"The Mind Hears": An Examination of Some Philosophical Perspectives on Musical Experience

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Abstract

An adequate account of musical understanding must be sufficiently detailed and nuanced so as to be able to make sense of the experience of listeners with diverse musical and cultural backgrounds. It should also help us begin to understand the wide variety of responses to music, including the responses of those who hear music as having semantic content. I approach these issues in the more general philosophical context of aesthetic understanding. As an approach to my own position, I examine the accounts of aesthetic understanding offered by Nelson Goodman, Roger Scruton, and Peter Kivy. Because each can be seen as broadly within the Kantian tradition, I also undertake an examination of Kant's aesthetics.

My account of what it is to understand music and of how this understanding is achieved draws upon a phenomenological analysis of listening. I argue that a continuum of two levels of understanding music can be distinguished. At the lowest level, "recognitional understanding," the listener can hear a series of tones as a rhythmic and melodic gestalt, and understand a minimum of expressive and gestural characteristics. The second level, "enhanced understanding," requires greater sensitivity to the music's expressive character, being able to place the music in an appropriate historical context, and some awareness of

musical form. Beyond these two levels but presupposing them is a third, which I call "interpretive understanding." Listening to music, we sometimes get the sense that the music is "profound" or has something to say, if only we could grasp it.

For musical understanding of any sort, involvement with the music is crucial. I develop an account of involvement with music which stresses the similarities between following a musical performance and following or constructing a narrative. I conclude by suggesting the ways in which my account of musical understanding captures some of the strengths of the accounts already discussed (while avoiding their weaknesses), and consider some objections which might be made against it.

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The mind sees and the mind hears.
The rest is blind and deaf.

Epicharmus*

* From: Plutarch, “On the Fortune of Alexander” II.3.336b [DK23B12].

Chapter 1

Introduction

People with little or no formal musical education seem to understand and enjoy music. Indeed, the concert-going and CD-buying public may find their understanding of music so unproblematic that the question "Did you understand it?" would seem odd. Yet unfamiliar music (whether culturally unfamiliar or based on an unaccustomed tonal structure) may in fact prompt perplexity, incomprehension, and consequent dislike of the music. These two types of experiences — transparent understanding and a lack of understanding combined with aversion - are clearly different, but just what these differences are and how they are to be accounted for, is elusive.

In what follows I address these questions: (1) What is "musical understanding" and how is it achieved? (2) How is understanding a musical performance similar to and different from understanding other types of artwork or understanding other types of auditory stimuli? I approach these issues in the more general philosophical context of aesthetic understanding, and I see musical understanding as part of the larger philosophical project of elucidating and explaining the nature of understanding more generally. Musical understanding is thus a conceptual problem, having affinities with both musicology (the study of musical

structure and history) and empirical psychology, yet overlapping completely with neither.

1.1 Defining “Music” and “Understanding”

Before going too far I need to state the limits of my enquiry. I propose to take “music” in a fairly wide sense. It will be useful to explore some of the difficulties inherent in giving either an exhaustive or a narrowly defined characterization of music. Consider the range of music to which we have access: In the contemporary developed west a remarkably wide variety of music is available — including art music from different historical periods, varieties of commercial music, and folk music from all over the world. In addition, music stores typically offer for purchase a range of recordings which are not generally considered to be “music” — rainforest sounds, chants and spoken word, whale song, birdsong — but which one can listen to as if they were music.

While there is wide agreement that music is a worldwide human phenomenon appearing in every culture, there is no universal consensus as to its scope and definition.[1] I suspect that if contemporary western listeners were surveyed, most would define music as an art of sound, intentionally produced and appreciated by humans, and it is

[1] For a discussion of the use of the term “music” among American conservatory students, see Henry Kingsbury, Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

likely that they would also make some mention of a connection between music and emotion. If pressed, they might add that music can be a fine or "high" art (in the form of operas, symphonies, chamber music, etc.), as well as being found in more popular forms (rock music, jazz, folk, etc.)

A consideration of music as understood by non-western cultures quickly makes such a concept of music questionable. Music is not universally characterized as purely auditory; it may be thought of as having a indispensable verbal or gestural component. Most pre-literate peoples seem to conceive of the words and melody of a song as one unit that cannot be separated.[2] Song and dance are one in Polynesian music.[3] Traditional Ghanian "music" includes drumming, dancing, and singing, which are together considered one inseparable thing.[4] The demand that music be a product of human intention is also not universal. Some cultures consider bird songs to be music, and for the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, the sounds of the forest are literally music.[5]

Music is not everywhere considered a fine art — indeed "fine art" is itself not a universal category and is

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[2] Nettl, Music in Primitive Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 21.
[3] T. Barrow, Traditional and Modern Music of the Maori (Wellington and Sydney: Seven Seas Publishing Pty Ltd., 1965), 7.
[4] Kathleen Marie Higgins, The Music of Our Lives (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 14.
[5] Higgins, The Music of Our Lives, 15.

relatively recent in the western tradition.[6] The music of most pre-literate peoples (despite some notable exceptions) serves particular purposes other than aesthetic enjoyment.[7] The different functions ascribed to music vary considerably. Traditional Maori music was thought to have magical powers to bring about favourable circumstances or obtain some desired end.[8] The Navaho traditionally believed music to have a medicinal effect on humans; "good" music is that which cures the patient.[9] Music has a quasi-legal function among Greenland Eskimos; when one member of the community is the victim of some shame, attack, or threat, he or she challenges the responsible party to a "song duel." Antagonists improvise derisive songs about one another before the rest of the group. The singer who is judged by the audience best able to convey his or her point of view is said to have won the "fight."[10]

We need not look to "exotic" cultures or to the work of ethnomusicologists to see that music has diverse cultural functions and plays many different roles. In the west, music is typically used to soothe children (lullabies), to lighten labour (think of the people who have "Saturday

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[6] See Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," Journal of the History of Ideas 12 (1951): 496-527 and 13 (1952): 17-46.
[7] Bruno Nettl, Music in Primitive Culture, 6.
[8] Barrow, Music of the Maori, 6.
[9] Higgins, The Music of Our Lives, 12.
[10] Nettl, Music in Primitive Culture, 13; and Charles Hoffman, Drum Dance: Legends, Ceremonies, Dances and Songs of the Eskimo (Agincourt, Ontario: Gage Publishing, 1974), 55.

Afternoon at the Opera" or Broadway showtunes accompany their household chores, not to mention more traditional work songs), to facilitate social relations (background music at dinner parties or romantic evenings), in worship services, to accompany television and films, and to calm and delight. What constitutes an "appropriate" response to music depends greatly on its social context. It is considered an appropriate response to join in with singing in church and around a campfire, but not at the opera. Audience behaviour differs considerably depending on whether one is listening to jazz in a smoky club, to rock in an outdoor arena, or to chamber music in a concert hall. A flamenco guitar recital which is listened to in silence and then receives enthusiastic but polite applause in Toronto's Roy Thompson Hall may be interrupted with shouts of "Olé" and accompanied by rhythmic hand-clapping when performed in a small town in Spain.

A glance at the history of philosophical and scientific speculation about music reveals even greater levels of complexity. Music has been a subject of scientific enquiry since the sixth century B.C.E. when Pythagoras connected certain musical intervals with definite numerical ratios.[11] The concept of harmony has been prevalent in discussions of

[11] Arpád Szabó argues that the mathematical concept of "interval" could not have originated without musical experiments using the monochord. See his The Beginnings of Greek Mathematics (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1978), 121.

ethics since at least the writings of Heraclitus, and is invoked by both Plato and Aristotle.[12] Socrates' concern in book three of the Republic with permitting only certain musical modes in the ideal city is relatively well-known, but it is less noted that Aristotle ends his Politics with a discussion of musical education and the role of music making in the life of a free man.[13] Plato's Timeus, with its insistence on the importance of harmony at the universe's creation and within the individual soul, is further testimony to the complexity and importance of music in ancient thought.

Together with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, music was part of the medieval quadrivium – the "exact" portion of the seven liberal arts. It was not until the 18th century that music gradually dropped out of the mainstream of what was then considered science.[14] Modern historians of science have tended to overlook that Johannes Kepler's discovery of the laws of planetary motion was an outgrowth of his central research program – the search for the laws of harmony governing the heavens and the other domains of nature.[15]

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[12] See Sidney Zink, "The Good as Harmony," The Philosophical Review 53 (November 1944): 557-74.
[13] See Plato, Republic 398d-399e and Aristotle, Politics 1337b23-1338b8 and 1339a11-1342b34.
[14] H.F. Cohen, Quantifying Music: The Science of Music at the First Stage of the Scientific Revolution, 1580-1650, UWO Series in Philosophy of Science, vol. 23 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1984), xiii.
[15] Cohen, Quantifying Music, 15.

All of this is to say that I shall not be able to delimit the many senses and varieties of what is considered to be "music" and what is listened to as if it were music. Furthermore, I shall not attempt to do justice to everything which might be thought to be important for understanding music as both an art and an object of scientific study. I shall, however, try to simplify my enquiry while yet hoping to cover as many aspects of musical experience as possible. My basic (simplified) paradigm will be that of a contemplative listener who attends to the music and considers music to be an art. I will not be able to say much about the (considerable) phenomenological difference between listening to a live performance and to a recording.[16] Nor will I be able adequately to investigate the social aspects of musical understanding. This paradigm, limited to engaged or "serious" but not necessarily musically trained listeners, applies to a wide range of people during at least some of their listening experiences. It seems elementary enough to be manageable, yet not so simple as to lack interest.

Similarly I shall not be concerned with delimiting precisely my second key term — "understanding." Consider the following diverse senses:

Archie understands the words spoken by Bill.

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[16] On this issue see Evan Eisenberg, The Recording Angel: The Experience of Music from Aristotle to Zappa (New York: Penguin, 1988).

> Charles failed to understand the poem he had been assigned to memorize.
> Deirdre understood the story of Noah's ark.
> Ellen did not understand the native's gesture, and ended up taking a wrong turn.
> It took only a single glance for Fred to understand that the evening would not go well.
> Gabriel understood that Helen was sad, and likely upset with him as well.
> Irene understood the mathematical proof at once.
> John's understanding of the scientific formula was limited by his ignorance of basic chemistry.
> Karen could not say how, but she understood that it would soon rain.

Since one of my primary aims will be to unpack and clarify what is central to "understanding" music, attempts to delimit it now could beg the question. Suffice it to say that the definition of "understanding" I assume in the course of the investigation tries to encompass the ambiguities and respect the tension between the different senses of understanding invoked above.

More specifically, I consider understanding to be the result of cognitive activity, as opposed to sense perception. I recognize that understanding sometimes involves interpretation, which may be more or less idiosyncratic, and I assume that understanding is communicable, whether in words (encompassing technical as well as metaphorical language), gestures or pictures, etc. Perhaps most crucially, I take understanding to be an achievement. Despite the range of possible defensible interpretations, there is a normative difference between correct understanding on one hand, and a lack of

understanding or misunderstanding on the other. (Although discriminating one from the other is not always straightforward.) A central theme of Plato's Theaetetus is that the definition of knowledge is arrived at only by sifting through the capacity for ignorance and error. I have found that thinking about what it is to misapprehend or lack comprehension of music has helped me come to a conception of what it is to understand music.

Music has often been linked with the "ineffable." Perhaps everyone has had the feeling that there are aspects of life or art — gestures, silences, tones of voice — which hold significance, yet in what precisely this significance consists it is difficult to say. While I think that this feeling can be analogous to the feelings we sometimes have listening to music, I will avoid talk of "ineffable" feelings or significance. In an obvious sense, music is beyond words and so literally ineffable. As to the deeper sense of ineffable — the idea that some things are too profound to be expressed in mere words — I have found it of little help in my own thinking about music.

1.2 Philosophical Approaches to Understanding Music[17]

While many philosophers have addressed the topic of understanding music, they have by no means all been talking about the same thing. Philosophical accounts of

understanding music have been motivated by different issues and problems, and largely constitute attempts to answer different questions. The accounts provided by various philosophers have played different roles in the context of their greater philosophical projects. For example, Kant's references to music constitute a small aspect of his system as a whole, while Schopenhauer's are central to his work.

An aspect of understanding music that strikes one thinker as absolutely fundamental, others will pass over in silence. Stephen Davies, for example, has argued (against what he argues to be the "common view") that musical understanding involves a consideration of how a particular work (say, a sonata) differs from others of its kind, and also a grasp of what distinguishes one musical kind from another (say, a quartet from an overture).[18] It is difficult to say whether the fact that other philosophers have not challenged him on this indicates broad agreement, or a lack of interest in the problem he has identified. Some, such as Mark DeBellis and Diana Raffman, discuss the problem of musical understanding solely in terms of individual cognition.[19] Others have stressed social and

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[17] I am assuming here a broad conception of "philosopher" and "philosophical," as I see no good reason to limit the discussion to professional philosophers.

[18] Stephen Davies, "Musical Understanding and Musical Kinds," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 52:1 (Winter 1994): 69-82.

[19] See Mark DeBellis, Music and Conceptualization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Diana Raffman, Language, Music, and Mind (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993).

cultural factors.[20] Together with those who have explicitly addressed the issue are others who, in the course of discussing another philosophical aspect of music, such as its capacity for representation or the nature of musical expression, assume an account of what it must be to understand music and how that understanding is achieved.

Hence to speak about "the" problem of understanding music would be misleading. I have identified four main areas of inquiry addressed in philosophical discussions of understanding music. They are: the connections between music and the emotions, the status of figurative language as applied to music, the effects of specialized training, and the possibility of cognitive content in music. Other questions are addressed, but these four seem to be central. While I do not deal with these topics systematically, attention to each has informed my research and thinking about musical understanding more generally. In particular, this division has allowed me to bring together a heterogeneous range of material, including work done by professional philosophers, as well as work of philosophical interest by psychologists, critics, musicologists, etc.

Before giving an account of the aspects of musical understanding I hope to address, it will be helpful to

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[20] For example, see John Blacking, How Musical is Man? (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983); and Laurence D. Kimmel, "The Sounds of Music: First movement," Journal of Aesthetic Education 26:3 (Fall 1992): 55-65.

survey briefly some of the work already done. Some of the philosophers I consider have written on only one of these areas, some on several.

Music and emotions: Is it necessary to recognize and acknowledge the emotional character of performed music in order to understand it? If I were to say that I found the Adagio from Schubert's String Quintet in C (D956) light and cheerful, would that count as evidence I had misunderstood it? Are emotive descriptions of music (happy, sad, yearning, etc.) reducible to technical terms? If I could give a technical musico-structural analysis of Schubert's Adagio, would the judgement that the music was sad and poignant convey anything not already captured in the technical analysis? Can music arouse the emotions that it conveys, and if so, is there a relationship between recognizing music's emotional character and responding emotionally to it? An affirmative answer to the previous question prompts the further question of just how music arouses emotions and what role this arousal plays in our understanding. The picture is additionally complicated when it is recognized that the listener's actual aroused emotions may or may not correspond with the emotions expressed by the music, and the fact that the listener's state of mind prior to listening can influence the emotional character of what he hears.

Recognition of the emotional character of performed music as fundamental to understanding might strike some as so obvious as not to need argument. Yet the point has been contested. R.A. Sharpe has written,

> I do not think that emotion qualities are of any great significance in the appreciation of music. 'The gifted listener', as [Aaron] Copland felicitously called him, appreciates music without being very interested in emotion qualities or in his own emotional reactions…[21]

If emotional qualities have no "great significance" in the appreciation of music, and assuming some connection between appreciation and understanding (or at least, attempts to understand), then being mistaken about the emotional qualities of music can hardly be important for understanding. Diana Raffman questions whether it even makes sense to characterize a listener's assessment of emotion in music as correct or incorrect rather than typical or atypical. A listeners' reaction may surprise us, but we would no more call him mistaken than we would say that a diner was mistaken to prefer one dish over another.[22]

The question of whether music arouses emotions in listeners, and, if it does, what significance these emotions have for understanding, continues to divide philosophers. Several have argued that, at least sometimes, expressive music arouses emotions in listeners. This position is held

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[21] R.A. Sharpe, Review of Music and the Emotions by M. Budd in British Journal of Aesthetics 26:4 (Autumn 1986), 398.
[22] Raffman, Language, Music, and Mind, 58-59.

by (among others) Frances Berenson,[23] Davies,[24] Jerrold Levinson,[25] Roger Scruton,[26] Colin Radford,[27] and Aaron Ridely.[28] Among these, Berenson, Davies, and Ridley have maintained a stronger position, according to which emotional responses to music can play an important role in understanding it.

Peter Kivy holds an intermediate position.[29] He regards the recognition of music's emotional character as fundamental to understanding it, but questions the importance of emotional responses to music.

Figurative Language: Listeners who have not had formal musical training (and some who have) tend to describe music in figurative or metaphorical terms. For example one might say that a piece moves along briskly, or that a particular performance drags, or that one pitch is lower than another, or that a melody undulates. What are the limits of figurative language as applied to music? To what extent is language used figuratively in such assertions, and does the answer have any implications for musical understanding? Is

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[23] Frances Berenson, "Interpreting the Emotional Content of Music," in The Interpretation of Music Philosophical Essays, edited by Michael Krausz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 61-72.
[24] Stephen Davies, "Why Listen to Sad Music if it Makes One Feel Sad?" in Music and Meaning, edited by Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 242-253.
[25] Levinson, "Music and Negative Emotion," in Music and Meaning, 215-241.
[26] See chapter 3, section 4.
[27] Colin Radford, "Muddy Waters," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 49:3 (Summer 1991): 247-52.
[28] Aaron Ridely, "Musical Sympathies: The Experience of Expressive Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 53:1 (Winter 1995): 49-58.

such use of language in some way fundamental to hearing music as music, or does it rather have the status of a heuristic device?

Scruton, for one, would argue that all of the assertions about music in the previous paragraph are figurative: Music does not literally move or undulate, and pitches are not located in space and so cannot be literally higher or lower than one another.[30] Nelson Goodman similarly holds that emotion terms applied to music are not literal; as music is not sentient, it cannot be literally happy or sad.[31] In contrast, others have defended the literal application of emotive terms to music. According to Kivy, for example, music is expressive of emotion in much the same (literal) way that human movements and pictures of St. Bernards can be expressive of emotion; all can be seen as appropriate to the expression of a particular feeling.[32]

According to Scruton, metaphor is a crucial aspect of our response to music; hearing music as music is founded upon metaphor, and understanding music involves invoking correct metaphors.[33] Similarly, Daniel Putnum has argued that learning in music occurs by exploring the avenues opened up by metaphor. Music, like language, can become a dead metaphor; when this happens, people cease to hear music

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[29] For details, see chapter 4, sections 2 and 3.
[30] See chapter 3, section 1.
[31] See chapter 2, section 2.
[32] See chapter 4, section 2.

and instead hear a succession of sounds.[34] Marion Guck recognizes the importance of metaphor, without going as far as Scruton or Putnum. Although metaphoric description and other less formal discourse about music have come to be dismissed by musicologists, she finds that they facilitate a more profound hearing of musical works. For example, Chopin's prelude in B minor, opus 28, no. 6, can be imagined as having two-measure arching melodies nested within phrase-length arches, which are in turn nested within a single arch encompassing the whole piece. Listening to the music with these metaphorical descriptions in mind, Guck found that she could attend to and make sense of ever more refined details of the music and its structure.[35]

Specialized Training: Tones in a musical context have dynamic qualities — they may create expectancy or satisfy it, appear in a state of tension and unrest, or in a state of balance and rest.[36] Listeners without formal musical training can hear these tonal relationships without being able to name the different degrees of the scale or know which tones in a piece correspond to which scale degrees.

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[33] See chapter 3, section 2.
[34] Daniel Putnum, "Some Distinctions on the Role of Metaphor in Music," Journal of Aesthetic Education 23 (Summer 1989): 103-06.
[35] For the full analysis of the Chopin prelude, see Marion A. Guck, "Two Types of Metaphoric Transference," in Music and Meaning, 201-212. Of course, some would disagree that characterizing a melody as "arching" is metaphorical at all.
[36] I have assumed here aspects of Victor Zuckerkandl's analysis and conception of musical experience. See his Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World, Bollingen Series XLIV, trans. Willard R. Task (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956).

Similarly, an untrained listener may feel that a certain musical work or performance has a particularly cohesive quality without being able to say why this is the case. What effect does formal musical training, including auditory training, have on musical understanding? Do different degrees of musical understanding correspond neatly with different levels of formal training? Is formal or technical training the only way to increase musical understanding? Similar questions can be asked of the musical training, formal and informal, specific to different cultures. Do African listeners, for example, perceive rhythm differently from European listeners?

Even if we limit the discussion to Western listeners and set aside cultural variations, the differences made by specialized training are difficult to detect and quantify. For one, there is a lack of explicit agreement as to what constitutes "formal musical training." Do we count as "trained" only those with degrees in musicology or do we include anyone who received a C+ or better in a music appreciation class? Do we include anyone who can play a musical instrument, or do we limit the class of musically trained to those who play well? What about those who play well but are self-taught? While they lack formal training, would we want to put them in the same category as others who also lack formal training, but neither play an instrument nor sing? These complications have received little

attention from philosophers, and few participants in the discussion take the trouble to be clear about what they mean by "formal training." Some concentrate on knowledge of large-scale musical form, others on the subtleties of pitch and scale-position discrimination in moment-to-moment listening. The result is that discussions of technical training and musical understanding are not always discussions of the same thing.

As might be expected, there is a range of opinion among philosophers regarding the effects of specialized training on musical understanding. Malcolm Budd maintains that a listener need not master technical terminology in order to understand music.[37] The reverse is held by Benjamin Boretz: He has argued that non-technical terms such as "sad" applied to music can be compared to prescientific attributions of anthropomorphic characteristics to natural phenomenon. Such non-technical language are symptoms of an underprivileged stage of cognition.[38]

Michael Tanner and DeBellis hold similar positions with regard to role of technical training in understanding music. For Tanner, understanding music is a matter of grasping why the music is as it is, and each level of musical understanding requires the grasp of an ever more technical

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[37] Malcolm Budd, "Understanding Music," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement 59 (1985): 233-48.
[38] Benjamin Boretz, "Nelson Goodman's Languages of Art from a Musical Point of View," Journal of Philosophy 67 (August 1970): 548.

vocabulary.[39] DeBellis takes the view that technical training in music is more than the ability to apply a specialized vocabulary. Auditory training actually influences the way one hears music, such that DeBellis argues that the experiences of listeners who have had this training are different from the experiences of those who have not.[40] (However, he nowhere gives an explicit account of musical understanding, and his discussion of the experiential and aesthetic differences made by auditory training is disappointingly thin.)

Like Budd, Kivy and Levinson reject the notion that only listeners with formal training can truly be said to understand music. Kivy has argued that understanding how music is put together and why it has the characteristics that it does, is not necessary for understanding music. As long as listeners can describe what they hear, and this description corresponds to what is going on in the music, they can be said to understand. The effect of musical training is to provide a richer listening experience.[41] Levinson defends "concatenationism" – the view, derived from 19th century musicologist Edmund Gurney, that musical understanding is centrally a matter of apprehending individual bits of music and the immediate progression from

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[39] Michael Tanner, "Understanding Music," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement 59 (1985): 215-32.
[40] Mark DeBellis, Music and Conceptualization.
[41] See chapter 4, section 3.

one bit to the next. He doubts that formal musical training will help most listeners apprehend large-scale form in music, and doubts the importance of such apprehension.[42]

Musical "Content" and Cognition: What do you understand when you listen with understanding? Some say that certain music strikes them as profound or true, or even as having moral value. What can this mean? Music is sometimes assumed to bear a great deal of extra-musical content. To mention just one example, Ivan Hewett finds the music of Arvo Pärt and Henryk Górecki wanting because, "genuine religious music must engage with doubt…."[43] Can music convey something like a semantic content, with "semantic" understood as whatever systematically contributes something to the sense, reference, or truth of propositions? Is the value of listening to music contained solely in the beauty of the tones of which it is comprised? Is there more to understanding music than simply being able to follow along? If an aspect of understanding music does indeed involve apprehension of an extra-musical content, how does the listener accomplish this?

Philosophers' attitudes to the possibility that musical experience can have cognitive value tend to reflect larger theoretical commitments. Those with a formalist orientation

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[42] Jerrold Levinson, Music in the Moment (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

hold that the perceptual elements of an artwork and the relations holding between them are the primary locus of aesthetic value, and tend to reject the existence of extra-musical content. Immanuel Kant, Eduard Hanslick and Kivy belong in this group.[44] Those who take a semiotic approach to art and treat it as a type of symbolic system have been friendlier to the idea of extra-musical content. However they have differed as to what extent the symbolic relations inherent in music are regular or "language-like." Nelson Goodman and Suzanne Langer (among others) belong in this group.

