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One Approach to Musical Hermeneutics: Thoughts on Music Analysis (Personal Musings in the Direction of an Analytical Credo)

1
PROLEGOMENON

> [According to Schleiermacher it is the task of hermeneutics] to reconstruct the work, in the understanding, as originally constituted. For art and written texts handed down to us from the past are wrenched from their original world. . . . Schleiermacher writes, "when works of art come into general circulation," they are no longer what they were naturally and originally. "Part of the intelligibility of each one derives from its original constitution." "Hence the work of art loses some of its significance if it is torn from its original context, unless this happens to be historically preserved."
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> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, 2nd rev. ed., p. 166.

It is the discussion of music itself that often seems the weakest aspect of musicological writing. Not a few musicologists seem to organize their work in such a way as to avoid confronting the specifics--the complexities and inevitable ambiguities--of individual compositions. To judge from the difficulties that so many writers have had along this line, it would appear that the musical "content" of a past composition is normally dormant. Each piece of music, however, is potentially rich in a recoverable content, and this content is generated both by the compositional choices displayed in that specific piece and by the traditional content--musical, aesthetic, social (many of which are aspects of

reception conventions)--already embedded (or pre-established) in the genre employed.

Consequently, it is the task of musical hermeneutics to enter into a dialogue with individual pieces (and with their varying cultural frameworks), in order to reawaken that dormant content. This must not be done with the naive hope that it is either an easy task or the only task worth pursuing. Rather, it should be done with an awareness, informed by current methodological and critical theory, that on certain levels of inquiry no piece can be "reduced" to a single "meaning"; that each piece of music can legitimately (and must inevitably) "mean" many different things simultaneously, depending on the "angle" (formal? aesthetic? sociological? political? ideological? etc.) of our attending to it; that musical "texts" are actually complex, multivalent constellations of often differing, perhaps "unresolvable" tensions; that the earlier concept that brashly assumed the existence of an indissoluble "unity" within a composition (supposedly penned <u>only</u> as an "individual" statement by an "individual" subject or composer) has by now been irrevocably challenged (<u>complemented</u>, I would prefer to say) by the concept of simultaneously multiple "social" voices or positions "speaking" within any single utterance--something akin, perhaps to Bakhtin's concept of <u>heteroglossia</u>.

My main concern here, however, is the <u>initial</u> problem of musical analysis, for an inadequate or stunted procedural method at this level is likely to skew any consideration at broader or perhaps more provocative levels. In this respect, I find it difficult not to agree, at least in a general way, with the proposal made in 1974--in quite differing methodological circumstances--by Carl Dahlhaus ("Issues in Composition," <u>Between Romanticism and Modernism</u>, p. 77):

> That there are social implications in the works themselves [and in their very conceptions and founding principles] . . . cannot seriously be denied, although the prospect of deciphering them is one to daunt any scholar whose ambitions go beyond facile categorizations

> . . . and the construction . . . of merely verbal analogies. . . . [True, we must admit that] the aesthetic and technical terms of reference [that is, those standard professional languages of music theory and traditional musicology devised to deal with "compositional issues"] are inadequate in their exclusiveness but they are equally essential, as a first stage that must on no account be skipped over.

In confronting a piece at this necessary "first stage," two sets of extremes are to be avoided. The first set is most traditionally found among musicologists, journalistic commentators, "interdisciplinary" writers trained more strongly in other subject areas, and preparers of commercial repertory-guides and commentaries (whose task, inevitably, is falsely to suggest an "easy access" into the music at hand). It consists of: taking too superficial an overview of either a piece or a repertory; rushing too eagerly to evaluative conclusions; wishing to "solve" problems in a facile manner instead of allowing the problems themselves to become the core of the piece; falling into clichés or smoothing out a piece's idiosyncrasies by casting them into simplified, and often poorly understood, categories.[1] The second set--the opposite extreme--is more commonly found among professional music theorists. This set includes: becoming seduced by the sheer mechanism of the analytical method chosen; insisting on only one method or one interpretation of a problem; allowing the method to generate data unharnessed by a clear conceptual point; extreme discomfort with theoretical

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[1] There is a central aspect of music that is technical, mathematical, arcane, a separate, not easily accessible sphere. This cannot be wished away. Image: Suppose that Critic X wished passionately (for whatever reason) to comment on the details and significance of selected master chess matches--championships and the like. Suppose also that this commentator had an exceedingly low level-rating (say, 800, indicating a rather limited conception of the strategy and tactics of the game), while the "masters" on which he or she claimed to comment were actually playing at the "2400+" level. To what extent could this commentator garner the authority to pronounce on the significance of these chess matches? To what extent would the corresponding level-rating of the reader of his or her commentary (0? 800? 1600? 2400?) matter?

ambiguity, or embracing a belief that each musical problem is solvable with a single, "scientific" solution.

Generally considered, one should never write (publish) an analysis of a piece for the sake of the analysis. Each musical detail adduced in any written analysis must serve a larger conceptual point. Conversely, no single detail of analysis should be provided unless it contributes to that point. To provide a redundant or unused bit of information is a procedural error. It is easy to multiply observations about a piece of music--or about anything, for that matter. The trick is is to coordinate the observations selected into a coherent proposal for "awakening" the piece's dormant content, or, at least, into a proposal for awakening what we believe that content to be, as buttressed by our selection of evidence.

