

[1995 DRAFT OF A NEVER-PUBLISHED ESSAY: PORTIONS OF IT WERE
REWORKED AND MERGED INTO APPENDIX 1 OF *ELEMENTS OF SONATA THEORY*]¹

Musicology and Genre: Reflections on Two Texts and a Counter-Text

1.

All cultural forms of representation—literary, visual, aural—in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded. . . . They cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses. . . . The postmodern [works] to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique. . . . Postmodernism works to ‘de-doxify’ our cultural representations and their undeniable political import. (Linda Hutcheon)²

The idea of the autonomy of the work of art—which at first seemed a proud boast and a value to be defended—now begins to look a little shameful, like a symptom into whose pathology one would want to inquire more closely. (Fredric Jameson)³

2.

¹ 2016 note: An early version of this essay-draft—not to be cited without permission—was presented as a talk at the University of California, Berkeley, in April 1994, under the title, “Theses on the Sociology of Genres: Bridging Hermeneutics to a Sense of the Postmodern.” It received a stormy reception at Berkeley and an even stormier one—indeed, a hostile one—at Stanford University a day or two later. The 1994 paper and its 1995 revision document an early stage of the conceptual thinking that was beginning to underpin the origins of the axioms of *Elements of Sonata Theory*. Perhaps the paper was scrapped, never reworked for publication, because it seemed too mid-1990s in flavor, adopting an aggressive and *engagé* tone now having a sorry tarnish of the antique. But those were the 1990s—marked everywhere by the challenges of a self-preening “new musicology.” On the other hand, it was in the mid-1990s that I was turning to full-time work (with Warren Darcy) on the *Elements*. This essay-draft therefore languished on the shelf for over two decades. Looking again at this 1995 revision, I see that some of the notes are incomplete and others are only reminders to myself for completion at a later date.

² Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge, 1989), p. 3.

³ Fredric Jameson, “Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism” [1975], rpt. in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986. Volume 2: The Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 116.

Musical works of art whose aesthetic quality no one calls into question are treated as if they belonged to the products of the culture industry, for the generalising sociological analysis makes them seem to be interchangeable examples of a type. If one Bach fugue is a tonal reflection of the principle of manufacture, then so is another. The individuality of the entities, which constitutes their very essence, is not within the reach of social decoding, at least at present. (Carl Dahlhaus)⁴

Until recent times it has been a feature of twentieth-century musicology and music-theoretical analysis to be concerned with the individual characteristics of individual works and individual composers. In the past decade, however [1985-95], this modernist practice of coaxing out the histories and particularities of canonic works that we have claimed as at least relatively autonomous has been cast into suspicion. The reasons for this are numerous. For some, the new skepticism has been a reaction to underconsidered or overstated claims from midcentury traditionalists. For others, it has been the inevitable result of our social growth into a thriving, late-century cultural pluralism. For still others, it is a natural extension of the multiple revolutions within the humanities in general—including those in the areas of poststructuralism, postmodernism, cultural materialism, postcolonial criticism, the various new historicisms, feminist and gender criticism, and so on.

Within these areas the most characteristic voices have often accepted a now-familiar roster of grounding principles. These include, for example: both Barthes's and Derrida's postulate of textuality (though often redirected into the concept of a cultural text, not only a literary one); Foucault's insistence (stemming from Marx) on the social construction of the subject/individual and the consequent imperative to de-naturalize traditional behavior patterns; the related contention that all utterances and modes of analysis are implicated in webs of political and social power—and also implicated in suspect systems of cultural discipline and social containment; the conviction that scholarship and analysis ought to be a branch of cultural advocacy and social exposure, particularly

⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, "The Musical Work of Art as a Subject of Sociology" [1974], Schoenberg and the New Music, trans. Derrick Puffet and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 236.

in matters concerning race, class, and gender; and the consequent embrace of only that scholarship that serves (or can be used to serve) as the academic arm of socially transformative mass movements.

There is no need to rehearse these arguments here: as entrenched, new orthodoxies (perhaps by now past their prime) they have long lost their capacity to surprise. For a musicologist or theorist to embrace them in toto—as an overturning or exposé of once-standard practice—typically ushers in a hostility to traditional research agendas, disciplinary-specific expertises, and formalist analyses. In a compensatory gesture for what are sometimes perceived as the more limited concerns of past decades, we have been encouraged to embrace a more emphatic interdisciplinarity, even antidisciplinarity; to demystify a work's ideological base; to exercise a cold-eyed unmasking of its hidden agendas, its social voices, its power-contexts, its real-life impact as cultural practice.

