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WRITING MUSIC HISTORY*

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ABSTRACT

Influenced by methodological trends in contemporary cultural history, recent writings in music history now share a common and very basic concern: to reconcile the desire to treat musical works as purely musical entities with value and significance of their own with the desire to account for the fact that such works are conditioned by the historical, social, and psychological contexts in which they are produced. This essay places these modern reconciliations within a broader discussion of the uneasy relations that hold between the domains of the musical and the extra-musical. It shows how both the logic and the history of this relationship has reflected the need to establish borders of the musical domain, and, following upon that, criteria of relevance for determining what is and what is not to be included in the writing of music history.

I

Paradigms can continue to exert influence even after they have fallen from power. They do this by serving in our historical memory as the traditional standards against which we measure our new paradigms and constantly assert their difference. Formalism in music criticism and positivism in the philosophy and history of music currently fill this role. Together they stand as the once dominant but now largely discredited paradigms of musical scholarship. They serve in our present as our legacy from the past.

In recent years music theorists have witnessed an intensive overhaul of their practices of interpretation, criticism, and analysis. Hermeneutical, phenomeno-logical, structuralist, and, more recently, feminist paradigms have (after decades of battle) finally come to be accepted as alternatives to formalism and positivism. Perhaps surprisingly, the theoretical giants of the field have not exempted themselves from this wave of "theory," a fact to which the three books under review here clearly testify. Their authors have not played the conservatives' game. They have entered the "theory" arena with vigor and commitment, though, at they same time, they have shown greater or lesser degrees of caution — Carl Dahlhaus and Leonard Meyer more, Leo Treitler less. In their scholarship generally, they have helped to moderate and give sensible direction

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* A review essay of Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, translated by J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, 1989); Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1989); and Leo Treitler, *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

to contemporary theorizing. Their theories are less "exciting" than the more radical ones perhaps, but they have kept the latter in check. They have taken the strengths of exhausted paradigms, leaving their weaknesses behind and bringing these strengths to bear in the new paradigms. They have shown how the new can both be continuous and discontinuous with the old.

Their methodological aims are closely tied to their conceptions of history. All three authors more or less reject traditional, positivist, progressivist, determinist, linear and causal, and diachronic conceptions. They do not see the past as something that exists as fixed and static — as "out there" waiting to be described. They do not see the past merely as the prehistory of the present or the present as the prehistory of the future. They do not favor a disinterested, detached, or neutral attitude on the part of the historian. Indeed, they do not believe that such an attitude is possible, and even if it were they would still not favor it.[1] None of the authors, finally, regard knowledge as a fixed product of rigidly systematic and rational inquiry.

Instead, they conceive knowledge as much in terms of imagination and experience as of cognition, as a process that "bonds" the knower to the known through traditions of interpretation. The known — the interpreted — finds itself constantly revised as the active, engaged, and interested knower — the interpreter — shapes the past, present, and future according to prevalent interests and values. Such interests are as much social as personal, reflecting as they do the community and context in which the interpreter functions. That these needs "enter" the interpreter's "heart," in Treitler's Laotian terms, does not preclude them from having communal value.[2] Shaped by interpretation, the past, present, and future do not exist as separated from one another by sharply demarcated borders. Rather, they are regarded as fluid, interacting, context- and interpretation-dependent constructions that involve one another necessarily. They keep an eye on one another, constantly taking into account what has been, what is, and what will be. They are three interlocking dimensions of any particular historical interpretation.[3] History, finally, functions and expresses itself not as an ab-

1. Cf. Treitler, 3; also his parody of objectivity's perversity in his description of the character Wozzeck from the opera and drama of the same name. Objectivity, he says, results in a loss of our capacity to love, feel, and imagine, and in a loss of our sense of beauty (7ff.) Cf. his related comments on genderized epistemological styles (14). Meyer employs well-known arguments in the philosophy of history — Walsh's, Danto's, etc. He sees hypothesis-formation as lying at the base of historical writing (chap. 3). On 351, he summarizes: "histories are interpretations. . . . [W]hat [are] constructed [are] network[s] of hypotheses and observations whose several strands, woven together and reinforcing one another, form coherent and convincing fabric[s] of explanation." In his book, Dahlhaus provides only the outline of a hermeneutical view influenced by critical theory. He leaves readers to look at his companion *Foundations of Music History*, transl. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge, Eng., 1983) for a fuller exposition. Note that all page references are to the books under review unless specified otherwise.

2. Cf. Treitler, 10: "In the language of Lao the expression that corresponds to our verb 'to know' is *khow jai*, literally, 'to enter the heart.' . . . In preparing for knowledge one gives oneself over to what one understands, and that presupposes an affinity for it. Understanding means being in harmony with one's surroundings."

3. Cf. Dahlhaus's comments beginning, "[t]he only way the historian can discover the past . . . is through the mediation of the present in which it manifests itself" (3).

stracted, independently-identifiable process, but through practices comprising actions, expressions, and products. Because of this, practices themselves are seen as essentially historicized and serve as the primary subject matter of historical inquiry.

To support their conceptions of history, the authors encourage and argue for methodological standpoints they take to be comfortably placed between the traditional extremes of relativism and objectivism, skepticism and certainty, realism and idealism, historical generality and particularity, ahistoricism and (deterministic) historicism. They also pursue a methodological balance among disciplines. Each attempts to do justice to the *history* of music and to the history of *music*, to the *philosophy* of the history-of-music and to the philosophy of the *history-of-music*.[4]

None of these methodological maneuvers is peculiar to music theory other than in matters of application. Joining scholars from most other fields, Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler seek strategies of investigation that will fall into none of the old, familiar traps. Yet within their own field, which has tended in the past to trail behind others, they provide exemplary models of musico-historical understanding.[5]

Dahlhaus contributes to this understanding by describing the complex legacy of romanticism and the multiplicity of traits identifiable in nineteenth-century musical genres. He discusses how the "highbrow" and "lowbrow" traditions of instrumental music, opera, *Lied*, folk, and *Trivialmusik* helped form and sustain the often contradictory aesthetic, social, political, and psychological myths constitutive of the "*Geist*" of that century's musical culture.

