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Many Spheres of Music:
Hermeneutic interpretation of musical signification

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Preface

Considerable interest has been shown in the field of music aesthetics in recent years, not only by aestheticians but also by writers from diverse fields such as musicology, psychology and linguistics. What we have witnessed in these discussions have been not only painstaking analyses of music in terms of its aesthetic value, but also explorations of music in relation to a varied range of research areas from examining the relations between music and mind using psychological methods, through evaluating music in terms of our post-modern notion of art, to exploring the relations between language and music in terms of their semantic and semiotic characteristics. Such accounts typically seek to show that music is more than mere sound, and, in particular, several accounts focus on its expressiveness and its possibility of conveying a certain significance.

Among the arts, music is atypical, possessing predominantly a temporal structure and with no actual or implied spatial content, a fact which appears to have contributed to the notorious difficulty of identifying its nature.¹ There are no clear answers agreed by philosophers and musicologists to questions relating to the essence of music. Further, while some musicologists scrutinise the tonal structure of Western music and compare each key with its apparent meaningfulness, others, especially philosophers, argue that there are no meanings in music at all. Inadequate accounts of musical significance lead to circular debates with no apparent prospect of agreement. This thesis seeks to examine the problem of musical interpretation in the light of

¹ To say that music lacks spatial content is not to say that space is irrelevant to it; one needs space for any sound to travel. For a discussion of “auditory space”, see Zuckerkandl (1956).

philosophical hermeneutics. First, though, we must provide a working account of the concept of “music” and, second, we need to sketch the range of conceptions of “meaning”, “significance” and “meaningfulness” we shall be addressing in this thesis.

The types of music on which this thesis is focusing are somewhat narrower than the full range of items to which the term “music” is commonly applied. Nevertheless, this thesis is not concerned to develop a theory applicable only to Western Tonal Music, but one that would also hold for a more general understanding of music. This is why this thesis is not entitled “The Hermeneutics of Western Tonal Music”, even though many of the musical examples discussed are taken from Western Tonal Music. The discussion presupposes the propriety of ethnomusicology, leaving it open for the hermeneutic approach developed here to apply more generally. In order to avoid confusion, it is appropriate to note that the terms “classical music” and “classical composer”, used throughout this thesis, indicate the music and composers of Western Tonal Music, and not necessarily music of the historical “Classic Age” which lies roughly between the work of Gluck and Rossini.² Where such a distinction is necessary in this discussion, the capitalised “Classical” will be used.

With respect to meaning, both analyses in terms of language and analyses in terms of the expression theories of music will be examined in order to show their limitations in providing an adequate account of musical significance. Chapters 2 and 3 in this thesis develop critiques of the three main approaches to musical significance. Firstly, the extensive and very precise correlations between Chomskian syntactic structure and

² As with any other movements in history, the exact period of the Classical Style is difficult to specify. Moreover, Romanticism which follows the Classical era overlaps, and it is often suggested by musicologists that “The continuity between the two styles is more fundamental than the contrast” Grout & Palisca (1993: 657)

music, such as those provided by Bernstein, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, are analysed.

This approach has affinities with a more general semiotic approach which treats music in terms of its significance both intramusically and extramusically, as developed by Nattiez and Coker. Thirdly, psychological and conceptual discussions of the relation of meaningful expression to the emotion of the listener are examined, with particular reference to the theories of Matravers, Hospers and DeBellis.³

There are also more than a few theorists who claim that music does not mean or express anything at all. While musicians and composers not infrequently resist the thought that formal musicological analyses reveal meaning or expressiveness, musical aestheticians are much more sympathetic to this idea. Nevertheless, we can find examples of both in each camp. For example Stravinsky firmly maintains:

I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc... [I]f, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality.⁴

On the other hand, Tchaikovsky remarks:

I should be sorry if symphonies that mean nothing should flow from my pen, consisting solely of a progression of harmonies, rhythms and modulations.⁵

³ These categorizations may suggest some problems, since a number of theories, such as Langer's, can be categorised as containing both semiotic and expressionist elements. However, this is a convenient categorisation in order to illustrate the distinctive features of these claims.

⁴ Stravinsky (1975: 53)

⁵ Tchaikovsky's remark cited in Beardsley (1981: 320)

This difference is mirrored by theorists such as Hanslick and Kivy.⁶

However each person may evaluate and name the effect of a piece of music according to its individuality, its content is nothing but the audible tonal forms; since music speaks not merely by means of tones, it speaks only tones.⁷

Kivy on the other hand claims:

It seems...irrefutable fact that one of the correct and most pervasive ways to describe pure music [...] is in terms of what I shall hence forth call the “garden-variety” emotions...⁸

Even though we should note the distinction between Stravinsky’s claim to be unable to express anything through the music, and Hanslick’s that ‘the content of music is tonally moving forms,’⁹ the two claims have much in common.

The development of hermeneutics, especially over the last century, has established new co-ordinates for our understanding of the meaning of texts. In particular, its insistence on the socio-historical dimension of interpretation proves illuminating in exploring the problem of musical significance. Indeed if, as we shall see in the Introduction, the notion of music as being a “universal language of emotions” is a false starting point, the importance of hermeneutics’ sensitivity to the issues of cultural embeddedness becomes more apparent.

⁶ Kivy describes himself as a Formalist, even though his remarks on music as being capable of expressing feelings may indicate some instability in his position. His position as an associationist (or gesture theory) will be discussed in a later chapter. Cf Kivy (1990)

⁷ Hanslick (1986: 78)

⁸ Kivy (1989: 153)

⁹ Hanslick (1986: 29)

The first chapter sets out the groundwork of how philosophical hermeneutic theory has been developed through phenomenology. This will enable us to provide a framework for our investigation of musical hermeneutics. The following two chapters will argue the limitations of the Syntactic, Semiotic and Expression theorists' respective attempts to address the problem of musical meaning, and the fourth will reassess the Formalists' position. These chapters feed into our constructive discussion of musical hermeneutics in Chapter 5, which we illustrate with some musical examples. The outcome of this discussion will help us to readdress more fruitfully the issue of how we can interpret music and its meaningfulness.

Introduction: A Preliminary Account of the Notions of Music, Meaning, and Significance

As the thesis title suggests, its central topic is how musical interpretation, using the procedures of hermeneutics, enriches our understanding of music. In particular, through comparing and critiquing the various existing theories of musical meaning and expression, we shall see how the hermeneutic approach can explicate our grasp of musical experience and its meaningfulness more fully than others. At the outset it will be helpful to provide preliminary accounts of some of the core concepts of this thesis. As is recognised by several of the theories we shall consider, music is to be understood as more than mere sound. An initial exploration of the concepts of “music” and “meaning” will provide an orientation towards the position this thesis will be arguing with respect to musical interpretation.

1. Music

An unsatisfactory starting point can be found in Robin Maconie where he defines music as ‘the idea behind or beyond the sound.’¹ Even if one is not a professional musicologist, it is clear that this is a misleading definition.² Philip Alperson, on the other hand, interestingly comments; ‘music is the universal language, *we are told*, the language of the emotions.’³ Whether this premise is an appropriate one or not, we shall shortly seek to determine. However, Alperson is right to cast a doubt on the

¹ Maconie (1990: 10)

² There are many compositions that have no apparent ideas behind them. Moreover, this definition excludes all listeners who have “failed” to grasp the ideas who, nevertheless, rightly claim that they are listening to music.

³ Alperson (1987: 3) with my italics.

notions of both universality and a language of emotions. Since we discuss in some detail music as a language and its relation to emotion in the later chapters, we shall only take up the notion of universality here. Not surprisingly, there is a wide range of definitions of music proposed by both musicologists and philosophers. While retrieving all the definitions would be an unprofitable task, one can categorise them into two main sets of approaches.

The first approach, often cited and discussed by musicologists and musicians, emphasises the acoustic aspect of music as “organised sound.” Charles Culver, for example, defines music as ‘sounds with regular and periodic vibrations.’⁴ One generally thinks of music in terms of physical phenomena, and yet this tendency is challenged by many contemporary musicians. The famous example of *4’33”* by John Cage suggests not only the importance of the performance and the composition but also the audience, and moreover raises the issue of the definition of music itself.

Nicholas Cook notes, ‘If it is not possible to arrive at a satisfactory definition of music simply in terms of sound, this is probably because of the essential role that the listener, and more generally the environment in which the sound is heard, plays in the constitution of any event as a musical one.’⁵ This points to the difference between treating music as a physical phenomenon and as an aesthetic work. Considered as a physical phenomenon, of organised sound vibrations in temporal succession, there is no need to be concerned with understanding music in aesthetic terms. Aestheticians, however, typically claim that music is essentially an artwork and that we need to search for an understanding of such artwork. ‘Despite the differences of emphasis’

⁴ Culver (1941: 4-5) quoted in Merriam (1964: 64).

⁵ Cook (1990: 11)

remarks Nattiez, ‘Adorno, Dahlhaus, and McAdams are in agreement with each other – as also with Collingwood and Hampshire – that the active participation of the listener plays an essential role in the constitution of the musical artwork.’⁶

From these diverse accounts, Jean-Jacques Nattiez rightly drew a crucial inference; ‘What these special cases show – paradoxically – is that we could not know how to speak of music without referring to sonority, even when the reference is only implied. We can, then, allow that sound is a minimal condition of the musical fact.’⁷

Thus, despite the counter example by Cage, if we accept the existence of sound as a fact of music, the next step is to determine how this sound is understood as music.⁸

The second approach, indeed, seeks to define music in terms of a type of understanding of sound, seeing music as a product of culture. The distinction between music and noise is often seen as an essential factor in understanding the nature of music. If music is defined as ‘sounds with regular and periodic vibrations,’ then noise could be said to be ‘pitchless sound’⁹ or borrowing Nattiez’s words, sound with ‘nonperiodic character.’¹⁰ However, Nattiez, concurring with Chocholle, conceives of noise as having a disagreeable character;

[A]ny sound that we consider as having a disagreeable affective character, something unacceptable, no matter what this character may also be...[T]he notion of noise is first and foremost a subjective notion.¹¹

⁶ Nattiez (1990: 17)

⁷ *Ibid.* (43)

⁸ Cage’s example could be seen as a reaction against the very nature of music. However, this in turn, presupposes the traditional concept of sound as a necessary element of music.

⁹ Seashore (1938: 20) quoted in Merriam (1964: 64).

¹⁰ Nattiez (1990: 45)

¹¹ Chocholle (1973: 38) quoted in Nattiez (1990: 45).

If this is so, then distinguishing between non-music and music must also involve some degree of subjectivity. Although the distinction between music and noise is in one sense a trivial issue, the apparent need to appeal to the experiencing subject in identifying music is one of the core reasons for questioning the claim for its universality. Cultural understanding and subjective understanding are indeed distinct. Our cultural understanding of music may differ considerably from our subjective perceptions. However, Nattiez's suggestion that we subjectively discriminate a noise from a tone is not in the strict sense individualistic. Nattiez uses "subjective" to contrast with what is rational, concrete and objective, such as the rules of geometry. While there are important distinctions to be made between the purely subjective and the cultural intersubjective in the case of music, such as that between a personal association and a work's musical significance, and between levels of understanding depending on a subject's musicological competency (as we shall see with respect to DeBellis' account), in this context the notion of subjectivity is best construed in contrast to that of universality, and thus as extendable to include cultural intersubjectivity.

The fundamental understanding of music that ethnomusicologists typically propose takes a similar approach, with a particular emphasis on the cultural aspect of music. Alan Merriam notes: 'Music is a product of man and has structure, but its structure cannot have an existence of its own divorced from the behaviour which produces it.'¹² Undoubtedly, there is a close connection between music and the culture which produced it. As Paul Farnsworth notes 'music is made of socially accepted patterns of

¹² Merriam (1964: 7)

sounds’;¹³ not only is the distinction between noise and music dependent on the cultural background in terms of which the listener perceives, but also the understanding of music is predominantly cultural. From the results of field research, Robert Morey concludes that music is only understandable intra-culturally. ‘Western music is not recognised by the Loma of Liberia as expressing emotion...’, and ‘Music, said to express emotion to an expert in music and emotion in western society, does not express emotion to auditors whose musical and social training is different from that of the composer of the music.’¹⁴

Moreover, there are cultures that have no concept corresponding to the Western notion of music. Nattiez brings out this point: ‘[e]xamining the borders between music and other symbolic forms along a given continuum reveals that the semantic surface of the concept “music” is displaced from one culture to another. This is particularly clear in societies for which the word “music” does not exist.’¹⁵

According to Bruno Nettl cited by Nattiez, ‘ethnomusicology as western culture knows it is actually a western phenomenon,’ in large part because the same is also true for the concept of music itself.¹⁶

From these considerations, ethnomusicology typically rejects the notion of music as a universal language. Charles Seeger writes; ‘We must, of course, be careful to avoid the fallacy that music is a “universal language.” There are many music communities in the world, though not, probably, as many as there are speech communities. Many

¹³ Farnsworth (1958: 17) quoted in Merriam (1964: 27).

¹⁴ Morey (1940: 342, 354) quoted in Merriam (1964: 11-12).

¹⁵ Nattiez (1990: 54)

¹⁶ Nettl (1983: 15) quoted in Nattiez (1990: 59).

of them are mutually unintelligible.’¹⁷ To claim this is not to deny that music could be a communication tool; on the contrary, the study of musical communication is one of the core research areas of ethnomusicologists. However, the locus of this communication is typically restricted to the society where the music is born and those influenced by it.¹⁸

One may conclude from these two approaches taken together that there is no universal understanding of the “musics” of different societies, even though music as a physical phenomenon can be partially defined at least cross-culturally, even if not universally. It appears that music consists of sound with a structure, and that what counts as a musical structure is at least in part a cultural matter. What we shall also see, in the later chapters, is that the significance of these diverse “musics” is best grasped through the technique of interpretation of music, rather than through a direct examination of the nature of music itself.

2. Meaning, Meaningfulness and Significance

When we talk about the meaning of music, the meaningfulness of music or the significance of music, it seems at first glance that we are discussing an identical subject matter. But analysis of the ample literature purporting to engage with the “meaning of music” (or sometimes “musical meaning”), indicates that various authors use different approaches and even different concepts of “meaning” in relation to

¹⁷ Seeger (1941: 122) quoted in Merriam (1964: 10)

¹⁸ See Chapter 1 for discussion of cultural relativism. See also Danto (1981), Margolis (1980) and, for general cultural relativism, Winch’s articles in B. Wilson (1970).

music.¹⁹ Some see musical meaning in terms of semiotic signification, while others in more psychological and experiential terms, or even in terms of musical expression. What is clear is that the use of the term “meaning” is vague and ambiguous in many of these theories.

First, we shall sketch some of the traditional theories of “meaning” from different branches of the philosophy of language. This will provide us with a basis on which to explore distinctions between these uses in relation to the hermeneutics of music.

Many attempts have been made to clarify the notion of meaning. “A word referring to an object” is a classical case, made explicit in the discussion of connotation and denotation by John Stuart Mill. In Mill’s view, most words are “names,” though in a much broader sense than that of our use today, and they have properties of both denoting (naming), and connoting (significance). Although Gilbert Ryle sees the failure of Mill’s “word meaning” approach, he nevertheless supports this distinction between connotation and denotation:

Most words and descriptive phrases, according to him [Mill], do two things at once. They *denote* the things or persons that they are[...] the name of. But they also *connote* or signify the simple or complex attributes by possessing which the thing or person denoted is fitted by the description.²⁰

Giving an account of all the different approaches to linguistic meaning is not feasible; it is, however, plausible to state that in the earlier part of the twentieth century the

¹⁹ See for example, Coker (1972), S.Davies (1994a), Hatten (1994), L.Kramer (2002), Meyer (1956), Pratt (1968), Price (1988), Raffman (1991) and Robinson (1997a).

²⁰ Ryle ‘The Theory of Meaning’ in Olshewsky (1969:137).

study of meaning branched into two major schools. On one hand, there was the detailed synchronic study of language by F. de Saussure which provoked many linguists to turn to the study of semiology, which focused on the relation between the signifier and the signified, and has led to contemporary attempts in linguistics to analyse the structures of language systematically. On the other hand, the American school inspired by the work of C.S. Peirce has cultivated the theory of semiotics displaying the tri-folded relations of the sign, the signified object and the interpreting mind, and affirmed that ‘we have no power of thinking without signs.’²¹ An influential discussion of the meaning of “meaning” developed by Ogden and Richards, follows this Peircian Semiotics. They claim that the classical account of word meaning, as articulated in Mill’s argument, is false, and the importance of meaning lies in the interpretation of the symbol by the thought. ‘Words, as every one now knows, ‘mean’ nothing by themselves, although the belief that they did, [...], was once equally universal. It is only when a thinker makes use of them that they stand for anything, or, in one sense, have ‘meaning.’ They are instruments.’²² They exhibited many definitions of the word “meaning,” from philosophers, philologists and psychologists, and demonstrated that they are all insufficient in terms of the then recent investigations in the philosophy of mind.

The definitions of Meaning may be dealt with under three headings. The first comprises Phantoms linguistically generated; the second groups and distinguishes Occasional and erratic usages; the third covers Sign and Symbol situations generally... [A] careful study of these expansions leaves little room for doubt that what philosophers and metaphysicians have long regarded as an abstruse and ultimate notion, falling entirely

²¹ Peirce (*CP*:5.265) quoted in Ketner and Kloesel (1986: 325).

²² Ogden & Richards (1976: 10)

within their peculiar domain and that of such descriptive psychologists as had agreed to adopt a similar terminology, has been the subject of detailed study and analysis by various special sciences for over half a century.²³

Developing an alternative approach, Wittgenstein came to define the meaning of a word in terms of its usage. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein claimed that ‘The name means the object. The object is its meaning,’²⁴ by which he meant that ‘each token sign of ‘this’ or ‘A’ is a different token sign or thing from another ‘this’ or ‘A’, but the use or sense is attached to the whole class of signs or expression of the same type.’²⁵ This was echoing Russell’s claim that ‘this’ or a thing ‘A’ has a particular reference at particular context.

Later, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein modified his picture theory into a tool box theory. Whereas in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argued that the meaning and the structure of language is similar to the construction of a picture, constituted in terms of a Fregean notion of word-meaning and its reference, in the *Investigations* he claimed that reference, meaning and object do not stand in a simple logical connection, but are constructed with several different logical forms. A word does not refer to an object as in a simple pictorial theory, but the meaning is constituted through the understanding of how the word is used in a particular context. Thus he claims ‘Language is an instrument’ and moreover, ‘The meaning of a phrase

²³ *Ibid.* (249-50)

²⁴ Wittgenstein (1995: 3.203)

²⁵ Ishiguro ‘Use and Reference of Names’ in Winch (1969: 35).

for us is characterized by the use we make of it.’²⁶

More recently, rejecting (like Ogden and Richards before him) the classical “word meaning” concept, Donald Davidson has formed a theory of meaning in terms of sentence meaning rather than connection of atomic word meanings.

[I]t is now evident that a satisfactory theory of the meanings of complex expressions may not require entities as meanings of all the parts. It behoves us then to rephrase our demand on a satisfactory theory of meaning so as not to suggest that individual words must have meanings at all, in any sense that transcends the fact that they have a systematic effect on the meanings of the sentences in which they occur²⁷

In some tension with this line of approach, J.L. Austin’s development of a theory of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, together with the Gricean notion of natural and non-natural meaning, have led philosophers such as Searle to take a step further to claim that meaning is in part constituted through the intention of the speaker. Paul Grice claimed that it is not within the words or the sentences themselves that meaning lies, but in the recognition of what is intended by the speaker. ‘A must intend to induce by x a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognised as so intended.’²⁸ In criticizing and modifying the Gricean notion of meaning, John Searle developed a complex theory of meaning and intentionality, which explains how the audience is able to understand the intention of the speaker.

²⁶ Wittgenstein (1997: 569; 2000: 65) Also, in his earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein makes a similar claim: ‘In order to recognize a symbol by its sign, we must observe how it is used with a sense.’ (1995: 3.326) For further discussion of Wittgenstein’s early and later accounts of meaning, see Ishiguro’s article in Winch (1969: 20-50).

²⁷ Davidson ‘Truth and Meaning’ (1967: 305) reprinted in Moore (1993: 93).

²⁸ Grice (1989: 219)

Searle argues that ‘meaning is one kind of Intentionality’ in which, both the intentional state and the speech act (i.e. utterance) have the same conditions of satisfaction.²⁹

The key to the problem of meaning is to see that in the performance of the speech act the mind intentionally imposes the same conditions of satisfaction on the physical expression of the expressed mental state, as the mental state has itself.³⁰

Gottlob Frege’s distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*) in word meaning has led to much debate on the notion of meaning and significance, most influentially by such philosophers as B. Russell, P. Strawson and W.V.O. Quine.³¹ ‘A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense, *stands for* or *designates* its reference. By means of a sign we express its sense and designate its reference.’³² It is relevant to our purpose that, in this context, Frege introduced the concept of “idea”. While sense and reference are directly connected to the sign, the “idea” is subjective and thus there may be ‘a variety of differences in the ideas associated with the same sense.’³³ The reference is objective and the idea subjective. The “sense”, or what Hirsch later misleadingly calls “significance”, resides in between.

The reference of a proper name is the object itself which we designate by its means; the idea, which we have in that case, is wholly subjective; in between lies the sense, which is indeed no longer subjective like the idea, but is yet not the object itself.³⁴

²⁹ Searle (1983: 161)

³⁰ *Ibid.* (165)

³¹ For further discussion on meaning and reference, see Moore (1993).

³² Frege’s ‘Sense and Reference’ reprinted in Moore (1993: 27).

³³ *Ibid.* (26)

³⁴ *Ibid.* (26)

Russell's criticism of Frege addressed the issue of the relation between truth and meaning, where such a sentence as "The King of France is bald" constitutes a meaningful sentence, although there appears to be no truth value in the sentence. On Russell's analysis, Frege's account of sense and reference is not strictly necessary for such a sentence as this to be understood, even though its reference does not exist in reality.

Hirsch's account of the difference between interpretation and criticism, where interpretation is concerned with the meaning of the text while criticism takes account of "significance", is based on this Fregean distinction.³⁵

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. Significance, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.³⁶

However, while he is right to seek the distinction between what earlier hermeneutics called "*subtilitas intelligendi*" and "*subtilitas explicandi*", this does not directly correspond to Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. Further, echoing Russell, Tugendhat sees that "significance" – or *Bedeutung* – has reference to truth and falsity, but does not require a separate entity called "sense".

[W]hat Frege discovered was not, as is often said, that names have, besides a reference, a sense and that sentences and predicates have, besides a sense, a significance in terms of truth and falsity: sentences are

³⁵ Hirsch (1976: 211)

³⁶ Hirsch (1967: 8), for his criticism of Gadamer, see *ibid.* (211ff).

significant (*'bedeutungsvoll'*) insofar as they are true or false; predicates are significant insofar as they are true of some objects and false of others; and names are significant insofar as they refer to something of which predicates can be true or false.³⁷

For the purpose of our discussion of musical hermeneutics, it is Hirsch's distinction between the one and only objective meaning – of a text and its many different contextual significances – that, as we shall see, is of crucial importance. According to Hirsch:

[T]he distinction itself is far from artificial; it is natural and universal in our experiences. In fact, if we could not distinguish a content of consciousness from its contexts, we could not know any object at all in the world. The context in which something is known is always a different context on a different occasion.³⁸

For Hirsch, then, the distinction between meaning and significance lies in the difference between content and its context.³⁹

The terms “meaning” and “meaningfulness” may be seen as drawing a similar distinction. Chambers echoes Geertz's criticism of the semiotics of art when he notes that signs cannot be studied devoid of their history and ethnography, and distinguishes between the semantic and formal structure of meaning and “meaningfulness” which is “its being apprehended in a context”.⁴⁰ Further, Chambers' distinction has important implication for our hermeneutic approach:

³⁷ Tugendhat (1970: 185-6)

³⁸ Hirsch (1976: 3)

³⁹ As we shall see, Gadamer's hermeneutics sees the importance of “context” which relates directly to our discussion of musical significance.

⁴⁰ Chambers (1979: 135) and see Geertz (1976: 1498)

[T]here are other devices of meaningfulness by which, within the assumed cultural context, texts imply or, indeed, specify the context which supposedly makes “sense” of their propositions.⁴¹

As we shall see, the above accounts suggest that when we talk about the “meaning” of music, it is in fact the “meaningfulness” or “significance” with which we are normally primarily concerned, that in the case of theorising musical meaning, the notion of “meaning” typically shifts. There is common ground among the diverse theorists of linguistic meaning, that meaning always involves items which stand in specifiable relations to each other, whether it is a relation between a word and object, a sentence and satisfaction condition, or an utterance and an intentional state. On the other hand, music lacks this sort of definite relationship between musical items and any represented object or satisfaction conditions, or between an intentional state and a work in which the intention might be fully realised. Further, as we shall see in Chapter 2, through examining music’s quasi-syntactic structure, an objective semantics of music cannot be attained. To determine what we mean by interpreting and understanding music, we shall need to explore what has above been termed “meaningfulness” or “significance”, and for this purpose Gadamer’s focus on the contextual “horizon” will provide a helpful clue.

⁴¹ Chambers (1979: 143)

Chapter 1: Philosophical Hermeneutics and Some Related Concepts

Since the main topic of this thesis is the hermeneutic interpretation of music, it is appropriate to offer a synoptic sketch of the development of philosophical hermeneutics and to indicate why we shall seek to use Gadamerian hermeneutics as a model for our investigations. Having explored some of the traditional and current theories of musical aesthetics, we shall return to the theory of distinctively musical hermeneutics in Chapter 5, using the co-ordinates provided in this chapter. We shall attempt to show that the hermeneutic approach incorporates and complements a number of themes that have traditionally been thought to be diverse and irreconcilable.

1.1.1. The Origin and Development of Philosophical Hermeneutics

In the aftermath of the Middle Ages, several philologists, theologians and philosophers, under the influence of the reformation of the church, used the terms “hermeneia” or “hermeneutikos” in developing new models of interpretation against the dogmatic teaching of the Bible by the church. While the term “hermeneutics” may trace its origin to the Greeks, it was F. Schleiermacher who integrated these interpretations, together with his own interpretative studies of the Bible and the Platonic dialogues, creating a distinct discipline of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher notes: ‘A more precise determination of any point in a given text must be decided on the basis of the use of language common to the author and his original public.’¹ Schleiermacher’s development replaced the allegorical and theological interpretation

¹ Schleiermacher ‘General Hermeneutics’ in Mueller-Vollmer (1985: 86)

of the church with psychological understanding of the author. This turn, originally developed from the grammatical interpretation of the early Romantic hermeneutic theorists, criticised not only dogmatic teaching, but also attempts to secure objective semantic interpretations without reference to the distinctive input of the author. As Gadamer notes, by foregrounding psychological interpretation in terms of the author, hermeneutics turned not only from dogmatic interpretation, but also from solely relying on grammatical and objective meaning, to incorporating the ‘individuality of the speaker or author.’²

Richard Palmer’s six distinct definitions of modern hermeneutics in terms of its development are suggestive for our historical investigation here.³ His first two definitions: ‘Hermeneutics as Theory of Biblical Exegesis’ and ‘Hermeneutics as Philological Methodology’ focus on the emergence of hermeneutics in the light of the Reformation and how it developed from a religious to a philological method. Palmer terms Schleiermacher’s development ‘Hermeneutics as the Science of Linguistic Understanding’ where he notes: ‘[f]or the first time hermeneutics defines itself as the study of understanding itself. It might almost be said that hermeneutics proper here emerges historically from its parentage in biblical exegesis and classical philology.’⁴

Wilhelm Dilthey, who was also a biographer of Schleiermacher, thought to take a further step by widening the scope of hermeneutics to become a method of understanding for all *Geisteswissenschaften*. In developing what Palmer calls ‘Hermeneutics as the Methodological Foundation for the *Gesiteswissenschaften*’,

² Gadamer (1996: 186)

³ R.Palmer (1969: 33ff)

⁴ *Ibid.* (40)

Dilthey's focus was to make hermeneutics a foundation for historical inquiry into the human sciences. This Dilthey sought to achieve through two modifications: firstly, by re-introducing the model of Kantian critique to apply to "historical" reasoning, and secondly, by seeking to transform the psychological approach of Schleiermacher into a historical enquiry. These two developments subserve a notion central to Dilthey's philosophy, that of lived experience – *erlebnis*. In arguing for hermeneutics as a foundation for the human sciences (as distinct from the natural sciences), he maintained that one cannot detach oneself from the historical and lived experiences that constitute its subject matter. This shift of focus is not only important for the development of Gadamerian hermeneutics, but also for the entire phenomenological movement given decisive development by Husserl.

In place of the "validation theory" of Schleiermacher, where the interpretation must be validated through the psychological "intention" of the author, Gadamer sought the application of phenomenology to Romantic hermeneutics, whereby the quest for objective validity in the interpretation of the text is displaced and reinterpreted by the relation between the subject and the object, as articulated in Husserlian phenomenology.⁵ This shift, of course, is influenced by Heidegger's ontological turn. Heideggerian ontology, or the metaphysical investigation into the existential question of "being", stems from Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology sought to overcome enlightenment "idealism" by the method of "bracketing" our experience and displacing subjective consciousness into the higher "ego" solipsistically.

⁵ See Gadamer's discussion of Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology in Gadamer (1996: 242ff.). The notion of "intention" will be discussed later.

[W]hen I practise the reducing epoché on myself and *my* world-consciousness, the other human beings, like the world itself, fall before the epoché; that is, they are merely intentional phenomena for me. Thus the radical and perfect reduction leads to the *absolutely single ego* of the pure psychologist, who thus at first absolutely isolates himself and as such no longer has validity for himself as a human being or as really existing in the world but is instead the pure subject of his intentionality, which through the radical reduction is universal and pure, with all its intentional implications.⁶

Contrary to many of his critics, Husserl's philosophical solipsism is not reducible to a mere Berkeleyan idealism. The crucial difference is that phenomenology is not based on the traditional epistemological subject-object dialectic, but rather through the understanding that one can exist only in relation to an other.⁷ Husserl overcomes subjective idealism through his notion of intersubjectivity. Phenomenology is construed as a theory of relations, such that consciousness of ego can only be attained by consciousness of the "other", as Ströker remarks:

My ego is mine only in association with other egos. As a transcendental ego, I would have to have other transcendental egos next to and outside of me – transcendental egos distinct from and yet similar to my ego – in order to be justified in calling this transcendental ego mine.⁸

Husserl notes:

[S]elf-consciousness and consciousness of others are inseparable; it is unthinkable, and not merely [contrary to] fact, that I be man in a world

⁶ Husserl (1970: 256)

⁷ See, for example, Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, developed from this relation.

⁸ Ströker (1993: 126)

without being *a* man. There need be no one in my perceptual field, but fellow men are necessary as actual, as known, and as an open horizon of those I might possibly meet.⁹

More significantly for our discussion, through exploiting the intentionalism and psychologism developed by Brentano, Husserlian phenomenology is grounded not on traditional “objective” knowledge, but that of the concept of inter-subjective experience. Husserl remarks:

[R]eduction to the transcendental ego only *seems* to entail a *permanently* solipsistic science; whereas the consequential elaboration of this science, in accordance with its own sense, leads over to a phenomenology of transcendental intersubjectivity and, by means of this, to a universal transcendental philosophy.¹⁰

Heidegger’s criticism of Husserlian phenomenology focuses on the fact that while it has overcome the traditional dichotomy of subject-object, phenomenology still works within the framework of science and epistemology. By turning the question of subjective consciousness into that of a mode of being, and moreover, through the notion of *Dasein* – “being-in-the-world” – Heidegger transformed traditional epistemology into analysis of our temporal mode of being. In other words, with Heidegger phenomenology, which was for Husserl a “rigorous science” concerning the consciousness of ego, was turned into a phenomenological ontology. Further, as Palmer notes:

⁹ Husserl (1970: 253) with original italics.

¹⁰ Husserl (1960: 30), quoted in Zahavi (2001: 21), with original italics.

His thinking becomes more “hermeneutical” in the traditional sense of being centered on text interpretation. Philosophy in Husserl remains basically scientific, and this is reflected in the significance it has for the sciences today; in Heidegger, philosophy becomes historical, a creative recovery of the past, a form of interpretation.¹¹

There are two important concepts in Husserlian phenomenology which Heidegger and Gadamer developed later in their hermeneutics, namely those of temporality and of the horizon. As we shall see, these notions are interwoven together although, especially in Gadamer, they are used rather differently from in Husserl.

Husserl’s idea of temporality is derived from the Augustinian notion of what has been called “thick” temporality. Through the transcendental reduction of consciousness, Husserl maintains that not only is subjective consciousness intentional, but all objects – which are relational to the subject – also carry the imprint of intentionality.¹² In defining the horizon structure, Husserl notes:

The horizon structure belonging to every intentionality thus prescribes for phenomenological analysis and description methods of a totally new kind, which come into action wherever consciousness and object, wherever intending and sense, real and ideal actuality, [...] and, on the other hand, experience, judgement, evidence, and so forth, present themselves as names for transcendental problems, to be taken in hand as genuine problems concerning “subjective origins”.¹³

¹¹ R.Palmer (1969: 126)

¹² Gadamer later rejects this notion of “intentionality”.

¹³ Husserl (1960: 48)

From the point of view of phenomenological investigations, the notion of horizon is used to indicate the relation between the intending subject and the “intentional” world.

In other words, as Bell comments;

To say that an intentional object appears under the same aspect, but that that appearance contains within it tacit allusions to other possible ways in which it might also appear is, in Husserlian terms, to say that every adumbration is surrounded by a horizon of other, possible adumbrations.¹⁴

In *Logical Investigations* Husserl gives an example of how this horizon structure is connected with the temporality. In exploring the relation between intentionality and the notions of retention and protention, Husserl notes: ‘If I see an incomplete pattern, e.g. in this carpet partially covered over by furniture, the piece I see seems clothed with intentions pointing to further completions’¹⁵, indicating that our consciousness is always within the what is immediately past and what is not yet come. Bell writes:

‘Every adumbration, in other words, contains within it a structure of “retentions” and “protentions” that are a function of memory, imagination, expectation, and habit.’¹⁶

While these concepts are modified in Heidegger and Gadamer, they remain at the heart of Gadamerian hermeneutics and, moreover, will turn out to be key concepts in exploring musical hermeneutics.

This notion of temporality is crucial for our discussion of musical understanding. As we shall see later, since music is primarily a temporal art, our conceptualisation of

¹⁴ D.Bell (1990: 190), we shall see the application of this phenomenology of time in relation to music in Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Husserl (2001: 211)

¹⁶ D.Bell (1990: 190)

music stems out of our experience of music not as sequences of unrelated notes, but as a group and each phrase must be perceived as a single unit. We shall return to the discussion of musical experience several times in conjunction with conceptualisation, Gestalt and other psychological approaches to musical interpretation, which all presuppose this phenomenological understanding of the thick “now”.

Gadamer sought to dissociate himself from two complementary philosophical tendencies which he saw as inimical to proper interpretation. One is that of post-Kantian radical subjectivism; the other that of Cartesian objectivism, whereby one seeks methodically to obtain the one and secure “truth”. The latter concern is reflected in the title of his *magnum opus* itself, *Truth and Method*, which should really be read as “Truth against Method”. Hermeneutics should not be construed as “method” after the Cartesian model, and while this is sometimes seen as allowing an element of relativism into Gadamerian interpretation, the notion of “validity” or “truth” remains an aim towards which interpretation should be directed. Hirsch’s main concern is precisely with this issue, as is clear from the titles of his works, *The Aims of Interpretation* and *Validity in Interpretation*. However, Gadamerian hermeneutics can be seen as seeking to overcome traditional strong relativism, since Gadamer’s notion of truth, though distinct from that normally associated with that scientific truth so much admired in the Enlightenment, is strongly present in his writings.¹⁷

Is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but equally certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics

¹⁷ We shall return to the notion of relativism later in this chapter, and to hermeneutic truth in Chapter 6.

precisely to provide a basis for the fact that artistic experience is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind, certainly different from that sensory knowledge which provides science with the data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge and indeed from all conceptual knowledge, but still knowledge, i.e. the transmission of truth?¹⁸

For Gadamer, truth in interpretation is to be achieved through the phenomenological relationship between subject and text, where understanding is constituted through an interaction between the pre-judgement and historical condition of the subject and the world of the text. The criteria for distinguishing between truth and delusion are to be found in the protocols governing this interaction.

While Gadamer's critics have been concerned to argue that such a phenomenological hermeneutics is incapable of generating correct interpretations, resulting in subjectivism and relativism, Gadamer steadfastly maintains that his philosophy is not a methodological "prescriptive" hermeneutics, but is rather "descriptive", 'seeking to ascertain what actually occurs whenever we seek to understand something'.¹⁹

[T]he purpose of my investigation is not to offer a general theory of interpretation and a differential account of its methods [...] but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never subjective behaviour toward a given 'object', but towards its effective history – the history of its influence; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.²⁰

¹⁸ Gadamer (1986: 87)

¹⁹ Madison 'Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur' in Kearney (1994: 296)

²⁰ Gadamer 'Foreword to the second edition' of *Truth and Method* (1996: xix)

This appeal to “effective history” is crucial to Gadamer’s defence against the charge of his hermeneutics being a form of subjectivism. Madison’s comment is pertinent: ‘interpretation is never – indeed, can never be – the act of an isolated, monadic subject, for the subject’s own self-understanding is inevitably a function of the historical tradition to which he or she belongs.’²¹ Gadamer’s notion of the historical reader is closely connected with his notion of the prejudiced self which, as we shall see, renders the application of this form of hermeneutic interpretation to music both distinctive and plausible.

Gadamer argues that in any process of understanding, whether of a text or a work of art, the perceivers (or the readers) can never detach themselves from their own culture and history. Thus we are always prejudiced before we comprehend anything new and alien to us. This “prejudice” however, is not a negative notion, rejecting or judging what is given (text, art) through our pre-judgement, but rather a necessary tool for understanding what is new to us.

The interpreter dealing with a traditional text seeks to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal. That he understands it as such and only afterwards uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal thing, the text; i.e., to understand what this piece of tradition says, what constitutes the meaning and importance of the text. *In order to understand that, he must not seek to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation, if he wants to understand at all.*²²

²¹ Madison in Kearney (1994: 302-303)

²² Gadamer (1996: 324) with my italics.

Two further notions in Gadamer's theory will find their use in the discussion of musical hermeneutics, those of the "fusion of horizons" which stems from the notion of prejudice and of the "hermeneutic circle". Although Gadamer distances himself from the Husserlian notion of intentionality discussed earlier, he uses the term "fusion of horizons", indicating the process of understanding through the fusion of the perspectives of reader and of the text, perceiver and the works of art, of the self and the "other".²³ It is neither a simply an "objective", nor "subjective" understanding, but the frames of reference of both subject and object are fused to create a more comprehensive form of knowledge. Further, for the Gadamerian horizon the historical dimension is central to our understanding:

[T]he horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*²⁴

Thus, echoing Husserl, the Gadamerian horizon takes account of the dimension of temporality, where historical life – or *erlebnis* – must be construed in terms of the horizons enabled by tradition as Madison clarifies:

What Gadamer has called 'tradition' is nothing other than the way in which our own horizons are constantly shifting through 'fusion' with other horizons. 'In a tradition,' he says, 'this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other.'²⁵

²³ See Gadamer (1986: 76) and (1996: 248 ff)

²⁴ Gadamer (1996: 306) with original italics.

²⁵ Madison in Kearney (1994: 307).

What Gadamer calls “prejudice” seems to echo methodological relativism, whereas the concept of the fusion of horizons fits well with advocacy of the possibility of several distinct and yet compatible interpretations.²⁶ In Husserl, as in the theorists of the Enlightenment, the notion of prejudice has negative overtones which for him distort the deduction of pure psychological consciousness:

So great is the power of prejudice that, although for decades now the transcendental epoche and reduction have been presented in various stages of their development, nothing more has been achieved than sense-distorting applications of the first results of the genuine intentional description to the old psychology.²⁷

Gadamer however takes the notion of prejudice to be a positive and necessary instrument of our understanding.

The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.²⁸

In hermeneutic theory, each “prejudiced” self must find his/her own interpretations depending on cultural and historical background, but these interpretations must also be able to show, as Ricoeur has insisted time and time again, their credentials for claiming interpretative validity.²⁹

²⁶ The problem of cultural relativism and pluralism will be discussed later in the chapter.

²⁷ Husserl (1970: 250)

²⁸ Gadamer (1996: 276)

²⁹ See, for example Ricoeur (1971) and Ricoeur ‘On Interpretation’ in Montefiore (1983)

The Gadamerian account of the hermeneutic circle was developed from Heidegger's approach to the understanding of being.³⁰ While Heidegger sees the circle of interpretation as an essential tool in order to understand the hermeneutics of existence, Gadamer applies this notion to the interpretation of texts. Further, Gadamer takes account of the relationship between the parts and the whole in the circle, where the whole is always understood in terms of the parts, and *vice versa*. In interpreting a text, the parts must be contextualised in terms of the whole, and in order to understand the whole, one must understand each of the parts which make up the whole:

Nineteenth-century hermeneutic theory often discussed the circular structure of understanding, but always within the framework of a formal relation between part and whole – or its subjective reflex, the intuitive anticipation of the whole and its subsequent articulation in the parts.³¹

What Heidegger achieved, according to Gadamer, was the finessing of this model of “intuitive anticipation” and “subsequent articulation” with one in which understanding remains always marked by the interpreter's context and prejudgements, by “the anticipatory movement of foreunderstanding.”³² Drawing on this insight, Gadamer seeks to integrate his recognition of the circular movement of understanding with his notion of “effective history”.

The circle, then, is not formal in nature, it is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the

³⁰ Heidegger (1996: 194)

³¹ Gadamer (1996: 293)

³² *Ibid.* (293)

tradition. But this commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition.³³

Gadamer is not denying that interpretation typically involves structural interplay between parts and whole here, but insisting that this interrelationship is part of a broader interplay between foreunderstanding, text and tradition.

Recognition of what Gadamer calls “the circle of whole and part”, whether in its Romantic or Gadamerian version, becomes, as we shall see, one of the core features of interpreting musical works hermeneutically.

Since *Truth and Method*, we have witnessed the application of versions of such hermeneutics to psychoanalysis (Ricoeur), anthropology (Geertz), and legal systems (Stecker).³⁴ As Wolfgang Iser rightly argues, interpretation is an act of translation not only of the text (language), but of culture itself.³⁵

While we shall develop our full investigation into the hermeneutic interpretation of music in the fifth chapter, here we shall do a little ground clearing, with respect to the interconnected and vexed questions of hermeneutic relativity and the role of intention in interpretation. As we have seen in the Introduction, if music consists of sound with a structure, and is, moreover, a symbolic system, then music may be seen as having certain similar characteristics to those of language. This, of course, not only relates to the hermeneutic approach grounded in textual interpretation, but also to various other accounts, past and present, of musical “meaningfulness”.

³³ *Ibid.* (293)

³⁴ See Ricoeur (1989), Geertz (1973), Stecker (2003).

³⁵ Iser (2000: 5ff)

1.2.1. Interpretation of the Interpretative Process

Turning to the interpretation of music, it seems from our Introduction that theorization of musical understanding is faced with the problem of relating two different sets of coordinates. Considered ontologically, music consists of a set of specific physical vibrations creating notes. This becomes, on a larger scale, a melody and a harmony and eventually an entire movement or piece of music. On the other hand, music is also a social and cultural product, demanding its own forms of, apparently alternative, interpretative processes. While we shall return to this “gap” between the formal and the contextual understanding of music, it is worth noting here that the hermeneutic circle provides one set of co-ordinates which help to bridge this apparent dichotomy. The Part-Whole relationship in music not only has applications in any coherent account of formal structure, but also illuminates the relations of different stylistic constraints within its historical context.³⁶

Interpretation, it is now widely held, has two different aspects, that of understanding and that of imagination. On the one hand, an interpretative process is required whenever we find something that is, at present, beyond our comprehension; this process is what Novitz calls “elucidatory” interpretation.³⁷ This aspect of interpretation seeks justificatory criteria whereby our interpretation can properly be judged as true or false, or some analogue of these. On the other hand, we have so-called “elaborative” interpretation where we fill the gap of what is not written (or seen in the case of painting, or heard in the case of music) through imagination. This

³⁶ The historical account of hermeneutic circle will be discussed in Chapter 5.

³⁷ Novitz ‘Interpretation and Justification’ in Margolis & Rockmore (2000: 7)

aspect of interpretation requires no justification along the lines of that sought by the elucidative. For example, whatever we imagine as the physical characteristics (colour of eyes, hair or size) of Juliet would be just as “right” as those of a Juliet which another person imagines, subject only to overall coherence and plausibility in a given cultural context.

With respect to elucidatory interpretation, theorists divide into two camps: those who hold that there can be only one right interpretation of any given work or text, and those who argue that there may be more than one admissible interpretation

Singularists claim that there is ultimately only one valid interpretation of a given work. P.D. Juhl maintains: ‘[T]here is in principle one and only one correct interpretation of a work...if a work has several correct interpretations, they must be logically compatible...[which] can be combined into one interpretation of the work.’³⁸

What all singularists claim, whether intentionalists or their opponents, is that in order to understand a work of art, we need an objectively valid elucidatory interpretation of the work. While there could be several acceptable interpretations of a particular work, these should be, if logically compatible, reducible into one coherent interpretation.

Novitz, in criticising Margolis’ account, claims that bivalent logic must be applied in the interpretative process. While “elaborative” or imaginative interpretation of a work can sustain numerous incompatible acceptable interpretations, “elucidatory” or critical interpretations of a work, while they may be rooted within diverse ranges of concern – psychological, cultural or linguistic – must pass the test of consistency as a set.³⁹ In

³⁸ Juhl (1980: 199) cited by Margolis ‘One and Only Correct Interpretation’ in Krausz (2002: 26)

³⁹ See Novitz in Margolis and Rockmore (2000: 21).

examining the applicability of two incompatible elucidatory interpretations, Novitz concludes:

[W]hile it may often be the case that a work can support what at first sight appear to be two incompatible interpretations, if it really does support two different and incompatible sets of meanings within the framework of the same (appropriate) set of cultural conventions, this entails that the work is ambiguous – and that a true interpretation will find it so by *incorporating both sets of meaning*.⁴⁰

Pluralism, often labelled as “relativism”, on the other hand, maintains that there may be more than one valid elucidatory interpretation with incompatible meanings that cannot be so incorporated, a position sympathetically explored by Krausz and Margolis.⁴¹

Insistence on the role of socio-cultural considerations in the understanding of musical significance appears to raise issues relating to cultural relativism, in which hermeneutic interpretations have often been thought to be implicated.⁴² Cultural relativism, as the name suggests, appears to be a branch of relativism, much criticised in traditional philosophy for its potential for subjectivism and the possibility of its leading into solipsism. Distinctions are often drawn between strong relativism, weak relativism (to which cultural relativism is normally assimilated) and pluralism. But while we shall seek to respect these distinctions, many theorists, both relativists and anti-relativists, appear to confuse them. Some such distinctions are nevertheless

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (21) with my italics.

⁴¹ See Krausz ‘Intention and Interpretation: Hirsch and Margolis’ in Iseminger (1992) and Margolis (1989,1995a)

⁴² Gadamer has been traditionally criticised as relativist, but, as Bernstein argues, his (Gadamer’s) rejection of objectivism does not necessarily entail that he should be labelled as “relativist”. Further discussion will follow later in the chapter. See R. Bernstein (1983: 109ff).

necessary for our purpose since, as we shall see, it is cultural relativism which is essentially implicated in interpreting a musical composition, and this weak form of relativism does not of itself lead to subjectivism nor, indeed, to irrationalism.

Traditional accounts of relativism can be traced back to Socrates' engagement with Protagoras in Plato's dialogues, the version here identified being a form of strong relativism, the object of critique throughout subsequent intellectual history.⁴³ Strong relativism usually maintains that the truth of any claim, or the applicability of any concept, is relative to a given time and place. Further, since claims to knowledge are only relative to a set of communities (or indeed individuals), and are not applicable universally, we can never rationally aspire to cross-cultural consensus. One well-worn objection to this theory is that if what have been traditionally thought of as universal concepts such as "truth", "good", or "justice" are all relative, this can lead to what Putnam calls irrationalism.⁴⁴ Moreover, a fatal self refutation occurs if the central relativist claim – that "all judgements are relative" – is itself taken to be relative.⁴⁵

"Pluralism" may be contrasted with "singularism" (or monism), maintaining that there may be more than one acceptable apparently incompatible interpretation of an item, and thus in its radical form, as described though not endorsed by Booth, seeking to show that there is more than one "truth". Booth has argued that what essentially distinguishes it from strong relativism, is that such relativists claim that every mode of thought is always relative to something else, and that knowledge of the world, should it be possible, would consist in total coherence between these relative "modes", while

⁴³ See especially Plato's *Theaetetus*.

⁴⁴ Putnam (1983: 234ff)

⁴⁵ See Nozick (2001: 16)

the pluralist has ‘been forced into pluralism by his discovery that when he has taken at least two critics’ reasoning with as much seriousness as they did themselves, more than one mode emerges intact, irrefutable, viable, and *not* reducible or totally translatable into some other, superior mode.’⁴⁶ In brief, according to Booth, strong relativism can still claim truth, or at least “right” interpretation, while radical pluralism seems to lead into scepticism or even solipsism.⁴⁷ This claim seems to be dependent upon a somewhat idiosyncratic account of strong relativism.

An alternative account of relativism is offered by Rorty, who characterises relativism as ‘the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as every other.’⁴⁸ This notion of relativism seems to be close to Booth’s radical pluralism.