The manners in which such things may be carried out are legion, as are the political interests prodding them onward. But in all of them we are asked to respond to voices similar to that of Fredric Jameson, who urged us in 1981 to seek to uncover the “political unconscious” of literary (or, for us, musical) utterances. No analysis is complete, so the argument goes, until this political unconscious is called forth into daylight and exposed through cultural critique. Mere concern with formalism or a close reading of individual utterances alone is to be considered at best inadequate, a preliminary step toward the real goal of understanding—and ultimately transforming—a larger social totality: “In the spirit of a more authentic dialectical tradition, Marxism is here conceived as that ‘untranscendable horizon’ that subsumes such apparently antagonistic or incommensurable critical operations, assigning them an undoubted sectoral validity within itself, and thus at once cancelling and preserving them.”⁵ Such considerations help to ground the sharp critiques of aesthetic autonomy cited in the first two quotations (the two “texts” in the title) given under No. 1

⁵ Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell, 1981), p. 10.

at the opening of this essay—the first from one of the explicators of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon, the second from Jameson himself.

These are bracing challenges, and they have been useful as correctives to a disciplinary practice that had often chased away such inquiries too hastily. Still, to open these doors has admitted complications, just as it has invited exaggerations and abuses. That there is a political-unconscious aspect to music, including art music, is obvious—so obvious that it risks tipping into the banal. The real issue in play is whether we should invariably identify it with any given piece's specifically privileged horizon of meaning. Although the question might initially seem abstract, it is the way in which we answer it that will determine the agendas of our own, day-to-day practical work in the field of musicology.

This brings us to the counter-text, the quotation from Carl Dahlhaus, cited under No. 2 at the opening of this essay. In that remark Dahlhaus was responding neither to Hutcheon nor to Jameson—nor, in fact, to any of the poststructuralists and postmodernists who have framed so much of the debate for the past two decades. His statement was levelled at midcentury (cold-war) Germanic Marxists and post-Marxists, along with other advocates in the post-1968 era of a sociological approach to art music and its history.⁶ Nevertheless, even in today's context Dahlhaus's observation remains the central sticking-point for any insistence that it is the central task of scholarship to unmask individual musical works in order to use them as illustrations of larger, quasi-superstructural cultural forces or undesirable hegemonies. So far as I can see, there is no way to circumvent Dahlhaus's observation except to ignore it.

Notwithstanding its original context, Dahlhaus's point should still unsettle us: to what extent should we try to awaken a work's cultural-power content, with the implication that to settle for anything less—to settle, say, for a largely formal or technical analysis—would represent a co-opted shrinking away from the work's more compelling, social essence? And if we should wish to root out such inflammatory contents—especially to the exclusion or minimization other points of view or of

⁶ I have laid some of this out in "The Dahlhaus Project and its Extra-Musicological Sources," *19th-Century Music* 14 (1991), 221-46.

closer analytical or empirical work—what do we do if, as often happens, these contents turn out to be predictably similar? (Depending on the accepted category of activist analysis the predictable contents may be such things as: “the principle of manufacture”; various class, national, racial, economic, political, or sexual interests; European hegemony or European patriarchy; representations of the body; and so on.) Within the standard practice of each category of analysis, how do we respond to Dahlhaus’s criticism of those who would downplay what he believes to be an artwork’s essence, that which distinguishes one utterance from another? To what extent can we endorse the much-discussed collapse of the concept of an individual work into that of a cultural text—or the decentering of an individual text into its thickly contextualized social implications and political functions? Is there a way of accommodating both concepts: individual statement and cultural text? Or are they mutually exclusive?

The larger concept of genre is central to any attempt to resolve these questions. We might begin this inquiry by attending to the distinction between genres and individual exemplars of genres.⁷ Let’s recast Dahlhaus’s central question as follows: in claiming, for example, that Bach’s D-major fugue from The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, is most fundamentally an inscription of the principle of manufacture (or a construction or performance of any other social principle involving power relations and social or sexual identity— for our discussion here it hardly matters which), might this not be more a claim about the genre of fugue than about the individuality of this fugue? If so, the possibility arises that to interpret a single fugue, say the D-major fugue, as primarily a statement concerning social power-relations might be an interpretive exaggeration. It is not that it is

⁷ Merely to clarify: As the term genre is used here, some European art-music genres of the past few centuries would include: fugue, concerto, sonata, symphony, symphonic poem, opera, and so on. Individual exemplars would be: Bach’s D-major fugue from The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1; an individual Vivaldi concerto; Beethoven’s Hammerklavier; Schumann’s Rhenish Symphony; Strauss’s Don Juan; Bellini’s Norma. As should be clear, the argument presented here is also applicable to early music as well as to popular, ethnic, folk, and non-Western genres.