Meyer offers an overwhelmingly elaborate and rigorous framework that connects concepts of style, innovation, law, choice, convention, and form. He employs this framework to develop a historical method, which he then uses to produce a succinct and plausible account of the "elite egalitarian" ideology inherent in musical romanticism. The overall aim of his account is to demonstrate how replications of musical patterning—styles—result from a series of choices made by composers, choices which depend upon sets of constraints that establish repertories of compositional options. The purpose of Meyer's music history is to comprehend the choices composers actually made against the background of the choices they could have made at the time, as a way to understand the musical production of the given period.[6]

Treitler's book, a collection of ten essays written over a number of years (and often overlapping in content), provides imaginative and scholarly interpreta-

4. Cf. Dahlhaus's comment on his joint fidelity to the *history* of art and to the history of *art* (7); also Meyer's remark that interdisciplinary work is possible (and even necessary) because the many and diverse parameters of a culture are "inextricably interdependent" (115); finally, Treitler's recommendation for a "coordinated study of music analysis" that derives its elements from numerous different sources and disciplines (66).

5. Cf. Treitler's comment on the "deplorable rift" that still "exists in this country [the U.S.] between music history and theory" (66).

6. Meyer, 3–7.

tions of a number of musical works. He interprets Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and Berg's *Lulu* and *Wozzeck*; he comments in detail also upon Dufay's "progressive" composition as illustrated in his *Misse l'homme* and upon Mozart's development of absolute music as exemplified in his *Symphony no. 39 in E-flat*, K.543. These interpretations are invariably used to illustrate his methodological arguments regarding the writing of music history. Unlike Dahlhaus and Meyer, Treitler does not focus on nineteenth-century music, though he certainly has something to say about it.

Despite the differences among the three books, there is a noticeable core of shared concerns, a fact sometimes revealed in mutual referencing.[7] Most noticeable of all is the authors' concern with one of the most basic problems of music history: How does one reconcile the desire to treat musical works as purely musical entities with value and significance of their own, on the one hand, with the desire, on the other, to acknowledge that such works are tainted, influenced, shaped, and conditioned by their contexts — historical, cultural, social, political, economic, religious, and psychological? True to the first desire, works are treated as self-sufficient entities that require no more than purely musical or aesthetic description. True to the latter, works are treated as "parts of the world," as cultural or sociohistorical documents to be read as any other such document is read. This opposition has been formulated in many ways, most commonly as the aesthetic versus the historical or as the musical versus the extra-musical.[8] Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler together either use or mention nearly all the formulations.

The problems resulting from theorists choosing to be faithful to one side at the expense of the other are old, but apparently still not yet completely familiar, even though they have plagued musical scholarship for at least two hundred years. The problems turn on whether our understanding of musical works is sufficiently exhausted by describing works as purely musical and aesthetic entities or whether we need to account for extra-musical factors in addition, or even instead.[9] The question is what we need to account for and what we can justifiably

7. Treitler and Meyer refer to Dahlhaus numerous times on matters of methodology and music history, and to each other on similar matters but with far less frequency. Dahlhaus refers to neither. His book was published in Germany originally in 1980. In the last decade, his influence generally on Anglo-American music theorists and aestheticians has begun to show, increasingly so as more of his books are translated into English. The book under review here was translated in 1989 and reads extremely well.

8. The opposition has received much attention in recent scholarship. In *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley, 1989) Josef Chytry traces the conflict between the aesthetic and the historical/political in the history of German aesthetic theory. The debate specifically between the musical and the extra-musical figures centrally in Robin Wallace's *Beethoven's Critics: Aesthetic Dilemmas and Resolutions during the Composer's Lifetime* (Cambridge, Eng., 1986).

9. In some accounts musical dimensions of music are distinguished from aesthetic ones; in others, they are equated — it all depends on the scope one gives to the musical and aesthetic domains. Some theorists distinguish the cognitive from the expressive; others the structural from the experiential. Treitler distinguishes the regard for works as constructive orders from the regard for them as vehicles for expression (32). Focus on the former conception lies at the center of "formal" musical *analysis*; focus on both in their interconnectedness helps constitute musical *interpretation*. See Treitler, 32ff.; also Dahlhaus, 11 and Meyer, 7.

ignore when we seek an adequate understanding of music. The issue is one of meaning, scope, and definition.[10]

Unsurprisingly, no procedure for ascertaining what belongs to the domains of the musical and the extra-musical has yet been developed that satisfies everyone. Are the emotional qualities of a given musical work musical or extra-musical qualities? Are psychological or biographical facts about a composer's life ever to be counted as musical facts? If so, under what conditions? To be sure, musicians have usually given priority to the "musical" side of the conflict and, furthermore, to the belief that music is uniquely and essentially the art of sound — the performance of tonal combinations. Elements of a work's sounding structure — tones, pitches, keys, timbres — are usually deemed its purely musical elements. This narrow view has caused problems, however, especially when it has led to the claim that a work's meaning cannot be expressed in anything other than these purely musical terms. Believing that extra-musical factors cannot, in any straightforward or intelligible way, be embodied, incorporated, or translated into purely tonal or sounding combinations, some musicians have felt obliged either to diminish or ignore the relevance of such. The incommensurability of musical and extra-musical languages, they have concluded, cannot be overcome. For these musicians, the modified Wittgensteinian dictum has followed naturally: "Whereof one cannot speak (in extra-musical terms), thereof one should listen."[11]

