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HOW IS EXTRA-MUSICAL MEANING POSSIBLE? MUSIC AS A PLACE AND SPACE FOR "WORK" *

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The Problem:

It is a pervasive idea in Western culture that music is in some way capable of symbolizing emotions, images or ideas. Equally pervasive however, within the fields of philosophy, musicology, social psychology and linguistics, is the view that, in spite of increasing attention devoted to the topic, attempts to explain empirically music's communicative ability have met with relatively little success. Thus, from the outset, the issue of musical meaning is characterized by paradox: at the level of the listening experience music seems infinitely and definitely expressive while, at the level of taxonomic analysis, the same music seems perpetually capable of eluding attempts to pin it to semantic corollaries. There is, in other words, a tension between the apparent validity (at the level of listening) and the apparent invalidity (at the level of empirical analysis) of music's symbolic capacity.

This "gap," as John Rahn (1972 p. 255) has put it, "between structure and feeling," is not necessarily problematic for the study of musical meaning. It can, as I shall argue below, be seen instead as a resource, making the study of musical meaning all the richer. Yet the conventional ways in which the paradoxical aspect of musical meaning has been attended to, have consisted, for the most part, of attempts to collapse the issue into one or the other of two equally unsatisfactory extremes. On the one hand the formalist position describes music as essentially abstract and expressionless whereas on the other, the expressionist position likens music to language in that its compositional elements may be said to possess extra-musical referents of one kind or another. As the sociologist of music Ivo Supićić has argued:

The scientific flaw of all formalist and expressionist concepts lies in their readiness to generalize, to put forward one principle and aspect and exclude all others, or at least to play down the value of other principles and aspects (pp. 198-199).

The major consequence then, of framing the study of musical meaning in terms of formalism and

expressionism is that the initial richness of the issue is lost.

The general intent of this essay is therefore to arrive, via a re-evaluation of some of the basic premises of each side, at a "resolution" of the formalist and expressionist positions. I shall argue that the factors which impede such a resolution are related to the way in which the initial question has conventionally been formulated (i.e. "does music have extra-musical significance and can it therefore be conceived of as a language?") and that this formulation is a product of a fundamental misconception of language predicated upon a referential theory of meaning. Taken together, these two factors have constrained the debate over musical meaning by focusing inquiry upon the *music itself as the locus of meaning*. My fundamental task is to reformulate the initial question of whether music is or is like language by redirecting it at the source of tension itself, that is, to the issue of how it is possible that music is experienced as inherently meaningful when there may be no one-to-one correspondence of meanings to musical elements.

To this end, what follows is organized in three parts: (1) an over-view of the formalist-expressionist debate with an emphasis on previous expressionist explanations of musical meaning, (2) a critique of the fundamental conception of language shared by both expressionists and formalists and (3) a proposal of an alternate approach to the question of musical meaning which builds upon recent work in the area of sociolinguistics, cognitive sociology, ethnomethodology and especially, social construction theory as it locates social and cognitive structures in the interaction between people (Mehan 1983). The purpose of this alternative approach to the topic of musical meaning is to redirect the force of the initial descriptive (and implicitly linguistic, musicological or psychological) question of *what* music means to an explicitly sociological question of *how* musical meaning is possible. Finally, in fulfilling these three aims I hope to show, first of all, that the study of musical meaning has implications for the study of connotative meaning and interpretation more generally and, second, that these implications are in turn consequential for the way in which the relation between social actors (as individuals and as collectivities) and culture is conceived of and therefore, for the ways in which sociological studies of culture ought to proceed.

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The Expressionist-Formalist Debate:

To speak of expressionism as a unified theoretical "block" is, of course, misleading for there is certainly as much difference of opinion *within* the expressionist position as there is between it and the formalist view. In the first place, expressionists can be classified according to methodological approach (see, for example, Lippman 1981): *semiotic* (Nattiez; Ruwet; Dunsby; Coker; Cooke); *hermeneutic* (Plavsa; Duisberg; Harris and Sandresky; Kretchmar); *phenomenological* (Schutz; Clifton; Blacking). However these classifications are problematic in that they are to some extent arbitrary, not always mutually exclusive and not, in every case, self-proclaimed. The "loose" (and not self-acknowledged) semiotics of, for example, Ferguson or Coker bears little resemblance to the more rigorous version practiced by Ruwet or Nattiez and, for that matter, Ferguson's approach is quite different from Coker's in the first place. For these reasons, a survey of expressionism using as its dividing principle methodological approach is, ultimately, of little use.

More productive would be a classification which contrasts expressionist theorists according to intellectual influences. In this way, distinctions between, for example, the semiotics of Coker on the one hand (as it is steeped in the tradition of Charles Morris and George Herbert Mead) and Nattiez on the other (as it is derived from the work of Nicolas Ruwet and Zellig Harris) can be preserved. One can understand, given these differences, why it is not surprising that Coker is explicitly concerned with extra-musical or, as he calls it, extra-generic meaning and Nattiez tends to focus upon what he terms the "neutral level" or purely musico-logical level of a piece (what Coker terms "congeneric meaning") and the way in which this level is related to music's formal intelligibility.