I might add that Dahlhaus’s definition of genre is somewhat more restrictive than mine: Dahlhaus, for example, did not consider the fugue to be a genre, since in his view it was primarily a mere technical procedure rather than a form per se joined further to a clear social purpose. I have discussed these matters and provided my own view of genre in “Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: ‘Addio del passato’ (La traviata, Act III),” Cambridge Opera Journal 1 (1989), 249-76.

wrong, but rather that it might be overly eager to collapse the exemplar only into its genre or to pass too frictionlessly through its particularities as an utterance.

No one would dispute that any individual fugue is implicated in its genre. It could hardly be otherwise. Yet each fugue does articulate a certain individuality: it would be naive to ignore the distinctions, say, between the D-major and the D-minor fugues. Thus the dilemma. On the one hand, we need to acknowledge social content; on the other, we need to distinguish among individual exemplars. Though intertwined, these are conceptually different concerns. Further, it seems that it is precisely in their difference that what has been called the aesthetic component of the work has normally been located. (As will emerge, I do not understand that aesthetic component to be an existing, verifiable “thing” to be discovered; rather, it is a subjective valuation, though one discernible within a concrete historical practice of production and reception.)

Throughout, my argument unfolds some of the implications of two axioms:

First: The potential sociohistorical content of a musical artifact resides most purely in its genre, not in any individual exemplar of it. On the other hand, the potential within a given reception community to discern differing degrees of aesthetic content (that is, the invitation to experience the thing aesthetically) resides most purely in the particularities of the exemplar.⁸

Second: A sufficient awareness of the nature of both the genre and the exemplar—both the preponderantly social and the potentially aesthetic—is necessary to produce an adequate discussion of any composition (or musical utterance). On this side of the new challenges in the humanities, one-sided discussions are inadequate,

⁸ Again, there are no ontological claims here: these contents are not objectively in the piece, except to the extent that communities agree—socially—to believe in their existence. I might add that in this axiom I am not sketching out a rigid dichotomy in which only genre is cultural and only the individual utterance is aesthetic. Rather, I am referring to general tendencies, and there is much ambiguity and overlap between them. My seeming separation here of the aesthetic and the cultural is principally to furnish a conceptual clarity at this stage of the discussion.

simplistic, or reductive. There is no returning to simpler times and simpler methodologies.

We now proceed to a closer look at the issues at hand.

Genres and Artistic Production: Proposals for a Theory

It is probably true that no individual ever creates a genre *ex nihilo*. By and large, genres are socially produced, socially constructed and reinforced, the products of hundreds, thousands, of producer-receiver transactions over an extended period of time. As Jameson put it—agreeing with most prior genre theory—a genre is a “social institution, something like a social contract.”⁹ Seemingly new genres defined by individuals or small groups are usually more clearly seen as variants or combinations of well-established, older genres. The eighteenth-century self-standing symphony, for example, may be regarded as a genre that arose in the 1730s and 1740s. To be sure, such individuals as G.B. Sammartini played strong roles in establishing it, but as a genre it seems to have emerged as a tellingly inflected version of several well-established generic and formal antecedents: operatic *sinfonia*, ripieno concerto, binary dance formats, and the like.¹⁰ The same may be said of the perennial issue of Haydn’s role in inventing the string quartet.¹¹

Once established and recognized as such, musical genres are not stable things. Rather, they are complex constellations of norms and traditions—and these forces are fluid, systems-in-motion. I

⁹ Jameson, “Beyond the Cave,” p. 116. With regard to the term “genre,” cf. Saussure’s concept of *langue* [in the *langue/parole* dichotomy, often translated as “code and message”]. Cf. also Friedrich Kittler’s term, “discourse network.” Cf. also the brief summary of the concept of musical genre—with an immediate application to *ottocento* opera—as provided in JH, “Genre and Content in Mid-century Verdi: ‘Addio, del passato’ (*La traviata*, Act III),” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1 (1989), 249-76.