Joseph Margolis argues that, in the philosophical tradition, relativism has been off-handedly dismissed without much consideration being given to what it can offer. Moreover, the standard account of relativism has been somewhat diversified, as can be seen in his discussion of Putnam’s criticism of relativism which Margolis sees as a critique of “relationalism”.⁴⁹ Relativism, according to Margolis, is not being a ‘relationalist regarding truth’, nor claiming that the ‘same proposition or statement can be at once both true and false’, but operating with a many valued logic rather than

⁴⁶ Booth (1979: 27)

⁴⁷ Booth identifies three dimensions to the problems of pluralism, namely its failure to understand, to correspond, and to be coherent. Ultimately Booth sees the answer to pluralism in pragmatics. See chapter 5 in Booth (1979: 197ff).

⁴⁸ R.Rorty (1982: 166)

⁴⁹ Margolis (1991a) esp. Ch.3.

with a bivalent model of truth.⁵⁰ Relativism, on Margolis' account, maintains with respect to the interpretative process that:

- a) affirming or asserting interpretive claims implies that such claims or assertions take truth-values or truth-like values;
- b) thesis a) does not commit us in any necessary way to a bivalent logic; [...] many-valued logics may replace bivalence without precluding assertions or truth-claims⁵¹

So understood, according to Margolis, relativism deserves our serious attention.

In relation to our investigation of musical significance, "cultural relativism" may be seen as a weak form of relativism, where one takes a given musical interpretation to be an application of socio-cultural understanding, but without implying either that the musical meaningfulness cannot be obtained unless one is part of that socio-cultural context, nor that the significance of a piece of music shifts from culture to culture.⁵²

Somewhat as the concept of "truth" may be seen as transcendent to its verification conditions, so musical significance transcends our cultural access to it, though it is one's knowledge of its socio-cultural background which determines, in part, whether one can identify its meaningfulness (or set of meanings) or not. In this sense, socio-cultural features may be seen as providing criteria for musical interpretation.

We shall encounter criticisms of relativism again in connection with Gadamer's hermeneutics later in the chapter. However, for our purposes, it is sufficient to note

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* (58)

⁵¹ Margolis *et al.* (1995b: 3)

⁵² If one were to take Richard Rorty's stance, it might be called "ethnocentric pragmatism", rather than "relativism", Rorty (1982) especially Ch.9.

that it is the interpretative process that is characterised by cultural relativism; this does not imply that the concept of musical significance is itself relative.

Works of art are normally culturally embedded in ways the laws of physics, for example, are not. Thus weak relativism is indeed involved in invoking cultural features in order to understand the significance of a work of art, whether of our own or of other cultures. By contrast, taken in its strongest sense, relativism would appear to eliminate any possibility of understanding the art of other cultures, since we can never be in the shoes of their members to view it in their way. Institutional theory, mainly presented by Dickie from Danto's notion of the "Artworld"⁵³ and subsequently developed by Joseph Margolis, insists on the culturally embedded status of art without going that far. Dickie originally formulated his institutional theory as:

A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artefact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).⁵⁴

Margolis supports this view, arguing that a 'work of art can be identified as such only relative to a favourable culture with respect to the traditions of which it actually exists.'⁵⁵

Not only aestheticians, but also art critics echo this view, as can be found in one arm of Paul Valéry's disjunction, as quoted by E.H. Gombrich:

⁵³ Cf. Dickie (1974), Danto (1964).

⁵⁴ Dickie (1974: 34)

⁵⁵ Margolis (1974b: 193)

A work lasts to the extent that it is capable of appearing quite different from what its author made it. It lasts in order to be transformed, and to the extent that it contained the potential for countless transformations and interpretations; or else it must comprise a quality independent of its author, not provided by him but by his period or nation, and which acquires value from the change of period or nation.⁵⁶

Gombrich also points to a remarkably suggestive understanding of the distinction between acceptable cultural relativism and that strong relativism which can lead to solipsism:

Clearly one interpretation is not as good or as bad as another. The archaeologist or historian cannot be expected to forgo his birthright of guarding the evidence. He may not wish to ask for the credentials of any personal association that comes into the mind of the critic, but he can only allow the stream of consciousness to flow between the banks of facts.⁵⁷

Gombrich's further criticism seems to echo the hermeneutic approach:

We cannot and need not try to understand a rock or a tree, but we can seek to understand the creations of another human being, however far removed in place or time. There may be limits to this possibility, but this does not absolve us from the need of a different kind of controlled attention, without which we are left with the solipsistic pleasure of enjoying our own enjoyment. Without the presence of these three

⁵⁶ Gombrich (1991: 57-8) taken and translated from Valéry (1941: 168); see also Frances Berenson: 'Works of art become artworks by virtue of given social/cultural conventions including the conventions which govern the use of language in communication and enable us to make judgements about works of art. Art is thus essentially institutional.' Berenson 'Understanding Art and Understanding Persons' in S.C.Brown (1984: 47)

⁵⁷ Gombrich (1991: 58-59)

elements, that of initial readiness, of involvement, and of detachment, the work of art can never be brought to life.⁵⁸

For our purposes, we shall draw distinctions between pluralism, strong relativism and cultural relativism, in the light of the not wholly consistent accounts sketched above. Relativism in general is understood to be a form of pluralism, taking all judgements or modes of thought to be relative to one's subjective situatedness. Moreover, in the strong form of relativism, such concepts as "beauty", "good" or "truth" are ultimately dependent on the situations of and criteria endorsed by different groups and individuals, and this may in turn lead to methodological solipsism. Pluralism, whether relativist or not, holds the view that one can display more than one plausible and acceptable account of things or judgements, and indeed that several different and apparently incompatible judgements may be equally plausible.

Cultural relativism can be seen as a weak form of relativism, whereby judgement or mode of thought is constrained by one's socio-cultural background. The crucial difference with the strong form of relativism is that cultural relativism does not need to challenge the concept of an objective reality, transcendent of the capacities of human judgement, and typically insists in the spirit of Gombrich's remark above, that all judgements have to 'flow between the banks of facts'.

Amongst several factors in determining such facts, the role of "intention" has been widely debated. Traditionally, the intention is said to be that of the author, from the eighteenth century development of "Romantic" hermeneutics to contemporary theorists such as E.D. Hirsch. Since the role of intention needs further clarification

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (60)

and this plays an important role in musical meaning and in hermeneutics more generally, we shall sketch some of the recent debate on the issue. Pluralists as well as singularists have sometimes been intentionalists and, before constructing our own version of interpretation theory in connection with music, a sketch of some of the various forms of intentionalism will be useful.

1.2.2. Intention and Artwork

The notion of intention has become a central issue not only in aesthetics but also, as we saw earlier, in the philosophy of language. Searle, for example, differentiates meaning into sentence meaning and utterance meaning, where the sentence meaning is generated from its syntactic and semantic elements, while the utterance meaning is recognised through an understanding of the intention of the speaker.⁵⁹ In other words, to use Austin's term,⁶⁰ in performing an illocutionary act there are two layers of meaning, semantic and psychological (or pragmatic). Of course, in most cases the semantic and pragmatic meanings are the same. However, as Searle and others have pointed out, it is possible for a sentence to mean something and one's utterance of it be properly interpreted as having a different meaning. For Searle, identifying the meaning of an utterance requires the recognition of the speaker's intention by the hearer in terms of the conventions governing the 'speech act' in question.⁶¹

In discussing the meaning or significance of particular artworks also, whether verbal or non-verbal, the role of intention, originally advocated as crucial among theorists

⁵⁹ Searle took this model from Grice. Cf. Grice (1989).

⁶⁰ Austin (1962)

⁶¹ See Searle's identification of different "fallacies" in Searle (1969), and 'What is a Speech Act?' in Searle (1971).

who stressed singularism, has become central to the debate.⁶² In creating a work of art, say a literary work, it is normally self-evident that the author had some intention in order to create that work. Although it is problematic to include such intentions as “composing for the sake of money”, or “the publisher requires me to write four novels a year”, within the set of intentions relevant to the aesthetic domain, nevertheless they may well have been important in the creation of the work. Here, however, we are examining the intentionality of artists in terms of the aesthetic concepts integral to their work.

The term “intentional fallacy”, introduced by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946, soon became a centre of debate among interpretation theorists:

The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge.⁶³

‘If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do.’⁶⁴ Thus for Wimsatt and Beardsley, the semantic account of literary interpretation takes priority. While the intention of the author and any “biographical” explanations may not be entirely absent from nor irrelevant to poetic works, such matters are normally only relevant if the literary work itself points to them.

⁶² As noted in the Introduction, in the case of music “significance” is the more appropriate term, a matter to which we shall return.

⁶³ Wimsatt (1954: 5)

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* (4)

E.D. Hirsch, on the other hand, defends intentionalism by maintaining that there is only one single right interpretation, which is determined by the intention of the author. Hirsch notes: ‘Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (showed) by means of those linguistic signs.’⁶⁵ Elsewhere he claims: ‘[I]f the meaning of a text is not the author’s, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or indeterminate meaning.’⁶⁶ Thus, according to Hirsch, since there are no factors that can determine the fixed meaning of the text other than what the author intended, if there are any disputes about the interpretation, it is normally appropriate to seek to go behind the text to the mind of the author.

Against this intentionalism, Beardsley argues that plausibility of interpretation is based on the logico-semantic connection of the words which constitute the text.

The fundamental error, as I see it, in Hirsch’s account of verbal meaning is summed up in his statement, quoted above: “A determinate verbal meaning requires a determining will.” My position is, rather, that texts acquire determinate meaning through the interactions of their words without the intervention of an authorial will. When possible meanings are transformed into an actual meaning, this transformation is generated by the possibilities (the Leibnizian *compossibilities*) themselves.⁶⁷

Further,

I think there is no need to consult the historian of culture when the logician can give us the explanation so much more quickly and simply.

⁶⁵ Hirsch (1967: 31)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (5)

⁶⁷ Beardsley (1970: 30)

For unfortunately the belief that a text means what its author meant is not sensible.⁶⁸

Beardsley indeed not only advocates the primacy of the logico-semantic meaning of the text over the intention of the author in searching for the correct interpretation, but also criticises the whole idea of interpretation based on the culturally situated text. For Beardsley, literary interpretation is to be constructed from the text, construed aesthetically, and not from the authorial biographical, or even culturally situated, facts.

More recently, several versions of intentionalism have been developed seeking to evade the force of the objection that they are falling into some “intentional fallacy”. Noel Carroll, for example, argues that the intention of the author must be taken into account in interpreting a text rather than being ignored. However, unlike Hirsch, Carroll maintains that the text must demonstrate or at least reflect the intention of the author, and where there is a conflict between biographical information about the author and the semantic meaning produced by the text, the interpretation must not be supported solely by response to the author’s intention. Carroll notes: ‘Modest actual intentionalism only claims that the artist's actual intentions are relevant to interpretation.’⁶⁹ Further, Carroll maintains that this modest intentionalism is more plausible than that of hypothetical intentionalists, such as Jerrold Levinson, who claim that the intention of the author can be re-created through the text. In both cases, this reverse process intentionalism argues that what a text indicates is to be used to interpret the author and not the other way around.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (17)

⁶⁹ Carroll ‘Interpretation and Intention: The Debate Between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism’ in Margolis and Rockmore (2000: 76)

What hypothetical intentionalism, according to Levinson, concedes is that there could be more than one way of interpreting a work. While this can be seen as a dangerous admission, since it is the reader who “re-creates” the postulated author, Levinson defends the position by distinguishing between the heuristic and the final:

Hypothetical intentionalism accords the semantic intentions of the actual author a crucial role; only it is *heuristic*, rather than a *final*, one.

Authorial intention is what truth-seeking interpretive activity necessarily *aims at*, the idea being that what one would most reasonably take to be that intention, on the basis of the text and a full grasp of its author-specific public context, yields a true interpretation of the literary work, understood as an artistic utterance, which is embodied in the text.⁷⁰

Moreover, this hypothetical intentionalism relies not merely on the logico-semantics of the Beardsleyan thesis, nor on Hirschian intentionalism, but maintains that the ‘core meaning of a literary work is utterance meaning – that is, what a text says in an author-specific context of presentation to an appropriate, or suitably backgrounded, reader.’⁷¹ In this sense, hypothetical intention cuts through to the contextual base of the text, and the understanding of the reader should involve a pre-understanding of this context. Levinson concludes:

We are [...] entitled and empowered to rationally reconstruct an author as meaning, in a work, something different from what he or she did, in private and in truth, actually mean, so long as we have *put ourselves in the best position for receiving the utterance of this particular historically and culturally embedded author*.⁷²

⁷⁰ Levinson ‘Hypothetical Intentionalism: Statement, Objections and Replies’ in Krausz (2002: 316)

⁷¹ Levinson (1996a: 186)

⁷² *Ibid.* (213) with my italics.

In many ways, this claim seems to echo hermeneutic theory whereby the text is contextualised in terms of the culturally embedded author. This version of hypothetical interpretation, while singularist in terms of interpretation, admits a multiplicity of different readings:

The best, most correct and comprehensive, interpretation of a work of art subject to multiple individually justifiable or revealing readings must be an interpretation that enfolds all such readings.⁷³

Levinson's hypothetical intentionalism has striking similarities with Nehamas' invocation of the "postulated author". For Nehamas, the different readings must be logically compatible and thus capable of being ultimately combined into one interpretation. While the meaning of the text may not have been fully grasped by the author him/herself, the works are still those of the author and thus 'to interpret a text is to consider it as its author's production' and 'to place it in a context.'⁷⁴ In agreement with Levinson, Nehamas sees the importance of the semantics of the text itself, while the intention must be realised only through the text itself.

To interpret a text is to place it in a context, and this is to construe it as someone's production, directed at certain purposes. A purpose is neither the end toward which motives aim, nor a text's "perlocutionary" effects, nor again a message lying behind the surface. Meaning is a symbolic relation, and what an object symbolizes depends partly on which of many systems it can be construed as an element of. *At least the choice of symbol system is an intentional act, and to appeal to intention is to appeal to a particular explanation of why a text, or one of its features, is as it is.*⁷⁵

⁷³ *Ibid.* (311)

⁷⁴ Nehamas (1981: 145 and 144)

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (144) with my italics.

It appears that while hypothetical intentionalists acknowledge the relevance of intention, and moreover that of the author, in focusing primarily on the context and the language of the text itself they bring their interpretative process close to that of the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, as distinct from Romantic hermeneutics. Although this is not always realised, the various intentionalisms sketched above seem to be compatible with each other. Juhl's remark seems to echo that of Nehamas, and Novitz's singularism can be seen also in the words of Levinson. While their approaches to the interpretative process may be distinct, they all admit the possibility of several different (though not incompatible) interpretations so long as these different readings can be incorporated into one coherent understanding of the text, as Nehamas notes:

The monism I have presented is not threatened by the existence of many partial readings of a text since it can exploit discoveries made through such readings in pursuing a more complete understanding of the text. Methodological pluralism is compatible with a monism of content.⁷⁶

Gadamer in some ways echoes the Wimsatt-Beardsley theory. In his 'On the contribution of poetry to the search for truth', he notes: 'We are concerned with the question to which what has been successfully achieved in the poem is the answer, rather than anything standing "behind it."' ⁷⁷ However, he also warns against divorcing the literary work from the "author's" intention. While the notions of hermeneutic truth, validity and meaning will be discussed in our concluding chapter, here it is important to note that hermeneutic interpretation provides a role for intention

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (147)

⁷⁷ Gadamer (1986: 113)

only “through” the literary work rather than searching for the authorial intention as a separate interpretative item.

One of the main historical influences on such reservation towards authorial influence is that modern methods of hermeneutics originally developed in opposition to the dogmatic interpretation of the Bible by the Church. Early hermeneutic philologists such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey would have accepted the claim: ‘Hermeneutics had to rid itself one day of all its dogmatic limitations and become free to be itself, so that it could rise to the significance of a universal historical organon.’⁷⁸ Although this move in the interpretation of the scriptures redirected attention towards the individual authors and their historical background, nevertheless Schleiermacher and his successors aimed to develop a universal theory of interpretation in terms of which one could claim ‘to understand a writer better than he understood himself.’⁷⁹ This move turned the interpretation of a written text away from concern with an authoritative voice until it finally ‘collapses the distinction between interpreter and author.’⁸⁰

Issues arising from the “intention” debate by literary and hermeneutic theorists sketched above have been applied not only to poetry, but to all kinds of art, and music is no exception. In most cases, a particular piece of music is composed by a certain composer with a specific intention. In this sense, there is a certain authorial intention behind almost every musical work. However, it is difficult to maintain that this intention of itself constitutes the significance of the particular music or passage.

⁷⁸ Gadamer (1996: 176)

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* (192) – see also the parallel in the example of Goldsmith and Johnson in Cioffi (1964).

⁸⁰ Gadamer (1996: 193). In the later twentieth century this led to Barthes’s claim of “the death of the author” (Barthes, 1977), and the “unlimited semiosis” of Derrida.

Within the abundance of musical works over the entire span of human history, only a very small proportion includes any compositional notes or bears any relevant biographical information about the composer. Just as when we comprehend a literary work without any authorial comments, we do indeed display a learned capability of conceptualising a particular piece of music without reference to what the composer may have said about it.

1.3.1. Chapter Conclusion

This account of the development of philosophical hermeneutics, with such associated concepts as relativism and intention, illuminates several coordinates with which hermeneutics operates. These coordinates will be further developed when we return to our investigation of musical hermeneutics. Although this chapter has primarily focused on the issues of hermeneutics and the interpretation of literary works in general, omitting direct engagement with musical interpretation, the account sketched above, together with the outcome of the following chapters, will become the bases for our discussion of musical hermeneutics. As our examination of it in Chapter 5 will show, insights arising from the development of phenomenology have important implications for the way in which we understand music. Further, the above discussion of the process of interpretation will enable us to assimilate different approaches taken to the interpretation of music. The intervening chapters will interrogate relevant recent, and not so recent, discussion of music aesthetics. Through the discussion of theories of syntax, semantics, and semiotics in the following chapter and of formalism, expression, and cognition in the subsequent chapters, we shall see how the

limitations of these theories play a significant role in pointing to the priority of hermeneutics in musical interpretation.

The next three chapters focus attentions on 1) music as language – assessing the syntactic and symbolic nature of music, and 2) music and language – the relation between them, including the expressiveness of music, its formal properties, and how we verbalise the musical experience. In the light of these discussions, and in particular of the limitations of the associated theories, we shall return to examining the potentialities of musical hermeneutics.

CHAPTER 2: Music and Language – Semantics or Semiotics?

The development of linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure and others in the early twentieth century has led the discipline into two major branches. The first approach, the site of most of the philosophical investigations, is the relation of language to mental activity and to the items referred to. As briefly discussed in the introductory chapter, following from the questions of how we know language, and how we acquire the knowledge to use it, it focuses on language as signs and the study of decoding these signs. On the other hand, the method which Saussure set out has flourished in the study of linguistics as a discipline on its own in which, more recently, Noam Chomsky and other linguists have analysed the structure of language systematically. This chapter focuses, first, on the latter set of studies, examining the semantic correlation between music and language, and then moves into more general discussion of music as signs in the semiotic sense.

Although the discussion of the semantic aspects of music has not been a major theme in the field of musical aesthetics, there are at least a few theorists and composers who have set out on the painstaking task of correlating the syntactic structure of language with musical structure, and in linguistics the semantic level is typically seen as interdependent with the syntactic. Many current debates on musical meaning discuss, at least in part, apparently semantic aspects of music; nonetheless, as we shall see, several obstacles and problems appear to point to the conclusion of the implausibility of musical semantics.

One main obstacle to the study of semantics in music is that the nature of musical understanding is such that music often fails to convey a clear signification

corresponding to language. As we shall see, the notion of ineffability suggests limits to our capacity in verbalising what music expresses. Furthermore, in the light of recent developments in the study of semiotics, musical structure is often scrutinised in terms of the theory of musical signs. One must not, however, confuse semiotics and semantics, which are quite distinct. By juxtaposing the two, it will be demonstrated that musical semiotics points to a different type of theorisation from that of musical semantics.

2.1.1 Syntax and Semantics

The debates between the different analyses of language are not the focus of concern here. It will be sufficient to use the notions of syntax and transformational grammar developed by Chomsky and his followers without considering the wider linguistic debates within which his approach is situated.

In the study of linguistics, a natural language is, firstly, divided into two usages, namely speaking and writing. Speaking or, more commonly, “utterance” is concerned with phonology, the study of sound. While writing does not require phonology, since one can study a foreign language without ever pronouncing it, utterance must be both phonetically and syntactically correct. The arguments for and against phonocentricism are unimportant for our concern here, and similarly the study of phonetics is omitted from the discussion for the following reasons. Firstly, unlike natural language,¹ musical language, or more precisely notation, is primarily a set of phonetic

¹ Of course, we can find some exceptions. Japanese characters, for example, have developed as phonetic symbols out of Chinese characters.

signs, and thus in need of no further philosophical investigations on how the written signs should be decoded into a sound. Secondly, while phonetic study is mainly concerned with the different sound structures used in different natural languages, music, from this point of view, is a universal language.² The Western notational system, developed from the four-stave neumatic notation of the early Christian church, is certainly not a universal language, and in other cultures there are sounds which cannot be expressed through the Western notational system.³ However, from the viewpoint of physics, the current notational system, which has developed from the Western notational system, and has since been adopted by computer musicians, makes it, in general, possible to notate a particular sound or sound pattern into a written product accurately. There are, of course, problematic issues other than that of “accuracy” surrounding the notation system, most notably the problem of “reproducing” music from notation which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Syntax, according to Chomsky, is defined as a ‘study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages.’⁴ At a linguistic level, one can find a finite set of phonemics (letters), morphology and phrase structures that are all descriptive devices to enable the construction of grammars. While our main concern is to examine Chomskyan Transformational Grammar in order to reassess how musical structure can be treated as possessing syntactic features and hence be construed semantically, a general overview of two main issues ought to be focused here, namely the distinctions between morphology and constituent structure, and deep and surface structures.

² Not, of course, a universal language in the sense considered in the Introduction.

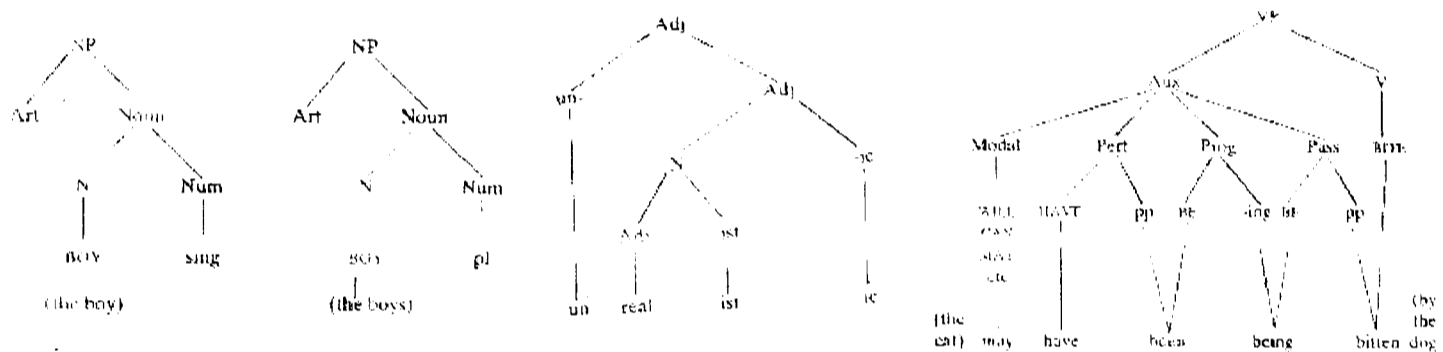
³ *Raga* music of North India for example, divides the Octave into more than twelve notes.

⁴ Chomsky (1957: 11)

2.1.2 Comparison of Syntactic Structures – Linguistic and Musical

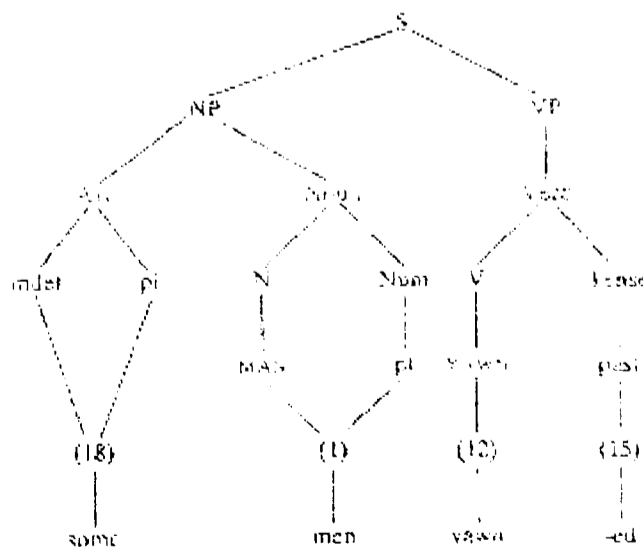
A morph is said to be the smallest unit described in syntactic studies. A word such as “real” “bite” and “boy” are all morphs since these cannot be broken into any smaller units unlike the word “extra-ordinary” or “base-ball.” These morphs then, through morpheme rules, construct a proper word in a sentence.

The figures below illustrate the morphological realization rules (and word formation rule in the case of adjectives) applied to the words “real” (adjective) “bite” (verb) and “boy” (noun)⁵ [ex.1].



These morphology realization rules are bound by constituent structure rules which are determined by the structure of the sentence itself. The figure below indicates the hierarchical structure in which these constituent structure rules apply to a sentence.

- S(entence) → N(oun)P(hrase) V(erb)
- P(hrase)
- VP → Verb
- NP → Art(icle) Noun
- Num → {sing,pl}
- Art → {def, indef}
- Verb → V Tense
- Tense → {past, non-past}



In a tree diagram these rules are shown as above [ex.2]:

⁵ These examples are taken and modified from Brown and Miller (1991)

Constituent structure is thus the structure of an entire sentence, which determines the morpheme of each word within the sentence. Each rule within the constituent structure is made up of morphological rules and concord rules which are rules applied to concord the two morphs such as the singular article (indefinite) and singular noun, singular subject noun with singular verb.

In universalising the linguistic grammar, Chomsky proposed a generative grammar that consists of this phrase structure and employs a distinction between deep and surface structure. Not only does the sentence in this process pass through a set of grammatical rules, but also a transformation of initial phrase-markers to a set of final phrase-markers. The phrase-markers, or simply set of transformation sentences, belong to syntactic structures generated by the grammar. Put simply, borrowing the words of Roger Fowler, a phrase structure rule is one of 'a set of rules which explains the syntactic relations and semantic relations and content common to all the sentences', while the transformational rules can be defined as 'a set of rules which explains the diversity of superficial word-orders distinguishing the sentences'.⁶ In other words, transformational rules apply to underlying phrase-markers to give derived or superficial phrase-markers; they do not derive sentences from sentences, but phrase-markers from phrase-markers.⁷ A phrase-marker, through transformational rules, leads to the surface structure.

In his Norton lectures delivered in 1973, Leonard Bernstein considers how musical structure may be linked with linguistic structure.⁸ The first part of his theory is

⁶ Fowler (1971: 14)

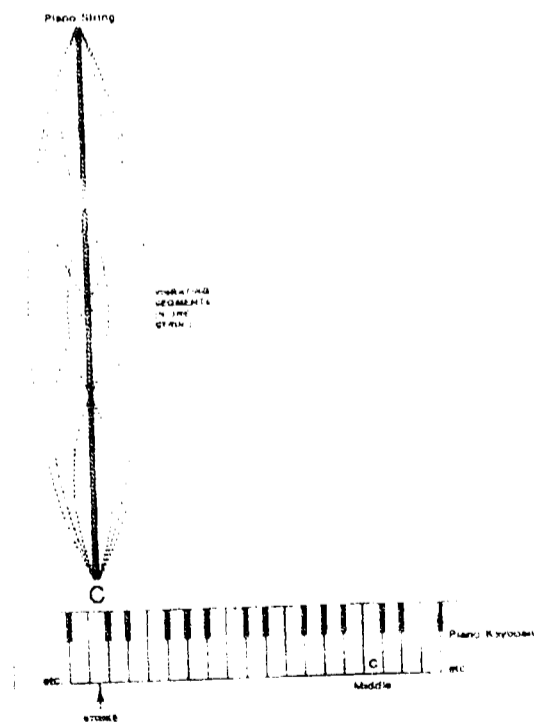
⁷ *Ibid.* (15)

⁸ L. Bernstein (1976) The title *The Unanswered Question* is, of course, echoing Charles Ives' composition *Unanswered Question* (1908).

divided into three sections, in which he examines the possibility of correlating phonology with the nature of musical sound, syntax with harmony, and semantics with meaning in music respectively. Although, as noted earlier, while the discussions of phonology are of minor interest here, it is nevertheless necessary to introduce Bernstein's argument concerning the universality of sound structures, in order to examine his theory of musical syntax and semantics. As we pointed out in the introduction, there are many "musics" that have been developed historically, and have not been based on the Western Tonal System; thus there is a limit to communicating through music inter-culturally. Bernstein argues for the universality of the origin of music, through examining forms of music world wide, such as Hindu music, American Jazz, and Japanese *Gagaku* which are, in fact, all based on the pentatonic scale. In defending such universality against the objection that we do not have universal musical communication, Bernstein argues: [ex.3]

Just as grammars of human languages (even mutually unintelligible ones) may have sprung from the same monogenetic sources, so in the same way highly varied musical tongues (which are also strangers to one another) can be said to have developed out of their common origins.⁹

By and large, Bernstein's account of overtone structure producing the harmonic series which became the pentatonic scales of various musical cultures, and its relation to phonetic universals seems feasible in the light of the empirical claims drawn on in



⁹ *Ibid.* (33)

support, such as a string producing an overtone according to its length, which are evidently true [ex.3].¹⁰

Allan Keiler, in his criticism of Bernstein, argues that this theory of overtone structure constituting the universal musical phonetics is constructed insecurely for the following reasons: ‘[...] as we have all finally come to understand, the intervallic content of even our simple diatonic scale requires, on one hand, gross adjustment and, on the other, harmonic partials that exist only in the farthest limits of the overtone series.’¹¹

Also, with respect to Bernstein’s consideration of Non-Western music, Keiler notes:

Take as an example the so-called pentatonic or slendro scale of Indonesian music which Bernstein discusses. There is absolutely no relationship of intervallic content between this scale and the overtone series. The sequence of intervals that makes up this scale, in fact, varies from less than our half step to greater than our whole step.¹²

While taking these criticisms into account, Bernstein’s general, and no doubt oversimplified, theory of musical phonology is, nevertheless, plausible and helpful.

However, there is a danger in universalising musical structure analogous to that of seeking analytic truth in the laws of physics. Further, while the procedures of producing overtone harmony may be, by the law of nature, universal, the claim that one might deploy these sounds into a “cultural pattern of sounds” universally seems implausible.

¹⁰ The example is taken from *ibid.* (18)

¹¹ Keiler (1978a: 207), the adjustment Keiler is noting here, of course, is the emergence of equal temperament.

¹² *Ibid.* (208)

In arguing for the coherence of musical syntax, Bernstein sets out with certain hypotheses correlating linguistic syntactic components with the musical units. The attempt to demonstrate that a musical note corresponds to a phoneme, as shown [ex.4], fails to be developed into any satisfactory theory. Nevertheless, the structural analysis in this approach shows that a musical piece can be broken down into its units in a way that at least suggests a structural

parallel between music and language.¹³

[ex.4]

As his next step to examine the relationship,

	<u>MUSIC</u>	<u>LANGUAGE</u>
1)	note	= phoneme
2)	motive	= morpheme
3)	phrase	= word
4)	section	= clause
5)	movement	= sentence
6)	piece	= piece

Bernstein tries to analyse the development of surface structures branched out from the same deep structure “Jack – love – Jill” through transformational rules. Bernstein then boldly equates these transformations with a triad and its harmonic resolution. This move is highly controversial and certainly implausible, as Bernstein admits himself, since the musical note cannot be equated with a particular word; on the contrary, a musical note on its own has no reference at all. Through a set of harmonic progressions, or as a part of melodic line, a note changes its musical value and, on each occasion, it constitutes totally different significance. His second analogy of musical structure is its melodic structure, where melodic analysis of Mozart’s *G minor Symphony* is used to indicate how Western Tonal Music prefers the symmetrical structure. Furthermore, Bernstein argues, this symmetry is broken down, or overruled by the rhythmic structure, in which Mozart deliberately stresses the upbeat of the second bar rather than the first, which makes a piece of music poetic and aesthetic rather than a quasi prose structure.

¹³ L. Bernstein (1976: 58). This account is also susceptible in terms of hermeneutics’ interest in “part-whole” relationship.

So the performer must understand what Mozart has done – that he takes our universal instinct of symmetry and plays with it, violates it, *ambiguifies* it, by using the equally universal process of deletion to operate counter to those instinctive symmetrical forces that operate in us. And therein lies the creativity; that's what makes it art.¹⁴

Bernstein concludes that these are not true analogies since the nature of language belongs to the communicating world of prose while musical language belongs to the world of aesthetics. Only when language is used in its aesthetic function, such as poetry, through 'taking a leap – a metaphorical leap into the super surface structure of art,' can musical structure be equated with linguistic structure.¹⁵

While these analogies failed to achieve any substantial theory of universalising musical syntax, Bernstein's arguments nevertheless demonstrated the underlying string of musical language in terms of its harmonic, melodic and rhythmic combinations.

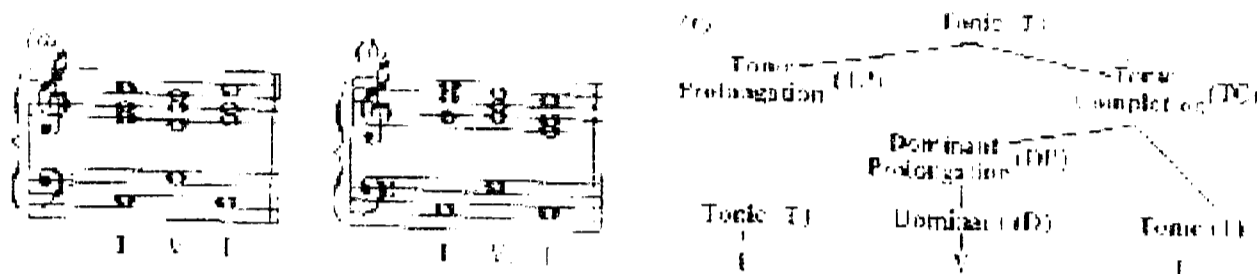
Keiler, on the other hand, offers an alternative theory of musical syntax that is based on its own harmonic system. While Bernstein correlated each note to a word to constitute a sentence, or rhythmic, harmonic and melodic properties to demonstrate the syntactic components of musical structure, Keiler more securely grounds his work on the patterns of harmonic progression. Instead of seeking to demonstrate an awkward analogy of syntax and music, Keiler finds an entire quasi-linguistic system based on harmonic relationships. 'Allan R Keiler finds in the harmonic structure of tonal music the processes of embedding and left-branching which Chomsky finds in his analyses on English, and is able to express these in the form of tree diagrams.'¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (105)

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (79)

¹⁶ Monelle (1992: 131)

As is shown in the diagram below [ex.5], what Keiler's theory achieved, more securely than that of Bernstein, is to represent the underlying string of music (Western Tonal Music in this case) as being its harmonic structure. 'This example suggests that the principle of syntactic embedding is a device of harmonic expansion just as it is a process of sentence expansion. The TP [Tonic Prolongation] of this example is, in other words, a complete syntactic structure.'¹⁷ [ex.5]



This seems more plausible, at least in the case of Western Tonal Music. Since the harmonic (vertical) compositions were gradually established from contrapuntal music by the sixteenth century, and with the theorising of harmonic structure by Rameau in his *Treatise on Harmony* in 1722, there has been a set of rules of harmonic progression, which have in large part been obeyed for almost three hundred years until the emergence of atonal music.¹⁸ Nevertheless, while Keiler's theory does provide considerable detail on musical structure, it does not demonstrate any underlying structure of musical syntax universally.

As has been often noted, much current work on Western Tonal Theory is based on that of Heinrich Schenker. While Schenkerian theory is not developed in relation to linguistics in any way (his later and main work *Der Freie Satz* was published in 1935 which is much earlier than the work of generative grammarians), it breaks down the musical work into two major quasi-syntactic components, namely the bass

¹⁷ Keiler (1978a: 215)

¹⁸ For a historical account of Western Tonal Music, see Chapter 5.

arpeggiation (*Bassbrechung*) and the melodic line (*Urlinie*). These, melody and harmony can be seen as constituting an equivalent to the deep structure of a sentence, which Schenker calls the fundamental structure (*Ursatz*) of the music.¹⁹

John Sloboda, in *The Musical Mind*, develops a similar approach to that of Bernstein. However, his theory is more thorough and much closer to Schenkerian as well as Chomskyan theories. Comparing these theories, Sloboda derives three contrasts between language and music. Firstly, *Ursatz* in Schenkerian analysis is a skeleton of the musical piece. Similarly, the deep structure of a sentence is the frame of the sentence meaning. But while both have these identical properties, the former on its own right can be treated as well-formed music, but not the latter well-formed language. Secondly, while musical rules are applied to the whole movement or sometimes whole piece of music, containing more than several hundreds of notes and themes, linguistic rules can only generate a single sentence each time. Finally, Sloboda distinguishes the meaning of music and of language, where much of the meaning in music is generated not by its *Ursatz*, but by its surface structure (such as its decorations and articulations), whereas meaning in language is generated fundamentally by its deep structure.²⁰ Sloboda's account is important for our purpose, not only because it relates to the issue of musical semantics, especially the third contrast Sloboda makes, nor just because of its instructive contrast with Bernstein's account, but because it also relates to the discussion of the psychological mode of the listener examined in chapter three.

¹⁹ Schenker's first comprehensive theory of harmony, *Harmonielehre* was published in 1906. For further discussion of Schenker's analysis of Western harmony, see Schenker (1979)

²⁰ Sloboda (1985: 15-6)

Sloboda takes up the theory advocated by Sundberg and Lindblom who analysed the grammar of eight-bar melody, and demonstrates the similarities in structure between linguistic and musical syntax in two ways.

It resembles the generative phonology of Chomsky and Halle (1968) in two respects. Firstly, the basic grammatical structure is an hierarchical tree. Secondly, integral to the tree is a ‘prominence contour.’ In speech, such a contour is used to assign stress, timing, and intonation to a sentence. In this music grammar, the contour is used to generate appropriate chords and durations.²¹

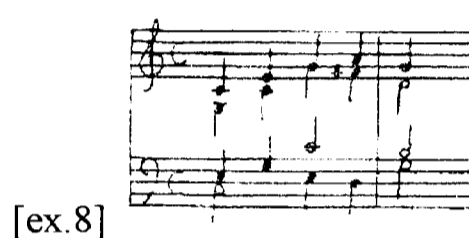
The main theme in terms of musical syntax is divided into three parts namely, harmony, rhythm, and melody. These three components are the core structure of any musical work, as is also noted by Bernstein, and thus are fundamental factors in constituting musical meaning. What is fundamentally different in the work of Sloboda is the extensive use of our psychological understanding of music. As we shall see in connection with our discussion of Gestalt, phenomenological experience and conceptualisation, the relationship between musical “structural” rules and linguistic syntax are in certain respects similar:

Different rules, applied in different orders, can produce exactly the same set of sentences or musical sequences. The mere discovery of a single workable grammar is, therefore, no guarantee that *this* grammar is the one that best describes psychological processes of generation. Another argument derives from the observation that humans can (and deliberately do) violate the rules which seem to account for some of their behaviour.²²

²¹ *Ibid.* (38)

²² *Ibid.* (32)

In other words, many composers often deliberately disobey these rules to generate a tension in the work of art, and also to create an ambiguity. Nevertheless, these rules for modulatory process, cadence formation, and resolving the leading note are all necessary tools in composing within the framework of Western Tonal Music. Furthermore, Sloboda examines the psychological anticipation of the listeners on perceiving a certain musical passage.



Most listeners will hear Example [ex6] as remaining in C major, rather than modulating to G. They choose the interpretation of A which preserves the initial key. If, however, we write out two alternative chordal accompaniments (Example [ex.7] and [ex.8]), we can disambiguate the phrase. The appearance of an F sharp in [ex.8] ‘forces’ the listener to shift the key frame to G major. In general, the fuller the accompaniment to a melody, the less possibility for a tonal ambiguity there is.²³

The Rhythmic structure is also governed by certain conventions though, unlike harmonic rules, it is less strict and obvious. The time signature on the piece indicates its rhythmic arrangement, indicating which beat is stressed. Note that here too, Sloboda’s concern is the perception of the listener.

If a listener is presented with a set of equally spaced, equally loud notes of equal pitch, there is no way in which any rhythm may be said to be

²³ *Ibid.* (44)

present (although the listener may *impose* some rhythmic grouping of his own (Woodrow 1951)). To communicate an intended rhythmic interpretation, the primary stresses must be marked in some way. One method of doing this involves variations in intensity.²⁴

This is echoing the demonstration given by Bernstein in his rhythmic analysis of Mozart's *G-minor Symphony*.

Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff in their *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (henceforth *GTTM*) give the most detailed study of generative structure of music in the dimension of its rhythmic and metric structure. The former being a musicologist and the latter a linguist, they analysed several pieces of Western Tonal Music and formulated rules governing rhythmic structure. Instead of analysing music in terms of its harmonic structure, as other theorists have attempted, they judged the grouping of the musical piece into phrases and sub-phrases to be the fundamental syntactic analysis and divided the syntactic structure of music into four sets of categories, each of which has several formation rules and preference rules. The structure of the analysis is somewhat Schenkerian, in that through disseminating a musical piece into a microcosmic structure they achieved the addition of a new and vital element into the *Ursatz* of music, namely its rhythm and the metric dimension. While the entire argument cannot be reproduced here, both Lerdahl and Jackendoff and Raymond Monelle give comprehensive summaries and analyses of *GTTM*.²⁵ There are four hierarchical structures beneath the musical surface structure (musical notation) of

²⁴ *Ibid.* (47)

²⁵ See Jackendoff (1987: 213-245), Monelle (1992).

which the listener may be made aware through analysing the notation of the music. These four processes of musical well-formedness are grouping, metrical structuring, time-span reduction and prolongation reduction. As Monelle puts it, the first two methods involve physical perception through the score, such as bar-lines and melodic slurs. Grouping structures are noted with slurs beneath the musical surface, indicating the segmentation of the music into phrases and motifs. Metrical structure is also a physical phenomenon in which the bar-line and melodic lines indicate the place of strong and weak beats (echoing the discussion of Bernstein's *G-minor symphony* analysis). While these two constitute the basic rhythmic structure of the music, the further two reduction methods make up the sequence of notes and chords into melody and harmonic progression.

Time-span reduction of the opening of Mozart, K. 331

[ex.9]

Time-span reduction is an analysis of a musical passage into its harmonic skeleton as in the example above [ex.9]; the whole section is divided into subsections, phrases and sub-phrases, distinguishing the core harmonic progression of the piece from mere decorative (*appoggiatura*, passing notes etc.) notes. Jackendoff further points out that such pieces as “theme and variations” have these same skeletal harmonic progressions and each variation differs in its *tempo*, and decorative notes.²⁶

²⁶ The example is taken from Jackendoff (1987: 226)

Prolongation reduction on the other hand, deals with the tension and relaxation of the piece. Though carefully analysing the harmonic progression, and by taking the most stable chord of the harmony to be the root of its tonic, we can see that prolongation reduction also hierarchically branches out in a systematic way.

What is common to all these syntactic theories (of Bernstein, Keiler, Sloboda and Jackendoff) is the absence of generative structure. While *GTTM* sets out faithfully to represent the Chomskyan notion of the “generative,” these rules of well-formedness in music, in which the descriptions of Tonal Music are explained in an analytic way, do not enable the constitution of any innovative music out of the rules. The crucial difference between Chomskyan generative syntax and these musical syntactic theories is, thus, that while generative syntax focuses on the analysis of a natural language, and systematises the way that one can reproduce not only the same utterance, but subsequently an infinite number of different sentences, musical syntax fails to generate any further music on its own.

From the various approaches to musical syntax discussed above, it seems that there is a definite “syntactic” structure in music, at least in Western Tonal Compositions.²⁷ At least in one musical culture, and within a specific historical time-span, there is a set of musical rules which can be tracked from the birth of tonal compositions (that blurred transition when contrapuntal compositions are gradually replaced with harmonic music) till the total breakdown of tonality (which some may argue to be around the era of late Mahler’s compositions). And as different sets of linguistic rules apply in

²⁷ As we shall see in Chapter 5, similar quasi-syntactic rules may be found in the music of other cultures.

different languages of different periods, so it seems plausible to suppose, analogous rules may be discerned in the music of other cultures and times. Many ethnomusicologists analyse non-western music, particularly where there is a rich musical structural system such as Indonesian *Gamelan*, Indian *Ragas*, and Japanese *Gagaku*, in a similar manner. All these different forms of music have, as both Keiler and Jackendoff have demonstrated, internal coherent structures of their own. However, Bernstein's analogy has severe limitations; correlating linguistic syntax and musical structure does not produce a complete match, perhaps at least in part for the reason, noted by Bernstein himself that language is primarily a communication tool, while music is primarily concerned with aesthetic value.²⁸

Our discussion of musical syntax points to two conclusions. Firstly, Schenker's identification of the *Ursatz* of music enables an informative distinction between fundamental and surface structure, analogous to the distinction between deep and surface structure in linguistic analysis. On the other hand, more importantly, the fundamental differences between language and music are a function of the differences between these different structural levels. As we shall see, musical significance typically arises out of the surface structure such as articulation, timbre, tempo and so on. The basic harmonic structure (*Ursatz*) is the fundamental skeleton in terms of which music operates, but of itself has not the power of linguistic deep structure to generate rules for the production of new meaningful items.

One further classification may prove useful at this stage, that of the difference between structure and style. As Meyer plausibly observes:

²⁸ See L. Bernstein (1976: 79)

A style is learned, even by the composers who “invent” it. As with the early learning of a language, a new style tends to involve a considerable amount of redundancy. Such redundancy not only results from the repetition of works and of patterns and processes within works but is an important characteristic of the structures themselves; that is, the patterns and processes employed in the early stages of a style tend to possess a clear, even obvious, order, regularity, and coherence so that they reinforce, sustain, and affirm one another.²⁹

Our use of the terms “structure” and “style” may not correspond precisely with that of Meyer, but his mode of distinguishing between them in terms of invention, stages and regularities, and his insistence that style is something learned are indeed useful. In our usage, what we have designated as the quasi-syntactic “structure” of music relates to formal accounts of musical works considered in isolation, whereas “style”, though often relating to such structures, is used where we are concerned with their development (especially the development of surface structures) in a wider historical context. This is why in considering the significance and aesthetic value of a work, structural analysis of itself does not suffice for musical interpretation. In considering the stylistic constraints of an artwork, we are constantly reminded of its place in the particular artistic progression of that historical moment. Danto’s institutional theory reminds us that artistic style is constantly renewed, and whether certain artworks are judged as aesthetically valuable or not depends on how we can relate to them as artworks.³⁰ Thus in hermeneutic terms, it is the style rather than the isolated structure that stands in effective history with the listener, thereby giving the audience access to the significance of the music.

²⁹ Meyer (1956: 116)

³⁰ See Danto (1964)

2.1.3 Deep Structure, Surface Structure and the Comparison with Semantics

Transformational grammar leads to the core of syntactic structures as well as to the semantic interpretation of a sentence. Consider the following two sentences:

John ate a green apple. A green apple was eaten by John.

They both possess the same deep structure of “John – eat – green – apple,” while through the transformation rule, the latter sentence, in its surface structure, has undergone a passive transformation. The deep structure of the phrase-marker, as is suggested by its name, constitutes the underlying meaning of the sentence, while the surface structure, through transformational rules, such as passive rule, interrogative rule, and deletion rule generates the well formed sentence.

The deep structure of an utterance is given completely by its Transformation-marker, which contains its basis. The surface structure of the sentence is the derived Phrase-marker given as the output of the operations represented in the Transformation-marker.³¹

In other words, the meaning of a sentence (surface structure) can be analysed in terms of its deep structure. However, Chomsky is not advocating that a well-formed sentence is constituted by a movement from its semantic (i.e. deep) level to its syntactic (surface) level, and then to its phonological component. On the contrary, the underlying string of the sentence (initial phrase-marker) is the base from which to generate the syntactic components (i.e. well-formed sentence) through a transformation of deep structure. Jerrold Katz notes: ‘Just as the same syntactic system can be open to many different semantic interpretations, so, conversely, the

³¹ Chomsky (1965: 131)

same semantic interpretation can be placed on different syntactic systems.³² Thus he concludes:

Why do natural language have a level of deep structure? Because deep structure, as explicated by underlying phrase-markers in CKP [Chomsky, Katz-Postal] grammars, embodies the complex network of connections between the language-universal and the language-particular syntactic structures necessary to link sound and meaning in natural languages.³³

Semantic interpretation of a sentence then, according to Katz and Postal, must be derived from two distinctive components, namely, the lexical items of the language and a finite set of projection rules.³⁴ As a first step, each lexical item in a sentence must obtain the semantic information (i.e. meaning) from the dictionary, then the projection rules combine these meanings to constitute a meaningful sentence.

Thus through a projection rule, such a sentence as: “This is a sound argument” can be understood and rewritten as: “This is a satisfactory argument” rather than: “This is an auditory argument”.