It should be clear then, that any study of "expressionism" as a body of thought would need to emphasize the ways in which expressionism can *not* be thought of as a unified approach. For the purposes of this paper however, I shall do exactly the opposite. In this section, I wish to examine, first of all the way in which the work of all expressionist theorists is unified by a common theoretical assumption that the locus of extra-musical meaning is in the musical object itself, and secondly, I shall explore the ways in which different expressionist theorists come to "operationalize" this assumption according to their particular methods and intellectual influences.

Essentially, the aim of expressionist theorists concerned with the issue of extra-musical meaning is to establish the "objective" nature of musical meaning. They are not particularly interested in "subjective" responses for their own sake. Rather, they look for *reliable* connotations, by which it seems fair to say they mean isomorphic links

between musical symbols and extra-musical referents, notations and connotations. Given then, these operant terms, "symbol" and "referent" as terminological "constants," one can classify expressionist theories (and formalist theories as well) along two "axes": first, the way in which the symbolic unit is defined (whether it is a note of the scale, an interval, a phrase, the entire piece) and second, that unit's degree of specificity (whether it refers to a particular object, image or idea—such as the "cuckoo" in Beethoven's Pastoral symphony—or whether it alludes in a more general way to a less precise object of reference—for example, the more general sense of "the countryside" to which Beethoven's symphony allegedly refers).

In *The Language of Music*, for instance, Deryck Cooke argues:

In some way or other, we feel (music) conveys to us the subjective experience of composers. But in what way? . . . how can it be done in music which can only represent a few physical objects, vaguely suggest a few others, and make no explicit description of anything at all? To try and find the answer to this question we must turn to a consideration of the analogy between music and literature and an investigation of the problem of music as language (p. 10) . . . The task facing us is to discover how music functions as a language, to establish the terms of its vocabulary and to explain how these terms may legitimately be said to express the emotions they appear to (p. 34).

Cooke then proceeds to define music's (and it is important to note, *tonal* music's) expressive framework as it is constituted through intervals. A minor second, for example expresses "spiritless anguish" (p. 90) while a major second is equated with "pleasurable longing," a minor third, "stoic acceptance" and so on through to the octave, "neutral; finality" (p.89). Using this "dictionary," Cooke's method of analysis consists of totting-up intervals in order to arrive at a composite picture of the emotional content of any given piece. Although he admits that his linguistic correlates are far from precise ". . . I am only too well aware that by using the simple everyday words for human emotion to make my classification of the terms of musical language, I have only scratched the surface of a problem of will-nigh infinite depth . . ." (p. 272), Cooke concluded that it is or will one day be possible to arrive at a complete lexicon of musical significance:

A psychologist of deep insight and great understanding will be called for; perhaps psychology will have to link hands again with philosophy and metaphysics before the language of music yields up its innermost secrets . . . (pp. 273–274).

Although Cooke's approach is not nor has ever been received by music scholars with particularly high regard, it is worth noting because it is one of the few attempts to account for fairly specific emotional reference at the "micro" musical-structural level of intervalic relations.

Taking a slightly larger unit of analysis, the phrase, Donald Ferguson (1960) puts forward the Aristotelian argument that, "melodies which are mere sounds resemble dispositions" (p. 123). The crux of his argument is that, "Emotion (is) . . . conveyed by the musical substance" (p. 79), or in other words, the musical structure "communicates" non-musical content. Music is able to function communicatively, Ferguson argues (along the same lines as Meyer, 1954 260 and Coker, 1972 34) because purely physical aspects of musical processes are analogous to types of experience. On the basis of this idea of contiguous meaning, Ferguson rekindles the Mendelssohnian argument that music is actually *more* expressive than words precisely because it is able to offer sonic parallels of types of unmediated experience (for example, music does not *signify* the feeling of suddenness, quiet, confusion, etc., by *telling* the listener about an instance of any of these feelings; rather it *recreates* the feeling through the medium of sound). Tones, Ferguson suggests, are "a truer profundity than is possible with the machinery of nouns and verbs" (p. 123).

With a one and a half bar fragment from Wagner's *Ring* . . . , Ferguson attempts to demonstrate that the type of tonal relations found in it possess "verbal counterparts", by which he means, "one or more affective words, such as ecstasy, anticipation, warmth, poignance . . . If we attempt to fuse all these factors together in a single impression of feeling character it will not be difficult to identify the experience with which this music must be associated. This is patently a type of love music" (p. 95). And, in spite of the fact that one could come to the same conclusion based upon the libretto Ferguson argues that the same conclusions could be arrived at even if one had absolutely no idea of what the particular fragment was meant to accomplish (a point which he develops in an analysis of one of the fugues from the *Well Tempered Clavier*).