¹⁰ See, e.g., the introductory discussions by Eugene K. Wolf, Douglass M. Green, and Gordana Lazarevich in *Antecedents of the Symphony: The Ripieno Concerto . . . [and] The Eighteenth-Century Overture in Naples*, Series A, Vol. I of *The Symphony: 1720-1840*, ed. Barry S. Brook (New York: Garland, 1983).

¹¹ See, e.g., the discussion (with references to past positions on the matter) in W. Dean Sutcliffe, *Haydn: String Quartets, Op. 50* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 199XXX), pp. 000.

have argued elsewhere that the concept of genre (as opposed to that of mere forms or standard schemata) is radically multivalent. Genres are distinguished as having both a collection of musical (and possibly formal) norms and an implicit cultural content.¹² Within certain kinds of genre theory it has been common to refer to these features as the inner (formal/technical) and outer (cultural) aspects of genre.¹³ The inner constellation may include certain standard (though flexible) elements of formal patterning (such as “sonata form” or “strophic song”), but in some instances the notion of fixed elements of formal design may be dispensed with—or at least subordinated—to more genre-defining features of mood, tone, or style (as, perhaps, in the designation of “nocturne,” “waltz,” or “barcarolle,” none of which *per se* designates an invariable form).¹⁴ For Dahlhaus, the constellation of inner generic elements included formal guidelines, standard patterns, scoring norms, and the like—those aspects which could be regarded as music-specific, even though they might vary from case to case.¹⁵

If the inner aspects of genre are notoriously difficult to specify, the outer elements are even more so. These social factors must include the cultural, economic, or political conditions necessary for the creation and sustaining of the genre itself. (Any genre will imply those cultural conditions necessary for its existence.) As such, these factors may be construed as broadly as the concept of context itself. Some of these outer factors conditioning the possibility of any given genre are: the implied expense needed to undertake a performance, or the monetary aspect needed to motivate a composer into producing an exemplar; the institutional base of production and distribution; the expected level of complexity of any exemplar; the expected level of generic deviation tolerated; the social uses to which exemplars are normally to be put; the social stratum and educational level of the range of expected receivers, and consequently the level of cultural distinction (Bourdieu’s term) associated with the genre; the world view of the genre (including its implicit politics and regulation

¹² “Genre and Content”

¹³ Wellek and Warren. Cf. Dahlhaus.

¹⁴ Kallberg

¹⁵ Dahlhaus

of sexual behavior and relationships); its expected construction of subjectivity; the degree of social affirmation or supposed resistance expected of the exemplar (for example, genres may pose as a site of [social] resistance—what Foucault called the practice of reverse-discourse, which is nonetheless always also a site of broader social containment); the normative guidelines for the assessment of quality; the degree of dialogue of this genre with other, similar or dissimilar genres; and so on.

At any given point of its development, a genre-constellation may be considered as pre-centered, centered, or post-centered in terms of its stability, clarity, reification, and social/intellectual acknowledgment. I have dealt with the process of centering elsewhere—especially with regard to the sonata—and I will not derail the present discussion in that separate direction now. The point, though, is that genres are mobile constellations and that they change over time, perhaps through identifiable stages. Genres are “historical through and through” [Nietzsche; Adorno].

Because they are discourse networks of fluid social forces, genres are loaded with connotations. Moreover, the connotations of any genre are manifold. For receivers, these multiple connotational loads may be encountered by asking hermeneutically useful questions of the genres—questions that seek through dialogue to uncover those connotations. [Gadamer, Jauss.] Above all, genres may not properly be reduced to single connotations. On the contrary, the abundance of connotations is responsible for the multiple voices that may be heard within any genre. Since these multiple voices resound through the generic aspects of an individual work, any hermeneutic acknowledgment of those aspects touches off inquiries that work against the midcentury traditionalists’ concern for unity, closure, and single meanings. Since individual works are grounded in generic components, the search for an imaginary, transcendental unity within a concrete utterance is fruitless.

This is to affirm the poststructuralist notion of a genre as a constructed site for the staging of the tense interactions of differing, competing social interests, the genre as an arena of social discourse. Dealing with the generic level of works, this position endorses Bakhtin’s heteroglossia

postulate and also recognizes the more recent concept of the decentering of the author or composer. This recognition of the multiplicity of social voices within genres merges comfortably with current convictions regarding textuality, intertextuality, and the social authorship of works (which last phrase—“social authorship of works”—I would qualify to read, “the social authorship of those aspects of works that are ineluctably generic.”).