For this reason, to adapt ideas from both Edward Cone and Hans-Georg Gadamer, every analysis--or hermeneutical explication--of a piece is an interpretation of it: a reading of it, or a highlighting of certain details, inevitably to the exclusion of others. Perhaps needless to say in the 1990s, one's hermeneutic analysis cannot be considered objective "truth," since it emerges from the fusion of the horizons of our own [changeable] present and the piece's past. Yet neither is the analysis wholly subjective, provided that one is not so intoxicated with one's own presentness as to overwhelm the claims of the piece's pastness. There is more to consider about a piece, after all, than what we might want it to mean. Our own current passions and concerns may be largely irrelevant (or at best marginal) to that of the composer and his or her culture. Above all, as we place ourselves into a question-and-answer dialogue with a piece, we should listen carefully to what it itself "wants" to say. This is all the more important when what "it" wants to say seems not to be what <u>we</u> want to say. In its pastness the piece has its own voice, its own humanness, its "otherness" to ourselves, and it can be attended to, despite the inevitable flurry and force-field of our own personal interests. Part of the goal of musical hermeneutics, then, is <u>sympathetic listening to the free or uncompelled voice of the other</u>. This is

no easy task, but being aware of and acknowledging the difficulties involved at least points us in the right direction. Personal acceptance, rejection, or critique--at some different level--can come later, if desired.

The elusive, probably unattainable goal in any music analysis is to uncover each piece's "secret." This cannot be nuanced carefully enough: Through flexible, eclectic means--making use of whichever tools seem best for the addressing of the "problem" at hand, avoiding either analytical dogma or an unflinching adherence to rigid, prefabricated methods, and as a matter of principle staying "open" to other possibilities to the best of our own abilities--we seek (however limited can be our claims to "success") to find the leading-thread that binds the whole; to perceive some of the dialectical interactions between personal or idiosyncratic statement and the conventions of the genre. At least as a heuristic principle, we must believe that each moment of the composition represents a more or less clear, conscious choice, presumably one informed by a recognizable, generally coherent purpose.[2] Such a consideration--again within the limits of individual error, bias, and awareness--can help to awaken each moment of the piece to significance.

[2] If we cannot presume this, then there is no point to analysis, or to the study of music, and, weeping and wailing, we should probably be advised to flee without delay to another, more rewarding field--auto mechanic? veterinarian? trapeze artist?

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SECOND PROLEGOMENON: ASKING QUESTIONS

It should the intention of analysis to try to grasp the ruling idea or dominant "expressive" or "generic" logic that guides an entire composition--for example, a movement or a sequence of movements. Analysis seeks to awaken a piece out of its seclusion, its state of being-taken-for-granted. Its principal method is that of asking the piece questions that bring each of its portions to expressive life or seem to release its communicable content.

The skill involved rests in sensing which questions are appropriate. A piece of music will normally provide "answers" to any question we might wish to ask of it. It will also answer inappropriate questions or questions posed at low levels of thought, but in these cases the answers provided will be themselves off-the-mark or irrelevant, although those posing the questions will normally not realize this.

Hermeneutic skill is that of knowing which questions are most useful to ask of a piece at any given level of general knowledge. Once we attain what seems to be a "higher" level of questioning, questions posed at lower levels seem foolish or naive--and often irrevelant, in the manner of a "wrong" question that cannot be answered cogently because it is poorly posed. Gaining expertise in an area of knowledge is gaining skill in the posing of questions. Our goal, then, cannot be that of obtaining lasting answers, but only of learning to ask better questions. Acquiring this skill is a matter of historical knowledge, a thorough awareness of the "rules" of the "game" of music, and experience in the method of questioning.

3

STEP ONE: RECONSTRUCTING THE "HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS"

Before analyzing an individual composition, one should know as thoroughly as possible the model (or genre) within which the composer is working. This is an immense task. In practice, one investigates it to a sufficient level of practicality. We may define "sufficient level of practicality" as follows: One has pursued the study further and with greater care and complexity than it has been pursued by any reader that one is currently likely to have.

There is no single model for any genre. A generic model is normally something dynamic: it changes historically with the genre and with the time, place, and composer. Put another way: as with a software program, a generic model is usually subject to frequent "updates" or "upgrades." (I use these "loaded" terms with some caution.)[3] Thus for the sonata there is a 1750 model, an 1800 model, a middle-Beethoven model, a late nineteenth-century model, and so on. One thus needs to know which "upgrade" a composer is likely to have used.

Among other things, a musical genre is a hierarchical set of defaults that guides a composer in making choices at each point in his or her composition. There is normally no single default for each compositional moment in history. More likely, the standard default might have one or more "backup" defaults at deeper levels of

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[3] For this analogical model, of course, it needs to be stressed that "upgrades" within genres in music history should not be taken to imply anything on the order of absolute "improvements." The "progressive" model of history, now generally discredited, does not in any case seem to apply to the arts. The term "upgrades" is only metaphorically used here to imply the ever-emerging presence of an increasing number of different stylistic and structural options--a model designed to handle an ever-burgeoning complexity of compositional choice and back-referencing to the developing canon, but not necessarily one delivering more artistic "excellence." In short, in the term "upgrades" I intend there to be no implications whatever with regard to quality.

the hierarchy. Overriding the first default (for example, around 1815 in Germanic lands, modulating to the dominant in the exposition of a major key sonata) might lead one into second or third defaults (going instead, perhaps, to the major mediant or flat mediant).

Before we begin to analyze any piece, we should pause to consider the "default" gestures--or hierarchical sets of defaults--available to the composer in that genre at that given point and place. Some of the features to consider are:

1) expected rhythmic, melodic, modal, or textural features.
2) standard placement (and frequency) of cadences.
3) standard melodic types (or <u>topoi</u>) for each section.
4) areas where resolutions or new tonicizations are expected.
5) standard instrumental practice or strategies.
6) standard expectations about how melodic, "rounded," or "complete each section is supposed to be.
7) the length and expected inner complexity of an entire piece; standard instrumentation; etc.
8) etc.