As a final example it is worth looking at the recent work of Catherine Harris and Clemens Sandresky (1985) who use as their unit of analysis the entire piece. This work consists of an unusual "synthesis" of Schenker's structural approach, Meyer's use of information theory, the Meadian theory of gestures and significant symbols and the formalist idea of music as "unconsummated symbol" (Langer 1953, p. 30) or "myth" (Levi-Strauss; one reason perhaps, why they focus upon the piece as a whole). Specifically what Harris and Sandresky are concerned with is showing the correspondence between, on the one

hand, harmonic and melodic structural relationships and, on the other, social typifications of collective meanings. Through a series of examples, they draw parallels between musical structure and extra-musical phenomena in order to explain why certain musical works connote some things and not others. Along the lines of Ferguson, they put forth a theory of meaning by contiguity. Where they differ from Ferguson (and for that matter from Cooke as well,) is that they make explicit the idea of cultural mediation of musical meanings or, in their words, of typifications and it is this which gives their approach slightly more of a sociological tilt. They argue, in other words, that the musical tone as such does not necessarily have any definite *a priori* meaning but, given contiguous constraints and set in a cultural context (by which they mean, or seem to mean, a pre-existing set of shared meanings, cognitive, moral and aesthetic) it comes to seem, for all practical purposes as if its meaning is intrinsic. For instance:

Music plays a remarkable role in communicating a notion of the 'character' or style of emotional expression of a particular people, nationalities and historical periods. It has symbolized collective feelings of grief and joy, excitement and despair . . . The list could go on. Some examples are in order (p. 296).

and to take of their many examples:

The exuberance of our national anthem, *The Star Spangled Banner*, gives form to one aspect of patriotic feeling; the quieter radiance of *America*, another. When sung with conviction, *who among us can resist* a feeling of pride and community? (p. 296, emphasis mine).

With this example, Harris and Sandresky seem to have made a progressive move away from the implicitly psychological thrust of Cooke and Ferguson only to re-establish *a priori* meaning by relocating it at the level of culture or, in other words, by relocating the objectivity of musical reference in the cultural mediation of the tone itself (as if culture closes off what would otherwise be, to use a term from Berger and Luckman, a "world open" relationship between social actors and their social environment, by making that environment seem "given," "natural" or "world closed"). What this determinist (and essentially Durkheimian) conception of culture tends to obliterate however, is the *contested* aspect of culture, implying instead a naive, anthropological picture of culture as a "ground" in which social actors or more accurately, enactors (in this case music listeners) are embedded (and also implying a naive approach to the study of culture, a form of "meaning reading," what Berger (1981) refers to as "culturology" and Bittner, in a similar vein, as "naive realism" (1973). This is a point I shall discuss in more detail below).

It seems reasonable, for example, that for many listeners, *The Star Spangled Banner* may not connote a "feeling of pride and community." Think, for instance of the Jimi Hendrix version of this piece. Or, even allowing for the qualification, "sung with conviction," would *any* version of the *Star Spangled Banner* evoke or connote national pride and community spirit among *all*, or even *most*, Jimi Hendrix devotees? Unless the answer to this question can be an unequivocal "yes," we must reconsider the fruitfulness of attempting to enunciate lexicons (whether universally valid or culturally circumscribed) of extra-musical meaning as it is found *in the music itself*. It is about here then, that one can begin to see why the formalist position is often perceived as the more "intelligent" side of the musical meaning debate, aloof as it is from this morass of expressivist issues.

In a review article of semiotic approaches to music, Patricia Tunstall observed that the usefulness of semiotic inquiry as it has been developed in other fields is called into question in music because of the problems involved in elucidating the semantic connotations of music:

Music seems to involve primarily syntactical, not semantic relationships; it does not exhibit a systematic one-to-one correspondence of each specific musical element with a specific non-musical meaning. According to Saussure's definition, then, music must be considered not a system of signs but a system of signifiers without signifieds. Therefore musical analysis can make only limited use of the particular virtues of the semiological approach . . . Its element are not signs, but the relations between them are coherent and meaningful. It is these relations themselves, the formal operations performed upon sonorous elements, that are the essence of musical structure. Perhaps, then, that structure is a uniquely lucid and unmediated reflection of the formal operations of cognition (1979, p. 62).

What is important to note here is that Tunstall, like the expressionists she criticizes, directs her attention to the musical object itself, and, by virtue of the fact that she concurs with Saussure's definition of music as a system of signifiers without signifieds, she reaches a dead-end with respect to music's semantic content. As an alternate route, she suggests that musicologists pursue a kind of syntactical structuralism, which is what she means when she argues that music study ought to focus upon the "formal operations themselves" (a conclusion which, as Jonathan Dunsby has pointed out in his 1983 review of music semiotics, Nattiez and Ruwet had already reached).

This conclusion is not a particularly new one; the Viennese music critic, Edward Hanslick, argued along similar lines in his book *The*

Beautiful in Music (1885). Hanslick's approach is worth noting since he remains one of the few writers to appreciate the paradoxical aspect of musical meaning, namely that music may be perceived as expressive, yet simultaneously elude analytic attempts to pin it to semantic corollaries. Hanslick challenged the appropriateness of applying the metaphor of language to music by objecting to the idea that there exists any one-to-one correspondence between the musical symbol and a specific, external referent:

The fundamental difference consists in this: while sound in speech is but a sign, that is, a means for the purpose of expressing something which is quite distinct from its medium, sound in music is the end, that is, the ultimate and absolute object in view. The intrinsic beauty of the musical in the latter case and the exclusive dominion of thought over sound as a mere medium of expression in the former are so utterly distinct as to render the union of these two elements a logical impossibility (1957, p. 67).

and for this reason, he thought it philistine to attempt to pin music to *an* interpretation since this ultimately destroyed the musical beauty which was not so much a product of intrinsically meaningful symbols mechanically strung together but due to the fact that music was a kind of polymorphous, sonorous logic in a pre- or unconscious, tactile sense (this is more or less the same argument Mendelssohn made). Hanslick did not want to reduce what he called the "beauty" of a piece of music to verbal concepts. He was objecting to the idea that music expresses things *to* a listener, which he believed was a quality of language but not of music. Music, he argued, had, over the course of the nineteenth century, been subsumed under an essentially inappropriate model of verbal language based upon a correspondence theory of meaning.

