ineluctably makes use of "symbols created by the intellect itself."³⁰ This realization does not stem from armchair speculation, but rather takes its cue from the history of science. "Mathematicians and physicists," writes Cassirer, "were first to gain a clear awareness of this symbolic character of their basic implements."³¹ The basic concepts utilized by physics – "such as those of mass and force, the atom or the ether, the magnetic or electrical potential, even concepts, like those of pressure or of temperature"³² – confounds the theory that concepts are simply copies of things given in perception. In truth, these concepts are "theoretical assumptions and constructions, which are intended to transform the merely sensible into something measurable, and thus into an 'object

²⁷ Cassirer, "Einstein's Theory of Relativity," 355.

²⁸ Cassirer, PSF I, 79.

²⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, edited by Birgit Recki (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006), 31.

³⁰ Cassirer, PSF I, 75.

³¹ Cassirer, PSF I, 75.

³² Cassirer, "Einstein's Theory of Relativity," 357.

of physics,' that is, into an object *for* physics."³³ "In this sense," concludes Cassirer, "the reality of the physicist stands over against the reality of immediate perception as something through and through mediated; as a system, not of existing things or properties, but of *abstract intellectual symbols*, which serve to express certain relations of magnitude and measure, certain *functional coördinations* and dependencies of phenomena."³⁴

This notion of function is central to Cassirer's thought as well as the development of the sciences presently being discussed. If the basic concepts of a science do not pick out a substance in the world, what they do is describe functional relationships: "The concept of function constitutes the general schema and model according to which the modern concept of nature has been molded in its progressive historical development."³⁵ This point is well illustrated by theoretical physicist Richard Feynman when he writes of the conservation of energy:

there is a certain quantity, which we call energy, that does not change in the manifold changes which nature undergoes. That is a most abstract idea, because it is a mathematical principle; it says that there is a numerical quantity which does not change when something happens. It is not a description of a mechanism, or anything concrete; it is just a strange fact that we can calculate some number and when we finish watching nature go through her tricks and calculate the number again, it is the same...It is important to realize that in physics today, we have no knowledge of what energy *is*. We do not have a picture that energy comes in little blobs of a definite

³³ Cassirer, "Einstein's Theory of Relativity," 357.

³⁴ Cassirer, "Einstein's Theory of Relativity," 357, italics added.

³⁵ Ernst Cassirer, "Substance and Function," in *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, translated by William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1953), 21.

amount. It is not that way. However, there are formulas for calculating some numerical quantity, and when we add it all together it gives [for instance] ‘28’ – always the same number.³⁶

Or, as Cassirer writes “the epistemological, as well as the physical, value of energetics is not founded on a new pictorial representation to be substituted for the old concepts of ‘matter’ and ‘force’ but on the gaining of *equivalence-numbers*, such as were expressly demanded and discovered by Robert Mayer as the ‘foundation of exact investigation into nature.’”³⁷

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant does not analyze objectivity as such, but rather the form of objectivization correlated to the “basic concepts of science, particularly the concepts and principles of mathematical physics.”³⁸ Thus the furtherance of Kant’s project entails a similar analysis of the other modes of cognition that render different types of objects accessible. These various modes of objectivization are what Cassirer names symbolic forms.

A symbolic form, then, is characterized by serving as a functional series by way of which the world is organized and understood. Let us seek a more concrete understanding of the symbolic forms through a heuristic device that Cassirer often employs to elucidate their functioning: the *Linienzug*, or line segment. Consider a line drawing encountered in the “lived-experience of perception itself as a purely phenomenal givenness.”³⁹ There are instances where Cassirer seems to concede that it is possible to encounter the *Linienzug*, and

³⁶ Richard P. Feynman, *Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics Explained by Its Most Brilliant Teacher* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 69-72.

³⁷ Cassirer, “Einstein’s Theory of Relativity,” 359.

³⁸ Cassirer, PSF I, 79.

³⁹ Ernst Cassirer, “The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy,” in *The Warburg Years (1919-1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, translated and edited by S.G. Lofts and A. Calcagno (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 258.

other phenomena, in “the realm of pure intuition [*Intuition*],”⁴⁰ that is, outside of the realm of meaning. However, in such an experience, “the unlimited wealth of life itself would not be encountered; rather, it is, again, only the narrowness and dullness of sensuous consciousness that surrounds us,”⁴¹ but when we regard the *Linienzug* as a meaningful entity, we are operating under the auspices of one of the symbolic forms.

One of the most obvious ways to regard the *Linienzug* is on a purely formal level. In this case I am attentive to considerations such as the drawing’s overall balance, tonal contrast and dynamism. Considered thusly, “the drawn line suddenly begins, as it were, to animate itself from within as a whole. The spatial formation [*Gebilde*] becomes an aesthetic formation [*Gebilde*].”⁴² In other words, the meaningfulness of my experience is configured by the symbolic form of art.

Under the symbolic form of science, the *Linienzug* “can also offer itself to thought as an example of a coherent purely logical conceptual structure.”⁴³ Whereas the symbolic form of art shows the *Linienzug* as saturated with an expressive value, within the symbolic form of science the *Linienzug* attains the sphere of pure signification [*reine Bedeutung*]. Here a “mere abstract *correlation*”⁴⁴ obtains between the elements of the symbolic relationship. For instance, instead of seeing the *Linienzug* as a pure form suggestive of equilibrium or as a

⁴⁰ Ernst Cassirer, “The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences,” in *The Warburg Years (1919-1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, translated and edited by S.G. Lofts and A. Calcagno (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 100.

⁴¹ Cassirer, “The Concept of the Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences,” 100.

⁴² Cassirer, “The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy,” 258.

⁴³ Cassirer, “The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy,” 259.

⁴⁴ Cassirer, “The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy,” 262.

representation of waves on the ocean, “the mathematical physicist perhaps recognizes in this same curve the law of a certain natural process, such as the law of periodic oscillation.”⁴⁵

Although there is no unmediated access to being, the symbolic forms represent a multiplicity of modes of access to being. “If the object of knowledge can be defined only through the medium of a particular logical and conceptual structure,” writes Cassirer, “we are forced to conclude that a variety of media will correspond to various structures of the object, to various meanings for ‘objective’ relations.”⁴⁶ Thus even within the natural sciences, as a consequence of the variety of conceptual structures utilized, individual sciences have ‘different’ objects: “Each science *has* its object only by the fact that it *selects* it from the uniform mass of the given by certain formal concepts, which are peculiar to it.”⁴⁷ A similar sort of critique is at play in the introduction to Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, albeit with different results.⁴⁸ In the section entitled “The Ontological Priority of the Question of

⁴⁵ Cassirer, “The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy,” 259-260.

⁴⁶ Cassirer, PSF I, 76.

⁴⁷ Cassirer, “Einstein’s Theory of Relativity,” 356.

⁴⁸ In fact, Heidegger may well be implicitly differentiating his project from Cassirer’s in this section, when he writes “Thus, for example, what is philosophically primary is not a theory of concept-formation in historiology, nor the theory of historical knowledge, nor even the theory of history as the object of historiology; what is primary is rather the interpretation of genuinely historical beings with regard to their historicity.” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 10). It is quite possible that he has Cassirer in mind in this passage. His reference to a “theory of concept-formation in historiology” recalls the first chapter of Cassirer’s *Substance and Function*, “On the Theory of the Formation of Concepts,” which traces the treatment of concepts in Aristotle, Berkeley, Mill and with reference to contemporary work on mathematical concepts. What Heidegger calls the “theory of historical knowledge” may be a reference to Cassirer’s momentous four-volume *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*. For more on the relationship of Cassirer and Heidegger, cf. Steve G. Lofts, “Cassirer and Heidegger: The Cultural-Event The *Auseinandersetzung* of Thinking and Being,” in *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer: A Novel Assessment*, edited by J Tyler Friedman and Sebastian Luft (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

Being,”⁴⁹ Heidegger argues that his own project of fundamental ontology is necessitated by the individual sciences’ reliance on regional ontologies (i.e. fundamental concepts that determine the science’s object from “the uniform mass of the given”), which themselves are founded upon naïve concepts of being derived from “pre-scientific experience.”⁵⁰ Thus, Heidegger concludes that “*All ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its innermost intent if it has not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task.*”⁵¹ Whereas Heidegger’s project seeks to ground and reorient the positive sciences on the basis of his investigation into the meaning of being, Cassirer’s project picks up with the sciences already in full bloom.⁵²

The ineluctable mediation of knowledge constitutes an insuperable challenge to philosophy’s traditional search for the unity of being. Each mode of accessibility carves up the world according to its conceptual paradigm, showing different structures of objects. Where once was the promise of the thing in itself, the noumenal substrate of reality, “the unity of being...threatens once more to disintegrate into a mere diversity of existing things.”⁵³ But the critique of culture does not have to discard the postulate of unity *tout court*. Rather, mirroring the shift from a substantial to a functional ontology, philosophy now operates with a “postulate of a purely functional unity,”⁵⁴ which explains why Cassirer does not seek to ground the sciences, but is rather grounded by them.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 8.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 8.

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 10.

⁵² Cf. Cassirer, PSF I, 71, 77 and 81.

⁵³ Cassirer, PSF I, 76.

⁵⁴ Cassirer, PSF I, 77.

2. A Kaleidoscopic View of the Human Being: The Philosophical-Anthropological Approach

In the preface to EM, Cassirer discusses the initial impetus for the book stemming from repeated requests from his English-speaking colleagues to publish a translation of the three volumes of PSF. Cassirer demurred not only on account of the enormity of such an undertaking, but also because he found it “unjustifiable to reproduce the former book in its entirety.”⁵⁵ Noting that he had conceived of his project and written PSF several decades earlier, Cassirer explains that in the intervening years “the author has continued his study on the subject. He has learned many new facts and he has been confronted with new problems. Even the old problems are seen by him from a different angle and appear in a new light.”⁵⁶

In a chapter on “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” which does not correspond to any chapter in the published version EM, Cassirer presents a history of the philosophy of man (i.e. of philosophical anthropology) in terms of “two perilous cliffs between which every philosophy of man has to find its way and to steer its course,”⁵⁷ namely absolutism and relativism (or, dogmatism and skepticism). These two perilous cliffs represent two fundamental orientations of human beings. On the one hand there is the mythical tendency to attribute a supernatural or divine origin to symbolic forms such as language, religion and art. Thus among so-called primitive human beings (or, better, human beings in thrall to the symbolic form of myth), words and images have a power of their own (cf. PSF II and *Language and Myth* for illustrations). Human beings may learn to harness the power of words, images and numbers,

⁵⁵ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 1.

⁵⁶ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 1.

⁵⁷ Ernst Cassirer, “Essay on Man: Part III. Symbol and Truth, Ch. I, ‘Dogmatism and Scepticism,’ draft B, typescript, carbon, corrected (corresponds to no published chapter),” Ernst Cassirer Papers, Box 11, Folder 212, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 4.

but these objects have an independent existence and origin that is not traced back to human beings.

The emergence of the diametric opposite point of view is, according to Cassirer, “one of the hardest tasks and one of the greatest achievements of Greek philosophy.”⁵⁸ Already among the Pre-Socratic philosophers the “anthropomorphic character of the fundamental concepts of man”⁵⁹ began to be recognized as such. Xenophanes, for instance, levels a charge of anthropomorphism at the gods of Homer and Hesiod: “It is man, declares Xenophanes, who has made these gods in the image of himself. If oxen and horses or lions had hands and could paint with their hands and produce works of art – they would act in the same way. But in this case the gods would have no human forms but the shapes of oxen or horses or lions.”⁶⁰ The apotheosis of this skeptical or relativistic view is found in the famous remark by Protagoras that “Man is the measure of all things, of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not.”⁶¹

True to the irenic character of Cassirer’s thought, he believes each of these standpoints to have an essential function. It is not a matter of declaring dogmatism or skepticism to be the “correct” position and it also is not a matter of presenting a disinterested, merely historical account of their role in the history of philosophical anthropology. Rather, by tracing the history of the conflict that Cassirer names the “Dialectic of symbolic consciousness,”⁶² he intends to prepare the ground for “a critical theory of Symbolism.”⁶³ “We are in quest for truth, for an absolute truth,” says Cassirer of philosophy’s enduring task. “But instead of

⁵⁸ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 2.

⁵⁹ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 2.

⁶⁰ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 3.

⁶¹ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 4.

⁶² Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 5.

⁶³ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 8. Cassirer’s underlining.

finding it we find ourselves bound to the endlessly revolving wheel of our own concepts, our images, our symbols, our abstractions.”⁶⁴ While some have sought to skirt the mediation of symbolism, the critical theory of Symbolism that Cassirer proposes would seek “a justification of this inevitable element: a vindication of the rights of symbolic thought and symbolic expression.”⁶⁵

In the course of presenting the history of the dialectic of symbolic consciousness, Cassirer spends nearly fifteen pages discussing the transitional position of Montaigne.⁶⁶ According to Cassirer, Montaigne “offers a new anthropology, a new picture of man and of his relation to the universe,”⁶⁷ which derives in turn from the new picture of the universe put forth by Copernicus. Whereas Montaigne’s Stoic and Christian predecessors saw the universe as governed by a divine power and teleologically ordered with human beings at the center, Montaigne’s thought has been marked by the dislocations of Copernican cosmology; namely, human beings are no longer the center of the universe, but instead find themselves in the midst of a vast, infinite space, the silence of which terrified Pascal. Montaigne, on the other hand, was not terrified and instead recognized that “[t]eleology is anthropomorphism; and anthropomorphism is nothing but a continual self-deception.”⁶⁸

The implications of this new cosmological position were far reaching. For one, Montaigne was “the first admirer and defender of the ‘primitive’ mind and of primitive culture.”⁶⁹ The inferiority of primitive culture had been argued on the basis of a teleological

⁶⁴ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 7-8.

⁶⁵ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 8. Cassirer’s underlining.

⁶⁶ By comparison, Cassirer allots Montaigne approximately one page in the published version of *Essay on Man*.

⁶⁷ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 30.

⁶⁸ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 31.

⁶⁹ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 33.

position according to which European culture represented a more advanced stage of development. “To seek after a universal moral law and after a universal truth means to pursue a fantastic and illusory end,” Cassirer writes of the consequences of Montaigne’s position. “Every age, every nation, every country has a truth and a morality of its own. We may compare these different perspectives of humanity, but we cannot judge them. The law of relativity that we have discovered in the physical universe holds just as much in our logical and moral universe.”⁷⁰

Montaigne’s *Essays* also inaugurates a new procedure in philosophical anthropology: “All the former writers – philosophers, theologians, moralists, pedagogues – were concerned with some general aspects of human life...Montaigne is the first author who dares to abandon this procedure. He detects a new problem: the problem of individual life.”⁷¹ Whereas philosophers up to Montaigne’s time searched for “the ‘idea’ of man,” an idea that has “permanent being and an eternal truth,”⁷² by probing in painstaking detail the aspects of his individual life, Montaigne finds no unchanging essence, no being but rather a perpetual becoming. As a consequence of Montaigne’s fascination with the ever-changing and oft-overlooked aspects of human existence, Cassirer claims that Montaigne “has not a theoretical but a kaleidoscopic view of man.”⁷³

Cassirer inherits these two features of philosophical anthropology – a pluralist orientation and a kaleidoscopic view of man – that are first found in Montaigne’s *Essays*. Cassirer’s pluralist orientation finds expression in his defense of the independence and irreducibility of the different symbolic forms. “Each function [i.e. symbolic form] makes use of different

⁷⁰ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 34-35.

⁷¹ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 35-36.

⁷² Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 37.

⁷³ Cassirer, “Dogmatism and Scepticism,” 38.

instruments, each one presupposes and applies entirely different standards and criteria; and the result is different also,” writes Cassirer. “...The achievement of each one must be measured by itself, and not by the standards and aims of any other...”⁷⁴ Such a position leads Cassirer to regard with respect, as did Montaigne, the so-called primitive mind, or in Cassirer’s parlance, the worldview correlated to the symbolic form of myth.

Whereas Montaigne’s skepticism prevents him from dismissing outright primitive culture in favor of ‘more civilized’ cultures and his kaleidoscopic view of man welcomes what is odd and putatively trivial into the philosophical fold, Cassirer sees mythical consciousness as not merely interesting to but *essential for* philosophical anthropology.⁷⁵ In the Preface to PSF II, he offers an argument for the indispensable role of myth in the philosophy of man, which we will now briefly recapitulate.

Speaking in Hegelian terms, Cassirer claims that the lowest rung of the ladder leading consciousness to itself is not, as Hegel had it, sensory consciousness. He dismisses this claim by pointing to the phenomenological insight that the consciousness of abstract perceptual phenomena such as pure color and tone is “itself a product of abstraction, a theoretical elaboration of the ‘given.’”⁷⁶ As such, this realm of experience is in fact more sophisticated than its rudimentary elements would suggest.

⁷⁴ Cassirer, PSF I, 91.

⁷⁵ Cassirer also undercuts the hierarchical perspective of the relationship between “primitive” and more advanced cultures by identifying so-called primitive elements in more advanced cultural phenomena. For instance, in his discussion of space and spatial relations in language, Cassirer points out that more advanced languages, like their primitive counterparts, similarly express spatial relations with terms that are ultimately oriented by reference to the human body. Cf. Cassirer, PSF I, 207.

⁷⁶ Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 2: Mythical Thought*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), xvi.

The lowest rung of the ladder, the most basic type of distinctly human consciousness, in Cassirer's view, is mythical consciousness. As the lowest rung, myth stands in a "genetic relationship" as the "primal source"⁷⁷ of higher cultural forms. In fact, so close are myth and religion that in "the development of human culture we cannot fix a point where myth ends or religion begins. In the whole course of its history religion remains indissolubly connected and penetrated with mythical elements...Myth is from its very beginning potential religion."⁷⁸ Religion is animated by the same energy that underlies the mythical worldview, which Cassirer describes with the Stoic's concept of the "sympathy of the Whole."⁷⁹ Both myth and religion give form to the instinct of mankind that "nature [is] one great society, the society of life,"⁸⁰ in which human beings exist on the same level as flora and fauna. Religion, however, introduces individuality into the universality of feeling characteristic of myth.⁸¹

Cassirer also adopts the kaleidoscopic view of human beings that he attributes to Montaigne. As opposed to the theoretical view, which attempts to fix the essence of human beings at the outset of its investigations, Cassirer follows his own decree that

All the so-called definitions of man are nothing but airy speculation so long as they are not based upon and confirmed by our experience of man. There is no other way to know man than to understand his life and conduct. But what we find here defies every attempt at inclusion within a single and simple formula.⁸²

⁷⁷ Cassirer, *PSF II*, xv. On this point also cf. Cassirer, "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture," 86f.

⁷⁸ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 96. Below we shall also consider the close relationship between myth and art.

⁷⁹ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 103.

⁸⁰ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 91-92.

⁸¹ Cf. Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 105.

⁸² Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 16.

Whereas Montaigne takes himself as his test subject, enumerating the quirks of his body and mind, Cassirer casts a wider net, claiming that the only way to study human beings in all their kaleidoscopic richness, the only way to understand their life and conduct is by studying their varied works: “‘being’ can be apprehended only in ‘action.’”⁸³

3. Art as a Symbolic Form

Although art is mentioned whenever Cassirer lists the symbolic forms and although it receives relatively extended treatments in essays and monographs, Cassirer’s presentation of art is much less developed than his accounts of language, myth and science.⁸⁴ There is evidence that Cassirer planned to write a volume of PSF devoted to art but set the project aside on account of Hitler’s rise to power and the existential tumult that ensued.⁸⁵

The aim of this section is to present Cassirer’s theory of art as it can be reconstructed from his writings on the subject. Despite being one of the ‘main’ symbolic forms, we shall see that many questions remain that are necessary in order to fill in the lacunae of Cassirer’s theory. Thus presenting the theory is preparatory to discussing the work that remains to be done in understanding art as a symbolic form.

As it appears in his scattered writings on the subject, the symbolic form of art never receives the systematic treatment that language, myth and the theoretical world-view receive

⁸³ Cassirer, PSF I, 80.

⁸⁴ Cassirer’s discussions of art can be found in a chapter on the subject in *Essay on Man* as well as the essays “*Eidos and Eidolon: The Problem of Beauty and Art in the Dialogues of Plato*,” “*Mythic, Aesthetic, and Theoretical Space*,” “*Language and Art I*,” “*Language and Art II*” and “*The Educational Value of Art*.”

⁸⁵ In a 1942 letter to Paul Arthur Schilpp, Cassirer cites “*die Ungunst der Zeiten*” (the disfavor of the times) as the reason he was unable to write a projected volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* devoted to art. Cf. Fabien Capeilleres, “‘K’ for ‘Kunst’: Cassirer’s Pages on Art for PDSF IV. With a note on Francis Bacon,” *Cassirer Studies* 2 (2009): 14fn2.

in their respective volumes of PSF. Consequently, we face a challenge in the elucidation of art as a symbolic form; namely, what would a systematic presentation require?

A recently discovered, newly published document dating from 1917, entitled “‘Philosophie des Symbolischen’ (allg[emeine] Disposition)” is the earliest known sketch of the project that Cassirer would undertake during the 1920s. The document is comprised of six sections: I) Die Psychologie des Symbolischen, II) Die Logik des Symbolischen, III) Die Zahlfunktion, IV) Allgemeine Erkenntnislehre, V) Die Grundprobleme der Aesthetik, VI) Die Metaphysik des Symbolischen. Given the panoptic character of the document, as well as its explicit consideration of the basic problems relating to aesthetics, we might find some sort of orientation here.

Unfortunately the section on “Die Grundprobleme der Aesthetik” is not as developed as one would hope; in fact there is only a single subsection, a single *Grundproblem* addressed, namely, the primordial function of the aesthetic [*Die aesthetische Urfunktion*].⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Cassirer makes some interesting remarks that are worthy of consideration. In the document, Cassirer favors a negative approach to the theme of aesthetics; that is, he spends more time addressing mistaken aesthetic theories than he does offering a positive determination of the aesthetic standpoint. For instance, when characterized in opposition to “the world of empirical reality, as against the logical-scientific world [the world of ‘causality’],”⁸⁷ the aesthetic realm becomes viewed as “the world of play, of appearance, of

⁸⁶ Arno Schubbach, *Die Genese des Symbolischen: Zu den Anfängen von Ernst Cassirers Kulturphilosophie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2016), 411.

⁸⁷ “die Welt der empirischen Wirklichkeit, wie gegen die logisch-wissenschaftliche Welt [die Welt der >Kausalität<].” Schubbach, *Die Genese des Symbolischen*, 411.

illusion.”⁸⁸ According to Cassirer, however, such a characterization is misleading since it fails to recognize the relativity of this illusion: “Conscious self-deception – but one can only speak of deception when another criterion of absolute reality has already been presupposed!”⁸⁹ Cassirer claims that his interest is not in setting up one tier as reality *par excellence*, “rather we ask: which positive, qualitatively determined form of configuration corresponds to the aesthetic outlook.”⁹⁰ As we shall presently establish, answering this question entails a consideration of the unique form that space, time and other such foundational aspects of experience take in the domain of the aesthetic.

In different terms, Cassirer is asking about the constitution of a “unity of consciousness,”⁹¹ a Kantian notion that Cassirer, in keeping with his project’s relationship to Kant, both adopts and expands. Kant claims “that we recognize [an] object when we have effected synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition.”⁹² Cassirer is interested in the different ways that we can recognize an object, the different unities that the manifold of intuition can result in. Harkening back to his example of the *Linienzug*, it is possible to recognize this object as an artistic ornament, the graphic representation of a sine curve, as an attempt to obscure the writing it is superimposed over, etc. What determines the particular meaning context of an object is the particular type of synthesis that consciousness performs. “The synthesis by which the consciousness combines a series of tones into the unity of a melody,

⁸⁸ “die Welt des Spiels, des Scheins, der – Illusion.” Schubach, *Die Genese des Symbolischen*, 411.

⁸⁹ “Bewusste Selbsttäuschung – aber von Täuschung kann eben nur die Rede sein, wenn schon ein anderer Maßstab der absoluten Realität vorausgesetzt wird!” Schubach, *Die Genese des Symbolischen*, 411.

⁹⁰ “sondern wir fragen: welche positive, qualitative bestimmte Gestaltungsform entspricht der ästhetischen >Auffassung<.” Schubach, *Die Genese des Symbolischen*, 413.

⁹¹ Cassirer, PSF I, 94.

⁹² Ernst Cassirer, *Kant’s Life and Thought*, translated by James Haden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 172.

would seem to be totally different from the synthesis by which a number of syllables is articulated into the unity of a ‘sentence,’” writes Cassirer, “But they have one thing in common, that in both cases the sensory particulars do not stand by themselves; they are articulated into a conscious *whole*, from which they take their qualitative meaning.”⁹³

The syntheses yielding a unity of consciousness are affected through various types of relation. Cassirer offers three examples. “The factor of ‘juxtaposition’ as it appears in the form of *space*,”⁹⁴ is one such example. Another original type of relation is “the factor of succession as in the form of *time*.”⁹⁵ Finally there is “the combination of material properties in such a way that one is apprehended as a ‘*thing*,’ the other as an ‘attribute,’ or of successive events in such a way that the one appears as a *cause* of the other.” Cassirer here shows his Kantian influence very clearly: space, time and categories such as causality are the mechanisms by which consciousness elaborates raw sense data into a meaningful unity. True to this systematic statement, Cassirer organizes the volumes of PSF along these lines. The first volume, for instance, contains chapters dedicated to “The Expression of Space and Spatial Relations,” “The Representation of Time” and “Language and the Expression of the Forms of Pure Relation. The Sphere of Judgment and the Concepts of Relation.” On the basis of further commonalities in the volumes of PSF we are compelled to add number and subjectivity to the body of fundamental relations contributing to the constitution of the unity of consciousness.⁹⁶

⁹³ Cassirer, PSF I, 94.

⁹⁴ Cassirer, PSF I, 94.

⁹⁵ Cassirer, PSF I, 94.

⁹⁶ PSF II has the most lucid organization of the elements of a symbolic form. The first part concerns “Myth as a Form of Thought,” i.e. mythical consciousness’ determination of an object and the particular categories that are in effect. Part two treats “Myth as a Form of Intuition,” involving its characteristic experience of space, time and number.

We learn from the introduction to PSF I that the unity of consciousness, or the form of configuration belonging to symbolic forms as such, is the function of two characteristics, quality and its modality. “By the ‘quality’ of a given relation,” explains Cassirer, “we here understand the particular type of combination by means of which it creates series within the whole of consciousness, the arrangement of whose members is subject to a special law.”⁹⁷ With respect to time as a basic type of relation, for instance, “simultaneity” and “succession” would constitute different qualities. As a basic type of relation, time will be a unifying factor in the different symbolic forms. Time in science compared with time in art, however, are quite different. In the world of science, for instance, time is “the stable basis of all motion and the uniform measure of all change,”⁹⁸ as Newton explains at the beginning of his *Mechanics*. Time as it pertains to music, on the other hand, in Cassirer’s view is that which “governs a work of music and its rhythmic measures.”⁹⁹ To render the dissimilarity even clearer, consider that time in science, as suggested by Newton’s definition, is an objective measure. Time in music, however, is thoroughly subjective. In his *Making Music Together* (MMT), Alfred Schütz emphasizes a phenomenological conception of music that defines the phenomenon as “meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time.”¹⁰⁰ Schütz argues that music belongs to inner time (which we might call “subjective time”) with a simple thought experiment. “[L]et us imagine that the slow and the fast movement of a symphony each fill a twelve-inch record,” Schütz proposes, “Our watches show that the playing of either record

Part three is on “Myth as a Life Form,” in which subjectivity is discussed. Cf. Cassirer, PSF II, v.

⁹⁷ Cassirer, PSF I, 95.

⁹⁸ Cassirer, PSF I, 96.

⁹⁹ Cassirer, PSF I, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Schütz, “Making Music Together,” in *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, edited by Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 170.

takes about three and a half minutes.”¹⁰¹ However, the time shown by the listener’s watch is not the time of the listener’s experience: “It may come as a complete surprise to him that the main theme of the second movement of Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonata in d-minor, Op. 31, No. 2, takes as much time in the mere clock sense – namely, one minute – as the last movement of the same sonata up to the end of the exposition.”¹⁰² Exciting music feels shorter than slow music. Music without a consistent, discernible pulse is experienced as longer than music with a clearly delineated rhythmic structure. Music associated with a traumatic experience will feel longer than music towards which a listener is indifferent. Despite the differences of time as it pertains to science and art, “this unity of nomenclature involves a unity of meaning at least in so far as both posit that universal and abstract quality which we term ‘succession.’”¹⁰³

While the different symbolic forms partake of the same basic forms of relation, each does so in a singular manner. Furthermore, abstracted from a symbolic context, the basic forms of relation would have no “concrete application and concrete meaning”.¹⁰⁴ Thus an analysis of a symbolic form cannot merely enumerate the forms of relation, but must discuss the particular *mode* that relations take in this context. The unique form that the manners of relation take within the holistic context of a symbolic form is its modality: “If we designate the various kinds of relation – such as relation of space, time, causality, etc. – as R1, R2, R3, we must assign to each one a special ‘index of modality,’ m1, m2, m3, denoting the context of function and meaning in which it is to be taken.”¹⁰⁵ Space, for instance, is a basic form of

¹⁰¹ Schütz, MMT, 171.

¹⁰² Schütz, MMT, 171.

¹⁰³ Cassirer, PSF I, 96.

¹⁰⁴ Cassirer, PSF I, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Cassirer, PSF I, 97.

relation that plays an indispensable role in constituting a unity out of a sensory manifold.

However, space functions differently for scientists and artists:

In the one case [i.e. of science] we have the modality of the logical-geometric concept, in the other the modality of artistic imagination – in the one, space is conceived as an aggregate of mutually independent relations, as a system of ‘causes’ and ‘consequences’; in the other, it is conceived as a whole whose particular factors are dynamically interlocked, a perceptual, emotional unity.¹⁰⁶

The relation between quality and modality can also be understood in the vocabulary of symbolism. The qualities affecting a unity of consciousness constitute a “‘natural’ symbolism” that are, due to the ineluctably mediated nature of consciousness, “contained or at least projected in every single moment and fragment of consciousness.”¹⁰⁷ The modality of these qualities, the unique form that they take in a given symbolic form, yield “the artificial symbols, the ‘arbitrary’ signs which consciousness creates in language, art, and myth.”¹⁰⁸ In the 1931 essay “Mythic, Aesthetic and Theoretical Space,” Cassirer presents this concept of modality with great clarity and is therefore worth quoting at length:

[T]here does not exist a general, universal, essentially fixed intuition of space; rather, space receives its determined content and its particular coincidence by means of the *order of meaning* with which it configures itself in each case. Depending on whether it is thought of as mythic, aesthetic, or theoretical order, the ‘form’ of space changes, and this transformation not only concerns individual and subordinate features but also relates to space as a whole, to its principal structure... That which links all these

¹⁰⁶ Cassirer, PSF I, 96.

¹⁰⁷ Cassirer, PSF I, 105.

¹⁰⁸ Cassirer, PSF I, 105.

spaces of different characters and provenances of meaning (that which links the mythically, aesthetically, and theoretically united spaces with one another) is simply a pure formal determination that is expressed most clearly and concisely in Leibniz's definition of space as the 'possibility of coexistence' and as the order of possible coexistences (*l'ordre des coexistences possibles*). However, this purely formal possibility experiences very different kinds of realization, actualization, and concretization.¹⁰⁹

An analysis of art oriented by the theoretical underpinnings of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms will thus have the following elements: an enumeration of the basic forms of relation at play in art and a presentation of their respective modalities. Immediately a question presents itself – are we at liberty to speak of 'the arts as such' or will the different art forms require individual accounts? Fortunately, in an unpublished draft of EM, Cassirer weighs in on this question in the course of discussing the orientation of the philosophy of symbolic forms from the wealth of empirical materials available:

...what an overwhelming mass of facts and what an amazing list of the most difficult and heterogeneous problems we meet here! To begin with the linguistic facts, it becomes imperative to study, to order and to classify the languages of the world; to answer the question of their mutual relation, to follow up their historical development. Moreover, we have to make a comparative study of Myth and Religion which, on the one hand, must take into consideration all the facts of primitive thought with which we have become acquainted by modern Anthropology and Ethnology –

¹⁰⁹ Ernst Cassirer, "Mythic, Aesthetic, and Theoretical Space," in *The Warburg Years (1919-1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, translated and edited by S.G. Lofts and A. Calcagno (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 325-326.

and which, on the other hand, must be extended to the highest conceptions of religious thought. We have to inquire into the origin and growth of our moral ideas, *to study art in all its forms and in all its periods*, to investigate the development of our social institutions and our political constitutions.¹¹⁰

3a. Space in (Visual) Art

In order to hew as closely to Cassirer's thought as possible, our analysis of art as a symbolic form will be oriented by Cassirer's texts where possible. For instance, in discussing the modality of space in art, we shall take Cassirer's essay on "Mythic, Aesthetic and Theoretical Space" (MATS) as our point of departure.

After beginning with an account of how the history of philosophical thinking ultimately leads from substantial theories of time and space to the recognition of their functional nature, Cassirer offers a comparative account of space as it occurs within "the *order of meaning*"¹¹¹ that is configured in myth, art and theoretical cognition. Helpful and important though the essay is, Cassirer's account of mythical, aesthetic and theoretical space is disappointingly brief and all but devoid of clarifying examples. Consequently, interpretive work is required.

Compared with theoretical space, exemplified by "the abstract schema of geometry"¹¹² and "the pure *measured space* of mathematics and mathematical physics,"¹¹³ aesthetic space

¹¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, "Essay on Man: Part I. What is Man?, Ch. I. 'The Problem and the Method of a 'Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,'" draft B, typescript, carbon corrected (corresponds to no published chapter)," Ernst Cassirer Papers, Box 10, Folder 186, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 7. Emphasis added.

¹¹¹ Cassirer, MATS, 325.

¹¹² Cassirer, MATS, 328.

¹¹³ Cassirer, MATS, 332.

and mythical space are “thoroughly *concrete* modes of spatiality.”¹¹⁴ The most fundamental concrete mode of spatiality is the everyday space of mere activity. Phenomenology teaches that everyday spatiality is constructed around “a kernel of optimal accessibility,”¹¹⁵ which is “the sphere of nearness with my own body in the center, constituted as the origin of the whole coordinate system which I apply to the spatial field.”¹¹⁶ Thus, closeness concerns that which lies within my grasp, while remoteness denotes that sphere requiring the performance of “kinaesthesias,”¹¹⁷ i.e. motor mechanisms such as walking, in order to be transformed into closeness. As a “‘physiological’ space,”¹¹⁸ i.e. a spatiality constituted from the sense of vision and touch, everyday spatiality gains its concreteness. This concreteness of everyday spatiality can be contrasted with the abstraction of theoretical space.¹¹⁹ “Euclidean space,” explains Cassirer, “is characterized by the three basic attributes of continuity, infinity, and uniformity.”¹²⁰ These three basic attributes are foreign to concrete everyday spatiality. Perception is not infinite; it is bounded by sight lines and the extent of one’s reach. The uniformity of theoretical space is granted by its purely formal nature. Theoretical space has

¹¹⁴ Cassirer, MATS, 328.

¹¹⁵ Alfred Schütz, “Fragments Toward a Phenomenology of Music,” in *Collected Papers IV*. Edited by Helmut Wagner and George Psathas (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 251.

¹¹⁶ Schütz, FPM, 251.

¹¹⁷ Schütz, FPM, 251.

¹¹⁸ Cassirer, PSF II, 83.

¹¹⁹ According to Cassirer, Heidegger’s analysis of space in *Being and Time* concerns this primary experience of pragmatic space. Cassirer does not take issue with Heidegger’s “sharp analysis,” but claims that his own account of space is distinguished from Heidegger’s insofar as “it does not stop at this stage of the at-hand and its mode of spatiality, but without challenging Heidegger’s position goes beyond it; for we wish to follow the road leading from spatiality as a factor in the at-hand to space as the form of existence, and furthermore to show how this road leads right through the domain of symbolic formation – in the twofold sense of ‘representation’ and of ‘signification.’” (Cassirer, PSF III, 149fn.4)

¹²⁰ Cassirer, PSF II, 83.

no content; position in theoretical space is determined with reference to other positions and vice versa. Everyday space, on the other hand, is suffused by things with which we are concerned and which orient our activity. Position in everyday space is a function of our projects and the nearness or farness of the things that are implicated in those projects. Thus, my position in everyday space is not abstractly determined in terms of a Cartesian grid or the longitude and latitude that I inhabit, but rather by considerations such as whether I am close enough to catch the bus that will get me to work on time.

The concreteness of mythical space is a function not of the correlation between direction and physiological orientation¹²¹, but rather a correlation between direction and “specific mythical feeling values.”¹²² Although these feeling values take different shapes in different cultures, Cassirer identifies underlying commonalities:

Holiness [*Heiligkeit*] or profanity [*Unheiligkeit*], accessibility or inaccessibility, blessing or curse, familiarity or strangeness, promise of happiness or threat of danger, these are the characteristic features according to which myth separates localities in space from each other and on the basis of which it distinguishes directions within space.¹²³

Ultimately, mythical feeling can be traced back to the fundamental opposition of “*day* and *night*, *light* and *darkness*;¹²⁴ and Cassirer defends this contention with reference to a wide variety of anthropological literature, for instance, on the religion of the Iranians and the Cora

¹²¹ At least not directly. Cassirer does identify a similarity between language and myth in that both forms originally understand spatial orientation (e.g. “behind,” “above” and “below”) in terms of human beings’ intuition of their own bodies. Cf. Cassirer, PSF I, 206 and PSF II, 90.

¹²² Cassirer, PSF II, 85.

¹²³ Cassirer, MATS, 326.

¹²⁴ Cassirer, PSF II, 96.

Indians, the creation stories of the Babylonians and the Egyptians and Herder's interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis.¹²⁵

It is systematically appropriate to ground an elaboration of the concept of aesthetic space in comparison with mythical space, since, according to Cassirer, art – indeed, all the symbolic forms – arise out of myth. “None of these forms started out with an independent existence and clearly defined outlines of its own,” asserts Cassirer, “in its beginnings, rather, every one of them was shrouded and disguised in some form of myth.” Thus we would do well to approach aesthetic space in terms of its difference from mythical space.

Aesthetic space is characterized by a new relationship between human beings and the world. Whereas mythical space is shot through with feeling values, the contemplative attitude of aesthetic experience frees human beings from the violent interplay of forces that characterize mythical space: “the object [*Objekt*] shifts to a new distance, to remoteness from the I; only in this does it gain its own independent being and create a new form of ‘objectivity.’ It is this new objectivity that distinguishes aesthetic space.”¹²⁶ Despite its independence, the aesthetic object nevertheless “originates from the I and develops from the formative forces of the I.”¹²⁷ This is an essential point that recurs throughout Cassirer's writing on art, which entails a rejection of the copy theory of art that Plato so influentially put forth.¹²⁸ The “general function” of aesthetic space, in Cassirer's most direct definition, “is a

¹²⁵ Cf. Cassirer, PSF II, 96ff.

¹²⁶ Cassirer, MATS, 328.

¹²⁷ Cassirer, MATS, 329.

¹²⁸ For instance cf. Ernst Cassirer, “Language and Art I,” in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture*, edited by Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 154: “What is common to language and art is the fact that neither of them can be considered as a mere reproduction or imitation of a ready-made, given, outward reality.” In the preface to PSF II, Cassirer identifies this impulse as a stumbling block for both myth and art: “And yet in this ‘illusionism’ [i.e. the tendency of psychology and psychologism to regard myth and

quintessence of possible ways of configuration, and within each, a new horizon of the world of objects opens up.”¹²⁹

Since art arises out of myth and because the new form of objectivity characterizing aesthetic consciousness distinguishes its peculiar spatiality, let us approach a more detailed understanding of aesthetic space by first considering the breach between the mythical and aesthetic object. Prehistoric cave art is a fitting phenomenon to orient the discussion and a consideration of several contemporary interpretations of cave art may serve to illustrate an understanding of cave art both as a specifically mythical phenomenon and as a specifically aesthetic phenomenon.

One of the earliest and most influential interpretations of the meaning of cave art was put forth by French priest and archaeologist Abbé Henri Breuil. In his 1952 monograph *400 Centuries of Cave Art*, Breuil defends understanding the creation of cave art in terms of so-called hunting magic. The efficacy of hunting magic derives from a particular feature of mythical consciousness, namely, in Cassirer’s terms, an “indifference of mythical thinking towards distinctions in the ‘stage of objectivization.’”¹³⁰ In other words, the name of a thing or an image of the thing are aspects of that thing’s reality. “A man’s image like his name is

art as a subjective illusion] that keeps cropping up – both in the theory of mythical representations and in attempts to establish a theory of aesthetics and art – there lurks a grave problem and a grave danger...For if these forms as a whole really do constitute a systematic unity, the fate of any one of them is closely bound up with that of all the others.” (Cassirer, PSF II, xiv). An especially lucid presentation of this issue comes at the beginning of Cassirer’s 1932 essay “Language and the Construction of the World of Objects.” Cf. Ernst Cassirer, “Language and the Construction of the World of Objects,” in *The Warburg Years (1919-1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, translated and edited by S.G. Lofts and A. Calcagno (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 334-336.

¹²⁹ Cassirer, MATS, 329.

¹³⁰ Cassirer, PSF II, 42.

an alter ego,” writes Cassirer, “what happens to the image happens to the man himself.”¹³¹ Breuil’s thesis is that prehistoric cave art is a response to the precarious nature of hunter-gatherer societies during the Ice Age. Through the manipulation of images, prehistoric humans were trying to multiply and control the animals on which their lives depended: “The daily pursuit of game and its multiplication by Nature, or the success of hunting expeditions were the principal anxieties.”¹³² Breuil’s interpretation of cave art thus understands the phenomenon as a product of mythical consciousness. And the nature of the mythical object has implications for thinking about the spatiality of cave art. Although hunting magic has been rejected as a global explanation for prehistoric cave art, the basic supposition that this symbolic behavior had a supernatural function is still in vogue. The shamanistic interpretation of cave paintings put forth by David Lewis-Williams and Jean Clottes¹³³ is largely driven by the location of the work: “To venture underground was akin to moving between worlds...In this way, the shamans would encounter the spirits that lived inside the rocks and inhabited those mysterious, frightening places, contacting the gods through painting and engraving and gaining their goodwill or some of their power.”¹³⁴

Magical interpretations of cave paintings are consistent with Cassirer’s understanding of the development of art: “The beginnings of creative art seem rather to partake of a sphere in which creative activity is still embedded in magical representations and directed toward specific magical *aims*, in which consequently the image itself still has no independent, purely

¹³¹ Cassirer, PSF II, 42.

¹³² Abbé H Breuil, *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art*, translated by Mary E. Boyle (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1979), 23.

¹³³ For instance, cf. Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *The Shamans of Prehistory. Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1998).

¹³⁴ Jean Clottes, *Cave Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008), 25.

aesthetic significance.”¹³⁵ What would it mean to interpret cave paintings as possessing their own “purely *immanent* validity,”¹³⁶ as becoming “a self-contained cosmos with its own center of gravity”¹³⁷? At the risk of begging the question, this would mean to interpret the paintings as art. But how does Cassirer understand art?

Art “is not an imitation but a discovery of reality,”¹³⁸ claims Cassirer. To this extent the artist resembles the scientist; through processes of simplification, condensation and concentration, both individuals give objective meaning to nature. For instance, the scientist deduces general rules governing material nature by abstracting from individual instances. Scientists discover reality through a process of “abstraction.”¹³⁹ Science pursues laws and theorems that can encompass the greatest number of phenomena. Thus with a tool such as the Pythagorean Theorem, mathematicians are able to determine the length of the sides of any triangle. This process of abstraction has proved enormously productive and the determination of causes and effects has allowed human beings to cure disease and conquer distance. The value of science is not in question for Cassirer. However useful generality may be, this does not change the fact that, according to Cassirer, “abstraction is always an impoverishment of reality.”¹⁴⁰

Where science generalizes, art intensifies; where science abstracts, art becomes ever more specific. “If we say of two artists that they paint ‘the same’ landscape,” writes Cassirer, “we describe our aesthetic experience very inadequately.”¹⁴¹ Two artists approaching ‘the

¹³⁵ Cassirer, PSF II, 25.

¹³⁶ Cassirer, PSF II, 25.

¹³⁷ Cassirer, PSF II, 26.

¹³⁸ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 183.

¹³⁹ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 184.

¹⁴⁰ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 185.

¹⁴¹ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 185.

same' landscape from different orientations or at a different time of day or a different season do not have the same landscape as their subject matter. What the painter paints is "the individual and momentary physiognomy of the landscape."¹⁴² Claude Monet's 1890-1891 series of haystack paintings are an apt illustration. From summer's end of 1890 through the spring of 1891, Monet painted twenty-five canvasses of haystacks viewed from different perspectives, in different light and under different climatic conditions.¹⁴³ From a rigorously scientific (if somewhat caricatured) point of view, painting the same landscape twenty-five times is an incomprehensible redundancy. The scientific treatment of landscapes would seek to abstract from Monet's particular landscape in order to understand something about wheat fields as such, which would prove useful to farmers. Art, on the other hand, pursues the "intensification and illumination"¹⁴⁴ of reality, which tends in the opposite direction of science and language. "In art we do not conceptualize the world," writes Cassirer, contrasting art and science, "we perceptualize it."¹⁴⁵ That is to say, art does not attempt to put things in boxes, so to speak, but celebrates their unruly multiplicity. "What would we know of the innumerable nuances in the aspect of things [for instance, of haystacks]," writes Cassirer of

¹⁴² Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 185.

¹⁴³ Wassily Kandinsky – who we shall soon discuss in the context of Cassirer's theory of art – regarded his exposure to one of Monet's haystack paintings as one of the "two events that stamped [his] whole life and shook [him] to the depths of [his] being." Interestingly, and somewhat contrary to the claim that the import of the haystack paintings is to show the nuance of things, Kandinsky credits this experience with instilling in him the conviction that objects are not an essential element of a painting. Cf. Wassily Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," in *Complete Writings On Art*, edited by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994), 363.

¹⁴⁴ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 189.

¹⁴⁵ Ernst Cassirer, "Language and Art II," in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture*, edited by Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 186.

the true meaning and function of art, “were it not for the works of the great painters and sculptors?”¹⁴⁶

Thus art ends in knowledge; not theoretical knowledge but sensuous knowledge – this is how such a thing looks, this is the affective character of a particular color. “Even art may be described as knowledge,” Cassirer affirms, “but art is knowledge of a peculiar and specific kind.”¹⁴⁷ Certain contemporary studies of prehistoric cave paintings emphasize precisely this aspect of the phenomenon. Methodologically, these studies have favored scrutiny over speculation. For instance, close descriptive study of the works has yielded insights that call for a reevaluation of the painting’s putatively ‘primitive’ character. Although prehistoric artists did not paint with the linear perspective that was discovered during the Renaissance, prehistoric art frequently evidences other forms of accuracy. Prehistoric artists were able to suggest three-dimensionality by exploiting the topographical features of the cave, thereby heightening the verisimilitude of the image – the bulging of a rhinoceros’ powerful shoulder or a lioness rubbing her flank against her male. By certain criteria, prehistoric artists were even more accurate than later artists; for instance, recent studies have shown that prehistoric depictions of walking quadrupeds are statistically more accurate than modern counterparts.¹⁴⁸ These canny prehistoric painters saw the “pure forms” of these animals clearly enough to reproduce accurate, if not necessarily ‘realistic,’ images in dark caves without the benefit of photographs or other models. While we moderns whose relationship with animals is distant and mediated may merely see ‘animals’ in prehistoric paintings, these nuanced images

¹⁴⁶ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 215.

¹⁴⁷ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 216.

¹⁴⁸ Gabor Horvath, Etelka Farkas, Ildiko Boncz, Miklos Blaho, Gyorgy Kriska, “Cavemen Were Better at Depicting Quadruped Walking than Modern Artists: Erroneous Walking Illustrations in the Fine Arts from Prehistory to Today,” *PLoS ONE* 7.12 (2012): e49786. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0049786.

contain unexpected detail.¹⁴⁹ Subtle variations in animal posture that would go unnoticed by modern viewers would be seen by the prehistoric individual as a male/female urination posture, a threat vocalization posture or a raised-tail threat position.¹⁵⁰ Paleolithic artists also depicted animals with telltale signs of different seasonal appearances.¹⁵¹ In short, cave art shows us “the innumerable nuances in the aspect of things”¹⁵² that we moderns have lost sight of.