As social sites of discourse, genres are also, at least in part, social ideologies and are thereby vulnerable to the interrogations of cultural critique. To adapt the recent discussions of ideology by Terry Eagleton, genres are ideologies insofar as they are fluid patterns or social institutions that make meaningful experience possible: they help us to understand the way we “live [our] relations to society as a whole” they are “particular organization[s] of signifying practices which go . . . to constitute human beings as social subjects.”¹⁶ Just as ideologies are necessary conditions for meaningful intersections with society, so, too, a genre is the precondition or defining frame that makes any individual exemplar or utterance possible. There is no getting rid of genres. Like ideologies, genres set the terms for experience and communication. Those who believe they have escaped oppressive social genres have only slipped into others that they have chosen not to investigate.¹⁷

In order to produce anything expected to be received as a meaningful statement, any composer (or performer) must work within a socially shared genre or mixture of genres. Yet there is no reason to suppose that any individual composer is consciously concerned with the multiple connotational loads of those genres. Normally, the composer does not unpack the connotations of a genre before using it. Rather, the genre is given socially, something accepted axiomatically, as self-evident. In the Gramscian sense, it functions hegemonically, exerting power through common consent and acceptance.

¹⁶ Eagleton’s paraphrase of Althusser in *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 18.

¹⁷ For this reason Dahlhaus’s central contention that the genre system was in decline in the nineteenth century is misguided. We might rather say only that the eighteenth-century genre system was being replaced by a different one. One ideology, or set of ideologies, was being modified into another.

Because the tacit social aspects inscribed within a genre constellation are also given and accepted as self-evident, they cannot be made subject to an act of personal intentionality. In that sense, the composer cannot compose the generic aspects of his or her composition: those aspects are socially composed, though the composer may arrange pre-existing genre-blocks into individual patterns.¹⁸

The discourse that we identify as the Eroica Symphony, for instance, should not be considered only Beethoven's work: we are also dealing here with a social composition, a decentering of authorship—a contending of multiple, disparate voices. The most fundamental choices in the work were composed socially, over the preceding half-century of symphonic transactions: shape, basic structure, performance occasion, disposition of forces, standard textures, tonal resolution, interpretational expectations, and so on. In this sense and on the simplest of interpretational levels Beethoven alone did not compose the modulation to the dominant in the first movement's exposition. What he did compose was an individual realization or articulation of a socially composed, in-place principle, which he chose to reaffirm by attending to it through compositional particulars. To be sure, the Eroica may be understood as an individual dialogue with a genre, but it is one in which the socially composed genre is very much present—out front and, for the most part, substantially, monumentally, reaffirmed.

Two major issues in the production of any musical statement—such as the Eroica—are those of genre-choice and genre-arrangement or realization. One might argue that the mere act of genre-selection may be construed as personally intentional. But the issue becomes more complex when we acknowledge that, within a limited range of options, the selection process itself may be structured by a generic range of standard options. Although it will be deferred here, the question

¹⁸ Cf. Barthes: “[The text is] a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. . . . [The author's] only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.” (“The Death of the Author” [1968], in Image Music Text, trans. Stephen Heath [New York: Noonday, 1977], p. 146.

still looms: which larger social genres condition the extent of the array of musical genres with which any composer believes that he or she is presented?

Genres are like encountered backdrops, established frames of reference. Consequently, as a condition given socially—a discourse network of connotations—a musical genre is outside the grasp of a composer to alter in the production of any utterance. Instead, the composer undertakes a personal dialogue with the given state of the genre. This dialogue proceeds under the assumption that the norms of the genre will frame the conditions of the understanding of that dialogue. The dialogue need not be—and most often is not—one of complete affirmation of all aspects of the genre; resistance and individualized texturing are common features. The Eroica does not affirm and reinforce all aspects of the prior concept of the symphony.

Still, the larger point is that at the moment of its production and first reception, the Eroica did not alter its genre: the individualized dance on the floor does not alter the floor. It is also evident, though, that subsequent composers may understand that the genre itself has been fundamentally modified by exemplary prior exemplars—as was the case in the nineteenth century, for example, after the appearance of Beethoven's Eroica. This phenomenon—subsequent genre alteration by strong example—helps to drive historical change within a genre. (To be sure, other relevant factors are more socially based.) This phenomenon is the process that can bring a genre to its centered phase (as in the case of the symphony with late Haydn, late Mozart, and all of Beethoven), and it can drive the centered phase of a genre, ultimately, into a post-centered phase (resulting in the production of what I have called sonata deformations.)