One should also consider the "world-view" of this model. What conception of the human being is implied by its "horizon of expectations" (to use the term of Hans Robert Jauss)? What is the intended persuasion of its discourse? For instance, in the originally crystallized "sonata" model, the world-view would seem to be one of balance, symmetry, proportion, taste, properly groomed sentiment, elegance, etiquette, "rational" resolutions of clearly stated tensions, and so on. This model doubtless proceeds out of the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment" view of the the balanced human being (no easy thing to characterize <u>in nuce</u>, but at least we have a start here).

We may suppose, axiomatically, that <u>all patterns of discourse have been fashioned by an "economy" of production- and consumption-transactions in a way that consciously or unconsciously projects and supports the interests of certain individuals and/or groups</u>. (I use "<u>patterns</u>" here to suggest that the most telling sociological

content may reside more in the genre than in the individual piece that is in dialogue with it.) We need to ask: What are those interests? Who participates in them and who is excluded from them? Within that culture are they hegemonic or non-hegemonic interests? And which other prevailing or important interests are not being articulated or projected by the model?

How may we obtain evidence to suggest what this "world-view" might be? As Dahlhaus suggested (pp. 2-3 above), this is an enormously difficult problem, and those who, failing to perceive the complexity of the issues involved, rush too eagerly into it are probably those with the least likelihood of addressing it satisfactorily. Since what is at stake is an at least partial sociological decoding of genres--and hence, many would assert, a claim for interpretational "control" over a piece or repertory of pieces--the endeavor invites (from all sides) the biases of ideology, self-interest, and pre-judgment. Normally, any claim regarding sociological decoding--no matter from which direction it springs, left, center, or right--must be assessed solely on the quality, thoroughness, non-reductiveness, and basic fairness of its evidence and argumentation.

In general, a helpful way of predicting the scope and likelihood of reliability of any analytical claim--musical, aesthetic, "scientific," sociological, or whatever--is try to determine how willing the author or speaker seems to be to consider relevant evidence or argumentation that leads in directions <u>other</u> than the one being proffered. Is evidence important at all to this particular argument? If so, what accounts for the particular selection of evidence that seems relevant here? Does the scholar ask you, explicitly or implicitly, to ignore or belittle other approaches to the topic at hand?

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STEP TWO: GENERAL EXAMINATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL PIECE (FOR DIFFERENCES AND IDIOSYNCRASIES)

Once the complexities of the genre problem are grasped, one should initiate a thorough ("traditional" or "work-immanent") musical analysis of the piece at hand. The analysis should include a close look at elements of: 1) architectural design and symmetrical balance; 2) motivic unfolding; 3) Schenkerian linear analysis and, especially, concern for long-range linear coherence, sensitivity to (5-4-)3-2-1 descents in the upper voice, and any unusual patterns of chord-to-chord voice-leading; 4) arrangement and frequency of unequivocal resolutions and cadences. Not all of these things are most relevant at every moment of the piece. One should be flexible, using the analytical tools that provide the information that one needs at any point.

However "work-immanent" or merely "formalist" the immediate task may seem to be, the analysis is to be carried out <u>in full awareness of the "historical" state of the genre</u> at the time the piece was written (Adorno's "state of the material"; Jauss's "horizon of expectations"). Without the constant presence of this awareness, the analysis is likely to go astray or to produce irrelevant data.

The particular "angle" of the first phases of this analysis should be to highlight the <u>uniqueness</u> or <u>individuality</u> of the piece under consideration--its <u>differences</u> from the model posited or uncovered in Step One. NB: For any composer to articulate any such "differences" (that is, in the production of an "individualized" work), he or she must override some of the default gestures of the genre. "Differences" thus imply conscious compositional decisions. (One might also argue that a persistent overriding of "first defaults" in favor of unusual arrangements of deeper-level defaults could also impress the recipient as the creation of "differences." This would seem to suggest that a generic model also contains within

it the implication of the maximal number of first-level default overrides that are permissible within the genre. To exceed that number by appealing persistently to second- and third-level defaults, and particularly to override highly important first-level defaults, could result in a highly unusual work, even though each individual override is explainable through the genre-program.)

Note at least the most significant of these differences. What is idiosyncratic about the piece?

1) Where are default gestures (especially first-level defaults) overridden?
2) Are unusual keys visited anywhere?
3) Are the proportions normal or unusual?
4) Are the themes complete or incomplete?
5) Are the tonics asserted solidly or only suggested?
6) Are there modal changes (major-minor) in unexpected places?
7) For sonatas: repeat-scheme normal? Recapitulation treated normally? Development "proper" in length, complexity? "New Themes" in unusual places? Interrelationships between themes?
8) For concertos" is there an orchestral ritornello? Is the cadenza in an odd place--suppressed or altered in some way?
9) Who did such things before this composer and this piece? Are there models for these differences? (That is, are there standard <u>patterns</u> of default-overrides available to the composer?)

<u>Four Central Considerations</u>:

<u>Title</u>: What is the function of the title of this composition? Only to identify a genre? (If so, this would serve to situate the composition in an aesthetic and social tradition within which it originally asked be understood.) Or something more? If the music is the "text" of a piece, a title is the "paratext." Paratexts typically determine the conditions under which the given text is to

be perceived.[4] Under no circumstances may titles, authentic subtitles, or accompanying verbal epigrams or given "programs" be ignored: they belong to "the work itself," although they have paratextual, not textual, status.

In the case of a symphonic poem, concert or operatic overture, titled piano work, and so on, as I have argued elsewhere, the title is indispensable. For instance, the essence of a symphonic poem (indeed, its definition) lies in its invitation to us to draw connections between the musical "text" of the work and the implications of its paratextual apparatus. We are asked to connect what we hear with what we expect upon hearing the title or other accompanying verbal features. The essence of a symphonic poem lies in the listener's (or analyst's) act of drawing connections between the implications of the paratext and the actuality of the text. Reception theory becomes particularly important here.