There are many intermediate positions between formalist and semiotic approaches. Davies holds that music has meaning, although it is not a symbol system that conveys semantic or quasi-semantic content. Levinson, while not holding a semiotic view of art, has argued that some senses of "musical truth" have meaning and are worthy of interest.[45] Furthermore, in his view it is legitimate to talk about music being "about" things outside of the music — emotions, death, etc.[46] Radford implies a similar position

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[43] Ivan Hewett, "Screams Inside a Circle of Fifths," review of Arvo Pärt by Paul Hillier and Henryk Gorecki by Adrian Thomas, in Times Literary Supplement 24 October 1997, 21.
[44] A fuller discussion of formalism is to be found in chapter 5, sections 2 and 3.
[45] Jerrold Levinson, "Truth in Music," in Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990): 279-305.
[46] Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Profundity Misplaced," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 50:1 (Winter 1992): 58-60.

in his discussion of music and morality.[47] James O. Young goes so far as to argue that music can be a source of knowledge as well as pleasure, and can help us understand non-musical matters.[48]

Why have I identified the four areas discussed above — music and the emotions, listeners' use of figurative language, the effects of specialized training, and the possibility of semantic content in music - as central? It is likely that the most transparently important topic of the four is that of the connection between music and the emotions. Indeed, Francis Sparshott has written that the there is reason to think that the concept of emotion itself, which has its origins in the contrast between reason and desire in Plato's Republic, was developed in conjunction with music theory.[49] Many listeners' initial attraction to music is for its emotional resonance, and sensitivity to music's affective character may remain the fundamental component of their listening experiences. I would conjecture that the greater part of philosophical speculation on music, as well as a large amount of empirical research, concerns the nature and expression of emotion in music, and its effect on listeners. Even if I were to come

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[47] Colin Radford, "How Can Music be Moral?" Midwest Studies in Philosophy 16 (1991): 421-438.
[48] James O. Young, "The Cognitive Value of Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 57:1 (Winter 1997): 41-54.
[49] F. E. Sparshott, "Aesthetics of Music: Limits and Grounds," in What is Music: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music, edited by Philip

to only negative conclusions about the role of emotion in understanding music, these would still be of significant interest.

Understanding music (or indeed understanding almost anything) would seem to involve a minimum of two elements: an understanding subject and a more or less understood object.[50] Philosophers have tended to address the "object" side of musical understanding with questions about the possibility of music's cognitive content. Just what is understood in musical experience, and what is the nature of musical "meaning"?

Philosophical inquiry about the "subject" side of aesthetic appreciation is expressed in questions about different types of listeners ("trained" as opposed to untrained, for example), and differing modes of language use. Attention to the status of figurative language as applied to music reflects a now standard philosophical move. Largely thanks to the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, many hold that a study of how language is used and developed can transform and even dissolve philosophical problems. Since most people lack a technical vocabulary with which to describe the music they hear, their only avenue is figurative language. Even those who possess a specialized

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Alperson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 38.

vocabulary must use more or less figurative language when communicating with the non-initiated. It seems fruitful to ask whether utterances about music of different characters reflect different levels or varieties of understanding. Questions about the effect of specialized knowledge — whether professional training or the sensitivity required to appreciate different musical cultures - is another way of attending to the subject in aesthetic experience. Do differently trained listeners have different listening experiences, and if so, are these differences a matter of degree or kind?

1.3 The Problem of Musical Understanding as I Discuss It

Music can inspire many responses. With respect to understanding, I would suggest that there are three that are basic:

Unmediated understanding: This is the response which most of us have when we listen to music of our own cultural tradition, including most popular and mainstream art music. We hear the music "as music" and do not suffer any feelings of incomprehension. Music which is deliberately exclusionary — certain avant-garde art music, and popular music specific to certain subcultures (punk, etc.) - is not usually intended to evoke this response.

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[50] The possibility of understanding and failing to understand oneself raises some interesting questions. Can one fulfill the role of knowing subject and known object at the same time?

Incomprehension and aversion: This is the response to music which one does not understand and does not care to hear again. The music which brings about this response will vary according to different listeners. Some may love 19th century orchestral music but find their patience tried by more recent experimental composers, say Berio, Partch, Cage, or Babbit. Others may have this reaction in response to music which is culturally unfamiliar.

Intrigued Uncertainty: In this type of response, the listener is not quite sure that he has understood the music in question, but does not react aversively. Instead, the listener wants to hear the music again in order better to comprehend it. The listener may feel that the music has been trying to tell him something that he has not understood. As with the aversive reaction described above, the music which inspires this response will vary among listeners. Few serious listeners, I would say, felt that they "got" Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier on first hearing. The same composers who inspire an aversive reaction in some may intrigue others. Similarly, culturally unfamiliar music may fascinate and charm some listeners, just as it confuses and annoys others.

I would suspect that almost every listener has at some time experienced each of these three reactions to some music or other. What is the nature of the experience underlying each of these responses, and how does one go from

incomprehension and aversion or intrigued uncertainty to greater appreciation, if not understanding? A related question is to what degree is musical experience intersubjective? Imagine that I can follow the musical logic of Berg's Violin Concerto and am eager to listen to it again, but you find the music off-putting - alienating and chaotic - and do not wish to rehear it. We might be in the same concert hall responding to the same auditory stimulus, but it would seem that we have had very different musical experiences.

Even when one has achieved an unmediated understanding of a work (as distinct from familiarity with a specific performance), such understanding is not necessarily final. One may be very familiar with a certain work and listen to it confidently. However hearing another performance with a different interpretation — perhaps one that is innovative, more nuanced, or shows greater historical sensitivity — can make a listener feel that she is hearing the work anew and call into question her previous aesthetic complacency. The listener has not gone from incomprehension to understanding; yet something has changed in her experience of the piece, whether we characterize it as an enhancement of understanding or some altogether different type of experience.

Does musical understanding consist in more than just following along — having some sense of the musical syntax or

logic? I suspect that it does. Along with hearing music "as music," there can be other more "semantic" levels of understanding. It is possible to have the sense that you have followed along, made sense of each transition, and yet at the end not have a feeling of deeper or more complete understanding. This is comparable to the experience of reading some poetry: One may understand the meaning of each word and understand the transition from line to line, yet still feel at the end that one has missed something. Hence I am suspicious of the view that differences in musical comprehension are reducible in every case to differences in technical musical knowledge. As indicated above, most listeners without formal training can follow music "as music," and the feeling that music is trying to convey some semantic content can strike trained as well as untrained listeners.

An account of musical understanding, then, should be able to make sense of ordinary listening experience (resulting in unmediated understanding), as well as help us better to comprehend the experience of music that challenges us. In what follows I examine in detail three recent accounts of aesthetic understanding — those of Goodman, Scruton, and Kivy. The first two focus specifically on music. In considering their views, I will need to pay attention to the following:

The Nature of the Musical Object: In each of the three types of response discussed above, the listener realizes that he has been listening to music.[51] It is interesting that most people can distinguish music (even unfamiliar music) from noise, even without a cultural context.[52] While most people have some (vague) idea of what music is, I doubt that many would survive a Socratic inquisition on the nature of music with their beliefs intact. Are the birds that sing in your garden at dawn every morning making music? What about if someone were to record them and sell the results at HMV packaged with tasteful cover art? In particular, questions about the ontological status of music are unimportant to most listeners. Ontological confusion and inconsistent views on the nature of music are no barriers to aesthetic understanding and appreciation.

However, what a philosopher says about musical understanding will partly be determined by her conception of the nature of the musical object. Can music represent non-musical objects and events? How is music expressive, and of what can it be expressive? What is the status of figurative language as applied to music, and how important is the broader cultural and aesthetic context in which we listen?

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[51] Here and in what follows, I understand "music" as a neutral or descriptive term, rather than as evaluative.
[52] Devoid of an institutional setting, I wonder whether the average person could successfully determine which of an unfamiliar set of objects were considered as "art" by an alien culture?

Answers to these questions and others will influence a philosopher's account of musical understanding.

Meaning and Content: Can music have extra-musical meaning or content, and if so, how is that meaning embodied by the music? Some listeners claim to "hear" a great deal in music that other listeners do not. It is possible to argue that the former are simply mistaken, are not concentrating on the music, or have over-active imaginations. Yet given the epistemological difficulties in understanding and characterizing "normal" listening experience, on what basis can these imaginative listeners be dismissed? Is there no way to make sense of their experience, without at the same time alienating other listeners who claim to hear no more than "the music itself"? Answers to these questions will influence what a philosopher takes to be the scope of and correct approach to musical interpretation.

The nature of the listening experience: Each of the philosophers I consider in detail believes that listening to music is a cognitive experience and that the pleasures evoked by music may be intellectual as well as sensual. That is, they hold that music is an object for the mind, as much as or more than for the ear, and that understanding music involves more than reaction to a stimulus or the perception of sound. A flawed or implausible account of the

listening experience will provide a shaky foundation for any view of musical understanding.

The range of philosophical opinion on musical understanding does not suggest that this experience is easily grasped. Moreover, an account of musical understanding must be sufficiently detailed and nuanced so as to be able to make sense of the experience of listeners with diverse musical backgrounds and different degrees of technical expertise. It should also help us begin to understand the wide variety of responses to music, including the responses of those who hear music as having semantic content. In the next three chapters I examine in detail the accounts of aesthetic understanding offered by Goodman, Scruton, and Kivy. While their views are quite different from one another, each can be seen as broadly within the Kantian tradition. For that reason I also undertake an examination of Kant's aesthetics (chapter five). Finally, in chapter six I offer my own account of what it is to understand music and of how this understanding is achieved, drawing largely on a phenomenological analysis of listening.

Chapter 2

Goodman on Understanding Art

Goodman's contribution to the philosophy of music is sometimes assumed to consist primarily in his discussion of musical notation. As philosophically rich as this discussion is, I will argue that it has little to do with music as an art or "way of world making." To appreciate Goodman's contribution to the philosophical issues concerning music, we will have to investigate his approach to art more generally.

Goodman's approach to art is cognitive. Knowledge we may have about a work informs our perception of it, and the appreciation of art can in turn give rise to knowledge, conceived of as the advancement of understanding. In this chapter I examine those aspects of Goodman's theory of art which bear on the problem of understanding art. This will include his conceptions of representation, exemplification, expression, metaphor and style. As we consider his ideas on understanding art generally, we will ask what application these have to understanding music more specifically.

First, we will have to take a brief look at Goodman's conception of notation.

2.1 Notation and Worldmaking[53]

[53] My goal in this section is not to evaluate Goodman's conception of a notational system or the applicability of this conception to standard musical notation. This has already been done by abler critics than myself. See for example Benjamin Boretz, "Nelson Goodman's Languages of

For something to be a notational system, it must fulfill certain syntactic and semantic requirements. Only two of these requirements will concern us here. First, the characters in a notational system must be finitely differentiated or articulate. That is, it must be theoretically possible to determine, for every two characters K and K*, and every mark "m" that does not actually belong to both, either that "m" does not belong to K or that "m" does not belong to K*.[54] For example, a handwritten numeral one ("1") must be recognizable as such; if it can be mistaken for a numeral seven ("7"), then the (handwritten) notational system to which it belongs is not syntactically articulate. Music in standard notation seems to meet this syntactic requirement: The "shape" and position of a note on the staff tells us its pitch and relative duration. Systems which do not meet this requirement are said to be syntactically dense.

The second requirement is semantic finite differentiation: It must be theoretically possible to

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Art from a Musical Point of View," Journal of Philosophy 67 (August 1970): 540-52; Peter Kivy, Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 108-23; Stefano Predelli, "Goodman and the Score," British Journal of Aesthetics 39:2 (April 1999): 138-147 and "Goodman and the Wrong Note Paradox," British Journal of Aesthetics 39:4 (October 1999): 364-375; and William Webster, "Music is Not a Notational System," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 29 (Summer 1971): 493-97. Rather, I want to consider Goodman's conception of notation sufficiently so as to be able to distinguish considerations proper to the notational system of music from those applicable to music as heard.

[54] Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 135. Henceforth LA; further references will be given in brackets in the text.

determine, for every two characters K and K* which do not have identical compliance classes, and every object "w" that does not comply with both, either that "w" does not comply with K or that "w" does not comply with K* (LA, 152). For example, the mark "l" may have three compliance classes: A lower case "L," an upper case "i," or the numeral one. If the mark "l" is part of a notational system, it must be theoretically possible to determine to which of these characters it is supposed to refer. Again, the standard notation of music would seem to meet this requirement: A trained listener will be able to determine the symbol for a given musical tone and relative duration. Systems which do not meet this requirement are semantically dense. Goodman cites syntactic and semantic density (the very properties which preclude a symbol system from being notational) as two "symptoms" of the aesthetic (LA, 252).

The primary function of a musical score is the authoritative identification of a work from performance to performance (LA, 128). An "authentic" performance of a work both complies with and exemplifies the score. (LA, 236-37).[55] In a series of Replies to Commentators, Goodman says

[55] Goodman's criteria of an authentic performance as one that complies with the articulate elements of the score (that is, not with verbal instructions, tempo markings or traditions of performance) has been the subject of much controversy. (See for example, besides the works already cited in the first footnote, Stephen Davies, "Authenticity in Musical Performance," British Journal of Aesthetics 27 (Winter 1987): 39-50; and Jerrold Levinson,. "Autographic and Allographic Art Revisited," in Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 89-106.) This

that much of what he says about music happens to be about notation,

> and this may easily create a false impression. [Commentator Jens] Kulenkampff does well to point out that in my view notation is not music, a musical score is not a musical work, and the major aesthetic characteristics of music are not to be understood in terms of the characteristics of notational systems. The musical work consists of performances, and these usually function quite differently from a score.[56]

These remarks have several implications. For one, they vindicate my strategy to consider Goodman's approach to music without delving too deeply into his views on notation, since the "major aesthetic characteristics" of music are not to be understood in terms of notational systems. Goodman's characterization of a musical work as a set of performances supports the position that the proper objects of aesthetic appreciation and understanding are performances rather than works, a view that fits in nicely with my strategy to focus on the listening experience as foundational. Moreover, we will have occasion to recall these remarks when we consider some of Goodman's comments on representation in music, and on the cognitive aspects of music appreciation.

2.2 Varieties of Denotation

In this section I consider what it means for music to exemplify, express, and represent, according to Goodman's

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issue will not concern us here; as I argued in chapter one, questions about the ontology of music and of individual works of music, while philosophically of great interest, rarely have significance for ordinary listeners.

[56] Nelson Goodman, "Replies," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 39 (1981): 274.

understanding of these terms. For Goodman, representation and expression are both types of denotation in which certain relationships have become fixed by habit; these relationships are not absolute, universal, or immutable (LA, 45-50). Denotation is the relationship which a symbol has to the object to which that symbol applies.[57] For example, the word "cat" denotes the four-legged mouse-chasing animal. Denotation, Goodman says, is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance (LA, 5).[58] The relationship between symbols and what they denote can be literal or metaphoric. For example, in literature the cat is sometimes used as a symbol for physical passion.

Representation is of objects or events; expression is of feelings or other properties (LA, 46).[59] Along with this

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[57] As Stephen Davies points out, the "crucial" notion of denotation is not analyzed by Goodman and acts as a "primitive" in his theory. The only shortcoming Davies points out as arising from Goodman's failure to analyze denotation is that it renders Goodman's discussion of the representation of fictions (Pickwick, unicorns, etc.) "so unconvincing." See Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 76. The problem of the representation of fictions pertains primarily to the visual arts and so will not concern us here.

[58] Note that Goodman does not claim that representation is entirely a matter of convention, rather that, "no firm line can be drawn between what is conventional and what is not." Quoted from a personal letter to E. H. Gombrich in the latter's "Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation," in The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), 284n.

[59] Of course, Goodman's nominalism does not allow for talk of "properties," and in using the term I do not mean to imply any ontological committments. However, Goodman asserts that his discussion of exemplification does not require acceptance of either nominalism or platonism. See his "Variations upon Variation, or Picasso back to Bach," Acta Philosophica Fennica 43 (1988): 176-77 (note 4). One consequence of Goodman's metaphysical "tolerance" here is that Douglas Arrell's claim that Goodman's nominalism "distorts" his account of exemplification and lays it open to objections, will have to be reconsidered. See Douglas Arrell, "Exemplification Reconsidered," British Journal of Aesthetics 30:3 (July 1990): 233.

difference, representation and expression differ as to "direction." A picture, for instance, subsumes what it represents, so that a picture of a donkey can be classified as a donkey-picture. What is expressed by the picture, say, sadness, subsumes the picture as an instance (LA, 52). Expression is a special case of exemplification, such that what is expressed is metaphorically exemplified (LA, 85). An object exemplifies a property when it is literally or metaphorically denoted by the corresponding predicate and refers to that property. Exemplification is thus possession (of a property) plus reference (LA, 52-53).

On Goodman's understanding, when something exemplifies something else, it serves as a sample of it. Take, for example, the scented slips of paper which are inserted into the pages of magazines to advertise perfume. The slips of paper exemplify (or stand as a sample of) certain features of the perfume — most notably its smell — but do not exemplify certain other features, such as the size and shape of the perfume bottle they advertise. To exemplify, then, is to "bring out" or "call attention to" a feature, but not necessarily to stress it, as exemplification might be very subtle.[60] An artwork does not exemplify or express all of

[60] Goodman, "Variations upon Variation," 169.

the features it possesses; only those which are relevant to its functioning as a work of art (LA, 87).[61]

The logic of exemplification has to be distinguished from the process which we undergo when we want to say what is exemplified by a given artwork. A representational artwork denotes what it represents. In exemplification, the artworks are denoted, rather than denoting. For example, a picture may represent and so denote a seascape; the same picture may exemplify and so be denoted by the words "calm," "tranquil," etc. There is no one-to-one relationship between the various elements of the artwork and what is exemplified. Discovering what an artwork exemplifies is like applying an ungraduated meter, where every difference in pointer position constitutes a difference in degree, and we can never determine the position of the pointer with complete precision. Saying what an artwork exemplifies is a matter of finding the right words, and we can never be sure which of two equally suitable terms is exemplified by the artwork in question. Using the analogy of the meter again, the direction of exemplification is from the quantity measured back to the position on the gauge, and with an ungraduated meter, we can never determine the quantity measured with precision (LA, 234-36).

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[61] Goodman reiterates this point in "Some Notes on Languages of Art," Journal of Philosophy 67 (August 1970): 567.

The "lack of precision" inherent in the process of discovering or saying what qualities are exemplified by an artwork has troubled some commentators. Henning Jensen charges that Goodman does not attempt to solve the problem of deciding which properties are relevant to a work of art, and that any theory which disclaims this responsibility is "seriously flawed."[62] Douglas Arrell concurs, finding Goodman's failure to clarify the notion of exemplificatory systems (that is, the systems which determine which of their predicates objects exemplify), "perhaps the most serious criticism" of his theory. According to Arrell, if the arts are governed by exemplificatory systems, we should be able to write exemplificatory dictionaries and grammars for them.[63] Stephen Davies notes that a work could possess a property without that property being exemplified.[64] He contends that:

> The failure to spell out both what exemplification amounts to in an artwork and what is sampled in exemplificatory contexts calls into question the success of Goodman's theory in its claim to distinguish expressive from other, merely possessed, properties. He seems to take aesthetic/artistic importance as the sole criterion for identifying exemplified properties (whereas he should regard the aesthetic/artistic importance of a property as explained by, and hence distinguishable from, its being exemplificatory.)[65]

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[62] Henning Jensen, "Exemplification in Nelson Goodman's Aesthetic Theory," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 32 (Fall 1973): 49-50.
[63] Arrell, "Exemplification Reconsidered," 237.
[64] Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 140.
[65] Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 144.

While it is true that Goodman says less than one might like about the nature and significance of exemplification in the arts, I do not find that this reticence jeopardizes his position to the extent that these critics seem to think. Arrell's contention that we should be able to provide exemplicatory dictionaries and grammars for the arts if Goodman is right, is surely extreme. Works of art (here performances of music) are not notational systems or languages, although Goodman's title Languages of Art may inadvertently give that impression. Although Goodman does not say so explicitly, it seems to me that his theory implies we must decide which features of an artwork possess aesthetic significance on a case-by-case basis. Features of an artwork which impress us as significant on an initial exposure, may later seem not so important, or important in a different way, or for different reasons. So we cannot always establish, definitively and absolutely, which features of an artwork are significant. Rather than a shortcoming, this strikes me as a strength of Goodman's position. He is able to account for our occasional uncertainty in the face of particular artworks, as well as our changing evaluations and interpretations of them.

For example, Jascha Heifetz's performances of Bach's Unaccompanied Sonatas and Partitas for Violin likely impressed his contemporaries by their speed and technical brilliance. But the conception of what these works sound

like has changed since Heifetz recorded them in the 1950's, partly under the influence of historically informed performance practices. On listening to his recordings today we cannot but compare them with more sparse and restrained interpretations, and are likely to be struck by Heifetz's extremely romantic and lush readings. Certain aspects of these performances simply did not stand out for Heifetz's original audience, because the music of Bach was conceived to sound a certain way. Since our expectations have changed, our evaluation of Heifetz's performances has changed with them, and different aspects of them come to our attention. So today these performances exemplify "1950's Bach style" in a way they could not have for an audience who knew no other way of hearing Bach.

Since expression is metaphorical exemplification we will need to examine Goodman's understanding of metaphor (LA, 68-71). Most simply put, a metaphor is the application of an old label in a new way. This application must be in some sense contra-indicated. We might say, for example, that a melody is sad, but since melodies are not sentient this cannot be literally true. Metaphorical possession is not literal possession, but neither is it automatically false. The metaphorical and the literal have to be distinguished from the actual. A predicate may apply to an object without applying literally. This is not to suggest that any predicate can be applied to any object. A

statement can be both literally and metaphorically false; that a certain melody is gay is literally false and may be metaphorically false as well. Goodman explains, "whereas falsity depends on misassignment of a label, metaphorical truth depends on reassignment" (LA, 70).

Goodman's account of artistic expression has not been immune from criticism.[66] Perhaps the most serious shortcoming is identified by Davies, who notes that Goodman can explain artistic expressiveness as symbolic in character only if he can distinguish literal from metaphoric exemplification.[67]

Markus Lammenranta finds two difficulties with Goodman's contention that music expresses the emotion labels of ordinary language.[68] First, if linguistic predicates are the only labels that music can express, we must admit that people who cannot describe accurately the expressed emotions simply do not understand expressive music. Lammenranta claims that this is not a "desirable conclusion," although

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[66] Although Howard argues that the musicological and psychological evidence supports Goodman's theory of expression as applied to music. See his "Music and Constant Comment," Erkenntnis 12 (January 1978): 73-82.

[67] Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 166. The notion of "metaphoric" exemplification or possession only has sense if we have already defined literal possession. But if we distinguish those objects which literally possess a given property from those that do not, then either "metaphoric" possession delineates either a subset of the former (objects which literally and metaphorically possess a given property), or of the latter. However talk of the set of objects which do not possess a given property "and metaphorically so," is nonsense. If a melody is sad, it is literally sad; if it is not sad, it is not sad, metaphorically or otherwise.

[68] Markus Lammenranta, "Nelson Goodman on Emotions in Music," Acta Philosophica Fennica 43 (1988): 210-16.

he does not say why. Second, ordinary language does not seem adequate to name the emotions expressed in music. These worries seem to me exaggerated. It seems to me in fact to be the case that the inability to recognize (and somehow describe) music's expressive properties does indicate a lack of understanding. Lammenranta's own solution to the problem, which he sees as consistent with Goodman's conceptual framework, is that emotion labels are a kind of "mental image." Indeed there is nothing in Goodman's system which precludes music from expressing images, gestures, moods, etc. Nor does Goodman insist that understanding an artwork's expressive properties must always be cashed out in an ability to describe them verbally. I could express my understanding of music by doing an interpretive dance or painting a picture.

More generally, Francis Sparshott has noted that Goodman's account of expression does not privilege emotion or feeling terms — these just furnish one common set of metaphors. Sparshott wonders, then, if Goodman's discussion of expression is of a different subject than that engaged by Herder, Rousseau, Croce, Collingwood, and others. Sparshott concludes that while Goodman cannot accommodate expression as "a lyrical cry from the heart," his account corresponds

better than one might have expected to the symbolic relations implicit in traditional theories of expression.[69]

Other commentators have been troubled by a perceived "over intellectualization" in Goodman's account of expression and theory of art more generally. Arrell charges that Goodman's theory denies the "immediacy" of our experience of art. On his reading, Goodman implies that we first, say, perceive music, and then later make a connection with a predicate — "this refers to 'joyful.'"[70] There are several problems with this characterization. For one, there is nothing in Goodman's account that indicates he rejects the possibility of an immediate (as opposed to an "unmediated") reaction to art. Secondly, while the qualities expressed by some artworks do indeed strike one directly and at once, much art does not have such an effect. Art that is complex, multi-faceted, or enigmatic, defies such immediate classification and simple characterization. One need only remember the time and effort spent over the interpretation of Velázquez's Las Meninas, Wagner's operas, and Last Year at Marienbad for an indication of the "immediacy" of our reactions to these works. (I will return to similar issues in the next section on "Art and Cognition.")

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[69] F.E. Sparshot, "Goodman on Expression," Monist 48 (April 1974): 187-202.
[70] Arrell, "Exemplification Reconsidered," 236.

In Languages of Art, Goodman raises some misgivings about the possibility of musical representation (LA, 232). If the performance of a work defined by standard notation is claimed to denote, he remarks, still it does not represent. As a performance, it exemplifies what is articulate, disjoint, and limited (i.e. the score). The same sound event, belonging to a dense set of auditory symbols, may represent. So electronic music without notation may be representational, whereas music in standard notation may not.

I am convinced that these remarks must be understood in light of Goodman's later comments on the same subject (discussed in section 2.1). A system is representational only insofar as it is dense (LA, 226), and we will remember that Goodman cites syntactic and semantic density as two "symptoms" of the aesthetic (LA, 252). Nowhere in Goodman's work is there any indication that he denies music the status of art, or denies that music as heard possesses syntactic and semantic density. As he elaborates:

> But while compliance with a score identifies a performance as of a given work, a performance ordinarily functions within the full spectra of sound: that is within a dense system such that every difference in sound — whether between correct performances or between correct and incorrect performances — makes a difference. If a performance functioning in this way denotes, it is thus representational rather than descriptive. Of course it often also or instead exemplifies or expresses in other systems.[71]

[71] Goodman, "Replies," 275.