Nevertheless, in any single instance—say in the process of composing the Eroica—the genre itself with which a piece is in dialogue is itself unaltered: it remains a fixed backdrop or frame of reference by means of which the originally targeted receivers will be invited to interpret the individual exemplar. What happens to the genre as a result of subsequent Eroica-reception, on the other hand, is a different matter. Such considerations bring us to the process of reception—to our dialogue with its dialogue—and to all of the problems uncovered by recent hermeneutics.

Genres and Reception: Hermeneutic Genres

In the process of reception—that of coming to what we regard as a significant intersection with a musical utterance—we may also discern hermeneutic genres. In every way analogous to production genres, these reception modes must similarly precondition the possibility of our perceiving the work at all. Reception genres make it possible for us to undertake our dialogues with it and to become convinced that they are meaningful. (Whether they in fact are meaningful in an ultimate sense is a larger issue that will not be addressed here. The present point is only that reception genres carry with them a sense of their own sufficiency. This is part, perhaps, of their necessary illusion.)

Since the modes of hermeneutics are themselves genres, they are socially constructed discourse networks outside the power of the individual to alter. (At best one can choose to live within certain modes while ignoring others.) Reception modes, too, are fluid constellations that change over time; they, too, may be observed to follow pre-centered, centered, and post-centered phases of development, with reception deformations notably prominent in the last two of these stages; they, too, carry multiple connotations with multiply contending voices; they, too, are sites where meaning is permitted to happen and where meaning may be socially contained. Thus in the process of coming to an understanding with a work, individual receivers are also in dialogue with one or more reception genres. As the individual utterance was in dialogue with its genre, so the individual receiver is in dialogue with one or more surrounding hermeneutic genres.

In synchronic practice modern reception genres are volatile, strongly felt, and in aggressive competition with each other. Many of them seem to be vying for acknowledgment as the specially privileged, panoptic spot with unique insights into the individual work. The claim to a special, deeper validity—characteristically, part of a larger struggle for recognition and status, as Bourdieu has insisted—leads to a desire to trivialize or marginalize rival modes. These conflicts are professional,

and they are often politicized. Some of these hermeneutic modes for absorbing, using, or understanding music are:¹⁹

- A belief in the superiority of the aesthetics of immediacy; a trust in the accuracy or fundamental rightness of personally intuitive or emotional responses (the eighteenth-century conviction of music as the universal language of emotions). This can foster the view of music as narcotic pleasure or bewitching entertainment: the Monostatos Effect, whose impact can seem to render irrelevant the need even to ask further questions, much less to launch a critique.
- A belief in the superiority of the act of performing or reproducing music—music as releasing its most essential meaning in the act of physical performance.
- A belief in the superiority of the activity of composition as an act of reception. Composition, that is, may be construed as a psychological struggle or dialogue with existing genres and individual exemplars. (Cf. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence, etc.)
- A belief in the superiority of various social and personal Bildung-responses: the conviction that one should approach music sympathetically by means of personal aesthetic education and patient training, especially along the lines of the liberal arts in general (orthodox liberal-humanism).

¹⁹ Cf. also Adorno's compelling outline of the "types of musical conduct" in the initial essay [1962] of his Introduction to the Sociology of Music, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1976), pp. 1-20.

- A belief in the superiority of various culture-critical responses: a wish to interrogate the apparently unjust hegemonic power of certain types of music; an unmasking of illusions; an explicitly pointed, tradition-critical approach.
- and so on.

We are now prepared to introduce some issues concerning the potential for a persistent, legitimate belief in a strong aesthetic presence within the musical artifact.

Six Theses on the Problematics of Aesthetic Presence

1. Within the system of cultural statements in any epoch (literature, visual arts, music, dance)—even in the most generic systems of functional products—there is a potential art-character present in every exemplar. This art-character is in large part generated by the receiver’s wish to savor an utterance’s made-ness, to relish its poiesis. Such an art-status, of varying degrees of intensity, can be conferred by receivers themselves, sometimes quite apart from the intentions of the producers. This impulse toward delectare—delight, even to the point of self-absorption in a work or a self-forgetting reverie—is historically demonstrable in situations involving non- or pre-autonomous art. The drive toward the enjoyment of aesthetic experience—which may be used for any variety of personal or social purposes—traverses ancient and modern cultures alike ²⁰

²⁰ Hans Robert Jauss, “Sketch of a Theory and History of Aesthetic Experience” [1977], trans. Michael Shaw, in Jauss, Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1982), pp. 3-151. The essential argument is that we have over two thousand years of evidence that “aesthetic experience” is a transcultural phenomenon, one that seeks out the pleasure available from considering “made-ness”—a kind of proto-connoisseurship. Jauss maintains, for example, that long before the modern period and its “aesthetics of subjectivity” or its “autonomous aesthetic of genius” (pp. 11-12), one encounters even more “fundamental experiences of poiesis, aesthesis, and catharsis” (pp. 22-36). Cf. also Theodor Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory [1970], ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, 1984). Still, the essential discussions presented in Jauss and Adorno can be modified and toned through much of the newer, poststructuralist theory.

