



The Discourse of Musicology

Giles Hooper

ASHGATE e-BOOK

THE DISCOURSE OF MUSICOLOGY

For my wife, Clare

Whom I thank for her unremitting support in recent years –
especially during those long evenings when I was inevitably
‘just finishing the next paragraph’.

The Discourse of Musicology

GILES HOOPER

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ASHGATE

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
Introduction	1
1 A New Musicology?	5
2 The Study of Music as an Institutionalized Discourse	41
3 Putting Things in Context	73
4 Models of Mediation	99
5 Comparative Critique: Mahler's Ninth Symphony	121
6 Conclusion	137
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>153</i>

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A number of small sections of this book reproduce in modified form some material that appears in my article ‘An Incomplete Project: Modernism, Formalism and the “Music Itself”’, *Music Analysis*, 23/ii–iii (2004).

Der Inhalt ... soll nach positivistischem Brauch gegen seine Darstellung indifferent, diese konventionell, nicht von der Sache gefordert sein, und jede Regung des Ausdrucks in der Darstellung gefährdet für den Instinkt des wissenschaftlichen Purismus eine Objectivität, die nach Abzug des Subjekts herrauspränge, und damit die Gediegenheit der Sache, die um so besser sich bewähre, je weniger sie sich auf die Unterstützung durch die Form verläßt, obwohl doch diese ihre Norm selber genau daran hat, die Sache rein und ohne Zutat zu geben. In der Allergie gegen die Formen als bloße Akzidenzien nähert sich der szientifische Geist dem stur dogmatischen.

Theodor W. Adorno, *Der Essay als Form*

Introduction

What can one say about music? What should one say about music? How does 'postmodern' theory impact upon the interpretation of music or upon the very nature of musicology itself? How does the academic study of music differ from everyday talk about music? What does it mean to situate music in its 'social' context? Can ethical or political imperatives ever guide our research and pedagogical activities?

In addressing such questions this book participates in a broad and substantive debate that now encompasses nearly all aspects of contemporary musicological practice (I use musicology in its broadest disciplinary sense to include both 'conventional' historical, analytical and theoretical modes of enquiry as well as the increasing number of interpretive or methodological approaches that resist such easy categorization). Indeed, one of the most noticeable developments in recent years has been a proliferation of disciplinary self-reflection, of 'talk about talk', of what I will term 'meta-discourse'. This internal debate, however, has tended primarily to focus on the vicissitudes of a perceived 'postmodern' turn in musical scholarship, on the emergence of a 'new' or 'critical' musicology in all its many and varied guises. Its principal concern has been to (re)define the scope of musicological study, both in terms of the type and range of music studied and also in relation to the methodologies employed in doing so, and to focus on the relative merits of adopting this or that critical or interpretive strategy. As a result, the contemporary musicologist is confronted with a bewildering array of potential interpretive methodologies. Yet amid the ensuing fragmentation of disciplinary presupposition, rather less attention, perhaps too little attention, has been paid to the precise nature of musicological discourse itself, particularly in relation to the very validity or legitimacy of the claims to knowledge that are constitutive of it. To be sure, musicology, as an academic discipline, has been examined and subsequently challenged from a number of critical perspectives, especially those influenced by post-Foucauldian theories of discourse and power (see, for example, Bergeron & Bohlman, 1992). Yet few have probed more deeply the connections that might exist between the *epistemological* and *normative* legitimacy of musicology's claims to knowledge, on the one hand, and the underlying institutional or discursive context in which they are made, on the

other. (By ‘epistemological legitimacy’ I refer to the status or condition of musicological claims to knowledge and the mechanism(s) through which they are deemed to be a valid and acceptable contribution to the discourse as a whole; by ‘normative legitimacy’ I refer to the reasoning adduced in order to support or justify a concern with a particular repertoire or the adoption of a particular interpretive strategy or methodological framework.) This book’s principal contention – as set out in Chapter 2 – is that such connections (between discursive legitimacy and institutional context) can be proposed and theorized, and that these have serious ramifications for, and impose necessary limitations upon, the kind of knowledge to which musicology can legitimately lay claim. This book’s principal concern is therefore not so much to determine what we can know, or can claim to know, about music per se, but rather to examine the extent to which *musicological* claims to knowledge are determined by, delimited by and yet, crucially, are also *enabled* by the nature of the ‘academic discipline’, or ‘institutionalized discourse’, of which they are a constitutive part.

Although this book argues from a perspective that seeks to cut across the more simplistic taxonomy of ‘old’ and ‘new’, the line that is taken here – with its talk of ‘validity’, ‘limits’, ‘discipline’ and ‘reason’, and its partial indebtedness to the thought of Jürgen Habermas – will no doubt rub against the grain of prevailing ‘postmodern’ sensibilities. This is not necessarily to suggest that postmodernism is somehow inevitably in the ascendancy or that the majority of scholars are entirely sympathetic to its axioms and implications. Nevertheless, despite a number of notable interventions, Cook and Everist still felt able to observe, as recently as 1999, that ‘there is as yet no authoritative conservative response to the New Musicology’ (Cook & Everist, 1999, p.viii, n.6). While the arguments developed in this book could hardly be described as ‘conservative’, they do register a fundamental unease with a number of aspects intrinsic to recent developments in musicology, many of which do depend upon the selective appropriation of nominally ‘postmodern’ ideas. This book argues that, both in the pursuit of new methods of musical interpretation and understanding and also in reflecting on the nature of disciplinary practice itself, musicology has at times proved somewhat precipitous in its adoption and ready acceptance of certain ‘postmodern’ doctrines – often to the detriment of other equally or potentially more productive lines of thought.

Having said that, when measured quantitatively by concrete output alone the practical response to the ‘postmodern’ has in fact remained rather more patchy and uncertain than the seeming ubiquity of its conceptual economy might otherwise suggest. Some practitioners avoid explicit engagement altogether, perhaps fearful of its alien language; others simply dismiss that same language and its correlative interpretive practice as little more than a superficial ‘jargon’ covering for a lack of intellectual or musical rigour;

others, whether out of weary pragmatism or in an admirable and well-intentioned spirit of reconciliation, hope that musicology might yet somehow come to accommodate both ‘old’ and ‘new’, that the division might be shown to exist more in theory than it does in practice, and that the two might even come to realize they have more in common than they first thought. However, neither is it my aim explicitly to ‘take sides’ where this particular issue is concerned – the binary taxonomies of the contemporary debate, of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ or of the ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’, tend to conceal rather than illuminate what were, and remain, complex disciplinary and sub-disciplinary developments – nor is it my intention simply to capitulate to a kind of fuzzy, ‘anything goes’ pluralism. Nevertheless, it remains my firm conviction that several aspects of an ostensibly ‘postmodern’ mode of thought are simply and inherently irreconcilable with a number of the presuppositions that must necessarily form the basis of any institutionalized research discipline – musicology included.

Chapter 1 provides a critical appraisal of the so-called ‘postmodern turn’ in musicological practice and (re)evaluates the critiques of ‘positivism’ and ‘formalism’ with which it is typically associated. It also considers the issues of ‘gender’ and ‘the canon’. Chapter 2 develops a theoretical model of academic discourse based in part on Jürgen Habermas’s theory of ‘communicative action’ and the ‘discursive redemption of validity claims’. It is argued that certain epistemological, methodological or normative presuppositions necessarily underwrite, and consequently serve to delimit, the legitimacy of the claims to knowledge which are constitutive of the study of music as an academic or institutionalized discourse. In some cases, this requirement can be seen to contradict certain developments in contemporary musicology, especially those that have been influenced by particular strands drawn from ‘postmodern’ theory. The chapter concludes by asking whether wider political and ethical imperatives can or should impact upon the contemporary study of music. Chapter 3 focuses on the notions of ‘mediation’ and the ‘music itself’. It examines different models of mediation – for example, those oriented toward production and those oriented toward reception – as well as the complex relationship that exists between music as an object of discursive knowledge and the discourse which seeks to know it. It concludes by arguing that a dialectical notion of the ‘music itself’ is a necessary presupposition of musicological enquiry. Chapter 4 compares and contrasts the work of two influential scholars: the German ‘critical theorist’, Theodor Adorno, and the contemporary ‘new musicologist’, Lawrence Kramer. By undertaking a comparative critique of several quite different approaches to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, Chapter 5 provides a more concrete context in which to locate the more abstract arguments developed in preceding chapters. The piece itself is chosen

simply because it has served as the object for such a diverse array of relevant interpretive and analytical studies. The final chapter summarizes and draws together the arguments developed in the preceding material. It is worth pointing out in advance that rather than building systematically toward a clinching concluding argument, the book's principal claims are bound up with, and emerge from, the text considered as a whole.

In developing these arguments, I have not – and could not – restrict myself only to those issues that are internal to the study of music alone. In fact, in many respects, it would be more accurate to describe this book as a critique of academic discourse which happens to take the study of music as its focus. Of course, to put it this way is to invite an obvious rejoinder: am I not in danger of making presumptive, generalizing claims about academic discourse based merely on an engagement with the study of music, while simultaneously making claims about the study of music that are themselves derived from an idealized, abstract notion of a generalized academic discourse? While this represents an important cautionary note for any enterprise such as this, I would contend that the argument developed here, and especially the central claim, is only really available from a position external to any individual disciplinary context. The challenge then becomes one of mediating between that which is a necessary condition of any academic discourse and that which, in this case, is unique to the study of music. Similar concerns might be voiced about the extent to which this book draws on specifically philosophical arguments: is such material relevant to the study of music and, in any case, is a nominal *musicologist* really equipped to deal with it? Again, while these certainly represent legitimate and pertinent questions, I would suggest that any interdisciplinary study is inevitably caught in this kind of paradox – where the level of expertise required to move within any one field seems always to place insurmountable intellectual demands on any one writer or reader who seeks to move within several. However, while it is true that one cannot engage with a particular disciplinary topic without a reasonable grasp of the theoretical framework(s) in which it is ordinarily articulated, one must also be careful to avoid a reification of means that serves simply to congeal an otherwise beneficial and reciprocal exchange, or that closes off perspectives that would otherwise remain unattainable. To put it another way, musicology has not asked these kinds of questions and philosophy has not asked them of musicology.

Chapter 1

A New Musicology?

It is now something of a cliché to observe that over the last decade or so musicology has undergone some kind of paradigmatic transformation.¹ The more crude, reductionist account of this development is sometimes presented in the manner of a quasi-redemptive narrative: once upon a time scholars laboured under outmoded, ideologically tainted, patriarchal, hegemonic, imperialistic, Western, positivist, formalist – in short, ‘modernist’ – presumption(s); until, some time around 1990, a handful of ‘new’ (mostly US) musicologists, armed with a battery of ‘postmodern’ and other literary or cultural theoretical devices, came forth to save musicology from itself. Just as once, on the very cusp of modernity, Kant had urged us to release ourselves from our self-imposed tutelage, from our dependence on tradition and myth, so now, with the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ turned full circle, and not without a certain irony, the ‘new’ musicology urged that we throw off the insidious shackles of the ‘modernist’ orthodoxy. Many of our most cherished concepts were revealed to be problematic fictions – ‘truth’, ‘structure’, ‘musical facts’, the ‘music itself’. In their place a new and exotic vocabulary infiltrated the hitherto austere domain of musicological discourse; the talk was now of ‘contingency’, ‘plurality’, ‘locality’, ‘difference’, ‘heterogeneity’, ‘dissemination’, ‘iterability’, ‘semiosis’. Of course few, if any, scholars would actually adhere to such a simplistic account of recent disciplinary developments; indeed, pointing up the clichéd nature of such accounts has become a kind of second-order cliché in itself. Yet whatever the claims and counter-claims, whatever the polemical rebuttals or reconciliatory gestures, the account of musicology’s transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’, from the ‘modern’ to the ‘postmodern’, has nevertheless secured a certain orthodoxy, especially at the more subterranean level of the disciplinary self-conscious.

Most historical accounts of the emergence of a ‘new’ musicology tend to locate the first proper articulation of its motivating impulses in Joseph Kerman’s article, ‘How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out’ (1980)

1 For general accounts of recent disciplinary developments see: Cook & Everist, 1999, [preface]; Kerman, 1991; Lochhead, 2000; Lorraine, 1993; McCreless, 1997; Miles, 1995; Powers, 1993; Samson, 1999; Scott, 2000 [introduction]; Treitler, 1995 & 1999; Williams, 2000 & 2001.

and his book, *Musicology* [published as *Contemplating Music* in the US] (1985). While the attempt to identify a ‘prima causa’ for any historical development inevitably risks sliding toward an untenable determinism or oversimplification, it is difficult to deny the part played by Kerman’s texts, even today, in consolidating the image of an ‘older’ (conservative, reactionary) discipline – defined by a musicological ‘positivism’ and an analytical ‘formalism’ – and the correlative need for a ‘newer’ (critical, progressive) direction. As Kofi Agawu argues: ‘His [Kerman’s] book of five years later, *Contemplating Music*, enabled a crystallisation of the offending categories as “positivism” and “formalism”. Although these terms carry considerable semantic and ideological baggage, their complex histories were subsequently suppressed in the drive to inform about the limits of theory-based analysis’ (Agawu, 1997, p.299). If, on the one hand, Cook and Everist rightly caution that ‘we seem to be well on the way to creating a disciplinary myth that divides musicological history into two discrete ages, the old and the new, separated by Kerman’s opening of Pandora’s box (or rather his public announcement that it was being opened)’ (Cook & Everist, 1999, p.viii), so, on the other hand, Jim Samson, in his contribution to the same edited collection, suggests that ‘the debates about formalism and positivism (the two were unhelpfully associated by Kerman) did indeed signal the end of a particular project, one of those mysterious caesuras which punctuate intellectual history and which no amount of context can fully explain’ (Samson, 1999, p.54). Of course, Kerman’s original texts preceded by some years the advent of a recognizable and self-consciously ‘postmodern turn’ in musicological practice; and in many ways his original blueprint for a more ‘humane’ form of music criticism now appears rather conservative, perhaps even tame, when compared to the rapid developments that have taken place in some areas of the discipline: ‘The type of criticism Kerman recommends is more like what used to be mainstream literary criticism – a patchwork of analysis, criticism, history and, possibly, aesthetics that would link music to underlying human values’ (Williams, 2001, p.6). It is instead with a cluster of influential texts, particularly Lawrence Kramer’s *Music as Cultural Practice* (1990), Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings* (1991) and Carolyn Abbate’s *Unsung Voices* (1991) – there are undoubtedly others – that a ‘new’ musicology really began to take shape, albeit that its chief protagonists would deny that it ever had any real unifying shape. That this particular period can justifiably be considered one of those points in the development of a discourse when a paradigm shift becomes properly aware of itself is evidenced not only by the appearance of self-consciously ‘new’ musicological writing in the early 1990s, but also by a marked increase in self-reflective discourse – for example, the ‘Approaches to the Discipline’ edition of *Current Musicology* (53, 1993) and the special edition of *The Journal of Musicology* (15 (3), 1997). Further evidence is provided by the fact that the

alleged paradigm shift itself became the target for a less proliferate, though at times no less polemical, ‘counter-reformation’ – typified, for example, in Pieter Van den Toorn’s *Music, Politics, and the Academy* (1995) or Kofi Agawu’s ‘Analysing Music Under the New Musicological Regime’ (1997). It is a sign of the cyclical rapidity with which intellectual trends (or fashions) develop and recede – perhaps mirroring the world at large – that the ‘new’ musicology is now seen by many as itself a historical moment already passed; and it is surely a sign of some considerable disciplinary dislocation that while some have navigated through and (well) beyond it, some continue as though it had never happened. Whatever one’s personal proclivities and whatever one’s evaluation of recent developments, one cannot ignore the radical disjunction not only between the objects of contemporary study but also between the very fundamental bases on which that study depends. If Cook and Everist are right in observing that ‘conquest is giving way to colonization, which is to say that controversy is giving way to compromise’ (Cook & Everist, 1999, p.x), it is not so clear that the fundamental issues on which that controversy depended have yet adequately been resolved, nor that the terms of a provisional compromise are coherently sustainable. The debate may indeed be ‘in danger of growing wearisome’ (Samson, 1999, p.54), yet rather than acting as a stimulus to a productive exploration of tensions that remain latent in disciplinary presupposition, a reconciliatory (or resigned) pluralism may well serve simply to sidestep what remains an entirely necessary and critical encounter.

Definitions

The attempt to represent, or account for, recent disciplinary developments is not helped by the manner in which the labels ‘new’, ‘postmodern’ and ‘critical’ are used, on some occasions and by some writers, to refer to quite distinct methodological or theoretical frameworks and yet are employed, on other occasions and by other writers, as relatively interchangeable. Hence, rather than it representing an unnecessary exercise in semantic pedantry, devoting at least some attention to the complex and often contradictory use of these various terms can help both to clarify the nature of recent disciplinary developments as well as to point to the manner in which those developments are self-reflectively perceived, or framed, by those involved. As has already been suggested, the phrase ‘new musicology’ has itself become rather ‘old’; perhaps we have witnessed ‘the ageing of the new musicology’ – as Adorno might have put it. It seems to refer more to the fruits of a particular historical moment than to an underlying movement that has continued into the present, albeit that this may have less to do with its substantive impact and everything to do with the well-documented

terminological paradox that inevitably befalls the historically ‘new’. The label ‘postmodern’, however, has lost none of its actuality, even though it is more often than not closely associated, if not directly identified, with the ‘new’ musicology: ‘Since the mid-1980s another and mostly different group of authors have developed a “postmodern” musicology, defining new paradigms of understanding music in general. The resulting “New Musicology” has indeed generated vital debate ...’ (Lochhead, 2002, p.2). While some of that which came to be called ‘new’ musicology was certainly influenced by, or partly dependent upon, ‘postmodern’ theory in one form or another, it is also clear that the ramifications of postmodern theory extend well beyond the localized historical (and geographical) context with which the ‘new’ musicology is, or was, typically associated, and in such a way that the two terms can no longer be conceived as mutually exhaustive. In fact, if one considers that Susan McClary, for example, was writing from a feminist perspective that made no explicit reference to ‘postmodern’ theory – in fact, the feminism underlying her earlier work is sometimes criticized precisely for its alleged ‘essentialism’ and hence ultimate dependence upon ‘modernist’ epistemology – and that Lawrence Kramer, for example, at least in his earlier work, sought to synthesize hermeneutics, ‘thick historicism’ and speech-act theory – albeit the latter incorporating poststructuralist adaptations thereof – then it remains less than clear why this ‘new’ musicology is so often directly conflated with an alleged ‘postmodern turn’. Nevertheless, fervently embraced by some, and studiously avoided by others, the term ‘postmodern’ undeniably has played a significant role in determining the focus and trajectory of a significant part of contemporary musicological study. Yet whether serving as a rallying call for a ‘new’ type of musicology, as a stylistic category for a ‘new’ type of music, or as a useful term of abuse for all that is superficial, faddish and basically wrong with the contemporary study of music, the term’s import remains infuriatingly imprecise. Genealogical complexity, interdisciplinary assimilation and, it has to be said, wilful ignorance on the part of some have all contributed to a situation in which the term ‘postmodern’ seems increasingly to refer to so many things that one might reasonably argue it can no longer be said usefully to refer to anything; and the situation is exacerbated, from a musicological perspective, by the fact that ‘postmodern’ can refer to the object studied, to the theoretical assumptions underlying a particular way of engaging with an object or to the general condition of the discipline itself. In this respect the term has become less than useful and the principal aim in this chapter is to argue that the deployment of the term is often unhelpfully, if not wilfully, misleading – especially in its implicit dependence upon, or retro-active construction of, a supposedly ‘modernist’ musicology against which it is then seen to react or beyond which it is alleged to have ‘progressed’.

While the label ‘critical musicology’ avoids the historical paradox of the ‘new’ and some of the semantic ambiguities inherent in the ‘postmodern’, it nevertheless suffers some complexities of its own. In a rather basic sense it can tend to imply that other ‘traditional’ approaches are innately un- or non-critical, when arguably all scholarly work is by definition critical in intent – one need only think of that hallmark of ‘positivist’ scholarship, the ‘critical edition’. The term ‘critical’ has also been used interchangeably with ‘new’ (or ‘postmodern’). Stephen Miles, for example, views the work of Rose Subotnik, Lawrence Kramer and Susan McClary as paradigmatic instances of ‘critical musicology’ (Miles, 1997, p.722). However, critical musicology is more typically understood to have clear etymological and historical links with ‘critical theory’, in which case ‘critical musicology’ simply and obviously refers to the application of critical theory within a musicological context. Yet critical theory itself can refer to two different, if inclusively related, bodies of thought. In its narrower sense, ‘Critical Theory’ proper (often capitalized) tends to refer to a quite specific German tradition that is normally associated with the various ‘generations’ of the so-called Frankfurt School – whose leading figures include Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (first generation) and Jürgen Habermas (second generation). At a more generic level, however, ‘critical theory’, especially in the arts, humanities and social sciences, tends simply to mean ‘theory’ per se – a general body of inter- or supra-disciplinary material that incorporates everything from postmodern and poststructuralist theory through to postfeminist and postcolonial theory (notice the ‘posts’). As Martin Morris observes, ‘the appellation critical theory has proliferated in recent decades. It no longer primarily refers to the Frankfurt tradition but can apply to diverse theoretical perspectives and preoccupations in fields such as sociological theory, historiography, literary theory, and aesthetic criticism’ (Morris, 2001, p.3). If one then considers that some Frankfurt Critical Theory – on which some musicology has drawn – is explicitly opposed to several tenets that are central to much postmodern or poststructuralist discourse – on which much musicology has drawn – then the semantic and theoretical confusion appears complete. At its worst, the phrase ‘critical musicology’, like ‘postmodern musicology’, appears to signify only negatively what it is not. Robert Fink, for example, has described the ‘new’ musicology as a ‘gawky, speculative set of interdisciplinary trends that bore little resemblance to the traditional discipline whose methodological and ideological rigidity popular music scholars have feared and shunned for decades’ (Fink, 1998, p.137). Yet any conception that is able to include within its scope such diverse, disparate and often contradictory theoretical orientations as post-Marxist cultural theory, French poststructuralism or Lacanian psychoanalysis is surely impoverished, especially if it depends upon a correlatively crude depiction of that which it is not – the ‘traditional

discipline'. I will return to this point toward the end of the present chapter.

The semantic ambiguity alluded to above also serves to highlight an interesting (inter)national or geographical perspective. The general paradigm shift referred to here – whether designated 'new' or 'postmodern' – was, and in some respects still is, a predominantly Anglo-American affair, and one mostly internal to the musicology of Western 'high-art' culture. Many of its claims to originality depend upon a notably insular conception of its own disciplinary tradition(s). As Alastair Williams notes, for example, 'the new musicology's "discovery" that music is a contextual art is strikingly ironic when one considers that the most developed existing theory of modernism – Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* – was written by a man fascinated by the intersections of music, sociology and philosophy' (Williams, 1998, p.281); and 'popular musicology' and ethnomusicology had both presumed the equal scholarly worth of studying all music(s) long before post-modernism appeared on the scene to 'problematize' the high–low divide or deconstruct underlying canonic presuppositions. Yet even within the Anglo-American orbit there remain notable distinctions. The 'new' musicology is, or was, primarily a US phenomenon; and the 'postmodern' discourse on which it and those influenced by it drew tends often to have been filtered through US literary and cultural studies. Adam Krims, for example, has noted that 'specifically literary forms of post-structuralist theory have been more influential in "New Musicology"' than they have been in popular music studies (which is not to say that there has been no literary-theoretical influence in the latter). Thus, issues like pleasure and sexuality, along with the manners of speaking culled from French traditions, predominate more in the scholarship of classical, than of popular, music' (Krims, 2000, p.22). While one cannot overlook obvious commonalities of approach or reciprocity of influence, developments in the UK have tended to take a slightly different path. Derek Scott observes that 'critical musicologists in the UK are generally agreed that the biggest problem facing current musicology is the collapse of the binary divide between pop and classical; it is the fundamental importance accorded to this perception that *sets them apart* from the "new musicologists" of the USA, who tend (with few exceptions) to concentrate on canonic works' (Scott, 2001, p.145, my emphasis). While this may be true of those whose primary interests incorporate 'popular' music(s), there is also an identifiable British tradition, often focused on twentieth-century 'high-art' music, which tends to synthesize formal analytical concerns with a range of critical perspectives drawn more from German or post-Marxist thought than from the French-oriented (post)structuralist frameworks typically adopted by 'new' or 'postmodern' musicologies.

A final feature of the 'new' musicology, and a significant part of more

recent musicology, is a kind of second-order or ‘parasitic’ appropriation of theoretical frameworks that were originally developed with things other than music in mind. Joseph Kerman once famously observed that ‘nearly all musical thinkers travel at a respectful distance behind the latest chariots (or bandwagons) of intellectual life in general’ (Kerman, 1985, p.17). If, in the meantime, musicology has made up some considerable ground, as Kerman himself later acknowledged (Kerman, 1991), then the discipline still appears, even at the time of writing, to suffer from a noticeable ‘trade deficit’ in respect of the flow of ideas. Musicology may well have ‘caught up with the times’ in respect of its having advanced beyond a tentative encounter with phenomenology or early structuralism and toward a more comfortable accommodation with the central tenets of, say, poststructuralism or postfeminist discourse. Yet one rarely hears of psychoanalysts, anthropologists or sociologists mining the resources of contemporary musicology; one is far more likely to encounter a paper on ‘Schumann and the Lacanian “Real”’ than on ‘Structural Signification and Prolongation: A Schenkerian Take on Adolescent Angst’. As Kerman also observed, ‘it seems to me that the most fruitful grafts upon recent musicology have come not from other music disciplines; rather they have come from areas of thought outside of music, in the humanities and social sciences’ (Kerman, 1991, p.132). Whether or not those grafts have proved entirely ‘fruitful’ remains an open question; nevertheless, Kerman was certainly right to point to contemporary musicology’s apparent dependence on ‘foreign imports’. Hence, it is pertinent not only to seek out the factors behind this asymmetric crisis in methodological confidence but also, as is the aim here, to examine some of the difficulties that are encountered when an explicitly self-reflective musicology fails to reflect on problems that remain latent in those extra-musical appropriations. Harold Powers offered the following explanation for this apparent disparity in interdisciplinary influence: ‘Maybe people who take up the academic study of music are just naturally a bit slower and duller than their quick-witted colleagues in other humanistic fields. Perhaps I shouldn’t dismiss the possibility; but I think it more likely that musical data are more resistant to verbal explication than the data in other humanistic domains’ (Powers, 1993, p.6). Certainly, a significant number of the theoretical frameworks appropriated by the ‘new’ musicology originated in, or were filtered through, branches of literary or cultural studies that were themselves influenced by poststructuralist theory – Krims again notes that ‘much of the analysis-oriented music theory and musicology has tended to gravitate toward critical theory that is directed toward the literary text’ (Krims, 1998, p.298). Hence, its adaptation for the purpose of musical interpretation often involves a kind of ‘two-step’ manoeuvre in which music *first* has to be parsed, conceptualized or packaged as (though it were) a ‘language’, or at least conceived as a semiotic field with its own semantic

or signifying plane, before it can *then* be interpreted in accordance with the relevant theoretical framework. Yet it cannot simply be, as Powers suggests, that musical data are strictly more resistant to verbal explication – musicologists have always found more than enough to say about music – but rather that musicology, precisely because of music’s lacking an explicit semantic dimension, *already* comprised a number of highly developed (sub-)disciplines – theory, analysis, sketch-study, biography – each of which had its own particular set of methodological assumptions and, in some instances, its own specialized vocabulary. To put it another way, it is not so much that musical data are strictly resistant *to* verbal explication, but rather that they are more resistant to being *treated as* verbal (semantic, signifying, communicative) data. Of course, those who are sympathetic to recent developments would most likely argue that it is precisely the notion of music’s unique ‘autonomy’ that they are challenging; that it is not so much that music really *is* more resistant to being understood as a cultural text or as a semiotic field, but rather, due to complex historical and institutional factors, the (Romantic/modernist) ideology of aesthetic autonomy is or was more deeply ingrained in the musical and musicological consciousness. I will return to this argument in Chapter 3.

Nevertheless, the appropriation of ‘theory’ for the purpose of musical interpretation – rather than for the self-reflective critique of disciplinary practice – has often proved less than convincing. Indeed, one of the more disconcerting aspects of this ‘discursive kleptomania’ is the way in which various figures or ‘thinkers’ – the latest ‘big things’ on the intellectual scene – are so quickly appropriated and then subsequently discarded. It is worth pointing out, in advance, that I have in mind here the appropriation of various critical theoretical or conceptual frameworks for the interpretation of particular musical works or utterances. Some might argue that this would appear to implicate the significant reference to, and use made of, the work of Jürgen Habermas, especially in Chapter 2. However, I there engage with one specific aspect of Habermas’s theory of communicative discourse in order to develop my own argument concerning, precisely, the nature of institutional discourse. No doubt the imperatives of grants, tenure and promotion play a role in compelling scholars both to carve out an original niche or ‘disciplinary identity’ for themselves as well as to remain conversant with the latest trends. Yet it can sometimes appear as though musicologists are simply ransacking the library of twentieth-century thought as part of some elaborate exercise in which musical works are pushed through a variety of theoretical sieves in the hope that something of interest might emerge on the other side. Alan How, for example, rightly warns against ‘the production and commodification of ever new ideas, concepts and authors’ and suggests that while society and those of its objects deemed worthy of study may change, ‘disciplines that merely mimic this tendency

through their own self-proliferation weaken themselves by ignoring the accumulated wisdom of their own hard-won insights' (How, 2003, p.171). One feels compelled to ask why it is the case, if some proponents of the 'new' or 'critical' musicology are to be believed, that musicology is now only able adequately to deal with music by rejecting its own traditional precepts and highly developed and sophisticated methodologies and replacing them with this or that theoretical or conceptual framework appropriated from the ever-growing pantheon of 'key thinkers' – most of whom are the subject of innumerable 'short introduction' or 'companion' series ('buy Foucault and Lacan and get Derrida free!'), and none of whom are musicians or musicologists. Of course, none of this is to imply that musicology should immediately close, or re-close, those genuinely inter-disciplinary borders across which it might seek a reciprocally beneficial dynamic; it is to urge caution, however, that individual theoretical or conceptual frameworks are not simply so many convenient, revitalizing tools that one can empty of content (and history) and then bolt on to whatever subject matter one happens to be dealing with.

Indeed, a second and related problem stems, ironically, from the comparatively 'uncritical' manner in which various 'critical' theories have been mobilized for the purpose of interpreting music. The standard template for much of this kind of work typically requires that one summarize the basic idea or set of axiomatic concepts – say, 'difference', 'sign' or 'power' – and then proceed to map the latter onto the interpretation of a given musical work or utterance. However, a more critical reflection on the appropriated theoretical or conceptual framework itself is often lacking. That the work of a Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva or Žižek is typically received with greater sympathy *outside* of, rather than within, the disciplinary context in which it originated should at least give some pause for thought. For example – taking just one figure who has figured heavily in recent musicological discourse – many of Jacques Lacan's principal texts, certainly those that incorporate the material most often adopted for the purpose of musicological application, were written some several decades ago; his theory developed over time, is one among many and remains highly contentious within the psychoanalytic community itself; and an extensive secondary literature includes a number of complex and critical studies mounted from a variety of psychoanalytical, philosophical and critical-theoretical perspectives. Yet it can sometimes appear as though some musicologists have absorbed their knowledge of Lacan not from a detailed exploration of the original texts themselves, but from a cursory study of a comparatively limited secondary literature; or have appropriated it via assimilative work undertaken in other disciplinary fields (this, incidentally, would go some way to explaining the notable literary or cultural studies inflection that often appears to inform musicological appropriations

of Lacan's work). Such appropriation can, on occasion, amount to little more than a standard summary of the 'three registers' (the 'imaginary', the 'symbolic' and the 'real') – of the sort typically encountered in those numerous 'short introductions' or 'companions' – followed by a tentative attempt analogically to map them onto the interpretation of a particular musical work. One is far more likely to encounter a statement of the type, 'Lacan teaches us that the Real is forever out of our grasp and can only be encountered in moments of traumatic disassociation. The intrusion of the dissonant melody in bar fifteen could be interpreted in precisely these terms', than of the type, 'Lacan's notion of the Real is but one component within a highly contentious and problematic theory. Before attempting coherently to interpret any piece of music in these terms it is necessary to consider his work as a whole and, more importantly, to consider the many objections that have been levelled at his theory, especially by those who remain actively engaged in contemporary psychoanalytical or philosophical research.' It is as though a scholar of, say, Romantic literature were to appropriate Schenker's theory, perhaps through an introductory textbook or through one particular analytical instance, and then proceed to read off 'structural levels', 'middleground neighbour motions' or 'linear progressions' in various literary or poetic works of the early nineteenth century. Of course, one should not prejudge the utility or viability of such an enterprise, yet it would appear no more abstruse, and no less in need of the most careful elaboration, than the attempt to appropriate the work of Derrida, Kristeva or Deleuze for the interpretation of a Beethoven piano sonata. Hence, while it is certainly true that our understanding of music can be, and has been, enriched by an expansion in the interpretive and analytical methodologies available to us, we should remain alert to the complex of problems that are encountered whenever 'new' theoretical frameworks are brought to bear on objects originally conceived apart from them.

The developments alluded to above are often portrayed as a necessary 'overcoming' of the limitations of a more traditional musicology. In the remaining sections of this chapter I consider a number of 'critical issues', supposedly intrinsic to an alleged paradigm shift within musicology, with a view to suggesting that some of them are not quite so 'new' or quite so 'postmodern', or indeed quite so necessary or desirable, as is sometimes suggested.

Positivism

If one were asked to vote for *the* musicological 'straw target' of the past two decades, then 'positivism' would surely prove a strong contender. Having entered into the musicological consciousness largely as a result of

Joseph Kerman's *Musicology* (1985), the term continues to serve as a convenient epithet for all that is 'old' and outmoded. It tends to evoke images of musty archives, austere leaden papers and a suffocating attention to detail – all in marked contrast to the exhilarating interpretive flamboyance of the contemporary critical enterprise. However, before examining 'positivism' as it typically relates to musicological enquiry, it may be useful to locate the term within a broader historical and philosophical context.

As a distinct 'school of thought' positivism was originally associated with the doctrines of the nineteenth-century French philosopher and sociologist Auguste Comte, who sought to establish a form of sociological enquiry that operated in accordance with the presuppositions and dictates of the natural sciences; later, and within the narrower context of the Vienna Circle, what is commonly referred to as 'logical positivism' (or logical empiricism) dictated that what is knowable and hence ultimately meaningful is limited to that which is either empirically verifiable or logically self-evident. However, as Brian Fay suggests, 'in contemporary thought the term "positivism" has come to refer to a broadly empiricist approach to knowledge rather than the specific doctrines of Saint-Simon and Comte ... or the logical positivists of the so-called Vienna Circle' (Fay, 1996, p.90). At a philosophical level it is closely related to the move away from a speculative, world-disclosing or system-building mode of thought and toward what effectively becomes either a philosophy *of* science or even a philosophy *as* science; philosophy no longer claims to disclose (necessarily metaphysical) truths about the world, but instead concentrates on analysing and understanding how science can justifiably claim to know the world. As Paul O'Grady puts it: 'It was thought that philosophy could help the pursuit of the absolute conception of reality first of all by supplying epistemological foundations for it. However, after many failed attempts at this, other philosophers appropriated the more modest task of clarifying the meanings and methods of the primary investigators (the scientists)' (O'Grady, 2002, p.7). In whatever cast, positivism is clearly related both to a longstanding empiricist tradition as well as to twentieth-century Anglo-American 'analytical' or 'ordinary language' traditions.

The term 'positivism' also has a long, complex and often contentious history of use in the social sciences – albeit that this cannot be viewed apart from the philosophical context just outlined. Where the social sciences are specifically concerned, positivism has typically come to refer to what is best comprehended as a particular epistemological or methodological orientation that serves to underpin a certain type of sociological study. Its characteristic tenets are usefully summarized by Thomas McCarthy:

1 The unity of scientific method ... the methodological procedures of natural sciences are applicable to the sciences of man.

2 Scientific investigation, whether of social or non-social phenomena, aims at the discovery of lawlike generalisations that can function as premises in deductive explanations and predictions.

3 The relation of theory to practice is primarily technical ... no 'ought' can be derived from an 'is', no 'value' from a 'fact'. Scientific inquiry is itself 'value-free'; it strives only for objective (intersubjectively testable) value-neutral results.

4 The hallmark of scientific knowledge is precisely its testability (in principle) ... the empirical basis of science is composed of observation statements ... that can be said either to repeat perceptual experiences or, at least, to be motivated by them. (McCarthy, 1978, pp.138–9)

It is unlikely that many scholars strictly and explicitly adhere to such a set of axioms; and, in practice, where the humanities and social sciences are concerned, it would seem that applications of positivism tend instead to vacillate between a less commonly encountered strong(er) version, which advocates the extension of a strict natural-scientific method into all realms of human understanding – or at least its acceptance as a precondition for meaningful knowledge – and a more commonly encountered weak(er) version, which emphasizes the virtues of empirical verifiability and value-free enquiry.

Of course, one of the key objections to a positivist conception of knowledge, especially where the social sciences are concerned, is that the objects of study – social, cultural and historical phenomena, or at least those aspects thereof that are of primary interest – are not themselves subject to causal laws; hence they cannot adequately be grasped by the kind of hypothetical or causal–predictive theoretical constructs that are typically associated with the natural sciences. A second objection, albeit related to the first, is that where such phenomena *are* treated in this manner – as they are for example within certain strands of cognitive psychology or empirical sociology – such methodologies tend to objectify individuals in such a way that, whether intentionally or not, the latter are rendered (more) pliable to the demands of instrumental or administrative control. This was, of course, one of the motivating factors behind the Frankfurt School's dismissal of positivist social science in favour of a 'critical social theory'; and it remains a key component in the long-running German debate concerning the respective status of the *Geistes-* and *Naturwissenschaften* (see especially Adorno, 1976). In this context, it is worth emphasizing another fundamental distinction between Frankfurt Critical Theory and 'post-modern' theory: their respective response to, and criticism of, positivism. Whereas postmodern theory tends to reject positivism because it also rejects, among other things, the traditional notions of 'truth' and 'reality' on which the latter depends, Frankfurt Critical Theory rejects positivism because, in seeking only to convey the world 'objectively' or 'as it is', positivism – or a positivist social science – actually serves to occlude a

deeper reality and to promote an adaptation to, or an acquiescence in, a seemingly inevitable status quo that is in fact contingent and (potentially) mutable. Critical Theory, as one would expect given its Freudian–Marxist heritage, does not start out strictly by questioning the notion of there being a true ‘reality’ in itself or by challenging the belief that one can ever ascertain the ‘facts’ about a given state of affairs. Instead, its aim is to disrupt the process through which ‘facts’ become reified affirmations of ‘what is’ at the expense of ‘what could be (otherwise)’. Hence, for Critical Theory, society must be conceived as a dynamic totality – a concept, incidentally, to which most postmodern sensibility is antipathetic in the extreme; for Critical Theory, society must become the object of a ‘dialectical’ critique that is able to reveal its immanent contradictions. For ‘postmodern’ theory, however, there is no pristine ‘reality’ lurking beneath the veil of ideological deception because, ultimately, there simply is no ‘beneath’. However, this fundamental, axiomatic distinction is often occluded by talk of a ‘new’ or ‘critical’ musicology. In some respects, the differences between Critical Theory and ‘postmodern theory’ are actually greater than those between a ‘traditional’ historical musicology and certain manifestations of a nominally ‘new’ one. Indeed, the radical differences that exist between a number of intellectual currents that are typically described as, or included within the ambit of, ‘critical’ or ‘postmodern’ theory suggest that far greater care should be exercised in delineating their various applications and appropriations in the context of contemporary musicology.