Other theorists have not been satisfied to side with the musical "purists," with those who prefer to ignore the role of the extra-musical. Works are regarded as tonal expressions of extra-musical ideas with priority given to the extra-musical ideas and only secondarily to their tonal expressions. Others try to find a middle road; they have been concerned to avoid moving too far in the extra-musical direction, fearing that on the way they might collapse the musical into the extra-musical. These theorists have consequently found themselves caught between the two extremes. Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler are no exception. As the first so aptly writes: "the problem we face when we write music history resides not in finding musical documents to illustrate social structures and processes, but rather in establishing a relation between the aesthetic and the historical substance of works of music."[12]

10. Cf. Treitler's comment, 33: "The decision to establish a limit on the pursuit of questions of meaning at the boundaries of the work, and to restrict the language of that pursuit to the 'technical' [structural] language of analysis, is an arbitrary decision that places severe limitations on the historical understanding." Cf. Meyer's descriptions, spread throughout the book, of the musical and extra-musical parameters of music — specifically of the "internal" and the "external" factors that govern compositional choices.

11. Complicating the debate here is the fact that, in the practice of classical music, emphasis is given not only to the concept of music, but also to that of a musical *work*. One has to be careful not to conflate the two. One needs to differentiate different parts of the musical domain, say, what belongs to a work and what to its performance and reception. Often the parts are conflated, mostly because the work-concept is not well understood. I have discussed this last point in detail in my *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, 1992).

12. Dahlhaus, 1. Cf. Treitler on the antagonism between musical and historical perspectives (76, 79, and 170ff.). All three authors stress the difference between seeing musical works as self-sufficient entities and seeing works as illustrations of broader historical ideas or moments. They associate the

For the rest of this essay, I shall focus on the conflict between the musical and the extra-musical. For reasons that will become obvious, I shall continue also to refer to the conflict where appropriate in terms of that between the aesthetic and the historical. I shall explore the intricacies of the conflict along two different paths, the first logical, the second historical. I shall then return to the connection between the conflict and the way Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler choose to write their music histories. My aim is to make fully explicit the nature of a basic problem in music history and analysis of which their books should be considered exemplary treatments.

<center>II</center>

In the tradition of music scholarship, the conflict between the musical and the extra-musical has typically adopted a lopsided form. This fact is reflected in the uncomfortable way the distinction between the two domains has been drawn. However formulated in the literature, the distinction has confirmed the ontological, epistemological, and evaluative priority given to the musical. The extra-musical has been defined as the hanger on, as that which is somehow appended to the musical. The musical has served as the standard to which the extra-musical connects itself or from which the extra-musical somehow derives.

For the most part, the distinction's lopsidedness has been expressed and sustained by an essentialist logic. This logic has satisfied the desire for there to be a fixed, essential core of the musical to which one could then relate the extra-musical. Many theorists have wanted to say that though certain biographical facts about a composer influence the composition of a work, these "extra-musical" facts do not directly translate into the work's essential properties. To make this view plausible, theorists have formulated the distinction between musical and extra-musical facts so as to render only the former essential to musical interpretation.[13]

Thus, there has been a tendency to distinguish *monadic* from *relational* properties. The former are the intrinsic or exhibited properties of a work; they are the essential ones. The relations in which a work stands to something outside itself generate the external, non-exhibited, and extra-musical properties. The essential properties are usually identified as a work's structural properties — the properties we hear in its performances or see in the scores we read. The extra-musical properties, by contrast, are usually identified as the intentional, referential, and biographical ones. Often, a work's monadic properties are regarded with evaluative connotation as the pure properties and its relational

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former with the nineteenth-century, romantic cult of originality and the concurrent development of the work-concept. See Meyer, 8ff., Treitler, 93 and 170ff., and Dahlhaus, 9–10, and 27–28.

13. In producing formulations of the distinction, I am extrapolating from the literature rather than borrowing from it. The terminology used in this section has more often been implied or assumed by music theorists than actually used. Note, again, the conflation in this argument between the concept of a work and that of music. It is being assumed here that if a property does not belong to a work, it does not belong to music.

properties as impure. This conclusion has worried those who regard the fact that Beethoven composed (Beethoven's) *Fifth Symphony* as neither accidental nor impure.[14]

The distinction between the musical and the extra-musical has also been formulated by reference to *unique* and *shared* properties. Unique properties belong to one and only one domain and are constitutive of, or essential to, that domain. They are the specifically musical properties that are not exhibited by non-musical phenomena. Extra-musical properties, by contrast, are those prop-erties that are shared among domains including the musical one. By virtue of these properties, what would otherwise be distinct domains find themselves connected to one another. *Literal* and *metaphorical* properties have also been employed to help theorists distinguish the musical from the extra-musical. As nineteenth-century music critic Eduard Hanslick might have put it, works admit two types of description, literal and metaphorical. Literal descriptions pick out properties that *belong to* the work, metaphorical ones refer to those features that are *imposed upon* it. Hanslick regarded structural, analytical, or formal properties of works as literal ones, emotional or expressive predications as metaphorical. However convenient emotional epithets are, he argued, they are impure. Ultimately, they are dispensable when describing a work's true meaning.[15]

All these formulations of the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical have presupposed an essentialist core. Unfortunately, this core is a problematic one. To see why, it is useful to draw a distinction between the *extra-musical* and the *non-musical*. Both stand in contrast to the *musical*, but differently. The musical/non-musical distinction captures two mutually exclu-sive domains that together include all properties. For any given property, either it belongs to the domain of the musical or to that of the non-musical. One may now distinguish within the domain of musical properties those that are *essential* from those that are *contingent*. Contingent properties are extra-musical; they belong to the domain of musical properties only as a matter of fact or accident.