In his discussions of art, and especially of aesthetic spatiality, Cassirer frequently references Adolf Hildebrand’s *Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst*.¹⁵³ In MATS, Cassirer approvingly cites Hildebrand’s methodological claim that “the question of the nature [*Wesen*] of form can only be formulated and clarified once the prior questions of the nature [*Wesen*] of space and spatial presentation have been formulated and clarified.”¹⁵⁴ Thus it is worthwhile to consider Hildebrand’s theory. Let us also take Hildebrand’s theory as an opportunity to consider the aesthetic object once it has been, so to speak, de-mythologized.

The de-mythologizing of the aesthetic object leaves us with a purely perceptual object. This object is not experienced in terms of the affective values that characterized the mythological worldview, nor is this object regarded as a pragmatic object. This is precisely the sort of object that Hildebrand describes. Hildebrand begins with a comparison of the artistic versus the everyday understanding of space, thereby implicitly distinguishing

¹⁴⁹ R. Dale Guthrie speculates that prehistoric artists preferred side views of animals because “side views show a hunter’s ideal target, and such views contain a wealth of artistically diagnostic information.” R. Dale Guthrie, *The Nature of Paleolithic Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 93.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Guthrie, *The Nature of Paleolithic Art*, 61.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Guthrie, *The Nature of Paleolithic Art*, 74-75.

¹⁵² Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 215.

¹⁵³ Cf. Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 154; Cassirer, MATS, 318f.

¹⁵⁴ Cassirer, MATS, 318.

pragmatic from aesthetic space. For purposes of orientation in everyday life, we do not reflect on how much our spatial orientation derives strictly from our visual impressions and from what we infer based on these phenomenal appearances. Artists adopt a different relationship to space and form, which Hildebrand defines as “delimited space.”¹⁵⁵

Anticipating Cassirer’s rejection of the view that art imitates reality, Hildebrand points out that artists must not represent what they see with total fidelity: “There are natural conditions of light, such as an abundance of reflected light, that dissolve any impression of form and thereby defeat any possibility of obtaining a clear spatial impression...[the artist] must learn, albeit indirectly, how the appearance expresses its formal content, which he does by learning to discern when it speaks clearly to us and when it does not.”¹⁵⁶ Given the distinction between the ways that things appear and their form, Hildebrand deems it necessary to consider our mode of perception in order to draw the distinction between two modes of seeing that he calls *Gesichtsvorstellungen* and *Bewegungsvorstellungen*.

Hildebrand asks readers to imagine that before them is an object set against a background. Given the distance of the background, movements of the eye will not present different sides of the object. Consequently, the background appears as a flat, two-dimensional surface. As one moves towards and around the object, on the other hand, our image of the three-dimensional object is the synthesis of a number of different views. In this

¹⁵⁵ Adolf Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems In German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 227.

¹⁵⁶ Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” 228.

case, “seeing becomes scanning, and the resulting ideas are not visual [*Gesichtsvorstellungen*] but kinesthetic [*Bewegungsvorstellungen*].”¹⁵⁷

These two types of seeing correspond to the activity of the painter and the sculptor respectively. Given the three-dimensional nature of sculpture, the sculptor works with kinesthetic ideas; but, according to Hildebrand (who was an accomplished sculptor in his own right), the sculptor determines the adequacy of his work by viewing it from afar in order to see its visual image (i.e. *Gesichtsvorstellung*). The painter, on the other hand, depicts a two-dimensional *Gesichtsvorstellung* in an attempt to create the impression of a three-dimensional object. Thus the painter and sculptor approach image and form from opposite directions: “The painter creates an image in relation to the idea of form, and the sculptor realizes an idea of form in relation to the impression of the image.”¹⁵⁸ Whatever the artist’s medium, the work must “connect one object with another in every direction of a general space, so that we, on the basis of such kinesthetic ideas, experience and understand space as a total volume or as general space, a continuous and unbroken whole.”¹⁵⁹

This last quote might lead one to believe that Hildebrand subscribes to some form of the copy theory of art. However, this is not so. “Artistic space is also filled and permeated with the most intensive values of expression; it is vitalized and moved by the strongest dynamic, antithetical oppositions,” Cassirer writes, comparing artistic with mythical space. “And yet this movement is not identical with the very *immediate* movement of life which expresses itself in the basic mythical affections of hope and fear, in magical attraction and rejection, in the all-encompassing desire of seizing the ‘sacred’ and in the horror of the touch of the

¹⁵⁷ Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” 229.

¹⁵⁸ Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” 232.

¹⁵⁹ Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” 239.

forbidden and unholy.”¹⁶⁰ It is within the purview of the artist to impart such aesthetically expressive values to the work. According to Hildebrand, over the course of life, human beings acquire a fund of “functional signs [*Funktionsmerkmale*]”¹⁶¹ that are derived from our own bodily experience, similar to the process by which “the child learns to understand laughter and tears by joining in the process and is able to feel, through muscular activity that he himself calls forth, the inner cause of pleasure or pain.”¹⁶² The sculptor and painter not only impart the experience of spatiality to the viewer, but also imbue their work with functional signs that render it an affective experience.

In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (CSA), Russian artist and theorist Wassily Kandinsky offers a different account than Hildebrand of intensive values of aesthetic expression in the context of painting that are nevertheless of a different order than mythical affections. Kandinsky’s theory may be read as a useful supplement to Hildebrand’s account, since Kandinsky speaks in the context of non-objective art, whereas Hildebrand’s theory strictly concerns the representational arts. According to Kandinsky, colors and forms possess “spiritual value”¹⁶³ that beget a “*corresponding vibration of the human soul.*”¹⁶⁴ It is the basic physical impressions of color that are the bridge to the soul: “The eye is strongly attracted by light, clear colors, and still more strongly attracted by those colors which are warm as well as clear,” explains Kandinsky. “...Keen lemon-yellow hurts the eye in time as a prolonged and shrill trumpet-note [hurts] the ear, and the gazer turns away to seek relief in

¹⁶⁰ Cassirer, MATS, 328.

¹⁶¹ Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” 261.

¹⁶² Hildebrand, “The Problem of Form In the Fine Arts,” 261.

¹⁶³ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, translated by M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 28.

¹⁶⁴ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 29.

blue or green.”¹⁶⁵ Beyond this physical effect, Kandinsky claims that for more sensitive souls colors will “produce a corresponding spiritual vibration.”¹⁶⁶ Offering a linguistic description of this “spiritual vibration” is, to put it mildly, difficult, and Kandinsky himself is not terribly interested in doing so. In an essay entitled “On Understanding Art,” he draws a distinction, familiar to readers of Dilthey and Ricoeur, between explanation and understanding.

Explanation is a linguistic affair, an attempt to define one’s “inner experience.”¹⁶⁷

Understanding, on the other hand, is what is granted by experience. Although he concedes

¹⁶⁵ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 24. Kandinsky seems to have based his understanding of the physiological effect of color on the “opponent-process theory” put forth by Viennese physiologist Ewald Hering. Some of the spiritual resonances that Kandinsky identifies as associated with certain colors (i.e. the light, warmth and proximity of yellow as contrasted with the darkness, coldness and distance of blue) were likely derived from Goethe’s *Theory of Colors*. Cf. Lisa Florman, *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky’s Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 27 and 188n.58.

¹⁶⁶ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 24. Whether this “spiritual vibration” is a direct effect on the soul or a function of association is a question Kandinsky considers. Stated differently, does a certain shade of red elicit disgust due to its resemblance to blood or on account of some intrinsic property of the color itself? Kandinsky advocates the position that the color directly influences the soul, arguing that the many associatively unclassifiable instances of color’s effects, highlighted especially by cases of synaesthesia, suggest that a more direct relationship is at play.

This question of the associative power of color was central to Kandinsky’s research at the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture: “It is clear...that to investigate any art in theoretical terms, we must use the analysis of the media of this art as a departure point... physiological effect should serve simply as a bridge to the elucidation of the psychological effect. We know, for example, the powerful and invariable effect of different colors (proven by experiment): red (in a color bath) increases the activity of the heart which is expressed, in turn, by the acceleration of the pulse; blue, however, can lead to partial paralysis.” Cf. John E. Bowlt, Rose-Carol Washton Long, and Wassily

Kandinsky, *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of On the Spiritual in Art*, edited and translated by John E. Bowlt (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1984) 115n.xii. For a harsh and historical assessment of this aspect of *On the Spiritual in Art*, cf. John E. Bowlt, “Vasilii Kandinsky: The Russian Connection,” in *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of On the Spiritual in Art*, edited and translated by John E. Bowlt (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1984) 28-29.

¹⁶⁷ Wassily Kandinsky, “On Understanding Art,” in *Complete Writings on Art*, edited by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994), 289.

that explanation can help prepare someone to understand a work of art, Kandinsky is more concerned with the dangers of explanation, in particular that through explanation “no spiritual forces are awakened by these [explanatory] words; rather, the living work is ousted by the dead word (label).”¹⁶⁸

Although we shy away from offering an explanation of the spiritual vibration brought about by color, the vast and significant potential that Kandinsky saw in color’s working is made evident by his interest in chromotherapy and his reference in CSA to the research of Dresden physician Dr. Franz Freudenberg, “who believed that he could restore a patient’s disturbed inner balance by means of colors... To this end chromotherapy made use of colored glass panes hung in the window, to which the patient suffering from such disorders was exposed.”¹⁶⁹

The spiritual valence of a color has implications for the forms to which it is most suited, and thus also for aesthetic spatiality: “Keen colors are well suited by sharp forms (e.g., a yellow triangle), and soft, deep colors by round forms (e.g., a blue circle). But it must be remembered that an unsuitable combination of form and color is not necessarily discordant, but may, with manipulation, show the way to fresh possibilities of harmony.”¹⁷⁰ This last statement is uncannily resonant with Cassirer’s statement that aesthetic space is “a quintessence of possible ways of configuration, and within each, a new horizon of the world of objects opens up.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Kandinsky, “On Understanding Art,” 289.

¹⁶⁹ Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art, 2: From Impressionism to Kandinsky* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 322.

¹⁷⁰ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual In Art*, 29.

¹⁷¹ Cassirer, MATS, 329.

3b. Space in Music

Aesthetic spatiality takes a different shape in the various arts. “In the fine arts – in painting, sculpture, architecture – configuration is not based upon a determined image, upon a finished *template* of intuitional space into which it drags particular objects,” writes Cassirer. “None of them simply comes across space as already given *before* it; rather, they must *obtain* it, and each of them obtains it in its *own* and specifically *characteristic* way.”¹⁷² The question that now concerns us is whether the notion of spatiality that obtained for the visual arts will hold equally in the realm of music. It is not difficult to understand why we must answer this question in the negative. Aesthetic space, we have seen in the previous section, is to be characterized as perceptual space. It is distinguished from mythical space by being denuded of the “mythical affections of hope and fear, in magical attraction and rejection, in the all-encompassing desire of seizing the ‘sacred’ and in the horror of the touch of the forbidden and unholy.”¹⁷³ Aesthetic space is distinguished from everyday pragmatic space by the viewer’s disinterestedness, the fact that the aesthetic object is not viewed as something to be used for any end besides mere contemplation. Aesthetic space is distinguished from theoretical space by its concreteness, that is, its derivation from the individual’s lived experience as opposed to being the abstract product of a view from nowhere.

But the phenomenological stance on the constitution of space puts us in a problematic position. Phenomenology, even in Hildebrand’s proto-phenomenology, argues that space is constituted through the embodied kinaesthetic experiences of seeing, touching and

¹⁷² Cassirer, “Language and the Construction of the World of Objects,” 336.

¹⁷³ Cassirer, MATS, 328.

moving.¹⁷⁴ However, as Schütz points out, “the organ by which we experience music, the ear, does not have any kinaesthesia...the ear is not able to build up the dimension of space.”¹⁷⁵

And to the extent that the sense of hearing is able to provide spatial orientation – for instance, by allowing us to determine that a noise came from a particular direction – this information is derived from spatial understanding that is itself ultimately derived from our visual, tactile and locomotive experience. Thus we forcefully encounter the question: what does “space” mean in the context of music?

A number of distinctions must be made to orient our survey of this perilously confusing terrain. Frederico Macedo argues for five discrete meanings of “space” as it pertains to music. The first meaning concerns the use of spatial metaphors in the vocabulary used to describe properties of sound. Reference to spatial terminology such as “high” and “low” are two common examples of this metaphorical use of spatial language in the context of music. This metaphorical use of space is to be contrasted with the subsequent four meanings of space in music, which Macedo characterizes as literal uses of space, “in the sense that they are related to specific aspects of the perception of sound in space, or to a general perception of space and its relation with aural perception...Space becomes then not only a metaphor to describe different aspects of music, musical structure or how music of sound is perceived by the listener, but also a physical reality that, in interaction with sound, produces different kinds of aural perception.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Schütz, FPM, 250-254.

¹⁷⁵ Schütz, FPM, 253.

¹⁷⁶ Frederico Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space: Five Meanings of Space in Music and Sound Art,” *Organised Sound* 20.2 (2015): 243.

The first of the literal meanings of space as it pertains to music concerns “acoustic space.”¹⁷⁷ This category recognizes that sound is affected by the environment in which it exists. Factors such as reverberation and resonance are characteristics of sound as it pertains to an acoustic space. The second literal meaning of space is “sound spatialisation.”¹⁷⁸ This category pertains to sound’s ability to encode spatial cues. As Schütz also recognizes, we are able to place the direction from which a sound originated, to have a rough idea of the distance of the sound source and to hear whether the source of the sound is in motion. “Reference,” the third literal meaning of space, is the ability of sound to harbor information about its source, or in Macedo’s words, “*space as reference*, in the context of this typology, refers to the use of the referential properties of sound to produce or recall in the listener the experience of being places other than the place where the music is performed.”¹⁷⁹ Macedo discusses the referential capacity of sonic space in the context of the relatively young tradition of electro-acoustic music, in which composers have composed soundscapes that evoke a particular environmental setting through the use of sounds associated with such a setting; for instance, using sounds recorded in nature to evoke associations of the natural world. The final meaning of space in music identified by Macedo is “space as location.”¹⁸⁰ This category recognizes that the spatial impressions listeners receive through the senses other than the auditory sense interact with the listener’s experience of sound. “The place where music is performed stimulates, and often demands, specific kinds of behavior and attention on the part of the listeners,” writes Macedo, “also producing different kinds of

¹⁷⁷ Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space,” 243.

¹⁷⁸ Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space,” 244.

¹⁷⁹ Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space,” 246.

¹⁸⁰ Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space,” 246.

meaning that can be attributed to sounds.”¹⁸¹ To illustrate this sense of space, Macedo cites works by sound artists in which a sense of dislocation is brought about by piping in sounds that do not typically belong in the place where they are played; for instance, in one case by playing ocean sounds from the coast of Normandy through forty-eight loudspeakers at the *Arc de Triomphe*. The chief characteristic of works utilizing space as location is that they encourage the listener to “listen to the environmental sounds *as* music, to bring to the foreground the aural perceptions that are normally in the background, and to produce a renewed interest in the environmental sounds.”¹⁸² Clearly, space as reference and space as location are closely related, but they are to be distinguished by the fact that the latter utilizes the experience of space granted by the listener’s other sensory modalities.

3c. Skeptical Conceptions of Space in Music

What is the relevance of these five different meanings of space as it pertains to sound and music for our analysis? The answer depends on the conception of music that is in play. According to Schütz’s phenomenological account, music can be defined as “a meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time.”¹⁸³ Thomas Clifton also defends a phenomenological understanding of music’s ontological status:

However we care to defined music, we should agree that one of its important aspects is its non-empirical status. It is sustained, no doubt, by a collection of empirically verifiable acoustical data, but music is to acoustics what a person is to his body.

Music *has* empirical data, but it is not defined in terms of these data, just as we say

¹⁸¹ Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space,” 246.

¹⁸² Macedo, “Investigating Sound in Space,” 247.

¹⁸³ Schütz, MMT, 170.

that my body *has* muscles and tissue, but that I can neither necessarily nor sufficiently be defined by them.¹⁸⁴

Such definitions deny the essential significance of music as an acoustic phenomenon and thereby do not concern themselves with the four literal meanings of space in the context of sound and music. Let us first be oriented by this phenomenological understanding of music and consider the spatiality of music vis-à-vis its putatively metaphorical character.

We will begin with the skeptics – those thinkers who regard spatial metaphors as misguided and misleading in the context of music. Vladimir Jankélévitch is one such philosopher who takes issue with what he deems “the spatial mirage.”¹⁸⁵ According to Jankélévitch, “it is vision layered upon hearing...[that] projects the diffluent, temporal order of music into the dimension of space, onto spatial coordinates.”¹⁸⁶ This projection seems to be a consequence of using language to describe music, since Jankélévitch makes the questionable claim that language *in toto* arose “as means to translate visual experiences.”¹⁸⁷

Thomas Clifton offers a phenomenological justification for the use of spatial language in describing the musical experience. Clifton’s position is that spatially descriptive terms such as “rising lines” are essences that should be accorded an *a priori* status and that these synaesthetic experiences are rooted in the listener’s body. Clifton’s argument is as follows. Synaesthetic characterizations like “rising line” do not derive from abstracting their meaning as it relates to an individual phenomenon, say, in this case a drawn rising line. To the contrary, the meaning of “rising line” derives from the experience of a collection of objects

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Clifton, “Music as Constituted Object,” in *In Search of Musical Method*, edited by F.J. Smith (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, Inc., 1976), 73.

¹⁸⁵ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, translated by Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 90.

¹⁸⁶ Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, 90.

¹⁸⁷ Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, 90.

that would certainly include a line drawing but also, for instance, an ascending musical scale. In other words, “it is the essence which defines a collection, not a collection which defines an essence.”¹⁸⁸ Clifton offers four reasons why such essences are to be considered *a priori*. First, the experience of “rising line” is not to be considered arbitrary and merely subjective, “since it does not depend on a mood for its existence.”¹⁸⁹ Secondly, the experience of “rising line” does not presume a preexisting definition, but rather constitutes an irreducible experience.¹⁹⁰ Third, the experience of a synaesthetic essence “arises spontaneously from the evidence of experience rather than systematically from the evidence of empirical observation.”¹⁹¹ And finally, synaesthetic essences are *a priori* because they are rooted in the body.

Regardless of whether “essences” like “rising line” should be granted an *a priori* status, ethnomusicological research demonstrates that different cultures find such essences in different places in the world. Consider “going up,” a sort of variant of “rising line.” In Western musical traditions, this sort of language is used to describe a progression of tones that move towards the treble, and, in Western musical notation, do in fact go up. Conversely, tones “go down” when they move towards the bass, visually traveling downwards on the staff paper used for notating music. Self-evident as the correlation between upward motion and higher pitch may be (N.B. *higher* pitch: this sort of language thoroughly permeates Western musical vocabulary), other cultures spatialize music differently. In his article “Aspects of ‘Are’are Musical Theory,” Hugo Zemp discusses the sense of melodic direction

¹⁸⁸ Clifton, “Music as Constituted Object,” 86.

¹⁸⁹ Clifton, “Music as Constituted Object,” 87.

¹⁹⁰ Clifton asserts this point without adequate justification, leaving himself open to the charge of begging the question.

¹⁹¹ Clifton, “Music as Constituted Object,” 87.

that was developed by the 'Are'are people from the Solomon Islands on the basis of their predominant use of panpipes:

The main direction of the melodic movement in a *ro'u mani 'au* is expressed by the terms *siho* "to go down" or *hi hu'a* "towards the bottom," and *hane* "to go up" or *hi uuru* "towards the top." Like their English equivalents, these terms are used primarily to indicate movement in space: one "goes up" a coconut tree or "towards the bottom" of a mountain; one "goes down" a tree or "towards the bottom" of a hill towards the sea. But, to the great confusion of the ethnomusicologist, the 'Are'are terms are applied to melodic movements in the sense opposite to that in use in the West: "to go down" and "towards the bottom," indicate a movement towards the treble, and "to go up" and "towards the top," towards the bass. The 'Are'are provide the following explanation: going towards the bass of a panpipe, one "goes up" "towards the top" because the pipes on this side of the instrument are "long" (*'ewa*); conversely, one "goes down" "towards the bottom" because the pipes on the treble side are "short" (*ko'osu*).¹⁹²

This alternative determination of "high" and "low" based on the physicality of the musical instrument can also be found in ancient Greece. The lyre was tilted in such a way that in being played the bass note (what we would call the "lowest" note) was closest to the musician's head while the treble note (what we would call the "highest" note) was closest to the ground. Consequently, with respect to the lyre, the Greeks used "low" and "high" in the opposite sense that contemporary musicians are accustomed to describing pitch.

¹⁹² Hugo Zemp, "Aspects of 'Are'are Musical Theory," *Ethnomusicology* 23:1 (1979): 14-15.

Some cultures derive musical vocabulary from their system of notation. The Lau of the Solomon Islands make chalk marks on a plank to write out a tune. Low-pitched notes are called “*bulu* (black)” and high-pitched notes are “*kwao* (white)” on account of the markings on the planks, “heavy down-strokes being ‘black,’ and light up-strokes ‘white.’”¹⁹³

Other musical traditions do not describe pitch in terms of the spatial contrast between high and low. Bulgarian musicians, for instance, distinguish pitch “along a continuum labeled fat (*debel*) and thin (*tûnak*), where thin corresponds to a high-pitched and fat equals low-pitched.”¹⁹⁴ The Kpelle tribe of Liberia hear a similar sort of correspondence, describing low-pitched instruments as “large-voiced,” and high-pitches as “small-voiced sound”¹⁹⁵ A similar logic also seems to influence the characterization of tones among the Bashi people of the Eastern Congo, who refer to high-pitches as “small” or “weak” tones and low-pitched tones as “big” or “strong.”¹⁹⁶ This common correlation of small/high and low/big is also found in the musical vocabularies of the Chopi of Mozambique¹⁹⁷ and the Basongye of the Congo.¹⁹⁸

Just as 'Are'are musical theory derives many of its terms relating to musical intervals, tunings, song forms and other musical vocabulary from the material, namely bamboo, that is central in the construction of their panpipes, so do other musical cultures find a linguistic

¹⁹³ Walter G. Ivens, *The Island Builders of the Pacific*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, n.d.), 98. Quoted in Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 96.

¹⁹⁴ Timothy Rice, “Aspects of Bulgarian Musical Thought,” *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 12 (1980): 54.

¹⁹⁵ Ruth M. Stone, *Let the Inside Be Sweet: The Interpretation of Music Event among the Kpelle of Liberia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 60.

¹⁹⁶ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 96.

¹⁹⁷ Hugh Tracey, *Chopi Musicians: Their Music, Poetry and Instruments* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 107.

¹⁹⁸ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 97.

basis for their musical theory in culturally significant natural phenomena. For instance, imagery relating to waterfalls pervades musical understanding for the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea. In “‘Flow Like A Waterfall’: The Metaphors of Kaluli Musical Theory,” Steven Feld presents a comprehensive typology of melodic contours used in Kaluli music and, with one exception, connects these musical movements with waterfall terminology.

With respect to melodic contours:

...the most important features are descent and terracing shapes. In the names for waterfall parts the common term for the ledge or upper place from which the water drops, is *sa-we:l*. In melodic terminology *sa-we:l* refers to the leading pitch in a line or phrase from which the melody descends. Descent to level melodic shape is also found; the Kaluli name it *sa-mogan*. A *mogan* is a still or lightly swirling water pool; *sa-mogan* is the flow of a waterfall into a level waterpool beneath it. The descent to level contour is precisely what is melodically marked by *sa-mogan*.¹⁹⁹

The use of visual imagery is not always applied after the fact to explain music that had been created through a purely auditory process. Instead, spatial imagery imported from the material world also serves creative, compositional ends. Zemp cites three 'Are'are compositions that were inspired by the observation of events that occur in the material world:

the piece entitled *Rawauuruuru* 'Spider' is composed to follow the swaying movement of a species of spider, which, settled in the middle of its web, sets it to swinging regularly; the piece '*Ereeroa*'i 'Suspended' reproduces the pendular motion of a necklace of shell beads stirred by the wind; the piece entitled *Huu* '[Fruit of the

¹⁹⁹ Steven Feld, “‘Flow Like A Waterfall’: The Metaphors of Kaluli Musical Theory,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13 (1981): 31.

tree] *Barringtonia asiatica*' imitates the movements of a piece of fruit that has fallen into the sea and alternately sinks and is tossed by the waves.²⁰⁰

3d. Critique of Skeptical Conception of Space In Music

Despite Schütz's skepticism regarding the spatial dimension of the musical experience, other phenomenologists have defended a meaningful concept of spatiality in music. In this section we will consider two such accounts, that of Don Ihde and Victor Zuckerkandl.

At no point in his landmark *Listening and Voice* does Don Ihde mention Schütz. Yet his account of spatiality in audition involves a critique that might well have been directed precisely at Schütz's concerns about the notion. Ihde sums up traditional positions regarding the spatiality of music as follows: "There is often either implicitly or explicitly a negative claim that listening is either therefore 'weak' spatially or, most extremely, that *sounds lacks spatiality entirely*."²⁰¹ Ihde's unwillingness to subscribe to these positions is a phenomenologically motivated desire, to adapt Husserl's famous phrase, to go back to the sounds themselves. In Ihde's formulation, "auditory spatiality must be allowed to 'present itself' as it 'appears' within this level of experience. Negatively, a predefinition of spatiality such that it is prejudged 'visualistically' must be suspended."²⁰²

This visualistic prejudice is a function of what Ihde calls "sensory atomism;"²⁰³ that is, the theoretical tendency to regard the senses as entirely divorced from one another. However, attending to experience itself militates against the fragmentation of the sensorium. In place of

²⁰⁰ Zemp, "Aspects of 'Are'are Musical Theory," 21.

²⁰¹ Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 58.

²⁰² Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 61.

²⁰³ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 60.

sensory atomism, experience reveals “the notion of a *relative focus* on a dimension of global experience such that it is noted only against the omnipresence of the globality.”²⁰⁴

According to Ihde, in “the first naïve existential level of experience...sounds are the sounds of things.”²⁰⁵ This is a well-known phenomenological claim that recognizes that regarding sounds abstractly involves a theoretical stance that is derivative of our more naïve experience of the world in which sounds are always already heard *as* something, be it a knock at the door, a motorcycle revving its engine or thunder in the distance.

Where we hear sounds as the sounds of things, in Ihde’s formulation, it is ordinarily possible to distinguish certain “*shape-aspects* of those things.”²⁰⁶ Insofar as shape implicates space, the spatiality of audition thus first appears at this naïve experiential level. The auditory experience of shape may be weaker than the visual experience of shape, but its actuality can be easily established by an auditory game: “Someone puts an object in a box and then shakes and rolls the box, asking the child what is inside. [...] more specifically, the question is directed toward shapes, the observer soon finds that it takes little time to identify simple shapes and often the object by its sound [e.g. a marble or a die].”²⁰⁷ Such practices even quickly give way to a heightened sophistication of one’s ability to determine the qualities of an object through audition. “A rubber ball is as auditorily distinct from a billiard ball as it is visually distinct,” writes Ihde, “The very texture and composition as well as the shape-aspect is presented in the complex richness of the event.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 61.

²⁰⁵ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 61.

²⁰⁶ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 61.

²⁰⁷ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 62.

²⁰⁸ Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 62.

Zuckerlandl is familiar with the traditional line taken regarding the relationship between music and space: “Music seems to have shaken the last grain of dust of spatiality from its shoes.”²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, a comparison with different arts leads him to raise the question anew. Zuckerlandl considers the similarity between mixing colors and mixing tones: “If simultaneously sounding tones coalesced into a mixed tone as colors simultaneously projected upon a surface coalesce into a mixed color, then the chord would simply be another tone, as blue-green is another color...”²¹⁰ But this is not the case, since the ear is able to distinguish the tones comprising a chord. Just as space keeps colors separate and distinguishable, so it seems that “the fact of the simultaneity of different tones would in some way bring space, as its indispensable prerequisite, into music.”²¹¹ Zuckerlandl’s admission of space into the realm of music is not some naïve equation of the space of the eye and the hand with the space of the ear. Rather, in a statement that sounds remarkably consistent with Cassirer’s position regarding time and space in different symbolic forms, Zuckerlandl asserts “the experience of music is also an experience of space, and indeed a *particular experience of space*.”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Victor Zuckerlandl, *Sound and Symbol Volume 1: Music and the External World*, translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 267.

²¹⁰ Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 268. The musical analog of mixing colors to create a new color would be timbre, the ‘quality’ of a tone that is determined by its particular overtone series. The blend of these individually imperceptible overtones is what lends the trumpet its brilliance, the viola its mellowness, etc. Interestingly, timbre is often referred to as ‘tone color.’

²¹¹ Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 268.

²¹² Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 270. Emphasis added. It should not be concluded that there are simply two spaces that stand in opposition to one another. Despite their similarities, Zuckerlandl also differentiates between visual and geometrical space: “No eye has ever seen a point, a straight line, two parallel lines” (Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 337). Indeed, auditory and musical space will themselves be distinguished, but understanding why this is the case requires a familiarity with Zuckerlandl’s views on hearing noise as opposed to hearing tones. We will address this theme below.

The difference between the space of the eye and the hand and the space of ear can be approached from the concept of place. While the space of the eye and hand is “the *aggregate of all places*,” the space of ear is “a space without places.”²¹³ What, then, is place?

Phenomenologist Edward S. Casey addresses this question in an essay belonging to an interdisciplinary volume of essays on *Sense of Place*. The common conception of place is a bequest of modern thought. Newton and Kant has left us with the assumption that “space is absolute and infinite as well as empty and a priori in status,”²¹⁴ with the consequence that places then become “the mere apportionings of space, its compartmentalization.”²¹⁵ In contradistinction to this hierarchy, Casey argues rather that place is in fact general while space is particular; or, in other words, that the Newtonian theoretical standpoint that identifies space as empty is derivative of the existential standpoint in which we are always already emplaced.²¹⁶ Place, to condense Casey’s insightful and complicated view, is a consequence of the surplus that stems from the horizons of experience. At every instant, we are surrounded by things, which possess internal horizons of unseen aspects, and the situation as a whole opens on to external horizons of other places. On a very basic level, “place” names the particularity of embodied situation. Only from this particularity can the theoretician abstract to achieve the placeless standpoint of empty space.

²¹³ Zuckerandl, *Music and the External World*, 276.

²¹⁴ Edward S. Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” in *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 14.

²¹⁵ Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 14.

²¹⁶ This argument that the theoretical perspective is founded upon the existential standpoint is a classic phenomenological move. Its most famous occurrence is perhaps section 13 of Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, “The Exemplification of Being-in in a Founded Mode: Knowing the World.”

Zuckerlandl has claimed that the space of the eye and hand is “the *aggregate of all places*,” while the space of ear is a “a space without places.”²¹⁷ The eye and the hand are subject to perspective in a different manner than the ear. What one sees and is capable of grasping is determined by one’s position, while the ear, to some extent, can hear around corners and through walls. Zuckerlandl, following William James, likens the situation to laying on one’s back and staring into a clear, cloudless sky. This vast vista has no parts. This visual experience is analogous to the spatial experience of the ear. Instead of encountering things in places, we experience space.

Zuckerlandl addresses the ear’s ability to localize sound, which, as we have seen, comprises a central aspect of Schütz’s dismissal of the spatiality of music. To Zuckerlandl’s way of thinking, it is more accurate to speak of the ear’s ability to localize the *source* of a sound: “The ability concerns, not the ‘where’ of the sound, but the ‘where’ of the thing in space that causes the sound.”²¹⁸ This distinction is also essential in the differentiation of noise and tone. Noise, believes Zuckerlandl, draws our attention to the thing causing the noise – presumably so that in addressing the source, we can halt the noise. Tones, on the other hand, do not direct us to any locality in space. “We see blue flower; we touch smooth wall,” writes Zuckerlandl, “but we hear tone – not sounding string.”²¹⁹ Noise belongs to the same category as the blue of the flower or the smoothness of the wall. Tone, on the other hand, is not a property of things. Zuckerlandl deems the localization of sound sources as “the faculty of the ear in which it comes closest to the

²¹⁷ Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 276.

²¹⁸ Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 279.

²¹⁹ Zuckerlandl, *Music and the External World*, 273. By and large this may be true, but it should be noted that it is not necessarily the case that we hear tone and not sounding string. To hear sounding string belongs to the so-called “ecological level” of perception. Cf. Shove and Repp, “Musical Motion and Performance: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives,” 59.

other senses, especially the eye,” but “it is tones in which...hearing comes to itself; and what hearing come to itself creates is music.”²²⁰

Zuckermandl’s treatment of the problem of audible spatiality allows us to critique Schütz’s approach. Schütz addresses the problem in terms of visual space. He therefore concludes that while the ear is able to provide some orientation in space, however impoverished, this ability is ultimately derivative of our various kinaesthetic capacities. Schütz does not consider whether there may be a sense of space that is unique to the ear.

This does not mean, however, that there are no similarities between visual and auditory space. The visual spatial experience of looking at the cloudless sky “shares an essential characteristic with the space experience of the ear – undivided totality.”²²¹ More generally, visual and auditory space are both experienced as “the ‘whence of encounter.’”²²² Things in the external world encounter me in space, as do the tones that present themselves to my ear. However, in keeping with Zuckermandl’s presentation of auditory space as placeless, visual and auditory space present different degrees of specificity. The experience of visual space involves three dimensions – height, width and depth. Auditory space, on the other hand, involves a single dimension: “‘from...’.”²²³ Furthermore, this ‘from...’ “does not mean ‘from there or from elsewhere’ but ‘out of depth from all sides’; and ‘out of depth’ is not a direction in space but a (nay, *the*) direction of space.”²²⁴

Understanding the unique nature of auditory space entails that space be conceived in terms other than place. For Zuckermandl, the relevant concept for auditory space is *force*. The nature of

²²⁰ Zuckermandl, *Music and the External World*, 280.

²²¹ Zuckermandl, *Music and the External World*, 282.

²²² Zuckermandl, *Music and the External World*, 336.

²²³ Zuckermandl, *Music and the External World*, 290.

²²⁴ Zuckermandl, *Music and the External World*, 290.

this force can be approached through a consideration of tone as an acoustical and a musical phenomenon. As an acoustical phenomenon, tone is “a specific aural sensation characterized by pitch, timbre, loudness, and duration, produced by vibrations in a physical medium...”²²⁵ But as any phenomenologist knows,²²⁶ these characteristics belong to a theoretical type of tonal experience as opposed to the specifically musical experience, in which the salient characteristic of tones is their “dynamic quality.”²²⁷ The dynamic quality of a tone is its character of striving or stability that results from its position within a musical context. In short, functional harmony yields a tonal field in which the different members of the scale are experienced as possessing different degrees of tension. It is a simplification, albeit not inaccurate, to say that the tones comprising the triad of the predominant tonality (i.e. the first or root, third and fifth notes of the scale) are stable, while the other members of the scale – especially the major seventh, which is just a half step away from the root – seem to strive to resolve to one of the stable tones. The dynamic quality of a tone is not of the same order as its pitch, timbre, loudness, and duration, although, claims Zuckerkandl, “We *hear* it just as we hear pitch or tone color...”²²⁸ Dynamic quality is not a property of the tone itself:

A tone must belong to a musical context in order to have dynamic quality. Within a musical context no tone will be without its proper dynamic quality. Outside the musical context, however – for instance, in the laboratory – tones have no dynamic qualities.

²²⁵ Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol Volume 2: Man the Musician*, translated by Norbert Guterman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 97.

²²⁶ A similar insight is also found at the outset of Schütz’s FPM when he delineates the particular phenomenological approach to music. Cf. Schütz, FPM, 246-247.

²²⁷ Victor Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 19.

²²⁸ Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music*, 19.

Thus, the dynamic quality of a tone is its musical quality proper. It distinguishes the musical from the physical phenomenon.²²⁹

Auditory space as a placeless space of force cannot be understood in terms of the spatial experience of the eye or the hand or in terms of the spatial concept of geometry. Conflating different spatial experiences is what has traditionally led thinkers to interpret the spatial experience of music in terms of the spatial experience of the ear, which in turn was viewed as impoverished and derivative vis-à-vis the spatial experience of the eye and hand.

4. Time in Art

As was the case with space, a consideration of time in art leads to a distinction between the arts of time and the arts of space. Self-evident as this distinction may seem, its pervasiveness in thinking about the arts comes on the heels of Lessing's *Laocoön*. Among Italian humanist thinkers "the assumption that a basic parallelism prevailed between painting and poetry, between the literary and the visual arts, was almost an article of faith."²³⁰

Whereas the ancients and Italian humanist thinkers emphasized the unity of the arts,²³¹

²²⁹ Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music*, 19-20. Zuckerkandl also weighs in on the question of the origin of the dynamic qualities of tones. The typical position is that the experience of dynamic qualities is a function of habit: "We have heard certain typical tone sequences so often that by now, when we hear music, we necessarily associate certain expectations with the tones." (Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music*, 20). Zuckerkandl, however, rejects this commonsensical position. If the experience of dynamic qualities is part and parcel of the musical experience as such, then there could be no musical experiences that predated the perception of dynamic qualities such that they habituated listeners to perceive certain dynamic qualities.

²³⁰ Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art, 1: From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 149.

²³¹ Barasch points out that humanistic thinkers "revived the ancient saying...that painting is a mute poetry, poetry a loquacious painting," and that Horace's phrase "*ut pictura poesis* – as is painting, so is poetry – became a credo of the humanistic tradition." (Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art, 1*, 149)

Lessing was the first to influentially argue for their diversity. Art historian Moshe Barasch presents the distinction in temporal terms:

The arts of space, as common wisdom had it, represent only what can be seen at a given moment, that is, a slice of time so tiny that, in human perception, it has neither past nor future. The arts of space, then, are arts of the ‘present’ only, whenever the particular present represented in the picture may have occurred. The arts of time, on the other hand, represent the entire gamut of time; that is, the continuity of past, present, and future is essential to them.²³²

Although music and poetry, along with the other literary arts, are similar by virtue of being arts of time, it can be argued that music is the temporal art *par excellence*. This is due to the absence of conceptual or representational content from a musical work. Although both a poem and a musical work unfold in time and cannot be perceived, so to speak, in a single glance, like a painting, once a poem has been heard it can be summarized according to what it is about. A musical work, on the other hand, is essentially unable to be summarized, distilled or translated.²³³ This state of affairs has led those who understand music’s essential temporal, a-conceptual nature to perform acts befitting a Zen master: “Once, somebody asked Robert Schumann to explain the meaning of a certain piece of music he had just played on

²³² Moshe Barasch, *The Language of Art: Studies in Interpretation* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 247.

²³³ Schütz discusses the essentially “polythetic” nature of the musical experience in FPM. For a more nuanced view of the polythetic/monothetic distinction as it pertains to poetry, cf. Alfred Schütz, “Reflections on the Problem of Relevance,” in *Collected Papers V: Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, edited by Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 139.

the piano,” recounts David Markson in *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, “What Robert Schumann did was sit back down at the piano and play the piece of music again.”²³⁴

4a. Time in Visual Art

A few words on time in the visual arts are in order. We have already seen that the visual arts are so-called ‘arts of space’ and, given this spatial mode of being, are also ‘arts of the present.’ However, this status has not prevented artists from striving to reconcile the non-temporal status of the visual arts with the temporal nature of events, which the visual arts frequently take as their subject matter. In his monograph *The Language of Art: Studies in Interpretation*, Barasch dedicates a chapter to a discussion of the chief ways that visual artists have historically negotiated a temporal dimension into their work. Let us briefly consider the three methods discussed by Barasch.

The most modern manner of temporalizing the static art of painting is Cubism’s use of multiple perspectives. This method involves depicting an object as an assemblage of the way that it appears from different viewpoints. In doing so, the use of multiple perspectives suggests the time-dependent acts of the viewer moving around the object or the object itself moving. Barasch quotes Cubist painter Jean Metzinger who characterized the advancement of Cubism in temporal terms: “[Cubist painters have] allowed themselves to move round the object, in order to give...a concrete representation of it, made up of several successive aspects. Formerly a picture took possession of space, now it reigns also in time.”²³⁵ It should be noted that the introduction of multiple perspectives does not, strictly speaking, give painting the possession of time. Rather, the simultaneous presentation of multiple

²³⁴ David Markson, *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 1988), 214.

²³⁵ Barasch, *The Language of Art*, 251.

perspectives collapses the fruits of a spatial process, which unfolds over time, into an instant. Additionally, Cubism's breakthrough also involves a drawback; namely, the use of multiple perspectives oftentimes batters on the identity of the depicted object. That is to say, in offering a more panoptic visual grasp of the object, Cubism paradoxically leads the viewer to lose sight of what the object itself is.

The "narrative cycle" or "narrative strip" is of a more ancient provenance than Cubism's use of multiple perspectives, but it similarly strives to represent temporal unfolding. As their name suggests, narrative cycles are depictions of narratives, i.e. events, which by their nature unfold over time. In order to represent a sequence of time, narrative cycles demand the performance of what we have been calling kinaesthesias on the viewer's part. These kinaesthesias may be as minor as merely moving one's eyes from panel to panel of a comic strip, or they may involve movements of the viewer's whole body. The latter is the case with one of Barasch's examples, the Column of Trajan. The enormous column is nearly one hundred feet tall and, using more than 2,500 carved figures spread out over 155 episodes,²³⁶ tells the story of Trajan's victorious participation in the Dacian Wars. Since the relief winds around the column twenty-three times,²³⁷ experiencing the narrative requires the viewer to physically move around the column, which insures that the experience of the work will be an event in time. The relief itself temporally distinguishes between events by various means, for instance "the insertion of natural elements (trees, rocks) or the reversal of the direction of the figures."²³⁸

²³⁶ Filippo Coarelli, *The Column of Trajan*, translated by Cynthia Rockwell (Rome: Editore Colombo, 2000), 27.

²³⁷ Coarelli, *The Column of Trajan*, 27.

²³⁸ Coarelli, *The Column of Trajan*, 27.

The third method for temporalizing the visual arts is, in Lessing's famous formulation, "the pregnant moment."²³⁹ This device consists in the artist's depiction of a moment, so well-chosen and containing such appropriate details that they "provide the spectator's imagination with sufficient clues to make it possible for him or her to complete in his or her mind what happened before that instant, and what is going to take place afterwards."²⁴⁰ Paintings of pregnant moments do not depict entire events, as do narrative cycles, nor do they represent the Cubist's quasi-God's eye view of objects that can only be achieved through movement and thus time; rather, paintings of pregnant moments interact with the viewer in such a way as to either remind a viewer, who already knows the narrative, of what has already occurred and what is in the offing or to suggest possibilities of what has and will happen to the viewer unacquainted with the narrative. The viewer's contribution, however, is in fact common across the different manners of representing time in the visual arts: "In all pictorial traditions of rendering the *Nacheinander* [one after another] in the medium of *Nebeneinander* [one next to each other], it is always the basic assumption that the spectator looking at the picture or relief will complete in his mind what the artist could suggest but was unable to actually and fully embody in the tangible matter of his medium."²⁴¹

4b. Time in Music

Although Barasch also recognizes a category of composite ways of representing time in the visual arts, our account of the pregnant moment is a helpful transition to a discussion of time in music, since here the tripartite character of temporal consciousness that became clear

²³⁹ Barasch, *The Language of Art*, 257.

²⁴⁰ Barasch, *The Language of Art*, 259.

²⁴¹ Barasch, *The Language of Art*, 264-265.

in the pregnant moment come clearly to the fore. The unique character of musical time can be best represented in comparison with the scientific and mythical conceptions of time.

The mythical experience of time is characterized by Cassirer, in comparison with objective time, as “timeless.”²⁴² By positing an “absolute past, which neither requires nor is susceptible of any further explanation,”²⁴³ mythical consciousness demonstrates a willingness to institute barriers between the trichotomy of past, present and future; barriers that are absent from scientific as well as musical time, in which the three dimensions of time cannot be strictly separated but instead always already bleed into one another.

Similar to its intuition of space, mythical consciousness’ intuition of time is “qualitative and concrete”²⁴⁴ in comparison with theoretical consciousness’ quantitative and abstract intuition of time. The qualitative aspect of time for mythical consciousness is well illustrated by the determination that only specific times were appropriate for certain activities.²⁴⁵ The concreteness of the mythical intuition of time is founded upon a biological basis in phases of life such as birth, death, puberty and pregnancy. According to Cassirer, mythical consciousness first apprehends “the periodicity of the planets...the change of day into night, the flowering and fading of plants, and the cyclical order of the seasons only by projecting these phenomena into human existence, where it perceives them as in a mirror.”²⁴⁶

The theoretical intuition of time, on the other hand, has been thoroughly liberated from any connection with biological instantiations and has become quantitative and abstract.

²⁴² Cassirer, PSF II, 106.

²⁴³ Cassirer, PSF II, 106.

²⁴⁴ Cassirer, PSF II, 108.

²⁴⁵ “Specific sacral acts are meticulously assigned to definite times and seasons,” writes Cassirer, “outside of which they would lose all sacral power.” For particular examples cf. Cassirer, PSF II, 108.

²⁴⁶ Cassirer, PSF II, 109.

Theoretical time marches on at a uniform pace quite separate from lived experience. Like theoretical space, theoretical time is characterized by continuity, infinity and uniformity.²⁴⁷ Time, from a theoretical standpoint, is an unceasing onrush. While people speak with poetic liberty of 'time standing still' during unusually intense experiences, theoretical time recognizes only a continuous, even-handed, mono-directional flow of time. Whereas mythical thinking institutes absolute boundaries into the totality of time, the theoretical perspective understands time as having no absolute beginning or ending, instead being infinite.

Especially with respect to its uniformity, theoretical time differs from the intuition of musical time, which is essentially bound up with lived experience. Schütz describes this difference well in FPM:

I have here a box of different kinds of 78 rpm records. If you look at your watch, you will find that it takes about three minutes to play one side of a twelve-inch record. This is an important fact for the person in charge of making up a radio program. It is entirely immaterial to the listener. To the listener, it is not true that the time he lived through while listening to the slow movement of a symphony was of equal length to the time he lived through while listening to its finale, although each movements needed the playing of two sides of a twelve-inch record.²⁴⁸

It is the qualitative character of the intuition of musical time that accounts for the difference between the objective length of a musical work and its felt length. This same incommensurability of lived time and objective time is evident in non-aesthetic experiences; for instance, in the felt difference between an hour spent in agreeable conversation with an

²⁴⁷ As Cassirer says of Euclidean space. Cf. Cassirer, PSF II, 83.

²⁴⁸ Schütz, FPM, 254.

old friend versus an hour spent leafing through magazines while awaiting the results of a consequential biopsy. The qualitative character of the intuition of musical time can be understood analogously with the relationship between the qualitative character of mythical space and aesthetic space. The latter, we saw above, is rich in expressive values – the expanses of indeterminate, placeless landscapes favored by Salvador Dali may strike the viewer as melancholy or mysterious or discomfiting, but they will not leave the viewer affectively indifferent. The difference with mythical space seems to be qualitative. The feeling values of mythical space are described by Cassirer as far more intense and violent than their aesthetic counterparts, which have been mellowed by the contemplative distance that separates the subject and the world in the aesthetic experience.

The intuition of musical time also differs essentially from the fragmentation of mythical time. We have seen that mythical time posits absolute divisions between past, present and future. This division is entirely foreign to the experience of musical time. The acts of consciousness that are conditions of the possibility of the musical experience – retention and protention – in fact demonstrate the indivisibility of musical time (at least in lived experience, reflection is a different matter).

Schütz's analysis of an unfolding sequence of six tones (c-d-e-c-d-d) illustrates this indivisibility of musical time. The first tone perceived is c. This single tone is experienced as continuous, its initial phase and enduring phase are contained in its final phase through the functioning of retention, which furnishes the listener with the experience of having heard a single tone extended over time. The first tone, c, is followed by the sounding of the second tone, d. This tone is given in the vivid present, and, although the first tone (c) has ceased to sound, the listener experiences the interval c-d. Given that the perception of the second tone (d) contains the

perception of the interval between the first tone (c) and the second, the first tone is itself retained, albeit “indirectly.”²⁴⁹ The perception of the second tone (d) mirrors that of the perception of the first tone, save that the perception of the second tone is augmented with the perception of the relationship between the first and the second tone. The retention of elements that are no longer experienced in vivid presence explains why the musical theme is *apperceived* as a unit. Just like a three-dimensional spatial object, a musical object is by its very nature unable to be experienced in a single ray.

With the perception of the third tone (e), the contents of consciousness have rapidly accumulated and include: “(1) the third tone (e) in actual experience; (2) the second one (d) retained; (3) the interval (d-e) between the second and the third; (4) the first one (c) as a retentional element of (2) (d); the interval (c-e) between the actually experienced third (e) and the first one (c).”²⁵⁰ The fourth and fifth tones (c and d, respectively) are isomorphic with the first and second tones, giving rise to a protention of the subsequent tone as e.