We have now come full circle back to the initial paradox. Music cannot satisfactorily be analyzed as a language because it lacks sufficient examples of what David Osmond-Smith (1971) has called "double articulation" (i.e. music is best conceived of as a system of signifiers without signifieds). Nevertheless, it is frequently experienced as if it were a type of language, capable of extra-musical reference. As Jacques Barzun has described it:

The issue then, boils down to: sounds with or without connotation, those voting aye to "Without!" being divided into pure sensualists and pure Platonists; those voting aye to "With!" being still at a loss to account for music's connotative powers beyond the few effects based on association—church bells or military trumpets (1980 10).

What this problem suggests then, is that the real

question of interest is not so much psychological, musicological or linguistic as *sociological*, not so much *what* any given music means as *how* it is possible that music can be experienced as inherently meaningful when, in fact, there may be no one-to-one correspondence of meaning to musical elements.

What remains is to attempt to answer this question and in so doing, attempt to resolve the formalist objection of extra-musical meaning and the expressionist sense of it. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to back up a bit and examine the model of language implicit in both formalist and expressionist theories, for it is this model, I wish to argue, which is responsible for many of the problems identified by each position with regard to the other.

Problems with the formalist and expressionist conception of language:

First and foremost, all the writers so far reviewed shared the tacit and unchallenged premise that verbal language is characterized in practice by an "ideal speech situation," as it has been described by Habermas (1976) and Grice (1975), in which what is said is equal to what is meant is equal to what is understood. Leonard Meyer (whose ideas about the nature of musical meaning are particularly hard to classify) for example, argues that the listener, "must respond to the work of art as the artist intended . . ." (1956, p. 41). Dusan Plavša (1981, p. 67) hypothesizes that, if the programs to Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*, Strauss' *Till Eulenspiegel* and Smetana's *Sarka* were exchanged, listeners hearing these pieces for the first time would still be able to find that the programs would evoke associations, "which simply cannot be related to the music one hears," the point being that music is representative because the "wrong" tones, like the "wrong" words, will not convey the initial intent of their author. In other words, formalists and expressivists alike tend to assume that language is characterized solely by a referential theory of meaning in which form (the symbol or utterance) and function (the "received" meaning of that utterance) are inextricably linked. Yet this is hardly the way that actual day to day speech situations proceed, as Wittgenstein (1953), Austin (1962) and more recently, speech act theorists (Labov and Fanshel 1977, Searle 1967 and particularly Streeck 1980 in his critique of speech act theory) have recognized in their respective discussions of "language games," "performatives" and "speech acts."

The performative utterance *looks* like a statement and grammatically, it would be classified according to its literal meaning, however it is recognized by the hearer as something quite different. Its illocutionary and perlocutionary forces, in other words, are not identical. What this

means is that a statement or utterance may function in a way that has little to do with its actual form. (For example, the statement, "It's hot in here," may be understood as a request that a window be opened.) In this regard, Wittgenstein made an analogy to chess: speakers use words like chess pieces in a simultaneous multiplicity of language games (of which there may be an infinite variety). It is important to note here that, as Jurgen Streeck has argued in his critique and extension of speech act theory, the meaning or function of speech acts relies upon the hearer as well as the speaker, being assigned to some extent in retrospect according to the type of response it provokes. Thus, the statement, "It's hot in here" would only be understood as a request to open the window *if* the hearer actually acknowledges it as a request. Otherwise, it will (ostensibly anyway) be defined as a statement of fact (Though there may, on the part of speaker and/or hearer be a tacit recognition that the initial function of the statement was one of request).

The point then, is that speech is not nearly as referential in practice as it is conceived of in idealized terms. Therefore, rather than comparing music to formal speech and grammatical rules it may be more productive to compare it to speech in practical contexts, to study meaning in *use*, in which case *both* music and speech may exhibit the problem of being perceived as connotative in cases where there is no explicit link between form and function.

In fact, it may be that the conception of music as referential language is *doubly* confused because it is founded upon an initial misconception of language and verbal meaning itself, one which implies an over-determined (and sociologically under-determined), idealized view of composer-listener interaction which over emphasizes composer intentionality on the one hand, and undervalues listener participation on the other. At this point, it is worth examining in greater depth some of the assumptions upon which these misconceptions of meaning and language are based and the implications for the study of meaning in general and musical meaning in particular which they carry.

First of all, most conventional approaches to the problem of meaning take, implicitly or explicitly, what some scholars have called a "theoretical short-cut" (Bittner: 1965; Dore and McDermott 1982) based upon a metaphor of meaning *transmission* or meaning *exchange*, as if bits or pieces of meaning may be arranged in mosaic-like pictures according to the rules or regularities of what may be "done" with any given bit or of how it can be treated (see also, Mehan 1983, for a discussion of this transmission model). What makes the metaphor of transmission a "theoretical shortcut" is that it assumes encoded meanings are meaningfully received because meaning receivers (or "hearers")

come equipped (or are equipped by their culture; in other words, "socialized") with a kind of decoding device or lexico-grammar (Dore and McDermott 374 and Bittner 246).