The situation is even more pronounced in texted works: songs, operas, and so on. And here we are even more obliged to situate the "independent" verbal text within its own literary/historical/social horizons. Thus the situation becomes more complex. Why these words? Why this poet/poem and not another? And so on. Generic or abstract titles ("Symphony"; "Concerto"; String Quartet") present a different set of problems, although not unrelated ones.

Composer's letters or reports of offhand remarks made by a composer about a piece may also tempt us to interpret them as tacit or supplementary paratexts. (They are "tacit" because they are not part of the piece as presented formally to its public; and "paratexts" because they are a producer-supplied [or "intended"] verbal accompaniment to a musical text.) Such utterances normally do not have the authority of genuine paratexts: the composer did not specify that all recipients of the text have this knowledge, and often our knowledge of them is an "accident" of historical research. Further, one must assess the validity of the utterance: how seriously was it delivered?; could the composer have changed his or

[4] See, e.g., Genette in Critical Inquiry 14 [1988] 692-720; Escal in Poétique 69 [1987], 101-08)

her mind?; for what communicative purpose was the utterance made?; and so on. The paratextual remarks made by early recipients (reviewers, analysts, etc.) may also be provocative, particularly for reception analysis, or for our consideration of the work as a fully communicative event--a production-reception transaction that actually occurred. The introduction of another personality into the mix complicates the hermeneutic analysis, however: now a third person, and perhaps a fourth or a fifth as well--and thus a third, fourth, or fifth "horizon" separate from our own--now enter into our own dialogue with the piece.

Cadence Pattern: One of the richest sources of information about a piece, particularly vis-à-vis a generic model, is its placement of strong cadences. The analyst should isolate each strong cadence (V-I, in which the tonic chord is stated in root-position, usually on a strong beat, and with 1 in the upper voice) and assess how strongly articulated it actually is. One should also note where cadences are approached but avoided, elided, or weakened in one way or another. For each piece examined, one should be able to list precisely the number and location of all strong cadences.

The cadence is a "full-stop," of course, but it is also the death of a given musical idea. Thought stops here; a break or juncture occurs that creates problems for continuation. What is the composer's strategy for generating new ideas after the "death-trap" of the cadence? In mid- and later-nineteenth-century pieces: what are the strategies for avoiding cadences? Is the piece to some extent "about" the non-availability of simple cadences?

In all pieces, but especially in those without many clear tonic resolutions, note with special care the treatment of the 6-4 sonority over the dominant ("cadential 6-4"), always very powerful and expectant, and the dominant chord proper.

Thematic characterization: one should consider each musical unit ("theme" or section) as an "idea" striving to speak or to deliver a coherent expressive gesture (carving out or "sculpting" an expressive shape in musical space and time). What "meaning" lies

concealed in its shape, structure, or timbre? To what extent is the "meaning" non-musical or suggestible also by words? This is essentially a question of semiotics, and at times it is easily answered by reference to its use of a topos or standardized musical type. Some standard topoi are: pastoral, march, minuet, storm, battle, funeral march, waltz, peasant-dance, hymn, chorale, and so on. One should consider also the standard "characters" of themes in certain portions of a sonata: affirmative, fanfare-like, bustling, or heroic first themes (with lyrical first subjects as a second- or third-level default in the eighteenth century); contrasting, periodically regular cantabile second themes (with restatement of the first theme as a second-level default, although in some styles, as in Haydn it often seems elevated to the first level); standard "coda-behavior," etc. In issues of topoi (or standard character) the issue is not the mere existence of the thematic type. Rather, one should ask: to what extent does the actual musical idea affirm or problematize the selected topos? In short, what is the nature of the piece's dialogue with standard types?

In many instances, topoi are unclear or not so easy to determine. In these cases we should try to grasp the shape of the idea as a whole. And we should pay special attention to its contours, its manner of unfolding: is it all ascent and upbeat to a single cadence?; is it reiterative (circular, meditative, ritualized, or dazed?); is it periodic and symmetrical? striving towards a denied or postponed cadence? developed from a single idea or fused together from many? and so on. Is there a "psychological" meaning associated with that shape? To what general patterns of human experience does it conform?

Caution: Topos-analysis is fundamental, but it carries dangers with it, namely those of exaggeration and a too-ready willingness to label things unequivocally without sufficient grounds. In general, we should be willing to label only those elements as topoi that seem unmistakably to be such. And we should be willing to revise our opinions if sufficient and convincing evidence is forthcoming. In such an ambiguous, foggy area as musical semiotics it is

usually prudent to leave room for uncertainties, multiple possibilities, future revisions and nuances of judgment, and so on.

The various styles of music analysis and hermeneutics themselves can be considered systems of generic methods--with implications, connotations, past traditions, and so on. Whatever its potential validity might be, we might recall that "explaining" music in non-musical terms (especially imagistic verbal terms) has had a bad history among professionals. It has characteristically been the haven of enthusiasts lacking sufficient musical training or training in analysis. Although musicologists must not shy away from this task of verbal interpretation (the confrontation with metaphoric and symbolic content, and so on, all of which, particularly in the 1990s, may be handled on a highly sophisticated level), they might be advised to approach such things with caution, and always to do so while anticipating the potential, reasoned objections of the skeptical, "professional" reader or listener.

In professional circles, topos analysis, when overstressed or adduced with too much fervor, can give the impression of either the composer or the analyst (or both?) striving after either after simplistic effects or "easy-access" profundity. Unless there are strong counterbalancing factors, particularly the demonstration elsewhere in the presentation of the ability to perceive the actual "musical/technical" processes on a sufficiently high level (by which I mean "in dialogue" with the current concerns and levels of Music Theory as a professional discipline), there will nearly always be the smell of dilettantish zeal in the air. As a rule of thumb, one's "non-musical" vocabulary should not be markedly more advanced than one's musical vocabulary.