Semantic decoding is, for this reason, always an interpretative process. While there are formal realization rules governing the application of semantic decoding, meaning produced in semantic understanding is always interpretative. Consider the two following sentences:

1. He enjoys wearing a light suit in the summer³⁵
2. The whole town was populated by old men and women³⁶

³² J.Katz (1972: 367)

³³ *Ibid.* (414)

³⁴ For further discussion on semantic interpretation, see Katz and Postal (1964: 12-27)

³⁵ The example is taken from Katz and Postal (1964: 15)

³⁶ The example is taken from L.Bernstein (1976: 121)

In each case, there is an ambiguity in the sentence that cannot be determined by the given sentence itself. The first sentence contains a lexical ambiguity on the word “light” which can be interpreted as light weight or light colour, and the latter sentence illustrates the semantic ambiguity between old-men and women which the adjective is used for a single noun or old (men+women) where the second “old” is omitted by the deletion rule.³⁷

Within the theory of musical meaning, the semantic properties of music have been a non-trivial issue for some time. Besides Bernstein and Sloboda, whose arguments have been the main focus here, this issue has been considered also by some emotivists and formalists, and especially by the music semioticians whose claims are considered in the following chapters. While the conception of musical semantics is not clearly drawn in many of these theories, any discussion of musical signification based on the notion of music as having some sort of meaning, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, would appear to have at least some connection with the semantic dimension of musical work. Furthermore since, in the field of linguistics, the main connection between meaning and language is chiefly associated with linguistic semantics, by analogy, we might expect musical composition and its meaning to have, in its broadest sense, a connection with its semantic dimension.

As noted earlier, for Bernstein since music is not primarily for communication, but rather bears an aesthetic meaning, the direct analogy with linguistic semantics is severely limited. For this reason, he claims the key to the understanding of musical

³⁷ This kind of semantic ambiguity can be explained and clarified by a tree-diagram that would illustrate the association of the adjective with a particular noun.

semantics lies in the notion of metaphor.³⁸ There are three distinctive uses of metaphor in music, Bernstein maintains, namely the intrinsic where the metaphor is directed within the musical sphere, extrinsic where music signifies an external world in a metaphorical sense, and analogical where musically intrinsic metaphors are to be understood in terms of analogous linguistic operations, where “this musical transformation is like that verbal one.” Having asserted that there is meaning in music, Bernstein makes a problematic distinction between “meaning” and “expressing.” For Bernstein, “meaning” is used in the Hanslickian sense, so intrinsic meaning is within the form of music, whereas “expressing” is associated with an extrinsic feeling when listening to music.³⁹ Indeed, this claim echoes Hanslick’s formalistic claim, that while music can convey our feeling, its meaning is located within its musical structure. Bernstein claims:

[A]ll musical transformations lead to metaphorical results. A piece of music is a constant metamorphosis of given material, involving such transformational operations as inversion, augmentation, retrograde, diminution, modulation, the opposition of consonance and dissonance, the various forms of imitation (such as canon and fugue), the varieties of rhythm and meter, harmonic progressions, coloristic and dynamic changes, plus the infinite interrelations of all these with one another. These *are* the meanings of music. And that is as close as I can come to a definition of musical semantics.⁴⁰

On the other hand, his understanding of musical expression is analogous to the notion of “ineffability”: ‘But when music “expresses” something to me, it is something I am feeling, and the same is true of you and of every listener. We feel passion, [...] And

³⁸ The notions of metaphor and musical metaphor will be examined in Chapter 5.

³⁹ See Chapter 4 for further discussion of Hanslick.

⁴⁰ L. Bernstein (1976: 153)

here we are in trouble; because we cannot report our precise feelings in scientific terms; we can report them only subjectively.⁴¹ ‘[...] one point remains: music does possess the power of expressivity, and the human being does innately possess the capacity to respond to it.’⁴²

These claims, especially that locating meaningfulness within the form of music, will be discussed with respect to formalism in a later chapter, however Bernstein’s conclusion seems disappointing given the ambition of the approach he initiated, with respect both to clarity and to precision. The fundamental differences between Bernstein’s approach and that of Sloboda’s more psychological one is that, while Bernstein concentrates on the notions of deep and surface structure – analogous to those of linguistics – but fails to correlate the generative structure of deep structure and musical significance, Sloboda uses the notions of psychological “memory” and of “expectation and tension” to locate much of a work’s meaningfulness not in the deep structure but in the surface structure.

Further, Sloboda argues, when hearing music, we may not remember any particular theme, melody or harmonic progressions, but we can often analyse music in terms of our cognitive perception. Examining Deryck Cooke’s analogies of musical patterns and the corresponding emotional responses, Sloboda concludes that it can not be adequately proven that a particular melodic line evokes a particular feeling. Music, Sloboda argues, in its analogy with language, has no more intrinsic connection with

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (135)

⁴² *Ibid.* (139)

specific feelings than the sound of the word 'cat' is suitable or adequate for the small domestic mammal.

However, Cooke's account of the expressiveness of music is a comprehensive study, and very useful as an example of a detailed survey of music semantics. Cooke's initial point is similar to that of Bernstein. Defining the overtone structure not only as a concept in Western culture, but as a physical phenomenon, Cooke discusses the tonal tension in Western Music. His historical analysis of the major and minor third, advocating joy and grief respectively, shows that these conditions are broadly grounded in the conventional procedures set by Western culture.

But there is another, more serious reason offered against the equation 'major = pleasure' – the fact that in other systems of music, pleasure is apparently expressed by music of a decidedly minor character; in African and Oriental music, for example, and even in Spanish, Slav, and Balkan folk-music. An examination of this point will lead us straight to the heart of the problem.⁴³

Moreover, the minor third chord stands as a dichotomy to the major third conventionally:

Western composers, expressing the 'rightness' of happiness by means of the major third, expressed the 'wrongness' of grief by means of the minor third, and for centuries, pieces in a minor key had to have a 'happy ending' – a final major chord (the 'tierce de Picardie') or a bare fifth. But eventually, the need to express the truth – cases of unrelieved tragedy – led composers to have an 'unhappy ending' in the minor.⁴⁴

⁴³ Cooke (1959: 53)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (57-8)

Cooke's argument, for the most part, focuses on particular harmonic structures which several different composers have exploited to evoke similar emotions in the listener. Such connections can be seen, according to Cooke, throughout the history of Western Music, ranging from the Contrapuntal music of Medieval times to the Neo-Classical compositions of Stravinsky.

While Cooke's account does indeed appear to be supported by the examples he has given, they provide an insecure basis for a general theory of musical semantics for three reasons. Firstly, his examples are all taken from vocal music, resulting in subordinating the meaning of "pure" music to that of textual meaning. While it is generally the case that composers do indeed take the words' meaning into account in their compositions to reinforce the textual meaning, where there is a text, with the musical one, in the absence of a text, interpreting "pure" music in this way becomes questionable. Secondly and more importantly for our discussion, as noted earlier, these examples are taken from a very narrow range of musical compositions, namely Western and Tonal. This of itself suggests that what Cooke has constructed here is not a theory of music semantics per se, but rather analyses of certain cultural or historical musical conventions. While associating these with certain "emotions" may be historically correct, this is neither a generative theory, stemming out from the musical syntax, nor a "universal" theory of semantics which can be applied to the musics of many cultures. Finally, as Meyer convincingly shows, the same melodic patterns can, in different contexts, produce quite different significations;⁴⁵ the harmonic structure alone fails to determine significance in music. As we noted, for

⁴⁵ See Meyer (1973) and Sloboda (1985: 65) notes: 'Meyer's approach also shows how the same melodic pattern could have quite different meanings in different contexts according to whether or not it fulfilled implications of earlier material.'

Meyer style as well as structure plays a role in determining the meaningfulness of music.

Meyer further distinguishes embodied meaning from designative meaning in terms of its “formal” and “cultural” differences.⁴⁶ Meyer sees the embodied meaning of music purely in terms of its formal structure, including the creation of tension and resolution according to recognised patterns and the expectation of the listener, whereas the designative meaning can only be understood “referentially” through cultural coordinates. It should be noted that many theorists of musical aesthetics do not provide so sharp a distinction between embodied and designative meaning, since to do so presupposes that there is always a distinction between what is musical and what is extra-musical, a matter which may be contested. While pictorial representation and emotion evocation theories clearly lie on the designative meaning side of the divide since they clearly make use of extra-musical materials, the notions of tension and resolution are more difficult to classify since they do not have a particular object (such as a particular feeling or picture). Not only for this reason, but also because the notions of tension and resolution are rooted within musicological concepts, for Meyer they are to be classified as forms of embodied meaning.

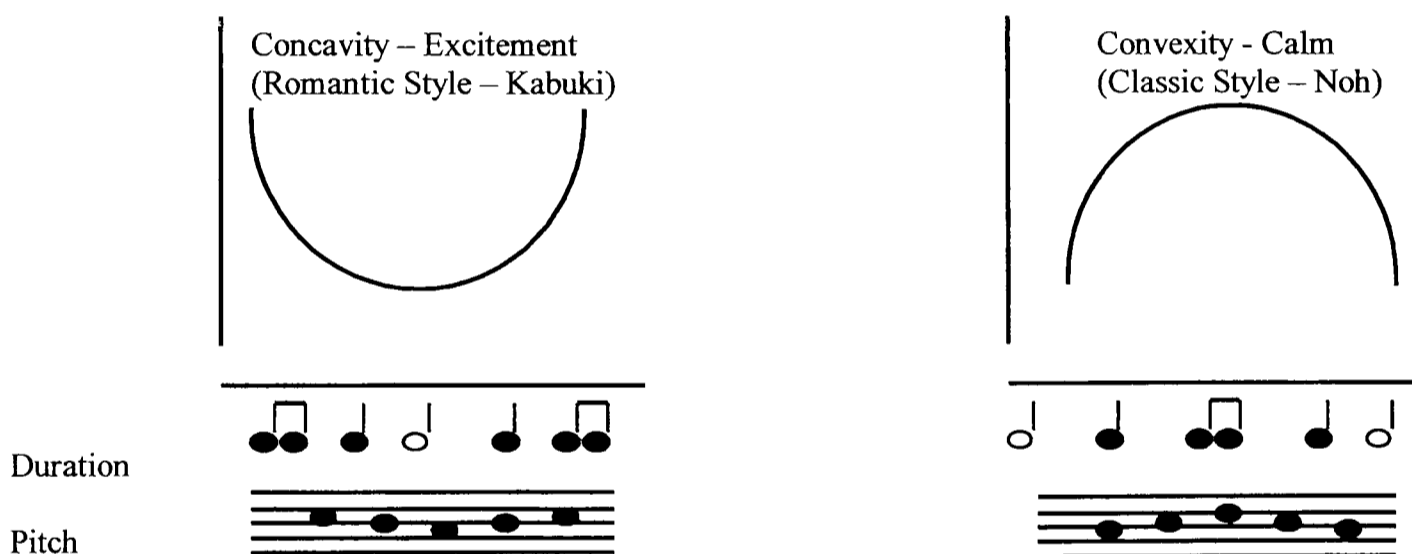
A recent study by Dalia Cohen and Gershon Stern, ‘Experiential meaning of musical rules,’ develops this contention.⁴⁷ Taking a similar approach to Meyer’s, they claim that in approaching musical meaning there are two fundamental codes embodied in

⁴⁶ Forms of this distinction appear throughout the literature, often with different terms such as autonomous vs. heteronomous – Pratt, intrinsic vs. extrinsic – Bernstein, and congeneric vs. extrageneric – Coker; see Meyer (1956)

⁴⁷ Cohen and Stern (unpublished conference paper) at *Seventh Conference on Musical Signification* (Imatra: 2001).

the structure of music. On the one hand, aesthetic preference is historically and culturally relative, and thus develops diverse structures according to place and time. On the other hand, there are universal internal constraints which are identifiable through pure cognitive science.⁴⁸ These belong to the natural scheme (whereas the former is associated with learned schemata) which can be found in both Western and non-Western music. Its rules include response to duration and pitch where, for example, convexity draws calmness and concavity evokes excitement in the listener (resolution and tension) [ex.10].

[ex.10] Convexity and Concavity of duration and pitch arousing tension and resolution in the listeners. (Prof. Dalia Cohen and Prof. Gershon Stern)



What they seek to demonstrate is not the universality of these rules themselves but rather, that the principles behind these rules are, through the natural cognition of human listening, universal.

Cohen and Stern's distinction of learned from natural schemata helps bring clarity to the discussion of musical semantics, and, the method of tension and relaxation is often used deliberately by composers to create certain meanings. However, if we examine

⁴⁸ We shall return to the interrelations of the natural and cultural in Chapter 5.

the notion of this tension and relaxation further, it appears that this phenomenon is not restricted to music. The siren of an ambulance, though it may not be universally recognised, is at least an inter-cultural sound to the extent that it alerts (through tension) people without any background knowledge of it. While it is true that certain musical passages create tensions and relaxations, this phenomenon is neither an exclusive feature of musical works nor does it, in the strict “referential” sense, have any semantic properties similar to that of word meaning.

The main concern of this first section of the chapter has been to give an account of the syntactic structure of musical compositions with an eye to its semantic implications. While at the semantic level, correlating linguistic syntax and musical structure creates at best an awkward analogy, musical structure may be conceived of as having a musical syntax of its own. Just as natural language has numerous syntactic rules according to each language, so musical syntax varies from one musical tradition to another. To borrow Sloboda’s words again:

The linguistic analogy is neither ‘true’ nor ‘false.’ Like all analogies, it achieves a partial fit with its subject. The ‘true’ element which I would like to emphasise most strongly is the notion that we represent sequences of individual elements by assigning them roles in abstract underlying structures, some of which, particularly those with hierarchical organization, have strong family resemblance to one another.⁴⁹

It remains the case, however, that at semantic level, musical structures lack the “generative” properties of linguistic ones, thereby necessitating a considerable

⁴⁹ Sloboda (1985: 65)

metaphorical “stretch” in talking about musical meaning.⁵⁰ Further, there appears to be an immovable road-block on the path to developing any fully fledged musical semantics significantly analogous to that of language. Looking ahead to the following section, Emile Benveniste describes it precisely:

Musical language is composed of diversely articulated sound combinations and sequences; the elementary unit, the sound, is not a sign; each sound is identifiable in the scalar structure upon which it depends; none is endowed with meaning in itself.⁵¹

This suggests the following question: If the semantic analogy is inadequate in achieving a full explanation of musical meaning, since the latter neither has generative structure nor is made up of meaningful units, is there a more promising approach towards explaining how music can be meaningful? Further, if music is indeed (in some sense) meaningful, does it symbolise or signify an extra-musical content, and if so how?

2.2.1. Signification Theories – Saussure’s Social Semiology and C.S. Peirce’s Logical Semiotics

Our discussion of music as language, using the model of transformational grammar, has so far proved somewhat negative at the semantic level. We turn now to the semiological and semiotic models, taking account of developments in both Saussurean

⁵⁰ See Chapter 5 for further discussion of metaphor.

⁵¹ Benveniste (1981: 15)

semiology and Peircean semiotics in the first half of the twentieth century.⁵² We shall go on to consider current debates in musical semiotics and semiology, together with related examples of musical analysis offered by semiotically and semiologically inclined musicologists such as Coker, Tarasti and Nattiez.

As noted above, Saussure's study of signs or "semiology" was a linguistic one, concerned with the synchronic analysis of language. Instead of giving an etymological or developmental account of language, Saussure examined the nature and structure of language. For Saussure, language [*langage*] has two distinct characteristics, namely *langue* and *parole*. By *langue*, Saussure meant a construction of a particular language which is socially and conventionally structured. 'What, then, is linguistic structure [*langue*]? It is not, in our opinion, simply the same thing as language [*langage*]. Linguistic structure is only one part of language, even though it is an essential part. The structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty. At the same time, it is also a body of necessary conventions adopted by society to enable members of society to use their language faculty.'⁵³ *Parole*, on the other hand, is the individual and contingent part which 'takes as its object of study the individual part of language, which means speech, including phonation. This is a psycho-physical study.'⁵⁴ Saussure's main account of the nature of the linguistic sign is a linear one. The sign is not the link between the name and the object it denotes, J.S. Mill's model. Instead, it is the connection between the sound pattern and the concept, such as the sound "arbor" referring to the concept of "treeness." For

⁵² While there are important differences between semiology and semiotics, especially in connection with linguistic signs, these began to blur as the twentieth century advanced, not least in discussions of musical signification, so that it is often appropriate to use the term "music semiotics" to characterise contributions from either school.

⁵³ De Saussure (1983: 9-10)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (19)

Saussurean semiology, the sound pattern is the signifier, and the concept it signifies is the signified.

Peirce, like Saussure, did not publish a single *opus magnum*, his collected lectures and papers were published posthumously. Peirce defines “sign” as ‘a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to *stand for* or *represent*. This thing is called the *object* of the sign; the idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an *interpretant* of the sign.’⁵⁵ The triadic (and hence non-linear) relation which Peirce formulated was this distinction between the sign, interpretant and the object where the sign denotes the object through the interpretant. It is often mistakenly reported that the interpretant is the interpreter; however, as quoted above, for Peirce this is not the case.

Peirce distinguishes three kinds of sign, namely icons (likenesses), indices (indications) and symbols (general signs).⁵⁶ Icons are pictorial signs which represent by imitating the object, such as Egyptian pictorial writings. ‘An *icon* is a representamen which fulfils the function of a representamen by virtue of a character which it possesses in itself, and *would possess just the same though its object did not exist*.’⁵⁷ Indices are indications of the object, such as are given by its spatial and temporal coordinates. ‘An *index* is a representamen which fulfils the function of a representamen by virtue of a character *which it could not have if its object did not exist*.’⁵⁸ Symbols are signs which we conventionally agree for their usage, thus most

⁵⁵ Peirce (1998:13) with original italics.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* (4)

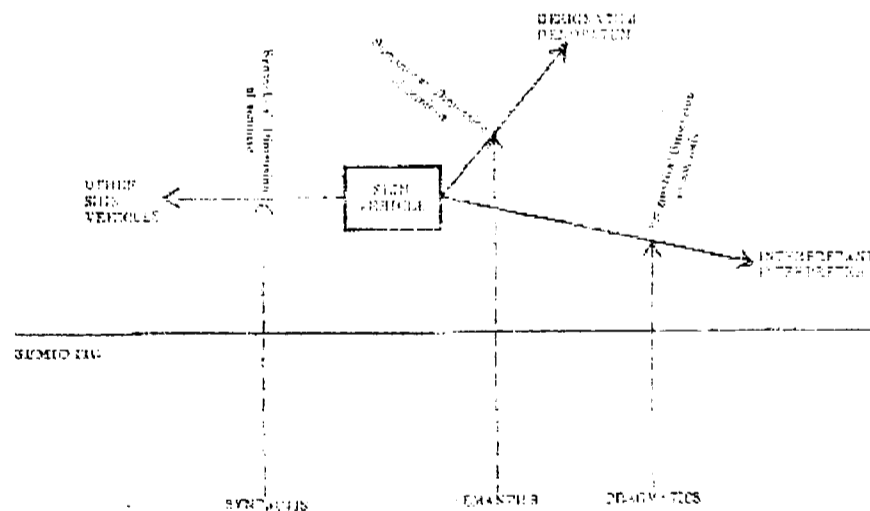
⁵⁷ This is taken from Peirce’s Harvard lecture ‘The Categories Defended’ which is a later work (by nine years) from the previous (‘What Is a Sign?’) work. *Ibid.* (163), the second italics are mine.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (163), the second italics are mine.

words which denote an object (or event) are classified as symbols. ‘A *symbol* is a representamen which fulfils its function *regardless of any similarity or analogy with its object and equally regardless of any factual connection* therewith, but solely and simply because it will *be interpreted to be a representamen*.’⁵⁹

2.2.2. Non-Linguistic Semiotics: Morris, Jakobson and Benveniste

While Peirce did not discuss the implications of semiotics for the domain of aesthetics, Charles Morris, one of the first developers of Peirce’s ideas, extensively widened the range of semiotics in its application to human behaviour, borrowing from G.H. Mead’s theory of human actions, and especially to art. In his ‘Foundations of the Theory of Signs’, Morris differentiates semiotics into three dimensions, namely, semantics, pragmatics, and syntactics. [ex.12]⁶⁰



As seen from the diagram, the semantic dimension of semiosis is the relation of sign-vehicle to what it designates; the pragmatic dimension is the relation of sign-vehicle to its interpreter and the syntactic dimension is the relation of sign-vehicle to other sign-vehicle(s). An important aspect of the semantic *designatum* is that it is not the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* (163), the second italics are mine.

⁶⁰ [ex12] taken from Morris (1939: 133); for Morris’ detailed study of semiotics, especially in connection with his behaviouristic approach to general semiotics, see Morris et al. (1971).

object which the sign denotes. Instead, the sign, while it has its signified (i.e. designation), does not necessarily have a particular object it denotes, but this signified *designatum* can be an autonomous value of the sign itself.

By definition a sign must designate (“have a designatum”), but it may not actually denote anything (“may have no denotata”). One may take account of an approaching train (act as if a train were approaching) when in fact no train is coming; in this case the sound heard designates but does not denote (“has a designatum but no denotata”).⁶¹

Applying this semiotic structure of language, Morris, in his article, ‘Esthetics and the Theory of Signs,’ defines aesthetic understanding in terms of its semiotic nature. ‘Esthetic analysis then becomes a special case of sign analysis, and esthetic judgement a judgement on the adequacy with which a certain sign vehicle performs the function characteristic of the esthetic sign.’⁶²

Since a sign vehicle needs no denoted object (*denotatum*), Morris is able to take works of art to be autonomous, echoing the Kantian “disinterested interest”, and thus as not necessarily signifying any particular referent. While we shall return to the notion of autonomous art both later in this chapter in conjunction with the difference between congeneric and extrageneric musical signification and in Chapter 4 with its association with formalism, we shall here note that Morris argues that the function of the sign vehicle not only includes the signification (extra-musical content), but also conveys the significance of the artwork itself, which in the aesthetic context typically has an evaluative dimension.⁶³

⁶¹ Morris (1939: 132)

⁶² *Ibid.* (132)

⁶³ We shall return to aesthetic value and its connection with hermeneutics in Chapter 6.

[S]ign functioning answers to an often noted character of esthetic experience: the work of art is apprehended as “meaningful” or “significant” and yet this character seems to be embodied in the work itself – so that esthetic perception is tied to the work itself and does not use this merely as a springboard for evoking reveries and recollections. This whole character of “immanent meaning”, or “significatory but not referential” status, of “disinterested interest,” – formulations which seem so contradictory – is accounted for in the fact that in the apprehension of the iconic sign there is both a mediated and an immediate taking account of certain properties; and the frequent though confused use of ‘meaning’ in discussions of art to include both signification and significance (value) is an indication that in the case of esthetic signs (though not in the case of all iconic signs) the properties in question are value properties.⁶⁴

This theory of artistic significance became the corner stone for many aestheticians, whether connecting it to works of art as a manifestation of logical symbolism (Langer), or with the iconic signification of musical gestures (Coker).

Roman Jakobson, in his essay ‘Language in Relation to Other Communication Systems’, is concerned with the different kinds of communicating systems which human society has created other than the verbal. “Semiotic, as an inquiry into the communication of all kinds of messages, is the nearest concentric circle that encompasses linguistics, whose research field is confined to the communication of verbal messages[...].”⁶⁵ Thus for Jakobson, following the claim made by Peirce that anything can be a sign, ‘all five external senses carry semiotic functions in human society.’⁶⁶ Within the arts, Jakobson categorises signification into two different categories, namely introversive and extroversive semiosis. Introversive semiosis, of

⁶⁴ Morris (1939: 136-7)

⁶⁵ Jakobson ‘Language in Relation to Other Communication Systems’ (1971: 698)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (701)

which Jakobson considers music to be the prime example, is a ‘message which signifies itself, is indissolubly linked with the esthetic function of the sign system and dominates not only music but also glossolalic poetry and non-representational painting and sculpture[...].’⁶⁷ On the other hand, extroversive semiosis, although secondary to the introversive and thus of comparatively trivial significance with respect to the concept of art as sign function, nevertheless exists in much representational art. ‘[A]nywhere in poetry and in the bulk of representational visual art the introversive semiosis, always playing a cardinal role, coexists and coacts nonetheless with an extroversive semiosis, whereas the referential component is either absent or minimal in musical messages, even in so-called program music.’⁶⁸

For Jakobson, while music is understood in terms of non-representational signs, it nevertheless holds an important role in the sign system. Dividing the signs into icons, indices and symbols following Peirce, Jakobson maintains that while the icon is associated with its object by similarity, and an index similarly by contiguity, there is no necessary connection between a symbol and its object. This is why a work of non-representational art, unlike imitative art which is related to icons, is itself a symbol which he defines as ‘signatum based on a learned, agreed upon, customary contiguity.’⁶⁹ From this claim, Jakobson draws an analogy between language and music:

They [verbal and musical signs] show us two essential features. First, both music and language present a consistently hierarchized structure, and, second, musical as well as verbal signs are resolvable into ultimate, discrete, rigorously patterned components which, as such, have no

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* (704)

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (705)

⁶⁹ Jakobson ‘Visual and Auditory Signs’ (1971: 335)

existence in nature but are built ad hoc. This is precisely the case with the distinctive features in language and it is likewise exact about notes as members within any type of musical scale.⁷⁰

Although Jakobson gives primacy to the introversive semiotic nature of music, it remains nevertheless a system of signs. This claim has provided the basis for later semioticians and musicologists to argue for and against music semiotics. Kristeva, for example, following Jakobson's parallelism between language and music, states 'the similarities between the two systems are considerable. Verbal language and music are both realized by utilizing the same material (sound) and by acting on the same receptive organs. The systems both have writing systems that indicate their entities and their relations.'⁷¹ Here we also find similar concerns to those of Jakobson with respect to conceiving music as possessing an extroversive semiosis: '[...] while the fundamental function of language is the *communicative* function, and while it transmits a *meaning*, music is a departure from this principle of communication. It does transmit a "message" between a subject and an addressee, but it is hard to say that it *communicates* a precise *meaning*.'⁷²

Benveniste, contrary to both Jakobson and Kristeva, argues that music does not constitute a semiotic system. In his essay 'The Semiology of Language,' Benveniste maintains that the necessary conditions for any system to be semiotic are;

- (1) a finite repertory of *signs*,
- (2) and rules of order governing its *figures*,
- (3) existing independently of the nature and number of *discourses* that the system allows to be produced.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* (341)

⁷¹ Kristeva (1989: 309)

⁷² *Ibid.* (309)

⁷³ Benveniste (1981: 15)

Music, according to Benveniste, is not a semiotic system since notes, the only units in music, have no signification value. Moreover, these units (notes) are only identifiable within a scale.

It is organized from an ensemble constituted by a scale that is itself formed of notes. The notes have no differential value except within the scale[...]. [...] but it only assumes this value within the scale, which fixes the paradigm of notes.⁷⁴

Therefore, as noted in the conclusion to the first part of this chapter, Benveniste concludes:

Musical language is composed of diversely articulated sound combinations and sequences; the elementary unit, the sound, is not a sign; each sound is identifiable in the scalar structure upon which it depends; none is endowed with meaning in itself. This is a typical example of units which are not signs, which do not designate, because they are merely the degrees of a scale whose range has been arbitrarily set.⁷⁵

Thus, 'if music is considered as a language, it has syntactic features but not semiotic features.'⁷⁶

The crucial difference between Jakobson and Benveniste is thus that while the former recognises music as a sign system, the latter does not. This disagreement arises from the fact that Jakobson considers the musical composition as a whole, signifying its aesthetic message, whereas Benveniste interrogates the structure of musical composition wherein he finds no signification value in the smallest units of music –

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* (15)

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (15)

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (14)

“notes.” In Benveniste’s case, as with Bernstein’s Chomskyan analogy seen in the previous chapter, musical signification is sought at the level of designation of basic units. However, as in language where a single letter does not designate anything, but plays a role in a wider signifying complex, so too do musical notes. Benveniste is right in claiming that music has two distinctive movements, namely simultaneity and sequel.⁷⁷ However, he fails to see that these musical movements themselves provide the possibilities for musical signification. In other words, it is not the notes that signify anything, but if any part of music signifies something, it is found either in simultaneity (i.e. the chord), or in sequential order (phrase, motif). Wagner’s extensive use of signifying chords would be an example of the former signification, whereas numerous composers, both current and past, from East and West, use the patterns available to sequential ordering to signify either intrinsically (self-referentially) or extrinsically.

2.2.3. Art as Symbolism – From the Standpoint of Aesthetics: Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer

While the accounts sketched in the previous section mainly focused on the communicative aspect of semiotics (as also do several semiological accounts), there are also related theories that are more concerned with other aspects of the general study of signs, and in particular with the notion of signifying symbols. Although Ernst Cassirer did not write primarily on aesthetics, nevertheless, he shared a common ground with and has influenced many recent aestheticians, especially those concerned with formal signification. Cassirer’s treatment of art resembles that of Morris in

⁷⁷ Ibid. (13) ‘they [musical sounds] function is an isolated state or simultaneously...’

claiming that art, like other human phenomena, must be analysed by its logical rules and, following Kant, maintains that art is autonomous. For Cassirer, there are several similarities between language and art, especially with respect to their mimetic nature. He gives a historical account of how imitative art has been transformed by the Romantics, such as Rousseau and Goethe, into more emotional art:

It is true that all characteristic or expressive art is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” But if we were to accept this Wordsworthian definition without reserve, we should only be led to a change of sign, not to decisive change of meaning. In this case art would remain reproductive; but, instead of being a reproduction of things, of physical objects, it would become a reproduction of our inner life, of our affections and emotions.⁷⁸

Cassirer in fact, like other formalists, does not deny the expressive characteristics of art. Moreover, he seems to support Croce’s expression theory and especially his notion of parallelism between art and language. ‘Art may be defined as a symbolic language... Croce insists that there is not only a close relation but a complete identity between language and art. To his way of thinking it is quite arbitrary to distinguish between the two activities. Whoever studies general linguistics, according to Croce, studies aesthetic problems and vice versa.’⁷⁹

However, Cassirer objects to Croce’s claim of complete identity between art and language:

⁷⁸ Cassirer (1968: 141) Cassirer’s treatment of art as symbolic is, as Lofts rightly claims, ambiguous; Cassirer never clarifies the precise system or structure of art symbolism. See Lofts (2000: 183).

⁷⁹ Cassirer (1968: 168)

There is, however, an unmistakable difference between the symbols of art and the linguistic terms of ordinary speech or writing. These two activities agree neither in character nor purpose; they do not employ the same means, nor do they tend towards the same ends. Neither language nor art gives us mere imitation of things or actions; both are representations. But a representation in the medium of sensuous forms differs widely from verbal or conceptual representation.⁸⁰

Cassirer points out that in the course of the history of art, we have witnessed a change in conceptualising art from mimetic form to expressive content. Yet, there has always been an underpinning formal construction in terms of which art is expressed. He thus claims, ‘Art is indeed expressive, but it cannot be expressive without being formative.’⁸¹

Susanne Langer exploits this Cassirerean approach to symbolism in human phenomena, especially aesthetics, in her *Philosophy in a New Key*. Constructing her argument in terms of L.A. Reid’s notion of form, derived from Clive Bell’s concept of “significant form”, Langer argues that aesthetic expressiveness is rooted in the significant form of art. Reid notes, ‘The true aesthetic form, ...is expressive form, and conversely form is the structure of expression. For aesthetic expression is embodied expression. It is not mere content, but imaginatively apprehended content-in-a-body.’⁸² This marriage between expression and form is precisely what Langer tries to demonstrate in her chapter “On Significance in Music.” For Langer, music is the pre-eminently non-representational art, and thus musical form is the very essence

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* (168) Croce’s argument is discussed in connection with his notion of ‘expression’ in the next chapter.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* (141)

⁸² Reid (1973: 197)

of music.⁸³ Langer nevertheless admits that emotional response to music is a more significant reaction to music than appreciation of the beauty of its form. Moreover Langer, although she rejects the claim that the emotional response is to the sound rather than the music, nevertheless notes: ‘Music is known, indeed, to affect pulse-rate and respiration, to facilitate or disturb concentration, to excite or relax the organism...’⁸⁴ What Langer sees in the emotional content of music is not simply psychological reaction but something rooted in the logic of symbolism.

If music has any significance, it is semantic, not symptomatic. Its “meaning” is evidently not that of a stimulus to evoke emotions, nor that of a signal to announce them; if it has an emotional content, it “has” it in the same sense that language “has” its conceptual content – *symbolically*.

And thus:

[...] in musical aesthetics the vital problem with which we are faced is one that involves the entire logic of symbolism. [...] In short, we are dealing with a *philosophical* problem, requiring logical study, and involving music: for to be able to define “musical meaning” adequately, precisely, *but for an artistic, not a positivistic context and purpose*, is the touchstone of a really powerful philosophy of symbolism.⁸⁵

Langer, like Morris and Cassirer, sees a close connection between language and music, especially in their use of symbols. Langer observes that words are used to

⁸³ From this point of view, Langer can be categorised as Formalist, along with Hanslick. Many have argued that Langer is on the side of the formalist, rather than the expressionist. However her claim, if categorised as formalist, is contradictory, since in her argument both here and in her later work *Feeling and Form*, she clearly declares that music is connected with feeling. See the next chapter for further discussion.

⁸⁴ Langer (1979: 212)

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* (218-9) Langer’s use of the term “semantic” here, does not literally mean the linguistic theory of semantics but rather semiotics in general. As indicated, it is used in contrast to “symptomatic”. Langer is claiming here that the way musical signifies has similarity with that of language.

describe events, places and things, whereas music expresses moods and emotions. Moreover, she notes: ‘[...], the first requirement for a connotative relationship between music and subjective experience, a certain similarity of logical form, is certainly satisfied.’⁸⁶ The symbolism exploited in music, she claims, possesses a connotative function, although she notes that this connotation is not fixed, nor are there vocabularies corresponding to that of language, and consequently, music cannot properly be called a language.

Music is characterised by a form of symbolism which cannot be translated into other forms, especially those of language. Langer sees, unlike many other music aestheticians, that this property of music – the expressive and unspeakable form – is distinct and not inferior to those of language. What music can reveal, more so than language, is the ‘truth’ in human feeling. Langer concludes:

What is true of language, is essential in music: music that is invented while the composer’s mind is fixed on what is to be expressed is apt not to be music. It is a limited idiom, like an artificial language, only even less successful; *for music at its highest, though clearly a symbolic form, is an unconsummated symbol.*⁸⁷

This oft-quoted if puzzling passage from Langer indicates that music as a symbolic system has severe limitations. Since, on this account, music’s symbolic system has “no assigned connotation”, it cannot be brought into correspondence with a verbalisable symbolic system, a conclusion similar to that of Benveniste noted earlier.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* (228)

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (240) with original italics; we shall return to Langer’s claims in Chapter 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* (240)

What art expresses most clearly in the case of music, as Langer brings out, is rooted in its own form. For Langer, the content of music is the self-expression of the musical form, using symbolic syntax in a manner analogous to natural language. Expression and content do not together form a unified concept, nor do they represent a dichotomy in the traditional sense, but co-exist together to produce the true expression-form.

Implicit in the above accounts is the relation between ‘expression’ and ‘content,’ terms which invite clarification. Hjemslev was one of the first semioticians to discuss this relationship in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Traditionally, a ‘sign was recognised as an expression that points to a content outside the sign itself.’⁸⁹ Yet by Saussure the sign had become an independent entity generated by the connection of these two. Hjemslev notes: ‘The sign function is in itself a solidarity. Expression and content are solidary – they necessarily presuppose each other. An expression is expression only by virtue of being an expression of a content, and a content only by virtue of being a content of expression.’⁹⁰ Hjemslev displays several examples of content – expression relations where one content signifies numerous expressions, and vice versa. One content signifying numerous expressions can be easily seen by translating a sentence into another language. “I do not know” thus becomes “Je ne sais pas,” the same content using different expressions. On the other hand, the English word “got,” German noun “Gott,” and Danish adjective “godt” use the same expression to indicate different content.

Thus, for Hjemslev, a sign in any language contains expression as well as content.

⁸⁹ Hjemslev (1961: 47)

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* (48)

What is important in the present context, is that this bridging of expression and content represents a central problem for all aestheticians who have been concerned with the semiotic (and indeed semiological) approach to art forms.

2.3.1. – Application of Semiotic Theory to Music: Wilson Coker and Eero Tarasti

Theories of signification have not only been at the centre of philosophical argument in the past decades but, as noted above, they have also been widely applied to literature, visual art and to music. Music semiologists and semioticians such as Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Eero Tarasti, and Wilson Coker have used these sign systems of language to explore the system of musical signification.

While Wilson Coker's theory of music semiotics is now almost forgotten, it nevertheless displays a basic framework of musical understanding which shows notable parallels to Peircean semiotics in using the notions of Iconicity, Index Sign and Symbols. The fundamental argument of Coker is rooted in Morris' behaviouristic semiotics. The meaning of any item, according to Coker, can be considered in three different dimensions, namely, semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics. Moreover Coker, echoing Morris, employs Mead's gesture theory of pragmatic communication in language. According to Mead, the gesture is a social-act, used to communicate a sign between two organisms. Gesture, whether a linguistic or purely physical act, is the only communication tool between living organisms.⁹¹ Coker argues that music can be classified as gesture in this sense, since objects, including music, 'are

⁹¹ For further discussion of Mead's theory of gesture, see D. Miller (1973: 66-87).

significant to us in many ways and we talk about their variegated meanings.’⁹² Coker defines “musical gesture” as: ‘[...] a complex stimulus to the response of composer, performer, and listener as well as to further musical development. [...] which signifies other purely musical objects or non-musical objects, events, and actions.’⁹³

The components which create musical gestures are the quality of sound (pitch, duration, timbre etc.) and its rhythmic structure. Coker notes that the musical gesture may be considered as comprised of three different types of sign, namely, iconic, indexical, and syntactic-logical. While indexical signs in music are connected with the internal coherence of the musical syntax, as identified for example by the Schenkerian theory of musical analysis discussed in the previous chapter, Coker takes iconic signs to be central, displaying the significant value, whether congeneric or extrageneric, of music. Logical-syntactic signs of music, Coker’s third category, then constitute the logical connection of iconic representation and musical syntax. In distinguishing musical meaning between congeneric and extrageneric, Coker uses the iconic signification of music to be the vital element for both forms of meaning.

Congeneric musical meanings are those resultants of a dominantly iconic sign situation in which someone interprets one part of a musical work as a sign of another part of that same work or a diverse musical work.[...]
Extrageneric musical meanings are those resultants of the iconic sign situation in which someone interprets a musical work or some portion of it as a sign of some non-musical object, including sounds not then organised as parts of the musical work.⁹⁴

⁹² Coker (1972: 17)

⁹³ *Ibid.* (18)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* (61)

However, on Coker's account, congeneric and extrageneric musical meanings are not mutually exclusive. Music, he maintains, is expressive. He does not defend this through response to the theorists and composers who have supported the claim in the past; rather 'it is our experience that leads to [this] belief and the theories of philosophers and composers that help us to gain understanding'. For Coker, this musical expressiveness is not something extra but, rather, it is deeply embedded within music. "Music is a cry of the soul," as Delius succinctly puts it. But, we must remember, that "cry of the soul" is in the music itself, the sentient attitudes that music expresses are those objectively in tone and rhythm as such.'⁹⁵

This view in part echoes Langer's notion of significant form. Moreover, Coker takes up a notion of musical metaphor for the case of extrageneric meaning. While congeneric and extrageneric meanings are both 'valid aesthetic dimensions of musical meaning,' extrageneric meanings are found by the metaphorical transformation of the primary dimension – congeneric meaning. Music is capable of evoking extra musical ideas or materials only because of its iconic and, moreover, social nature. In order to create an extrageneric meaning, a musical work has to be an adequate sign vehicle to sustain its pragmatic, syntactic and semantic dimensions. Since congeneric meaning can be achieved only through these dimensions, extrageneric meaning also requires these characteristics.

More recently, a Finnish musicologist Eero Tarasti has developed a theory of musical semiotics, using the Peircian notion of iconicity. His account borrows a Greimasian notion of isotopies which, together with iconic signification, forms a complete theory in which all music can be analysed semiotically. On Greimas' account of isotopy,

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* (148)

according to Tarasti: ‘Isotopy designates a set of semantic categories whose redundancy guarantees the coherence and analysability of any text or sign complex.’⁹⁶ Applying this to music, Tarasti notes: ‘In music, isotopies mean the principles that articulate musical discourse into coherent sections.’⁹⁷ Thus, Schenkerian analysis can be seen as employing isotopies since its musical sections or groupings (*Ursatz, Urline* etc) are said to convey a musical discourse. With respect to iconicity, Tarasti notes ‘the inner iconicity of music, that is, [...] the idea that the concrete musical expression, the neutral level, contains all the information necessary for analysis of musical content.’⁹⁸ This “neutral level”, taken from Nattiez considered in the following section, is also a starting point for Tarasti in his analysis of music. “Isotopy” is a category of meaning, of signification which exists at the neutral level before any other sign operations and thus makes the work coherently analysable, its inner iconicity, a category which creates the thematic coherence of a musical work.⁹⁹ These theoretical background assumptions are clarified through his analysis of particular musical examples. As an example of semiotic investigation, using these notions of iconicity and isotopies, Tarasti analyses Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata Op.53*, stating that ‘[m]y objective is to depict *was es eigentlich gewesen ist* in music.’¹⁰⁰ Tarasti segments the first movement into three major isotopies and then subdivides

⁹⁶ Tarasti (1994: 6)

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (6)

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* (11)

⁹⁹ To reproduce his words accurately; ‘the “inner iconicity” which creates the so-called thematic coherence in a musical work. However, isotopy is a category of meaning, signification which exists before any other sign operations. I am more and more studying that “something” which exists before any fixed signs and before the subject 1 says anything to subject 2, i.e. the empty space gap between partners of communication, which enable the communication. I feel this empty space is filled by modalities, it is a modal space. I consider the concept of modalities the most important contribution of Greimas to semiotics – which I develop further in my present “existential” semiotics.’ Electronic mail conversation with author (Dec.2001)

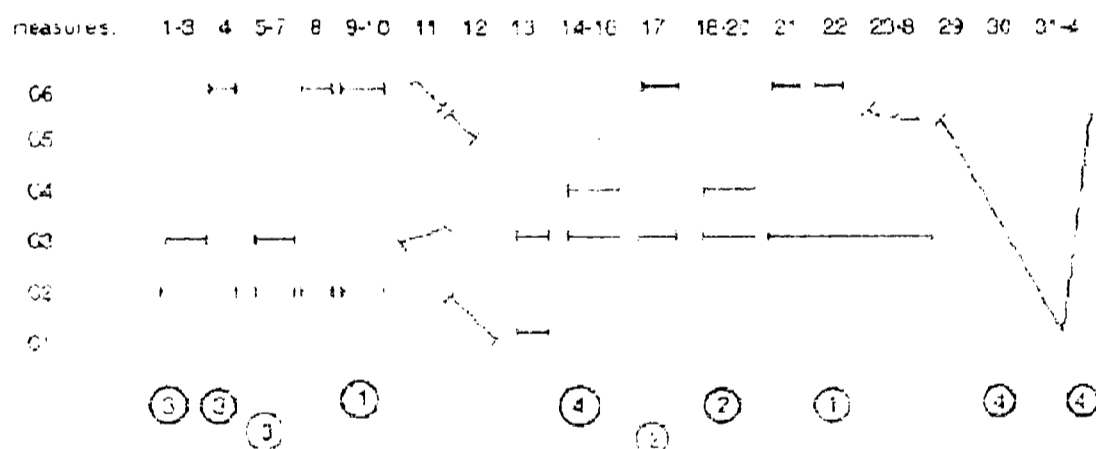
¹⁰⁰ Tarasti (1994: 116)

them into eight further segmentations [ex.13].¹⁰¹

Exposition (mm. 1-86): First thematic area (mm. 1-13): C	Second transition (mm. 50-73): E
Second transition (mm. 14-34): C → E	Codetta or closing theme (mm. 74-86): E
Third thematic area (mm. 34-50): E	Development (mm. 87-155)
	Recapitulation (mm. 156-249): C → A → C
	Coda (mm. 249-302): D \flat → G → C

Beethoven, Op. 53, mvmt. I, mm. 1-13; actors a, b, c, d

In each isotopy, Tarasti separates musical analysis into three iconic dimensions, namely spatial, temporal and actorial. With respect to the spatial, Tarasti maps the pitch onto a graph [ex.14] which represents “outer spatiality”, together with the key modulations which create intensification (inner spatiality) through engagement (*embrayage*) and disengagement (*débrayage*) depending whether the key is moving away from or towards the tonic chord.¹⁰²



[ex.14] Beethoven, Op. 53, mvmt. I, outer spatiality of mm. 1-34

¹⁰¹ Example taken from Tarasti (1994: 117) This piece of music can be said to be written in typical Classical Sonata style. Classical Sonata style consists of Exposition where the first “subject” is stated in the home key (in this case C major), then usually a second theme in dominant or subdominant (in this case median ((C → E))), then the Development section will usually develop these subjects in many key areas before returning to Recapitulation, stated in the home key and the Coda to finish off.

¹⁰² Key relations in music cannot be fully explained here, but in Western Tonal Music there is a system called the “circle of fifth” where, say, given C major as a home key (as in this case), the first sharp key then will be a 5th up, i.e. G major, and first flat key will be a 5th down i.e. F major. This then becomes a full circle from C → G → D → A → E → B → F sharp → C sharp → G sharp (A flat) → D sharp (E flat) → A sharp (B flat) → E sharp (F) → C. These twelve notes, used in Western Tonal Harmony, when this harmonic rule breaks down become the basis for the twelve-tone technique (dodecaphonic).

The temporal dimension is concerned with the metre and tempo, which together create the rhythmic structure of the piece.

He writes:

The first isotopy and transition contain similar programs of disengagement through rhythmic acceleration. The sixteenth-note figuration increases in the right hand (mm.8-11), and at the end of the transition it dominates the registers in both hands (mm.23-30). This temporal acceleration no doubt generates much of the *Steigerung* which August Halm believed permeates this sonata.¹⁰³

Outer temporality is the acceleration / deceleration in rhythmic time units, arising out from the change of metre and tempo which creates the “basic pulse.” In this case, the basic rhythmic time is the eighth-note (♪) and thus when it becomes faster, say as in the bar 3, 16th-note (♩), then it is +1/8, meaning that on one eighth-note of the bar there occurs an acceleration of the basic time unit, and when slower say, as at the end (m13) of the first theme, whole-note (♩), it is – 3.

Inner temporality, on the other hand, constitutes the temporal relations of musical events. In other words, it is the temporal relation of events, such as “motif” or “theme” or “harmonic progression” which occur throughout the piece, and the relations of these “isotopies.” This is possible through, according to Tarasti, the memory of the listener which has the capacity to connect, and reconnect, the musical events of the past to present, part to whole. He notes: ‘Where a new isotopy is

¹⁰³ Tarasti (1994: 117)

introduced into a piece, bringing with it an entirely new field of signification, a change also occurs in the paradigm of memory.’¹⁰⁴

Tarasti takes the “actorial dimension” of music signification from the musical psychologist Ernst Kurth’s notion of “energy of movement” for which music as a phenomenon is a form of movement.

Kurth considers the smallest unit of musical segmentation, the motif, as the offspring of a certain kinetic energy. [...] If we identify melody or theme with a musical actor, then the actorial analysis of music is the analysis of the motif constituting a theme, and the reduction of those motifs to their energising, kinetic tensions.¹⁰⁵

The movement of music, according to Tarasti, is not only the rhythmical tension and “pulse” created by change of temporal metre and pitch, but is also a combination of spatial (i.e. harmonic) properties. Later he also claims:

Although music is basically a linear art of time, it can create the effect of superimposed and simultaneous levels of musical action, much like Bakhtin’s concept of “polyphonic consciousness” in the novel (1970).¹⁰⁶

What Tarasti is concerned with here, is not the signification of music; he is rather using the semiotic approach in analysing music in order to seek deeper understanding than that available on the Schenkerian model. While the Schenkerian approach, as noted in the previous chapter, made use of the parallel with spatiality, and with

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* (63)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* (101)

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* (115) The Bakhtin reference is to his *La Poétique de Dostoïevski*.

temporality in Jackendoff's *GTTM*, Tarasti further elaborates the analysis by adding the actorial dimension of music.

2.3.2. – A Parallel Account: Nattiez's Semiological Approach

While Coker examined musical signification in terms of its iconic function understood in terms of "musical gesture", Tarasti developed a theoretical background to musical meaning semiotically, borrowing from this notion of iconicity, together with Greimas' theory of "isotopy."

Tarasti's formulation of semiotic theory borrows some of the aspects, (such as the notion of the "neutral level", cited above) from semiological theorists such as Nattiez who take the theory of communication to be the central issue in musical signification. In his *Music and Discourse*, Nattiez borrows his theoretical background from the semiologist Jean Molino, drawing a distinction between poietic and esthetic, as well as neutral processes.¹⁰⁷ On the classical approach to communication, a producer (or composer in the case of music) produces a message (music) by means of which a receiver (audience) perceives its meaning [Ex.15].

(Ex 15: Classical Model of Communication)

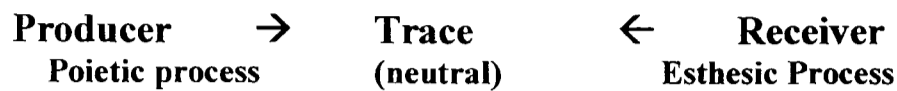
Producer → **Message** → **Receiver**

If and when the receiver fails to receive the same message as the producer sought to produce, then there is a fault in the communication, either on the producer's side, or in the perceiver's lack of understanding.