Goodman insists, then, that a musical performance also normally expresses and exemplifies much beside the score. A musical performances can be taken, not only as the exemplification of a score, but also as a sound-event. However, we have to be careful about claiming that properties belonging to one particular performance also belong to the work. It will seldom be the case that a property will be exemplified by all performances of the work, as exemplified properties not prescribed by the notational elements of the score are nonconstitutive of the work and do not affect the status of a performance as genuine (LA, 237).[72] Once again, the differences between Heifetz's romantic reading of Bach and more austere approaches illustrate just how widely performances of the same score can differ in expressiveness.

A complete examination of the relevance for music of Goodman's account of representation, expression and exemplification will have to wait until the fuller examination of these issues in chapter six, but we can make a few preliminary remarks. First, the fact that some musical works fail to "resemble" what they are sometimes said to represent does not imply that musical representation

[72] Davies has a point when he suggests (Musical Meaning and Expression, 139-40) that Goodman should regard expressiveness as the property of performances, not works. Yet it seems possible that some works are such that authentic performances (in Goodman's sense) will be consistently expressive.

is impossible.[73] If the concept of denotation within performed music is coherent, and musical performances can at least sometimes be said to denote, then the notion of representation in music would seem to be unproblematic. Goodman's account of expression as metaphorical exemplification does not challenge our ordinary way of talking about music expressing emotions. Since a character in an expressive symbol system actually is what it metaphorically exemplifies, sad music <u>really is</u> sad.[74]

2.3 Art and Cognition

The fact that the appreciation of a work is informed by knowledge we may have about it arises centrally in the context of Goodman's discussion of forgery (<u>LA</u>, 99-123). Goodman asks whether anything that an agent does not discern merely by looking at a picture at a given time could constitute an aesthetic difference for the agent at that time. He answers yes; the knowledge that a painting is a forgery is aesthetically significant whether or not the agent can herself distinguish between an original and a forgery. The fact that one painting is a forgery and the other an original tells the agent that there may be a difference between the two paintings that she can learn to perceive. This knowledge gives the present perception a particular character as training toward future

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[73] "Resemblance" is seldom obtained even in onomatopoeia. See V.A. Howard, "On Representational Music," <u>Noûs</u> 6:1 (March 1972): 41-53.

discrimination. Furthermore, the knowledge makes demands that modify and differentiate the agent's present looking.

The relevance for music would seem to be evident. Knowledge listeners have about a particular composition or performance has an influence on their aesthetic experience. For example, the title of a work, knowledge of the composer's life and express intentions for the work, may make us listen more carefully and for different things. Knowledge that a performance will be executed with a particularly fine instrument, or that the musicians will be adopting historically informed performance techniques can affect how we listen. We will have to leave for now the question of to what extent such knowledge about a work or performance is crucial to understanding it.

Like Dewey before him, Goodman rejects the dichotomy between the emotive (pleasure, pain, liking, loathing, "all brainless affective response"), and the cognitive (sensation, perception, truth, "all nerveless inspection and investigation") (LA, 248).[75] In daily life, classification by feeling is often more vital than classification according to other factors — fear or distrust of an object may prove a better guide to its treatment than the ability to discern its shape or weight. In aesthetic experience, the emotions

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[74] Sparshot makes this point in "Goodman on Expression," 187.
[75] See John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958). Richard Shusterman has explored the connections between Goodman's work

function cognitively. That is to say, a work of art is apprehended by feeling as well as by sensing. Cognitive use of the emotions involves discriminating and relating them in order to comprehend the work of art and integrate it with the rest of our experience of the world. Furthermore, the emotions work in combination with one another and with other means of knowing: "Perception, conception, and feeling intermingle and interact" (LA, 249). Emotion in aesthetic experience is a means of discerning what properties a work has and expresses. Just as the emotions inform cognition, so too do the comparisons and contrasts involved in the cognitive process affect the participating emotions (LA, 248-251).

What insights, if any, does Goodman's account of the emotions in art provide regarding the investigation of music? The often derided connection between music and emotion gains some cognitive respectability if the emotions are understood as aspects of cognition, rather than opposed to it. Discernment of a musical work's emotional aspects is not an incidental part of the listener's experience for Goodman, but essential to it. In a description of music which shows understanding, technical terms cannot

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and pragmatism in "Art Infraction: Goodman, Rap, Pragmatism," Australasian Journal of Philosophy 73:2 (June 1995): 269-79.

necessarily be substituted for predicates denoting emotions.[76]

We noted above that Goodman sees no contradiction in speaking of metaphorical truth or falsity; this underscores both his highly cognitive approach to art and his particular form of relativism. The arts, he says, must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of creation, discovery, and enlargement of knowledge. ("Knowledge" here taken in the broad sense of the advancement of the understanding.)[77] Works of art, like science, present views of the world that can provide right insights. According to Goodman, there is an enormous number and diversity of versions and visions of the world in the works of different painters and writers, in the various sciences, and in our own perceptions as informed by these. There is no handy set of rules for transforming any of these versions into any other; physics cannot easily be converted into biology, nor the world of Beethoven into that of Van Gogh. Furthermore, there is no ready-made version of the world, independent of

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[76] Boretz's claim ("Nelson Goodman's Languages of Art from a Musical Point of View," 548), that ascriptions to music containing emotion terms are "empty" and intelligible only as ascriptions to things to which prior recognition has been given as structural entities, seems to me misguided. I will take up these issues in greater detail in chapter 6.

[77] Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking. (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), 102. Henceforth WWM; further references will be in brackets in the text.

language, to which different versions can be compared (WWM, 2-5).[78]

This plurality of worlds does not imply that we have to give up the notions of truth and falsity. Goodman's willingness to accept countless alternative true or right world versions does not mean that anything goes: "The multiple worlds I countenance are just the actual worlds made by and answering to true or right versions" (WWM, 94). How do we distinguish a true or right from a false or wrong version of the world? In the case of metaphorical or artistic versions of the world, truth of statements and rightness of description is primarily a matter of fit: fit to what is referred to in one way or another, or to other renderings, or to modes of organization. Understanding, then, is not limited to the acquisition of true beliefs, but includes the discovering and devising of fits of all sorts (WWM, 138). What does this mean for the music listener? Kulenkampf says:

> Music is the way we explore the world of what may be heard, or better, the world of what may be listened to. We do this since we are confronted with musical compositions which are instances of the already known or the previously unheard of, or the partly new – at any rate, instances of that which is never entirely known.[79]

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[78] See also Avishai Margalit, "Goodman, Nelson. Survey of Thought," in Michael Kelly, ed. Encyclopedia of Aesthetics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[79] Jens Kulenkampf, "Music Considered as a Way of Worldmaking," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 39 (Spring 1981): 257.

So the composer and performer[80] together create a world, and understanding music would seem to entail a willingness to enter into this world. "Fit" in music — the criterion which differentiates true from false worlds - takes many forms: the character of a composition can be fitting or not to its subject matter. A performance can be fitting or not to the style and subject of a composition. A composition can comfortably fit, transcend, or be inadequate to its genre. It seems that none of these matters can be evaluated without stepping into the world the music presents.

Some have wondered whether Goodman's cognitive approach to art and others like it are inappropriately over-intellectualized. Göran Hermerén suspects that the high prestige of science may be part of the reason why many have emphasized the cognitive aspects of art, and finds that this emphasis, "can be an obstacle to those who want to enjoy and analyze the sensuous and structural qualities of works of art."[81] Similarly, Anthony Savile charges that to count a picture's expressive qualities as features that are relevant to its appreciation and understanding, we have to be interested in them for themselves, not for their

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[80] I will use "performer" to apply both to single performers and composites such as orchestras, quartets, bands, etc.
[81] Göran Hermerén, "Representation, Truth and the Languages of the Arts," Acta Philosophica Fennica 43 (1988): 205.

informativeness about other situations.[82] Both Hermerén and Savile fear that a semiotic approach to art will tend to draw our attention away from the artworks themselves. Yet while this danger may exist, I cannot regard it as significant. Our only access to the cognitive significance of an artwork is through its sensuous and structural properties, so concern with a work's "meaning" is likely to draw us deeper into these qualities, rather than away from them. Furthermore, attempts to understand the cognitive significance of an artwork can shed new light on its sensuous properties, or make us regard them in a different way.

Despite my support for a cognitive approach to art, Stefan Morawski's point that the different arts vary in cognitiveness, and that our response to different domains of art and particular works will not all be primarily cognitive, seems correct.[83] Clearly, though, some work will have to be done before we can begin to fix the limits of the cognitive or evaluate the cognitive potential of the different arts.

2.4 Style

Goodman has done much to clarify the ontological status of style. The distinction between those features that are

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[82] Anthony Savile, "Nelson Goodman's Languages of Art: A Study," British Journal of Aesthetics 11 (Winter 1971): 18-19.

constitutive of a work's style and those that are not does not map neatly onto the distinction between content (what is expressed) and form (how it is expressed) (WWM, 22-23). A feature of style may be a feature of what is said, what is exemplified, or what is expressed. A property counts as "stylistic" when it associates a work with one rather than another artist, period, region, school, etc. However not all such features are stylistic — only those features which have to do with the functioning of a work of art as a symbol. (So identifying features such as the label on a picture or the signature on a score do not count as stylistic) (WWM, 34).

We have already seen that convention is a crucial aspect of representation and expression in art. Understanding art, then, will necessarily involve familiarity with the relevant conventions. According to Goodman, the discernment of style is an "integral" aspect of understanding works of art. We usually perceive the style of an artwork at first without being able to analyze it into elements or specify its necessary and sufficient conditions. As we gain more insight into the style of a work, so too is our comprehension of the work deepened; the more intractable a style is to our approach, the more adjustment we have to

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[83] Stefan Morawski, "Three Observations on Languages of Art," Erkenntnis 12 (Jan 1978): 124.

make and the more our powers of discovery are developed (WWM, 40).

The consequences for understanding music might seem so obvious as to be trivial. Listening to a performance with understanding will include discerning stylistic aspects of the work being performed. A more educated listener will be able to make ever finer stylistic distinctions — the work in question is not just Baroque but unmistakably Bach; the performer, employing historical performance techniques, is likely, say, Monica Huggett rather than Elizabeth Wallfisch. The adjustments that need to be made in order to understand and enjoy stylistically unfamiliar works may be considerable. If Goodman is right, the effort will be repaid by an increased capacity to understand the work in question and other similarly unfamiliar music.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

I have made several "promissory notes" in the course of this chapter. I have put off until later discussion of the appropriateness of a cognitive or symbolic approach to art and particularly music. Evidently I find Goodman's theory of art congenial and expect it to be a fruitful approach to the problem of understanding music. Before ending this discussion, I should indicate what I find to be the unresolved problems or limitations in his approach to art in general and music more specifically.

Goodman stresses the role of convention in understanding art, particularly representational art. As Morawski has argued, it might well be the case that systems of symbols draw not only on cultural standards and competencies, but also on suprahistorical, anthropological regularities.[84] While Goodman would not likely take issue with this position, we will need to consider it at great length, with particular regard to music. The task of differentiating the natural from the conventional aspects of our experience of understanding music will be no easy task.

Because Goodman says so little about how art is experienced, he leaves himself open to charges of having an anti-intentional, context-independent approach. Goodman has stated that, "In the setting up of symbol systems, as in the building of bridges, intentions are indeed usually involved; but in both cases, we can study the results independently of the thoughts of the makers."[85] This is surely an inappropriate analogy; a bridge is a utilitarian object whose purpose and the intentions with which it was built are fairly clear. The purpose of an artwork is certainly less so. While it is certainly possible to examine an artwork without regard for the maker's intentions, this may not

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[84] Morawski, "Three Observations," 127. Gombrich has made similar claims in "Image and Code," and "The "What" and the "How": Perspective Representation and the Phenomenal World," in Logic and Art: Essays in Honor of Nelson Goodman, eds. Richard Rudner and Israel Scheffler (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1972),129-149.
[85] Goodman, "Some Notes," 566.

always be desirable. Sometimes our aesthetic experience and understanding can be enhanced by such regard.

Kendall Walton has argued persuasively that if a work's aesthetic properties are those that are found in it when it is perceived correctly, and if the correct way to perceive a work is partly determined by facts about the author's intention and/or his society, then the view that works of art should be judged simply by what can be perceived in them, is misleading. If, for example, we were confronted by a work whose origins we knew almost nothing about (say, an artwork from another planet) we would simply not be in a position to judge it aesthetically. Even the ability to see paintings as paintings had to be acquired, likely by repeated exposure to many paintings.[86] All of this indicates that Goodman's approach to art would be enhanced by greater attention to the role of contextual considerations in the understanding and appreciation of art.

With specific reference to music, Lee B. Brown has found that appreciation of intention and context is crucial for understanding improvisational music. The point of an improvisational performance is to create music in the course of playing it. Someone who approached a piece of improvisational music as though it were a string of sounds, or a string of sounds exemplifying a music structure, would

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[86] Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art," Philosophical Review 79 (July 1970): 334-367.

not be in a position to respond to it in an informed way. Any system of aesthetics such as Goodman's which treats artworks as continuants and subject to a criteria of re-identification will tend to marginalize improvisational music.[87]

Sparshott has offered a transcendental critique of Goodman's semiotic approach to art: why think of artworks as characters in a symbol system? While Goodman does not argue or state this view in Languages of Art, Sparshott is convinced that several passages insinuate that the work suffices to outline a new and better alternative to all extant views of art. Sparshott's question, if it does indeed adequately reflect Goodman's position, is not easily answered or dismissed. His own answer is that if art is for the understanding, then in makes sense to consider it in terms of that which offers itself to the understanding through and through — symbols and their systems. However reluctant we are to abandon this approach, he says, its shortcomings suggest that at some point we may have to.[88]

In conclusion, we have seen that Goodman offers a rich and philosophically sophisticated semiotic analysis of art. Although he says less than one would like about the

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[87] Lee B. Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 54 (Fall 1996): 353-369.
[88] Sparshott, "Goodman on Expression."

appreciation and understanding of artworks, his remarks on these topics are suggestive. Coming to understand a work of art requires becoming involved with it, or entering into the world it presents. After a consideration of some divergent views (specifically, those of Scruton and Kivy), I will offer my own analysis of in what this involvement might consist.

Chapter 3

Scruton on Understanding Music

Roger Scruton's account of musical understanding and philosophy of art more generally seems to contrast significantly with the positions defended by Goodman. Scruton claims to reject semantic theories of the arts, and maintains that music cannot be representational. Instead, Scruton stresses the role of the imagination in aesthetic understanding. Although I will in the end disagree with much of what Scruton has to say, a careful examination of his position is important for my purposes because he provides a real challenge to the positions I want ultimately to defend.

Scruton's Aesthetics of Music[89] is an ambitious work which touches on virtually all issues of current interest in the philosophy of music, as well as other less well discussed topics. Many of the positions elaborated are a development and extension of views presented in his earlier Art and Imagination.[90] Scruton begins with a consideration of the metaphysics of sound, and ends with a diagnosis of the decline of musical culture, and a reminder of the "great task which lies before the art of sound": namely, the recovery and renewal of tonality (AM, 507-508). In between,

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[89] Roger Scruton, The Aesthetics of Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Henceforth AM; further references will be given in brackets in the text.

Scruton's focus is almost entirely on western art music, with primary attention given to the roles of composer and audience. Performers and performances are given comparatively little consideration, and, whether as a consequence or a cause of this, Scruton's conception of music is rather abstract and disembodied. His harshest words are for atonal art music, although Scruton at the same time cannot deny the emotive power of some of the greatest atonal composers.

Scruton writes, "It came as a surprise that so dry a question as 'what is sound?', should lead at last to a philosophy of modern culture" (AM, ix). In what follows, I will have little to say directly regarding this theory of culture, or about Scruton's metaphysics of sound. Instead, I will limit my attention to what Scruton has to say about understanding music, and consider other topics only insofar as they relate to understanding music. More specifically, I will focus on the nature of the musical object, the relation between musical hearing and 'hearing as,' the role of metaphor in understanding music, and Scruton's account of involvement with music as a "dance of sympathy." I will attempt to show that Scruton implicitly recognizes different levels of understanding music, and although this distinction between levels of understanding is crucial for Scruton's

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[90] Roger Scruton, Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1974).

wider project of defending cultural conservatism, it remains unclearly articulated. The links between understanding music and aesthetic judgement remain undeveloped, and, given Scruton's understanding of music as a "character-forming force" (AM, 502), this is a serious limitation.

3.1 Musical Hearing and the Musical Object

As hinted at in the opening paragraphs, Scruton treats music as an abstract or disembodied entity. This passage, describing the result of the displacement of song and dance by instrumental music and silent listening, is characteristic:

> Music is heard as though breathed into the ear of the listener from another and higher sphere: it is not the here and now, the world of mere contingency that speaks to us through music, but another world, whose order is only dimly reflected in the empirical realm. Music fulfils itself as an art by reaching into this realm of pure abstraction and reconstituting there the movements of the human soul (AM, 489).

One of the major themes of Aesthetics of Music is that hearing sounds is necessary and sufficient for understanding music; the sounds do not have to be identified in terms of their causes. Scruton proposes a thought experiment in which sounds are heard in an empty room. There are no physical vibrations in the room, and the sounds can be traced to no specific source. A person in this room who hears the sounds experiences everything necessary in order to understand them as music (AM, 3). In listening to music, we hear sounds apart from the material world (AM, 221).

Although sounds are of course always produced by something, the cause of a given sound is not the intentional object of hearing (AM, 11). Rather, tone is the intentional object of musical hearing (AM, 20). For example, if I listen to a recording of Bach's Well Tempered Clavier, the intentional object of my hearing is not the CD player or the piano whose sound it reproduces; the intentional object of my hearing is rather the series of musical tones (originally produced by a piano).

Understanding music is a cognitive activity, and hearing and playing with understanding are two ways of manifesting a single capacity (AM, 211). To hear music, we must be able to hear an order that contains no information about the physical world, stands apart from the ordinary workings of cause and effect, and is irreducible to any physical organization (AM, 39). Not surprisingly, then, the salient features of a musical work are those which contribute to its tonal organization (AM, 110). Harmony, melody and movement are said to belong to the "essence" of music, while instrumentation is accidental (AM, 453).

Understanding music is first manifest in the apt organization of the musical gestalt (AM, 229). Scruton rejects the possibility that a theory of musical understanding could be founded on an analogy between music and language (AM, 202). Although music has a quasi-syntactic structure, and a "kind of meaning," its structure

is not the "vehicle" of meaning (AM, 198). While descriptions of music in technical language are neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding (AM, 212), theoretical analysis can be a "scaffold" by which to rise to higher and more complete perception (AM, 427).

Following Pierre Schaeffer, Scruton distinguishes between acoustic phenomena and the "acousmatic" — the character of sound as heard in the context of musical experience and detached from the circumstances of its production (AM, 2-3).[91] The (intentional or phenomenological) world of what is heard is separated from the physical world by "an impassable metaphysical barrier," such that relations between tones, although spatial and causal, have nothing to do with physical space or causality. There is no real space of tones, but there is a phenomenal space (AM, 74-75). (Scruton also characterizes the space and movement of tones as "metaphorical," and I will have more to say about this in the next section.) Similarly, form and structure in music are purely phenomenal, and the formal relations we perceive in music neither are, nor result from, any structure below the surface (AM, 323—33). The acousmatic realm is structured by virtual actions and virtual intentions. We perceive these immediately, such

[91] See Pierre Schaeffer, Traité des objets musicaux (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966).

that a work of music directly acquaints us with a form of life (AM, 115).

Given this characterization of music as a pure abstraction, it is not surprising that Scruton rejects the possibility that music can be representational. Indeed, music "inspires and consoles" us, partly because it is "unencumbered by the debris that drifts through the world of life" (AM, 122). Scruton's main argument for rejecting musical representation is that thoughts about the alleged subject of representation are never essential to the understanding of music.[92] Nothing much, or at least nothing musical, he contends, would be lost by the listener who thought that Richard Strauss's Don Quixote was about the life of a dog. It is possible to understand a piece of music "as music" without grasping its representational content (AM, 129-38).

Two problems with Scruton's arguments come to mind. First, Scruton begs the question against representation by beginning with an account of musical understanding which does not require the recognition of any information about

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[92] Scruton provided different arguments against the possibility of musical representation in "Representation in Music," in The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture (London: Methuen, 1983), 62-76. Criticisms of those earlier arguments include: Frances Berenson, "Representation and Music" British Journal of Aesthetics 34:1 (January 1994): 60-68; Peter Kivy, Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 146-58; and Richard Kuhns, "Music as a Representational Art," British Journal of Aesthetics 18 (Spring 1978): 120-25. I have chosen to focus on his position in The Aesthetics of Music because the argument there is based on the listener's understanding — my main area of interest.

the physical world (AM, 39, cited above). So it comes as no surprise that hearing music "as music" without grasping its representational content is sufficient for understanding it. Scruton is thus able to dismiss without discussion the view that representational elements might be significant in listeners' experience, as well as the possibility that the recognition of composers' or performers' intentions regarding representation might enhance listeners' experiences.

Second, the requirement that a piece can be said to have representational elements if and only if an awareness of these elements is essential for understanding seems too stringent, even if Scruton is correct that understanding the music as music is possible without this awareness. I will ultimately defend the position that recognizing the representational content of a piece often enhances our enjoyment and appreciation of the music as heard. Moreover, Scruton admits that knowing that a piece is supposed to depict something can affect the way in which we listen to it (AM, 130).

It is interesting to note that although music cannot properly be said to represent extra-musical phenomena, Scruton allows that it may suggest them, as, for example, when a fanfare on the horns suggests the hunt (AM, 126). Extra-musical thoughts prompted by music have an "ostensive" character, as though the music were making a gesture towards

something it cannot define (AM, 132). Scruton seems to allow that music (at least sometimes) can be said to "point to" or denote things in the world. We will recall here Nelson Goodman's characterization of denotation as the core of representation. Scruton, of course, does not accept Goodman's account of representation, but it is interesting to note that they seem not to disagree about the power and capacity of music. Similarly, Scruton's charge that Peter Kivy confuses musical representation and expression seems to indicate a verbal disagreement, rather than a disagreement about music itself.[93]

I have stressed the elements which contribute to Scruton's characterization of music as abstract. It is important to note that he does not characterize music as wholly other-worldly. In the presence of sound intentionally produced and intentionally organized, we find ourselves within another person's ambit, and that feeling conditions our response to what we hear (AM, 18). Works of music are intended objects, and a sense of the composer's intention informs our musical perception (AM, 107-08). It will remain to be seen how recognition of such "human factors" informs Scruton's account of musical understanding, and whether consideration of them can be made consistent with some of his more abstract characterizations of music.

3.2 Aspect Perception and Metaphor

[93] I will have more to say about this in Chapter 4.

For Scruton, the understanding of music is crucially and fundamentally informed by metaphor. The metaphorical incorporation of extra-musical ideas distinguishes the experience of perceiving sounds from the experience of understanding these same sounds as music. Hence, access to the cognitive categories used by listeners can be had through an analysis of the descriptive language used to characterize music, as opposed to sound. [94]

Metaphor seems to play two roles in Scruton's account: First, understanding music involves the ability correctly to apply metaphorical terms to music. For example, music does not literally exist in space, so the ascription of spatial relations to music is one important source of metaphor. Second, Scruton is convinced that music exhibits a "double intentionality" and hence aspect perception, grounded in metaphor, is a crucial component of musical understanding. I will examine both of these roles after discussing Scruton's conception of metaphor.

Following Aristotle, Scruton understands a metaphor as the deliberate application of a term or phrase to something that is known not to exemplify it (AM, 80).[95] The success of a metaphor (or any figurative language) consists in its

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[94] My understanding of Scruton's views on the relationship between metaphor and music has been informed by Malcolm Budd, "Understanding Music," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement 59 (1985): 233-48; and Naomi Cumming, "Metaphor in Roger Scruton's aesthetics of music," in Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music, ed. Anthony Pople (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 3-28.

bringing dissimilar things together, and creating a relation where previously there was none (AM, 83). Yet a metaphor is not a gratuitous likening of one thing to another, rather an attempt to understand one thing through another (AM, 235). The "point" of a metaphor is captured by the experience that leads us to adopt them — the experience of "fit" between two mental contents (AM, 153). When I come to understand a sentence I acquire a grasp of its truth conditions; but when I understand a metaphor, I come to see its point (AM, 85).

The purpose of a metaphor is not to describe an object, but to change its aspect for us (AM, 84). Scruton's account of aspect perception is inspired by Wittgenstein's discussion of the duck-rabbit figure in Philosophical Investigations. The change of aspect is a change from one experience to another, but it is not precipitated by any change in perceptual information.[96] It involves the transition from one entertained (yet unasserted) thought to another, each embodied in, say, a visual image, whose sensory contours remain unchanged (AM, 90). Scruton hopes that aspect perception "provides sufficient proof of double intentionality to suggest a plausible way of looking at metaphor" (AM, 87).

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[95] Note the similarity to Goodman's account of metaphor as the application of an old label in a new way (LA, 68-71).
[96] It is unclear to me whether Scruton's account of understanding music, based as it is on his analysis of aspect perception, can support an account of misunderstanding. In seeing the duck-rabbit now as a duck, and now as a rabbit, one does not go from misunderstanding to understanding it.

What is this "double intentionality" in the experience of music? Musical hearing is subject to the will, and this "fact" is of "supreme importance" to the philosophy of music (AM, 44). We hear sound and "the life and movement that is music"; we hear life and movement in the sound and situate it in an imagined space (AM, 96). Scruton seems to be saying that it is possible to alternate between hearing the sounds in which music is conveyed and hearing music. It is only when we listen to sound for its own sake, rather than for the sake of gaining information, that we begin to hear music: "We may pass over from the world of sounds into the world of tones; our experience then ceases to be organized in terms of the information contained in it, and acquires a newer and freer organization whose foundation is metaphor" (AM, 220). An illustration might help convey what I think Scruton is getting at: Imagine listening to a song in a language you do not understand. The first time, you listen and try to write down the words of the song in phonetic notation. The second time, you listen without regard for any such information, but simply follow the "contours" of the voice – the pitch, rhythm, timbre, dynamics and expressive qualities.[97]

[97] Scruton's account suggests phenomenological influence. Entering the realm of tones would seem to be like Husserl's "bracketting" of the natural attitude, in this case the "natural attitude" being listening to the causes of sounds. However Scruton says little about the influence of specific phenomenological accounts on his own work, and indeed seems to want to distance himself from phenomenology at times (AM, 96).