This protention suggests to Schütz that the sequence of the first three tones has been constituted as a theme. However, the fulfillment of this protention is dashed when the sixth tone emerges in vivid presence as d instead of e. This frustrated protention gives the listener to understand that what we had expected to be the musical theme (c-d-e) is in fact only a part or “moment”²⁵¹ of the actual theme, which is now understood to be the entire six note sequence c-d-e-c-d-d.

Retention and protention demonstrate that the musical ‘present’ is shot through with the context of tones that have ceased to sound and colored by the expectation of the tones that are

²⁴⁹ Schütz, FPM, 261.

²⁵⁰ Schütz, FPM, 261.

²⁵¹ Schütz, FPM, 260.

likely to follow. In other words, there are no strict dividing walls between the past, present and future in the experience of musical time, the experience of which is qualitative, concrete and continuous.

5. Symbolic Forms and the Experience of Subjectivity

To each symbolic form is correlated a specific experience of the self. In PSF II Cassirer refers to this dimension as constituting a “life form.”²⁵² In addition to giving shape to the external world through particular styles of intuition (i.e. particular experiences of space and time), as a life form, a symbolic form gives shape to the experience of the self. For instance, in the context of the symbolic form of language, Cassirer emphasizes how a study of a diversity of languages demonstrates that “at first the concrete feeling of self is entirely bound up with the concrete intuition of one’s own body and limbs.”²⁵³

The discovery of subjectivity for mythical consciousness is a useful point of departure for a consideration of the experience of subjectivity for artistic consciousness, since, as we have seen, myth functions as the fount for the other symbolic forms. According to Cassirer, it is action that “constitutes the center from which man undertakes the spiritual organization of reality. It is here that a separation begins to take place between the spheres of the objective and subjective, between the world of I and the world of things.”²⁵⁴ In the course of activity, as the external world pushes back against our efforts, there is a progressive determination of the boundaries between the I and the not-I. Cassirer claims that this emphasis on action accounts for salient characteristics of mythical intuition: “Here lies the core of the magical world view, which is

²⁵² Cassirer, PSF II, 153.

²⁵³ Cassirer, PSF I, 251.

²⁵⁴ Cassirer, PSF II, 157.

saturated with this atmosphere of efficacy, which is indeed nothing more than a translation and transposition of the world of subjective emotions and drives into a sensuous, objective existence.”²⁵⁵ As this quote makes clear, for mythical consciousness, despite its origin in the subject’s consciousness, the efficacy of reality is not attributed to the self, but is rather understood to exist in the external world. It is this dialectical reversal that explains the supposed potency of names and images over the objects to which they refer.

Mythical consciousness thus involves a more fluid relationship between the self and the world. While this fluidity certainly does not mean that the self and the world are not distinguished, certain boundaries taken for granted by the theoretical stage of consciousness have not been instituted: “Above all, [mythical consciousness] lacks any fixed dividing line between mere ‘representation’ and ‘real’ perception, between wish and fulfillment, between image and thing.”²⁵⁶ The musical experience, we shall see, also involves a relationship between inner and outer that is foreign to theoretical consciousness.

5a. Music as a Life Form

As a form of intuition, a symbolic form gives shape, so to speak, to the external world. As a life form, a symbolic form involves the “discovery and determination” of subjectivity, of the “I.” Thus, as a symbolic form, art will demonstrate a particular experience of the self and music, as a form of art, will also involve an experience of the “I.”

²⁵⁵ Cassirer, PSF II, 157.

²⁵⁶ Cassirer, PSF II, 36.

Independently of Cassirer's framework, Zuckerkandl speaks to the particular self-experience involved in listening to music.²⁵⁷ He describes this life form by distinguishing "the 'I' of objective hearing" from "the 'I' of musical hearing,"²⁵⁸ a distinction that hinges on different varieties of auditory experience:

'To hear' does not always denote the same act. I hear the marching of troops, and I hear the march they are playing: here language obscures the true state of affairs, for it has only one word to signify two very different functions. In the first case, to hear is to perceive a physical event; the function involved is essentially comparable to the functions of other senses. In the second case, hearing is something entirely different, completely *sui generis*. If one tries to understand hearing on the basis of any sound sensations, as most psychologists do, one can never get beyond what hearing has in common with seeing and touching. What hearing really is, what we really are as listeners, can be understood only on the basis of hearing music.²⁵⁹

Understanding specifically *musical* hearing, and thereby the life form correlated with music, demands achieving an understanding of hearing that goes beyond the merely physiological explanations that have monopolized discussions of the sense modality.

Hearing as such reaches out beyond the given sense datum. In workaday life, hearing reaches out to grasp the origin of the sensation. Thus, as phenomenologists have noted, we never hear abstract sensations; rather, we hear a knock at the door, or a car driving by, or a shout in the

²⁵⁷ Zuckerkandl does cite Cassirer at one point in *Man the Musician*, the text in which he discusses the "I" of musical hearing. However, the reference is unrelated to systematic matters, referring instead to remarks that Cassirer makes in *Essay on Man* on how the question of whether animals possess language centers on the way that "language" is defined. Cf. Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 59.

²⁵⁸ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 336.

²⁵⁹ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 88.

distance. Musical hearing differs from this objective hearing in that “what is heard here is self-contained,” while objective hearing hears the source of sound. Self-contained though it is, musical hearing does reach out beyond the sense datum. But instead of hearing the source of the sensation, musical hearing grasps the relationship between the given tone and those which have ceased to sound or have not yet sounded, which Schütz refers to as the processes of retention and protention.

The hearing that characterizes the I of musical experience reveals a different subject-object relationship than its objective, everyday counterpart. The traditional position has long been that since tones do not refer to objects in the external world, they are in one way or another revelatory of or connected with the inner life of human beings. This conclusion is born of the perplexing meaningfulness of musical tones: “Such a musician [as Beethoven] stirs us deeply, but what is he saying, what is he talking *about*? Not about this, not about that, not about anything that can be named, not about any object – he is speaking about *nothing*; yet this ‘nothing’ is an ‘all.’”²⁶⁰ This perplexing all-containing nothing finds an analogue in pure subjectivity, which is similarly “‘nothing’ so far as things, objects, are concerned, nothing that can be pointed to, called by name...And yet it is ‘all’ at the same time, because the objective existence of all objects presupposes it.”²⁶¹

Such considerations, however, tacitly rely on a conception of music as absolute – i.e. without the participation of words or a preexisting narrative that the music represents. Thus, theories that reach the aforementioned conclusion on such grounds have done so with an impoverished, historically contingent conception of music. When tones are considered in their relationship to words, different conclusions present themselves.

²⁶⁰ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 53.

²⁶¹ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 53.

Zuckermandl argues that if words pointed to things in the world, while tones pointed inward to states of the soul, then the conjunction of the two would conflict. This is disproven by actual singing, which demonstrates that words and tones are mutually enhancing. The tone “accompanies the word on its way to the thing, to the object. Only, unlike the mere word, it does not stop at the object: it breaks through the dimension of objective existence, thus making it impossible for what the word denotes to be nothing but object... The tone does not blur the word’s meaning but rather deepens it.”²⁶² The singing of celebratory words, for example, adds more celebration to the mere denotation of the words. The ability of tones to deepen the meaning of words, to add contour to the meaning presented, suggests that the non-objectivity of tones “is not that of the ‘other side,’ of inwardness devoid of an object, or pure subjectivity; it is a non-objectivity *behind* the objects.”²⁶³ While there does appear to be a meaningful connection between tones and inner life, this connection does not exclusively point to the inner life of the self. “This is precisely why the singer experiences inner life as something he shares with the world, not as something that sets him apart from it,” writes Zuckermandl, “As he sings (and hears himself sing) he discovers that the things of the world speak the language of his own inwardness and that he himself speaks the inner language of things.”²⁶⁴ Thus, concludes Zuckermandl, the musical experience of the self problematizes the subject-object distinction that is frequently taken as common sense.

²⁶² Zuckermandl, *Man the Musician*, 55.

²⁶³ Zuckermandl, *Man the Musician*, 56.

²⁶⁴ Zuckermandl, *Man the Musician*, 56.

6. Thinking in Music

In addition to an experience of the self and a form of intuition, a symbolic form entails a specific form of thought. The following presentation of music as a form of thought will follow the model of PSF I, in which Cassirer considers “Language as [an] Expression of Conceptual Thought.”²⁶⁵ With assistance once again from Zuckerkandl, we shall consider in this section whether, and in what respect, music is an expression of thinking. In contradistinction to Cassirer’s account of language and thought, we shall omit the qualification “conceptual” from our discussion. It is generally accepted that one of the chief characteristics of absolute music is its non-conceptual character. In fact, this is the first claim made by Schütz in FPM: “Music is an instance of a meaningful context without reference to a conceptual scheme and, strictly speaking, without immediate reference to objects of the world in which we live, without reference to the properties and functions of those objects.”²⁶⁶ Zuckerkandl – in what amounts to a very ‘Cassirerean’ and phenomenological move – argues that this lack of conceptuality does not entail that music and thinking are mutually exclusive, but rather that an unbiased study of certain musical processes sheds light on an expanded understanding of thinking that is truer to the evidence of experience. Let us consider in more detail Zuckerkandl’s account of thinking in music.

In his views on both space and thinking in music, Zuckerkandl echoes Cassirer’s claims about the tendency of symbolic forms to claim exclusive rights over certain concepts. The denial of spatiality in music “was based on the assumption that what is currently known of space is all that there is to space. So far as geometric space is concerned, the assumption works well enough,

²⁶⁵ Cassirer, PSF I, 278.

²⁶⁶ Schütz, FPM, 244.

and music has indeed very little to do with it.”²⁶⁷ The claim that music is of a non-intellectual character derives from a similar argument: “It would appear that skepticism concerning the role of thinking in music springs from a similar prejudice, namely, that the nature of thought has been defined once and for all by logicians.”²⁶⁸ In other words, geometric space and logic – or, in Cassirer’s parlance, the symbolic form of science – have arrogated to themselves the ‘true’ senses of space and thought, rendering other applications of these concepts to an, at best, metaphorical status.²⁶⁹

Nevertheless, just as he did with spatiality, Zuckerkandl argues that there is indeed a meaningful intellectual character to music, which, when properly understood, leads us to expand our understanding of thinking as such. Zuckerkandl’s reflections on the intellectual character of music also provide an entrance into a consideration of how music manifests a unique form of thought, which Cassirer argues belongs to all symbolic forms. Zuckerkandl characterizes his approach in a manner that sounds akin to both phenomenology and Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms:

We should stop forcing the facts to fit the concept, so that essential features of music are relegated to the domain of the irrational: that is, rendered unintelligible by definition. Rather, we should let the facts guide us toward a broader concept of the rational – a concept that more truthfully reflects the real power of thought, the true scope of the intelligible.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 222.

²⁶⁸ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 222.

²⁶⁹ As we have seen, such a prejudice leads thinkers like Vladimir Jankélévitch to reject a meaningful connection between music and spatiality.

²⁷⁰ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 273.

The view that denies an intellectual character to music is based on a dichotomy between thinking and inspiration. Music, in the ‘traditional’ account that Zuckerkandl sets up to knock down, may derive from two creative sources – intellect and inspiration. The application of the rules of music theory, which can be taught and even codified in such a way as to be programmed into computers²⁷¹, are viewed as “knowledge and skill.”²⁷² But the material to which the rules of music theory is applied – a musical theme – is not constructed by means of music theory. “How to treat a theme, what can be done with it, is learnable, teachable,” writes Zuckerkandl of this prevalent view, “but not how to compose a theme; the explanation for this is that a theme is not made, but simply found – it ‘occurs to one,’ all at once.”²⁷³ While the composition of music is traditionally held to involve the intellect in the application of the rules of music theory in devising variations on the theme, there is an implicit value judgment that the composition’s true aesthetic value lies not in the workmanlike application of rules but in the inspired creation of a theme.

Zuckerkandl refutes the two-creative-sources view by identifying compositions that flout the involvement of either intellect or inspiration. The Andante of Bach’s A-minor Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin, for instance, unfolds like a work of unadulterated inspiration, in which the rote rules of music theory would not allow the beholder to anticipate what comes next should the progress of the piece be arrested at any point. Thus, concludes Zuckerkandl, there seem to be

²⁷¹ Music theory deals with music in the abstract, having nothing essential to do with music as sounding tones. Thus, “with adequate training a deaf-mute could solve most of the problems [set out to teach music theory].” Since music theory trades in “topographical, not musical, problems...electronic computers do not do so badly when given tests in musical theory.” (Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 225.)

²⁷² Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 226.

²⁷³ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 226.

musical works that are ‘pure theme,’ deriving wholly from inspiration and betokening mastery so profound that technical know-how gives way to the other creative source.

Similarly, there are compositions that are theme-less. Polyphonic music from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, for instance, confounds modern views about the construction of a composition in terms of theme and variations. Zuckerkandl cites Palestrina’s four-part motet *Super flumina Babilonis* as an example in which speaking of themes is misleading. “Palestrina’s melody,” he writes, “seems to be little more than a saying of the words in tones.”²⁷⁴ No theme emerges that orients the construction of the composition, which, therefore according to the two-source view would be bereft of inspiration; if, that is, inspiration is characterized strictly in thematic terms.

Zuckerkandl concludes through such examples and detailed analyses of compositions²⁷⁵ that the view that music derives from two creative sources is, in many cases, misleading and, in other cases, adds nothing to our understanding of music and the creative process of composition. Consequently, he posits a single creative source, which better accounts for the musical facts under consideration. Zuckerkandl’s argument for a single creative source takes the form of a defense of an expanded concept of “thinking,” which is able to incorporate the putatively paradoxical notion of “nonlogical thinking.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 229.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 231-269.

²⁷⁶ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 334. Again, Zuckerkandl here appears uncannily compatible with Cassirer when he writes, “That there is such a thing as nonlogical thinking, and that it is not merely a stage preliminary to logical thinking but equal to it in status and performance, is no longer a matter for debate” (Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 334). Zuckerkandl also echoes Cassirer on the ontologically constructive nature of art: “Conceptual thinking is cognitive, its purpose is to add to our store of knowledge. Musical thinking is productive, its purpose to add to our store of reality” (Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 337).

What then is nonlogical thinking and what is its relationship to the more familiar notion of logical thinking? Logical thinking is the manner of regarding the world in terms of “concepts and propositions, the latter defining concepts and linking them according to rigorous rules.”²⁷⁷ The construction of logical knowledge proceeds by way of its “supreme law” of “implication,”²⁷⁸ that is, ensuring the validity of further concepts and propositions by deriving them as necessary from one’s initial concepts and propositions. Logical thinking is also analytic, meaning that it adds to our store of knowledge by teasing out what is already contained in the axioms and definitions that begin one’s investigation. Thus, for instance, mathematical theorems are implicit in the fundamental concepts of mathematics such as point, line, right triangle, etc. “The whole force of a logical argument consists precisely in this,” writes Zuckerkandl, “that it never says anything really new, that it only makes us see what we have not seen before.”²⁷⁹

Musical thinking differs from logical thinking in all of these respects. As opposed to concepts and propositions, the grist of musical thinking is patterns, which it links into patterns. And whereas logical thinking is analytic, musical thinking is synthetic, a form of invention. Musical thinking brings something new into existence, which was “not implicit in the given, but demanded by it.”²⁸⁰ Zuckerkandl’s demonstrates the existence of nonlogical thinking through observation rather than argumentation, finding it to be writ large in Beethoven’s Sketchbooks.

Beethoven’s Sketchbooks allow Zuckerkandl to establish several points, which show musical thinking to be different than the common conception of inspiration (in which a complete work is revealed to the creator in a flash) and different from the logical process of uncovering a single “right” answer contained in the material with which the composer is working. The Sketchbooks

²⁷⁷ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 334.

²⁷⁸ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 334.

²⁷⁹ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 334.

²⁸⁰ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 335.

militate against the everyday notion of inspiration insofar as they show a laborious process rife with false starts and missteps. Time and time again, when confronted with an incomplete phrase, Beethoven will write the phrase anew, putting down on paper measures that he has already solidified as if it were necessary to be carried along by the momentum of the phrase itself, like repeating a sentence over and over in search of an elusive final word. For Zuckerkandl, this repetitious activity serves to show that “inspiration,” if one can speak of such a thing, comes not from on high but from the tones themselves, which over time suggest possibilities for furtherance that could not be computed a priori. This notion that “inspiration” comes from the tones themselves is in keeping with Zuckerkandl’s unwillingness to formulate the philosophical problems of music as subjective (in which case, psychology would be the proper field to investigate the problems) or objective (in which case, physics would be the proper field). By classifying its dynamic quality as a tone’s uniquely musical characteristic, and by claiming that this dynamic quality is neither an acoustical property of a tone (and hence inaccessible to the physicist) nor imputed to the tone by the listener’s mind (and hence inaccessible to the psychologist), Zuckerkandl delimits music as a *sui generis* field, existing outside of human beings and thus furnishing resistance that necessitates thought.

Moreover, this process of invention does not uncover the single, inevitable solution to a compositional conundrum. Whereas logical thinking operates with hard and fast notions of right and wrong, in musical thinking, the “difference between right and wrong remains, but admits of degrees.”²⁸¹ It is the composer’s perennial struggle to establish a coherent work that nevertheless confounds expectations with a satisfying lack of predictability. Although possibilities for continuation are suggested by the tones themselves, the ‘right’ answer is not contained in the

²⁸¹ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 299.

tones. The composer “starts from the given, but is directed toward something beyond the given, toward a void. The given is behind rather than before him; he seeks not within it but together with it – together with the given he seeks something which is not in the given.”²⁸² This also distinguishes musical thinking from logical thinking, which *is* directed towards what is given. Mathematical thinking, for instance, is directed towards the phenomenon of a triangle in order to elucidate the particular laws that are contained within it, so to speak.

7. Conclusion

The primary aim of this chapter has been to begin an explication of what it means for art to be a symbolic form, as Cassirer claims it is. While this project has involved a consideration of numerous different art forms, our focus has been on music. Perhaps more than any other art form, music poses challenges for an account that would position it as a unique mode of experiencing reality. Certain categories that Cassirer believes to be essential to symbolic forms as such do not seem readily applicable to music. In fact, these problematic categories – spatiality and an intellectual character, in particular – have been traditionally denied to music. In the course of this chapter, with the assistance of certain thinkers, Victor Zuckerkandl above all, we have been able to reclaim a meaningful sense in which music reveals often overlooked aspects of the experience of space and the nature of thinking. Thus, music does not only represent a particular type of experience; properly understood it enlarges our everyday understanding of experience.

Phenomenological accounts of music have proven indispensable to the foregoing chapter. However, it will have been noticed that there is divergence even among adherents of

²⁸² Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 300.

phenomenology concerning questions pertaining to music. For this reason, the next chapter will take up a critique of phenomenology's ontology of music with an eye towards determining the implications of an ontology of music on an attendant account of the musical experience.

Chapter Two: The Phenomenology of Music: a Historical Overview and Ethnomusicological Critique

While phenomenologists have traditionally directed their efforts towards the visual and literary arts – when they deign to detour from lofty epistemological and ontological projects at all – a number of these thinkers have applied the phenomenological method to music. This chapter will present a historical overview of phenomenological treatments of music, guided by reference to two overarching themes: the ontology of music and the nature of the musical experience. It will be argued that certain phenomenological treatments of these themes, while valuable, are ultimately vitiated by an ethnocentric bias; that is, a tendency to conflate music as such with the tradition of Western classical music. The introduction of ethnomusicological literature into the phenomenological fold not only demonstrates the myopia of existing phenomenological thinking about music, but on a more constructive level, provides theoretical insights born of concrete ethnographic studies that call for a phenomenological analysis. In this way, phenomenology and the philosophy of culture can be set on a mutually beneficial course while avoiding the pitfalls described by Cassirer when he describes the methodological relation between phenomenology and “a purely objective philosophy of the human spirit:”

The two are so closely linked and necessarily interdependent that not only are their positive results closely related but, conversely, every false move in the one direction makes itself felt forthwith in the other. An inadequate appreciation of the objective meaning of the particular symbolic forms always involves the danger that the phenomena in which this meaning is grounded will be misunderstood – and on the other hand, every

theoretical prejudice that injects itself into the pure description of phenomena endangers our evaluation of the meaning of the forms that result from it.²⁸³

This chapter will unfold in three major sections. In the first section, an overview of phenomenological treatments of music will be presented. Alfred Schütz, Roman Ingarden, Thomas Clifton and Don Ihde will be considered in turn with an eye on their views concerning the ontology of music and the nature of the musical experience as well as the ways that these positions harmonize and conflict with their phenomenological predecessors. While the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, does not warrant a section of his own, given his fleeting and unsystematic interest in music, a number of concepts that Husserl introduced are central to subsequent phenomenologists who took a more active interest in music and therefore benefit from being considered in their original context.

The second section levels a two-pronged critique of phenomenology's ontology of music, which generally conceives the phenomenon as an ideal object. The first prong of the critique is directed at the alleged ideality of music. This critique of ideality will itself have two prongs. First, it will be argued that conceiving of music as ideal derives from a misleadingly reductive understanding of the multiple possible ways that a listener can constitute a musical work. This line of argument will culminate in the charge that phenomenology presents a "digital" ontology of music. Secondly, it will be argued that the conception of music that has led phenomenologists to view music as ideal is not only historically contingent but also wholly inadequate to conceptualizing other forms of music and music making.

²⁸³ Cassirer, PSF III, 74. Schütz addresses this methodological relationship in an essay entitled *Phänomenologie und Kulturwissenschaft* (Schütz, "Phenomenology and the Social Sciences," 118-139) as well as a short outline of the same name (Schütz, "Phenomenology and Cultural Science," 106-109).

The second prong in the critique of phenomenology's ontology of music is directed at the second term characterizing phenomenology's view of music, namely as an object. Once again, ethnomusicology will come to our assistance, giving the lie to conceiving of music in terms of static works and showing such a conception to be both reductive and historically contingent.

The third section will untangle the implications that the foregoing critique of phenomenology's ontology of music has for its account of the musical experience. In short, one would expect that an unduly restricted account of what a thing is cannot help but result in an unduly restricted account of our experience of it. In other words, speaking of "the" musical experience is misleadingly reductive. It will be demonstrated that there are in fact a multiplicity of musical experiences, each of which warrants its own phenomenological account.

1. Alfred Schütz's Essays on Music

Schütz's work on music unfolds across a number of essays, the most systematic of which went unpublished during his lifetime. The essays that he saw published utilize music as an illustration or test case for some non-musical phenomenon that constitute the essay's thematic interest. For instance, in *Making Music Together*, music serves as a paradigmatic instance of "the 'mutual tuning-in relationship' upon which alone all communication is founded."²⁸⁴ However, Schütz could just as well have elected any number of forms of interaction as a means of accessing the mutual tuning-in relationship. He lists, for instance, "the relationship between pitcher and catcher, tennis players, fencers, and so on," going on to note that, "we find the same features in marching together, dancing together, making love together."²⁸⁵ *Mozart and the Philosophers* once again is not concerned with music as such, but rather with "a consideration of

²⁸⁴ Schütz, MMT, 161.

²⁸⁵ Schütz, MMT, 162.

the purely musical means by which Mozart solved the problems of the philosophers in his own way, thereby proving himself to be the greatest philosopher of them all.”²⁸⁶ Moreover, according to Schütz’s own lights, both *Mozart and the Philosophers* as well as another treatment of music, the chapter on “Meaning Structures of Drama and Opera” from *Life Forms and Meaning Structures*, are vitiated by a claim that Schütz makes in his most systematic work on music, *Fragments on the Phenomenology of Music*. In FPM, Schütz is interested in pure music, i.e. what is left when “we abstract from the special use of music to accompany certain events in the outer world – music for dancing, music for marching, music in combination with the drama...”²⁸⁷ Both *Mozart and the Philosophers* and “Meaning Structures of Drama and Opera,” on the other hand, pertain to music in a programmatic context, that is with the addition of dramatic elements that vie for the listeners’ attention and structure their perception with visual and conceptual ballast.

In FPM, which never saw publication during Schütz’s lifetime, Schütz offers a phenomenological analysis of music as such and for its own sake. Despite its fragmentary character, which leaves a number of questions incompletely addressed, the essay touches on a wide variety of important themes pertaining to a phenomenology of music. Let us now consider two of these important themes: the ontology of music and the musical experience.

1a. Schütz’s Ontology of Music

The decisive phenomenological claim regarding music is that it belongs to the class of ideal objects. “Music has a non-empirical status,”²⁸⁸ asserts later phenomenologist Thomas Clifton. Schütz likens a musical work to a mathematical theorem. “To be sure, the score, the

²⁸⁶ Schütz, *Mozart and the Philosophers*, 179.

²⁸⁷ Schütz, FPM, 258.

²⁸⁸ Clifton, *Music as a Constituted Object*, 73.

performance, the book, the lecture, are indispensable means for communicating the musical or scientific thought,” writes Schütz. “They are not, however, the thought itself. A work of music, or a mathematical theorem, has the character of an ideal object.”²⁸⁹ Clearly, the perdurability of a musical work is dependent on being bound to material objects and, as Schütz argues:

any kind of communication between man and his fellow man and therefore the communication of musical thoughts presupposes an event or a series of events in the outer world...Musical thoughts can be transmitted to others either by the mechanics of audible sound or by the symbols of musical notation.²⁹⁰

Yet we are mistaken to identify the musical work *per se* with the necessary conditions for its communication. Schütz is not terribly prolix on this point, seeming to take ontological characterization of the musical work as an ideal object as a relatively uncontroversial assertion and buttressing his claim with references to Mozart’s legendary ability to compose works in his mind. Schütz’s line of thought is well illustrated by his claim that “he who knows a piece of music ‘by heart’ does not need any reference to print, to any musical instrument or to performances heard or previously made, in order to reproduce the piece of music from beginning to end for his inner ear.”²⁹¹

Like other ideal objects, music is founded on real objects in the outer world; for instance, in some cases, musical notation and, in all cases, sound waves. But, Schütz has argued, music

²⁸⁹ Schütz, FPM, 247. It must also be noted that Schütz and many of the thinkers to be discussed are thinking of music in terms of musical works, a topic to which we will return later. Anticipatorily, it should be realized that conceiving of music in terms of works is by no means exhaustive of the ways that humans engage with music and, furthermore, it is a historically-contingent phenomenon in the Western classical music tradition, as will be argued by Christopher Small and Lydia Goehr.

²⁹⁰ Schütz, MMT, 165.

²⁹¹ Schütz, FPM, 247. In a footnote in MMT, Schütz also quotes Brahms: “If I want to listen to a fine performance of ‘Don Giovanni,’ I light a good cigar and stretch out on my sofa” (MMT, 92, fn. 24).

cannot be reduced to its notated form or its actualization in performance. In phenomenological terms, an appresentational situation obtains between the real object (or, occurrence) of the performance and the ideal object of the music proper. The appresenting object (e.g. the performance) belongs to the realm of physical things existing in the spatial time of the outer world while the appresented object (i.e. the music proper) belongs to the realm of ideal things existing in inner time. The appresenting object serves the function of wakening or calling forth²⁹² the appresented object. Music, then, is not merely sounds, but “meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time,”²⁹³ which means in the conscious experience of a listener. Conceiving of music in this manner helps to explain why Schütz feels that we can disregard the score and performance, since the appresentational relationship is governed by what Schütz names “the principle of the relative irrelevance of the vehicle.”²⁹⁴ Just as there are various means for calling forth an ideal object like the number two (which may be adequately appresented by signs such as “2,” “*deux*,” “*zwei*,” etc.), if a musical work is understood as polythetic process, then any means for effectuating these acts is an equally adequate appresenting object. Listening to a masterful live performance of a musical work, listening to a poorly recorded reproduction of the work, listening to a work that one knows by heart ‘in one’s head’ – all of these are valid ways of intending a musical object.

That, in brief, constitutes Schütz’s discussions of music’s status as an ideal object. Given the importance of this claim for phenomenological conceptions of music and the rich history of ideal objects in phenomenological thought and work in aesthetics, let us revisit some of the aforementioned claims as they appear in the work of other philosophers. We will begin with

²⁹² Cf. Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 303 for the use of these terms.

²⁹³ Schütz, MMT, 170.

²⁹⁴ Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 303.

some of the reasons why philosophers have been motivated to conceive of music as an ideal object in the first place.

One way of explaining why many philosophers have concluded that musical works are ideal objects takes a negative approach; that is, demonstrating the problems of reducing a musical work to either its score or its instantiations in performance. Schütz spends no time doing so, but other thinkers have reflected at length on the problems that follow upon such ontologies of music.

What is problematic about identifying a musical work with its score? Roger Scruton gestures towards some of these problems in his monograph *The Aesthetics of Music*. One such problem concerns the underdetermined nature of musical scores. According to Scruton, “we should recognize that works of music, whatever they are, originate in human actions, and are understood as *intended* objects.”²⁹⁵ The inability of the score to exhaustively account for the composer’s intention should therefore give us pause about conflating the score and the work. “Whether we count an arrangement as a version of the original or as a new work, will depend in part on the intention of the arranger,” explains Scruton. “And the difference between a performance and a travesty lies in our sense of the distance between the composer’s intention and the performer’s product.”²⁹⁶ The decisions that conductors and performers must make in the course of performance cannot be assumed to be entirely adequate to the composer’s intention. In this respect, the performance and the score that provided its imperfect orientation cannot be considered co-extensive with the work itself, which exists in the composer’s mind.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 107.

²⁹⁶ Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 107.

²⁹⁷ In *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, Evan Eisenberg regards the ineluctable interpretation demanded by scores as one of the impulses behind the creation of records:

Scruton also offers an argument from analogy, comparing a work of music with a painting. A painting is defined by what the viewer *sees in* the work. Were a painting to be submitted to a rigorous, scientific description that charted every inch of the canvas describing what colors and textures occur, we would have a specification of the painting's design but not the intentional object that constitutes the viewer's experience. Such a description finds an analogy in a musical score, which outlines with some rigor the sonic design of the musical work, but not the intentional object that is the viewer's object of experience.²⁹⁸ Christopher Small makes a similar point when he writes that a musical score is merely "a set of coded instructions that, when properly carried out, will enable performers not only to make sounds in a specific combination, called a musical work, but also to repeat that combination as many times as they desire...the fact that [a] title appears on the cover of the score does not mean that the musical work resides in its pages. We find there only a set of instructions for performing."²⁹⁹

Furthermore, the ontological identification of the musical work with the score yields some counter-intuitive consequences. In this model, a performance constitutes an instantiation of the work if the performer follows all the instructions outlined by the score. As a result, strictly

Marks on paper can be misinterpreted. A composer with unorthodox ideas about rhythm and sonority, whose work does not rest snugly within the German tradition of ideal music but has a strong sensuous element, will not want to give his performers too much rein...When the composer is the performer, what the recording records is nothing less than the composer's intentions (assuming he's a good performer). He becomes a phonographer; if he is not composing in the recording studio, he might as well be. He is free to disregard his own markings but compelled to specify them – to indicate phrasing, dynamics and the like by demonstration rather than description (Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 105).

²⁹⁸ Evan Eisenberg also compares the situation of the composer and the painter: "Suppose one wished to make music as directly as a painter paints. A painter would be outraged if he were asked to create a work by listing the coordinates of dots and the numbers of standard colors, which we could then interpret by connecting the dots and coloring by number. But that is what a composer is asked to do" (Eisenberg, *Recording Angel*, 106).

²⁹⁹ Small, *Musicking*, 112.

speaking, it could be argued that a performance containing mistakes is in fact not a performance of the work. Similarly, a performance in which the performer indulges in artistic liberties that run afoul of what the score dictates has ventured sufficiently far from the work's stringent identity conditions that, contrary to the performer's intention and the audience's perception, the work has not been instantiated.

Different problems emerge from identifying a musical work with its concrete instantiation in performance. R.A. Sharpe addresses the theme in his *Philosophy of Music: An Introduction*; however, as we shall see, part of his argument does flirt with question begging. Sharpe dismisses the reduction of the work to its performance on the basis of "a few truisms."³⁰⁰ First, a musical work "can exist unperformed, as long as the music has been written out and preserved in a library or a study. It might, as well, be remembered accurately by somebody even if no notated copy exists."³⁰¹ Supposing the work is not currently being performed and there are no performances of the work, it would follow from the ontological work-performance adequation that the work does not exist; a conclusion, which according to Sharpe, no one would accept.

Sharpe also argues that the ability to make judgments about the accuracy of a performance and musical interpretation presupposes a concept of musical work that transcends its performance. A score is an essential aid to memory in the realization of a complicated, large-scale work, as well as to the work's survival over long spans of time. But a score is not without ambiguities and both the conductor and the performers share in the creation of a work to the extent that they cannot avoid interpretive decisions. Evaluating interpretations, however, tacitly presupposes a notion of the work that precedes the performance such that the performance can be compared with this ontologically prior work.

³⁰⁰ Sharpe, *Philosophy of Music*, 59.

³⁰¹ Sharpe, *Philosophy of Music*, 59.

Doubtless there are ways of massaging both the above ontological positions that would twist free of the criticisms leveled at them, but that is neither our purpose nor our interest.³⁰² As has already been noted, Schütz and fellow phenomenologists conceive of musical works as ideal objects, irreducible to their score and their instantiation in performance. In order to evaluate this position we must seek a richer understanding of what an ideal object is.

Husserl generally discusses ideal objects in the context of the mathematical sciences and the achievement of objectivity. In this context, the ideal object stands opposed to the ineluctably imperfect, albeit always more perfectible, object of the experiential world. Through repeated acquaintance with an experiential thing, the experiencing subject attains an ever more accurate understanding of the thing. By seeing all of a thing's sides, I remove a degree of indeterminacy from my knowledge of it. By seeing up close a thing I have hitherto only known from a distance, I may achieve a more precise notion of the thing's color, texture and shape. However, it belongs to experiential things that they may never be known with unwavering exactitude since there is "belonging modally to the experiencing itself, always something like coming nearer to the thing, getting to know it more exactly; and this involves, under the title of 'more exact determination,' a continually possible process of correction."³⁰³

³⁰² While Schütz and other phenomenologists agree with defenders of aesthetic formalism that the musical work cannot be reduced to its score or its performances, phenomenology's ontology of music is not for that reason identical with that of formalism. Eduard Hanslick the father of the formalist conception of music, understands "music's essential aspect as a stable structure that can be notated in a score [albeit not the score itself]" (Higgins, *The Music of Our Lives*, 10). Phenomenologists, on the other hand, focus less on some objective stable structure and more so on the constitution of a coherent musical experience by the music's beholder. Whereas formalists conceive of music as something objective, phenomenologists conceive of music as something that happens through the correlation of 'subject' and 'object.'

³⁰³ Husserl, *Crisis*, 343.

In contradistinction to this unconquerable “horizon of open, possibly closer determination”³⁰⁴ stands the exactly determined ideal object. This experientially impossible ideal object is an achievement of thought wherein the endless series of a thing’s possible subjective representations are imagined as having been experienced. Thus emerges the notion of an ideal property “as the unity of the conceived infinity of thinkable and exact, relatively perfect exhibiting, through which, *idealiter*, harmonious identification would proceed.”³⁰⁵ The thing itself is conceived as the sum of its ideal properties, which thereby permits knowledge of the thing not as something actual but as the imagined object of ideally possible experience. As the imagined exhaustive experience of a thing, the ideal object transcends the particularity of an individual subject’s perspective as “absolutely identical for anyone who practices the method, no matter how much his empirically intuitive representation may differ from what serves others in their intuition-based idealization;”³⁰⁶ or, in a word, as objective.

Seeing as there are different types of ideal objects³⁰⁷, what should we identify as the essential features of ideal objects as such? One feature shared by ideal objects is their inessential material existence. As is implied by Schütz’s principle of the relative irrelevance of the vehicle in appresentational relationships, the material manifestation of musical works in performance or on a score certainly contributes to the perdurance of the work, but these material manifestations are not the work itself. Husserl writes “The idealizing mental accomplishment has its material in the ‘thing-appearances,’ the ‘thing representations.’ In perceiving, with its flow of appearances having vital ontic validity, these appearances are found in the mode of performance and are not

³⁰⁴ Husserl, *Crisis*, 344.

³⁰⁵ Husserl, *Crisis*, 346.

³⁰⁶ Husserl, *Crisis*, 349.

³⁰⁷ In Husserl’s essay on *The Origin of Geometry*, he writes of his subject, “what is thematic here is precisely ideal objects, and quite different ones from those coming under the concept of language.” (Husserl, *Crisis*, 357).

appearances as ‘material.’”³⁰⁸ That is to say, the authentic existence of ideal objects does not reside in their inessential material form – for instance, the Pythagorean theorem is itself not “ $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ ” and Beethoven’s Fifth is not the score or any particular musical performance of the work – rather, these ideal objects exist in the performance of the polythetic processes through which they are constituted – the demonstration of the Pythagorean theorem or the imbrications of retentions and protentions constituting Beethoven’s Fifth as a coherent musical event.

Ideal objects are also united in sharing “an existence which is peculiarly supertemporal and which – of this we are certain – is accessible to all men...[of] all ages.”³⁰⁹ This characteristic bears some consideration. With respect to the ideal objects of mathematics, the supertemporality of ideal objects does not elicit any consternation. It seems self-evident that the Pythagorean theorem should remain identical when expressed in different languages and that its meaning is in no way altered whether it is grasped in ancient Greece or present day America. However, Husserl insists that the supertemporality and pan-accessibility of ideal objects holds also for “a whole class of spiritual products of the cultural world...for example, the constructions of fine literature.”³¹⁰ This position has proven more contentious, with some phenomenologists unable to countenance it. Indeed, it is on this score that Roman Ingarden rejects the classification of musical works as ideal objects:

Some philosophers accept the existence of ideal objects, immutable and atemporal, having no origin and never ceasing to exist. The objects of mathematical investigations are supposedly belonging to this class. Are Chopin’s B Minor Sonata and other musical

³⁰⁸ Husserl, *Crisis*, 348.

³⁰⁹ Husserl, *Crisis*, 356.

³¹⁰ Husserl, *Crisis*, 356-357.

works such ‘ideal’ objects? We cannot agree to this, for who would deny that the sonata in question was created at a particular time by Chopin?³¹¹

It is the origination of the musical work that is the sticking point for Ingarden, since he acknowledges that, once created, a musical work endures indefinitely.

Further consideration suggests that the distance between Ingarden’s position and that of his fellow phenomenologists may not be as drastic as it initially appears. Ingarden ascribes to the musical work the status of an “intentional object.”³¹² To exist as an intentional object means that “a musical work remains something that we can create only intentionally and not in reality.”³¹³ With this statement, Ingarden sides with Schütz in the view that a score or a performance do not a musical work make; it is not the mere externalization of sound that creates a musical work, it is the work’s being intended, or, stated differently, the constitution of the work in the consciousness of the beholder. We shall have occasion to discuss this process in greater detail when we turn to the phenomenological account of the musical experience.

What are we to make of Ingarden’s refusal of the status of ‘ideal object’ to a musical work in light of Husserl’s and Schütz’s acceptance of it? Perhaps we can chalk it up to the different types of ideal objects that Husserl adverts to. Some ideal objects – such as numbers and mathematical theorems – possess a bi-directional supertemporality; they have no origin and no expiration. Other ideal objects – such as literary works and musical works –undeniably have an origin, but once brought into being, take on an independent existence and thus become supertemporal.

For a musical work to be an ideal object indicates that, in its essence, it is untethered to a material substrate and exists supertemporally. In fact, Ingarden takes this position to be one of

³¹¹ Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, 3-4.

³¹² Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, 120.

³¹³ Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, 120.

the “unsystematized convictions that we encounter in daily life in our communion with musical works before we succumb to one particular theory or another.”³¹⁴ Ingarden characterizes the conviction as follows:

The composer fashions his work in a creative effort, over a certain period of time. This labor fashions something – the musical work in fact – that previously did not exist but from the moment of its coming into being does somehow exist quite independently of whether anyone performs it, listens to it, or takes any interest in it whatever. The musical work does not form any part of mental existence, and, in particular, no part of the conscious experiences of its creator: after all, it continues to exist even when the composer is dead nor does it form any part of the listeners’ conscious experiences while listening, for the work of music continues to exist after these experiences have ceased.³¹⁵

1b. Schütz’s Account of the Musical Experience

In FPM, Schütz characterizes the phenomenological approach to music negatively. The phenomenological approach is *not* oriented by considerations that are immaterial to the listener’s experience of music. A physicist studying music might regard music in terms of sound waves. The physiologist would make reference to structures of the human auditory system that constitute conditions for the possibility of experiencing sound. The neuroscientist may identify different parts of the human brain and nervous system that are activated by music. The mathematician would uncover the numerical relationships that undergird the construction of consonant and dissonant intervals.

³¹⁴ Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, 1.

³¹⁵ Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, 2.

The phenomenologist, on the other hand, is first and foremost concerned with what is given in experience, which our own encounters with music reassure us is not sound waves, not the vibration of our inner ear's tympanum, not the lighting up of the frontal lobe, not a series of mathematical relationships. "[The listener] responds neither to sound waves, nor does he perceive sounds," writes Schütz, "he just listens to music."³¹⁶ The physiologist, neuroscientist, mathematician et al. are not fundamentally misguided in studying music as they do, but each of these individuals operates from what may be called derivative standpoints. Only the phenomenologist seeks to describe music as experienced. Beginning from this fundamental experience (hence the designation "derivative"), the physicist et al. offer different perspectives that add contour to our understanding of the complex phenomenon that is music.

To reiterate, the phenomenologist claims to offer a description of music that is most basic, that precedes all other secondary descriptions of music as a physical, physiological, neurological or mathematical phenomenon. How then does the phenomenologist describe this musical experience that we all allegedly have, which has nevertheless been obscured by derivative descriptions clamoring for their own misguided claims of priority?

It is important to note that, in FPM, Schütz explicitly focuses on absolute or pure music. As he did with the phenomenological approach to music, Schütz delineates the phenomena of pure music negatively; namely, as what we are left with when "we abstract from the special use of music to accompany certain events in the outer world – music for dancing, music for marching, music in combination with the drama..."³¹⁷ Not only is the music that Schütz is concerned with in FPM theoretically divorced from all cultural activity, Schütz explicitly advises phenomenologists that "to attempt a truly phenomenological analysis of the listener's experience

³¹⁶ Schütz, FPM, 246.

³¹⁷ Schütz, FPM, 258.

of music, we must try to bring about those elements which are common to all kinds of music and we must disregard – temporarily at least – all the features characteristic of a particular musical culture only.”³¹⁸

Music regarded as a phenomenological or merely perceptual object thus sets aside lyrics and other conceptual ballast as well as the various functions that the music may accompany in a subservient role and the many contexts in which the music may be experienced. According to Schütz, the musical experience consists in the “meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time.”³¹⁹ Music as a phenomenological object does, however, take into account the existence of a frame of reference, which functions as a condition for the possibility of experiencing music as meaningful: “Our analysis will, therefore, have to take into account the fact that, while listening, the listener uses previous experiences of the kind of music he is listening to. He has a certain knowledge of its general type and style.”³²⁰ Clearly then Schütz must be credited with the claim that culture is at play even in our most basic experience of music. Nevertheless, further consideration of the role of a frame of reference is absent from his analysis in FPM and it is unclear from Schütz’s analysis of a sequence of six tones³²¹ how the knowledge of a particular type or style of music would not merely contribute to but *enable* a listener to follow the flux of music. In fact, Schütz’s analysis gives no indication as to why a specific frame of reference

³¹⁸ Schütz, FPM, 258. Theoretically, such a methodology would appear to benefit from – if not require – an extensive familiarity with ethnomusicology. Insofar as ethnomusicology is the discipline concerned with the study of particular musical cultures, an acquaintance with this literature would prepare one to determine what features are common across musical cultures.

³¹⁹ Schütz, MMT, 170.

³²⁰ Schütz, FPM, 259.

³²¹ This analysis was discussed in chapter 1.

would be necessary for the understanding of a listener being “confronted for the first time with Gothic music or a modern composition written in the twelve-tone system.”³²²

We considered Schütz’s analysis of a six-tone sequence in chapter one, but this does not suffice for a complete consideration of Schütz on the musical experience. The reason we cannot rest content with this analysis is not because it is tendered from the theoretical standpoint, but because it seeks to justify how the musical experience is possible, not to describe what the musical experience entails. It is more accurate, albeit inadequately descriptive, to say that the musical experience involves the experience of music’s finite province of meaning. This Schützian concept requires unpacking.

Schütz argues for the existence of multiple realities. Such a statement is liable to suggest unphilosophical assertions for the existence of spiritual worlds or even modal logic’s philosophical, but ultimately misleading, interest in possible worlds. Rather, what Schütz has in mind is more in line with what Husserl refers to as “attitudes” (*Einstellungen*) and what Cassirer names “symbolic forms.” To assert the existence of multiple realities, in Schütz’s sense, is merely to observe that human beings have different ways of relating to the world, which generate different schemes of relevance, show objects in different lights, demand and prohibit different types of behavior and interaction and generally are accompanied by their “own special and separate style of existence.”³²³ More specifically, each reality (also referred to as a “finite province of meaning,” or, following William James, a “subuniverse”³²⁴) is “characterized by a specific tension of consciousness...by a specific time-perspective, by a specific form of

³²² Schütz, FPM, 259.

³²³ Schütz, OMR, 207.

³²⁴ Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 340.

experiencing oneself, and, finally, by a specific form of sociality.”³²⁵ An example should help clear this up.

Schütz identifies “the reality of our everyday life” as “the paramount reality.”³²⁶ The tension of consciousness associated with workaday life is wide-awakeness, which can be contrasted with the lack of alertness to the material world that characterizes the dreaming individual (whether that is REM cycle dreaming or, to a lesser extent, daydreaming). In daily life we engage with the world in a practical manner, as “something that we have to modify by our actions or that modifies our actions.”³²⁷ Thus our daily life is oriented by projects, which, in turn, determine the particular time-perspective holding sway in this paramount reality.

The activity of daily life involves a number of time perspectives that are unified in the acting individual. When projecting an action to be undertaken, I grasp the act in the future perfect tense or *modo futuri exacti*, i.e. as “the thing which *will have been* done, the act which *will have been* performed by me.”³²⁸ When, in the course of activity, I turn a reflective glance to the phases of a project that have been completed, they appear in the past tense or the present perfect tense or *modo praeterito*, i.e. as something that was done or that has been done. When I am neither explicitly anticipating the future nor reflecting on the past and instead live in the ongoing flux of activity, I experience my action in the present tense or *modo presenti*, i.e. as something being done.

In addition to these three time perspectives, activity is experienced on two planes. On the one hand, insofar as activity entails bodily engagement, I experience my movements as events taking

³²⁵ Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 341; also cf. Schütz, OMR, 230 where Schütz adds “a specific *epoché*” and “a prevalent form of spontaneity” to his list of “the basic characteristics which constitute [a finite province of meaning’s] specific cognitive style.”

³²⁶ Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 341.

³²⁷ Schütz, OMR, 209.

³²⁸ Schütz, OMR, 215.

place in space and time. On the other hand, from the point of view of consciousness, I experience these movements as “manifestations of [my] spontaneity pertaining to [my] stream of consciousness.”³²⁹ As such, my activity in the world also takes place in inner time or, in a Bergsonian term that Schütz favors, “*durée*.”³³⁰ Schütz claims that inner and outer time are unified in the actor, thereby yielding a “single flux which shall be called the *vivid present*.”³³¹ Action is an event in the outer world and, as such, takes place in spatial (a.k.a. objective, cosmic or clock) time. However, it is in inner time that ongoing experience, through retention and recollection, comes into contact with the past and, through protention and anticipation, comes into contact with the future. Thus the body is a sort of schema that unites inner and outer time.³³² Vivid presence is an essential element of the specific time-perspective of everyday life, but one other component is still missing.

It is a useful, albeit artificial, theoretical perspective that conceptualizes the individual independently of other people, since “the world of daily life into which we are born is from the outset an intersubjective world.”³³³ This consideration introduces a third dimension of time. Schütz uses verbal communication as an example. As the other speaks to me, she experiences the communication in vivid presence. The thought being conveyed is unified through retentions and protentions in the speaker’s stream of consciousness and thus in inner time. The actual occurrence of speaking, however, partakes of the objective time of the outer world. As the listener, I also experience the process of communication in vivid presence. The physiological

³²⁹ Schütz, OMR, 215.

³³⁰ Schütz, OMR, 215.

³³¹ Schütz, OMR, 216; cf. Schütz, OMR, 219 for the process of communication as an example.

³³² Cf. Schütz, FPM, 260-261 for this same point, albeit discussed with reference to music’s connection with objects and events in the outer world.