Viewing extra-musical properties as a subdomain of musical properties is potentially misleading, however, and for two reasons. First, it renders the phrase "musical properties" ambiguous. The phrase refers to either the essential proper-ties or both the essential and contingent ones. It cannot do both jobs. One would probably do better to call those musical properties that are not extra-musical *essential-musical* properties. The latter belong necessarily to the musical do-main; they demarcate and define the domain as musical. Second, properties that

14. Providing examples of the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical is difficult because determining what is "inside" and what is "outside" a work or the musical domain is con-stantly in dispute. Thus, my examples should be regarded not as definitive but as reflective of how the distinction has been used. Quine once made a similar point with regard to the logical/extra-logical distinction, but in stronger terms. Since no a priori/logical principle can determine which items are logical (without circularity), all one can do is give an empirical list of items that have been taken to fall on either side.

15. *On the Musically Beautiful*, transl. G. Payzant (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 32. Cf. Meyer's more charitable and sophisticated treatment of metaphorical descriptions in music (128ff.).

are contingently musical are as much a subdomain of non-musical properties as they are a subdomain of musical ones. To capture this dual status, one would do well to think of extra-musical properties less as constituting a subdomain of any other domain and more as an independent domain that cuts across and creates areas of overlap between the otherwise distinct musical and non-musical domains. Extra-musical properties are those that might or might not be musical properties, and in cases where they are not they lose their description as such.

This last point now raises a new problem. How do we determine whether a potential extra-musical property is actually that sort of property or, in the given case, a non-musical property? A reasonable answer is that our determination depends upon the given context of classification. A context provides us the standards of relevance by which to judge the status of the properties. Unfortunately, this answer only transfers the problem to the level of contexts. Now we need to know how different contexts determine their standards and modes of classification.

Perhaps one could say that since we are familiar with the results of describing phenomena within given contexts we already know which contexts result in musical predications and which do not. One might say, in other words, that we know the difference between musical and non-musical contexts, and similarly between musical and extra-musical properties, "when we see it." This response is inadequate and rests upon an overconfidence in our powers of discrimination. There are enough problem cases and conflicts in the musical literature to cause us to doubt that we do in fact know.

Thus far, I have mentioned some nitpicky problems internal to our reading of the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical. I have not as yet considered the problems of engaging specifically in an essentialist reading of the distinction. Unsurprisingly, these problems arise when one views matters externally. Adapting well-known anti-essentialist arguments one could point out first that to demonstrate the rationale for having an essentialist reading of a distinction does not itself guarantee that the distinction can actually be made. Recall that the function of the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical is to guarantee the existence of a fixed and unchanging core of essential-musical properties. But, the objection goes, wanting an essential core of the musical does not constitute a proof that there is one. On the contrary, the anti-essentialists continue, contingency goes all the way through, even through the core. Thus, no property is essential by nature. All property attributions — what is musical and what is not — depend upon contexts of classification. "[H]ow we group words in two kinds," Wittgenstein once wrote, "will depend on the aim of the classification" — and the aims will be determined within contexts.[16] Hence, even if we decide to continue to call a property "essential" (for whatever reason), we have to recognize that this classification is context-dependent too.

Out of this argument arises the real challenge to the essentialist. If, in a given context of classification, a property falls into the musical domain, why not just

16. *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1958), Remark 17.

say that it becomes a musical property? Why clarify it further either as essentially musical or as contingently extra-musical? Why not be content to say that, given a set of properties and an appropriate context of classification, either a given property is musical or it is not?

In the anti-essentialist reading, the musical/extra-musical distinction collapses into the musical/non-musical one. It collapses when speaking about musical and non-musical properties is no longer taken to suggest that either domain is absolutely fixed and unchanging in its membership. This contrasts with the essentialists' claim that there are some musical properties that are essential independently of any contextual classification. In this regard, the anti-essentialists have the advantage over the essentialists. Whatever problems remain for the former — for instance, those pertaining to contextual classification — they do not have to account either for the notoriously problematic commitment to an essential and absolute musical core or for those problematic "extra-musical" properties that somehow and sometimes belong to the musical domain but do not have to and do not always.

What has exploring the logic of the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical revealed? First, the extra-musical is usually defined as that which is connected to the musical as the contingent is connected to the essential (with essentialists thinking there are extra-musical properties and non-essentialists thinking there are not). Second, that formulated as the hanger on extra-musical properties are left waiting ambiguously in a halfway house. Finally, there are anti-essentialist alternatives to essentialism available to those seeking alternatives.

This is as far as logical exploration takes us. It can reveal that the distinction between the musical and extra-musical has presupposed the truth of essentialism, but it cannot explain why this has been so. Nor can it explain why the extra-musical is deemed of negligible importance when it comes to the task of describing music's meaning. Thus, though logical analysis may *reflect* or *express* the conflict between the musical and the extra-musical, it is not to be held responsible for *generating* it.

What is responsible? As I shall now go on to show, the answer is "the context of musical practice," more specifically, "the history of music-aesthetic theory, embedded within the context of European, classical music." And lest one still fear that we cannot speak about contexts without solving the logical problems first, let me reiterate why we can. It is not the logic of contexts, but the history of a single context — the actual way in which one particular context resulted in a particular type of classification — that is responsible for generating the conflict we seek to understand.