¹⁰⁷ For Molino's argument, see Molino (1979, 1984)

In place of this, Nattiez, following the approaches taken by Molino and other semiologists, sees the interpretations of the perceivers as producing a variety of constructions of meanings in the message [Ex.16]

(Ex 16: Semiologists' Approach to Communication)



The meaning of a text – or more precisely, the constellation of possible meanings – is not a producer's transmission of some message that can subsequently be decoded by a "receiver." Meaning, instead, is the constructive assignment of a web of interpretants to a particular form; i.e., meaning is constructed by that assignment.¹⁰⁸

The role of semiology, for Nattiez, is 'to identify interpretants according to the three poles of the tripartition, and to establish their relationship to one another.'¹⁰⁹

Turning to music, Nattiez sees problems in the cultural relativist's concept of music; '[...] at a given time and in a given society, there is never a single, culturally dominant conception of music.'¹¹⁰ For Nattiez, the concept of music is more radical and fragmented than for ethnomusicologists such as Alan Merriam cited in the introduction; Nattiez too, sees the difficulties in the search for universal meaning in music. The only way to construct a universal meaning for music, it is argued, is through the "neutral process", using physical rather than poetic or aesthetic levels of analysis. This echoes Molino's search to find the 'universals of strategy.'¹¹¹

Nattiez's main concern is the way in which music possesses semiological characteristics. With respect to the musical composition, Nattiez sees the necessity of an extra step of interpretation in order to achieve an adequate understanding of a

¹⁰⁸ Nattiez (1990: 11)

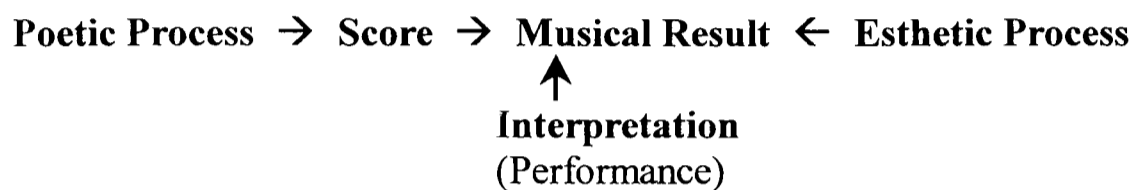
¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* (29)

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* (43)

¹¹¹ For further discussion of the "Universals of strategy," see *ibid.* (67)

musical work. Using Molino's tripartition as the model [ex.16 above], Western Tonal Music and any other music possessing a written signifier (e.g. score), needs an extra step [ex.17]. Interpretation of music is thus ambiguous, 'as Adorno pointed out, it can mean play, *or* interpret in a critical sense. This ambiguity illustrates the degree to which a performer is also a "hermeneuticist" in Gadamer's sense.'¹¹²

(Ex 17: Process of Communication and Interpretation in Western Art Music)¹¹³



From this interpretation process, Nattiez draws his concept of musical meaning, which is rooted in semiological facts. Nattiez notes: 'As a symbolic fact, music has the potential to refer to something.'¹¹⁴ However, Nattiez is not only concerned with extra-musical reference in music but, more importantly, with the intrinsic musical meaning. He criticises Benveniste's classification of music as consisting of non-signifying units (to contrast music with language), since, according to Nattiez, non-signifying units (notes) can still plausibly achieve intrinsic musical signification. By using the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic meaning, as defined by Jakobson, Nattiez notes that intrinsic musical analysis, as in Meyer's theory, can plausibly be characterised as intermusical referring, where a particular musical passage signifies another musical passage. Intramusical signification on the other hand, Nattiez argues, is another type of intrinsic musical signification where a particular musical structure signifies some 'larger musical universe to which it belongs.'¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Ibid.* (72)

¹¹³ *Ibid.* (73) for further discussion of performative and critical interpretation, see Chapter 5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* (102)

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* (117)

With respect to possible extrinsic signification, Nattiez identifies three distinctive categories: spatio-temporal, kinetic and the affective. Spatio-temporal symbolisation is recognised through music as an art of time, thus through the pattern of sound and silence in music, the linearity of time is realised; spatiality in music is created by the musical movement. Here, Nattiez is not concerned with movement in terms of “musical space” but rather with sound volumes and the impression of distance it makes to the listener’s ears.¹¹⁶ Kinetic symbolisation is the transfer of musical movement to movement in the listener, i.e. that of feeling. Here, we are again discussing the notion of tension and relaxation in musical movement, evoking the feeling of calmness and excitement in the listener. Affective signification, by contrast, is not natural signification, but the socially and culturally orientated understanding of music.

Nattiez plausibly concludes:

Musical semanticism has biological, psychological, and cultural bases, but we must beware of all reductive or mechanical explanations. Above all, we must not confuse music’s meaning, properly speaking, with *translation* of that meaning, since verbalizing music’s meaning is itself a special type of symbolization.¹¹⁷

2.4.1. The Language of Music – The Standpoint of Musicology

While semioticians and semiologists such as Tarasti and Nattiez, both musicologists,

¹¹⁶ As noted in the preface, see Zuckerkandl (1956) for explanation of the notion of “Auditory space”.

¹¹⁷ Nattiez (1990: 124)

worked on systems of musical signification, other musicologists and musicians such as Blume, Agawu and Rosen have applied such semiotic systems to particular forms of music, drawn from Western Tonal Music of the Classical period.

Blume gives a comprehensive historical account of how “the language” of Classical music was transformed into the language of Romantic music in his *Classic and Romantic Music*. In the Classical period, Blume notes, different national styles – in particular the French, German, and Italian styles of Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Century music – combined to produce a universal musical language. ‘Gluck declared that he wished to write “a strong music that speaks to the heart,” that would “appeal to all peoples” and “wipe out the ridiculous differences in national music.”’¹¹⁸ Viennese composers such as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in the late Eighteenth-Century sought in their music to achieve such a universal language. This aspiration appears to lie behind Mozart writing to his father that: ‘[...] music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the listener, or in other words must never cease to be music’¹¹⁹

While we cannot excavate semiotic or detailed syntactic notions of universal language from these historical accounts, they nevertheless clearly indicate that composers of the time saw music as language. Moreover music, it was widely held, must be communicated (understood) beyond the borders of the countries or social classes, within which it originated, for the prime function of music is to be expressive to all humanity.

¹¹⁸ Blume (1972: 28)

¹¹⁹ Mozart’s letter to his father on the 26th September 1781 in E.Anderson (1966: 769)

The musicologist Kofi Agawu, in his *Playing with Signs*, develops a more distinctive interpretation of certain particular cultural and historical forms of music, namely the Classical music of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. Using the studies of Rosen, Ratner and Blume as models, Agawu approaches this instrumental music of the Classical period semiotically. Taking for granted that music is similar to language, Agawu bases his theory of musical semiotics on the nature of language.

For language to provide a useful model for musical analysis, it must do at least three things: first, it must explain the laws that govern the moment-by-moment succession of events in a piece, that is, the syntax of music. Second and consequently, it must explain the constraints affecting organization at higher levels – the levels of sentence, paragraph, chapter, and beyond. It must, in other words, provide a framework for understanding the *discourse* of music. Third, it must demonstrate, rather than merely assume, that music represents a *bona fide* system of communication, and must then go on to show what is being communicated and how.¹²⁰

Though criticising Jakobson's so-called "false-dichotomy" between introversive and extroversive semiotics, Agawu nevertheless uses this model for his analyses of various string quartets. Agawu calls the extra-musical signs of music 'topic', where these topics are labelled socio-historically, particularly in this case with respect to eighteenth-century Viennese composers (such as *Sturm und Drang*, Fanfare, etc.).¹²¹ We can, according to Agawu, generate a variety of topics out of what we hear, but always in accordance with its "practical and stylistic constraints."¹²² These topics are, according to Agawu, produced out of certain types of musical expression which are

¹²⁰ Agawu (1991: 9)

¹²¹ For further discussion, see *Ibid.* (49)

¹²² *Ibid.* (50)

often described as “characteristics” of a certain musical style. Through certain structures associated with the ideas which the composer wishes to express through music, the effects or so called “topics” are created. Agawu cites Wye Jamison Allanbrook:

[Composers were] in possession of something we can call an expressive vocabulary, a collection in music of what in the theory of rhetoric are called *topoi*, or topics for formal discourse. [They] held it in common with [their] audiences, and used it...with the skill of a master craftsman. [...] In short, he can articulate within certain limits the shared response a particular passage will evoke.¹²³

Turning to introversive semiosis, Agawu claims that deeper formal structure is required for these referential signs which he calls “pure signs”. For him, there is no distinct separation between extroversive and introversive semiosis but, rather, extroversive semiosis is only possible on the ground of formal introversive semiosis. His analysis of formal structure through dividing into beginning – middle – end is similar to that of Tarasti’s isotopy method, and his melodic and harmonic analysis echoes the Schenkerean approach.¹²⁴ Agawu concludes that each topic is indeed an extra musical expression, a rising out of certain patterns of harmonic, rhythmic and melodic structures. Agawu thus achieves a re-union of the notions of “expression” and “form” which are often debated as if they represented a dichotomy in art. Semiotic analysis reveals their interdependence, and, moreover, the formal relations of musical structure are a necessity for any extra musical signification.

¹²³ *Ibid.* (35)

¹²⁴ Of course, Tarasti’s notion of isotopy is not of a purely temporal dimension. Musical analysis, at least in the case of Western Tonal Music, consists usually of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structure as three major factors for analysis.

Agawu notes:

T[opic]s therefore embody aspects of both introversive and extroversive semiosis. Similarly, aspects of structure are not completely devoid of expressive capability. In harmonic terms, an implicit recognition is often made of the elements of tension and resolution, thereby hinting at a potential expressive dimension.¹²⁵

2.6.1. The Limits of Semiotics: A Vision of Hermeneutic Interpretation

From the recent debates concerning signification theories and their application to music sketched above, one can see that the distinction between semiology and semiotics has ceased to have useful application in the case of music. Moreover, aestheticians advocating musical symbolism, such as Langer, can promote plausible accounts of musical symbolism without the help of either logical semiotics or social semiology. However, whether understood in terms of a signifier – signified connection, or subject – representamen – object relation, musical signification is only possible within the social and cultural domain. Thus, musical meaning can be paralleled by Saussure’s concept of *langue* in the sense that it is language understood as structured in terms of a set of cultural conventions. On the other hand, it is also evident that contemporary music semioticians such as Tarasti find the Peircian notion of iconocity more useful as a tool in analysing music. It is, indeed, reasonable to conclude that in the domain of musical semiotics both semiology and semiotics may be fused in order to create a coherent theory. From what we have seen in the recent history of semiotics and its application to music, interrelated semiotic and

¹²⁵ Agawu (1991: 133)

semiological frames of reference would seem to provide more illuminating access to the meaning of music than that available to musical semantics in the narrower sense, discussed in the previous chapter. Contemporary musicologists, such as Tarasti and Agawu, provide what may be seen as evidence for this judgement through painstakingly identifying semiotic significations in particular musical works, not in the sense of creating a musical pseudo-dictionary which Cooke once attempted, but in a more Peircian way, using the concept of iconic signification in relation to a particular piece or passage of music.¹²⁶ No comparable body of work has arisen out of the project of musical semantics. One of the main reasons for this more positive outcome for music semiotics lies in the fact that, whereas it is difficult to assign semantic meaning to the elementary musical units, musical phrases or “isotopies” can, as Tarasti and Agawu have both showed, be much more plausibly treated as signs.

Nevertheless there is increasing criticism of over-labelling with terms from semioticians. Charles Rosen, an eminent musician and a careful analyst of musical scores, sees the possibility of “over-semioticising” leading to “mis-reading” the intention of the composer.¹²⁷ On his account, the performance and interpretation of a composition must take account of wider criteria than these provided by a purely analytic decoding of its signs. As we shall see in Chapter 5, he, with many other composers and performers, insist not only on the relevance of the intention of the composers but also of their cultural and historical practices and how these were

¹²⁶ For Cooke’s project, see section 2.1.3. above.

¹²⁷ Rosen sees the danger of over-semioticizing without paying significant attention to cultural norms or intentions. Robert Hatten’s analysis of Beethoven’s Third Symphony (Hatten: 1994), for example, appears to Rosen to exhibit a case where semiotics is used as a pure scientific method, ignoring the intention of the composer. (Conversation with the author: Helsinki 2001). Hatten’s work will be discussed in the fifth chapter, together with a critical assessment of the plausibility of his understanding of musical hermeneutics.

understood by the audiences of the time.

In recent studies of semiotics, there have been critical voices raised against the “overinterpretation”, which is closely related to the concern with “over-labelling”. Eco’s seminal work focuses on the problem of over-interpretation and its limits, arguing that even if the notion of authorial intention may often be irrelevant to the work, the work itself possesses an intention (*intentio operis*). This notion of the intention of the work prevents the interpreter from over-interpretation, and although sympathetic towards the notion of unlimited semiosis, originating with Peirce and given wide currency in the context of Barthes’ “death of the author”,¹²⁸ Eco resists the drive to make an ‘open work of every text, but rather is concerned with the way “the progressive interpretations of a sign make its meaning more determinate.”’¹²⁹

Furthermore, in validating what is a right interpretation and distinguishing it from a wrong one, Eco insists on the “Augustinian” idea that ‘any interpretation given of a certain portion of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed by, and must be rejected if it is challenged by, another portion of the same text.’ Eco’s position is in fact closer to hermeneutic theory which employs the notion of the “whole-part” relation than is traditional in semiotics.¹³⁰ His further notion of the dialectic process between the intention of the reader and that of the text also touches the hermeneutic process of understanding which we shall discuss in Chapter 5.

This insistence on the importance of the hermeneutic dimension can also be seen in a short article by Oleg Sus where he argues that the ‘universality of semiotics in the

¹²⁸ Barthes (1977)

¹²⁹ Eco (1990: 120)

¹³⁰ Eco notes, ‘I am not ashamed to admit that I am so defining the old and still valid “hermeneutic circle” in describing the validation process.’ Eco (1992: 64)

framework of the science of literature has its own problems.’¹³¹ For Sus, the scientific “formal” study of semiotics is only concerned with the “structure” of the signs, and the real meaning of the signs is ‘connected with the concrete existence of the living human factors as well as the world of their living experience.’¹³²

These warnings against reliance on semiotics alone will take on a positive significance in our discussion of hermeneutics in Chapter 5. Music, along with other aesthetic items, are rooted deeply within human culture, and cannot be decoded solely in terms of the analytic processes of semiotics.

Scruton notes the failure of musical semantics and semiotics adequately to explore the understanding of music. He argues that grasp of “musical expression” is only attainable through the listener’s musical understanding.¹³³

[Y]ou see at once how inadequate are the currently fashionable ‘semantic’ and ‘semiotic’ theories of musical meaning. [...] The real question is not whether this programme can be carried through (say, in the naïve and illuminating manner of Deryck Cooke, or in the sophisticated and vacuous manner of Nattiez), but whether it provides a genuine description of what is understood by the cultivated listener.¹³⁴

While musical semiotics has made some progress towards elucidatory meaning in music, these claims suggest a different approach, in terms of musical expression and understanding which will be examined in subsequent chapters. As we shall see, a case can be made for claiming that interpretation of music should incorporate the

¹³¹ Sus in Chatman et al. (1979: 717)

¹³² *Ibid.* (720)

¹³³ See Scruton (1983a)

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* (35)

historical and cultural associations of a particular musical work, together with certain aspects of the intention of the composer, alongside the formal analysis.

CHAPTER 3: Musical Expression and Emotion

The previous chapter's focus on the relation between music and language found the semantic analogy for music weak, but that patterns of semiotic analogies appeared to have greater potential for illumination. This chapter will seek to relate semiotic signification to musical content in exploring the connection between music and its expression. While various theories of musical expression are discussed in this chapter, we have deliberately omitted examination of such related concepts as musical representation and exemplification.¹ Some music indeed possesses representational quality, whether the cuckoo in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony or Debussy's *La Mer* representing the sea, and for certain purposes it is indeed useful to make sharp discriminations here. Goodman, for example, differentiates as follows:

Representation and Description relate a symbol to things it applies to. Exemplification relates the symbol to a label that denotes it, and hence indirectly to the things (including the symbol itself) in the range of that label. Expression relates the symbol to a label that metaphorically denotes it, and hence indirectly not only to the given metaphorical but also to the literal range of that label.²

However, we are using the term "expression" in its wider sense to include all of these phenomena. Scruton, it is worth noting, takes a similar approach: 'One can understand a "representational" piece of music without treating it as a representation, indeed, without being aware that it has this status'; the representation is only one of

¹ For further discussion of Representation, see Scruton (1974: 188ff.), exemplification, see Goodman (1976: 52-55)

² Goodman (1976: 92)

many aspects of significance a particular piece may possess.³ Indeed, to the extent that such qualities fall within the category of extra-musical signification, they are a part of music itself and can be considered under the ruling of the expression of music.

Scruton concludes:

[W]hen we speak of music as representing the movement of the sea, or the inexorability of fate, and when we speak of music not as representing but as expressing these things, then we are speaking of one and the same phenomenon.⁴

If music is a language of emotion, as is often claimed, how does this emotional “evocation” occur, and where does this emotional content lie? In considering these issues, we shall not be arguing any kind of universality in terms of emotional signification; as noted in Chapter 2, the project of creating a dictionary relating musical form to its emotive content, along the lines of that attempted by Deryck Cooke, encounters insuperable difficulties.

While the main focus here is on musical expression, normally conceived, it will be useful to reconsider the notion of “expression” more generally first, in the linguistic context as well as in the aesthetic domain. Furthermore, it will also prove relevant to take account of some of the classical expression theorists, such as Collingwood and Croce, in order to provide a context for understanding the developments of recent music expression theorists.

³ Scruton (1974: 210)

⁴ *Ibid.* (212)

3.1.1. The Term “Expression” Reconsidered

Although some analytic philosophers have argued that the term “expression” designates a purely illocutionary act, so that as an element of speech expression is only possible through intentional utterances, it is now widely accepted that a more psychological approach is required which takes account of facial expressions, and expression through utterances which do not constitute illocutionary acts.⁵

Searle defines the expressive in language as a sub-class of illocutionary acts; in ‘A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts,’ he states: ‘Expressives. The illocutionary point of this class is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. [...] Notice that in expressives there is no direction of fit.’⁶ Alston argues ‘that squeals, looks, and tones of voice do not express feeling in anything like the sense in which they are expressed by interjections.’⁷ For Alston, facial expressions, laughs, and sighs are all part of natural behaviour which show, demonstrate, and manifest the emotions, but this is not sufficient for them to be called “expressions”,

Let us ask how one would support an inference from ‘I am disgusted,’ on the one hand, and from a facial expression on the other, to the person being disgusted. To put the matter shortly, in the first case one would appeal to a general practice of using the sentence in a certain way, whereas in the second case nothing of the sort is involved.[...] This latter exhibits basically the same structure as any case of taking one thing to be a natural sign of another, for example taking a certain noise in an engine

⁵ For detailed discussions of “Expression” as an illocutionary act, see Alston, ‘Expressing’ in Black (1965), Searle (1969), and his ‘A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts’ in Gunderson (1973).

⁶ Searle in Gunderson (1973: 356).

⁷ Alston in Black (1965: 17).

to be an indication of an improperly seated valve. More fundamentally it is the fact that in the English language community there exists a practice of using the sentence in a certain way...⁸

Tormey seeks to provide a more comprehensive study of the term “expression” as used both in linguistics and in its application to aesthetics. Echoing Alston, Tormey denies that natural behaviour such as blushing in embarrassment can properly be considered as expressive.⁹ Furthermore, contrary to what Wittgenstein claimed, such a remark as “I am in pain” cannot be regarded as an expression but rather as reporting a state of affairs. Tormey considers intentionality as the minimum requirement for expression while, in contrast with Searle, maintaining that expression needs a certain object (i.e. direction of fit). Thus, voluntary behaviours such as crying in sadness are said to be expressions, while spots do not express measles.

Green, on the other hand, echoing Austin’s hesitation to describe expression as an illocutionary act, argues that the term “expression” may be used in a wider context;

There appear to be several reasons which Austin had for hesitating to say that expressing emotion is an illocutionary act. 1) There is no explicit performative formula available for this use of language as there generally is for illocutionary acts. 2) “We may evince emotion in or by issuing an utterance”, whereas illocutionary acts are performed in speaking. 3) Illocutionary acts must be conventional, and clearly not all expressions of emotions are so.¹⁰

⁸ *Ibid.* (20-21)

⁹ Although, as will be discussed in a later chapter, there is a distinction between “expression” and “expressive”, here the term “expressive” is used as the relative adjective of “expression.” Tormey (1971: 20-21)

¹⁰ Austin (1962: 104-5) cited in Green (1979: 587).

Through arguing that expression is not as such an illocutionary act, Green tries to develop a more adequate expression theory which can be applied not only to linguistic, but also to non-linguistic expressions. He identifies three main types of expression, namely psychological, para-linguistic and linguistic. Psychological expressions are, according to Green, expressions without any specific linguistic conventions, being rather mediated by understanding of the psychological mode of the person. Further, Green notes, ‘A distinction can be made between saying frightened or angry things and speaking in an angry or frightened way.’ “Para-linguistic” designates the tone and inflexion of speech which may express emotion. This is a middle way between the linguistic, which is conventional, and psychological, non-conventional, expression. While linguistic and some para-linguistic expressions are types of illocutionary acts, psychological expression is not an illocutionary act since there is no linguistic convention in it.

With respect to musical expression, in part because of frequent lack of “direction of fit” (for music may sound boisterous, sad or otherwise, but it is not sad about anything), the affinities would appear to be with Green’s para-linguistic and psychological forms of expression.

3.1.2. Feelings and Emotions – Comparisons and Contrasts

While in everyday use we often treat the words “feeling” and “emotion” interchangeably, there are several differences between these two terms. In order to be able to engage fully with the discussion of expression and arousal theories, it is necessary to take account of some of these distinctions.

The verb “to feel”, according to Kenny, has three main distinctive usages. Firstly, it is used in conjunction with certain objects, such as “The cat feels smooth” or “I feel the hotness of the kettle.” The second use is where it is used instead of the verb “to be,” where we claim “I feel hungry” (where one can also say “I am hungry”), or “I feel tired.” Thirdly, it is followed by an *oratio obliqua* clause as in “feeling that the moment was unpropitious.”¹¹

Since we are only concerned with feelings that are closely associated with “emotions” here, it is the second case which needs further attention. Feeling in this case does not necessarily take an object. That is to say, if one feels tired, there need be no intentional object which one is tired of. Such feelings do not necessarily have to do with the emotions and, as discussed below, therefore require no intentional objects, and hence no directions of fit. Thus boredom, anxiety, horror, happiness, calmness, exhaustion etc. can all count as feelings. This relates to the central debate between arousal theory and expression theory, as we shall see later. The meaning of “This music is sad” can be explicated as “This music feels sad” in this sense. But can music, a non-animate item, feel something? Or is it the listener who feels sad, listening to music?

Emotion is a type of feeling according to Kenny (and arousal theorists typically repeat this claim). Firstly, emotion has to do with cognition. In other words, emotions usually have some object towards which the emotion is directed.¹² John fears dogs, because he believes that dogs are harmful to him. The object of fear is the dog, and

¹¹ Kenny (1963: 52)

¹² Of course, as Kenny rightly notes, there are exceptions; “Still, there are cases where we are afraid, but afraid of nothing, or of something, but we know not what.” Kenny (1963: 61)

his belief is thus cognitive.¹³ It is indeed often argued that emotion is conceptually connected with beliefs, but we shall not pursue this further here, since a definition and comprehensive account of emotion is not essential to our project.¹⁴ If one is frightened or agitated, one normally needs to have a certain object which makes one frightened or agitated. Such emotions thus have a mind to world direction of fit. Sadness, with its contrasting happiness (and/or joy), on the other hand, appears to be a problematic case, as we shall see later in connection with sadness in music. Sadness is typically said to have an intentional object and thus is often classified as an emotion, yet, in some cases, it is possible to feel sad without any definite object that one is sad about, in which case it may be labelled as “feeling” rather than, more specifically, as full blown emotion. While they may seem trivial here, these distinctions will return as part of a central argument when we discuss arousal theory.

3.2.1. Expression Theory – Communication between the composer and the listener

When a work of art is said to be expressing something, it is normally associated with the expression of a certain feeling. While we can deny the literal linguistic acceptability of such a sentence as “Beethoven’s *Symphony No.9* is joyful” or “The *Pathetique Sonata* is sad,” since music does not possess feelings as animals or humans do, we still plausibly describe art as expressive.

¹³ Others such as Pitcher and White, cited in J.R.S. Wilson, make a similar point. ‘Emotions are very often, and perhaps always, directed towards something.’ Pitcher (1965: 326) and ‘Unlike a mood, an emotion necessarily has an object.’ White (1967: 124) both quoted in Wilson (1972: 29).

¹⁴ For further discussion of emotions and beliefs, and of the cognitive aspects of emotion, see Matravers (1998) Chs. 3,4, and A. Rorty ‘Explaining Emotions’ and de Sousa ‘The Rationality of Emotions’ in A. Rorty (1980).

A challenging account of the relations between “music is sad” and “I am sad” is provided by O.K. Bouwsma, where he compares such sentences as “the book is sad” and “Cassie is sad, reading the book.” He concludes:

[L]istening to the music and hearing it is one thing, and feeling sad is another, and when you say that the music is sad, you mean that while Verbo listens to the music, he feels sad.¹⁵

And later he claims, ‘The music “evokes,” “arouses” feelings.’¹⁶

This invites the question, Can it be in the work itself where this sadness lies, or must it be, as Bouwsma maintains, entirely within the listener where sadness is aroused through perceiving the work of art?

While there are several theories which involve the relation between art and emotion (or in some cases, art and feeling), there are two main types of approach, namely expression and arousal theories, which differ exactly on this matter. On the side of expression theory, R.G. Collingwood and B. Croce can be said to be the two major philosophers who have advocated expressionism.

Collingwood argued that a work of art can only be created through the intention of an artist and, moreover, only when the artist expresses his/her emotional content.¹⁷ In *The Principles of Art* Collingwood distinguishes between art and craft in order to define what art is. While the craftsman knows what he wants to make before he

¹⁵ Bouwsma ‘The Expression Theory of Art’ in Elton (1954: 82).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* (88)

¹⁷ Collingwood’s distinction between emotion and feeling is not quite the same as that of Kenny discussed above. He nevertheless distinguishes “feeling” between the sensational level (heat, hardness, even colour and smell) and the emotional (which he calls psychical) level (pain, anger and fear). Emotion for Collingwood is the latter – psychical level – of feeling. See Collingwood (1958: 164 ff)

makes it, and thus the end is thought out before the means, the artist's creation is practically constituted by the pressure of his/her emotions as they transform themselves into artistic experience. Thus it is not the finished product which for Collingwood has priority, but rather the artistic process which an artist executes in "art-making." This in turn, implies that in pure artistic creation (rather than craft making), there is no distinction between means and ends. 'The central and primary characteristic of craft is the distinction it involves between means and end. If art is to be conceived as craft, it must likewise be divisible into means and end. We have seen that actually it is not so divisible...'¹⁸ What Collingwood is criticising here is the functional theory of art where art is a technical product for something else. Instead, Collingwood maintains that art work is a pure product of one's imagination and otherwise unexpressed emotions. Representational art for Collingwood, therefore, cannot be called an art proper, but rather craft work since representational art is not an expression of an artist's inner emotion, but rather seeks the end of imitation.

Another significant distinction between craft and art proper is:

[..A]rt proper, as the expression of emotion, differs sharply and obviously from any craft whose aim it is to arouse emotion. The end which a craft sets out to realize is always conceived in general terms, never individualized.¹⁹

Since artistic expression for Collingwood is that of emotion which is not otherwise realised, it is individual to the artist and unlike the crafts – which include, according to

¹⁸ Collingwood (1958: 107-8)

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (113)

Collingwood, representational art – which may seek specifically to arouse certain emotions in the audience.

It should be noted that if we apply to Collingwood's account of art rigorously, then it can lead into idealism.²⁰ Collingwood does not distinguish between the artistic product and the artistic process, but rather the process itself is the artistic product. Moreover, the artistic product does not necessarily need any physical manifestation, but may exist rather within the mental "imaginative" process of the artist.

This tune is already complete and perfect when it exists merely as a tune in his head, that is, an imaginary tune. Next, he may arrange for the tune to be played before an audience. Now there comes into existence a real tune, a collection of noises. But which of these two things is the work of art? Which of them is music? The answer is implied in what we have already said: the music, the work of art, is not the collection of noises, it is the tune in the composer's head.²¹

Benedetto Croce similarly argues that an aesthetic creation (i.e. work of art) is a product of the artist's inner feeling.²² The term "expression" for Croce is used in quite similar fashion to that of those linguistic expression theorists discussed above. In the "natural" sense, there may be an expression of embarrassment by blushing, grinding of teeth may express anger, whereas aesthetic (or spiritual) expression relates to the feelings of the poet, painter and composer. Croce goes on to present the process of aesthetic creation.

²⁰ For discussion of Collingwood's affinities with Idealism, see Ridley (1997, 1999), and Kobayashi (2001); an influential criticism of Collingwood can be found in Wollheim (1973).

²¹ Collingwood (1958: 139)

²² Although Croce's work is earlier (1901) than that of Collingwood's (1924), and Collingwood is influenced by Croce, it is convenient here to consider them in non-chronological order. Croce's use of the term "feeling" is quite vague here, not so much because of problems of translation, but because he appears not to have made the distinction between emotion and feeling.

The complete process of aesthetic production can be symbolised in four stages, which are: *a*, impressions; *b*, expression or aesthetic spiritual synthesis; *c*, the hedonistic accompaniment or pleasure in the beautiful; *d*, the translation of the aesthetic object into physical phenomena.²³

The crucial difference is that, while for Collingwood the artistic product does not necessarily have to be physical but, rather, mental imagination and creation in the artist's mind has a superiority in terms of art, Croce more plausibly admits the importance and necessity of the physical aesthetic object. Moreover, for Croce the notion of intuition plays a crucial role in aesthetic expression. Croce notes: 'Intuitive activity intuits only insofar as it expresses.' And later he comments: '[...] whether it be pictorial or verbal or musical, or however else one describes or labels it in any of these guises, expression cannot lack intuition, from which it is strictly speaking indivisible.'²⁴ Rather than the aesthetic product being some not yet realised emotion (Collingwood), Croce thus draws a parallel between the artist's expression and the artist's intuition. Nevertheless, Croce and Collingwood both understand the work of art as an expression of an inner feeling of the artist, and for this reason they have often both been classified, and criticised, as idealist theorists.²⁵

The rudiments of a yet more plausible account of expressionism are provided by Tolstoy when he states:

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, line, colours, sounds,

²³ Croce (1992: 107)

²⁴ *Ibid.* (9) Croce's terms "intuition" and "expression" are often unclear. For further discussion, see Patanker (1962: 112-25).

²⁵ See Hospers (1955), (1956), Wollheim (1980).

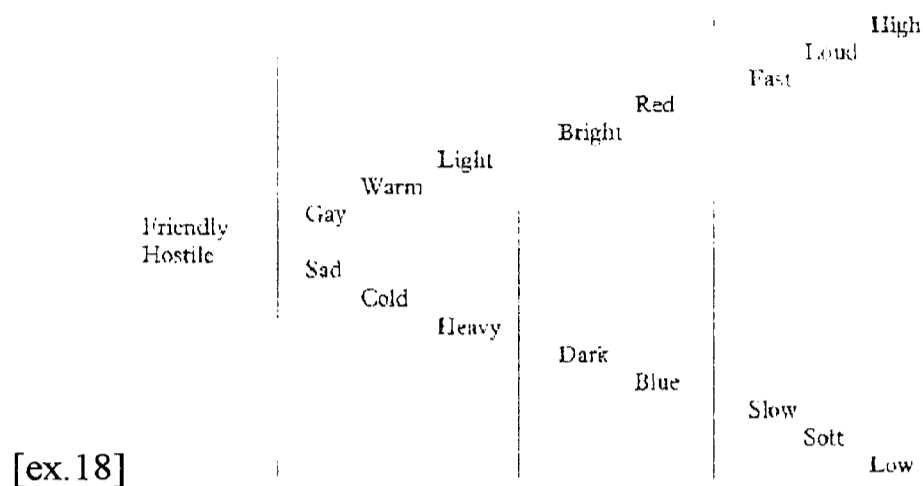
or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling – this is the activity of art.²⁶

The most notable difference between Tolstoy and other expressionists relates to the notion of communication. While all expression theories claim that the work of art is an expression of the artist, for Tolstoy, in order to achieve a true manifestation of the work of art, the expression of the appropriate feeling has to be such that it may be correctly communicated to an audience. This in turn enables art to connect not only with the artist, but also with the audience. The communication model of expression theory is indeed a more attractive one than those we have so far considered, since the audience often not only appears to respond to a work of art, but also to the intention or the feeling of the artist in creating that particular work of art; it takes account of the fact that the expression is communicable. Not only is the communication model more plausible than those provided by the idealist theories of Collingwood and Croce, but it provides an opening for the musical semiotic and semantic theories discussed in the previous chapter. Expression is, in any case, an expression of something by someone, and to the extent that it may be understood in illocutionary terms requires uptake to be fully constituted; thus expressionism may of itself be thought to require some mode of communication.

E.H. Gombrich, it should be noted, makes a clear polemical distinction between Communication and Expression in terms of the conventional versus the natural respectively, distinguishing between language which is made up of conventional codes in order to communicate, and natural expressions such as blushing and laughter. Further, Gombrich maintains that the work of art, because of its “conventional” usage

²⁶ Tolstoy ‘Art and Communication’ in Hospers (1971: 10).

of colours and shades (in the case of painting) or fast and high pitch (in the case of music) [ex.18], is to be understood as a communication process, rather than as expression, which an artist tries to achieve through his/her work of art.²⁷



This view, rightly criticised by Wollheim, is unsustainable.²⁸ We noted earlier attempts to take account of both the psychological and the illocutionary dimensions of expression. In the present case, while indeed natural expressions, such as laughter or crying, may be seen as expression without communication, in the concept of expression in the aesthetic domain there is normally an underlying assumption that the expression is somehow communicated to the audience. While it is plausible to say that it is not only the expression of feeling which an artist may want to communicate, but also imitations or representations of ideas or certain objects, it does not follow that if music expresses certain qualities it does not communicate them. Certainly, the sadness which a composer may try to express may not be the feeling which an audience perceives, but this is not sufficient to support Gombrich's polemical use of his distinction.

But what exactly does music communicate? There are several accounts of what it communicates and how it communicates, ranging from mimeticism to expressionism.

²⁷ [Ex.18] taken from Gombrich (1963: 63).

²⁸ Wollheim (1964: 276)

Davies in his *Musical Meaning and Expression* provides a comprehensive account of several relevant theories which we shall follow closely.²⁹ The first account, which Davies rightly characterises as the “crudest version” of expression theory, holds that the expressiveness of music is derived from the inner feeling of the composer felt at the time of composition.³⁰ This view was introduced by the French idealist Eugène Véron who, influenced by the Romantic movement, advocated that Art is a language of feelings. For Véron; ‘Art, therefore, is “*l’expression émue de la personnalité humaine*”.’³¹ While later idealists such as Collingwood and Croce did not provide comprehensive accounts of the process of communication, nevertheless they too both claimed that the art creator expresses his/her feeling through the work of art. This theory is often rejected for several obvious reasons, since it is implausible to suppose that all composition possesses expressive qualities in this sense; the composer cannot plausibly be considered as expressing his/her joy in the first movement, suddenly expressing his utmost sadness in the second movement, which quickly turns into an uplifting motif in the second theme written in the relative major scale, etc. Nevertheless, there may be some works which the composer created through his/her emotional discharge.

Dewey’s account of artistic expression modifies this view. In his *Art as Experience*, Dewey sees expression as only achievable through understanding of the “act” of expression.

As the infant matures, he learns that particular acts effect different

²⁹ S.Davies (1994a: 170 ff)

³⁰ S.Davies may have borrowed the word “crude” from Wollheim – see Wollheim (1980) Chapters 15-17.

³¹ Véron (1878), cited in Ducasse (1929: 22).

consequences, that, for example, he gets attention if he cries [...]. He thus begins to be aware of the *meaning* of what he does. As he grasps the meaning of an act at first performed from sheer internal pressure, he becomes capable of acts of true expression.³²

Although Dewey agrees with the Collingwood-Croce theory that emotional discharge is a necessary condition for expression, he argues that the act of expression in an artist needs not only the emotional discharge, but also understanding of how the intention to discharge this emotion may artistically be achieved.

Dewey's more sophisticated account, which remains within the main stream of contemporary expression theory, claims that composers, whatever their feelings, deliberately create works of art with expressive qualities. The audience is supposed to understand the composer's intention through the work of art.³³ Moreover, the expressive qualities are to be found within the music itself. Indeed if one closely examines the history of Western music, it begins with the notion of imitation (*mimesis*), develops from representation to formalism, and then goes on to expressionism in the nineteenth century.³⁴ Not only is it plausible to say that in the Romantic era the composers did deliberately create work with expressive qualities, such can be seen in the work of Tchaikovsky, Satie and Fauré, but those who composed in terms of imitation and representation also sought to communicate what the composer intended to communicate. Communication theory may have application beyond expressionism.

³² Dewey 'The Act of Expression' in Hospers (1971: 76).

³³ For the notion of intention and that of the "intentional fallacy" (Wimsatt and Beardsley), see Chapter 1.

³⁴ The force of "Western" here relates to the fact that in, for example, Japanese art history, we find the notion of "expression" before that of imitation. For further discussion of comparative aesthetic values East and West, see Imamichi (1981).

3.2.2. Arousal Theory – Plausibility and Problems

What is sometimes called the “arousalist” approach typically claims that through perceiving a work of art, the audience’s feelings are “aroused” by the work.

Contemporary expression theory also believes, fundamentally, that the audience is moved by the work of art; however, the crucial difference is that arousalists traditionally deny that there are any connections between the intended expression of the composer and the cognitive perception of it, but rather claim that music simply evokes feelings in the listener. Matravers provides a useful definition:

A work of art x expresses the emotion e , if for a qualified observer p experiencing x in normal conditions, x arouses in p a feeling which would be an aspect of the appropriate reaction to the expression of e by a person, or to a representation the content of which was the expression of e by a person.³⁵

There is thus a certain act of expression by the art work itself. There is, here, no denial of the existence of artistic expression, nor even of expression by the art work itself, but the emotional qualities do not need to be traced to the artist.

One reason for seeking an alternative to expression theory is that the latter does not enable one to determine a single correct answer as to how a musical expression should be understood. A subjective aesthetic feeling can never be plausibly formulated in terms of an objective expressive concept such that there could be universally verifiable procedure for identifying the correct concept. Moreover, the cognitive theory of musical expression typically holds that if one feels sad, listening to a certain

³⁵ Matravers (1998: 146)

musical work, then the sadness must have an intended object. In other words, one is sad about something, a certain object, let it be the music itself. Arousalism believes otherwise. While we may never be certain of the composer's intention, nor have a correct understanding of the musical expression, the entire "feeling" is located in the mind of the listener rather than in the music. Music, through its expressive qualities (the analogy with the paradigm cases of expression now being stretched to its limit), triggers these feelings which are in the listeners themselves, and they do not necessarily have to be inter-personal. Moreover, arousal theory claims that the feelings aroused by music need not have any object. This brings us back the problem of expression and the direction of fit.

Arousal theorists often carefully note these differences and seek to demonstrate that what a work of art arouses is a non-cognitive feeling and not an emotion.³⁶ In other words, when we listen to music, and when we feel sad as a consequence of listening to it, the sadness does not have any object such as an imaginary representation which music expresses nor even the music itself.³⁷ Matravers notes: 'The characteristic state aroused by an expressive work of art is, [...] a feeling and not an emotion: that is, it does not have a cognitive content.'³⁸

Within arousal theory, there are several accounts of how music triggers our feelings. The crudest version of arousal theory, which Matravers rejects, holds that the "sadness" does not lie anywhere but within the mind of the listener himself. More precisely, given that according to these theorists music, being non-animate can possess neither feeling nor emotion, they conclude that: 'the emotional state it is

³⁶ See the discussion of differences between feeling and emotion earlier in the chapter.

³⁷ For further differentiation between different types of theory, see Nolt (1981: 140); for the difference between emotion and feeling, see Matravers (1998).

³⁸ Matravers (1998: 147-8)

appropriate for an expressive work to cause is of the full-blooded kind for which tears, action, or gnashing of teeth would be an appropriate manifestation.’³⁹ Often, mistakenly, cognitivists take this as the main stream of arousalism and criticise it. For example, Kivy notes:

If music is expressive of emotions in virtue of arousing them, then it would seem that listeners would shun, for example, music expressive of anguish, or melancholy, or any other of the unpleasant ones. [...] Yet, clearly, listeners do not shun music expressive of the unpleasant emotions. Therefore, it seems highly implausible to think music is expressive of these emotions in virtue of arousing them.⁴⁰

This version of arousal theory takes the term “evocation of emotion” in a somewhat behaviouristic fashion. It appears to take the notion of “expressive quality within the listener” (i.e. the sadness within the listener) too literally.

A more defensible version of arousal theory admits that the expressive quality lies within the music itself. This seems to echo Wollheim’s criticisms of expression theory that the expressive quality of music is not something outside of music, but rather itself a musical property.⁴¹ The crucial difference between the cognitive (expression) theory and arousal theory concerns not where the “expressive property” lies, about which cognitivist Kivy and arousalist Matravers both agree, but the notion of cognitive aspect or the lack of it. Contemporary cognitive expression theorists hold that it is by understanding music, and perceiving it cognitively, that we perceive the

³⁹ *Ibid.* (146)

⁴⁰ Kivy (1989: 155)

⁴¹ Of course Wollheim is not an arousalist. He gives an alternative account somewhat similar to Wittgenstein’s notion of “seeing-as.”

emotional quality of expressiveness.⁴² On the other hand, arousalists claim that music's expressiveness is not an objective quality which we can cognise in it, because expressiveness does not take an intentional object. As Allen puts it: 'a piece of music is not *about* anything. It is nostalgic, melancholy or triumphant or whatever, without being nostalgic, melancholic or triumphant about'⁴³

If we assume that musical expressiveness lies within the music itself, then arousalists' claims can be summarised as follows:

- 1) We do *perceive* music, as both expressive and arousal theorists agree.
- 2) Both expression and arousal theorists claim that the *music* (say Beethoven's *Pathetique Sonata*) is sad.
- 3) For arousal theorists, this sadness is evoked in the listener; even if they acknowledge that the property of sadness lies within the music itself, this is not the same thing as music *expressing* sadness.
- 4) Some arousal theorists (most explicitly Matravers and Allen) claim that if such an emotion as 'sadness' is perceived through music, then there has to be *some object* as to what we are sad *about*. But since there is no intentional object, one cannot say that music *expresses* emotion, but rather, evokes feelings in the listener.

On this basis, arousalism seems theoretically weak. The main objection raised to arousal theory, not surprisingly, is that the theory is grounded in the mind of the

⁴² We shall return to the cognitive theory of musical expression in the chapter and in chapter 5.

⁴³ Allen (1990: 58)

subject rather than in some objective concept. Kivy thus plausibly objects that arousal theory is insufficient since it is based only on subjective experience. Davies also notes that it is only too easy to show how so-called “sad music” fails to make people (objectlessly) sad. Hospers’ famous criticism of arousal theory can be echoed here, where he notes:

Does “The music expresses sadness” ever mean “I am disposed to feel sad when I hear music”? If it did, why should I ever wish to hear it? Sad experiences, such as suffering personal bereavement or keen disappointment, are not the kind of things we wish to repeat or prolong. Yet sad music does not affect us in this way...⁴⁴

Nolt, defending arousal theory against Hospers, discards the claim for communication between the listener and the composer as experiencing the same emotional quality.⁴⁵ Matravers holds a similar view, arguing that rather than sad music communicating sadness to the listener, what in the listener is evoked, listening to sad music, is the feeling of pity. However, Ridley rightly notes, this notion of feeling of pity in response to sad music is difficult to sustain.⁴⁶ What should the listener feel pity for and about? Surely one cannot pity a few structured notes. While, according to Matravers, it is supposed to be an objectless ‘feeling’ of pity rather than a full blown emotion,⁴⁷ it is difficult to see how a feeling of pity can exist without anything to feel pity about. Nonetheless, however strong the criticisms of arousal theory may be, music does, as Davies and Kivy rightly note, from time to time arouse us. While as a theory or analysis of musical expressiveness arousal theory seems implausible, yet at

⁴⁴ Hospers (1955: 326)

⁴⁵ ‘It is obvious that the emotions which an art object tends to evoke need not correspond to the emotions of the artist, so that expression need not be communication.’ Nolt (1981: 147)

⁴⁶ Ridley (1993) which is a criticism of Matravers (1991).

⁴⁷ Matravers (1991) and his reply (1994) to Ridley.

the same time one cannot simply ignore some of those features of musical experience to which arousalists draw our attention.

It is worth noting that phenomenology's insistence, remarked in Chapter 1, on transforming the problematics of subjectivity into those of intersubjectivity, may be relevant here. Hermeneutic theory, building on this shift, makes the validity of interpretation strongly dependent on shared intersubjective understanding, together with the role of "effective history" and cultural commonality, a matter to which we shall return.⁴⁸

3.2.3. Musical Cognitivism – Solutions to the expression vs. arousal dichotomy?

Recent criticisms of both arousal and classic expression theories made by Scruton and Kivy, often echoing not so recent criticism made by Hospers, develop an expression theory which is not rooted in the communication model, but rather in the cognitive aspects of musical expressiveness. Hospers shifts the focus further from the artistic value of the art-process towards the product of the art process. Criticising the Collingwoodian view of the art-process as the sole value of art-proper, Hospers rightly argues for the importance of the manifestation of the finished product.

What difference does it make *what* emotions the artist felt, so long as the work of art is a good one? If the artist was clever enough to compose a work of art without expressing emotion in anything like the manner described by the expression theory, or even if he felt nothing at all, this is

⁴⁸ See Chapter 6 for further connection between hermeneutic theory and aesthetic truth.

of no consequence so long as we find the work an enduring source of aesthetic satisfaction.⁴⁹

Hospers considers a proposal that what is expressed in the art work cannot and should not be the emotion of the artist in creating the work of art but rather the intended feelings which the artist deliberately conveyed or tried to convey to the audience, an account which is closer to arousal theory. Hospers sees that this view, although it can explain several cases of musical expression, encounters several difficulties.⁵⁰ While certain works of music can be created with the deliberate intention of expressing feeling, how can one be assured, where there are no evidences of the composer's intentions, that one is correctly understanding the music? In extreme cases, we might find anonymous compositions where we cannot understand the intention of the composer. Secondly, where we do find evidence of the composer's creative process, and where we perceive a work of art as not corresponding to his/her intention, are we, the ignoble listeners, to blame ourselves for the lack of understanding, or is it simply the lack of the composer's ability to express what he/she intended to express? Furthermore, as Dewey rightly points out, what a composer must express is not his/her bare feelings, but rather the composer creates a work of art which enables listeners to understand his/her expressions.⁵¹ So if "expression" is neither to be equated with the artist's emotional discharge, nor in its process of creation, as Collingwood once thought, then where, if anywhere, is it to be located?

The most common view in recent debate is the cognitive approach to perceived expressive qualities. Rather than trying to search for the emotional content or

⁴⁹ Hospers (1955: 323)

⁵⁰ Hospers gives three objections to this view. See *ibid.* (339).

⁵¹ Dewey in Hospers (1971: 76, 79, 82)

intended emotional content which the composer has expressed (or attempted to express) in the work of art, it is now generally held that the expressive content lies within the work of art itself. In other words, when one says, “this piece of music is sad,” one is not saying “the composer expressed his sadness through this music,” but rather, simply “this music has the expressive quality of sadness.” This raises an issue that Bosanquet, who influenced Collingwood long ago, pondered: ‘how a feeling can be got into an object.’⁵²

Hospers, indeed, after examining the difficulties of expression and arousal theories, suggests that this notion of the art work itself as possessing an expressive quality requires theorisation:

It is neither the artist nor the audience that matters here; it is the work of art itself. It is the music which is expressive; and the music may be expressive even if the artist had no emotions when he wrote it, and even if the audience is composed of such insensitive clods that they feel nothing when they hear it. The expressiveness of the music is dependent on neither of these things.⁵³

Hospers offers suggestions as to how such an account should be articulated and defended. The first approach is through analysing certain passages, chord progressions or harmonics as providing signs of a certain expressive mode in similar fashion to that found in the works of Cooke cited in Chapter 2; we have noted some of the problems with this. An alternative approach is through imitation. This view, often called associationism or resemblance theory, argues that certain emotional

⁵² Bosanquet (1923: 74)

⁵³ Hospers (1955: 341)

contents can be imitated in certain musical works. In other words, music with slow movement, low pitch, and a descending minor scale resembles a sad person walking slowly, with his back bent and quietly sighing. Such views of expressive quality as lying within the artwork itself are clearly opposed to approaches which link it primarily with characteristics of the artist, as is sharply brought out by Wollheim's criticisms of Croce and Collingwood in his *Art and its Objects* where he notes that on their accounts:

...the work's expressiveness now becomes a purely external feature of it. It is no longer something that we can or might observe, it is something that we infer from what we observe: it has been detached from the object as it manifests itself to us, and placed in its history, so that it now belongs more to the biography of the artist than to criticism of the work. And this seems wrong.⁵⁴

Hospers' version of expression theory seems more plausible since it takes into account the existence of musical constraints that prevent musical expression being a simple function of the composer's intention; it has become standard in today's expression theory, especially in the branch that incorporates the so-called cognitive theory of musical expressions advocated mainly by Kivy. Hospers dismisses accounts of expression as an activity of the artist, expression as evocation, and expression as communication,⁵⁵ arguing instead for "gesture" theory, such that the sound of sad music has similar characteristics to the gestures of a sad person.

For Hospers, music's expressiveness is to be located neither in the composer's mind nor in the audiences' response. In similar fashion to Nattiez's model of music

⁵⁴ Wollheim (1980: 23)

⁵⁵ Hospers (1955: 340)

semiotics sketched earlier, the expressiveness is to be found within the music itself, whether one perceives it or not. No doubt the quality of expressiveness must come from somewhere (i.e. from the composer) and it must be transmitted in order to qualify as being expressive, but the expressiveness itself – as with any other so-called musical “content” – must be located within the music itself.