The main issue here is the degree to which we might sense that we are invited by a musical genre to place a privileged value on this feature of poiesis. Historically, much of this art-character—especially in manifestly functional genres—is not what Dahlhaus called the strong concept of art, which he identified as increasingly characteristic of certain strata of Austro-Germanic music from about 1770 onward. So from the outset we might distinguish within any individual utterance this ever-present, potential art-character (small-a) from the later, more culture-specific concept of Art (capital-A). (These are historical production and reception categories, established by a shared group-perception of intensity and degree.)

But it is precisely the real existence of this “strong” aesthetic presence that current orthodoxies wish to call into question. Under these circumstances, recovering a responsible sense of aesthetic presence, should we wish to do so, becomes both a substantial methodological problem and an act of defense within current musicology. Certainly the defense of aesthetic presence on the non-reflective basis that it is simply self-evident was threadbare long ago; it cannot legitimately be revived now.

2. To what extent can an individual utterance, construed as intervening into a socially constructed discourse network (or genre-constellation), be seen as capable of escaping a reduction into total social construction? Put another way: under which circumstances can an utterance be expected to call attention to its own utterance-quality—its art-character, strong or weak?

Here it can be helpful to invoke the concept of the genre system as a socially charged game, a matter of intense aesthetic/generic gamesmanship—or even agonistics—demanding the recognition that those who wish to be participants need to play by the rules. If the genre-game is one of seeking out and attending to this presumed aesthetic presence—whether or not that presence is ontologically fictive—then that potential for aesthetic presence is in fact a datum of human experience and we are justified in becoming interested in it. But this presumed disclosure of

individual presence, though it is art-specific, cannot represent the totality of that utterance: much of its framework and basis, of course, remains generic.²¹

3. It is in the particularities of an utterance that this potential for strong aesthetic presence lies. Although the genre-constellation remains the condition of possibility for the existence of the utterance, the individual work has a palpability, a specificity, a concreteness, a material permanence unavailable at the generic level. Paraphrasing Dahlhaus again: this is why an individual Bach fugue cannot be legitimately reduced only to the principle of manufacture. To be sure, its genre may exemplify or articulate a larger principle, but there are still features of the concrete utterance that will be unique.

4. How does a perception of small-a art grow to become a belief (at some watershed point) in capital-a Art, or in the the strong concept of art? In Austro-Germanic concert music this was a historical process—and by no means an exclusively benign one—occurring mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It would appear that within certain cultures, and at certain times and places, the act of cultivated savoring, particularly of highly crafted, strongly individualized exemplars, became a significant aspect of both the production and the reception genres, part of their game aspect. In nineteenth-century Europe this practice in turn fueled the institutionally reinforced conviction that striking, memorable individualization was the central attribute of the high forms of the available genres. At this point, one might speak of the social presence of a relative autonomy within the sphere of art music. One encounters historically a social agreement (among

²¹ One obvious problem here would be the point of view—stemming from Lacanian axioms, Foucauldian axioms, and so on—that the subject supposedly producing the utterance is entirely socially constructed, that the concept of the individual is itself nothing more than a fiction. In this view the composer would be one type of totalized social construction in dialogue with a genre, yet another totalized social construction. Apart from certain logical incongruities (why would a pure social construction wish to dialogue with another at all? are these social constructions operative at the same conceptual levels?), there is a reductio ad absurdum involved in the image—chillingly akin to the most fundamental of predestinarianisms. Such issues may have to be addressed at some point, but they cannot be our topic here.

the most devoted players of the game) largely to restrict the institutional discussion to the particulars of individual utterances, and by extension to minimize or to declare irrelevant attention to other, generic/social features of the artwork.