Thomas McCarthy has observed that ‘the term *positivism* now functions more as a polemical epithet than as a designation for a distinct philosophical movement’ (McCarthy, 1978, p.137) – and this is certainly true of contemporary musicology. As has been noted, Joseph Kerman played a significant role in crystallizing the terms in which an ‘older’ musicology would come to be understood in relation to subsequent disciplinary developments. The following provides a reasonable summary of what he intended by a ‘positivist musicology’: ‘The emphasis was heavily on fact. New manuscripts were discovered and described, archives were reported on, dates were established, cantus firmi traced from one work and one composer to another. Musicologists dealt mainly in *the verifiable, the objective, the uncontroversial and the positive*’ (Kerman, 1985, p.42, my emphasis); and this would appear to be what the majority of musicologists have in mind when they refer to ‘positivism’. Kerman cites R.G. Collingwood’s account of nineteenth-century German historiography as an apt depiction of musicology in the 1950s:

Historians set to work to ascertain all the facts they could. The result was a vast increase of detailed historical knowledge, based on an unprecedented degree of accurate and critical examination of evidence. This was the age which enriched

history by the compilation of vast masses of carefully sifted material.... But all through this period there was a certain uneasiness about the ultimate purpose of this detailed research. *It had been undertaken in obedience to the spirit of positivism according to which the ascertaining of facts was only the first stage of a process whose second stage was the discovery of laws.* (Cited in Kerman, 1985, pp.43–4, my emphasis)

However, for Kerman, the ‘second stage’ in this process was not to be ‘the discovery of laws’, but instead, as previously noted, ‘criticism’. Hence, in Kerman’s scheme, positivism is effectively stripped of its causal–predictive, (quasi-)scientific properties and instead is identified with what one might simply term a kind of flat ‘historical description’. As Leo Treitler observes: “Since the publication of Joseph Kerman’s *Contemplating Music* [*Musicology* in the UK], a *watered-down notion of positivism* has gone into the label “positivist musicology”, applied to that branch of musicological activity that entails “the presentation of the texts of early music and facts and figures about it”” (Treitler, 1999, p.376, my emphasis). It is interesting to note that in Treitler’s gloss on the impact of Kerman’s intervention, ‘positivism’ is associated not only with a particular epistemological or methodological orientation, but also with a quite specific object-domain – ‘early music’ – and a quite specific set of variables or data by means of which the objects within that domain are to be studied – ‘the facts and figures about it’. It is likely that this perception derives in part from the nature of musicological research in the era that served as Kerman’s primary focus; having said that, it is equally *unlikely* that many musicologists would now actually understand ‘positivism’ as somehow uniquely bound to the study of ‘early music’. Instead, the term’s primary import appears to be methodological or epistemological; it is supposed to describe a particular way of doing musicology, a particular set of aims and assumptions. Yet a lack of clarity in arguments relating to positivism from an epistemological or methodological perspective – or indeed its simplistic and wholesale rejection – has rendered much contemporary discussion unwilling, or perhaps unable, to determine whether ‘positivism’ is an inherently inappropriate paradigm for the study of music per se, an inappropriate paradigm for the study of some aspects of music but not for others, or a necessary (first) component within a more complex and systematic framework of interpretive understanding. On the one hand, if one insists that (a rigorously conceived) positivism is an ‘all or nothing’ doctrine that must by definition encompass all conceivably meaningful knowledge, then clearly it cannot function simply as one component, element or stage within some broader epistemological or methodological scheme. On the other hand, if one accepts a more deflationary notion of positivism as merely determining the epistemological conditions for, or constraints that are enacted upon, a certain kind of knowledge – say, knowledge of how things in an empirical, ‘third-person’

world must necessarily be presumed to be – then this would appear to render it more than relevant to any form of academic discourse.

There is a tendency, in at least some ‘new’ or ‘critical’ musicological writing, to imply that positivism is simply and inherently a ‘bad thing’. As Terry Eagleton observes, in relation to the study of history, ‘there would also seem to be those for whom utterances like “Lord John Russell then became Prime Minister” are insidious instances of “positivism”’ (Eagleton, 1996, p.12). Yet it is clear that the weak(er) version of ‘positivism’ can actually incorporate a strikingly diverse range of research activities. For example, it might include: establishing the provenance of a given work, the biographical details for a given composer, or the financial transactions of a seventeenth-century opera-house; collating data on the educational arrangements at a medieval cathedral or the sales figures for a particular genre of popular music; or investigating, at an empirical level, the emotional or cognitive reaction of listeners to a particular piece of music. Although such undertakings might be categorized as historical musicology and the sociology or psychology of music respectively, they all embody a common set of methodological and epistemological assumptions. They also account for a very significant proportion of contemporary musicological research; in fact, it is difficult to envisage any research project that does not in some way, at some level, in relation to some of its material, rely upon a weak positivism in establishing its basic terms of reference.

While it is certainly true that, traditionally, historical musicology (or positivist musicology in Kerman’s terms) focused on a relatively narrow range of musical production and did so in a relatively narrow way, this could just as easily suggest that the positivist ideal was itself distorted by ideological currents external to it. The exclusive focus on specific repertoires – Western European, classical, high-art – and the way in which these were usually articulated in terms of a uni-linear flow of stylistic influence along a chain of individual masterworks and great composers has usefully and rightly been challenged. Feminist critique (the topic of the next section) has interrogated the exclusion of women’s music from the canonic pantheon of great works; ethnographic critique has questioned the exclusion or portrayal of non-Western music; within the ‘canon’ there has been an ever-increasing attempt to foreground or investigate once marginalized or ‘minor’ composers; and ‘popular musicology’ is compelling a gradual, if at times rather grudging, acceptance of popular music as a viable object of musicological study. Yet many strands within feminist, cultural, post-colonial and various other forms of musicological ‘critique’ can and do operate quite comfortably within the traditional methodological assumptions of the ‘old’, ‘positivist’ musicology. Hence, it is inaccurate to attribute the fact that historical musicology traditionally focused on a narrow repertoire to some suspect ideological bias inherent within the positivist methodology

itself. On the contrary, there may be an element of inconsistency or even hypocrisy in the argument of those who reject an allegedly 'positivist' paradigm by means of a reified categorization that tends to flatten out and ignore the sophistication of the methodological reflection that has shaped, and continues to shape, particular modes of historical enquiry. The next two sections will seek to elaborate this point in more detail.

Gender

'Gender and representation' is typically viewed as one of the defining issues for the 'new' or 'critical' musicologies. While it is impossible coherently to subsume within the ambit of a unified 'feminist' musicological practice the many and often disparate interests and approaches that are, and have been, taken up by scholars working in this field, it is nevertheless clear that they are seen by many as at least united in a shared rejection of older 'positivist' or 'objective' musicological practices, in which the issues of gender and representation were considered irrelevant or actively suppressed. My aim in this relatively brief section is not to provide a comprehensive overview of feminist scholarship in contemporary musicological practice – this would most likely require more than one book in itself – but instead to focus on one very precise issue: the extent to which a concern with 'gender', or the 'representation of gender', can justifiably be deemed an inherently 'new', 'critical' or even 'postmodern' development.

In her book, *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary lists five groups of issues that she deems relevant to, or constitutive of, a feminist-oriented musicological practice: 'Musical constructions of gender and sexuality'; 'Gendered aspects of traditional music theory'; 'Gender and sexuality in musical narrative'; 'Music as a gendered discourse'; 'Discursive strategies of women musicians' (McClary, 1991, pp.7–19). These might be compared with the three principal categories of feminist art history identified by Karen-Edis Barzman: a focus on 'female producers of material culture ... and on female-produced objects and their texts ...'; a consideration of 'women as the object of the look rather than as the subject of the look – not women artists but Woman in representation'; a shift from 'an exclusive focus on material production to one that includes or even privileges reception' because 'if what happens at the moment of reading is as important in the process of meaning-production as the conditions and events surrounding the creation of the object/text itself, then audience, address, and reception are legitimate and necessary objects of our inquiry' (Barzman, 1994, pp.328–31). We might also consider a feminist critique of the institution of musicology itself (see, for example, Cusick, 1999).

By combining, refining and reordering the above it is possible to derive

at least seven issues, strategies or emphases that are relevant to a feminist or gender-oriented disciplinary practice – the logic behind the ordering should become apparent in the ensuing commentary:

- 1 the discovery or rediscovery of music composed by women;
- 2 the history of the roles that have been played by women in the production, reproduction and consumption of music;
- 3 the use of gendered codes in the description and technical explication of music;
- 4 the portrayal of women in music with explicit textual content;
- 5 the implication of gendered codes in (un-texted) musical material;
- 6 the role or significance of music in actively shaping, constructing or resisting particular forms or notions of gendered identity;
- 7 the extent to which women have been excluded from, or treated unequally within, the institutional framework of musicology itself.

It is clear that grouping together all of these issues or categories as simply so many constituent components within a unified and coherent ‘feminist musicology’ only serves to efface some very real differences between them. It is therefore worth examining each of them in greater detail.

1 The Discovery or Rediscovery of Music Composed by Women

This undertaking generally appropriates the traditional tools of, and operates in accordance with the traditional precepts of, historical musicology; it collates historical and biographical facts pertaining to the composition of music by women. The *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* is a good example of the kind of publication in which this type of scholarly work might result. It remains ‘non-critical’ to the extent that it satisfies itself with historical or factual description – albeit that it may be motivated by an underlying reaction to the way in which music composed by women has been suppressed as a viable object of musicological investigation. As Williams observes: ‘Given the overwhelming gender imbalance in the canon, it was not surprising that the first efforts in feminist musicology followed the lead of literary theory and were directed at the study and documentation of female artists. Such projects dispute unstated priorities, *but can use standard procedures to investigate music by women without immediately threatening positivist methodology*’ (Williams, 2001, p.49, my emphasis). Of course, the example afforded by the *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* also points up a kind of double-bind in which such enterprises almost inevitably find themselves: they risk re-inscribing the very distinction they are attempting to efface – in short, there is no *New Grove Dictionary of Men Composers*. The more fundamental point, however, is that from a *methodological* perspective

there is nothing particularly ‘new’, ‘critical’ or ‘postmodern’ about enlarging the domain of music deemed ‘eligible’ or ‘appropriate’ for musicological study to include that composed by women.

2 *The History of the Roles which have been played by Women in the Production, Reproduction and Consumption of Music*

This is closely related to (1), ‘the discovery or rediscovery of music composed by women’, and will typically employ similar forms of historical and documentary research. In fact, an interest in the exclusion of women from, or the institutional suppression of the roles played by women in, the production, reproduction and consumption of music generally dovetails with the (re)discovery and critical editing of music composed by women. As Cusick puts it: ‘The feminist musicologies that ask, Where are the women? seek to rescue from obscurity the women and the women’s musical work (compositional or otherwise) that have been marginalized in musicology’s narratives. This attempted rescue is avowedly performed for the sake of giving musical women in our time an empowering awareness that they are part of a tradition’ (Cusick, 1999, p.484). Again, from a methodological perspective, there is nothing to distinguish this from other forms of historical research. In fact, both of these undertakings – researching music composed by women and researching the roles played by women – may ultimately serve to reinforce several of the methodological or even institutional frameworks which they are sometimes alleged to challenge.

3 *The Use of Gendered Codes in the Description and Technical Explication of Music*

This refers to the way in which music, whether in academic or general discourse, is sometimes described or accounted for through the use of terms that are explicitly gendered or that carry implicit gender connotations. Although examining the deployment of gendered terminology in the description or technical explication of music – musicological or otherwise – will rely in part upon conventional historical and documentary research, there is an important difference between this and those undertakings outlined in (1) and (2). A convincing account will necessarily depend upon a robust theoretical framework within which, or in accordance with which, the function of such codes can be related to identifiable and demonstrably ideological gender constructions which, in turn, can be shown, implicitly or explicitly, to reinforce particular constitutive moments within an encompassing set of patriarchal assumptions. For example, the observation, ‘in his treaty of 1834 x refers to masculine and feminine themes’, is empirically verifiable in a way that the interpretive claim, ‘this demonstrates

how patriarchal values manifest themselves in writing about music', is not, unless furnished with coherent theoretical support.

4 The Portrayal of Women in Music with Explicit Textual Content

This theme is closely allied with that outlined in (3). Although it, too, will involve historical, documentary or analytical research, at least in establishing its terms of reference, its ultimate intent is to develop a critical account of, or oppositional challenge to, the way in which women are typically represented in music (in canonic works typically composed by men). Cusick, for example, claims that 'it is all too clear that many canonic works that overtly represent women also represent institutionalized misogyny' (Cusick, 1999, p.482).

5 The Implication of Gendered Codes in (un-texted) Musical Material

This is similar in some respects to (3) and (4), although it is likely to involve a greater emphasis on close reading or some form of analytical work. More importantly, the comprehensibility of its claims will depend upon its establishing a convincing theoretical account of the mediating mechanism(s) by virtue of which particular constructions of gender manifest themselves within the fabric of the musical material itself.

6 The Role or Significance of Music in Actively Shaping, Constructing or Resisting Specific Gendered Identities

This is the most common contemporary concern – and the most complex. It is seen by many to represent a necessary move beyond the 'essentialism' implicit in attempts to interpret particular musical structures as concretely and immutably 'gendered'. Again, as with (5), the comprehensibility of its claims will depend upon its successfully establishing or appropriating a convincing theoretical account of gender construction in addition to its furnishing a verifiable account of the mechanisms or processes through which music actively works to shape, construct or resist particular notions of gendered identity.

7 The Extent to which Women have been Excluded from, or Treated Unequally within, the Institutional Framework of Musicology itself

This differs from the topics (1) through (6) in so far as here it is musicology, rather than music, that serves as the explicit object of study. To that extent this belongs to what I have termed 'meta-discourse'.

Taken as a whole, the list demonstrates how misleading and

inappropriate it is to refer to ‘feminist critique’ as one unified element within an encompassing ‘new’ or ‘critical’ musicology. While it is true that all of the issues or strategies described above share certain assumptions about the role of (ideological) notions or constructions of gender in maintaining and reinforcing a particular set of patriarchal power-relations or values – whether through the exclusion of women from the institutions of music, the suppression of music composed by women, the portrayal of women in music, or the description and hierarchical devaluation of supposedly feminine attributes in music itself – nevertheless, within the framework provided by those common assumptions, one can discern a diverse range of often quite incompatible methodological, theoretical, epistemological and normative presuppositions.

This renders misleading, and perhaps even obsolete, their straightforward inclusion within the binary taxonomy of ‘old’ and ‘new’ musicologies; and it is even less obvious how the ‘postmodern’ is to be located in relation to the various strands of feminist discourse. Presumably those scholars who appropriate or integrate postmodern (or postfeminist?) precepts into their critical interpretations would consider themselves proponents of a ‘postmodern’ musicology, yet clearly there is nothing intrinsically ‘postmodern’ about a concern with gender. Hence, just as acknowledging that an allegedly ‘positivist’ musicology traditionally focused on a relatively limited range of music does not, in and of itself, necessarily implicate positivism, as a set of epistemological or methodological assumptions, in the ideological or institutional factors that sought to determine which music was to be deemed a valid object of academic study, so the disciplinary exclusion of music composed by women likewise does not necessarily implicate, as a determining factor in that exclusion, the actual methodological frameworks within which that discipline operated. Hence, contrary to Cusick’s claim that ‘feminist musicologies’ rejection of autonomy and objectivity, both as epistemological positions and as motivations, contribute to a regendering of the persona of musicology’ (Cusick, 1999, p.485), a number of strands within that contemporary musicological scholarship which is labelled ‘feminist’ or which is concerned with issues of gender and representation can and do operate in accordance both with an epistemologically motivated notion of objectivity and with a methodology that is closely allied to that of an ‘older’, ‘positivist’ musicology. (I return to this issue in Chapter 2 where I theorize in greater detail the distinction between, on the one hand, the epistemological framework in which claims to musicological knowledge are forwarded and validated and, on the other hand, the normative framework in which the object and purpose of musicological research is contested.)

It cannot be over-emphasized, at this point, that none of the above is to deny the entirely indefensible way in which, historically and still to this day,

music composed by women and the historical roles played by women in musical institutions and practices have been excluded from the domain of objects and topics deemed acceptable for musicological study; nor is it to ignore the way in which issues of gender have likewise been suppressed; nor is it to overlook the obvious fact that musicology, as an institutionalized discipline, was, and, in part, inexcusably remains, determined or defined by particular patriarchal assumptions or prejudices. However, it is to maintain, by way of summarizing this section, two basic assertions: firstly, it is inaccurate to associate directly, especially in a causal sense, particular epistemological or methodological frameworks with the disciplinary exclusion of music composed by women or with the suppression of issues of gender; secondly, it is likewise inaccurate simply to associate the inclusion of music composed by women or issues of gender with a ‘new’, ‘critical’ or (especially) ‘postmodern’ musicology.

Canon

It is important to understand that a linear paradigm works to exclude or marginalise certain figures. ... Canons imply an autonomous cultural development, and those who fail to participate in that particular development, or who seek alternatives, are marginalised, as were Weill and Eisler for rejecting modernism. Someone who is seen to be part of a line, like Mussorgsky, is moved up, while anyone not part of the line, like Rimsky-Korsakov, is downgraded. (Scott, 2000, pp.6–7)

In addition to the critique of positivism and formalism, another development typically associated with a ‘postmodern’ musicology is a new disciplinary openness to ‘all’ musics. As already noted, the latter typically include: the music of ‘marginal’, ‘lesser-known’ composers, who nevertheless still count as composers of ‘high-art’ music; genres previously considered less worthy of study – jazz, popular, folk, film, stage – that nevertheless remain ‘Western’ in origin and orientation; and the music of ‘other’, ‘non-Western’ cultures and traditions. For complex reasons – certainly more complex than is sometimes implied – the academic study of music has, until relatively recently, tended to focus on a narrowly circumscribed range of music, on a ‘canon’ of select musical works deemed more worthy of academic study. Now, however, it is opening its ‘disciplinary doors’ to all forms of music, as the value distinctions on which canonic legitimacy depends are variously problematized. However, a number of points are worth making. Firstly, while there were some, even many, types of music that were clearly excluded as viable or appropriate objects of study – at least where academic *music* departments were

concerned – the ‘canon’ was never quite so immutable or exclusive as is sometimes claimed. It has always been dependent upon time, place and individual or institutional proclivities. Secondly, it is evident that individuals and institutions tend to vary in their openness to, and tolerance of, non-canonic repertoires. One musicologist’s model of ‘progressive’ inclusivity may well represent another’s notion of restrictive ‘conservatism’. An analysis of research interests, undergraduate taught modules and research grant recipients across the Anglo-American sector would most likely reveal that the ‘hegemony’ of the Western ‘high-art’ canonic repertoire remains rather more resilient in practice than reports of its imminent or actual collapse tend to suggest in theory – indeed, it is worth considering that were musicology adequately and proportionately to reflect ‘real’ musical life, both past and present, then Western ‘classical’ or ‘high-art’ music would probably account for little more than 10 per cent of all institutionalized research and teaching, and consume a similar proportion of overall funding. Thirdly, as was noted in the introduction to this chapter, the celebrated pluralism of a ‘postmodern’ musicology depends upon a relatively insular conception of its own disciplinary tradition(s). Ethnomusicology is arguably as old as musicology itself and the academic study of ‘popular music’ precedes the arrival of a ‘postmodern’ musicology by some decades – albeit that, until recently, such study often took place not in music departments but in departments of anthropology, sociology or cultural studies.

What is clear is that *the* canon, or the notion of a canon in general, is almost always perceived in a rather negative light – as something to be exposed, challenged, deconstructed and overcome. Katherine Bergeron, for example, in her ‘prologue’ to *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons* (Bergeron & Bohlman, 1992) – one of the texts that helped advance the issue of canonic presupposition toward the forefront of the (new) musicological consciousness – proposes a ‘disciplinary’ account of the canon. She is concerned with the ‘ideological and social practices that inform the disciplining of music’ and with the ‘relation that obtains between the concepts of canon and discipline, a relation that orders the behaviour of social bodies (our scholarly “societies”) and the individuals within them’ (Bergeron, 1992, p.1). Drawing on Foucault’s description of Bentham’s Panopticon, she describes ‘inmate-players [who] learn to conduct *themselves*, so to speak, according to the canons of performance they share’ and the player who is ‘entrapped by an acoustic constraint; he cannot escape his own audibility’ (Bergeron, 1992, p.4, original emphasis). The language and choice of analogy tend to imply that the role of the conductor and the actual physical arrangement of the players in an orchestral ensemble somehow represent a slightly insidious exercise of power. Bergeron continues the (double) analogy by asserting that scholarly ‘fields’ are ‘enclosures *in very much the same sense*, distinguished from one another

principally by the nature of the conduct they foster. A field is, in other words, a site of surveillance, a metaphorical space whose boundaries, conceived “panoptically”, are determined by the canon that stands at its centre’ (Bergeron, 1992, p.4, my emphasis). However, there is a danger that this argument serves to highlight the disabling effect of an alleged exercise of ‘power’ at the expense of acknowledging the enabling effect of collaborative discipline. As Bergeron herself notes, ‘the band thus implicates the musician in a network where acts of mutual surveillance serve to maintain the musical standard’ (Bergeron, 1992, p.4, my emphasis). In other words, there may be a positive or necessary aspect to the exercise of disciplinary ‘power’. Without some constraints – in the form of commonly agreed norms, conventions or standards that can serve as the enabling condition for any kind of comprehensible communication and dialogue within a given discourse – it is difficult to envisage how musicology might continue as a coherent practice. Hence, recourse to post-Foucaulian theories of ‘power’ can, at times, appear a little like bemoaning the fact that when we communicate with one another we are ‘constrained’ by the language we use, as though the latter were some insidious imposition. In any case, it is questionable whether the ‘discipline’ that is required of an orchestral or ensemble player can so easily be equated with the ‘disciplinary’ imperatives or conditions that are unique to a particular discursive environment or field. The practical and technical requirements of ensemble performance are hardly the same as those imposed by academic or scholarly stricture. Having said that, just as the physical spacing of ensemble playing may derive from a necessary and enabling ‘discipline’, so musicological canons may derive, in part, from pedagogical or institutional necessity. There is a difference between, on the one hand, challenging a canon of ‘masterworks’ that simply serves to conceal the way in which certain arbitrary and ideological value systems are maintained and transmitted as though universal and immutable and, on the other hand, recognizing that some music or some works may be more significant for, or more appropriate to, particular pedagogical or institutional requirements.

Don Michael Randel, in an essay from the same collection, is certainly right to observe that ‘we tend to constrain not only how things can be studied but what can be studied at all. We sometimes give the impression that other things are not even worthy of study’ (Randel, 1992, p.11). However, it is not so obvious that ‘the canon expanded, then, not to include a greater diversity of works so much as to appropriate and dominate a greater number of works and make them behave in similar fashion’ (Randel, 1992, p.14). Randel is here referring to what he describes as the ‘musicological canon’ or the ‘canon of acceptable dissertation topics’ and, in particular, the extension of traditional philological techniques and other research tools to repertoires beyond those of the Medieval and Renaissance

periods – to begin with, the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This process has continued at a notable rate and, at present, allowing of course for institutional allegiances and prejudices, there are few repertoires considered *universally* unsuitable for musicological study. Yet surely such developments require, and deserve, a more sophisticated, and perhaps more charitable, analysis than one which simply chalks them up to the imperialism of a monolithic discipline grudgingly accepting the inclusion of other musics all the better to control them as its own.

While many scholars, although by no means all, welcome the ongoing ‘deconstruction’ of traditional canonic presupposition, there is clearly a tendency to conflate a challenge to (the possibility of justifying) the notion of hierarchical value per se with a challenge or reflective alertness to the way in which particular value hierarchies are produced and reproduced in given (local) contexts. One can discern a number of strategies that are employed in dealing with canonic issues:

- 1 the first strategy represents a kind of revisionist critique, a kind of ‘fiddling at the canonic margins’. In this case, the basic premise of a canon will remain intact, as will the criteria that determine entry into it; one simply argues that some music, currently included, should not be, or that some music, currently not included, should be. This is not too dissimilar to what Mark Everist labels a ‘conservative critique’: ‘The conservative might happily speak of the Kleinmeister, and identify works that might have been popular in their time, but now – with the aid of our greater sensibilities and critical awareness – can be judged as being of less value than canonical works’ (Everist, 1999, p.389);
- 2 the second strategy can accept the basic premise of a canon (or canons) but will seek to demonstrate that the value criteria determining entry into the canon are inappropriate. For example, one might argue that notions of organic structural unity, complexity or formal innovation tend to favour certain forms of music at the expense of others – typically the Austro-Germanic repertoire from Bach to Schoenberg. This will often lead to a kind of ‘third-way’ model involving multiple canons. The notion of a canon will remain intact, but it will typically be relativized, or localized, to particular social, cultural or historical contexts. Value will be examined, and perhaps respected as a reflection of a given musical tradition, but no one set of canonic values will be promoted, as though universally valid, at the expense of others;
- 3 a final strategy is simply to dismiss the notion of a canon or canons altogether on the grounds that there are no ‘objective’ criteria in accordance with which one can legitimately order or value music in the first place. Everist appears drawn to this position by what he considers the immanent contradiction inherent in the liberal critique: ‘If one asks

that certain works should now be admitted to the canon on the basis that they are as good as those already included, and have only been excluded because they are by women, Caribbean authors, or for indeed any other reason, this is as much as to say that objective value may be identified not only in the works for which admission is sought, but also in its existing members' (Everist, 1999, p.390).

In other words, any (well-meaning) attempt to adapt canonic presupposition in order to admit previously excluded music may simply rebound upon itself. There is also a danger that one may simply construct a new kind of 'negative' canon: the canon of traditional Western 'high-art' music is 'bad', in so far as it, and the institutional and cultural power with which it symbiotically exists, functions to include or exclude certain forms of cultural expression on the basis of implicit universal norms that are at best contingent and relative; yet (any) other newly conceived canons are 'good', in so far as they represent sites of legitimate resistance to that same institutional and cultural 'hegemony'.

A further problem stems in part from the fact that there are very few cultures, or 'sub-cultures', that do not incorporate, or depend upon, their own set of what are effectively 'canonic' presuppositions – in so far as the latter is taken to refer to the belief that some groups of works, for reasons that transcend the merely personal, are to be valued more highly than others. Derek Scott, for example, notes that 'the argument over high and low art, a familiar component of elitist and mass-culture views, is, ironically, repeated within the very areas of music which are so often attacked as being low. In jazz, the debate concerns the difference between true jazz and dance band music. In rock there is an attempt to distinguish between serious rock and brash, commercial pop' (Scott, 2000, p.2). In one sense, then, a challenge to the concept of hierarchical value judgement per se may itself depend in part upon precisely that cultural- or ethno-centrism – in this case, a kind of paradoxical 'liberal elitism' – that it was intending to overcome.

The critical point, however, as it was with the issue of 'gender and representation', is that debates surrounding 'canonicity' do not necessarily impact upon the epistemological or methodological framework within which a particular musicologist may choose to work. Indeed, the demand that musicology embrace 'all' music – itself a rather positivist sentiment – and the accompanying critiques that are typically directed at the various 'ideologies of exclusion', need not necessarily suggest an antipathy to the positivism that is so often predicated of precisely that old musicology against which a supposedly 'new' or 'critical' musicology reacts; and so Boismortier receives an expanded section alongside Bach, the Beatles precede Beethoven, and the music of the indigenous peoples of Borneo takes its rightful place before Borodin. As Lochhead observes:

This new postmodern musicology entails on one hand, a methodological shift in its approach to canonic works of the Western concert tradition and on the other, an embrace of music in the popular and jazz traditions as well as music outside of the West. In the latter case, the music may be approached with either the new methods *or more traditional, 'modernist' ones*. (Lochhead, 2002, p.2, my emphasis)

Hence, while it is certainly true that the traditional Western canon derived in part from the imperatives of 'positivist' or 'formalist' preconception, it is nevertheless quite possible to continue operating in accordance with particular positivist or formalist assumptions even after a 'postmodern' challenge to canonic certainty has expanded the object-domain of viable study to include precisely that music originally excluded by those very same assumptions.

Formalism

If 'positivism' has served as the primary target for a 'postmodern' critique of historical musicological practice, then 'formalism' has played a correlative role in the critique of analytical or interpretive practice. Jim Samson was certainly right in observing that the two 'were unhelpfully conflated by Kerman' (Samson, 1999, p.54), albeit that Kerman's characterization does remain fairly ensconced in many accounts of disciplinary development: 'If musicology has traditionally been *positivistic*, music theory and analysis have been, and continue to be, *formalistic*' (Lorraine, 1993, p.238, my emphasis). However, the association of positivism and formalism is misplaced not only because each relates to a quite distinct sub-disciplinary discourse with its own complex development and institutional history, but also because each refers to a quite different moment within that respective discourse – positivism, primarily to a particular set of methodological and epistemological assumptions; formalism, primarily to a particular conception of the musical object. Moreover, both positivism and formalism are often portrayed, mistakenly, as straightforward constitutive components within an older 'modernist' musicology. In this respect the attack on formalism, especially when mounted from an allegedly 'postmodern' perspective, is as misconstrued as that on positivism.

Nearly all criticisms directed at analytical practice tend to include, whether explicitly or not, a challenge to 'modernism' and its associated conceptual vocabulary. Although he was writing almost a decade ago, Leo Treitler's pointed comments retain a contemporary prescience:

One of the root points of contention in the current discussions ... concerns the conception of the autonomous and epistemologically self-contained character of

the musical experience. Cling to that and you will never extricate yourself from the web of modernism. ... You will be committed to the aestheticist, transcendentalist, internalist, essentialist, and, yes, *formalist* ... beliefs that raged under *modernism*. (Treitler, 1995, p.12, my emphasis)

In many ways, the kind of desire that Treitler is alluding to here – the desire to escape the sins of an encompassing ‘modernism’ and its various constitutive ‘-isms’ – can be viewed as one of the connective threads binding together the otherwise myriad disparate trajectories that comprise the ‘new’ or ‘postmodern’ musicologies. It is clearly present, for example, in Gary Tomlinson’s attempt to develop, and promote, a kind of ‘thick contextualism’. In what has become a famous and oft-cited exchange, in which Tomlinson locked horns with Lawrence Kramer over the future direction of what was then still an embryonic postmodern turn in musicological enquiry, the two were clearly in agreement when it came to locating ‘the origins of what we may call *modernist* musicology in *nineteenth-century* views of the signifying distance between music and words’ (Tomlinson, 1993, pp.18–19, my emphasis). Crucially, for Tomlinson, and for many others, the origins of a ‘modernist’ musicology are not strictly concomitant either with aesthetic ‘modernism’ or for that matter with European ‘modernity’, but are identified with elements internal to, or coincidental with, specific strands in nineteenth-century aesthetics. Yet if there are some compelling reasons for viewing modernism, at a stylistic level and especially in its earlier expressionist guise, as a kind of intense, self-negating extension of late Romantic sensibility – as exemplified in, say, Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* or his Op.11 piano pieces – it remains questionable whether one can simply transfer such a schema onto a theoretical, historical, socio-cultural or, for that matter, an institutional or disciplinary level without enacting a rather crude and potentially debilitating conflation of what are complex and contradictory patterns of intellectual and artistic development.

To be sure, the partial derivation of *formalist* presumption from certain aspects of nineteenth-century thought is widely attested and relatively uncontroversial. Lydia Goehr, for example, in a comprehensive historiographical study, has traced the development of the ‘work-concept’, the view of music as a delimited, objective ‘in and for itself’ – on which depends much formalist presupposition – both to a number of strands within nineteenth-century Romantic thought as well as to particular social and cultural developments peculiar to that period of (bourgeois) European history (Goehr, 1992). Yet, in an important sense, this is precisely the point. It is the easy association of formalism, not with Romanticism or with elements of nineteenth-century thought, but with ‘modernism’ per se or, in particular, with a purportedly ‘modernist’ musicology, that remains

fundamentally problematic. This can be illustrated by turning to one idea in particular: the concept of ‘organicism’. The assumption of, or the search for, underlying, autotelic unity in a musical work is often closely associated with formalism. Its subterranean traces are still deeply rooted in contemporary analytical presupposition; and it is doubtful they could ever be entirely expunged, even if that were desirable. Yet while analytical ‘organicism’, so often a key target for critical rebuke, may well have been partially cleansed of its (explicit) metaphysical or biological trappings – such that it has mutated into a kind of paradoxical ‘inorganic organicism’, a structuralist functionalism predicated on techniques of hierarchical reduction – the concept of organic unity, closely bound up as it was with the development of German idealist thought, represents not so much an analogical *counterpart* either to the modern Enlightenment project or to aesthetic modernism, but arguably derived, in significant measure, from a romantic *aversion to*, and desire to transcend, the social anomie unleashed by precisely that industrial, urbanized, technocratic instrumentalism with which modernity in general is typically associated. As an underlying aesthetic conception, it is part of a tradition leading from Goethe, through Hoffmann and Hegel, to Schenker himself; a tradition, moreover, which itself lies quite some way from the objectifying, quasi-scientific methodology with which (late) twentieth-century analytical formalism is also typically equated.

Hence, in their critique of formalist presupposition, many advocates of a contemporary ‘postmodern’ musicology seek to fuse together two contradictory, albeit dialectically entwined, conceptions of the ‘modern’: on the one hand, an alienating and inappropriate ‘modern’ attachment to the quasi-scientific, empirical, objectifying strategies and faux-rigour of systematic theoretical–analytical practice; on the other hand, the notion of music as an autonomous ‘in and for itself’, which, while described as an ultimately ‘modernist’ conception, is then attributed to strands that originate in a nineteenth-century aesthetic sensibility that was, at least in part, ‘anti-modern’. Hence, if formalism has *multiple* roots, in the procedural disinterestedness of a Kant or the wavering absolutism of a Hanslick, in the transcendent idealism of nineteenth-century Romantic expressionism, and in the presumed methodological objectivism of an institutionally arrayed research discipline, then it is wholly inaccurate simply to frame, and then dismiss, it and its key presupposition, the ‘music itself’, as the products of an outmoded ‘modernist ideology’ – Tomlinson speaks of categories that are ‘darkly tinted for us with modernist ideology’ and, on a number of occasions, accuses Kramer of betraying or revealing his underlying ‘modernism’ (Tomlinson, 1993, p.23). Indeed, as has been suggested, some of the principal concepts targeted by much contemporary ‘postmodern’ musicological discourse – among them, transcendentalism, internalism and

organicism – were in part reactive *against* early cultural and social modernity, while historically *prior* to aesthetic modernism proper.

If postmodernism has helped to collapse, or problematize, the binary distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’, then the issue of formal close reading still remains central to debates internal to popular musicology. If Derridean-type deconstruction can be applied to the canonic masterpieces of the Western classical tradition and if the notion of unity or internal coherence, as traditionally conceived, can be suitably problematized, then the ensuing analytical work itself can still operate quite comfortably with the presupposition of an autonomous and self-relating structure of signification. The ideology or ‘myth’ that underpins the ceaseless search for fundamental synthetic unity amid even the most seemingly anarchic disunity may have been subject to trenchant critique – and rightly so (see, for example, Street, 1989) – yet the switch from a methodologically secured elaboration of subsumptive or reductive unity to a dialectically conceived mediation between part and putative whole need not necessarily collapse the formalist conception of music as an autonomous manifestation of ideal structural relations. Still, the straightforward association of modernism and formalism – and thus ‘postmodernism’ with ‘post-formalism’ – is so ensconced in certain strands of contemporary thought that the counter-argument bears some repeating. The notion of music as an autonomous manifestation of ideal structural relationships cannot be ascribed, simply and exclusively, to the same nexus of historical and philosophical circumstances with which cultural modernity or aesthetic modernism are respectively associated. By operating with a conception of music that is actually neither modern nor modernist but instead represents a complex concatenation of overlapping historical and aesthetic currents, is it not rather the case that formalist presupposition actually defies the kind of simple binary taxonomy that would allow one to place it firmly in the box marked ‘modern(ist)’? It is only really with quite specific postwar developments, common to both fields, that, on the one hand, the normative–aesthetic aspect of compositional practice – the ‘high-modernism’ of integral serialism – and, on the other hand, the systematic aspect of analytical theory – the ‘neutralization’ of Schenker, the development of pitch-class theory, and, somewhat later, the appearance of structuralist semiotics – can be said to converge in such a way that they might be located appropriately within the ambit of an objective and recognizably modern(ist) form of reason; and this primarily at the level of methodological sensibility. In that sense, formalism represents a complex amalgam of, *among other things*, nineteenth-century Romantic transcendentalism *and* internalism *and* an aesthetics of procedural disinterestedness *and* a methodological objectivism *and* the development of an institutional context in which it was able to establish a recognizable disciplinary and pedagogical identity; and in its various guises it is likely that

a greater or lesser emphasis will be placed on any one or more of these.

Rethinking the 'Postmodern Turn'

As the above discussions have implied, the manner in which various ideas or theoretical presuppositions are represented and dismissed as constitutive components within an over-arching 'modernist musicology' betrays not only a reluctance to engage, in sufficient detail, with complex historical and philosophical currents, but also suggests the need to construct a suitably amorphous (straw) target for a subsequent postmodern assault. As Treitler notes: 'Primary among the postmodern traits of some recent musicology is its self-proclaimed mission to wrench the discipline free of the habits and beliefs, no, the constraints – the "discipline" (Foucault) – of modernism' (Treitler, 1995, p.10). It can seem, on occasion, as though a purportedly 'postmodern' or 'new' musicology must conjure up the spectre of a 'modernist tradition' simply as a foil against which to define itself. This in itself is a dangerous move. Martin Morris, for example, argues that 'the belief that a liberatory political project can be guided by theoretical critique without offering some kind of account of the metaconditions through which critique itself becomes possible is internally limited. *Such a position risks imposing a different ideology with a new set of blinkered dominations, exclusions and oppressions in the place of one discredited by the new, authoritative theoretical critique*' (Morris, 2001, p.42, my emphasis). It is for this reason that reflections on contemporary musicological practice – especially allegedly 'new', 'post-modern' or 'critical' practice – would benefit from a more sophisticated interrogation of underlying methodological and epistemological presuppositions than has sometimes been the case.

Despite the fact that a 'modernist musicology' is regularly evoked in order to distinguish 'that which we did' from 'that which we now do', the basis on which one can justifiably label an institutional discipline 'modern(ist)' or 'postmodern(ist)' remains rather unclear. For example, does a musicology become 'modernist' simply by virtue of its accepting the underlying convictions of enlightenment 'modernity'? To be sure, oriented methodologically toward the goal of scientific, technocratic control and epistemologically toward the notion of objective, value-free enquiry, 'positivism' is certainly a derivative of a (post-)Enlightenment, 'modern' sensibility. Yet, according to most accounts of the 'postmodern', so is Kantian transcendentalism, Hegelian idealism, Marxist political economy, Freudian psychoanalysis, Husserlian phenomenology and any other system of thought which seeks to establish foundational truths or delimiting 'conditions of possibility' or which continues to insist upon some kind of

distinction between what 'is' and what 'appears'. In that respect it is not immediately clear in what sense an academic discipline can be described as 'modernist' in the first place, or how, by virtue of rejecting a (weak) positivist concern with factual verifiability and scholarly rigour in favour of a 'postmodern' emphasis on indeterminacy and interpretive 'play', it could realistically and coherently remain one.