Whenever a theorist states that, for some specified universe a particular utterance, object, act has a corresponding set of functions which, in turn, correspond to a finite set of interpretations on the part of the hearer, s/he may be said to be taking this short-cut which, simply put is the belief in the absolute referentiality of meaning and a denial of meaning through use (and as such the theoretical short-cut may be seen as a form of stimulus-response theory). This is not, however, to deny that objects, utterances or acts may possess seemingly greater and lesser degrees or referentiality, or in other words, that they will provide their interpreters with varying degrees of interpretative constraint and that, in some cases, that constraint will be so great that, for all practical purposes, the problems implicit in taking the theoretical short-cut will be "merely theoretical." In many cases however, the implications of assuming that "shared meaning" facilitated by culturally coded significances is a general feature of all "communication" are far from trivial. For one, it implies that the meaning "transmitter" or speaker (or composer) must have access to or have internalized the lexico-grammar in order to "transmit" meaning. For another, it implies that what is "transmitted" corresponds to (a) specific meaning(s) (which implies means-end intentionality on the part of the transmitter) and further, that the meaning receiver is essentially passive in that s/he has no impact upon the meaning of the object, utterance, act but rather that s/he merely receives it in its complete form. One should now be able to see how, given these assumptions about meaning and language, there could be only one implied methodological task for the study of any type of meaningful activity: to provide a thorough enunciation of that activity's lexicon of culturally coded significances.

My point in this section has been to argue against determinist explanations of meaning (whether universalist—in which the meaning of the utterance cuts across cultural or sub-cultural boundaries—or particularist—in which the meaning of the utterance is determined by the cultural, sub-cultural or even psychological context of which it is a part and in which it may be said to be "hermetically sealed") *though this is in no way to deny* that there are, within certain contexts as these are conceived by actors, probabilistic distributions of the ways in which utterances, acts and objects are interpreted. Rather, I wish to call attention to the fact that there is a fine line between speaking of objects, utterances or acts as if they possess intrinsic and immutable meaning (as if form and function are linked) and to speak of these as socially constructed through use according to various constraints. The former view (as I shall

argue below) presents an implicit picture of culture as uncontested whereas the latter does not. To put it in other words, my point has been to move away from idealized conceptions of speech and meaning "transmission", as they characteristically assume (and as Streeck has enumerated): 1) that the meaning of an utterance is constituted by the speaker (or "author") of the utterance (and not at all by the hearer or interpreter) 2) that meaning is therefore a function of the sentence uttered and therefore that function is linked to and dependent on the form of the words uttered and 3) that, at least at a deep structural or cultural level there is a rule which can account for the way in which the utterance was used. These assumptions imply a dyadic relation between object and interpretation (or between object and subject) grounded in a logical view of language which has come under increasing criticism in recent years, in that it depicts actors as enactors or "cultural dopes" who are frozen in to their cultures without the possibility of reflexive behavior (or insincerity, alienation etc.), a depiction Streeck describes as treating "context as given" (p. 144).

Both musical meaning and verbal meaning (at least in the case of implicit verbal meanings) may be best considered as what D'Andrade (in reference to other types of meanings) has called "count as" phenomena, by which he means that their meaning does not correspond to a concrete or "brute factual" category which exists objectively *outside* of the interaction in which it is constructed (as it does, for instance, in the case of nouns such as "tree," "hand," or "stone"). Instead, its meaning is assigned through an enacted process. So, for example, a musical utterance takes on meaning because an individual or group adheres to a constitutive rule which constructs a sort of aura of significance around that utterance. This in turn enables it to be "counted as" an example of that category of meaning, and the maintainance of that significance is dependent upon actors who continue to perceive and act toward the phenomenon as "counting as" what it "counts as" (or it will fail to count and, perhaps, count as something else). Thus, as with all "institutionalized facts" the "instance" perceived under the proper felicity conditions" (D'Andrade refers here to Austin's work on speech acts) counts as an exemplary instance of an "objective" category. What the meaning of "count as" phenomena depends upon is not transmission/reception of pre-coded information (which would appear and reappear *to* the receiver) but upon the active social and social-psychological intersubjective processing of that information which *transforms* (and therefore "produces") it (and I use the term transform here to include cases where repetition or re-cognition occurs).

In down-playing the active role of the listener then, expressionists concerned with making taxo-

onomic distributions of musical meaning attempt to treat music as a species of language, when it actually may be more appropriate to treat language "as a species of music," a point brought up by the English poet and essayist Sidney Lanier in the seventeenth century (see Hollander 1973, p. 11). Bearing also in mind the implications of Wittgenstein's suggestion that language may be something on which to "hang tones" or, in other words that words may be moulded in such a way as to have a multiplicity of forces (1953), one might be tempted to add, "and tones are something upon which to hang words." The implication is that the imputed illocutionary force of tones may rely, in part, upon the perceived context supplied by the words imputed to these tones by composers, performers, listeners and critics. Thus what taxonomic approaches fail to realize is that musical meaning may be achieved or realized through the compositional "work" of the very listeners who may act "as if" they are merely "receiving" that meaning. And because of this failure, any lexicon which an expressionist approach may propose would be little more than an artifact of the methodology used to "discover" or "reveal" that meaning in the first place. In other words, music scholars possess the same "tools" or "folk methods" of sense-making as music listeners and perhaps the greatest of these tools is the assumption (and its retinue of implied sub-assumptions) that the locus of meaning is *in the music* when it seems more likely that it is not "received" but is *achieved*, the product of interactive work.