³³³ Schütz, OMR, 218.

processes of hearing take place in objective time, while the unification of the meaning of the utterance is a process in inner time. Thus, the speaker and I share a vivid presence, which establishes a “We-relation” or a “face-to-face relationship.”³³⁴ “All the other manifold social relationships,” claims Schütz, “are derived from the originary experiencing of the totality of the Other’s self in the community of space and time.”³³⁵ I may grasp the Other as the one responsible for such and such an act, but I thereby only grasp the Other partially. As we shall see in Schütz’s analysis of making music together, listening to a piece of music establishes a “quasi simultaneity” with the composer of the piece, but in such a case there is no co-presence of the partners. In everyday life, all the different time perspectives that are derived from the face-to-face relationship are “apprehended as integrated into a single supposedly homogenous dimension of time,” which Schütz calls “civic or *standard time*.”³³⁶ This is the time perspective specific to the paramount reality of everyday life.

As we have already intimated, everyday life is but one reality in which human beings act. The musical experience is also correlated to its own finite province of meaning, the presentation of which will entail enumerating the tension of consciousness, time-perspective, form of self-experience and form of sociality comprising the “cognitive style”³³⁷ that animates the experience of musical reality.

The tension of consciousness of an individual listening to pure music exhibits important differences from the tension associated with the paramount reality of everyday life. Such an individual “stops living in his acts of daily life, stops being directed toward their object.”³³⁸

³³⁴ Schütz, OMR, 220.

³³⁵ Schütz, OMR, 221.

³³⁶ Schütz, OMR, 222.

³³⁷ Schütz, OMR, 230.

³³⁸ Schütz, FPM, 258.

Schütz is slightly inconsistent in his discussion concerning this tension of consciousness insofar as he claims that listeners “accept the guidance of music in order to relax their tension and to surrender to its flux” after having just claimed that the change in the listener’s tension of consciousness “has nothing to do with the intensity of his listening. He may be engaged and, for the most part, he will be engaged, with greater intensity in listening to music than in the performance of his daily routine work.”³³⁹ It seems more accurate to say that instead of a necessary slackening of the tension of consciousness, the experience of listening to pure music involves a redirection from the world of space and spatial time to that of inner time. On the other hand, there do seem to be reasons for regarding the listener’s tension of consciousness as less taut than that of someone involved in their daily routine work. The aesthetic experience that Schütz describes in FPM is not fraught with consequences in the same way as the work world. Consider someone at work in the paramount reality of everyday life; for instance, a surgeon. If a surgeon’s focus lapses the consequences are grave and an implicit awareness of these consequences keeps the surgeon’s consciousness tense and directed. But the type of listening that Schütz is discussing has no such consequences, and if it does (perhaps in the case of a composition student analyzing a piece of music during an examination) then the listener is back to living in the acts of daily life as opposed to the disinterested aesthetic experience. Stated more generally, our attention to the more trivial tasks of everyday life is differently motivated than our attention in aesthetic experience. In everyday life we are motivated to carry out uninteresting tasks in order to accomplish more distant aims. Typical students, for example, memorize facts and formulas not because they believe this information will prove useful, but because they wish to get good grades in order to get a good job. Their present tension of consciousness derives its

³³⁹ Schütz, FPM, 258.

tautness from some future aim. A truly aesthetic experience, however, is not tied up with larger projects. A work of art holds our attention by virtue of its own merits. Future goals and consequences do not enter into the equation.

The tension of consciousness associated with the musical experience would thus seem to be somewhere in between that of workaday life and that of dreaming. Aesthetic engagement with music (which we recall is an ideal object in Schütz's view) is not concerned with material things in the world and is not extended into the future to the same extent as is consciousness in the execution of a project. On the other hand, the listener is not as distant from the world of practical life as is the dreamer. To this extent, the tension of consciousness correlated to music resembles that of the world of phantasms to the extent that "we have no longer to master the outer world and to overcome the resistance of its objects. We are free from the pragmatic motive which governs our natural attitude toward the world of daily life, free also from the bondage of 'interobjective' space and intersubjective standard time."³⁴⁰

The time perspective proper to the musical experience is inner time, which follows from the ontological characterization of the musical work as an ideal object. We have seen that the lived experience of listening to a musical work does not necessarily map on to the objective time required for the tones of that work to be run through. This is the central point that locates music's time perspective as inner. We have also seen that Schütz is indifferent to the means of effectuating the polythetic processes distinguishing a particular music work – hearing a live performance, enjoying a recording in the privacy of one's headphones, listening to a familiar work in the mind's ear: all of these are valid modes of constituting a musical work. In many cases, music may be experienced in vivid presence. However, this would only apply to instances

³⁴⁰ Schütz, OMR, 234-235.

in which our intending of the ideal object is mediated by an event in the outer world (e.g. a performance). In such a case, there is an intersection of inner time and spatial time, whose unification into a single flux is an experience of vivid presence. But since Schütz believes that one can access the ideal object by reproducing the work in her mind, spatial time is not a condition for the possibility of the musical experience and thus cannot be characterized as the time-perspective that is specific to the musical experience.

What is the form of experiencing oneself specific to the musical experience? Clearly it will differ from the experience of “the working self as the total self”³⁴¹ that characterizes the form of experiencing oneself specific to the paramount reality of everyday life. The self of the musical experience has ceased to be oriented by work relating to objects in the outer world. Thus the self of the musical experience is not the working self that experiences itself as the author of ongoing actions. In fact, there does not seem to be an explicit experience of the self in the musical experience Schütz describes in FPM and MMT. This is fitting since I suggest that the aesthetic experience of FPM and MMT involves precisely the temporary effacement of the self. The beholder of a musical work is not pragmatically involved in the world; nor is the beholder pragmatically involved in the fictitious worlds of phantasy or dreams. This temporary effacement of the self brought about by the musical experience is described by Friedrich Nietzsche as music’s Dionysian character.

Schütz thematizes the musical experience’s specific form of sociality in MMT and names this form of sociality “the mutual tuning-in relationship.”³⁴² In MMT, Schütz focuses on the social relationship that obtains between the composer of a musical work and its beholder, a

³⁴¹ Schütz, OMR, 230.

³⁴² Schütz, MMT, 161.

category that includes “the player, listener, and reader of music.”³⁴³ This relationship consists in the beholder participating “with quasi simultaneity in the former’s [i.e. the composer’s] stream of consciousness by performing with him step by step the ongoing articulation of his musical thought.”³⁴⁴ Stated differently, in listening to a piece of music, the beholder performs the same retentions and protentions that were performed by the composer in the composition of the musical work. While the musical work outlives the composer, and thus the beholder and composer may not be contemporaries sharing the same external, objective dimension of time, the two parties are nevertheless “united...by a time dimension common to both,”³⁴⁵ that is, inner time – hence the “quasi simultaneity” of the social relationship. This “quasi simultaneity” is derived from the experience of face-to-face partners sharing a vivid presence, which is experienced in a musical setting, for instance, in the case of a beholder listening to a performer reproduce a musical work. As opposed to the derived relationship of composer and beholder sharing a single dimension of time (viz. inner time), the performer and beholder undergo “the common experience of living simultaneously in several dimensions of time.”³⁴⁶

Thus Schütz’s phenomenological view of the musical experience involves a disregard for objects of the world (i.e. a slackened tension of consciousness), the effacement of the self effected by disinterested contemplation and a retreat from the objectivity of external time. However, this combination of factors does not preclude the social experience of a quasi-simultaneity of consciousness established with co-listeners and the work’s creator.

³⁴³ Schütz, MMT, 169.

³⁴⁴ Schütz, MMT, 171.

³⁴⁵ Schütz, MMT, 172.

³⁴⁶ Schütz, MMT, 175.

2. Critique of the Phenomenological Ontology of Music

Phenomenology, we have seen, conceives of music as an ideal object. There may be concerns from some phenomenological camps about whether a musical work can be conceived as ideal considering its origin in time and in culture. But in all essentials, phenomenology presents a fairly unified ontology of a musical work as something that is neither to be equated with its score nor any one performance or even the set of all its performances. A musical work, many phenomenologists agree, is the sum of the processes that constitute the experience in the consciousness of the beholder.

This section will present a number of arguments and observations that cast aspersions on understanding music as an ideal object. We will begin with a critique of the putatively ideal character of music. It will be demonstrated that conceiving music as ideal is essentially bound up with conceiving of music as an object or a work.

2a. Critique of Phenomenology's "Digital" Ontology

Conceiving of music as an ideal object yields what we shall call a digital ontology. In brief, what this means is that the conception of musical works as ideal objects problematically presupposes a definition of "signal" and thereby relegates everything else to the status of inessential "noise." Analog, digital, signal, noise – these terms are familiar, yet elusive, and thus call for explication. Damon Krukowski's monograph *The New Analog: Listening and Reconnecting in a Digital World* is a wide-ranging investigation of the cultural implications of the transition from analog to digital technology. To Krukowski's way of thinking, the analog-digital divide applies more broadly than traditional technological discussions would suggest:

Analog refers to a continuous stream of information, whereas digital is discontinuous. This distinction predates electronics, let alone integrated circuits. Any division of information into discrete steps is a digital process: from counting on our fingers, to calculating using an abacus, to (at least in some musicians' view) plotting notes on a staff of music. Yet our senses remain resolutely analog. When we hear numbers counted aloud, see the beads of an abacus, or feel the vibration of a string, those sensations happen on a continuous scale.³⁴⁷

The concepts of “signal” and “noise” have their place within this analog-digital paradigm of information transference. Noise is a relational concept. It has no existence in itself, but is rather defined in terms of its counterpart: “Noise...is whatever is not regarded as signal.”³⁴⁸ Similarly, signal also has no stable identity but is context-dependent, denoting whatever information is taken to be salient.

In the context of music, the signal-noise distinction would seem to be unproblematic. The signal constitutes the sound created by the musicians, while noise stems from unsanctioned sound sources such as the whirr of the central air, the whispered conversation of our neighbors or an unfortunately unsilenced cell phone. Granted, there have been musical works whose explicit purpose is to problematize the signal-noise dichotomy. Most famously, John Cage's infamous *4'33"* calls for a performer to take the stage, sit at a piano and periodically turn the pages of a score while remaining otherwise motionless and silent. The dashed expectations of the audience

³⁴⁷ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 9. Noted historian and sound scholar Jonathan Sterne disputes the contrast of analog as continuous, digital as discrete. “[Stewart Brand, who introduced this definition in his 1987 monograph *The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT*,] is in fact wrong about the continuous/discrete comparison – his example works with vinyl records or optical sound-on-film but not with sirens, magnetic tape, or player pianos” (Sterne, “Analog,” 37).

³⁴⁸ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 11.

calls attention to the sounds that would usually be heard as intrusive, rendering this “noise” as the “signal.” However, the effect of Cage’s provocation does not so much undo the traditional signal-noise hierarchy as initiate a breakdown situation in which the dichotomy becomes exceptionally clear. In this respect, *4’33”* has a philosophical analog in Heidegger’s celebrated example of the worldliness of the world being revealed through the breaking of a hammer.

I argue that the signal-noise distinction in music is not as clear as past phenomenologists would have us believe. Schütz’s example of a six-tone sequence, for example, is misleadingly simple. What Schütz has offered is an instance of the constitution of signal in the consciousness of a beholder through the processes of retention and protention. In order to do so, Schütz has omitted a number of other considerations that are ineluctably involved in the auditory situation. The six-tone sequence is, so to speak, pure melody that is ostensibly not being heard in a harmonic context provided by other instruments.³⁴⁹ Because there is nothing else to hear, Schütz has offered an example of pure signal. But it must be acknowledged that such a situation is decidedly an exception rather than the rule. Usually there are other sounds to be heard, which may well be the listener’s focus. While the phenomenological perspective recognizes that music’s existence is intimately bound up with a listener’s constituting consciousness, Schütz’s analysis overlooks the fact that there are an indeterminate number of ways that a listener may constitute a musical work. Thus, in implying that there is a single ‘right’ way to constitute a musical work, Schütz presupposes a definition of “signal” and, by extension, a definition of “noise.”

³⁴⁹ That being said, as we shall see below in the discussion of Tumbuka drumming, even an unaccompanied six unit musical phenomenon can undergird multiple possible constitutions in the consciousness of a listener.

What the listener hears and thus how the work is constituted is a function of interest and attention. In his monograph *Listening to Jazz*, musician/critic/historian Ted Gioia offers insights meant to assist the inexperienced listener in understanding the foreign and forbidding world of jazz. One suggestion concerns what might be called ‘directed listening,’ that is, listening to one recording a number of times and, with each subsequent listening, directing one’s attention to a different member of the ensemble. While the first listen may highlight the main melodic instrument – thus allowing the listener to constitute the melody in the manner that Schütz would expect – the next listen may foreground the drummer, thereby constituting the piece as a predominantly rhythmic phenomenon. To take an example from the Western classical tradition, consider one of Bach’s inventions. These compositions are two-part counterpoint exercises in which the pianist’s right and left hand trade off the roles of melodist and accompanist. The listener is thereby provided with different perceptual possibilities. The listener may follow the melodic line as it transitions into different registers, or may continue directing their attention to the register to which they have been listening. But – importantly – they cannot do both at once. A thorough ‘understanding’ of the work will necessarily require multiple listenings, allowing the listener to constitute the work in its different aspects. A musical work, like a pregnant phrase or certain visual illusions, admits of being diversely constituted.

This plurality of possible constitutions is especially evident in the phenomena known as “multistable acoustic phenomena,”³⁵⁰ a phrase coined by ethnomusicologist Steven Friedson.

³⁵⁰ Friedson, *Dancing Prophets*, 143. Ingrid Monson discusses this type of auditory experience under the rubric of what she calls “perceptual agency – the conscious focusing of sensory attention that can yield differing experiences of the same event.” (Monson, “Hearing, Seeing, and Perceptual Agency,” 37) Monson teaches students to become aware of a perceptual agent’s perceptual possibilities by encouraging them to listen to a group of jazz musicians “from the bottom of the band up,” which is to say that they should “focus their listening first on the bass line, then on the ride cymbal of the drum

Likening the phenomena to the well-known visual illusions of Gestalt psychology such as a Necker cube or the face/goblet illusion, Friedson adopts the phenomenological method of imaginative variation in order to lay bare the multiplicity inherent in a central rhythmic pattern of the Tumbuka people of Malawi.

The rhythmic pattern involves a cycle of six strokes, made alternately by the right and left hand on the knees and thighs of their respective legs. For purposes of illustration, the pattern can be understood in a somewhat simplified manner.³⁵¹ The pattern begins with a right hand knee hit, followed by a left hand thigh strike and then a right hand thigh strike. These first three hits are mirrored to complete the rhythmic cycle: left hand hits at the knee, right hand hits the thigh, left hand hits the thigh. This straightforward simplicity of this rhythmic pattern harbors unsuspected depths, akin to the polymorphous structure of a Necker cube. By accenting the first and fourth strikes (right hand hits knee, left hand hits the knee), one highlights the “duple pattern generated by applying a triple grouping to the strict duple alternation of right-left hand hits.”³⁵²

Alternatively, focusing one’s attention to the activity of one hand and disregarding its relationship to the other generates “a triple two-pulse grouping with each hand playing this figure

set, and then on piano comping patterns – the typical elements that go into establishing the rhythmic feel or groove of the piece” (Monson, “Hearing, Seeing, and Perceptual Agency,” 38-39). From there, attention can be focused on the chief melodic instrument, which presents the object of primary focus; namely, the melody. In phenomenological terms, Monson is leading the students through an awareness of the elements that constitute their experience of the music, in its bodily and intellectual aspects. Monson’s focus on the bodily, or groove-based aspect of the experience is a welcome complement to Schütz’s analysis of the six-note sequence, which would describe the listener’s experience of the melodic instrument’s contribution.

³⁵¹ For a detailed analysis of this rhythmic pattern and its role within Tumbuka musical practice, see chapter five of Friedson’s *Dancing Prophets*.

³⁵² Friedson, *Dancing Prophets*, 145.

(knee, thigh, thigh) in a staggered time relationship.”³⁵³ In other words, the pattern is then constituted as three units of knee-stroke/thigh-stroke.

While there are more perceptual possibilities inherent in this rhythmic pattern, the co-existence of the two are sufficient to demonstrate a flaw in phenomenological thinking about musical ontology. Schütz and others who promote a conception of a musical work as an ideal object presuppose that there is *one way* to constitute a musical work, while the aforementioned examples of two-part inventions and Tumbuka drumming serve as paradigmatic instances of multistability in acoustic phenomena. A more general point is that foregrounding some aspect of a musical event necessarily entails backgrounding others, and that by assuming different perceptual standpoints, the listener yields what amounts to different musical works – if, following Schütz, we understand a musical work to be a particular polythetic process of constitution.

By presupposing that there is one way of constituting a musical work, phenomenology’s ontology of music also presupposes a static definition of a work’s ‘signal.’ I have suggested that phenomenology, for this reason, puts forth a ‘digital ontology,’ since this state of affairs bears some similarity to contemporary recorded music. “A microphone amplifies not only what we say through it – the signal – but everything around that signal, which sound engineers call *noise*,” writes Krukowski. “And the engineers for digital signals have developed a suite of tools to eliminate it.”³⁵⁴ As a corollary to presupposing a definition of signal, a digital ontology will also overlook the constitutive role of noise in auditory perception. Phenomenology’s tendency to do just this will become clear in the following argument, which will demonstrate that our perception

³⁵³ Friedson, *Dancing Prophets*, 146.

³⁵⁴ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 60.

of sound is always contextualized by noise and therefore that a viable ontology of music and account of the musical experience must account for the function of noise.

The function of noise in musical experience can be analogized with the processes of retention and protention, which we saw in Schütz's analysis of the six-tone sequence to be central to the phenomenological account of a listener's constitution of music. Retention and protention demonstrate that a listener's perceptual present is saturated with the temporally absent. The tone that I hear now contains, or is heard in relation to, the preceding tone that has ceased to sound. The tone that I hear now also possesses a certain dynamic quality that suggests possible ensuing tones. Similarly, noise contextualizes what is heard while flying under the perceptual radar. Whereas retention and protention show the perceptual present to be affected by the temporally absent, an argument for the musical function of noise demonstrates that the perceptual present is colored by the thematically absent. In phenomenological terms, these background tones constitute a horizon against which the signal is perceived.

In *The New Analog*, Krukowski argues convincingly for the importance of noise in various auditory functions taken for granted in workaday life. Our ability to locate sounds in space, for instance, implicates the concept of noise:

If I want to listen to the person across the table from me in a restaurant, I block out the noise from the rest of the room. If I want to listen in on the conversation at the next table, I tune out the talk at my own. In other words, spatial hearing is dependent of the *presence of noise as well as signal*. If everything were signal, the restaurant would be a screaming mass of sound, and we wouldn't be able to focus our attention on anything at all.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 50.

The critical role of noise in spatial hearing is further demonstrated by the inefficacy of hearing improvement technology in certain scenarios. “Hearing aids are notoriously bad at cocktail parties and crowded restaurants because amplifying volume doesn’t improve spatial hearing – it only makes the same clump of indistinguishable noises louder,” writes Krukowski. “Localization is not a function of hearing *sensitivity*; it’s the result of our ability to detect *difference* in what we hear from each ear.”³⁵⁶ In other words, localization involves the ability to distinguish signal and noise; it involves our ability to render some stimuli signal and other stimuli noise through the direction of our attention.

Noise communicates more than just where a sound is coming from. How something is said is often as communicative as what is being said. This is demonstrated by the drawbacks of advances in telephonic technology. Perceptual coding has made it possible for cell phone developers to eliminate “not merely the noise framing a signal, but those parts of the signal itself that are unnecessary for communicating data...The rest of the voice – those aspects that do not help a listener understand the words – can then be separated out and reclassified as noise.”³⁵⁷ As a consequence, words become clearer, but how they are delivered is obscured. This ostensibly desirable state of affairs had led to certain losses in communicativeness. For instance, the microphones in cell phones are designed to minimize what audio engineers call ‘proximity effect’: “the simple fact that the closer a sound source is to a mic, the mellower its tone; and the farther a sound source, the thinner its sound.”³⁵⁸ As Krukowski points out, the expressive use of proximity effect is epitomized by the “intimate mikeside manner”³⁵⁹ of Frank Sinatra, who lent

³⁵⁶ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 23.

³⁵⁷ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 75.

³⁵⁸ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 78.

³⁵⁹ To borrow a phrase from the back cover of Sinatra’s *Close To You* (Capitol Records, 1957), an album that epitomizes Sinatra’s creative use of the microphone. His extensive

depth to his interpretation of lyrics by leaning in close and singing softly to convey intimacy and vulnerability or stepping back and singing loudly for opposite effects. As noted, cell phone microphones intentionally minimize the proximity effect in the service of relaying a consistent signal. In so doing, it becomes easier to understand an interlocutor's words, but more difficult to glean their manner of communicating. In Krukowski's poetic formulation, "Digital media allow for clear communication across great distances, but communicating distance itself becomes a challenge."³⁶⁰

If we bring the musical experience itself to bear on our views concerning the ontology of music then we find that noise claims an ineradicable place. Stated differently, there is no experience of music that is not contextualized by noise. On the one hand, if the musical experience takes place in vivid presence – i.e. where the listener is being confronted with externalized tones – then the fact that the listener is embodied and situated will have an effect on perception. Perhaps the listener is seated directly in front of the brass section; in this case, the listener is more likely to constitute the brass' sequence of tones as central, not in the least because the loud brass would likely drown out the string section. On the other hand, if the musical experience takes place in the listener's mind, so to speak, then the centrally constituted tonal sequence still owes its character to the tones that are merely implicit in the listener's conscious processes of retention and protention. These tones are not the signal itself, thus they are noise, but the signal would not be the signal it is were it not for this noise.

Because there is no musical experience that does not involve the interplay of signal and noise, any characterization of what music *is* (i.e. any ontology of music) must reflect this

use of the proximity effect is suggested by the album's title. Strangely, *Close To You* goes unmentioned by Krukowski.

³⁶⁰ Krukowski, *The New Analog*, 84.

essential aspect of music's existence. This inclusion becomes increasingly necessary when we remember that, according to the phenomenological conception, the coming into being of a musical work involves a subjective pole. In accordance with its ideal status, it may be sensible to Schütz to regard a musical work as existent even if it is nowhere being realized at the moment. But the proper mode of existence of a musical work only comes about when it is constituted in consciousness – whether this be through being heard, remembered or read on a score.

3. Critique of Work-Paradigm

Many scholars have critiqued conceptualizing music in terms of 'works.' This section will consider the different critiques of the work-paradigm of music, as well as the way that this work-paradigm is implicated by viewing music as an ideal object. In keeping with our approach thus far, we will consider not only the arguments of philosophers, but also the ethnographies of ethnomusicologists and the historical reflections of musicologists. We will first consider the historical contingency of the work-paradigm before considering some ethnomusicological models suggesting alternative paradigms for thinking about the ontology of music.

3a. Historical Contingency of Work-Paradigm

It only makes sense to construe music as an ideal object if one is trying to account for the mode of being particular to a musical *work*; that is, a musical event that admits of multiple instantiations over time. To attribute ideal status to an extemporized musical expression does not have the same intuitive force as thinking of musical works in these terms. An extemporization is precisely the type of thing that has no existence outside of the moment. In fact, its radically situated nature is often taken to be what is unique and valuable about improvisation; it is a

reflection or consequence of the performers' state of mind, the atmosphere of the audience, the acoustic properties of the room and other such individuating factors.

A musical work, on the other hand, is thought to be in some respect 'the same thing' each time it is performed. This conviction gives rise to the need to explain how it is that 'the same thing' can exist in multiple instantiations that are not only geographically and temporally distinct, but may also differ from one another in details such as tempo, dynamics and accuracy. Ideality is, pardon the pun, an ideal solution, which permits the positing of an existence beyond the multiple instantiations and can, with a Platonic imprimatur, explain why each of the instantiations never attains the perfection of the work itself.

But the 'work itself' is a latecomer to the world of music making. Recall Schütz's delimitation of the type of music in which he is interested in FPM: that which remains when "we abstract from the special use of music to accompany certain events in the outer world – music for dancing, music for marching, music in combination with the drama..."³⁶¹ It would be more accurate to view all music as, in one way or another, functional and to understand pure or absolute music as embodying a particular function that arises out of certain social, economic and cultural conditions.³⁶² With this promissory claim in mind, let us consider the functional nature of music throughout history with an eye on the ways in which this history problematizes the work-paradigm that undergirds the ontology of music as an ideal object. Since the work-

³⁶¹ Schütz, FPM, 258.

³⁶² Christopher Small's monograph *Musicking* offers an especially compelling and in-depth analysis of the many ways in which a symphonic concert (i.e. a performance of absolute music) implicates a wide web of economic, social, cultural, political and historical relationships. Small not only argues that the work paradigm is historically contingent, he boldly suggests that "there is no such thing in the Western concert tradition as 'absolute music,' that is, a musical work that exists purely to be contemplated for the abstract beauty of its patterns of sound" (Small, *Musicking*, 153). Small grounds this suggestion on his historical portrayal of modern compositional practice emerging out of opera and theatre more generally. Cf. Small, *Musicking*, 144-157.

paradigm is most prevalent in the Western classical tradition, and because the philosophers who defend the conception of music as an ideal object do so on the basis of considerations arising out of the Western classical tradition, we will limit our historical reflections to this tradition.

The autonomous composer is a relatively recent phenomenon. This fact alone ought to suggest that their creations did not prioritize contemporary notions of artistic integrity, but instead were above all intended to be serviceable:

Before the late eighteenth century, ‘serious’ music was truly a performance art. It was mostly produced in the public arena to perform extra-musical functions. Performances were geared towards the temper and needs of the persons and institutions who determined the functions. Musicians, who were normally in the latter's employ, had little control and power of decision regarding matters of instrumentation, form, length, and text. They obeyed the wishes of their employers.³⁶³

The musical implications of this subservient role are far ranging. The accompanying role that music played meant that it was not the music itself that was the center of attention. Music in centuries past was not primarily encountered in a concert setting wherein it was recognized as the gathering's *raison d'être*. Instead, music accompanied other activities that were the center of attention and, as a consequence, “music was not so much listened or attended to, as it was worshipped, danced, and conversed to. It was quite to be expected that audiences would applaud, chatter during, and sing along with a performance.”³⁶⁴

As a consequence of the utilitarian nature of music, in conjunction with the fact that composers were not accorded ownership of their compositions, recycling (or, from a

³⁶³ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 178.

³⁶⁴ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 193.

contemporary vantage point, plagiarizing) pieces of compositions was common artistic practice.³⁶⁵ But this piecemeal approach also served an important function; namely making music highly adaptable to the different needs that a composer may encounter in the form of commissions. Insofar as composers were essentially freelancers with no shortage of work opportunities,³⁶⁶ recycling portions of compositions was an occupational necessity. “Reusing music...was just part of what it meant to compose music,”³⁶⁷ writes Lydia Goehr of eighteenth century compositional practice.

It follows from the functional, commissioned nature of music during this period of time, that “Musicians did not see works as much as they saw individual performances themselves to be the direct outcome of their compositional activity.”³⁶⁸ One consequence of the de-emphasis, or even absence, of the work-concept in guiding composers was a relationship to notating music that is drastically different than the contemporary approach, which is itself a child of music in the age of the work-concept. Musical notation in centuries past assumed that performer’s possessed adequate improvisational ability to flesh out a relatively schematic score. Performers were held responsible for embellishments and making determinations where the composer left matters un- or underdetermined. In Goehr’s presentation, it was not until the turn of the nineteenth century

³⁶⁵ The ability to recycle pieces of existing compositions did not mean, however, that there were no notions of ownership and intellectual theft. Cf. Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 183-185.

³⁶⁶ Bach’s contract for services in Halle dictated that he compose works to be performed “on all high holidays and feast days, and any others as they occur, and on the eves of such days, and every Sunday and Saturday afternoon, as well as at the regular Catechism sermons and public weddings . . . in furtherance of divine service to the best of [one’s] ability and zeal” (Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 182).

³⁶⁷ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 181.

³⁶⁸ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 186.

that “notation became sufficiently well specified to enable a rigid distinction to be drawn between composing through performance and composing prior to performance.”³⁶⁹

The emergence of a regulative concept of the musical work cannot be easily explained and neatly dated. Many factors over a lengthy period of time have brought us where we are, musically speaking. It is not impossible, however, to identify different shifts that produced the beliefs, relationships and practices characteristic of contemporary musical culture. One such shift was the artistic and social emancipation of composers. “As the eighteenth century drew to a close,” writes Goehr of the correlation between the autonomy of the composer and the autonomy of their productions, “musicians were no longer thought about predominantly as in service to extra-musical institutions. Like their musical compositions, they were fast being liberated from the traditional power and restraint of ecclesiastical and aristocratic dignitaries.”³⁷⁰ This newfound autonomy altered how musical originality and ownership were thought about, as is reflected by a number of new laws put into place at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.³⁷¹ These laws, in turn, necessarily had to determine what constituted a musical work, or a piece of a work, in order to forbid illicit reproduction. The emergent view that the musical work is an inviolable entity brought about a more determined score that, instead of asking for the performer’s creative contribution, now demanded absolute fidelity. Christopher Small sees the thoroughgoing score as a major factor in the prevailing conception of musical works as ideal objects: “Concert life today...is dominated by the idea that musical works have a continuous reality that transcends any possible performance of them...This idea stems partly from the

³⁶⁹ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 188.

³⁷⁰ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 206.

³⁷¹ Cf. Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 218-223.

undeniable continuous existence of scores as permanent objects, which gives musical works the illusion of solidity...³⁷²

In addition to the emancipation of composers from the restrictions imposed by the system of patronage, changes in performance practice also contributed to the dissemination of the work paradigm. It is not surprising that the autonomy of composers, and consequently their works, was coincident with the rise of a professional class of musicians tasked with their faithful realization in performance. Before the first half of the nineteenth century, it was taken for granted by composers and audiences alike that many if not most of the musicians performing a piece of music would be so-called amateurs. “The coming of the traveling virtuoso-entrepreneur ended that situation,”³⁷³ according to Small. In Small’s presentation, these virtuosi realized the economic rewards to be reaped from the newly formed middle class, whose expendable wealth came at the cost of an inability to develop their own musical abilities, thus relinquishing the labor of performance to the unprecedented prowess of virtuosi. With the stratification of the world of music into professionals-amateurs, Small identifies an epochal “change of attitude”: “Musical works were made for playing, and now they are for listening to, and we employ professionals to do our composing and playing for us. A piece of music is written not to give performers thing to play but in order to make an impact on a listener, who is its target.”³⁷⁴ In brief, music becomes less as an activity that people engage in, and more something that people listen to with the expectation of being affected.

³⁷² Small, *Musicking*, 113.

³⁷³ Small, *Musicking*, 72.

³⁷⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 73.

3b. Conceptualizing Music Beyond the Work Paradigm

The changes that took place in the conceptualization of music during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century have remained in place to the present day, determining not only musical practice but also philosophical treatments of music. At the heart of this musical *Weltanschauung* is the idea that music is something that one listens to. And what one listens to are musical works. Self-evident as these ideas may seem, it is the task of the present section to problematize them – or at least to demonstrate that these ideas represent only a minuscule piece of the rich and unruly world of human music making. We will do so by considering several alternative conceptions of music. We will begin with dichotomies drawn by Victor Zuckerkandl and Christopher Small that problematize some of the chief assumptions about music that have oriented philosophical reflection and led to the phenomenological conception. We shall then turn to ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino’s argument that music is not a unified art form and his proposal of four distinct fields of music making.

Victor Zuckerkandl begins the second volume of *Sound and Symbol*, which treats *Man the Musician*, with a reflection on two concepts of musicality. The “familiar”³⁷⁵ concept understands musicality in terms of contemporary Western musical practice and beliefs, which Zuckerkandl refers to as “the culminating phase”³⁷⁶ of music history. This view of musicality distinguishes between the musically gifted individuals and unmusical persons, puts forth a division of musical labor where the composer, performer and audience each has their proper realm and equates music with musical works. The alternative conception of musicality regards it as an “overall

³⁷⁵ Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Volume Two. Man the Musician*, translated by Norbert Guterman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 11.

³⁷⁶ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 10.

human endowment,”³⁷⁷ which belongs not to an elite class of artists and connoisseurs, but to human beings as such.

Zuckerandl implies that the familiar concept of musicality has obscured the existential concept of musicality as constitutive of being human due to the overwhelming magnificence of the tradition of Western art music. Speaking of the “epochal discovery of polyphony,”³⁷⁸ Zuckerandl does seem to accord the Western tradition a special status, but his project requires a more inclusive reach. “How,” he asks, “. . . can we hope to understand the innermost essence of music, including that of the culminating phase, unless we consider its entire trajectory and take into account both the beginning and the culmination?”³⁷⁹ However, “beginning” in this context is not a temporal designation. Zuckerandl is not proposing to undertake a history of music. Rather, it implies an examination of the primordial, as opposed to the familiar, conception of musicality that Zuckerandl endorses.

The impetus to consider music outside of the context of its culminating phase is motivated by points of divergence between music in its culminating phase (i.e. Western art music) and music in other stages of its development as well as other musical traditions. Gregorian chant, for instance, represents a stage in which music was not conceived as works to be disinterestedly contemplated by an audience. This tradition undoes some of the assumptions that orient music in its culminating phase. Here roles such as “composer,” “performer” and “audience” are inappropriate. The so-called composer has not created anything, he has “been graced with the gift of being able to hear the angels singing; all he does is set down the sounds vouchsafed him

³⁷⁷ Zuckerandl, *Man the Musician*, 16.

³⁷⁸ Zuckerandl, *Man the Musician*, 10.

³⁷⁹ Zuckerandl, *Man the Musician*, 12.

by heaven.”³⁸⁰ Strictly speaking the music is performed, but modern assumptions about what performance entails are wholly inappropriate with respect to Gregorian chant. The music is neither entertainment nor art. The music is not something to be listened to, but part of the process of worship.

Folk music also problematizes the traditional notion of music. Until recent days, folk music was never notated and set down into compositions; it was an oral tradition, passed down through generations and undergoing all the alterations that one expects from such an informal mode of transmission. Performance also takes a different form in the folk tradition; it is, to anticipate a term used by Turino, participatory. “The situation is that of an all-together,” writes Zuckerkandl, “not of a confrontation,”³⁸¹ in which there is a strict separation between performers and listeners.

The evidence of music other than the Western art music of the past few centuries completely reorients Zuckerkandl’s aim vis-à-vis a philosophy of music: “Seen from the phase of the beginning, music appears as one of the main faculties of human consciousness in its advance toward even wider horizons. What we must do is take the problem of musicality out of the context of the culminating phase and place it back into the context of the beginning.”³⁸² To consider musicality as a main faculty of human consciousness has methodological implications. Zuckerkandl’s approach is thus phenomenological: “The task simply is to have a close look at the facts, describe them faithfully, and interpret them correctly.”³⁸³

Zuckerkandl’s task of studying the musicality of human beings resonates with the central claim made by Christopher Small in his monograph *Musicking*. Small’s basic claim is that music is fundamentally an activity, despite the fact that historical forces have led to the hypostatization

³⁸⁰ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 13.

³⁸¹ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 14.

³⁸² Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 20.

³⁸³ Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician*, 20.

of music into works and have led us to conceive of music as a thing. Stated differently, both thinkers are interested in music as something that human beings do as opposed to the reified works of music that select human beings have created.

In the previous section, we sketched Small's narrative concerning the ascendance of the work-paradigm during the first half of the nineteenth century. This shift in priority between work and performance has consequences for answering two central questions about music: "*What is the meaning of music?*" and "*What is the function of music in human life?*"³⁸⁴ Small likens the ingenious answers that have traditionally been proposed to explanations of planetary movement offered by astronomers before Copernicus' heliocentric universe yielded a simpler and more satisfying solution. Small proposes his own Copernican turn when he claims that music "is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do."³⁸⁵

What, then, does it mean to consider music in terms of what we might call the activity paradigm? In *Musicking*, it takes the form of an ethnography, or a "thick description,"³⁸⁶ of a symphonic concert. Music as an activity or an event – which Small designates by coining the term "musicking"³⁸⁷ – is animated by the relationships that constitute, are created by and are reinforced by the happening. "*To music,*" writes Small, "*is to take part, in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.*"³⁸⁸ Small even suggests that the activities of ticket-takers, roadies, people working the soundboard and the

³⁸⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 2.

³⁸⁵ Small, *Musicking*, 2.

³⁸⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6. Geertz acknowledges that he borrows the term from Gilbert Ryle.

³⁸⁷ Small, *Musicking*, 9.

³⁸⁸ Small, *Musicking*, 9.

janitorial staff may arguably be considered musicking insofar as they make a contribution to the event of musical performance.

Already it is clear that a study of musicking does not subscribe to the characteristic convictions of the study of musical works. For one, the separation (even hierarchy) between participants that marked the work paradigm is absent from the study of musicking: “in making no distinction between what the performers are doing and what the rest of those present are doing, it reminds us that musicking...is an activity in which all those present are involved and for whose nature and quality, success, or failure, everyone present bears some responsibility.”³⁸⁹ Conceiving of music as musicking also alters the perennial question concerning the meaning of music. Previously the question was posed in terms of the work – what is the meaning of this particular work, say, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony? Under the rubric of musicking the question changes: “*What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?*”³⁹⁰

A different question quite naturally yields a different answer. Similar to the myopic approach that locates the meaning of music (viz. a musical work) entirely in the relationships between the tones, Small’s answer to the question concerning the meaning of musicking is also concerned with relationships, albeit of a different order: “The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds...but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance...”³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Small, *Musicking*, 10.

³⁹⁰ Small, *Musicking*, 10.

³⁹¹ Small, *Musicking*, 13.

To summarize, Small's thesis is that music is primarily a process and only derivatively a product. As such, each instance of musicking is a radically individual event. Just because the same musical work was performed does not entail that the meaning of the musicking is the same. For instance, listening to Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* during the *Bayreuther Festspiele* instantiates different relationships than the experience of hearing that piece in the context of the film *Apocalypse Now* while sitting in a movie theater. The relationships between the tones remain the same, and therefore so does some of the meaning of the musicking, but the de-emphasizing of the work as the locus of musical meaning overwhelmingly alters how musical meaning is parsed out.

Zuckermandl and Small both propose conceptions of music that challenge the work paradigm. Zuckermandl proposes an understanding of musicality that sees it as a universal human endowment, thereby rejecting the prevalent view of the so-called culminating phase of Western music history that musicality belongs to the elite, the educated or simply the fortunately endowed. By relativizing the culminating phase as just one tradition among others – indeed, as just one historical stage of one tradition – Zuckermandl paves the way for a philosophical consideration of music that is not reliant on musical works. Small similarly recognizes the contingency, both historical and cultural, of the Western classical canon. His genealogy of the emergence of this tradition demonstrates to him that music is less about works than it is about musicking; and this holds equally well in the culminating phase, the blindness of which to priority of musicking is merely a characteristic of its particular, peculiar manner of musicking.

Zuckermandl and Small thus propose dichotomies – musicality is not something rare, it is part and parcel of the human condition; music is not a thing, it is an activity. Thomas Turino, on the other hand, offers a paradigm for thinking about music that accommodates the work paradigm

while refusing to accord it any special status. In lieu of dichotomies, Turino sets out a four-fold conception of music, which he even suggests may be open to further distinctions and refinement.

Music “is not a unitary art form,” writes Turino, anticipating a central thesis of *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, “but rather...this term refers to fundamentally distinct types of activities that fulfill different needs and ways of being human.”³⁹² Turino argues for this thesis with different tactics. On the one hand, because we generally speak of music *simpliciter*, Turino believes that the English language lends itself to conflating the different fields of music into a single art form. Turino also pursues a linguistic line of argumentation leading to observations reminiscent of Christopher Small’s thesis in *Musicking*. Not only do we use a single word – music – to speak of a wide range of phenomena, but this single word is a noun, a consequence of which is that we “generally tend to think of music as a thing – an identifiable art object owned by its creators through copyrights and purchased by consumers.”³⁹³ Turino contrasts this state of affairs with his knowledge of varied musical cultures, gleaned through ethnomusicological fieldwork. Indigenous Aymara musicians in Peru, we are told, regard musical recordings in a manner analogous with photographs. Just as we think of a photograph as a representation of a person, not the person itself, so do the Aymara regard recordings as representations of past musical events, a pleasurable tool for reminiscing about special experiences, but never to be confused with the social event itself, which the Aymara thought of as music as much as the purely acoustic recorded residue. Turino resists the normative dimension, found in Small’s *Musicking*, of the recognition of this “strange reversal.”³⁹⁴ Strange though it may be, this particular cosmopolitan-capitalist conception of music is just one

³⁹² Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.

³⁹³ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 24.

³⁹⁴ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 25.

phenomenon among others. We should not, however, overlook the fact that this conception is not the only one available even within cosmopolitan-capitalist society: “in the United States, as throughout the rest of the world, there are a multitude of music-dance activities that do not involve formal presentations, the star system, or recording and concert ticket sales. These other activities are more about *the doing* and social interaction than about creating an artistic product or commodity.”³⁹⁵

Following Small, it must be remembered that the reifying cosmopolitan-capitalist conception of music is itself tied up with idiosyncratic types of doing and social interaction, or, in Small’s parlance, musicking. Thus instead of conceptualizing music in terms of common categories such as styles, Turino opts for thinking about music “in relation to different realms or *fields* of artistic practice.”³⁹⁶ This notion of a field of artistic practice is modeled on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of social field. Both concepts delimit “a specific domain of activity³⁹⁷ defined by the purpose and goals of the activity as well as the values, power relations, and types of *capital* (e.g. money, academic degrees, a hit song, athletic prowess, the ability to play a guitar) determining the role relationships, social positioning, and status of actors and activities within the field.”³⁹⁸ Turino’s four fields can be subdivided into two fields pertaining to real-time performance and two fields pertaining to the recording of music.

The two fields pertaining to performance are participatory performance and presentational performance. Participatory performance erases the artist-audience distinction to the extent that its

³⁹⁵ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 25.

³⁹⁶ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 25.

³⁹⁷ Turino’s adaptation of Bourdieu’s concept of social fields should be compared with Ruth Stone’s use of Alfred Schütz’s concept of a finite province of meaning in her monograph *Let the Inside Be Sweet*.

³⁹⁸ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 25-26.

“primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role.”³⁹⁹ The participatory performance field obtains, for instance, in singing at church or recreationally making music with friends. Presentational performance is arguably the predominant model in contemporary Western musical culture. In contrast with the participatory performance field, presentational performance draws a strict distinction between artist and audience. In this field, the artists “prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing.”⁴⁰⁰ Presentational performance governs, for instance, the artistic practice of classical music.

Turino names the two fields pertaining to recorded music high fidelity and studio audio art. Although they may take advantage of the artistic potential of the studio, high fidelity recording purports to be a representation of live performance. Studio audio art, on the other hand, unabashedly incorporates sounds that have been crafted or manipulated in the studio. So, for instance, while the early recordings of the Beatles sound like the types of performances they would put on in the basement venues of Hamburg, later albums such as *Revolver* use studio tricks such as running recorded tracks backwards (as on the guitar solo of *I’m Only Sleeping*).

What are the implications of conceptualizing music outside the work paradigm for a phenomenological ontology of music that views it as an ideal object?

4. Consequences for the Phenomenological Account of the Musical Experience

Our next question concerns the effect that conceptualizing music outside of the work paradigm has for our understanding of the musical experience. Doing so will involve, first, a recapitulation of Schütz’s account of the musical experience. Then we shall return to the

³⁹⁹ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 26.

⁴⁰⁰ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 26.

conceptions of music that we examined in the foregoing section. Treating in turn Zuckerkandl, Small and Turino's conceptions of music, we shall ask in what ways and to what extent these views lead us to alter our account of what we experience when we experience music.

Anticipatorily, we shall see that all three of these conceptions compel an expanded account of music that transcends purely auditory experience by emphasizing the social and embodied dimensions of music's existence.

In previous presentations of Schütz's account of the musical experience, we emphasized that this experience consists in a complex imbrication of retentions and protentions that unfold over time through the particular polythetic performance of constitution that characterizes a musical work in its singularity. This account is not false, but a further qualification must be made. Earlier in this chapter we saw that this account of the musical experience belongs to the reflective attitude. It is the retrospective experience of music, which comes into view not in the course of experience, but only after the experience has come to pass. While Schütz does not renounce the reflective account of musical experience, he deems it "very important to make it perfectly clear that the experience of listening itself has quite another structure."⁴⁰¹ The pre-reflective experience of listening knows nothing of retentions and protentions; no more than hearing speech first involves encountering syllables that are then worked into words or the experience of reading text first finds letters that are synthesized one by one into complete words. Setting aside the characteristics of music's finite province of meaning that we examined above, it can be said that Schütz's account of the pre-reflective experience of music has as its basic unit the theme: "a single impulse, as long as he [the listener] lives within the flux of the ongoing music."⁴⁰² But this

⁴⁰¹ Schütz, FPM, 269.

⁴⁰² Schütz, FPM, 270.

qualification does not take us far enough to easily accommodate the conceptions of music that derive from Zuckerkandl, Small and Turino.

With respect to Small's theory, the problem hinges on Schütz's account of the role of social relationships in the musical experience. For Small, what we experience when we engage in musicking is not simply an auditory, tonal event – although this is certainly a significant moment in musicking. Small emphasizes the non-auditory aspect of the experience, that is, its function as “an activity by means of which we bring into existence a set of relationships that model the relationships of our world, not as they are but as we would wish them to be...musicking is in fact a way of knowing our world...”⁴⁰³ It would be inaccurate to claim that Schütz is ignorant of the social dimension of music – indeed this is the explicit focus of *Making Music Together* – but it is an open question to what degree Schütz and Small are in accord regarding this social dimension. The adequacy of Schütz's account of the music experience, vis-à-vis Small's conception of music, will then hinge on the relationship between the two thinkers' views on the social dimension of musicking.

Schütz discusses two aspects of the social dimension of music in MMT. One of these aspects concerns “the pluridimensionality of time simultaneously lived through by man and fellow-man,”⁴⁰⁴ which is involved in making music together. This “pluridimensionality” refers, on the one hand, to the dimension of outer time – e.g., the ten minutes of measurable time required to perform a work – and, on the other hand, to the simultaneous performance of polythetic steps in inner time that are part and parcel of the constitution of a musical work by the listener. From Small's position, this view of the social dimension of music does not go far enough. The

⁴⁰³ Small, *Musicking*, 50. This final claim – that musicking is a way of knowing our world – is consistent with Cassirer's general understanding of art as a form of knowledge, albeit of an intuitive, as opposed to conceptual, type.

⁴⁰⁴ Schütz, MMT, 175.

simultaneous living-through of a pluridimensionality of time on the basis of tones in the external world being articulated in consciousness does not transcend the tonal dimension of music that Small's theory goes beyond. As Small writes, the meaning of the act of making music resides "not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance."⁴⁰⁵ Can Schütz accommodate such a theory?

The second aspect of the social dimension of meaning articulated in MMT takes us at least part of the way there. This aspect concerns musical culture, which Schütz conceives of in an epistemic manner. Musical culture is present in the act of making music as a socially derived "stock of knowledge at hand."⁴⁰⁶ Schütz's presentation of the function of musical culture takes place from the perspective of a musician and is thus discussed in terms of the performer's knowledge of typicalities of certain musical styles (e.g. the harmonies typical of nineteenth century piano sonatas, which allow the performer to sight-read an unknown work with some degree of fluency). In FPM, Schütz also gestures towards the function of musical culture, albeit here from the listener's perspective. In this context, Schütz speaks of "a frame of reference"⁴⁰⁷ that to some extent determines the listener's protentions, insofar as the listener's pre-knowledge of the type of music she is listening to leads her to anticipate how a work will unfold and therefore accounts for experiences of surprise and boredom.

At first blush, this epistemic perspective on the social dimension of music seems somewhat impoverished. The experience of music through one's pre-reflective knowledge and expectations is social in the same way that walking alone along a well-trodden path is to go on a walk with

⁴⁰⁵ Small, *Musicking*, 13.

⁴⁰⁶ Schütz, MMT, 169.

⁴⁰⁷ Schütz, FPM, 259.

others. First impressions aside, to what extent does Schütz's account of musical culture accommodate Small's view of the musical experience as the instantiation of social relationships?