Conversely, one might ask whether describing a musicology as 'postmodern' is supposed to refer (1) to a condition of musicology itself – its disparate, fragmentary plurality of competing and intertwining interests and methodologies; (2) to its openness to all music in a 'postmodern' age when value distinctions and canonic hierarchies no longer hold sway; (3) to its concern with a recognizably 'postmodern' music; or (4) to its appropriation of recognizably 'postmodern' theoretical frameworks or assumptions for the interpretation of (any) music. This ambiguity is, of course, closely related to the general confusion surrounding the term 'postmodern' itself. To describe a discipline as 'postmodern' simply because it encompasses a range of competing or incompatible interpretive strategies would seem as analytically trivial as it is historically inaccurate – it is questionable whether musicology, as a whole, was ever quite so coherent or quite so dominated by a single over-arching (modernist) meta-narrative as is sometimes implied. To consider a musicology postmodern simply because it demonstrates a willingness to engage with all music(s) is similarly misplaced – a number of sub-disciplines have long been concerned with a range of non-canonic repertoires. Likewise, it is difficult to relate a 'postmodern' musicology to a concern with 'postmodern' music since, firstly, there is even less agreement about what constitutes postmodern music than there is about what might constitute a postmodern musicology and, secondly, the majority of work that is nevertheless typically associated with a postmodern musicology has generally focused on a segment of Western art music which, whatever the terminological ambiguity, is certainly not postmodern. Hence the fourth and final option – viewing a 'postmodern musicology' as one which appropriates, integrates within itself and employs recognizably postmodern concepts or which operates within, or in accordance with, recognizably postmodern theoretical frameworks – probably represents the most coherent, and least trivial, designation.

Nevertheless, Derek Scott appears to include, or at least to imply, most of the above characteristics, and some additional ones, when he suggests that a postmodern musicology might include the following:

A concern with social and cultural processes, informed by arguments that musical practices, values and meanings relate to particular historical, political and cultural contexts; a concern with critical theory and with developing musical hermeneutics for the analysis of the values and meanings of musical practices

and musical texts; a concern to avoid teleological assumptions of historical narrative ...; readiness to engage with, rather than marginalize, issues of class, generation, gender, sexuality and ethnicity in music ...; a readiness to contest the binary divide between 'classical' and 'popular' ...; a readiness to study different cultures with regard to their own specific cultural values ...; a readiness to consider that meanings are intertextual, and that it may be necessary to study a broad range of discourses in order to explain music ...; a readiness to respond to the multiplicity of music's contemporary functions and meanings.... (Scott, 2001, pp.145–6)

While some of these concerns can be seen to relate to, or derive from, ostensibly 'postmodern' theoretical positions, it is just as clear that a significant number do not – perhaps rendering problematic their straightforward designation as constitutive moments within an encompassing 'postmodern' musicology. For example, as has already been argued in this chapter, a 'readiness to engage with, rather than marginalize, issues of class, generation, gender, sexuality and ethnicity in music' is not an inherently 'postmodern' concern – one can adopt 'positivist' methods for the historical study of music composed by women or formalist precepts for its technical analysis. Equally, one can incorporate 'deconstructive' elements into hermetic close readings of musical 'texts'. 'Hermeneutics' pre-dates the 'postmodern' by more than a century and ultimately derives from a set of presuppositions that is at odds with underlying poststructuralist notions of meaning and signification. Finally, 'a concern with social and cultural processes, informed by arguments that musical practices, values and meanings relate to particular historical, political and cultural contexts' is hardly unique to 'postmodern' theory, having long served as a basic foundation for Marxist and post-Marxist modes of interpretation.

Hence, some of the terminological confusion surrounding developments in contemporary musicology would appear to stem from the way in which a critical challenge to the traditional exclusion of particular repertoires, issues or interpretive priorities is confused with the adoption of 'critical' (theoretical) interpretive strategies themselves. To return to one of the topics considered earlier in this chapter, there is a marked difference between a challenge to the exclusion of music composed by women from the 'canon' of objects of viable study – albeit that such a challenge may be motivated by 'critical' feminist concerns – and the adoption of a critical theoretical (post)feminist interpretive framework or set of methodological presuppositions for the purpose of understanding any and (potentially) all music. Likewise, it may be that, at a general level, certain 'postmodern' ideas or sensibilities have worked to transform underlying disciplinary presuppositions; however, this does not automatically render 'postmodern' any ensuing work that happens simply to have absorbed some of its implications.

Yet another definition is proposed by Gary Tomlinson, who states that 'in broad terms, a postmodern musicology will be characterized most distinctively by an insistent questioning of its own methods and practices' (Tomlinson, 1993, p.21). Contemporary musicology is undoubtedly characterized by an inherently self-reflective condition; it is often as concerned with problematizing itself as it is concerned with problematizing music – this book is of course a prime example. No doubt this is a symptom of disciplinary uncertainty, of the attempt to find one's disciplinary bearings amid the swirling eddies of intellectual trends as well as to remain reflectively alert to one's 'grounding' – especially in an academic climate acutely sensitive to the requirement that one do so. However, once again, its designation as 'postmodern' is problematic. For example, such self-reflection has long represented a defining moment in (post-)Hegelian or (post-)Marxist critical traditions. The latter have always demonstrated an acute, even painful, 'dialectical' sensitivity to the way in which the very theoretical framework or conceptual economy with which they seek to interpret a particular social formation is itself in some way determined, or enabled, by that same context – once again raising doubts as to the uniquely 'postmodern' condition of a musicology that 'insistently questions its own methods and practices'. Nevertheless, one might still worry that such a self-reflective turn will have the kind of effect envisaged by Scott Burnham: 'For as we become increasingly self-aware of the ways we talk about music, as talk about music eclipses music itself as the most fascinating object in the academic firmament, the history of such talk suddenly assumes a luminous relevance' (Burnham, 1993, p.76). One might then be drawn to the conclusion that 'we could become so wrapped up in critical theory that we lose sight of the *raison d'être* of our efforts: music itself' (Citron, 1993, p.74). In other words, musicology becomes more concerned with its '-ology' than its 'music-'. As Arnold Whittall argues: 'Just as music is best thought of as interacting with the structures of speech and language rather than as simply opposed to them, so the New Musicology is likely to be best served by the promotion of dialogue – dialogues about compositions, that is, even more than about the nature of musicology itself' (Whittall, 1999, p.99). One can sympathize, to an extent, with the concern expressed by Citron and Whittall – who presumably would be less than favourably inclined toward the purpose and content of this book. There is, to be sure, always a danger that self-reflection can spiral into regressive abstraction or dissolve the basic terms of reference on which rational discourse depends. However, as this chapter has (I hope) suggested, there is a clear and continuing need for a self-reflective discourse that is better able to differentiate between the normative, methodological and epistemological criteria that serve to demarcate 'old' from 'new' and 'modern' from 'postmodern'.

Hence, if meta-discursive reflection has served to render transparent particular institutional mechanisms which once served to restrict, and may continue to restrict, the types of music studied or the manner in which they are studied, it has yet to offer a plausible strategy for avoiding either the instigation of a new disciplinary orthodoxy or the descent into an incoherent, fragmented and ill-defined pluralism. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that much of the polemic or reciprocal misunderstanding that is characteristic of contemporary musicological reflection – especially in relation to ‘new’, ‘critical’, or ‘postmodern’ musicology – derives from a failure to examine and question, at a more fundamental level, the source of its own legitimacy. Summarizing developments in contemporary musicology, Renée Lorraine has suggested that

If all these tendencies [in musicology] were to share space in a fluctuating stasis, one or another might rise to prominence for a time, but none would exercise ultimate authority. In a typically postmodern way, not only different ideologies but different paradigms would co-exist, even if they seemed mutually-contradictory. There would be criteria of truth, meaning and value, but these could be different or even irrelevant depending on the given paradigm. There would be no common language (at least that we can see at present), but multi-lingualism would become essential. (Lorraine, 1993, p.242)

This would seem an apt portrayal of contemporary musicology; many contemporary musicologists adhere to its underlying ethos. However, the claim that ‘there would be criteria of truth, meaning and value, but these could be different or even irrelevant depending on the given paradigm’ not only collapses under the weight of its own ‘performative contradiction’, but also undermines the very presuppositions or conditions of possibility which underpin the study of music as an institutionalized discourse: student – ‘I object to this mark of 45 per cent on the grounds that in writing this essay I have adopted my own criteria of truth, meaning, and value’; scholar – ‘I object to my article being rejected on the grounds that in writing this piece I have adopted my own criteria of truth, meaning, and value’. As Peter Dews warns:

Such an admission of permanent instability, of lack of fit between what we feel driven to say, the means of saying it, and the available procedures of justification, should not be used to legitimate the deflationary short circuit currently proposed by thinkers such as Rorty. Such a short circuit seeks to eliminate all traces of transcendence, of an imperative source of meaning, through what becomes – paradoxically – *an objectivistic metaphysics of contingency*. (Dews, 1995, p.12, my emphasis)

In short, a trivial relativism, whether linguistic, epistemological, interpretive or moral, would always seem compelled both to recognize those very theories that deny its possibility and to cancel itself out by its own logic. As Thomas Nagel puts it: 'Many forms of relativism and subjectivism collapse into either self-contradiction or vacuity – self-contradiction because they end up claiming that nothing is the case, or vacuity because they boil down to the assertion that anything we say or believe is something we say or believe' (Nagel, 1997, p.6). While we may 'no longer know what we know' (Cook & Everist, 1999, p.v), a fear of enacting some kind of aggressive mastery should not confine us either to the mute immediacy of solipsistic introspection or to a kind of passive relativism. When it finally engages with music, 'postmodern' musicology tends always to stress the provisionality of its readings, the unavoidable plurality of interpretation or the contingent 'situatedness' of its multiple subject positions. Unease with the status of knowledge sees avowedly 'postmodern' protagonists battling with one another to prove their own brand of knowledge more reflective, more knowingly problematic and more absolutely non-absolute than any other. Yet, as I will argue in the next chapter, one can assert the individuality, subjectivity or contingency of some meaning or value only for so long before such assertions eventually undermine the legitimacy of the very discursive field in which they are ordinarily articulated. If no mode of knowledge is ever to be privileged over any other, and if there are no criteria in accordance with which we can (at least presume to) evaluate the legitimacy of particular discursive claims, then the study of music as an institutionalized discourse would appear to have little choice but to cancel out the very presuppositions or conditions of possibility on which its existence is predicated and effectively deconstruct itself out of existence.

A similar (moral) force is implicit in Peter Zima's argument that 'like every formalism, Deconstruction, marked by Nietzsche's extreme ambivalence, contains imponderables and risks. In view of such risks it seem important to insist ... on the importance of textual constants, depth structures and actant models in a text such as *Mein Kampf* and on the impossibility of dissolving them by shifts, contradictions and polysemies, whose existence, however, should not be denied either' (Zima, 2002, p.175). Transposed into the realm of music, one might well ask: 'What is the point of showing that the institutions of the canon are elitist and patriarchal if, at the same time, one supports a relativism that would grant elitist, patriarchal readings as much validity as decentred critique?' (Williams, 2000, p.386). It is a danger that is more than obvious to Terry Eagleton; his counter-critique of postmodernism's critique of generality is usefully disarming. It is indeed very much a universal human condition, for example, that we must eat, sleep, labour, reproduce, communicate and so on; and,

likewise, it is hard to envisage what is wrong with expounding such universal principles as ‘torture is wrong’ or ‘a just society will be one in which everyone is equal before the law’ (see Eagleton, 1996).

Lawrence Kramer also appears alert to this: ‘Given the dangers of a social (de)formation in which mutually indifferent, incomprehending, or hostile groups blindly jostle together, it seems fair to say that this agenda [postmodernism] currently makes more sense conceptually than it does practically’ (Kramer, 1995, p.9). Yet for postmodernism ‘to make more sense conceptually than it does practically’ appears not only to render it impotent – a common accusation to be sure – but to re-introduce precisely that family of modernist dualisms whose deconstruction lies at the very heart of his postmodern critique. Moreover, when Kramer supplies the caveat, ‘the practical issue is not directly at stake here’, he seems to be running counter to his previously expressed belief that ‘without some appeal to standards of truth and falsehood, reality and illusion, reason and unreason, neither social institutions nor consensus beliefs can be competently criticised’ (Kramer, 1995, p.9). The latter do seem rather ‘practical’ issues, however one presents them. It is thus no less confusing when, having suggested that ‘postmodernism makes more sense conceptually than practically’, Kramer then proceeds to assert that ‘this epistemic shift [to postmodernism], however, *is practical* as well as theoretical; it has substantial moral and political implications’ (Kramer, 1995, p.33). This is no dialectic reversal *à la* Adorno, but rather an inconsistency born of a parlous vagary that haunts much postmodern theory – its precise relation to practice. Essentially, it circles back to the point highlighted by Eagleton. When Kramer points out that ‘binary thinking, in short, always has a moral dimension. It has underwritten dubious values far too often ...’ (Kramer, 1995, p.39), he is of course assuming a rather fundamental binary distinction himself – that between ‘dubious’ and ‘non-dubious’ values. Kramer does seem alert to this when he claims that ‘not all dualities are automatically or consistently oppressive’ (Kramer, 1995, p.38). However, what Kramer might be missing is that it is not just that binary thinking always has a moral dimension, but rather that moral thinking, and, for that matter, any kind of normative, prescriptive or imperative thinking, always (and necessarily) has a binary dimension. This latter point is the thorn in the side of a postmodern approach that seeks to apply deconstructive strategies born of (an often misappropriated) Derridean theory to the exigencies of concrete moral life. It also has ramifications for the political and ethical justification of musicological practice, to which I return in the final section of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Study of Music as an Institutionalized Discourse

More often than not, as the conclusion to the last chapter suggested, ‘new’, ‘critical’ or ‘postmodern’ musicologies claim to include within themselves an awareness of, and a self-reflective sensitivity toward, the institutional nature and function of their discipline. Postmodern, poststructuralist and other critical-theoretical frameworks are deployed not only for interpretive (musicological) ends; they have also encouraged musicologists to adopt a more self-consciously reflective attitude toward the very nature of discursive practices themselves. However, while a ‘new’ musicological self-awareness has manifested itself in a variety of forms – some of which have made a productive contribution to our understanding of institutional and disciplinary practice – insufficient attention has been paid to the manner in which quite specific epistemological, methodological or normative presuppositions might also determine the legitimacy of musicology as the source and ultimate arbiter of disciplinary knowledge. Rather more attention has been paid to challenging or questioning the assumption of disciplinary authority than to reflecting on the demands that such authority might place on those who assume it. Such language will most likely unnerve those of a more postmodern sensibility, and perhaps others too. The prevailing intellectual climate, especially in the arts and humanities, is less than receptive to notions of disciplinary ‘authority’ or institutional ‘legitimacy’. Whenever issues of disciplinary authority are raised it is usually as a precursor to a critical deconstruction of the way in which a seemingly ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ state of affairs serves actually to promote or protect particular narrow or ideological interests – interests that are typically associated, where musicology is concerned, with this or that ‘modernist’ preconception. For example, Gary Tomlinson argues that post-Foucauldian histories ‘have worked hard to show us the ways in which some of our most basic, apparently “natural” categories are local cultural constructs’ (Tomlinson, 1993, p.23). To be sure, if revealing the contingency of categories that may previously have been considered universal and immutable serves to challenge, say, an untenable (and ideologically motivated) disciplinary emphasis on one narrow tract of Western ‘high-art’ music, then this would seem a laudable aim. However, as we have also seen

(in Chapter 1), critical manoeuvres or strategies of this sort often tend to overshoot their mark and implicate an ill-defined ‘traditional’ musicology *in toto*, thus conflating what is undoubtedly a quite appropriate challenge to particular elements within contemporary disciplinary presupposition with what is nevertheless a quite inappropriate assault on the entire ‘modernist’ edifice of an allegedly outmoded musicology. It is certainly to the benefit of any disciplinary practice to remain alert to the way in which, when subjected to reflective or deconstructive scrutiny, a number of its underlying assumptions or values will most likely be shown to depend upon particular interests, which latter may, in turn, serve to occlude or suppress other equally viable interests. Yet although particular institutional mechanisms or structures will themselves have developed within, and will thus reflect, specific structural contexts – and in that sense do represent strictly contingent phenomena that must remain open to historical and social explanation or challenge – they may still play a pivotal role in determining the very ‘conditions of possibility’ for the study of music as a coherent discursive practice in the first place. The ultimate contingency or ‘context dependency’ of a particular aspect of disciplinary practice is not, *in and of itself*, a justifiable reason for mounting a critical challenge to it – in other words, ‘contingency’ should not be conflated with ‘arbitrariness’. As Thomas McCarthy observed: ‘Although commitments, values, rules, conventions, attitudes, frames, and so forth clearly do arise and develop under empirical conditions, they are just as clearly conditions of possibility of scientific knowledge’ (McCarthy, 1978, p.52). The reference to ‘science’ should not distract from the underlying argument. It may be that musicology too, in so far as it is construed as an ‘institutionalized discourse’, is dependent upon, or determined by, its own ‘conditions of possibility’, which, while ‘contingent’ in a strictly empirical sense, nevertheless serve as the necessary guarantors of both its institutional legitimacy and disciplinary coherence.

Defining Institutionalized Discourse

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault claimed that he treated discourse ‘sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements’ (Foucault, 1972, p.90). Sara Mills, who also cites this passage, suggests that Foucault’s third definition – which frames discourse as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements – is perhaps the one with the most resonance for many contemporary scholars. She takes it to mean that Foucault ‘is interested less in the actual utterances/texts that are produced than in the

rules and structures which produce particular utterances and texts. It is the rule-governed nature of discourse that is of primary importance within this definition' (Mills, 1997, p.7). This latter emphasis usefully captures one element of what I intend by an 'institutionalized discourse' – musicology as not (only) the collective intellectual endeavour of a number of individuals pursuing their own research interests, in their own way, as their whim takes them, but musicology as a discourse that is determined and shaped by myriad institutional dictates and requirements. Once again, however, rather than seeing the latter merely as constraining, or in some way insidious, instances of 'power' or 'surveillance' – one thinks back to the discussion of 'canon' in Chapter 1 – it may be possible, or even necessary, to consider that those same conditions might also serve an enabling function in so far as they guarantee the discursive, and perhaps the ethical, legitimacy of institutionalized musicology.

As is implied by Foucault's multi-layered definition, it should also be clear that an inclusive relationship obtains between the notion of a 'discourse in general' – Foucault's 'general domain of statements' – and that of any one delimited instance. For example, a peer-reviewed journal participates in one discursive field, an informal exchange over dinner in another; yet *both* are clearly examples of 'discourse in general' in the very broadest sense. (It is worth emphasizing this distinction in order pre-emptively to avoid at least one potential source of confusion. In the final section of Chapter 3 I examine what is there described as the relationship between music and 'discourse', between a purported 'music itself' and *any* discursive context or form of discursive appropriation – institutional or otherwise – in which it is articulated or implicated. This chapter focuses on that which serves to differentiate an 'institutionalized discourse' from general 'non-institutionalized' or 'everyday' discourse; the final section of Chapter 3 explores the relationship between a purported 'musical object' and 'discourse in general'.)

Throughout this book I will employ 'discourse' or 'discursive field' to refer to a given body of statements – spoken or written, symbolic or semantic; and I will use 'institutionalized' to specify that condition of a particular type of discourse in which its constitutive elements and mode of propagation are subject to some form of institutionally determined definition, sanction and control. Within this scheme I then understand a particular 'discursive statement' or 'discursive claim' to refer to any communicative formulation considered in conjunction with, or viewed as co-extensive with, the particular (institutional) legitimating context in which it appears. Effectively this represents a reworking of a basic speech-act theoretical premise according to which 'one and the same sentence with precisely one meaning can, if uttered in different circumstances, realize different aims, that is to say, express different senses (meanings in context)'

(Wunderlich, 1976, p.446, my translation). Just as the latter distinguishes, if only at a provisional analytical level, between the ‘constative’ and ‘performative’ constituents of a given utterance – between what it ‘is’ and what it ‘does’ – so I am interested in that which determines whether or not a particular discursive claim, which potentially may be made in *any* context, is to be deemed a legitimate contribution to the study of music as an institutionalized discourse. For example, returning to that earlier comparison, a statement appearing in a peer-reviewed journal is clearly part of an institutionalized discourse in a way that the ‘same’ (semantically identical) statement uttered during an informal exchange over dinner is not; and different criteria of acceptability will apply in each case. The statement ‘I really like Bach’s music’ may represent a quite acceptable expression of musical preference, but will almost certainly be rejected or censored if included in an article submitted for publication in an academic journal. Conversely, although an informal social gathering might lack similarly direct and substantive mechanisms of censorship or validation, the statement ‘of course the opening motif in that Schoenberg piano piece comprises set 5-24 which, interestingly, is itself a member of the Kh sub-complex around set 4-Z29’ would most likely be deemed a rather unusual contribution in such a context, especially if those present included ‘non-musicologists’ (or ‘normal people’). It is worth emphasizing that neither should this distinction be taken as implying that the latter informal discourse is itself free from, or independent of, its own quite specific set of conventions; nor should it be taken as implying that statements produced in that latter context necessarily fail to meet the criteria which determine the legitimacy of those produced in the former. It simply recognizes that an informal exchange over dinner permits a rather different, and typically less restricted, set of statements than does an institutionalized form of discourse. Where one is governed *primarily* by codes of social convention, the other is *also* determined by a set of disciplinary and institutional structures and presuppositions – or ‘conditions of possibility’ – that I will argue serve to delimit the types of statements that can be considered legitimately constitutive of disciplinary knowledge.

Foucault’s point of departure, during the early ‘archaeological’ or quasi-structuralist phase in his intellectual development, was that the unity of a large group of statements – a discursive formation – cannot be founded on: (1) its referring to the same object or set of objects (this would then imply that the unity of musicology cannot be founded simply on its comprising all statements which refer to music); (2) its comprising specific or normative types of statements (this would imply that the unity of musicology cannot be founded on the epistemological or performative nature of its constitutive elements); (3) its employing a common set of notions or concepts (this would imply that the unity of musicology cannot be founded on, for example, its employing a delimited theoretical language); (4) its revolving

around a single thematic or theme (this would imply that the unity of musicology cannot be founded on, for example, the attempt to understand given musical works as manifesting a particular form of structural unity or as encoding specific representations of gender) (Foucault, 1972, pp.34–43). Then, in order to comprehend such a discursive formation, Foucault suggests that we need to identify and describe: (a) who constructs or produces a discourse; (b) the institutional sites from which a discourse derives its legitimacy or authority; (c) the positions the subject can occupy within a given discursive setting (Foucault, 1972, pp.55–8). This general strategy clearly informs much contemporary critical reflection on the nature of institutional practice; it also resonates quite strongly with the strategy I have adopted in this book. However, contrary to the ends to which such analysis is ordinarily put – the deconstruction or exposure of particular ideological assumptions or relations of power – I will argue, from a reconstructive or ‘quasi-transcendental’ perspective, that, *contra* Foucault, a significant and necessarily defining connection *does* obtain between, on the one hand, ‘the institutional sites from which a discourse derives its legitimacy or authority’ and, on the other hand, the ‘specific or normative types of statements’ which are constitutive of it.

The need to distinguish between ‘an institutionalized discourse’ and a ‘discourse in general’ explains why it is inappropriate to view ‘musicology’ as comprising all statements that are concerned with, or relate to, music. Ralph Locke, for example, tells us that he ‘take[s] the term “musicologist” to include not just the published scholar but also the journalist, the writer of programme notes, the classroom teacher, the radio broadcaster, and any others in a position to *affect the wider discourse on music*’ (Locke, 1999, p.502, my emphasis). However, such a position appears not to recognize any substantive or conditional distinction between those statements that are constitutive of musicology as an institutionalized discourse and those that might arise, for example, as part of an informal exchange concerning musical preference. In this respect Locke’s definition is rather slippery. It is not too clear how a characterization that takes a musicologist to be ‘anyone in a position to affect the wider discourse on music’ can avoid sliding toward a characterization that frames a ‘musicologist’ as simply *anyone* who says *anything* about music. It would seem that Locke probably intends some kind of institutional context – he explicitly mentions the press, the concert hall, the school or the media – but again it is difficult to see how, for example, one might avoid categorizing the informal exchange that takes place over dinner as an event which ultimately affects ‘the wider discourse on music’ – such that, in theory, everyone becomes a potential ‘musicologist’. Moreover, the discourse of the press or the concert hall is regulated by a quite different set of presuppositions and conventions than is the discourse of an academic discipline. Of course, there may be those

who find such an idea rather appealing, perhaps even liberating. Yet its acceptance would rob the signifier ‘musicology’ of its semantic purchase. It would no longer seem usefully to demarcate a particular form of discursive knowledge from that which simply happens to take music as its purported object. We might note, in passing, that a similar problem arises with Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s claim that ‘just as music is whatever people choose to recognize as such, noise is whatever is recognized as disturbing, unpleasant, or both’ (Nattiez, 1990, pp.47–8). As harmless as this may seem, especially in the context of certain prevailing orthodoxies, it nevertheless depends upon a debilitating contradiction. If music really is whatever people choose to recognize as such, then ‘music’ is robbed of any substantive referent, hollowed out and reduced to an empty signifier that can no longer serve any conceivable communicative function. Likewise, ‘musicologist’ cannot simply refer to any individual who is in a position to influence the wider discourse on music, since this includes anyone and everyone; rather, in so far as the term is to remain meaningful, a ‘musicologist’ must be someone who operates in accordance with those same guiding presuppositions that are a condition of, or are constitutive of, a particular institutionalized or academic form of discourse. To be sure, it may be that Locke is simply ploughing his own semantic furrow; yet while his underlying motivation is no doubt well intentioned, the ramifications of accepting such a view remain problematic. As is so often the case, what might appear superficially to be so much semantic wrangling conceals a more substantive point.

The study of music as an institutionalized discourse is constructed, produced and reproduced by individuals who typically disseminate their work through institutionally sanctioned channels and whose work supposedly derives its legitimacy from its being (at least potentially) subject to a mechanism of peer appraisal that serves to moderate those same channels of dissemination – such as the giving of a conference paper or the submission of a journal article. Both the production and dissemination of knowledge in its institutionalized form (which includes books, journals, papers and PhD theses) and the reproduction and transmission of that knowledge (via lectures, seminars, tutorials, syllabuses, essays and examinations) presuppose a set of criteria in accordance with which one can (potentially) evaluate the legitimacy of the discursive claims that are constitutive of it. Were such criteria to be lacking or to be found wanting, then the basis on which those various claims might be evaluated or assessed remains unclear – as would the basis on which they might be distinguished from that wider general discourse which simply happens to take music as its object. Moreover, the legitimacy of particular discursive claims or statements cannot (or should not) derive from the nominal authority of those who produce them; rather, the authority of those producing them

should derive from the conditional legitimacy of the claims themselves. In other words, being a ‘musicologist’ does not guarantee the discursive legitimacy of one’s claims to knowledge; rather, it obliges one to ensure that one’s claims to knowledge satisfy the criteria of discursive legitimacy. Again, McCarthy appears to be making a similar point when he observes that ‘conventions, of course, result from some form of agreement. If they are not arbitrary, there must exist rules for attaining such agreement, forms of argument that are appropriate to supporting or challenging it, standards and values that might be appealed to in such argument, and so on’ (McCarthy, 1978, p.48). Or, as Jonathan Dunsby puts it, ‘the idea “don’t like” is simply not good enough in, for instance, research supervision, or in the refereeing of potential publications’ (Dunsby, 1994, p.77). One cannot (or should not) mark down an undergraduate essay, fail a thesis, reject a potential journal publication or subject a book to negative review simply on the grounds that one ‘doesn’t like it’. In this respect an old anecdote from David Best serves to highlight, in a most succinct form, one side of the connection that I am arguing must exist between the epistemological or normative status of particular claims to knowledge or validity and the institutional context in which they are made: ‘I well recall offending a music lecturer who insisted on the subjectivity of artistic judgements by pointing out that if he were right he was not entitled to his salary’ (Best, 1980, p.116). The very fact that performances, compositions and essays are subject to some form of assessment must imply some set of criteria in accordance with which such an assessment can be made – indeed, it is now usually an institutional requirement and audit stipulation that such criteria are clearly established and communicated; and the same logic applies, at a higher level, to the peer appraisal and review of conference papers and publications. It is for this reason that ‘ad hominem’ arguments or ‘tribalism’ are viewed as poor substitutes for a rational and careful engagement with the work of one’s peers. Moreover, even where the concrete mechanisms of review and control are not strictly or actually employed, it nevertheless remains a necessary presupposition of their discursive legitimacy that the claims put forward are theoretically or ideally susceptible to challenge and hence, crucially, to invalidation or revision should the challenge prove successful. An institutionalized discourse is thus conditional upon there being (at least provisionally agreed) criteria in accordance with which one can (at least presume to) determine the legitimacy of particular discursive claims. At first blush this might seem a slightly obvious, trivial, even harmless conclusion. However, it acquires rather more significance when contrasted with certain epistemological, methodological or normative assumptions that are typically informed by a purportedly ‘postmodern’ sensibility or which emphasize the incommensurable plurality of interpretive positions; and it is for this reason that I now turn to a thinker who offers a sophisticated alternative to

‘postmodern’ subject-oriented perspectivism and for that matter ‘post-structuralist’ textuality.

Jürgen Habermas: an Overview

Despite his wide-ranging interdisciplinary interests Habermas is probably best known for his theory of ‘communicative action’. Following his early publication, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Habermas, 1987b), in which he first attempted to derive the quasi-transcendental conditions of human knowledge from the particular ways in which individuals interact with both the world and one another, Habermas proceeded to develop, and has continued to elaborate upon, a pragmatic, ‘reconstructive’ theory of communicative action which seeks to provide both a theoretical model of, and a normative justification for, the rational basis of linguistically or symbolically mediated interaction (see especially Habermas, 1984, 1987b, & 1998).¹ While a remarkable level of holistic integrity serves to bind together much of Habermas’s work, the bulk of it is generally weighted more toward his theory of communicative action and its substantive social and political consequences than toward what one might term ‘theoretical philosophy’ proper. Nevertheless, his more systematic thought is clearly underpinned by a distinct set of epistemological assumptions that have themselves found more direct articulation in recent times.² It is these that are most relevant to the arguments developed in this book.

Given its centrality in the development of Habermas’s thought, a brief digression on the origin of ‘reconstructive’ or (quasi-)transcendental argument may prove useful at this point. The term ‘transcendental’ is fairly consistent in respect of the *type* of argument or deduction to which it typically applies. According to Robert Stern, transcendental arguments

1 Among the secondary literature, a good expository overview is provided by Outhwaite, 1994. A number of introductory studies dealing with Critical Theory in general include useful sections on Habermas and may also serve as a more general introduction to the Frankfurt tradition itself: see Held, 1980 (esp. Part 2, pp.249–350); and How, 2003. Two collections of English-language essays include a representative selection of more involved or critical engagements with specific elements in Habermas’s thought: see White, 1995; and Dews, 1999.

2 In addition to the texts already cited, two collections of more recent ‘philosophical essays’ focus on epistemological issues: see Habermas, 1988 & 1999. Unfortunately, neither of these important contributions has yet appeared in English translation, with the exception of two individual chapters – ‘Zur Kritik der Bedeutungstheorie’, from the former, and ‘Zu Richard Rortys pragmatische Wende’, from the latter – both appearing as, respectively, ‘Toward a Critique of the Theory of Meaning’ and ‘Richard Rorty’s Pragmatic Turn’, in Habermas, 1998.

involve the claim that ‘one thing (X) is a necessary condition for the possibility of something else (Y), so that (it is said) the latter cannot obtain without the former’ (Stern, 1999, p.3). In its narrower range of application and consequently in its stronger sense – usually associated with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and especially with the arguments put forward in his *Critique of Pure Reason* – transcendental argument refers to a type of deduction that establishes the conditions of possibility of experience itself: ‘I name all knowledge transcendental which concerns itself not so much with objects as with our mode of knowledge of objects so far as this [mode of knowledge] is a priori possible’ (Kant, 1933, p.59). As Sebastian Gardner puts it, ‘these conditions must be fulfilled before the subject can be epistemically related to an object’ (Gardner, 1999, p.45). Hence, in this narrower sense, ‘transcendental enquiry is therefore enquiry into the cognitive constitution of the subject to which objects must conform; its product, transcendental knowledge, is at one remove from objects, and concerns only what makes objects, and a priori knowledge of them, possible’ (Gardner, 1999, p.46). In its broader range of application and consequently in its weaker sense, transcendental argument refers to a type of deduction that aims merely to demonstrate what are the necessary conditions of possibility in order that a particular contingent phenomenon can simply exist or be given as it is. Hence, while a strong transcendental argument aims to demonstrate that it simply is not possible to conceive of the world or our cognitive capacities in any other way, a weak transcendental argument aims simply to demonstrate that in order for a particular phenomenon (Stern’s ‘Y’) to exist *as it does* – one might take an institutionalized form of discourse for example – certain presuppositions or conditions of possibility (Stern’s ‘X’) must obtain; and that the latter can be subsequently identified or ‘reconstructed’. What is common to all such arguments is a kind of shuttling back and forth between deductive reasoning and empirical reconstruction in order to identify the particular determining or delimiting factors that typically serve to preclude certain claims on the grounds that they contradict or undermine their own presuppositions or conditions of possibility.

Lambert Zuidervaart locates transcendental argument among three alternative forms of philosophical critique. He observes that ‘transcendent critiques locate their criteria in the critic’s own position; immanent critiques locate them in the position being criticised; *transcendental critiques locate them in preconditions making possible both the criticisms and the position criticised*’ (Zuidervaart, 1991, p.xvii, my emphasis). Of course this familiar schema represents only the very tip of the epistemological iceberg, and the difficulties that typically arise in relation to each are well known: if knowledge is to be derived from some ultimate ground, then how does one gain access to that ground without being literally ‘all-knowing’; if there are

no such grounds, then how does one ground the assertion that there are none; in seeking the ‘conditions of possibility’ of knowledge, how does one avoid employing precisely that which one is attempting to explicate? Each mode of critique, including the ‘strong’ transcendental, appears to be caught in a performative contradiction of its own making. As Nagel puts it: ‘In order to have the authority it claims, reason must be a form or category of thought from which there is no appeal beyond itself – whose validity is unconditional because it is necessarily employed in every purported challenge to itself’ (Nagel, 1997, p.7); or likewise Karl-Otto Apel: ‘One cannot seriously investigate knowing [*Erkenntnis*] from without in respect of its qualities as though it were something appearing in the world – say an instrument or a medium – before making use of it oneself’ (Apel, 1976, p.12).

It is for this reason that, already in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas had claimed that the rules governing what he there termed cognitive interests ‘no longer possess the status of pure transcendental rules. They have a transcendental function but arise from actual structures of human life’ (Habermas, 1987b, p.194). This early notion of ‘quasi-transcendental’ cognitive interests, however, attracted some considerable and mostly justifiable criticism. As Thomas McCarthy, one of his most sympathetic critics, succinctly put it: ‘Habermas appears to be caught in a dilemma: either nature has the transcendental status of a constituted objectivity and cannot, therefore, be the ground of the constituting subject; or nature is the ground of subjectivity and cannot, therefore, be simply a constituted objectivity’ (McCarthy, 1978, p.111). In other words, on the one hand, Habermas wanted to argue that there are (quasi-)transcendental structures or rules in accordance with which one must necessarily operate in order to ‘know’ the world with a view to its technical manipulation and control; and yet, on the other hand, he wanted to demonstrate that the condition of the human species, its cognitive interest in the technical manipulation and control of ‘nature’, is itself a product of that same ‘nature’. Hence the Kantian notion that we can know nature only in terms of the categorial structures by means of which we appropriate it – which, for the Habermas of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, are not those of a transcendental subject per se, but are grounded in the empirical exigencies of material reproduction – collided with the need to posit a nature that is knowable independently of those same categorial structures.

It was partly in response to such criticism that Habermas gradually began to develop a more pragmatic ‘theory of communicative action’, a theory that finds its most comprehensive articulation in his two-volume ‘magnum opus’ of the same name (Habermas, 1984 & 1987b). However, an underlying interest in reconstructive or ‘quasi-transcendental’ theory still permeates his work. In the introduction to his recent collection of essays, *Wahrheit*

und Rechtfertigung [*Truth and Justification*], Habermas observes that ‘after the pragmatic deflation of Kantian conceptuality, transcendental analysis refers to the search for the presumptively general, but only de facto unavoidable conditions which must be fulfilled in order that specific fundamental practices or achievements can take place’ (Habermas, 1999, p.19, my translation). The significance of this philosophical–theoretical enterprise lies precisely in its rejecting the traditional search for ultimate epistemological or metaphysical truths while nevertheless refusing to succumb to the relativism or perspectivism implicit in much ‘postmodern’ thought:

The one side holds to an independent reality toward which our interpretations finally converge in the sense of a correspondence theory of truth. It leaves intact the rational idea that ultimately there must be a true and complete theory which corresponds to the objective world. The relativists, however, put forward a social-context theory of truth and believe that every possible description reflects only one particular construction of reality which is intrinsically and grammatically tied to a respective linguistic world-picture. ... Both positions are confronted with insuperable difficulties. The objectivists face the problem that in order to defend their thesis they must assume a standpoint between language and reality. ... On the other hand, the relativist thesis, which grants a perspectival legitimacy to every linguistically constituted world-view, cannot assert itself without committing a performative self-contradiction. (Habermas, 1998, pp.174–5, my translation)

Or, as Martin Morris succinctly puts it: ‘For Habermas, the arguments of a radical sceptic or relativist, who denies that a universal concept of reason or truth can be discovered, are undermined by the universal–pragmatic presuppositions he or she is nevertheless forced to make in uttering such claims’ (Morris, 2001, p.112). As will become clear, this book aims to determine, in a necessarily more limited context, whether similar pragmatic presuppositions impact upon the nature of musicology as an institutionalized discourse; and, ultimately, whether they too undermine some of the arguments that are put forward by, or in favour of, a ‘postmodern’ musicology. In other words, as I have suggested, a careful examination of institutional presupposition need not serve only to expose arbitrary sites of ‘disciplinary power’, but may also point to quite necessary ‘conditions of possibility’ which serve simultaneously to enable, and to delimit, the type of knowledge to which musicology can legitimately lay claim – at least in so far as it wishes to avoid committing an institutionalized equivalent of Habermas’s ‘performative contradiction’.