The opposite viewpoint (including many of today's varieties of cultural criticism) would focus instead on the multiple voices inscribed in the genres. This perfectly valid practice—another hermeneutic genre—is what seems to cause a dispersion of meaning, the generation of the postulate of textuality, the assertion of death of the author. But that the concept of autonomy was socially constructed hardly makes it less real than any other aspect of any other genre. And once we are prepared to accept this, even as a merely historical phenomenon (as opposed to one that we claim to be ontologically true in itself), the whole panoply of formalist-analysis types comes rushing in, as do the traditional hierarchies of aesthetic evaluation. Within an aggressively inclusive system of consideration, none of these things may be ruled out of court. On the other hand, neither may we rule out an interrogation of the social uses to which these things have been put.

5. To say that a work is in dialogue with a genre is only to say that, one way or another, an understanding has been struck to employ the norms of that genre—or set of genres—as frames of hermeneutic reference (as horizons of expectation). Whatever the requirements might be to connect an individual utterance to a genre—thus establishing a set of guidelines for understanding—once the minimal requirements for the generic connection are made, the transaction between the utterance and the genre is effected.

Once this transaction is established, any individual statement can do one of three things:

- It can fall short of the implicit expectations of the social genre—as assessed by those empowered to maintain the status of the genre. In this case the exemplar is normally judged to be weak, flawed, unsuccessful, incompetent, boring, and so on.

- It can meet the generic requirements and go no further. It would thus have a certain potential art-character— namely that conferred by its participation in the genre itself—through the enunciation of a set of concrete particularities. Still, due to its status of mere adequacy, it is more likely to remain largely functional in its immediate contexts. Unless pressed (in the process of reception), it would not call undue attention to its individuality as a specific art-object.
- It can—for whatever reason (often personal, within a non-autonomous art sphere)—exceed the requirements of the genre in varying degrees. It can exceed it, for example in the level of elegance, craft, intensity, quirkiness, or complexity (more than is needed to complete a successful transaction). Here, I think, is where we begin to encounter the origins of the strong concept of art, or capital-a Art: recall Joseph II's remark to Mozart about Die Entführung; recall Bach's cantatas, fugues, or concertos, which were far more intricate than they needed to have been to get the social job done.

Still always in dialogue with established social genres as the condition of their possibility, works within the game of Art in the strong sense are utterances in part about high style and technique, about the striving toward an impeccable individual statement. In a fully unfurled, capital-A Art System, the genre itself aspires (paradoxically) toward the production of utterances that exceed generic expectations—that surpass what the historically reified genre requires, either in its technical/emotional components or in its expressive intensities. This, I take it, is the point of the purest forms of the game of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European art music.

6. Any aspect of an utterance that is normally perceived as exceeding the functional requirements of its genre may be considered a surplus gesture. In turn, this surplus strengthens the work's potential art-character, or its particularity as an individual statement. This surplus is not the only locus of a

work's art character, but the belief in its existence can trigger a sympathetic response from its targeted audiences. At the point of significant group response, we generally refer to the utterance as a "work of art that we choose (socially) to retain permanently in what André Malraux called our "imaginary museum." And historically, we might argue, for example, that composers who in their own terms insisted on the (then socially unnecessary or even economically disadvantageous) principle of the surplus (Bach, Haydn, Mozart) were subsequently re-envisioned by later epochs—ones that believed more centrally in the autonomy principle—as some of the initiators of the concept of supposedly autonomous music.

Envoi

The current musicological tension between the social contextualists and the aesthetic traditionalists is the product of a much broader, late-twentieth-century crisis in the legitimation of knowledge. Although the postmodern condition is fraught with ambiguities and uncertainties on all sides, what is clear is that one-dimensional, non-reflective, or naive solutions to this set of problems are no longer adequate to the demands of our own times.

The best that we might hope for at present is a recognition that to investigate the full, open-ended art-situation adequately—genre-constellation and individual exemplar, confronted on both the production and the reception sides—would seem to require a hermeneutic dialoguing between two dialectical principles. The first encompasses the social / the discourse network / the generic / the textual. The second encompasses the individual / the particular / the concrete utterance / the aesthetic. The crux of musicology's new work, I think, might lie in a willingness to shuttle back and forth between these two principles.

Those wishing to confront the full problematics of the issues at hand will keep in mind the complexity of the decentered art-situation as a precondition of any meanings at all. True, in real-life practice we all inevitably narrow our sights according to the dictates of our own talents and according to the questions that interest us at the moment. Even so, given the present, radically

uncertain state of our historical awareness, we cannot afford to work in such a way as to suggest that we are either unfamiliar with or eager to invalidate contrasting modes of inquiry.