III

In a trivial sense the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical is as old as music itself, but the peculiar and interesting conflict to which it has given rise received its most articulate and conscious expression in the early nineteenth century. The conflict followed upon a paradigm change of immense significance

in the theory and practice of classical music. With this change, three forces that had been gathering power during the previous century — emancipation, independent institutionalization, and aestheticization — crystallized to produce for classical music a new understanding of its meaning, function, and value.[17]

Before the nineteenth century, music was generally regarded as part of the social world and not in any way as separable or independent from it. It functioned in the context of social, religious, political, and domestic rituals as a means towards fulfilling their ends. Musical meaning was defined accordingly. Theorists attributed meanings to music that would render it a worthy contributor to the moral, rational, national, and religious character of their societies. Music, they said, achieves its meaning in two non-exclusive ways. It has a *cathartic* ability to influence and sustain a person's religious, moral, and political convictions and a *mimetic* ability to imitate the nature of persons and the world.[18]

By the late eighteenth century, attitudes had changed markedly. Musical theorists had begun to insist that music no longer be awarded significance according to principles that rendered it dependent upon a non-musical institution. Music, they argued, is for music's sake and should no longer derive its value or meaning from anything other than itself. Music should no longer derive its value from its outward-looking or public appearance but from its inner and private soul. Music, theorists continued, is not merely a means but also its own end. This being so, it should be emancipated from former dependencies and granted sufficient autonomy so that activities of composition, performance, and reception can henceforth function on their own terms.[19]

The emancipation of music was no different from other forms of emancipation. It involved the separating out of what belonged to the musical from what did not. Hence, musicians undertook to draw new borders for their emancipated domain. This process involved more than their simply sorting out existing items into the musical and non-musical. Formerly in no need of them, musicians had to create or recontextualize many new musical items. They had to develop theories of meaning and value as well as practical approaches to composition, performance, and reception to sustain the existence of an independent institution. They also had to help foster economic, social, and political conditions to achieve the same end.

17. The phrase "classical music" is employed here with its broadest meaning to refer to what we nowadays include under opus, concert hall, or "serious" music and not just to music produced in the classical style. In this section, I shall speak exclusively about classical music, though, as Dahlhaus demonstrates well, even this music does not so easily admit homogenous description.

18. I have described this history in detail in my *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*. I have also developed the theme of the musical and the extra-musical problem in political terms in a companion piece to the present essay in "Music Has No Meaning to Speak of: On the Politics of Musical Interpretation," forthcoming in *The Interpretation of Music*, ed. M. Krausz (Oxford). Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler provide many of the same details of this history, sometimes, however, to different ends.

19. Note that even if one believes that the conditions of musical production progressed, this does not imply either that music history follows a determinist path or that there was necessarily progress in the works composed.

Thus, influenced by a complex interplay of enlightenment, idealist, and for-
malist strands in the new aesthetic theorizing, music was willingly granted mem-
bership in the recently-founded club of the autonomous and elite fine arts.
Emancipated from poetry and the religious word, much music — notably instru-
mental music — also saw itself transformed into an absolute (as opposed to a
social or ritual) art. With music institutionalized in the concert hall, a new
"musical" space was created far removed from the church and court. It was a
space that could for the first time be devoted solely to the performance and
reception of a purely musical repertoire. Two theories of musical meaning
emerged simultaneously to treat music independently and to replace the tradi-
tional theories of catharsis and mimesis: transcendentalism and formalism. The
former severed music's connection to the ordinary world of concrete significance
and raised music to the level of universal, spiritual meaning; formalism moved
musical meaning from its exterior to its structural interior.[20] Finally, with such
matters as ownership and copyright transferred from patrons and publishers to
musicians, the latter found themselves operating as novices in a marketplace
over which they could (in theory if not always in practice) exert control.

All these changes involved acts of *appropriation* — borrowing items from what
was now considered the outside and reconceiving or recontextualizing them
according to new, purely musical terms.[21] All these changes involved acts of
severance or *separability* — cutting ties of dependency to the outside. More than
the former, it was these acts of severance that shaped the emancipation, indepen-
dent institutionalization, and aestheticization of music in the late eighteenth
century. Without them, the formation of romantic ideology would have taken
a very different form.

Yet it was also these acts of severance that produced within romantic ideology
the conflict with which we are concerned — that between the aesthetic and the
historical. As Dahlhaus puts it, such acts "'sequestered' music into a realm of
its own," leaving musicians of "delicate conscience . . . torn hither and thither
between cries of art for art's sake and pronouncements on the social mission of
art."[22] Confining musicians to a newly-built ivory tower, romantic autonomy

20. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, transcendentalism and formalism were not
regarded as separable and together helped constitute romantic theory. They were separated in later
decades when formalism came more closely to be tied to positivist and scientifically-styled theorizing.
Transcendentalism was left carrying the torch for romanticism. For more on this gradual separation,
see Wallace's *Beethoven's Critics*. The same details are treated fully though less directly by Dahlhaus
(89ff.) and Meyer (chap. 6).

21. For more on the acts of appropriation inherent in the aestheticization process, see Pierre
Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. R. Nice (Cambridge,
Mass., 1984), 56.