A closer look shows that, while Schütz is on the right track, Small's analysis cuts deeper. In *Musicking*, the social relationships that Small considers include the economic kinship of self-selected audiences and their shared knowledge of appropriate concert comportment, the meaning of performers' mode of dress and behavior towards the audience, the mediating function of the conductor, the mythological status accorded to dead composers and the authority of the score.⁴⁰⁸ Some of these relationships can indeed be translated into Schütz's language of the stock of knowledge at hand. For instance, the authority of the score and thereby the performer's relationship to the composer is implicated in the performer's respect for the letter of the text, in the performer's understanding that every musical decision made must be sanctioned by the score. The listener's frame of reference can also be expanded in a manner that is not unfaithful to the spirit of Schütz's text. Whereas Schütz writes of the frame of reference in purely tonal terms, there is no reason why it should not be understood to include the context in which the music is experienced. Thus, the frame of reference for the experience of a symphony differs from a heavy metal concert not only with respect to the sounds that the listener expects to hear, but also with respect to the behavior that she is likely to encounter and engage in. This is manifest in the type of clothing that the listener wears (a tuxedo versus a t-shirt), the listener's comportment during the performance (remaining still and silent versus violently moshing) and also the leeway granted to the performers in their realization of their own previously recorded works and their covers of other musical works.

⁴⁰⁸ For Small on audiences cf. 41; on performers cf. 65ff; on the conductor cf. 79f; on the composer cf. 87ff; on the score cf. 115.

Other aspects of Small's theory of musicking do not fit so effortlessly into Schütz's account. We have seen that Small includes putatively peripheral roles in the social relationships that constitute the meaning of musicking. For instance, ticket takers and custodial staff figure into Small's theory. Ticket takers manifest relationships that mark the concert hall experience as "a microcosm of those [relationships] of the larger industrial society outside of its walls."⁴⁰⁹ The custodial staff also point to a division of labor that is indicative of a particular type of social arrangement. It is a stretch to place these roles within the performer's stock of knowledge, although, once again, they can be included in an expanded conception of the frame of reference. In final analysis, Schütz's account of the musical experience is theoretically amenable to Small's account, although doing so requires departing from the letter of Schütz's texts on music.⁴¹⁰ The divide between Schütz and Small is most evident with regards to their respective conceptions of music, which for Schütz is a matter of tonal relationships and for Small is a matter of social relationships (only some of which are mediated by tonal material).

How does Schütz's account of the musical experience fare when placed in conversation with Turino's four-fold conception of music? Recall that Schütz's presentation of music most neatly corresponds with the field that Turino names "presentational performance."⁴¹¹ This field of music making maps onto the situation that Schütz generally has in mind when writing about music: the experience of a concertgoer attending a performance. But to the extent that the co-performance of polythetic acts constituting the work's identity is what is essential to the Schützian view of musical experience, Schütz's view is also amenable to Turino's category of

⁴⁰⁹ Small, *Musicking*, 36.

⁴¹⁰ There may be resources in Schütz's work on the phenomenology of the social world that would assist in bridging the divide between his theory and Small's. We will consider this possibility in the next chapter.

⁴¹¹ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 26.

“high fidelity,” which refers to “the making of recordings that are intended to index or be iconic of live performance.”⁴¹² A number of examples that Schütz offers demonstrate that the embodied co-presence of listener and musician is inessential to the musical experience. This is a corollary to Schütz’s “the principle of the relative irrelevance of the vehicle”⁴¹³ pertaining to ideal objects. Thus it is not essential that the listener be present at a performance, or that the piece be performed on the instruments intended by the composer, or even that any tones be externalized. As previously quoted, Schütz unequivocally maintains: “he who knows a piece of music ‘by heart’ does not need any reference to print, to any musical instrument or to performances heard or previously made, in order to reproduce the piece of music from beginning to end for his inner ear.”⁴¹⁴

Schütz’s view of the musical experience can also be discussed in terms of what Turino calls “studio audio art,”⁴¹⁵ in which the creation of a musical work involves studio technology to such an essential extent that the work cannot be realized in live performance. However, “the principle of the relative irrelevance of the vehicle” also ensures that the inability to be performed in no way alters studio audio art’s ability to fit into Schütz’s framework. It is simply the case that, if we wanted to draw finer distinctions concerning types of musical works, we would relegate studio audio art to that type that is experienced outside the concert hall.

The most interesting questions arise from the juxtaposition of Schütz’s account of the musical experience with Turino’s field of participatory performance. The most salient characteristic of this field is the effacement of the distinction between audience and artist. In other words, the field of participatory performance does not presuppose the category of listener,

⁴¹² Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 26.

⁴¹³ Schütz, *Symbol, Reality, and Society*, 303.

⁴¹⁴ Schütz, FPM, 247.

⁴¹⁵ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 27.

at least as it appears in FPM. In bracketing the so-called “special”⁴¹⁶ uses of music for purposes other than abstract listening, Schütz has also excluded the listener’s participation from consideration. The Schützian listener does not dance or otherwise take part in the creation of the music.⁴¹⁷ The listener simply listens. On the other hand, Schütz often speaks of the “beholder,” which encompasses “the player, listener, and reader of music.”⁴¹⁸ The inclusion of the player offers some preliminary indication that Schütz’s account of the musical experience pertains to participants as well as mere listeners.

5. Conclusion

The accounts of the musical experience offered by Small and Turino offer two considerable challenges to Schütz’s view of the musical experience. In Small’s case, the challenge stems from an expanded conception of music that understands the phenomenon to consist in more than mere tonal relationships. In particular, Small focuses on the role of relationships in the constitution of the event of musicking, of which tonal relationships are but one sub-category. Turino’s field of participatory music challenges Schütz’s common picture of the musical experience taking place in the mind of an otherwise inactive listener. It is unclear whether Schütz’s writings on music are able to accommodate an action-based theory of what is involved in the phenomenon.

We shall address these challenges in the next chapter by re-reading Schütz’s essays on music in light of his essays on the phenomenology of the social world. We shall argue that musical meaning is an equivocal concept in need of disambiguation and that Schütz’s social phenomenology is a handy theoretical resource for doing so. Once we have teased out the

⁴¹⁶ Schütz, FPM, 258.

⁴¹⁷ Except insofar as constitution can be considered a form of creation.

⁴¹⁸ Schütz, MMT, 169.

different aspects of the meaningfulness of music we will be in a position to assess the ability of phenomenology to meet the challenges posed by ethnomusicology and musicology alike.

Chapter Three: Musical Meaning, Musical Universals and the Reciprocal Benefits of Ethnomusicology, Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Music

While the phenomenological account of the musical experience cannot be described as solipsistic or asocial, the accounts offered by ethnomusicologists and musicologists alike have led us to question whether phenomenology has an adequately social understanding of the musical experience. The first aim of the present chapter is a closer consideration of the social dimension of the musical experience, albeit through the indirect route of the theme of musical meaning. My argument has several components. First, I contend that Schütz's writings on music, which we have seen to be few in number and primarily oriented by non-musical questions, can be profitably supplemented with his better-known work on the phenomenology of the social world. Placing these aspects of his thought into conversation allows us to rectify what has appeared to be a lacking account of sociality in phenomenology's account of the musical experience. By fleshing out the manifold meanings implicit in the equivocal concept of "musical meaning" we shall see that phenomenology finds sociality at every turn.

We shall then consider the reciprocal benefits of ethnomusicology and the philosophy of culture. After considering the bifurcated nature of ethnomusicology, we will consider the role that the search for musical universals has played in the history of the discipline. By translating ethnomusicology's insights into musical universals into Kantian language, we will consider the relationship between this conception of musical universals with the role of the *a priori* in the philosophy of culture. Despite initially appearing to be at odds, the synthetic *a posteriori* information gleaned from ethnomusicology will prove to be exactly what the philosophy of culture's interest in *a priori* knowledge calls for.

1. Distinctions Pertaining to Meaning

A phenomenological account of the musical experience is distinguished by its focus on the activities of consciousness that constitute music as a meaningful experience. Consequently, if it can be shown that music offers different types of meaningful experiences, then an equivalent number of phenomenological accounts will be called for. As a preparatory step towards considering whether music is indeed the source of different varieties of meaningful experience, we will now consider number of distinctions that run through Schütz's treatment of the theme "meaning" as it appears in his *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (hereafter PSW).

1a. Subjective Versus Objective Meaning

In his chapter on "Meaning in Schütz," Lester Embree distinguishes three different "species"⁴¹⁹ of meaning that are tacitly at play in Schütz's thought. The first species of meaning involves the distinction between subjective and objective meaning, which Schütz acknowledges to be adopted from Max Weber's work. Subjective meaning, Schütz writes, "is the meaning which an action has for the actor or which a relation or situation has for the person or persons involved therein."⁴²⁰ More expansively stated, the subjective meaning of an action refers to "what he [viz. the actor] does, why he does it, and when and where his action starts and ends."⁴²¹ For instance, an individual who is running may be doing so for exercise, or to flee a real or imagined danger, or to minimize his tardiness for a soon-to-begin appointment. Only the actor is entirely privy to the meaning that he "bestows upon' or 'connects with' his action."⁴²² Thus the

⁴¹⁹ Lester Embree, *The Schutzian Theory of the Cultural Sciences* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 136.

⁴²⁰ Schütz, "Some Equivocations in the Notion of Responsibility," 275.

⁴²¹ Schütz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," 60.

⁴²² Schütz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," 60.

subjective meaning of an action involves the epistemic privilege that actors have to their own motivations and goals.⁴²³ Suppose I am out for a walk and happen to witness the aforementioned individual running. Any explanation I now offer for what I see is an instance of the action's objective meaning, which concerns "the meaning the same action, relation, or situation has for anybody else, be it a partner or observer in everyday life, the social scientist, or the philosopher."⁴²⁴ Schütz acknowledges the inaptness of the term "objective" since "so-called 'objective' interpretations are, in turn, relative to the particular attitudes of the interpreters and, therefore, in a sense 'subjective.'"⁴²⁵ Perhaps I have lately been brooding on my idle lifestyle and have been chastising myself for my lack of an exercise routine. In this case, I may be more likely to interpret the running individual's action as exercise. Or perhaps I am a pathologically anxious person. In this case, the individual's action is more likely to appear to me as fleeing than running. Since objective meanings are to some extent unavoidably subjective one might be inclined to characterize the witness' interpretation of another's action as the subjective meaning that this person attributes to the actor's action. Schütz, however, unmistakably rejects this interpretation: "it is obvious that an action has only one subjective meaning: that of the actor himself."⁴²⁶ To mitigate such misunderstandings, Embree proposes the qualifiers "insider" and "outsider" in lieu of "subjective" and "objective" meaning, respectively.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ One might wish to level a psychoanalytic critique of the notion of subjective meaning, charging that, to some degree, individuals are not entirely the authors of their actions but are driven by unconscious desires. This critique, however, misses the mark. While such a line of thinking would be valid within the psychological sphere, the cultural scientist is precisely concerned with the meaning that an action has for its actor, regardless of whether other explanations of the action are available or whether the actor is ultimately mistaken to some degree about why she did what she did.

⁴²⁴ Schütz, "Some Equivocations in the Notion of Responsibility," 275.

⁴²⁵ Schütz, "Some Equivocations in the Notion of Responsibility," 275.

⁴²⁶ Schütz, PSW, 32.

⁴²⁷ Embree, *The Schutzian Theory of the Cultural Sciences*, 137.

Just as objective/outsider meanings are colored by the observer's attitude, Schütz also recognizes that the understood meaning of an action is also a function of the individual's cultural context. This leads us to the second species of meaning in Schütz's thought, according to Embree: "'personal' (or 'individual') and also 'collective' (or 'communal')" meaning.⁴²⁸ The aforementioned distinction between subjective/insider and objective/outsider meaning now falls under the rubric of personal or individual meaning, since the subjective/insider meaning an action has, as well as the objective/outsider meaning granted to the action by an observer, concerns meanings as they are understood and characterized by individuals. Insofar as the meaning of an action is determined by its position within a cultural context, the meaning attributed to an action by the group performing the action will differ from the meaning attributed to the action by another group. Thus, "collective" or "communal" meaning can be further parsed into the meaning attributed to an action by the "in-group" (i.e. the group performing the action or the culture to which the actor belongs) and an "out-group" (i.e. a group with a different cultural background).⁴²⁹

1b. Merely Perceptual/Phenomenological Object Versus Socio-Cultural Object

The second meaning distinction operative in Schütz's thought concerns what we shall call merely perceptual, or phenomenological, objects versus socio-cultural objects. We have already touched on the nature of an object considered merely perceptually in our previous discussion of Schütz's treatment of music in FPM. To state it negatively, a merely perceptual object is what remains when all socially-culturally derived significance is stripped from the object. In the context of FPM, Schütz's analysis of music has bracketed lyrics, other conceptual material such

⁴²⁸ Embree, *The Schutzian Theory of the Cultural Sciences*, 137.

⁴²⁹ Embree, *The Schutzian Theory of the Cultural Sciences*, 137.

as titles, the many functions that the music may serve other than contemplative listening and, relatedly, the various contexts in which music may be experienced. Once all the socio-cultural significance has been removed to reveal the merely perceptual or phenomenological object, Schütz finds that we are left with the “meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time.”⁴³⁰

We encounter music as a socio-cultural object when we restore the elements that were bracketed in order to access music as a phenomenological object. Thus, regarding music as a socio-cultural object will take into account the fact, amply proven by ethnomusicology, that most music is of a functional nature and that an exhaustive account of the meaning of this music cannot omit the meaning granted by its place within a cultural context: “Traditional societies use music in innumerable ways across nearly all domains of life,” writes Timothy Rice. “Musical performances accompany nearly every important activity of cultural and social life, from birth to death and from work to rituals, religious ceremonies, leisure, and play.”⁴³¹

1c. Object Versus Activity

The final distinction important for a phenomenological account of musical meaning concerns the question of whether music is regarded as an object or as an activity. Distinguishing between the meaning of an object and an activity is vindicated by the differing accounts that Schütz offers in PSW.

We have already discussed meaning as it pertains to activities in section 1a under the rubric of subjective versus objective meaning. In this presentation, the meaning of an activity was understood in relation to a project, of which the activity was a constituent part. The project is the context in which the activity gains its meaning for the actor, its subjective meaning that

⁴³⁰ Schütz, MMT, 170.

⁴³¹ Rice, *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction*, 45.

encompasses “what he [viz. the actor] does, why he does it, and when and where his action starts and ends.”⁴³² The understanding of the same action by an observer is the objective meaning of the action. In short, the meaning of an activity is bound to the actor’s motivations, whether these motivations were the actor’s own (i.e. the subjective meaning) or the observer’s speculations (i.e. the objective meaning).

Meaning as it pertains to products is not cashed out in terms of projects, since, in contradistinction to an activity, a product does not bear the inextricable relationship to its producer that an action bears to the actor. Of course, a product may indeed be understood as evidence of its producer’s motivations, as, for instance, an archaeologist would regard an uncovered prehistoric artifact. Such an interpretation strives for the subjective meaning of a product: “*the meaning-context within which the product stands or stood in the mind of the producer.*”⁴³³ However, when the interpreter disregards the production of the product and instead interprets the product as a constituted objectivity existing within a broader context, we are here dealing with the objective meaning of a product. Concern for the objective meaning of a product yields new fields of investigation. For instance, in Schütz’s example, instead of studying “the subjective meaning which the word takes on in the usage of a particular author or of a particular circle of speakers,” the philologist can study “the objective meaning of a word at a definite time within a definite language area.”⁴³⁴ To take another example, an originalist stance on constitutional interpretation, which attempts to determine the meaning of the Constitution in the minds of its authors, sets its sights on the subjective meaning of the product. This stance is illustrated by former Attorney General Edwin Meese III’s call for judges to embrace a

⁴³² Schütz, “Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences,” 60.

⁴³³ Schütz, PSW, 133.

⁴³⁴ Schütz, PSW, 138.

“jurisprudence of original intention.”⁴³⁵ When a judge, lawyer or legislator interprets the Constitution in terms of legal precedent, and thus the history of constitutional interpretation and the principle of *stare decisis*⁴³⁶, then these individuals have the objective meaning of the product in view.

The aforementioned meaning-distinctions demonstrate that “meaning” is a highly equivocal concept. Thus when we ask about the meaning of music we must be specific as to *which* meaning we are pursuing: is it the subjective meaning of music regarded as a merely perceptual product, the objective meaning of music regarded as a socio-cultural activity, etc.? In the following sections we shall take a closer look at each of the sub-species of the broad category of musical meaning.

2. Subjective Meaning of Music Qua Merely Perceptual Product

We will begin with the species of musical meaning that is most comprehensively treated by Schütz. If we were to gloss “subjective meaning of a merely perceptual object” on the basis of previous discussions it would seem that this type of meaning concerns the sum of polythetic acts undertaken by the producer of the object without reference to any specific cultural context. Although Schütz does not use the term, it is the subjective meaning of music qua merely perceptual product that is thematized in FPM.

We have discussed in a previous chapter Schütz’s analysis of a sequence of six tones.⁴³⁷ In what respect is this sequence meaningful? What does it in fact mean?

⁴³⁵ The Heritage Foundation, “The Originalist Perspective,” accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/09/the-originalist-perspective>.

⁴³⁶ The legal principle giving juridical weight to precedents established by previous rulings.

⁴³⁷ Cf. chapter 1.

According to Schütz, music is, by definition, meaningful. In MMT, Schütz defines music – albeit “very roughly and tentatively” – as the “meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time.”⁴³⁸ Music, for Schütz, trades in tones as opposed to words and he delimits the difference at the outset of FPM by first considering the meaningfulness of language. “Each term,” writes Schütz, “is a symbol of the concept which it conveys, and the concept itself refers to the real or ideal objects of our thoughts, to the qualities of these objects, to what happens to them with or without our interference.”⁴³⁹ Language is a meaningful context that makes reference to a conceptual scheme. Music, on the other hand, is “a meaningful context without reference to a conceptual scheme.”⁴⁴⁰ Music also does not have a representative or referential function, which is to say, music is a meaningful context “without immediate reference⁴⁴¹ to the objects of the world in which we live, without reference to the properties and functions of those objects.”⁴⁴²

The meaningfulness of music is not granted by reference to things beyond itself. But the meaningfulness of music is a function of consciousness reaching beyond what is immediately given in experience. In Schütz’s formulation, the musical experience “is based upon the faculty of the mind to recollect the past by retentions and reproductions and to foretaste the future by protentions and anticipations.”⁴⁴³ In other words, the meaningfulness of music is a function of the listener’s present perception of tones being saturated with past perceptions of tones as well as containing anticipations of future tones, which yields the unified experience of a musical object. As Thomas Clifton points out, “each successive instant is not created out of nothing only to be

⁴³⁸ Schütz, MMT, 170.

⁴³⁹ Schütz, FPM, 244.

⁴⁴⁰ Schütz, FPM, 244.

⁴⁴¹ Schütz’s qualification of “immediate reference” is ostensibly an acknowledgment of program music.

⁴⁴² Schütz, FPM, 244.

⁴⁴³ Schütz, FPM, 260.

again cast into nothingness. Such a situation could never lead to the experience of succession.”⁴⁴⁴ Instead, retention and protention undergird the unity of a piece. Music means, then, by referring back to dimensions of itself that it has already revealed and by suggesting how it might continue to unfold. We have seen how retention and protention are at work in the constitution of the six-note theme, but the respect in which “meaning” enters into the picture is still somewhat unclear. The concept of coherence is important here.

Schütz introduces the concept of coherence in his discussion of continuance as a basic category of the musical experience. In Schütz’s account, coherence names the “virtual unity [that] may be established even between intermittent notes of different pitch.”⁴⁴⁵ The different pitch of the tones is what distinguishes coherence from continuance, which pertains, strictly speaking, to “the same enduring tone.”⁴⁴⁶ A few words concerning continuance and repetition are in order so that we may lay the ground to distinguish coherence.

Continuance and repetition comprise a single category of musical experience since Schütz understands repetition simply as “a special case of the intermittence of a continuance.”⁴⁴⁷ The experience of a single tone as enduring is the experience of continuance. Consider the initial chord struck in Schubert’s *String Quintet in C, D 956*, which is held for two bars. The dynamic markings indicate that the musicians should begin by playing *piano*, i.e. softly. By the first beat of the third bar, when the second violin and viola begin to play different tones, the instruments are supposed to be playing *forte*, i.e. loudly. The experience of a musical crescendo, of recognizing the transition from relative softness to relative loudness, involves retention. If our perception of uninterrupted tones did not retain earlier phases of the sonority in our perception of

⁴⁴⁴ Clifton, “Music as Constituted Object,” 81

⁴⁴⁵ Schütz, FPM, 263.

⁴⁴⁶ Schütz, FPM, 263.

⁴⁴⁷ Schütz, FPM, 263.

later phases then there could be no experience of crescendo, of becoming louder. Schütz describes repetition as “merely a special case of the intermittence of a continuance. It is intermittence of a sameness.”⁴⁴⁸ For instance, in the famous opening phrase of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, the first three notes of the four-note phrase are the same tone, albeit repeated as opposed to sustained.

The examples we have used to discuss continuance and repetition have only pertained to single tones. However this category is also at play on what we might call higher levels of musical construction. Entire themes or motifs, for instance, may be repeated. In such cases, the experience of repetition requires more than mere retention, which was sufficient to ground the repetition of a single tone. In the case of a repeated theme, “the repetition originates in a synthesis of recognition between the reproduced past experience of the theme with its actually experienced recurrence.”⁴⁴⁹ So, continuance and repetition may be considered with respect to either a single tone or functional units. And when applied to functional units, continuance and repetition require acts of consciousness that go beyond mere retention, viz. memory and syntheses of recognition.

Is the situation the same vis-à-vis coherence? We must first note that, unlike continuance and repetition, coherence does not apply to a single tone. An intermitted tone of the same pitch is not, in Schütz’s terminology, coherent; it is repeated. Minimally, then, it would seem that coherence requires two successive tones of differing pitch. However, this claim warrants closer consideration. Do we really hear two tones experienced without context (such as hearing these two tones against a harmonic background or within the unfolding of a musical theme) as coherent? I argue that we do not. When a mere ‘two tones’ are heard as coherent, this coherence

⁴⁴⁸ Schütz, FPM, 263.

⁴⁴⁹ Schütz, FPM, 263.

is granted by context, be it explicit or implicit (implicit context could be, for instance, previous experience of having heard the two tones sung for “Amen” in their proper harmonic context). The smallest unit of musical coherence would seem to be the theme, which is constituted *as* a theme precisely by virtue of being recognized as coherent.

“The basic element of all music,” claims Schütz, “is a unique configuration called the theme.”⁴⁵⁰ This is a significant claim; on its basis we may deduce the following claim: sound “becomes” music when it is perceived as a theme; that is, as a coherent structure or a “meaningful arrangement.”⁴⁵¹ When applied to the constitution of the six-note theme we now see that what was meaningful about the experience was the recognition of coherence in the sequence of tones. We are also able to draw the conclusion from Schütz’s analysis of the six-tone sequence that coherence emerges *retrospectively*. This becomes clear in many of Schütz’s discussions of the concept of meaning.⁴⁵² “The flux of tones unrolling in inner time is an arrangement meaningful to both the composer and the beholder,” writes Schütz, “because and in so far as it evokes in the stream of consciousness participating in it an interplay of recollections, retentions, protentions, and anticipations which interrelate the successive elements.”⁴⁵³

To sum up, the meaning of music qua merely perceptual object concerns the experience of coherence of non-representational, non-referential, a-conceptual tones. Such an experience of coherence is a function of recollection, retention, protention and anticipation, which unifies the unfolding of the tones in inner time. What makes this meaning “subjective” is the fact that the

⁴⁵⁰ Schütz, FPM, 260.

⁴⁵¹ Schütz, MMT, 170.

⁴⁵² But this is not the case in all Schütz’s accounts of meaning. As we shall see, “meaning” is a highly equivocal concept in Schütz’s thought. At the beginning of the next section we will consider two other species of meaning, which differ from retrospectively emergent type of meaning in question here.

⁴⁵³ Schütz, MMT, 170.

experience of this coherence brings about a quasi-simultaneity in the activities of consciousness performed by the beholder in listening to the piece of music and those performed by the composer in the composition of the music. The meaning of the music is subjective insofar as the coherence of the music originally belonged to the composer who, through the externalization of the tones, offers beholders access to the activities of consciousness that first yielded a meaningful experience in the composer's mind.

We go astray when we try to be more specific about what a piece of music, regarded as a merely perceptual object, means. As an essentially polythetic process, the activities of consciousness that constitute the coherence of a piece of music, cannot be distilled or abbreviated. And regarded as a merely perceptual object, the meaningfulness of the music cannot be translated into language (which is by its very nature conceptual) that would express what music means. In other words, while musical objects have subjective meanings that can be known, these meanings will not be able to be translated into a statement of the sort "Musical object x means..." In fact, it should be noted that in the foregoing account we have not explained *what* music means but rather *how* music means. However, when we pivot to a consideration of music qua socio-cultural object, new possibilities emerge for discussing the meaning of music in conceptual, linguistic terms.

3. Objective Meaning of Music Qua Merely Perceptual Object

With respect to music that has been shorn of all socio-culturally dependent meaning, the subjective-objective distinction disappears. In other words, the subjective meaning of music qua merely perceptual object is, in Schütz's framework, the same as the objective meaning of music

qua merely perceptual object. Thus our discussion of this category is already contained in the previous section. Nevertheless let us take a closer look at why this is the case.

If we regard music simply as the meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time, as does Schütz, then the beholder's experience of music will always reduplicate, with varying degrees of adequacy, the polythetic acts that constituted the experience of the producer – i.e. the subjective meaning of the music. Stated differently, when the only meaning-context at play in the musical experience is the self-referentiality of the work of music itself (i.e. the complicated imbrications of retentions, recollections, protentions and anticipations), then the variance in possible experiences is drastically reduced. Shorn of all its extra-musical associations, my experience of a piece of music is no different from that of its producer and the distinction of subjective versus objective meaning breaks down.

In what respects can the experience of the composer and the beholder differ? One factor that would alter the experience is what Schütz refers to as the beholder's "frame of reference."⁴⁵⁴ A frame of reference is a collection of knowledge derived from previous experience that is subconsciously at play in my present experience. It may seem at first blush that with the introduction of the concept of a frame of reference Schütz has violated the *epoché* that he instituted in order to access those "features which are essential for the experience of music *as a phenomenon of our conscious life*,"⁴⁵⁵ or what we have been calling merely perceptual music. For surely the knowledge that much American popular music of the twentieth century is constructed according to a 32-bar AABA form runs afoul of Schütz's call to "disregard – temporarily at least – all the features characteristic of a particular musical culture only."⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Schütz, FPM, 259.

⁴⁵⁵ Schütz, FPM, 259.

⁴⁵⁶ Schütz, FPM, 258.

However, we evade the criticism by pointing out that a frame of reference is itself one of those features that is essential for the experience of music; and so long as the specific contents of a frame of reference are bracketed, such that the frame of reference is considered only formally, then we remain within the finite province of meaning of music considered merely perceptually.

How can the concept of the frame of reference account for a divergence between the composer and beholder's experience of a musical work? It can do so on account of the frame of reference's effect on the richness of a beholder's protentions and anticipations. The greater the beholder's knowledge of what is typical, the more concrete and assured her protentions and anticipations will be. For instance, if a beholder has a familiarity with a substantial body of the Great American Songbook (the body of popular music largely hewing to the 32-bar AABA form) then she will anticipate resolutions and repetitions that will surprise a beholder with no stock of knowledge concerning Western popular musical conventions. To this extent the beholder's experience may be less rich than that of the composer, but an impoverished frame of reference would not prevent a beholder from the sorts of constitutive activities that yielded the coherent six-tone sequence that Schütz analyzes. In other words, the beholder would still undergo a simultaneous or quasi-simultaneous experience of the polythetic acts that took place in the mind of the producer.

4. Subjective Meaning of Music Qua Socio-Cultural Object

Like the subjective meaning of the musical product qua merely perceptual object, the account of the subjective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object concerns the meaning-context in which the object stood in the mind of the producer; and our ability to experience this meaning requires our simultaneous or quasi-simultaneous performance of the polythetic acts that took

place in the mind of the producer. While this dimension would be founded upon the subjective meaning of the musical product qua merely perceptual object, it will also include all the extra-musical resonances that the work had for the producer since we are here concerned with music as a socio-cultural object instead of as a merely perceptual object.

4a. Finite Province of Meaning Correlated to Socio-Cultural Music in General

As previously discussed,⁴⁵⁷ Schütz argues that different realms of experience are characterized by different finite provinces of meaning. We have seen that glossing a finite province of meaning entails an account of the tension of consciousness, time-perspective, form of experiencing oneself and form of sociality that is unique to a particular type of experience. What type of experience is that of music in its socio-cultural character? On the one hand, it seems to bear some resemblance to our earlier account of the work world as the paramount reality. As with the work world, the socio-cultural world is an intersubjective world in which construing the subject in a solipsistic manner is, at best, a helpful theoretical starting point and, at worst, a gravely misleading mistake. On the other hand, the experience of music qua socio-cultural object bears some resemblance to the experience of music as a merely perceptual object. In this case as well, insofar as we are not directed towards the manipulation of objects in the world and carrying projects out, our tension of consciousness resembles the relaxed surrender of the tension correlated to merely perceptual music.

We shall see that the search for a single finite province of meaning to encompass all socio-cultural considerations of music is misguided. Some musical phenomena of the socio-cultural world will elicit the sort of disinterested aesthetic attitude that accompanied the musical

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. Chapter 2, section 1c. on Schütz's account of the musical experience.

experience that Schütz describes in FPM. Other musical phenomena will be more closely tied to pragmatic functions that situate the musical experience within the work world of everyday life. In short, socio-culturally-informed music embraces a diversity of finite provinces that stand in stark contrast to the single finite province of merely perceptual music. If we wish to determine the finite province of meaning correlated to socio-cultural music we shall have to consider the phenomena on a case-by-case basis.

4b. Peter Kivy on Pure Music

Since subjective meaning is in question, we are concerned with the meaning for the creator of the work. And since we are construing music as an object that stands within a socio-cultural meaning-context, we are no longer bracketing the layers of meaningfulness that derive from a musical work's place within tradition, ritual, history, discourse, etc. Thus the subjective meaning of a musical work qua socio-cultural object makes reference to the meaning that the work has for the producer, including those dimensions of meaning that go beyond the interplay of recollection, retention, protention and anticipation. While the socio-cultural meaning of a musical work goes beyond the species of musical meaning discussed in the previous section, socio-cultural meaning will be build upon the meaningful (i.e. coherent) arrangement of tones in inner time. After all, as we saw in the previous section, what distinguishes music from mere noise is the experience of coherence. Thus in order for socio-cultural associations to be part of the musical experience, we must first have a musical substrate to which they may be appended.

What sorts of meanings do we have in mind when referring to music as a socio-cultural object? In delimiting his area of interest in FPM, Schütz focused his attention on music not utilized "to accompany certain events in the outer world – music for dancing, music for

marching, music in combination with the drama...”⁴⁵⁸ However, insofar as we are still concerned with music qua object as opposed to qua activity, we continue to bracket the use of music to accompany events in the world.

We will now turn to Peter Kivy’s discussion of pure music as a means of introducing these socio-cultural dimensions of meaning as they pertain to subjective meaning and the epistemic problems surrounding them. In his attempt to define “pure music,” Kivy touches on issues pertaining to subjective meaning and its significance for the beholder’s experience. Kivy’s interest is 1) whether authorial intention to represent or accompany some extra-musical object or event destroys the purity of the music the beholder hears and 2) whether the objective meaning of the phenomenon (viz. the extra-musical associations the beholder hears into, so to speak, the musical object) alters the status of pure music. These are not our questions, but Kivy’s discussion of authorial intention is a useful way to orient the discussion of the subjective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object.

In his book *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*, Peter Kivy spends fourteen pages trying to define the concept. Schütz’s definition (if we can call it that) of pure music begins to appear problematic when Kivy writes “just because [musical works] have no accompanying text, title, program, or other literal hint that they are not to be taken as pure musical structure, it does not follow that these things are ‘pure music,’ what I have been and will be calling ‘music alone.’”⁴⁵⁹ The composer’s intention is for Kivy the sticking point. Musical works that we now tend to regard as pure musical structures may in fact have initially possessed some extra-musical functions: “Mozart’s wind band divertimenti were functional compositions for social occasions. And a great deal of Bach’s best-known keyboard

⁴⁵⁸ Schütz, FPM, 258.

⁴⁵⁹ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 15.

music had a quasi-didactic intent.”⁴⁶⁰ To countenance this consideration, Kivy proposes a provisional definition of pure music that demands only “*one* of the leading intentions being that it be responded to in such and such a way.”⁴⁶¹ Translating Kivy’s concerns into our terms, he is asking about the effect of subjective meaning on objective meaning. More specifically, he is asking whether the subjective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object prevents a beholder from experiencing a musical work as a merely perceptual object (i.e. as pure music). But by and by, Kivy rejects authorial intention as a necessary or sufficient condition for either destroying or establishing the ‘purity’ of a musical work. Two examples allow him to do so.

Kivy cites Arthur Honegger’s *Pacific 231* as an instance of a work in which authorial intention goes against our perception that the work in question is not pure music. As the title suggests, and Honegger’s introductory remarks to an edition of the work’s score make clear, *Pacific 231* bears some relation to a railway engine. And yet, Honegger states in no uncertain terms that he has *not* “aimed to imitate the noise of an engine.”⁴⁶² Nevertheless, Kivy takes it for granted that it is well-nigh impossible *not* to hear the composition as a representation of railway noises. Kivy’s point here is that the listener’s perception of representation, even where the author did not intend to represent, will render the experience of a musical object as something other than pure music. In our terminology, the experience of *Pacific 231* yields an objective meaning that is difficult, if not impossible, *not* to hear as the subjective meaning of the composer. Stated differently, the composition seems so evidently to represent the sounds of a train that it is

⁴⁶⁰ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 15.

⁴⁶¹ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 16.

⁴⁶² Kivy, *Music Alone*, 17.

difficult for the beholder⁴⁶³ to conceive that such a representation was not the intention of the composer.

The second example that Kivy uses to deflate the significance of authorial intention is the case in which the composer avows that a representation is intended while the listener experiences no such representation. Kivy here cites the second movement from Beethoven's String Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1, which was allegedly written with the vault scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in mind. Arguing that in an aesthetic register, representation should be understood as a "success concept,"⁴⁶⁴ and citing the experience of Beethoven expert Joseph Kerman along with his own experience, Kivy is content that the unsuccessful intention of a composer to represent is not to be accorded priority over the listener's experience. To once again translate Kivy into our terms, the question here is how we are to regard a musical work that is regarded by the beholder as a merely perceptual object while having been conceived by the composer as a socio-cultural object.

Kivy claims that these considerations point to the position that "what determines our decisions is the music itself. What can sustain our interest as pure music, as music alone, is, ipso facto, music alone, the composer's intentions notwithstanding."⁴⁶⁵ Regarding the question from a phenomenological perspective we are partially in agreement with Kivy. However, instead of pointing to the noematic pole of the relationship (i.e. the music itself), it is more accurate to regard the noetic pole (i.e. the acts of the beholder's consciousness; the beholder's "cognitive

⁴⁶³ Of course this is somewhat subject to the background of the beholder. An individual with no knowledge of railroads would not recognize *Pacific 231* as representational. In Schütz's terms, the ability to make the connection between the music and a train turns on the beholder's "stock of knowledge at hand."

⁴⁶⁴ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 22.

⁴⁶⁵ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 23.

style”⁴⁶⁶ in constituting the musical object) as the decisive factor. Recall that, from the phenomenological standpoint, music does not exist apart from a subject that constitutes it as a meaningful arrangement. Thus it is not the tones themselves, but rather the subject’s relationship to them that yields the experience of music. Furthermore, it is the subject’s particular attitude or cognitive style that determines what type of musical experience is had – that of music qua merely perceptual object, music qua socio-cultural object, etc.

Although Kivy refers to the music itself to resolve disputes over its status as pure or programmatic, he sees dangers in the unqualified acceptance of this position. The problem, argues Kivy, is casting the net too widely. If we accept that something’s ability to be heard as pure music is sufficient to characterize it as pure music, then we are forced to include phenomena such as bird songs, foreign languages, mechanical noises, etc. under the rubric “music.” Such a consequence, however, runs afoul of Kivy’s most basic understanding of music as something possessing “syntactic properties”⁴⁶⁷ that could not be found in a phenomenon that is not the product of human consciousness. Similarly, the “winds and tides may, by chance, produce on the beach an arrangement of pebbles that looks like letters spelling out a well-formed grammatically correct English sentence. But it cannot be one.”⁴⁶⁸

Once again, from a phenomenological perspective, we don’t run into the same problem as Kivy; although questions in need of addressing do arise. Recall that, in MMT, Schütz defines music – albeit “very roughly and tentatively” – as the “meaningful arrangement of tones in inner time.”⁴⁶⁹ Defining music in this manner does not *prima facie* deny bird songs and mechanical noises the status of music. Nor does this definition make any reference to the author or origin of

⁴⁶⁶ Schütz, OMR, 230.

⁴⁶⁷ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 24.

⁴⁶⁸ Kivy, *Music Alone*, 25.

⁴⁶⁹ Schütz, MMT, 170.

the tones. What is important for Schütz, and the phenomenologist more generally, is the listener's experience, more specifically, the assumption of the cognitive style constitutive of the musical attitude. Such a position entails that subjective meaning is not a condition for the possibility of objective meaning.

Let us return to an aforementioned example to get a better understanding of subjective meaning as it pertains to music qua socio-cultural object. The type of meaning in question here is the connection that the second movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1 had for Beethoven with the vault scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. This connection exists in the mind of the composer, hence it is a subjective meaning, and the connection transcends what is strictly given in the tones comprising the musical work and makes reference to a wider cultural meaning-context.

To simplify matters, let us take as a test case the connection between Arthur Honegger's *Pacific 231* and a locomotive train.⁴⁷⁰ This variety of socio-cultural subjective musical meaning involves the association of tones and a material object in the outer world. Just as the constitution of the subjective meaning of music qua merely perceptual object was illustrated with a phenomenological account of the constitution of a musical theme, the constitution of the subjective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object can be grounded in an account of association. It should be noted, however, that associative connections are also at play in the constitution of subjective meaning of music qua merely perceptual object, namely in remembering and expectation.⁴⁷¹ But a different sort of association grounds the connection

⁴⁷⁰ However, this is not to suggest that the subjective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object would be exhausted by such a connection.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 164.

between tones and, say, a train. At its most basic, this phenomenon is referred to by Husserl as appresentation.

4c. The Concept of Appresentation

The concept of appresentation⁴⁷² has already, albeit briefly, been addressed in the context of Schütz's ontology of music.⁴⁷³ It was seen that an appresentational relationship exists between the object of the musical score or the occurrence of performance and the ideal object that music essentially is. Let us consider the concept more closely. Appresentation can be clarified with the distinction between perception and what, in *Ideas I*, Husserl terms “*depictive-symbolic* or *signitive-symbolic objectivation*.”⁴⁷⁴ In perception, or an immediately intuitive act, something is given “in itself:” “perception makes present, seizes upon an it-itself in its presence ‘in person.’”⁴⁷⁵ But in the case of depictive-symbolic or signitive-symbolic objectivation “we intuit something in consciousness as depicting or signitively indicating something else; having the one in our field of intuition we are directed, not to it, but to the other, what is depicted or designated, through the medium of a founded apprehending.”⁴⁷⁶ Thus although it belongs to the essence of the perception of physical things that it be adumbrative perception, and therefore that my perception of a box include sides that are not immediately intuited and yet are apperceived, this

⁴⁷² It should be noted that appresentation and apperception are commonly used interchangeably; a tendency in which Husserl himself is complicit: “Husserl tends to use the term ‘appresentation’ [sic.] as synonymous with ‘apperception’ or indeed ‘presentification’” (*Husserl Dictionary*, 40). Schütz follows this tendency in his discussion of “that particular form of pairing or coupling, which Husserl calls ‘appresentation’ or ‘analogical apperception’” (Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 295).

⁴⁷³ Cf. Ch. 2, section 1b.

⁴⁷⁴ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 93.

⁴⁷⁵ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 93.

⁴⁷⁶ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 93.

would not constitute depictive-symbolic or signitive-symbolic objectivation because I am still directed towards the box in itself.

The appresentational pairing comes in different forms. In *Cartesian Meditations* (CM) and *Ideas II*, Husserl shows how appresentation is involved in the constitution of others as psycho-physical beings through the experience of empathy, and in *Experience and Judgment* (EJ), Husserl discusses a further variety of possible appresentational relationships.⁴⁷⁷ The different forms that appresentation takes can be glossed with reference to the notion of orders of objects:

Each object is an object within a field; each experience carries along its horizon; both belong to an order of a particular style. The physical object, for example, is interconnected with all the other objects of Nature, present, past, and future, by spatial, temporal, and causal relations, whose sum-total constitutes the order of physical Nature.⁴⁷⁸

Mathematical objects, artistic objects, religious objects and so on could be similarly glossed. This plurality of appresentational situations compels Schütz to search for the commonalities underlying appresentational relationships as such, and he proposes four orders involved in every instance of appresentation. Let us consider these four orders, using socio-culturally meaningful music as an illustration.

Schütz names the first order the apperceptual scheme, which concerns “the order of objects to which the immediately apperceived object belongs if experienced as a self, disregarding any appresentational references.”⁴⁷⁹ If we construe appresentation at its most basic as a situation in which one thing refers or directs consciousness to something other than itself (whether this

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Husserl, CM § 50-51, *Ideas II* § 45-47 and EJ § 34-43.

⁴⁷⁸ Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 298.

⁴⁷⁹ Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 299.

‘something other than itself’ be an aspect of the thing not immediately given to perception, a recollection, an idea, etc.), then the apperceptual scheme brackets the ‘something other than itself’ to which the first thing refers and merely considers what kind of thing the first thing is.⁴⁸⁰

In the case of socio-culturally meaningful music, the apperceptual scheme would concern the tones being sounded, which could be construed as belonging to the order of perceptual objects.

When we take the immediately apperceived object not as a self “but as a member of an appresentational pair, thus referring to something other than itself”⁴⁸¹ we have the order of the appresentational scheme. The appresentational scheme is most powerfully present in those curious instances when one knows that an object refers to something beyond itself yet lacks the context to understand what is being appresented; for instance, in encountering an ancient Egyptian hieroglyph I am aware that the symbol has a meaning, but do not know what it means. Thus I am still directed towards the immediately apperceived object, but as a question mark of sorts. Returning to our test case of socio-culturally meaningful music, the appresentational scheme would come into view, for instance, when listening to a field recording of ritualistic music. If we were to be conscious of the indications that this music was accompanying an event from which it drew its significance, then the awareness of this ambiguous reference situates us within the appresentational scheme.

⁴⁸⁰ Schütz’s terminology lends itself to misunderstanding since, in his definition of the apperceptual scheme, he speaks of an “apperceived object” where “perceived object” seems to be more appropriate. Evidence that these terms may be read synonymously can be found earlier in his discussion of appresentation, when he writes of the unseen backside of a red wooden cube, “the unseen side will have *some* shape, *some* color, and consist of *some* material. At any rate, we may say that the frontside, which is apperceived in immediacy or given to us in presentation, appresents the unseen backside in an analogical way” (Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 295). Clearly, Schütz is using the phrase “apperceived in immediacy” as synonymous with “given to us in presentation.”

⁴⁸¹ Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 299.

To construe the phenomena according to “the order of objects to which the appresented member of the pair belongs which is apperceived in a merely analogical manner,”⁴⁸² is to be oriented by the referential scheme. For instance, in the aforementioned case of the second movement of Beethoven’s String Quartet in F, the referential scheme would be oriented towards the order of fictive objects to which theatrical scenes (in this case, the vault scene from *Romeo and Juliet*) belong.

Finally, the contextual or interpretational scheme concerns “the particular type of pairing or context by which the appresenting member is connected with the appresented one.”⁴⁸³ We have already noted the plurality of types of appresentational situations – cases in which the apperceived object and appresented object belong to different realms (for instance, the relationship between the American flag and the United States of America) or cases in which they belong to the same realm (for instance, the relationship between smoke and fire). The contextual or interpretational scheme makes clear which type of appresentational relationship holds between the apperceived object and appresented object.

On this note, let us return to the question of the contextual or interpretational scheme undergirding the connection of tones and socio-cultural meanings. How is it that an arrangement of tones can be connected with a scene from dramatic literature (e.g. the second movement from Beethoven’s String Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1), or a material object in the outer world (e.g. Arthur Honegger’s *Pacific 231*), or the ideals of a nation (e.g. *The Star-Spangled Banner*)? These three examples suggest that there is in fact not one answer, but rather a multiplicity of manners by which music may be laden with socio-cultural meanings.

⁴⁸² Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 299.

⁴⁸³ Schütz, “Symbol, Reality, Society,” 299.

As was suggested by the case of Beethoven's String Quartet, which Peter Kivy and Beethoven scholars were unable to hear as a reference to the vault scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, the appresenting of a musical work may be entirely a function of the producer's individual associations. The private and idiosyncratic nature of Beethoven's belief that the second movement of his string quartet bore a connection to the vault scene is no refutation of this socio-cultural meaning. After all, what we are concerned with here is the *subjective* meaning of music qua socio-cultural object; that is, the meaningfulness of the music as a phenomenon of the producer's mental life.

The example of Arthur Honegger's *Pacific 231* demonstrates that the appresentational relationship may be founded upon auditory resemblance, through the use of the acoustic resources of instruments to imitate the sounds made by another object. The connection between *The Star-Spangled Banner* (excluding its lyrics) and the ideals of the United States is an appresentational reference that possesses the same degree of arbitrariness as the connection of Beethoven's string quartet with *Romeo and Juliet* – one would be hard-pressed to explain how *The Star-Spangled Banner* sounds like the ideals of the United States, not to mention to explain how ideals 'sound' at all. However, unlike the case of Beethoven's string quartet, the appresentational character of *The Star-Spangled Banner* is not founded in the producer's whimsy, but rather in the intersubjective, socio-cultural category of tradition.

In sum, the contextual or interpretational scheme undergirding the appresentational relationship between an arrangement of tones and a socio-cultural meaning that these tones have for their producer may be of various types.

5. Objective Meaning of Music Qua Socio-Cultural Object

The objective meaning of a product concerns the product's situation in a meaning-context within the mind of the beholder. No reference is made to the producer or the production. Omitting the producer and production from the process of interpretation neither implies nor entails that the beholder is unaware that the object was produced, as if the cultural object had been confused for a natural object. In fact, the beholder may interpret the object in terms of a meaning-context that makes reference to a producer; for instance, to interpret an object as "art" implies an artist. However, instead of recognizing the work of art as painted by Picasso and thereby interpreting the painting in accordance with our knowledge of Picasso's different stylistic periods, his personal life and his posthumous influence, all knowledge of the artist is omitted from our interpretation. The artist "is hidden behind the impersonal 'one' (someone, someone or other). This anonymous 'one' is merely the linguistic term for the fact that a Thou exists, or has once existed, of whose particularity we take no account."⁴⁸⁴ Similarly, insofar as the work is recognized as an object created by someone, the beholder is not unaware that the object is the result of a process of creation. But this awareness does not play a role in the beholder's interpretation of the object.

Structurally speaking, the objective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object appears to be isomorphic with the subjective meaning of music qua socio-cultural object. The difference concerns the meaning-context in question. Knowing the subjective or objective meaning would in both cases entail our ability to experience in simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity the polythetic acts that constituted the experience of the producer or the beholder. We have seen that this is an

⁴⁸⁴ Schütz, PSW, 135.

achievable goal with respect to music construed as a merely perceptual object, but that the situation becomes more complicated when we introduce socio-cultural layers of meaning.

Nevertheless, the structural similarity concerning the subjective and objective meaning of socio-culturally meaningful music pertains to the nature of the contextual or interpretational scheme that describes the particular type of connection between the appresenting pole of the music and the appresented pole of the meaning. Just as in the case of subjective meaning, this connection may be a function of some correlation that would have to be explained with reference to individual idiosyncrasy or individual past experience, auditory resemblance or tradition.

6. Subjective Meaning of Music Qua ‘Merely Perceptual’ (Formal) Activity

At the end of the section devoted to an examination of the category of the subjective meaning of music qua merely perceptual object, we found that we had offered an account of *how* music, construed as a phenomenon of our consciousness, could yield a meaningful experience. The essentially non-conceptual character of music prevented us from ever saying *what* music means, but we have established that there is nothing problematic in the assertion that “meaning” does not necessarily entail verbal communicability.⁴⁸⁵

As we transition to a consideration of music as an activity as opposed to an object it appears that the category of the meaningfulness of music as a ‘merely perceptual’ activity resembles that of music as a merely perceptual object; although it seems more accurate to say that we are speaking of activity in formal terms than ‘merely perceptual’ activity. In other words, what we have in mind here is a description of the different activities of consciousness that underlie the

⁴⁸⁵ Thomas Turino argues that music’s ability to express meanings that are incapable of being verbalized is part of its significance for human life. Cf. Turino, “Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music,” 249-250.

concept of action, i.e. a formal account of the concept of activity, such that all socio-cultural content is separated out from the basic categories that belong to activity as such. Thus we will come to an understanding of how activity can be meaningful, while bracketing the question of what any given activity actually means. And since in this section we are concerned with subjective meaning, we shall focus on the constitution of meaningful activity for the actor. We will begin with an overview of Schütz's understanding of the concept of action and how this conceptualization poses a difficulty for understanding a particular species of activities to which music itself belongs, namely autotelic activities.