What does it mean to say that the organization of music is "metaphorical"? This claim is connected with Scruton's conception of the role of imagination in aesthetic understanding. Our ordinary intentional understanding is subservient to our goals; we divide the world in the ways most conducive to moral and practical existence. When we set aside our projects, another way of seeing the world becomes possible; an order that we actively create through imaginative perception "spreads through the realm of appearance." In perceiving this order, we use our ordinary concepts differently from the way in which we usually employ them. This "oblique" use of our concepts purifies them for us, and reconciles us to the world that they describe. Hence, "imagination cleans the window of perception" (AM, 236).

We may be selective in the metaphors we use; we may, with Scruton, characterize music as a "living, breathing, moving organism." The crucial point is that metaphor forms the structure of our musical experience and cannot be eliminated from it (AM, 332). The elimination of "compelling" or "indispensable" metaphors from the description of music results in a description of sounds, not music. Irreducible metaphors include those of unity, organism, growth, and life (AM, 428). The spatial relations within music constitute another important set of metaphors (AM, 92-94).

In listening to music then, we listen differently from the way we do in our everyday (non-aesthetic) lives. We use our usual concepts to describe the music — it may be sad or joyful, the music may move quickly or drag along, chords may be filled or hollow. We use these concepts assuming the same meaning that we assume in non-aesthetic and non-metaphorical contexts. So although these concepts mean what they usually do, they are applied in non-standard contexts.[98] Musical qualities, including the emotions we ascribe to music, are said to be like aspects in that while they are part of the appearance of something, they are not objects merely of sensory perception. They are perceived through the exercise of the imagination, and their perception is subject to the will, within limits (AM, 94 & 160).

There are many problems with Scruton's account of metaphor and aspect perception, as applied to music. Indeed, these problems seem so significant that it is unlikely an account of musical experience which relies crucially upon his conception of metaphor and aspect perception could be rescued. Malcom Budd has charged that

[98] Scruton's favourite illustration of the consistency of meaning in literal and metaphoric usage is taken from Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations; in the sentence "Wednesday is fat," "fat" is taken to have its usual meaning (AM, 84-85). The problem with Scruton's use of this example (and a problem with his account of metaphor more generally) is that metaphors are only illuminating (in aesthetic and other contexts) if they are effective as communication; that is, if we can have a sense of what they "mean" in a more prosaic sense. Devoid of

Scruton's position is incoherent, as the experience of musical understanding cannot be said to have a merely "metaphorical" essence. Furthermore, it is unclear how a metaphor could be part of the content of a perceptual experience.[99]

Part of the problem is that Scruton does not anchor his account of metaphor in any particular language community — naïve listeners, concert program writers, or professional musicologists — and so writes as if it were a simple matter to distinguish metaphorical from literal usage. R. A. Sharpe has pointed out the need to recognize degrees of metaphoricalness: "the music is sad" is well on the way to being a dead metaphor in company with "weighing the evidence." We do not invite interpretation when we say that the music is sad.[100] Moreover, to what extent is the application of spatial relations to music metaphorical? Naomi Cumming has argued that such metaphorical transfer is not experiential but merely semantic: "The most basic material foundation for musical 'space' is an actual differentiation between pitches. 'Motion,' on the other hand, is an indication of change occurring through time as

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context, I have no idea what Wittgenstein might have meant by characterizing Wednesday rather than Tuesday as "fat."

[99] Budd, "Understanding Music," 242.

[100] R. A. Sharpe, "'Hearing As'," British Journal of Aesthetics 15 (Summer 1975): 224-25.

one pitch is succeeded by another. These words, applied to music, are not literally false, but trivially true."[101]

Scruton's account of "double intentionality" seems to have only limited application to music or aesthetic experiences more generally. We do not (as Scruton does), speak of seeing a picture of the queen "as the queen," or a picture of a man "as a man."[102] Only when a picture is ambiguous does it make sense to ask someone to see it "as" something else. Similarly, Sharpe has argued (compellingly, I think) that while the expressive character of some music is ambiguous (the music of Mozart and Schubert comes most readily to mind), it is a mistake in most cases to think of the sadness of music as something we can choose to hear or not. The music just <u>is</u> sad.[103]

3.3 Meaning and Perception

For Scruton, the meaning of a piece of music is what you understand when you understand it; no fact or interpretation that is irrelevant to musical understanding can be part of the meaning of music (<u>AM</u>, 344).[104] As mentioned above, hearing sounds (as opposed to hearing the <u>causes</u> of sounds) is necessary and sufficient for hearing music, and Scruton rejects the idea that the meaning of

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[101] Cumming, "Metaphor in Scruton," 11-13.
[102] Scruton, <u>Art and Imagination</u>, 108, 118, 195.
[103] Sharpe, "'Hearing As'," 222.
[104] See also Roger Scruton, "Analytic Philosophy and the Meaning of Music," in <u>Analytic Aesthetics</u>, ed. Richard Schusterman (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989), 85 and "Understanding Music," in <u>The Aesthetic Understanding</u>, 77-100.

music could depend on anything extra-musical. The meaning of a piece of music is not given by convention, as is meaning in language, but by perception (AM, 210). In all cases of aesthetic meaning there is an irreducibly sensuous component, such that the meaning can only be discovered through an encounter with the artwork. The meaning is not an "association" or a train of images; rather, it is the intentional object of perception (AM, 227). Yet Scruton's account of musical meaning and understanding is not consistent with his claims about the power and social significance of art and music. To see this, we will need to consider Scruton's own discussion of specific works of art.

We will recall Scruton's characterization of the musical object as a pure abstraction, and his claim that knowing the cause of sound is not necessary for understanding, and that instrumentation (and hence timbre) are accidental. Yet consider his highly perceptive and sensitive discussion of Bach's D minor Chaconne:

> This is undeniably one of the most noble and profound utterances for solo violin in the history of music, and a remarkable study in implied harmony. Its effect of titanic strain, as of a giant Atlas, bearing the burden of the world's great sadness, is inseparable from the way in which the performer must stretch across the four strings of the instrument, to provide as many voices as can be produced by it, and to imply as many more. The performer's effort must be heard in the music, but heard too as part of the music. The brilliance of Bach's writing was precisely to achieve that effect: to make the difficulty of the piece into a quality of the music, rather than a matter of virtuosity. The music is intrinsically difficult, but not because it is

> showing off: rather, because difficulty is inseparable from its message (AM, 452).

It seems as though there are two levels of understanding implicit in Scruton's account. We must hear it as music, but to understand the "message" of this piece would seem also to require knowledge of instrumentation and performance practices. On his account, someone who knew little about the difficulties of producing separate voices on bowed string instruments would miss something important in the music. And without knowledge of the "solo" in the title of the piece, our uninformed listener might well get the impression that the piece was a duet played by two violinists!

Scruton's discussion of the D minor Chaconne brings to mind another limitation of his analysis: his underestimation of the role of the performer in heard music. While Scruton tells us that a sense of the composer's intention inhabits our musical perception, he makes no similar claim for the performer's intentions. His contention that "the performer inevitably leaves a mark on what is heard" (AM, 440) strikes me as a gross understatement: In listening to music (as opposed to silent score reading) the performance is just what is heard. While it is the "brilliance" of Bach's writing that makes the difficulty of the Chaconne part of the music (compare, for example, some of Paganini's virtuosic compositions) it is

surely also due to the "brilliance" of the performer that the difficulty of the music is not heard as mere showing off.

Similarly, Scruton's contention that meaning is the object of perception is hard to reconcile with his discussion of meaning in a particular artwork:

> When I see the dancers in Poussin's Adoration of the Golden Calf, I am not merely prompted by the painting to think of them, or to conjure them in my mind's eye. I see them there, in the painting. And when I turn my eyes away I cease to see them. If I retain an image of them it is also an image of the painting. The meaning of this painting lies in the experience of it, and is not obtainable independently. Nor is the meaning a simple matter of what is represented. I do not only see these dancing figures, and the scene in which they participate. I see their foolishness and frivolity; I sense the danger and the attraction of idolatry, which invites me to cancel all responsibility for my life and soul, and join in the collective dance. A moral idea begins to pervade the aspect of the painting. The figures come before me in a new light, not as happy innocents, but as embodiments of lawlessness, and assassins of the Father (AM, 227).

How does Scruton know that the figures in the painting are idolaters? Might they not be engaged in an approved religious rite? Even knowing the title of the painting cannot does not tell us the moral and cultural significance of the activity depicted: there seems to be nothing wrong per se with adoring a golden calf. Once again, there seem to be two levels of understanding implicit here. Understanding just what the painting depicts is not sufficient for understanding the meaning of the painting. Recognizing what Scruton points to as the meaning of the

painting depends upon a great deal of information, particularly of the Christian religious tradition, which is outside of the painting. I doubt very much that someone outside of the Christian tradition would have the same reaction to the painting as did Scruton, yet she could see the depicted scene equally clearly. Furthermore, someone who did not share Scruton's cultural and moral assumptions — imagine a young British neo-pagan — would reject his evaluations of the figures in the painting, perhaps seeing them precisely as "happy innocents." The issue here is not that Scruton's analysis of the painting is necessarily incorrect; it might very well be correct. The problem is that he does not come to his understanding through perceptual experience alone.

3.4 Sympathy and Involvement with Music

By "expression" Scruton understands the aesthetic meaning, identified through metaphors, which works of art are said to have over and above their representational content (AM, 140). In the case of poetry and music, this expressiveness cannot be detached from its sensuous form (AM, 360). Although the meaning of music does not lie purely in its emotional content, the expression of emotion is a paradigm case of musical significance (AM, 346). Expression in music must be heard for understanding to be possible; to grasp the meaning of a piece of music is already to respond to its quality as music (AM, 169).

According to Scruton, in order to understand expression in music, we must first understand our response to it. His account of this response is thought-provoking and original (AM, 354-57).[105] The response to expression is a sympathetic response, awakened by another life or subjectivity. What is a sympathetic emotion? If two people are happy their feelings coincide; if one is happy, and the second observes this happiness and comes to share it, without being happy for herself, then her happiness is sympathetic. Sympathetic emotions are more fully released by fiction than by fact, as in real situations our interests tend to eclipse our sympathies. One of the reasons why art matters is that through this "free play of sympathy" in fiction our emotions can become educated, but also corrupted.

Our response to music is sympathetic — a response to human life imagined in the sounds we hear. Yet the life in music is abstract, indeterminate, and belongs to the music process. Since music does not have the capacity to represent, there is no precise object of sympathy. In addition to feelings, actions and gestures may also be sympathetic, and like sympathetic feelings, sympathetic gestures may arise in response to real or aesthetic contexts. Scruton understands dancing as potentially

[105] Scruton's account of musical expressiveness has roots in Plato and Schopenhauer. His criticisms of Kivy's theory of expression in music are puzzling in light of his own account. I will have more to say about this in the next chapter.

sympathetic in this way: "In dancing I respond to another's gestures, move with him, or in harmony with him, without seeking to change his predicament or share his burden. […Dancing] involves responding to movement for its own sake, dwelling in the appearance of another's gesture, finding meaning in that appearance, and matching it with a gesture of my own" (AM, 355).

When we dance to music we move with it, and silent listening can be a kind of dancing too: "Our whole being is absorbed by the movement of the music, and moves with it, compelled by incipient gestures of imitation" (AM, 356). The object of imitation is the life imagined in the music. The response of the listener, then, is a kind of latent dancing; it is a sublimated desire to "move with" the music and so focus on its moving forms.

Scruton makes a connection between the social aspects of dancing and the gestures and movements of social life more generally. Manners are said to be a kind of generalized choreography. In the "dance" we perform as a response to music, we are led through a series of gestures which gain their significance from the "intimation of community." It is this link between music and social life which prompts Scruton to call music a "character forming force" and lament the decline of taste in popular music (AM, 502). Plato's conviction that dancing is a reflection of social character is "surely right"; the mores and habits of

mind and character of those who listen and dance to Nirvana will be radically different from those who listen to a Renaissance gavotte (AM, 390-91).

Like Scruton, I am convinced that understanding music requires some form of involvement with the music. His account of involvement as a sympathetic dance seems promising (although I am less sure about the culture critique he wants ultimately to draw from it.) One of the advantages of Scruton's account is that it indicates the importance of the body for musical understanding. It may be that some aspects of music's effect on us, and our reaction to music, will require an examination of music's natural, supra-cultural aspects. I will leave a full appraisal of Scruton's account until the more extended discussion of these matters in chapter six.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

Scruton is caught in a bind: He is convinced that we can learn from art, yet he wants to resist the thought that artworks are a means to information. He believes that what we learn from art can be gained only through a direct encounter with the work, so he resists the thought that artworks refer to anything beyond themselves, or that understanding them requires any knowledge beyond what is given in immediate perception. Yet his own analyses of artworks (the Bach Chaccone and Poussin's painting) show that in order fully to understand art we sometimes require

information beyond what is perceptually given in the artworks themselves.

Much of what Scruton says seems to imply the existence of levels of understanding: hearing the music "as music" and hearing its meaning, which requires extra-musical knowledge. Yet this theme is never developed. Later I will argue that an adequate account of musical understanding requires an explicit awareness of levels of understanding.

Scruton greatly overstates the importance of hearing aspects and "double intentionality" in the experience of listening to music. It is difficult to see how metaphor can form the "structure" of our experience of listening to music, or indeed of anything else. Lawrence Kimmel has pointed out that there is a "surface sense" in which we hear things rather than sounds. We hear dogs bark, doorbells chime, telephones ring, and trucks idle. The "sounds things make" is a cultural phenomenon too complex for mere ears; that is, hearing the sounds things make involves listening and understanding, not simply hearing. Hearing music in the first movement of understanding is not a physiological or a psychological process, but a cultural facility; it is misleading to say that we hear sequences of sounds and somehow spontaneously or "metaphorically" convert them into melody and music.[106]

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[106] See Laurence D. Kimmel, "The Sounds of Music: First movement," Journal of Aesthetic Education 26:3 (Fall 1992): 55-65.

I do not deny that it is possible, in special contexts, to hear sounds rather than music. For example, a violinist might listen to a performance with the aim of ascertaining which fingering the performer has used in a particular passage.[107] Rather than hearing the musical qualities inherent in Henryk Szeryng's performance of Bach — the sonorous "warm" character of his tone — she may hear two succeeding pitches, the first a D on the open string, followed by the same pitch played on the G string. Indeed, our experience of unfamiliar music, be it atonal art music or music of an unfamiliar cultural tradition, is sometimes an experience of sound rather than music. We may hear a series of pitched sounds, rather than a melodic line or rhythmic gestalt. But I think that we rarely listen to music for the sake of gaining information, and that it is even difficult to switch at will from one mode of listening to another. For those in the western music tradition, tonal music is heard first as music, just as English speakers hear (unaccented) English as meaningful, not as a set of sounds. Scruton admits that hearing music is subject to the will only "within limits," yet he never specifies just what these limits are. I want to suggest that they are very narrow:

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[107] On the violin, the same passage can often be played in different positions, avoiding or exploiting harmonics and the brightness of "open" or unstopped strings, with resultant differences in tone colour. The performer's decision as to fingering might be based on consideration of his physical features (the shape of his hand, length and strength of fingers), the tone quality of his instrument, the passages preceding or

Imagine listening to a great performance of Bach's Chaccone for solo violin or Mozart's Requiem and hearing it "as" light and breezy. The demand itself does not even seem to make sense.

It is interesting to note that Naomi Cumming and Rom Harre have examined Scruton's account of understanding music as informed by metaphor and have come to different conclusions as to the direction further research ought to take: Cumming is convinced that in order to determine whether and to what extent imagination and volitional activity direct perception of music, we need to look to experimental psychology rather than language analysis.[108] Harre agrees with Scruton that the idea of musical structure is not enough to account for the phenomenon of musical experience, and argues that our analytic understanding of music can advance only through detailed exposition and critical discussion of the metaphors through which the significance of music is generally portrayed.[109] Perhaps these two avenues for research are not exclusive, and psychological research can also be made to encompass what listeners say about music.

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following the passage in question, as well as the musical qualities made possible by the different fingerings.

[108] Cumming, "Metaphor in Scruton," 17-18.

[109] Rom Harre, "Is There a Semantics for Music?" in The Interpretation of Music: Philosophical Essays, ed. Michael Krausz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 210.

Chapter 4

Kivy on Understanding Music

Peter Kivy has probably done more than any other contemporary philosopher to encourage the serious philosophical study of music. My focus will be limited to Kivy's conception of understanding music, and I will consider his ideas regarding musical ontology, representation, and expression, only insofar as they illuminate what he has to say about musical understanding more generally.

Kivy's work on musical expression has been the subject of vigorous debate, and his views on musical representation, while not quite so widely discussed, have certainly been important in the ongoing controversies surrounding that topic. Kivy has defended his positions vigorously, and occasionally rethought and modified his views in the face of criticism. I will not attempt to provide anything like an overview of the critical assessment of Kivy's work. Instead, in discussing criticisms of his work, I will concentrate on those which have implications for musical understanding.

4.1 The Musical Object

Kivy is a platonist with respect to the ontological status of music. That is, he defends the views that musical works are universals or types, while performances of them are particulars or tokens; and that musical works are

discovered, rather than created.[110] (I mention this in order to help the reader place Kivy in a context; since I have set aside ontological questions as unimportant for most listeners, I will not here attempt to defend or oppose his position.)

Kivy distinguishes between two "arts" of music: The fine art of musical text setting and the decorative art of pure instrumental music. The former is primarily the art of representing human expression in musical tones. The latter, also called "absolute" music, lacks text, descriptive title, program, and plot.[111] Kivy prefers the term "music alone" for this type of music, and examples of paradigm cases include Bach's Well—Tempered Clavier, Brahms' fourth symphony, and Beethoven's string quartets.[112]

Inspired by Eduard Hanslick, Kivy characterizes his approach to music as "formalist." Accordingly, music is a cognitive object, but has no semantic meaning.[113] While humans may have a tendency to interpret musical sounds as

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[110] See Peter Kivy, The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); especially "Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense," 35-58, and "Platonism in Music: Another Kind of Defense," 59-74.
[111] See Peter Kivy, "Is Music an Art?" in The Fine Art of Repetition, 360-373.
[112] Peter Kivy, Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 14-29. Henceforth MA; further references will be given in brackets in the text. It is somewhat confusing that Kivy includes a titled work — The Well-Tempered Clavier — as a paradigm example of music alone (which is said to lack descriptive titles). This highlights the difficulties inherent (of which Kivy is aware) in giving a rigorous definition of music alone.
[113] I mean here to distinguish "semantic" meaning (analogous to the way a sentence is meaningful), from what might be called to "personal

meaningful in the fully linguistic sense, this tendency is easily defeated by the stringent semantic requirements on successful linguistic interpretation (MA, 9). The only "content" that music can be said to possess is its capacity to express emotions and to represent non-musical objects or events. Philip Alperson has used the term "enhanced formalism" to describe Kivy's view, as his account of music admits not only sensible qualities and relations, but also expressive, representational, and other features that figure in our aesthetic appreciation of the formal presentation of the work or performance.[114]

4.2 Representation and Expression

Kivy distinguishes pictures from representations. Pictures are those illustrations that are readily recognizable without verbal aids; for example, the Mona Lisa is readily recognizable as being a picture of a woman. Representations are illustrations which require verbal aids before they are discernible; for example, if I am drawing you a map of my neighbourhood, I may designate all the places where you can buy fresh fish with an "x". You will not know what the x's represent until I tell you. Kivy believes that there is a basis in ordinary language for the difference between pictures and representations, and notes

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significance" sense of meaning (analogous to the way a favourite blanket is meaningful to a child).

[114] Philip Alperson, "The Arts of Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 50:3 (Summer 1992): 217.

that the distinction does not commit him to a position on the conventionality of pictorial representation.[115]

Similarly, musical "illustrations" can be pictorial or representational. The potential for pictorialization in Western music is small. Examples, which the "vast majority with minimal sensitivity" can recognize, include musical depictions of various bird songs, thunderstorms, and babbling brooks. In the case of some musical pictures, the minimal information that one is listening to representative music might be needed in order to identify the object pictured. Kivy sets aside the question of whether all musical pictures sound like what they represent, or whether one can make musical pictures of things other than sounds (SR, 28-35).

Kivy recognizes three types of musical representation: (1) those that "sound like" the thing represented, (2) those of objects other than sounds, and (3) representation in musical notation. (Since the last is representation for the eyes and is therefore not part of the listening experience, I will have nothing to say about it).

Musical representations which sound like the object they are meant to represent are distinguished from musical pictures, because in order to be understood the former require more than the knowledge that they are meant to be

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[115] Peter Kivy, Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 19-24.

representational. A title or a line of text is needed to "fix" the object of representation. For example, in Handel's Israel in Egypt, a rapid thirty-second note figure in the violins sounds like and represents the buzzing of flies. A similar violin passage occurs in the first movement of Bach's Fourth Brandenburg concerto, but it is unlikely that anyone would say that the music there represents the buzzing of flies. The presence of the text in Handel's oratory accounts for the difference: it makes the resemblance between the music and the activity of insects perceivable, and the representation possible (SR, 35-37).

Musical representation can also be secured through conventional association, or by stipulation within a work itself (SR, 50-51). There are many conventional associations in western classical music: horn fanfares represent the hunt, the sound of the bagpipes represents Scotland, etc. Internal stipulation is also common, perhaps most widely employed in opera. Wagner's use of leitmotifs to stand for characters and dramatic themes is well known.

There are other ways, besides convention or stipulation, that music can represent non-aural properties.[116] Adjectives such as "bright," "jagged," "rising," and "soft," which denote simple perceptual

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Henceforth SR; further references will be given in brackets in the text.

properties are predicated univocally of musical sounds and of other things in the world. (We also apply emotive terms univocally to music, but Kivy is convinced that these bear on musical expressiveness, not representation.) The application of these adjectives to music is not idiosyncratic or bizarre, and neither are such applications merely examples of secondary usage. Composers have exploited the synaesthetic properties of music in text setting: In Handel's Creation, the brightness of the First Light is represented by the brightness of the C-major chord (SR, 61-71).[117]

While the representation of such synaesthetically transferred adjectives in musical representation is small, the practice of representation via structural adjectives is more significant. Structural relations in music can be isomorphic to structural relations in the world or in a text. Some of the most common examples are the correspondence between physical ascent or descent and the ascent or descent of a musical line, and the use of a rapid "fleeting" passage to represent flight. Wherever there is isomorphism of structure, the bare bones of representation

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[116] This is not to suggest, however, that the types of musical representation to be discussed shortly are free of convention.
[117] Jerrold Levinson has pointed out that light and the C-major chord can resemble each other without their possessing simple perceptual properties which are themselves highly resembling. There is a higher-order perceptual quality — "sensory brightness" meaning vividness or clarity in comparison to other presentations in a given sensory mode — of which visual and auditory "brightness" are species or determinates.

exist (SR, 72-77). Kivy recognizes limits to musical representation, and in particular of the capacity for music to tell a story. Musical "narration" can best be seen as illustration of a text, rather than narrative proper (SR, 195).

How can we tell a valid from a spurious interpretation of musical representation? Kivy argues that a representational interpretation is necessary only if we cannot make sense of a passage on purely musical grounds. Also, a composer's intention to represent is a necessary but not sufficient condition for representation. Discovering (through, say, a letter or diary entry) that a composer did not intend to represent is decisive evidence against representation. However Kivy thinks that such a discovery would be an unlikely scenario: We seldom have evidence of an artist's intention outside of the work of art itself (SR, 197-216).[118]

As mentioned earlier, Kivy distinguishes between musical representation and expression. Kivy is well known for providing persuasive arguments against the arousal theory of musical expression that suggests that "this music

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See his Review of Sound and Semblance in Canadian Philosophical Reviews 5:10 (1985): 456-57.

[118] Kivy's contention that intention to represent is necessary but not sufficient for representation should be read in light of his discussion of composers' disavowals of representation (in favour of expression) in his treatment of "representation as expression" (SR, 124-42).

is sad" entails that "this music makes me feel sad."[119] In Sound Sentiment Kivy vigorously defended the claim that music does not customarily arouse "garden variety" emotions like sadness, fear, happiness, or anger in listeners in ordinary aesthetic contexts. Subsequent challenges, especially by Colin Radford, have led Kivy to revise this claim. Radford argued that not all of our emotions or occasions of emotion are informed, explained, and justified by appropriate beliefs. Just as certain colours (primrose yellow) have a tendency to cheer, and others (ice blue) have a tendency to calm, so too will certain music tend to arouse the emotions it expresses. Furthermore, Radford points out that the view that music arouses emotions does not entail the view that expression in music just is this capacity to arouse.[120] In his latest reflection on the topic, Kivy has conceded that certain listeners, who are musically engaged and perceptive, may indeed come to feel the emotions expressed by the music they listen to, although he notices no such tendency in himself.[121]

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[119] See Peter Kivy, Sound Sentiment (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Henceforth SE; further references will be given in brackets in the text.

[120] See especially Colin Radford, "Muddy Waters," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 49:3 (Summer 1991): 247-52. Stephen Davies has also pointed out that not everyone who accepts that music can arouse emotion also accepts that the nature of musical expression is to be analyzed in terms of this tendency. See his Musical Meaning and Expression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 193.