We are now in a position to formulate a more plausible account of the expressiveness of music, consonant with Hesper’s conclusion. We have seen reason to reject the cruder versions of expression theory in the light of the problems of intentions where the evidence of the composer is either absent or unknown. Even if there is evidence of intention, the mis-match of the composer’s intended expression and the listener’s understanding of them occur too frequently to ignore.⁵⁶ This problem of mis-match between the composer’s (or music’s) expressiveness and the emotional responses of the listener also has negative implications for arousalism, since arousal theory relies on a notion of normativity based on empirical observation rather than on rational cognition.

Would not this however be a fatal problem not only for arousalism and the cruder forms of expressionism, but for any claim for music’s expressiveness at all? Where and how does this mis-match occur? Consider two people, listening to the same music under the same conditions, having relevant incompatible feelings; say, one experienced the music as frightening while the other claimed that it was calming. Are such responses feasible and, if so, how can aesthetic theory account for such responses?

⁵⁶ See S.Davies (1994a: 195)

One simple answer would be that one response is correct whereas the other is wrong. Just as if we displayed an apple and asked them what colour it was, and one answered red while the other said yellow. Such responses, however, are grounded in phenomena which are empirically testable, for the colour of an item can be correlated with its physical wavelength. There is an analogy with the musical use with respect to the sounds of music, for it is universally and conventionally accepted that the sound wave of a regular pitch at 440Hz constitutes A; despite the complexities of differentiating the octave over different cultural practices (such as the Indian *Shruti* Scales which can divide the octave – *Svara* – with up to 66 intervals), nevertheless, the definite physical pitch which corresponds to the western notion of “A” still exists.

With respect to the expression of emotion, while one cannot claim one of the contrary statements to be wrong in this physical sense, since one cannot, unlike in the case of definite pitch, universalise the expressive content, yet it is often held that in such cases, one party may nevertheless have failed to understand the music in ways that may be brought only by applying musical hermeneutic criteria. Scruton notes:

It is clearly wrong to think that one could explain meaning in language while saying nothing about understanding language: for the meaning of a sentence is what we understand when we understand it – it is the intentional object of a particular mental act. Likewise it must be wrong to attempt to give a theory of musical expression which cannot be rewritten as a theory of musical understanding. If music has a content, that content must be understood.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Scruton (1983a: 77)

Understanding an expression involves, according to Scruton, understanding the harmonic structures and rhythmic patterns of music. If there is such a quality as expressive content, it is to be found within the music.

3.3.1. Form, Content, and Concept

Leaving the debate on expression theory on one side for the time being, we have reached the stage where certain ontological questions about music have become pressing. Issues bearing on the question “what is music?” have been sketched in the Introduction have considered music as quasi-language, or at least as possessing some “significant” value, such as that which theorists have attempted to capture with such terms as “expressiveness.” In order to be in a position to consider musical “expressiveness” further, we must seek to clarify our conception of music.

Nevertheless, the notion of a “formal property” of music relates to the following chapter on “Formalism,” and for this reason the discussion of “musical form” is somewhat concise here.

Form and Content, paralleling the dichotomies of “Body-Mind” or “Sign-Signified,” is frequently treated as a polemical dualism within philosophical debate. The term “form” is often taken to indicate the physical characteristics of an object, or how a word is positioned in a wider linguistic context, or how colours, shapes and brush strokes are integrated in visual art. “Content” on the other hand, may be seen as designating the essence of a particular object, the so-called “meaning” of the word or sentence in terms of language, or the representations or ideas within the art work conceived as a meaningful object.

In the case of music this distinction becomes a problem, since the attempt to separate the content from the form is highly contested. We can indeed hear the structure of music, or analyse music through notations, and, conversely, it is possible to construct imaginary sounds in one's mind from the score without ever making or hearing a single sound. Are these all formal properties of music or are they its content?

Formalists, as we shall see, claim that there is no content in music other than its own formal structure. The cruder forms of expression theory would suggest that the emotion expressed by the composer is to be understood as the content of music; in other versions, the representational concepts and ideas, such as pastoral scenes, can said to provide the content. Such theorists do indeed make a distinction between form and content.

Through our discussion of musical expression and arousal theory so far, it can be seen that musical expressiveness can plausibly be said to lie within music. On such an account, it would seem, musical sounds are an amalgamation of form and content. Moreover if, as we saw in the Introduction, one can take the essence of music to be no more than a culturally accepted pattern of sounds, then the formal structure of sounds provides the only possibility for locating “expressiveness”.

Whatever the aesthician, musical critic or ordinary listener claims the musical content to be, if there is nothing in music other than the structured sounds themselves, one must find the content of music, if such a thing exists, within those structured sounds. Yet these sounds themselves, considered simply as physical phenomena, do not possess any content in themselves, conceptual or other, and, moreover, it is implausible to construct some kind of dictionary of musical contents based on

melodic line or harmonic progressions such as that attempted by Cooke, since it is only too easy to find two musical phrases, consisting of the same melodic line or harmonic progression, exploiting totally different concepts.⁵⁸

On the other hand, it seems absurd to reject the idea of musical content. If Scruton is right in advocating the importance of musical understanding, the understanding of musical content through understanding musical phrases, pitch, harmonics, and rhythmic structures, then there must be some “concept” which we understand associated with music’s own formal structure.

DeBellis, in his *Music and Conceptualisation*, claims that in order to appreciate music aesthetically, one needs to understand music as conceptual. Although DeBellis does not identify a specific “conceptual” content of music other than musical structure itself he, nevertheless, gives a comprehensive account of how one can achieve hearing music conceptually. DeBellis defines “concept” as follows;

A concept is a certain psychological capacity, an ability to have beliefs (and thoughts generally) in which *one grasps a particular mode of presentation*. A concept is individuated, then, by the corresponding mode of presentation.⁵⁹

Thus, for DeBellis, to conceptualise music is to understand and grasp the musical presentation. His analyses of music, which depend on Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s *GTTM* together with the Schenkerian analysis (both sketched above in Chapter 1), seek to demonstrate the ability of the expert listener to hear music conceptually. For

⁵⁸ For further discussion of criticisms of Cooke’s *The Language of Music*, see Meyer (2000).

⁵⁹ DeBellis (1995:32), with my italics.

expert listeners, unlike what he calls “intermediate” listeners, do not hear music and have some musical concept in their mind, which they bridge together with beliefs, but they simply hear the music “as”, say, dominant 7th or harmonic progression of I-ii-V-I. For DeBellis, this way of hearing music is crucial in order to appreciate music fully.

It is not the acquisition of an understanding of connections among distinct features he hears, but a deepened perception of a property for what it is, that is central to his increased appreciation. And with this comes a deepened pleasure in the music.⁶⁰

Scruton and DeBellis, then, take the understanding of music to be of its own formal structure, claiming that, in terms of that structure, one can aesthetically appreciate music more fully. However, cognitive expression theorists such as Raffman and Langer require more than just understanding of the formal structure.

3.4.1. Cognitive and Emotive United?

From what we have sketched so far, it would appear that neither classic expression theory nor arousal theory, considered independently of each other is particularly attractive. Moreover, it is not just that one type of theory is more plausible than the other, but that the putative comparison, as Goodman rightly remarked, is based on a problematic dichotomy. ‘Most of the troubles that have been plaguing us can, I have suggested, be blamed on the domineering dichotomy between the cognitive and the emotive. [...] This pretty effectively keeps us from seeing that in aesthetic

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (77)

experience the emotions function cognitively.’⁶¹ It is not a false dichotomy, in the sense that traditional empiricism versus rationalism can be coherently united, but within aesthetics the aesthetic experience has both cognitive as well as emotive aspects. Moreover, the musical emotions are always cognitive, as both cognitivists such as Kivy and Hospers, and more formal cognitive psychological musicologists such as DeBellis and Raffman, have rightly claimed.⁶² On the other hand, this cognition is not something which we can rationally verbalise, as Raffman and Langer maintain, but it is felt knowledge which cannot be translated into language.⁶³

Kingsbury’s recent article articulates this view where she sees weakness on both sides of the argument, but especially on that of the arousal theory.

[A]rousal theorists have trouble explaining how music arouses the emotions it expresses; more trouble than cognitivists have, because the arousal theory rules out the most plausible explanations by making them circular.⁶⁴

She concludes:

[T]he distinction between emotivism and cognitivism becomes less clear-cut than it has previously seemed. The cognitivist says that expressive qualities are recognised in the music: the process of perceiving the expressiveness of the music is a cognitive one. The arousal theorist will presumably allow that a listener can perceive the sadness of music

⁶¹ Goodman (1976: 247-8)

⁶² See the next section for Raffman’s thesis.

⁶³ Not only is musical perception ineffable, but it is also in some sense a private perception, since it is a form of felt knowledge. For further discussion of how we may “inter-personally” communicate “private” perceptions, see the next section on ineffability; see also the 5th Chapter of Ayer (1956).

⁶⁴ Kingsbury sees the arousal theory as circular theory since ‘A piece of music cannot be said to express sadness in virtue of arousing it unless it is the sadness expressed by the music which arouses sadness in the listener.’ See Kingsbury (1999: 84-5)

without themselves feeling sad, where perceiving the sadness of music involves recognising that the music is such that it tends to arouse sadness. [...] When the arousal theorist begins to talk of our perceiving that a piece of music has a disposition to arouse sadness without actually being saddened by it, he is not very far from cognitivism.⁶⁵

Can arousal theory and expression theory ever be united? We have seen that strong versions both of expression theory and of arousal theory have their own implausibilities, however forms of cognitive theory take account of music's expressive dimension by focusing on the understanding of what is "expressive" seem to point to a more promising "middle way". This change in focus from expression to cognition of expressive properties both shifts attention from the composer (expression) to the audience (cognition), and also relates the expressiveness of the music to its meaning in a way that, as we shall see, is congenial to hermeneutic understanding.

The problems we have considered, together with the quasi-semantic and semiotic theories of music discussed in previous chapters, may in turn draw us to reconsider formalism, since our investigation has begun to show the potential importance for our study of formal structure.

3.4.2. Musical Content, Ineffability and Significant Form

One important issue remains to be considered in connection with musical expressiveness, namely the question of the "ineffability" of music. While

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (86)

conceptualising music in terms of its form is a step towards plausible interpretation, as we have seen in Chapter 2, when we talk about the “content” of music, or what music is expressive of, our communication often appears to be in some way lacking.

Raffman’s study of musical ineffability, with particular reference to musical feeling, addresses this issue. Raffman uses the cognitivists’ account of music to explore what really goes on mentally when we listen to music.⁶⁶ Three distinct categories of musical ineffability provide her starting point, Raffman tries to overcome a problem set by Cavell.⁶⁷

[T]he first fact about art [is] that it must be felt, not merely known – or, as I would rather put it, that it must be known for oneself. It is a statement of the fact of life – the metaphysical fact, one could say – that apart from one’s experience of [a piece of music] there is nothing to be known about it.⁶⁸

Raffman, contrary to Cavell, insists that there must be something to be known about, and moreover, this something, must be related to the feeling of the listener.

[T]he meaning of a musical work consists in the feelings that result (or would result) from the experienced listener’s unconscious recovery of structures constitutive of the work, *whatever those structures may be*.⁶⁹

With respect to her first ineffability – structural – Raffman argues that we have severe limitations in verbalising what we can hear in music “structurally”. While admitting that ‘with enough knowledge of what kinds of musical structures give rise to what

⁶⁶ Raffman (1993) Her account of cognitivism is that of a ‘conception of knowledge as mental representation of some kind’.

⁶⁷ Raffman distinguishes between structural ineffability, feeling ineffability and nuance ineffability. See Raffman (1993: 4 ff).

⁶⁸ Cavell (1976: 218) quoted in Raffman (1993: 38).

⁶⁹ Raffman (1993: 53)

kinds of conscious experience – the listener will get very good at reporting the contents of his structural description of the music’,⁷⁰ nevertheless, she concludes:

At any given time, the underlying structural description will “make itself felt” in the current phenomenology, to be sure; that is the sense, if any, in which you consciously know its content. But the likelihood seems vanishingly small that you will be able to *say*, exhaustively anyway, what that content is. To this extent, I suggest, you have conscious but ineffable knowledge of the music.⁷¹

In Chapter 2, we saw the possibility of analysing the structure of music. Yet, our discussion was purely musicological, devoid of enquiries into “phenomenological listening” or conceptualising. Indeed, musicological analysis demonstrates precisely the verbalisation of the structure, whereas Raffman’s notion of the structural ineffable lies in the competency and verbalisation of musical listening. We shall return to this problem of conceptualisation in relation to DeBellis’ conceptualisation in the following chapter, and to with phenomenological listening in Chapter 5.

In the case of her second ineffability – feeling – she distinguishes this from emotion, using the arousalist’s distinction discussed earlier, denying that there are any objects of emotion in music itself. ‘Whereas an emotional state (at least typically) involves a positive or negative evaluation of some object or state of affairs, the musical feelings are neutral in this regard...’⁷² With respect to the emotive content of music, Raffman comments on the traditional view: ‘Emotional responses to music are neither correct

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* (34)

⁷¹ *Ibid.* (35)

⁷² *Ibid.* (56)

nor incorrect – typical or atypical, perhaps, but not right or wrong.⁷³ What Raffman has in mind is not the sort of emotion that we experience listening to sad news or reading sad stories (*contra* Bouwsma), but rather the feeling of something which is neutral (i.e. neither a positive nor a negative emotion).⁷⁴ The problems of verbalising such neutral musical feelings relate to what is for her the central issue of ineffability. While one cannot verbalise this sort of musical feeling, Raffman believes that we can consciously perceive it and understand this feeling (“feeling ineffability”). On this account, ‘the quasi-meanings of musical works *are* feelings’,⁷⁵ and this musical value or “content” cannot be verbalisable.

However, as we shall soon see, whereas knowledge of the structural features can be communicated by language provided the requisite schemas are in place, knowledge of (at least some of) the non-structural features cannot be communicated by language under any circumstance.⁷⁶

While Raffman’s denial of the possibility of the communication of some of the non-structural features of music is plausible, this does not imply a complete ineffability of extra-musical properties. Some indeed can be articulated through musical analysis, as described by DeBellis, but also through schematising the musical nuance. In other words, we must not only be able to verbalise the musical structure, but also experience it as the musical concept, and thus the scale of C major must be felt as C pitch. This is, according to Raffman, what musical feeling must be like, the musical feeling is a “felt” knowledge, or “knowledge in sensing”, in which the listener

⁷³ *Ibid.* (59)

⁷⁴ Indeed this neutrality seems to echo Nattiez’s concept of the neutral (as opposed to aesthetic and poetic) position. See Chapter 2.

⁷⁵ Raffman (1993: 60)

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (61)

understands the expression of music within musical feeling, a felt knowledge which she calls “nuance ineffability.”

Raffman’s distinction between three ineffabilities feeds positively into our account of hermeneutics. As we can see, her distinctions correspond to three distinctive ways of talking about music – structure, feeling (expression) and nuance. The first two, while they are different aspects of music in their own right, feed into nuance ineffability where Raffman perceives the central problem to lie. This relates to our discussion of conceptualisation and the experience of music which are at the heart of musical interpretation. This problem of ineffability ties into our investigations of music semantics in the previous chapter. Monelle, criticising Swain’s study of *Musical Language*, writes:

Music cannot be a language in the sense of a speech-phonology [...]; it is clearly a repertory, a literature, its message falling into Jakobson’s category of the poetic. It is more like a fictional narrative or a lyric poem. These utterances are only very obliquely related to the ‘real world’, and their meanings are extremely ‘foggy’, if translation is the touchstone of meaning. They are accessible to interpretation and hermeneutics, not to lexical, grammatical and semantic analysis.⁷⁷

Raffman’s account of ineffability indeed seems to echo Langer’s description of music as “unconsummated symbol”. While we have sketched Langer’s account of art as “significant form” in terms of its logical nature in connection with non-discursive form in Chapter 2, here we are close to her argument for a connection between the art work and human feeling. While, as we saw, Langer rejects music’s ability to evoke

⁷⁷ Monelle (1998: 589) and see Chapter 5 for further discussion of Swain on musical metaphor.

particular emotions, she sees the forms of art (especially music) to correspond to human feelings. '[Art] works are expressive forms, and what they express is the nature of human feeling.'⁷⁸ Langer thus sees the importance of the form which 'allegedly carries aesthetic meaning' and points to where the problem of musical ineffability lies. This connection of the forms of art (music) with the forms of human feelings will be returned to in Chapter 6; here we shall note Langer's explanation of what she means by the forms of human feelings:

The tonal structures we call "music" bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling – forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses – not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both – the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life.⁷⁹

Langer's musical forms are not said to be ineffable. Indeed, as we saw in the previous Chapter, Langerian musical semiotics does indeed have connotative import.⁸⁰ Yet, the difficulty in evoking particular emotions in the way traditional expression theorists claim, brings Langer's thesis close to Raffman's idea of feeling (or nuance) ineffability.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Langer (1957: 7-8)

⁷⁹ Langer (1953: 27)

⁸⁰ See Chapter 2, section on Cassirer and Langer.

⁸¹ It is a matter pursued by much earlier theorists. Kretzschmar, for example, argued 'Music continues when words have no more power; the composer is able to catch in a moment, and in all their fullness and individuality, those movements of the human soul – the smallest as well as the greatest – which a poet can only partially communicate in long paraphrases and circumlocutions.' Kretzschmar 'Anregungen zur Förderung musikalischer Hermeneutik' in Bujic (1988: 118)

Jankélévitch also points to what others have seen as the ineffable dimensions of music. Comparing the differences between language and music, he writes:

In language, words (which carry meaning) are naturally somewhat univocal: when equivocal – as homonym or synonym – they take part in a game played by virtuosos of the pun, a game played with sounds. The equivocal, however, is music's normal regime since it is a "language" that bears meaning only indirectly and suggests without signifying. [...M]usic creates a unique state of mind, a state of mind that is ambivalent and always indefinable. Music is, then, inexpressive not because it expresses nothing but because it does not express this or that privileged landscape, this or that setting to the exclusion of all others; music is inexpressive in that it implies innumerable possibilities of interpretation.⁸²

Is the expressiveness of music then, to be construed in terms of "private experiences" which cannot be communicated? Comparing this account with Dennett's treatment of "qualia", we can see that both have similar properties. Both are said to be subjective experience through senses which are ineffable. Dennett argues that such items as the taste of coffee, for example, cannot be truly communicated to others since the taste is a private and intrinsic experience, as he notes:

That idiosyncrasy is the extent of our privacy. If I wonder whether your blue is my blue, your middle C is my middle C. I can coherently be wondering whether our discrimination profiles over a wide variation in conditions will be approximately the same.⁸³

Musical listening can then also be said to involve privacy, in the sense that we can

⁸² Jankélévitch (2003: 73-4)

⁸³ Dennett in Marcel and Bisiach (1988: 71)

never accurately know what the others hear in the same music. Indeed, what all hear from one recording is the same sound, yet we do not hear the music exactly in the same way. Because we all have a particular experience filtered through our sets of cultural backgrounds and history, our understanding of music differs considerably. It is, nevertheless, important to see that despite the differences, our musical experience, just like any other “qualia”, must be communicable. Dennett’s solution to the shared understanding of qualia comes from Wittgenstein where he notes:

Wittgenstein argues that the fact (if it is one) that others cannot have one’s own experiences is no more indicative of the radical privacy of those experiences than is the fact that another cannot possess one’s shadow ground for regarding shadows as radically private objects. We share a public language in which experiences are names and described just because experiences must sometimes (if not always) display a public character.⁸⁴

Analogously, just because musical experience is private, it does not have to be non-communicable. We learn the language of sensations in that public context in which it makes perfectly good sense to speak of shared experience and shared understanding. Most of us know what it feels like when hitting one’s finger with a hammer and we can compare our experiences; similarly, we can communicate our musical experience by reference to our shared experience and our capacity in our public language to compare our discrimination profiles. Our subjectivity is interdependent with our intersubjectivity. While the sharing of musical experience depends more on association with a particular (musical) culture than in the case of the hammer,⁸⁵

⁸⁴ S. Davies (1994a: 158), see Wittgenstein (1997: line 246).

⁸⁵ Hence the temptation to describe as “ineffable” works with which we do not stand in a relation of effective history.

intersubjective understanding and hence hermeneutic justifiability is achievable despite those features that are often pointed to with the adjective “ineffable”.

Chapter 4 – Formalism in Music and Its Limitations

In discussing different aspects of musical meaning, whether semantic, semiotic or expressive, the formal properties of musical composition have always been presupposed by the argument. Further, different musical cultures, whether Western Tonal Music, Indian *Raga*, or Japanese *Gagaku*, all possess their own musical forms. Music indeed cannot exist without its own formal structure, as we saw in the Introductory chapter, if we take the “culturally accepted pattern of sound” as a key element in any plausible definition of music. More narrowly, within Western traditions, whether tonal or atonal, polyphonic or monophonic, all music abides by certain rules conceived as integral to its own formal structure.

While the overall concern of this thesis is the meaning of music, whether extramusical or intramusical, its conceptualisation, as DeBellis and many other theorists have argued, must be rooted in its formal structure; only through understanding the structural properties of music can one begin to explore the “content” of music. Traditionally, formalists are said to have claimed that the formal structure of music (or any aesthetic object) is what constitutes its beauty (where this adjective applies); that there is, indeed, no meaning to “beauty” other than formal beauty. In this chapter we shall revisit some of the claims maintained by formalists, and reassess whether their claims are as radically exclusive as this would suggest. Further, we shall consider the conceptualisation of music in terms of its formal structure in order to discern the limits of the defensible claims of formalism.

4.1.1. Form and Aesthetic Formalism

The concept of “form” has a long and complex history, but for our present purposes we need to go back no further than its development in the aesthetic domain from the late Eighteenth century, primarily by German philosophers such as Kant in order to elucidate a universal concept of “beauty”.

To briefly summarise, Kant sets out on his search for subjective universal judgement in order to enable us to understand the apparent coherence of nature. Nature being organised in harmony, Kant argues, there must be some underlying law governing the world as we perceive it, yet nature can only be perceived empirically and universal laws cannot be empirically grounded, thus we are reliant on a priori judgement. In order to solve the problem of scepticism concerning universal laws that arises from empiricism, it is necessary for Kant to construct a principle based on subjective empirical knowledge yet which can be applied universally.¹ Here, Kant identifies the connection between our seeing nature as “harmonious” and our perception of beauty, understood as not falling under such conceptual categories as those of liking, goodness or desirability, as both being empirically based and yet seeming to have universal import. In order to claim universality for beauty, Kant needs to formulate an argument based solely on form rather than content since any content requires a concept, and any judgement based on concept (content) is a determinative judgement. This is where Kant sees the importance of form in the aesthetic object, and our judgement of pure taste is solely based on the form of the object devoid of all other qualities.² In describing Kant’s concept of beauty, Crawford notes:

¹ For further account of Kant’s reflective judgement, see the Introduction (esp. Ch.IV) in Kant (1987).

² For the distinction between Judgement of Sense and Judgement of Taste, see §12 Kant (1987).

Free beauty is the beauty of an object, whether of nature or art, judged simply as to its form; and although some such objects are describable wholly in terms of surface qualities and relations, others quite obviously contain depth elements; in these cases, however, our attention is to be directed to the formal aspects of those elements.³

Kant goes on, somewhat strangely, to distinguish between shape and structure as pure form and colour and tone as non-formal qualities. Kant uses Euler's distinction to explain that a single colour or tone, as it is a mere physical vibration of the air, does not belong to the pure formal property from which we formulate our aesthetic judgement.⁴

While aesthetic formalism was challenged with the rise of Romanticism and the subsequent flourishing of Impressionism and Expressionism in Europe, some critics have sought to revive the idea of the importance of formal structure. Clive Bell's famous term "significant form", first introduced in the early 20th century, has influenced the more moderate formalism of recent years.

While echoing Kant in rejecting conceptual content as relevant to aesthetic quality, Bell does not confine form to merely lines and shapes but includes all perceptual qualities including colours. Furthermore, Bell recognises that aesthetic experience is based on subjective psychology where an individual is emotionally affected by the work of art.

³ Crawford (1974: 118)

⁴ Some theorists believe that the traditional view of Kant as formalist is an error. A matter to which we shall return later in the chapter. For further comment see Chapter 4 in Schaper (1979) and Zangwill (1999: 613)

In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call “Significant Form”; and “Significant Form” is the one quality common to all works of visual art.⁵

We shall return later in this chapter to the relation between form and emotion.

Bell endorses the Kantian view: ‘Now to see objects as pure forms is to see them as ends in themselves’,⁶ and, as does Kant, maintains that in order to see pure forms as ends in themselves, one must free oneself from attending to works of art as material objects. At first glance, it seems that Bell was simply reiterating Kant’s aesthetic formalist claim that art should be judged solely by response to its form. Indeed, Bell does stress that form is the only quality of a work relevant to our aesthetic experience. Yet, in a wider context, Bell’s theory can be seen as innovative and in part critical of Kant.

Firstly and epistemologically, Kant and Bell have very different agendas. While the enlightenment philosopher tries to overcome claims to knowledge about the “unknown” world by rationalising the whole of human experience, including that of the external world, in terms of our cognition (i.e. our subjectivity), Bell sees works of art as objects in their own right and tries to deduce what is common to all.

Furthermore, Kant’s idea of beauty is based on a purely theoretical assumption whereby one must see beauty in terms of our judgement whereas Bell, as an art critic, seeks to show that the first instance of awakening to beauty is through our experience

⁵ C.Bell (1924: 8)

⁶ *Ibid* (52)

of aesthetic emotion. While their results echo one another, Bell's approach seems the more attractive since it does not condition our way of judging aesthetic objects in terms of some purely theoretical and metaphysical principle.

Secondly and historically, Kant wrote his *Critique of Judgement* in 1790 which was on the cusp of the transition from Classicism to Romanticism, and Expressionism was unknown to him, whereas Bell's *Art*, written in 1914, is based on the experience of that whole major shift and its aftermath as well as the rise of psychological studies pioneered by Freud in the 1890s. Kant's task of rationalising experience in synthetic a priori terms and Bell's sociological art criticism differ in their aim and approach.

Thirdly and most crucially, Bell's original term "Significant Form" suggests, contrary to Kant, that art is not just autonomous pure form. The word "significant" led aestheticians such as Langer to articulate formalism in terms of symbolic forms, and much of the semiotics of art presupposes notions of "significance" in relation to form.

A somewhat similar approach, yet with a significantly different result, can be seen in the writing of Roger Fry, an art critic who was a contemporary of Bell. Fry, like Bell, sees art solely in terms of its form, Fry seeing the elements of design such as line, mass, space, light, and colour as all part of the 'connected essential condition of our physical existence.'⁷ Although he does not specifically call these properties "form", as distinct from the content, this approach echoes Bell's idea of "significant form".

While both Bell and Fry see art as an end in itself (following the Kantian

⁷ Fry (1923: 33-4)

understanding), the crucial difference between their theories is that for Fry art is ultimately an expression of emotion.⁸

We must therefore give up the attempt to judge the work of art by its reaction on life, and consider it as an expression of emotions regarded as ends in themselves.⁹

Fry further maintains that: '[t]he fact is that the average man uses art entirely for its symbolic value. Art is in fact the symbolic currency of the world',¹⁰ a claim that had significant influence on subsequent aesthetic symbolists such as Langer and Goodman.

4.1.2. Formalism in Music

Kant argued that music, since it fails to display any formal spatial quality, should be placed in the lowest class among the arts. For competent musicologists, music is constituted by forms – harmonic, rhythmic and melodic – but for Kant and other philosophers not expert in musicological analysis it is conceived primarily in terms of the stimulation of feelings.¹¹ The status of formalism in music has been, and remains, a central issue since Hanslick's theory first emerged in 1854.

Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* was written as a criticism of late Romanticism in music, especially with respect to what he saw as Wagner's over-abundance of human expression and symbolism, and to restore the insight that music is based on nothing but its own form. Hanslick criticises the historical movement for which

⁸ The apparent dichotomy of expression and form will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁹ Fry (1923: 29)

¹⁰ *Ibid.* (72)

¹¹ See § 53 in Kant (1987). Of course, Schopenhauer later elevates music to the highest rank in art, using this very notion of music's direct relationship with human feeling.

music is the expression of human emotions; this he discusses at considerable length, and acknowledges the common opinion that the purpose of music is to excite human feeling. Hanslick even goes so far as admitting: ‘Music can, in fact, whisper, rage, and rustle...’ and further, ‘it happens that music can nevertheless excite such feelings as melancholy, gaiety and the like...’.¹² Yet, Hanslick is negative towards conceiving human emotion as integral to musical content. While he accepts the ability of music to excite feelings, for him these feelings are only subjectively conceived by the audience and ‘the representation of a specific feeling or emotional state [such as love and anger] is not at all among the characteristic powers of music’, since ‘love and anger occur only within our hearts.’¹³

There seems to be a contradiction between this hesitant acceptance of music as being a symbol of unspecified feelings and his insistence elsewhere on its complete autonomy. Further on, in comparing Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* and more recent compositions such as those by Mendelssohn and Chopin, Hanslick suggests: ‘[...] in older music the autonomy appears more obvious, the interpretability more difficult and less tempting.’¹⁴ Here, Hanslick’s main claim of autonomy appears once again, yet on the other hand it does not suggest a complete denial of music’s expressivity. This is more clearly demonstrated in his argument concerning vocal music where he notes:

In vocal music, the music adds colour to the black-and-white design of the poem. We have recognised, among the ingredients of music, colours

¹² Hanslick (1986: 9-10)

¹³ *Ibid.* (9)

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (14)

of great splendour and delicacy, which in addition possess *symbolical significance*.¹⁵

Kivy sees this tension, noting that not only in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, but also in several places within Hanslick's musical criticism, we can witness the Hanslick's acknowledgement of musical expression.¹⁶

While Hanslick's apparent self-contradiction is evident from several passages, many of his critics and defenders seem to have missed what seems a crucial point through which Hanslick influences the later and more moderate formalists.

Whatever else in music seems to portray specific states of mind is *symbolic*. That is to say, tones, like colours, possess *symbolic meanings* intrinsically and individually, which are effective apart from and prior to all artistic intentions.¹⁷

While his use of the term "symbol" is unclear, Hanslick's claims suggest that the content of music is not only "tonally moving forms", even though this is his definition of musical content.¹⁸ Hanslick's theory of musical autonomy does not deny the possibility of musical feeling, but his account of aesthetic judgement does not make clear its relation to musical expression.

But even more emphatically than we opposed the possibility of musical representation of feelings do we intend to oppose the view that this could ever serve as the aesthetical principle of music.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (16) with my italics.

¹⁶ Kivy is right in concluding that Hanslick indeed contradicts himself. However, he overlooks the importance of "symbol", a term which Langer and Pratt subsequently employ. See Kivy (1993a) Chapter XV.

¹⁷ Hanslick (1986: 11) with my italics.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (29)

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (21)

Thus he concludes:

Music consists of tonal sequences, tonal forms; these have no other content than themselves. They remind us once again of architecture and dancing, which likewise bring us beautiful relationships without content. However each person may evaluate and name the effect of a piece of music according to its individuality, its content is nothing but the audible tonal forms; since music speaks not merely by means of tones, it speaks only tones.²⁰

Hanslick, it appears, is not only uninterested in the content (or material/concept in Kantian terms), but denies the existence of any content other than musical form. His essential aim can be traced in his introduction, where he is sympathetic to, yet quite adamant in rejecting, the concept of musical feeling:

I share completely the view that the ultimate worth of the beautiful is always based on the immediate manifestness of feeling. However, I hold just as firmly the conviction that, from all the customary appeals to feeling, we can derive not a single musical law.

He argues similarly against representation theory:

It is not idle bickering to argue emphatically against the concept of “representation,” since from this concept have arisen the most serious errors in the aesthetic of music. To “represent” something always involves the notion of two separate dissimilar things, of which one must be intentionally related to the other through a particular mental act.

Several other critics of his time added their voices in support of the theory of musical

²⁰ *Ibid.* (78)

formalism, including a composer, Hans-Georg Nägeli and a psychologist, Moritz Lazarus.²¹ Nägeli's main concern is that with nineteenth century idealism flourishing in the domain of philosophy, true art and aesthetic values are in danger of being lost. Furthermore, many aesthetic theories are based on visual art, and the lack of distinction made between visual and audible arts leads to a failure to clarify what the nature of music is. With respect to Nägeli's claim for musical formalism, Lippman quotes:

It possesses only *forms*, regulated combinations of tones and series of tones into a whole...

By its play of forms, music counteracts any possible tendency of contemplation that through attraction to color, figure, and shape might in any way impel the mind to emotion. Music strives to *play away* emotion. [...] [I]t makes it truly receptive to the *pleasures* of its free play of forms.²²

Lazarus's theory mirrors that of Hanslick in terms of the lack of conceptual content in music. Lippman quotes:

These relations, from which melody, harmony, and rhythm are formed, alone make up the content and the form of music; they are the content of musical beauty or the musical form of the beautiful. These pure relations without any content other than tone constitute a musical beauty...²³

In both cases, the implied opposition comes from the Idealists, indicating that criticism of idealism (especially German Idealism) in defence of formalism is

²¹ For a comprehensive account of the formalist movement in this context, see Chapter 10 in Lippman (1992)

²² Nägeli (1826: 105) quoted and translated in Lippman (1992: 297-8).

²³ Lazarus (1882: 445) quoted and translated in Lippman (1992: 302).

advocated by other than aestheticians. Moreover, as we shall see later, although their heavy emphasis on form without content (i.e musical autonomy) is often too aggressive, nonetheless, they are right to warn against aesthetic theories which overshadow the importance of form.

It is here appropriate to return to Langer's thesis, not just with respect to her symbolism, but also to her use of "form" and especially of "Significant Form" which, as mentioned above, is derived from Clive Bell.²⁴ Langer's distinctive approach to the content of music as "unconsummated symbol" tries to connect the traditional view of formalism with more Romantic approaches relating to human feeling, thereby challenging the traditional dichotomy between form and content. Her preliminary claim echoes that of Bell and Hanslick:

Music, [...] is preëminently non-representative even in its classical productions, its highest attainments. It exhibits pure form not as an embellishment, but as its very essence; [...], German music from Bach to Beethoven [...] have practically nothing but tonal structures before us: no scene, no object, no fact. That is a great aid to our chosen preoccupation with form. There is no obvious, literal content in our way.²⁵

Her difficulties with Hanslick's claim do not lie in his denial of the possibility of expressive quality in music, but his denial of the problem of the relation between form and content altogether. Her ultimate judgement of Hanslick's theory is indeed quite positive:

²⁴ Langer's theory as symbolism in part derived from E. Cassirer, see Chapter 2, section 2.1.3.

²⁵ Langer (1979: 209)

The fact is, I think, that Hanslick, who admitted only the *formal* similarity of music and emotive experience but denied the legitimacy of any further interpretation, and those authors who realised that formality, but took it for the nature of *meanings* rather than of musical symbols, were very close to a correct analysis. For music has all the earmarks of a true symbolism, except one: the existence of an *assigned connotation*.²⁶

Langer sets out her argument concerning art (especially music) as form and significance under the influence of recent developments in logic, and while she does recognise as relevant the emotive effect of music on the listeners, she stresses the non-connotative and un-translatable symbols in terms of which music is formed: ‘If music is a symbolism, it is essentially of [...] untranslatable form’.²⁷

Her aesthetic symbolism is further developed in her later work, *Feeling and Form*, where Langer tries to take further some of the initial enquiries raised in *Philosophy in a New Key*, especially that into “Significant Form”. Langer restates her claim that symbolism in art (she defines music in terms of “unconsummated symbol”) is essentially a formal property, that of “articulate form”, explained in terms of the ‘concept of significant form as an articulate expression of feeling, reflecting the verbally ineffable and therefore unknown forms of sentience...’²⁸ This “articulate form” is closely connected with human feeling, as her definition of art clearly implies: ‘the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.’²⁹

²⁶ *Ibid.* (240)

²⁷ *Ibid.* (235)

²⁸ Langer (1953: 39)

²⁹ *Ibid.* (40)

This move turns her towards such expression theorists as Croce and Collingwood.

With Croce, Langer expresses a considerable measure of agreement, particularly with his claim that:

We must, [...] reject both the thesis that makes the aesthetic fact to consist of the content alone, and the thesis which makes it to consist of a junction between form and content... The aesthetic fact, [...], is form, and nothing but form.³⁰

While this sounds almost a contradiction to his main theory of art as expression of human intuition, Langer sees a significant affinity with her thesis that form is where human feeling can be found “symbolically”, and although she criticises Croce’s notion of intuition as muddled, his main train of thought anticipates that of Langer. A further parallel can be seen between Langer’s theory and that of Collingwood where she notes:

On the subject of artistic truth and falsity I find myself in full agreement with [...] R.G. Collingwood. [...]
Art is envisagement of feeling, which involves its formulation and expression in what I call a symbol and Mr. Collingwood calls “language.” [...] This envisagement, however, may be interfered with by emotions which are not formed and recognised, but affect the imagination of other subjective experience...³¹

Langer sees the crucial inadequacy of expression theorists as that of ignoring the importance of symbolism in art. Expressive quality without symbolism, Langer claims, cannot correctly characterise the expressive quality which art is supposed to

³⁰ Croce (1992: 15)

³¹ Langer (1953: 380)

articulate.

The unavowed fact which haunts them [expression theorists] is the fact that an expressive form is, after all, a symbolic form. As soon as one looks this fact in the face, all the major paradoxes and anomalies disappear – “significant form” that is not significant of anything, poetry and music of which “we may say, if we like, that both are expressive,” but should avoid trouble “by insisting that they ‘express’ nothing, nothing at all,” Croce’s theory of artistic expression requiring no medium, and Collingwood’s similar concept of the “expressive act,” which occurs only in the artist’s head, as the work of art itself. So long as one tries to evade the symbolic form which mediates the “expression of the Idea,” one cannot study the process of that expression, nor point out precisely how it differs from other activities.³²

Although Langer’s approach ultimately leads her to claim that ‘the artist’s work is the making of the emotive symbol’, which seems to turn her into an expression theorist, her idea of symbolic form seems far from those expression theorists sketched in the previous chapter. Melvin Rader criticises Langer’s use of “symbol” as lacking any referential value which for him makes her theory implausible in terms of explaining aesthetic “content”;³³ however, this negative use of “symbolic form” enables her theory to unite formalism and expression theory.

Carroll Pratt’s contribution to this debate has its own distinctive spin. While his initial stand involves complete rejection of musical symbolism, he nevertheless concludes with an acknowledgement of symbolic expression. Having recognised

³² *Ibid.* (385)

³³ See Rader (1954: 396-8).

music as ‘present[ing] mood and feeling, not external fact and logical discourse’, Pratt criticises symbolism in a way that echoes that of Rader’s critique of Langer.³⁴

A language is a system of symbols, a device to carry the mind by way of association beyond the thing presented into a different universe of discourse. Language is a means to an end, not an end in itself. A symbol can be an end in itself only if it serves no other purpose – a state of affairs which by definition is a contradiction in terms.³⁵

His preliminary claim echoes that of Hanslick and other theorists of musical autonomy, maintaining: ‘tonal form represents only itself’, ‘the form and content are one’, and ‘music is an end in itself’.³⁶ Yet, his main aim is to re-evaluate music in terms of Schopenhauerian idealism, and he sees the formalist’s interpretation as too narrowly confined.³⁷

This results in quite close parallels to Langer’s claims, though Pratt always maintained his distance from Langer’s theory, with respect to which he remarked:

The most difficult meaning is [...] to regard expression as an intrinsic quality of perception closely resembling mood and emotion. This view almost cries out for an iconic or isomorphic interpretation. [...] [U]nfortunately this highly plausible interpretation, and the one which would give to aesthetics an almost miraculous solution to the ancient riddle of how emotion finds its way into art, is incapable of proof in the absence of an acceptable phenomenology of emotion.³⁸

³⁴ Pratt (1968: v)

³⁵ *Ibid.* (vii)

³⁶ *Ibid.* (vi)

³⁷ Pratt remarks, echoing Schopenhauer: ‘Music is a direct expression of the will itself; not by way of the usual objects of perception, [...], but by effective embodiment of the inner nature of all phenomena, their striving, longing, sorrow, joy, pain, merriment, or peace of mind.’ *Ibid.* (217)

³⁸ Pratt (1961: 83)

While initially Pratt appears to be developing a theory of musical autonomy, he concludes that the “purpose” of music is the symbolic expression of emotion:

The design or purpose of music is thus to give alleviating expression to the inner life of emotion and will, an expression which is not an escape but rather a fulfilment and completion. [...] [A]t last it may indeed be true that music becomes symbolic, for it seems to stand for and express the joy and sorrow of all mankind.³⁹

4.1.3. Varieties of “Form”

The concept of “form”, like that of “expression” has been used by various theorists in very different senses. David Pole suggests three distinctive ways in which theorists take account of the concept of “form”: 1) form as opposed to matter, 2) form as opposed to content, and 3) form as opposed to formlessness.⁴⁰ These immediately suggest that there is a strong association between form and “structure” or “shape”. In our discussion of formalism, we have treated the concept of form in terms of the structure of music. However, as Pole points out, within the domain of aesthetics it has been commonly used as ‘coherence, as harmony or as significant form; indeed even as proportion or order.’⁴¹

A usage of the term “form” that fits only uneasily into Pole’s these categories can be found in the work of Tovey. Conceived neither as tonal structure nor melodic pattern, the form of music for Tovey can be seen as over-arching design or architecture.

³⁹ Pratt (1954: 299-300)

⁴⁰ Pole (1983: 81)

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (84)

The normal form of a first movement has earned the title ‘sonata form’ *par excellence*. Its evolution can be easily traced as originating in the so-called ‘binary form’ of a certain kind of melody.⁴²

This sort of usage of the term “form” seems to point towards a larger scale than that of Schenkerian *Ursatz* or melodic/rhythmic patterns. However, to the extent that Tovey’s use may be fitted into Pole’s taxonomy, it reflects structural features of the work rather than so-called “extra-musical” content.

As we shall see later in the chapter, musical form as contrasted with musical content, can be conceived not only in terms of the sort of structure envisaged by Schenkerian analysis, but also as Gestalt, seeing structural grouping and conceptualisation as among the forms of music. Cook also distinguishes different approaches to musical form:

First, there is Schenkerian theory, which in its original form was located at the intersection of psychology, phenomenology, and metaphysics, but after crossing the Atlantic became assimilated within the post-war formalist tradition [...]. Then there is the approach to rhythmic analysis developed during the 1950s by Meyer and Cooper, heavily influenced by Gestalt psychology though without the empirical control that one would expect of an explicitly psychological theory. The third element is structural linguistics, which provided not only certain key features of the theoretical model [...] but also its epistemological orientation...⁴³

“Form of music”, then, is not an unambiguous concept. Different approaches create very different prospects for “formalism. Whilst the structural formalism of Schenker

⁴² Tovey (1981: 10)

⁴³ Cook in Christensen (2002: 99-100)

which Hanslick had in mind is deeply problematic, application of the principles of Gestalt psychology to the phenomenological experience of music points to a type of formalism which can enrich hermeneutic interpretation.

4.2.1. A Traditional Mistake

Formalism, as traditionally understood, conceives of art as neither containing nor being able to express any content. In the 20th century, formalists have often been contrasted with expression theorists, for whom there is abundance of feeling, conceived as content, in music, whereas for formalists there is no content to a musical work other than its own form.

From the account of the various formalisms sketched above, it is clear that while the notion of “musical content” is problematic, this does not substantiate the traditional conception of formalism as a “non-meaning” theory. Even the allegedly strictest formalists such as Kant and Hanslick, although distancing themselves from empirical claims for universal subjective aesthetic judgements, took account of the capacity of art to arouse pleasure and thus connect with our subjective feelings. Moreover, with the advance of psychology in the late 19th and semiotics in the early 20th centuries, the formal nature of art became firmly connected with symbolism and signification.

While formalism is still sometimes conceived in polemical opposition to expression theory, with formalism seen as advocating the supremacy of form and thus seeking to deduce a universal understanding of art without reference to subjective emotions, and with expression theories, as we saw in the previous chapter, seeking to understand the content of art through its capacity to express emotion, a more sophisticated and less oppositional account is clearly required.

Zangwill somewhat negatively remarks that formalism today ‘at best receives unsympathetic discussion and swift rejection.’⁴⁴ His defence of moderate formalism reinterprets formalism’s claims as not denying the existence of non-formal aesthetic properties, but maintaining that these properties have no significant aesthetic function. As briefly noted earlier, for Kant, judgements regarding free beauty concern themselves solely with formal properties, but Schaper and Zangwill rightly note that this is not necessarily to deny the existence and the importance of non-formal aesthetic properties. Zangwill claims:

Kant is often thought to be the wellspring of formalism. But since he accepts the category of dependent beauty, this is a major error. In view of the abuse he has suffered for being a formalist, it is ironic that Kant is an *anti*-formalist about many art forms, because he thinks that they have a purpose that must be understood.⁴⁵

Although his claim that Kant is anti-formalist sounds paradoxical, since formalism cannot be philosophically construed without using some analogue of the Kantian conception of “free beauty”, Kant does indeed concede that there are properties in art that are non-formal.

Pratt indeed had already seen the Kantian distinction between free and dependent beauty as illuminating the conflict between autonomous and heteronomous theories of music. Autonomous theories appeal to formal criteria to subserve the ideal of a single concrete agreement, while heteronomous theories take into account extrinsic musical meaning or content and hence are sceptical of the possibility of agreement.⁴⁶ For Pratt,

⁴⁴ Zangwill (1999: 610)

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (613)

⁴⁶ Pratt (1968: 210)

this scepticism is due to the fact that music does not actually possess any extrinsic qualities, which are attributed by the listeners who interpret.⁴⁷

Zangwill's moderate formalism argues the possibility of distinguishing between what is formal from what is not (expressive, representative or otherwise). The priority of formal properties in Zangwill's theory does not deny the existence of historical or contextual properties of art, but rather argues that some historical, contextual or indeed representational properties may not be aesthetically relevant. Indeed, some non-formal properties may even be aesthetically significant, but some historically prominent properties can be argued to have no aesthetic function. He concludes:

Moderate formalism allows that many works of art only have formal aesthetic properties, that many works of art only have non-formal aesthetic properties, and that many works of art have both formal and non-formal aesthetic properties. Only moderate formalism recognizes that all three possibilities are generously populated.⁴⁸

This conclusion seems far from plausible, since it is difficult to see how a non-formal aesthetic object could exist independently of its form, whether line, shape, rhythm, or even tone. This difficulty stems from the fact Zangwill, in contrasting the formalists and anti-formalists (rather than non-formalists), claims that anti-formalists deny any formal properties in art. But even the strongest expression theorists do not deny the existence of formal properties. It seems that Zangwill has failed to take full and unambiguous account of the difference between the recognition that an artwork has certain properties and the claim that these properties are aesthetically significant. Yet,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (214) '[W]hether it has a meaning or not depends upon the listener, not upon the music.'

⁴⁸ Zangwill (2000: 493)

Zangwill at least sees the problems in traditional formalism theory, and recognizes that non-formal properties do exist within artworks.

While it is difficult to maintain that there are no distinctions between form and content, as we remarked earlier, it may be possible to develop an alternative “new” theory which can accommodate both formal and non-formal aesthetic properties. The crucial difference between such a “new” theory and that of Zangwill’s is that in it formal and non-formal properties should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather the one sprung from the other. Langer was right to see that human feelings are symbolically articulated by means of form, and Hanslick plausibly argued that tones possess symbolic meanings. Moreover, both rightly claimed that any qualities which can be attributed to music are dependent on formal properties.

From our discussions so far, we can provisionally conclude that music signifies something, whether intrinsically or extrinsically (Chapter 2), and while it is difficult to pursue musical content in terms of expression or arousal of emotion, music does indeed possess expressive qualities (Chapter 3). More importantly, while musical “quasi-syntactic structure” cannot be equated with that of linguistic structure, music does possess its own formal structure (Chapter 2). All these conclusions can be united within such a new, moderately formalist, theory: Music possesses a formal structure, and its non-conceptual expressive quality is dependent on it. Music is capable of signifying both intrinsic and extrinsic meaning, but these significations must lie within the formal properties of music itself. Any non-formal properties, whether conceptual or non-conceptual, must originate from formal properties, since physically,

as noted in the Introduction, music consists of sound with a structure; any interpretation of music as devoid of form cannot intelligibly be defended.

4.2.2. A Universal Ground for Musical Meaning?

In any domain of philosophical investigation, the concept of universality is a dangerous one. Although it was once seen as the main task of philosophy to discover knowledge through deduction from universally acceptable premises complementing the inductive development of science, such a model is becoming less and less appropriate in philosophical enquiries today. As remarked in the Introduction, this thesis is by no means trying to establish one universally applicable concept of meaning in music, nor indeed to settle on a universal definition of music.

Kant's analysis had a tremendous impact on aesthetic theories, especially his development of the possibility of universalising "perceptual objects" through transcendental "pure" judgement resulting in ascription of beauty; this became the basis not only for formalists but for all aestheticians who support the idea of universality in the domain of aesthetics. Yet, in the light of our current examination, what appears to be needed is a less idealistic theory that can both treat the aesthetic object as possessing conceptual content, and allow that this content may also be treated as an aesthetic property.

What our account of formalism suggests is that there is a basic universalisable unit, namely the form of the object. Nevertheless while, as we saw in Chapter 2, formal

analysis of music provides very little space for disputes,⁴⁹ response to musical expression, as we saw in the previous chapter, is remarkably diverse. Is formalism then, capable of developing a plausible universal theory of art? How far can formalism stretch in terms of rendering intelligible aesthetic signification and value? If formalism is a theory which, when applied to music, limits aesthetic inquiry to a mere musicological analysis, it cannot stand on its own. It seems almost impossible for such a formalism to explain how we may be understood to admire the beauty of form without reference to any other features, either within or outside the artwork. But formalism need not be so construed. Thus we need to explore the possibility of widening the scope of formalism to include what an art form can signify other than, simply, its beauty.