The perspective of 'Interpretive Studies'; Social Construction and its Constraints:

Given then, that there *appears* to be, or actors act *as if* there exists an objective system of overlapping meaning—a core culture or collective conscience or culturally-coded lexicon—which is shared to some degree by all members of the cultural setting and which is defined by that setting, the Interpretive Studies question asks *how* does objectivity get socially constructed. With respect to music, the question is therefore: how do listeners come to recognize a piece as embodying some qualities but not others or, more generally, how is it that an audience comes to define any piece of music as meaningful in the first place?

To answer this question requires a focus upon cohort production, the idea that the social world or *Lebenswelt* (or "Nature") is produced through the scenic practices, interpretive procedures, members' methods or "work"; how through interaction (collaboration, conflict, collusion) actors come to construct an aura of naturalness about the object, utterance, act, "as if" the properties perceived *in* that object are actually and intrinsically *of it*. Thus, Interpretive Studies looks at the transformative

practices which construct the illusion of idealized meaning transmission and inherent meaning.

What these practices consist of is a process of "filling in" of objects (including others' identities, one's own identity, one's "subjectivity") *at the level of interaction*. The task of Interpretive Studies then, is to tell the "local history" of how the phenomenon was "realized," and that history would consist of a chronicle of all aspects of meaning "production": the (to use a Marxian analogy) *mode* of that production as it is characterized by its *forces, relations* and *available technology* or in other words, all of the seemingly "objective" constraints upon the process of naming or meaning production.

With regard to the "tools" of sense-making, then, it is important to recognize at the outset that we, as social actors, approach objects with what may perhaps be best described as a "systematic bias" in favour of meaning; we are perhaps, as Merleau-Ponty has put it, "condemned to meaning." For this reason, we need to have some understanding of the types of interpretive procedures (Cicourel 1974) which operate beneath the level of normative constraint. Social action may, to varying extents be seen as a process of *ad hocing* whereby actors attempt to align their informal procedures with formally defined rules and meaning categories (a process similar to Berger's notion of "ideological work" (1981) and C. Wright Mills' idea of "situated vocabularies of motive," (1940)).

First of all, we assume that there is, between actors, a "reciprocity of perspectives" through which each is able to overcome his/her individual biases due to physical or mental position in order to establish with others the objective features of phenomena. We assume that, if a reversal of perspective were possible, we would each see the world through the eyes of the other (a proposition which is of course merely hypothetical). Secondly, we assume, according to a kind of "law of good continuation" that the phenomena we encounter will possess an internal logic and completion which we will be able to perceive. And third, we interpret "historicismally," letting unclear information pass and later, returning to interpret it according to the "new" light shed upon it from our present perspective. (So, for instance, if we perceive something in an object which strongly contradicts our interpretation of the object up-until-then, we may re-interpret all of what we had encountered of it previously in order to bring it into line with the new "fact.")

Perhaps the main reason we have so little trouble making sense out of just about anything, as Garfinkel's "therapy experiment" demonstrates (Garfinkel 1962), is that we go to "work" at meaning construction given the "materials at hand," i.e. the perceived context of which the phenomenon is also a part and with which it

reflexively reacts (see Dore and McDermott on context, not as a surround or ground, but as interactively and reflexively related to the object which it "frames"). Thus, one can say that what is produced is constrained by the forces and relations of that production or, by the way phenomena are perceived to be framed and how they in turn frame each other. Thus meaning categories emerge or are constructed according to their perceived contextual constraints, i.e. according to how, where, when and why they are framed and who is involved in framing them (the relations of meaning production).

Framing then, becomes a crucial constitutive tool of meaning construction since it helps to inspire the belief necessary to "drive" the machinery of what has been called in different contexts, "oracular reasoning" (see Evans-Pritchard 1937 and Mehan forthcoming). Mehan describes this process as the way in which an initial emotional, aesthetic or religious commitment to a basic premise or "incorrigible proposition" is further buttressed by "secondary elaborations of belief" which both rationalize the validity of the initial premise and fend off contradictory evidence. In this way then, the phenomenon is "fleshed out" (or transubstantiated)—remembering that this concept was initially used to describe a religious context) as a meaningful or coherent whole. The first step then, to finding meaning in an object is *believing* that the object in question is inherently meaningful and that it deserves to be taken seriously, that it is significant. The primary object of study then, when focusing on musical meaning is to examine the way in which belief is inspired so that the listener listens "in good faith" and thus, cooperates in fleshing out the sketchiness of the music so that it appears to mean something (or so that it *will* mean something or, that it *is* meaning something but that the listener is unable to recognize the meaning at that moment).