[121] See his "Auditor's Emotions: Contention, Concession and Compromise," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 51:1 (Winter 1993): 1-12.

Kivy defends what he calls the “cognitive theory” of musical expression. We recognize emotion in music as a perceptual property. Throughout Sound Sentiment Kivy draws our attention to the photograph of a St. Bernard reproduced in the book. The dog’s face is expressive of sadness; this is not to say that she actually is sad, or that looking at her will arouse sadness in us. Rather, her “drooping” face and liquid eyes seem appropriate to the expression of sadness; her expression looks like one that might be on the face of a sad person. Similarly, according to Kivy, music is expressive in virtue of its resemblance to expressive human utterance and behaviour. For example, there are vocal and bodily patterns typical of sad people — they tend to speak slowly, in low tones, and move as though under strain. Music expressive of sadness will resemble these features — it will likely be slow and in a low register.

Such resemblance of “contour” is only one way in which expressiveness can be secured; conventional associations also play a role in musical expressiveness. Indeed, some features of musical expressiveness can be explained in virtue of their customary association with certain emotions, apart from an structural analogy between those features and the emotions expressed. Kivy suspects that the happy character of the major mode is a result of its customary association with positive emotions. However he is also inclined to believe that many musical features which are

expressive by convention were once heard as resembling identifiable expressive behaviour; so "contour" and "convention" are not easily separated. [122]

While expressiveness can contribute to musical illustration, it is false to claim that all illustration can be reduced to expression. There are too many examples of music that are sound pictures or representational which are not so in virtue of being expressive (of emotions or of anything else) (SR, 133).

4.3 Understanding Music[123]

Kivy rejects the idea that music is "meaningful in the full linguistic sense," due to the stringent semantic requirements on successful linguistic interpretation.[124] Yet, just as human beings have a tendency to interpret visual stimuli as objects in the world, so too is there a tendency to interpret sounds as meaningful in the fully linguistic sense. Both propensities likely developed because of the evolutionary advantages they afforded. In listening to music, then, we seek to understand something

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[122] Alan Goldman has argued that the claim that the association of minor keys with negative emotion is conventional, is no more plausible than a corresponding allegation in regard to dull, muted colours. See his "Emotions in Music (A Postscript)," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 53:1 (Winter 1995): 59-69. Certainly, this is a puzzle not likely to be resolved any time soon.

[123] My account of Kivy's conception of musical understanding is based primarily on Music Alone.

[124] The question of whether and to what degree music is "language-like" has been the subject of much philosophical reflection. The balance of opinion is on the negative, although much depends on the account of linguistic meaning with which one begins. Davies has discussed and evaluated various positions on the relationship between music and language in Musical Meaning and Expression, 1-49.

like linguistic meaning, but this search is thwarted because of music's low potential for conveying semantic meaning. Yet this lack of semantic content puts up no barrier to hearing music as expressive (MA, 1-13).

In the course of explicating his own views on understanding music, Kivy discusses certain rival positions. He claims that Descartes' account of music appreciation is paradigmatic of what he calls the "stimulation model." According to this model, music is a mere physical stimulus that puts the listener in a pleasurable state, analogous to the way in which drugs work. Kivy is concerned to show the inadequacies in Descartes' account because the stimulation model continues to be accepted, although now couched in the language of modern neurophysiology (MA, 31).[125] The problems with this model lie in its acceptance of the view that music is able to arouse emotions in regular aesthetic contexts, and in its conception of the musical object as a mere stimulus, rather than cognitive object. Kivy points out that if music were a mere stimulus, a listener's level of musical knowledge would have no effect on her pleasure in listening to music. Yet an educated listener is not like a pharmacologist who gets no more pleasure from heroin because he knows all about its molecular structure. Rather, knowledge about music, such as the awareness that certain

things are going on technically, and knowledge of the difficulties involved in producing certain sounds on different instruments, makes for a more complex perceptual object. Knowledge about music gives one more to think about and can increase one's appreciation of music and pleasure in listening to it (MA, 38-41). Even for the most naïve listener, music is not a mere physical stimulus but a perceived and cognized object, understood under one description or another (MA, 42).

Kivy also challenges the view, propounded since at least the eighteenth century, that all music is somehow representational. One obvious difficulty with this view is that while most "normal" observers will be able to say what is depicted in a representational picture, there is no such intersubjective agreement among music listeners where the music lacks a descriptive title, text, or program. An explanation of our enjoyment of music in terms of the apprehension of unconscious representations is theoretically possible, but unsupported by evidence and implausible. While it is true that some listeners may hear "pure" music as representational — hear battles and epic journeys in the music — Kivy is convinced that this type of activity is not listening, but free association to music (MA, 42-67).

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[125] In his zeal to confront contemporary proponents of the stimulation model, Kivy overlooks the subtleties of Descartes' position; but I will not develop this point here.

Despite their problems, the view that music is a mere physical stimulus and the view that all music is representational are each correct in one aspect. The mere stimulus view is correct in that it leaves no place for semantic musical "content"; the view that understanding music is understanding representation is correct in that it conceives of music as a cognitive object (MA, 66-67). In formulating his own account of musical understanding, Kivy seeks to draw on the strengths of these accounts. To begin with, he takes it as "something of an axiom" that those who respond to sound merely as a physical stimulus do not respond to music. Even a seemingly "mindless" response to music is a response to a cognitive object. The musical appreciation and understanding of more and less sophisticated listeners form a continuum of increasingly complex cognition (MA, 68-70).

Kivy's method of inquiry into the nature of the musical experience is hermeneutic phenomenology — he attends to his own experience of listening to music. One phenomenon he notes is "finding the theme" of a fugue:

> One of the things I do when I listen to a fugue, of course, is to listen for the entrance of the theme. Sometimes I get it right, sometimes I miss an entrance because it is an "inner voice" or otherwise disguised, sometimes I am fooled into thinking that there is an entrance, when, in fact, it is only a scrap of the theme in an "episode." This is something I enjoy when I listen to fugues. I presume others enjoy it too (MA, 73).

However, pleasure does not lie simply in finding the theme, for otherwise there would be no difference in the pleasure afforded by listening to fugues by composers of varying ability. Upon further reflection, Kivy says that he takes pleasure in how the theme enters, and how he hears the entrance is a function of how much he knows about and can perceive in fugues (MA, 77). Kivy goes on to argue that this experience of finding the theme of a fugue is paradigmatic of musical experience more generally. He sums up his claim: "[W]hen someone is enjoying music, he or she is, in any given instance, enjoying some sonic quality of a piece of music perceived under a certain description as doing something the listener enjoys, as doing something beautifully" (MA, 78).

The descriptions under which a listener hears the qualities of the piece need not be technical. One listener might say, "I enjoyed the funny way the theme sounded just then, when it came in: like the way it sounded before, but somehow a little different; I don't know, maybe a little more somber." Another listener might say, "I enjoyed how Bach sneaked that theme in, starting on the seventh degree of the scale rather than the first; and, of course, in doing that he gave the theme a whole new harmonic structure and cast." In both cases, the same musical event is perceived, yet under different descriptions. Both descriptions evince

musical understanding, but the second also indicates mastery of technical language (MA, 77-78).

Kivy takes it as a matter of common sense that our enjoyment of music correlates with our understanding of it. A listener's musical understanding is shown in, indeed constituted by, his ability to describe what he has heard. Again, this description need not be in technical language, any more than the descriptions under which a listener hears need be in technical language (MA, 98). Kivy allows that some Socratic "midwifery" might be necessary before an untrained listener can give a description of what he has heard (MA, 108).[126]

I mentioned earlier that in Music Alone Kivy suggests that listeners who "hear" events represented in music are free associating to the music rather than listening to it, and that this is not the best way to appreciate music (MA, 62). Kivy has come to change his mind on this issue; he no longer thinks that his way of listening to music is the only way, or a privileged way of listening.[127] As Alperson has argued, our understanding of "pure" instrumental music is

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[126] Would Kivy say that a listener who claimed to find music "ineffable" and was unable to describe it had failed to understand? Presumably such a listener would also benefit from Socratic midwifery. Also, a description of what one has heard need not be an exhaustive characterization.

[127] See Kivy, "Auditor's Emotions," and "Listening: A Response to Alperson, Davies, and Howard," Journal of Aesthetic Education 27:1 (Spring 1993): 24.

compatible with a variety of musical practices.[128] Indeed, Kivy's acceptance of non-technical descriptions of music as evidence of understanding in Music Alone already entailed that he would be hard pressed to reject "representational" descriptions as evidence of understanding. For example, a listener who was in the habit of "animating" her perceptions of music might liken the theme in the fugue discussed above to a small white cat, and the second entry in a new harmonic structure to a smaller black cat creeping along behind it. If such a description could be shown to characterize the music accurately (however fancifully), it is difficult to see on what grounds Kivy could reject it as evidence of understanding.

One crucial aspect of understanding music, for Kivy, is the ability to make basic emotive distinctions in music. It is almost impossible to imagine full musical competence in the absence of this ability (SE, 147). A person might fail to recognize expressiveness in music if he is unfamiliar with the conventions governing the behavioural expression of emotion in a given culture, or if he is unaware of the musical conventions that contribute to expressiveness in a given tradition or style (SE, 84-94). These claims seem reasonable enough, but some have implied that they do not go far enough. Roger Scruton has argued that such theories as

[128] Philip Alperson, "Instrumental Music and Instrumental Value," Journal of Aesthetic Education 27:1 (Spring 1993): 8-9.

Kivy's confuse expression with the route to it; an adequate account of musical expression will refer to the listener's experience and explain why she is affected in the way she is.[129] Similarly, Aaron Ridley contends that although certain features of music may be causally responsible for our experience of the music as expressive, they cannot by themselves explain what it is to experience music as expressive.[130]

I am unable to decide whether such criticisms are trivial or profound. Certain features of a photograph of my grandmother bring about my experience of recognizing her. The nature of this experience is either obvious (it just looks like my grandmother) or deeply mysterious, and so better investigated in conjunction with empirical psychology. Both Scruton and Ridley contend that music arouses in listeners the emotions it expresses. While no doubt some listeners are affected in this way, it seems unlikely that all are, and assuredly not all of us all of the time. (Peter Kivy, for one, claims that he never is.) On what evidence should we accept that our experience of an emotion in music is more than the recognition of that emotion? It seems likely that the experience of emotion in music at least begins with recognition, if not recognition

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[129] Roger Scruton, The Aesthetics of Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 146-53.

of a specific emotion, then, at minimum, recognition of the presence of emotion.

Before leaving this topic, I would like to examine Ridley's arguments in greater detail because they directly bear on the topic of musical understanding. For Ridley, to hear music as expressive is to have an experience of the music which has affective aspects, such that the appropriate musical gestures are heard as being expressive of the state which we experience sympathetically.[131] Elsewhere he makes the weaker claim that unless some or even most of us had responded affectively to music at some point, it would never have become appropriate to extend the application of expressive predicates to music.[132] According to Ridley, there are "reasons to think" that sympathetic response is essential to the experience of any kind of expressiveness: "There is or there can be among people a kind of community of affect, in which we grasp the states of others in the very act of responding to them and learn something of our own states through the responses they inspire."[133] He proposes an analogy with coming to appreciate the melancholy of a willow tree only as one is saddened by it — one apprehends the melancholy through a kind of "mirroring"

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[130] Aaron Ridley, "Musical Sympathies: The Experience of Expressive Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 53:1 (Winter 1995): 49-58.
[131] Ridley, "Musical Sympathies," 55.
[132] Ridley, "Musical Sympathies," 54.

response rather than merely identifying the expressive stance which the willow's posture resembles.

The problem with Ridley's argument (at least, as it pertains to his stronger claim insisting on the necessity of affective response to understanding expressiveness in music) is that there is no consensus on the scope and importance of sympathetic response in human beings. Even child development specialists disagree as to the importance of sympathetic response in the development of emotional "intelligence" in children. Indeed, a psychologist's assessment of the role of sympathetic response in childhood development will likely depend on the overall theoretical framework in which she works - behaviourists, freudians, piagetians, and social constructivisits all having differing views on the subject. If the issue is controversial with regard to children, it is no less so with regard to adults. It seems unarguable that we often do respond sympathetically to the emotions of loved ones — their sadness and joy palpably affect us. It is much more problematic to suggest that a sympathetic response is necessary to understanding the expression of emotion, be it the expression of people or music.

4.4 Profundity in Music

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[133] Ridley, "Musical Sympathies," 53. Notice the diminution of the claim made from "there is" a community of affect among people to "there can be" such a community.

Throughout Music Alone Kivy defends the view that although music is a cognitive object, it has no semantic content and limited capacity for representation. Yet he recognizes that certain musical works, for example Beethoven's late string quartets and Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, are considered "profound" (MA, 202-03). Does this belief in the profundity of certain music make sense? It seems uncontroversial to say that Goethe's Faust is a profound work, while Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, for all its charms, is not. Drawing on this insight, Kivy identifies three requirements for a work to be profound. First, a work must be able to be "about" something. Second, the subject matter of the work must itself be profound — of abiding interest and importance to human beings. Third, the work must treat its subject matter in an exemplary way; that is, it must function at a high aesthetic level (MA, 203-04).

One type of music which is often said to be profound is counterpoint, and it would seem to meet these three requirements. It is "about" the possibilities of musical sound, which is a subject of interest to many people. The third condition — that of high aesthetic quality — is not met by all contrapuntal music, but that coincides with our intuition that only some such music is profound (MA, 209-10). Yet music other than contrapuntal is considered profound — what about it? Generalizing from our insights

about counterpoint, it seems plausible that musical craftsmanship, so evidently exemplified in counterpoint, is the common feature of profound music. More exactly, this craftsmanship must be such that it commands our attention as a primary factor in musical experience, yet at the same time does not obtrude or draw attention to itself (MA, 210-13).[134]

Kivy realizes that there are problems with his account. For one, not all subjects of abiding interest and importance to human beings are profound. Proper nutrition and weather patterns are certainly of great significance and interest, but we would hardly call them profound. Kivy admits that he has no clear idea of why human beings should find the possibilities of musical sound of such abiding interest that we are prompted to call the subject profound (MA, 214-16). Another problem is the circularity of his account: There are profound musical works only if musical sound is a profound subject matter, and musical sound is a profound subject matter only if there are profound musical works (MA, 216-17).

Kivy seems dissatisfied by his account of musical profundity, and ends on a note of "mystery and puzzlement." He is convinced that some musical works are so compelling that "profound" is the only appropriate word to describe

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[134] Thomas Carson Mark has proposed a similar account with regard to artworks of virtuosity: Such artworks require skill, and are partially about the skill they require. See his "On Works of Virtuosity," Journal of Philosophy 77 (1980): 28-45.

them. Furthermore, he does not mean "profound" as another way of characterizing "great" music; not all great works are profound. Yet there seems to be no rational justification for characterizing any musical work as profound (MA, 217-18).

As several commentators have pointed out, Kivy's formalism and denial of musical "content" gets him into trouble here. David A. White has noted that to say that music is "of the world" but "not about the world" (MA, 67), leaves open the question of how music is related to and understandable in terms of the world.[135] According to Davies, Kivy's denial of musical "aboutness" generates many of the difficulties that his account of musical value acknowledges, without being able to answer.[136] Levinson has argued that musical "aboutness" is best defended on a case-by-case basis; there is no need to accept the principle that any piece of music is about all of its extra-musical properties: "There is no reason we should restrict our useful informal notion of aboutness to systematic or conventional relations of reference or denotation."[137] The concerns pressed by Graham McFee are more far-reaching, relating to Kivy's contention that pure music's lack of semantic content makes it a decorative rather than a fine

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[135] White, David A., "Toward a Theory of Profundity in Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 50 (1992): 33.
[136] Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 277.

art. If music alone is "nothing but" sound, how could it be understood? Why would we want to make sense of our experience of music as valuable? Kivy has offered a "wallpaper model" of decorative art, but we do not try to "understand" wallpaper, no matter how intricate its structure or much pleasure we might derive from it. Furthermore, there is no basis for Kivy's claim that music alone can be genuinely understood, yet not be meaning-bearing.[138]

The problem of music's "aboutness" or capacity to bear meaning is clearly one of the thorniest in aesthetics, and I will not be able to say much about it here. I share these commentators' reservations towards Kivy's denial of music's cognitive content. Perhaps one way of considering the problem is to think about the difference between musical works which have descriptive titles and those which do not. In calling his composition for viola and orchestra "Abdi ne viderem" ("I turned away so as not to see") Giya Kancheli would surely seem to be drawing our attention to its subject — his decision to leave his native war-torn Georgia - and resultant expressive character. The music is clearly meant to be "about" something. I think Kivy would agree so far; the descriptive title of the piece means it is not, after

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[137] Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Profundity Misplaced," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 50:1 (Winter 1992): 58-60.
[138] Graham McFee, "Meaning and the Art Status of 'Music Alone'," British Journal of Aesthetics 37:1 (January 1997): 31-46.

all, “music alone.” Yet imagine the same composition without the descriptive title. Is it any less “about” the same subject? I would say no — the difference is that in the first case the composer’s intentions are on the surface, and in the second case they are hidden. We would have to be careful about the claims we made for the second composition, but it would be going too far to say that it was not “about” anything.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

In examining the work of Goodman, Scruton, and Kivy, I have tried to bring out what was most important to their accounts of understanding music, (in the case of Goodman, his account of understanding art more generally.) We have seen that only Goodman has anything like a fully worked out conception of the logical structure of representation and expression. Kivy claims that his account of these phenomena in music is compatible with Goodman’s, but certain commentators have doubted whether this is in fact the case.[139] I suspect that Kivy and Goodman would fundamentally agree about the power and nature of music, but differ as to the character of logical relations underwriting representation and expression in music. Scruton has criticized both Goodman and Kivy, yet we have seen that his account of expression has much in common with Kivy’s (both rely on the structural similarities between expressive music

and expressive human behaviour), and his own account of musical representation is not compelling philosophically or to common sense.

In the next chapter, I will examine the Kantian background which, with different consequences, informs the views of each of these thinkers. My goal will be to gain a better understanding of the premises they share and the issues which divide them.

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[139] For example Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 83-84 and 145.

Chapter 5

Kantian Themes

Almost everyone who writes on Kant's contribution to the philosophy of music feels compelled to disclose at the outset that Kant seems to have had little affinity for art in general and for music in particular. His preferences ran to loud and boisterous military music, heroic fanfares, large orchestras, and he is said not to have cared for solo instruments in the least.[140] In the Critique of Judgement he disdainfully compares music to perfume, because both extend their influence further than is desired.[141] Indeed, Kant once wrote indignantly to the director of police, commanding that he prevent the inmates of a nearby prison from singing hymns.[142] Kant's contribution to understanding aesthetic experience has nevertheless been immense, and an examination of it is necessary fully to understand many contemporary issues in philosophical aesthetics. Roger Scruton has gone so far as to say that were it not for the Critique of Judgement, aesthetics would not exist in its modern form.[143]

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[140] Herman Parret, "Kant on Music and the Hierarchy of the Arts," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 56:3 (Summer 1998): 252. Parret's source for these remarks are the biographic materials collected in Siegfried Drescher, ed., Wer war Kant? Drei zeitgenössischen Biographien von Ludwig Ernst Borowski, Reinhold Bernhard Jachmann und E.A.Ch. Wasianski (Pfullingen: Neske, 1974).

[141] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), §53. Further references (to section numbers) will be given in brackets in the text.

[142] Roger Scruton, Kant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 5. Scruton does not cite his source for this anecdote.

[143] Scruton, Kant, 79.

I will not attempt to provide a full analysis and assessment of Kant's contribution to the philosophy of music; this has already been done by others more able than myself.[144] Rather, I will consider three aspects of Kant's philosophical contribution to aesthetics: one area - form and content - has been of great influence in the philosophy of music. The other areas I will examine have been less influential, but should be of significance to philosophers interested in musical understanding. They are the Kant's analyses of aesthetic ideas and of the sublime.

Unsurprisingly, there are Kantian themes in the work of Goodman, Scruton, and Kivy. I will begin with a short discussion of the similarities and differences between Kant and the three contemporary figures. This will also help us see the affinities and oppositions among the latter.

5.1 Goodman, Scruton, Kivy, and Kant

Goodman, Scruton, and Kivy have enjoyed a much greater range of aesthetic experience than Kant could have had. Lewis White Beck has conjectured that Kant probably never saw a beautiful painting or a fine statue.[145] Consequently or not, these three philosophers have much greater

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[144] See for example Robert E. Butts, "Kant's Theory of Musical Sound: An Early Exercise in Cognitive Science," Dialogue 32 (1993): 3-24; Parret, "Kant on Music and the Hierarchy of the Arts;" and especially Herbert M. Schueller, "Immanuel Kant and the Aesthetics of Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 14 (1955-56): 218-247.

[145] Lewis White Beck, Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 498. This work has helped me to achieve a better understanding both of Kant's aesthetics and of its place in his critical philosophy.

appreciation for the range of art and music than Kant did, bringing a richness to their discussion of specific artworks. Scruton and Kivy, in particular, have had a significant degree of formal musical education.[146]

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Kant's influence on Goodman, Scruton, and Kivy is the conception of artistic appreciation as primarily a cognitive activity. Art is first understood and judged by the mind; its stimulus to emotions is secondary. Indeed for Kant, even single tones are judged, not merely sensed (§14). That said, it should be noted that Kant's conception of emotions and their role in aesthetic judgement has few contemporary adherents. Neither Goodman, Scruton, nor Kivy shares Kant's suspicion of emotions in aesthetic experience.[147]

While the philosophers under discussion consider the appreciation of art to be a cognitive activity, only Goodman goes so far to say that music can be a "way of worldmaking" — that music can be knowledge-bearing. The greatest difference between Goodman on the one hand, and Scruton, Kivy, and Kant on the other, is that the latter adhere to some doctrine of aesthetic formalism.[148] According to Goodman form cannot be distinguished from content, and we cannot

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[146] I do not know whether Goodman ever had formal musical training.
[147] I will explicate Kant's understanding of the role played by emotion in aesthetic judgement more fully in the next section. It should be noted that Kant does not regard emotions themselves as inimical to aesthetic experience; only interested emotions are so.
[148] I will leave off a fuller discussion of Kant's formalism and its application to music until the next two sections.

say, definitively and absolutely, which features of an artwork have aesthetic significance. A feature which at one time seems to us incidental may later come to have greater importance. His view is thus at odds both with Scruton's conception of the musical object as primarily a tonal structure and with Kivy's "enhanced formalism."

We saw earlier that much of Goodman's discussion of art focussed on the logic of the denotative relationships — representation, exemplification, and metaphor — inherent in works of art (including musical performances) and discovered through engagement with them. Goodman said comparatively little about the process by which we come to appreciate those relationships, and their role in aesthetic experience. This approach is asymmetrical to Kant's, who devotes most of the Critique of Judgement to a consideration of the mental process operative in understanding art, and says comparatively little about artworks themselves.

Scruton, besides accepting a formalistic conception of the musical object, seems to have been influenced by Kant's arguments for the objectivity of aesthetic judgements. For Scruton, as for Kant, when I say that something is beautiful, I expect others to agree, and it matters to me whether they do or not. Also, we will recall that according to Scruton, everyday concepts are used differently in aesthetic experience, which in turn highlights the importance of metaphor in aesthetic judgements. This

recalls Kant's view that the concepts employed in everyday cognition are determinate, while the concepts employed in aesthetic judgements are indeterminate. These Kantian themes in Scruton's work coexist uneasily with what can be interpreted as his romanticism. I am thinking particularly of his conception of music as abstract and not of the physical world, his privileging of diatonic tonality as "natural," and the idealization of the past implicit in his lamentations condemning atonal and popular music.

We saw earlier that Kivy distinguishes between the "fine" art of musical text setting, and the "decorative" art of pure music. Although Kant does not use the same terminology or work out his insights about music as an art consistently and in a systematic fashion, Kivy's distinction is clearly Kantian. We will see later that Kant considers music without a text to have no cognitive content, and vacillates on the question of whether music is one of the fine arts.

5.2 Form and Content

In the Critique of Judgement, Kant distinguishes two types of aesthetic judgements. Material aesthetic judgements (judgements of sense) assert that an object is pleasant or unpleasant. Pure aesthetic judgements (judgements of taste) assert the beauty of an object or of the manner of representing it (§14). Judgements of sense make no claim to universality; when I say that I find

broccoli delicious, I do not expect others necessarily to agree. Judgements of taste, on the other hand, are meant to be universal; when I say that Beethoven's violin concerto is beautiful, I expect that others will concur.

For Kant the appreciation of art is cognitive in the sense that the cognitive faculties are involved. However it is non-cognitive in that the application of determinate concepts is ruled out. Furthermore, the apprehension of beauty is an affective state; one feels pleasure when one judges an object to be beautiful. Kant's definition of beauty is "purposiveness without purpose;" that is, a beautiful object seems an organic whole designed for apprehension by our mental powers, although we either do not know the object's purpose or set it aside in order to make an aesthetic judgement. Pleasure in the beautiful arises from the "harmony" of our faculties of imagination and understanding in contemplating the form of a beautiful object. Furthermore, in aesthetic judgements our mental powers are free; reflection and contemplation must not be determined by a previous interest. Hence judgements of the beautiful are disinterested: the perceiving subject must have no interest in the existence of the object.[149]

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[149] My understanding of Kant's aesthetic theory has been greatly aided and influenced by Donald W. Crawford, Kant's Aesthetic Theory (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974); and Kathleen Marie Higgins, The Music of Our Lives (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 47-80.