6a. Schütz on the Concept of Action

Like the term “meaning,” the term “action” is equivocal. Removing the equivocation requires distinguishing between “action” and an “act.” Presently I am sitting in my office and find myself desirous of a cup of tea. Satisfying this desire would require the completion of a sequence of events: I must stand up, gather my mug and a tea bag, open my office door, walk to the kitchen, fill the kettle, heat the water, steep the tea bag and walk back to my office. Thus when I speak of the action of getting a cup of tea, I may be referring to “the action in the very course of being constituted, and, as such, a flow, an ongoing sequence of events, a process of bringing something forth, an accomplishing.”⁴⁸⁶ On the other hand, when I speak of the action of getting a cup of tea I may alternatively have in mind “the already constituted act [*Handlung*] considered as a completed unit, a finished product, an Objectivity.”⁴⁸⁷ To differentiate between these two

⁴⁸⁶ Schütz, PSW, 39.

⁴⁸⁷ Schütz, PSW, 39.

common uses of the term “action,” we may speak of “the action in progress (*actio*) and the already finished and constituted act (*actum*) which has been produced by the former.”⁴⁸⁸

It belongs to the concept of action that it be based on a preconceived project. The actor has a sort of mental picture of what is to be done, which guides the carrying out of the act. Schütz argues that what the actor projects before acting is the act, not the action. In terms of our previous example, what I project is the completed act of having procured a cup of tea, not the discrete steps that constitute the action of procuring a cup of tea. Schütz preempts the objection that a more fine-grained analysis would in fact reveal a projection of the individual steps of action by pointing out that, if this were so, then what we are in fact projecting are themselves completed acts. In other words, projection “is given only to reflective thought, not to immediate experience or to spontaneous Activity,”⁴⁸⁹ which is to say that projection is the projection of discrete units as opposed to a stream of experiential flow. Because an action is by definition based on a preconceived project and the execution of the projected act makes the action meaningful, “*the meaning of any action is its corresponding projected act.*”⁴⁹⁰ Elsewhere Schütz refers to the “pre-phantasied state of affairs to be brought about by the future action” as the “in-order-to motive.”⁴⁹¹ This is to be contrasted with the “because motive,” which, with reference to the actor’s past experiences, explains the choice of action. Schütz gives the morbid example of someone committing murder to obtain money. Getting money would be the murderer’s in-order-to motive. But there are innumerable ways of procuring money. Instead of murder, for example, the individual could have sought a job. In this case, a “because motive” would refer to the individual’s past in order to explain why a particular course of action was chosen; perhaps

⁴⁸⁸ Schütz, PSW, 39.

⁴⁸⁹ Schütz, PSW, 60-61.

⁴⁹⁰ Schütz, PSW, 61.

⁴⁹¹ Schütz, “Choosing Among Projects of Action,” 70.

because the murderer grew up in an abusive setting and was taught from an early age that violence was an acceptable means for getting what one desires.

This because/in-order-to distinction has consequences for an account of meaning as it relates to action. An in-order-to motive is a subjective meaning. It is accessible to the actor in the course of acting as “what he has actually in view as bestowing meaning upon his ongoing action.”⁴⁹² Once the action is completed – once it has become an act – then the actor can retrospectively investigate the circumstances that led him to act as he did. The “because motive,” then, is an objective category that cannot be viewed from within the lived stream of experience and only becomes accessible from an observer’s standpoint, even if this observer is the actor himself looking back at his past act.

The because/in-order-to distinction has further significance for our understanding of the meaning of an action when we consider the relation between motivational context and meaning-context. We have seen, if mostly implicitly, that meaning is not an inert entity. For instance, in our discussion of subjective versus objective meaning we saw that the objective meaning of an activity was largely a function of what we can call the observer’s particular attitude or orientation or, better yet, *interpretive scheme*. Interpretation, defines Schütz, is “the referral of the unknown to the known, of that which is apprehended in the glance of attention to the scheme of experience.”⁴⁹³ That is to say, interpretation involves the understanding of a present experience in terms of past experiences, which have been synthesized to create a unity that exists as an object for consciousness. Previously we used the example of art to explicate the notion of

⁴⁹² Schütz, “Choosing Among Projects of Action,” 70-71.

⁴⁹³ Schütz, PSW, 84. Schütz, in turn, defines a scheme of experience as “a meaning-context which is a configuration of our past experiences embracing conceptually the experiential objects to be found in the latter but not the process by which they were constituted” (Schütz, PSW, 82).

meaning-context, which makes it perfectly suited for a discussion of schemes of experience and the process of interpretation. A scheme of experience is present in the course of lived experience “in the form of ‘what one knows’ or ‘what one already knew.’ They consist of material that has already been organized under categories.”⁴⁹⁴ So, for instance, as I turn my attention to an object hanging on the wall, I refer it to the category of ‘painting,’ which I have built up out of my previous experiences of paintings. The category to which I refer the present object of experience may be even more specific – perhaps I have sufficient previous experience to categorize the present painting as ‘painting by Picasso.’ These schemes of experience, which seem to be more or less synonymous with what Schütz calls “stock of knowledge at hand,”⁴⁹⁵ are thus schemes for interpretation.

Clearly the example we have just discussed pertains to the interpretation of objects. However, in this section we are concerned with the interpretation of activity, in which case we refer the action not to a meaning-context, but rather to a *motivational context*. The significance of the because/in-order-to distinction can now be made clear. What we now must demonstrate is that the meaning of an action is different according to whether it is interpreted in light of the in-order-to motivational context or the because motivational context.

The in-order-to motive, we have seen, appears to the actor to be the meaningful ground of her activity. When the actor undertakes the action (the polythetic series of steps or constituent acts) that ultimately yields the completed act of getting a cup of tea, she is most likely to account for the meaning of her act in terms of the act’s in-order-to motive. Stated differently, if we were to

⁴⁹⁴ Schütz, PSW, 84.

⁴⁹⁵ “Let us therefore limit the term ‘stock of knowledge at hand,’” writes Schütz, “to the store of already constituted objectivities of experience in the actual Here and Now, in other words, to the passive ‘possession’ of experiences, to the exclusion of their reconstitution” (Schütz, PSW, 78).

ask her “why did you do that?” (or, more awkwardly, but more explicitly, “what did you mean by doing that?”) the answer we are likely to receive is something like “in order to get a cup of tea.”⁴⁹⁶ It is this projected act that constitutes the meaning-context in which her action is to be understood. Why did she stand in the first place? To prepare to move to the kitchen. Why did she move to the kitchen? To get a tea bag and to boil water. In short, the in-order-to motive explains an action in terms of its project.

A genuine because-motive, on the other hand, represents a different sort of meaning-context that cannot be translated into an in-order-to motive. Suppose, when we ask the actor why she got the tea, she were to answer “because I have drunk too much coffee today.” Firstly, we note that this statement cannot be translated into the future perfect tense that characterizes the in-order-to motive. Instead, this explanation refers to an act further back in time – the genuine because-motive has the temporal character of pastness. Thus the genuine because-motive is a meaning-context essentially different from the in-order-to motive. Although the because-motive and in-order-to motive represent different meaning-contexts, Schütz only speaks of the in-order-to motive as “the meaning of [the actor’s] action.”⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Colloquially, she would probably say “*because* I wanted a cup of tea.” According to Schütz, however, this is an improper use of language, not proof that we are dealing here with a because motive. To make this clear, Schütz calls such statements a “pseudo because-statement” (Schütz, PSW, 89). Pseudo because-statements are defined as any because-statement that is logically equivalent to an in-order-to statement. What marks the because-statement as a veiled in-order-to statement is its temporal structure of futurity, which belongs to in-order-to statements. Although the aforementioned pseudo because-statement may appear to have the temporal structure of pastness (as “wanted” seems to suggest), the explanation it offers refers to a “project with its still empty protentions” (Schütz, PSW, 89).

⁴⁹⁷ Schütz, PSW, 94.

6b. “Problems” Pertaining to the Relation of Schütz’s Concept of Action and Meaning

Schütz’s account of the meaning of an action should give us pause. When we discussed meaning in the context of the subjective and objective meaning of music as a merely perceptual object, meaning was seen to emerge retrospectively. At the cessation of the experience, the reflective glance rendered the experience discrete, which was seen to be a condition for the possibility of meaning. But there is a forward-looking relationship between an action and the project of which it is a component; that is, a particular action is chosen because of its suitability for yielding some projected end. Thus it would seem that the meaning of an action is known to the actor in advance, which seems to run afoul of Schütz’s characterization of meaning as something backwards-looking. “Only a defined experience has meaning;” writes Luigi Muzzetto, “and, given the temporal nature of experience, a defined experience is a past experience.”⁴⁹⁸ To follow a more orthodox reading of Schütz and claim that the meaning of an action only emerges after the completion of the action yields its own confusions. This would problematize the purposive nature of action and suggest that our intentions are in fact justifications pinned onto our actions *ex post facto*.

The nature of projective consciousness demonstrates that there is, in fact, no contradiction in maintaining both positions, that meaning emerges retrospectively and that the actor knows the meaning of his action in advance. Determining an effective course of action entails anticipatory imagining, an orientation “to an act phantasied in the future perfect tense as already executed.”⁴⁹⁹ In the case of easily achieved goals and commonly undertaken actions, this orienting phantasy is sufficiently negligible that the actor is unaware of it. In cases of goals that are difficult to attain or unfamiliar or that permit of a wide variety of possible courses of action, the actor is more

⁴⁹⁸ Muzzetto, “Time and Meaning in Alfred Schütz,” 10.

⁴⁹⁹ Schütz, PSW, 87.

likely to thematize the preparatory stages of the action. The phantasying of the act is what allows the meaning of an action to be known in advance without contradicting Schütz's understanding of meaningful lived experience in which the "reflective glance singles out an elapsed lived experience and constitutes it as meaning."⁵⁰⁰ In the phantasy, the completed act comes before, as it were, the constitutive action. I know what is to be done before I have decided how to do it. The action is oriented by the act that has been phantasied in the future perfect tense (i.e. as something that I will have done). In phantasy, from the standpoint of completed act, I look back on projected actions. Thus, phantasying involves the same sort of retrospection that we have seen to be involved in the concept of meaning.

Schütz's concept of action yields another problem when considering the meaning of music as an activity. If we continue to operate with the concept of music that Schütz presents in FPM and MMT then we recall that the meaning of music is tantamount to the execution of the various polythetic acts that constitute the musical work. No degree of familiarity with a musical work and no amount of musical talent can obviate the need to re-perform these polythetic acts in order to experience the meaning of the musical work. When we introduce these insights into our discussion of action then a problem appears to arise; namely, music seems to belong to those class of activities that are autotelic, that is, activities that are not goal-oriented, or rather, whose goal is the carrying-out of the constitutive steps as opposed to completed state of affairs. For instance, 'taking a walk' is another auto-telic action. One who is taking a walk is not doing so in order to arrive at some final destination, walking is itself the goal of the action. Finding the meaning of an action in the completed act seems to suggest that the meaning of the action permits monothetic characterization. For example, I undertook a sequence of actions in order to

⁵⁰⁰ Schütz, PSW, 71.

get a cup of tea. “Getting a cup of tea” would then be the meaning of my action. But how would we characterize the monothetic meaning of having performed a piece of music?

Recall that the meaning of a piece of music is grasped retrospectively. As the musical work unfolds, themes are constituted and thus emerges the experience of coherence and meaning. It is only at the completion of the musical work when all the polythetic acts have been performed that the meaning of the musical works as a whole can emerge. To this extent we can say that the meaning of the activity of playing a musical work is *having played the musical work*.

7. Objective Meaning of Music Qua ‘Merely Perceptual’ (Formal) Activity

Grasping the meaning of a musical activity makes reference to an actor responsible for the activity. Just as “[a]ll the other manifold social relationships are derived from the originary experiencing of the totality of the Other’s self in the community of time and space,”⁵⁰¹ so all derivative manners of grasping the meaning of a musical activity (for instance, watching a DVD of the concert, listening to a recording of the concert) leads us to imperfectly imagine how our experience would have been had we been there. For this reason, the case of being present at an act of improvisation is the example *par excellence* of experiencing the subjective meaning of musical activity. Does this meaning concern music qua mere perception or viewed through the socio-cultural lens? Hearing music merely perceptually, we have said, is a theoretical conceit that is phenomenologically useful, but experientially derivative. That is to say, we always experience music as laden with significance and fringes of meaning that derive from our being always already cultural subjects.

⁵⁰¹ Schütz, OMR, 221.

8. Subjective Meaning of Music Qua Socio-Cultural Activity

We saw in section 6a that an actor understands the meaning of her action in terms of the project of which it is a part. This appeared difficult to gloss when we construed music merely as a formal phenomenon. However, when we allow socio-cultural considerations to reenter the picture, things become clearer and our field of investigation widens. To repeat and elaborate: the subjective meaning of the activity of playing music will be the relation of this activity to some larger, orienting project in the mind of the actor. This is as far as the formal definition of the meaning of activity will get us. If we wish to understand the actual, ‘material’ meanings (as opposed to the formal meaning) of the activity of playing music we shall have to consider some of the projects of which the activity of playing music forms a part. And in order to identify some of these projects we shall make recourse to the discipline of ethnomusicology, the study of music in its cultural context. First, however, we will consider the particular province of meaning in question when dealing with the activity of music.

8a. Finite Province of Meaning Correlated to the Activity of Music

The activity of music making encompasses a number of different finite provinces of meaning, depending on our perspective. If we assume the attitude of a listener (as opposed to a participant), such as that of someone attending a concert by a symphony orchestra, then the finite province of meaning in question may well be the same as the finite province of meaning discussed in section 2a as correlated to merely perceptual music. We can imagine a listener having no previous acquaintance with the concert program,⁵⁰² who has some grounding in the conventions of Western classical music and who has adopted the sort of aesthetic attitude that is

⁵⁰² And thus no extra-musical associations with the musical works being presented.

implicit in Schütz's analysis in FPM. An observer from a different culture, an anthropologist for instance, may experience a musical event from a theoretical standpoint. With a disinterested attitude that distinguishes the theoretical thinker from the active participant, the anthropologist inhabits the world of scientific theory.⁵⁰³ A participant engaged in a musical activity that is inextricably linked with some pragmatic purpose, on the other hand, will be operating within the natural attitude of daily life, which was discussed in section 1.

This goes to show that the socio-cultural world bears within itself an indeterminate number of sub-universes. It is the particular interest of the individual that will determine which finite province of meaning holds sway, and this means that the role of the individual will determine within which finite province of meaning the activity of music making is experienced. The roles that may be fulfilled are in turn partially dependent on the specific function of the musical activity. Let us now consider the different functions that music may serve.

8b. Functions of Music

In *Music in Human Life: Anthropological Perspectives on Music*, John E. Kaemmer gives a survey of the different uses and functions that music serves in societies throughout the world. In order to better grasp the types of projects to which music may be an essential component, let us consider these functions individually.

One of the major uses of music is as a form of play. Play involves a lack of explicit concern with practical purposes. One who plays is not, for the moment at least, concerned with food, shelter and other material necessities of life. Citing anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, Kaemmer lists some of the unspoken and unnoticed 'useful' functions that music may serve even

⁵⁰³ Cf. Schütz, OMR, 245-259.

without any explicit awareness on the part of the individuals who are playing; for instance, playing music with other people facilitates the development of social skills, playing music develops motor skills, playing music satisfies a human desire for complexity. There may be some truth to these explanations; however, they do not pertain to the subjective meaning of the activity. These explanations are not in-order-to motives and thus are not the subjective meanings of the activity of making music as play.

The in-order-to motives that orient the action of playing music as play will vary from instance to instance. The activity may be conceptualized as an accompaniment to other play-activities, such as chanting a skipping rhyme while jumping rope or singing “pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker’s man” while playing patty cake. Determining the subjective meaning of a particular instance of play-oriented musical activity can be accomplished simply by asking the agent why he or she is undertaking the activity.

Kaemmer also identifies “self-expression” as a common function of musical activity, noting that this “expression is often related to the psychological needs and personal integrity of the individual.”⁵⁰⁴ Catharsis, the release of pent-up emotion or tension, is one such psychological need that music can serve. The Flathead Indians, for instance, use music and dance to “relieve the tensions of constant interaction with the dominant white culture.”⁵⁰⁵ “Among the Tuareg of Niger,” another ethnomusicological study reports, “a vassal woman can use *tende* songs for such things as stating in public her feelings for a man. Spoken openly, this type of statement is unthinkable and would cause untold embarrassment and criticism. Being sung makes it acceptable.”⁵⁰⁶ In some cases, such as the shrieking vocals of heavy metal music or the

⁵⁰⁴ Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 154.

⁵⁰⁵ Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 154.

⁵⁰⁶ Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 154.

unapologetically repetitive rhythms of groove-based music, the cathartic function of music may be sufficiently explicit to the actor to be cast in the form of an in-order-to motive.

The function of music as self-expression also encompasses its use to express one's individual identity. In the jazz tradition, for instance, a premium is placed on the development of a distinctive sound and improvisational conception.

Music also functions in projects involving communication. Courtship songs are listed by Kaemmer as instances of the communicative capacity of music and accords with our understanding of an activity's in-order-to motive as its meaning. Why does the lover serenade the beloved? In order to communicate his love. The communicative function of music even extends to parties that are unaware that communication is taking place. In the South Pacific, where it was common for sailors to set out on the water and to never return, a group of islanders, the "Tikopia considered certain people to be spirit mediums who could provide news of missing persons through song."⁵⁰⁷ Music also communicates to large groups. "In rural India," it is reported, "Wedding songs serve to make the whole community aware of the marriage."⁵⁰⁸

Music is additionally mobilized in political projects, such as conflict resolution: "Settling disputes by song contests was formerly practiced among the Inuit of the polar regions, since violence connected with ordinary disputes could seriously endanger the whole community."⁵⁰⁹ The political import of music is also related to its role within power dynamics. Protest songs unify the voice of the dissenters, facilitating group identification and enhancing perseverance. Oppressive powers, in turn, may restrict music thought to be subversive and promote music that reifies power relations.

⁵⁰⁷ Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 156.

⁵⁰⁸ Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 156.

⁵⁰⁹ Kaemmer, *Music in Human Life*, 160.

9. Objective Meaning of Music Qua Socio-Cultural Activity

The objective meaning of musical activity concerns the meaning attributed to the act by an observer. Lester Embree's discussion of species of meaning in Schütz's thought, discussed in section 1a, points to an important distinction that must be drawn with respect to the objective meaning of musical activity when viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Embree's insight is that there exist varying degrees to which one may be an outsider. By virtue of not being the author of an action, I am an outsider and lack epistemological privilege to the subjective meaning of an action. However, if I am a member of the culture to which the author of the observed action also belongs, then I am more qualified to judge to meaning that the action's author attributes to it.⁵¹⁰ Of course, this does not make my interpretation of the action any less objective, but it leads Embree to distinguish between "'personal' (or 'individual') and 'collective' (or 'communal')" meaning⁵¹¹, and to subdivide the latter into the meaning attributed to an action by the "in-group" (i.e. the group performing the action or the culture to which the actor belongs) and an "out-group" (i.e. a group with a different cultural background).⁵¹²

Thus when we discuss the objective meaning of musical activity viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon, we must consider whether the observer in question is a member of the in-group or a member of an out-group. And as we have already intimated in section 8a, the category "out-group" contains an indeterminate number of sub-universes that will yield a differently meaningful experience.

The everyday relationship of an in-group to its folkways is ethnocentric, that is, this view of the world situates "one's own group [at] the center of everything and all others are scaled and

⁵¹⁰ Such a conviction leads anthropologists and ethnographers to seek the input of members of a culture.

⁵¹¹ Embree, *The Schutzian Theory of the Cultural Sciences*, 137.

⁵¹² Embree, *The Schutzian Theory of the Cultural Sciences*, 137.

rated with reference to it.”⁵¹³ This does not mean that a member of the in-group can never take a proverbial step back and, viewing his group from a critical distance, recognize the equal validity of the values of different groups. But in the everyday attitude, the in-group’s way of life is encountered as a self-evident and taken for granted. A member of an out-group, however, will encounter the world taken for granted by the in-group through the lens of his own group’s taken for granted world: the “outsider measures the standards prevailing in the group under consideration in accordance with the system of relevances prevailing within the natural aspect the world has for his home-group.”⁵¹⁴ The evaluation of another group’s system of relevances and typifications in incommensurable terms will, at best, leave them not understood and, at worst, result in their being regarded as inferior and detestable. A member of an out-group who is operating as a social scientist, on the other hand, “supersedes his situation as a man among his fellow-men within the social world. The problems of the theoretician originate in his theoretical interest, and many elements of the social world that are scientifically relevant are irrelevant from the viewpoint of the actor on the social scene, and *vice versa*.”⁵¹⁵

10. Ethnomusicology and the Reciprocal Advantages of Philosophizing About Music

This section will argue for the essential relevance of ethnomusicology for an adequate philosophical treatment of music. We will begin by examining the discipline of ethnomusicology, which, over the course of its young existence has never ceased to ask itself just what it means to do ethnomusicology. Then we shall consider how a lack of cross-cultural agreement concerning the nature of music itself appears to pose a challenge to both

⁵¹³ Schütz, “Equality and the Social Meaning Structure of the Social World,” 244.

⁵¹⁴ Schütz, “Equality and the Social Meaning Structure of the Social World,” 246.

⁵¹⁵ Schütz, “Equality and the Social Meaning Structure of the Social World,” 248.

ethnomusicology and the philosophy of music. Finally, we shall consider the role of universals and the *a priori* in ethnomusicology and the philosophy of culture, in order to establish the fundamental compatibility of the two disciplines. This will entail considering some of Cassirer's statements about methodology in the philosophy of culture, with an eye towards the ways in which ethnomusicology has long been asking questions and collecting data that are of great interest to the philosopher of culture.

“Ethnomusicology carries within it the seeds of its own division,” writes Alan Merriam, “for it has always been compounded of two distinct parts, the musicological and the ethnological.”⁵¹⁶ Over the course of its young life,⁵¹⁷ the focus and methodology of ethnomusicology has remained one of the discipline's constant concerns.

The dual nature of ethnomusicology, to which Merriam refers, saddles the discipline with two distinct study objects and without a clear-cut manner of relating them. With the musicological approach, the ethnomusicologist encounters “music sound;” while with the ethnological or anthropological approach, the ethnomusicologist thematizes “music behavior.”⁵¹⁸ As Merriam points out, ethnomusicology's dual nature has given rise to disciplinary definitions,

⁵¹⁶ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 3.

⁵¹⁷ The history of ethnomusicology is also an enduring subject of debate and refinement among ethnomusicologists. While the term “ethnomusicology” was coined by Dutch scholar Jaap Kunst only in 1950, German comparative musicologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are regarded as precursors of ethnomusicology and a number of early, influential ethnomusicologists are direct student-descendants of their educational lineage. (Cf. Titon, “Many Ethnomusicologies”) Other scholars have identified an intellectual kinship with thinkers, explorers and missionaries dating back to the Enlightenment (Cf. Myers, *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, 3). Curt Sachs even mentions the speculative acknowledgment of the music of “the Hebrews and Hellenes, to Miriam and David, to Pythagoras and the Roman Boethius” found in treatises of the Middle Ages (Sachs, *The Wellsprings of Music*, 5). Also cf. Anthony Seeger “Lost Lineages and Neglected Peers: Ethnomusicologists Outside Academia.”

⁵¹⁸ Stone, *Let the Inside Be Sweet*, 11.

which, depending on the inclinations of the scholar, have tended to emphasize either the musicological or anthropological aspect.

Initially, scholars highlighted the geographic uniqueness of ethnomusicology's study of music, namely its focus on the music of non-Western cultures.⁵¹⁹ While, from a philosophical point of view, these studies are useful for the invaluable data they furnish about different conceptions of melody, harmony, rhythm and other musical characteristics of interest to Western views of music, there are at least two problems with the geographic definition of ethnomusicology. First, Merriam suggests that if "emphasis is placed upon *where* rather than upon *how* or *why*,"⁵²⁰ then ethnomusicology does not differ in any essential respect from the methodology of musicology or the geographic focus of ethnology. A second problem with the geographic definition of ethnomusicology is that the traditional categories of Western music theory do not necessarily map on to the musical culture being studied. For instance, not all cultures have a definition of music that accords with the Western philosophical emphasis on music as a sequence of tones that exists for itself and is capable of being conceived apart its cultural context and function. "For the Basongye [an ethnic group in the Congo]," reports Merriam, "to the contrary, every song depends heavily upon its cultural context and is conceptualized in this relationship."⁵²¹ In her study of the music of the Kpelle people of West Africa, Ruth Stone writes: "For the Kpelle music sound is conceived as part of an integrally related cluster of dance, speech, and kinesic-proxemic behavior referred to as *pêle* and occurring in particular time-space dimensions."⁵²² Thus, focusing on the 'where' rather than 'how' or

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 5 for examples of geographic definitions of ethnomusicology.

⁵²⁰ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 5.

⁵²¹ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 262.

⁵²² Ruth Stone, *Let the Inside Be Sweet*, 1.

‘why’ risks resulting in a study documenting a phenomenon that would be unrecognizable to the culture for which this phenomenon is a meaningful activity. A methodological pluralist might charitably argue that casting the study object in terms of concepts and categories derived from the researcher’s can yield valuable insights that would otherwise go undiscovered; and in terms of the taxonomy of meaning that we derived from Schütz’s phenomenology of the social world, this dimension of meaning would most likely be categorized as the objective (outsider) meaning of music qua merely perceptual object. But it cannot be denied that unreflectively relying on one’s familiar concepts and categories when faced with the unfamiliar is at very least incomplete and more likely the type of naïve conceptualizing that has historically justified the subjugation and exploitation of putatively “primitive” people.

Merriam’s own definition of ethnomusicology presents it as “the study of music in culture.”⁵²³ Merriam takes pains to explain the way that this definition both acknowledges and bridges the anthropological-musicological schism at the heart of ethnomusicology:

Music sound cannot be produced except by people for other people, and although we can separate the two aspects conceptually, one is not really complete without the other.

Human behavior produces music, but the process is one of continuity; the behavior itself is shaped to produce music sound, and thus the study of one flows into the other.⁵²⁴

Merriam’s disciplinary definition gives way to a “simple” model of the ethnomusicologist’s task, which unfolds across three “analytical levels”: “conceptualization about music, behavior in

⁵²³ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 6.

⁵²⁴ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 6. One can imagine this having a profound influence on Christopher Small’s development of the notion of “musicking.”

relation to music, and the music sound itself.”⁵²⁵ In other words, according to Merriam, the ethnomusicologist studies music as concept, behavior and sound.⁵²⁶

It would seem unproblematic, if somewhat provisional, to say that the ethnomusicologist studies music as a complex nexus where different threads of a given culture are interwoven and interactive. However, as the study of music as a concept suggests, the signification of the key term of this definition – music – is not as self-evident as one may think. And the indeterminacy of this term is of interest for ethnomusicology and significant for the philosophy of music.

Self-evident as the phenomenon may seem, defining music proves to be a surprisingly difficult task. One such definition proposed by John Blacking – music is “humanly organized sound”⁵²⁷ – seems to be a reasonable attempt. Ethnomusicological findings, however, suggest that Blacking’s definition may be too limited. “Ethnomusicologists have learned,” writes Timothy Rice, “for example, that in agricultural and pastoral cultures, where people work outdoors most of the time, humans sometimes sing in counterpoint with the sounds of animals and the natural environment, as if animals and nature were singing to and with us.”⁵²⁸ Examples of such interaction between humans and nature abound in the Tuvan musical culture of Inner Asia. In fact, there are certain types of music that are meant to be performed in particular natural

⁵²⁵ Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 32. Interestingly, Ruth Stone reports “Merriam staunchly maintained, in class lectures and conversation, that ethnomusicology as a whole possesses no single paradigm” (Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology*, 2).

⁵²⁶ In 1986, Timothy Rice published “Toward the Remodeling of Ethnomusicology,” which suggested an alternative tripartite model derived from the work of Clifford Geertz. Rice’s model presents music as “historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually created and experienced” (Rice, *Modeling Ethnomusicology*, 6). During his tenure as editor of *Ethnomusicology*, Rice determined that this model better represented the research that ethnomusicologists were undertaking; and in a recent examination of articles published in *Ethnomusicology* between 2006 and 2015, Rice determined that his model had grown in explanatory power, accounting for 81% of the literature as opposed to 73% from 1978 to 1986 (Cf. Rice, *Modeling Ethnomusicology*, 8).

⁵²⁷ Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?*, 10.

⁵²⁸ Rice, *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction*, 5.

acoustic environments.⁵²⁹ In their monograph on the sound world of Tuva, Theodore Levin and Valentina Süzükei record instances of musicians interacting with their natural environment and even altering this environment in order to elicit the types of sounds that the musician wishes to make music with.⁵³⁰ Given the extent to which Tuvan singing is tied up with nature, not only in performance, but also in pedagogy – many styles are said to be imitations of natural phenomena such as wind – it seems fair to say that humans are taking their cue from nature in the organization of sound. Considerations such as these have motivated certain ethnomusicologists to argue that the discipline’s research domain ought to encompass sound as opposed to just the humanly organization of it.⁵³¹

Another common, if less academic, understanding of music regards it as “the art of organizing sound in pleasing or thought-provoking ways.”⁵³² However, this definition erects a conceptual boundary between music and other elements that frequently accompany mere sound such as lyrics, dancing and costumes. Such a boundary proves to be at odds with the way that particular cultures conceptualize music. In comparison with the Western model of pleasantly organized sound, some cultures have a broader understanding of music that encompasses elements absent from the Western understanding of music. For instance, Bruno Nettl reports that in India “the word *sangit* or a derivative of it is used to translate ‘music’ rather accurately, but

⁵²⁹ Levin, *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing*, 31.

⁵³⁰ Levin and Süzükei report, for instance, an experience with Tuvan singer Kaigal-ool musically interacting with a river and cliff: “In using his voice to excite the reverberant qualities of the cliff, Kaigal-ool’s aim was not simply to hear his own voice amplified, but rather to feel an interaction with the startlingly beautiful natural scenario in which he emplaced himself through singing. ‘I love to hear the voice of the cliff speaking back to me,’ he told me during one of our late-night recording sessions” (Levin, *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing*, 38).

⁵³¹ For instance, cf. Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*.

⁵³² Rice, *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction*, 4.

the term may also include dance.”⁵³³ Other cultures omit from the realm of music sounds and practices that Western culture takes for granted as music. For instance, Nettl also reports that the Blackfoot Native Americans “have a word for ‘song’ but not one for ‘instrumental music.’”⁵³⁴

Summarizing what appears to be a grave problem for ethnomusicologists, Nettl writes

There is no conceptualization or definition of music that is shared by all or perhaps even many cultures, and very few societies have a concept (and a term) precisely parallel to European ‘music.’ They may instead have taxonomies whose borders cut across the universe of sounds produced by humans (or even animals) in ways quite different from those of Western societies.⁵³⁵

At first blush, this lack of intercultural consensus concerning the meaning of the term “music” – indeed, the occasional absence of a general term covering different musical activities⁵³⁶ – would seem to represent a methodological problem for the ethnomusicologist: how is the object of study, music, to be determined? However, Nettl encourages ethnomusicologists not to dwell on the problem. The task, Nettl argues, is to determine the definition of music operative in a given culture, not to approach said culture according to some presupposed concept of music. Thus ethnomusicologists have been led to study music in forms that would run afoul of the definitions of “music” found in Western standard reference works.

This lack of concern for an orienting definition of music that Nettl advocates yields data that is useful for philosophical reflections on music, since a merely descriptive account of the unwieldy variety of concepts, behaviors and sounds considered music should encourage philosophers to skeptically regard the Western notion of music as a merely acoustic

⁵³³ Nettl, “The Art of Combining Tones,” 24.

⁵³⁴ Nettl, “The Art of Combining Tones,” 24.

⁵³⁵ Nettl, “The Art of Combining Tones,” 20.

⁵³⁶ Cf. Nettl, “The Art of Combining Tones,” 24.

phenomenon. Just as avant-garde works of the Western tradition problematize common understandings of music,⁵³⁷ so should the musical practices of non-Western cultures inform the way that we philosophize about music.

For instance, one such consequence of proceeding from ‘musics’ to ‘music as such’ would be the introduction of the aesthetic unit of the event. Ethnomusical rationales for conceptualizing music in terms of the event are not uniform. John Kaemmer, an early advocate of the approach, presents the event paradigm as a response to the methodological trends and concerns of ethnomusicology as a self-reflective discipline. In Kaemmer’s presentation, the study of music in culture has taken two distinct approaches; namely, as a product of cognitive or social processes. When focused on social processes, ethnomusicologists have chosen one of two approaches. The broader approach, exemplified by Alan Lomax’s *Folk Song Style and Culture*, took its cue from evolutionary theory and sought to study the universal development processes of music through a quantitative, comparative effort undertaken on a worldwide basis. This grand narrative approach resulted in an inevitable backlash, with scholars still framing music in terms of its role within society but opting for a detailed study of individual cultures. The focus on musical events derives from the social sciences’ interest in social interaction.

A second motive for the study of music as an event is concisely expressed by Ruth Stone and derives from the researcher being oriented by the categories in effect among the group being researched. “Music event as a study object possesses conceptual validity from the Kpelle perspective,” Stone writes. “For the Kpelle music sound is conceived as part of an integrally related cluster of dance, speech, and kinesic-proxemic behavior referred to as *pêle* and occurring

⁵³⁷ For instance, John Cage’s *4’33”* may be understood to problematize Blacking’s presentation of music as “humanly organized.”

in particular time-space dimensions.”⁵³⁸ In this case, the justification for studying music as an event involving more than the mere sounding of tones follows from orienting one’s study of music according to the conceptualization of music in effect in the society in question.

The question of disciplinary concern for beginning with a definition of the study object in question is related to the different status of universals in ethnomusicology and the philosophy of culture. The history of ethnomusicology demonstrates a vacillating interest in and denial of musical universals. Just as Merriam found the seeds of ethnomusicology’s division planted in the term itself, Rice suggests that differing disciplinary definitions similarly evince a dual nature to ethnomusicologist’s task:

In 1960 Alan Merriam...defined ethnomusicology in just this way: ‘[T]he study of music in culture’; but a sentence or two later he returned the definition of the field to the universality implied in my opening definition [“Ethnomusicology is the study of why, and how, human beings are musical”]: ‘[T]he study of music as a universal aspect of man’s activities.’ The two poles of the culturally particular and the humanly universal, whether understood as a tension or productive antitheses, have galvanized ethnomusicologists’ thinking about their field ever since.⁵³⁹

Nettl tells a fine-grained story of the status of universals in ethnomusicology over the past century. Initially, his narrative goes, ethnomusicologists were primarily concerned with defending the difference of the world’s music. This was largely a response to the ethnocentric assumption of the scholarship of the time that “the basic principles of Western music were universally valid, because it was the only ‘true’ music, of which all other musics represented

⁵³⁸ Stone, *Let the Inside Be Sweet*, 1.

⁵³⁹ Rice, *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction*, 3-4.

generative, or perhaps degenerative stages.”⁵⁴⁰ However, the theories of Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss in linguistics and anthropology, respectively, brought a newfound validity and academic respectability to musical commonalities across far-flung cultures. Nettl outlines a number of different approaches to musical universality and deems the most realistic approach to the subject to be “whether there is anything that is found in every musical system, in the music of every society; whether, thus, there is a way in which all musics, all musical culture, are in some way alike; and whether there are any characteristics or traits present somewhere in all of them.”⁵⁴¹ Perhaps with Merriam’s simple model of ethnomusicology in mind, Nettl poses the question with respect to musical sound, behaviors and concepts.

As for concepts pertaining to music that pass the empirical, ethnomusicological test of ubiquity, Nettl notes “the association of music with the supernatural,” “the musical association with dance and speech” and the identification of discrete musical units.⁵⁴² Such units are not necessarily akin to the Western notion of a “work,” which is embodied by a score of performance instructions that serve to an indeterminate extent as the identity conditions of said work, although the Western notion of a “work” is one such manifestation of the universal conceptualization of music as something consisting of “distinct units of creativity.”⁵⁴³ The individuation of musical units might otherwise result from the role that a given unit serves in a particular ritual or the unit’s attribution to a creator living or dead or perhaps supernatural. All musical cultures also give evidence of possessing a conception of musicality, a more or less sharply delimited understanding of what sounds are music proper and what sounds are noise or non-musical. Every known musical culture has a manner for the passing on of tradition, whatever

⁵⁴⁰ Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 32.

⁵⁴¹ Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 34.

⁵⁴² Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 35.

⁵⁴³ Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 35.

the particulars of pedagogy may be. Finally, there are cross-cultural similarities of repertoire, for instance the omnipresence of a distinct body of children's music.

With respect to musical sounds, Nettl identifies a number of commonalities. These include the overwhelming preponderance of the major second (“anything from three to five quarter tones”⁵⁴⁴) in vocal musics, a tendency for descent at the end of phrases, use of repetition, rhythmic structures created by distinctions between note lengths and dynamic strength. “All of the mentioned features are universals in the sense that they exist practically everywhere,” writes Nettl,⁵⁴⁵ “but they are significant universals also in another sense: they would not have to be present in order for music to exist and thus are not simply a part of the definition of music.”⁵⁴⁶ The second sense in which these features are significant universals can be translated into a Kantian terminology, and doing so will assist in putting ethnomusicology in conversation with the philosophy of culture. To derive universals from the definition of music is to make analytic *a priori* judgments about music, which, as such, do not add to our store of knowledge about music. The universal features identified through a comparative analysis of ethnomusicological literature yields synthetic *a posteriori* insights about music – they tell us something about the nature of music, which is not definitionally contained in the concept of music, by way of the study of actual musics.

How do these synthetic *a posteriori* insights square with the sort of universality in question for the philosophy of culture? *A priori* knowledge is concerned with what we might call the universal conditions of cognition; it tells us about ubiquitous aspects of knowledge that – as

⁵⁴⁴ Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 34.

⁵⁴⁵ The problematic nature of attributing universal status to features that are found “practically” everywhere as opposed to absolutely everywhere is not lost on Nettl. He later notes that if we want to be “fussy” then we can add a qualification by speaking of “‘statistical’ universals” (Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 35).

⁵⁴⁶ Nettl, “Is Music the Universal Language of Mankind?,” 34.

universal – can be presupposed to give shape, and thus to create limitations, to experiences that we have not even had yet. In keeping with its Kantian origin, Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms is transcendental in reach; that is to say, it inquires into the conditions for the possibility of types of experience. Whereas, in the traditional Neo-Kantian reading, Kant’s epochal contribution to transcendental philosophy focused on a justification of the fact of Newtonian science, the Neo-Kantian school sought to expand this critique to different domains of experience, which in Cassirer’s parlance are symbolic forms. In Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, Kant’s understanding of the *a priori* is “pluralized.”⁵⁴⁷ Thus the conditions for the possibility of cognition enumerated in Kant’s *Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic* cannot be assumed to apply to the types of experience within the symbolic form of art, myth, etc. Nevertheless, as was discussed in chapter one, the *a priori* elements of symbolic forms are not entirely different in each case, which is explained by Cassirer’s distinction between the quality and modality of a symbolic form.

Cassirer’s conception of the *a priori* is also indebted to another advancement of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism; namely, in conceiving of the *a priori* as dynamic. Kant held that the pure forms of intuition (space and time) and the twelve categories of thought are eternal, universal conditions for the possibility of experience. Cassirer argues that, not only do the different domains of culture modalize these qualities of experience differently, but that even within a given symbolic universe, the nature of these *a priori* elements are historically developing.

Crucially, for Cassirer, the philosophical discovery of the dynamic *a priori* governing the operation of a symbolic universe entails an intimate engagement with the special sciences tasked

⁵⁴⁷ Luft, *The Space of Culture*, 185.

with studying the various domains of culture. Philosophical inquiry “can neither disregard empirical particulars nor can it wholly submit to them and still remain entirely faithful to its own mission and purpose,”⁵⁴⁸ writes Cassirer of the curious methodological dilemma resulting from having to discover the universal from the particular. The philosopher of culture must therefore “formulate the *questions* asked of linguistics [or other special sciences] with systematic universality, but in each case derive the *answers* from actual empirical inquiry.”⁵⁴⁹ Doing so entails grounding one’s research in as broad a body of empirical material as possible. In the context of his volume of language, Cassirer even mentions the importance of consulting different linguistic families, that is, of not privileging Western phenomena.

How does one derive the universal from the particulars? How does one know when a sufficient number of particulars have been consulted in order to make universal claims? Cassirer presents no hard and fast rule, but indicates that the particulars themselves will begin to demonstrate suggestive commonalities: “If I nevertheless continued [to delve into the ever-expanding body of literature it proved necessary to consult], it is because, as the diversity of linguistic phenomena opened up before me, the particulars seemed more and more to cast light upon one another and to fit as though of their own accord into a general picture.”⁵⁵⁰ If the general picture derived from the study of particulars is to prove its mettle, then subsequently considered particulars will show themselves to be in accordance with the pure form of the phenomenon in question. And if a growing body of particulars cannot be made to accord with the general picture in effect, then perhaps it is time for a paradigm shift.

⁵⁴⁸ Cassirer, PSF I, 71.

⁵⁴⁹ Cassirer, PSF I, 71.

⁵⁵⁰ Cassirer, PSF I, 71.

Cassirer's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and the special sciences makes clear the significance of ethnomusicology's synthetic *a posteriori* insights into different manifestations of human musicality for determining the dynamic *a priori* at the heart of human musicality as such; namely, ethnomusicology provides the empirical particulars from which the philosopher of culture comes to understand the shape of the conditions for the possibility of musical experience. While these synthetic *a priori* universals cannot be claimed to have regulative import – that is to say, it is feasible that some hitherto unknown group of people may engage in musical practices that differ from those of all other known musical cultures – that is not out of character with the nature of the dynamic *a priori*, which must be altered to explain the facts of human activity.

Nettl claims “what is most important to us – as ethnomusicologists – about the music of the world is its varieties, the fact that it consists of ‘musics,’ rather than its universals.”⁵⁵¹ Although the same cannot be said of the philosopher of culture, it is serendipitous that the ethnomusicologist's data collection and focus on variety serves the end of searching for an underlying unity at the heart of human musicality.

11. Conclusion

The question concerning the meaning of music cannot be answered without a number of preliminary qualifications. These qualifications must be made with respect to the individual for whom the music is meaningful. Is the individual in question the creator of the work or a listener? What sort of *epoché* has the listener performed that affects the nature of the experience (e.g. bracketing out the socio-cultural dimensions of the music)? Is the hearing of the music tied up

⁵⁵¹ Nettl, “A Nonuniversal Language: On the Musics of the World,” 63.

with the broader experience of the activity of its creation? If the musical experience involves the experience of the act of musical creation, from what standpoint does the subject experience the activity? Is he a member of the culture engaged in the act of music making? Does he belong to a different culture? Has he adopted a theoretical standpoint towards the activity? Only by answering these and other clarifying questions do we disambiguate the otherwise equivocal concept of musical meaning. Schütz's framework thus provides ethnomusicologists with distinctions essential for a consideration of the multifaceted meaningfulness that derives from the essential connection between music and cultural life.

Ethnomusicology, for its part, provides an indispensable service to the philosophy of culture. Following Merriam's simple model of ethnomusicology as the study of music as sound, behavior and concept, ethnomusicological research furnishes the empirical data that orient the philosopher's reflections and progressively points the way to an understanding of those structures which, at a given time, govern the relationship between human beings and sound. The many forms this research takes include transcription and tonal analysis (which serves as the basis for the determination of universals such as the ubiquity of major second interval), interviews with a wide range of members of the culture in question (which give way to insights into cultural conceptions of the boundaries of music and non-music, understanding of the hierarchy of talent and distinct categories in the repertory) and the writing of ethnographies (which offer the outsider's perspective on musical behaviors). The philosophy of music thus proves itself to be an essentially interdisciplinary enterprise.

Chapter Four: Towards a Phenomenology of Improvisation

In previous chapters we have argued that a viable philosophical treatment of music cannot afford to overlook the evidence provided by a diverse body of musical cultures. This conviction holds equally well when applied to the diverse body of musical practices that are found across cultures. Improvisation is one such practice that has been frequently neglected in philosophical literature, although, as will be seen in the literature referenced by this chapter, that situation is beginning to change.

If the philosopher of music wishes to make claims about music or musical concepts such as improvisation without the qualification that these claims only pertain to a particular musical culture (usually, as we've seen, the tradition of Western art music), then the philosophy of music must reckon with the unwieldy world of human musicality. In other words, the philosophy of music must become ethnomusicological.

The aim of this chapter is to begin such an undertaking by examining some of the central themes of a philosophical treatment of musical improvisation. The first task towards the completion of this aim involves clarifying what we mean when we talk about improvisation. Doing so will involve a consideration of etymology, the pedagogy of improvisation and the question of the relationship between improvisation and composition. These and other considerations will also lead to a revision and expansion of some of the phenomenological claims about music that we have discussed in past chapters. For instance, we shall see that improvisation motivates an expanded concept of retention and suggests enhancements to Schütz's picture of the social relationships that constitute the musical experience.

1. What is Improvisation?

Etymologically, the term “improvisation” derives from the Latin *improviso* “unforeseen; not studied or prepared beforehand.”⁵⁵² This term can be broken down into the privative prefix *im-*, connoting “not, opposite of, without,”⁵⁵³ and the verb *providere* meaning to “foresee, provide.”⁵⁵⁴ Thus to improvise is to act in an unforeseen manner. But the unforeseen-ness of improvisation is never absolute. As thrown into a world that has been shaped by history and other forces that predate our existence and agency, we ourselves are shaped by a realm of possibility that is not of our creation. The world has furnished us with foreseeable possibilities. To improvise a poem entails an understanding of what a poem is; an understanding that is historically and culturally contingent. Is a poem something that, by definition, rhymes? Is a poem something with a predetermined structure like the fourteen lines of a sonnet or the five-seven-five syllabic structure of a haiku? If we take it for granted that a cultural object like a poem has no Platonic ideal existence but instead exists as a historically and culturally agreed upon set of rules, then to improvise such a thing necessarily involves a foreknowledge of these rules. This qualifies the unforeseen-ness built into the definition of improvisation.

In her study of Italian poetic improvisation and its relationship to Romanticism, Angela Esterhammer suggests that improvisation as such – whether in the practice of the Romantic *improvvisatore*, the contemporary improv comedian or a jazz musician – involves three factors. First, improvisation involves a relationship to time that distinguishes it from other varieties of

⁵⁵² Online Etymology Dictionary, “Improvisation (n.),” accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/improvisation>.

⁵⁵³ Online Etymology Dictionary, “In (adv., prep.),” Accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/in>. This prefix is better known in the form *in-*, but still survives in terms such as “impertinent.”

⁵⁵⁴ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Improvisation (n.),” accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/improvisation>.

literary, comedic and musical activity; namely, the improviser submits to the “forward motion of time, which disallows erasing, editing, or revision.”⁵⁵⁵ While, of course, a non-improvising poet or a composer also create in the forward motion of time, their activity admits of retrospective refinement: what was written earlier, for instance, can be revised in light of what was written later. It is the complete coincidence of creation and performance that places the improviser in a distinctive relationship to time.

Secondly, the improviser is influenced by “the immediate feedback provided by fellow performers or by the audience.”⁵⁵⁶ This factor, I argue, is less defensible than the first. It entails that improvisation is, by definition, a communal act; or, to make the same point negatively, it entails that one cannot improvise alone. This seems patently false. One can certainly poetize or make music in the forward motion of time (factor one) and limited by a pre-given framework (which we shall see is factor three), without other people present and without this running afoul of our intuition that a genuine improvisational act took place. Conversely, and equally damaging to the assertion that immediate feedback is unique to improvisation and therefore by definition absent from composition, we can imagine a poet or composer trying out musical or poetic lines on someone else who is present. In short, we can imagine a non-improvisational literary and musical process that is shaped by immediate feedback of fellow performers or an audience.