22. Dahlhaus, 194. Romantic ideology is often associated with an aesthetics of separateness or,
in Meyer's terms, acontextualism. In its transcendental expression, "aesthetic" refers to a domain
cut off and raised above the "ordinary" and "mundane" world. Aesthetic objects are thus regarded
as beyond the ordinary course of events and as such attain the status of being ahistorical. Thus,
the chasm and the conflict between the aesthetic and historical is generated: how can ahistorical
entities be treated historically? Cf. Schopenhauer's claim that ordinary human "actions are transi-
tory while works remain. The most noble *action* still has only a temporary effect; the work of genius
on the other hand lives and has beneficial and uplifting effect through all times." (Quoted by Thomas

had the overall effect of severing fundamental connections between musicians and what was now being described as a hostile and alien "outside" world—a world that would surely undermine the independence of music if given the opportunity.

Some musicians recognized quickly that romantic autonomy did not have to imply complete separation and solitude. Acknowledging that the musical domain necessarily relied upon external domains—economics, politics, and the other arts—they sought ways to reconcile independence with connection. To be avoided at all costs, however, was the reestablishment of the sort of dependencies that would render music heteronomous as it once had been. Instead, the aim was to acknowledge music's connections with the world while maintaining simultaneously its independence.[23]

Other musicians viewed the situation differently. Instead of seeing connections, they identified an irresolvable conflict. They regarded the aesthetic and the historical routes as mutually exclusive. They could not see how to retain the independence of the musical domain if they acknowledged the influence of the non-musical upon it. Responding to this dilemma, some musicians opted to maintain a fundamental separation between the musical and the non-musical and to deny their points of connection. A more moderate version of this purist solution, more moderate at least in spirit though with the same results, was to distinguish in theory what was essential to the musical domain from what contingently belonged to it, and then to ignore the latter in practice—in actual descriptions of music.

Mann in his discussion of the conflict between the aesthetic and the political/historical. See his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, transl. W. D. Morris [New York, 1987], 162). To make a similar point, Meyer quotes Clive Bell: "'Great art remains stable and unobscure because the feelings it awakens are independent of time and place, because its kingdom is not of this world. To those who have and hold a sense of the significance of form what does it matter whether the forms that move them were created in Paris the day before yesterday or in Babylon fifty centuries ago?'" (188). Meyer demonstrates here the connection between formalism and romanticism (see n. 20). Formalism, like nineteenth-century organicism, is "platonism in sheep's clothing" (195). Meyer also shows how romantic ideology is egalitarian in its acontextuality; the latter takes art beyond all social divisions. But Meyer also agrees with Dahlhaus that the ideology exhibits strong elitist tendencies (170ff.). Note, finally, that romantic ideology is often taken to bear broader associations than the term "romanticism." It does so when it captures the conditions of artistic production as well as aesthetic theories of artistic meaning. Romantic ideology is often associated with bourgeois ideology. Cf. Dahlhaus, 41ff. On 51 he writes: "And if we understand institution to mean, not simply an organization, but a crystallization of social facilities, modes of behavior, and categories of judgment, then the concert as an institution includes aesthetic and sociopsychological levels as well, and becomes a representative instance of bourgeois culture."

23. Cf. Dahlhaus's description of national music (217ff.). His point is to show that for music to fall under the label "national music," it did not have to exhibit any particular musical traits. On the contrary, he writes, "the national side of music is to be found less in the music itself than in its political and sociopsychological function" (217). See also his description of the way aesthetic and compositional principles were intermingled with intellectual and social history, and how this intermingling shaped musical nomenclature. Such intermingling was also evident in the development of opera, especially Wagnerian opera. For another very good discussion (compatible with Dahlhaus's) of the ways nineteenth-century composers connected music to the social world, see Ralph P. Locke, *Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians* (Chicago, 1986).

Evidence that musicians viewed the aesthetic and the historical as fundamen-
tally disconnected was as abundant in the nineteenth century as the evidence
demonstrating that other musicians (or the same musicians at other times) were
seeing the two as connected.[24] But the point is that, in either case, so long as
the separation between the aesthetic and the historical—the musical and the
worldly or extra-musical—was maintained in any way to give priority to the
former, the status of the latter remained ambiguous. The presence of the histor-
ical or the worldly might well be acknowledged but its effects one way or another
factored out—for the sake of preserving music's autonomy.

It is against this historical background that our contemporary position is set.
Today we recognize that though the romantic ideology succeeded in emanci-
pating music, it also seemed to go too far. It granted music a form of aesthetic
autonomy that allowed too much separation and too little connection. It gave
musicians the terms by which to articulate a fundamental rift between the
aesthetic and historical (social/political) dimensions of music. Of course, musi-
cians continued to argue with one another over where the borders for this
separation were to be drawn, but no one thought any more that the borders
should not be drawn in the first place. Romantic ideology generated other
problems as well, but the ones I have mentioned suffice to prompt the question:
what kind of alternative ideology would be more satisfactory?

Drawing a parallel between musical works and persons might stimulate new
thoughts on this matter. Just as a person is both an individual and a social
animal—has an inward- and an outward-looking face—so a musical work is
both an aesthetic and an historical entity. And just as people define themselves
from the inside out, so a musical work gives priority to the aesthetic. But the
point is that the opposite follows just as well. Just as people might define
themselves from the outside in, so too a musical work. This way around, the
aesthetic character of a work is derived or extrapolated, without derogatory
connotation, from its historical character.[25]

That we can move from the aesthetic to the historical or the other way around
can alter our entire picture of the distinction between them. It has the potential
to remove the traditional lopsidedness because it no longer deems one side

24. Dahlhaus shows in great detail the discrepancies, lacks of parallels, and non-contempora-
neous developments that existed between musical and extra-musical movements during the nine-
teenth century. More than anything else, he blames the Beethoven paradigm of musical under-
standing for imposing too sharp a chasm between art and non-art. All three authors describe the
development of absolute and program music with constant reference to the musical and extra-
musical distinction. Meyer describes how changes in the conception of program music during the
nineteenth century involved constant redelineations of musical and extra-musical parameters (212–
217). Note, finally, that the conflict between the aesthetic and historical is evident in the current
debate over authentic performances of early music. Should performers be faithful to the music qua
beautiful music or to the original conditions of its production? What happens when being faithful
to one excludes faithfulness to the other? Which side has priority?