An example may help to clarify: Imagine contemplating a particularly attractive fish arranged on ice shavings. In ordinary cognition the manifold of sense impressions is brought under a determinate concept: This is a fish — a rainbow trout, to be exact. In an aesthetic judgement, the sense impressions enliven one another without coalescing in a determinate concept. You contemplate the fish, noticing its symmetry, its particular shape, the arrangement of its gills and fins, etc. Any knowledge you may have about, say, the appropriateness of the fish's shape to rapid travel through water, must be set aside. Any thoughts related to an interest in the fish's continued existence — such as your desire to cook it for dinner — must also be set aside if your contemplation of the fish is to be disinterested and a free play of imagination and understanding.

The notion of aesthetic form plays a major role in Kant's aesthetics, but it is not easy to discern exactly what he means by it. According to contemporary usage in aesthetics, "form" refers to the perceptual elements of an artwork and to the relations holding between them. "Formalism" is the aesthetic doctrine according to which these related elements are said to be the primary locus of aesthetic value.[150] When discussing the visual arts, Kant sometimes writes as though by form he understands

delineation, figure, or shape (§14, §42). Yet the matter is not so simple, as the notion of form is logically related to the notion of purposiveness. An object's purposiveness is what we perceive in it — its form and organization — which leads us to say that it resulted from a concept. The "free play" of our mental powers and their "harmony" arise from the fact that the objects' formal properties are related in a purposive way, even though no concept is employed to judge the object at the time. Returning to the fish example, we contemplate the fish without thinking of it as an instance of a fish, a swimming creature, a sea-dweller, etc. So judgements of form are never purely "object oriented;" they always make reference to how the perceiver affectively responds to the perceptual object. As Crawford explains, a pleasing form itself is insufficient for Kant - the form is a means to a significant experience.[151]

A judgement of taste is "pure" only so far as no empirical satisfaction is included in the determining ground of the judgement. We cannot assume that all people experience the same quality of sensations; hence pure aesthetic judgements must be based solely on the form of an object, as only this admits of "universal communicability." A musical composition, not the pleasant tones of a

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[150] Lucian Krukowski, "Formalism: Conceptual and Historical Overview," in Michael Kelly, ed. Encyclopedia of Aesthetics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[151] Crawford, 124.

particular instrument, is the proper object of a pure judgement of taste (§14). For example, different people will experience varying degrees of pleasure in the timbre of, say, the flute. So we cannot determine whether a composition for flute is beautiful unless we "abstract" the characteristic flute timbre and judge the composition solely on the basis of its form or structure. Otherwise, a listener who dislikes the sound of the flute might incorrectly judge the composition as not beautiful simply on the basis of its timbre.

In all beautiful art, the essential thing is the form (§52). Kant gives the example of the colours added to a sketch; these can increase the pleasure we take in the sketch and enliven it for sensation, but they can never make the sketch worthy of contemplation or beautiful. In the instances where tone and colour add to the beauty of an object, it is not the case that they add something to our enjoyment of the form. Rather, they make the form "more exactly, definitely, and completely, intuitable," and by their charm fix our attention on the object itself (§14). This enhanced attention may thus facilitate the pleasurable harmony of the faculties.

Some of Kant's negative estimations of music come from the fact that we cannot decide whether sensations bound up with the appreciation of music are based on sense or strictly on reflection. We cannot say with certainty

whether sounds are merely pleasant sensations, or whether they form in themselves a beautiful play of sensations. If musical sounds could constitute a beautiful play of sensations, they would be able to be the occasion of aesthetic judgements of satisfaction in the form of an object. As I interpret him, Kant leaves undecided the question of whether music can be a beautiful (fine) art (§51).[152] A question which Kant does not leave undecided is the cognitive status of music. Music merely "plays with sensations" and so offers little culture to the mind (§53).

Many commentators have found difficulties with Kant's aesthetic formalism. Schueller has argued that, in separating charm from aesthetic judgement, Kant is asking for form without content. Yet sensations are necessary for aesthetic judgement, as they are what make the form intuitable.[153] Crawford notes that by Kant's own characterization of the form/matter distinction, the two are inseparable in experience.[154] Perhaps more significantly, in decrying music's lack of "culture" for the mind, Kant reveals a preference for content and moral instruction over form.[155] Indeed, Kant's notion of aesthetic worth as related

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[152] This position is also held by Butts, Parret, and Schueller. Schueller (223) makes the interesting suggestion that the status of music as an agreeable or fine art depends on the listener: If a listener only half-hears music in the background of a dinner party, say, the music is decorative. If the same listener turns from the party to contemplate the music aesthetically, the music has the status of a fine art.
[153] Schueller, 242-43.
[154] Crawford, 110.
[155] Schueller, 235.

to the supersensible and to morality indicates that he wants to pack more into his notion of formal purposiveness than a strict formalistic theory will allow.[156]

5.3 Hanslick and the Tradition of Musical Formalism

It is likely that Kant had too little inclination for music to see the implications inherent for it in his aesthetic theory. In particular, Kant's formalism required someone with a greater appreciation of musical structure to work out its full potential with regard to music. It is very tempting to read Eduard Hanslick's On the Musically Beautiful as an exercise in Kantian formalism as applied to music. Although we have no evidence that Hanslick ever read Kant,[157] there is an uncanny similarity between their positions.

Since its first appearance, Hanslick's book has had considerable influence on those working in musical aesthetics; Payzant's new English translation in 1986 further stimulated philosophical discussion of Hanslick's ideas.[158] Although Hanslick's avowed project in the book is quite modest, the reader may come to suspect that his polemical language belies these modest aims. It is safe to say that Hanslick has exerted more direct influence on

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[156] Crawford, 176.
[157] Geoffrey Payzant, translator's preface to On the Musically Beautiful by Eduard Hanslick (Indianpolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1986), xv-xvi.
[158] Scruton and Kivy have both engaged with Hanslick's thought: Scruton in his Aesthetics of Music, and Kivy in Sound Sentiment, Music Alone, and in the essays "Something I've always wanted to know about Hanslick,"

musical aesthetics, broadly construed, than has Kant. (If nothing else, Hanslick is a lively writer and his ideas are fairly accessible.) We will see that despite the similarities between their positions, some of Kant's most important and promising insights are not to be found in Hanslick. In particular, we cannot find in Hanslick either the notion that beauty inspires the free play of cognitive faculties, or the potentially richer understanding of formalism present in Kant's work.[159]

There are several specific points of agreement between Kant and Hanslick. Like Kant, Hanslick regards the appreciation of music as primarily a cognitive activity, saying that music is composed not for the eardrum but for the auditory imagination.[160] Hanslick considers the pleasure brought about by listening to music to be cognitive in nature: Instead of wallowing in feeling, "to take pleasure in one's own mental alertness in the worthiest, the wholesomest, and not the easiest manner of listening to music."[161] Furthermore, Hanslick shares Kant's preference for disinterested aesthetic interpretation. Pure, contemplative hearing is the only "artistic, true" form.[162]

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and "What was Hanslick denying?" both in The Fine Art of Repetition, 265-275 and 276-295).

[159] See Peter Kivy, "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*: What He Said, and What I Wish He Had Said," in The Fine Art of Repetition, 263-64; and Higgins, The Music of Our Lives, 72-80.

[160] Eduard Hanslick, On the Musically Beautiful, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianpolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1986), 30.

[161] Hanslick, 64-65.

[162] Hanslick, 63.

In an aesthetic inquiry, one should not take into consideration anything pertaining to the personal circumstances and historical background of the composer. Rather, one hears and believes only what the artwork itself has to say.[163]

According to Hanslick, the beauty of a piece of music is specifically musical; that is, it is inherent in the tonal relations without reference to any extramusical content.[164] While music can suggest ideas and convey the "motion" of feelings, these ideas and feelings are not thereby the content of the music.[165] Rather, the content of music is structural and inherent in its "tonally moving forms." Hanslick seems to want to limit musical structure to those elements conveyed by the score — melody, harmony, and rhythm.[166] Accordingly, he makes a sharp distinction between "the music itself" and other aspects of the aesthetic experience of listening to music. Our feelings and mental images are "frequently misled" by verbal texts, titles, and other "merely incidental associations of ideas," which we are "wrongly inclined" to ascribe to the music itself.[167]

We are reminded of elements of both Kivy's and Scruton's positions by this brief overview of Hanslick. In

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[163] Hanslick, 39.
[164] Hanslick, xxiii (Foreword to the Eighth Edition).
[165] Hanslick, 10-11.
[166] Hanslick, 28-29.

particular, I am thinking of Scruton's resistance to the notion of musical representation, his contention that melody, harmony, and movement belong to the essence of music, and his construal of meaning as the intentional object of perception. Kivy's attempt to distinguish "music alone" from other music and his denial of musical content would also meet with Hanslick's approval. However it should be noted that Kivy and Scruton are much more philosophically sophisticated than Hanslick, and that Kivy's "enhanced" formalism escapes some of the problems inherent in Hanslick's more austere version. Perhaps most crucially, both Kivy and Scruton reject Hanslick's insistence on the primacy of "deliberate pure contemplation" of music, with "pure" opposed to "pathological" or affective. Kivy holds that the recognition of emotion in music is essential for understanding, and Scruton's account of involvement with music is based on a notion of sympathy.

However both Kivy and Scruton are prey to some of the same worries that plague Hanslick's austere formalism. In the discussion of Scruton in Chapter 3 we saw that his conception of the musical object and of musical meaning were meager and underdeveloped, given the social and moral significance he accorded music. In Chapter 4 we noted that Kivy had trouble reconciling his feeling that some music was profound with his denial of musical content. Furthermore,

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[167] Hanslick, 6.

Kivy's distinction between "music alone" and music with text, title, or program, was seen to be problematic.

In contrast to a formalist approach to art, in a semiotic account such as Goodman's, art is considered as a symbol system. Symbolic relations within artworks and between elements of an artwork and the world are the focus of attention. The way we come to appreciate such symbolic relations is through engagement with the work, including engagement with its perceptual qualities. A semiotic approach, construed in a such a way that the symbolic is approached through a work's formal properties, would seem better able to make sense of the listening experience. A formalist account would have us concentrate on certain features of artworks; some formalists, like Hanslick, would even encourage us to censor those responses which were not prompted by approved features.[168] A semiotic account, on the other hand, preserves the strengths of a formalist position — the importance of engagement with a work's perceptual qualities — and would not seem to share the weaknesses of formalism.

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[168] At least, the desirability of censoring such responses is implied in Hanslick's rhetoric. Consider, for example, the following description of listeners whose attitude to music is pathological or affective, rather than contemplative: "Slouched dozing in their chairs, these enthusiasts allow themselves to brood and sway in response to the vibrations of tones, instead of contemplating tones attentively. […] These people make up the most "appreciative" audience and the one most likely to bring music into disrepute. The aesthetical criterion of intellectual pleasure is lost to them; for all they know, a fine cigar or a piquant delicacy or a warm bath produces the same effect as a symphony." Hanslick, 59.

For example, one of the difficulties with formalism is that it is difficult on such an account to connect our encounter with an artwork with the wider range of our experience. According to a semiotic approach, appreciation of a work's symbolic character can be enhanced by attention to its historical and cultural context, as well as speculation as to the artist's likely intentions. (Recall that for Goodman any knowledge a person has about an artwork can effect how she sees it, while according to Hanslick, we should attempt to forget what we may know about a composer's historical and cultural context.) A semiotic approach to art thus provides for a potentially richer experience than does a formalist approach. Furthermore, a semiotic account can better account for the feelings we sometimes get that there is more to an artwork than given in immediate perception.

5.4 Aesthetic Ideas

Aesthetic ideas and rational ideas are counterparts of one another, comparable to two sides of a coin. A rational idea is a concept of the mind to which no sensible intuition or representation of the imagination can be adequate. Kant's example of a rational idea is the kingdom of the blessed. An aesthetic idea is a (sensible) representation of the imagination which brings about much thought, but to which no definite thought or concept is commensurate. It is difficult to provide an example of an aesthetic idea, as

they cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language (§49).

According to Kant, the poet (one is tempted to say, the creative artist more generally), tries to express rational ideas by using sensory means. That is, he tries to give the appearance of objective reality to certain concepts which lie beyond the bounds of experience. Or, if the artist deals with things of which experience is possible — death, the emotions, vice, etc., he tries to present these things with a "completeness" they lack in nature. In this type of creative work, the artist's faculty of aesthetical ideas is manifest (§49).

Closely linked to aesthetical ideas are the aesthetical attributes. These are forms which the artist uses to make us think of rational ideas. The aesthetical attributes are "approximate representations of the imagination" and express the consequences bound up with a given concept and its relationship to other concepts. However the aesthetical attributes do not simply present given concepts. These concepts, as rational ideas, cannot be adequately represented; and if these concepts are given in experience, they lack a certain completeness. The aesthetical attributes of rational ideas "furnish" aesthetic ideas; that is, they enliven the mind by alerting it to the possibility of unlimited range of related representations (§49). Because aesthetic ideas are representations of the

imagination for which an adequate concept can never be found, they cannot be cognized as knowledge. Similarly, a rational idea can not be cognized as knowledge because it involves a concept corresponding to which no intuition can be given. Aesthetic ideas are inexponible (ineffable) representations of the imagination, meaning that they cannot be conveyed to others through language (§57, Remark I).

Kant's examples of aesthetical attributes are not very illuminating: The aesthetical attribute of the king of heaven (a rational idea) is Jupiter's eagle with lightning in its claws. By way of further explication he analyzes a poem by Frederick the Great which many subsequent commentators have found notable only for its banality (§49). I will try to offer a more illustrative example: "The act of Divine creation" is a rational idea which is not given in experience. Michelangelo tried to evoke or "realize to sense" this idea in his well-known fresco of two outstretched hands about to touch one another (God's hand touching Adam's). The aesthetic ideas expressed by the fresco — impossible to convey adequately in language - might include the God's benevolence and wisdom, the fundamentally dependent and contingent nature of human life, and the perfection of divine design. The aesthetical attribute by which these ideas are evoked is the form of Michelangelo's fresco; that is, the perceptual qualities inherent in it and their relations to one another, as perceived by a subject.

Kant indicates that music can express aesthetic ideas:

> Thus as modulation is, as it were, a universal language of sensations intelligible to every man, the art of tone employs it by itself alone in its full force, viz. as a language of the affections, and thus communicates universally according to the laws of association the aesthetical ideas naturally combined therewith. Now these aesthetical ideas are not concepts or determinate thoughts. Hence the form of the composition of these sensations (harmony and melody) only serves instead of the form of language, by means of their proportionate accordance, to express the aesthetical idea of a connected whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought, corresponding to a certain theme which produces the dominating affection in the piece (§53).

We see here Kant's acceptance of the notion of a universal "language of passions," conveyed through the intonation of the speaking voice, which can in turn be expressed in music. In commenting on this passage, Kivy claims that, with the integration of the notion of aesthetic ideas, Kant transforms the "shopworn" 18th century notion of the Affectenlehre into something "entirely novel" and "indelibly marked with the signature of the third Critique."[169] However Kivy's enthusiasm is short-lived, as Kant seems to back away from the insights expressed above in favour of a physicalistic account of musical experience:

> It is not the judging the harmony in tones or sallies of wit, which serves only in combination with their beauty as a necessary vehicle, but the furtherance of the vital bodily processes, the affection that moves the intestines and the diaphragm — in a word, the feeling of health [… .] In music, this play proceeds from bodily sensations to aesthetical ideas (the objects of our affections), and then from these back again to the body with redoubled force (§54).

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[169] Kivy, "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*.," 252-53.

According to Kivy, this passage gives us "nothing more than the standard, pre-critical explanation in the British manner," which Kant had already put behind him in the "Analytic of the Beautiful."[170] Kivy conjectures that Kant failed to live up to the promise of his earlier insights about music and aesthetical ideas (§53, quoted above), because of his "almost complete ignorance" of music as an art, including his ignorance of the larger elements of musical form.[171] What Kant was groping towards in his application of aesthetic ideas to music, Kivy believes, is an attempt to capture "that feeling of logical coherence we have, but cannot state in conceptual terms, in a well wrought musical structure, a feeling of connected discourse…."[172]

I cannot share Kivy's view that the aesthetical ideas which Kant thought music able to convey were ideas related (exclusively) to its formal structure. For one thing, if Kant really was as ignorant of music's formal properties as Kivy and other commentators believe, it would seem unlikely that he would elevate musical form to the status of an aesthetic idea. None of the examples which Kant gives of rational ideas have to do with the form of an artwork. Form rather pertains to the aesthetic attributes — those features of an artwork which get us to think of aesthetic ideas. It

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[170] Kivy, "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*.," 258.
[171] Kivy, "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*.," 263.

seems more likely that the "connected whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought" is linked specifically to the expressive properties of music. The aesthetical ideas in music do, after all, correspond to a theme "which produces the dominating affection in the piece."[173] Perhaps Kant's linkage of the aesthetical ideas conveyed in music to "bodily sensations" (§54, quoted above), is an underdeveloped attempt to provide a stronger physical basis for the natural and transcultural effect of music on the emotions.

Kivy rejects the notion that Kant sought, in his doctrine of aesthetic ideas, to ascribe a content to music.[174] Yet we can question the view that Kant meant the aesthetic ideas conveyed by music to be its form only, without thereby suspecting Kant of attributing content to music. The fact that Kant was unlikely to have thought that music possessed semantic content need not stop us from using his doctrine of aesthetic ideas to make sense of some listeners' propensity to hear music as meaning-bearing. Setting aside the question of content and thinking of Goodman's notion of art as a symbolic system may help here. Perhaps the aesthetic ideas are what music denotes, yet the symbol system is dense rather than articulate, so we can never say exactly what music conveys. That is, there is no

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[172] Kivy, "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*.," 256.
[173] I assume that by "theme" Kant is here referring to a musical theme.

one-to-one relationship between the elements of the music and of the world. Each musical work can be seen as having a different symbolic structure and as utilizing different semantic relationships. The denotative relationships which are found in artworks - representation, expression, and exemplification - are not universal or immutable. They must be "decoded" in each artwork we encounter, although knowledge of the artistic tradition and operative conventions will help us gain a better understanding of the work in question. For example, an ascending chromatic passage need not signify the same thing in works by different composers, nor even in works by the same composer, nor even twice in the same work. Semantic density ensures that we will never be able to say exactly what a particular musical passage conveys.

I do not mean to suggest that Kant had anything like Goodman's account of art as a symbol system in mind, or that Goodman needs Kant's analysis of aesthetic ideas to round out his own thought. However bringing the two together in such a way is suggestive and is not precluded by anything either says. If we take seriously Kant's contention that music denotes aesthetic ideas, and accept Goodman's claim that the symbol systems of artworks are dense rather than

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[174] Kivy, "Kant and the *Affektenlehre*.," 254-55.

articulate, we can begin to see why some ascribe semantic content to music.[175]

5.5 The Sublime

The beautiful and the sublime have much in common: both please in themselves and both presuppose judgements of reflection (§23). That is, in both types of judgements, a particular is given, and a universal has to be found for it (§IV). However the beautiful and the sublime are importantly different in a number of ways. For one, the beautiful is connected with the form of an object, while the sublime is found in formless objects. Furthermore, the sublime is incompatible with charm; we saw above that charm could add to our appreciation of a beautiful object's form. In judgements of the sublime, however, the mind is alternately attracted and repelled by the object (§23).

The chaos and disorder of nature arouse the feeling of the sublime within us, provided that we also perceive nature's size and might (§23). Among Kant's favourite examples of phenomena which occasion judgments of the sublime are mountains, the raging sea, the vast starry sky, and violent weather patterns. Although much of Kant's discussion of the sublime centers on the sublime in nature, he does not preclude the possibility that artificial objects might occasion judgements of the sublime. Indeed his

[175] In the following chapter, I consider in greater detail the propensity of some listeners to ascribe semantic content to music.

inclusion of the pyramids and St. Peter's in Rome among examples of the sublime suggests as much (§26). Kant focuses on the sublime in nature, as the sublime in art is "limited by the conditions of agreement with nature" (§23). The presentation of the sublime in fine art may be combined with beauty to form a tragedy in verse, a didactic poem, or an oratorio. In these combinations, fine art is even more artistic (§53).[176]

The fact that a judgement of the beautiful can be made presupposes that the mind is in a state of restful contemplation, and this mental repose is maintained throughout the judgement. A characteristic feature of judgements of the sublime, however, is the "movement" that the mind makes in contemplating the object. This movement is referred through the imagination, either to the faculty of cognition, or to the faculty of desire. In the first case the judgement is of the mathematically sublime; in the second, of the dynamically sublime (§24).

Both types of judgements of the sublime are related in a distinct way to our mental powers, as well as to our understanding of ourselves as rational beings, and especially as <u>moral</u> rational beings. Nature is

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[176] Schueller doubts that Kant thought an art could be sublime, as a defining characteristic of objects which arouse sublimity is formlessness (243). I am not sure what to make of this apparent contradiction in Kant's writing. As Schueller points out, judgements of the sublime are subjective and based on feelings. Perhaps the "formlessness" of an object is the result of seeing it a certain way. Schueller suggests as much, as we will see.

mathematically sublime in those of its phenomena, “whose intuition brings with it the idea of its infinity.” We contemplate certain objects without reference to their form; the mind “abandons itself” to the imagination and to reason. The mind finds the whole power of the imagination inadequate to its ideas and feels itself raised in its judgement (§26). An example of a judgement of the mathematically sublime might be the experience of contemplating a vast plain, stretching flat in all directions as far as the eye can see. We do not measure the plain or examine it according to any idea of what a plain should be like; we merely try to take in the vast space. The possibility of actually experiencing infinite space challenges the limits of the imagination, yet we can understand the idea of infinite space well enough. The mind enjoys the feeling of its own power, and this feeling is the basis of judgements of the sublime.

In judgements of the dynamically sublime, the object is considered in an aesthetic judgement as something mighty or powerful which has no dominion over us. In such cases, the object is regarded as fearful, although we are not actually afraid of it. The object calls up the power in us of considering the things we care about (life and health, for example) as unimportant in comparison, yet regarding the might of the object as nonetheless without dominion over us. The mind thus feels the sublimity of its purpose, in comparison with the object itself, (which lacks such a

purpose) (§28). Imagine watching and listening to a thunderstorm from the safety of your home. You realize that if the storm were a few miles closer, your house would risk being struck by lightning and burnt to the ground. This thought causes a feeling of displeasure. The feeling of being safe at home and out of immediate danger is necessary for the feeling of the sublime, but not the immediate reason for that feeling. Rather, the feeling of the sublime is the respect you have for nature as a superior force, combined with the realization that a part of you is "supersensible" — not subject to the laws of nature and thus potentially autonomous.

The judgement of the sublime needs culture; without the development of moral ideas, those objects which occasion judgements of the sublime would be merely terrible. Yet the feeling of the sublime is not therefore primarily produced by culture and conventional. Rather, it is rooted in human nature, perhaps in the universal tendency to what is moral (§29).

Schueller has made some interesting applications of Kant's analysis of the sublime to musical experience. First, he questions Kant's claim that objects which occasion judgements of the sublime such as mountains are really "formless." It would seem rather that the form of a mountain is ideal, since we cannot see it all at once. Sublimity may then be the feeling that certain immense

objects elude us in immediate perception, only to be captured as remembered experience or imagined form. He gives the example of listening to Wagner's Ring cycle as such an experience which eludes us only to be "grasped" later. (If you don't like Wagner, think instead of Mozart's Requiem or Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier.) Such "noble" musical works can arouse the feeling that an overwhelming object eludes us temporarily, yet tests our capacities. Kant's distinction of the beautiful from the sublime, then, suggests that there are two mutually exclusive (but usually combined) ways of judging art: According to form (beauty) and according to intensity of subjective emotional response (sublimity). An art object such as a Beethoven symphony can combine beauty and sublimity by combining (small scale) form with more elusive (large scale) "formlessness" and with the emotions aroused by that which appears greater than us.[177] In Schueller's own words,

> If the feeling of the sublime is the awareness by the mind of its own, orderly, moral superiority to formless nature, then surely music can be sublime too just because it is the least "graspable" and the most abstract of the arts. It can give one the feeling that it is beyond form. It can give the feeling of the formless, of the discrepancies of the parts, in Kant's terms, especially if it is the feeling of the occasion, not of the form itself, which defines sublimity.[178]

I find Schueller's application of Kant's notion of the sublime to music to be compelling, whether or not Kant would

[177] Schueller, 244-45.
[178] Schueller, 245.

have sanctioned such an application. (Parret has conjectured that the music that Kant could have loved, and would have judged sublime, had not yet been written. He gives the music of Mahler, Richard Strauss's Alpensymphonie and Beethoven's Pastoral symphony as examples.)[179] Sometimes we do indeed have the feeling that we have not understood a piece of music, although it was not particularly difficult to follow. Some type of "meaning" has escaped us. Yet the feeling is not one of outright perplexity, such that we do not want to ever hear the piece again. (We do, of course, sometimes have that reaction, but I am setting aside such cases for the moment.) If Kant's notion of the sublime does account for some aspects of aesthetic experience, it is tempting to apply it here.[180]

While an assessment of Kant's aesthetics as applied to music has not been my intention in this chapter, still less a general appraisal of the Third Critique, I have found it to be extremely fruitful in its application to the problem of musical understanding. Kant's formalism is rich and nuanced enough to elude many of the difficulties which plague other versions of formalism, most notably Hanslick's. One virtue of Kant's formalism is that, in the doctrine of aesthetic ideas, it leaves open the possibility that a

[179] Parret, 252-53.
[180] I say more about this in chapter 6, section 3d.

semiotic approach to art can be pursued in conjunction with the strengths of a formalist account.

Another virtue of Kant's account of aesthetic experience is that such experiences are founded on pleasure, and hence are affective by their very nature. Even the comparatively more sophisticated versions of formalism suggested by Scruton and Kivy were found liable to difficulties which Kant's formalism escaped. In particular, both Scruton and Kivy accord music considerable significance; Scruton is convinced that music is of social and moral importance, and Kivy believes that music can be profound. Yet it is only in Kant's version of formalism (with its attendant doctrine of the sublime and connection between the rational, the moral, and aesthetic judgements) that music can really be seen as having significance beyond the audible.