In relation to the specific line of argument pursued in this book, there are two key elements, intrinsic to Habermas’s later work, which are worth emphasizing here. Firstly, he operates within a recognizably ‘post-

metaphysical' paradigm that has absorbed the implications of the so-called 'linguistic turn'. In necessarily abbreviated terms, such a framework attempts to move beyond an instrumental 'subject-object' model of cognition – language as a transparent medium of representation and truth as a simple correspondence between propositional 'statement' and ontological 'fact' – and recognizes instead both the world-disclosing capacity of linguistically mediated 'subject-subject' interaction and the necessary fallibility of knowledge:

Every experience is linguistically impregnated, such that a non-linguistically filtered access to reality is impossible. This insight represents a strong motivation for ascribing to the intersubjective conditions of linguistic interpretation and understanding the transcendental role which Kant had reserved for the necessary subjective conditions of objective experience. In place of the transcendental subjectivity of consciousness enters the detranscendentalised intersubjectivity of the lifeworld. (Habermas, 1999, p.41, my translation)

We can see from this that while Habermas attempts to provide a solution to the problem of knowledge in a manner that is similar in some formal aspects to Kant's original project, his philosophical enterprise nevertheless differs substantially in several crucial respects. In keeping with Kant's project, Habermas does not seek to posit some transcendent entity – such as 'Being' or God – as a final ground; however, unlike Kant, he does not then proceed from the assumption of a transcendental subject – as implied by Kant's reference to the 'unity of apperception'. Instead Habermas focuses on the mechanism of argumentation or discursive practice itself and seeks to recover or 'reconstruct' that which must always be presupposed in order that individuals can engage in any type of meaningful argumentation in the first place; his target is the rational-pragmatic core intrinsic to all discursive practice. As his associate Karl-Otto Apel puts it:

The significance of this turn from epistemology *qua* analysis of consciousness to epistemology *qua* analysis of language appears to lie in the fact that the problem of the validity of truth is no longer viewed as one concerning the evidence or certitude of an individual consciousness in the manner of Descartes, nor as one concerning the objective (and to that extent intersubjective) validity for a 'consciousness in general', but as primarily concerned with that of the realization of an intersubjective consensus on the basis of linguistic (argumentative) understanding. (Apel, 1973, p.312, my translation)

If the emphasis on a linguistically mediated access to the world chimes with several seemingly 'postmodern' themes, then the second key feature of Habermas's thought appears in marked opposition to them. Contrary to a number of hermeneutic, poststructuralist and various 'postmodern'

positions³ – of precisely the sort that have played an influential role in recent musicological developments – Habermas’s Kantian inheritance, his engagement with Anglo-American analytical philosophy and speech-act theory, and his qualified defence of ‘modernity’ have all contributed to his figuring truth as the rational outcome of an ideally conceived participatory discourse, itself centred upon the appropriate redemption of claims to propositional, normative and aesthetic validity: ‘Processes of reaching understanding aim at an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance. A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents’ (Habermas, 1984, p.287). Hence, while disputing the possibility of truth both in the traditional metaphysical sense of its mirroring the essence underlying appearance and also in the (strong) positivistic sense of a methodologically secured objectivity – whose inflation to the paradigmatic standard of all knowledge Habermas generally refers to as ‘scientism’ – he nevertheless seeks to counter the various species of relativism implicit in certain postmodern lines of thought. (I will consider how Habermas’s critical interpretation of ‘positivism’ relates to my earlier, partially defensive, discussion of ‘musicological positivism’ later in this chapter.) It is precisely the viability of this pragmatic, deflationary transcendentalism, or ‘weak naturalism’ [*schwacher Naturalismus*] as he sometimes refers to it (see especially Habermas, 1999, pp.32–40), which may have important ramifications for our understanding of the epistemological presuppositions underlying contemporary musicological study and its purported object(s) of enquiry. I therefore return to Habermas after a brief digression.

The Problem of Subjectivism

Postmodern theory is often associated with the attempt to theorize knowledge in relation to multiple contingent or constructed subject positions; and this is clearly a matter of fundamental significance especially where the arts and humanities are concerned – post-empirical philosophies of science notwithstanding. It is therefore not surprising that much postmodern theory is characterized by a marked distrust of, or even an open hostility toward, notions of ‘objectivity’. In this respect it participates in a line of sceptical thought that is probably as old as philosophy itself. If not carefully marshalled, however, a productive theory of interpretive

3 For his reaction to poststructuralist positions, see especially Habermas, 1987c. See also D’Entrèves & Benhabib, 1996.

pluralism can very quickly mutate into a redundant form of ‘anything goes’, subjectivist relativism. It may be inaccurate to conflate directly various more or less sophisticated brands of constructivism or perspectivism with an untenable subjectivism, yet the former do have a habit of sliding all too easily into the latter. To illustrate this point I will take three quite specific examples from contemporary musicological literature. It should be emphasized that in each case it is *the claim itself* that is of interest; the argument adduced does not necessarily implicate the general body of work from which a particular claim is taken.

The first example is drawn from Lawrence Kramer’s *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*. Although a scholar undeniably influenced by postmodern theory – and one to whom I will return on a number of occasions – he nevertheless claims that ‘the possibility of knowledge implies the possibility of error; the listener as personified subject can always listen badly, or listen well and report on it badly’ (Kramer, 1995, p.23). It should be clear that the notions of ‘error’, of ‘listening badly’ and of ‘reporting badly’ can only make sense, and are only really intelligible, in so far as there exists a set of conventions or criteria in accordance with which such judgements can justifiably be made in the first place. Kramer’s claim necessarily presumes at least some set of criteria in accordance with which ‘the listener as personified subject’ can be judged to have ‘listened badly’ or to have ‘listened well and reported on it badly’. Hence, if the requisite criteria are lacking, or prove to be incompatible with those necessarily presupposed by an institutionalized discourse, then such statements – as ‘she listened badly’ or ‘he reported badly’ – can claim no legitimate place within that discourse. Similarly, when Kramer asserts that ‘the character of aesthetic pleasure varies with that of the subject who enjoys it, and vice versa’ (Kramer, 1995, p.22), he thereby precludes aesthetic pleasure – intentionally or not – from serving as a possible foundation for musicological knowledge. This is not to dispute the assertion itself (that ‘aesthetic pleasure varies with that of the subject’); it is to contend that particular descriptions or accounts of ‘aesthetic pleasure’ – in so far as the latter is perceived as a subjective phenomenon – cannot in themselves form the basis of the kind of statements that are to be deemed legitimately constitutive of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse. If the character of aesthetic pleasure does indeed vary with that of the subject who enjoys it, then there would appear to be no justifiable basis for individuals *qua* (mostly remunerated) participants in an institutionalized discourse simply utilizing such aesthetic pleasure as a basis for proffering this or that interpretive reading. It may well serve as the *object* of indirect empirical assertion – for example, ‘x reported that she felt a certain way upon hearing this piece of music’ – but it cannot function as the foundation for a discursive claim in itself. Hence, the two claims – that somebody can

'listen badly' and that 'the character of aesthetic pleasure varies with that of the subject who enjoys it' – have quite different implications. The former must refer to one (presumably cognitive) aspect of listening, the latter to some other (presumably non-cognitive) aspect: 'a trumpet is playing', when actually it is a trombone, would represent an example of listening or reporting badly; 'I derive immense satisfaction from the sound of the trombone' would represent an example of aesthetic pleasure. The key point is that the former statement can be contested substantively ('a trumpet is playing' – 'actually, it is not a trumpet but a trombone' – 'oh, well let us examine the evidence in conjunction with our respective interpretations of instrumental nomenclature'); the latter statement only trivially ('I derive immense satisfaction from the sound of the trombone' – 'oh no you don't!' – 'oh yes I do!'). The former claim can be contested on the basis of some presupposed objective, 'third-person' state of affairs; the latter claim only on the basis of a challenge to the presumed sincerity of the person making it. If these are rather trivial examples, then one might consider a (purposefully generic) claim such as 'the opening passage serves to delineate a particular construction of the feminine which is, however, subsequently deconstructed by the almost bodily intrusion of the jarring discordant harmonies in the accompanying contrapuntal texture. Lacan teaches us ...'.

The second example is Jim Samson's assertion that 'the need for criticism is as fundamental as the need for art. Quite simply it is the need to share our reactions (especially our enthusiasm and excitement), and *there are no restrictions on their authentic expression*' (Samson, 1999, p.54, my emphasis). Again, my focus on an isolated claim should by no means be confused with a challenge to the text from which it is taken (which situates a thoughtful and illuminating discussion of analytical presupposition in a range of historical and philosophical contexts); it is simply that, *in and of itself*, the claim does serve usefully to illustrate a typical inconsistency that is often encountered in the contemporary emphasis on a pluralistically conceived discourse. Firstly, the claim that 'there are no restrictions on authentic expression' is at one level trivially tautological, as is my expression of preference for the music of Bach or Britney Spears, or, for that matter, for a particular flavour of icecream. In fact, it is closely related to Kramer's claim that 'aesthetic pleasure varies with that of the subject who enjoys it'. Secondly, however, and perhaps more importantly, the study of music as an institutionalized discourse must involve more than the sum of statements produced by 'enthusiastic' and 'excited' individuals; otherwise not only would we appear to have returned to something like that untenable scenario in which 'musicology' simply comprises any statements that happen to affect the wider discourse on music, but it would be unclear on what grounds musicology could justifiably present itself as a coherently differentiated form of discourse. On what basis is one to be deemed a musicologist or a

contributor to the institutionalized discourse of musicology, or, indeed, on what basis is one to justify one's status and remuneration, if one is merely sharing one's reactions (upon which there are no restrictions)? Finally, one might also observe that for an expression to be 'authentic' one must be able to cite the set of criteria in accordance with which it can be judged to be so. Hence, *contra* Samson, there *must* be restrictions on authentic expression in order for an expression to be deemed authentic in the first place. Otherwise, the signifier 'authentic' would lose any semantic purchase – as would, we might recall, a musicology that simply comprised all statements about music or a music that was whatever people wanted it to be.

A third example is drawn from the introduction to Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*. Here she claims always to begin a reading 'by trusting that [her] own reactions to music are legitimate' (McClary, 1991, p.22). She expands on this by explaining that

By 'legitimate' I do not mean to suggest that my readings are identical with everyone else's or are always in line with some standard version of what a piece is taken to mean ... but neither would I accept that my readings are 'subjective' in the sense that they reflect only my own quirks. Rather, I take my reactions to be in large part socially constituted (McClary, 1991, p.22)

It is worth unpicking this claim at some length. If one follows closely the reasoning that is employed here, McClary's argument ultimately reduces to the belief that the 'legitimacy' of a reading derives from the 'socially constituted' nature of the reactions on which it is based: (1) her readings are neither the same as everyone else's, nor are they in accordance with some standard version; (2) however, her readings are not (merely) 'subjective' in the sense that they reflect her own quirks; and this is because, (3) the 'reactions' on which those readings depend are in large part socially constituted. However, this line of reasoning poses certain problems. Firstly, it presupposes a way of distinguishing between socially constituted (and therefore legitimate) reactions and merely subjective (and therefore illegitimate?) reactions – those latter reflecting mere personal quirks. Such a mechanism is not forthcoming. Secondly, if indeed her readings are not dependent upon subjective personal quirks but instead are derived from those (legitimate) reactions that are themselves socially constituted, then should not such readings also approximate other readings proffered by other individuals whose reactions are similarly constituted and thus tend toward precisely that 'standard version', accommodation with which McClary denies can serve as a measure of legitimacy? On the other hand, if McClary's own readings do not tally with other readings – to which her response might be that we are all the products of such complex socially determined constitutions that our reactions are bound not to tally – then

how does one distinguish between the unique reaction that is the product of an individual's particular social constitution and the merely subjective reaction that is the result of an individual's quirky (but presumably not social) constitution?

The recurring problem here stems from McClary's use of the term 'legitimate', Samson's use of the term 'authentic' and, to a certain extent, Kramer's reference to the possibility of 'listening and reporting badly'. In short all three are trapped by the aporetic desire, on the one hand, to reserve some kind of justifiable legitimacy or authority for their readings of and reactions to music – 'the possibility of error and listening badly', 'authentic reactions', 'legitimate readings which are not merely subjective' – and yet, on the other hand, to avoid implicitly elevating their own readings and reactions on account of their being more 'correct' or 'appropriate' – 'the character of aesthetic pleasure varies', 'there are no restrictions upon', 'not in line with some standard version'. Such instances cannot be dismissed as isolated cases of semantic imprecision, nor can the arguments levelled against them be dismissed as mere pedantry; rather they tend to highlight, precisely in their seeming harmlessness, a deeper contradiction – a tension between a pluralist concern with the indeterminacy or relativity of interpretation, on the one hand, and a presupposition of institutional authority and academic purpose, on the other. Any type of study that takes music as its object and is to represent more than a collection of trivial claims to the effect that 'this is what music means to me' – and one presumes (and has to presume) that the study of music as an institutionalized discourse is more than that – must be operating in accordance with a set of conditional criteria that transcend the uniquely individual and the merely subjective. As Nagel puts it in relation to the purpose of rational argumentation:

The idea of reason, by contrast, refers to nonlocal and nonrelative methods of justification – methods that distinguish universally legitimate from illegitimate inferences and that aim at reaching truth in a nonrelative sense. Those methods may fail, but that is their aim, and rational justifications, even if they come to an end somewhere, *cannot end with the qualifier 'for me' if they are to make that claim.* (Nagel, 1997, p.5, my emphasis)

This, incidentally, also explains why Cusick's attempt to portray (traditional) musicology as an inherently 'masculine' discourse, on account of its systematically excluding a more 'feminine' concern with the sensual, bodily or pleasurable moments of musical experience, misses the point that the particular epistemological and methodological presuppositions underlying an allegedly 'masculine' discourse may have more to do with the necessary requirements of an institutionalized discourse than with inherent patriarchal

prejudice – although the latter may well have played an originary role in determining disciplinary priorities (see Cusick, 1999). In other words, it is possible that musicology may ultimately have adopted some of the right epistemological and methodological priorities, but for some of the wrong reasons.

In this light, and at this point, it is worth returning to Kramer's attempt to grapple with the paradox of a postmodern emphasis on interpretive indeterminacy. He argues that 'while bad interpretations may be manifestly false, good interpretations can never be manifestly true'; this is not to say 'that interpretation must forgo all claims to be credible, scrupulous, and rational', although those terms themselves are 'susceptible to continual redefinition'; moreover, interpretation must meet demands for 'explanatory power, interconnectedness, telling detail, and honesty' (Kramer, 1990, pp.15–16). However, Kramer does not elaborate on how we are to decide what constitute bad interpretations and how they may be manifestly false, or why a good interpretation can never be manifestly true; nor does he explain how an interpretation is to be deemed credible and rational when those terms are themselves open to continual redefinition. In a sense, by claiming that interpretation must not forgo claims to be 'credible, scrupulous and rational' and yet then suggesting that the latter are open to 'continual redefinition', Kramer simply displaces the locus of indeterminacy from the mechanism of interpretation itself to the mechanism of (post-facto) justification. It is difficult to envisage how one is to distinguish between, on the one hand, interpretations upon which there are no effective limitations and, on the other hand, interpretations upon which there are limitations, albeit that the latter are themselves open to continual (re)interpretation. One assumes that what Kramer has in mind is that the plausibility of an interpretation is dependent upon the extent to which it renders music meaningful, in the sense that its hermeneutic insight illuminates a context of meaning that might otherwise have remained operative merely unconsciously or not at all (I examine Kramer's 'hermeneutic' mode of interpretation, in some detail, in Chapter 4). Yet this fails to answer the question as to how such hermeneutic insights might claim some kind of validity beyond the perspective of the person offering them. This problematic is still apparent in later work where Kramer attempts to square the circle by arguing that 'postmodernist reason always serves interests other than truth and *by that means enables itself to serve truth*, however imperfectly' (Kramer, 1995, p.7, original emphasis). Despite its Adorno-esque turn of phrase, this would benefit from further elaboration. In particular it would be helpful to know exactly what Kramer intends by 'truth' – as something that can never be predicated of an interpretation – and, indeed, what he means by 'postmodern reason'; for some the latter would represent a rather paradoxical notion in itself. Nevertheless, Kramer

is one of those rare and welcome thinkers who is (mostly) aware of the paradox into which an enthusiastic embrace of ‘postmodern’ thought can lead; at times, one can almost sense him pulling at his own theoretical bootstraps as he seeks to maintain a critical discourse while applying precisely the kind of tools that threaten to spiral away from him, deconstruct the very critique that is the platform for his own and hence cancel all the way through. It is for this reason that I now return to the work of Jürgen Habermas.

The Ideal Speech Situation

Central to Habermas’s philosophical–theoretical system is the notion of the ‘ideal speech situation’. He frames this as a kind of regulative ideal inherent in every attempt at mutual understanding – one in which every participant is afforded equal opportunity to contribute. As Peter Dews explains:

According to this conception, speakers of a language necessarily presuppose that it is possible to resolve, and possess an intuitive knowledge of how to resolve consensually, disputed validity-claims, since otherwise language would be unable to fulfil what Habermas takes to be its central function of co-ordinating action through agreement. As is well known, this line of inquiry then leads Habermas to the notion of the ‘ideal speech situation’ – of those conditions under which truth claims could be resolved in a way which would guarantee the objective validity of the outcome. ... Thus, the ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor a rationalistic construction (Dews, 1995, pp.264–5)

For many commentators, whether they remain ultimately hostile or sympathetic to his underlying project, the principal problem with Habermas’s notion of the ‘ideal speech situation’ – which, although having undergone several modifications, remains a central component within his theory of communicative action – stems both from its seemingly ideal(ized), ahistorical condition and also from the universalizing system of rationally constrained and constraining norms that it would appear to imply. Richard Rorty, for example, has argued that ‘we ought to write history, and do philosophy, in the light of the possibility that the Peircian idea of convergence or the Habermasian idea of an “ideal speech community” may be a fake. It may be a fake because the vocabulary any community – even an ideal one – uses is just one more vocabulary, and may be as incommensurable with its predecessors as ours with Paracletus’s’ (Rorty, 1986, p.48); and, in a similar vein, Peter Zima has suggested that ‘one could object that the ideal speech situation postulated by Habermas “in a

counterfactual manner” within the tradition of Kant, Apel and American Speech Act Theory is an idealist abstraction. For it presupposes that those who take part in dialogue (“participants in discourse” for Habermas) overcome their psychological, political and ideological prejudices, that they are able to exchange their roles, and that they agree on an homogenous use of language’ (Zima, 2002, p.192). These are certainly powerful arguments. However, they are directed primarily against the universalizing claim that such normative conditions as are implied by the supposition of an ‘ideal speech situation’ obtain at *all* levels of *all* discursive practice. As Martin Morris notes: ‘the principle of communicative action ... is for Habermas a principle that is operative in the presuppositions of speech itself all the way down to the level of the everyday’ (Morris, 2001, p.103). Yet Morris also observes that

Both speaker and hearer engage in communicative action only with the assumption that an agreement based on mutual assent is possible in principle. The orientation toward mutual understanding and agreement is thus said to be an unavoidable presupposition of communicative speech action. On the face of it *this model appears most appropriate for some abstract and rigorous academic discourse or debate.* (Morris, 2001, p.103, my emphasis)

In other words, the apparent problem with Habermas’s conception of the ideal speech situation, where ‘discourse in general’ is concerned, may count in its favour where a quite specific mode of academic discourse is concerned. What I am therefore suggesting is that Habermas’s theory of discursive practice, and its elaboration of the conditions under which claims to discursive validity can legitimately be redeemed, provides not only the model *of* an institutionalized academic discourse, but also dictates the normative conditions of possibility *for* such a discourse. In this respect an institutionalized discourse can then be seen as the ideal – in the sense of a regulative and rationally (re)constructed – distillate of precisely that consensus-oriented mode of argumentation that is captured by Habermas’s theory of communicative action. David Held describes Habermas’s notion of discourse as follows:

For Habermas the only way to explain the particular qualities of intersubjectively recognised norms is by recourse to the notion of a consensus based on the primacy of rational criticism. ... While no procedures exist which can guarantee a lasting consensus, or which can supply the ‘truth’ once and for all, there are procedures, Habermas thinks, which generate good reasons to accept or reject competing knowledge claims. *These are located in the notion of a discourse. It is Habermas’s contention that the presuppositions and procedures of discourse are the basis for establishing both the truth of statements and the correctness of norms.* (Held, 1980, pp.330–31, my emphasis)

It is interesting to note, here, a point of convergence between the earlier Foucault and the later Habermas: both are concerned with the nature of discourse and both are interested in the specific structures or rules that are constitutive of it. However, Foucault is ultimately concerned with the various structures that determine a particular historically contingent discursive field, whereas Habermas is ultimately concerned with demonstrating the specific presuppositions that are a condition of rationally motivated discourse itself – that is, a discourse directed at achieving understanding. In an important sense, the notion of an institutionalized discourse can productively synthesize these two orientations. Hence the notion of the ideal speech situation (Habermas) is appropriated in order to reconstruct and impose normative limits upon a particular discursive formation that is itself comprehended in relation to specific institutional structures and regulatory mechanisms (Foucault). On the one hand, the seeming contingency implied by Foucault's 'archaeology' of discursive structures is itself constrained by the normative quasi-transcendental presuppositions or conditions of possibility that are constitutive of an institutionalized discourse. On the other hand, the seeming (false) universality of Habermas's theory of communicative action is tempered by its being located within the demonstrable and delimiting boundaries of an institutionalized discourse.

At the heart of Habermas's theory of the redeemable validity claim, then, is the stipulation that in order for a particular claim or statement to constitute a legitimate moment within the process of undistorted (non-strategic, non-coercive) communicative action – understood as being directed toward reaching understanding – it must be possible for the hearer or respondent justifiably to respond to that statement or claim with either assent or dissent. Habermas typically identifies three ways in which this can occur:

In contexts of communicative action, speech acts can always be rejected under each of the three aspects: the aspect of the rightness that the speaker claims for his action in relation to a normative context; the truthfulness that the speaker claims for the expression of subjective experiences to which he has privileged access; finally, the truth that the speaker, with this utterance, claims for a statement (or for the existential presuppositions of a nominalised proposition). (Habermas, 1984, p.307)⁴

4 Habermas often refers to a fourth condition that a given claim must meet – comprehensibility [*Verständlichkeit*]. However, this is a presupposition of linguistic communication per se and is not so much a condition of validity claims themselves as it is the very medium through which they are or can be raised in the first place. See also Habermas, 1999 & 1988 (esp. Ch. 4).

It should be clear that while one can challenge claims to truth [*Wahrheit*] through recourse to some form of publicly accessible evidence and claims to rightness [*Richtigkeit*] through recourse to some form of intersubjectively established norm, one can only challenge claims to truthfulness [*Wahrhaftigkeit*] through recourse to a supposition about the presumed sincerity of the person making the claim. To take a rather trivial example: I can dispute another's assertoric claim '*there is a piano over there*' on the basis of my observing that there is not a piano over there; however, I cannot dispute another's self-reflexive claim '*I see a piano over there*' on the same basis. I may impute some kind of hallucinatory experience to the individual in question (or perhaps to myself), or I may impute some kind of metaphorical meaning to the claim itself, or I may attempt to ensure that the claim means the same for me as it does for the individual making it. However, I cannot challenge the propositional content of the claim itself through recourse to some form of intersubjectively established norm or through recourse to some form of publicly accessible material. To be sure, this does not preclude the possibility that he or she may yet claim that '*there [really] is a piano over there*' and I may yet claim '*there [really] is not a piano over there*' – but that is precisely the point. The '*there is a piano over there*' claim is criticizable and in principle *contestable* in a manner that the '*I see a piano over there*' claim is not. Just as was the case, we might remember, with the claim, 'a trumpet is playing', and the claim, 'I derive immense satisfaction from the sound of the trombone' – the former can be contested on the basis of some presupposed 'third-person' state of affairs; the latter only on the basis of a challenge to the presumed sincerity of the person making it.

It is thus my central contention that an institutionalized academic discourse is underwritten by, and dependent upon, the condition that its constituent claims to discursive validity submit to just such a principle of contestability. In order that it not commit a kind of 'performative contradiction', in order that it not fall prey to an untenable subjectivism, and in order that it distinguish itself from any 'discourse in general' that happens simply to take music as its object, it is a necessary condition (of possibility) for an institutionalized academic discourse that it issue only in those claims that are contestable according to the criteria of 'assertoric truth' – claims about how a presupposed 'third-person' world actually is – or 'normative acceptance'. Hence, it cannot issue in claims that depend upon reactions which 'vary in accordance with each individual' or upon which 'there are no restrictions'; nor can it simply include any claims that happen 'to affect the wider discourse about music'. I also want to suggest that where as discourse proper comprises claims to truth – those assertoric claims about a presupposed 'third-person' world – what I earlier referred to as 'meta-discourse' comprises claims to normative acceptance. The claim

that ‘a trumpet *is* playing’ is of a different order than the claim that ‘musicologists *should* spend more time studying trumpets’. The former takes music as its object; the latter takes musicology itself. I will now take each in turn.

The Principle of Contestability

The principle of contestability refers to that condition of a discursive statement according to which it is understood to be raising an implicit claim to the effect that it is compatible with, entailed by, or could potentially be supported by recourse to some form of ‘third-person’ evidence. Hence, it demands that the individual making such a claim must formulate it in such a way that it is clear what would count as the evidence required in its support:

It is part of understanding a sentence that we are capable of recognising grounds through which the claim that its truth conditions are satisfied could be redeemed. This theory explains the meaning of a sentence not only mediately through knowing the conditions of its validity, but immediately through knowing grounds that are objectively available to a speaker for redeeming a validity claim. (Habermas, 1984, p.317)

Assertoric claims are those concerning how the world is or was. Their ultimate fallibility does nothing to alter the condition that they be compatible with or entailed by some form of third-person evidence: ‘In post-traditional societies or under the conditions of post-metaphysical thinking, all knowledge is recognised – from the point of view of a third person – as fallible, even if, performatively, from the perspective of the participant, we cannot avoid holding the claimed knowledge to be unconditionally true’ (Habermas, 1999, p.107, my translation). This is one of the (several) conditions that serve to differentiate Habermas’s implicit epistemology from the strict ‘verificationism’ of logical positivism. Unlike the latter, according to which statements are only true, and indeed only meaningful, in so far as they can demonstrably and irrefutably be derived from concrete, empirical or sensory evidence, Habermas’s conception of assertoric truth is predicated upon the necessary presumption of the possibility of redeeming objective validity claims about a necessarily presupposed third-person world through undistorted communicative practice. In many respects, this epistemological aspect of Habermas’s thought is rather closer to the ‘critical rationalism’ of Popper than it might otherwise seem. To take a very trivial example: the claim ‘Bach was born in 1685’ satisfies the criterion of assertoric contestability precisely in so far

as it picks out a clear fact about the world and because the means to corroborate it are (in principle) known. The criterion of contestability therefore refers to a *condition* of statements; it does not refer to whether or not they actually are *true*. Hence, the claims ‘Bach was born in 1685’ and ‘Bach was born in 1785’ are both legitimate according to the criterion of assertoric contestability – albeit that at least one of them must be (assumed to be) false. In other words, the principle of contestability is that which allows that one can argue (in a non-trivial manner) for and against a given discursive claim in the first place. As Cristina Lafont puts it:

To any clearly stated question concerning the truth of statements, there can only be one right answer. We cannot say that a statement was true and is now false. This explains why we cannot say that we knew something that turned out to be wrong, whereas we can say without contradiction that we were justified (i.e. epistemically responsible) in believing something that turned out to be false. That there is something to be known about certain questions means that there is a fact of the matter as to their answers. It means that what can be known is either one way or the other. (Lafont, 1999, p.293)

It is for this reason that we can deem ‘trivial’ all those claims that comprise no more than a subjective preference or a purely subjective interpretation – albeit that the latter may be obscured by the form of a particular claim or set of claims – or which, by virtue of an alleged ‘perspectivism’, ultimately amount to the same.

It will be remembered that Habermas argues that one can challenge claims in respect of their truth [*Wahrheit*], their rightness [*Richtigkeit*] and their truthfulness [*Wahrhaftigkeit*]. Hence, in the case of the statement ‘my favourite composer is Bach’, it should be clear that we cannot contest its truth (there is no form of publicly accessible evidence to which we could turn), nor its rightness (there is no intersubjectively agreed consensus as to which composers are to count as potential favourites), but only its truthfulness. At the same time, claims such as ‘my favourite composer is Bach’ should not be confused with those claims that might initially appear to be equally subjective – for example, the claim that ‘Bach is the greatest composer’ – since they are, in fact, of a quite different order. The observation that Bach is one’s favourite composer cannot strictly provoke dissent; it may elicit a normative judgement about one’s taste, but no one can actually refute the claim *per se*. However, the claim that Bach is the greatest composer clearly demands the assent of others – in so far as it is not simply a misleading expression of preference. This is a crucial distinction to grasp, however trivial the example might at first sight appear. Moreover, simply countering any dispute with a qualifier to the effect that Bach is the greatest composer ‘*for me*’ or ‘*in my opinion*’ does nothing to alter the epistemological stakes. If one is wishing to claim more than that Bach

is simply one's favourite composer, then one is necessarily obliged to provide justification for the claim that one is making. We might remember Nagel's argument that 'rational justifications, even if they come to an end somewhere, *cannot end with the qualifier "for me" if they are to make that claim*' (Nagel, 1977, p.5, my emphasis). Hence, unless the predicate 'greatest' can be reduced to, or shown to be commensurate with, a set of criteria upon which all can potentially agree and that are themselves conditional upon some form of demonstrable third-person evidence, such claims cannot be deemed legitimate contributions to the study of music as an institutionalized discourse – because musicology has to be more than a collection of claims to the effect that 'this is what music means to me'. As Habermas argues, 'mutual understanding [*Verständigung*] with regard to the contested existence of states of affairs can be reached by participants only on the basis of the evaluation of sentences that are capable of being true' (Habermas, 1988, p.110). Hence, where the validity of a statement or claim cannot be evaluated, the sentence cannot be deemed to be referring to a genuinely contestable state of affairs. Likewise, according to this pragmatic dispensation, the addition of the qualifier 'it is true that ...' adds nothing substantive to the claim 'my favourite composer is Bach', nor could truth ever be predicated of such an observation except in the form, 'it is true that x stated that his or her favourite composer is Bach'. In other words, first-person experiential sentences cannot be 'true and false ... *unless such experiential sentences are assimilated to assertoric sentences*' (Habermas, 1988, p.126, my emphasis).

This argument may appear to represent a rather involved and protracted way of arriving at a rather trivial conclusion; its implications, however, are profound in respect of those (not few) instances in which scholars qualify their 'readings' with provisos to the effect that 'the following is only my interpretation and no more or less valid than that of anyone else'. For example, Susan McClary's implicit recognition of the redundancy of first-person experiential claims within the context of an institutionalized discourse – 'I do not mean to suggest that my readings are identical with everyone else's or are always in line with some standard version of what a piece is taken to mean ... but neither would I accept that my readings are "subjective" in the sense that they reflect only my own quirks' – should have resulted in her acknowledging that the disjunction between her readings and those of others implied one of two options: either (1) that, in fact, her readings were the equivalent of first-person 'quirky' experiential claims and therefore could not be deemed a legitimate contribution to the study of music as an institutionalized discourse; or (2) that she was claiming that her readings were objectively more justified than those of others by dint of the available (third-person) evidence – which latter she would therefore be obliged to supply.

This is, of course, the enduring paradox of ‘interpretation’. By definition, an interpretation is only one among others. Yet the characteristic ‘postmodern’ belief in the indeterminacy or ultimate plurality of interpretation poses real problems in so far as the purpose and legitimacy of an institutionalized discourse is concerned. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, the meaning or significance that one may happen to derive from a particular musical work or utterance (or one’s reactions to it) and, on the other hand, a particular ‘representation’ for which one wishes to claim ‘third-person’ assent. It is indisputable that music will have multiple meanings and significances, not only for each individual, but also for any one individual. However, this is not, in and of itself, a justification for one’s simply proffering, on the basis of one’s particular reaction to a musical work or utterance, an interpretation that is ‘equally valid as any other’; instead, it is a stimulus both to deriving a coherent theory of musical signification and to pursuing detailed empirical research into particular contexts of reception (I consider this issue in greater detail when I look at ‘mediation’ and ‘reception’ in Chapter 3). These two conditions are often confused or conflated. As I argued in relation to Kramer’s (quite correct) observation that ‘the character of aesthetic pleasure varies with that of the subject who enjoys it’, while aesthetic pleasure may therefore form the basis of informal, and perhaps interesting, communicative exchanges, it cannot form the basis of the kind of discursive claims that are to be deemed legitimately constitutive of musicology as an institutionalized discourse. As Habermas puts it:

With the claim Kp , a speaker combines not only the intention that the addressee recognise that he [the speaker] holds p to be true and that he wishes the addressee to know this. Instead of his own thought, p , he wishes to communicate the fact ‘that p ’. The speaker pursues the illocutionary aim such that the hearer should not only recognize his [the speaker’s] opinion, but rather that the hearer should arrive at the same view and thus share his opinion. (Habermas, 1999, p.10, my translation)

At the same time, the relativity of meaning or significance at the personal level should be confused neither with the intrinsic and limited indeterminacy afforded by a particular systematic mode of representation – for example, the way in which, say, an orthodox Schenkerian reading may permit more than one reading of the penultimate tone of the fundamental descent – nor with the fact that a given musical work or utterance may be interpreted or analysed from a range of perspectives – for example, an analysis of its technical structure or an investigation into the extent to which it contributes to a particular construction of the feminine. John Neubauer, for example, has suggested that ‘interpretive communities and traditions –

whether those of music analysis, historicism, New Criticism, or deconstruction – focus our attention on certain features of an artwork. They place a differential value on different parts, and suggest certain networks of association between them’ (Neubauer, 1992, p.18). However, in each case it is implicit, or must be understood as implicit, that in proposing a given reading or interpretation one is seeking assent from others about a presumed ‘third-person’ state of affairs.

It is precisely this (Habermasian) recognition of intersubjective understanding as teleologically implicit in the world-disclosing or action-coordinating nature of communicative praxis that provides an escape-route from the compulsion to choose between *either* a subject–object conception of knowledge – whether in its strict idealist or logical empiricist versions – *or* its (poststructuralist) liquidation in the performative contradiction of a self-positing and self-relating discursive textuality. I would argue that in its desire to escape the former, due in part to a misconstrued diagnosis of ‘positivism’ (as discussed in Chapter 1), some contemporary musicology has veered too far toward the latter.

Discourse and Meta-discourse

Thus far I have focused on what one might term the ‘epistemological’ conditions of institutionalized discourse in respect of the discursive claims that are constitutive of it. However, an institutionalized discourse will most likely also include reflection on such matters as the guiding theoretical frameworks in accordance with which particular statements are to be made, the working methodologies that are to be adopted in arriving at them, and the mechanisms by means of which those statements and claims are to be articulated, exchanged and contested. Hence, an institutionalized discourse will include its own ‘meta-discourse’ – of which this book is a most obvious example. If this latter point can appear somewhat counter-intuitive or even a little circular, at least from an etymological point of view, then it should be borne in mind that I intend no more than that the discourse of musicology be taken not only to include statements or claims about its purported object – music – but also to incorporate self-reflective statements or claims about itself.

While assertoric contestability refers to those claims that, within Habermas’s schema, can be challenged in terms of their truth [*Wahrheit*], normative contestability refers to those that can be challenged in terms of their rightness [*Richtigkeit*]. Another way of putting this is to say that normative contestability refers to that condition of a discursive statement according to which it is understood to be raising a particular claim, the realization or acceptance of which would inevitably require a corresponding

change of circumstance, practice or orientation on the part of others. In short, normative contestability is a condition of 'ought' or 'should' claims – where those claims demand, implicitly or explicitly, the acceptance or agreement of others – but for which one cannot have direct recourse to some form of (presupposed) third-person evidence in the manner of assertoric contestability. This also clarifies the distinction between subjective statements such as 'Bach is the greatest composer' – meaning 'I like the music of Bach more than that of anyone else, but you are free to prefer whomever you choose' – and genuinely normative claims such as 'Bach is the greatest composer' – meaning 'you must agree with me that Bach is the greatest composer'. Although the two may overlap, it is clear that there exists a set of claims that do submit to normative contestability but not to assertoric contestability. This observation is the approximate equivalent of the claim that one cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is' (and, incidentally, is thus the principal source of moral and other forms of relativism). These are also the claims that typically comprise 'meta-discourse'.

As I have already suggested, 'meta-discourse' refers to that part of a discourse that is involved in reflection upon itself. While assertoric contestability represents the epistemological condition of possibility for the acceptance of specific claims *qua* knowledge (Habermas's *Wahrheit*), meta-discourse *itself* is not subject to the same condition. While the statements 'we can interpret the first movement of this symphony as constructing a particular notion of the feminine' and 'musicology will be better served if it includes a concern for issues of gender and representation, even when interpreting music without an explicit textual or programmatic content' are both contestable in one sense, the mode of legitimating each claim, the manner in which it is possible to redeem the claim to validity inherent in each statement, is of a different order. The former, if it is to be deemed an acceptable contribution to musicology as an institutionalized discourse, is (or should be) in principle contestable or falsifiable on the basis of the empirical evidence, theoretical framework and interpretive mechanism that is employed in making it. The latter, however, clearly does not, or cannot, have recourse to the same legitimating procedures. This is obviously related, at one level, to the longstanding problem posed by the 'fact-value' dichotomy, a considerable topic in its own right. It is not my intention, nor could it be, to engage in detail with that particular debate. However, it is worth observing that Habermas's model represents an attempt to theorize the difference between claims to assertoric 'truth' and normative 'rightness' while also holding that both are underwritten by a similar mechanism of argumentation and system of legitimating procedure. In this respect he seeks to avoid both the (strict), if generally caricatured, 'positivist' view which reduces the determination of 'value' to an irrational decisionism and also the (extreme), if generally caricatured, 'postmodern' view which

collapses the distinction between the two. In short, and this is one of the principal contentions underwriting the argument developed in this chapter, the (postmodern) collapse of the fact–value distinction threatens to undermine what is in fact a *necessary presupposition* of any academic, institutionalized discourse.

It is of course the case that an assertoric claim will necessarily imply, or depend upon, one or more underlying normative claims – and vice versa. Hence the normative contestability of meta-discursive debate and the assertoric contestability of ‘discourse proper’ are mediated through the mechanism by means of which a given theoretical framework or set of methodological assumptions subsequently determines the ‘discursive aim’ in accordance with which individual claims are marshalled and organized to a given end. For example, the claim, ‘the ambiguity of tonal resolution undermines the masculine conviction of the recapitulation’, is an assertoric claim (to truth) that may be guided by the desire, or ‘discursive aim’, to account for particular works in terms of their articulating particular representations of gender. In turn, this desire or aim is itself guided by an implicit normative claim that ‘musicology can and should be interpreting musical works with a view to revealing the way in which they articulate particular representations of gender’. As a more extended example, one might consider a hypothetical argument between an advocate of strictly formalist analysis and an advocate of gender-oriented readings. Each protagonist may argue, for example, that their respective methodology or discursive aim provides a ‘more complete understanding’ of a given piece of music – such claims are not unknown. However, in itself, this argument may already have become circular in so far as each may define or understand a ‘more complete understanding’ precisely in terms of those criteria at whose elaboration their respective methodology is directed. A similar situation arises in relation to claims that a given methodology or discursive aim will provide a ‘greater insight’ or a ‘better explanation’. Meta-discursive debate often includes claims to the effect that this or that theoretical perspective, methodological approach or discursive aim will furnish a fuller, richer, more complete or more intimate understanding of a given musical work or utterance. Both the formal analytical reading and the gender-oriented reading might be evaluated in terms of the extent to which their ensuing claims are supported by the available evidence and in terms of the extent to which the theoretical framework underwriting those claims avoids self-contradiction. The advocate of a critical feminist mode of interpretation, for example, may argue that formalist analysis is inherently patriarchal and hence must be modified. The advocate of a formal analytical understanding may argue that a critical feminist reading fails to account for the unique specificity of a particular work or utterance. What is clear is that such (normative) meta-discursive claims cannot be resolved by referring to

a presumed ‘third-person’ world, albeit that they do presuppose a mechanism of rational, non-decisionist argumentation.

Hence, given such a conception of meta-discourse, it is worth asking whether, in addition to the requirement that meta-discourse be limited to proposing theoretical frameworks and methodological procedures that satisfy the conditions of possibility of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse, in respect of the discursive claims to which they will give rise, there are any additional constraints or factors that one might consider when deciding between the normative claims that typically comprise meta-discursive argument – not least because it is clear that musicology cannot study all music in accordance with all epistemologically acceptable discursive aims.