However, some sense of this second factor can, and arguably should, be salvaged as constitutive of improvisation. Instead of pointing to feedback, we might note the essentially contextual or situated nature of improvisation. This may include audience and co-performer feedback, but it is not limited to it. The contextual or situated nature of improvisation acknowledges that insofar as the process of conception and actualization are coincident in

⁵⁵⁵ Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 4.

⁵⁵⁶ Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 4.

improvisation, the considerations that influence the conception will also influence the actualization. In a compositional situation, on the other hand, the separation of conception and actualization purifies the conception from the conditions of realization. For instance, an improvising poet offered the theme of love is likely to foreground different aspects of the phenomenon if performing in a brothel as opposed to performing at a wedding. And a musician's improvisational decisions will be different when subject to the echo of a cavernous hall versus an acoustically dead space. And the influence of context may, as Esterhammer suggests, extend to the presence and feedback of an audience or co-performers. A receptive and demonstrative audience can push an improviser in an exploratory direction, while a staid reception might promote a more conservative approach that privileges tried-and-true audience pleasing maneuvers.

The third factor distinctive of improvisation is “a given theme and a limiting framework that make meaningful invention possible, precisely by constraining the possibilities of totally free creation.”⁵⁵⁷ As discussed above, absolute improvisation is inconceivable. To improvise always involves a foreknowledge of the rules that constitute the particular activity in question.⁵⁵⁸ The themes and frameworks that limit the improviser come in different forms. In the practice of the Italian *improvvisatore* and *improvvisatrice*, audience members might write themes on slips of paper that would be drawn at random from an urn, giving the improviser the subjects on which to improvise.⁵⁵⁹ The *improvvisatore* or *improvvisatrice* would be further constrained by a particular poetic form, for instance *ottava rima* stanzas. The jazz musician improvises over the melody, chord changes and structure of a particular tune. Bruno Nettl sums up this aspect of

⁵⁵⁷ Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 4.

⁵⁵⁸ We will problematize and investigate this claim below in a discussion of so-called “non-idiomatic improvisation.”

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 1.

improvisation when he suggests that we accept as a “basic assumption that all improvisation is somehow based on something pre-existing, some kind of point of departure – an existing tune, a series of chords, a group of style imperatives, a system of modes such as ragas, a precisely delineated system such as the radif [in Persian music].”⁵⁶⁰

As is clear from the references to Romantic poets and jazz musicians, to say nothing of improvisational comedy or everyday situations of acting in the midst of indeterminacy, improvisation comes in many different forms; and the differences between these forms is of potential significance for a study of improvisation. Even species of improvisation, like musical improvisation, admit of further subspecies that harbor important differences. It is past the two-thirds mark in the 1938 monograph *Die Improvisation in der Musik: eine entwicklungsgeschichtliche und psychologische Untersuchung* that Hungarian musicologist Ernst Ferand explicitly addresses instrumental improvisation. It proves necessary to do so, because when turning attention to the subject “at every turn in this peregrination we find ourselves before problems that were foreign to the praxis of vocal improvisation.”⁵⁶¹ Since instrumental improvisation will be our chief interest in this chapter, let us consider the problems unique to instrumental improvisation, which, explains Ferand, are in part phenomenological and in part genetic.

Ferand first addresses the phenomenological problem group with the observation that, with the introduction of instrumental music “a new and certainly especially significant component for

⁵⁶⁰ Nettl, “Landmarks in the Study of Improvisation: Perspectives from Ethnomusicology,” 177.

⁵⁶¹ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 273. [...so sehen wir uns bei dieser Wanderung auf Schritt und Tritt vor Probleme gestellt, die der vokalen Improvisationspraxis fremd waren]

improvisation praxis comes along,⁵⁶² namely “the moment of instrumental technique, which ensues from the specific construction of the instruments in question and the related moment of timbre, which is connected with the material of the instruments.”⁵⁶³

While it is true that the singer encounters technical difficulties in realizing the inner musical impulses that precede their externalization, it is also clear that “these material-technical moments are incomparably more intensely in the foreground in instrumental music.”⁵⁶⁴ In fact, in the case of instrumental music, the instrument itself plays a role in shaping the musician’s imagination.⁵⁶⁵ Considerations such as comfort of instrument design – which are overlooked when music is considered as an abstract finished product as opposed to a process – “can be of virtually decisive significance for the instantaneous instrumental utterance.”⁵⁶⁶

Ferand does not discuss in great detail by what justification this problem group is to be regarded as ‘phenomenological,’ other than to say that it concerns the “psycho-physiological particularities of instrumental music in comparison with those of vocal musician.”⁵⁶⁷ While Ferand’s discussion has little in common with the technical uses of the term ‘phenomenology’

⁵⁶² Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 274. [...kommt in der Instrumentalmusik eine neue, gerade für die improvisatorische Praxis besonders bedeutungsvolle Komponente hinzu]

⁵⁶³ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 274. [das aus dem spezifischen Bau des betreffenden Instruments sich ergebende Moment des Instrumentaltechnik, und das damit bzw. mit dem Material des Instruments verbundene Moment der Klangfarbe]

⁵⁶⁴ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 277. [...doch treten diese materialtechnischen Momente in der Instrumentalmusik unvergleichlich stärker in den Vordergrund]

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 274. [Sind es doch gerade die besonderen baulichen Eigenheiten der einzelnen Instrumentengruppen, Art und Anordnung der Besaitung bzw. der Grifflöcher oder Tasten, die der Phantasie des Spielers ganz wesentlich die Richtung weisen; und dies um so stärker, je unentwickelter die Musikübung ist]

⁵⁶⁶ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 275. [...für die instrumentale Augenblicksäußerung von geradezu ausschlaggebender Bedeutung sein können.]

⁵⁶⁷ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 287. [...psycho-physiologischen Besonderheiten des instrumentalen Musizierens gegenüber dem vokalen]

that we have seen in Schütz, Husserl, Zuckermandl and others, his discussion of the decisive role of the instrument in improvisational praxis may be considered ‘phenomenological’ insofar as it concerns the musician’s first-person experience during improvisation.

The group of problems concerning instrumental improvisation that Ferand refers to as ‘genetic’ concern the implications of the historical dependency of instrumental music on vocal music, at least in the Western tradition, which is Ferand’s primary focus. In the fifteenth century, when music historians can first piece together direct knowledge of instrumental music (as opposed to the indirect knowledge of previous centuries when music historians must rely on indirect sources such as literary descriptions and sculptures), the lines of development between instrumental and vocal music begin to separate.⁵⁶⁸ The genetic questions stemming from instrumental improvisation thus concern historical questions about the ways in which composed vocal music influenced the development of instrumental improvisation. Given the rootedness of this group of problems in the Western musical tradition, we will not delve deeper into it, other than to note the importance of genetic considerations in the study of improvisation.⁵⁶⁹

To review, improvisation is characterized by a submission to the onrush of time, an engagement with the contextual situation of performance and the liberating limitation of a theme and framework. This third factor, the liberating limitation of some type of framework, warrants a closer consideration for the purpose of establishing that improvisation should be understood as

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 289: “It unfolds from the situation that until this time [the fifteenth century], the transition from improvisation to composition had not, or only very imperfectly, taken place. Linked to this, we also have the lack of independence so peculiar to Western music of the first millennium and a half.” [*Sie ergibt sich aus dem Umstande, daß bis zu dieser Zeit der Übergang von der Improvisation zur Komposition noch nicht, oder nur sehr unvollständig, vollzogen war. Damit hängt auch die für die abendländische Musik der ersten eineinhalb Jahrtausende so eigentümliche Unselbstständigkeit der Instrumentalmusik und ihre langandauernde Abhängigkeit von der Vokalmusik zusammen.*]

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. Gushee, “Improvisation and Related Terms in Middle-Period Jazz.”

existing on a spectrum. As Nettl points out, musical improvisation encompasses “a vast array of types of creativity, from the choice among two or three ornaments for insertion to presentations of totally ‘free’ improvisatory performance.”⁵⁷⁰ Anticipatorily, we will now investigate the claim that improvisation admits of different approaches that can be distinguished according to the degree to which the improviser is constrained by a theme and framework; and we will investigate this claim in the context of the pedagogy of improvisation.

2. The Pedagogy of Improvisation

In this section we will consider some approaches to teaching improvisation, which will give contour to a practice that, even in light of section one, remains abstract. Improvisation, we have said, admits of degrees of freedom, which not only reflect different improvisational traditions and their respective values, but also serve as a pedagogical device for learning to improvise. Saxophonist Lee Konitz, for one, advocates the use of these different degrees of improvisation as a method of learning how to improvise and illustrates its utility with an example consisting of ten gradients of improvisational freedom. The neophyte begins by willfully being highly constrained by the theme and framework in question before adopting a progressively looser relationship to these limitations. “The goal of having to unfold a completely new melody on the spot and appraise it as you go the closer you look at it, can be frightening!” Konitz acknowledges. “So I think that first and foremost you have to adhere to the song for a much, much longer period of time.”⁵⁷¹ Initially, then, the would-be improviser must internalize the melody of the tune in question, which is the theme on which the musician will eventually improvise. The second

⁵⁷⁰ Nettl, “Landmarks in the Study of Improvisation: Perspectives from Ethnomusicology,” 169.

⁵⁷¹ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 12.

gradient introduces embellishments, which subtly begin the process of transforming the given theme into variations and, eventually, entirely new melodies: “I suggest the kinds of compositional devices that are available: a trill, a passing tone, an appoggiatura that can bridge one melody note to another. The point is, you're still playing the melody, but you're doing something to it now.”⁵⁷² Providing hard and fast criteria for distinguishing a gradient from its predecessor or successor is perhaps impossible, but in the ten-stage example on the first eight bars of *All The Things You Are* that Konitz supplies, it appears that there are four gradients of embellishment. What marks these gradients as embellishment can be illustrated by considering the first bar. The unadorned melody, which is the first gradient, involves sustaining an *f* for four beats. In the second gradient, which is the first stage of embellishment, the melody's *f* has become a dotted half note, meaning that it is sustained for three of the bar's four beats. The final beat of the bar is given to two eighth notes (*e-d*) that descend a whole tone. In this first stage of embellishment, the thrust of the original melody is still of central importance.⁵⁷³ The third gradient, i.e. the second stage of embellishment, the original melody note is only heard for a beat and a half of the bar's four beats. However, its placement at the beginning of the bar⁵⁷⁴ and the end of the bar affirms its significance and renders the intervening quarter note and triplet the status of embellishment. The de-emphasis of the original melody note in the first bar continues in the fourth gradient, where it is sounded for one beat, spread over two eighth notes. But again Konitz is able to suggest the significance of the tone without insisting on it, so to speak. In both cases, the *f* is sounded as the peak of a brief ascending eighth note motif (*d-e-f*). In the course of

⁵⁷² Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 13.

⁵⁷³ The construction of a logical improvisation can be illustrated by considering the first three beats of the second bar, where we find an approximate mirror image of the first bar. Two descending eighth notes (albeit in the second bar descending only a half step) lead to the sustained tone of the original melody (albeit in the second bar for only two beats).

⁵⁷⁴ On the ‘and of one,’ to be precise, but it is the first tone sounded.

a traditional performance in which the tune's melody is played more or less as written before the musicians take to improvising on it, the first bar of the fourth gradient would be heard as making self-evident reference to the melody while clearly also departing from it. The fifth gradient treats the *f* in very much the same way as the fourth gradient, as the peak of an ascending eighth note motif, which, however, in this case admits of wider intervallic leaps (*a-d-f*).

The sixth gradient inaugurates a departure from the previous approaches. In the preceding five gradients the original melody of *All the Things You Are* was present but diluted by the introduction of tones, which while harmonically apposite, had not been written by Jerome Kern when he composed the tune in 1939. In our discussion of the gradients two through five we saw how the melody is still suggested despite its dilution. The sixth gradient takes a new liberty with original melody by “still using melodic targets but displacing for new melodies.”⁵⁷⁵ In other words, the second bar of the sixth gradient begins with a *b-flat*, just as the original melody does. However, this *b-flat* has been displaced to one octave below where Jerome Kern had originally written it. Thus while partaking of the ‘rightness’ of the original melody by placing the ‘correct’ tone at the ‘correct’ rhythmic moment, the sixth gradient also gives the impression of newness by situating this melodic target as part of a lengthy phrase that disguises its rightness: *ars celare artem*.

The seventh gradient consists, in Konitz's words, of “more new melodies.”⁵⁷⁶ In his example, the original melody's *f* is not heard in the first bar and the *b-flat* melody not of the second bar has been delayed by an eighth note, becoming disguised in the melodic flow. The eighth gradient contains “still a subtle reference to the original song,”⁵⁷⁷ by containing more references to the

⁵⁷⁵ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 13.

⁵⁷⁶ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 13.

⁵⁷⁷ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 14.

melodic targets than the seventh gradient. However, the eighth gradient reverses the general direction of the melodic line, which has been mostly preserved in previous gradients. The original melody involves an upward leap of a fourth (i.e. five semi-tones) from *f* to *b-flat*. Even when previous gradients have disguised or omitted the tune's melodic targets, they have maintained this ascending movement.⁵⁷⁸

The ninth gradient involves a “totally new theme.”⁵⁷⁹ In his example of this advanced stage of improvisation, Konitz – perhaps studiously – avoids reference to the tune's melodic targets and maintains the descending motion that also differentiated the eighth gradient from the morphology of the original melody. Finally, the tenth gradient culminates in “an act of pure inspiration,”⁵⁸⁰ for which Konitz provides no illustration. Perhaps this gradient should be taken as a sort of limit idea, as one of those rare instances in which an improviser manages to invent a melody as compelling and seemingly inevitable as the original.

These ten gradients represent different degrees of limitation that, as we have argued, make improvisation possible. A musician may elect to improvise while more or less sticking to one gradient. Such an approach is common in the early history of recorded jazz. At this inchoate stage of improvisational practice, musicians tended to improvise embellishments on a tune's melody. Overtime, as improvisational practice became increasingly sophisticated, some musicians eschewed the ‘lower’ gradients for the creation of new themes.

But for the most part, and probably always in the case of successful improvisations that span several choruses, these gradients constitute stages of a single improvisation. As Louis Armstrong inimitably put it, “the first chorus I plays [sic] the melody. The second chorus I plays the melody

⁵⁷⁸ With the exception of the sixth gradient; but this is for the sake of a different symmetry that requires a consideration the first four bars to perceive.

⁵⁷⁹ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 14.

⁵⁸⁰ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 14.

round the melody, and the third chorus I routines.”⁵⁸¹ Or, to adapt an apt quote attributed to novelist Laurence Sterne, “I progress as I digress.”⁵⁸² Konitz too advocates constructing an improvisation by proceeding from the lower gradients to the higher. He points out to a student who plays an arranged and stylized version of *There Will Never Be Another You* that it “would be very difficult to follow or develop what you’re doing at that level, starting out at that very high intensity, for ten choruses or whatever you would do.”⁵⁸³

In addition to the method of progressive embellishment, Konitz advocates another heuristic for learning to improvise or developing one’s improvisational conception: memorizing and learning to play exemplary improvisations recorded by musicians that one admires. Paradoxically, at first blush, this method appears to be anathema to the spontaneity that characterizes improvisation as such. In effect, this method treats an improvisation like a composition. But if one considers that a great improvisation possesses the sort of perfection that a composition also demonstrates, then memorizing and learning to play recorded improvisations constitutes an analytical step directed towards understanding “what a great solo consists of.”⁵⁸⁴

As taught by Konitz and his own teacher Lennie Tristano, learning improvisations is a multi-step process. One must learn to sing the improvisation before translating it to their instrument. “If you can’t sing it, you haven’t heard it,” Tristano claimed – a provocative claim given how

⁵⁸¹ Richard M. Sudhalter and Philip R. Evans, *Bix, Man & Legend* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1974), 192. To “routine” is an early term, more or less synonymous with improvisation, which was used primarily by New Orleans musicians. The term initially had pejorative connotations among musicians. Armstrong’s use of the term, however, is not used in a negative sense. Cf. Gushee, “Improvisation and Related Terms in Middle-Period Jazz,” 266.

⁵⁸² Blitzer, “The Worldly Digressions of Javier Marías,” accessed December 10, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/the-worldly-digressions-of-javier-marias>.

⁵⁸³ Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 141.

⁵⁸⁴ Kastin, “Lee Konitz: Back to the Basics,” 12.

difficult it is to accurately sing an improvisation *a cappella*.⁵⁸⁵ And before taking up one's instrument and before even vocalizing, learning to sing an improvisation involves repeated listening, which allows the listener to memorize the improvisation and internalize all the subtlety and nuance that casual listening tends to overlook. Capturing the subtleties and nuances of an improvisation is a crucial part of the sing-along method: "Not only are we trying to hear a recorded solo perfectly and sing along with it precisely, we are also trying to recreate that solo with all its dynamics, inflections, and shape of sound—everything which makes that solo distinctive—including that intangible element, feeling, which is such a vital part of jazz."⁵⁸⁶ Through the sing-along method, the listener aims "to 'become' the solo, so if we were to listen to someone accurately singing along with a recorded solo, it would be difficult to distinguish the singing from the solo."⁵⁸⁷ Once the improvisation can be accurately sung along with the recording, the student is then to ensure that the improvisation can be sung *without* the recording, an unexpectedly beguiling test that demonstrates whether the student has really heard, in the profound sense of the term, the improvisation. Finally, only once the improvisation can be adequately sung with and without the recording is it time to translate this knowledge to one's instrument with the same aim of 'becoming' the solo.

Let us consider in phenomenological terms the value of learning an improvisation for learning how to improvise. In previous chapters we have discussed Schütz's account of the musical experience from the perspective of the beholder. In brief, this experience consists in the beholder's performance of the various acts of consciousness that the creator of the work also

⁵⁸⁵ Tehan, "A Guide to Lennie Tristano's Sing-Along Method and the Art of Improvising," 1.

⁵⁸⁶ Tehan, "A Guide to Lennie Tristano's Sing-Along Method and the Art of Improvising," 1.

⁵⁸⁷ Tehan, "A Guide to Lennie Tristano's Sing-Along Method and the Art of Improvising," 1.

performed in the work's composition. Thus is established a quasi-simultaneity of consciousness that connects the beholder and the creator, even in cases where the creator is absent and perhaps long deceased. Learning an improvisation also establishes this quasi-simultaneity of consciousness but deepens it by involving the beholder's body in the process, a factor that is conspicuously absent from Schütz's account of the musical experience. There is undoubtedly phenomenological work to be done on the way in which a tuning-in relationship can be affected not only through the co-performance of processes of consciousness (e.g. retention and protention), but also by performing the bodily processes that contributed to the constitution of the work. This sort of embodied, communicative experience is also brought about in the preliminary stages of learning an improvisation; for instance, in the aforementioned sing-along method. Learning to sing an improvisation involves *breathing along* with the improviser, affecting a quasi-simultaneity of physical processes that enhance the quasi-simultaneity of conscious processes and yield a more complete, more tuned-in experience. Embodied engagement can of course also take on more immersive forms, as noted by Vijay Iyer: "The notion of musical co-performance is made literal in musical contexts primarily meant for dance; the participatory act of marking time with rhythmic bodily activity physicalizes the sense of shared time and could be viewed as embodied listening."⁵⁸⁸

3. Improvisation and Composition

The pedagogical method of learning to improvise by learning improvisations raises an interesting and important question: if a great improvisation is like a composition to the extent that it has the sort of perfection that a thought-out, written-down work has, then why concern

⁵⁸⁸ Iyer, "Improvisation, Action Understanding, and Music Cognition With and Without Bodies," 79.

oneself with improvisation in the first place? Why not just listen to composed music, which presumably enjoys a lower hit-miss ratio than improvisation? What is it about improvisation that confounds comparison with composition? What does it mean to hear an improvisation *as improvised*? This section will consider various treatments of the relationship between improvisation and composition, with an emphasis on the status of ‘imperfections’ in improvisation.

Some writers have taken an apologetic view when comparing improvisation and composition, casting improvisation as an “imperfect art”⁵⁸⁹ and identifying this imperfection as the unique and valuable characteristic of improvisation, if problematically so and with the need of explanation and justification. In Ted Gioia’s presentation, the “central problem of jazz criticism” is as follows: “It has become a commonplace to assert that jazz is an ‘art’; yet those who glibly pronounce this word seldom move on to a discussion of how jazz compares (if at all) with the established arts.”⁵⁹⁰ For Gioia, this discussion amounts to a defense of the technical imperfections and creative lapses that mar a great many recorded jazz improvisations. Gioia advocates a different sort of approach that, instead of evaluating jazz in terms developed to address Western classical music, accepts jazz “on its own terms” by developing an “aesthetics of imperfection.”⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ This phrase was introduced as the title of Ted Gioia’s 1988 book *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*.

⁵⁹⁰ Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 54.

⁵⁹¹ Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 54-55. It does seem odd that accepting jazz on its own terms involves defining the music as “imperfect” as opposed to just different. Andy Hamilton suggests that the etymological senses of the terms “perfect” and “imperfect” overcome the conundrum: “‘perficere’ means ‘to do thoroughly, to complete, to finish, to work up’; ‘imperfectus’ means ‘unfinished, incomplete’” (Hamilton, “The Art of Improvisation and the Aesthetics of Imperfection,” 171). Thus, the aesthetics of imperfection would evidently describe the artistic values belonging to works in progress.

Gioia suggests two different ways of thinking about jazz that cast its putative imperfections in a new light. First, in response to the charge that improvisation is an anarchic, formless music, Gioia presents two ways of thinking about form. The familiar approach is termed “the blueprint method,”⁵⁹² in which the trajectory of the work is planned in advance of its execution, just as architects draw up an exhaustively detailed blueprint before ground is broken. With respect to music, the blueprint method is the approach to form commonly found in the Western classical tradition. The blueprint – that is, the score – tells musicians what notes to play, for how long, with what intensity. Because improvisation eschews such a blueprint, it has often been summarily concluded that this approach is by definition formless. This conclusion is neither inevitable nor, as Gioia tells it, correct. “The improviser may be unable to look ahead at what he is going to play, but he can look behind at what he has just played;” he writes, “thus each new musical phrase can be shaped with relation to what has gone before. He creates his form *retrospectively*.”⁵⁹³ The retrospective method of artistic form stands beside the blueprint method as an equally valid approach, one that finds analogs in other arts such as early Italian fresco painting and stream-of-consciousness literature.⁵⁹⁴

The second change of perspective required to appreciate jazz improvisation on its own terms addresses the putative imperfections that result from the retrospective approach. When a musician does not know exactly what he will play over the course of an improvisation, there is frequently a mismatch between one’s melodic instinct and one’s technical facility, which leads to imperfections – flubbed notes, squawks, rhythmic awkwardness. Such moments are regarded as defects viewed through the aesthetic lens of the Western classical tradition. Arguably, this is

⁵⁹² Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 60.

⁵⁹³ Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 61.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 61.

because, in the Western classical tradition, the musician is regarded as a vessel through which the musical intentions of, for example, Mozart come to fruition. Thus any departure from the letter of the score, which cannot be justified as an interpretive decision arising from the ambiguity of the score, is regarded as an error. Such a perspective, however, is at odds with the improvisatory practice of jazz in which the musician is not regarded as expressing another's musical thoughts, but rather one's own. Thus, when evaluating an improvisation, it must be considered "in relation to the artist who created it; [this jazz attitude] asks whether that work is expressive of the artist, whether it reflects his own unique and incommensurable perspective on his art, whether it makes a statement without which the world would be in some small way, a lesser place."⁵⁹⁵ To the informed ear, then, an improvisation is heard in a special context. An alto saxophonist is heard in relation to other recordings they have made, as well as other alto saxophonists working in the same idiom, as well as other instrumentalists working in the same idiom, as well as other alto saxophonists of different idioms, etc. Imperfections are therefore not evaluated against an abstract notion of the ideal improvisation, but what we know of the musician and the tradition of which the improvisation in question is a part. Perhaps we know that an imperfection arose in the course of an especially ambitious passage that suggests future directions for the idiom. Perhaps we know that an imperfection represents an uncommon level of emotional involvement for the musician in question. Perhaps we know – as in the case of Charlie Parker's famous recording of *Lover Man* on the Dial label – that a recording took place shortly before a mental collapse that resulted in the artist's temporary institutionalization. Viewed from such a perspective: "When we listen to Charlie Parker's records we take delight in probing the depths of his abilities as an artist, and even his failures interest us because they tell us about the

⁵⁹⁵ Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 66.

musician who created them.”⁵⁹⁶ Thus, in Gioia’s account, preserving the dignity of an improvisation entails rejecting the autonomy of art by understanding works as intimately tied to their author.

On this note, one objection that could be leveled against Gioia’s account is that it promotes an elitist view of improvisation. Appreciating jazz and forgiving its alleged flaws requires an intimate acquaintance with the tradition, which allows the listener to contextualize what is being heard. While it is certainly the case that the more one gets into jazz, the richer one’s experience of jazz becomes, Gioia fails to account for the ignorant listener’s experience of jazz and how, despite this ignorance, the listener’s experience can still be aesthetically satisfying.

In his monograph *Philosophie des Jazz*, Daniel Martin Feige explicitly rejects casting jazz in terms of an “aesthetics of imperfection [*Ästhetik der Unvollkommenheit*].”⁵⁹⁷ Feige charges this approach with “tacitly drawing on certain qualities of a specific type of musical performance in the tradition of European art music as a measuring rod of aesthetic qualities, in order to then formulate a compensatory theory of value for jazz performances.”⁵⁹⁸ In other words, understanding jazz in terms of an aesthetics of imperfection privileges, without adequate justification, the criteria of a successful performance of classical music and, in light of such criteria, tries to make amends for jazz’s non-adherence to the norms of Western classical performance practice. Feige also argues that defenders of an aesthetics of imperfection frequently identify as imperfections what are, in truth, “aspects of the *personal style* of the

⁵⁹⁶ Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, 67.

⁵⁹⁷ Feige, *Philosophie des Jazz*, 31.

⁵⁹⁸ Feige, *Philosophie des Jazz*, 32. [*Es handelt sich vielmehr um das Vorgehen, stillschweigend bestimmte Qualitäten bestimmter Arten musikalischer Performances in der Tradition europäischer Kunstmusik als Messlatte ästhetischer Qualität heranzuziehen, um dann eine kompensatorische Theorie des Werts von Jazzperformances zu formulieren.*]

musician in question [*Aspekte des spezifischen Personalstils der entsprechenden Musiker*].”⁵⁹⁹ In a footnote he points to Lee Brown’s characterization of Miles Davis’ solo on *My Funny Valentine* as containing “cracked notes not quite in tune, sloppy triplets, unaccountable pauses, arbitrary shifts of rhythm, and chaotic runs that go nowhere.”⁶⁰⁰ Feige’s point seems to be that these supposed imperfections are more accurately understood as purposive aesthetic decisions. For instance, a certain disregard for the conventions of Western tonality (cracked notes, playing slightly out of tune, smearing groups of notes instead of cleanly articulating them), can be interpreted as a bequest of the African diasporic musical traditions that Miles Davis’ inherited.

Feige provides the resources for another critique of conceiving of improvisation as imperfect. The temporality of improvisation differs from that of composition. As Bruce Ellis Benson describes it, improvisation is a process that occurs “in-time” whereas composition takes places “over-time.”⁶⁰¹ In other terms, improvisation is a process-oriented, as opposed to product-oriented, practice and improvisations are thus embedded in time as opposed to merely contained in time. As such, improvisation reveals a “retrospective temporality [*rückblickende Zeitlichkeit*]”⁶⁰² such that “What the improviser does first obtains its specific meaning in light of what he will have done later. [*Das, was der Improvisierende tut, erhält seinen spezifischen Sinn erst im Lichte dessen, was er später getan haben wird.*]”⁶⁰³ Thus, a ‘wrong’ note in an improvisation neither attains that status by virtue of not conforming to what the improviser intended to play nor does this note become ‘wrong’ at the moment it is played; since, if the improviser is able to immediately construct a phrase in which this unintended note is elevated to

⁵⁹⁹ Feige, *Philosophie des Jazz*, 32.

⁶⁰⁰ Brown, “‘Feeling My Way’: Jazz Improvisation and its Vicissitudes – A Plea For Imperfection,” 113.

⁶⁰¹ Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 78-79.

⁶⁰² Feige, *Philosophie des Jazz*, 78.

⁶⁰³ Feige, *Philosophie des Jazz*, 77.

a central place, then the note's initially 'mistaken' occurrence will retrospectively not appear as an imperfection or a mistake, but rather as evidence of the musician's reactive prowess or as a bold aesthetic choice.⁶⁰⁴

While Gioia is the contemporary reference point for discussions of the alleged aesthetic imperfection of jazz, he is not the first to discuss the curious status of the unexpected and unintended in improvisatory situations. Ernst Ferand also addresses what Gioia would later term the aesthetics of imperfection in *Die Improvisation in der Musik: eine entwicklungsgeschichtliche und psychologische Untersuchung*.⁶⁰⁵ In Ferand's account, 'imperfections' are understood in an even more positive light than Gioia's apologetic treatment. "It belongs to the most appealing particularities of improvisation, that apparently unintentional accidents or lapses influence the further development of thoughts, lend new impulses to the imagination of the musician," writes Ferand. "Such accidents are welcome opportunities for the genuine improviser to prove his superiority in the mastery of compositional and technical media."⁶⁰⁶ One might counter that improvisational (including compositional and instrumental)

⁶⁰⁴ Ernst Ferand made the same point some eighty years prior: "Even blunders, technical lapses, mishandlings can become creative occasions. Every skilled improviser knows about singing a song, how an initially entirely unintended, accidentally played harmony, a 'melodically strange' note (if such an expression is permitted) can become meaningful and positively configured through spontaneous, interesting resolution or continuation – and especially when this note is highlighted again through subsequent repetition" (Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 17) [*Selbst Fehlleistungen, technische Entgleisungen, Zufallsgriffe können zu schöpferischen Anlässen werden. Jeder gewiegte Improvisator weiß davon ein Lied zu singen, wie eine zunächst gar nicht beabsichtige, zufällig gegriffene Harmonie, eine 'melodiefremde' Note (wenn dieser Ausdruck gestattet ist) durch spontane, interessante Auflösung bzw. Weiterführung – und erst recht, wenn sie durch nachträgliche Wiederholung und Betonung noch hervorgehoben wird – bedeutungsvoll und positiv gestaltet werden kann.*]

⁶⁰⁵ Ernst Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik: eine entwicklungsgeschichtliche und psychologische Untersuchung*, (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1938).

⁶⁰⁶ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 424. [*Es gehört gerade zu den anziehendsten Eigentümlichkeiten der Improvisation, daß scheinbar unbeabsichtige Zufälle oder*

mastery should correspond to a minimum of accidents and lapses with which the improviser must reckon, but interestingly Ferand does not regard improvisational imperfections as stemming from inadequate creativity or technical prowess. Instead – and perhaps representative of the intellectual inclinations of the age – Ferand favors a psychological (more specifically, a psychoanalytic) explanation of artistic inspiration⁶⁰⁷ and thus misfires of inspiration: “If one asks after the origin and the ultimate cause of the aforementioned accidents and lapses, the answer points to the deepest layers of psychological events, to processes that happen under the threshold of consciousness.”⁶⁰⁸ As with all such psychoanalytic accounts, it is difficult to satisfactorily engage with and argue against this interpretation of improvisational imperfection. “Disharmonious or mutually opposed psychic forces”⁶⁰⁹ do not present themselves for direct observation and therefore the identification of symptoms that are evidence of such unconscious conflicts will remain ineluctably speculative. Assessing the philosophical commitments and presuppositions that make such a theory viable is a task beyond the scope of this project; however, it is interesting to note that, for Ferand, the psychological explanation of improvisational imperfection is connected with what he understands to be the extra-musical significance of the improviser: “Precisely the overcoming of such obstacles and inhibitions...

Fehlleistungen das Weiterspinnen der Gedanken beeinflussen, der Phantasie des Spielers neuen Impuls verleihen. Dem echten Improvisator werden solche Zufälle willkommene Anlässe sein, seine Überlegenheit in der Beherrschung der kompositionellen und spieltechnischen Mittel zu beweisen.]

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 425. “When it comes down to it, [artistic inspiration is] unanalyzable, because it is rooted in the deepest depths of the Unconscious.” [...*letzten Endes unanalysierbaren, weil in den tiefsten Tiefen des Unbewußten verwurzelt*].

⁶⁰⁸ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 425. [*Fragt man aber nach Herkunft und Ursache der erwähnten Zufälle und Fehlleistungen, so weist die Antwort in die tiefsten Schichten des psychischen Geschehens, in die unter der Schwelle des Bewußtseins sich abspielenden Vorgänge.*]

⁶⁰⁹ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 425. [*unausgeglichener oder gegeneinander gerichteter seelischer Kräfte...*]

however, forms the value – one could say the ‘ethical’, or if one prefers, the educational value – of improvisatory capacity.”⁶¹⁰ The figure of the improviser thus assumes for Ferand a significance that transcends merely musical considerations: “Through the harmonious unification of spiritual and bodily (ideal and material) elements, improvisation virtually becomes an emblem of an eternal educational ideal.”⁶¹¹ We shall return to this theme below when we consider the relationship between improvisation and ethics.

All said, Ferand and Gioia are roughly in agreement. Both recognize imperfections as an inevitable element of improvisatory practice and both wish to explain these imperfections in such a way so as to evaluate and value improvisation on its own terms, as opposed to the criteria of reproductive performance. Both Ferand and Gioia wish to vindicate these imperfections with reference to what we might call the humanity of the improviser. For Gioia, this humanity is particular. We affirm improvisatory lapses like we embrace an intimate’s peccadillos, since both shed new light on an individual with whom we have an aesthetic-emotional connection. For Ferand, the humanity of the improviser is more general. The improviser is an emblem of humanity as such and its struggle to harmoniously unite its material and spiritual aspects. According to Ferand, this shared struggle of the human condition also explains the effect of improvisation on the listener: “This circumstance [of the unification of the spiritual and the

⁶¹⁰ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 426. [*Gerade die Überwindung solcher Hindernisse und Hemmungen... aber macht den – man könnte sagen ‘ethischen’, oder wenn man will, erzieherischen – Wert der improvisatorischen Leistung aus.*]

⁶¹¹ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 426. [*Durch die harmonische Vereinigung von seelischen und körperlichen (ideellen und materiellen) Elementen wird die Improvisation geradezu Sinnbild eines ewigen Erziehungsideals.*]

material] accounts for the happy effect of a worthwhile improvisation: it is the satisfaction that human beings find in the concordance of idea and actualization...”⁶¹²

Other writers have taken issue with the improvisation-as-imperfect paradigm by questioning whether the dichotomy between composition and improvisation is as simple as Gioia seems to suggest. Andy Hamilton argues for a more fluid relationship in which composition and improvisation exist on a continuum. At the farthest reaches of the compositional end of this continuum stands “pre-realized electronic music,”⁶¹³ in which the composer’s vision need not contend with performers’ interpretive liberties or imperfect technique. Other epochs and aesthetics of the Western classical tradition either did not strive for or lacked the means for achieving the compositional fixity of pre-realized electronic music; Lydia Goehr’s investigations in the history of the Western classical tradition abound in examples. As early as the sixteenth century, Goehr writes, “it had been believed sufficient to notate the figured bass and the melodic outline, leaving the performance to embellish and perform extempore according to established conventions and taste. Even in the eighteenth century, performers used well-established and traditional conventions for reading incomplete scores.”⁶¹⁴ Composers of such works accepted the improvisational contribution of the performer in the realization of their somewhat schematic compositions. Other composers have regarded performers as something of a necessary evil; inevitable, but all too liable to distort the composer’s inviolable intentions. Igor Stravinsky, for one, inveighed against performers as “the root of all the errors, all the sins, all the misunderstandings that interpose themselves between the musical work and the listener and

⁶¹² Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 426. [Aus diesem Umstand erklärt sich wohl auch die beglückende Wirkung einer wertvollen Improvisation: es ist die Befriedigung, die der Mensch in der Übereinstimmung von Idee und Verwirklichung findet...]

⁶¹³ Hamilton, “The Art of Improvisation and the Aesthetics of Imperfection,” 171.

⁶¹⁴ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, 187.

prevent a faithful transmission of its message.”⁶¹⁵ Despite even the best-intentioned performer’s desire to adhere unswervingly to Stravinsky’s “great principle of submission,”⁶¹⁶ occasional errors and undetected interpretive decisions are unavoidable, thus introducing a modicum of improvisation into the performance.

At the most extreme reaches of the improvisational pole of the continuum would stand so-called ‘free’ improvisation or, in Derek Bailey’s useful terminology, “non-idiomatic improvisation.”⁶¹⁷ This approach to improvisation proceeds without any pre-determined structure, tonal center, consistent rhythmic pulse and with a desire to avoid the conventions of any particular improvisational idiom.

Between the extremes of pre-realized electronic music and non-idiomatic improvisation, there are an indeterminate number of approaches to improvising. One type of improvising that flirts with compositional procedure is what Lee Konitz calls “prepared playing,”⁶¹⁸ which relies on worked-out patterns that a musician knows to be effective. There may be some slight variance in the prepared phrase – a new articulation or added embellishments – but, in essence, the phrase is set. Prepared playing is to be distinguished from what Konitz calls the “compositional”⁶¹⁹ approach to improvisation. Using alto saxophonist Charlie Parker as an example, Konitz writes, “As a ‘composer,’ [Parker] conceived of these great phrases and fit them together in the most logical way, and played them until they came alive.”⁶²⁰ Konitz seems to distinguish the compositional approach from prepared playing by way of the former’s “truly dynamic feeling for

⁶¹⁵ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 122.

⁶¹⁶ Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, 127.

⁶¹⁷ Bailey, *Improvisation*, xii.

⁶¹⁸ Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 109.

⁶¹⁹ Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 102.

⁶²⁰ Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 103.

the music, and...great phrases...put together ingeniously”⁶²¹ as opposed to the more sclerotic, less changeable nature of prepared licks that are used at specific moments.

Moving farther from pre-realized electronic music and prepared playing, Konitz classifies his own improvisatory approach as “intuitive improvisation.” Unlike free improvisation, Konitz and other intuitive improvisers bring material to the improvisational situation, as opposed to attempting to discover everything anew, as the truly non-idiomatic improviser does. However, in contradistinction to the prepared and compositional improviser, the intuitive improviser utilizes what Konitz calls “filler material.”⁶²² Filler material is distinguished by its relative abstractness, and therefore by its applicability to an indefinite number of situations. “For example, odd rhythmic phrases – in 5/8, ‘da-ba-ba-da-ba, da-ba-ba-da-ba,’ that kind of a feeling, you could play it against any chord at any point.”⁶²³ Konitz’s use of filler material derives from his early, formative study with pianist Lennie Tristano, who is commonly regarded as the first musician to systematically teach improvisation.⁶²⁴ Part of Tristano’s course of study involved working with melodic fragments, “short melodic phrases played sequentially and diatonically in all twelve keys, starting on each scale degree.”⁶²⁵ These melodic fragments furnished grist for the improvising mill, without constraining the improviser to prepared phrases. As one of Tristano’s

⁶²¹ Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 109.

⁶²² Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 104.

⁶²³ Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 104.

⁶²⁴ Konitz says that Tristano “was one of the first to get something together, to offer a course of study. Guys used to get together to practice, and share their ideas; but this was kind of formal, and Tristano was the first to do that” (Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*, 15). It may be argued, however, that Samuel T. Daley’s *Sure System of Improvising* from 1926-1927 is an earlier example. “Improvising is an art that has been credited with being born in a person and therefore, impossible, to a certain extent to teach,” writes Daley “In this book I try to convey the idea of Improvising in a systematical manner” (quoted in Gushee, “Improvisation and Related Terms in Middle-Period Jazz,” 271).

⁶²⁵ Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life In Music*, 142.

guitar students noted, “when you want to improvise, perhaps if you’re playing an idea, you would be able to take that idea and modulate it into another place on the neck or another key or another chord.”⁶²⁶ Stated differently, the practice of working with melodic fragments introduced students to the indispensable improvisatory practice of thematic development without dictating what themes to play or where to play them, which would be characteristic of the compositional or prepared approach to improvisation.

Other tools taught by Tristano were similarly geared to maximizing a musician’s flexibility without being constrained by a pre-composed cache of licks, i.e. intuitively improvising: “He showed us how to take three notes and invert them, how to use them in retrograde, and so on...They were the standard motivic materials...imitation, retrograde-inversion, diminution, augmentation, adding materials, subtracting materials...It gave me a sense of composition and improvisation being similar.”⁶²⁷ Tristano also encouraged his students to compose improvisations – to write out thirty-two-bar choruses that, ideally, they would have liked to have improvised. This exercise instilled a feeling for the compositional character of the best improvisations: “[Tristano] also tried to get the idea across that it’s like actually telling a short story. Even though it’s one thirty-two-bar tune, there should be a good beginning and a good middle section...and then towards the last eight [measures] you would come to some sort of a climax and then that would end somehow.”⁶²⁸ In teaching improvisation, then, Tristano taught many of the tools of composition (“imitation, retrograde-inversion, diminution, augmentation, adding materials, subtracting materials”) and had his students practice actual composition to internalize the possibilities of these procedures.

⁶²⁶ Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life In Music*, 143.

⁶²⁷ Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life In Music*, 143.

⁶²⁸ Shim, *Lennie Tristano: His Life In Music*, 143-144.

This emphasis on compositional procedures in Tristano's pedagogy of improvisation once again elicits the temptation to regard improvisation as composition *manqué*. Is an improvisation at best an imperfect composition (albeit with its own compensatory charms, as Gioia would have it) or is there something *sui generis* about improvisation that allows us to preserve the practice's dignity and uniqueness?

Bruce Ellis Benson defends an ennobled conception of improvisation in his monograph *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* wherein he argues that "the activities that we call 'composing' and 'performing' are essentially improvisational in nature, even though improvisation takes many different forms in each activity."⁶²⁹ In other words, Benson flips the common script, which conceives of improvisation as instantaneous and thus imperfect composition, by instead presenting composition as an elongated process of improvisation. What prevents us from initially recognizing the validity of Benson's claim, he argues, is not the way that we *make* music but rather the ways that we have become habituated to *thinking about* music. Like Christopher Small and Lydia Goehr, Benson argument is largely based on a genealogical examination of the Western classical tradition, the historical ascendance of "the ideal of *Werktreue*"⁶³⁰ and the related privilege accorded to the composer as the author of the work (*Werk*), to which performers are to be ideally faithful (*treu*).

The uncertain status of improvisation derives from "the schema that we normally use to think about music making – that is, the binary opposition of composition and performance."⁶³¹ With respect to performance, improvisation flouts the conventional paradigm that regards performance

⁶²⁹ Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 2.

⁶³⁰ Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 3.

⁶³¹ Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 24.

as the presentation of a work. But improvisation also does not have the standard character of a composition, which is conceived as premeditated, prescriptive and permanent.

Although improvisation is resistant to being explained in terms of composition or performance, Benson finds it to be a handy concept for describing these two musical activities. For instance, improvisation proves to be a more adequate characterization of the compositional process than creation or discovery, two concepts to which philosophers have historically adverted in trying to describe what composition entails.⁶³² To the extent that composition involves the transformation of preexisting musical elements, it is, argues Benson, improvisational in nature. The improvisatory character of performance derives from what Ingarden called the “*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*,” or places of indeterminacy, of musical scores.⁶³³ To actualize a musical score unavoidably entails making improvisational decisions about how to determine what has been left undetermined by the composer.

Benson salvages the dignity of improvisation not by arguing for its distinctness, but rather by demonstrating that the boundaries between improvisation, composition and performance are more porous than is generally acknowledged. This position is perhaps more satisfying to defenders of improvisation than attempts to justify improvisation’s imperfections, but it still fails to account for what is singular about the experience of improvisation. We will return to this question of the uniqueness of the musical experience of improvisation, but in this next section we will take a detour in order to consider what the different varieties of improvisation have in common. Stated differently, we will bracket the question of what is singular about the experience

⁶³² Cf. Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*, 37-44 on discovery and creation in composition.

⁶³³ Ingarden, *Ontology of the Work of Art*, 90.

of improvisation in favor of the question of what is shared by the many different improvisational traditions.

4. Audibility and Density

“If the concept of improvisation can be said to be at all viable,” writes Bruno Nettl, adverting to the motivation for undertaking a comparative approach to improvisation, “it should be considered one of the few universals of music in which all cultures share in one way or another.”⁶³⁴ In this statement we once again encounter an underlying ethnomusicological interest in human musicality as such, which occasionally becomes overlooked by the discipline’s “specialized studies of systems and subsystems [that do not give] much attention to the nature of the concept [of improvisation].”⁶³⁵

We have seen some philosophers attempt to subvert the improvisation-composition dichotomy by arguing, as does Bruce Ellis Benson, that composition is in fact improvisational. Nettl also problematizes the hard and fast separation of improvisation and composition, pointing out that even music that is unequivocally composed may admit of degrees of improvisation; as is clear, for instance, when we compare “the painstaking and often protracted method of Beethoven with Schubert’s quick, spontaneous creation of lieder.”⁶³⁶

While Nettl agrees that improvisation and composition do not name qualitatively different processes and thus should be regarded as poles on a continuum, his comparative approach to improvisation proposes evaluating improvisational traditions in terms of audibility and density, the two central concepts to be discussed in this section.

⁶³⁴ Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach,” 4.

⁶³⁵ Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach,” 4.

⁶³⁶ Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach,” 6.

The preliminary task of identifying the object to be studied – namely, improvisations – proves to be more difficult than one might initially expect. We have seen that under Alan Merriam’s so-called simple model of the discipline, the ethnomusicologist studies music as concept, sound and behavior. As might be expected, however, different cultures conceive of improvisation differently, with the result that certain behaviors may count as improvisation to a Western scholar while being denied that status by a native practitioner. Some improvisatory traditions downplay the significance of the perceptible differences that result from improvisational activity, emphasizing what remains the same over what is different. When Nettl asked a Persian musician to elaborate on the differences between two performances of the same piece, the musician denied that there was in fact any difference. When presented with incontrovertible recorded evidence of such difference, the musician conceded that, while there were differences, they were insignificant and “implied that the essence of what he performed in a *dastgah* [an Arabic modal structure] is always the same.”⁶³⁷ What this anecdote illustrates is the philosophically salient point that a musical culture’s conception of a musical entity has implications for its conception of improvisation. Speaking of American Plains Indians, Nettl writes, “It is sometimes difficult to see why two rather different performances (without even the guidance of words) are regarded as variants of the same song, and why two others that sound practically alike are taken to be separate musical items.”⁶³⁸ Nettl concludes “Perhaps the way to approach the ‘improvised’ music of South and West Asia is likewise to say that performers sing or play the same piece, but that their idea of what is a ‘piece,’ a musical unit with its own integrity, is simply different from ours.”⁶³⁹ The plurality of concepts of music, in particular the

⁶³⁷ Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach,” 8.

⁶³⁸ Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach,” 9.

⁶³⁹ Nettl, “Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach,” 9.

plurality of ontologies of music, presents the study of improvisation with a methodological complication. A musical event may be regarded as improvisation when viewed through the lens of one particular conceptual paradigm, while being denied that status by a different conceptual paradigm. This variance is a central motivation for Nettl's comparative approach to the subject.

Nettl points to another methodological difficulties in getting access to study objects. In trying to assemble a body of recordings of Persian music for study he found that "the kinds of performances described by musicians as most characteristic of avaz [an improvised component of Persian music] took place in circumstances in which recording was forbidden."⁶⁴⁰ Consequently, Nettl was compelled to employ musicians to perform the music he wished to record and study, which he notes "might not have represented the decision-making processes that musicians might have used in other circumstances."⁶⁴¹ The contextual nature of improvisation here shows its methodologically nettlesome side: because the circumstances of performance alter the character of the study object, the researcher faces the difficulty of determining which features of the study object are essential, which features are variant and how the context has shaped the improvisation.

How can we compare improvisation's various manifestations? Nettl proposes to examine improvisatory practices "in accordance with their positions in the two continua of density and audibility."⁶⁴² Situating them on these continua first involves the acknowledgment, already discussed above, that improvisation is never creation *ex nihilo*, but rather is always oriented by

⁶⁴⁰ Nettl, "Landmarks in the Study of Improvisation: Perspectives from Ethnomusicology," 179.

⁶⁴¹ Nettl, "Landmarks in the Study of Improvisation: Perspectives from Ethnomusicology," 179.