4.2.3. Sensation, Perception and Conceptualisation

As Bell pointed out, any spatial art can give rise to an immediate perception of its formal structure by the perceiver.⁵⁰ With respect to music, as DeBellis has argued, understanding consists in conceptualising.⁵¹ Furthermore, his notion of conceptualisation involves analysing the perception of musical formal structures in terms not of individual tones but of what Hanslick called collective “tonally moving forms”, that is, formally structured units made up of changing tones. In exploring the relation between such conceptualisation and contemporary theories of perception,

⁴⁹ As all musicologists know, the use of term with the same extension such as “F-sharp” and “G-flat” can produce quite different interpretations within the formal analysis. In the history of Western Tonal Music, as the harmonic structure breaks down, it becomes more difficult to deduce a single “universal” analysis. However, such differences are firmly rooted within musicological theorisation, and have no significant relevance for the “meaning in music” discussion in this thesis.

⁵⁰ See 4.1.1. above.

⁵¹ See Chapter 3, 3.3.1. above.

DeBellis engages significantly with the work of Churchland and of Fodor.

Sensation, on Churchland's account, is logically possible but realistically implausible, since it consists in a neutral observation of objects without conceptualising them.

Perception on the other hand, takes place in our daily life. Normally when we perceive any object, we automatically conceptualise the object. For example, we do not just sense a mass of H₂O molecules giving rise to our sensation of such and such a wavelength creating the colour of blueness, we perceive them collectively as water.

This suggests that we automatically conceptualise when we sense, and thus our perception virtually always 'involves some theoretical presuppositions or prejudicial processing'.⁵² Of course, this perception theory goes back as far as Descartes's perceptual doubt and Locke's idea of perception. Locke remarks: '[t]he ideas we receive by sensation, are often in grown People alter'd by the Judgement, without our taking notice of it.'⁵³ In the aesthetic domain, Goodman makes a similar point:

There is no innocent eye... Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyzes, constructs.⁵⁴

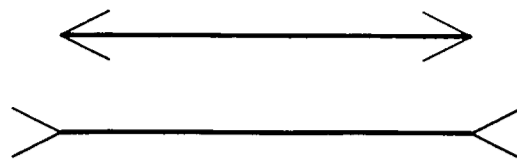
Against this theory of mental plasticity, Fodor presents a computational theory based on the notion of theory-neutral perception. Taking the Müller-Lyer illusion as an example, Fodor claims that all perceptions are like computational input which must be reassessed according to our beliefs.⁵⁵

⁵² Churchland (1988: 167) cited in DeBellis (1995: 84)

⁵³ Locke (1997) Book II, Chp. ix, 8.

⁵⁴ Goodman (1976: 7-8) cited in DeBellis (1995: 84).

⁵⁵ Fodor (1983: 66) cited in DeBellis (1995: 86).



Müller-Lyer illusion – illustrating that although both lines are the same length, we perceive them as different.

For our purpose, though, it is not the differences but the points of agreement between these theories that is important. Both agree that in perceiving an object, we often fail to grasp the reality, whether it is a simple illusion (Fodor) or because one has been selective (Churchland). Sensory perception is integrally connected with our capacity for rational judgement, and the perception of music is, Churchland and Goodman both note, a form of selective listening. Further, capacity for such listening can be developed. It is normally only the skilled conductor, whose ears are trained to hear each instrument in the entire orchestra, who is able to distinguish which instruments are played at what pitch in a single chord.

Analogously to the case of the differences between water and its molecular structure in Churchland's case, when we listen to music we only perceive the "collection" of tones as a formally structured set. As with Goodman's idea of prejudice, we discriminate, associate and construct. This often unnoticed mental capability depends, as Churchland would claim, on one's 'conceptual framework or theory'.⁵⁶

This raises a dilemma for strict musical formalism. If it claims that the sole content of music is "tonally moving forms", then these forms are either theoretically based, and hence perceptually underdetermined, or perceptually based, in which case they involve prejudgements that may well be highly culturally relativistic. The former

⁵⁶ For DeBellis' account of mental plasticity see DeBellis (1995: 83)

alternative seems most plausible in the case of musicological analyses where music is dissected and analysed through the musical microscope, in order to construe what was the aim of the composer. But while formal musicological analysis is clearly important for musical understanding, it points us away from musical perception. The latter alternative, however, seems in considerable tension with formalism's apparent claim for "universal formal" content. Can formal understanding be culturally relative, and yet universal?

This dilemma points to the need to address two issues. Firstly, taking account of the models of mental perception offered by Churchland and Fodor, we need to examine the phenomenological and psychological process of how we perceive music. Indeed if we are supposedly conceptualising music, an account of how this conceptualisation process takes place is needed.⁵⁷ Secondly, if not only musical signification but also the formal structure of music itself turns out to be culturally relative, then we must provide an account of the interpretative process that not only allows but focuses on the socio-historical dimension of the work itself.

In doing so, we shall come closer to discovering at least one dimension of the "meaning" of music, which will be the concern of the following chapter, but first, it is worth taking stock of how far formalism can contribute to our investigation of the "meaning" of music.

4.3.1. Musical Perception – The Contribution of Gestalt psychology

⁵⁷ See later in this chapter for further discussion of conceptualisation.

So far, we have touched on the concept of “musical understanding” from various angles, whether taking music to be fundamentally semiotic, an expressive entity or mere form. While music possesses all of these elements, it is the listener, by conceptualising music, who hears the musical work as coherent patterns of sound. This suggests that we might do well to look more closely at what it is to be a coherent pattern, and here the approach of Gestalt psychology may prove useful.

The previous chapter introduced the computational approach taken by Fodor, together with Churchland’s “mental elasticity” account of the way in which our perceptive system is socio-culturally induced, resulting in certain prejudices with respect to what we construe reality to be. The Gestalt psychologists provide a different, though possibly complementary (at least in the case of Churchland), framework for understanding how our perception of music works, focusing on the way the natural phenomenon of “grouping” occurs in our musical listening.

As Diana Deutsch argues, of the several principles of Gestalt psychology, there are three main ones that can be applied to music, namely “the principle of Proximity”, “the principle of Similarity” and “the principle of Good Continuation”.⁵⁸

To spell out the definitions of these three principles:⁵⁹

1: The Principle of Proximity [ex.19]:

Other things being equal, in a total stimulus situation those elements which are closest to each other tend to form groups.

2: The Principle of Similarity [ex.20]:

When more than one kind of element is present, those which are similar tend to form groups.

⁵⁸ Deutsche (1982: 100ff). For a more comprehensive account of the principles (laws) of Gestalt psychology, see D.Katz (1951: 24ff).

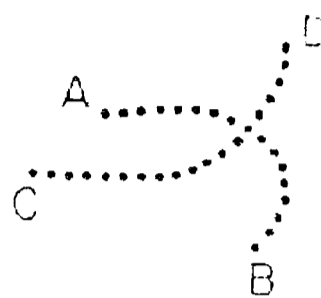
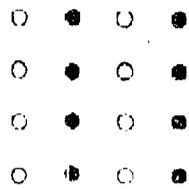
⁵⁹ D.Katz (1951: 25-26)

3: The Principle of Good Continuation (The law of good contour) [ex.21]:
 Parts of a figure which have a “good” contour, or common destiny, tend to form units.

[ex.19]



[ex.20]



[ex.21]

These principles, as the above figures demonstrate, are primarily constructed with respect to the perception of visual images. When applying these principles to a musical composition, they do not provide clear criteria for deciding which principles affect which quality of music. For example, the grouping of one voice as “melody” may be interpreted as applying either one or several of these principles. Consider Debussy’s *First Arabesque*. Throughout the piece, one hears the melodic line on the top register, played by the right hand, although the right hand does not only play the melody, but instead the lower register (C#, E, F#) is grouped with the harmonic *arpeggios* played by the left hand [ex.22]. However, at the recapitulation (bar 1 ff in ex.22), one hears the melodic line as [ex.23], due to the sustained notes being overridden by the lower register tones in the right hand. This can be seen as a clear application of the Proximity principle, where there is a distinction between the lower pitch, a harmonic *arpeggio*, and the higher single melodic line. On the other hand, if one looks at the rhythmical structure, the identification of the melodic line can be interpreted as an application of the principle of Similarity, where the notes of the triplet-quavers are heard as group, distinct from the crochets of the melodic line. Each of these claims can also be seen as an application of the principle of Good Continuation.

[ex.22]

[ex.23]

Further, there are several principles that are Gestalt in nature and only applicable to musical sound structure. Some, as Sloboda and Deutsch have noted, themselves derive from musical theory, such as the “scale illusion”, an application of the “Good Continuation” principle within musical grammar; melodic determination rules, indeed, derive from the combination of several Gestalt principles.⁶⁰ The best example for demonstrating the “scale illusion”, oft-cited by musical psychologists, is the opening bars of the *Finale* of Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 6* [ex.24], where we perceive the sound (between the first violin part and second violin part) as two descending scales [ex.25].

[ex.24]

[ex.25]

Sloboda, indeed, maintains that our very perception and cognition of a melody within polyphonic music is determined by applying such Gestalt principles.⁶¹

These melodic determination principles include:

⁶⁰ Cf. Deutsch (1982), Sloboda (1985)

⁶¹ Sloboda (1985: 172-74)

- 1) “All other things being equal, it is the line with the highest pitch range that tends to be focally processed”. 2) A line with a louder or distinctive “solo” timbre tends to be focally processed. 3) Change of quality or texture in the focal line – such as introducing a fugue in another voice – tends to shift attention to another focal line. 4) The listener tends to remain at the same focal line, unless there are strong enticements for him to shift attention.

The underlying principles governing attentive auditory perception seem not only applicable to music, but to any natural or non-natural sound. We often drive along a noisy road, without noticing its sound due to our attention to the radio. Yet, when we hear the ambulance siren, our attention suddenly shifts. In musical composition too, as can be seen in Saint-Saëns’ *Symphony No. 3*, one may hear, say, the organ part as the melodic line due to melodic determination principle 2 above, yet in its absence melodic attention shifts to the violin part due to principle 1; these follow sudden shifts of attention to the 2nd Violin and Cello part (3rd bar ex.26), then to the Viola, Oboe, Clarinet and Horn part (6th bar ex.26), then to the 1st Violin part (9th bar ex.26) etc. when the “*fugata*” passage is introduced, representing application of principle 3 [ex.26 see next page].

These Gestalt principles help provide a framework in terms of which we may pursue scientific explanations as to how our perception works. Moreover, as in the case of visual examples, these auditory principles may also be applicable inter-culturally.

- Flute 1
- Flute 2
- Flute 3
- Oboe
- English Horn
- Clarinet
- Bass Clarinet
- Bassoon
- Contra Bassoon
- Horn 1&2
- Horn 3&4
- Trumpet 1&2
- Trumpet 3
- Trombone 1&2
- Tromb 3 & Tuba
- Timpani
- Organ
- Violin 1
- Violin 2
- Viola
- Cello
- Double Bass

Musical score for the first page of the orchestral score. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with woodwinds at the top, brass below, percussion and organ in the middle, and strings at the bottom. The woodwind section includes Flute 1, Flute 2, Flute 3, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, and Contra Bassoon. The brass section includes Horn 1&2, Horn 3&4, Trumpet 1&2, Trumpet 3, Trombone 1&2, and Tromb 3 & Tuba. The percussion section includes Timpani and Organ. The string section includes Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is written in a common time signature and features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Continuation of the musical score on the second page. The score continues with the same orchestral layout as the first page. The woodwind section includes Flute 1, Flute 2, Flute 3, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, and Contra Bassoon. The brass section includes Horn 1&2, Horn 3&4, Trumpet 1&2, Trumpet 3, Trombone 1&2, and Tromb 3 & Tuba. The percussion section includes Timpani and Organ. The string section includes Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score is written in a common time signature and features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

These principles also provide a scientific basis for developing accounts of how we hear music conceptually.

4.3.2. Musical Conceptualisation – The Limits of Gestalt and Music Cognition

While these principles provide us with some solid ground for our analysis of musical perception, the conceptualisation of music, i.e. the cognition of music at the level of perception in the manner identified by DeBellis, as well as the broader understanding of music and the interpretative process pointed to by Scruton and others, requires 'more than mere universal grouping principles.'⁶² There are indeed parallels here between the methods and results of Gestalt psychology and those of aesthetic formalism, in that both give priority to the perception of the whole in terms of its structured parts and in the universality of their claims, aspects which in turn have had their critics.⁶³ Kanizsa, though broadly sympathetic to Gestalt theory and concerned to clarify some of the classical misunderstandings by its critics, nevertheless sees the danger of universalising the process of categorical assimilation into automatic perceptual modification.⁶⁴ More generally, Cook sees many psychological experiments concerning music to be a matter of "language games"; where one cannot verbalise what is taking place in one's mental activity while listening to music, psychologists often dismiss the result as a failure to understand music.

⁶² There are, of course, further claims based on Gestalt by numerous psychologists; see for example *Music, Mind and Brain* by Clynes (1982), and *Music and the Brain* by Critchley and Henson (1977).

⁶³ Cf. Osborne (1964).

⁶⁴ Since we are not concerned with a detailed study of Gestalt theories and their defects, extensive argument is omitted here. Kanizsa is concerned to distinguish between "categorical assimilation" and "automatic perceptual modification" because, say, in perceiving a unclosed circle (like C), we do categorise it as "circle" but yet we do not modify the perceived object into a complete circle. See Kanizsa (1994)

What we have here, as often in psychological writings about music, is an attempt to give a purely psychological explanation for what are in part social phenomena.⁶⁵

Our criticism of musical psychology, however, is more positive and constructive. Some at least of these psychological claims do indeed contribute to our understanding of musical hearing, especially with reference to our pre-conceptualised perception, though Cook is right to remark that these explanations often fail to take account of the work of art as a socio-cultural product.⁶⁶ Moreover, the very nature of perception, as we have seen with respect to Churchland's and Goodman's accounts, is such that cognition of an object is normally available only within the social community. In terms of language, Churchland argues, elasticity of understanding is only possible within such a context:

What is it, after all, that permits two speakers to understand one another...*Given that they share identical vocabulary, syntax, and dispositions to draw formal inferences...*⁶⁷

Goodman's account of aesthetic realism echoes this claim: 'Realism is relative, determined by the system of representation standard *for a given culture or person at a given time.*'⁶⁸

It seems, then, that it would be misleading to seek to provide an account of musical understanding in terms of psychology alone. What and how we perceive is a

⁶⁵ Cook 'Perception: A Perspective from Music Theory' in Aiello and Sloboda (1994: 69)

⁶⁶ see *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Churchland (1979: 51) with my italics.

⁶⁸ Goodman (1976: 37) with my italics.

psychological process, yet interpreting what is a socio-cultural product in terms of psychological laws alone would provide only a limited account of musical meaning.⁶⁹

4.4.1. The Limits of Formalism

Traditional or “strict” formalism, we have seen, appears inadequate in the analysis of music. One might indeed wonder whether a less strict “new” theory is even possible, since we are concerned with the “meaning” of music, and this meaning has to be based on what music is built upon – tonally moving forms. The approach the formalists initiated in seeing the importance and primacy of musical form in interpreting musical meaning is a valid starting point. Furthermore, if one disregards formal properties altogether in interpreting musical meaning, it is difficult to see how any interpretation can be grounded. Focusing closely on strictly musical properties provides the most plausible basis for constructing any developed account of musical signification. Yet, when we consider the apparent “meaning” of music, we note that it can only be found in the perceptual judgement which alone can ground musical understanding. Strict formalism thus cut itself off from aspects of musical meaning which are perceptually actual. By constraining ourselves within the formal properties of music, we exclude many aspects of music which are essential to musical understanding, including its expressiveness, Tarasti’s “actorial dimension”, and other forms of extroversive semiosis.

The moderate formalism adumbrated here can be summarised as follows: There are

⁶⁹ We have seen analogous limitations in the attempt to develop a semiotic analysis devoid of any socio-cultural considerations.

no physical properties in music other than its “tonally moving forms”. All significations, if any, whether intra-musical or extra-musical, are rooted within the form, and are products of socio-historical interpretation.

The formalists have rightly seen that there are no purely objective properties other than the formal within a musical work; if there is any significance in a musical work, it is not such a property, but is a function both of such properties and of interpretation.

We have in fact a double process of interpretation, firstly by our selective “non-innocent” ears in hearing music “as”, the “prejudice” remarked on by Goodman, and secondly a further, conscious, process of interpretation. Only through discerning and applying the criteria for valid interpretations can one find what a musical work signifies other than, self-referentially, its “tonally moving forms”.

Chapter 5 – Musical Perception and Musical Interpretation: Towards a Hermeneutics of Music

The previous chapters have left many questions that remain to be answered. While there are clearly some analogies and similarities between music and language, in that both are formed by a set of syntactic or quasi-syntactic conventions, at the semantic level, as we saw in the second chapter, the correlation between the two seems insufficiently marked to provide informatively detailed parallels. Yet, in more general terms, it seems that music, like language, can be treated as possessing semiotic properties. The discussion of the semiotics of music showed that music is capable of signifying intra-musically as well as extra-musically. The implied idea of music as signification, or as “significant form” – the term used both by Clive Bell and Susanne Langer – will be useful in exploring the notion of musical hermeneutics.

The second chapter’s discussion of music as language concluded with a promissory note for further investigation into what musical understanding consists in, and into an interpretative method that takes account of the historical and cultural associations of a particular musical work, and interrogates the relevance of the intention of the composer to the analysis of its significance.

The chapter on musical expression examined various types of extra-musical signification, with particular reference to the emotional aspect of music. While the debate between expression and arousal theories seems inconclusive, even muddled, the power of music to convey its “expressiveness”, we concluded, can be understood through a firm grasp of the musical form itself. Hearing music conceptually, as

DeBellis claims, is rooted within the form of music, and experiencing music conceptually provides the key to musical meaning. Here we returned to the question of “understanding”, but this time with a cognitive emphasis, arguing that the expressivity of music must be retrieved from the musical work itself. This, in turn, drew us to reconsider the approach taken by the formalists. The previous chapter saw the importance of form as providing the basic structural units of not only music but all artworks. Moreover, it seemed that aesthetic appreciation of formal beauty, as Hanslick long ago noted, might constitute – if we took a Kantian approach – the only universalisable type of claim available to aesthetics. Admittedly, the judgement of taste, to use the Kantian notion, is constructed in a hypothetical scenario, whereas in reality there can never be a universal common understanding and appreciation of a work of art. Nevertheless, however artificial the Kantian universal may be, if it is at all possible to theorise such a subjective notion as a judgement of taste in terms of universality, in similar fashion it might also be possible to construct a theory, however artificial or hypothetical, of the meaning of art, and hence of music. This is not to say that this chapter will try to construct some unstable theory seeking to elicit parallels with the Kantian account; rather it will use the theoretical bases of the formalists’ approach, as examined in the previous chapter, and explore the possibility that these may be used to provide a framework for musical interpretation that could be applied universally.

While musical sound as a physical phenomenon is open to analysis by musicologists, what this chapter seeks to examine is its significance. If we respond to music with some emotion, or are led to understand a piece of music, then there must be something more than awareness of the pure sonorous form. To put it in another way,

when we hear music of a different culture that we have no previous experience of hearing, or listen to some recent dodecaphonic composition without any theoretical background, we are indeed led to believe that “this music is beyond my comprehension”. This indicates that music must contain some extra-sonic properties that we do normally comprehend, and in understanding music there seem to be two levels of comprehension. Firstly, in hearing music one can grasp its formal structure. It is only through such hearing, as DeBellis rightly argued, that we can proceed to the second level, the comprehension of the signification of a particular piece of music, taking account of its socio-historical constraints. Only when we comprehend the structure can we grasp the next step of musical understanding and conceptualisation. Thus it appears that the classical distinction between form and expression should not be construed as poles in a polemical dichotomy, but rather as complementary features of musical experience. As we shall seek to show, the conceptualisation of musical form provides an essential stage in the grasp of musical significance.

5.1.1. Music and Language

In the light of our previous discussions of the various relationships between music and language, it is here appropriate to draw the threads together. By bridging some of the diverse aspects of the relationship we have noted so far, this will help provide a basis for our prioritisation of the hermeneutic interpretation of music.

Our chapter on music as language concluded that within the framework of linguistics, music cannot go beyond its quasi-syntactic structure. Yet, if we are to link the linguistic structure of music with our discussion of formalism in the previous chapter,

it seems that even in the most objective and formal analysis of music historical interpretation is required. This is because the syntactic rules are not atemporal universal rules, but themselves deeply rooted within the stylistic constraints of the history of music and, more generally, of art. On this relation, Rosen remarks:

[A] style may be described figuratively as a way of exploiting and focusing a language, which then becomes a dialect or language in its own right, and it is this focus which makes possible what might be called the personal style or manner of the artist.¹

Here, Rosen focuses on the Classical style – of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven in particular – examining how it is that whereas the historical styles of high baroque or particular national styles such as German, Italian and French can be traced within the music of the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the style of these three composers are distinctively personal styles which, he argues, may be united under the notion of “tonality”.² According to Rosen, the syntactic structure of tonality, and moreover the achievement of equal temperament, are essential for the development of the Classical style. Rosen notes:

The musical language which made the classical style possible is that of tonality, which was not a massive, immobile system but a living, gradually changing language from its beginning.³

Further, in contrasting baroque and classical styles, Rosen remarks: ‘A Baroque composer worked mostly with vertical filling (the figured bass), and the classical

¹ Rosen (1976: 20)

² *Ibid.* (22 ff.)

³ *Ibid.* (23)

composer with horizontal: long phrases of conventional passagework.⁴ Another musicologist, Carl Dahlhaus makes a similar point on the differences between classical and romantic music where he notes:

In Beethoven formal ideas and melodic detail come into being simultaneously: the single motive is relative to the whole. By contrast, in the later nineteenth century the melodic idea acted as a motive in the literal sense of the word, setting the music in motion, and provided the substance of a development in which the theme itself was elaborated. Musical form now presented itself primarily (though by no means exclusively) as a consequence drawn from thematic ideas, not as a system of formal relations.⁵

As we shall see later in the hermeneutics section of this chapter, musical style, so understood, must indeed determine the syntactic structure of particular musical compositions. In the absence of semantics, the significance of music must arise out of its contextual meaning. This can only be achieved through an interaction between musical syntax and its pragmatic implications. Further, it is precisely because of this lack of semantic meaning, that musical significance must be interpreted and explained in terms of hermeneutics.

This point relates to our discussion of music as semiotic system, discussed in Chapter 2. Benveniste was right in claiming that the units of music – notes – have no referential value, and this, of course, is reflected in Langer's claim that music is not a made up of discursive symbols. As we have seen, Langer understands music in terms

⁴ *Ibid.* (71)

⁵ Dahlhaus (1989: 42)

of symbols with emotional content – analogous to the way language has “conceptual” content symbolically. Further, echoing Benveniste’s claim, since musical units have no fixed references, music belongs to the sphere of presentational symbols rather than discursive ones. For Langer:

[I]ts elements are not words – independent associative symbols with a reference fixed by convention. Only as an articulate form is it found to fit anything; and since there is no meaning assigned to any of its parts, it lacks one of the basic characteristics of language – fixed association, and therewith a single, unequivocal reference.⁶

Budd’s discussion of Langer usefully summarises two further aspects of her main themes: namely the concepts of “unconsummated” symbol and of “the forms of feeling”.⁷

As we saw earlier, in the formalism chapter, Langer echoes Hanslick in claiming that music is primarily a form.⁸ Further, she maintained that it is a logical form, symbolising human feelings. Budd quotes Langer:

The forms of feeling and the forms of discursive expression are logically incommensurate, so that any exact concepts of feeling and emotion cannot be projected into the logical form of literal language.⁹

In other words, according to Langer, the forms of expression available to language are not suitable for describing human feelings and emotions.

⁶ Langer (1953: 31)

⁷ See Budd (1985a: 109 ff), for previous discussion of Langer, see 2.3.3. and 3.3.2. of this thesis.

⁸ See Chapter 4, footnote 32.

⁹ Langer (1957: 51), quoted in Budd (1985a: 110)

Music [on the other hand], is “significant form,” and its significance is that of a symbol, a highly articulated sensuous object, which by virtue of its dynamic structure can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey. Feeling, life, motion and emotion constitute its import.¹⁰

Further, on Budd’s plausible reading, it is music’s lack of fixed import that leads Langer to characterise it in terms of the “unconsummated symbol”.

It symbolises not the different feelings - by means of the different forms of the different kinds of feeling – but instead the common forms that different kinds of feeling sometimes share.¹¹

That music should be seen as a symbolic system is, indeed, an at least partially plausible thesis, even though the musical units do not bear significance semantically and hence cannot truly be called a semiotic system. Yet, as Nattiez, Tarasti and others have demonstrated, if musical units can be construed as topics or isotopies then music can indeed be called a significant form. Of course, as a formal art, the significance of music is rooted within the formal structure of music, as Tarasti’s analysis showed. Yet, if music is nothing but a pure sonorous form, then there is nothing further to interpret. This points not only to the viability of a semiotic account of music, but also to a minimum requirement for the hermeneutic interpretation.

Further, Nattiez’ model of communication itself resembles the hermeneutic method of interpretation, where significance is constructed through the interaction of the receiver and the “trace”. This model, unlike the Romantic hermeneutic model, takes the forms

¹⁰ Langer (1953: 32)

¹¹ Budd (1985a: 110)

of music rather than the composer's intention as a primary source of interpretation. The significant form, as we have seen in Chapter 3, must carry the expressiveness. Indeed since music does not just occur as a natural phenomenon, but somebody somewhere has to create it, it cannot detach itself completely from its composer. However, if we are to interpret its significance – whether representational, expressive or otherwise – this must be reflected within the product itself. In this sense, the claims of formalists are feasible, that music is foremost a formal art. The primacy of form in music must be granted since, otherwise, it is difficult to see how any kind of relevant interpretation is possible.

In Langer's perspective, both "music as language" and "music and language" can be suitably interpreted, affirmed, uniting what were once seen as competing approaches. Music is indeed an "unconsummated" form of language, and "consummated" language often fails to articulate the core significance of music. In these terms, Langer rightly claimed, 'music articulates forms which language cannot set forth'.¹² However, it may be thought that the terms are themselves suspect, since there are forms of language – often designated "metaphorical" – that themselves appear to lack fixed "import".

5.1.2. Metaphor, Intention and Pragmatic Interpretation

As we noted in Chapter 2, Bernstein claimed that musical semantics, if possible at all, is grounded in the power of metaphorical transformation, and a useful linguistic analogy here is indeed that of the phenomenon of metaphorical utterance. However,

¹² Langer (1979: 233)

just as in order to investigate musical significance it was necessary to clarify the notion of “meaning” and of significance in a wider context, so in order to explore the claim that musical language is metaphorical there is a need for a certain clarification of the term “metaphor”. Several accounts of metaphor have been offered in recent years, especially by those concerned with the philosophy of language, but examination of the notion of metaphor goes back at least to Aristotle, who claimed that:

A metaphor is the application of a word that belongs to another thing: either from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by analogy.¹³

While a version of this account, known as “substitution theory”, still finds defenders, in recent years, with the rise of interest in the philosophy of language and in verbal art, such traditional accounts of metaphor have been reappraised.

I.A. Richards, one of the two authors of *The Meaning of Meaning* discussed in the Introduction, provides an attractive account. According to Richards, metaphor cannot only be a matter of substitution, for metaphor cannot be translated into literal language without losing its tension. Such a sentence as “Juliet is the sun” means much more than just “Juliet is radiant” or “My day begins with Juliet”; rather, many different properties of the notion of the “sun” must be taken into account. Richards thus introduces a new theory of metaphor, namely a version of what has become known as interaction theory.

¹³ Aristotle 1457b (1995: 105)

The traditional theory noticed only a few of the modes of metaphor; and limited its application of the term *metaphor* to a few of them only. And thereby it made metaphor seem to be a verbal matter, a shifting and displacement of words, whereas fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of *thoughts*, a transaction between contexts.¹⁴

Thus, as Ricoeur notes, Richards rejected two central features of the traditional view of metaphor, namely the assumptions that metaphor does not constitute any meaning beyond that of the literal sentence, and that the use of metaphor is purely decorative.¹⁵ Further, Ricoeur concludes that on such an account true metaphors are non-translatable, since we find new concepts through metaphors which cannot be literally stated, and the meaning of such untranslatable concepts are born out of the tension between what Richards calls tenor and vehicle.

Davidson, on the other hand, rejects the idea of metaphor possessing any figurative meanings; his account is rooted within the literal meaning. Thus for Davidson the distinctive force of the metaphorical sentence belongs to the world of pragmatics rather than semantics, and he rejects the claims for new additional meanings or the tension of non-translatable meanings which enable understanding of the sentence in particular contexts. 'I agree with the view that metaphors cannot be paraphrased, but I think this is not because metaphors say something too novel for literal expression but because there is nothing there to paraphrase.'¹⁶ Further, he notes 'I depend on the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do. I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use.'¹⁷

¹⁴ Richards (1979: 94) with original italics.

¹⁵ See Ricoeur (1976: 49)

¹⁶ Davidson (1978: 32)

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (33)

Certainly, as Davidson notes, metaphor does not introduce a new figurative concept through a shift in word meaning. When the word “sun” was used metaphorically in the case of Shakespeare, its meaning did not suddenly change, the figure was rooted within the literal meaning. Nevertheless, on the interaction model, metaphorical meaning, while using the properties of the literal meanings of individual words, may be seen as creating a new figurative meaning which exists not in the domain of semantics but in the field of pragmatics. The sharp contrast drawn by Davidson depends on a dissociation of meaning from use which many of those who have learnt from Richards, most notably Ricoeur and Max Black, do not accept.¹⁸

What the above discussion suggests is that, if we are to entertain the concept of metaphorical meaning, that meaning must be located not only in the field of semantics but also in pragmatics. As Searle rightly remarks:

...whenever we talk about the metaphorical meaning of a word, expression, or sentence, we are talking about what a speaker might utter it to mean, in a way that departs from what the word, expression, or sentence actually means. We are, therefore, talking about possible speaker's intentions.¹⁹

While there may be a set of semantic meanings which give the literal meaning of a sentence used metaphorically, there is always a pragmatic figurative meaning which may be more appropriate depending on the context. At least in the typical case, in order to understand these figurative meanings, the hearer (or reader) must reconstruct some understanding of the intention of the speaker (or author) and the context in

¹⁸ Black (1962)

¹⁹ Searle (1979: 77)

which the utterance is used.

Black's interaction theory also suggests that metaphors involve a shift in meaning, at least in so far as the meaning of an item is in part a function of its implications, since they involve extending or changing the semantic meaning of the "subsidiary" subject to fit the principal subject, thereby reorganising or selecting our conception of it, and through this interaction producing 'a meaning that is a resultant of that interaction.'²⁰

Their mode of operation requires the reader to use a system of implications (...) as a means for selecting, emphasizing, and organizing relations in a different field. This use of a "subsidiary subject" to foster insight into a "principal subject" is a distinctive intellectual operation (...), demanding simultaneous awareness of both subjects but not reducible to any comparison between the two.²¹

On the face of it, Black's account seems to suggest that interaction metaphors work, at least in part, by stretching the principal semantic meaning of X into that of the subsidiary subject. This notion of metaphor as involving the stretching of semantic meaning will find its use in the discussion of musical metaphor. On another account, the hearers are encouraged through their understanding of the distinctive illocutionary force of the metaphor to see "X as Y", which also has its musical analogue.²²

In the domain of hermeneutics, Gadamer offers a notion of metaphor as;

[M]aintain[ing] the appearance of carrying something over from one realm to another, that is, it brings to mind the original realm of meaning

²⁰ Black (1962: 38)

²¹ *Ibid.* (46)

²² See Warner (1973). For further discussion of the different variations of metaphor, see Goodman (1976: 81ff.)

from which it has taken and out of which it has been carried over into new realms of usage, as long as this content as such is kept in mind.²³

5.1.3. Metaphor in Music

In the light of the above considerations, together with the unsatisfactory results arising from the earlier chapters' explorations of the notion of musical significance, we can now reconsider the problem of musical understanding, using pragmatic modes of interpretation analogous to those we have been considering. Music, like figurative sentences, must be interpreted in the light of our understanding of the intention and context of the work. The analogy is not perfect, since music, unlike language, is not subject to translation, but each formal structure of music arises out of its historical and cultural background together with the intention of the composer. Moreover, since musical significance, if one tries to verbalise, can only be articulated in metaphorical language, any account of meaningfulness in music has to take account of the metaphorical dimension of musical verbalisations.

In the musical domain, there are two levels of metaphor, both of which are centrally at issue here. Firstly, in verbalising music, for example in describing its expressive quality, such as that a piece of music is "sad", "gay" or "triumphant", these terms are used metaphorically. Moreover, in a narrower context, musical analysis is full of metaphorical statements, such as "The harmonic is full or empty", "Melody is going up or down", or "A leading note is rising to tonic to make a cadence". It is, of course, absurd to think that sound, as a purely physical phenomenon, is literally sad or full or even rising. Secondly, and more importantly, if music is said to share at least some

²³ Gadamer (1976: 85)

characteristics of language, such as syntactical structure, and the capacity to signify something, then there is the possibility that this signification may take place in a manner informatively analogous to that of metaphorical utterance.

In the case of music, it seems the metaphorical process is reversed. In language, we have a basic word meaning or semantic meaning. Any metaphorical sentence used with certain words somehow relates to the meaning of these words in their literal sense. However music, as we have repeatedly noted, has no semantic meaning. In a strict sense, any particular set of chordal progressions or melodic lines does not denote or connote anything. Instead, what is achieved, if there is any meaning at all, is a pragmatic form of contextual meaning. It is the composer who uses certain harmonic or melodic patterns to elicit a particular meaning in terms of the socio-historical constraints of the time. This is one of the main reasons why music is not translatable. Music making is thus like language making; the repeated use of the same chordal progressions by a particular composer or through a particular period may become a conventional “signification”. Thus, it can be repeatedly used by later composers to bring out conventionally that particular signification by using the specific “historically associated” chordal / melodic progressions. As we saw in the Introduction, what is often called musical meaning is a function of contextual, pragmatic, meaning better designated “significance” or “meaningfulness”.

This process in itself does not show that music essentially signifies metaphorically, since it would be absurd to claim, as Nietzsche once did, that all language, since it is

constituted by conventional agreement (as is music), is essentially metaphorical.²⁴

The crucial difference with language is that, once use has established connections governing a sound or inscription sequence sufficiently for it to be entered into a dictionary, we may say that the transition from pragmatics to semantics has been made, we have a word that may be said to have a particular meaning. On the other hand, while it is true that once a musical innovator has developed a new set of chordal or melodic progressions it may become conventionally established, it still remains within the domain of pragmatics. An essential feature of semantic meaning is that it enables words to be translatable (more or less adequately) into other languages, but we can never accurately translate music, however conventionally constructed, into another medium. Since music does not possess semantic meaning, we can never accurately claim that a certain musical passage *is* X (e.g. sad), but only that it can be heard “as” or it may signify “X”. This is not to say that all musical significations are strictly metaphors, but it is useful to notice, at least for discussion of the interpretative process, that music shares important features with metaphor.

One crucial difference between metaphor and music is that while metaphor, since it is, after all, created within the linguistic medium, is explicable in literal language (and often translatable into another language) music is strictly speaking untranslatable into any linguistic medium and the sorts of explication available are very different from the spelling out of analogies one typically finds in a (necessarily inadequate) “prose paraphrase”. Significant analogy between metaphor and music arises from the fact that in attempting to translate metaphorical (or figurative) utterance into literal

²⁴ Nietzsche (1979: 82ff); without the notion of ‘literal’ meaning that of ‘metaphor’ becomes empty of content.

language, the quality of aesthetic tension disappears.²⁵ Musical “translation” into words also loses the aesthetic quality of tension between structure and context, while of course the verbalisation becomes non-music at the same time.

Although music does not properly have semantics, the metaphorical analogy at the level of pragmatics may be supplemented, as Joseph Swain has argued, at that of syntax.²⁶ Examples noted include linguistically grounded metaphor – as in the case of Handel’s *Messiah* [ex.27] where the word meanings are reflected in the musical movement – and purely expressive (or, if that term is used more narrowly, sometimes representational) metaphor – as in the case of numerous operas including Gilda’s murder and the storm in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*.

and ev - 'ry moun-tain and hill _____ made low

the crook - ed __ sraight,

[ex.27]

While the music itself may said to be expressing (or representing) a storm, this does not provide a particular key, harmonic progression or rhythmical structure with a semantic dimension; rather, the understanding invited is pragmatic – an understanding within the context, or supplementing the verbal meaning, and always analysable within its syntactic structure.

²⁵ The concept of “tension” in metaphor is, of course, a central concept for both Richards and Black.

²⁶ Swain (1997: 98ff)

Swain develops the parallel between comprehending a verbal metaphor and that of music, echoing Sperber and Wilson's theory of implicature where we must account for two issues: 'One is that meaning is always conditioned by the context of the utterance, and the other is that members of a language community usually communicate with one another in good faith.'²⁷ Musical metaphor too, is contextual and the musical community needs to understand the communication tool. However, the difference is, to cite Swain again:

In poetry, rhetoric, and speech the metaphor stretches the *semantic* range of utterances to include meanings quite outside their bounds; in music it stretches the *syntactic* coherence of composition.²⁸

With respect to linguistic metaphor in general, most naturally in the case of literary metaphor, there is typically, a stretching of the semantic meaning of the particular word or phrase; it may thus seem problematic to explore metaphor at the level of syntax. However, given the absence of semantic meaning in music, musical meaning appears to lie in the relation between musical 'syntax' and its pragmatic implications; thus the musical metaphor, as in the case of Handel's work cited above, must be at least in part a function of the quasi-syntactic structure of the music. In the absence of semantic range, musical metaphor must be understood by the audience's recognition of its "syntactic" structure. Somewhat as shifting and stretching the semantic meaning of words create metaphorical tension in the utterance, musical metaphor must stretch its syntactic norm of the particular socio-historical musical form. Swain gives several examples, including that of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, where we

²⁷ *Ibid.* (109) The theory of implicature, of course, was originally introduced by Grice (1989).

²⁸ *Ibid.* (110) with my italics.

find “syntactic” anomalies, demonstrating a harmonic metaphor. As we shall see later in this chapter with reference to the history of the Western Tonal music, the Baroque and Classic eras had strict harmonic rules which could, and still can, be easily identified by audiences. In many cases, musical metaphors can be identified as being used by the Baroque and Classical composers, stretching the harmonic and rhythmic rules in order to create the perception of musical tension by the audience. For Swain metaphor involves: ‘incongruities, and incongruities in syntax, almost by definition, have a roughness about them, because syntax controls the ease of handling information.’²⁹

The notion of “stretching” is, of course, itself used metaphorically. In the absence of semantics in music, contextual significance needs to arise through the hermeneutic fusion of horizons. Musical significance is closer to pragmatics than semantics in the sense that, in the lack of fixed meaning, it is always contextual. The audience interprets the music in the light of its perceived structure, taking account of its implicit structural and stylistic rules, and recognises breaks of those rules in the given context as a part of that very horizon of significance the audience is invited to share. The relative emphases may be more structural (as in the case of Handel) or contextual (as in the case of Verdi), but in either case our presence in the work’s effective history enhances our capacity to discriminate those cases where the music invites us to use the expected patterns positively to enrich our perception of the break – so that the latter is perceived as a stretching of the former to achieve new possibilities – from cases of irony, parody or that form of rejection for which the most appropriate

²⁹ *Ibid.* (117)

linguistic analogy would be contradiction. And such historically contextual placing is a function, in part, of pragmatics.

Swain's appeal to the level of "syntax" to exploit the relation of musical metaphor is suggestive, but of only limited applicability, since he himself admits that such syntactic metaphors can only be identified in certain musical periods and works, where the syntactic structure is readily identifiable by the audiences. As atonal or artificial syntactic structures emerged in Western Music in the early twentieth century, this notion of musical metaphor as stretching musical syntax to demonstrate pragmatic meaning could not coherently be applied. We shall return to the notion of musical metaphor in the next chapter, in the light of our discussion of musical hermeneutics.

In analogous manner, we can discern other forms of stretching of musical syntax, including that of musical irony.³⁰ Irony works in a similar way to that of musical metaphor, in the sense that in the absence of semantics, our grasp of it is a function of our grasp of a work's structural and stylistic coordinates. Not only must our horizon meet the horizon of the work in this respect, but we need to be able to understand the point of the irony. Elleström notes: 'When we feel that two contrasting moods are mutually exclusive, and yet in a way make sense when jumbled together, it is irony that tickles our ears.'³¹

³⁰ There have been a number of studies seeking to explore the supposedly ironic dimensions of Shostakovich's work. The most detailed recent account is that of Sheinberg (2000) See also MacDonald (1991); also Longyear's study of Beethoven's irony in Longyear (1989).

³¹ Elleström (1996: 205)

We have irony when the stylistic constraints create an expectation, or a certain harmonic structure creates a certain tension which is deliberately not met or resolved. Thus Mozart's famous *Musical Joke* finishes in a discord, creating a moment of realisation in listeners who stand in effective history with this musical tradition. Parody in this context can be a variant of irony, when the ironic gesture is to be read as belittling the norm, but can also be developed by use of that norm in an exaggerated manner. Elleström's comment is pertinent:

We very often hear arguments about whether this or that poem is ironic or not, but there is no definite formula for deciding this.³²

The notions of musical metaphor, irony and even joke bring out with some force the role of such matters, central to hermeneutics, as the fusion of horizons and the role of effective history in understanding musical significance.

5.2.1. Musical Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: "Now" and Historical Understanding

Before turning directly to the issue of how philosophical hermeneutics engages with musical analysis, there is one feature of our account of the development of phenomenology in Chapter 1 that it will be helpful to return to here – that of music's temporal dimension.

Our earlier discussions of Gestalt, perception and the conceptualisation of music have already pointed us towards an account of the phenomenological perception of music.

³² *Ibid.* (207)

In the previous chapter we considered how we perceive music, grouping its elements in accordance (in part) with the Gestalt rules, in order to hear them “conceptually”. We shall here return to this notion of “conceptualisation”, as examined by DeBellis, with an eye to Husserl’s understanding of what it is for experience to be present to us.

Having defined a concept as ‘a certain psychological capacity, an ability to have beliefs in which one grasps a particular mode of presentation’, DeBellis distinguishes between non conceptual, weak conceptual and strong conceptual hearing depending on the experience on the listener.³³ What we are interested in here is, however, not the analysis of the degree of musicological competency, but how we, the ordinary listeners perceive music. Can we not hear the music as comprehensible even if we are not trained musicologists? DeBellis names those who can theoretically describe the musical structure as “expert listeners”, while those who can hear it but do not have mastery of musicological terminology as “intermediate listeners”.³⁴ Further, he maintains that only the expert listeners who have the capacity to understand the theoretical rationale can hear music conceptually. Against this view, Budd remarks:

To experience music with musical understanding a listener must perceive various kinds of musical processes, structures and relationships. But to perceive phrasing, cadences and harmonic progressions, for example, does not require the listener to conceptualise them in musical terms. A listener can experience these phenomena whether or not he hears them under the description they are given in a correct analysis of the music. This description applies to the experience of a listener who experiences the music with understanding; but the listener does not need to recognise this fact in order to have the experience it describes.³⁵

³³ DeBellis (1995: 32)

³⁴ *Ibid.* (37ff.)

³⁵ Budd (1985b: 247)

There are indeed important differences between musicologically trained listeners and ordinary concert goers. As we shall see later, hermeneutics can bring out differences in significance with respect to a particular piece, and how, moreover, a particular performance is fabricated only by means of the interaction of the listener and music and not through music alone. DeBellis is right in differentiating the levels of competency in this context, since the conceptualisation of music does indeed depend on the musical experience of the individual perceiver. However, Budd is not wrong either, in claiming that understanding music does not necessarily require access to musicological conceptualisation with its terminology. Just as we appreciate the beauty and structure of a tree without ever knowing its name, or a child who does not know its name “door” still capably enters and exits, so what is important in listening to music is how we perceive it and appreciate it. As we all know, we do not require a musicological training in order to appreciate the music from the radio, or a band playing in the park. Of course, musicologists would rightly argue that there is a higher level of understanding – or listening strongly conceptually as DeBellis puts it – and this is reflected in such analyses as those by the music semioticians sketched earlier, and indeed by musicologists whom we shall discuss shortly. Here, we are concerned not with the verbalisation of the structure of music, but the understanding of it, and this requires further attention to how we perceive music. As we have already seen in both the Gestalt and the semiotics sections, we perceive music as configurations of units. While of course we can break what we hear down into notes, rests and articulations, our perception does not naturally segment the melodic line into individual notes. This fact is an aspect of our consciousness of the present discussed in the section of phenomenology. We shall return to the levels of musical

competence, with particular reference to the understanding of a particular musical culture, in our discussion of ethnomusicological interpretations.

As we saw in the first chapter, Husserl's notion of the "now" extends to include retention and protention, through the work of memory, imagination, expectation and habit. Husserl further elaborates this point, using music as his example in claiming:

If the intention is directed toward a particular tone or a particular measure for its own sake, we have perception so long as precisely the thing intended is perceived, and mere retention as soon as it is past. Objectively considered, the measure no longer appears as "present" but as "past." The whole melody, however, appears as present so long as it still sounds, so long as the notes *belonging to it*, intended in the *one* nexus of apprehensions, still sound. The melody is past only after the last note has gone.³⁶

This notion of what Bergson called *temps duré* is fundamental not only in perceiving music but also in organising the structure mentally into coherent units. Bell's comment on the function of memory, imagination, expectation and habit needs further elaboration.³⁷ It was not Husserl but Kant who first saw the productive role of imagination. Imagination, for Kant, is not only a reproductive tool between the past (memory) and present, but also a productive and necessary instrument for our knowledge. In echoing empiricism, Kant argued that all human knowledge is derived from experience, but argued that experience is only possible through the work of imagination providing forms of coherence that enable knowledge.³⁸ Further, the

³⁶ Husserl (1964: 61) with original italics.

³⁷ See Chapter 1, footnote 16.

³⁸ Kant (1929: A124, p.146)

concept of expectation here, in terms of musical listening, plays a crucial role in determining Meyer's "embodied" meaning where the tension and resolution of a musical passage is one of the core factors in determining its significance.³⁹

Expectation is possible, in other words, only through this phenomenologically thick temporality, where past and present notes are bridged within wider melodic phrases.

This phenomenological concept of the temporal is crucial for an adequate understanding of musical listening and conceptualisation, of Budd's "various kinds of musical processes, structures and relationships", and thereby makes possible the hermeneutic interpretation of music.

The step from phenomenology to hermeneutics involves attention to the historical dimension. While phenomenology sets out the basic perception of music, it gives little attention to how and why we hear music in a certain way. Here, Gadamer's critique of Husserl's stance on "overcoming prejudices" is relevant.⁴⁰ The fact that not all human beings experience a particular piece (or more precisely a particular performance of a piece) of music in exactly the same manner suggests that there may always be a prejudice which we cannot discard. Further, each work is also composed in the context of such prejudices or prejudgements. On Gadamer's account, rather than seeking to overcome the prejudices which form our horizon of interpretation, we seek to bring that horizon into creative contact with that of the work. But this imports a historical dimension into our interpretative engagement with the work, even where our concern is with its aesthetic dimensions, and this raises again a form of the by

³⁹ Meyer (1956) see Chapter 2, footnote 46.

⁴⁰ See Gadamer (1996: 276)

now familiar, problem of uniting “external” with “internal” criteria in our interpretative practice.

One prominent advocate of the hermeneutic approach to music, Carl Dahlhaus, insists that the tension is a real one, not to be resolved by seeking for some supposedly unified level of discourse; aesthetic writing and historical writing each have their distinctive criteria and procedures:

[A]ttempts to reconcile aesthetics and history without resorting to devious methodology, and to settle upon a level of abstraction that would permit the writing of lucid history without at the same time violating the aesthetic nature of works of music by reducing them to mere illustrations of techniques or ideas – attempts, in other words, to bridge the gap between the history inherent in a work by reason of its artistic nature and the course charted by works in history – are all doomed to failure by their very nature.⁴¹

Lydia Goehr also sees this distinction as a problem though, unlike Dahlhaus, she sees the historical approach to be more crucial than the analytic. In criticising Wollheim’s logical definitions of art, Goehr notes:

[According to Wollheim, i]f we want to consider a general concept, we can do this by examining the totality of particulars falling under that concept, and works of art fall under the concept of art. His reasoning rests on the assumption that the concept of art can automatically be understood with regard to the more specific concept of a work of art. The logical argument is fine. Yet, from a historical point of view, the transition from art to work of art is neither automatic nor just logical.

⁴¹ Dahlhaus (1983b: 32)

The concept of a work of art, where this embraces, say, a work of music, a work of literature, or a painting, has not always been understood in the way it is today, and it stands in more than one relation to the different practices within which it functions. The relations between each art and its associated work-concept are not easily made subject to generalization, since in each case they are deeply historicized and are comprehended only by reference to the individual histories of the different arts.⁴²

Goehr is concerned to show how the historical account gives deeper insight into musical works than does the analytic approach. However, her philosophical investigations into historical accounts of musical practice are focused on philosophical and historical issues, and the insights they provide have at best only indirect relevance to the elucidation of musical significance.