25. Recall Adorno's related discussion of the interactions between the individual and social
reality. For a lucid exposition of this discussion, see M. Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984),
chaps. 2 and 3.

essential and the other contingent. It suggests, by contrast, that the aesthetic and the historical domains are mutually dependent, that they reinforce and influence one another. Such mutual relations connect the two domains without implying reductionism or absorption of either one by the other. Each defines itself by its difference from the other, though it recognizes simultaneously that if the other did not exist then neither could it.

The two sides, moreover, are no longer seen to stand in the kind of antagonistic relations to one another in which each demands that attention be given to it at the expense of the other. Neither side is privileged with the title "musical" ("transcendental," "pure," or "spiritual"), relegating the other to the ("common," "ordinary," and "impure") "periphery."[26] Rather, the two sides are regarded as compatible or reconcilable, though (in Adorno's terms) still nonidentical.

Reconciliation, however, demands trust, the kind of trust that precludes fear that one side will try to take over the other. Thus, one has to keep in mind the antagonism and unease characterizing the original conflict between the aesthetic and the historical. That unease stemmed from the musicians' desire to create a space—an aesthetic space—in which music could function on its own terms, away from the demands and restrictions of non-musical bodies. And one has to remember that romantic ideology developed at least in part as a way for musicians to express and accommodate that desire. Hence, if we find in our contemporary world that musicians still fear that their space is threatened, we might do better to conclude that antagonistic relations of resistance and separation are still more effective for the time being than the more moderate and utopian relations of compatibility. And we might even be led to conclude that some aspects of romantic ideology are still relevant as well.[27]

Whatever the reality, recommending reconciliation is not radical. On the contrary, there are both more radical and less utopian recommendations available. One could deny the whole distinction between the aesthetic and historical. One could rewrite the distinction completely, such that two sides take on thoroughly new meanings. Or one might claim that the very conflict between the aesthetic and the historical is generated by romantic ideology, so that if we give up the latter, the conflict disappears. Whatever the recommendation one adopts, one never frees oneself, however, from the fundamental question that lies underneath all others, about what constitutes the musical—not, at least, as long as music exists.

This question remains for another reason as well, namely, that no answer to it is ever final. What constitutes the musical and what constitutes its separation

26. Removal of associated talk about "the extra-musical" would be appropriate on adoption of this view. Continuing to see the distinction between the aesthetic and the historical as one does the distinction between the musical and the extra-musical would suggest that one still thinks the historical dimension less important than the aesthetic.

27. Adorno thought that antagonistic relations were necessary because they fulfill a special "redemptive" function in any non-utopian condition of the world. Even in a utopian condition, they might still have this purpose, though Adorno is less clear on this point.

and connection from the non-musical are open questions that music history answers over and over again. They are answered each time a theory is produced that tells us in its particular terms what music means.[28] In this century alone many new theories have been offered — some formalist, others expressivist, symbolic, phenomenological, or structuralist. Some of these theories have succeeded in expanding the borders of the musical domain; others have failed. Some have preserved old ideological stances, others have urged new ones. None, however, has denied that there are borders between the musical and non-musical — not even John Cage's border-bashing theory.

Yet if we accept that the borders of the musical domain are open and revisable, the threat always arises that they will collapse completely. It is just because of this that autonomy is always a pressing issue whether or not the issue produces conflict. The issue of autonomy is just that of preserving borders. Without borders, music lacks not only context, interest, and value, but also its very existence.

IV

It is new borders that Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler attempt to demarcate as they develop new strategies for musical interpretation. Each author provides examples of the many ways in which the separation between the aesthetic and the historical took form in the nineteenth century. Responding to this history of separation, any one of the three could have adopted a radical solution, but none did. Disparaging of those who try to historicize or politicize the domain to the point of reduction of the musical domain to the non-musical, the three authors stand firm in defense of music's autonomy. Disparaging of those who treat music as "just another" cultural practice laden with all the impurities of the real world, they defend music's integrity and beauty. Yet, at the same time, they do not recommend that we privilege or essentialize the aesthetic over the historical.[29]

Instead, they each seek a way for the aesthetic and historical dimensions of music to enter equitably into their writing of music history. Each presents a method which preserves music's integrity but which also accounts for those

28. This problem is not peculiar to classical music but applies as well to other sorts of music. Varying solutions will be given, however, as different kinds of music are determined to stand in different relations to the social world. As Meyer illustrates, music, in its different forms, is governed by different internal and external limitations and constraints (9ff.). Again (see n. 17), it is a mistake even to consider classical music as homogenous on this score; it too reveals a history of changes in limitations and constraints. Cf. here also Dahlhaus's critical comments on the arbitrary and changing parameters of so-called "highbrow" and "lowbrow" musics (311ff.).