Chapter 6

The Experience of Understanding Music

So far I have examined in detail four thorough-going and astute, yet contrasting, accounts of aesthetic understanding as applied to music, three of them contemporary. In this chapter I shall present my own view of musical understanding, drawing on the strengths of these analyses, and hoping to avoid some of their weaknesses.

Understanding the music of one's own cultural tradition may seem so transparent as to require no elucidation or explanation. Yet it is also clear that unfamiliar music, be it from another culture or from the work of composers who challenge one's own tradition, can elude understanding on initial (and subsequent) hearing. What then is the difference between understanding and failing to understand as musical experiences? In section one of chapter one I suggested that, based on Socrates' discussion of knowledge in the Theaetetus, an account of understanding implies an account of misunderstanding, and that an analysis of musical misunderstanding will help us to arrive at an account of musical understanding.

An important desideratum of an account of musical understanding is that it be sufficiently detailed and nuanced so as to be able to comprehend the experience of listeners with diverse musical backgrounds and different degrees of technical expertise. One of the problems we saw

with Scruton's account of understanding music was that, although his analysis ultimately relied on there being different levels of understanding, the differences between these levels were not made explicit. Jerrold Levinson's analysis of the "ordinary listener's" experience in his Music in the Moment, also suffers, I think, from a similar failure to delineate levels of understanding. Yet not all differences in musical understanding necessarily correspond, as Stephen Davies, Michael Tanner, and Mark DeBellis have suggested, with differences in listeners' technical musicological knowledge.

I will argue that a continuum of two levels of understanding music can be distinguished. These are hierarchical in the sense that the first is foundational, and without it the second cannot be reached. The first level is hearing the music as music (rather than as sounds), which I will call "recognitional understanding."[181] At this level, the listener can hear a series of tones as a rhythmic and melodic gestalt, and understand a minimum of expressive and gestural characteristics. Virtually all cognitively normal members of a given musical tradition can understand the music of their own culture or sub-culture in this way.

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[181] By "recognitional understanding" I do not mean simply that listeners recognize that there is music in their vicinity; they must also hear the sounds identified as music, that is, as forming a rhythmic and melodic gestalt. It is possible to hear sounds (say, coming from an open window), recognize that it is music, yet not hear the tones as forming such a gestalt. The hypothetical listener might think, "Some people regard these sounds as music, but they do not make sense to me."

The second level - which I will call “enhanced understanding” — entails greater sensitivity to the music’s expressive character, being able to place the music in an appropriate historical context (hearing it “as” Baroque rather than late romantic, for example), and some awareness of musical form, including knowledge of how the music is put together.

Alongside these two levels, that is, neither above nor below them, is a third aspect of musical understanding, which I will call “interpretive understanding.” Listening to music, we sometimes get the sense that the music is “profound” or has something to say, if only we could grasp it. I want to explore what this might mean, and what an adequate account of such “understanding” might entail. I have resisted characterizing interpretive understanding as a “level” of understanding because I do not see it as better or more advanced than the two types of understanding already mentioned. Interpretive understanding is in one sense superior to recognitional understanding, as the first presupposes the second. But I do not want to suggest that a listener who can hear music as music, yet has no sense that the music might have “something to say” is inferior to one who has this sense. I am trying to make sense of an existing phenomenon (the variety of responses to music) rather than to recommend particular listening strategies. Nor do I suggest that these three aspects of understanding

are exhaustive; other responses, more or less cognitive, are available.

For musical understanding of any sort, involvement with the music is crucial, and part of my task will be to analyze the nature of that involvement. First I will develop the notions of recognitional and enhanced understanding. Then, by way of moving toward an account of interpretive understanding, I will examine philosophical debates over the possibility of music's cognitive content. If arguments against the possibility of extra-musical content are decisive, we may have to think twice about the status of interpretive understanding. Finally, I will offer an account of the nature of involvement in the listening experience.

6.1 Two Levels of Musical Understanding

What I have called recognitional understanding involves, at a minimum, hearing music as music. The listener must be able to follow the music and hear a series of tones as rhythmic. He or she recognizes the beginning, course, and ending of melodies, and hears tones which sound together, where appropriate, as harmonies. In addition, the listener is able to detect some large scale relationships within the music (repeats of sections, for example), and to distinguish between significant and insignificant features of what is heard.

Virtually all cognitively normal people understand culturally familiar music at this basic level.[182] Indeed, there is evidence from developmental psychology which suggests that infants as young as six months possess adult-like musical processing capacities.[183] While humans seem to possess the cognitive capacities to comprehend music from a very young age, musical understanding is shaped through exposure to the music of one's culture. There is some interesting research in this area: Infants were found to exhibit comparable processing capacities for melodies based on diatonic and non-diatonic scales. Western infants and musically untrained adults were tested for their ability to detect subtle pitch changes to simple rise-fall melodies consisting of notes from the diatonic major scale or from the Javanese pélog scale. While adults performed better on the major than on the pélog scale, infants performed equally well on the two distinct scale types. The findings suggest that both scales begin on an equal footing for

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[182] The "tune deaf" or those suffering from dysmelodia lack the ability to recognize wrong notes in simple tonal melodies. H. Kalmus and D.B. Fry who studied tune deafness in Britain estimate the frequency of tune deafness there to be 4.2% of adults of both sexes. They found that tune deafness was more closely related to tonal memory than either was to pitch discrimination, and suggest that the material defect underlying tone deafness in a deficiency in gestalt perception, probably located in the cerebral cortex, as opposed to a defect in the ear. See H. Kalmus and D.B. Fry, "On Tune Deafness (dysmelodia): Frequency, development, genetics and musical background," Annals of Human Genetics 43 (1980): 369-82.

[183] See Sandra E. Trehub, "The World of Infants: A World of Music," Early Childhood Connections (Fall 1996): 27-34; and Sandra E. Trehub, G. Schellenberg, and D. Hill, "The Origins of Music Perception and Cognition: A Developmental Perspective" in Perception and Cognition of

unacculturated listeners, but culture-specific experience enhances one in relation to the other.[184]

My characterization of recognitional understanding implies that music, once understood, makes sense: the tones form a rhythmic and melodic gestalt. Beginnings and endings of melodies do not seem arbitrary, but follow a sort of coherent plan. Tones do not simply sound together randomly, but form intelligible harmonies. With such harmonic and melodic gestalts readily apparent, the gross emotional and gestural character of the music is also evident. I have said nothing about the need for the listener to recover the structure or "grammar" of the music — the formal thought process embedded in the composition. For recognitional understanding the listener need not be able to pick out the theme of a fugue or the tones employed in a tone row.

Tonally unfamiliar music, be it atonal art music or music of a different culture, can be difficult to comprehend even at the level of recognitional understanding. Some examples of my own experience with musical understanding might help here, but I should briefly defend this course of action. Because I am interested in music as heard, it makes sense to pay close attention to listeners' concrete

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Music eds. Irène Deliège and John Sloboda (Psychology Press, 1977), 103-28.

[184] Sandra E. Trehub, et. al., "Music and Speech Processing in the First Year of Life," Advances in Child Development and Behavior 24 (1993): 22-23. The research discussed is M.P. Lynch, et. al., "Innateness, experience, and musical perception," Psychological Science 1 (1990): 272-76.

experience. I do not (and cannot) claim that my experience of the following musical examples will conform to everyone else's experiences of them, nor that I am a "typical" listener. Yet I do not believe that my responses will be wildly idiosyncratic either. As someone with a basic background in the history of western tonal music and some familiarity with twentieth century developments, I might be better prepared than certain listeners, and assuredly know less and am less well prepared than a great many others. While caution must be exercised in drawing general inferences about the phenomenon of musical understanding from the experience of a single listener, one listener's experience seems a reasonable place to start.

The first composition I propose to consider is the symphony in C major by Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-92), a Swedish contemporary of Mozart.[185] I will then turn to music which seems likely to present greater challenges to understanding. Specifically, I will examine Alban Berg's Three Pieces for Orchestra (atonal art music) and some Georgian folk songs (culturally and tonally different from either).

Until I was given the CD of Kraus's work, I had never heard of him and was unfamiliar with his music. Yet before even taking the disc from its case, I had some idea of what

[185] Kraus, Tre symfonier, Uvertyr till Olympie performed by the Svenska Kammarorkestern with Petter Sundkvist conducting (Naxos 8.553734S).

the symphony would sound like. I knew from my previous exposure to tonal music that C major is a "bright" key, I could assume that Kraus would likely sound something like other 18th century composers with whom I was more familiar, and I thought it likely that I would be familiar with the instruments used to perform the symphony.

My expectations turned out to be correct. Within a measure or two, I could place the slow and stately music as in the classical style, somewhat reminiscent of Haydn. After the statement of the first theme (the upcoming ending signaled by a diminuendo), there was a slight pause, followed by the statement of the second, faster, theme. I knew that the pause was just that — a pause and not an ending. As the first movement progressed, I was aware of a sense of direction; things were moving forward. When the ending of each of the three movements came, I recognized that this was the ending — the music did not stop abruptly but came to a musically appropriate close. Throughout each movement, I could readily distinguish the melody from its accompaniment. This was so even when the melody was passed between different sections, and even when, as in the second movement, the accompanying strings and harpsichord were slightly louder than the flutes which carried the melody. The emotional character of the symphony was not particularly marked and did not strike me as especially important. If pressed, I would say that the first movement was happy and

triumphant, the second somewhat yearning, and the third joyful (due to its skipping, accented rhythm.)

In being able to place the music historically, and hear it as in the classical style rather than baroque or romantic, I displayed some elements of "enhanced" as opposed to merely "recognitional" understanding. A more sophisticated listener with greater enhanced understanding would be able to identify the symphony's underlying harmonic progressions and better understand how the music was put together. Such a listener might also be able to make intelligent comparisons between different performances of the same composition, as well as among different works by the same composer. For the latter, she would need to have a sense of large-scale musical form, and the various challenges facing the composer of the symphony, the overture, the string quartet, etc.[186] Enhanced understanding also demands the recognition and comprehension of extra-musical references: representational elements, quotations, etc. (These were absent in the symphony under consideration, as far as I could tell.)

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[186] Stephen Davies has stressed that knowledge of how a particular work (say, a sonata) differs from others of its kind, and in turn a grasp of what distinguishes one musical kind from another (say, a quartet from an overture) is fundamental to musical understanding. See his "Musical Understanding and Musical Kinds," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 52:1 (Winter 1994): 69-82. While such knowledge is undoubtedly important and would enhance the listening experience, I cannot see it as fundamental to basic understanding. If it were, we would have to say that few listeners besides musicologists understood music, which seems deeply implausible.

Turning now to more challenging music, I had listened (in passing) to Berg's Three Pieces for Orchestra (op. 6) a few times before making an effort to understand it.[187] My usual reaction on hearing the work would be mild irritation and impatience. I got into the habit of skipping over it and listening instead to the performance of Berg's concerto for violin and orchestra included on the same CD. As an experiment, but also in the hope of better appreciating a composer whose work others I respected found compelling, I resolved to listen more closely in an effort to better understand the Three Pieces.

The first piece ("Prelude") begins very softly with muffled percussion. Since becoming more familiar with composers who experiment with extreme dynamic ranges and contrasts, I have found that very quiet music has a similar effect to that of whispering in a crowed room — I find myself drawn in, straining to hear what is going on.[188] Paying attention in this way, I began to find myself drawn into the music as it got increasingly louder and more complex, and other instruments joined the percussion. While I could not discern an obvious theme or tonality, I became able to recognize repeated motifs and felt a sense of progression in the music. I became able to hear how the

[187] Deutsche Grammophon Classikon 439 435-2, the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan.

music built in volume to a cymbal crash, and them died away to finish softly, as it began, with muffled percussion. On repeated listening, then, I was able to discern structure in the music.

The second piece ("Rounds") was lighter than the first, and I could discern disconnected snatches of melody first in the strings, and then in the flutes. A haunting melody played by a solo violin was "taken over" by another motif played by louder instruments. Unlike with the Kraus symphony, I had no sense of one theme ceding gracefully to another — the music seemed to be somehow in constant struggle. At one point, the music died away and I thought that the piece had ended. After more attentive listening this pause no longer fooled me. The "real" ending when it came was signaled by a descending passage of harmonics on the strings, which was later taken up softly by the brass, with the accompanying strings continuing to play harmonics.[189]

I will not say too much about the third piece ("March") which I have found the most recalcitrant to understanding. This may be because it is almost twice as long as the first two pieces, or because there is little discernable melody

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[188] I am thinking here especially of the work of contemporary Georgian composer Giya Kancheli, whose CD's typically come with a warning about not playing them too loudly on headphones!

[189] A "harmonic" or "flageolet tone" is a ghostly sound achieved by touching the finger gently on the string at some point (rather than fully depressing the string.) These are rare in violin music before the

which one might follow. I knew enough of Berg's music not to expect a traditional march, and sure enough, there were only hints and indications of a march (an underlying march rhythm which came and went), coupled with the music's overall aggressive character. Despite the chaotic foreground, I felt a sense of direction in the music, and had a idea of what was the most important thing happening at any one time.

While I came to a greater familiarity with each of these pieces, which in turn led to deeper understanding, the first two came to appeal to me in the way that the third did not. I find it difficult to say whether this means that I failed in some way to understand the third, or whether I simply disliked what I understood. As the case with the Kraus symphony, I have no doubt that a more sophisticated listener than myself would be able to come to a better understanding of this work and in doing so, enjoy a richer aesthetic experience. Such a listener might be able to pick out the specific tonal patterns used by Berg, as well as more aware of Berg's relation to his musico-historical context. Despite my difficulty with the work, I feel that I displayed elements of enhanced understanding. My knowledge of sound production on the violin, for example, enabled me to pick out and follow the harmonic passages in very short

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19th century but become increasingly frequent after, and are used to great effect in some 20th century string quartets.

order. A listener without this kind of knowledge might have been confused ("what is that high eerie sound?") and distracted from the flow of the music.

Finally, I want to briefly discuss my ongoing attempts to better understand Georgian folk singing. I first became interested in Georgian musical traditions when I read about the importance of singing in a National Geographic article on the region. The author's claim that the Georgians had a "tradition of atonal folk singing" turned out to be not so much false as a misapplication of categories. (While Georgian music does not adhere to western diatonic tonality, it is not "atonal" in the same sense as western atonal art music.) Since then, I have heard Georgian polyphonic singing on various CD's, as well as performed by travelling Georgian choirs and Canadian groups which sing in Georgian.[190] Most often, the singing is without instrumental accompaniment, and there are elements of variation in vocal technique, etc. within different areas of the country. There are songs for virtually all aspects of traditional life, including religious and liturgical songs, work songs, agricultural songs, drinking songs, laments, and historical songs.

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[190] Two available CDs of Georgian music are Georgian Voices: The Rustavi Choir Elektra Nonesuch Explorer Series 9 79224-2 and Georgian Polyphony [I]: Choral music from Caucasia JVC World Series VICG-5003. Georgian choirs are strictly segregated — men and women never sing together. The second CD listed has the advantage of including some performances by a women's choir. The vast majority of recordings available seem to be of men's choirs only.

At first, most of the harmonies sounded strange to me — some strangely beautiful, and others merely odd. I liked some Georgian songs immediately and found them readily accessible. I later learned that these were mainly religious and liturgical songs. Work songs and drinking songs were soon readily recognizable as such, mainly due to their characteristic rhythms. Yet I frequently misjudged the emotive and gestural character of the music. I can remember hearing a hauntingly beautiful song during a concert, and being sure that it must have been a love song or lament. This turned out to be a cow-herding song.

How important is it to recognize representational and expressive characteristics of music? Does it matter that I sometimes misjudged what type of song I was listening to? We will recall that according to Scruton, representational elements in music are unimportant; you can hear music as music without knowing what, if anything, the music is about. Scruton's example was that it makes no difference to a listener if she believes that Strauss's Don Quixote is about the life of a dog — nothing musical is altered.

At one level, Scruton seems to be correct; not knowing the cultural function of the Georgian songs I heard did not stop me from appreciating them as music. I could still follow the melodic line and hear the various voices sounding together as harmonies. Yet there is arguably more to the appreciation of music than appreciation of sonic qualities.

In particular, we need to take seriously the view that music is a form of communication. If Scruton's claim is questionable with regard to art music, it is all the more problematic when we consider folk music. Music and art more generally are not things set apart from a group's general culture. Indeed, music might be seen to reflect the most significant preoccupations of social groups. My difficulty discerning the representational and expressive character of Georgian songs served to block a richer appreciation of the music and of its role in the general culture. Furthermore, if I lack the ability to tell a love song, say, from a cow-herding song, it follows that I would not be able to compare two love songs to one another, or compare a Georgian cow herding song with similar songs from Armenia or Azerbaijan.

As I listened to more and more Georgian singing, the harmonies came to sound less odd and made more musical sense. In addition, some aspects of the music which at first I had found slightly off-putting — hocketting (alteration of tones in the melodic line between different voices), yodels, melodic leaps, and drone accompaniment — I came to hear differently. As I paid greater attention, these assumed a "fit" with the surrounding music. However, I feel that as much as I enjoy Georgian music, I rarely get beyond the stage of recognitional understanding. No doubt that my understanding would be enhanced by ear training, and the ability to discern underlying harmonic patterns. Yet

formal training in music is not the only way in which my understanding could be improved. After all, knowing the harmonic structure of a song still might leave me unable to tell whether I was listening to a lament or an agricultural song. This ability would be more likely enhanced by a greater understanding of Georgian culture and traditions.

In the musical experiences described — of understanding with little difficulty, coming to an increased understanding, or feeling that I have failed to understand - what exactly have I done? How has my understanding increased, and why as it increased in some case but not in others? Part of the answer, I think, is given in this advice from Donald Francis Tovey to readers of the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica:

> though the music of one age or style may be at first unintelligible to a listener who is accustomed to another style, and though the listener may help himself by acquiring information as to the characteristics and meaning of the new style, he will best learn to understand it my merely divesting his mind of prejudices and allowing the music to make itself intelligible by its own self-consistency.[191]

Tovey, as I read him, seems to be saying that to understand unfamiliar music we need to set aside the expectations with which we usually listen. All music has its own self-consistency; the rules which underlie the self-consistency of unfamiliar music are likely to be different from those implicit in music to which we are more

accustomed. For example, almost all people in the developed west acquire the expectations which underlie the intelligibility of music in diatonic tonality. Music which does not adhere to expected tonal patterns — including various forms of non-western music, as well as avant-garde art music — is likely to sound odd if approached according to the norms of diatonic tonality. For such music to sound intelligible, it must be heard according to the expectations which inform its own self-consistency.

Part of what it is to come to a greater understanding of music, then, is to alter the expectations with which the music is approached. Returning to the example of my experience with Georgian music, I had said that at first some of the harmonies sounded odd, and later they seemed to make more sense. Obviously, the tones themselves did not change. Through repeated listening I became better able to set aside my prejudices and expectations and let the music reveal itself to me. To put it another way, the music's inner structure became more and more apparent. Still, this is only part of the story; one's initial approach to music — the expectations with which one begins — is only one aspect of involvement in the listening experience, and itself needs to be seen in light of a wider context.

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[191] Donald Francis Tovey, "Music — General Sketch," in Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed.

In the introductory section to this chapter, I began to develop an aspect of understanding that I called "interpretive." This begins with the sense that there is something more to the music that can be grasped simply by following it with comprehension. To make an analogy with reading a poem, it is possible to understand the meaning of every line of a poem, but nonetheless feel that one's understanding is inadequate. Take for example, Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The poem conveys somehow that more is going on than its modest depiction of a man riding a horse on a winter night. I will try to suggest reasons why music might also give us this feeling, but put off a full discussion until section 6.3.

6.2 The Debate over "Content"

The debate over musical content occurs on two levels: Arguments over how best to characterize the "meaning" of particular passages, and the meta-question whether it is even appropriate to say that music can have an extra-musical content. These questions are too often discussed in isolation from one another, the first tending to be the preserve of musicologists, and the second of "card-carrying" philosophers. I am more interested in the second question, but I am convinced that to come to an adequate answer, the variety of listeners' responses to music must also be taken seriously. So I will begin by quoting some descriptions of music as heard.

6.2a Some Listeners' Experience

The historian James H. Johnson notes the "literalism" of contemporary listeners' responses to the music of eighteenth century French opera:

> One critic faulted Mondonville for not distinguishing clearly enough between the depiction of titans, demons, and the cyclops. Another discerning listener admired a musical passage that "painted the painful and hopeless effort of a dying eighty-year-old trying to spit up a piece of phlegm in his chest."[…] Popular accounts of Rameau's music from mid-century are filled with unexpected images: d'Aquin de Châteaulyon wrote that the "bursting of shells, speeding rockets, a sparkling sky, tumult, shouts of joy, are all depicted in the manliest hues"; Clément complained that the overture to Zaïs "paints so well the unraveling of chaos" that the effect was unpleasant….[192]

Here is a contemporary listener's description of the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony:

> Imagine an enormous cathedral of marvelous architecture. It is night. A pale stream of starlight falls through the windows. The stones begin to move. The souls of the dead leave their underground tombs. They whisper, and their obscure sounds grow more and more distinct as they advance toward the nave. They rise, they unfurl into the high galleries, they continue their funereal procession. Life comes back to them slowly. Suddenly it bursts into a fortissimo. Pizzicato fugues mark the irregular and urgent steps of those phantom people that have recovered their existence through the tender invocation of harmony.[193]

The following is taken from Proust's Remembrance of Things Past:

> Whereas the sonata opened upon a dawn of lilied meadows, parting its slender whiteness to suspend itself over the frail and yet consistent mingling of a rustic bower of honeysuckle with white geraniums, it

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[192] James H. Johnson, Listening in Paris, a Cultural History. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 37.
[193] Hermione Quinet, quoted in Johnson, Listening in Paris, 273.

> was upon continuous, level surfaces like those of the sea that, in the midst of a stormy morning beneath an already lurid sky, there began, in an eerie silence, in an infinite void, this new masterpiece, and it was into a roseate dawn that, in order to construct itself progressively into me, this unknown universe was drawn from silence and from night. This so novel redness, so absent from the tender, rustic, pale sonata, tingled all the sky, as dawn does, with mysterious hope.[194]

It is important to note that the three preceding descriptions were made before the advent of recording. In each case, the writer is communicating with others who will not possibly be able to hear the same thing. The writer must try, then, to convey some of the musical object itself, as well as a description of it and some indication of its effect.

More recent are these remarks by Adorno:

> The aim of jazz is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism. "Give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated," the eunuchlike sound of the jazz band both mocks and proclaims, "and you will be rewarded, accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you, a mystery revealed at the moment of the initiation rite."[195]

And a present-day musicologist on Beethoven's ninth symphony:

> This explosive rage fuels most of the remainder of the symphony. The important exception is the third

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[194] Quoted in Johnson, Listening in Paris, 283. I realize that the "sonata" Proust describes here is fictional. I have nonetheless included this description because it is certainly based on Proust's general listening experience, although not necessarily on any particular experience.

[195] Quoted in Susan McClary, Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 65. The original source is Theodor Adorno, "Perennial Fashion — Jazz", in Prisms, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 129.

> movement, which serves as a kind of negative image to the rest. If the first two movements are monomaniacal, the Adagio is dialogic. It stands strangely aloof from the striving narrative of the other movements: perched as it is on the never-never-land degree of flat-six, it may be arcadian recollection, the imaginary sublime, or a dream of utopia. It offers the image of a world in which pleasure is available without thrusting desire, where tenderness and vulnerability are virtues rather than fatal flaws. But it can never be reality, as its infinite regress through a spiral of flat-six relationships indicates.[196]

One thing that is readily noticeable about these descriptions is that all of the listeners quoted (with the exception perhaps of the last, who is somewhat more speculative) seem confident of what they hear. The remarks quoted arguably reflect both the listeners' concerns, and their historical context. While many have perhaps found jazz distasteful, I would guess that few have seen it as the direct challenge to masculinity which Adorno seems to fear. The feminist analysis which underlies the description of Beethoven's ninth symphony quoted above would have been unthinkable before the 20th century. Had I included listeners from non-western musical cultures, it is possible that the descriptions assembled would have been even more varied and reflective of different cultural preoccupations.

Why pay attention to listeners' descriptions of their experiences? For one thing, I want to acknowledge differences among individual listeners and so avoid the

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[196] McClary, Feminine Endings, 128.

tendency to posit the existence of an "aperspectival ear."[197] Listeners are situated in a particular cultural and historical context, in addition to having individual concerns and experiences which are brought to the listening experience. To cite just one small example, I have noticed that I listen very differently to performances of works which I have attempted to play myself. While it would be foolish to hope that a single inquiry into the nature of musical experience and understanding could account for the variety of listeners' experiences across historical period, culture, and the particularities of lived experience, it nonetheless seems important to acknowledge that such a variety does exist.

6.2b Philosophers on Musical "Content"

In the philosophical literature which deals directly or indirectly with musical content, questions of "meaning," extra-musical "content," and the possibility of music's cognitive value are not sharply distinguished.[198] This is

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[197] See Kathleen Marie Higgins, "Musical Idiosyncrasy and Perspectival Listening," in Music and Meaning ed. Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 83-102.