Dahlhaus's approach, however, is closer to our own:

Aesthetic and documentary observations, while motivated by opposing interests, are not necessarily based on different and mutually exclusive groups of facts: just which sorts of facts are to be used in an historical or an 'immanent' interpretation is not determined a priori but must be decided upon in each individual case. The historian who feels that the 'immanent' or 'indwelling' interpretation is indispensable in the light of the aesthetic nature of art is in no way bound to disregard 'external' documents; he merely stands by his belief that it is the 'intrinsic', functional coherence of a work that serves as the final arbiter in deciding which facts do or do not belong to the matter at hand. Distinguishing between internal, aesthetic observations and external, documentary ones is a matter of choosing one's main areas of interest and principles of

⁴² Goehr (1992: 79-80)

distinct from the universal singular knowledge aspired to by the Enlightenment. That knowledge derives from intersubjective understanding, here Husserl's influence on Gadamer is evident, does not lead to a hardcore relativism, but that of a historical, cultural, relativism which is grounded in the concept of socially shared tradition.⁴⁸ In terms of historical knowledge, however, Gadamer modified Husserl's idea of phenomenology as the overcoming of prejudice. Prejudgement for Gadamer is not a negative obstacle to pure knowledge; on the contrary, true knowledge is only attainable through our prejudices. In any discipline in *Geisteswissenschaften*, knowledge can never be achieved through pure understanding devoid of our pre-conceptions born out of the *Lebenswelt*.

Music, as a cultural product, is eminently suited to such a hermeneutic approach. Its interpretation may rely on formal analyses and semiotic grasping of musical expressions and "topics", together with more natural (or "embodied") conceptualisation using such principles as Gestalt, but such interpretative claims are ultimately to be justified through placing the work into its own context, and taking the parts in terms of the whole.⁴⁹ As we shall see later, Mozart, for example, displays various styles inherited from his musical tradition, and our understanding of them requires fusing the horizons of our prejudgement and of that tradition.

For our first example we shall consider the musicological analysis of Western Tonal Music by musicologists and music semioticians to see how a hermeneutic approach

⁴⁸ For further discussion on how Gadamerian relativism is justifiable, see Larmore 'Tradition, Objectivity and Hermeneutics' in Wachterhauser (1986: 149)

⁴⁹ As Kretzschmar argued early in the 20th Century: '[i]t must be possible to explicate the spirit of a whole work and the smallest details of its individual parts – in fact there must exist a form of musical hermeneutics. Kretzschmar in Bujic (1988: 117)

order to throw light on musical significance one needs to begin with analysis of its form. To use Edward Cone's vocabulary: 'extrageneric meaning can be explained only in terms of congeneric. If verbalization of musical content – the specific expression uniquely embodied in a work – is possible at all, it must depend on close structural analysis.'⁴⁶

While deep musicological analyses of various compositions will be avoided, since this is primarily a philosophical investigation and not a musical one, we shall examine some musical examples in this context from different cultural backgrounds in order to explore how the hermeneutic approach can enrich our musical understanding. To the extent that this approach is thus illuminating, our investigation lends some, albeit limited, support to Gadamer's claim that he is uncovering 'what is common to all modes of understanding'.

Hermeneutics, as sketched in Chapter 1, takes seriously the dimension of intersubjectivity. Husserl's focus on phenomenology and Heidegger's on "being-in-the-world" helped shift the attention of hermeneutics from traditional "atemporal" museum experience to the interaction between art and perceiver. Hence Bruns' claim that 'the work of art is an event as well as an object, in which case the main question to ask about the work is not "what is it?" but "how does it occur?"'.⁴⁷

Contemporary hermeneutic approaches to the significance of art are thus hospitable to the post-modern (or anti-modern) stance of temporal, intersubjective pluralism as

⁴⁶ Cone (1982: 235)

⁴⁷ Bruns 'The Hermeneutical Anarchist' in Malpas, Arnszald and Kertscher (2002: 61)

distinct from the universal singular knowledge aspired to by the Enlightenment. That knowledge derives from intersubjective understanding, here Husserl's influence on Gadamer is evident, does not lead to a hardcore relativism, but that of a historical, cultural, relativism which is grounded in the concept of socially shared tradition.⁴⁸ In terms of historical knowledge, however, Gadamer modified Husserl's idea of phenomenology as the overcoming of prejudice. Prejudgement for Gadamer is not a negative obstacle to pure knowledge; on the contrary, true knowledge is only attainable through our prejudices. In any discipline in *Geisteswissenschaften*, knowledge can never be achieved through pure understanding devoid of our pre-conceptions born out of the *Lebenswelt*.

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may deepen our understanding of the cultural and historical significance of a composition.

Historical accounts of the development of Western Tonal music can be found in various musical treatises; this is not the place to emulate them. For present purposes we shall focus on how the Western harmonic structure and its progressions emerged. This quasi-syntactic structure was not so much laid down as a set of rules, as evolved through the development of compositional technique by various innovative composers.

The development and subsequent rejection of tonality in Western music must be understood in a wider context than that provided by any particular pieces of music from its cultural history. The Belgian musicologist, François-Joseph Fétis, identified four stages in the history of western tonality.⁵⁰ The first stage developed out of the ecclesiastic modes of the Middle Ages; thus the music of the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods can be classified as “*Tonalité-unitonique*”. Typically, music of this era was constructed in a single key; while there may be some decorative dissonances, which may also be found in the contrapuntal polyphonic music of the late Renaissance, primitive harmonic music has no modulatory process. At this stage, the harmonic structure was not fully established, and thus the concept of “key” was still understood as analogous to the church “modes”. The next crucial step in the development of western harmony was to establish a dissonance, neither as a decoration nor a mere cadential chord, but as a door to another key. In particular, the dominant 7th chord, much used as a decorative cadential chord, no longer only

⁵⁰ See Etter (2001: 25ff)

functions within its own key, but also as a chord towards another key. This modulation process, as can be seen from the mid-Baroque period onwards, takes Western Tonal music into a whole range of key relationships.

In the 18th century, at the height of Classicism, we see the establishment of proper key relationships, which Fétis sees as the second stage, calling it the “*Ordre transitonique*”. In the Classical Sonata Form, the tonic, dominant and subdominant keys, as well as the modes of major and minor are finally fully realised and we see the clear key relationships and modulatory processes within the composition.⁵¹

Moreover, in some innovative compositions, such as those of Mozart and Beethoven, one can find an element of surprise through a sudden modulation to an unrelated key, which is in itself a clear demonstration of the expectation of the listeners and their musical understanding.

Once these surprise modulations ceased to be a surprise, and composers wrote more and more freely against the harmonic relationships, we see the third stage – “*ordre pluratonique*”, in the style of Schubert, Chopin and other early Romantic composers. This achievement shifted the priority from the “well-formedness” of harmonic music into music that sought expressive quality. What was once seen as an element of surprise, or one of the necessary qualities for superior musical compositions, no longer functioned as a core aesthetic feature of tension and resolutions; rather, the modulatory processes were used when a shift in expressive quality was required. As

⁵¹ Major and Minor modes were not clearly defined until the establishment of harmonics and equal temperament in the early 17th century. The famous example by Bach, in his *Well Tempered Clavier*, showed what this new “temperament” can do. Moreover, the “Picardy 3rd”, as all music students know, was a clear indication of major chordal substitution on minor mode cadence, often used in pre-Classical compositions. From Classicism until the end of full-scale tonal music (one often uses Mahler to mark the end of the era), the major mode dominated as a ‘norm’ while the minor mode, which is said to express ‘sadness, darkness or negative emotion’, was not similarly accepted.

we saw in Chapter 3, musical works do not directly display any emotions as such; however, the freer key relationships meant that composers were less strictly bound to traditional “natural” harmonics, and thus were able to exhibit forms of expressivity that could be perceived by the audience.

“*Ordre omnitonique*”, or the last stage of the harmonic evolution or decay, sees harmonic progression no longer functioning as a predictive element, nor as an element of surprise, but as sheer expression. Any key could now modulate to any key, and moreover, the concept of modulation itself became blurred. Music no longer defined its tonal centre, as can be seen in Debussy and the musical “Impressionists”, and harmonic structure flows freely, without ever defining where it is and where it should go. While Fétis was critical of this “decadent” stage, even breakdown of Western harmony, it prepared the way for developing numerous new forms of musical syntax, including shortening the melody into a motif and eventually into leitmotif, where a single chord or particular key defines a piece’s potential for pragmatic meaning, as can be seen in Wagner’s operatic works.

What Fétis’s historical account demonstrates, is that Bernstein’s limitation (noted in Chapter 1) of harmony to “natural” universals is misleading, since musical development has significantly modified those alleged universals at different stages. Such developments, together with their physical basis, constitute any particular musical significance a work of tonal music may have, such works being rooted in this historical development of harmony. What is crucial here, is not to give an account of the history of Western music, but to demonstrate that the traditional (Bernstein-ian) view of our Western Harmony as the product of physical nature is not entirely a

correct understanding of musical development. Music, like any other art, is a product of human beings, and these human beings cannot be detached from their own culture and history; as Gadamer rightly notes, the “prejudiced” self cannot create a product devoid of this prejudice, and, further, in so far as the works discussed by Fétis form part of our cultural heritage, they play a part in the formation of our own “prejudices”, which is one reason Western harmony may seem so “natural” to us.

As we noted in Chapter 2, the semiotic signification of music, whether Tarasti’s “isotopies” or Ratner’s “topics”, is deeply rooted within the syntactic structure of music itself. What is crucially different between these semiotic analyses and the hermeneutic interpretation of music is that the former can be entirely developed from the syntactic structure of musical works and the subjective perception or analysis by the audience; there is thus the danger, as concluded in Chapter 2, of over-semiotising without a firm validation. The signification of musical semiotics is thus limited. E.T. Cone puts the point provocatively:

[W]hen the lucubrations of the recent school of musical semiologists are shorn of their pretentious jargon, that is all they are usually discussing – syntax, form, and style (and by no means always originally or even sensibly).⁵²

While musical semioticians are typically correct in claiming that a particular piece or passage signifies a hornpipe, march or Turkish music, hermeneutics goes one step further, grounding such categories in a wider context of cultural significance.

⁵² Cone (1982: 234)

The juxtaposition of minor and major, often seen as a surprise modulation to an unrelated key in the language of the Classical era, is of course deeply rooted in the use of the Picardy 3rd, which can be traced back to the Church modes of the Middle Ages. So-called “Turkish” music too, which was a particular style created in the Classical era and used by Haydn and Mozart, is not a direct “borrowing” from Turkish music itself. Instead, what was meant by “Turkish” in eighteenth century Vienna was no more than the use of different instruments – e.g. drums and triangles – such as can be seen in Mozart’s overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, the military march style in his piano sonata “*Alla Turca*”, Beethoven’s *The Rise of Athens*, or indeed the march section in the *Finale* of his *Symphony No. 9*. These topics can be traced through semiotic analysis in relation both to the composer’s intention and to the stylistic constraints of the time. However, the various topics, whether Turkish style, Hunt style, *Sturm und Drang* or otherwise, need also to be understood within the social and historical constraints of eighteenth century Vienna. Further, many of these styles may be traced back to the Renaissance period, or to other cultural backgrounds (such as the culture of hunting among the nobility, the role of the brass band in German towns etc.).

When the term “hermeneutic” is applied to the process of interpretation of items other than written texts, it needs a careful re-examination. There seem to be a wide range of musical analyses that employ recognisably hermeneutic procedures without either readers or writers being aware of it. On the other hand, a number of musicologists in the past few decades have published articles and monographs on so called musical hermeneutics in which the term “hermeneutic” is used somewhat obscurely.

Here, we shall look closely at how the methods of hermeneutics are working in various musical analyses and criticisms. We can generalise these into four main categories, differentiating in terms of different aspects of hermeneutics.

Firstly, there is a great deal of literature discussing the socio-historical context of a particular genre or a composer. Discussions of the emergence and development of the “sonata form” in the Classical era, the shift of focus from sacred to secular music in the Baroque period and its relation to the power of the Church, are all within this group. One such example can be taken from the composer directly where Mozart writes a letter to his friend, Padre Martini:

Our church music is very different from that of Italy, since a mass with the whole Kyrie, the Gloria, the Credo, the Epistle Sonata, the Offertory or Motet, the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei must not last longer than three quarters of an hour. This applies even to the most Solemn Mass said by the Archbishop himself. So you see that a special study is required for this kind of composition. At the same time, the mass must have all the instruments – trumpets, drums and so forth.⁵³

This letter illuminates the contrast, for example, in orchestration as well as length of Vivaldi’s *Gloria* and Mozart’s Mass settings. Indeed it employs a hermeneutic strategy, particularly prominent in Romantic hermeneutics, of explaining a work’s particular historical and musical significance in terms of wider social and historical considerations, taking account of the composer’s “world”. Moreover, with respect to the Mass, we are situated within “effective history”; our experience of the Mass and of the music it has inspired form part of our own “horizon”, informing our

⁵³ Mozart’s Letter to Padre Martini on September 4th 1776, quoted in Zaslav (1989a: 179-80)

understanding of how and why the development of Mass settings took place in the historical context of Mozart's day. While such accounts provide a useful key to understanding the particular musical meaningfulness of a work, they nevertheless operate at the level of historical generality rather than articulate particular musical significance.

This style of historiography can help us gain an overview of how certain styles were used or musical traditions were inherited and developed. But while these studies directly engage us with the background of how certain compositions were born, and are often used in concert leaflets and record covers, they themselves provide only an explanation of the context of the music without direct engagement with music's solid essence – its patterns of sound.

The second approach, which is less usually classified as hermeneutic interpretation, is the musicological analysis of relationships within and between musical “vocabularies”. “Vocabularies” here, of course, merely indicates particular harmonic progressions, rhythmic patterns, key relationships or other purely musical structures. While many of these purely musicological analyses ignore or even deny extra-musical properties and significations, in terms of strategy, especially the exploration of “part-whole” relationships as well as analysing a particular structural “vocabulary” as inter-relating historically with other compositions, this approach can indeed be called “hermeneutic”. Within purely musicological studies, we often discuss the relationship between the part and the whole, pre-judgement and “effective” history, without making a particular claim outside of that music itself. In Rosen's analyses of Beethoven's Sonatas, we can see extensive use of this type of analysis.

Insofar as a musical idea can be circumscribed by words, it should be obvious that even in a purely formal description, the central idea of the opening movement of the *Hammerklavier* is not merely a series of descending thirds, but the relation of the large tonal structure (with its powerfully dissonant long-range clash of B flat major and B major) to the rhythmic and harmonic energy of the sequences formed by the falling thirds. From this relation between far-flung dissonance and the impetuous force of the details comes not only the sonority peculiar to the work but also the combination of stern brilliance and transitory pathos.⁵⁴

Although Rosen seldom discusses the extra-musical meanings, when he does, it is to be noted that these usually arise out of the strict formal analyses, and often by connecting these particular musical forms to other compositions of the same or closely related period or culture in order to determine the “normativity” of the particular style.

In describing the descending third, Rosen is concerned to bring out the connections between different compositions:

Chains of descending thirds (and their twins, ascending sixths) are, of course, common throughout tonal music: Brahms’s Fourth Symphony is based on such a chain, and [...we shall note] the importance of similar sequences in Mozart’s D major Quintet. There is a relentless succession of descending thirds and rising sixths near the end of the first movement of Mozart’s Hunt Quartet K.458...

The use of these chains in the language of tonality is many-sided. They are central in that they start by defining a triad. In addition, [...] they provide the easiest way of writing a canon, and of thickening the

⁵⁴ Rosen (1976: 422)

contrapuntal texture, as every note in such a group forms a consonance with the two preceding and the two following, notes.⁵⁵

In the hermeneutic interpretation of music, the hermeneutic circle has much the same structure as with literary works. A note must be contextualised in relation to its related and neighbouring harmonic or melodic notes or motifs, and a motif or a theme must be realised within the movement or a piece, and moreover, a whole piece of music must be positioned within its historical context. Thus Rosen was right in remarking:

[T]he notes of a tonal composition have a significance beyond the immediate context in which they are formed, a significance that can be understood only within the total scheme of the whole work...⁵⁶

Meyer's position on musical meaning is markedly similar to that of Rosen, where he notes:

In and of themselves, for example, the opening chords of Beethoven's Third Symphony have no particular musical stylistic tendency. They establish no pattern of motion, arouse no tensions toward a particular fulfilment. Yet as part of the total aesthetic cultural act of attention they are meaningful. For since they are the first chords of a piece, we not only expect more music but our expectations are circumscribed by the limitations of the style which we believe the piece to be in and by the psychological demand for a more palpable pattern.⁵⁷

This approach, as distinct from the first one, is directly engaged with the notes and sounds themselves. Configuration of harmonic, rhythmic structure as well as

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* (407-8)

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* (34)

⁵⁷ Meyer (1956: 36)

attention to timbre, phrasing and articulations are at the heart of determining the musical style. Whereas the first type of account is more approachable for ordinary musical listeners, this second style of understanding involves what DeBellis called the higher level of conceptualisation of music – that of understanding its musicological form, and this too is essential to musical hermeneutics. We need not only to engage with the social and cultural understanding of musical period or style but also, and crucially, to be enabled to hear and analyse the forms of music which are part of its essence.

As we shall see later in the chapter, the musicological analysis of a particular piece may become a structural skeleton on which interpretation may properly be based. However, our experience of a piece of music, understood phenomenologically and taking account of perceived gestalts, may seem to conflict with accounts of its significance based on the musical skeleton, or what Schenker called the *Ursatz*. This is because, as we noted in Chapter 2, an important dimension of music's meaningfulness arises out of its surface structure, or to use Bernstein's analogy the "poetic" level, which of course in many cases is rooted in the deeper structure – when music's syntax is metaphorically "stretched" as discussed above – which often fails to connect with or even contradicts the deeper structure (musical syntax) of the piece. As we shall see, there may be different and sometimes seemingly conflicting accounts arising from attempting to verbalise musicological and experiential accounts. For example, what we experience as a smooth transition into the development section may in harmonic terms be "abrupt", or what we notice as a sudden change in rhythm may, in terms of the larger scale, be a return from a syncopated motif to the first theme. In these examples, what in verbal terms may seem to be conflicting accounts, are in fact

representations of different levels of the music. Thus both accounts may be compatible, describing the same music in different manners. As our title suggests, there are many levels or “spheres” of music of which we may give different accounts. While we shall return to the notion of “many spheres” in our concluding chapter, here, we simply note that experiential accounts and formal accounts of music may be distinct, and equally viable, verbalisations of an identical piece.

The third type of interpretation is what many musicologists now refer to as the “hermeneutics of music”. Works by Lawrence Kramer amongst others seem to treat a particular piece of music in terms of a signification based fairly directly on the personal or socio-cultural background. Kramer’s recent work, for example, examines the relationship between Schubert’s *Moment Musical* and his pleasurable temptation and disastrous result (syphilis), between Schumann’s *Carnival* and the Italian social order, and between other musical works and their cultural background. It is also worth noting in this context that, with respect to the history of Western Tonal Music, early Romantic music such as that by Schubert and Schumann is particularly narrative in structure, in that it in an important sense tells a story. Hermeneutic theorists have given considerable attention to the interpretation of narrative, which musicologists have found of use in their interpretation of music by composers of this period.⁵⁸ Other analyses focus on historical accounts of the composer’s intention behind the creation of certain works. For example, Knight notes:

There can be no doubt that the “Eroica” Symphony grew from a seed planted at that time. The soil in which it germinated was the mass of

⁵⁸ See for example, E.T. Cone’s analyses of Schubert in Cone (1982), (1984), and A. Newcomb’s Schumann studies (1984b), (1987). The classic account of the hermeneutics of narrative can be found in Ricoeur (1984-8).

impressions made by those previous four years of war. And though it would be an insult to consider it for a moment as “programme music” every movement owes its essence to the happenings abroad and to Beethoven’s view of them – the great armies poised for battle or joined in action, brave Austrian volunteers against enthusiastic republicans, the cavalry galloping in their thousands over the Italian plains, the infantry struggling up the mountainside, individual soldiers forging ahead with their banners in heroic self-sacrifice, all this is in the first movement; the sorrow of death and the dignity of the funeral in the second; the exhilaration of victory is in the Scherzo and the joy of triumphant human will-power in the finale. And beneath it all, expressed in the dialectic of the symphonic form, is the conflict between the old and the new – the struggle for the future – a reflection of the changing world beyond Vienna.⁵⁹

This type of musical analysis brings out the extra-musical signification, seeing a particular piece of music as engaging or engaged with its historical, cultural or in some cases “intentional” background. This approach can be called “hermeneutic” not only because of the cultural elements, but also because we can hear and experience the composition in the way Knight proposes since we – the prejudiced listeners – too are situated within that cultural history. A grasp of the development of musical culture or practice is indeed essential in uncovering the significance of music. It is only through historical understanding, and this is the strength of the first approach, that we can decode the particular style and forms of a piece of music in its context.

Out of many recent debates, that between Kramer and Tomlinson on the development of post-modern musicology is of particular relevance here. Kramer echoes Langer’s position in claiming that:

⁵⁹ Knight (1973: 45-6)

Language is denied access to music, it cannot represent musical reality; music is the very means by which the epistemological limits of language, that would-be omnivore, are set.⁶⁰

Further, he argues:

Music is still the most immediate of all aesthetic experiences, however we relativize the concept of immediacy, and words, do what they might, are still unable to capture the character, texture, and force of compelling music attentively heard.⁶¹

Tomlinson also sees the problem of the verbalising of music, concluding that:

Those who sought to put the study of music on a scholarly footing were left with two options: positivistic description of historical data around the music [our version 1] and analytic description of the workings of the notes themselves [version 2].⁶²

Both scholars then proceed to give a reconciliation in terms of hermeneutics. On the one hand Kramer writes:

From the postmodernist perspective I have been advocating here, listening is not an immediacy alienated from a later reflection, but a mode of dialogue.⁶³

While on the other, Tomlinson is more critical of this system of dialogue:

Kramer evades the immense complexity of the historian's dialogue with past subjectivities. He offers as the goal of musicology the continuance

⁶⁰ L.Kramer (1992b: 8)

⁶¹ *Ibid.* (10)

⁶² Tomlinson (1993a: 18-9)

⁶³ L.Kramer (1992b: 17)

of “the dialogue of listening,” but gives little hint as to how we might begin to reconceive this dialogue in postmodern terms.⁶⁴

In other words, both theorists are concerned with the bridging of our versions 1 and 2. Moreover, as we have seen from our discussion of music and language, they are concerned with how it is possible for language to gain direct access to music. In Kramer’s solution, we are in dialogue, while Tomlinson ponders what exactly are we in dialogue with. Kramer discusses at length the hermeneutics of K.562, in a manner similar to his discussions of Schubert and Schumann cited earlier and concludes:

“But where is Mozart’s music in this series of questions?” The shortest answer is that the questions are in the music. Mozart raises them by making his music behave as it does, and trusting the listener to hear the music within a broader field of rhetorical, expressive, and discursive behaviors.⁶⁵

Tomlinson is critical of this conclusion:

I for one do not find myself wondering where K.562 has gone. Mozart’s music is simply with us, in one or another of its numberless performative realities... I wonder, instead, where Mozart has gone.⁶⁶

Indeed, these arguments cut to the very core of our hermeneutic approach to music. Through hermeneutics, as we shall further clarify later, what was once thought to be irreconcilable – language and music – can coexist in harmony. Whether arguing where Mozart is gone (intentionalism) or the work is gone, Tomlinson is right in recognising that the musical work is with us.

⁶⁴ Tomlinson (1993a: 20-21)

⁶⁵ L.Kramer (1992b: 17)

⁶⁶ Tomlinson (1993a: 20)

However, as we have seen, music is foremost a formal art, and thus the validity of interpretations of a particular piece of music that pay little attention to the inner structure of the music seem to be only weakly secured. Moreover, Kramer-like strategies can only be applied to those compositions for which we know a good deal about the background, composer's intention or cultural influence, and are thus severely limited. Further, as we have seen in the section on music semiotics, any significance or semiotic labels that are not born out of musical structure may lead to the problems of what Eco called "Open Work". What we find in the third approach is a top-down system whereby through cultural understanding and historical knowledge about the composers, we painstakingly try to discern the "significance" of the music by finding the musical passages which are most closely associated with their historical context. Of course, in many cases, such an approach can derive a plausible and moreover justifiable conclusion about the significance of a particular piece or passage. Indeed, many of the current works of so-called musical hermeneutics, including those of Kramer and Tomlinson themselves, provide not only useful but also plausible accounts of the signification of the music they discuss.

The fourth and perhaps richest version of musical hermeneutics is effectively an inversion of the third approach. It seeks to bridge our first and second forms of hermeneutics in terms of a bottom-up strategy. It relies on the stylistic constraints of the time through a careful examination of the musical form, and yet in a wider context it takes account of the relationship between these particular forms and their human or cultural context or development.⁶⁷ While formal analyses are predominantly focused

⁶⁷ It is worth noting that Danto's influential account of the "artworld" also gives priority to the explanation of the details of musical form in the context of socio-historical considerations.

on intra-musical properties, some of these properties have a significant socio-cultural background. Further, in comparing and contrasting several works of the same culture, one can see the connections between the different compositions and understand not only how these pieces of music are constructed, but also why and how their formal properties may have significance, and, where we stand in an “effective” historical relation with these compositions, how such properties inform our own capacities to listen musically.

Hatten’s work, in contrast with that of Rosen, engages more directly with musical meaning, understood as having extra-musical resonance, in the structure of music. With respect to the general “expressivity” of the third movement of Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier Sonata*, Hatten maintains:

The opposition between B flat major and F# minor is important with respect to both mode and tonal distance. Minor vs. major mode correlates with tragic vs. nontragic in the Classical style, and distant vs. closely related tonality correlates with extremity vs. normalcy. Thus, the movement can be interpreted, not surprisingly, as extremely tragic.⁶⁸

Moreover:

The thick chordal texture that follows [the opening] is also quite topical (Ratner, 1980) in the style, suggesting the high stylistic register of a hymn, with its spiritual and solemn connotations. Indeed, this particular hymnic texture is one I would construe as “monumental,” a species characterized by primary diatonic triads, slow harmonic rhythm, and a

⁶⁸ Hatten (1994: 11-13)

slow tempo.⁶⁹

Though in a different context, similar “expressive” remarks can be found in Blume’s treatment of the second movement of the same work where he notes:

[...] the harmony in Beethoven’s late works is often very ragged and abrupt; rapid changes of key, digressive shifts, often only brief but violent in effect, are linked with piled up chromatic and enharmonic effects (as in the Adagio of the Piano Sonata in Bflat Op.106, of 1817-18), brusque contrasts are heaped one upon the other in titanic fashion.⁷⁰

These claims indeed echo the semiotic analyses of music sketched in Chapter 2; however, the working of concepts with extra-musical cultural resonance into the formal analyses, such as Hatten’s remarks above, enables a richer, hermeneutic, form of musical understanding.

Gadamer’s notion of “effective history” noted earlier plays an important role in the interpretation of music here. What we see in the cases of both Rosen and Hatten are not only the formal and/or cultural groundings of the interpretations, but also how it is that we can experience these compositions through an understanding of the tradition in which we are situated. Thus, understanding Beethoven from Rosen’s point of view, for example, enables us not only to recognise the temporal distancing between eighteenth century Vienna and twentieth century America, but also his place

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* (14); Ratner’s “topical” analysis of the *Hammerklavier*, referred to by Hatten, maintains for example that: ‘[...] the finale of the Hammerklavier Sonata, [...] recalls the variation canzona’ and elsewhere: ‘Beethoven used what might be called a motto. Each movement of Hammerklavier Sonata, 1819, begins with a rising major third.’

⁷⁰ Blume (1972: 40)

in one continuous cultural history – significant stages of which are explored in Fetis’s account of the history of Western Tonal Music – of which we are the inheritors. In other words, neither can we understand the works of Beethoven as could an audience of his contemporaries, nor as a strange historical product which is alien to our current culture, but as compositions from within the same tradition in which we stand, but innocent of the subsequent development of that tradition. Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons can be applied here as a fusion between the composition and the listeners, whereby we, as “prejudiced” listeners can articulate the meaningfulness of the composition through the shared tradition.

Further, we can compare Rosen’s account of the first movement of the *Eroica* *Symphony* with that of Knight quoted above, which will bring out the relation between the form and the signification more clearly:

The opening theme of the *Eroica* Symphony is essentially a horn-call, but the horn is never allowed to play it solo until the recapitulation is under way: at this point the orchestra from the tonic (E flat) to the supertonic (F) and the horn enters *dolce* with the theme, followed by the flute playing it in D flat major. Much of the sweetness and delicacy, and the air of stillness, come from the new keys as well as from the orchestration: D flat major, the key of the flat leading-tone, is heard as a remote and exotic subdominant, and Beethoven, in an extension of Mozart’s practice, is using it exactly where Mozart always uses the subdominant. [...] The emotional power is dependent on our hearing these phrases a few moments after the tonic has been re-established following the unprecedentedly long development section; as substitutes for the subdominant, the supertonic and the flattened leading-tone have a

feeling of tranquillity, while as remote keys coming at such a crucial moment they bring a tension to the heart of stillness.⁷¹

Rosen argues that extramusical considerations can play a role in the classical style, though they do not play a determining role. There can be a political message in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, for example, where we have "Viva la libertà" repeated a dozen times with full force by all the soloists, accompanied by fanfares from the orchestra.' Nevertheless Rosen claims that, despite appearances, this 'section can be interpreted in purely musical terms.'⁷²

Knight's account of the *Eroica Symphony*, quoted above in our sketch of the second version of musical hermeneutics, is no doubt written with its historical and political background in mind. Many biographical documents suggest that Beethoven's intention was to write a composition dedicated to Napoleon, as Donal Francis Tovey remarks: 'A copy with an autograph title-page is in the musical archives of Vienna; and where Bonaparte's name once stood, a ragged hole attests the truth of the story.'⁷³

Knight indeed provides an epitome of the discernment of extra-musical signification in music. In contrast, we find only a handful of gestures towards what we might call "extra-musical" properties in either Hatten's or Rosen's work cited above, as indicated by the terms "tragic", "hymn", "titanic", "sweetness and delicacy", and "stillness". Nevertheless, these gestures point to what we, twentieth and twenty-first century listeners, can specifically hear in the music, understood in terms of its "syntax".

⁷¹ Rosen (1976:80)

⁷² *Ibid.* (95)

⁷³ Tovey (1981:44)

In our analysis of Mozart's "Prague" Symphony later in the chapter, we shall indicate how the musical structure can bring out the significance of the particular melodic, rhythmic or harmonic dimensions. However, musical hermeneutics takes account not only of the structure but also of how we experience the music. Formal analysis and what we experience, as noted above, may seem to point to conflicting accounts, thus formal analysis on its own may sometimes prove an inadequate guide to musical understanding.

In comparing the third with our fourth version of hermeneutics, we can see that the latter is the more fruitful and richer because it takes account of the importance of what we can hear in the music itself, rather than relying on what we know about the composition independently of hearing it. Properly speaking, musical meaning, whether or not it connects with extra-musical significance, must be grounded in the structure of the music itself. Narrative or any other extra-musical concepts applied to music without specific reference to musical sound cannot thus be properly said to articulate musical meaning in the strict sense. We listeners are able to articulate the expressiveness of the *Eroica Symphony* through its form because it employs the sound patterns of our familiar culture and, as prejudiced listeners, we can associate our experience of these forms with the "world" of the work. Such associations are, of course, not infallible, and where interpretations conflict, we can only assess them in terms of plausibility. As Grondin remarks 'Hermeneutical truth, to extent that it inscribes itself within the horizon of finitude, obviously fits into the domain of the plausible'⁷⁴, and we can extend this attribute to the hermeneutics of music.

⁷⁴ Grondin (1994: 51)

Further light on this fourth version is thrown by the work of Leo Treitler, through his distinction between narrative (historical) and formal approaches to music: ‘What I do mean to allege is that the two things I have tried to describe – historical understanding and formalist analysis – do not match very well’.⁷⁵ Treitler is critical both of purely formal and of purely narrative approaches to music, and sees the importance of contextualising the historical understanding of music. Historical understanding for Treitler, as for Rosen, must be rooted within the style and genre of the music itself.

Still on the subject of the *Dichterliebe*, there is a published interpretation of the sixth song, “Im Rhein,” in which the dotted rhythm of the piano figure is said to represent waves. What is missed thereby is a reference to an item of a stylistic code – the grandeur of the Baroque majestic style – and the reflection through that, so to speak, of the image of Cologne cathedral. And with that is missed an entry into the meaning of the song – a case of misinterpretation resulting from decontextualisation.⁷⁶

His hermeneutic theory then, exemplifies the fourth version of hermeneutics:

As music historians we want analytical methodologies that are less normative and more phenomenological and historical; that take account of much more than pitch structures; and that concern themselves not with structures alone, but with the relations of structure and meaning.⁷⁷

Kivy’s theory of musical expressivity can be given a place within this framework. As remarked earlier, musical cognitivists such as Kivy distinguish between the terms

⁷⁵ For Treitler, this mis-match is due to the discrepancies between time scale analyses (historical and phenomenological) on the one hand, and “map-like” analyses (formal, analytic) on the other. (1989: 53)

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (53)

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* (55)

“expression” and “expressive”, a distinction initially made by Alan Tormey in his theory of expression. According to Kivy, what we perceive in listening to music is not the expression of emotion, but the expressiveness of music which resembles emotion. His distinction is illuminated by his account of a St. Bernard’s face being described as possessing an expressive quality of sadness. Whereas we express emotion by weeping, raising the voice or other physiological and physical activities, the dog’s face does not directly relate to his inner emotions. Kivy’s resemblance theory sees a structural similarity between the St. Bernard’s face which can be seen as sad and music’s expression of sadness. Music, Kivy argues, can be heard as “gestures” relating to our expressive behaviour, such that the sound is reminiscent of our physical gestures that make up a particular behaviour.

The theory of musical expression I intend to outline here is an account of how it is that music can be expressive of the emotions; it is not a theory of how music can express them. [...] I want to present a theory of what is going on when we describe music in emotive terms, in the absence of any suggestion that it is expressing the composer’s emotions, or anyone else’s.⁷⁸

This approach of cognising the emotive quality in music takes us back to Hesper’s account sketched in Chapter 3. We do indeed hear the anger or sadness in music, but these qualities are ‘concept-laden modes of attention and attitude that cannot logically exist in the absence of appropriate objects and attendant circumstances.’⁷⁹

It might be thought that the limits of Gestalt psychology with respect to musical

⁷⁸ Kivy (1989: 14)

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* (32)

understanding discussed earlier could be elucidated through his distinction between “contour” and “convention”, enabling natural perception and cultural understanding of music to be fused together. What Gestalt cannot achieve, is an account of the particular musical form or genre, style and other elements in our conceptual understanding which need specific forms of knowledge.

While ‘pure’ listening may give rise to an understanding of expressiveness, in order to understand how and what is expressed, or why it is expressive, we must go beyond the Gestalt account of musical perception. Analogously, it might be thought, Kivy associates “contour” with the “physiognomy of musical expression” where we can see the direct resemblance or “gesture” between how music is structured and our physiognomic expression of certain emotions, and contrasts it with “convention”. “Contour” like resemblances have been indeed noted by Rosen, Hatten, Treitler and other musicologists mentioned above who have sought to articulate plausible explanations for these musical gestures within the forms of music. However, the analogy fails through Kivy’s distinction between different types of conventions. His theory of musical resemblance relates indeed to hermeneutics most closely by means of his notion of the understanding of expressive quality through extra-musical conventions: ‘[O]ur “reading” of sadness in the Saint Bernard’s face is dependent upon “conventions,” tacit “rules,” and commonly accepted, public “criteria” of expression.’⁸⁰ For Kivy, “convention” is purely a matter of musical vocabulary, whereas “contour” stems out from the physiognomic resemblance.⁸¹ Thus, such concepts as “topics” or “isotopies” discussed in Chapter 2, are conventions created

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* (49)

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Chapter VIII, (71 ff.)

within the musical culture, whereas all other “conventions” which are not directly related to musical style are treated as “contours”. But these “contours”, as we have seen, are still as much subject to cultural conventions as those relating to the expression of emotion. They are not pure “Gestalts” in the sense discussed earlier. Indeed, as Treitler stressed earlier, any attempt to decontextualise the physiognomies of music from cultural styles, is liable to lead to mis-interpretation.⁸²

However Kivy on occasion appears to undercut his own distinction. While identifying certain emotive qualities as “contour” or natural expression, he suggests that even the most natural expressive quality must be bound by certain conventions which must be understood, similar to Gadamer’s “effective history”, in terms of cultural situatedness.

[E]xpressiveness by contour is not, by any means, expressiveness completely free of convention: expressiveness to the “naïve ear.” At least two kinds of convention can be seen to govern it. For we cannot hear the expressiveness (say) of the *Lamento d’Arianna* unless we can, to begin with, hear it as music; unless, that is, we are educated musical perceivers who have been initiated into the musical culture of which Monteverdi is a part. [...] [W]e must, of course, be initiated into whatever conventions may govern expression of emotion in our culture.⁸³

His plausible claim that cultural understanding must be presupposed in order to understand music’s expressivity, appears to lead him into allowing musical conventions partially to constitute contour, making the contour/convention contrast apparently one more of degree than of kind.

⁸² see Treitler’s comment above(footnote 76).

⁸³ Kivy (1989: 84-5)

Ethnomusicological considerations are relevant here, since we cannot perceive the “correct” expressiveness of music in the music of cultures with which we are not familiar. Thus in recognising the Turkish style, Hornpipe or Hunt style, we need the knowledge of these learned styles in order to understand their meanings. Here we have clear cases of Kivy’s “convention”. However, in conceding that conventions embedded in particular musical cultures are required even to discern expressiveness by contour, Kivy appears yet further to undercut the possibility of mapping his distinction onto the cultural / natural one, where the “natural” pole can be identified in Gestalt terms. We shall return to the relation between natural and conventional understanding in our discussion of ethnomusicology.

Kivy’s understanding of the “description” of the St. Bernard’s face does seem to fit our account of musical description as metaphorical. In describing music, Kivy argues, we use not only physiognomic terms – music sounds “as sad” – but also such notions as “rising” or “falling” melody or even tense rhythm; these are all part of a metaphorical (and what he calls sinaesthetic) vocabulary. Thus while indeed there is nothing sad about music, nevertheless, in describing music that resembles the expressivity of sadness, we are stretching words which characterise feeling in a non-psychological sense.

Only the combination of what Treitler characterises as “formal” and “narrative” analyses, it would appear, can produce the richest hermeneutic interpretation of musical meaning. One such account can be found in Donal Francis Tovey’s account of Beethoven’s *Eroica Symphony*.

This comes to a climax and ends with a solemn slow close in the dominant. Upon this a fragment of the main theme rises upwards with a sigh which is suddenly answered by a roar from the depths, and an upheaval fit for a setting of the Dies Irae. 'Never' (says Weingartner) 'has a fearful catastrophe been described with simpler means.' The tumult subsides in the weeping of a lacrimosa dies, and through the sound of weeping the entire theme of the march is heard in both its portions and with its whole series of afterthoughts. These close in a change of harmony and then some moments are measured only as it were by the slow swing of a pendulum. Above this enters at last, in a distant key, the beginning of a new message of consolation, but it dies away and the movement concludes with a final utterance of the main theme, its rhythms and accents utterly broken with grief.⁸⁴

Tovey's analysis of this second movement is concerned to demonstrate the firm relationships between extra-musical signification and its musical structure, in the precise manner of the fourth version of hermeneutics discussed above.

5.3.2. Hermeneutic Analysis of Mozart's Symphony No. 38 "Prague": A Case Study

The typology of four different types of hermeneutic interpretation we have constructed can prove useful in analysis, and in this section we take as an example a of Western Tonal composition. Through evaluating musicologists' notes, critics' comments and developing our own interpretation, it may become clearer why and how the fourth hermeneutic approach is the most fruitful for understanding music and hence in elucidating musical signification.

⁸⁴ Tovey (1981: 47)

Mozart's Symphony in D, K504 has been selected for several reasons. Firstly, our examples of discussions of Western Tonal Music so far, are taken from the writings of such musicologists as Rosen, Ratner, Hatten and others whose work is mainly focused on this period. As noted earlier, such "music hermeneutic" theorists as Lawrence Kramer and others have indeed tended to focus on works of Romantic Music which are said to be more expressive and poetic; however, since our discussion is not primarily concerned with the searching out of expressivity or with seeking representative qualities, Classical instrumental music has been selected. For the purpose of this study it is most appropriate to focus on what has been termed "absolute" music, music that is without specific extra-musical connotations.

Secondly, to a much greater extent than with proto-typical works such as Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* or Mozart's last three symphonies, different musicologists have expressed conflicting views on this particular composition. It is noteworthy that Donald Francis Tovey, one of our most influential musicologists who is well known for his meticulous musical analyses, omitted analysis of this composition, claiming: 'The Prague Symphony is, except for its finale, on a larger scale; but there is in all Mozart nothing greater than the Linz Symphony until we reach the last three symphonies and the great chamber-music.'⁸⁵ On the other hand, such musicologists as Einstein and Zaslaw see the "Prague" Symphony as one of Mozart's greatest mature masterpieces.⁸⁶ Finally, unlike his earlier symphonies, the "Prague" Symphony is a mature work, displaying the real quality of Mozart rather than the influence of his masters – such as J.C. Bach. While we can trace the historical influence lying behind many of his contemporary compositions, the "Prague"

⁸⁵ Tovey (1981: 434)

⁸⁶ see Einstein (1966: 232), Zaslaw (1989b: 412 ff.)

Symphony is not overshadowed by a particular composer, style or indeed theme, borrowed directly from other composers. The work is autonomous and non-representational, while remaining a firmly situated historical product which we can most fully analyse in terms of our fourth version of hermeneutics.

Taking up, to begin with, the first approach to hermeneutic interpretation, we can find numerous accounts of the historical and personal background of the “Prague” Symphony. These include the dating of the composition, the reasons for its composition and its relation to other works. Küster, for example, notes:

In fact, in the case of the four concerts planned for Advent 1786, there is a relative abundance of indirect evidence that Mozart’s intention to give them, at least, was quite serious. On 4 December he at last finished the C major Piano Concerto, K.503 [...]. Two days later he completed work on the ‘Prague’ Symphony, and from all that we know about Prague’s reception of Figaro we have to conclude that the news of the opera’s success had not yet reached him on that 6 December...⁸⁷

A similar account can be found in Zaslav’s description:

Mozart listed the ‘Prague’ symphony as ‘Vienna, 6 December 1786’. He may have had K.504 in mind not only for his forthcoming trip to Prague, but for the series of four Advent subscription concerts that he apparently gave in Vienna in December 1786 at the Trattner Casino.⁸⁸

Of course, these descriptions neither directly concern themselves with any particular musical signification of the piece, nor give any detailed musical analyses. However,

⁸⁷ Küster (1996: 244)

⁸⁸ Zaslav (1989b: 412)

these historical facts need to be taken into account in interpreting hermeneutically, since such background knowledge enables us to grasp part of the horizon of the “Prague” Symphony.

Other writings within this category include accounts of the general symphonic style of the period, such as Einstein’s distinction between the Italian style, which was adapted from *concerto grosso* to the *sinfonia* or *overtura* style that was used to open and close the concert, and the German style developed in Vienna which eventually created symphony as a separate musical entity. Many of Mozart’s early symphonies were heavily influenced by J.C. Bach who was German by nationality but Italian in terms of his composition, thus showing the Italian style. Again Einstein notes that: ‘about 1760, the Germans, particularly the Viennese, began to insert a minuet between the slow movement and the finale, thereby achieving the four-movement symphony.’⁸⁹

While remarks like this do not capture the significance of a particular musical piece, they point not only to the background cultural constraints of a particular style, but also indicate how such styles developed historically in order to help us understand how and why a certain composer of a specific period and place wrote a work in such and such a way.

Zaslaw also raises the matter of the *minuet* movement in this connection. Citing Spazier’s criticisms of inserting *minuets* into symphonic works, he differentiates the baroque style from more classical ones:

Spazier’s critique is basically a conservative one: he clings to the baroque aesthetic theory of the unity of affect within single movements, and even to some extent across all the movements of a symphony, along

⁸⁹ Einstein (1966: 216)

with the need to avoid hybridizing genres by mixing, for instance, the serious and comic.⁹⁰

Returning to Einstein's comment, the latter further suggests that despite the lack of a *minuet* movement, the Prague Symphony belongs to the Viennese style:

For the work is...not a return to the Italian symphony type, but rather a full-scale Viennese symphony, which happens to lack a minuet simply because it says everything it has to say in three movements.⁹¹

Since the discussion of the lack of a *minuet* movement refers to the musical structure of the piece rather than the socio-cultural background of its composition, it may be argued that these examples fall within our second category of hermeneutics.

However, these accounts are not directly connected with the inner structure of musical vocabularies, but rather relate to the larger stylistic understanding of the period; they may thus be reasonably classified as falling under the first type of hermeneutics.

The second type, which is concerned directly with musicological analysis, also encompasses variety. A prominent example can be found in the note at the beginning of the score by Kroyer, where he notes:

All three movements are built on the sonata form, and there are many similarities between the corner movements: In both cases the second subject is very condensed and plays no part in the development, so that the principal subject becomes much more pronounced in its delineation. In both movements the recapitulation acquires a new shading through repetitions and episodical additions, exemplified most strongly by the

⁹⁰ Zaslaw (1989: 416)

⁹¹ Einstein (1966: 231-232)

threefold chord after the principal idea in the recapitulation of the Presto (bars 228ff., 236ff., 244-260).⁹²

A similar approach to the “subject” structure of the first movement can be found in Larsen’s account:

[H]ere the striking feature is the tendency for the movement to fall into an arrangement of two ritornello groups, the first subject and transitional groups, as they would be called in sonata-form terminology. If we designate these two groups as A and B, and the second subject group as C, we arrive at the following, very striking structure for the whole movement.⁹³

I V V-I VI I i-V I
A^I B A^I C B^I :: A' B' B a' A⁽¹⁾ C B^I

On the other hand, a more semiotic approach, relating to the topics and styles can be seen in Ratner’s detailed segmentation of the first movement:

Topics. Mozart, *Prague* Symphony, K.504, 1786, 1st movt.

	Measures
1. Singing style, <i>alla breve</i>	37-40
2. Brilliant style, learned	41-42
3. Fanfare I	43-44
4. Singing style, learned	45-48
5. <i>Alla breve</i> , brilliant style	49-50
6. Brilliant style, learned	51-54
7. Brilliant style, modified <i>stile legato</i>	55-62
8. Fanfare II	63-65
9. Brilliant style	66-68
10. Cadential flourish (new material)	69-70
11. Singing style	71-74
12. <i>Alla breve</i> , brilliant style	75-76
13. Learned, brilliant, <i>alla breve</i>	77-87
14. Storm and Stress	88-94
15. Singing style, later set in learned style	95-120 ⁹⁴

⁹² Foreword to the Score p.I

⁹³ Larsen in Robbins-Landon and Mitchell (1965: 189)

⁹⁴ Ratner (1980: 27-8)

We shall offer our own musical analysis of the first movement of the “Prague” Symphony shortly, here we can sufficiently see that these analytic approaches differ from the first type of account in focusing on the actual musical score itself. While these analyses do not tell us anything about the meaningfulness or significant value of the piece, only through detailed analysis can we verify the coherence of the relation between the sounds and their alleged significations.

But analysis may be more phenomenologically orientated than those sketched above. It will therefore be convenient to consider another pattern in relation to our fourth model of hermeneutics before illustrating the differences between that model and the third. As we shall see, “historically informed” ears may pick up patterns rather different from those characteristic of a more purely musicological approach.

The first movement of the “Prague” Symphony begins in tonic, tempo is *adagio* and we immediately notice the use of the juxtaposition between *forte* and *piano* which was the style adopted from J.C. Bach.⁹⁵ While the first 3 bars firmly establish its key in D major, and the introduction or “overture” section ends in V at the m.36, the composer’s technique of juxtaposing major and minor – m.18, for example – is a clear indication of an innovative approach which, although present in the Baroque era as the “picardy third”, had never been accepted as a style since the major and minor mode in the same key are only remotely connected. While Ratner notes that this opening is a reminiscent of French overture style, it does not echo his definition of ‘uses a slow and heavy march tempo with dotted rhythmic figures’.⁹⁶ It seems no less

⁹⁵ see Einstein (1966: 218-9)

⁹⁶ Ratner (1980: 20)

appropriate to analyse it in terms of the connection with Mozart's later masterpiece, *Die Zauberflöte*, which has a similar opening with a succession of chords and a slow introduction followed by the *allegro* motif (see the comparative scores below). This slow-fast style was not uncommon for Mozart as we can also see the similar openings in his later E flat Symphony, and even to much earlier work such as his *Sonata for Violin and Piano K379*.

Ratner goes on to the introduction:

Ordinarily, we might expect three strokes, regularly spaced, but here we have five, with a stretto effect, until a quarter-note pattern is established by the end of m.2. This merges with the eighth-notes and rests of m.3 which continue the arpeggio figure implied by the coups, upward to an F#... When the F# of m.4 is reached as a routine continuation and apex, the harmony makes an abrupt change, and the new figure is concentrated twice in descending thirds, making a new and contrasting motive...⁹⁷

In this structural analysis we see exemplified our second version of our hermeneutics. And indeed, we need a basic structural understanding on which interpretations of musical significance may be based. However, are such detailed, even nit-picking, analyses necessary for this purpose, and do they accurately represent our experience of music? Do we really need to know that it is an F# in order to retrieve significance from the music? We noted earlier Budd's plausible claim, with respect to our experience of music, that we need to understand 'various kinds of musical processes, structures and relationships'; if we cannot hear the inner structures and relationships of music, we simply fail to hear it as a piece of music. But it may not matter whether we are able to define the eighth-notes or descending thirds. Further, while knowledge

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (104-5)

of the underlying principles of western harmonics and rules governing the composition of a particular period are useful in analysing what the composer is doing within the piece, they themselves need not be in the foreground of our musical experience.