Allusion or Intertextuality (fleeting references back to "fixed points" in the musical canon): Particularly in post-Beethoven works (that is, into the period when the musical canon is increasingly solidified and composition becomes more historically self-conscious) one must confront the issue of allusion. For any given musical idea: what is the model? What specific passages or techniques of prior "canonic" compositions seem to be evoked? How "original" is the composer's idea, and to what extent does the composer rely merely on the solutions of his or her predecessor? What is the relationship of the composer to "the tradition"? Is the piece "about" its relation to the past and the ideas of other

composers? What is new about this allusive treatment of materials? Is allusion part of the aesthetic content of the piece? How certain can we be that <u>this</u> passage alludes to <u>that</u> one in another piece? Do both passages merely share a common tradition?

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STEP THREE: GENERAL EXAMINATION OF THE SPECIFIC PIECE (FOR ADHERENCES TO THE GENERIC NORM)

One should now note those portions of the piece that do not differ from the generic model posited in Step One. These, too, may be understood as compositional choices. (The composer has _chosen_ to have a "conventional" recapitulation, or a "conventional" second theme, and so on. He or she has made the "conventional" choice of a slow movement for the second movement, etc.)

Adhering to higher-level default or normative choices within a genre (first- or second-level choices) tends to affirm the world-view of the genre. The normative aspects of a piece can thus be expressive in a generic way: they express what the genre "says" through the piece. Put another way, the genre itself (standing for certain conventions within a certain social group, as suggested in Section 3 above) has its own utterance to make, apart from the individual statement on the part of the composer. There is something in every symphony that expresses the generic concept of "symphony-ness"; in every opera of "opera-ness"; in _Lieder_ of "_Lied_-ness." Indeed, in earlier or classic forms of the genre the principal statement the piece has to make might be the celebration of its genre: the rich exploring of the inner contours and content permissible--or better, possible--within a clearly circumscribed genre.

The expressive value of genre has been perhaps put most succinctly by Northrop Frye in _The Critical Path_ [1971]:

> In an intensely formulaic composer, such as Vivaldi, the same scale and chord passages, the same harmonic and melodic progressions, the same cadences, appear over and over again, yet the effect is not monotony but the release of a self-propelled energy. One of the keenest sources of pleasure in listening to poetry or music is

> the fulfilling of a general expectation, of a sort that is possible only in highly conventionalized art. If a particular expectation is being fulfilled, when we know exactly what is going to be said, as in listening to something very familiar, our attention is relaxed, and what we are participating in tends to become either a ritual or a bore, or possibly both. If we have no idea what is coming next, our attention is tense and subject to fatigue. The intermediate area, where we do not know what Pope will say but do know that he will say it in a beautifully turned couplet, where we do not know in a detective story who murdered X but do know that somebody did, is the area of closest unity between poet and audience. (p. 40)

Moreover, it is possible to write against the backdrop of a partially or almost fully "tacit" genre. This characteristically occurs in the very latest phases of the development of the genre--during the phase of "decay," if we are to appeal to organic metaphors--and it may be found when the expected genre is not actually realized in sound, yet remains as the background presence and point of reference for what is actually occurring in the piece. A piece, that is, may override a substantial number of significant defaults of the genre, yet still ask (by reason of its paratext; presentational apparatus; etc.) to be be considered as "in dialogue" with a genre that is, for the most part, only implied. For these instances I use the term "deformation" or "modification"--e.g., "sonata-deformation," etc., as with the first and last movements of Mahler's First Symphony, Richard Strauss's Don Juan, the first movement of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony, and so on. In such instances the "lost" quality of the "missing" genre can often contribute powerfully to the "meaning" of the piece. The absence of genre, along with the absence of world-view that that genre represented--may be thematized within a composition.

A corollary here is that one must not confuse the structure of the acoustic surface of the music (what "actually happens" in sound)

with the apparently implied psychological structure--often embedded tacitly within a generic framework--that it implies or toward which (or away from which) the acoustic surface might be "aspiring." To pay attention only to the acoustic surface (to disregard the framing assumptions within which it seems to be set) is to risk missing the point of the piece altogether. In order to be understood, the composer must frame his or her individualized discourse within the more generalized, background generic utterance. Thus _any piece presents us with at least two discourses_--the generic (non-personal or social) and the personal. The individual composer's discourse must be grounded in a dialogue with the "given," or with the genre--the "rules of the game."

This dialogue need not be hostile. And departures from default choices do not _ipso facto_ signify an alienation from the genre and its world-view. In fact the dialogue is often a friendly partnership, in which the composer uses or manipulates the default expression of the genre for his or her own dramatic, narrative, or expressive ends--or for the "social" ends of the audience that he or she expects to be addressing. The generic and the purely personal may be disposed in any proportion, although, as one would expect, the personal and idiosyncratic rise markedly as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries progress. In nearly all instances, however, the normative, "generic" expression can be given a large place within the composition--even in seemingly "radical" pieces, which might in fact be based on "hidden" or not yet fully explicated genres. (Such is the case, for instance, with the "academic serialism" of the 1950s and 1960s, or the post-WWII "experimental" avant-garde in general, which, despite its ardent protestations to the contrary, seems to have tipped over almost completely to the generic.)