⁶⁴² Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," 12.

certain rules, restrictions, conventions, etc., which Nettl calls the improviser's "model."⁶⁴³ A model may be the chord changes of the tune a jazz musician is playing or the particular mode (i.e. musical scale) and rhythmic cycle being performed by an Indian musician. Every model will consist of certain elements that function as points of reference, sustaining the latticing of the model, so to speak. For instance, a jazz musician is beholden to the chord changes of a tune, but also enjoys a certain degree of flexibility with respect to this model. In an accompanist's role, the musician may allow certain chords to pass unsounded or may re-harmonize the tune by substituting different chords for those that were originally written. When improvising, the musician's melodic line may refer to chords other than those being played by the accompanist in order to introduce a degree of tension that will then be satisfyingly resolved.

Audibility concerns the question "to what extent does the model comprise the material that is actually heard by the student or performer?"⁶⁴⁴ For instance, Nettl identifies the show tunes that comprise a significant portion of the repertoire of jazz as a model of "more or less comprehensive audibility,"⁶⁴⁵ since at any moment listeners can orient themselves in the model by listening to the accompanying musicians. Like Yugoslav epic songs, these show tunes are learned without alteration before the musician takes the liberty of improvising on it. By contrast, Nettl mentions a pianist for a silent film as an improviser using an inaudible model, since there is no traditional score to which the pianist is improvisationally beholden.

The density of an improvisatory situation refers to how close or distant a model's points of reference are to one another. The denser a model, the fewer liberties a musician may take and the

⁶⁴³ Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," 11.

⁶⁴⁴ Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," 15.

⁶⁴⁵ Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," 16.

more similar iterations of the piece will be; as is the case, for instance, in Baroque music, in which a musician is limited to improvising embellishments on an otherwise rigid score.

If, as we have argued, a viable philosophy of music must be oriented by an ideal of human musicality as such as opposed to any particular musical tradition, then Nettle's continua of audibility and density are important in a consideration of the improvisatory dimension of musicking (to use Christopher Small's vocabulary). These two continua allow the philosopher to bridge the conceptual divides that separate the humanity's many divergent improvisatory traditions. Recognizing that no improvisatory activity is truly *ex nihilo*, but rather takes some 'model' as its point of departure, audibility and density enable what initially appear as incommensurate practices to be understood as manifestations of the same factors governing improvisation.

5. Listening to Improvising

Perhaps by taking an analytic approach to the practice we have been viewing improvisation through the wrong lens. Do we achieve different insights by considering the listener's experience? So far we have considered a number of different points along the composition-improvisation continuum, stretching from pre-realized electronic music all the way to free, non-idiomatic improvisation. But to what extent are these distinctions made manifest to the listener in the course of the musical experience? Do we hear an improvisation *as* improvised and a composition *as* composed or are these distinctions only realized reflectively? Let us consider from a phenomenological point of view the experience of listening to an improvisation.

Musician and theorist Vijay Iyer addresses the question of whether it is perceptually evident that one is listening to an improvisation. In response to the question whether the distinction

between listening to improvised versus composed music matters, Iyer answers in the affirmative: “The main source of drama in improvised music is the sheer fact of the shared sense of time: the sense that the improviser is working, creating, generating musical material the same time in which we are co-performing as listeners.”⁶⁴⁶ In a word, listeners *empathize* with the improviser. But it is inadequately clear how this embodied empathy distinguishes the experience of listening to improvisation versus composition. Iyer suggests that it “extends to an awareness of the performers’ coincident physical and mental exertion.”⁶⁴⁷ However, the experience of the improviser’s mental exertion remains unclear. Iyer suggests, “improvisational music magnifies the role of embodiment in musical performance. The perception of improvisation seems to involve the perception of another body or bodies engaged in embodied, situated, real-time experience.”⁶⁴⁸ Still, one might object that the performance of a composition equally involves bodies engaged in embodied, situated, real-time experience, leaving the distinctive experience of improvisation still undetermined. Iyer summarizes his thesis with the claim that improvisation “‘matters’ in music because a knowing listener experiences some kind of empathy for the embodiment of the performer, or some kind of understanding of the effortfulness of real-time performance.”⁶⁴⁹ In addition to brilliantly marshaling a large body of scientific literature on the neuroscience of musical cognition, Iyer’s approach is valuable for the centrality of the listener. Nevertheless, for all its merits, Iyer’s account fails to capture the listener’s first person perspective and to differentiate the listener’s experience of improvisation from composition.

⁶⁴⁶ Iyer, “Improvisation, Action Understanding, and Music Cognition With and Without Bodies,” 80.

⁶⁴⁷ Iyer, “Improvisation, Action Understanding, and Music Cognition With and Without Bodies,” 80.

⁶⁴⁸ Iyer, “Improvisation, Action Understanding, and Music Cognition With and Without Bodies,” 80.

⁶⁴⁹ Iyer, “Improvisation, Action Understanding, and Music Cognition With and Without Bodies,” 87.

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino also addresses the question of whether a listener can hear that improvisation is taking place. His answer is that, generally, improvisation is not perceptually evident, but certain exceptions must be made. Turino's treatment of the question rests on a distinction he proposes between "improvisation" and "formulaic performance."⁶⁵⁰ "In formulaic performance," explains Turino, "a 'piece' is considered a platform for individual and group play rather than an art object to be faithfully reproduced."⁶⁵¹ Formulaic performance, therefore, is well suited to the field of music making that Turino calls participatory performance, in which there is no hard and fast performer-audience distinction and the goal is to involve as many people as possible in the music making.⁶⁵² Turino likens formulaic performance to a game, which, as such, operates according to rules and, which, consequently, lends itself to the development of habitual ways of approaching the game; such habitual ways of approaching the game are the formulas that musicians develop over time and through experience.

In the context of formulaic performance, improvisation takes on a different meaning than traditionally ascribed to the practice; and this is a consequence of formulaic performance's conception of a 'piece,' which differs from that of the Western classical paradigm. Instead of merely referring to moments when the performer departs from the score or, more generally, the condition of performing without being entirely hemmed in by a score, in the context of formulaic performance, 'improvisation' names those "instances in performance where I *surprise myself* with purposeful alteration, extensions, or flights away from the model and habitual formulas."⁶⁵³ Improvisation is then characterized by the recognition of novelty – and this is why Turino concludes that improvisation is not usually perceptible to listeners. To hear something as novel

⁶⁵⁰ Turino, "Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music," 103.

⁶⁵¹ Turino, "Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music," 104.

⁶⁵² Cf. chapter 3 for a discussion of Turino on the four different fields of music making.

⁶⁵³ Turino, "Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music," 104-105.

or surprising entails a significant acquaintance with a particular performer's musical habits and tendencies. Only when a listener is familiar with what a musician usually plays can this listener hear something as especially inspired or uncharacteristic of this musician. Considering the improvisational criterion of surprise, Turino concludes, "it seems unlikely that we would be able to recognize a case of improvisation simply by listening to anyone but ourselves or our most intimate music partners, since we cannot know most people's complete collection of formulas."⁶⁵⁴

To get closer to the first-person distinctness of listening to an improvisation, let us liken the experience to watching a tightrope walker. The musical improviser and the tightrope walker share the characteristic of being subject to the forward motion of time, which disallows revision, do-overs or mulligans. And, for this reason, watching a tightrope walker *sans* safety net is an especially exciting experience, given the morbid possibility of a fatal fall. Like the tightrope walker, the improviser is distinguished from the non-improvising musician by abandoning the musical safety net of a score. This is not to say that improvisers have no safety nets available to them, however. The musical improviser's 'safety net' is not as self-evident as the tightrope walker's, which can be simply seen. As Turino showed, perceiving an improviser's safety net (i.e. their musical habits) requires a familiarity with both the musician's improvisational tradition and individual musician's work. Hearing an improviser play a hackneyed lick or rely on their favorite phrases detracts from the informed listener's evaluation of the improvisation, but hearing these things requires an acquaintance with the musical tradition from which the improviser emerged as well as the improviser's own oeuvre. Only once the listener has acquired this knowledge can an improvisation be heard as 'more' or 'less' improvised.

⁶⁵⁴ Turino, "Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music," 106.

This points to an enlarged conception of retention at play in listening to an improvisation (and music more generally). In addition to the sense of retention discussed by Schütz, which serves as a condition of the possibility of constituting a musical phrase, there is also a historical dimension to retention. Certain musical phrases arouse the informed listener's pre-reflective awareness that a reference has been made – perhaps a quote from another tune's melody or an allusion to a famous improvisation on the tune being played. The fact that the listener often can't immediately name the reference suggests that this experience is indeed the passive synthesis of retention as opposed to the volitional act of remembering.

To hear an improvisation *as* improvised means to listen with an ear oriented by the appropriate criteria, which demands a foreknowledge of what 'improvisation' means in the context in question. It is an informed sort of listening, just as improvising is an informed sort of playing, in contrast to the anything-goes colloquial misunderstanding of the practice. "It is true that there is no way of distinguishing improvised from precomposed music just by hearing it," agrees Bruno Nettl, "if one is ignorant of the musical culture or social context."⁶⁵⁵ Only in light of the appropriate frame of reference can something be adequately heard as an improvisation, which entails that different frames of reference are required to properly hear the improvisations of different traditions. Possessing the requisite knowledge to appreciate a jazz improvisation does not mean that I can also fully appreciate the improvisations of North Indian Hindustani music or Persian radif.

⁶⁵⁵ Nettl, "Landmarks in the Study of Improvisation: Perspectives from Ethnomusicology," 170.

6. The Social Situation in Improvisation

Up to this point we have treated improvisation by and large as a solitary activity, which is at odds with many actual instances of improvisation. Thus we must consider the social situation of improvisation; but before doing so it is worth noting that some scholars have, if not cautioned against the theme, encouraged caution when addressing it; namely to avoid “taking a preestablished commitment to an ideal of social interaction and ‘discovering’ it in certain improvised practices within jazz, leading to the conclusion that jazz is a better model for social life than we have now.”⁶⁵⁶ The charge against such accounts is that they beg the question and, more importantly for our purposes, “utilize an idealized model of improvisation that does not do justice to the phenomenology of the improvisational experience.”⁶⁵⁷ Such idealized models of improvisation can be found in certain uses of musical therapy as well as romanticized depictions of jazz.⁶⁵⁸ We will avoid this criticism of the social approach to improvisation by grounding our account in a phenomenology of improvisational experience.

The social situation of the improvisational musical experience differs from Schütz’s portrayal in MMT and FPM. In fact, the improvisational situation is in certain respects more complicated than the actualization of a composition. Let us then revise certain components of Schütz’s account in order to accommodate the distinctiveness of the musical experience of improvisation.

First, because of his focus on the playing of composed music, the “main social relationship” in Schütz’s account of the musical experience is that “between composer and beholder,”⁶⁵⁹ a

⁶⁵⁶ Jeff R. Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 92.

⁶⁵⁷ Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 93.

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 93-99 on what he regards as misguided approaches.

⁶⁵⁹ Schütz, MMT, 169.

term that encompasses “the player, listener, and reader of music.”⁶⁶⁰ The improviser, on the other hand – again, we are here limiting ourselves to the jazz tradition – is involved in a plurality of relationships. While playing the melody of a tune, the improviser may indeed affect a relationship with the tune’s composer not entirely unlike that of Schütz’s classical pianist. However, this is not necessarily the case. Even when a jazz musician is not taking advantage of the full liberties of improvisation, there is no premium placed on playing the melody exactly as written, which would bring about the quasi-simultaneity of consciousness with the tune’s composer. The improviser enjoys a more fluid relationship to the score than a classical musician. Thus it cannot be taken for granted that the improvisatory situation involves the quasi-simultaneity of consciousness between player and composer that is foregrounded in Schütz’s example of the classical pianist.

What then are the social relationships of the improvisatory situation? Although we can easily imagine a solitary improviser, and therefore neither of the following relationships constitute a universal condition of improvisation, the relationship between improviser and co-performers as well as the relationship between improviser and audience assume a different form than they had in the mere realization of a score.

If we assume the perspective of an audience member, then the situation does not seem so foreign to Schütz’s account. These passive beholders of the music are engaged in the activity of constituting the coherence of the tones being presented. Whether or not these tones have been pre-written does not materially alter this process of constitution. Assuming the audience members to be, if not connoisseurs then at least knowledgeable listeners with some degree of familiarity with jazz and the practice of improvisation, then surely their anticipations will be of a

⁶⁶⁰ Schütz, MMT, 169fn.

different sort than a knowledgeable listener approaching the recital of a classical work with which the listener is familiar. Approaching an improvisation involves a broader horizon of possibility than approaching a composition. Of the pianist encountering an unfamiliar nineteenth century sonata, Schütz explains, the scheme of reference brought about by the pianist's preknowledge of the typicalities of this genre "determines, in a general way, the player's anticipations of what he may or may not find in the composition before him. Such anticipations are more or less empty; they may be fulfilled and justified by the musical events he will experience when he starts to play the sonata or they may 'explode' and be annihilated."⁶⁶¹ What Schütz says of the pianist encountering an unfamiliar sonata also holds for listeners encountering an improvisation. In comparison with a composition, encountering an improvisation will entail emptier anticipations, and thus fewer experiences of fulfillment and annihilation.

Indeed, improvisation seems to call for a more open mind, or in phenomenological parlance, emptier anticipations. But this does not mean that anticipations will be entirely empty. Knowledge that a musician is considered a representative of hot jazz, swing, bebop, post bop, free jazz or some such discrete genre brings with it a general sense of what types of things a musician is likely to play. If all I know of Sonny Stitt is that he is considered a faithful disciple of Charlie Parker, then I will not foresee (or forehear, to coin a terms that maps well onto one dimension of what Schütz has in mind when he writes of "anticipation" as opposed to protention) avant-garde liberties when Stitt plays a tune written by or associated with Charlie Parker. There is also a correlation between a listener's familiarity with a particular musician's style and improvisational approach and the fullness of the listener's anticipations when presented with a

⁶⁶¹ Schütz, MMT, 168.

hitherto unheard improvisation. A vast acquaintance with Lester Young's recordings of the standard blues form grants one a robust sense of the types of things they are likely to hear in another such recording.⁶⁶²

Insofar as the activity of improvisation involves the coincidence of composition and performance, the improvisational musical experience involves the *actual* simultaneity of consciousness of the performer and the beholder, as opposed to the quasi-simultaneity established in the performance of a pre-written composition. The musical experience of improvisation also differs from that of composition in being more restricted in communicative possibilities; meaning that, whereas the sharing of the ongoing flux of the musical content of a composition "holds good whether this process occurs merely in the beholder's recollection, or through his reading the score, or with the help of audible sounds,"⁶⁶³ improvisation only exists as embodied in audible sounds. A notated improvisation no more encapsulates the improviser's mental processes than a photograph of an individual shows the world from the subject's vantage point. Improvisation, we have seen, is a contextual practice, affected by factors resistant to notation. Composition can be abstracted from the conditions of its creation; an essential aspect of its ontological status as an ideal object. The improviser's reactions to the prompts of co-performers, on the other hand, are an essential component of the musical event and yet have no

⁶⁶² When young pianist Bobby Scott asked Lester Young why he didn't play certain musical lines that had become common vocabulary with the ascendance of bebop, which emerged after Young's personal style had fully matured, he responded thusly: "His face took on a great incredulity, and he fired back, 'That's the way Bird played!' He paused, and then he said, 'He plays those licks, I play my licks, you play your licks'" (Scott, "The House in the Heart," 108). Once one has heard enough Lester Young to have heard "his licks," one can anticipate (to some degree) future iterations, not to mention identify Lester Young's influence on subsequent musicians. It must be noted that a musician's style is more than the sum of their licks, of course. Style also includes considerations such as sound, repertoire and changes over the course of their career.

⁶⁶³ Schütz, MMT, 174.

place in traditional notation. The same holds for the influence of the acoustics of a room, the particular state of mind that the improviser is in at the time of improvising and other such factors. It may be objected that the improviser's state of mind is no more on display when the listener is present than when we read the notated improvisation *ex post facto*. It may be responded, however, that other sense modalities yield a fuller picture of the experience. The musician's body language, banter with co-performers and other such signs allow the listener to contextualize the improvisation.

The social relationship between improvising co-performers differs from that of classical musicians by being unmediated by a score. Garry Hagberg presents a picture of form of interactivity that takes place in ensemble improvisation, and argues that this practice challenges both common pictures of social interaction and conceptions of the self.

In attempting to understand ensemble interaction, the social contract model appears at first to be an effective explanatory mechanism, insofar as an ensemble can be conceived as a microcosm of society: "the collective is no more than a convergence of individuals, who, *as individuals first*, choose one at a time to join a group that offers benefits (in our case musical) that expand what the individual could create alone, in exchange for a corresponding reduction in individual or autonomous freedom."⁶⁶⁴ Musicians in a symphony, for instance, have an agreement (generally unspoken) to play in accordance with one another's phrasing, dynamics, timbre and other musical elements that yield a uniform and appealing sound. Improvising musicians, on the other hand, agree to share solo space and to adopt a background role when a co-performer has taken the lead. Hagberg concedes that the social contract model is a useful heuristic for conceptualizing non-improvised ensemble performance; for instance, the type of interaction at

⁶⁶⁴ Hagberg, "Ensemble Improvisation, Collective Intention, and Group Attention," 481.

work in symphony orchestras. Each musician is responsible for a part, delineated by the work's score. Musicians privately rehearse their parts, ensuring mastery before the symphony comes together to become the sum of those parts. While effective in the case of non-improvising ensembles, Hagberg rejects the social contract model as an accurate representation of the interactivity of improvising ensembles.

As Hagberg points out, the social contract model harbors a Cartesian conception the self, which “shapes and restricts, to a far greater extent than commonly realized, our thinking about the nature of ensemble performance.”⁶⁶⁵ This conception of the self regards individuals as inessentially related to externality, yielding an “additive” end result of ensemble interaction, which proves to be at odds with the spontaneous coming-into-being of an improvisation.

Hagberg clarifies the problem with the notion of intention – not the phenomenological concept of intention, but the more colloquial sense of what one plans to do. He argues that the Cartesian model of selfhood entails that intentions are “mentally private to the intender.”⁶⁶⁶ Thus, the intentions that constitute a performance of a symphony are simply the sum of the intentions that comprised the respective musicians' individual practice and rehearsal regimens.

Hagberg argues, however, that this model cannot account for what takes place between an improvising ensemble, which involves “collective intention...something essential to the phenomenology of collective action that remains after we subtract the sum total of individual intentions from the final result.”⁶⁶⁷ The subtle difference is illustrated with an example drawn from John Searle. In the first case, a group of individuals are sitting in a park, it begins to rain, the individuals quickly get up and take shelter. In the second case, a group of actors are

⁶⁶⁵ Hagberg, “Ensemble Improvisation, Collective Intention, and Group Attention,” 482.

⁶⁶⁶ Hagberg, “Ensemble Improvisation, Collective Intention, and Group Attention,” 482.

⁶⁶⁷ Hagberg, “Ensemble Improvisation, Collective Intention, and Group Attention,” 483.

undertaking the same action as part of a play. The actions make look the same, but, Searle argues, they are qualitatively different. In the first case, the action is the sum of individual intentions. In the second case, the actors realize a we-intention.

The difference can be discussed in terms of a weak versus a strong sense of collaborative action. The weak sense understands collaborative action in terms of additive autonomous intentions. In the strong sense:

the action we are after is to be found in the interrelations between the collectively inflected intentions of the individuals as they work together. And the act of working together is not a moment, but a process, within which we coordinate individual actions into a cohesive unity that transcends the capacity of solo action, where this involves attending to the distributed progress of the agreed-upon action *in the act of performing it*.⁶⁶⁸

Hagberg argues that the Cartesian picture of the nonporous self is problematized by this strong sense of collaborative action in which individual intentions undergo alterations in the course of their actualization. Jazz improvisation in general is a powerful illustration of intentional action that is not temporally pre-conceived and ensemble improvisation is a powerful illustration of collective intention spontaneously developing.

A robust picture of the spontaneously developing collective intention of jazz improvisation emerges in ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner's monumental monograph *Thinking In Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, which contains much valuable information, gleaned through extensive interviews with practitioners, on the social situation unique to jazz. This social situation proves to be a highly complicated form of interaction involving fluid relationships

⁶⁶⁸ Hagberg, "Ensemble Improvisation, Collective Intention, and Group Attention," 484.

between the musicians who occupy discrete albeit porous roles and share responsibilities necessary for the establishment and maintenance of a successful improvisational happening. While precisely defining these roles and responsibilities would be exceedingly difficult and ineluctably provisional, certain commonalities can be identified that hold between different performances and styles.

Some of the of more or less invariant relationships are those existing in the rhythm section, which usually includes the bass, drums and a harmonic instrument (e.g. a piano, guitar, organ or vibraphone). As the name suggests, the primary responsibility of the rhythm section is setting and maintaining the rhythm of the music: “Among all the challenges a group faces, one that is extremely subtle yet fundamental to its travels is a feature of group interaction that requires the negotiation of a shared sense of the beat, known, in its most successful realization, as striking a groove.”⁶⁶⁹ Let us first consider the relationship between the drummer and the bassist, whose relationship to one another and to the beat are most important to getting into a groove. Both the drummer and bassist must retain a faithful relationship to the beat while also allowing for some variation (it is not uncommon for groups to imperceptibly speed up or slow down such that there is some variance between the piece’s beats per minute when comparing the beginning and the end of the performance). This slowing down or speeding up is a function of the unspoken negotiations that take place between musicians, who may be feeling the music differently or are coping with the mechanical vicissitudes of playing an instrument.

There are in fact an indeterminate number of ways that musicians may relate to the beat, which may broadly be characterized as playing behind the beat, playing on the beat and pushing

⁶⁶⁹ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 349.

the beat. In other words, allowance must be made for “the elasticity of the beat,”⁶⁷⁰ which accounts for different time feels; playing behind the beat creates a ‘deeper’ more relaxed groove whereas pushing the beat lends a feeling of forward momentum and drive to the music.

“Typically, either the bass player or the drummer provides an anchor or rhythmic ground for the more adventurous performances of the rest of the band,”⁶⁷¹ Berliner finds. In other words, the musicians variously trade off adopting a more or less restricted approach to the beat.

The rhythmic negotiations of the rhythm section are also not entirely separable from melodic considerations. Using a distinction between the music’s horizontal (i.e. rhythmic) space and vertical (i.e. melodic) space, Berliner points out that the rhythm section demonstrates a concern for the texture and transparency of the music while maintaining a consistent, if flexible, rhythm by playing in a melodic range that does not cover up the contributions of co-performers. For instance, the bass player may elect to play in a higher register if the soloist is playing an instrument, such as the baritone saxophone, whose tonality tends to overlap with the bass’ typical range.

So far we have seen how relationships between the bassist and the drummer shape the rhythmic character of an improvisatory performance while also maintaining an appropriate melodic frame for the soloist to fit into. The harmonic instrument of the rhythm section must also fit rhythmically and melodically in the overall sonic gestalt. This involves a relationship with the bass and drummer, jointly and severally. A pianist⁶⁷² and a drummer must coordinate their accenting of the beat so that “elements of their comping figures converge, reinforcing one another, or diverge, creating cross-accentuation schemes or interlocking patterns, one part’s

⁶⁷⁰ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 351.

⁶⁷¹ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 353.

⁶⁷² Again, this would hold equally well for other harmonic instruments in the rhythm section.

components occupying the space left by its counterpart.”⁶⁷³ An inattentive relationship between harmonic instrument and drummer will confuse the happening’s rhythmic character or at least will fail to realize the potential for creating dynamic time feels.

Whereas the relationship between the harmonic instrument and the drummer is primarily rhythmic, the relationship between the harmonic instrument and the bass player adds a harmonic dimension, since the bass player’s role essentially involves describing the harmonic contours of a piece. Thus both the bassist and, say, pianist must be ready and able to hear and respond to the various ways in which their counterpart may treat the harmonic framework. This ability to respond includes the capacity to accommodate chord substitutions that the pianist may play or the bassist may suggest, such that the final harmonic result “is not the uniform representation of a lead sheet model, but a lively composite creation, the product of multiple, ever-changing interpretations of a progression.”⁶⁷⁴

Within these roles, which have been codified by the historical tradition that the musicians inherit as well as the inherent qualities of the instruments themselves, allowances must be made for various sorts of hierarchies. The leader of a group, for instance, is at liberty to dictate aspects of the social relationships in the group. Among the leader’s prerogatives are creating the set list, setting the tempo, determining the order of soloists and requesting stylistic changes from the musicians.

The particular nature of improvisational practice in the jazz tradition also brings about another social relationship, namely that between the individual whose improvising is foregrounded as the co-performers who are accompanying the soloist: “While carrying on their discourse, the members of the rhythm section ultimately provide support for the soloist, whose

⁶⁷³ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 353.

⁶⁷⁴ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 356.

entrance increases the demands upon their attention and musical sensitivity.”⁶⁷⁵ That being said, the relationship between soloist and accompanists is bi-directional, and the soloist counts on the accompanists for consistent support as well as stimuli that may influence the direction of the improvisation: “New lines of interpretation can occur to them [i.e. soloists] in ongoing inspiration, as soloists hear and feel features of their ideas reinforced by their counterparts.”⁶⁷⁶ Conversely, the soloist may elicit a response from the rhythm section by repeating a strong, rhythmic pattern.

The social relationships of musical improvisation differ between traditions, styles and other such differentiating factors, and are often learned through doing as opposed to being theoretically learned. If any generalizations may be made, it seems accurate to say that improvisation demands social conscientiousness, an openness to one’s co-performers as well as the ability and willingness to respond to the subtle cues that are non-verbally communicated in the course of performance.

7. Improvisation and Ethics

The transition from the social situation of improvisation to the connection between ethics and improvisation is natural, since the former theme is usually understood as giving way to the latter. The variability and ambiguity of the rules of interaction between improvisers – especially vis-à-vis the clarity of the situation for musicians co-performing a score – quite naturally lends itself to questions concerning how musical subjects ought to relate extemporaneously, what sort of responsibilities they owe to one another and other such questions of an unmistakably ethical character. In this section we shall consider a number of different approaches to the question of

⁶⁷⁵ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 357.

⁶⁷⁶ Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz*, 358.

improvisation and ethics, which view the connection from different vantage points, thereby uncovering different aspects of the ethical significance of improvisation.

We have already encountered the association of improvisation and ethics, in the curious form this association takes in the work of Ernst Ferand.⁶⁷⁷ What is noteworthy about Ferand's treatment of the theme is that he discusses improvisational ethics in a solipsistic register; that is, for Ferand, the ethical upshot of improvisation does not emerge between improvising co-performers but rather in what we might call the self-overcoming of the solitary improviser. Recall Ferand's psychoanalytically inflected account of the imperfections of improvisation. Ferand attributed technical blemishes and imaginative lapses as symptomatic of subconscious or unconscious psychological conflicts, which, however nettlesome, also afford the improviser the potential to serve as an ethical symbol: "Precisely the overcoming of such obstacles and inhibitions... however, forms the value – one could say the 'ethical', or if one prefers, the educational value – of improvisatory capacity."⁶⁷⁸

A similarly individual-focused, if not solipsistic, approach to the ethical significance of improvisation is found in William Day's discussion of improvisation and moral perfectionism. Day's approach to untangling the ethical upshot of improvisation relates the imperfections endemic to improvisation with the project of moral perfectionism, and argues that exemplary improvisers demonstrate the moral perfectionist aspiration to "check our habitual responses to the world...in favor of newly discovered or newly charted desires."⁶⁷⁹ Habitual responses may

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. p. 18 above.

⁶⁷⁸ Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, 426. [*Gerade die Überwindung solcher Hindernisse und Hemmungen... aber macht den – man könnte sagen 'ethischen', oder wenn man will, erzieherischen – Wert der improvisatorischen Leistung aus.*]

⁶⁷⁹ Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," 99.

seem questionably categorized as imperfections, but they fit the bill insofar as they may be perceived as an aesthetically dissatisfying dearth of imagination.

The self-oriented flavor of Day's approach derives from the nature of moral perfectionism; a theory, the distinctive features of which are identified by Day as "a commitment to speaking and acting true to oneself, combined with a thoroughgoing dissatisfaction with oneself as one now stands."⁶⁸⁰ While focused on music, Day's account is not restricted to music. Much in the way that Schütz uses making music as an illustration of more general processes of communication, Day argues that improvisation is "best understood as a species of ordinary, unrehearsed activity,"⁶⁸¹ thus rendering the ethical significance of the improviser to be equally applicable to non-musical improvisers, or, in other words, human beings.

Day lays bare the improvisational instantiation of "the self heeding the self"⁶⁸² through original interpretations of recorded improvisations in which he attempts to "locate the genius in the solos, that is, to name the place where the soloist and the solo find themselves in such a way that what follows...can be heard to be the result of the improviser's full awareness of his place and presence, of his working through his conventional responses."⁶⁸³

It is worth tarrying for a moment on Day's comments about improvisational analysis, since they bear on the theme of the relationship between improvisation and composition. Day defends the necessity of a different analytic outlook when dealing with improvisation, rather than composition. When improvisations are regarded as compositions "the wonder of [an improvisation] will seem to be not that the notes follow one another in the particular way they do, but that this in fact quite conventional way of organizing a stretch of music could be

⁶⁸⁰ Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," 99.

⁶⁸¹ Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," 100.

⁶⁸² Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," 100.

⁶⁸³ Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," 100.

improvised.”⁶⁸⁴ When marveling at the compositional nature of an improvisation, “our marveling will be essentially abstract, not growing out of this or that moment of the solo itself but out of, as it were, the fact that the solo exists at all, out of its ontological significance.”⁶⁸⁵ Day’s point is that an overemphasis on the *that* of improvisation (*that* such a perfectly formed musical utterance could be extemporized) leads us to overlook *how* such utterances are created.⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, conceiving an improvisation as a whole demands that each moment of the improvisation be understood in relation to the whole; that each gesture serve some indispensable purpose in the perfection of the entire utterance. Day’s analytic approach, then, focuses on nitty-gritty details of recorded improvisations, attempting to identify “the impulse or impetus that at each moment informs the solo’s progress” as well as to motivate the thought that “their improvising can be read as making...claims on us.”⁶⁸⁷

Day examines Lennie Tristano’s improvisation on his “C Minor Complex” from 1961. Day is interested in a highly idiosyncratic section in which Tristano repeats a three-note figure for close to twenty seconds. The listener is likely to have several thoughts in response to this insistent repetition: How long can Tristano continue this figure? What musical solution will allow Tristano to transition out of this repetition? Through close description, Day presents Tristano’s negotiation of this improvisatory conundrum as purposive and self-trusting (insofar as Tristano commits to the figure instead of parodying himself or playing a contrasting run that would seem

⁶⁸⁴ Day, “Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism,” 101.

⁶⁸⁵ Day, “Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism,” 102.

⁶⁸⁶ Arguing for the prioritization of the ‘how’ over the ‘what’ is an important scholarly move, which can be understood as a consequence of regarding music as a dynamic activity as opposed to a static object. We find such a move, for instance, in Christopher Small’s reconceptualization of music as musicking. Jeff Warren advocates an emphasis on “*how* music becomes meaningful – rather than specifically *what* music means” (Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 12) in order to highlight the indispensable role of social and cultural factors in the establishment of musical meaning.

⁶⁸⁷ Day, “Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism,” 106.

to repudiate the figure). Day's point is that in such exemplary improvisations we find didactic instances of moral perfectionist dicta such as Emerson's "To believe your own thought...is genius."⁶⁸⁸

Both Ferand and Day treat the ethical content of improvisation as a function of the self's relation to the self. The second major approach to the connection between improvisation and ethics posits a social origin of ethical responsibility.

For ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino, the question isn't so much whether improvisation in particular or music making in general is related to ethics, but rather how the different aesthetic values of different musical contexts yield different sorts of ethical responsibility. As discussed in a previous chapter, Turino argues that "music" is not monolithic but is rather comprised of distinct fields that can be differentiated according to various considerations; including their respective views of what music is, different conceptions of musicians' roles and relationships, different types of hierarchy between the individuals involved in the performance, different aesthetic criteria and different evaluative criteria.

This paradigm yields a pluralistic and relativistic conception of musical ethics. Not only each individual field of music making, but also each instantiation of a field in a particular tradition harbors a conception of how musicians are supposed to interact with one another. While the complex context surrounding every musical tradition will yield subtle variations in ethics, which are not necessarily codified or even explicitly verbalized, some commonalities can be identified by virtue of the general features of the field of music making to which the particular tradition belongs.

⁶⁸⁸ Day, "Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism," 107.

Participatory performance, for instance, “is defined by the ethical priority of involving as many people as possible in the actual acts of music making and dance, as well as by a distinct set of values by which the success of a performance is significantly judged by the degree of participation achieved.”⁶⁸⁹ Presentational performance, on the other hand, in which there is a strict division between performers and audience, excludes less skilled performers in order to maximize audience interest. Thus there are aesthetic ramifications to a musical event’s ethical underpinnings: participatory performance does not necessarily devalue more advanced musicians or more sophisticated types of playing; but the virtuosity of virtuosos must ultimately serve the ethical end of supporting non-virtuosos and not scaring-off would-be participants. Contrarily, by barring the less skilled, presentational performance severs any ethical responsibility that more skilled musicians would otherwise have to the less skilled – although it may be argued that the ethical responsibility of the more skilled towards the less skilled does not disappear but rather undergoes a transformation into a sort of aesthetico-ethical responsibility in which the performers are obliged to make music at the height of their abilities for the enjoyment or edification of the audience.

Turino’s approach to musical ethics is an important supplement to that of Ernst Ferand, who treats the theme only with respect to a solitary individual. Upon reflection, Ferand’s focus on the individual seems odd insofar as ethical responsibility is often conceived as emerging in the encounter between individuals. But the ethical relationship between individuals is not always as simple as recognizing and respecting the contributions of a co-performer. The ethical responsibility of a musician is as much about roles as it is about relationships [“each field is

⁶⁸⁹ Turino, “Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music,” 109.

defined [in part]...by different ethics about roles, relationships, and responsibility.”⁶⁹⁰] For instance, during his tenure with pianist Thelonious Monk, soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy was rebuffed in his attempts to improvisationally interact with his accompanist:

[W]hen we were playing together sometimes he would play something on the piano and I would pick that up and play that on my horn. I thought I was being slick, you know? And he stopped me, and he said, ‘Don’t do that. ... I’m the piano player, you play your part, I’m accompanying *you*. Don’t pick up on my things.’⁶⁹¹

Monk was reminding Lacy that his present role called for him to lead as opposed to follow, that he should be the ‘speaker’ and not the ‘respondent.’

Just as Turino’s unpacking of the ethics of music making hinges on a fourfold understanding of what music is, so does Jeff Warren argue that misguided ontological conceptions of music prevent us from adequately understanding the connection between music and ethics. Yet again the culprit is a view of music that treats it as an object. To be more precise, Warren focuses not merely on the objectification of music, but on its commodification: “Discussion surrounding music and ethical responsibility in contemporary popular discourse usually involves the idea of music as a product.”⁶⁹² The commodified conception of music yields a legalistic understanding of ethical responsibility: consumers have a moral obligation to purchase music, respect copyright laws, etc.

Of course Warren does not defend the moral permissibility of illegally sharing music; instead, he argues that viewing music as an object, which is entailed in conceiving of it as a commodity, is an impoverished and misguided way of conceptualizing music. Basing a treatment

⁶⁹⁰ Turino, “Formulas and Improvisation in Participatory Music,” 108.

⁶⁹¹ Day, “Knowing as Instancing: Jazz Improvisation and Moral Perfectionism,” 108.

⁶⁹² Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 1.

of music on a “phenomenology of the improvisational [or, more generally, musical] experience”⁶⁹³ yields a vastly different understanding of the connection between music and ethical responsibility.

Warren locates the origin of ethical responsibility in music, and especially in improvisation, in a Levinasian understanding of an encounter with another person. An in depth explication of Levinas’ ethics would take us too far afield, so a superficial presentation of his view will be adequate for our purposes:

Levinas theorizes the face-to-face encounter as proximity. In proximity, two unique people come into relation. In this encounter responsibilities to the other emerge. Ethical responsibilities do not emerge by recognizing that the other person is just like me, but by recognizing that the other person is unique, requiring me to respond uniquely to the other. For an encounter with another to take place, a common space needs to be shared. Musical experience can create a shared experience that can allow difference to come into contact.⁶⁹⁴

From this conviction that music is primarily a lived activity, as opposed to an object, and from his personal experience as a bassist, Warren investigates different ways that music brings people in proximity and thereby yields ethical responsibilities. On the basis of a close description of the experience of playing bass as part of a small group providing music for a corporate function, Warren identifies four different levels of listening. The first level involves listening primarily to oneself, ensuring perhaps that one’s instrument is in tune and that one is conforming to the structure of the tune being played. While all musicians spend some time on this level of listening in the course of a performance, more advanced musicians will find it unnecessary to

⁶⁹³ Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 93.

⁶⁹⁴ Warren, *Music and Ethical Responsibility*, 8.

focus exclusively on themselves since greater skill makes it possible to attend to more inclusive sonic gestalts that incorporate the contributions of co-performers. The second level of listening is achieved when one's engagement with the music becomes subconscious. This requires a degree of familiarity with one's instrument and tunes (or song-structures) that allows for muscle memory to take the place of concentration, thereby opening up a space for consciousness to drift to matters that are tangentially or not at all related to the music being played. The third level of listening is directed towards one's co-performers. Once one has been freed from the necessity of self-absorption through diligent practice, the musician is able to fine-tune their contributions, so to speak, to their co-performers. This may involve, for instance, adjustments of timbre, tuning or amplitude in order to better blend into the whole. The fourth type of listening puts the musician in the position of someone in the audience. This type of listening may result in acoustic changes to one's playing, for instance to create the most advantageous balance of instruments, or aesthetic changes such as playing 'inside' the changes to provide audience members with musical reference points that are familiar to even the most musically uneducated listeners.

The third and the fourth types of listening bring the musician into proximity with others, with the co-performers and the audience, respectively. While conceptual complications emerge when distinguishing between the musician and the sounds that the person sends forth into the world, a simplified picture of the improvisational situation makes clear the ethical implications of the practice: to occupy an accompanist's role replicates the subservient position of obligation to the other that Levinas identifies in non-musical face-to-face encounters. As noted before, the philosophical – specifically, phenomenological – underpinnings of Levinas' claim that an encounter with the other presents ethical responsibilities will not be considered here, but Warren's understanding of the ethical significance of improvisation is subject to similar

questions about the status of encounters that take place between more than two people and the phenomenological objection about not experiencing an ethical bidding from the other.

8. Conclusion

As a ubiquitous musical – not to mention existential – practice, improvisation warrants serious philosophical attention. Whatever one's position on the improvisation-composition debate, the foregrounding of salient themes and questions for the philosophy of music in improvisation is sufficient motivation for further research. Especially as concerns the social situation in the musical experience, improvisation is a particularly rich field of study. The expanded notions of retention and the social situation in music serve as an argument for the importance of incorporating diverse musical practices and musical cultures into the philosophy of music. Only by striving for comprehensiveness can we hope to lay claim to valid insights concerning the uniqueness of the musical experience for the human condition.

Conclusion:

This dissertation began with a presentation of the project that Cassirer undertakes in his philosophy of symbolic forms. Then a historical overview of phenomenological treatments of music were examined and critiqued for what is argued to be problematic conceptions of music's ontological status, which trickles down into its presentation of the musical experience. Next, the thoroughgoing sociality of the musical experience is a topic that permeates discussions of musical meaning and the practice of improvisation. I will conclude with a brief overview of the preceding chapters before suggesting future directions for research.

In chapter one, I present the project that Cassirer undertakes in his three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* by considering the project's relationship to Kant's critical philosophy as well as by mining unpublished resources from an early draft of *Essay on Man*. Then I review Cassirer's assorted writings on art as a preliminary way of understanding what it means for art to constitute a symbolic form. The important concepts of the quality and mode of forms of relation are glossed, leading to the understanding that in order for "art" to name a distinct type of experience, it must involve unique meanings of time, space, subjectivity and a form of thought. Oriented by Cassirer's essay "Mythic, Aesthetic and Theoretical Space," I show how the aesthetic experience of space is characterized by concreteness (as opposed to the abstractness of theoretical spatiality), disinterestedness (as opposed to the goal-oriented care of everyday spatiality), and remoteness (as opposed to the violent interplay of forces and feeling values of mythical spatiality). I then investigated the contentious question of the relationship between music and spatiality, arguing that there is an auditory experience of spatiality that cannot be reduced to visualistic or kinaesthetic spatiality, despite being less rich than these more common

experiences of space. Time in music proves to be an easier theme than space and is shown to be qualitative (as opposed to the quantitative objectivity of theoretical time) and continuous (as opposed to the fragmentation of mythical time). I then address the experience of subjectivity that characterizes the musical experience. The I of musical hearing is distinguished from the I of objective hearing by virtue of emphasizing the relation of tones, as opposed to connecting what is heard with events in the external world. Musical thought is the final quality of relation that is discussed as constitutive of the musical experience. Musical thinking proves to differ from theoretical thought insofar as it does not seek a single, inevitable, “correct” solution to the problem it encounters, but nevertheless is answerable to music’s dynamic qualities, which neither belong to the tones themselves nor to the human mind. Thus, musical thinking differs from the common notion of thinking, yet also cannot be characterized as mere artistic fancy since it is answerable to considerations that exist outside the thinker.

Chapter two focuses on phenomenological treatments of music, with an emphasis on the ontology of music and the nature of the musical experience. I unpack the rationale for conceptualizing music as an ideal object, a commonly held position among phenomenologists. This ontology derives from the view that music, properly understood, is constituted by the consciousness of the beholder, as opposed to inhering in the written score or the sonic externalization of performance. Nevertheless, Schütz’s account of the ontology of music has problematic aspects. I argue that such an account yields what I term a “digital ontology,” that is, one which presupposes what is to be construed as “signal,” i.e. what is essential, and “noise,” i.e. what is inessential. Schütz’s account of listening to a six-tone sequence, which is his chief illustration of the musical experience, is a misleadingly simple example that permits him to overlook the complexity of the question of determining signal and noise. However, when one

reflects on musical encounters more robust than an unaccompanied six-note theme, the signal-noise situation is not so easy to parse. Using an example derived from ethnomusicological literature, I reflect on “multistable acoustic phenomena,”⁶⁹⁵ which harbor ontologically significant perceptual possibilities. These phenomena illustrate the broader point that considerations such as the direction of the beholder’s attention are consequential for the way in which music is constituted. Thus it is problematic to presuppose that all beholders constitute the “same” piece of music in the same way. I then critique another common assumption in phenomenological treatments of music and the philosophy of music more broadly; namely, the tendency to equate music with musical works. I demonstrate the historical contingency of musical works as presently conceived, before presenting conceptions of music beyond the work paradigm offered by phenomenologists, musicologists and ethnomusicologists. I then consider whether Schütz’s account of the musical experience is able to accommodate these alternative ontologically consequential conceptions of music.

Chapter three picks up where the previous chapter leaves off, considering whether Schütz’s account of the musical experience is adequately social. I attempt to redress some of the lacunae in his account by supplementing his essays on music with his better-known work on the phenomenology of the social world. This task takes the form of unpacking the unexpectedly manifold meanings of the concept of musical meaning. Borrowing distinctions derived from Schütz’s account of meaning in *Phenomenology of the Social World*, the meaningfulness of music is discussed with respect to a number of overarching dichotomies: subjective versus objective meaning; merely perceptual, or phenomenological, objects versus socio-cultural objects; object versus activity. Utilizing these distinctions allows an exhaustive presentation of

⁶⁹⁵ Friedson, *Dancing Prophets*, 143.

the different ways that music may be experienced as meaningful. I then turn to the discipline of ethnomusicology, examining the history and nature of the discipline, as preparatory for arguing that it is an indispensable resource for philosophers of music. As became evident in chapter two, Schütz's ethnocentric myopia resulted in problems for his ontology of music and account of the musical experience. By scrutinizing common definitions that orient philosophical treatments of music, I argue that ethnomusicology leads philosophers to adopt expanded understandings of what music is, what music does and what music reveals about our relation to the world and to one another. Finally, I turn to the topic of musical universals, relating ethnomusicology's approach to such universals to the type of universals that Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms seeks. I argue that the synthetic *a posteriori* universals discovered by ethnomusicologists are significant in the philosopher of culture's search for the dynamic *a priori* universals at the heart of human musicality.

In chapter four, I thematize improvisation. There are at least two reasons for doing so. Firstly, just as it has been argued that a viable philosophy of music must study human musicality as instantiated across a broad range of cultures, it must also study a broad range of musical practices. As chapter two demonstrated, a historical consideration of the Western classical tradition discovers that its prioritization of the written score is, in the grand scheme of things, a recent phenomenon, which in no way can be considered characteristic of most musical practices. Improvisation, broadly construed, names the situation of musicking without a written score. Secondly, while Cassirer argues for the necessity of studying human beings by way of their works, there is the danger that in studying works we overlook the working. In other words, the product must not obscure the process; studying improvisation safeguards against such a methodological error. I approach the theme of improvisation by different means including the

etymology of the term, through different improvisational practices, the pedagogy of improvisation, the comparison of improvisation with composition, the concepts of audibility and density and the question of whether improvisation is heard as improvised without any contextualizing knowledge. I then investigate the social situation in improvisation, which supplements Schütz's account of the sociality of the musical experience in important ways. Finally, I address the relationship between improvisation and ethics, which naturally follows the discussion of sociality, since improvising co-performers must negotiate performance without the orienting authority of a score.

To conclude I would like to outline a few ways in which the research undertaken in this dissertation could be continued. One direction for future research is simply quantitative. We have seen that Cassirer's philosophy of culture studies the human being through concrete cultural products, insight about which is gleaned and critically assessed through situating the product in the historical context of its emergence and understanding it in light of its predecessors and progeny. Thus, the more concrete cultural products that come under consideration, the finer-grained is our resultant picture of human beings. Cassirer's pluralism also pertains to theoretical frameworks: the more perspectives we have on a given phenomenon, the richer our final account of it. With respect to music, then, research could be advanced on two fronts. First, more ethnographies of particular musical cultures would add to our understanding of the ways that human beings conceptualize and perform music. If it is consonant with the concepts and practices of other cultures, then we are closer to the determination of the ethnomusicology's synthetic *a posteriori* insight into musical universals, which, as was argued in chapter three, puts us on the path to the dynamic *a priori* with which Cassirer's philosophy of culture is concerned. If, on the other hand, a musical culture presents significant differences in ideas and behavior,

then we will have guarded against overly reductive understandings of the existential significance of sound.

In addition to more study objects, our research would also be advanced by the inclusion of more theoretical perspectives. For instance, a purely physiological approach to human hearing would be a useful supplement to the sources included in this dissertation. While phenomenologists refuse to reduce music to a merely auditory phenomenon – recall that Schütz did not even believe that externalized sound was a condition for the possibility of the musical experience, since constitution could be effected by the internal recollection of a musical work – the vast majority of our musical experiences involve audition. The question of whether artistic conventions are grounded in physiology is a question first investigated in Herman von Helmholtz’s *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*,⁶⁹⁶ which would be profitably supplemented by the interdisciplinary research that has transpired since its publication in 1863. Neuroscience would doubtless provide another valuable perspective, with recent studies furnishing thought-provoking fodder on themes such as the relationship between music and language, the association between music and movement, the perception of emotions in music and the effect that musical training has on the musical experience.⁶⁹⁷

Another direction for future research picks up on a tactic used in chapter three, where Schütz’s phenomenology of the social world was used to supplement his phenomenology of the musical experience. Schütz’s writings on the theme of relevance, for instance, would be

⁶⁹⁶ Herman Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954).

⁶⁹⁷ For a summary of current research on these issues, cf. Daniel J. Levitin and Anna K. Tirovolas, “Current Advances in the Cognitive Neuroscience of Music,” in *The Year in Cognitive Neuroscience 2009* 1156 (2009): 211-231.

profitably mined for insight that may provide a Schützian response to the inadequacy in his musical ontology discussed in chapter two. The objection was raised that Schütz's account of the musical experience presupposed a single, unambiguous way of constituting a musical work. However, this presupposition is problematized by the existence of multi-stable acoustic phenomena, which, like the Tumbuka rhythmic patterns discussed in section 2a of chapter 2, can be differently constituted depending on what aspects of the phenomenon the listener is attending to. The concept of relevance and the related concept of attention are points of departure for thinking about how consciousness latches onto certain aspects of a sensory manifold while relegating other aspects to the background.

The aim of this research has been to achieve a better understanding of the significance of music in human life; where music is regarded as a distinct domain of experience with broader borders than have traditionally been recognized in philosophical discourse. Both Cassirer and Schütz furnish philosophical frameworks and resources for an expanded and ennobled conception of human beings' relationship to sound. While neither thinker presents anything like a complete account of what music is and what music does, by placing Cassirer and Schütz into conversation and indicating the directions suggested by their work, we have seen how the harmonious projects of the philosophy of culture and phenomenology can lead to new ways of thinking about music.

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