Institutional Legitimacy

The very idea that musicology should prove its political or ethical legitimacy will no doubt strike many as a rather unusual or unnecessary imposition. Yet, as Locke observes, ‘musicology and a concern for social relevance and efficacy might at first seem an odd pairing, but only if one works on the operating assumption that musicology and music are more or less irrelevant to society, are indeed not themselves social phenomena’ (Locke, 1999, p.500). Those who are involved in the study of music (as an institutionalized discourse) are not *only* pursuing a hobby or interest. They constitute an active component within society’s division of labour and are remunerated for that labour with the means to dispose over a given share of that society’s total material product. In addition to their teaching, administration and other activities, many of those involved in the study of music as an institutionalized discourse are remunerated, at least in part, for the knowledge that they produce, reproduce and disseminate. Hence one is justified in examining and enquiring after both the purpose of their producing, reproducing and disseminating such knowledge as well as the justification for their being remunerated in the manner that they are. This should not be mistaken for the increasingly prevalent, if rather philistine, demand that all remunerated activity must prove its economic worth – as though all value were quantifiable according to the logic of capital. Nevertheless, it does imply that at least some kind of justification might be required; and, moreover, one that extends beyond a general mix of humanist ideals or that relies on more than simply espousing the virtue of ‘knowledge for the sake of knowledge’ – for the questions yet remain: which knowledge, why, and for whom?

To put this in more concrete terms, one might reflect that while those involved in the study of music cultivate a fascination for, say, the aesthetic

subtleties of the late sixteenth-century madrigal, many of their fellow human beings are confronted on a daily basis with fundamental material want; or that while those involved in the study of music examine the implications of postmodern theory for an interpretation of the sexual-political ramifications of nineteenth-century chamber music, many of their fellow human beings suffer under conditions of political brutality and oppression; or, indeed, that while those involved in the study of music (in the UK at least) receive a level of remuneration that is higher than the national median average income – although some academics seemingly still find time and reason to complain about the fact – many of their fellow citizens labour for a meagre or exploitative wage or are denied the possibility of engaging in any type of remunerated, let alone meaningful, labour at all: ‘In North America and Great Britain, and no doubt elsewhere as well, academics tend not to feel privileged, perhaps because we imagine that we could have been making more money – and had more direct impact on the outside world – in another line of work. Yet privileged many of us surely are, in comparison to the bulk of our country’s citizens, never mind those of certain other countries’ (Locke, 1999, p.524). It would appear, then, that if those involved in the study of music are not simply indulging in what would ultimately represent a self-serving and selfish interest (or hobby) – whose institutionalization merely serves as an indirect means of acquiring an iniquitous share of the collective wealth – then the study of music as an institutionalized discourse may well require a first-order political or ethical justification; and one that penetrates beneath the superficial vicissitudes of meta-discursive debate. In this respect, the most pressing concern for those involved in the study of music, the issue in need of the most sustained reflection, would then become not whether formalism or poststructuralist hermeneutics offers the ‘better’ understanding of music, nor whether musicology should be studying Charpentier or The Carpenters; but, instead, determining why those involved in the study of music are to receive a greater disposition over society’s total material product than a street-cleaner or a nurse – especially when to many observers the contribution and benefit to society of the latter is considerably more tangible than that of the former. It is not so easy as it might first appear to justify why a scholar involved in the study of music should receive his or her comparatively large share of society’s collective wealth in return for establishing the provenance of a fifteenth-century manuscript; or why so much time, effort, material and labour should be expended in providing the institutional framework within which the results of such investigation can be disseminated and contested. As Locke puts it, in rather more encompassing terms: ‘What does a music scholar of whatever stripe (historical musicologist, theorist, ethnomusicologist, and so on) – and, more generally, a musician, a music-lover, a scholar, a teacher, a writer, a citizen, a resident on this planet – owe

to her or his fellow creatures?’ (Locke, 1999, p.502). While I have, of course, already taken issue with Locke’s untenably inclusive notion of musicology – according to which musicology is to comprise all those who are in a position to affect the wider discourse on music – his underlying challenge remains fundamental to any reflection on the purpose and scope of contemporary musicology as an institutionalized discipline; and it clearly impacts upon pedagogy as much as it does upon research. Locke reports the following:

The electronic discussion list of the American Musicological Society has been carrying frequent messages from graduate students seeking some reassurance about the ‘relevance’ (the writers’ usual term) of musical scholarship today. The students often wonder whether research, and sometimes even the teaching of music history, is becoming a pointless self-indulgence ... Some also wonder what music and musicology might do to help draw attention to, or even in some way alleviate, one or another of the many seemingly intractable national and world problems. (Locke, 1999, p.499)

Having said that, and whatever the merits of such arguments – to which I shall return in subsequent chapters – there is clearly no (strong) quasi-transcendental argument underlying the derivation of political or ethical imperatives; there is no argument correlative to that which imposes (epistemological) imperatives on the kinds of discursive claims in which the study of music as an institutionalized discourse can legitimately issue. There is, however, some convergence. The argument that the study of music should not (or cannot) base its discursive claims upon what are merely subjective reactions – upon which there are no restrictions – would appear to have both discursive and political–ethical support. Similarly, there is some force to the argument that in order to justify their collective remuneration, those involved in an institutionalized discourse should concern themselves with music in a manner that is oriented toward socially relevant and perhaps even emancipatory interests. Such an argument may therefore impact upon the way in which music is figured as an object of study. As Kay Shelemay argues: ‘a concern with the implications of music scholarship presupposes a commitment to approach music in a broader cultural context’ (Shelemay, 1999, p.531). Hence, in the next chapter, I turn to the issue of ‘mediation’ and ‘context’.

Chapter 3

Putting Things in Context

Chapter 1 argued that it is mostly misleading to understand recent developments in contemporary musicology in terms of ‘old’ and ‘new’, or ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’. In fact, it may be more accurate to contend that the primary challenge facing contemporary musicological study has less to do with the vicissitudes of ‘postmodern’ theory and the denigration of an outmoded ‘modernism’ – an attitude that only serves to obscure, and distract from, more productive and pertinent matters – and rather more to do with navigating between what are at first glance two quite antithetical conceptions: music as an autonomous manifestation of abstract structural relations and music as a thoroughly and multiply mediated concrete or symbolic phenomenon. In this respect, the more appropriate counterpart to formalism becomes something like ‘contextualism’, which, in many of its guises – among them historicist, hermeneutic and (post-)Marxist – has a long and complex tradition that also extends well beyond the simplistic dichotomy of ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’. As has been argued already, the ‘modern–formalist’ and ‘postmodern–contextualist’ binary is rendered incoherent by the fact that it is possible to imagine, and indeed point toward, modes of contextualist interpretation that are underpinned by a modernist aesthetic – for example, Adorno – or a ‘modern’ positivism – for example, empirical sociology – as well as modes of formalist elucidation that have absorbed particular tenets of ‘postmodern’ theory – for example, textual deconstruction. Hence, that significant and perhaps defining movement within recent (Anglo-American) musicological enquiry, which, rather than focusing exclusively on the ‘music itself’, attempts to situate music within its cultural, social and historical contexts, represents not so much an overcoming, or a movement beyond, some failed ‘modernist’ agenda, but instead points to an internal realignment of certain *normative* disciplinary priorities that ultimately transcends the methodological and epistemological imperatives of a purportedly ‘postmodern turn’.

It is probably no exaggeration to claim that the notion of the ‘music itself’ has become one of the more problematic, and one of the most ‘problematized’, notions in recent musicological discourse. Often described – as Chapter 1 suggested – in terms of a rather imprecise and, to some extent, internally contradictory amalgam of Romantic and modernist

ideology, the notion of the ‘music itself’ paradoxically remains one of the most criticized, and yet one of the more persistent, concepts in contemporary disciplinary debate. Indeed, the problem of the ‘music itself’ arguably represents the axial point around which revolve a significant number of the most prescient methodological questions confronting musicologists today. This is borne out not least by the fact that those who tend to be most critical of the notion of the ‘music itself’ nevertheless appear compelled to continue employing it – in however ‘problematized’ a fashion; while those who may tend instinctively to defend such a notion, or the methodologies with which it is typically associated, nevertheless appear compelled to ‘problematize’ it. However, in practice one can problematize a concept – the ‘truth’, a ‘fact’, the ‘music itself’ – only for so long before feeling obliged to acknowledge that its continued deployment probably points to some necessary moment that cannot in fact be problematized entirely away. In this respect, it is not always clear whether the various problematizing strategies that have been adopted, where the notion of the music itself is concerned, are to be seen as genuine gestures of reflective uncertainty – invoking some kind of Heideggerian ‘music under erasure’; hollow gestures designed to ward off easy attack – ‘I’ve problematized it, I’ve put it in quotation marks, leave me alone’; or even the empty gestures of an ironic appropriation that has largely forgotten exactly what it was that rendered it ironic in the first place.

While Chapter 1 went some way to challenging the simplistic conflation of ‘formalist’ (analytical) practice with a ‘modernist’ musicology, the present chapter focuses more closely on the precise normative, epistemological and ontological issues that are at stake in theorizing the twin concepts of ‘mediation’ and the ‘music itself’. In so doing, it will be useful to distinguish between two separate issues that are themselves sometimes confused or conflated. The notion of the ‘music itself’ can (itself) be interpreted in at least two different ways depending on whether one’s focus is (1) the substantive material contexts in which music is, or was, produced, reproduced and consumed; or (2) the various discursive strategies that seek to appropriate it. In other words, it may be useful to draw a (provisional) distinction between, on the one hand, the question of whether or not it is possible or desirable to treat music as a genuinely autonomous object, conceived apart from any form of social mediation, and, on the other hand, the question of how we are to understand music in relation to the various discourses, musicological or otherwise, that take it as their ‘object’. The first question is of course implicated in a number of longstanding and intertwined philosophical, aesthetic and disciplinary debates that extend from Kant and Hanslick all the way through to the contemporary musicological concern with determining the aim and purpose of formal analytical practice; the second question is related to a theme more typically

associated with poststructuralism, although it, too, echoes longstanding philosophical debates about the nature of reality and our (discursive) access to it. Of course, this analytical or theoretical distinction will tend to break down in practice. For example, the now widely accepted argument that our perception and figuring of music – the multiple meanings and significances that we derive from it or read into it – are dependent upon strategies, preconceptions or acculturated response-mechanisms that are themselves determined by particular social, historical and cultural contingencies would appear to blur the boundary between the condition of mediation and the nature of discursive appropriation – especially where reproduction and consumption are concerned. Nevertheless, while recognizing that the two issues tend to collapse into one another, this chapter will seek, at least provisionally, to consider each in turn.

Mediation

In his article, ‘Critical Musicology and the Problem of Mediation’, Stephen Miles suggests that ‘critical musicology is in danger of undermining itself through a lack of attention to the problem of mediation – the concrete links between music and society on the levels of production and reception’ (Miles, 1997, p.723). It is one of the peculiar features of contemporary musicology that the emphasis on interpreting music in relation to the social, cultural or historical contexts in which it is produced, reproduced or consumed is accompanied by a comparative lack of emphasis on the need to elaborate the coherent models of mediation on which such strategies would seem to depend. Hence, in this first section, I will temporarily put to one side both the normative question of whether or not we should treat music as a genuinely autonomous object, conceived apart from any form of social mediation, and also the methodological question of how a particular model or theory of mediation may imply or necessitate the adoption of a particular interpretive strategy; my focus, at least initially, will be on the nature of mediation itself.

It is possible to identify or theorize at least three analytically distinct levels, spheres, or modalities of mediation – and most interpretive strategies depend upon, or derive from, at least one of them. The first tends to focus, in a literal sense, on the processes, systems or institutions involved in actually producing, reproducing and consuming music; the second tends to focus on the musical ‘object’ as the site of mediation; and the third tends to focus on the musical ‘subject’ (by musical ‘subject’ I refer not to the ‘subject’ as embodied, ‘voiced’ or implied within a given musical work or utterance, but simply to the individual who listens to or perceives a given work or utterance within a given context). For the purpose of the following

discussion, I shall label these three levels or spheres the ‘structural–institutional’, the ‘productive’ and the ‘receptive’.

Structural–institutional Mediation

This refers to the relationship that exists between the level or condition of technological, social and economic development, on the one hand, and musical production, reproduction and consumption, on the other. Janet Wolff, for example, in discussing the ‘social production of art’ in general, refers to ‘technology’, ‘social institutions’ and ‘economic factors’ (Wolff, 1993, p.34). Where music is concerned this might include the study of, for example: the way in which improvements in brass instrument production impacted upon early nineteenth-century orchestration; the way in which digital recording technology affected the development of popular music in the late twentieth century; the role of the music publishing industry, the commercial music and recording industries or the various institutions and societies, international and local, public and private, that exist to promote and control musical production, reproduction and consumption; the role of the media, government and politics (whether with a small ‘p’ or a big ‘P’) in determining the same – this is a common theme in ‘popular musicology’.

Research of this kind tends to be less contentious than that which focuses on other forms of mediation, although typically, at least until recently, it is undertaken primarily by sociologists and cultural theorists rather than musicologists. It remains ‘positivist’ in its emphasis on the (re)discovery or reconstruction of the particular historical conditions or circumstances that obtained during the time when a particular musical work or utterance was produced, reproduced or consumed; it simply shifts the focus away from a work-centred concern with text or edition. It may serve to challenge the idealistic notion that music proceeds purely in accordance with its own internal laws of development or in response to the particular *musical* interventions of certain original (genius) composers. However, it need not necessarily challenge the viability of studying the resulting musical ‘product’ as an autonomous self-relating structure. In other words, one can examine the role of nineteenth-century entrepreneurial capitalism in expanding the bourgeois concert market without necessarily concluding that this had a direct tangible impact on the nature of the music that was performed or subsequently composed. Likewise, one can investigate the effect of the internet on the production and dissemination of popular music without necessarily assuming that this has a direct tangible impact on the nature of contemporary popular music. Of course, having said that, it is usually the case that such ‘structural–institutional’ factors do in fact play at least some role, however indirect, in determining, or at least enabling, that a particular type of music to be produced, reproduced or consumed in the

manner that it is. As already noted, at a most simplistic level, technological developments will allow new musical possibilities: the short-playing record and associated commercial imperatives demanded that popular music tracks be of a certain length; the contexts in which that music is typically consumed – for example, dance halls or clubs – will clearly determine the nature of the music composed. However, there is still an important distinction to be drawn between this type of ‘structural–institutional mediation’ on the one hand and ‘productive mediation’ on the other.

Productive Mediation

Strategies or methodologies that focus on mediation at the level of productive mediation tend to assume that particular contextual contingencies can, do and will have impacted upon or determined the *manifest form or content* of a given musical object or utterance in an explicit and decipherable way. Hence, while they do not treat musical objects as autonomous self-relating structures, they do still tend to assume a relatively static or closed conception of signification; it is simply that what were once viewed as formal, internal properties of the ‘music itself’ are now considered to have been shaped by, and hence revelatory of, the context or circumstances in which they were produced. Whatever the many and varied, and sometimes incompatible, strategies that are adopted to this end, there is nevertheless something common to attempts to interpret a musical work as mediated by, say, a particular philosophical or aesthetic sensibility, a particular conception of subjectivity or a system of patriarchal assumptions – there will of course be others. As Miles puts it: ‘Whether or not one agrees with scholars such as Rose Subotnik, Lawrence Kramer, and Susan McClary, the social contingency of autonomous music is no longer seriously questioned; rather, the debate has shifted to how this social contingency is to be interrogated’ (Miles, 1997, p.722). In each case the aim is to demonstrate how seemingly autonomous structural and material properties – in short, ‘purely musical’ characteristics – are in fact significantly determined or ‘mediated’ by ‘external’ contingencies and factors. This is more prevalent than the focus on structural–institutional mediation in musicological circles and typically aims to demonstrate how the actual material and structural properties of a given musical work or utterance are to be viewed as in some way reflective or expressive of the ‘external’ circumstances inherent in, or surrounding, the context of its production – for example, they may seek to interpret sonata form as reflecting or embodying a system of dominant patriarchy within nineteenth-century bourgeois society or they may seek to interpret certain works of early modernism as expressing a form of alienated subjectivity. As Wolff observes: ‘Works of art ... are not closed, self-contained and transcendent

entities, but are the product of specific historical practices on the part of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore *bear the imprint of* the ideas, values of conditions of existence of those groups, and their representatives in particular artists' (Wolff, 1993, p.49, my emphasis). However, strategies of this kind do tend to prove rather more problematic than those associated with the 'structural–institutional' level of mediation. They often take the form of 'analogical' readings in which 'social interpretation is developed by relating separate domains cognitively through the extended use of analogy, with the consequence that music and society ultimately remain separate, related only through the imagination of critic and reader' (Miles, 1997, p.723). The latter point, the potentially arbitrary nature of analogy, is a problem also alluded to by Pieter Van den Toorn in his critique of Susan McClary's feminist mode of musical interpretation: 'Analogous to "vulgar Marxism" ... McClary's feminism reduces [man] to his sexual needs And my sense is that the difficulty in getting the sexual-political motive to connect in meaningful ways to the superstructure of music ... is roughly of the same kind and magnitude as that which accompanies the Marxist reduction' (Van den Toorn, 1995, p.39). Of course, if Miles and Van den Toorn agree in their diagnosis it is with a view to a very different course of action – Miles arguing for a more developed theory of mediation, ultimately drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu; Van den Toorn arguing for the retention of an autonomous, 'aesthetic' moment predicated on formal analytical elucidation. In fact, this concern would appear to echo Carl Dahlhaus's well-known 'relative autonomy' argument:

The history of ideas is held in suspicion by materialists, on the grounds that it is liable, either intentionally or innocently, to turn reality upside down. Even the most orthodox Marxists, however, can hardly deny that there are some ideas which are not exhausted by the function of being a reflection and a vehicle of economic and social structures and processes. *While they may be reducible, in the final analysis, to economic and social terms, such ideas are imbued with an independent existence and significance which may be illusory but nevertheless gives them the power to intervene positively in historical developments.* (Dahlhaus, 1987, p.79, my emphasis)

In other words, it may not only be a question of providing a convincing account of how the material properties of a given musical work or utterance are determined in part by the circumstances of its production, but also a question of how a given musical work or utterance may itself impact upon the very contexts that gave rise to it. This would appear to necessitate a more complex 'two-way', or dialectical, model of mediation in place of the straightforward 'one-way' model typical of more determinist accounts. As Wolff says of the sociological analysis of culture: 'However complex and

multiple the mediations, it still appears to be a uni-directional relationship, where economic and social divisions, eventually and indirectly, affect and determine cultural products'. As a result, 'the model does not allow for the possibility of art and literature in their turn effecting other elements of society and of being historically effective' (Wolff, 1993, p.71).

Receptive Mediation

Interpretive strategies that focus on reception as the locus of mediation tend to operate with a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions according to which, at a trivial level, 'music' is indeed understood to encompass a particular set of determinate constituents that exist either spatially in notated form or temporally in acoustic form, but, at a more significant level, its meaning or significance is considered to be inextricably bound up with the context of its reception – where the latter is itself dependent upon particular historical, social or cultural contingencies. A significant number of scholars operate within this general framework. In the following material I briefly consider a number of such approaches.

Peter Rabinowitz, for example, appears to adopt just such a model when he states that he 'would like to make a related argument about listening – about the ways that music is implicated in *a network of discursive practices* so powerful that the very notion of "the music itself" becomes problematic' (Rabinowitz, 1992, p.38, my emphasis); and likewise when he claims that 'neither the score as written nor the sounds as performed offers sufficient grounds for interpretation or analysis' (Rabinowitz, 1992, p.29). Consequently, one of the fundamental requirements for an interpretive enterprise that has adopted such a model of receptive mediation is to account for the nature and origin of the various contexts of reception that serve subsequently to inform or shape musical understanding. Rabinowitz's solution is to propose an 'attributive' level. This comprises a series of interpretive strategies by means of which listeners make sense of music. Hence, Rabinowitz claims that 'when we hear music, we always hear a complex combination of chord and discourse' (Rabinowitz, 1992, p.42). A historical dimension is incorporated by noting that 'certain kinds of attributional activity are found more commonly in some periods than in others' (Rabinowitz, 1992, p.52). However, a conflict arises between the retention of a 'technical' level – 'what is specifically represented by the musical notation' – and Rabinowitz's underlying premise that 'the very notion of the music itself becomes deeply problematic' (Rabinowitz, 1992, p.40). In other words, Rabinowitz is caught between, on the one hand, the 'technical level' of the 'music itself' and, on the other hand, the 'attributive level' of the discourse surrounding it.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) also attempts to identify particular levels of

musical perception or interpretation: ‘The musical work is not merely what we used to call the “text”; it is not merely a whole composed of “structures”.... Rather, the work is also constituted by the procedures that have engendered it (acts of composition), and the procedures to which it gives rise: *acts of interpretation and perception*’ (Nattiez, 1990, p.ix, my emphasis). It appears that Nattiez is proposing a kind of ‘all-in’ conception of music that seeks to interpret, and relate to one another, every conceivable facet, dependence and effect of a musical work. Nattiez’s underlying tripartite schematic includes the ‘poietic’, ‘immanent/neutral’ and ‘esthetic’ levels – approximating to the modality or condition of production, text and reception. For Nattiez, ‘the essence of a musical work is at once its genesis, its organisation, and the way it is perceived’ (pp.ix–x); and his aim is to develop a general theory – a musical semiology – appropriate to this holistic vision of music. Yet this superficially attractive and enticingly holistic model suffers under more detailed scrutiny. For it remains unclear what exactly is intended by claiming that ‘the essence of a musical work is at once its genesis, its organisation, and the way it is perceived’. One presumes that Nattiez is arguing not only that music should be interpreted or analysed at each of its respective three levels – ‘poietic’, ‘immanent/neutral’ and ‘esthetic’ – but that one should seek to reveal or theorize the mediating links between each of them. Yet Nattiez ultimately fails to provide an adequate model for their analytical interconnection.

Charles Hamm, in his essay, ‘Privileging the Moment of Reception’, investigates a particular reception of Lionel Richie’s *All Night Long (All Night)* – to be precise, its reception by ‘two young black women in November of 1984 in a black township in the Republic of South Africa’ (Hamm, 1992, p.34). It is not my intention simply to reproduce Hamm’s analysis in detail; rather I want to focus on a single issue that is most relevant with regard to the matter at hand. Hamm believes that analytical systems developed in relation to the Western ‘classical repertoire’ cannot find an appropriate application in this context and his principal contention is that ‘the more precise meaning comes only at the moment of reception, shaped by the cultural capital of the listener’ (Hamm, 1992, p.26). For example, Hamm notes that ‘the entire chorus and the extended coda of Richie’s song are built on an alternation between two notes (the tonic and supertonic) and the two chords built on these pitches’; and because this musical feature permeates and persists in the acculturated forms of contemporary South African music, ‘though it was surely not Richie’s intention, extended sections of *All Night Long (All Night)* had a quite specific musical resonance among the black population of South Africa’ (Hamm, 1992, p.36). What one notices is that the attempt to ‘privilege the moment of reception’ cannot avoid some recourse to the intrinsic properties of the music itself – the ‘alternation between tonic and supertonic’. Even if one

accepts the proposition that ‘the more precise meaning comes only at the moment of reception, shaped by the cultural capital of the listener’, one would appear still to require some way of capturing or describing its particular ‘uniqueness’ apart from any particular instance (or moment) of its reception. In a similar light, Keith Negus has argued that:

The same musical genre or piece of music may be enjoyed and engaged with in completely different ways. Quite different audience experiences and activities are associated with listening to the same music in a performance event in stadiums, while driving or jogging with a Walkman or while dancing to a juke box in an open-air bar. These studies suggest that the meaning of music is very hard to tie down, and indicate that we could learn much about music audiences by studying the same music in different contexts and among different people. (Negus, 1996, p.32)

Again, Negus’s emphasis on the significance of (receptive) context in determining musical meaning has a close affinity with Rabinowitz’s notion of the attributive screen, with Nattiez’s description of an ‘esthetic level’ of analysis and with Hamm’s privileging of ‘the moment of reception’. The crucial point to note, here, is the reference to ‘the same musical genre or piece of music’. For it is surely the case that in order that the ‘same piece of music’ can be said to exist within multiple contexts, one must be able to attribute to it some determinate material existence *over and above* those multiple contexts in which it exists – otherwise the piece of music would, again, dissolve into them and could no longer reasonably be deemed the *same* piece of music. Put another way, in order that the *same* piece of music can be said to exist within multiple contexts one must be able to assume and enumerate at least some identity conditions according to which it can reasonably be deemed the same piece of music.

Finally, alluding to Nietzsche’s dismissal of the philosophical quest for ‘objectivity’, Kathleen Marie Higgins has argued that ‘Western philosophy has tended to posit not only an aperspectival eye but an aperspectival ear as well. The “scientific” aspirations of post-Enlightenment musical aesthetics have distorted musical experience in multiple ways, among them by failing to acknowledge the differences among individual listeners’ (Higgins, 1997, p.83). There is no doubt some truth in the claim itself; however, it is one thing to *acknowledge* the differences among individual listeners and quite another to determine whether and how this should impact upon the particular methodologies or interpretive strategies that one is to adopt in seeking to understand or account for particular musical works or utterances. Higgins includes among what she terms ‘idiosyncratic’ particularities ‘both the contingent facts of the listener’s biography and the diverse cultural contexts for interpretation that are generally assumed within

a society, but far from standard outside it' (Higgins, 1997, p.84). Once again, those 'diverse cultural contexts for interpretation' are clearly related to 'attributive screens', 'esthetic levels' or 'moments of reception'. While she makes the crucial point that 'musicologists tend to analyze musical structures, not experiences', she also contends that 'idiosyncratic experiences ... are experiences of value that should be encouraged, not foreclosed, by philosophical analysis' (Higgins, 1997, p.84 and 85). It is interesting to note that these 'idiosyncratic experiences', which Higgins is keen to include, are precisely those 'quirky reactions' that McClary was keen to avoid. Higgins also points to the way in which a number of scholars or thinkers, often working in rather different areas or with different priorities – she cites Eduard Hanslick and Leonard Meyer for example – have nevertheless sought to distinguish 'objective' issues of structure or significance from 'subjective' or 'idiosyncratic' aspects of individual response. However, while she sees this as a weakness, I would argue instead that it alludes to that quite necessary presupposition of musical scholarship outlined in the previous chapter. In other words, while I do not share the philosophical or psychological convictions of a Hanslick or Meyer in seeking their own particular notion of 'objectivity', I would contend, as I have argued already on a number of occasions, that the subjective idiosyncrasy of the situated listener's individual response cannot serve as the basis for any reading or interpretation which seeks to be something more than, precisely, and rather circularly, a merely individual account.

Although it is unlikely that any of the scholars cited above would describe themselves as 'deconstructionist', either in practice or in intent, Peter Zima's argument nevertheless has some relevance here: 'Deconstructionists all too often lose sight of the interplay of determinacy and indeterminacy, univocity and polysemy and forget that a text *must display some constants in order to be identifiable as a particular text*' (Zima, 2002, p.175, my emphasis). To assume some constants, some identity conditions, according to which a piece of music may be deemed identical with itself and different to others, is necessarily to implicate those constants in the transmission or construction of meaning – otherwise all music would simply be reduced to a peculiar type of mirror onto which any and all meaning might spontaneously and arbitrarily be projected. At this point one is reminded of a passage, cited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez:

... the sad thing is that you will never know (and I can never tell you) how I interpret what you say to me. You have not spoken in Hebrew, of course not. You and I, we use the same language, the same words. But is it our fault, yours and mine, that the words we use are empty? ... Empty? In saying them, you fill them with the meaning they have for you; I, in collecting them up, with the meaning I give them. We had believed that we understood one another; we have

not understood one another at all. (Nattiez, 1990, p.11, citing Pirandello, 1972, p.147)

Similarly, music would effectively come to mean ‘whatever it means’ or ‘whatever we want it to mean’. Of course, some of those cited above might counter that they readily accept that music does have clear and identifiable structural features which are constants – albeit that the enumeration or description of the latter will itself depend upon, or be informed by, some prior theoretical or conceptual framework; but that the manner in which those features are interpreted by a given listener or community of listeners is dependent upon the context of reception.

In one sense, this recurring tension in the models just outlined appears to replay one of the central dilemmas of post-Kantian philosophy. The defining moment central to Kant’s epistemology was of course the distinction he drew between ‘phenomena’ and ‘noumena’, between how things appear (to human perception) and how things are ‘in themselves’. He posited the latter as ultimately inaccessible and unknowable; we, as empirical beings, perceive things only as they appear (pre-)formed by the transcendental structures of perception and the faculty of ‘understanding’. If one then considers Rabinowitz’s talk of a ‘technical level’ – the ‘music itself’ – and an ‘attributive level’ – the discourse surrounding it – through which we necessarily perceive the former; or Nattiez’s talk of a ‘neutral level’ – the technical immanent properties of the music itself or its trace – and an ‘esthetic level’ – the level of reception; or Hamm’s talk of ‘musical features’ and the ‘cultural capital of the listener’, it is not difficult to recognize a commonality in the basic theoretical models that are invoked. Of course, Kant believed that his ‘categories’ were immutable and represented transcendental necessities of cognition. Rabinowitz, Nattiez and Hamm view their discursive filters as relative to particular social, historical or cultural contexts. In one sense this mirrors a variant of discursive relativism:

Relativists emphasise differences and the non-assimilation of versions of the world to each other. One of the means by which relativists do this is by using the idea that the world is mediated through a structure that yields different accounts of reality to us relative to that structure. Different terms have been used for such a structure – for example, ‘conceptual scheme’, ‘paradigm’, ‘linguistic framework’ and ‘language game’. (O’Grady, 2002, p.11)

Nevertheless, the difficulty these scholars face is in retaining some notion of a technical, immanent, neutral ‘music itself’ that is not itself simply the product of another form of discursive appropriation. If, ‘when we hear music, we always hear a complex combination of chord and discourse’, then

how can we ever identify the ‘chord’ apart from the ‘discourse’? This can lead some to the (for once) genuinely postmodern, Baudrillardian, conviction that there simply is no ‘itself’ lurking beneath those various representations or appropriations. Yet talk of a ‘technical level’ or a ‘neutral level’ marks an understandable reluctance to do so; for the consequence of taking this final radical step is a scenario in which ‘the sounds of music are of little or no consequence to questions of affect and meaning, and ... musical affects and meanings are driven by forces that are largely or entirely social and cultural’ (Shepherd & Wicke, 1997, p.15). In other words, ‘music’, as a system of signification, is effectively dissolved, or collapsed, into the context of which it is a part.

While it may be technically correct, if entirely trivial, to point out that at one level ‘music means many things to many people’, inflating such a pluralist conception into a methodological imperative paradoxically serves to restrict the investigation of musical meaning to a single method. Anything whose character ‘varies with the subject who experiences it’ or upon which ‘there are no restrictions’ either cannot serve as the basis for those discursive claims that are to be deemed legitimately constitutive of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse or simply constrains the study of musical meaning to an investigation of meaning-generating mechanisms – to what becomes, in effect, an empirical psychology of music. The investigation of musical meaning would be limited to a series of empirical enquiries into listener perception and response. Hence, it is a relatively short step from ‘privileging the moment of reception’ to a psychology or empirical sociology of (reactions to) music; and so, ironically, some of the very motivating impulses that aim to escape the restrictions of a documentary, text-based ‘positivism’ tend toward a theory of meaning and signification that is so dependent upon the individual proclivities of the situated listener that the interpretation of musical meaning itself curves back toward an equally ‘positivist’ investigation into the meaning-generating mechanisms that are now deemed to reside entirely within those situated listeners or the contexts in which they find themselves. It is for this reason that in the final section of this chapter I shall argue that a dialectically conceived notion of the ‘music itself’ is a necessary counterweight to an untenable, or trivial, emphasis on the ‘contexts of reception’.

In summary, there are then three key ‘modalities’ of mediation or three key ways in which mediation can be interpreted or approached:

- 1 The first of these focuses not so much on the way in which particular contingencies are directly manifest in the actual material properties of a given musical work or utterance itself, but rather examines the way in which the production, consumption and reproduction of music is bound

up with, or dependent upon, particular social, economic, technological or institutional developments or conditions.

- 2 The second model is centred on the belief that the actual material properties of a musical work or utterance are, to some extent or in some way, formed or determined by the particular social, cultural or historical circumstances or contexts in which they are produced. This conception has much in common with more or less orthodox or vulgar Marxist and post-Marxist models in which the ‘superstructure’ of musical form or content is seen as expressive or reflective of the underlying ‘base’ of social, historical or cultural determination. Unlike Marxist models, however, most musicologists and sociologists of music tend to focus on the social and cultural, rather than the economic, as a primary determining factor. Interpretive strategies or ‘readings’ typically rely on some form of analogical mapping. Hence, those who are critical of this mode of interpretation typically point to the way in which the link between music and determining context is ‘posited’ rather than explicated and the fact that empirical evidence or a coherent account of the mechanism of mediation is often lacking.
- 3 The third model is oriented toward examining how the discursive strategies, conventions or expectations that inform the meaning(s) or significance(s) that a given listener or community of listeners attaches to, or derives from, a particular musical work or utterance are themselves determined, in part, by particular social, cultural or historical circumstances.

I have labelled these three modalities ‘structural–institutional’, ‘productive’ and ‘receptive’ depending on whether they conceive the site of mediation *primarily* in terms of the *processes* of production, reproduction and consumption, the material properties of the musical *object*, or the contingent nature of the musical *subject* (as listener, user or consumer). For example, if one were dealing with a nineteenth-century symphony, one might examine: from the perspective of structural–institutional mediation, the technological developments that allowed particular instrumental effects to be included or the institutional and commercial mechanisms that enabled the concerts at which it was performed to take place; from the perspective of productive mediation, the extent to which the work as a whole, or a given movement, reflected or constructed a particular notion of gendered identity or bourgeois ideology; and from the perspective of receptive mediation, the way in which particular discursive or ideological notions worked to inform the meaning or significance that a particular audience derived from it. Of course, as with all such categories, the distinctions remain analytical or ideal. For example, in their view of artistic labour as ultimately comparable to any other form of labour, Marxist or materialist theories of artistic production

will tend to integrate what I have termed the levels of ‘structural–institutional’ and ‘productive’ mediation; and, in so far as they involve a notion of art as ‘ideology’, the ‘receptive’ as well. This is true, to an extent, of Adorno’s philosophy and sociology of music – to which I devote more detailed attention in the next chapter; and then, in Chapter 5, I consider a number of approaches to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony that can be seen as encompassing these different levels of mediation and suggest how the three might be productively and coherently integrated with one another.

What is clear is that models of structural–institutional, productive and receptive mediation all risk an untenable reductionism, whether through their reducing music to a mechanistic substrate of supervening material factors, through their reducing music to a blank reflection of this or that social or historical circumstance, or through their reducing music to a blank screen onto which are projected the contingent circumstances of a particular subject or context of reception. This concern is apparent in Leo Treitler’s claim that:

Postmodern scepticism about the rule of objectivity has placed the historical object in danger of fading, and the practice of both the contextualism of ‘New Historicism’ and the scepticism and relativism of the ‘New Philosophy of History’, taken to their extremes, can hasten and augment that tendency.... Under the New Philosophy of History, the text of history can become so opaque to its objects and instead call attention to itself. Under the New Historicism the object of history can become transparent to its contextual meaning, which then becomes the focus of attention. (Treitler, 1999, p.357)

It is for this reason that a number of scholars have attempted to develop alternatives to such ‘reflective’ or ‘expressive’ models of mediation. For example, Shepherd and Wicke argue that ‘the question ... is not that of understanding the relationship between “music” and “society”. It is rather that of understanding the constitutive features of music as a social process in relationship to other, equally non-reducible realms of social process’ (Shepherd & Wicke, 1997, p.95). In other words, music is not ‘like’ something else; instead, music literally ‘shares’ in the constitutive structure of the society in which it is produced and exists. At an immediate and intuitive level, there is much to commend this argument. Yet, at the same time, it may prove rather trivial, if not tautological, to observe that ‘music’ is not something that simply exists apart from ‘society’. Music, as a form of cultural expression or ‘product’, is by definition ‘social’; and yet it is clearly also both more *and* less than the social totality of which it is a part. Less, in that it is one component within a larger system upon which it depends for its production, reproduction, consumption and interpretation; more, in that it cannot simply be reduced to a passive reflection or expression of that same system.

Autonomy and Interpretation

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that I would focus, to begin with, on different concepts of mediation, rather than on the extent to which a particular model of mediation and its associated ontology might serve to determine, at a normative level, the mode of interpretation to be adopted. It is the latter to which I now turn. The key *normative* issue, then, concerns the utility or desirability of framing and interpreting music as an autonomous manifestation of ideal structural relations. There is a tendency among some to argue that *because* music can be shown to be multiply mediated, then it *should* or *must* be interpreted in a manner that is appropriately attuned to that condition. This is the standard argument against formalism – that formalism ignores or conceals music’s implication in, and determination by, a wide range of social, cultural and historical contingencies. Yet, in and of itself, this is not a matter that can or should be resolved by appealing to the ‘actual’ ontological condition of music or to the nature of our epistemological access to it. That music is, and can be shown to be, a multiply mediated phenomenon does not commit us, exclusively and *a fortiori*, to the adoption of those modes of interpretation oriented toward articulating it as such; one can readily acknowledge that the production, reproduction and reception of music are shaped by myriad material or ideological contingencies, while still placing a normative importance on investigating the internal properties of a given musical object or utterance. Ironically, Kramer adopts a formally similar line of argument, albeit with the opposite intention:

It does not follow from the fact that an analytical description is possible that it is important, or humanly significant, or even discernible outside a community organised around the possibility of its discernment. This point may serve to answer the pained and pointed question raised by Pieter van den Toorn ... of why analytical elaboration is any less an example of ‘human meaning’ than social or emotional or sexual content. The answer is that ... purely analytical discourse lies outside the discursive systems by which Western societies produce ‘humanly significant’ subjectivity. (Kramer, 2001, p.172)

There are, however, a number of difficulties with this attempted defence. Firstly, it is not immediately obvious that Kramer’s hermeneutic interpretations are any less dependent upon a ‘community organised around the possibility of [their] discernment’. In fact, the sheer erudition and commendable breadth of theoretical knowledge that underpin Kramer’s work suggest that it, too, lies very much outside the discursive systems in which most human beings operate. Secondly, the argument that purely analytical discourse lies outside the discursive systems by means of which Western societies produce ‘humanly significant’ subjectivity seems to ignore

the fact that purely analytical discourse is arguably the ancestral distillate of precisely that conception of music, according to which, in Kramer's own words, 'others, ... *and they were by far the majority*, found means to place high aesthetic value on the semantic emptiness of music, so that the process of following an autonomous musical form with close attention was established as one of the peaks of aesthetic experience' (Kramer, 2002, p.13, my emphasis). Given such a concrete social–historical mode of subjectivity – for what else is aesthetic experience? – Kramer does not appear to have provided an entirely satisfactory response to Van den Toorn's question as to why analytical elaboration is any less an example of 'human meaning' than social or emotional or sexual content. Thirdly, the logic according to which Kramer feels able to assert that 'It does not follow from the fact that an analytical description is possible that it is important, or humanly significant', threatens to double back and implicate his own enterprise – for nor does it follow from that fact that a hermeneutic interpretation or sociological investigation is possible that it is important or humanly significant.