The pose of the anti-generic, therefore, can itself become a powerful, recognizable genre. For instance, when one is tempted to praise a work because of its non-normative or anti-generic elements (its resistance to a given world-view), one may simply be employing the standards of a more covert "anti-generic genre" that expresses the world-view of an alternative or possibly utopian community. As an example, one might consider the practice of persistent, Romantic

"individual resistance" as a set of default choices whose nature it is to have a wide range of actual realizations. Persistent "innovation" and non-conformity can become generic when one prizes it as such, rather than considering the actual content and expressive detail of the thing expressed.

For all of these reasons, I take the following as a fundamental axiom:

> **Neither the generic (the social or non-personal) nor the personal aspects of any given work are to be praised or censured merely for being "generic" or "personal" choices. The only thing that matters is to explain the way that the composer has chosen to blend this particular set of defaults with that particular set of overrides--and for which expressive ends those choices might have been made. We seek to "listen to" and understand a piece's discourse as it is, not to force it into conformity with a pre-set vision of aesthetic "progress," much less to subject it to an obsolete, moralistic, standard of aesthetic propriety.**

This axiom bears further consideration, since it is at odds with conventional genre theory. Such theory normally situates the aesthetically valid or expressive portions of the piece in the deviations from the genre. This would appear to be the residue of the Romantic aesthetic postulate of compulsive originality, within which idées reçues, and the "given" positions or defaults within a genre were increasingly viewed as aesthetic lapses. Thus, despite the elegance of its articulation, and its not inconsiderable allure, we might today question Jauss's concept of "aesthetic distance" as a criterion of value, as articulated in his celebrated "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" ([1970] Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, p. 25):

> The way in which a literary work, at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously [?] provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value. The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experience and the "horizonal change" demanded by the reception of the new work, determines the artistic character of a literary work, according to the aesthetic of reception: to the degree that this distance decreases, and no turn toward the horizon of yet-unknown experience is demanded of the receiving consciousness, the closer the work comes to the sphere of "culinary" or entertainment art [Unterhaltungskunst]. This latter work can be characterized by an aesthetics of reception as not demanding any horizonal change, but rather as precisely fulfilling the expectations prescribed by a ruling standard of taste, in that it satisfies the desire from the reproduction of the familiarly beautiful; confirms familiar sentiments; sanctions wishful notions; makes unusual experiences enjoyable as "sensations"; or even raises moral problems, but only to "solve" them in an edifying manner as predecided questions.

Those investigating genre theory will find that in the process of evaluation, and even discussion, the balance has been tipped markedly in the direction of the deviation from the norm as the bearer of "progress" or aesthetic value. Anything that affirms a genre or default generic choices has tended to fall under a cloud of suspicion. The pressure of the tradition of assumed "progress" is great, and it is easy to fall into the anti-genre trap, which is now likely to impress us as old-fashioned and narrow (however grand) in its manner of reasoning.

Digression: The historical reason for the trap--the result of a complex of factors--seems basically clear, although the full explanation involves a labyrinth of complicated argumentation. In short, the essential "Romantic" position was to oppose oneself as an individual to the existing social order, which from at least the later eighteenth century onward was subject to the process of increasing complexity, fragmentation, and functional differentiation. (I follow here the analysis of Niklas Luhmann [The Differentiation of Society], which argues that a European "stratified" society has given way to a "fully differentiated" one--a process that has generated both considerable advances and considerable discomfort. This may be considered, from some perspectives, the emergence of the "modern" or, if one prefers, "bourgeois" world--fragmented and differentiated, a world of competing, incomplete systems--out of the traditional European world with its emphasis on Church and State. The emergence of European modernism, which occurred at different rates in different parts of Europe, presented that continent with an entirely new set of problems, and these problems are among those articulated and worked out in its art.)

The "Romantic" aesthete or social utopian considered this modern order of partial, interlocking systems to be emphatically negative. It was charged with being grounded primarily not in spirituality, aesthetics, intellectual substance, or various conceptions of "social justice," but in the characteristically "modern" ("cold," "impersonal," "non-human") phenomena of economic efficiency, Realpolitik, and what Weber would call Zweckrationalität, instrumental rationality, or rationality aimed only at specific, concrete ends.

What was particularly intolerable in this new European world, according to this perspective of "Romantic anti-capitalism" [Sayre and Löwy in New German Critique 32 (1984); cf. D.D. Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts), was the sense of a "lost" wholeness, an alienation or exile from palpably-felt, at-hand, deeper human values, the disappearance of a feeling of collective protection and purpose, what Rousseau called the tearing-apart of "the essential bond of human nature." (Summarizing Luhmann, Jochen Schulte-Sasse referred to this aspect of a European, pre-modern society dominated by stratification as the favoring of "patriarchal, nurturant ties among its members" [Cultural Critique 12, p.

87]. One might add "patriarchal and/or parental," since the modern person's vision of this nurturant state was often prized as the idealized "innocence" of childhood: this may help to explain the rise of the theme of the "child" in the Romantic movement.). In some respects--and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, since this movement usually viewed itself as unquestionably progressive--this may be understood as the not-unfamiliar cry of the traditionalist (metaphorically, the child) who has awakened out of tradition and into the modern--the cry of one who cannot be reconciled to the new, complex, and disturbingly decentered order. In any event, against this existential perception of the loss of contact with the former warmth of personalized meaning, a more "rational" argumentation on behalf of the ultimate benevolence of an "invisible hand" of statistical or non-personalized forces, it would seem, held little sway.