Leonard Meyer's discussion of the "preparatory set" (1954, p. 75) refers to essentially this same idea. Regarding the importance to the object's meaning of the perceived frame, he argues that it is the belief that we are about to have an aesthetic experience that is responsible for the fact that we do, subsequently, have such an experience; tone or sounds *as such* do not produce an emotional response. For example, hearing someone practice scales on the piano may "evoke" or "transmit" nothing, yet hearing these same scale patterns played by the same pianist who is now on stage, acting as a soloist may "evoke" quite a lot: "Once the aesthetic attitude had been brought into play, very few actions actually appear to be meaningless" (p. 35).

Thus, one could say that the way in which music is framed provides what Gumperz has called "contextualization cues" (Gumperz 1977) and Erickson, "implicit signals" (Erickson 1982)

which help prepare the listener or "warm up" the machinery of oracular reasoning so that s/he will look and listen for, or "work" toward realizing the meaning of the piece. The preparatory set then, is part of what is required to inspire belief or trust necessary for the collaborative, cooperative relationship between listener and composer which gets the "work" of constituting meaning done in music. Essentially, these cues consist of various conventions or ritual practices that, through experience, come to carry certain connotations which, one could say, serve as "tools" for the work of sense making and meaning construction. (It is worth noting here that this perspective can explain how instances of self-borrowing among composers can work successfully: for if Plavša's (1981) hypothesis were generally true—that programs of programmatic pieces could not successfully be exchanged—how then, could we explain, for instance, that a piece such as the well-known barcarolle from Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman* was originally conceived as the Goblin's song *Die Rheinnixen* (Barzun 1980, p. 17), and see *ibid* for additional examples of self-borrowing.)

In the case of "war horse" pieces (pieces in the repertoire which are programmed year after year and with which even "naive" or musically uneducated listeners are familiar—pieces like the first movement of Beethoven's fifth symphony, Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, Ravel's Bolero, Debussy's Afternoon of a Faun) where the listener has easy and frequent access to what the idealized mode of response consists of (i.e., the preparatory set is comparatively larger than for a "first-time-through" world premiere) and therefore some of his/her work has already been done by others. (S/he has perhaps read about the work, heard others discuss it, listened to it with others and already been through the interactive process of constructing its meaning. S/he is offered, prior to listening, a sketch or cognitive map of how to get the work done.) Thus, one could say that listening to "1812" is like assembling something from a "kit": one goes to work with one's pre-fabricated parts and a set of (indexical) instructions telling one what to do. (This is not to say that one will always succeed in one's assembly work or that, given the "kit" one may not discard the instructions, dismantle the parts and proceed from scratch in order to produce a different "object," a process not unlike that which Willis (1977) has described as "penetration.")

In the case of new or unfamiliar music, the belief inspired by the preparatory set or the contextualization cues is crucial. These cues are also more likely to consist of extra-musical devices such as program notes, the identity of the performers (i.e. New York Philharmonic, San Diego Symphony, or a local, amateur organization?), the fullness of the hall, the hall itself, the price of the ticket, the seating arrangements, the

gestures of the performers (and perhaps particularly of the conductor—see Adorno (1975, p. 105) on the subject of conductors: “The conductor acts as though he were taming the orchestra but his real target is the audience . . .”) One could generate a long list of possible examples of these contextualization cues but in order to describe the tools or available technology, forces and relations of any given listening situation one would have to turn to an ethnographic account of the “setting” or “work place” in which the music’s meaning is produced, as aspects of that setting function in the preparatory set of perceived constraints upon the process of meaning construction.

In general, however, the types of things one would look for would consist of: (1) aspects of *the music itself*—to what other pieces, composers, etc. does it bear family resemblance? is it familiar or unfamiliar? in what ways might it resemble sentic, physical or onomatopoeic processes through *rhythm*, *melodic relations* (upward or downward trend, wide gaps or step-wise motion, etc.), *harmonic relations* (open or closed, “consonant” or “dissonant,” chordal or polyphonic) (2) the *listener’s relation to other listeners* (who they are, how many there are, their perceived or imagined statuses, actions, utterances and attempts at defining the musical meaning) (3) *the listener’s relation to the composer* (whether s/he is alive or dead; his/her biography and degree of fame and supporters; how prolific s/he is) (4) *the listener’s relation to the conductor and to the musicians* (5) *the listener’s relation to (and the composer’s relation to) critics* (6) *the music’s relation to program notes and other scholarly materials* (7) *props and physical aspects of the setting* (such as seating, clothing, decoration).

Thus a sociology of musical meaning is also a sociology of styles or modes of work done by the listener and as such it should ask questions about how much work the music requires of the listener. For instance, does s/he find many contextualization cues, as occurs in highly ritualized situations (in which cases s/he need only re-affirm a conventional interpretation of the piece). Or, does s/he find so few contextualization cues that s/he must “on the spot” as it were, manage his/her own production by not constructing the interpretation but the cues of context as well? In this regard, it seems reasonable to say that in settings which are not highly contextualized (where perceived cues are scarce) the actor may be offered more latitude or scope for the work of interpreting the object or, in other words acts to a greater degree as a “com-poser.” In a sense then, this question is one of interpretive “worker control” over the production of musical meaning. It seems fair to say then, that the more cues provided (or the meaning “managed”) the less equivocal the meaning will seem and the less the range of things which can be

imputed or “hung on” to it. Thus the more the music will seem untouchable, sacred or “given.”