Likewise, the fact that the notion of music as an autonomous 'in and for itself' is itself a historically and culturally specific construct – as already noted – does not oblige us to abandon those interpretive strategies that depend upon such a conception, any more than recognizing the contingent origins of gendered approaches to musical textuality in the discourse(s) of postwar feminism would somehow neutralize their efficacy or negate their utility in providing one particular way of understanding, or reading, specific musical works or utterances. Lydia Goehr, for example, appears to miss precisely the latter point when she argues that:

The direct result of seeing the world's music – including early music – through romantic spectacles is that persons have assumed that various types of music can easily be packaged in terms of works. ... Because this way of thinking leads to our alienating music from its various socio-cultural contexts and because most music in the world is not originally packaged in this way, do we not risk losing something significant when we so interpret it? (Goehr, 1992, p.249)

There are at least two observations to be made here. Firstly, the requirement that music be bounded and that it manifest itself in a form amenable both to a legally recognized notion of property and also to a mode of reproduction suitable for exchange and the generation of profit is generally occluded by the attributing of the work-concept to a complex of romantic ideology and institutional, cultural and disciplinary imperialism. Secondly, the 'work-concept' argument finds itself in substantial difficulties for the same kind of reason as that relating to the critique of the canon. Goehr's 'this way of thinking' is itself a part of, and dependent upon, a specific social and cultural context. Hence, for Goehr to contend that

viewing music in terms of works, where such music may not have originally been conceived in that way, is to '[alienate] music from its various socio-cultural contexts', is to trade on a notion of authenticity that she elsewhere seeks to problematize. It appears to imply an ontology of music dependent upon the notion of some originary authentic condition that is itself subsequently distorted by the imposition of an alienating conceptual scheme. Goehr asks, 'do we not lose something when we hear the music of a flamenco or a blues guitarist in a concert hall?' (Goehr, 1992, p.249). Yet one is left wondering how Goehr can ask, on the one hand, 'do we not lose something when we hear eighteenth-century chamber music performed, outside of the "chamber", in symphonic concert halls?' and still insist, on the other hand, that 'retaining the terminology of authenticity remains problematic while its use continues ... to carry absolutist and unduly rigid, objectivist sentiments' (Goehr, 1992, pp.249 and 283). The 'loss' bemoaned in the former claim surely must be predicated upon a set of ontological assumptions that require precisely the 'authenticity' denied or problematized in the latter. Hence, Goehr's dependence on the notion of an originary and authentic social and cultural context represents precisely the kind of constraining mechanism she detects in the work-concept; and so the critique of *Werktreue* modulates into the affirmation of *Ursprungstreue*.

The argument that formal analysis 'ignores' music's multiply mediated condition is no more a justification for abandoning the former enterprise than the argument that contextualist interpretation ignores formal properties justifies abandoning the latter. As Treitler puts it:

Belief in the absolute autonomy of music and in the permanently closed-off character of the experience of music has given us some bad history, indeed, but that is not sufficient cause to abandon the belief that a provisional personal engagement with a musical utterance for the moment unrelated to anything else is not only a possible but a necessary condition of eventual understanding of it in its most dense connections. (Treitler, 1995, p.12)

The Music Itself

The first section considered the notion of the 'music itself' in relation to its mediation by the substantive material contexts in which it is, or was, produced, reproduced and consumed. The key *epistemological* issue, however, concerns the extent to which the 'music itself' can refer to an object that pre-exists its discursive appropriation. Once again, this is to highlight a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the notion of the 'music itself' as an autonomous manifestation of structural relations that exists, or at least that can be interpreted, independently of the contexts in which it is produced, reproduced and consumed and, on the other hand, the notion of 'the music

itself' as the kind of objective entity presupposed by naturalistic epistemologies. Where formal analysis is concerned, Andrew Edgar, for example, has observed that 'the task of analysis is presented in terms of the identification of the inherent properties of the *work itself*, presupposing that these properties *existed independently of the act of analysis*' (Edgar, 1999, p.439, my emphasis). The latter (epistemological) question is evidently separate from, if nevertheless related to, the issue of music's (ontological) mediation.

It is fair to say that vulgar 'objectivism' – the quasi-scientific belief in our ability to know objects 'as they are in themselves', independently of any prior discursive or theoretical presuppositions – is largely discredited as an epistemological doctrine. According to this view, objectivity and hence genuine knowledge are acquired through the sundering of the musical object (in itself) from the multiple mediations not only of the subjects who produce, reproduce and consume it, but also the discourses surrounding it. Instead, most epistemologies assume, implicitly or explicitly, to a greater or lesser extent, that our knowledge of objects is not a matter of simple representational immediacy. Nevertheless, at least on a superficial level, we appear to be faced with two options: on the one hand, a seemingly untenable situation in which the features of an object exist independently of their (re)presentation in propositional content; on the other hand, a situation in which those same features are intrinsically bound up with the articulation of (re)presentational content itself.

However, I would suggest that these are in effect two sides of the same misconstrued coin and that an impaired conception arises when either of these constitutively dialectical poles is hypostatized – that is to say, when music is viewed either as existing absolutely prior to any discursive engagement or as coming into existence only as a contingent product of the latter. If the concept of 'objectivity' as traditionally conceived is problematic, the complete rejection of the realist, objectivist model would appear to imply a position – however deflationary in its conception – that was once advanced by Michel Foucault when he spoke of 'not ... treating discourses as groups of signs ... but as practices that *systematically form the objects of which they speak*' (Foucault, 1972, p.54, my emphasis). Whether the early Foucault was championing a rigorous form of discursive constructionism, with its clear epistemo-ontological implications, or something weaker and more akin to a 'conceptual scheme' theory – a kind of historicized, discursive version of Kant's original categorical transcendentalism – remains a matter for some debate. Habermas, for example, suggests that 'Foucault's radical historiography remains transcendental in a weak sense inasmuch as it understands the objects of the historical-hermeneutical interpretation of meaning as constituted – as objectifications of underlying discourse practices that are to be grasped by structuralist

methods' (Habermas, 1987, p.252). If Foucault intended merely that particular discourses figure a given object in relation to a particular set of ontological determinants – as in the example of the psychology and sociology of music – or even 'synthesize the manifold' according to different rules of synthesis, then Foucault's assertion would seem tenable. If, however, Foucault is advancing a stronger position in which discourse itself is viewed as a determining factor over and above the mechanism of epistemological access or representation – as a determining factor in the very constitution or construction of the 'objects of which it speaks' – then we are confronted with some familiar problems. When pursued to extremes, theories of 'discursive constructionism' can quickly become intractably self-referential and slide toward a kind of infinite and ultimately self-defeating circularity. For if the musical object exists *only* as a function of the discourse that generates it, then we appear to be confronted with a peculiar 'textualized' version of an original Fichtean self-positing; and this form of what Robert Pippin terms 'absolute textuality' surely ignores the brute materiality of a music which not only shapes discourse but which must impose limits on the extent to which discourse can shape or construct it (Pippin, 1999, p.xii). Lured by the apparently infinite deferral of signifiers and the arbitrary – culturally and historically contingent – fixing of sign and referent, some tend to miss the dialectical point that, as material existents, signs are themselves products of, and are dialectically interwoven with, the same concrete world that they appear to manipulate. As Wolff argues, in a slightly different, yet relevant, context:

With the insistence by certain followers of Lacan on the primacy of the signifier and the denial of an independent signified, we run the risk of according total determining power to language and sign systems, which are seen not only to constitute subjects, but also to constitute the real world which they represent. Now it is true that we have no access to any 'real' world except through the systems of representation which enable us to conceive of it. It is disingenuous to conclude from this that signs, or signifiers, have free play in constructing the world. (Wolff, 1993, pp.134–5).

Neither can the 'music itself' be viewed as some kind of noumenal *Ding-an-sich*, in the properly Kantian sense, nor should it be portrayed as little more than a (textual) trace in the movement of discourse(s). Instead, to put it starkly, it must be seen to represent a necessary presupposition of our ability to communicate with one another about some kind of common musical object at all.

As Habermas puts it: 'Reaching understanding cannot function unless the participants refer to a single objective world, thereby stabilising the intersubjectively shared public space with which everything that is merely subjective can be contrasted. *This supposition of an objective world that is*

independent of our description fulfils a functional requirement of our processes of cooperation and communication? (Habermas, 1998, p.359, my emphasis). In fact, the above usefully binds together the argument (from Chapter 2) concerning the necessary presupposition of discursive contestability with the necessary presupposition of a dialectically conceived notion of the ‘music itself’. Interestingly, Leo Treitler appears to imply something not too far removed from Habermas’s position when he observes that ‘as effortless as such new exegesis [the hermeneutic model proposed by the likes of Lawrence Kramer] has been, it nevertheless entails the analysis of the interior of works, *the music itself*. This leaves the interpreters in a contradictory position, for they must, at least temporarily, entertain the very conceptions that they programmatically reject’ (Treitler, 1999, p.370, my emphasis). Of course, in alluding to the familiar ‘text–context’ problem, Treitler’s point has a slightly different purpose and nuance: in addition to the epistemological contention that the ‘music itself’ stands in for a necessarily presupposed component of a pre-discursive object world, he is making the convincing dialectical point that any attempt to ‘situate’ music in relation to some broader context necessarily *presupposes* the prior existence of that which is to be thus ‘situated’. Nevertheless, the underlying arguments are closely related.

A concern with the nature of our ‘access’ to music also appears to motivate Philip Bohlman’s observation that ‘music may be what we think it is; it may not be’ (Bohlman, 1999, p.17). Leaving aside the fact that at one level this is an observation whose enticing profundity belies its ultimate triviality – in that one could reasonably say the same of anything – this is effectively a musicological take on a perennial sceptical argument: ‘Deeply embedded epistemo-anthropological structures of mind might give rise to the same mode of experience for all language- and action-capable subjects. However, they cannot disperse the sceptical notion that the world, as it is in itself, partially escapes the horizon of our possible experience’ (Habermas, 1999, p.29, my translation). To claim that music may or may not be what we think it is would appear to imply the (metaphysical) supposition of some ultimate ‘*Musik-an-sich*’, some noumenal essence against which to measure the mere phenomenal appearance(s) to which we have access – in which case its being what we think it is would depend upon the nature of the epistemological fit obtaining between ‘knower’ and ‘known’. As Ian Hacking says of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation*:

It seems to have started with the hesitant belief, never stated, that there is a pure thing, madness, perhaps a good in itself, which is not something that we can capture in concepts. It is certainly not what the sciences of the insane call madness. We classify and treat and put away the mad by systems of our own creation. Our institutions create the phenomena in terms of which we see

insanity. The first major book by Foucault hints at an almost Kantian story in which our experience of the mad is a mere phenomenon conditioned by our thought and our history, but there is also a thing-in-itself which can be called madness and which is uncorruptible. (Hacking, 1986, p.29)

In other words, Foucault finds himself in the same difficulty when discussing ‘madness’ as does Bohlman when discussing ‘music’ – madness may be what we think it is; it may not be. Hence, one can take Bohlman’s observation as asking, in effect, do we cognize music as it really is, or simply as it appears? It is perhaps not surprising that some have declared the ‘end of philosophy’ precisely at the moment where it appears to have returned to the point where it all began.

Then again, it may be that Bohlman is alluding to a situation in which our understanding of, or access to, music is inextricably bound up with a particular discursive strategy or with a particular set of (un-reflected) preconceptions. Accordingly we might then seek reflectively to reconstruct the manner in which certain (ideological?) presuppositions serve particular (dominant or dominating?) interests: ‘The more the world is shown to be other than or in excess of what it is, the more it becomes possible to challenge and resist the systems of domination that establish the world and reassure us that it is in fact as it is’ (Morris, 2001, p.45). Yet this cannot be Bohlman’s concern; for the recognition of that epistemo-ontological ‘gap’, to which Bohlman’s opening gambit alludes, contradicts his subsequent attempts to dissolve it. One cannot get around the fact that to assert that ‘music may or may not be what we think it is’ is to presuppose some kind of epistemo-ontological scheme that places it outside of the possible ‘thinkings’ to which it may or may not then correspond. Yet Bohlman then proceeds to suggest that ‘music, however, may be something other than an object about which one thinks or can think; it may be a practice extrinsic to musical thought’ (Bohlman, 1999, p.17). However, if this were true then ‘thinking music’ or even ‘rethinking music’ would appear destined to become ‘not thinking about music at all’ – at which point Bohlman should stop thinking (and writing) about music. For it seems that ‘music’ would then refer to some noumenal entity known only by its ultimate ‘unknowableness’. Bohlman seeks to avoid this dilemma by suggesting that we figure music as a process rather than as an object:

The metaphysical condition with which we in the West are most familiar is that music is an *object*. As an object, music is bounded, and names can be applied to it that affirm its objective status. ... By contrast, music exists in the conditions of a *process*. Because a process is always in flux it never reaches a fully objective status; it is always becoming something else. (Bohlman, 1999, p.18)

However, thinking is always thinking some-*thing* – some object, however

conceived. One simply cannot think or rethink music without representing it to oneself (or others) as an object of some sort. To recognize music as 'existing under the conditions of a process' again slides toward figuring 'music' as some kind of spectral phenomenon – as a kind of 'becoming-in-itself' – forever beyond the clutches of discursive thought, which latter can only deal in reified objectifications. This apparent contradiction nevertheless bears witness to an underlying dialectical truth that is implicit, if suppressed, in Bohlman's position. To conceive of music as a process is to conceive of music as beyond conception; or, as David Harvey puts it: 'Any system of representation, in fact, is a spatialisation of sorts which automatically freezes the flow of experience and in so doing distorts what it strives to represent' (Harvey, 1990, p.206). Just as Bohlman argues that 'to become "my music", it must assume a form one can own' (Bohlman, 1999, p.20), so, in order to think about music, it must assume a form one can think. Hence, *pace* Bohlman, 'thinking – or even rethinking – music' is not 'at base an attempt to claim and control music as one's own' but rather the very enabling condition for any form of discursive representation. Hence, it is almost as though Bohlman wants to rethink music without thinking it.

The strong epistemological conviction which asserts that objects exist only by virtue of the particular discursive schema in which they receive their conceptual articulation ignores the dialectical point that such schema themselves depend upon intersubjective agreement about a *necessarily presupposed* 'third-person' world that exists prior to and independently of them; and this has significant implications for particular moments within contemporary musicology's 'postmodern' turn. It implies that any account of musical meaning which seeks to focus on the contingencies of particular contextual determinants or receptive strategies is inevitably compelled to grant music an existence that is independent of those strategies and contexts; in other words, it is compelled back toward precisely that concept of the 'music itself' from which it sought to escape. This alludes to a type of paradox that both Derrida, in his philosophical-literary excursions, and Adorno, in his dialectical reversals, never tired of exposing. The demand that music be reconnected, relocated, or reintegrated with the various social, historical, cultural, psychological, anthropological or discursive networks in which it is implicated feeds off the very division it seeks to overcome. To argue that 'music' should be actively related to or seen as the expression of some underlying trope or structure requires, as the first term in the equation, the assumption of precisely that a-historical, a-social, autonomous phenomenon, the assumed fallacy of which provides the impetus for its attempted overcoming in the first place. Hence, in seeking flatly to deny music its autonomy one almost inevitably concludes, however obliquely, by reaffirming it. To view music as the expression, reflection, manifestation, or consequence *of* something is to grant music's being something other than

that of which it is the expression, reflection, or manifestation, and so affirm the very division that is the basis of one's critique. The desire to reintegrate 'music' and 'society', or 'text' and 'context', or to trace the causal determination from the one to the other, often presumes precisely that false ontologization of dialectically mediated concepts that, philosophically, gave rise to the aporia of idealism and its crude materialist inversion – respectively, the desire to resolve the subject–object dichotomy in absolute knowledge or to posit the former (the subject) as the fully determined derivative of the latter (the object). Hence, not only must we counter the twin relativisms of subjectivist solipsism – music *is*, only in so far as it is *for me* – and discursive constructionism – 'music', always 'under erasure', is no more than the (textual) trace of locally contingent practices – in order that we can even presume to talk about a common musical phenomenon in any meaningful sense in the first place, but we must also recognize a 'quasi-transcendental' necessity in the prior presupposition of a 'music in itself' in order that we can *then*, if we so choose, proceed to explore *its* multiply mediated condition. It is the point at which interpretive strategies begin to focus exclusively on the moment of reception as some sort of ultimate or constitutive ground that not only does the distinction between, on the one hand, the pairing 'music and discourse' and, on the other hand, the pairing 'music and society' begin to collapse, but there also arise self-referential antinomies that threaten to render discourse self-reflectively mute.

It might be better, then, to conclude that all discourse inevitably opens up a virtual gap. In reaching out to grasp an object, language is unavoidably alienated from that at which it grasps. One might see Kant's *Ding-an-sich*, the noumenon, as representing an authentic attempt to capture discursively that which cannot be captured. In that respect, the Hegelian rebuttal that one cannot know the existence of that which is unknowable confuses a tran-scendental condition of discursive possibility with ontological essentialism. The resolution of contradiction through a recursive *Aufhebung* that terminates in absolute knowledge represents the dissolution of the very conditions of possibility for discursive knowledge itself. For contradictions will always arise when, rather than comprehending such a phenomenon as dialectically inherent within the movement of discourse itself, one seeks either to hypostatize that gap, as exemplified in the doctrines of Romantic transcendence, or to obliterate it, as exemplified in those oddly reductionist theories of poststructuralist ilk which, in a form of self-denying and regressive linguistic idealism, conflate the object of discourse with discourse itself. Hence, I would argue that the 'music itself' actually announces or implies a quite necessary strategy for 'dealing with' music in the first place. In short, one should view recourse (whether implicit or explicit) to the notion of the 'music itself' as neither an ideological delusion, nor a

particular strategy that one may or may not elect to adopt; instead it should be recognized as a quite necessary presupposition for any discourse that takes music as its object in the first place.

Still, it is perhaps not surprising that the purported ideological unmasking of the ‘music itself’ has been accompanied by a correlative critique of its methodological distillate, formal analytical practice. Yet the relation between formal analysis and musicological interpretation is always more complex than is implied by talk either of a clear binary division or of a nominal synthesis. At this point, Habermas may once again prove useful. A significant feature of Habermas’s later work, although presaged in his earliest, is the distinction he draws between *system* and *life-world*.¹ For Habermas, the life-world refers to the set of enabling background structures, or horizons, in which socialized individuals operate, communicate, symbolically represent and actively participate. System(s) refers to those functional, quasi-autonomous structures which regulate specific moments within a given society’s processes of material production and reproduction – for example, the market, the law or bureaucratic government. Habermas’s dualistic conception is an attempt to synthesize, while overcoming what he sees as the respective one-sidedness of, both a hermeneutic or phenomenological sociology – in which the coordination of society is perceived from the perspective of situated individuals oriented toward the understanding and maintenance of symbolic meanings and structures – and a functionalist systems theory – in which the coordination of society is perceived in terms of abstract trans-individual mechanisms oriented toward stability and optimum functionality. It is precisely this differentiation between system and life-world that allows Habermas to argue that we need not see modernity – identified, in the manner of Weber, with the increasing rationalization and emergence of distinct systemic components such as the capitalist market and liberal democratic government – as trapped in a terminal dialectic of Enlightenment, where the only glimmer of hope is an aesthetics of reconciliation negatively adumbrated in certain autonomous modernist works of art (as with Adorno). At the same time, we need not abandon the Enlightenment project itself and fall prey to the pluralistic celebration of myriad incommensurable conceptual schemes and language-games, the inevitable indeterminacy of meaning, or the contingent effects of power (as with much postmodern theory). It is this which leads Habermas to refer to modernity as ‘an incomplete project’; the problem lies not with modernity per se, but with the systemic distortion of, or breakdown in, the steering capacity of norm-regulated communicative discourse in the face of pressure imposed

1 See especially Chapter 6, ‘Intermediate Reflections: System and Life-world’, in Habermas, 1987a.

by seemingly independent system imperatives. The latter, of course, is Habermas's own reworking of the Marxist theory of reification. He suggests that the shift to a de-centred, communicative, that is to say, 'non-instrumental', paradigm can enable individuals critically to reflect upon and differentiate between objective, normative and subjective orientations in such a way that system imperatives do not unnecessarily encroach upon the symbolic and communicative context of the life-world, while, at the same time, those former quasi-autonomous systems can nevertheless be recognized as entirely necessary components by means of which the life-world reproduces and transforms itself.

Clearly such a framework can have intriguing implications for, and applications within, the understanding and interpretation of music itself. However, my intention here is to employ the distinction as a kind of heuristic device in order to model the relationship between the formalist precepts of analytical methodology and the interpretive imperatives of its various critics. As we have seen, one justifiable complaint, where analytical methodology is concerned, derives from the entirely reasonable observation that 'music' is not merely a spatio-temporal phenomenon amenable to assertoric description and subject to predictive nomological law, but is also, as the key contention underlying many recent and diverse musicological developments has it, a concrete phenomenon firmly embedded within both the material reality of social production and reproduction and the symbolic nexus of human meaning and understanding. Although some disciplines, acoustics or empirical psychology, for example, may sometimes presume to operate within that former framework, a musicology which is to do proper justice to the full extent of music's multiple mediations and significances, so the argument runs, must include alternative, appropriately attuned modes of understanding and interpretation. This is why the Habermasian notion that society comprises two analytically separable, if concretely intertwined, spheres – and hence requires a complex, synthetic theory that is able to grasp, and mediate between, on the one hand, the symbolic, semantic dimension of intersubjective meaning and understanding and, on the other hand, the objective dimension of trans-subjective systemic functionality – has a strong resonance with the need to recognize music both as a phenomenon embedded in the cultural exigencies of symbolic production and reproduction and also as an objective manifestation of ideal structural relations amenable to theoretical elucidation.

Hence, although they tend to overlook the fact that it represents the only objectifying mechanism by means of which we are able to grasp and represent the immanent structures of a musical object in the first place, those who are critical of formalism's abstractive tendencies are nevertheless right in so far as a failure on the part of analysis to reflect on its own guiding assumptions can risk, in Habermasian terms, a reification of its

systemic imperatives, such that it decouples itself from the life-world practices to which it is inextricably bound and may even double back and subject life-world exigencies – here, music’s semantic or symbolic experiential dimension – to its own self-evolving instrumental logic. There is something of this in the normative stricture implicit in closed theoretical systems. To take the most obvious example, the almost irresistible imperative of the *Uralmie* can sometimes necessitate a tendentious adduction of implied notes in a manner that is not too dissimilar from the increasingly elaborate epicycles which, in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary, were necessary in order to keep the Ptolemaic cosmological system afloat. One might say the same of a set-theoretical analysis in which the music is rendered little more than a convenient platform for the circular demonstration of preconceived arithmetic manipulations. The articulation of a theoretical premise, supposedly the means to an analytical or interpretive end, becomes the end itself. Having said that, these are extremes, and it is also clear that such observations have too often degenerated into generalizing caricatures with which to dismiss analytical methodology *in toto*.

While there are certainly powerful arguments – political and ethical, as well as philosophical and theoretical – for extending the interpretation of music beyond the boundaries of formalist premise, there are also good reasons for retaining, and continuing to develop, the ability to engage with the material and structural specificity of a given musical work (or utterance). In short, we need not suppose that we must throw the analytical baby out with the pseudo-objectivist bath water – something Jonathan Cross rightly cautions against (Cross, 2002, p.3). It is analytical practice which provides the sophisticated, developed (and developing) means – one might say, the ‘system’ – with which to interrogate, in a meaningful and substantive manner, the concrete specificity of individual musical objects in the first place. Adorno, inspiration for much critical musicology and scourge of positivism, scientism and reified methodologies in all their forms, always insisted that ‘to get know something intimately ... means in reality to analyse: that is, to investigate the inner relationships of the work and to investigate what is essentially contained within the composition’ (Adorno, 1982, p.171). Adorno, the unorthodox Hegelian–Marxist materialist who never tired of stressing music’s multiple social mediations, was clear that ‘all criticism which is of any value is founded in analysis; to the extent that this is not the case, criticism remains stuck with disconnected impressions, and thus, if for no other reason than this, deserves to be regarded with the utmost suspicion’ (Adorno, 1982, p.176). In the next chapter I look at Adorno’s theory of mediation and interpretation in more detail.

Chapter 4

Models of Mediation

Thus far, where the issue of mediation is concerned, I have purposefully avoided mention of, and reference to, the work of either Theodor Adorno or Lawrence Kramer. In this chapter I now focus in more detail on their influential work, especially in relation to the implicit theory or model of mediation underlying their respective approaches. In that sense, the following material might best be viewed as a kind of extended appendix to the preceding chapter.

Adorno

One of the most developed, and influential, theories of mediation is to be found in the work of Theodor Adorno. Few works on Adorno are complete without a considerable prologue dedicated to the complexities of his texts and their ‘proper’ reception.¹ On the one hand, there are those who assert that one should neither treat Adorno’s writings as a source of convenient sound-bites – for these are rendered meaningless when abstracted from the context in which they operate – nor hypostatize any one element of his complex dialectical web. On the other hand, there are those who, while admitting that Adorno’s tight dialectical style seemingly refuses representative quotation, nevertheless recognize its tendency to invite precisely that mode of appropriation. As Grenz observes, ‘the reactions to his [Adorno’s] writings are like those to a cuff about the ears. Some hit back, some turn the other cheek. *Few actually reflect*’ (Grenz, 1974, p.10, my emphasis, my translation). Hence, it should not prove too surprising if the oft-repeated assertion that Adorno’s work can, or should, only be interpreted as a *whole* inevitably leads to a situation in which interpreters are forced either into a *wholesale* adoption – in the guise of an expository or ‘shoring-up-the-edges’ apologetics – or into a *wholesale* rejection. It is perhaps to be expected that a mode of thinking that advocates the use of ‘constellation’ but which yet seeks to hold onto a

1 On the problem of approaching Adorno in general see: Paddison, 1993, esp. pp.13–20; Johnson, 1995, esp. pp.295–8; Zuidervaart, 1991, esp. pp.xv–xx; Klein, 1997, pp.105–9; Grenz, 1974, pp.9–15 and *passim*. On the specific problem of translating Adorno see: Weber, 1981, p.9–15; Gillespie, 1995.

dialectical tension between part and whole should give rise to such contradictions. Indeed, it is not without a certain irony that the dictate against (mis)appropriation, the taboo on a reified or monolithic interpretation of Adorno's work, has in fact contributed to a view of his work which leaves its interpreter so entangled in the problematic of how she might approach Adorno that she can often do little more than unwittingly further intensify that aura of reified impenetrability with which she was confronted in the first place. However, given the scope and purpose of the present book, it is my intention principally to focus on only one aspect of Adorno's philosophical and theoretical interpretation of music (in the knowledge that a significant secondary literature is now available, ranging from introductory to more critical studies and dealing with almost all aspects of his output).²

The key component in Adorno's philosophical and theoretical account of the relationship that exists between music and the social totality is that of the 'musical material':

Adorno's concept of material, the central category in the *Philosophy of New Music*, was misused in the 1960's, in order to claim the use of unusual sounds in the so-called *Klangkomposition* as historical progress, although Adorno tirelessly and stubbornly sought to argue that it was not the sounding material as such, but rather the relationships between the acoustical facts – *relationships in which the whole of music history is contained* – which constitute the substance of the concept of material, so far as he was concerned. (Dahlhaus, 1983, pp.133–4, my emphasis)

For Adorno, music is a socially mediated phenomenon in so far as society reveals itself within the immanent structures of music itself – 'relationships in which the whole of music history is contained'. This is due to the way in which specific compositional techniques are brought to bear on the 'musical material'. Incorporating a Hegelian–Marxist, dialectical model of historical development and progress, Adorno conceives the musical material with which a composer works as bearing the sedimented traces of previous compositional activity – it is objectified subjectivity; and because that material, in its most advanced condition, generates its own problems or contradictions, which, due to its social mediation, are also (representative or expressive of) social problems or contradictions, then the composer who, in the most 'authentic' manner and without compromise, seeks an immanent musical solution to those problems, although destined to fail, will nevertheless produce music that can be interpreted as a (negative) critique of the false society of which it is a part. At the same time, it is only through philosophical interpretation and aesthetic criticism that this 'cognitive'

² See in particular: Bernstein, 2001; Brunkhorst, 1999; Buck-Morss, 1977; Gibson & Rubin (eds.), 2002; Jarvis, 1998; Paddison, 1993 & 1996; Rose, 1978; Subotnik, 1991; Williams, 1997; Witkin, 1998; Zuidervaart, 1991.

moment in music (or art) can be realized or ‘made to speak’. Truth-content – the means through which authentic music, within its own immanent materiality, bears witness to the contradictions of a false society – is only accessible to philosophical reflection. Truth-content is also inextricably bound up with a particular conception of autonomous art³ – where Adorno is concerned, an art that has both severed all ties with explicit social function, including, for example, patronage by the church, state or aristocracy, and also, crucially, has renounced, or resists, its own commodification or incorporation into the ‘culture industry’. Hence, for Adorno, music both is, and is not, ‘social’. Music is social in so far as it carries within itself sedimented social and historical content; music is not social in so far as its autonomy allegedly frees it from explicit dependence on social institutions and provides it (or its authentic version) with the means to criticize society from without, while simultaneously remaining within. Music is social (or socially mediated) because it is critical or affirmative and critical or affirmative because it is social (or socially mediated).

For Adorno, as Max Paddison notes, ‘musical works constitute a mode of conceptless cognition [*begriffslose Erkenntnis*], and can be understood, in that they are not only meaningful in terms of their inner relations, but also point beyond themselves to tell us something about the world and our relationship to it’ (Paddison, 2002, p.209). In this respect, Adorno’s notion of musical material is also inextricably tied to his historical and sociological interpretation of the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ – a pessimistic diagnosis of the pervasive instrumental rationalization of Western society, which sees a commercialized culture industry and market economy, dominated by a logic of abstract exchange-value, extending into all aspects of inner and outer life and tending toward administrative totalitarianism, all of which is reflected in music that is complicit in adapting to and sustaining the status quo. This should be understood against the backdrop of Adorno’s guiding historical-philosophical concepts: *die verwaltete Welt, der Verblendungs Zusammenhang, das unwahre Ganze*. It also explains Adorno’s ambivalence with regard to focusing on reception as the locus of mediation. In a society where, according to Adorno, most individuals are reduced to passive alienated components within a system that is of their own making yet beyond their comprehension, blankly to identify music’s meaning with a positivist taxonomy of empirical reaction represents an empty, if not trivial, tautology – whereby music comes to mean whatever people think or are conditioned to think it means. This is no doubt the problem alluded to by Paddison when he observes that ‘Adorno thus gives priority to the structure of the work at the level of production, maintaining that to do otherwise ... is to

3 See also Harding, 1992; and Zuidervaart, 1991.

make the music an arbitrary occasion for the projection of the listener's preconceptions' (Paddison, 1993, p.209). Hence, Adorno tends to demote the importance of the role of the listener in relation to the inherent meaning, or truth-content, of the musical work itself: 'the relation of art to society is not to be sought predominantly in the sphere of reception. It is prior to this: it is to be sought in production. ... Art and society converge in content, not in something external to the artwork' (Adorno, G.S.7, pp.338–9);⁴ or as Paddison puts it: 'The motivating force of his [Adorno's] aesthetics and sociology of music is the desire to illuminate the complex of meaning which relates autonomous musical works to the socio-political totality, and which he argues is inherent (that is, "immanent") in the material of music itself' (Paddison, 1993, p.14); or Gillian Rose:

Adorno's sociology of music depends on the assumption that social 'meaning' can be predicated of music but not as its 'content'. He opposed any sociology of art which assumes that the experience of any work of art is a primary datum, or that such experience constitutes a subjective reflex to effects intended by the content of the work of art. ... Radical disjunction may occur between the composition and reception of works, and this can be given a sociological explanation. ... The social 'meaning' of a piece of music and its social function may diverge or contradict each other. (Rose, 1978, p.113)

Adorno's key contention, then, so far as our interest in mediation is concerned, is that the meaning, value, truth-content or aesthetic significance of a musical work cannot be decided, deciphered or interpreted only by means of empirical research carried out within the sphere of reception. This is not to say that he thought the investigation of reception entirely irrelevant. However, its results can only serve to explicate particular forms of ideological delusion, false consciousness, psychological deformation or social domination – when viewed against a philosophically grounded theory of society and an immanent analysis of the musical works themselves.

As attractive and compelling as this model is, the problem, perhaps inevitably, concerns the detail of its practical realization in respect of analysing or interpreting particular musical works. Taking Adorno's premise that 'as the products of culture, they [the structures of autonomous music] could not ultimately be separated from the contradictions of culture', Stephen Miles argues that this 'would be difficult enough to prove if the art form in question possessed a verbal dimension, but in the case of autonomous music only a form of speculative criticism, rich in metaphor

⁴ Given the inconsistency and variability in the quality of, and in some cases a lack of, English translations of Adorno's writings, I have chosen to provide my own translations together with a reference to the original volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* [abbreviated as G.S.]. The bibliography provides details of principal works in English translation.

and imaginative power, could make the necessary connections between the musical work and society' (Miles, 1997, p.725). The problem is, of course, that, by definition, *necessary* connections should not strictly require imaginative power – in the sense of their being creatively posited – but should prove susceptible to a mode of interpretation or investigation armed with the appropriate conceptual scheme and empirical tools. Peter Martin appears to concur with this when he suggests that 'for all his theoretical virtuosity, it is far from clear that Adorno did in fact provide a coherent account of the relationship he claimed between musical and social structures; indeed, in his unremitting efforts to relate the whole to the parts he leaves unresolved the familiar problems encountered in any attempt to explain individual action in terms of macro-sociological structures' (Martin, 1995, p.112); or as Miles succinctly puts it: 'one will search Adorno's work in vain for something like a theory of mediation' (Miles, 1997, p.727).

Max Paddison's *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (1993) can in one sense be seen as an attempt to reconstruct a viable theory of mediation out of the fragmentary allusions and implicit pointers that are scattered across Adorno's output as a whole. Paddison suggests that:

Adorno's concept of mediation can be seen as operating simultaneously on three different levels: (i) musical works are mediated 'in themselves' (as the dialectic of construction and expression); (ii) musical material is culturally and socially mediated (as the relation of musical to social production, reproduction, distribution and consumption); and (iii) musical material is historically mediated, in that its 'progress' can be understood as part of what Adorno and Horkheimer call the 'dialectic of Enlightenment'. (Paddison, 1993, p.108)

While each of these analytically distinct levels will necessarily interconnect with one another, it is the second and third levels – 'musical material is culturally and socially mediated' and 'musical material is historically mediated' – that are of the most significance for, or relate most directly to, contemporary attempts to grasp the 'social' in music; and it is this form of mediation that is most in need of a comprehensive theoretical account. '[Adorno] considers that, because musical reception is itself socially mediated, it cannot as an area of study be a substitute for the analysis of the specificity of the work itself. It is in the musical work and in the dialectic of the musical material that the social significance of music is to be deciphered, in terms of socially sedimented traces within the material, not through focusing exclusively on the conditions of music's reception/consumption' (Paddison, 1993, p.123). It is precisely those socially sedimented traces that constitute the crux of Adorno's theory of mediation; and, indeed, any theory of 'productive mediation' that seeks to understand music as socially mediated (in the sense of its manifest form or

content being somehow determined by the context in which it is or was produced).

However, as already noted, strategies of this kind typically rely on analogical readings or interpretations that seek to demonstrate some kind of structural ‘fit’ between the immanent characteristics of the music and some aspect of the social or historical context in which it was produced. Moreover, analogical accounts of socio-historical mediation tend only to operate at the level of generic form – as opposed, that is, to operating at the level of the unique specificity of any given musical work or utterance. Of course, nearly all interpretations of this kind do focus on an individual work or a limited number of works. However, in such instances, it is not that the implicit model of mediation serves to explicate the particularity of the given work or utterance in question so much as the particular work serves as an exemplar of the generic characteristics on which the interpretive reading ultimately depends. What is typically lacking is both an account of why a particular interpretive strategy is being adopted in relation to a given work or utterance as well as some sense of whether the strategy is being proposed as a general methodology, potentially applicable to all music – of which the given work is simply one exemplifying case – or whether it has been adopted because it is somehow uniquely attuned to that particular work, or those similar to it. This is especially true of Adorno. It is not, however, a new complaint. In a letter to Max Horkheimer, commenting on Adorno’s essay, ‘On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening’, shortly after its publication, Hans Mayer noted that ‘the individual musical work as such offers enormous resistance to an extra-musical, sociological mode of observation. The situation changes only when one progresses beyond individual works and attempts to consider general aspects: specific forms (the sonata, the rondo, the fugue), specific compositional methods (homophony or polyphony), specific styles (the classical and romantic symphony)’ (Mayer, 1998, p.369). In direct response, Horkheimer claimed that

The individual work of music is not to serve as an example of an otherwise sociologically interpreted type, but rather as the object of analysis. Its understanding is not the sum total of, say, its technical, biographical, historical, sociological, and economic explanation. Those categories which allegedly derive from the professional disciplines achieve their most prescient meaning by virtue of the structure they enter into in each individual analysis. The social content of Beethoven’s music is not revealed through the sociology of the German society of his time. (Horkheimer, 1998, pp.400–401)

It is clear that Horkheimer rather evades Mayer’s point, which is that if one were to consider from a sociological or critical perspective, say, Beethoven’s

complete piano sonatas, with a view to revealing their 'social content', one would struggle to do so without seeing each of them as ultimately exemplifying a 'formal type' whose generic characteristics must serve as the real object for any analysis oriented toward revealing their social or historical mediation. That which distinguishes one sonata from the other cannot be reduced to specific mediating or 'external' determinants. Like Miles, Mayer also points to the way in which 'Adorno does not succeed in proving concretely that his examples are anything more than analogies. If the laws of commodity production really do create and shape the contemporary musical world in all its manifestations, then Adorno has yet to provide concrete proof of the mediations by means of which such a relationship between the economic and social spheres arises' (Mayer, 1998, p.379).

This is certainly true, for example, of one of the most often cited passages from the essay in question: 'The familiarity of the piece posits itself in place of the quality ascribed to it. To like it is almost the same as to recognise it. Evaluative judgement has become a fiction for the person who finds himself hemmed in by standardised musical goods' (Adorno, G.S.14, p.15). One is bound to wonder to whom this is supposed to apply and on what basis one might begin to seek to furnish evidence in its support. As Mayer asks: 'How do things stand, according to the argument that everything on offer is the same, with other examples? *Even here one must generally say that one cannot avoid the impression that the answer is already decided in advance of the question being posed*, as though every possible object were ready-tailored in order that it fit the inappropriate strait-jacket afforded by the categories of exchange and use value' (Mayer, 1998, p.382, my emphasis). One cannot evade this problem simply by professing to hope that eventually the methodologies *might* be developed in order that such an assertion *might* be provided with some measure of proof. Likewise, the claim that 'to like it is almost the same as to recognize it' fails to define for whom exactly this claim is supposed to hold true – presumably it is not supposed to be true of Adorno – just as it fails to provide much justification beyond its repetition. Even should we intuitively believe it to be right, then this in itself would mean little in so far as the conditions of possibility of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse are concerned – not least because intuition is the sort of facility which might convince us that the earth is flat and is located at the centre of the universe. The inherent danger in Adorno's claims, then, is that their seemingly perspicacious 'rightness' stems not from the epistemological strength of the argument in which they occur nor from the evidence forwarded in their support, but rather from the fact that they simply accord (or not) with our own preconceived suspicions (or even prejudices).