This wholeness that one believed to have been lost (for we are writing of belief-systems or mythologies here--it is the belief that mattered, not the reality) was now to be projected onto various "redemptive spaces" [Schulte-Sasse]. From a broader perspective , these spaces may be considered perhaps merely compensatory, perhaps realms of truly deeper meaning, depending on our point of view. In any event, one of the redemptive spaces was "art." But there were difficulties: "As a functionally differentiated space, art under modern conditions is at once structurally equivalent to other differentiated activites and burdened with the primary function of sublating differentiation in a reconciliatory manner" [Schulte-Sasse, 87]. Ultimately, for those of a more practical bent, this lost humanness was posited as eventually recoverable (through a combination of social theory, societal reform, or revolutionary praxis) in a utopian future, to which some kinds of art might help to point. According to the most puritanical adherents of this mythology of "progress" towards a telos [cf. "ideology-critical puritans" in Jauss, Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, p. xxxix], all cultural products could in principle be assessed sociologically and ideologically, as contributing or not contributing to a particular vision of "social progress." That is, each artifact (or portion thereof) could be embraced as "progressive" or indicted as "regressive."

> Since, as mentioned in in Section 3 above, aesthetic genres crystallize to express or affirm a given vision of how order may or should be attained in the here and now within a certain social group, the acceptance of genres or generic expression in one's own work can suggest (if one rigorously pushes one's logic to final conclusions) a reconciliation or negotiated peace with the given social order. This was precisely the opposite goal from the one toward which the most uncompromising elements of the Romantic movement had been heading. (From their viewpoint, then, genres could be viewed as something akin to infantile or "innocent" modes of expression from the cradle-land of "real" humanity. When they persist into revolutionary ages, however, they tend to become frictional drags on the "march toward the telos") Thus, at least under the category of Romantic (or anti-functionally-differentiated) thinking, an artist may ideally declare himself or herself valid by exposing the tensions and contradictions of the "default" genres--which stand for society--and, ultimately, by refusing to be reconciled to them.
>
> Simply put: A prosecutorial interrogation of the genres can become a compensatory metaphor for the longed-for interrogation of a functionally differentiated society that fully accepts, or even endorses, its own reality.

Today, however, I would argue that such monolithic thinking seems antiquated. (Cf. Lyotard [The Postmodern Condition] and the delegitimation of "metanarratives"; Koselleck [Futures Past] and the collapse of Geschichte [singular] in favor of pluralistic, separate tracks of Geschichten, in which "absolute" values are by no means self-evident.) It now seems more likely that there are other positions and other, more flexible categories besides those of the ardent Romantics. Moreover, it now also seems obvious that, in actual practice, virtually all nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists were (and are) concerned with finding expressible relations between the "universal" (generic) and the "individual." In nearly all cases, within the artwork itself the cleft between the two sides of the dialectic is not drawn in such a sharply antagonistic fashion. The perceived antagonisms have been more

characteristically the result of overtly or covertly partisan exegetical commentary.

Because of this history, today both of the two "dialectical" sides--generic and individual--need to be considered, apart from polemical judgment. Within this framework generic defaults and their use become enticing--and rather fresh--problems for the analyst.

6

STEP FOUR: RECONSIDERING MUSICAL REPETITIONS

Because block-repetitions (or, in the later nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, the _avoiding_ of such exact repetitions) are so central to the conception of music, it is best to spend considerable time on this aspect of the piece. It, too, provides one of the central routes to understanding how the composer's mind is working and why choices have been made as they have. An argument may be made, for example, that the most telling elements of a sonata movement's "meaning" may be located in the [much-neglected] manner of its recapitulation. Traditionally, however, this has been the point at which the musical analysis of a piece breaks off, as though what follows were self-evident. In "classical" pieces this is the granting of the symmetry that drives to the heart of the desired proportion and balance, the necessary resolution of the tensions. In late-Romantic pieces, however, the recapitulation becomes a center of crisis, a major compositional problem, because of the "Romantic" delegitimation of unaltered repetition and symmetry.

Therefore: one should compare with special care the appearances of any repeated sections in any musical structure. For example:

1) Is the exposition (or first scherzo-section, etc.) given a literal repeat or written out with modifications?
2) _How exactly--in precisely which passages--does the recapitulation differ from the exposition_?
3) Are all _rondo-theme_ appearances identical?
4) In a rounded binary or _aaba'_ structure, how does that final _a'_ differ from its model?
5) What is altered in _sequential repetitions_ of a phrase?
6) And so on.

Some questions to ask of the repetitions include:

1) Are there interpolations or omissions?
2) Is there a breaking-off of the repetition? (Why here? What is the point of this compositional choice?)
3) Are "symmetry and balance" given the privileged positions or are they overriden by "growth and change"? By how much? Why?
4) How do the changes--or the lack of them--affect the aesthetic character of the piece as a whole?
5) Etc.

7

STEP FIVE:
TOWARD AN INTELLECTUALLY RESPONSIBLE NARRATIVE HERMENEUTICS

The "telling" of "narratives" ("narrative trajectories") is a central feature of "common-practice" instrumental music.[5] (By "narrative" we should understand the moment-to-moment, coherent sequence of events, the unfolding of a perceptible "logic" (this could be a "musical logic") with such traditional narrative devices as an approach to narrative time, characters (musical protagonists and antagonists), flashbacks and flashforwards, blockings, complications, developments, interruptions, "false" or visionary episodes as moments of escape, supposed and "real" resolutions, and so on. Indeed, the vocabulary of musical analysis--despite its occasional claims to explicating "absolute music" in "musical terms" and its disdain for attaching mere "stories" to music--has strong narrative elements inextricably embedded within it. The "natural" desire for the Schenkerian Urlinie 5 (or 3) to find rest in 1, and the way that that descent is prolonged, interrupted, delayed, and so on, is high drama. Similarly, the fulfilling of a complete "sonata-form," even in the most abstract sense, is just as "narrative" (that is, narratively coherent) as the most explicitly representational type of program music.