29. Meyer cynically assesses the tendency to focus exclusively on a narrow domain of parameters as being "reinforced by the educational system (itself a cultural parameter), which institutes programs and grants degrees in such disciplines" (115). On 226, Dahlhaus judges that people who have a "pigeonhole mentality" are unable to grasp the historicity of the category of opera (226).

historical and social dimensions which help give music its character. Each speaks of the interrelatedness of musical and extra-musical traits, of the many configurations of such traits, and of the different ways in which extra-musical traits have been successfully translated and transformed into musical ones.[30] In this way, our authors demonstrate a crucial methodological point, that to critically question one side of a distinction — in this case to question the priority given to the aesthetic dimension — does not always have to result in the disintegration of the distinction. Rather, it can be a route by which we give new life to the other side — in this case the side of the historical.[31]

The three authors endorse, furthermore, a certain range of values and interests in the light of which they determine the borders of the musical domain. Thus, they each attempt to preserve a sufficient degree of objectivity to render judgments among interpretations possible. To effect this, they acknowledge in non-essentialist terms the existence of a musical core — a set (perhaps comprising many subsets) of musical features that has developed over time — to which interpretations should make either explicit or implicit reference. Meyer stakes out his commitment to objectivity in these familiar terms:

Though documents do not determine interpretations, they do establish limiting conditions — the facts; and though hypotheses may differ, they must be consonant with our general experience of the world. Interpretations must be *accurate* in the sense that they represent the documents faithfully and fully. An interpretation that distorts or omits relevant data is obviously faulty. An interpretation should also be "objective" in the sense that, once documentation is established, hypotheses about relevant relationships are equitably and consistently employed. Objectivity in the humanities . . . consists in the evenhanded application of posited principles.[32]

That the authors sometimes take non-essentialist (rather than anti-essentialist) positions is also worthy of note. Such a procedure motivates the thought that music theorists could avoid the essentialism/anti-essentialism debate altogether. All they have to do is accept the point (famously made by Saul Kripke) that what is purportedly essential to the identity of an object does not necessarily pick out what is important about it.[33] Thus, they could pick out what is important about musical works without committing themselves to the claim that what is important must also be what is essential to them. They would do well to recognize also that employing essentialist terminology usually creates more problems than it solves.[34]

30. Cf. Meyer, esp. 12, chap. 2, and 99; Dahlhaus, e.g. 38; Treitler, e.g. 55. Treitler's comment on the importance of looking at *all* information that relates to musical works is notable for the conclusion that follows it: "Polemics about the musical and historical points of view would flounder if only we could agree upon the need for a sympathetic and canny, yet irreverent, approach to evidence of every cast" (78).

31. I found this point in Michael Walzer's related discussion of the conflicting commitments of social critics (*The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* [New York, 1988], 41).

32. Meyer, 72–73. Treitler also argues against only the strongest sort of absolutist objectivity. He refers critically to those "dogmas of objectivity" that have plagued musical scholarship (118).

33. Kripke, of course, retained an essentialist commitment.

34. Note also that what is important in one work might not be in another. This fact provides another reason for not identifying important features with essential ones, for essential properties

Consistent with their non-essentialist claims, finally, are the authors' antiposi-tivist claims about history. Making these claims Dahlhaus, Meyer, and Treitler exclude the possibility of their determining what the musical core(s) should or will be in the future. Their views preclude "shoulds" altogether and prevent their theories from carrying strong predictive value, though, in Meyer's view, one is still allowed to have hopes for and visions of the future. Treitler is often too wary of futuristic thoughts to concede Meyer's point. He chooses, instead, simply to remind us that systems of history that dictate how art shall be place the art world under totalitarian governance.[35] In the end, however, all three authors endorse the same methodological limitations, that, as historians, they are bound to the formation of hypotheses that are produced from the perspective of our present and the history embodied in this present.

They are not at all troubled by these limitations. On the contrary, they deem them necessary if we are to keep music theory and practice open. For all three authors, openness happily exists on many levels. Just as a work's reception is necessarily open, so too is its interpretation. And so too, in a nontrivial sense, is the writing of music history. Meyer closes his book with just this point: "Needless to say, . . . the relationships and connections in my sketch-history . . . do not pretend to be definitive. They are hypotheses. . . . All need to be tested through application. . . . It is a program of work to be done. . . . From this point of view, my sketch is not 'Classically' closed, but 'Romantically' open."[36] Treitler closes his final essay with a request that we—his readers—contemplate two lithographs by Eduard Munch. Asking us to view them while reflecting wordlessly upon his description of Lulu both as musical and dramatic artifice and as "extra-musical" character, Treitler exits with silence but without definite closure.[37] Of the three authors, Dahlhaus provides the most traditional closure. As he started, so he concludes—with a comment on the conflict between the musical and the extra-musical. Concluding that a hermeneutical history of musical genres is the most profitable way to reconcile "musical" and "extra-musical" dimensions of nineteenth century music, he repeats his rejection of the attempt to describe musical works either as purely aesthetic entities or merely as historical documents.

Finally, all three authors see the proof of their methodological claims as lying less in their theoretical conclusions than in the histories they write and the interpretations they offer. It is here perhaps that they fail to do full justice to

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of works are essential to all works. What is important to a work is not even to be confused with its individuating properties (the properties that make a work that particular work rather than any other).

35. Treitler, 156.

36. Meyer, 352.

37. For Treitler, the commitment to openness is evident throughout his book (cf. 1). On 2, he illustrates the way that "troping" in the Middle Ages was used as a musical device to keep the music "up to date." Troping directly contrasts with the idea that music is fixed forever at its moment of creation. Treitler's ending—the point at which he carries readers from words to thoughts—also matches his earlier description of how the performance of Beethoven's *Ninth* emerges when the first note arises out of the silence. "The silence is not broken, it is gradually replaced by sound" (19).

their multidisciplinary approaches, notably to the basic problem of the conflict between the musical and the extra-musical. Exemplary histories of music they write. Similar interpretations of music they offer. But they leave others (the philosophers) to explore the most basic philosophical issues at stake. In this essay, I could only begin this long and complicated task.[38]

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