The same could be said of his claim that 'The listener is converted, along

the line of least resistance, into the passive consumer. The partial moments no longer function critically against the pre-conceived whole; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful aesthetic totality exercises against the flawed one of society' (Adorno, G.S.14, p.19). Again, this notably generalizing assertion lacks an adequate theory as to the mechanism by which this is supposed to take place, a clear explication of the scope of the claim, and any adequate evidence in its support. Of course, Adorno's claim that 'the partial moments no longer function critically against the pre-conceived whole' derives from one of the central concerns of Frankfurt Critical Theory. It is motivated by the need to explain and understand the apparent failure of, or even the lack of, a lasting socialist revolution, despite the realization of those objective conditions which were to have given rise to it. We should remind ourselves at this point that the principal way in which Adorno seeks to account for the socially mediated nature of music in this essay is, as the title suggests, through recourse to the Marxist notion of the 'fetish character of commodities'. Mayer provides a succinct summary of that former notion:

A manufactured product behaves as though nobody had created it, as though it exists by itself. The pure 'thingness' of the object appears to scorn all sign of it having been anything else. More still: it is not only that the subjective creator, that the process of creation is denied; the creation itself appears before the one who has produced it as an alien power and seeks to shape him, to influence his thinking and acting. This is true fetishism: an elephant tusk painted by men becomes a God before which those who once painted it so brightly, now bend. (Mayer, 1998, p.372)

Mayer then proceeds to argue, surely aware of the irony, that the Marxist notion of *Warenfetischismus* is itself in danger of becoming fetishized, and, moreover, that its isolated appropriation – in relation to *Das Kapital* as a whole – is not dissimilar to precisely that splintered, atomistic mode of reception that Adorno posits as the principal feature of 'regressed' hearing. However, the idea that there exist 'objective interests' of which most people – that is to say, the 'masses' – remain largely ignorant trades on precisely those models of truth which have formed one of the principal targets of postmodern-inspired critique. For any kind of emancipatory orientation already presupposes either some identifiably repressive or oppressive background against which it reacts, or is required to project the regulatory model of what a truly emancipated society might look like. As is well known, Adorno, in his suspicion of a degeneration into falsely affirmative idealism, avoided the latter – the source of his totalizing pessimism; Foucault struggled to generate something approaching a normative ethics without presuming precisely those objective interests which he had replaced

with the workings of power; and Habermas continues to seek a concrete ethical programme within the guiding communicative paradigm of the 'ideal speech situation'. This explains why, incidentally, in the absence of a transcendent or quasi-transcendental ground for political or ethical imperatives, the argument relating to institutional legitimacy remains necessarily weaker than the epistemological argument concerning the nature of particular discursive claims.

Hence, the notion of music's socially mediated nature remains a kind of unstated centre in Adorno's work – not merely in the genuinely Adornian sense of that unspecified something to which the constellatory method indirectly alludes in its fear of trampling over the non-identical, but rather in the more debilitating sense of that unspecified something upon whose specification the theory or model rather depends. As Miles argues, the mere assertion of social contingency is ultimately unpersuasive: 'empirical evidence must be provided to substantiate these interpretive claims, demonstrating the concrete connections between the musical work and its social context' (Miles, 1997, p.723). There is a certain 'begging-the-question' to be discerned in Adorno's implicit theory of social mediation, one that requires more than the equally circular assertion that musical works simply are 'windowless monads'. To be sure, as Dahlhaus rightly observes, Adorno's sociology of music can be understood as an attempt 'to overcome a contradiction which seems almost incapable of being bridged: the contrast between an aesthetic compositional–technical analysis, which proceeds by individualising, and a sociological interpretation which tends to view musical works as documents and examples of general social tendencies and structures' (Dahlhaus, 1987, p.243). Yet, as Dahlhaus also notes, 'the contrast between the methods – between the formal-analytically individualising and the sociologically generalising procedure – returns as a flaw in the individual analyses, though Adorno was able at times, by dint of great effort, to reconcile the opposing views by force. And the verbal analogies perform the function of hiding a gap which the arguments could not close' (Dahlhaus, 1987, p.244). In fact, Adorno's tentative (and largely unrealized) call for a material theory of form and for a sociology of music that would unite empirical fact with philosophically informed critique suggests that he was not unaware of some of the limitations in his own method of interpretation. Indeed, in a work published near the end of a life in which he had consistently pursued a viable method of sociological interpretation, he observed that 'the question which *would* have to be asked is what, as against a mere introduction, a fully developed sociology of music *would* look like' (Adorno, G.S.14, p.422, my emphasis). The complexity and challenge of developing a coherent and workable sociology of music is highlighted by the fact that several decades later Peter Martin was still able to claim 'it is arguable that music is now a more central element in the

culture of advanced industrial societies than it has been in any earlier time or place, and thus that it is worth trying to remedy *the rather undeveloped state of the sociology of music* (Martin, 1995, p.xii, my emphasis) and Carl Dahlhaus was still able to observe, 'there is no agreement about what the sociology of music is or what it could be' (Dahlhaus, 1987, p.234). Condemned to sketches, outlines and introductions, the sociology of music appears to be a virtual discourse known only negatively as what it is not, or prolegomenarily as what it might one day be.

Nevertheless, Martin's model does provide a useful counterpoint to that of Adorno. Although it seems at times as though Adorno is proposing simply that musical works are structurally analogous to other social formations – or even to the social totality itself – nevertheless the crux of his theory is that works of art are social by virtue of the fact that they affirm or negate the context in which they arise and in which they remain immersed. For this reason, beyond a mere exposition of the most elementary kind, there is no neutral or depoliticized appropriation of Adorno to be had – one cannot arrive at a working theory of mediation by attempting to strip away the philosophy of history lying at its core. Central to this is Adorno's refusal to abandon a notion of truth or 'truth-content'. Martin, on the other hand, argues that 'as sociologists our role is not to take sides but to analyse the constant struggle. In short we must treat claims about the nature of art or the meaning of music as topics for analysis, rather than the resources with which to carry it out' (Martin, 1995, p.122). For Martin, value judgements represent the raw data with which the social scientist works in order to render a more complete 'understanding' of music as social fact; values themselves are treated as (more) facts, as neutralized grist for the objective analyst's mill. For Adorno, such material is an already mediated subject-matter requiring historical and philosophical interpretation in order to reveal its (negative) moment of truth – 'facts' themselves are treated as (already implying) values. One might simply compare Martin's appreciative quoting of Boehmer, 'a further difference between traditional musicology and the sociology of music is that the latter proceeds from the social relevance of musical consumption and not from the alleged aesthetic or formal qualities of the musical product. For instance, even if musicologists avoid light music because of its high degree of uniformity, *this sector of music production commands the music sociologist's attention for the very reason that it constitutes more than 90% of all music production and consumption*' (Martin, 1995, p.24, citing Boehmer, 1980, p.433, my emphasis), with Adorno's assertion that 'there exist artworks of the highest dignity, which, from the point of view of their quantitative effect, play no significant social role and which hence, according to Silbermann, would have to be excluded from consideration' (Adorno, G.S.10.1, p.369). Where Martin is interested in understanding social phenomena, Adorno is (also) focused on interpreting

or revealing their ‘truth-content’. In essence, it is the difference between, on the one hand, a neutral and objective uncovering or ‘laying bare’ of the causal nexus in which phenomena are situated – ‘ideas and beliefs must be the objects of sociological investigation, irrespective of their “ultimate validity or invalidity”... But such beliefs, their origins and effects, must be studied carefully, for they are what motivate real people’ (Martin, 1995, p.24) – and, on the other hand, conceiving *truth* as an evaluative, ethical, moral, philosophical and normative category; or, specifically in Adorno’s case, a negative potential, accessible only to a historical and philosophical critique centred on the falsehood of the human condition under the conditions of late capitalism – ‘value-freedom and social-critical function are incompatible’ (Adorno, G.S.10.1, p.372). It is also the motivation behind Critical Theory’s critique of ‘positivism’ (as noted in Chapter 1).

This overview of Adorno’s notion of mediation, although necessarily brief, serves usefully to illustrate both the strength and the weakness, both the allure and the frustration, of Adorno’s philosophical framework and interpretive methodology. On the one hand, it hints at a mode of interpretation that manages to incorporate both a detailed analysis of the immanent structure of the autonomous musical work as well as an account of how the latter bears witness to the larger social totality of which it is a part – and all in such a way as to suggest that the (appropriately oriented) study of music is itself a *necessary* component within a critical project directed toward revealing socially relevant or emancipatory interests. On the other hand, it lacks a detailed and convincing account of the mechanism of mediation on which such an interpretive enterprise ultimately depends.

While many of those who seek to interpret music as a phenomenon mediated by the social, cultural or historical conditions in which it is or was produced could hardly be described as Marxists, or post-Marxists, there is a clear affinity between the implicit notion of mediation underlying their interpretive method and the explicit ‘base–superstructure’ model central to orthodox or ‘vulgar’ Marxist theory. The viability of such interpretive endeavours tends therefore to stand or fall on the viability of the often implicit model of mediation on which they depend. Yet without a (dialectical) concept of ‘totality’, or a teleological or determinist model of historical and social development, or an acceptance that one can draw at least some coherent and demonstrable distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘appearance’ (or ideology) – all ideas that are mostly anathematic to guiding postmodern sensibilities – it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to even begin to interpret forms (or objects) of cultural expression (or production) as mediated phenomena in the ‘productive’ sense – in the sense of their incorporating, reflecting or expressing structures, ideas or tropes that are present in, or defining of, the broader social,

cultural and historical contexts in which they are, or were, produced.

This is undoubtedly one of the reasons behind a (postmodern?) shift in emphasis away from a theory of meaning as passively encoded within musical structures themselves and toward one that views it as actively constructed by ‘situated’ listeners. It is this, perhaps, which leads Martin to claim that ‘sociologically, the task is not – as Adorno saw it – the “deciphering of music” so as to show how it is determined by the social circumstances of its production, but rather to understand the processes by which sounds are creatively organised, and invested with meanings. ... It is thus not so much a matter of taking meanings out, so to speak, as of seeing how they get put in’ (Martin, 1995, p.125). Ultimately Martin advocates a view of musical meaning as socially constructed by human agents. Hence, it is the task of the sociology of music to investigate and understand the modes of human interaction that give rise to the construction and interpretation of such meaning. Again and again, Adorno insists that the relation of art to society is to be located and deciphered, if not uniquely, then predominantly, within the immanent structural features of the musical work itself. For Martin, the sociologist of music investigates how it is that music comes to have the meaning and significance that it has. For Adorno, such investigation merely contributes one aspect of a critical theory of society and its material and cultural products.

Kramer

A second notable and influential model of musical interpretation is to be found in the work of contemporary musicologist Lawrence Kramer. Although it is difficult to identify any one notion that is quite as fundamental to Kramer’s work as, for example, the ‘musical material’ is to Adorno’s, the systematic ‘agenda’ presented at the beginning of Kramer’s first major publication, *Music as Cultural Practice* (the title itself is revealing), does usefully capture what was, and in principle remains, the general orientation of his work. It comprised four basic claims:

- 1 Works of music have discursive meanings.
- 2 These meanings are definite enough to support critical interpretations comparable in depth, exactness and density of connection to interpretations of literary texts and cultural practices.
- 3 These meanings are not ‘extramusical,’ but on the contrary are inextricably bound up with the formal processes and stylistic articulations of musical works.
- 4 These meanings are produced as a part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations – part, in other words, of the continuous production and reproduction of culture. (Kramer, 1990, p.1)

It may be worth briefly considering each in turn. The first claim appears counter-intuitive. The medium of discursive meaning is ordinarily assumed to be language; and this would appear to cut music, especially instrumental music, out of the 'discursive loop' from the very beginning – one is rarely 'propositioned' by a string quartet, in the literal sense. As Kramer notes: 'The essential hermeneutic problem about music is usually put by saying that music is all syntax and no semantics, or that music lacks denotative or referential power' (Kramer, 1990, p.2). However, Kramer suggests that musical works can be understood as 'fields of humanly significant action' in so far as one approaches them with the appropriate interpretive attitude – what he describes as the 'hermeneutic attitude'; one is to assume that a 'text', or musical work, resists fully disclosing itself, and hence that 'a hermeneutic window on it must be opened through which the discourse of our understanding can pass' (Kramer, 1990, p.6). In other words, musical meaning is limited neither to abstract patterns of formal signification nor to what would presumably constitute the 'non-discursive' immediacy of emotional or automatic reflex; music is exhausted neither by its formal properties nor by its empirical effect(s) on the listener.

The second claim points toward another factor that complicates the way in which music is open to this form of interpretation. Kramer compares the interpretation of discursive meanings to the interpretation of literary texts or cultural practices. However, as noted in Chapter 1, it is not immediately clear how interpretive methods that depend upon hermeneutic, structuralist or poststructuralist conceptions of meaning might be appropriated for the interpretation of a phenomenon that appears to lack precisely the requisite order of signification. As noted, music seems to be both more immediate than, and yet at the same time 'once removed' from, the literal or semantic dimension on which such theoretical models typically depend. Kramer's strategy therefore employs a poststructuralist adaptation of Austin's speech-act theory; this enables him to build on the observation that 'although locutionary effects are confined to the sphere of language, illocutionary force need not be' (Kramer, 1990, p.9). In other words, a string quartet does not propagate discursive meaning in a constative or assertoric sense; it cannot raise propositional truth-claims – 'Music may seduce us, but it never makes propositions. And here we must acknowledge the kernel of truth in the formalist proposition. If meaning begins with (forms around, clings to) a truth claim (implicit or explicit, real or fictive), then music has no meaning in the ordinary sense' (Kramer, 1990, p.5) – but it can express or communicate 'something' in so far as its performative aspect or illocutionary force is open (or opened) to some form of hermeneutic interpretation. Jonathan Culler suggests, also in the context of Derrida's critique of Austin's speech-act theory, that 'what counts is the plausibility of the description of the circumstances: whether the features of the context

adduced create a frame that alters the illocutionary force of the utterances' (Culler, 1982, p.123). Culler's 'frame' is presumably not unlike Kramer's hermeneutic window. Culler further suggests that the boundlessness of context – what one might call the infinite potential of iteration – puts in question 'not the determination of illocutionary force by context but the possibility of mastering the domain of speech acts by exhaustively specifying the contextual determinants of illocutionary force' (Culler, 1982, p.123). This is evidently what Kramer has in mind when he argues that, in attempting to connect the object of interpretation to its cultural/historical situation, 'no enterprise is more vulnerable to the lure of monumentalisation, the illusion that the wavering movement of meaning has been arrested at last' (Kramer, 1990, p.16).

The third and fourth claims are more problematic. They point toward an antinomy that is inherent in Kramer's model of interpretation – an antinomy that manifests itself, in one form or another, in almost all of his subsequent work. The third claim emphasizes a 'hermeneutic mode of interpretation' that is centred on the way in which meanings are 'inextricably bound up with the formal processes and stylistic articulations of musical works'; the fourth claim points toward a mode of interpretation that is centred on the cultural and historical contexts in which music is produced, reproduced and consumed, on the way in which 'meanings are produced as a part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations'. In the third claim, Kramer tells us that 'these meanings are not "extramusical"'; yet, in the fourth claim, he insists that 'these meanings are produced as a part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations'. It would appear, where Kramer's model is concerned, that musical meaning both is, and is not, 'extramusical'.

The structural trope effectively represents Kramer's principal strategy for dealing with this apparent antinomy. The trope is 'a structural procedure, capable of various practical realizations, that also functions as a typical expressive act within a certain cultural/historic framework' (Kramer, 1990, p.10). Hence, illocutionary meaning is realized by virtue of a particular structural trope that is concretized in the musical work, but dependent for its meaning on particular social, cultural or historical contingencies. The notion of the structural trope represents Kramer's attempt to mediate between the two poles of mediation. On the one hand, there is a clear parallel here between the 'structural trope' and the analogical mode of 'productive mediation' highlighted in the previous chapter – Kramer seeks to reveal a particular trope through analytical insight into a given musical work. On the other hand, he also claims that structural tropes 'form something like the body language of an interpretive community' (Kramer, 1990, p.12). Here we are very close to the 'attributive screen' proposed by Rabinowitz – those interpretive strategies by means of which listeners make

sense of music. This is the source of the tension between Kramer's twin claims that meanings are both musical and extramusical, that they are both 'bound up with the formal processes and stylistic articulations of musical works' and yet also 'part of the general circulation of regulated practices and valuations'.

The structural trope provided by the 'impossible object' is one such example (Kramer, 1999, Chapter 2). Impossible objects are 'products of an epistemological/topographical discourse in which human subjectivity ceases to be a common field and becomes, instead, a secret recess'; they are 'fragments of the subject's incoherence' and 'tend to disguise their origin in such desperate creation by seeming unmotivated, context-free, inexplicably present' (Kramer, 1990, pp.88–9). Kramer suggests this trope as a way of understanding or interpreting Chopin's famous Prelude in A minor (Op.28). This is achieved, ultimately, by revealing points of formal or structural equivalence between the music (itself) and the discursive trope in question. The latter is furnished with further examples, typically drawn from a range of nineteenth-century artistic contexts. What is striking about Kramer's method, at least in this earlier book, is the level of formal analytical work adduced. In fact, one could almost envisage the technical explication of Chopin's work as an independent piece of analysis, perhaps oriented toward revealing the 'dialectical' organization of musical material. Of course, Kramer's aim is then to expand his interpretive frame beyond what is, for him, the limited or incomplete level of understanding made available by analysis alone, and situate the work within a broader social, cultural and historical context – which he aims to achieve, where this particular piece is concerned, by invoking the 'impossible object' as structural trope.

In his 'strategic map for musical hermeneutics' Kramer suggests that one should 'identify the expressive acts found among or by means of [the hermeneutic windows]' and then 'ask whether formal processes and stylistic articulations of the music can be said, either literally or figuratively, to exemplify the same or associated expressive acts' (Kramer, 1990, p.13). There is clearly an analogical mode of interpretation at work here; and the explicit inclusion of 'figurative' associations surely invites the same criticism that we saw directed at Adorno. Kramer does claim that he is keen to avoid treating the music as 'an instance of anterior forces', as the mere reflection of 'some context, however thickly described' (Kramer, 1990, p.17). Nevertheless, rather as was the case with Adorno, the precise nature of the mediating mechanism on which Kramer's interpretive methodology depends is never explicitly stated – or rather, it is, but only in conjunction with its (incompatible?) alternative: 'the works, practices, and activities – for us, the music – that we address as interpreters are not only the products but also the agencies of culture, not only members of the habitus but also makers of it' (Kramer, 1990, p.17). Like Adorno, Kramer is a deeply dialectical

thinker – perhaps ironically so, given his explicit postmodern sensibilities. In fact, Kramer is arguably at his most convincing at precisely those points where he tones down the postmodern emphasis on ‘play’ and ‘uncertainty’ and assumes a more critical, dialectical orientation. As Miles observes: ‘Kramer’s analysis is lucid and insightful, yet maddeningly elusive at the same time. It takes on the character of an impossible object itself, giving rise to the question: Where does all this lead?’ (Miles, 1995, p.33). Hence, although the typical criticism directed at Kramer is that he still assumes a position of interpretive ‘mastery’, that, despite the various caveats, he still ultimately assumes to speak ‘for us’, I would suggest that the more problematic area is the underdeveloped or imprecise nature of the implicit model of mediation that serves to underwrite his ‘hermeneutic’ enterprise as a whole. In fact, I would not consider his assumption of interpretive agency a problem, but rather a necessity.

In *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (1995) the hermeneutic, historicist and deconstructive tendencies at work in Kramer’s previous book are still very much in evidence – ‘Those [postmodern] projects can only be achieved through modes of hermeneutic and historical writing that are also critical’ (Kramer, 1995, p.18) – but now, together with a greater use of elements drawn from psychoanalytic discourses, they have coalesced into a recognizably and self-consciously postmodern strategy. In the introductory remarks to the chapter, ‘The Lied as Cultural Practice’, Kramer notes that

From the modernist critical perspective represented by Dahlhaus, still ruled by the formulas of the aesthetic era, the Lied can only be disenchanting by the recognition of its sociality. From a postmodernist perspective, the same recognition may be a way to save the Lied from disenchantment ... A postmodernist criticism might conceive of the Lied dynamically, not as a dehistoricised ideological product, but as a locus of the dehistoricising process. (pp.144–5)

Kramer then proceeds, via film theory, to consider the way in which the Lied, or song (or music?), is active in constructing subjectivities. He suggests that there are a number of positions that one can adopt in relation to a song and that ‘a song will typically seek to manage the interplay of text, voice, and musical technique in order to privilege one of the available positions’ (Kramer, 1995, p.147). This latter suggestion is of a sort that recurs throughout Kramer’s writing whereby some kind of intentional agency is seemingly attributed to an innate entity. Yet it is not clear how a song can actively ‘seek’ anything. Is the song a vehicle of the composer’s/author’s (un)conscious ‘seeking’ or a vehicle for the listener’s (un)conscious positioning? One assumes that Kramer is alluding to the way in which a song, as a structural or cultural trope, can be read, via the

hermeneutic attitude, as a reflection and informer of identities according to prevailing cultural, historical or ideological norms. However, in view of Kramer's reluctance to see music as a static reflection of a given context, it is to be expected that he goes on to suggest that 'the identificatory positions do not form a stable order; they can shift over time, vary in hierarchical value, displace or subsume one another, and be occupied simultaneously' (Kramer, 1995, p.147). Again more clarity or care would be welcome, especially in explaining how one might occupy more than one identificatory position simultaneously. One can accept that identities are decentred and fluid, and that music can encourage or serve as a pretext to explore and move between multiple 'subject positions'; indeed, one can accept that it is a powerful reflection and informer of subjectivities. However, the mechanism by means of which one might occupy multiple positions simultaneously is under-theorized. If Kramer is alluding to a 'multiple-personality' potential, then 'simultaneous' conceals the fact that at any given moment one identity will dominate; if he is alluding to an empathetic or appropriating potential, then 'simultaneous' conceals the fact that empathy or appropriation require precisely that distancing power of unitary self-identity without which one would simply cross over into and become one with one's other and thus obliterate the very distinction on which the professed simultaneity depends; if he is alluding to a kind of postmodern 'pick 'n' mix', in which one chooses one's identity (or identities) at will, then 'simultaneous' conceals the fact that such a model implies at least the kind of provisionally unified agency that is required in order that such a selection be made in the first place. Kramer goes on to argue that 'this elision of the first person can equally well give the impression of transcendental unity and of decentred fluidity. ... One aim of what I call postmodernist music criticism is to keep, as the music does, both possibilities continually in play' (Kramer, 1995, p.147). However, keeping both possibilities in play does not entail, cannot entail, their being realized in strict simultaneity – if anything, it suggests their being realized dialectically. Where postmodern criticism may seek to keep both possibilities in play, dialectical criticism would seek to understand both conditions as necessarily functions of one another. This would appear especially timely given Kramer's observation that 'it is hard to formulate binary oppositions without delegitimising one of its terms as other' (Kramer, 1995, p.37).

In his chapter on Charles Ives, 'Cultural Politics and Musical Form', Kramer again argues that 'individual identity is premised, not on one's separation from others, but on one's exchangeability with them. This exchangeability, in turn, crystallises in a series of passing moments drawn at random from an enveloping simultaneity' (Kramer, 1995, p.178). The same problem arises here as it did before. The assertion that 'individual identity is premised, not on one's separation from others, but on one's

exchangeability with them' appears to overlook the point that exchangeability is also dependent upon the separation of that which is exchanged. The suggestion that this exchangeability 'crystallises in a series of passing moments drawn at random from an enveloping simultaneity' appears to reduce 'individuals' to mere nodal points within some encompassing ideological flux, all of which neglects the point that subjects are as much producers of that supra-individual construct as they are products of it. As Peter Dews observes in relation to Apel's consensus theory of truth: 'Apel replies to the "convergence of the poststructuralist, hermeneutic and pragmatist critique of transcendental philosophy" by arguing that *the individual subject must be "more than a point of intersection of historically contingent and structurally anonymous determinations"*, since as a thinking and reflecting subject he or she participates in an "unlimited community of argumentation"' (Dews, 1995, pp.265–6, my emphasis). Hypostatized, both transcendental unity and decentred fluidity lead to an impoverished subjectivity – the former so ideologically closed that it remains impervious to its other and at the same time blind to its dependence upon it; the latter so porously open that it remains a mere reflection of whatever subjectivity the contingency of its contextualized setting constructs and thus impotent in the face of social and psychological deformation. Hence, the accusation that formal analysis and 'modernist' aesthetics attempt to conceal and negate the social contexts of music by presenting works as closed structures of autonomous signification should be tempered by the recognition that the simple reduction of music to its social contexts could well forfeit the possibility that music might also provide and channel certain modes of resistance within those social contexts.

With the third entry in his self-acknowledged trilogy, *Musical Meaning: A Critical History* (2002), Kramer is still motivated by the search for a 'nonreductionist contextualism', a 'critical practice meant to affiliate music richly with things beyond itself without *either* allowing it to fade into a mere echo of those things *or* succumbing to the illusion that it has any genuine identity apart from them' (Kramer, 2002, p.6). Yet here, in what appears a relatively unobjectionable aim, we can observe the very (insoluble) aporia that Kramer elsewhere claims 'is its own solution' (Kramer, 2002, p.2). In order to affiliate music with things beyond itself one has to assume, one has no option but to assume, that 'it' does in fact have some identity apart from them. In other words, in order to avoid succumbing to the illusion, one has no choice but to entertain it, to have already succumbed, so to speak – a 'necessary illusion' in the genuine sense. This is particularly apparent in his chapter on Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, where he explains that his discussion 'will accordingly focus at first more on how the music has been culturally situated than on the music itself, though at the same time it will show continually that this distinction is at best a convenient

fiction. The boundary implied by the term itself is – itself – a product of the way musical experience is culturally situated’ (Kramer, 2002, p.29). It is worth unpicking this passage in some detail. From a logical perspective, the former ‘music [which] has been culturally situated’, in order that it can be ‘that’ which has been culturally situated, must in fact refer to something other than ‘music as culturally situated’ – in other words, it must refer to the ‘music itself’. Hence, substituting terms, Kramer is effectively stating that his discussion will focus more on how the music itself has been culturally situated than on the music as culturally situated. However, according to Kramer, the ‘music itself’ is also a product of the way in which musical experience is culturally situated – in other words, it is also ‘music as culturally situated’. Hence, substituting terms, Kramer is effectively stating that his discussion will focus more on how the music as culturally situated has been culturally situated than on the music as culturally situated.

Rhetorical games aside, the problem here concerns whether the concept of the music itself is ‘at best a convenient fiction’ or a necessary presupposition for any discourse which seeks to appropriate or know it. Rather than conceiving of the ‘music itself’ as a necessary conceptual moment within that discourse which seeks to grasp it, Kramer attempts to subsume it within the terms of its other – ‘the boundary implied by the term *itself* is a product of the way music is culturally situated’ – whereupon it cancels all the way through, leaving nothing but the empty choice between a self-consuming reflective regression and a tautological redundancy. Kramer’s conviction that his is not a ‘zero-sum game’ (Kramer, 2002, p.2) does not entirely convince. Nevertheless, this has always proved a central issue for Kramer. In that famous exchange with Tomlinson, already alluded to in the discussion of formalism in Chapter 1, Kramer was concerned to retain some sense of music’s autonomous immediacy:

Tomlinson in effect asks for the reverse, the dispersal into context of what we usually grasp as the immediacy of music. What he wants, if we take him at his word, is music under erasure: a music so decentered, so bought out or bought off by the entrepreneurial historian’s ‘wealthy ... concatenation of past traces’ that we can no longer claim to know it, or claim it as ours to know. In this dispensation there would be no criticism because there would be nothing to criticise; the death of criticism would follow on the death of what we currently think of as music. For some of us that might seem a steep price to pay. (Kramer, 1993, p.27)

For his part, Tomlinson advocates the removal of an overbearing subjective mediation which, for him, too closely approaches the proscriptive assumption of ‘correct’ interpretation. However, his major problem lies in proposing an alternative without falling foul of his own criticisms. Tomlinson recognizes Kramer’s demand that ‘we should abandon the myth

of music's autonomy by broadening the horizons of our musical pleasure and welcoming the complex situatedness of musical utterances in webs of extramusical forces', but he considers that Kramer fails to follow through on the full implications of such a requirement (Tomlinson, 1993, p.19). The latter's readings of Mozart's Divertimento K.563 or Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*, in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, are most definitely a far cry from more 'traditional' modes of analysis. Nevertheless, Tomlinson complains that 'in the very moment that he [Kramer] holds out hope for an extramusical broadening of the notes' signifying potential, he draws our attention back to the work, making it the primary (almost exclusive) matrix of its own meanings' (Tomlinson, 1993, p.20). Having said that, Tomlinson himself then admits that finding an alternative to close-reading which would avoid losing the music entirely is a 'ticklish task' (Tomlinson, 1993, p.22). It is in his own attempt to proscribe a thick contextualism which will 'resolutely historicise musical utterances' that aspects of Tomlinson's own agenda threaten to run aground. Phrases such as 'in as full a volume as possible' are reminiscent of an earlier conviction that 'the internal validity of a cultural interpretation answers to demands – our own demands – of completeness, of fullness' (Tomlinson, 1984, p.352). It is here that concepts, explicit or, more often than not, implicit – completeness, totality, validity, truth – tend to undermine his proposal and contradict his avowed plurality. The notion of 'an internal validity answering to demands of completeness', when viewed from one direction, seems little removed from the overarching theories from which he seeks to escape. As Kramer points out, 'his [Tomlinson's] program appeals to discovery procedures and modes of knowledge uncontaminated by "individual, subjective agency"' (Kramer, 1993, p.32) – that is to say, it succumbs to the very positivism it denounces.

Finally, it is worth comparing the respective models of mediation proposed by, or implicit in the work of, both Adorno and Kramer. Both authors assert that the musical object is the proper locus of mediation. Adorno claimed that 'the relation of art to society is not to be sought predominantly in the sphere of reception. It is prior to this: it is to be sought in production. ... Art and society converge in content, not in something external to the artwork' (Adorno, G.S.7, pp.338–9). Kramer claims that 'these [discursive] meanings are not "extramusical", but on the contrary are inextricably bound up with the formal processes and stylistic articulations of musical works' (Kramer, 1990, p.1). The key difference is between Adorno's critical focus on recovering a philosophical or redemptive notion of aesthetic truth inherent in socially mediated works of art and Kramer's focus on a hermeneutic recovery of 'meaning'. Both authors insist on the necessity of interpretive work in order to render more immediate an otherwise mediated, or occluded, content. Adorno insists that the truth-content of a musical work is only accessible to an appropriately

attuned philosophical mode of critique, that musical works require interpretation in order to reveal their discursive meaning. Kramer argues that one must open up 'hermeneutic windows' in order properly and adequately to grasp the substantive social, cultural and historical significance of a given work. However, both authors tend toward making claims that fail the criterion of contestability or for which evidence is lacking. Adorno often makes assertions for which he does not provide adequate evidence or he makes assertions for which it is not clear as to what might even count as adequate evidence. Kramer tends to use a limited number of literary references and other cultural analogies as the basis for making large-scale claims that often exceed the evidence offered in support of them. As Stephen Miles observed in relation to Adorno: 'when the desire for social insight achieved through analogy proves stronger than the desire for detailed, empirically grounded documentation, the contribution to musicological and sociological knowledge is dubious' (Miles, 1997, p.728). Adorno often invokes the 'musical material' as though it were an entity with its own historical inner dynamic. In a similar fashion, Kramer often implies musical agencies at work without adequately specifying who or what they are. However, while there is an ineradicably critical, emancipatory moment in Adorno's writing, there is no obvious critical moment in Kramer's writing in the sense of a socially relevant or emancipatory orientation – Miles, for example, describes Kramer's work as 'strangely unpositioned' (Miles, 1995, p.33). 'Formal' analytical observation is integrated with 'hermeneutic' interpretation, and quite often hedged with postmodern uncertainty, yet the manner in which the readings themselves submit to some principle of contestability remains unclear – as does their ultimate purpose from the point of view of a critically oriented discursive aim. This latter point marks out one of the fundamental differences between the respective approaches of Adorno and Kramer. It can be seen as derivative of that wider distinction which can be drawn between, on the one hand, poststructuralist and hermeneutic theory and, on the other hand, critical, 'Frankfurt School', or Marxist theory – and perhaps, by implication, between 'new' and 'critical' musicology.

Finally, it is interesting to note that both Adorno and Kramer, in their very different modes of exposition, nevertheless share certain stylistic traits. In a famous passage, Adorno describes Beethoven's music in the following way:

The most powerful effects in Beethoven's music depend upon the fact that a recurrent element, which at one point was merely present as a theme, now reveals itself as a result and thereby assumes an entirely transformed sense. Often, as a result of such recurrence, the meaning of the preceding element is only subsequently made manifest. The onset of a reprise is able to generate the

feeling of something monstrous [*Ungeheuerlich*] which occurred earlier, even if the latter simply could not have been identified there and then. (Adorno, G.S.14, p.152)

It is possible to view Kramer's mode of writing in a similar manner: more often than not one encounters, first, a cumulative assemblage of theoretical, historical and literary themes (or exposition) which then, through their carefully presented adjacency (or development), represent the concrete manifestation of a trope which is simultaneously derivative – that is to say, derived from those themes analytically and *post facto* – and constitutive – that is to say, posited as in some way determining of those themes, before one is then typically provided with the clinching reprise (or recapitulation) in which the concrete musical example is introduced, at once revealing itself both as the goal of that which has preceded it and at the same time explicating and bestowing new meaning upon it. In fact, Kramer himself noted, in his first major publication, that 'structural tropes, actualized practically and experimentally during the interpretive process, emerge both as means and as ends in our approach to this mode of understanding' (Kramer, 1990, p.13). Kramer shares with Adorno a distinctive expository style and, bearing in mind that one of the chapters in his book, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History*, is entitled 'Franz Liszt and the Virtuoso Public Sphere', one is tempted to suggest that Kramer's writing itself inhabits a kind of 'virtuoso discursive sphere' – an intellectual arena in which the sheer breadth, erudition and stylistic finesse of those multiple 'semantic adjacencies' provide an exhilarating read (or ride) to be sure, but one which, on occasion, leaves the reader wondering whether, just as with Adorno, the concrete musical insights are quite so concrete, and quite so legitimate, as the virtuoso rhetorical performance implies.

Chapter 5

Comparative Critique: Mahler's Ninth Symphony

As a final elaboration of the principal arguments with which this book is concerned, this chapter examines four different approaches to Mahler's Ninth Symphony: Osborne and Kennedy's 'An Empirical Validation of Schopenhauer's Theory of Music Through Analysis of Listeners' Experiences of Mahler's Ninth Symphony' (1985), Anthony Newcomb's 'Narrative Archetypes and Mahler's Ninth Symphony' (1992), Vera Micznik's 'Mahler and the "Power of Genre"' (1994) and Adorno's *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1992). There is a substantial literature dealing with Mahler's Ninth Symphony. These four particular items have been selected both because they coincide with a number of the issues that have been raised in previous chapters and also because they are each quite distinct in terms of their methodological assumptions or 'discursive aims'.

Osborne and Kennedy

John W. Osborne's and Lillian Kennedy's methodology is unusual in that they seek to employ the rigour of a scientific enquiry within the framework of a rather impressionistic view of music. The latter is itself largely derived from an eclectic appropriation of Schopenhauer's philosophy (or, more precisely, the place of music in Schopenhauer's philosophy), Mikel Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* and David Holbrook's *Gustav Mahler and the Courage To Be*. According to Osborne and Kennedy, Mahler is depicted in the latter book as an 'existential' composer and therefore his music is not to be interpreted purely as a reflection of his own biographical life experience, in the manner of the intentional fallacy, but as imbued with the reality of human existence itself. As Osborne and Kennedy put it, 'in simple terms this study explores whether the existential crises experienced by Mahler before and during the composing of his Ninth Symphony, and said to be expressed in that work, are apprehended in the reported experience of a sample of college students who listened to the last movement of the Ninth Symphony' (Osborne & Kennedy, 1985, p.17). Before dismissing this study, which appeared in the *Journal of Phenomenological*

Psychology – and it is perhaps rather easy to dismiss it from a musicological point of view – it is worth reflecting on its discursive aim (remembering that discursive aim refers not to the status of individual claims themselves but rather to the strategy that determines both the selection of the particular claims that are to be made and also how they are to be employed in order to forward a given aim or objective). In that respect, the study represents an attempt empirically to ground a theory of (symbolic) mediation and to account for the manner in which specific symbolic ideas are subsequently decoded (and categorized) at the moment of musical reception – where those ideas are supposed to manifest themselves, via Mahler’s existential crises, in the very material with which he works. Hence, it does represent a genuine attempt to take account both of ‘productive mediation’ and ‘receptive mediation’, albeit that, where the former is concerned, it focuses on the composer as the principal conduit of mediation and, where the latter is concerned, it focuses on what are presumed to be naturalized empirical responses. From a methodological perspective there is a seeming disparity between the empirical analysis of (reported) listener response, on the one hand, and the appropriated philosophical or literary interpretation, on the other.

The experiment which lay at the heart of this study consisted in playing a recording of the final movement of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony to a group of psychology students, who were then asked to describe in words what they had experienced while listening to the music. The precise instructions given to the students were as follows:

Please try to convey in words what you experienced while listening to the music. We are interested in your giving us as much detail as you possibly can about your experience. There is no right or wrong approach. Make sure that you concentrate upon what you actually experienced while listening to the music rather than afterthoughts. You may wish to describe thoughts, emotions, images, sensations, fantasies, stories or any experience that occurred while listening to the music. You are free to respond in any way you feel is appropriate. Write on the back of this page if you need more space. (Osborne & Kennedy, 1985, p.19)

It is worth noting that ‘of the original 38 protocols in the present study only those which displayed some affective or imaginal involvement with the music were retained for detailed analysis. The rejected protocols contained miscellaneous thoughts and commentary on mundane matters with no apparent involvement in the music’ (Osborne & Kennedy, 1985, p.21). This latter admission might well invite some familiar objections. It would seem a rather debilitating instance of question-begging to omit certain response sheets on the grounds that they demonstrated no apparent involvement with the music, given that such a judgement already presupposes, at least

in part, precisely that which one is aiming to establish – that is to say, the nature of the involvement with the music. However, that more typical objection, sometimes levelled at this kind of investigation, which argues that one could not have been sure that the subjects, in their written responses, were using descriptive words in the same way, or to mean the same thing, is no more powerful or pertinent than the observation that the objection itself is subject to the same semantic indeterminacy. Instead, the more fundamental problem with this enterprise – one which may collapse it entirely – is that the ‘meaning’ of Mahler’s music, with which empirical responses are shown to correspond, is itself the result of other individuals’ (for example, Holbrook’s) reporting, narrating, or interpreting of their own responses. It includes, for example, an entirely non-problematized appropriation of Deryck Cooke’s attempt to account for the meaning of individual musical intervals. The following provides a good example of the rather parlous line of reasoning:

Rather than use the minor second as might have been expected, Mahler used the major second which is a more neutral note and thought to function like the major sixth, which Cooke associates with pleasure. So the structure seems to indicate a type of non-attachment or reconciliation within a context of finality with feelings of peace and sorrow. The data of the present study appear to confirm the relation between musical structure discussed by Holbrook and the experience of listening to the music. (Osborne & Kennedy, 1985, p.34)

A further difficulty arises with the authors’ references to experiences which are *said to be* expressed in that work or with such observations as ‘because Mahler’s Ninth Symphony *is* generally considered’. What one notices, perhaps surprisingly, is that this error, or sleight of hand, shares much with that previously identified propensity in Lawrence Kramer’s work to inflate a limited number of individual interpretations into a general or factual condition through rhetorical recourse to the impersonal passive. Whereas in Kramer’s work the writings of a small selection of authors became the general condition of perception against which the reception of the *Moonlight Sonata* was interpreted, in Osborne and Kennedy’s study the interpretive writings of a handful of authors become the general condition of meaning against which the empirical reception of a number of student subjects is measured. As the authors happily observe, ‘the present data appear to be quite congruent with the interpretations of critics such as Deither, Cooke and Holbrook’ (Osborne & Kennedy, 1985, p.36). Yet one is bound to wonder about other interpretations by other critics, and to ask why the alleged congruence between student responses and the interpretations of critics acquires any more force than the alleged congruence that is seen to exist between various student responses themselves. On the one hand,

Osborne and Kennedy's study may demonstrate, with some success, that a (very select) group of listeners tend to associate the final movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony with similar verbal descriptors – as indicating, or typical of, specific emotional or psychological states – and that these are themselves not dissimilar to the manner in which that same music has been interpreted by a (very select) group of authors or critics. Moreover, although it remains rather superficial in its explication, there is also a limited purchase to their claim that such responses can be seen to bear out certain aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophy of music – although it remains unclear whether it is the final movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony alone which is supposed to bear this out or, instead, whether this is supposed to be the case with all music. However, on the other hand, it suffers because the posited meaning against which empirical reactions are to be measured is itself merely derived from a limited set of interpretive readings. One might also note, perhaps surprisingly, that the influence, direct or indirect, of Schopenhauer's thought on Mahler himself – and hence possibly on his compositional practice – is entirely ignored. Finally, the study certainly does not provide what its title promises: 'an empirical validation of Schopenhauer's theory of music'. The latter is, in any case, simply inconceivable given that Schopenhauer's philosophy is predicated, in part, on the idea that music is able to represent, precisely, the *non-empirical* realm which lies behind the field of mere phenomenal appearance.