In place of a Ratner-type analysis, let us seek to verbalise, in so far as this is possible, what we actually “hear” from the piece. This will demonstrate how we – those who stand in a relationship of effective history with the work – experience music in a significantly different manner from what such analyses may derive from the score. For example, at the slow introduction the piece begins with, in unison, a D chord in forte, which we experience as an immediate solidness and solemnity. Instead of giving us the same chord over and over again five times, music provides decorative “triplets”, still ending in a D chord, giving a clear indication of which key this piece is in. In m.4, we hear the F# major chord. But is it simply a 3rd chord of D major with added #? Or is it a fifth chord of relative minor of D (which is B min)? As Budd implies, you can still experience the sound of the chord and moreover the chordal progression without being able to answer this question. In this case it is clear that it is a relative minor V resolving to I (which is B minor). But even if you cannot recognise and name chords, you can still hear that an unstable chord was introduced in forte, resolving into a more stable chord, creating a sense of relief.⁹⁸ M.5 answers back in piano, this time in the subdominant of D which is G major, creating a sound of remoteness in an almost “unrelated key”, and yet very calming and even soothing in relation to the major chord. Also, we can notice the use of pitch range and timbre.

⁹⁸ This reflects DeBellis’ distinction between weakly conceptual and strongly conceptual listening. See Chapter 4 for his account.

In m.4, the strings play low while winds enforce in the top range, whereas in m.5, strings alone play in a much higher range, creating an impression of calling-answering phrases. M.6 then offers another calling, but there are no answers. This reminds us of our citation of Bernstein in Chapter 2 above, where he notes ‘So the performer must understand what Mozart has done – that he takes our universal instinct of symmetry and plays with it, violates it, *ambiguifies* it, by using the equally universal process of deletion to operate counter to those instinctive symmetrical forces that operate in us. And therein lies the creativity; that’s what makes it art.’⁹⁹

The direct musical experience provides further associations. Top flute on m.4 ends in top D which is taken over in m.5 by the first violin, and after dropping another third down to B, this B is again resonated by the flute in the following bar, creating the sound of continuity. It will be noticed that this account contrasts with Ratner’s identification of “abrupt change” here, and this is one of the instances where harmonic analysis may offer a considerably different account from what we experience from music itself. From m.7, the style changes from strictly chordal to melodic thus creating a flowing motion. While from the score it seems that the first violin is playing the top D, creating the tonic, when one hears it is evident that the D is just a suspending note, waiting to be resolved to C, creating the V⁷ chord of D, and without resolving, it directly moves to the chord of the dominant of E minor (which is the relative minor of subdominant G) and so on, until at m.13 it rests on the subdominant chord of G.

⁹⁹ Bernstein (1976: 105); quoted in Chapter 2, footnote 14.

What we have constructed so far is a distinction between what musicologists analyse in terms of structure and how we experience music without a score. The contrast brings out the differences between a phenomenological approach and a formal approach. Further, the account of musical experience sketched above helps us bring out the force of Gadamer's resistance to such notions as that of "pure consciousness" and his foregrounding of the "prejudices" created by culture and history which are part of our experience. When listening to music, we hear it in certain ways, such as stable and unstable, or in terms of expectation and resolution, of calm, of solemnity, and of many other congeneric as well as extrageneric "gestures". This is why, as we shall see in the next section, we need ethnomusicological assistance in order to hear with understanding the music of alien cultures. The phenomenological approach to musical listening exemplified above relies on the possibility of some element of fusion of horizons, facilitated by a degree of continuity in historical and cultural background. As noted in relation to the distinction between natural and conventional schemata discussed in the semiotics chapter, our perception of music typically involves not only the natural schema, which may indeed be directly connected with our pure psychological perception, but also our understanding of musical conventions which become "native" to those who are within the shared history. These formal and experiential accounts are not so much conflicting as complementary, contributing towards the totality of defensible verbalisation of the piece. Both accounts, together with relevant background historical information – such as is offered by our first version – feed into the complete picture of our fourth version of hermeneutics.

We are now in a position to illustrate the distinction between our third version of hermeneutics, such as can be found in the work of Kramer, and our fourth, more Gadamerian, version which has its roots in the formal and experiential accounts. While proponents of the third model have, perhaps significantly, not provided comparable analyses of such works as the “Prague” Symphony, one can perhaps construct an appropriate account in the style of Kramer.

The difference in the reception of *La Nozze Di Figaro* between Vienna and Prague was inevitable. Although more “modernised” than pure Italian ears, Viennese audiences had difficulty in comprehending the innovative works of Mozart. On the other hand, in Prague his opera was well received which made Mozart keen to return to the capital of Bohemia to try his new works. Historically it is also noteworthy that he was one of the first composers, having resigned from his duties to the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, to become a freelance, composing purely for his art and “on demand”. What thereafter changed in his musical style, therefore, was not a function of variations in items, such as “mass” settings, that he was required to compose as part of his duties, and the amount of music as pure art – not only commissioned operas but also concertos for his friends and tutees and, indeed, instrumental music which appears often not to have been composed for a particular occasion or for a particular person – increased dramatically. When we seek to categorise his works, we note that Mozart rarely used minor keys, and we can count the number of his concertos and symphonies which are in minor keys with one hand. This is one of the reasons that ordinary listeners often label his music as “gay”, “light hearted”, “simple” and “elegant”. While some of his music is no doubt “expressive”, “emotional” or even “poetic”, most of his instrumental music remains within the

range of so-called “absolute” music which does not have a particular extra-musical connotation. The contrast of *adagio* and *allegro* in the opening of the “Prague” can be seen as providing an added solemnity which helps contrast with the light and airy opening of the *allegro* section. While the *allegro* section begins in D with a single instrument, as Einstein rightly claims this movement is ‘saturated with polyphony’.¹⁰⁰ Larsen remarks: ‘The ‘Prague’ Symphony was completed between Figaro and Don Giovanni, and one can see that it has spiritual affinities with both operas.’¹⁰¹

Unlike version 1, the focus here is on the music itself in the context of historical connections and stylistic development, but without detailed attention to the musical form, and in the absence of the sort of gestures characteristic of Romantic music, such accounts find it difficult convincingly to identify musical signification.

However our version four overcomes these difficulties. Even though we may not, from our direct musical experience, be able to identify precise chordal progressions or a particular use of instruments, we can hear the general “ideas” of what the music is doing. For example, we can hear the contrasts between mm.37-54, and the building up of mm.69-70 from m.55. Whereas the former is heard almost as “solo” with accompaniments, m.55 onwards are heard in the full force of *tutti*, participating in the build up, almost in the style of *Sturm and Drang*.

Thus, to take the *adagio*, it is not the technical analysis of how D major develops into D minor, or how F# is resolving, which provides the musical understanding, but the way we experience such developments and modulations. The sombre chordal

¹⁰⁰ Einstein (1966: 232)

¹⁰¹ Larsen ‘The Symphonies’ in Robbins-Landon and Mitchell (1965: 187)

introduction, then a shift in rhythm and abrupt introduction of chromatics in m.28 conveys that it is a beginning of a new section. The syncopated first motif of the allegro theme not only changes the tempo, but also experientially leads us to feel a heightened movement in the music. When the *allegro* section begins, it immediately gives us the sense of liberation, not only because of the tempo, but also through its returning to the major key. Such liberation indeed has extra-musical significance on which cultural and historical considerations may have a bearing, but it is grounded in the phenomenology of the music itself.

What is then the fourth type of hermeneutic interpretation? Have we achieved something new? The answer can be given both negatively and positively. In the negative sense, we have not derived any “new” ways of describing music. Music, being as we have seen in one sense “ineffable”, is not hospitable to language for describing what it is that we are experiencing. However, on a more positive note, we can see how all of the different methods of interpretation hang together.

Musicological and technical analysis explain why and how certain chordal progressions, rhythmic changes or instrumentation give rise to certain forms of musical understanding in our mind. Ratner’s “topic” approach sees the different segments of the movement in terms of how they can fit into its musical norm within its cultural and historical developments, and of course the biographical and inter-musical information not only helps situate a particular work in a particular place and time, but also illuminates how it is musically connected with other works. We may not have paid much attention to emotion in our interpretation of the first movement of the “Prague” symphony but, as we mentioned, this is because Classical instrumental music, unlike music from the Romantic period, is not primarily composed to play

with the audience's emotions. We can indeed hear the gestures of darkness, of heaviness, and moreover, they become clearer by the contrasts between the adagio and allegro sections. Composers are well aware of the contrasts in the winds and strings in their timbre, and all these contrasts – key, rhythm, timbre, tempo etc – are very much within music and musical hearing, which is the base for our experience of music as something meaningful.

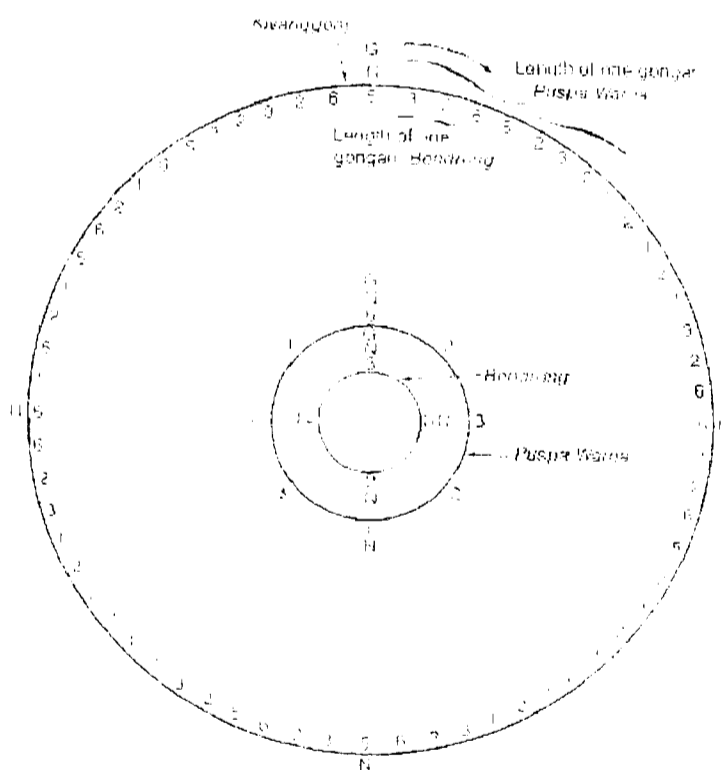
Such an account can be illuminated by considering hermeneutic interpretation in relation to ethnomusicology – examining musics from foreign cultures – to which we now turn.

5.3.3. Further Hermeneutic Analyses of Music – Ethnomusicology

The previous sections have shown how musicological analyses of Western Tonal Music can bring out non-structural properties of music. Much current musicological work on Western Tonal Music goes beyond musicology, narrowly conceived, to focus on the hermeneutics of music whereby we can see, taking account of socio-historical as well as formal co-ordinates, how and why we hear a particular piece of music in the way we do. We turn now to consider the musics of other cultures, which may not be familiar to Western listeners, in order to see how hermeneutic procedures may, despite the lack of “effective history”, be able to draw out the musical meaning.

Gamelan music in Indonesia (often described as Javanese music), much studied by various ethnomusicologists in the last century, also possesses a rich “syntactic” structure. While much of Western Tonal music is predominantly concerned with

melodic line and harmonic progressions, Gamelan music focuses on its rhythmical structure. Many of the instruments in Gamelan music are percussion instruments, ranging from the large *Gong* to small boxed *Ketuk* which are phrasing instruments. Many of the pitched instruments, both for loud style and soft style, are also percussion instruments somewhat similar to the Western Xylophones. The structure of Gamelan music resembles that of late Renaissance Counterpoint, in that they are polyphonic with several layers of melodies which all work towards a common pause. Moreover, the lower the pitch the instrument is, the less frequently it is introduced in the music. The beat of the lowest gong makes the complete melodic cycle (*gongan*), which often consists of 2 or 4 beats of *Kenung* (smaller phrasing instrument), and all higher pitched (including pentatonically tuned) instruments are played between these beats.¹⁰² [ex.29]



The only bowing instrument in Gamelan music, *rebab*, is often used as the only melodic instrument that can freely move between the pitches. In singing style, a solo

¹⁰² Example [ex.11] taken from Beckers in Steiner (1981)

female voice (*sindenai*) is reinforced (but not necessarily doubled) by *rebab*, creating the definite melodic line on top of all percussion instruments.

Such structural analyses of Gamelan music point, however, to a wider cultural dimension, as Lindsay notes:

Whether loud or soft style, the music can be seen as an elaborate layering, with the *saron* and *slentem* at the middle level, and all other instruments playing either a denser line (more notes) or fewer notes than this. [...] The very fine and elaborate structuring of layers in sound in gamelan music reflects the ordered structuring of Javanese society. As with Javanese language and etiquette, the complex interrelationships are designed to minimize the unpredictable.¹⁰³

Musicological analyses of how Gamelan music is created, organised and heard – such as its cyclic nature, use of high and low pitched percussion instruments in a particular way, and so on – are the tools required for understanding Gamelan music hermeneutically. These analyses, at first glance, seem to be analogous to the second version of musical hermeneutics discussed above. So interpreted, what is hermeneutic is not the extra-musical meaning nor any particular historical and cultural understanding of the music, but the way that such analyses of the style and structure of Gamelan music take account of its structural (cyclic) relationships of part-whole. However, if one examines these accounts more closely, one finds that the interpretations are deeply rooted within the culture of the music itself. While there is very little musical signification in terms of extra-musical meaning, nevertheless such features as their stress on rhythmical structure (rather than on melody or harmony

¹⁰³ Lindsay (1992: 55)

which Western Tonal Music stresses), cyclic and polyphonic structure, and moreover, the connection between Gamelan society and its music cited above, are all indeed cultural as much as musical phenomena. In this sense, it is possible and necessary to interpret Gamelan music in terms of our fourth version, pointing to the need for an exercise of the imagination, in order to grasp the music, beyond that required for works that stand in a relation of “effective history” with us.

A more obviously culturally conventional musical style can be found in *Raga* of North India. Much more strikingly than in Western Tonal Music, not only the melody but also the harmonic, rhythmic structure exhibits certain extra-musical meanings, each note of the scale in *Raga* having its own expressive meaning:

Each of the notes of the scale has its own kind of expression and a distinct psychological or physical effect, and so it can be related to a colour, a mood, a metre, a deity or one of the subtle centres (*chakra-s*) of the body. These relationships are given an important place in all Sanskrit treatises on music.

...for laughter and love, Madhyana (fourth) and Panchana (fifth) [of the scale] are used...¹⁰⁴

Further, not only does each note represent some expressive quality, but each mode (scale) of *ragas* is played at a certain time of the day.

Orthodox musicians in India never play a *raga* at any other than its proper time, for at the wrong hour it could never be developed so perfectly nor could it so greatly move an audience... Modes that correspond to crucial moments (sunrise, sunset, midday, midnight,

¹⁰⁴ Danielou (1968: 92-93)

solstices, equinoxes, etc.) often use both F# and F natural (*Ma tivra* and *Ma shuddha*)

(1) Modes sung at sunrise and sunset are known as “*samdhi-prakasha* (twilight) *ragas*.” Most of them include *Ri* und *Dha komala* (D and A flat).¹⁰⁵

Without going into further musical details, one can see how *raga* music is constrained by cultural conventions and through learning these, as well as the modes, and identifying each note, one can attain much fuller understanding of the meaning of the particular *raga*.

Whereas the sketch of Gamelan music above can be seen as having strong, though not exclusive, affinities with the second version of hermeneutic interpretation, with the analysis primarily concerned with its syntactical structure, Indian *Raga* brings into the foreground the essential role of extra-musical conventions. To the extent that these rich cultural connections are explored in terms of musical syntax – fourth, fifth, F# and so on – such accounts may fairly be said to represent our fourth version of musical hermeneutics.

The crucial difference between the analyses of Western Tonal Music we have considered and the ethnomusicological accounts lies in the lack of common ground in the latter case through which we can experience and understand the musical work. Lindsay and Danielou enable us to grasp the ways in which we need to listen to the music of alien cultures if we are to understand it, taking account of its form and cultural significance.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* (95-96)

What we noted earlier with respect to the notion of metaphor plays here a significant role in understanding music. While Swain plausibly argued that musical metaphor involves a stretch of quasi-syntactic structure, a grasp of such stretching requires understanding of the relevant tradition. We, as heirs of Western Tonal culture, can draw on the particular musical forms of Western Tonal Music, and thus hear the “syntactic” anomalies that give rise to musical metaphor, understanding the meaning simply by listening attentively. Music, and in particular the musical anomalies, of unfamiliar cultures cannot be understood in this way, but only through study of its history and cultural significance, such as ethnomusicologists seek to provide. Furthermore, the above sketches of Gamelan music and Indian *Raga* help reinforce what we have already noticed: the dichotomy between form and expression is not to be understood in terms of a polemical opposition, but as complementary. They throw light too on the role of “effective history”. Balkwill and Thompson carried out a survey of the understanding of *raga* music by both people related to it by effective history and people who are not familiar with its culture.¹⁰⁶ Their method was to sample four different prototypical *raga* styles which are directly connected with *rasas* (emotions). Both expert and naïve listeners were asked to hear three different *ragas* from each *rasa* – joy, sadness, anger and peace – and asked to note the correlations between music and emotion. This study demonstrated empirically that perception of emotions in musical works can transcend cultural boundaries, which demonstrates the plausibility of claims for the importance of the natural (psychological) understanding of music, while the differences between the naïve and expert listeners demonstrated that, indeed, understanding of conventions enhances the understanding of music. They concluded:

¹⁰⁶ Balkwill and Thompson (1999: 43-64)

The correlation between mean ratings assigned by expert and naïve listener rating was significance for joy...and sadness...; but not for anger...and peace... A closer look at the differences between mean ratings for each emotion indicates that expert made somewhat clearer distinctions than naïve listeners. Given the experts' knowledge of the tonal conventions of Hindustani music and the raga-rasa system, this result is consistent with our model.¹⁰⁷

5.4.1. Critical and Performative Interpretations

The previous sections have sketched how we may grasp the meaning of both Western and Non Western music. It should also be noted that this hermeneutic approach is relevant to the interpretation of particular musical performances. The art of music can, after all, only be realised through its sounds, as Maestro Barenboim remarks:

[N]obody is going to convince me that these black spots on white paper are the Fifth Symphony. The Fifth Symphony comes into being only when an orchestra, somewhere in the world, decides to play it.¹⁰⁸

While musicologists, critics and ordinary listeners often interpret musical works using the hermeneutic approaches discussed above, it is the performers who, in the first instance, apply these techniques.

Most musical notation systems have even greater limitations in their precision and accuracy in directing how to perform a piece on the basis of the score than in the case of the verbal arts such as poetry.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* (57)

¹⁰⁸ Barenboim and Said (2003: 111)

[I]f you try to objectively reproduce what is printed and nothing more, not only is this not possible to do – and, therefore, there’s no fidelity – it is also a complete act of cowardice because it means that you haven’t gone to the trouble to understand the interrelations and what the dosage is, to speak of nothing else – and I’m speaking at the moment only about volume and about balance, let alone the question of the line and the phrasing and all that.¹⁰⁹

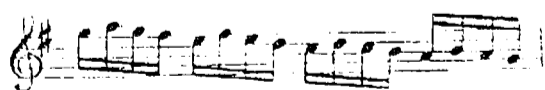
The composer Michael Tippett holds a similar view, arguing that though ‘instructions must of course be accurate, precise to the last possible detail’, ‘many factors will remain outside the composer’s control.’ Further, he notes caustically, ‘the composer who want at all costs to have the most absolute and unyielding accuracy in every rendition of his work is better off in an electronic studio.’¹¹⁰

Against this, Rosen argues that

[a] performance is at best an approximation to the score, and will always fall short of that score. The score is a kind of limit point, an ideal towards which the performer is always striving whilst knowing that some distance must remain between his performance and that ideal.¹¹¹

Nikolaus Harnoncourt plausibly suggests that such idealisation is culturally specific.

Writing of a passage in Leopold Mozart’s *Treatise on Violin Playing*, he remarks:



(Leopold Mozart’s *Treatise on Violin Playing*)

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* (112)

¹¹⁰ Tippett (1995: 259)

¹¹¹ Rosen’s view discussed in Carrier’s article (1983: 203)

In the performance tradition of today, such a passage is played just “as it stands”; each note is played as written, equally long, equally loud, and with a separate stroke of the bow (for strings) or tongued (for winds). Two hundred years ago the rules were quite different[...]. In the 18th century, articulation on an instrument was basically the responsibility of the interpreter. The composer had to mark only those passages in which he expressly desired an execution which deviated from tradition, from the established norm.¹¹²

What all would argue, though, is that (re)creating music through a notation system leads to many possible performative interpretations. Levinson distinguishes between what he calls “performative interpretation” and “critical interpretation”.

Performative interpretation (PI) typically involves two ‘moments’. First, in deciding what the score is “really” representing, including whether the composer’s intentions are realised fully through the score. Second, and more important, performers decide how to bring out that realisation through such parameters as tempo, rhythm, dynamics and phrasing. Here is the role of “performance notes” which performers decide (often collectively in case of ensemble) to use to guide them in hope of communicating their understanding of the music to the audience. Critical interpretation, on the other hand, is defined as ‘a conceptual and standardly propositional affair’ that ‘aims to explain or elucidate a work’s meaning or structure.’¹¹³

What is important here, however, is not the differences between these PIs and CIs, but their similarities, for the hermeneutic approach which we have so far primarily explored in terms of critical interpretation is also relevant to the performative. This is

¹¹² Harnoncourt (1997: 108)

¹¹³ Levinson (1996a: 66)

apparent in a recent debate concerning “authentic performance”, where Kivy’s criticism of authenticity makes use of a key hermeneutic concept in considering the performative interpretation of “historically distant” compositions. While Kivy is sympathetic towards recent attempts to encourage “authentic” reproduction of music, he nevertheless takes a hermeneutic twist in criticising the approach of some such efforts. He notes:

[A]uthentic musical performance is the vain attempt to revive a dead tradition, on dead instruments, rather than to carry on a live one with the living tools of one’s trade.¹¹⁴

Further, in defending Rudolph Serkin’s performance of Mozart’s sonata on a Steinway grand piano, he argues that:

[L]ike Mozart, Serkin is giving a performance based not on historical judgement but on musical imagination, and all the rest of those “good things” that the great performer brings to the art of musical interpretation, on the instrument to which he was born. And, like Mozart’s performance again, comes out of a living musical tradition, a laying on of hands, that gives such performances qualities of vibrancy and spontaneity that musicologically “correct” ones are felt to lack.¹¹⁵

Edward Said echoes this view in claiming that ‘[Authenticity] is about the present and of how the present sees and constructs the past and what past it wants.’ Barenboim adds: ‘the difference between the authentic movement today and Schumann or

¹¹⁴ Kivy (1988b: 286)

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* (287)

Mendelssohn or Wagner playing Bach and Beethoven is that they were really modern. They were trying to bring the past to their time.¹¹⁶

These accounts suggest that not only critical interpretations by musicologists and historians, as explored in the previous two sections, make use of hermeneutic considerations in interpreting musical works, but also more “hands on” music practitioners, whether consciously or unconsciously, apply hermeneutic concepts such as “tradition”, in their interpretation and execution, and that Gadamer’s notion of “effective history” has very clear application in performance contexts.

5.5.1. Chapter Conclusion

What we have sought to provide in this chapter is a synoptic sketch of a number of different dimensions of interpretation theory which together clarify what is at stake in the understanding and interpretation of music. In the course of this sketch, it has become clear that, in different forms, patterns of hermeneutic interpretation are remarkably pervasive. Music is foremostly a formal art, and hermeneutics, especially our fourth version of the hermeneutic interpretation of music, brings out both the importance and limitations of this recognition.

This chapter, together with Chapter 1, have demonstrated an overview of how hermeneutic theory which developed in the domains of philosophy, theology and literature, can be applied to music. Many musicological analyses of Western Tonal Music, although this has often been unnoticed, engage with the use of hermeneutic

¹¹⁶ Barenboim and Said (2003: 126-7)

procedures such as exploring part-whole relationships, socio-cultural and historical dimensions and, crucially the “effective history” of distancing between music and the prejudiced listener. Such procedures can, indeed, also lead to understanding of what is unfamiliar, as in the case of ethnomusicology sketched above.

Ethnomusicology essentially involves hermeneutic interpretation of what is alien to the “prejudiced” listener thereby enabling the horizon of that listener and the world of the alien work to be fused together.

For the purpose of contrasting formal and expressive properties of music, we have on occasion associated the extra-musical properties with the meaning of music and intra-musical properties with the formal structure of music. However, as we have seen, these associations are of only limited value. Music, as a product of one culture at a certain historical point, has its very structure rooted within its musical culture and history. Thus such remarks as that by Lindsay on the structures of Javanese society quoted above, may not demonstrate any extra-musical meaning, but yet illustrate the way that musical meaning plays a significant role within, and can only be understood in terms of, Gamelan culture. Gestalt theory and cultural relativism, as previously sketched, can be seen as representing a dichotomy between what Kivy calls “Contour” and “Convention”. Yet such a dichotomy, reflected also in the differences between the formal and expression theories, is not as sharp a contrast as has traditionally been thought.

In the case of our fourth, and preferred version of music hermeneutics, we can see musical meaning produced through the interconnection of formal and expressive features, contour and convention, as well as part-whole relationships and effective

history. It is through the interplay of all these elements that one may test an interpretation for its validity.

This concern for (plausible claims to) validity, will be a concern of the Conclusion which will return to issues kept open in the previous chapters. Hermeneutics, although it developed as a philosophical and literary theory, can provide a key to many of the doors that could not be opened in previous chapters. Through re-engaging with these issues, we may find what can properly be meant by “significance” in music, and possibly a clue to what music really is.

Chapter 6 –Musical Hermeneutics and Musical Significance: Some Concluding Suggestions

The value of the account of musical interpretation provided in the previous chapter needs to be tested against some of the issues raised in the thesis but as yet unresolved. These issues, including problems concerned with metaphor, ineffability, cultural relativity, intersubjectivity, universality, and ultimately the truth and validity of interpretation, have been deliberately left open since they can now be integrated by reference to hermeneutic interpretation. In the light of such integration, we may finally be able to approach a plausible account of musical significance.

We have already begun to see some of these interrelationships. Kivy's account of musical resemblance is ultimately a theory of musical metaphor, where we interpret the musical gesture – metaphorically.¹ As we noted in the previous chapter, musical metaphor is grounded not in semantics but in an analogue of syntax, and this fact has an important bearing on musical interpretation. Indeed, as we showed, much hermeneutic analysis of music depends on quasi-syntactic properties; musical metaphor is employed in order to form a bridge between musical “syntax” and its pragmatics in the absence of semantics. As Goodman remarks:

Understanding a work involves the discovery, the recognition, of unobvious patterns. The requisite breaching of barriers established by habit and literal language often occurs through the importation of schemata from a foreign realm.²

¹ S.Davies, for example notes: ‘A machine may move jerkily, quickly and so forth, but it cannot move with hesitation, vivacity, abandonment...’ Davies (2003: 141) We speak of music, however, in both waysm which suggests that the analogy with human gesture is not inappropriate.

² Goodman (1970: 568)

Further, linguistic metaphorical accounts of music may be grounded not only in musical structure, but also in its interaction with its pragmatic implications, which throws light on Mendelssohn's contention, on which Treitler focused,³ that the ambiguity involved in musical verbalisation is to be found not in the ambiguity of music but in that of the language describing musical experience. Musical significance, as we have seen, is always closer to "pragmatic meaning" than "semantic" and, as hermeneutics brings out, cannot be detached from its historical or human origin and reception. Goodman's parenthetical "or other" may be feeling its way towards this.

New likeness and differences, new relationships and patterns, are thus revealed, and are described by the metaphorical application of these alien terms. Theoretically, these metaphors can be supplanted by complex literal descriptions; but even as metaphors, they are in effect descriptions of structural features. Briefly, the feelings a work expresses are properties it has, not because the work literally has feelings, but because the feeling-terms applied are metaphorical descriptions of structure (or other) properties the work has and exemplifies.⁴

What may be ambiguous and thus often called "ineffable" is not so much the musical structure of itself but the related musical experience. Strictly such experience is not ineffable, as witness the vast literature dedicated to this phenomenon, but it is not susceptible of literal description, rather requiring resort to metaphor. As we have seen in our discussion of the hermeneutic dimensions of interpretation, understanding of such musical experiences, in terms of both musical and extra-musical properties, requires musical analysis. But it does not follow that the significances so discerned are thereby shown to be semantic properties of a musical work; they remain pragmatic

³ See Introduction

⁴ Goodman (1970: 568)

properties, involved in forms of metaphoric tension similar to those sketched in the previous chapter. In this light, the problem of ineffability mentioned in Chapter 3 can now be reassessed.⁵ This account illuminates Langer's hesitation in verbalising musical expression which precisely relates to this notion of "ineffability", where she notes: 'music articulates forms which language cannot set forth'.⁶ Langer's defence of music's expressiveness lies in the fact that music is formally and essentially untranslatable into at least literal language where she notes:

Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.⁷

Chapter 2 was concerned to bring out some of the differences between musical and linguistic forms, and in Chapter 3 we considered musical expressiveness and its relation to feelings. Our argument has been that while formal and expressive properties are distinct, in a hermeneutic framework they can be seen as complementary. Langer's account points to the similarities between musical experience and the understanding of metaphor in the problem of direct translation into a literal language. Musical experience, like understanding metaphor, cannot be translated precisely into a literal meaning, but only by means of "paraphrase".

What was seen as a dichotomy between expression theory and formalism, can thus also, through the understanding of metaphor, be united into one coherent theory of musical significance. Anthony Newcomb sees this:

⁵ See Howard (1971a)

⁶ Langer (1979: 233); see Chapter 3 on ineffability for further discussion of forms of human feeling and music.

⁷ *Ibid.* (235) with original italics.

Formal and expressive interpretation are in fact two complementary ways of understanding the same phenomena[...]. We select which of the properties strike us as important and bring them into convincing relationships with each other. In making this selection, we consciously or unconsciously experiment with various constellations and weightings of important properties, both formal and metaphorical, trying out their resonances and configurations in expressive as well as structural terms.⁸

While Treitler expresses reservations about Goodman's overall analysis of metaphor, he nevertheless finds his account suggestive in applying the duality between literal and metaphorical language to the musical and extra-musical properties of music.

The musical analogue of the duality of metaphorical and literal meaning is the duality of the musical and the extramusical, which underlies the theory that music has its qualitative properties through metaphorical transfer. It would be implicit, for example, in any adaptation to music of Goodman's distinction between literal and acquired properties – literal properties would be those that are strictly musical; acquired ones would be extramusical. But just as the boundary between metaphorical and literal meaning in language communication cannot be drawn, so the boundary in the duality of the musical and the extramusical cannot be located.⁹

Hermeneutic interpretation of music, as we have seen, relies not only on the connection between the structural and extra-musical properties of music, but also on the notion of "effective history" which Gadamer rightly saw as a key to understanding the products of culture. In this context it will be useful to return to the notion of cultural relativism. Understood in terms of hermeneutics, cultural relativism is a

⁸ Newcomb (1984a: 636)

⁹ Treitler in Robinson (1997a: 41)

positive notion, pointing to the way that cultural norms may provide a justification for a particular musical interpretation. Naomi Cumming's remark takes this positive view, arising out of Margolisian relativism:

What it means to declare that a work "emerges" within culture, in Margolis' sense, is more than to state the obvious fact that composers work in a cultural context. It is to say that the organization of a musical work itself depends on categories that structure other aspects of life, and that even abstract instrumental music cannot effectively be understood as the unfolding of pure patterns, sealed off from other forms of experience.¹⁰

Leonard Meyer sees this in terms of cultural distancing:

There appears to be positive correlation between cultural distance, whether historical or anthropological, and cultural noise. That is, the more distant a culture is from our present set of habit responses, the greater the amount of cultural noise involved in communication.¹¹

Both recognise that, as we saw in the previous chapter, music as a product of human creation cannot be detached from its situatedness. The interpretative process with respect to music must frequently overcome the cultural distance between the listener and the cultural product. Cumming notes:

The hearing of musical signification at any level requires some reference to a broader cultural frame, where notions of such things as "voice" are constituted, but the domain of reference has here been broadened considerably. Now at stake is the question of how *intersubjective agreement* can be achieved as to which broad attributes may be heard as

¹⁰ Cumming (2000: 245)

¹¹ Meyer (1956: 16)

inhering in a passage or work. How is it to be known where limits might be set to the multiplying field of interpretants? Should indeed limits be set at all? What distinguishes an arbitrary association from a shared mode of understanding?¹²

The notion of cultural distancing takes us back to the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer with his “fusion of horizons”. As we noted in the previous chapter, Gadamer sees the distancing of the culturally prejudiced reader from an earlier text as an archetype of the hermeneutic situation. We come to understand the text, according to Gadamer, through the application of our understanding to what was alien, thereby fusing the two horizons.

We have returned to yet another unresolved issue, that of intersubjectivity. One of the core criticisms of Gadamer by Ricoeur relates closely to Cumming’s problem, to the issue of “validity” or “truth” in hermeneutic interpretation. Ricoeur argues, showing some sympathy with Hirsch, that Gadamer has side-stepped the notion of “truth” on which depends the core issue of Romantic hermeneutics.

As concerns the procedures of validation by which we test our guesses, I agree with Hirsch that they are closer to a logic of probability than to a logic of empirical verification. To show that an interpretation is more probable in the light of what is known is something other than showing that a conclusion is true. In this sense, validation is not verification. Validation is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedures of legal interpretation. It is a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability.¹³

¹² Cumming (2000: 250) with my italics.

¹³ Ricoeur (1981: 212)

On such an account, the notion of hermeneutic truth that connects most closely with the quest of the Romantic theorists, though it is certainly one kind of truth, is not one that admits of conclusive demonstration but is rather, as we noted earlier, a form of truth that is most at home in “the domain of the plausible”¹⁴, and moreover one that is best tested in an intersubjective context.

Our search for musical significance echoes this hermeneutic insight; musical interpretation may have its justification and thus validation, but only in the domain of plausibility, a conclusion that lends support to Cone’s claim that ‘a piece of music allows a wide but *not unrestricted* range of possible expression.’¹⁵

This notion of “wide but not unrestricted” reminds us of how Eco saw danger in the notion of unlimited semiosis in Chapter 2. Through musical interpretation we can reach more than one plausible interpretation, a position which, in the strict sense of the term, is closer to “relativism” than absolutism (or certain forms of objectivism). Yet, such cultural relativism neither treats the musical work as an open work nor forecloses distinguishing between more and less plausible interpretations.

Margolis, Krausz and Stecker are right in seeing the work of art as a product of culture, and also in recognising the possibility of numerous plausible and significantly different interpretations. Nevertheless, what the hermeneutic “validation” process aims to achieve is the elimination of the possibility of incompatible acceptable interpretations. As noted in the previous chapter, critical monists such as Novitz,

¹⁴ Grondin (1994: 51) cited in Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Cone (1974: 166) with my italics.

Nehamas and Levinson have concluded that many plausible interpretations are possible depending on one's angle of approach to the work of art, but such interpretations must be able to be collated into one logically coherent interpretation.

Cone takes this perception one stage further:

Because each listener's reconstruction of the human context must be in terms of his own experience, attempts at verbal formulation of that context vary – sometimes widely. Nor, if we could read the subconscious reactions of which the words are only imperfect and incomplete reports, would we find any more unanimity. This does not condemn us to complete relativism, however. For the context is not the content, it is only the necessary vehicle of the content. The content of a song is not revealed by words alone but by the quasi-metaphorical relation between words and music. In the same way, the content of instrumental music is revealed to each listener by the relation between the music and the personal context he brings to it. Since each such context can be only exemplary, the resulting content can be only partial. The total content of a complex and profound composition is thus probably beyond the comprehension of any individual listener; it is a potential context matching the entire expressive potential.¹⁶

As remarked in the previous chapter, the difference between critical monism and relativism is not as extreme as is sometimes supposed. The hermeneutic approach indeed gives a leeway to relativism, yet this relativism is a cultural one and not a risky unlimited semiosis. Musical significance that takes account of extra-musical qualities, may be construed as the total sum of all these interpretations, Cone's 'entire expressive potential'.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* (171)

Cone's claim that such potential may be 'beyond the comprehension of any individual listener' points to the desirability of a certain modesty. Indeed, even within the circle of musicologists we see different emphases and, often, interpretations of a particular piece of work, suggesting that a single musicological analysis alone may in principle be inadequate to bring out the totality of a work's musical significance. But such recognition need not preclude the possibility of objectivity for, as Grondin puts it,

To make room for objectivity within hermeneutics is not to commit oneself to an absolutist perspective, but only to recognize that some claims to knowledge and interpretation are more reliable than others.¹⁷

The open-endedness of interpretation, and hence of validation procedures, is the other side of that notion of "truth" in this context preferred by Gadamer which, as Ricoeur notes, tends to deflect him from traditional issues of validation.. To see this, it will be helpful to return to Langer's analogy between the forms of music and of feeling:

Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.¹⁸

Langer's analogy directs us to two important considerations: the nature of musical experience, and the notion of "truth" (both explicit and implicit in her term "reveal") in music.

As we have seen, experience of music raises issues often discussed in terms of "qualia", in that there appears to be a limit to our capacity to communicate it verbally.

¹⁷ Grondin in Wright (1990: 53)

¹⁸ Langer (1979: 235) with original italics (quoted above on footnote 6).

But Wittgensteinian considerations should put us on our guard against attempting to construe musical hearing in terms of logically private experience, and here we can see one of the advantages of hermeneutic approach. Drawing on phenomenology's insistence on the priority of intersubjectivity, hermeneutics provides some guidance as to how we may begin to approximate to fused "horizons", and hence to be able to speak coherently of "shared" experience. While the verbalisation of musical experience is indeed problematical, not so much because of the nature of music as of language, it is still possible for music to communicate with us directly – as Langer insists – through shared history.

But what counts as successful communication here? On Langer's account it would appear to be when music "reveals" human feeling with detail and truth. However, since language is unable to state such truth, we are left with the problem of how we are to distinguish the true from the false – or perhaps the fake. If our only access to such revelation is through the music, then it would appear that the criteria must lie in the music itself and our experience of it, which suggests they must themselves be aesthetic in nature. In this context it is relevant that Gadamer's account of truth is heavily influenced by Heidegger's ontological notion of truth as *aletheia*:

"Truth" already had a double sense in early Greek philosophy. As it was used in the living language of the Greeks, the expression *aletheia* is best translated as "openness." For it was always connected with words concerned with speech. To be open means to say what one means. Language is primarily not, in the familiar phrase, the means given to us to conceal our thoughts. This primary meaning of truth then, is that we tell the truth, we say what we mean. This is supplemented, particularly

in philosophical usage, by a further sense in which *something* “says” what it “means”: whatever shows itself to what it is, is true.¹⁹

Gadamer’s hermeneutics seeks truth in the former sense in our experience of art, informed by historical knowledge which is itself ‘based on a kind of experience quite different from the one that serves in investigating natural laws.’²⁰ “Truth” in this sense is Heideggerian “unconcealed-ness”, and “musical truth” may be associated with Gadamer’s account of truth in poetry, where ‘[t]he text enjoys greater reality than any of its potential realizations can ever claim for itself.’²¹ There is an analogy here with Cone’s description cited earlier: ‘potential context matching the entire expressive potential’. The hermeneutic notion of aesthetic truth involves that of “openness”.

The experience of art acknowledges that it cannot present the full truth of what it experiences in terms of definite knowledge. There is no absolute progress and no final exhaustion of what lies in a work of art. The experience of art knows this of itself. At the same time we cannot simply accept what aesthetic consciousness considers its experience to be. [...] If we want to know what truth is in the field of the human sciences, we will have to ask the philosophical question of the whole procedure of the human sciences in the same way that Heidegger asked it of metaphysics and we have asked it of aesthetic consciousness.²²

The seeking of truth in art requires, as it were, a form of dialogue or interchange between the work as we experience it and our own, ideally philosophically interrogated, prejudgements.

¹⁹ Gadamer (1986: 108)

²⁰ Gadamer (1996: 8)

²¹ Gadamer (1986: 109)

²² *Ibid.* (100)

Despite Adorno's radical critique of aspects of the Heideggerian hermeneutic tradition, he echoes this approach to truth in aesthetics, claiming:

The truth content of artworks is the objective solution of the enigma posed by each and every one. By demanding its solution, the enigma points to its truth content. It can only be achieved by philosophical reflection. This alone is the justification of aesthetics.²³

Like Gadamer, Adorno insists that the requisite philosophical reflection must have a historical dimension, that '[t]he historical development of works through critique and the philosophical development of their truth content have a reciprocal relation.'²⁴

Approaching these issues from a very different perspective from that of Langer, he converges on a strikingly similar conclusion: 'The truth content of artworks cannot be immediately identified. Just as it is known only mediately, it is mediated in itself.'²⁵

But the affinities are much stronger with Gadamer, and Paddison helpfully brings out Adorno's stress on that wider circle with which hermeneutics has made us familiar:

Adorno argues that [...] aesthetics has to establish its connection with the particularity of art works, and to learn to grasp what he calls the 'micrological figures' (*die mikrologischen Figuren*), the tiniest details of the structure of art works. Furthermore, art works are not created or experienced in a vacuum: their context and their relation to that which lies outside their 'monadic' isolation is part of their complex of meaning.²⁶

²³ Adorno (1997: 127-8)

²⁴ *Ibid.* (128)

²⁵ *Ibid.* (129)

²⁶ Paddison (1993: 63)

On Gadamer's account, it would appear, "truth" in music is a function of a work's significance; we seek to fuse our horizons with that of the work, and to the extent that we do that we find that authentic music resonates with the potentialities of our own aesthetic experience, enlarging and clarifying our capacity to feel – hence, in part, the open-endedness of the notion of aesthetic "truth". Indeed, to the extent that the expressive aspect of music may be seen in mimetic terms, Gadamer's account of the cognitive import of mimetic art, conceived in terms of "recognition", here has application:

[W]hat we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is – i.e., to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself.

But we do not understand what recognition is in its profoundest nature if we only regard it as knowing something again that we know already – i.e., what is familiar is recognized again. The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar.²⁷

Adorno takes Gadamer's open-endedness one step further, relating it to the changing contexts associated with "the movement of spirit and of social reality".²⁸ But for both Gadamer and Adorno, the notion of "truth" here is never of something attainable "fully" but is more of the nature of a regulative ideal.

²⁷ Gadamer (1996: 114)

²⁸ In doing so, of course, he challenges the "jargon of authenticity", seeing it as reinforcing our acceptance of given social and psychological realities in a sense as a form of inauthenticity, since on the Heideggerian model the subject is authentic to itself. Gadamer's "philosophical questioning" in this context needs to be temporal by social critique which takes account of artwork's social role both in its own context and in ours. Its own import, which is a function of the content and form, needs to be related to its socio-historical totality. As Paddison puts it, 'the truth of work is revealed through philosophical interpretation [which] both makes use of immanent analysis and sociological critique as well as going beyond them.' Paddison (1993: 62)

Engaging with music in these terms is different from engaging with it as a historian, as Dahlhaus notes:

Aesthetic standing takes the form of a quality that attaches to a work in its own right. Historical significance, on the other hand, refers to a role played within a context: a work may be particularly telling expression of the ‘spirit of the age’, a discursive step in the evolution of a genre, form or particular technique, or a foundation and starting point for works which, on their own merits, have been accepted for display in the imaginary museum of music history.²⁹

The distinction, however, should not be overdrawn. As Cone, who insists on the hermeneutic approach to musical interpretation points out:

The best scholars [...] recognize that only as a composition speaks to us as a work of art can we comprehend its full value as a historical document. At the same time, only as the result of extensive and thorough historical investigations has much of the music of the past become available to our experience.³⁰

If aesthetic truth, however historically nuanced, is a function of a work’s significance, and in particular of its ability to relate to our capacities to feel, then judgements concerning a work’s aesthetic significance or “meaning” inevitably have an evaluative dimension. Adorno’s exploration of alienation in this context is witness to this – for feelings may become culturally deformed, unconsciously fake rather than authentic. And here both critical theory and hermeneutics parts company with the stricter versions of Formalism.

²⁹ Dahlhaus (1983b: 93), Goehr takes the cue for the title of her work, *Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* from this passage.

³⁰ Cone (1974: 152)

Inspired in part by a partial reading of Kant's Third Critique, aesthetic judgements have been distinguished by the stricter Formalists from value judgements. Analyses of Hanslick's "tonally moving forms" are treated as factual investigations even though they may subsume judgements concerning beauty. However, as Dahlhaus points out in his discussion of the relation between aesthetic standing and historical significance in the history of music,

Value-judgements must, of course, be kept logically separate from factual judgements; but this does not exclude the fact that, in practical terms, value-judgements are quite often partly grounded on factual ones, and conversely factual judgements are often influenced by value-judgements.³¹

On the hermeneutic model, when our horizons meet that of the artwork this is in large part enabled by our discernment of the (historically conditioned) forms of that work, but this discernment is itself importantly shaped by our place in the effective history of that work, which enables us to grasp and feel its significance in human life, in music's case (to adapt Langer's formulation) its capacity to "reveal the nature of feelings with detail and truth". Such capacities raise evaluative issues where we may seek to discriminate the authentic from the partial, meretricious or otherwise fake – the invitation to respond with stock responses, for example. And such judgements are inevitably a fusion of the formal and the contextual, operating in terms of a type of "openness" to which evaluation in terms of closed sets of criteria seems wholly inappropriate. Levinson's account of such aesthetic judgment is salutary:

It is anthropocentric in the sense that it is experiences of works being

³¹ Dahlhaus (1983b: 91)

intrinsically valuable for *human beings*, or beings enjoying a similar form of life, that is critical for aesthetic value. It is incommensurable in the sense that it cannot be ranged on a common metric, one guaranteeing that for any two works of unequal value there is always an answer to how *much* better the one is than the other; yet such incommensurability of works does not entail non comparability of works, even across artforms. It is objective in the sense of *intersubjectively valid*, something on which the reflective judgements of relevant subjects can be expected to converge.³²

Conclusion

What we have sought to show is that, although final interpretations in music may not be possible, and our potential and provisional interpretations may be no more than plausible, nevertheless we may reasonably claim that music is meaningful, or, better, “significant”, and that discernible meanings or significations may go beyond purely formal categories. Music, as a cultural product, possesses a “meaning”, or “many meanings”, and these can only be grasped through an interaction between informed perception of the sound, and cultural understanding of the work.

Of course it is the listener who understands or fails to understand the musical significance and not the other way around, so in this sense, the traditional subject-object polarity still has its validity. However, as Gadamerian hermeneutics rightly suggests, it is through the fusion of horizons, which involves applying to oneself or “appropriating” for oneself – to use Ricoeur’s term – that we come to understand the “meaning”.³³ The “entire expressive potential” of music is a function of neither a

³² Levinson (1996b: 672-3)

³³ See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol.3* (1985: 158)

purely subjective emotional response nor cognition of objective musical expressions.

It is neither purely formal nor purely expressive, congeneric nor extrageneric. Instead, musical significance is in an important sense fabricated through the interaction of music with its particular audience, and through the audience's capacity to engage with its formal properties, its cultural style and genre, and even, sometimes, the intention of the composer. Our sense that it is also retrieved, not simply fabricated, and hence that issues of validity in interpretation can be at stake, is witness to the importance of these capacities. As in Husserlian phenomenology, the criteria for distinguishing between truth and delusion are informed by the modes of "givenness" in terms of which we receive the sounds within the total "life-world".

Significance is thus constituted when we fuse the horizons of our "prejudiced" selves with the (sometimes alien) compositions. The "Totality of musical significances" of a work is like a sphere, which can be interpreted and understood from many different perspectives. The paths we each take in order to understand depend on our cultural and historical, as well as educational, backgrounds.

Is music then a universal language? Eco draws several threads of our argument together in his denial.

[T]he notion of optimal organization in music can refer only to a cultural datum. This means that music is not a universal language, and that our tendency to prefer certain solutions to others is the result of our apprenticeship within the context of a musical culture that has been historically defined.³⁴

³⁴ Eco (1989: 76)

Rather than being a universal language, music, just like verbal language, is a product of a certain culture, where one needs to acquire rules and vocabularies. Moreover, as with metaphor or poetic understanding, one must understand not only its syntax, but its historical and cultural background.

We must understand music through its many metaphorical representations and expressivities. Of course, in talking about music we are compelled to use metaphorical language in describing what we hear.

One last question still remains. What is music? The argument of this thesis does not provide a decisive answer, but it may provide pointers. The fact that, as we have seen, it can be analysed semantically, semiotically, formally and hermeneutically suggests that music consists of certain patterns of sound which are deeply rooted within the culture in which the music is born. Against this it may be objected that computers produce musical works; but the computer is a mere tool for those who handle the equipment. Computer music, or computer generated “rule-governed” sound patterns, can only be produced through the intervention of the agent behind the keyboard or programme. Nevertheless, it has to be conceded that music which derives from complex self adapting programmes stands at several removes from the programme’s cultural context. Here formal analysis has priority over the hermeneutic (at least in its fully developed “version 4”). Such music, however, should not be assimilated to “global” popular music, which has developed out of what was once “culturally” rooted music. Indeed, although the globalisation of sound patterns is now one of the characteristic features of popular music, our (potential) characterisation of music as

“culturally accepted patterns of sound” remains plausible if we recognise the development of a global culture.

The fully developed hermeneutic approach to the interpretation of music – the previous chapter’s fourth and final version – takes both the formal and the cultural dimensions of music with full seriousness, both the patterns of sound and the cultural rootedness. In doing so, it provides a bridge between formal and expression approach to musical interpretation and between constructivist and validation-orientated models. As such it appears to have considerable potential in any full account of musical significance and the nature of music.

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(Abbreviations: *BJA* stands for *British Journal of Aesthetics*, *JAAC* stands for *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*)

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