One must not confuse narrative with representation. True, one of the main points of difference among pieces of instrumental music

[5] Pace Carolyn Abbate, who in in a brilliantly written book has recently argued otherwise. By contrast, I would prefer not to raise the question of musical "narrativity" so much in the abstract. Rather, I would prefer to appeal to concrete production and reception conventions that are historically and socially grounded. In a very real sense, I think, a piece "is" ("may be acknowledged to function as") narrative if it is composed and heard within a social context that encourages the work to be heard "as" narrative. Narrativity is thus not essential to "the piece itself," but is rather an aspect of historical production and reception conventions. I would maintain that precisely such conventions were in place for most of the period in which the "standard repertory" was written. The (implicit or explicit) claim that such a context is fundamentally mistaken from some larger point of view (sub specie aeternitatis?) seems (to me) to be missing the point.

from the eighteenth through the twentieth century is their specificity of or, on the other hand, their relative lack of interest in "extramusical" representations. This is itself of considerable interest, but it has no bearing on the more general matter of narrative coherence in instrumental music. It therefore seems wrong to conclude that the only way to deal with music as "narrative" would be to translate or decode the various sound-objects into metaphoric representations of specific things "in real life." (Indeed, this procedure would sometimes appear to subject the "aesthetic" aspect of the piece to an interpretation that wishes to reduce it to an example of instrumental rationality. In such cases this may suggest the analyst's discomfort with anything except an instrumentally rational conception of "art.") Some pieces are overtly representational, others far less so. Nevertheless, this has no bearing on the issue of narrative. One may easily imagine a piece of relatively non-representational "absolute music" that is more "narrative" (more persistently ongoing in the grip of its narrative coherence) than, say, a symphonic poem concerned primarily with juxtaposing large, static, representational blocks of music.

Narratives can be handled, if need be, in "essentially musical" terms, without feeling the need to translate them into concrete references to any specific extramusical tale. But it sometimes happens that we are also given verbal or _topos_ clues that suggest that something external to a purely musical process is being suggested--that the music is allusive, or partially representational. We should be prepared to consider the externally representational aspects of the narrative _only so far as the paratextual evidence clearly suggests._ Without a clear reason we need not proceed very far beyond the abstract level (that is, beyond the level in which we would be speaking largely in music-analytical terms). This level is always grounded in the musical analysis of the piece.

Content analysis works with, not against, musical analysis: it takes its first steps from what is found in the piece and its genre. Corollary: narrative analysis is not refuge for those who need

further work in musical analysis. On the contrary, it demands the greatest sophistication in analytical expertise.

The technique itself is this: Having completed the preceding steps, one should now try to uncover a "chronological" or "temporal" pattern in the composer's presentation of differences or idiosyncrasies (Step Two). That is, as the piece unfolds, does the succession of differences chart out a coherent expressive (or "narrative") track? Where is the underlying coherence in the composer's selection of Differences A, B, C, D, E, and so on? Why did the composer present us with this sequence of differences? How do they relate to one another? Do the differences early in the piece have consequences later?

One should then try then to determine how the use of generic defaults (Step Three) plays into the coherence or narrative that one is finding. If the defaults have been subverting resolution, for example, what is the meaning of the final "generic" resolution toward the end of the composition?

With regard to the pattern that one might chart: generally considered, it should be one reasonably plausible within the composer's own time. Sometimes historical or biographical knowledge is crucial here, along with one's discoveries of plausibly "intentional" inner quotations, allusions, or topoi. It is probably safest to avoid ad hoc narratives that are not grounded in historical plausibility. One should be cautious not ovverreach. (But along these lines, see the problem of "text-adequate concretizations" and the perils and traps of reception history as discussed in the most useful article by Henry J. Schmidt, New German Review 17 [1979], 157-69.)

Above all, the chief concern should be to avoid narratives that are unnecessarily specific (that is, excessively "programmatic"/imagistic narratives that lack clear paratextual or historical grounding). These usually sound naive and amateurish. Unless there are clear suggestions to the contrary (gleaned from, e.g., the paratext, from the composer's letters or other utterances, from allusions to other, clearly defined passages, or, perhaps, a manifestly clear, consistent pattern of reception history), one is

better advised to suggest broad, underlying patterns, not specific concretizations of it--the genus of narration, not the species--for we may be dealing more with "abstract" structural patterns within which many competing, if similar, "stories" may be told.

> For example, in the second movement of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, the "general-level" narrative features could scarcely be clearer: the pattern is obviously one of the repeated "imploring" towards a fixed, immovable will, which then yields toward that imploring. There are, of course, numerous invidual musical details and nuances, and these, too, could be treated on a "general level" that is profoundly "narrative.:" But need one go beyond this, as Owen Jander did in 19th-Century Music, to "fix" the specificity of the Orpheus tale on this movement? Despite his adducing of an interesting array of circumstantial "Orpheus" evidence, no demonstrable links are made to clinch the argument. The question then becomes: do we need Orpheus here? If so, why? Would it not be better to stay at the more general level, or to regard Orpheus as only one possible metaphor for this kind of experience?
>
> The problems with specifying that "this phrase stands for that image or verbal idea" apart from strong evidence (and one must remember that such evidence is indeed available for some pieces) are: 1) apart from certain wild exaggerations almost anything in the "abstractions" of music can be heard as a symbol or representation of several "specific" things simultaneously; and 2) a specific narrative usually tends to limit the "meaning" of the piece into a mere representation of a single story. This is a story that might be just as well told in words. If so, why then do we need the music?

Again (one last time, for this is the Achilles-heel of narrative hermeneutics): Unless one has been provided manifest clues that strongly encourage the contrary (such as titles, indisputable topoi, letters from the composer discussing the piece, a written "program," etc.), one should frame one's narrative in as general--indeed, in as "musical"--terms as possible, that is, in terms of the "historical state of the material." Remember Ockham's Razor: Entities should not be multiplied beyond need.