Nevertheless, despite the weaknesses and despite those reservations, alluded to in the introduction to this book, regarding attempts to transgress interdisciplinary borders, one might caution against too easy a dismissal of the musical content in the study. Osborne and Kennedy's experiment provides a very real example of precisely where musicology will logically find itself if it consistently follows through on its claims regarding the ultimate implication of the subjective moment of reception in the construction of musical meaning. The experimental component in this study represents precisely the kind of empirical psychology of music that will result from asserting the unavoidable contingency of (subjective) interpretive strategies.

Newcomb

As Chapter 3 suggested, the greatest challenge facing non-formalist modes of interpretation – any interpretation that attempts to account for the meaning, effect or significance of a musical work or utterance through recourse to factors external to its formal actuality – is coherently and convincingly to account for the nature and mechanism of mediation involved, to elaborate the relationship between music and the social totality

of which it is nevertheless a part. As was suggested, one of the most common ways in which this relationship is analysed is through some kind of 'trope' or 'schema'; this is employed as a kind of metaphorical or analogical map whose salient features are related to key structural features of the music in question – rather as though one were attempting to realign a traced image with its original. Anthony Newcomb (1992) elaborates and employs just such a schema in his interpretive reading of Mahler's Ninth Symphony – although he refers to it as a 'narrative archetype'. Newcomb traces a one-to-one mapping between, on the one hand, the nodal points of this specific narrative schema – in this case modelled on the *Bildungsroman* – and, on the other hand, salient structural elements located within the score. A brief synopsis of Newcomb's reading may prove helpful at this point. Drawing on M.H. Abrams's notion of the 'circular or spiral quest', as exemplified in the *Bildungsroman*, Newcomb describes how the D major in the first movement of the Ninth Symphony, which represents our protagonist, pure and innocent, setting out on his journey, comes to be infused, gradually, with notes which are foreign to that key. This latter phenomenon represents our protagonist encountering the alien elements of an unfamiliar life-world. As the first movement progresses, these 'foreign' or 'alien' influences are absorbed into the musical fabric itself and hence, transfigured by his experience, our protagonist has taken that which seemed alien into himself. This is portrayed as representing a transition from childhood to adulthood. The second movement sees a conflict between Ländler and waltz, or *rustic* and *urbane* elements, where the rustic elements represent innocence, although one distorted through being viewed from the outside, and the urbane elements represent sophistication. The third movement depicts the developed adult – cold, calculating and professional. At this point an interruption occurs, a kind of denouement which suggests a potential for (re)development and which sets up a dynamic between the alienation of dissonant contrapuntal textures and the integration of harmonically controlled ones. The final movement then tends toward assimilation rather than confrontation. D-major is lost, and while it might be remembered or even yearned for, it can only be regained in an altered form – in the tarnished, transfigured, but possibly more fulfilling context of D-flat major. There is a tension throughout the work between the urge for restoration and an urge to move forward, a sense of working through the past in order to find the right ending, a sense of locating the past as *past within present*.

Clearly, Newcomb is not suggesting an autobiographical reading any more than were Osborne and Kennedy. However, one problematic question posed by this approach relates to the mechanism by means of which the posited narrative schema is realized: does the narrative archetype exist within the score; is it an addition or contribution on the part of the listener

and, if so, is it one that Newcomb would expect everyone to contribute; or does it represent, through some yet-to-be-elucidated mechanism of compositional transferral, the objectification or concretization of a particular socio-historical trope within the structural signification of the musical fabric itself? Newcomb goes on to explain:

I must stress that this interaction of formal paradigm, thematic character and recurrence, and plot archetype is in no sense an ‘extramusical’ matter, something external to the musical happenings themselves. Rather it is produced by these musical happenings in interaction with those conceptual paradigms I have called archetypal plots, just as literary meaning is produced by the interaction of verbal happenings with those conceptual paradigms. (Newcomb, 1992, p.120)

It requires a certain amount of unpicking, but there is something a little awry here. In the first place, it is little more than tautological to point out that an interaction involving formal paradigms and thematic character is in no sense ‘extramusical’ – it is not clear how one could evoke strictly formal musical paradigms as partaking in an extramusical event. Hence, what is actually taking place, or so it seems, is a process akin to that ‘tracing paper alignment’ rather than a genuine interaction. As (competent) social agents, so Newcomb proposes, we seek to interpret musical happenings in terms of acculturated narrative archetypes. This latter point is derived, in part, from Paul Ricoeur’s notion of ‘narrative activity’ according to which a freedom of succession – for Newcomb, the loosening of formal schemes in Mahler’s music – forces the listener ‘to interpret at every moment where he/she is in what kind of a paradigmatic series of events – forcing the listener to elicit, if only temporarily, a coherent configuration from a mere series of events’ (Newcomb, 1992, p.118). However, this tends to create a tension between, on the one hand, the active receptive element implied by talk of a ‘narrative activity’ and, on the other hand, what approaches a kind of reification of a specific socio-historically bound cultural trope. It is never quite clear whether the narrative archetype exists in the mind of the listener or in the notes on the page. Newcomb speaks of an ‘intersection’, but this mediation by another name remains inadequately theorized.

Micznik

In her article, ‘Mahler and the Power of Genre’ (1994), Vera Micznik observes that ‘Mahler’s critics have long recognised his propensity for relying on previously codified generic types: marches, Ländler, waltzes, trumpet signals’ and that her aim is to examine ‘the effect of generic

references upon the overall meaning of the music, or the various distinctions between various kinds and degrees of appropriation of the pre-existent materials' (Micznik, 1994, pp.117–18). The paradoxical nature of genre is captured in her observation that 'while Mahler's materials defy absolute generic commitments, their behaviour is dependent on the recognition of their generic models. What takes place here is a simultaneous affirmation and negation of genre' (Micznik, 1994, p.120). This is possible because 'in order for a work to negate genre, it must "bounce off" a minimum set of characteristics that render that genre recognisable. ... Mahler uses the signs of the norm only in order to immediately transgress and deny them' (Micznik, 1994, p.146). In other words, the music in the second movement of the Ninth Symphony contains at least the minimum of signifying material required in order that the 'appropriately' conditioned listener might perceive the connotation, but presents that material in such a way that the 'appropriately' conditioned listener recognizes that this is not the genuine article. A genre can only be recognized as such through what it is not and only recognized as not being such through what it is. This is not unlike Lawrence Kramer's take on narrative in music:

The salient claim, then, is that music is narratographically disruptive when it seeks to jeopardise (or unwittingly jeopardises) the dominant regimes (or what it fictitiously represents as the dominant regimes) of musical composition and reception. To use Nattiez's terms, music provokes us to the narrative metaphor when it seems to be undercutting its own foundations. (Kramer, 1995, pp.101–2)

This points up a complexity, common to hermeneutic interpretation, regarding the relationship or interaction between, on the one hand, a music which is located within one historical context and, on the other hand, a receptive strategy which is defined or determined by another (usually present-day) context. If the second movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony depends for its meaning on the appropriately conditioned listener recognizing the significance of various generic 'affiliations', then is the appropriately conditioned listener the one who 're-learns' early twentieth-century presuppositions or the one who applies his or her twenty-first-century presuppositions? Micznik observes:

It has often been pointed out that the concept of genre presupposes the sharing of some common knowledge between composer and audience. This knowledge consists not only in the purely musical characteristics of genre, but also of a broader spectrum of attributes encoded in the musical entities, which are not originally 'musical'. (Micznik, 1994, p.121)

She then suggests that the attributes encoded in generic identities are largely

the result of arbitrary associations which have become conventionalized and that while ‘generic affiliation’ relies, in part, on denotative meanings – that is to say, precise or direct meaning – ‘its most interesting attributes are inferred at the connotative level’ (Micznik, 1994, p.122) – that is to say, at the level of learned conventions. Of course, the distinction between denotation and connotation – as it appears in various linguistic or semiotic theories – has been challenged and problematized. Micznik does recognize this but she considers the distinction useful to her argument. However, after closer inspection it turns out that the distinction which Micznik is drawing between what she terms the denotative and connotative moments is little more, if any more, than a reworked version of that perennial distinction between formal and contextual, or between musical and extramusical, or even between syntactic and semantic dimensions.

The most fragile moment in Micznik’s argument, as one might expect, relates to the role of the listener in identifying such generic affiliations. On the one hand, she asserts that ‘while most characteristics codified within the generic units of meaning can be recognised by audiences aware of the historical transmission, the qualities associated with one genre are not necessarily fixed once and forever’, and, thus, ‘subsequent generations may draw different meanings from the same characteristics’ (Micznik, 1994, p.124). Once again, we appear to be returning to that relativistic framework, alluded to on a number of previous occasions, according to which, having stated that meaning is an arbitrary function of the listener or listening context, one cannot then continue with any kind of interpretation which claims to unearth a (or the) meaning such that it submits to the kind of contestability required of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse. At best, one is driven toward some sort of variant of reception history or some version of a psychology of music. Yet Micznik also argues that ‘they [subsequent generations] must learn the historically perpetuated and institutionalized “rules of the game” in order to come to understand the meaning of the generic utterances’ (Micznik, 1994, p.124). There would seem to be a contradiction here. On the one hand, different listeners may draw different meanings from the same characteristics; yet, on the other hand, listeners must know the ‘rules of the game’ in order to understand the (generic) implications of such characteristics. While Micznik’s subsequent argument, drawing on the literary critic Adena Rosemarin, that a search for generic traces which recognizes generic incompleteness can produce new meaning – basically, the production of meaning through the subversion of meaning – is quite acceptable and more than appropriate to the music of Mahler, at the same time it loses some of its potency through its conflation with that mutability of meaning which arises as a result of the arbitrary contextual determination of a situated listener.

Adorno

Adorno famously said in relation to Mahler that 'to be sure, music does not want to narrate something, rather the composer wants to make music in the same way as one narrates' (Adorno, G.S.13, p.209). The composer wants to make music in the same way that one *makes* a narrative; one does not necessarily want to make music that *is* a narrative. Likewise, Robert Samuels recognizes that Adorno's aphorism 'identifies in Mahler's technique a level of organisation analogous to narrative, but not reducible to simple extramusical reference' (Samuels, 1995, p.133). This is not a case of mere semantic pedantry. The stress lies on the process, and not on the end result. Moreover, Adorno's notion of the *Romanform* in Mahler's music is not overtly complex. Although such claims can, of course, prove to be somewhat of a red rag to the indignant Adorno apologist, nevertheless his depiction of Mahler's music is as much an allusory appeal based on a concrete engagement with the musical works as it is an elaboration of the deeper intricacies of his broader philosophical 'system'; or, as Peter Franklin has put it: 'Unlike Adorno's better-known musical monograph on Wagner, or the *Philosophy of New Music*, the Mahler volume is in a sense less directly occupied with illustrating and analysing the phenomenon of modern cultural decline than with elucidating the work of a composer' (Franklin, 1997, pp.273–4). It is possible to understand Adorno's notion of *Romanähnlichkeit* as manifesting itself in accordance with three distinct, albeit related, criteria.

'Material' – this refers to the 'subject-matter' or content. Material is itself already a rather loaded term to use when dealing with Adorno. The most obvious disadvantage is that such a usage can be drawn into Adorno's vast notion of musical material in general – that dynamic socio-historical resource whose progressive demands the authentic composer must meet (as discussed in Chapter 4). Having said that, such meanings should not be entirely dispelled here, because, for Adorno, and as mentioned in a previous section, Mahler is very much the authentic alternative to a compositional praxis predicated on the most advanced material. The advantage in employing the term is that it can refer both to the 'material' with which a novel deals and the musical 'material' with which a composer works; and this is the sense in which Adorno draws the following analogy: 'From a kind of mere musical existence, from those popular elements, those mediations are to be derived, through which alone existence justifies itself as meaningful. Hence, from a historical–philosophical perspective, Mahler's form approaches that of the novel. Pedestrian the musical material, sublime the execution' (Adorno, G.S.13, p.209). Adorno is here drawing similarities between the 'base', 'vulgar', or 'popular' material treated in certain novels – presumably he has 'realist' novels especially in mind – and Mahler's use of 'worn-out', 'debased', or 'popular' material in his symphonies. At the

simplest level, the inclusion of such 'base' material seemingly implies a semantic element that tears the music away from claims to formal autonomy and naturally compels an interpretive strategy more akin to that employed in constructing narrative. However, while the intrusion of referentially loaded elements or indeed their very manipulation might induce hermeneutic strategies, indeed strategies similar to contemporary depictions of narrative construction, there is no obvious reason why the use or portrayal of such elements should be considered (uniquely) typical of the novel per se. Therein lies the slight weakness in this element of the comparison. Adorno appears to be saying little more than that Mahler's music makes sublime use of crude material just like some novels do; or for that matter, we might add, just like some paintings, dramas, or poems do.

'Narrative' – Adorno's own conception of narrative is, once again, not particularly complex. In one of the clearest descriptions of his understanding of narrative, Adorno describes the formal law of narrative as 'a time continuum consisting of successive, essentially related, yet distinct events' (Adorno, G.S.13, p.226). Indicative of the confusion surrounding the concept of narrative is the fact that, for Adorno, it is dependent upon the dissolution of precisely those schematic imperatives which for others engender music's narrative moment in the first place. While Susan McClary (1991), for example, sees the music of the European canon (1700–1900) and especially sonata form as the music that embodies narrative structure, it is precisely the idiosyncratic subversion of the structuring principles typical of this music which, for Adorno, lends Mahler's music its narrative quality. Here, the comparison is one obtaining at the level of formal law. Hence narrative represents not an ontological condition per se, but rather a particular mode of form–content dialectic which is latent in both the novel and Mahler's symphonic writing.

'Structure' – this generally refers to the way in which formal design, at the architectonic level, and thematic identity at the sub-structural level, are 'loosened' in Mahler: 'The manner in which the individual element, emancipated, as in the novel, from schemata, forms itself and fashions autonomous connections becomes the specific problem of Mahlerian technique' (Adorno, G.S.13, p.230). The fundamental point is that form is not imposed from above or without. Rather, to a certain extent, the music generates form *sui generis*. This is the basis of Adorno's comment on an aversion in Mahler's music to knowing in advance what is going to happen next. It is perhaps not too surprising, then, that Adorno tends either to deny or play down sonata-form implications in Mahler's music or to highlight the subversion thereof. Once again, *Romanähnlichkeit* rests on a rather simple and this time not too problematic premise: the novel does not admit of (literal) repetition, much like a music in which the formal

imperatives of a scheme predicated on repetition (as return) have been dissolved or subverted.

Likewise, Adorno draws similarities between thematic manipulation in Mahler's music and character development in a novel:

Hence, Mahler's themes in general remain recognisable like characters in a novel, yet as developing beings, identical with themselves. ... Impulses drive [the characters in a novel], as the same they become other, shrink, grow, even age. ... Time enters into the characters and transforms them, as does empirical time faces. (Adorno, G.S.13, p.221)

In Mahler, themes do not remain aloof from the temporal development of the whole. If the self-identical elements of traditional classical form in a sense cheat time, then Mahlerian themes are subject to its necessity. This is of course a natural development of, or at least a reciprocal condition of, the relaxation of formal schemes. If (static) identity plays such an important role in establishing formal structure, then it is to be expected that the dissolution of strict formal imperatives will engender a similar transformation in thematic manipulation. A move from discursive logic to narrative at the architectonic level is accompanied by a move from 'proposition' to 'character' at the thematic level.

Essentially all this amounts to much the same thing. Mahler's music evolves from within, from below, according to its own logic, absorbing extraneous interjections into its immanent fabric. It is not the closed system of classical form – a *working out*. It is a *working with* – a constant 'Becoming'. There are, of course, strong affinities here with Adorno's view of the relationship between music and language. Music's similarity to language is manifest in the dialectic obtaining between the twin poles of a signifying language bound to intentionality and a purely music language bound to the transcendence of signification. Without their mediation, however, the former would simply revert to language per se and the latter would simply present a 'kaleidoscope' of phenomenological contingency – both would render music obsolete. Music appears to want to say something, without it ever being clear precisely what it is that it wishes to say. *Romanähnlichkeit* is couched in terms similar to those of *Sprachähnlichkeit*. Music resembles language yet is not language. Mahler's music resembles narrative yet it is not narrative. Most crucially, as the above discussion of narrative, material and *structural* similarity has revealed, it does not 'tell a story' but its construction mimics certain story-telling devices.

Having summarized each of these four different approaches to Mahler's Ninth Symphony, I now return to this book's principal argument and focus in greater detail on the extent to which their discursive claims satisfy that

principle of contestability which I have argued is a necessary condition of their contributing to the study of music as an institutionalized discourse and also evaluate whether or not they can be interpreted as oriented toward some critical, socially relevant, or emancipatory perspective.

- 1 Osborne and Kennedy's aim is to demonstrate, by means of an empirical experiment, a correspondence between the existential meaning of the last movement of Mahler's Ninth Symphony and the manner in which a group of students articulate their responses to it. Osborne and Kennedy's claims, in so far as the experimental component of their study is concerned, are quite clearly contestable and strictly empirical. The problem with their approach lies in their claim that such results prove anything other, or more, than that the responses of their student subjects generally correspond with the sorts of meanings associated with the same piece of music by a limited number of authors – and one in particular.
- 2 Newcomb's aim is to reveal the manner in which the Ninth Symphony can be seen to manifest, or concretize, a specific structural trope that was prevalent in the social or cultural context in which the symphony was written. Newcomb's approach does issue in claims which are grounded in a reading of the score. However, the main problem here, as already suggested, is that the theory of a narrative archetype – both in terms of what exactly it is and also how it manifests itself – remains underdeveloped. There is simply no explanation as to the actual mediating mechanism by means of which such an archetype (whatever it may be) comes to be concretized or realized within the musical fabric itself.
- 3 Micznik's aim is to reveal the way in which the Ninth Symphony manipulates or uses genre or generic presuppositions. This is based upon a detailed analysis of the way in which conventionalized (generic) meanings are subverted in Mahler's music. Micznik's article involves a detailed engagement with the score and many of her claims are, for that reason, quite legitimate from the point of view of the principle of contestability. Rather than inflating individual instances of reception into a universal condition of perception, Micznik is mostly careful to ground her claims with the (quasi-transcendental) observation that listeners must (or will have to) be familiar with conventionalized generic affiliations in order that they can then derive new meaning from the subversion or incompleteness of those implications in Mahler's music. While, near the beginning of the article, Micznik alludes to the trivial condition that different people may derive different meanings from the same piece, she proceeds to demonstrate how further meaning is generated only on the assumption that initial meanings have been understood.
- 4 Adorno's implicit aim in all of his writing about music is to reveal, or release, its (social) truth. As one might expect, Adorno's writing on

Mahler is the most difficult to assess. One reason for this is that, as argued in Chapter 4, while his assertions often seem to 'hit the mark' and while he often seems able to provide an insight into a piece of music in a manner of which few others are capable, at the same time there is often a notable lack of concrete grounding for the claims he makes. A further reason for the difficulty encountered in assessing Adorno's claims is that in order to contest Adorno's interpretations, or even to evaluate whether or not they are in principle contestable, it is necessary to implicate the complex philosophical and theoretical system on which they depend. As one might expect, the more critical interpretive method is provided by Adorno's account. However, it is perhaps telling that his interpretation of Mahler's music, which many believe to be his best, is the one in which his more explicit socio-historical critical edge is, if not exactly absent, at least partially submerged.

Finally, it is worth considering how each of these very different approaches might relate to one another and how it might be possible productively and coherently to integrate or synthesize their respective insights. Micznik's approach, for example, offers the kind of close reading and technical detail that could then serve as the basis for the discursive aim inherent in Adorno's writing. Indeed, it is possible to view Micznik's more thorough and detailed elaboration of such empirical or formal concerns as the adequately developed 'other half' to Adorno's more impressionistic critical concerns. Likewise, perhaps even Osborne and Kennedy's approach could provide an empirical basis both for the kind of claims which Micznik seeks to make regarding the meanings of generic affiliation and subversion and also – as Adorno himself intimated that he hoped would one day happen – for the kind of critical interpretation which itself mediates between (an already mediated) production and (an already mediated) reception. Hence there exist a number of tantalizing points of contact between these various approaches which, at least initially, suggest the possibility of a productive collaboration. Osborne and Kennedy's attempt to latch their observation that 'the reconciliation to the unity that encompasses life and death, love and hate is manifested in the person's relationship with the world, a significant other, and the self' (Osborne & Kennedy, 1985, p.35) onto the empirical responses of a given group of listeners is not entirely incompatible with the narrative interpretation of the final movement which is proffered by Newcomb – according to which there is a tension throughout the work between the urge for restoration and an urge to move forward, a sense of working through the past in order to find the right ending, a sense of locating the past as *past within present* (Newcomb, 1992). The relationship with world and other, and its tending toward reconciliation, in Osborne and Kennedy's interpretation of listener responses, resonates with Newcomb's

attempt to locate such features within the musical fabric itself – for example, the assimilation of chromatic notes foreign to the key, or the alienated (or alienating) urbanity of the waltz; and this latter interpretation, at the generic level, links up, at least in part, with Micznik’s reading of generic affiliation. In this respect both Newcomb and Micznik can be seen to operate at what one might term a generic level of mediation – in other words, they both focus, in their own way, on the manner in which the relationship between the musical material and the social totality can be traced to, or explicated at, the level of generic presupposition. There is certainly something Adornian about Micznik’s idea of attributes which are ‘encoded in the musical entities’ (Micznik, 1994, p.121); although, at the same time, it is worth remembering that while Adorno is never entirely clear on this matter, such an approach would appear incompatible, at least in part, with his insistence that the individual work *qua* ‘windowless monad’ should be interpreted in terms of its immanent structural features. That said, Micznik’s attempt to mediate between the denotative and connotative levels of signification or between the intra- and extramusical levels of meaning, by examining the way in which Mahler’s formal subversion of the denotative level impacts upon or manipulates the meaning inferred at the connotative level, can be seen to have much in common with Adorno’s notion of the composer working with ‘handed-down’ material, just as the former’s talk of connotative attributes has much in common with the latter’s ‘sedimented’ meanings.

It is worth emphasizing that the aim in this chapter was not to proffer yet another interpretation of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony; instead, it was to consider a number of interpretive strategies in order to provide a more concrete context for the arguments presented in earlier chapters. This was partially addressed in the above exposition and critical discussion. However, there are one or two final observations to be made. Firstly, the different approaches to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony discussed above serve to highlight that crucial distinction between, on the one hand, a general condition of (alleged) interpretive indeterminacy and, on the other hand, a potential for multiple, yet ultimately compatible, representations. The former, typically ‘postmodern’ emphasis on the impossibility of ever arresting the infinite deferral of signification or on the inevitably contingent or contextually determined nature of interpretation is not to be confused or conflated with the fact that different representative strategies can and do focus on different aspects of the same object. Discourse (in the general sense) does not ‘construct the objects of which it speaks’ so much as draw attention to different elements of a necessarily presupposed ‘third-person’ world. Secondly, the Osborne and Kennedy study in particular highlights the danger in shifting the interpretive emphasis too far toward the condition, context or ‘moment’ of reception. A general theory of reception or

signification should not be confused with the interpretation or representation of individual works or utterances. That different individuals will derive different meanings or significances from the same work remains a trivial theoretical proposition unless carefully coordinated with an analysis of immanent material properties. The latter are not ideological figments; rather they lie at the very centre of, and are the necessary presupposition of, a genuinely contestable and coherent discourse.

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Conclusion

The aim of this book has been modest; its ramifications are perhaps less so. By stepping outside of the study of music in order to reflect back upon it, it has not sought to provide a strictly foundationalist justification for the study of music as an institutionalized discourse or for the discursive claims in which it issues. Instead, it has sought to reconstruct the nature of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse in order to delimit the kind of claims in which it can legitimately issue *if* it is not to fall into contradiction with its own presuppositions or conditions of possibility. This is the stronger argument. The more tentative argument has sought a political or ethical justification for the kind of discursive aims that regulate the study of music.

The first demand – strictly necessary according to the quasi-transcendental argument concerning the nature of institutionalized discourse – will therefore preclude ‘readings’ in so far as they are portrayed as, or derive from, the personal engagement of a privileged scholar with a given work. Likewise, while not necessarily precluding theories which argue that ‘meaning’ is in some way dependent upon the listener, or the context in which he or she listens, it does indicate the very real and limiting consequences that follow from such theories in respect of the kind of work which one might subsequently pursue. It has called for a more careful (empirical) grounding of social and cultural claims and for a more detailed account of ‘mediation’; and it has attempted to show that both the notion of the ‘music itself’ and the correlative interpretive and analytical practices that are dependent upon it are not ‘ideological’ fictions, but instead represent entirely necessary moments within any discourse which seeks to grasp and represent particular musical works or utterances.

The second (not strictly necessary) demand precludes those normative positions that see their aim as lying *only* in the description of historical or compositional fact. As we have seen, this is the weaker political or ethical claim that, in order to justify their being remunerated for the labour they perform, those who study music, if they are not to be seen as simply inflating a personal interest or hobby into an institutionally privileged necessity, must study it in such a way as to generate the kind of critical, socially relevant, or even emancipatory knowledge which might then contribute to a greater (self-)understanding of a society and its material–

cultural products. The real challenge facing contemporary musicology, then, in addition to that of finding a way of mediating between autonomous structural analysis, documentary historical research and social context or meaning, is to conceive of discursive aims which, on the one hand, comprise claims that satisfy the principle of contestability required of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse, and which, on the other hand, are oriented toward the critical, socially relevant, or even emancipatory interest inherent in rendering transparent the manner in which music is implicated in the social totality.

While the practical realization is undoubtedly more complex than its theoretical espousal, recent years have seen some promising developments in the attempt to situate extended formal analytical work within a modern critical and interpretive context. This is especially true of a group of British scholars whose research focuses predominantly on twentieth-century music.¹ What is notable about much of this work is that, unlike a predominantly American ‘new musicology’, with its typical literary-theoretical overtones, or a more general contextualizing musicology, with its frequent appropriation of various externally conceived theoretical frameworks, it instead appears to have developed *out of* a self-reflective and contextualizing attitude toward its own analytic and critical presuppositions. Indeed, in this respect it is much closer to the German critical tradition to which Habermas himself belongs – and, where Adorno is invoked, explicitly so. Such attempts to mediate between the sophisticated tools of *systematic* analytical theory and music’s *life-world* contexts are surely to be encouraged; and, moreover, they would seem to promise a far more productive base from which to pursue a mode of interpretation that is rigorously work-centred and yet socially aware than do those approaches which, starting out from a misconstrued dismissal of outmoded ‘modernist’ practices and adopting a set of necessarily alien axioms, can never quite find their way back to the specifically musical.

It is worth reiterating that the stipulation that musicology (as an institutionalized discourse) should only issue in discursive claims that are genuinely contestable is a reconstructive argument grounded in the material and institutional nature of contemporary academic practice itself. This does not preclude that musicology may adopt an alternative form, or that the nature of institutionalized disciplinary practices may change – at which point a correlative reassessment of underlying epistemological and normative conditions would be required. Nor do the arguments developed here, as restrictive as they might initially appear, serve to preclude any type of discourse about music. The argument developed here asserts only that individuals – in so far as they are remunerated out of the public collective

¹ I have in mind work by, among others, Robert Adlington, Craig Ayrey, Jonathan Cross, David Clarke, Alan Street and Alastair Williams.

wealth and, more importantly, in so far as they are contributing to the discourse of musicology as an institutionalized discourse, with all its attendant presuppositions of review, audit and professionalism – are obliged to ensure that their claims to discursive knowledge are genuinely (and not merely trivially) contestable in relation both to their empirical grounding and also their theoretical coherence. In this latter respect, it has been argued that certain moments common to theoretical positions that are typically described as ‘postmodern’ simply are not commensurate with this conditional requirement.

The most significant question, then, remains whether or not an epistemological demand that claims should submit to the principle of contestability – which represents the presupposition or condition of possibility of the study of music as an institutionalized discourse – can be reconciled with an ethical demand that discursive aims are motivated by critical, socially relevant, or even emancipatory interests. This book has necessarily restricted itself to posing this question, to providing a more systematic framework in which one might begin to answer it, and to demonstrating its relevance for the self-understanding of the contemporary study of music.

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Index

- Abbate, Carolyn 6
Abrams, M.H. 125
'absolute textuality' (Pippin) 91
Adorno, Theodor 3, 7, 9–10, 16, 40, 58,
73, 86, 94, 96, 98, 113–14, 118–20,
138
 on Mahler's Ninth Symphony 121,
 129–34
 model of mediation 99–110
aesthetic pleasure 54–5, 60
Agawu, Kofi 6–7
analogy, use of 78
anomie 32
Apel, Karl-Otto 50, 52, 59–60, 116
assertoric truth 62–5, 68–9
attributional activity 79, 83
Austin, J.L. 111–12
autonomy of music 88, 94, 117–118
- Bach, J.S. 63–4
Barthes, Roland 13
Barzman, Karen-Edis 20
base–superstructure model 85, 109
Baudrillard, Jean 84
Beethoven, Ludwig van 14, 104, 116–17,
119–20, 123
Bentham, Jeremy 26
Bergeron, Katherine 26–7
Best, David 47
Boehmer, K. 108
Bohlman, Philip 92–4
Bourdieu, Pierre 78
Burnham, Scott 37
- canonical works 25–30
Chopin, Frédéric 113
Citron, M.J. 37
'cognitive interests' (Habermas) 50
Collingwood, G. 17–18
communicative action, theory of 3, 12,
48–50, 59–61
Comte, Auguste 15
connotation and denotation 128
consensus theory of truth 116
constructivism 54
contestability, principle of 63–9, 92, 119,
138–9
contextualism 73, 89
Cook, N. 2, 6–7, 39
Cooke, Deryck 123
critical feminism 69
critical musicology 9–10, 13, 17, 19, 24–5,
38, 41, 75, 98, 119
'critical rationalism' (Popper) 63
critical theory 9, 11–12, 16–17, 35, 106,
109–10
Cross, Jonathan 98
Culler, Jonathan 111–12
Cusick, S.G. 22–4, 57–8
- Dahlhaus, Carl 78, 107–8
deconstruction 39–42, 73, 82
deductive reasoning 49
Deleuze, Gilles 14
Derrida, Jacques 13–14, 33, 40, 94, 111–12
Dews, Peter 38, 59, 116
disciplinary authority in musicology 41
discourse 42–3, 95
 definition of 43
 see also institutionalized discourse;
 meta-discourse
discursive constructionism 91
discursive legitimacy 47
Dufrenne, Mikel 121
Dunsby, Jonathan 47
- Eagleton, Terry 19, 39–40
Edgar, Andrew 90
empiricism 15
epistemological legitimacy 1–2
epistemology 15, 51, 63–7, 83, 89–92,
139
ethical issues 71, 139
ethnography 19
ethnomusicology 26
Everist, Mark 2, 6–7, 28–9, 39

- fact-value dichotomy 68–9
 Fay, Brian 15
 feminism 8, 19–24, 36, 69, 78, 88
 Fichte, J.G. 91
 Fink, Robert 9
 formalism 6, 30–33, 69, 73, 87, 97
 Foucault, Michel 13, 26, 34, 42–5, 61, 90–93, 106
 Frankfurt School 9, 16, 106, 119
 Franklin, Peter 129
 functionalism 96
- Gardner, Sebastian 49
 gender issues 20–25
 genre 127–8
 Goehr, Lydia 31, 88–9
 Goethe, J.W. von 32
 Grenz, F. 99
- Habermas, Jürgen 2–3, 9, 12, 48–53, 59–68, 90–92, 96–8, 107, 138
habitus 113
 Hacking, Ian 92–3
 Hamm, Charles 80–83
 Hanslick, Eduard 32, 74, 82
 Harvey, David 94
 Hegel, G.W.F. 32, 95, 100
 Heidegger, Martin 74
 Held, David 60
 ‘hermeneutic attitude’ and ‘hermeneutic window’ (Kramer) 111–15, 118–19
 hermeneutics 35–6, 52–3, 58, 87–8, 92, 96
 Higgins, Kathleen Marie 81–2
 historical musicology 19
 historiography 17–18
 Hoffmann, E.T.A. 32
 Holbrook, David 121, 123
 Horkheimer, Max 9, 104
 How, Alan 12–13
- ‘ideal speech situation’ 59–61, 107
 idealism 95
 institutional legitimacy of musicology 70–72
 institutionalized discourse 43–7, 51, 57, 61–2, 65–72, 138
 interpretation of music 98, 118–20
 interpretation, paradox of 66
 intersubjectivity 67, 91, 94
- jazz 29
 journals, academic 44
- Kant, Immanuel (and Kantianism) 5, 32, 49–53, 59–60, 74, 83, 90–91, 95
 Kennedy, Lillian 121–5, 132–4
 Kerman, Joseph 5–6, 11, 14–15, 17–19, 30
 knowledge
 concepts of 67
 problem of 52
 Kramer, Lawrence 3, 6, 8–9, 31–2, 40, 54–9, 66, 77, 87–8, 92, 99, 123, 127
 model of musical interpretation 110–20
 Krims, Adam 10–11
 Kristeva, Julia 13–14
- Lacan, Jacques 13–14
 Lafont, Cristina 64
 legitimacy *see* discursive legitimacy;
 institutional legitimacy
life-world concept 96–8, 138
 ‘linguistic turn’ in scholarship 52
 Lochhead, J. 8, 29–30
 Locke, Ralph 45–6, 70–72
 logical positivism 15, 63
 Lorraine, Renée 30, 38
- McCarthy, Thomas 15–17, 42, 47, 50
 McClary, Susan 6, 8–9, 20, 56–7, 65, 77–8, 82
 Mahler, Gustav
 Ninth Symphony 3–4, 86, 121–34
 Martin, Peter 103, 107–10
 Marxism 36, 85–6, 97, 100, 106, 109, 119
 Mayer, Hans 104–6
 mediation between music and society
 74–80, 84–9, 122, 124, 137
 key modalities of 84–5
 models of 99–120
 meta-discourse 1, 23, 38, 62, 67–70
 metaphysics 51
 Meyer, Leonard 82
 Micznik, Vera 121, 126–8, 132–4
 Miles, Stephen 9, 75–8, 102–7, 114, 119
 Mills, Sara 42–3
 modernism and modernist musicology
 31–5, 116, 138
 Morris, Martin 9, 34, 51, 60, 93
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus 118
 ‘the music itself’, concept of 73–9, 83–4, 89–96, 117, 137
 musicologists
 definition of 45–7
 remuneration of 70–72, 137–9
 Mussorgsky, Modest 25
- Nagel, Thomas 39, 50, 57, 65
 Nattiez, Jean-Jacques 46, 79–83
 Negus, Keith 81

- Neubauer, John 66–7
 new musicology 2, 5–13, 17, 19, 24–5, 31, 34, 37–8, 41, 119, 138
 Newcomb, Anthony 121, 125–6, 132–4
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 39, 81
 normative legitimacy 1–2
noumena (Kant) 83, 92, 95
- objectivity 53, 82, 90
 O’Grady, Paul 15
 ontologization 95
 ontology of music 89–91, 95
 organicism 32
 Osborne, John W. 121–5, 132–4
- Paddison, Max 101–3
 patriarchy 22–5, 69, 77
 peer appraisal and review 47
 perspectivism 47–8, 51, 54, 64
 phenomenology 96
 Pippin, Robert 91
 Popper, Karl 63
 popular music, academic study of 26
 popular musicology 76
 positivism 6, 14–21, 29–30, 34, 36, 67–8, 73, 76, 84, 98, 109
 positivist musicology 17–20, 24
 postmodern musicology 8–9, 24–6, 30–39, 41, 51
 ‘postmodern turn’ in musical scholarship 1, 6, 31, 73, 94
 postmodernism 2–5, 8–10, 16–17, 24, 33–41, 47, 51–3, 58–9, 66–9, 73, 114–15, 119, 134, 139
 use of term 8
 poststructuralism 10–11, 41, 47–8, 52–3, 74–5, 95, 111
 power, theories of 27
 Powers, Harold 11–12
productive mediation 76–9, 85–6
 psychology of music 84, 91
- Rabinowitz, Peter 79, 81, 83, 112–13
 Randel, Michael 27
 Ravel, Maurice 118
receptive mediation 76, 79–81, 84–6
 reification theory 97
 ‘relative autonomy’ 78
 relativism 38–9, 51–4, 83
 Richie, Lionel 80
 Ricoeur, Paul 126
 rock music 29
 Rorty, Richard 38, 59
 Rose, Gillian 102
- Rosemarin, Adena 128
- Samson, Jim 6–7, 30, 55–7
 Samuels, Robert 129
 Schoenberg, Arnold 31
 Schopenhauer, Arthur 121, 124
 scientific knowledge 42
 scientific method 15–16
 scientism 53, 98
 Scott, D. 10, 25, 29, 35–6
 self-awareness, musicological 41
 semiology, musical 80
 Shelemay, Kay 72
 Shepherd, J. 84, 86
 situatedness of music 92, 118
 sociology of music 73, 91, 107–10
 sonata form 77
 song 114–15
 speech-act theory 53, 111–12
 Stern, Robert 48–9
 structural–institutional mediation 76–7, 85–6
 structural tropes 112–16, 120, 132
 structuralism 33, 111
 subject–object dichotomy 95
 subjectivism 39, 53–9
 subjectivity 82, 87–8, 116
 Subotnik, Rose 9, 77
 systems theory 96
- textuality 67, 91
 Tomlinson, Gary 31–2, 37, 41, 117–18
 transcendence 38, 48–51
 Treitler, Leo 18, 30–31, 34, 86, 89, 92
 ‘truth-content’ of a musical work 102, 109–11, 119
- Van den Toorn, Pieter 7, 78, 88
 Vienna Circle 15
- Wagner, Richard 129
 Weber, Max 96
 Whittall, Arnold 37
 Wicke, P. 84, 86
 Williams, A. 6, 10, 21, 39
 Wolff, Janet 76–91
 women as portrayed in music 23
 women composers 21–5, 36
 women’s roles in musical institutions and practices 22–5
 ‘work-concept’ of music 31, 88–9
 Wunderlich, D. 43–4
- Zima, Peter 39, 59–60, 82
 Zuidervaat, Lambert 49