Further, one could compare the cues presented by the speaker/artist/transmitter, the “vertical” axis, with the cues or resources for meaning “recognition” provided by the hearer(s)/audience/receivers, the “horizontal axis.” It seems reasonable to suppose that the greater the ratio of cues provided by the speaker and his/her colleagues to cues provided by the hearer and his/her colleagues, the more the hearer will feel “constrained” to “find” the right or “true” or “real” meaning of the object, by which I mean that s/he will attempt to discover what the speaker *meant* by his/her utterance/act. Thus, it seems sensible to say that the more the contextualization cues of the setting, object or situation are made by the speaker, the more the hearer will feel compelled to conform to what s/he perceives is the right interpretation of the “object” and thus, the more the actual process of meaning construction or “work” will be obfuscated or concealed, or, in other words, the more the actual “labour” of meaning construction will seem “invisible.” Thus, a crucial aspect of any preparatory set is its characteristic division of labour, whether and to what degree there is “worker control” over the tools and resources of meaning construction.

Implications for the way in which Culture is conceived:

In summary, the meaning of objects, utterances and acts is neither inherent nor invariant but socially constituted. With regard to social or conceptual meanings (that is, “count as” phenomena), this implies a dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy as it is generally implicit in conventional theories of meaning “transmission” and “reception.” In other words, the perceiving subject constitutes, given perceived constraints, the “object” through interpretation, and further, the meaning of this response or interpretation is in turn constituted by the response *to* the response, and so on. What this in turn implies is that the “field” of meaning generated by speaker/hearers’ utterances/objects/acts and responses ought not be conceived of as a bounded linear or additive progression (as if actors move along a column or tube of meaning) but as a multi-dimensional space. This space may be retrospectively reduced to a linear account for the purposes of use, as, for example, an account of what happened or a history.

Thus it is not only music which is characterized by the “problem” of a lack of double articulation (i.e. no one-to-one correspondence of form and function). The same is true for utterances, objects and acts whenever they are perceived as being invested with aesthetic, ideological or ethical connotations, and this has serious implications for

the way in which culture is conceived. For if music may, to some extent be conceived of as a sonic version of a rorschach ink blot, upon which various "words may be hung," then to argue that "... poetry (one could substitute music) makes nothing happen (as Clifford Geertz, quoting Auden, does, 1973, p. 443) is to put forward, at least implicitly, a view of culture as distinct from or disinterested in what Geertz seems to see as the "vulgar" aspects of interests. These interests inhabit the realm of social structure as defined by access to various resources, symbolic and material.

Rather, we should see (as Bourdieu has argued, 1983, p. 92 and throughout) that culture represents a struggle over the definition of social reality and therefore, the issue of the meaning of objects is also an issue of who defines or appropriates them, where, when, how and for what purpose. A group's or nation's culture, in other words, should not be conceived of as a set of "cultural goods," but rather as set of tools, conditions, alibis, etc., whose meaning is reflexively related to the ways in which it is appropriated. Given this perspective, one can see why, for instance, thinkers from Plato and Aristotle through Tolstoy (and continuing today) saw music as a "dangerous art" (Cooke 1960, p. 272) which required legislation, not for the reasons Cooke argues:

"... whatever else the mysterious art known as music eventually be found to express, it is primarily and basically a language of emotions, through which we directly experience the fundamental urges that move mankind, without the need of falsifying ideas and images—words and pictures" (p. 272).

but because it provides a forum, *par excellence*, for the "work" of appropriation, that is, a place and space for "work."

We should therefore be interested in the social structure which characterizes this appropriation (its "relations of production" between composers as a group; listeners and composers; composers and critics and listeners; and listeners themselves), which we may be able to describe by distinguishing greater and lesser degrees of author-ity on the part of the composer and his/her colleagues on the one hand and response-ability on the part of the listener and his/her colleagues on the other. We should be willing to consider that these social structural "relations of meaning production/construction" may provide "subliminal" or pedagogic messages which relate to taken-for-granted assumptions about meaning, musical and other: where it *is* and how it is (or should be) conveyed. The subject/object dichotomy for example, and the referential theory of meaning which it implies may be seen as a type of ideology which creates a systematic bias in favour of power, symbolic and material, as the oft-quoted passage from Lewis Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass* (where Humpty

Dumpty explains his theory of language, the "use"-based theory, to Alice, an adherent of the referential theory,) aptly illustrates:

"when I use a word, "Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more or less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

If, as Humpty Dumpty seems to suggest, the question is "who is to be master?" then perhaps the way to gain mastery in "work" situations is to have control over the rhetorical means of making one's interpretations of objects, utterances or acts seem "as if" they are "objective" ("good," "beautiful" or "true"). This would also be the means of "persuading" the hearer to act toward these things "as if" they are inextricably linked to and signify specific things in an absolute, non-negotiable sense, as if their meaning is determined by some higher authority than mere interpretative "work." (In this regard see Bourdieu, 1983 and Mehan's modified version of W.I. Thomas' theorem: "All people define situations as real; but when powerful people define situations as real, then they are real in their consequences" (Mehan, forthcoming).) It is here, then, that one begins to see why music aesthetics has been and is a "political" issue, political in all the senses of that word.

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