[198] For example, M. Beardsley, "Understanding Music," in On Criticizing Music: Five Philosophical Perspectives ed. Kingsley Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981), 55-73; Frances Berenson, "Interpreting the Emotional Content of Music," in The Interpretation of Music ed. Price, 61-72; Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed," in Must we Mean What we Say? A Book of Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 180-212; David J. Elliot, "Music as Knowledge," Journal of Aesthetic Education 25:3 (1991): 21-40; Rom Harre, "Is There a Semantics for Music?" In The Interpretation of Music ed. Price, 203-213; Vladimir Karbusicky, "The Anthropology of 'Semantic Levels' in Music," Acta Philosophica Fennica 43 (1988): 54-69; Thomas Carson Mark, "On Works of Virtuosity," Journal of Philosophy 77 (1980): 28-45; Graham McFee, "Meaning and the Art Status of 'Music Alone,'" British Journal of

not surprising, and I do not think it is a flaw or an indication of confusion. If music can be meaningful (analogous to the way that a sentence is meaningful, rather than the way that a favourite stuffed toy is meaningful to a child), then this meaning will be describable as the music's "content." If music has cognitive, as well as hedonic value, then this will likely be assessed in terms of its meaning or content. I will briefly consider two philosophical attempts to account for music's meaning (loosely construed), followed by a look at Kivy's argument for the rejection of the possibility of musical semantic content. Finally, in the next section, I will present my own views. Briefly, I find the debate as it has been conducted unproductive, and propose a different approach.

In his article, "The Cognitive Value of Music," James O. Young attempts to defend the thesis that music, even so-called "absolute" music, is valuable as a source of knowledge and can help us understand non-musical matters. According to Young, the arts contribute to our knowledge by means of immediate demonstration — placing someone in a position to recognize that something is the case. Immediate demonstration can be achieved using interpretative or

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Aesthetics 37:1 (January 1997): 31-46; Anthony Newcomb, "Action and Agency in Mahler's Ninth Symphony, Second Movement," in Music and Meaning ed. Robinson, 131-153; Jay Newman, "The Philosophical in Music" The Music Review 41:4 (November 1980): 302-08; Kingsley Price, "Does Music have Meaning?" British Journal of Aesthetics 28:3 (Summer 1988): 203-215; and Donald Walhout, "Music and Moral Goodness" Journal of Aesthetic Education 29:1 (Spring 1995): 5-16.

affective representation. In the first, something about an object is made apparent to an audience; techniques facilitating interpretive representations include amplification and simplification. For example, in the work of Dickens, aspects of character or institutions are amplified or exaggerated so that the audience is in a better position to understand the features in question. An affective representation puts an audience in a position to know something about an object by making them feel a certain way about it. Affective representations may be extroverted, when the affects are directed outwards, or introverted, when the aroused affects are themselves the objects of knowledge.[199]

Music employs interpretive representation when it indirectly represents affects by representing the movements with which affects are associated.[200] The representation of these movements can provide audiences with insight into certain affects; "Listening to a skillfully composed piece, listeners can realize, for example, what it is like simultaneously to feel attracted to something and hesitant about embracing it."[201] More commonly, music employs affective representation — it arouses feelings in some

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[199] James O. Young, "The Cognitive Value of Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 57:1 (Winter 1997): 41-54.
[200] I have not discussed Young's account of how music represents affects, as it does not significantly differ from accounts of musical expression already discussed.
[201] Young, "Cognitive Value," 48.

listeners and in so doing, shows them something about the affect in question.[202] For example, in listening to the music of the nineteenth century, one can gain insight into what it was like to adopt a romantic perspective on life.

Although I think that Young has to be admired for trying to bring some conceptual clarity and philosophical insight to such a nebulous and difficult topic, it must be admitted that his conclusions are very modest: Some (not all) music may have cognitive value to some (not all) listeners. The cognitive value of music turns out to be fairly banal: Surely everyone who has tried to quit smoking or follow a diet knows what it is like to feel attracted to something and hesitant about embracing it. While listening to sad music might make me better able to appreciate varieties and gradations of sadness, I might also gain such knowledge by reading a novel or talking to a sad person. I doubt the possibility that listening to music could tell me anything more or better than other courses I might follow.

Kendall Walton is concerned with meaning "for" the listener, rather than with the semantic meaning of music more narrowly construed. He begins by trying to specify how music differs from other more obviously representational arts, and considers the possibility that the semantic content of music is more general than that of figurative

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[202] I will not take up the point, noted by Young, that not all listeners experience emotions listening to music.

painting, literature, etc.[203] While it seems presumptuous, even "unmusical" to suggest that a sonata is about, say, the Trojan war, or even warfare in general, it makes sense to suggest that music can be about struggle in general. Depending on a listener's personality, interests, and immediate situation, she might hear a struggle in music as a clash between two people, an internal battle, or a struggle for dignity under oppression.

Walton then turns to the "puzzle" of how a musical passage gets connected to the idea (say) of struggle in general, without somehow portraying a particular instance of struggle. His solution, as I understand it, is that music often calls for imaginative introspecting. We imagine that our actual introspective awareness of auditory sensations is an experience of being aware of our states of mind: "My suggestion is not that the music portrays an objective event or circumstance, and then induces the listener to imagine responding to it in a certain manner; it just induces the listener to imagine the experience of responding to an object of a certain sort." However, the fact that music elicits imaginings does not justify talk of musical meaning or semantic content.

I think that Walton is definitely on the right track in focusing his investigation into musical meaning on the

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[203] Kendall L. Walton, "What is Abstract about the Art of Music?" Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 46:3 (Spring 1988): 351-64.

listener's experience. Walton does not get any farther than Young with regard to the possibility of musical content, and his account (at least as I understand it) is somewhat puzzling. I know what it is to imagine, and to introspect, but I am not sure what it would be to imagine that I introspect while listening to music. Walton hopes to facilitate "the daunting task of uncovering the secret of [music's] power," but there is little specifically musical in his account. It could serve just as well as an account of why different people see various things in Rorschach blots or cloud formations. What is it about music that elicits such imaginings? Without a fuller account of how meaning for the listener is underwritten, it is difficult to see how there can be even the broadest consensus among listeners. While it seems uncontroversial to say that a particular passage might make me imagine a struggle between weather patterns, and symbolize for you the struggle between good and evil, what about the listener who hears no struggle whatsoever?

Walton assumes that it is unproblematic to say that music can be "about" struggle in general. We saw in chapter 4 that Levinson, in his criticism of Kivy's account of musical profundity, defended "our useful informal notion of aboutness," seeing no reason to restrict it to systematic or

conventional relations of reference or denotation.[204] Kivy, in his response to Levinson's critique, argues that "aboutness" is a semantic concept, and a causal connection between music's expressive properties and thinking about those properties is not enough to establish it.[205] It simply begs the question to go from the fact that many works of music have expressive properties as part of their structure to the conclusion that these properties make up an emotive, semantic content.[206] Furthermore, it is not enough to establish that music can be about some extra-musical subject; defenders of musical "meaning" also need to show why musical "aboutness" is interesting. Kivy finds it difficult to see how music could say anything valuable regarding what it is about.[207] So even if we allow that a certain composition is about struggle in general, it still needs to be shown that the music could tell us or show us something interesting about struggle. More alarming, for Kivy, is that he detects Schopenhaur's views on music, minus their metaphysical niceties, widely held among musical scholars. Accordingly, music has a hidden content, not apparent on its surface, which is in need of hermeneutical revelation.[208]

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[204] Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Profundity Misplaced," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 50:1 (Winter 1992): 58-60.
[205] Peter Kivy, Philosophies of Arts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 169.
[206] Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 165.
[207] Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 175.
[208] Kivy, Philosophies of Arts, 181-83.

Kivy does not say what would be necessary to establish the concept of "aboutness" in music. He offers no suggestions as to the necessary and sufficient conditions, or other indications of how to discuss "aboutness" in the arts. I suspect he does not because he realizes how difficult it would be to do this with any rigour. I think that Levinson is right to claim that a loose, informal sense of aboutness is valuable for aesthetics. Indeed, restricting the notion of aboutness would excessively constrict our ability to discuss other arts.

For example, literary works often seem to be "about" things not explicitly discussed. If someone were to ask me what Chekhov's short story "The Lady with the Small Dog" was about, I might answer that it was about an adulterous love affair between a man and a younger woman whom he meets on vacation. I might also say that it was about the power of love to triumph over the cynicism and despair of middle age. What is my warrant for saying this? My analysis of the story's meaning required interpretation, although I have not claimed to reveal any hidden content or say what Chekhov "really" meant. I would likely be able to convince other readers that my interpretation was correct by pointing to aspects of the story — for example the change from the protagonist's initial world-weary boredom to his increased attentiveness and joy in his children by the end of the story.

What is the relevance for music? Literary works, unlike music, often have an unambiguous propositional content. However literary works are not always about their propositional content. To determine what a literary work is about requires judgement and careful reading, with attention to details, nuances, and sometimes also to the context in which the work was written or initially received. These various factors cannot be enshrined in a formula or given in the form of necessary and sufficient conditions. Despite such difficulties, we can talk with profit of what literary works are "about," and offer evidence in favour of rival interpretations. I would suggest that it is similarly possible to discuss what a particular musical work may be about, despite the conceptual difficulties involved. Furthermore, the clarity of a literary work's propositional content does not invariably make possible a clear determination as to what the work is about. So lack of agreement as to the "content" of a musical work should not necessarily prohibit speculation as to what that work is about.

Kivy develops his arguments against the possibility of extra-musical meaning through a consideration of two recent attempts by musicologists to find "content" in non-programmatic music.[209] Even if we knew, for example, that

[209] Hans Eggebrecht on Bach's The Art of the Fugue and David P. Schroeder on Haydn's London Symphonies.

Bach intended the Art of the Fugue to express the proposition, "I seek salvation," we cannot conclude that this is what the music actually expresses. Music cannot express this proposition, so Bach's purported intention simply fails. While particular structural features of the Art of the Fugue can indeed represent seeking and reaching a goal, how do we know which goal is represented? We have no more right to say that the goal is "salvation" than to say that it is victory over enemies or returning home after a long journey. What, exactly, is the "message concerning tolerance" expressed in Haydn's symphonies? Even if it could be shown that the music refers to tolerance (which Kivy doubts), how do we know what Haydn wanted to say about tolerance? And even if we had evidence (say, in a letter) that Haydn wanted to endorse Shaftesbury's views on tolerance in his music, it seems silly to say that we could gain a better understanding of Shaftesbury by listening to Haydn.

6.2c My views on the "Content" Question

We have seen that the sophisticated attempts by Young and Walton to make sense of musical "content" proved disappointing. A philosophically rigorous analysis of musical content seems to allow us to say far less than is indicated in the experience of many listeners. Kivy would have an answer to my qualified defense of musical "aboutness": Defenders of musical content have been misled

by analogies between music and the "contentful" arts of literature and representational painting. And his arguments against the presence of a complex extra-musical content in the music of Bach and Haydn seem fairly devastating. Attempts to expound the "hidden meaning" of instrumental music in propositional terms seem doomed to fail for the reasons that Kivy indicates — even if we allow that music can refer, how can we tell whether it endorses or condemns, and how can music tell us the precise terms in which it endorses or condemns?

It seems to me that Kivy accords respect to those with whom he disagrees, and gives their claims and arguments the serious treatment they deserve. What he fails to do, however, is to take seriously their listening experiences (all the while insisting, plausibly, that his listening experience must be taken seriously). If Kivy is right, and defenders of musical content (both musicologists and philosophers) have been misled by analogies between music and literature, what does this say about music and about the listener's experience?[210] What can we learn from such misleading analogies (if that is indeed what they are)? The musicologists Kivy attacks certainly have the capability to make sense of their experience in theoretical and musico-

[210] I will develop my position on musical content examining the analogies between music and literature, and say nothing about painting. The classic statement of the differences between poetry and the visual arts in G.E. Lessing's Laocoön, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Indianapolis:

structural terms. Why, then, do they chose to describe music according to notions perhaps more appropriate for literature? It may be easy to dismiss the experiences of untrained listeners, such as some of those quoted in 6.2a, but there seems little good reason not to take seriously the experiences of performers and musicologists, even if there is little consensus among them.

Is the debate over musical content doomed to end in a stalemate between those who "hear what they hear" and those who insist that, for sound philosophical reasons, those in the first group cannot possibly hear what they claim? Does philosophical rigour insist that we condemn those who insist on the reality of extra musical content? Only if the debate continues in the manner that it has; I want to suggest an approach that I hope will be more fruitful. Rather than continuing to ask "does music have an extra-musical content or meaning?" let us consider the question, "what is it about music, and about the experience of listening to music, such that listeners frequently experience it as carrying semantic weight?" However in asking this question, we must not ignore those who claim to hear "the music itself," devoid of any extra-musical content. I am convinced that it is important to take the experiences of both types of listeners seriously and perhaps even seek to reconcile them. While I

The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1962). Sadly, the part of the work which was to have examined music was never completed.

shall not defend the existence of hidden messages in instrumental music, I do want to try to understand the ground of the possibility for claims of hidden content. To that end, we have to examine the nature of involvement with music as heard. Even particular claims about a composition's "hidden content" must ultimately be assessed by what a listener hears.

6.3 The Nature of Involvement with Music

Music can be part of a rich variety of experiences; I cannot adequately address the many ways of being involved with music and coming to understand it better. The particular integration of body and mind fostered by moving with music — whether in dance or physical labour — deserves extended phenomenological investigation. I have been focusing on listening because it is clearly foundational to other forms of involvement including performing, composing, and formal study. But what is the nature of the listener's involvement with music in listening? An account of musical understanding and of the involvement which underwrites it should be able to make sense of listening experiences as active, cognitively engaged processes. Ideally, it should be able to clarify the experiences of those with varying levels of musical competence, and be applicable to different types of music. Furthermore, an account of musical understanding should speak to both the formal aspects of music (particularly its character as an evolving structure

over time), and the semantic aspects. With regard to the latter, it should help us comprehend why some listeners experience music as rich in extra-musical significance, while other listeners do not.

Throughout my discussions of philosophical accounts of musical understanding and in descriptions of my own listening experiences, I have used such expressions as "sense of direction," "follow along," "come to a musically appropriate close," "chaotic foreground," "in constant struggle," and "sense of progression in the music." These expressions gesture towards the account of involvement I wish to present. Briefly, I propose to develop an account of involvement with music which stresses the similarities between following a musical performance and following or constructing a narrative.

6.3a What is Narrative?

In what follows, I will be employing a conception of narrative that is loose, but, I hope, sufficiently rigorous to be fruitful. According to some psychologists of language, the minimum requirement for narrative is at least two sequential clauses, temporally ordered, about a single past event.[211] As I see it, the most important characteristic of narrative is that it is a way of making

[211] W. Labov, Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972). I am relying on the discussion in Jean Berko Gleason, The Development of Language Fourth edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 407.

sense of — of giving a structure to — events over time. I will try to show that music as heard has a narrative structure, and where this structure is not readily apparent, the listener nonetheless approaches the music and tries to comprehend it within the framework of a narrative structure. When musicologists use the term "narrative," they often have in mind one form of musical structure, that of tonal striving, climax, and closure, typical of many 19th century symphonies. My own broader use of narrative includes but is not limited to this pattern. Indeed I will argue that even minimalist "non-narrative" music utilizes a narrative structure to involve us.

Telling stories or imposing a narrative coherence on events is one of the main ways in which we make sense of our experience. When a person, known to us or not, does something unexpected, we try to make sense of his actions within a narrative framework, usually working on the assumption that he is rational and acting in what he feels to be his own best interest. Even when we doubt that an actor is rational, we look for a rational explanation for his behaviour. Our narrative explanation of his behaviour may be correct or incorrect, plausible or implausible. If we believe a person to be self-deceived, we typically mistrust his own narrative reconstructions of the events in which he is involved. In the philosophical literature on understanding music, one comes across claims such as

"understanding a musical work is like understanding a person."[212] Underlying such assertions, I am convinced, is the fact that we get to know and understand other people largely through learning their stories, and the narrative coherence that they place on their own lives.[213] I will hope to show that we come to understand music in a similar way.

While the use of narratives appears to be worldwide, there seems to be no universal standard for narrative form. Psychologists have found that narrative structure varies according to the teller's age and cultural background. For example, studies of children in the west suggest that four-year-olds most commonly use a "leap-frog narrative" structure, in which the child jumps unsystematically from one event to another, often leaving out important points. By the time children are eight years old, they are capable of organizing events into the "classic" narrative structure in which events build to a high point, are briefly suspended, then resolved and evaluated.[214] However this "classic" narrative structure is by no means the only

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[212] For example, Frances Berenson, "Interpreting the Emotional Content of Music," in The Interpretation of Music ed. Price, 61-72; and Göran Hermerén, "Art and Life: Models for Understanding Music," Australasian Journal of Philosophy 73:2 (June 1995): 280-92. As we see in chapter 3, section 4, Scruton implies such a position in his comparison of involvement with music to an internal dance and his claim that the response to music is a response to a human life in the sounds.

[213] Some philosophers have gone so far as to argue that narrative structure is the organizing principle, not only of experiences and actions, but also of the self who experiences and acts. See for example David Carr, Time, Narrative, and History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 73.

legitimate or most potent form. To cite only one counter-example, Japanese children tell stories in which temporally distinct events are linked thematically, often using a structure that emulates Haiku.[215] The world-wide adoption of American media formats should not blind us to the fact that the linear "classic" narrative structure is far from being the only available or most effective way of ordering events.[216]

"Narrative," as I use the word, is not the same as "plot." I take "plot" to be a smaller structural unit within a narrative, often advanced by conflict. Traditionally, there are three types of conflicts: between individuals, between an individual and nature, and between an individual and God. A narrative does not require conflict. Some examples will be helpful here. The story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16) is a narrative with a clear plot: Two brothers are rivals, one kills the other and is sent into exile. In this narrative (variations of which still provide a basis for movie screenplays) we have an initial situation, a conflict, and a resolution. A narrative may contain more than one plot. The story of

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[214] C. Peterson and A. McCabe, Developmental Psycholinguistics: Three ways of looking at a child's Narrative (New York: Plenum, 1983), as discussed in Gleason, Development of Language, 408-09.
[215] M. Minami and A. McCabe, "Haiku as a Discourse Regulation Device: A Stanza Analysis of Japanese Children's Personal Narratives," Language in Society 20 (1990): 577-99, as discussed in Gleason, Development of Language 409.
[216] See Jeremy Tunstall, The Media are American: Anglo-American Media in the World (London: Constable, 1977).

Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50) can be seen as having one underlying plot (the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers and his ultimate forgiveness of them), which contains many smaller plots within it (the story of Joseph and the Pharaoh's wife, Joseph's divination of the dreams, etc.). But a narrative need not have a plot at all. The genealogy of Christ which begins the Gospel according to Mathew ("Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers…," etc.) is also a narrative.

Philosophical applications of narrative to music, as far as I have been able to judge, do not make clear this distinction between narrative and plot, often treating the two as synonymous. The result is that only music containing "conflicts" is recognized as having a narrative structure, and a narrative analysis is seen as applicable to only a limited range of music. For example, in his paper, "Music as Drama," Fred Everett Maus points to literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov's account of plot: "An ideal narrative begins with a stable situation that some force will perturb. From which results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in a converse direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is quite similar to the first, but the two are not identical."[217] This

[217] Tzvetan Todorov, Introduction to Poetics trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), quoted in Fred

account of narrative-as-plot works nicely for the Beethoven string quartet which Maus analyses, and it would work nicely for the Kraus symphony I discussed in 6.1. However it is less applicable to Berg's "March" in the Three Pieces for Orchestra or to the Georgian folk songs also discussed earlier, or to much other music.

"Narrative," as I use it, does not require antagonism, and its beginnings and endings may be largely arbitrary. Again, this means it may be applicable to a wide variety of music — music without clear beginnings and endings, and music without "conflicts." We can see that a narrative's beginning and endpoints may be arbitrary by considering the type of newspaper articles typically written after someone has behaved in a manner seen as requiring explanation (such as committing an act of violence or heroism). The article may begin with a sketch of the actor's parents, with information about his or her childhood generally, with the description of a formative event in the actor's earlier life, or with a report of how he or she began the day in question. The "logical" starting point depends ultimately on what the writer deems to be important or interesting. Similarly, the ending of a narrative is rarely obvious or explicit, and usually reflects the teller's preoccupations.

Everett Maus, "Music as Drama," in Music and Meaning ed. Robinson, 126. Maus's article is one of the best I have read on the connection between music and narrative forms, and has influenced my own thinking on the subject.

The story of a person's life may end with his or her physical death, but just as often some reference is made to surviving relatives, or to the deceased's influence on them and on the world, or an indication is made as to how he or she will be remembered.

The events described in a narrative need not even be coherently connected. Indeed, if events seem disconnected from one another rather than rationally ordered, a narrative recounting these events may seem similarity disjointed. But a narrative, by its very structural arrangement of events in a sequence, whatever the organizing principle of that sequence, can give recounted events a coherence that they lacked as lived events. Events may be selected and hierarchically ordered according to strict time sequence, dramatic potential, significance for any one of the actors involved, or some other principle. Once events are recounted and understood in terms of the chosen principle, they can at least be assessed for coherence. To use an analogy: events before their arrangement in a narrative structure are like separate scattered puzzle pieces. It is only once they are selected and arranged in some order that their connections with one another and overall significance can be assessed. When an initial ordering has been achieved, the order itself can be questioned. The selection and arrangement of events according to an "artificial" or arbitrary coherence may never be enough fully to explain

these events, but it is a powerful tool enabling more sophisticated forms of coherence and greater understanding.

6.3b Narrative Involvement with Music

The fundamental feature shared by music and the various forms of artistic narrative (stage drama, epic poetry, short stories, novels, and dance narratives, among others) is that all are arts of time.[218] As such, they present themselves as temporal gestalts, demanding continuous and continued attention. In this they are different from the visual arts; paintings and drawings exist in time, but they do not occupy time. Music and narratives fill up time; they impose an organization on time.[219]

Now, a critic who wanted to challenge the analogy between music and the narrative arts (and their mutual disanalogy with the visual arts) might remind me that long narrative works are frequently not the object of continued attention. No one, for example, is likely to try to read - War and Peace in a single sitting. We might read a chapter or two of a novel, put it aside for hours or days, and continue our reading later with little disadvantage. In this way, appreciating a long musical work is significantly different. Something seems to be lost if we leave a gap of

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[218] Performed dramas and dance narratives are spatial as well as temporal, of course. I will leave the differences between these and the non-spatial arts of written literature and music unexplored. On the question of what it is for an art form to involve time, see Jerrold Levinson and Philip Alperson, "What is a Temporal Art?" Midwest Studies in Philosophy 16 (1991): 439-50.

[219] I say more about music and the experience of time in the Appendix.

days between listening to the first and second movements of a symphony, to say nothing of leaving off a recording of a work somewhere in the middle. However the differences between music and literature in this regard do not seem to me so obvious or pronounced. In reading, each section of the narrative on which we focus is the object of continued attention, and this section will have to be of at least a certain minimum length. We may choose to read War and Peace chapter by chapter on a daily basis over a month or so, but we would not read it sentence by sentence on a daily basis over several years.

Let me now turn more specifically to the nature of musical involvement. First, the title of a work creates expectations as to the character of the music, including narrative expectations. The knowledge that we are about to listen to the "Pastoral" symphony alerts us that the music will likely contain representational elements. Similarly, the "Pathétique" symphony is likely to be very expressive. Narrative expectations are elicited even by non-descriptive titles. For example, the "Symphony in D major" is likely (but not absolutely certain) to consist of three or four distinct movements, with some thematic continuity among them. One of the movements is likely to be slower than the others. We know that a "Concerto" is likely to be a musical dialogue between a solo instrument and an orchestra, again usually in three distinct movements. A "tone poem" is

likely to be less formally structured than either a symphony or a concerto, and may be notable more for its expressive and sonorous qualities than for the excellence of its thematic material.

A great deal of music has a narrative structure, even a plot, apparent on its musical surface. I mentioned earlier that some musicologists speak quite unproblematically of a "musical narrative" in many 19th century symphonies. Think of the Kraus symphony discussed earlier. A slow and stately opening theme was followed by a slight pause, and then the statement of a second, faster theme. It is not implausible to think of these statements as separate actions, and as the rest of the movement as consisting in the further unfolding and ultimate consequences of these actions. The musical narrative is the conveyance of these actions, reactions, and consequences.

The listener hears this narrative, but also becomes involved with it or swept up; he wants to know what will happen next. One mark of a bad story is that we can stop listening or reading at any point — we no longer care how things will turn out. Something similar can be said of music; one indication of an interesting work or performance is that while we enjoy the music, we also want to know what will happen next. We want to hear where it is going. The musical narrative also includes indications as to how the various actions are to be hierarchically ordered, and hints

as to how they will ultimately be resolved. For example, a pause may signal that something new is about to happen; a ritard or deceleration can indicate that what we are now listening to — the phrase, theme, or entire work - is about to end. Becoming involved with much music is a matter of discerning and following its narrative structure, perhaps revising expectations as the music continues. By "following" I mean paying attention and being alert to the "clues" in the music and to the expectations — tonal and rhythmic — which it generates.[220]

A skeptical critic might ask, "If musical themes are actions, who are the actors — the composer, the performers, or some imaginary others?" Maus addresses this question explicitly: Music is abstract and can be dramatic without imitating or representing any determinate characters. While this answer may seem strange, Maus reminds us that for Aristotle, tragedy is an imitation of an action and of life, not of human beings, and character is subsidiary to the action. So music can be thought of as a drama that lacks determinate characters.[221]

Of course, not all music has a structure as easily discernible as that of the Kraus symphony; indeed, some

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[220] To discuss in any detail the role played by expectation in the experience of listening to music would demand much greater command of musicology and the psychology of listening that I possess. The reader is referred to Leonard B. Meyer, Emotion and Meaning in Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

[221] Maus, "Music as Drama," 128. Aristotle's discussion is in Poetics, 1449b20-1450b20.

music is composed specifically so as to be difficult to follow and elude ready understanding. What then of music which lacks an obvious narrative or dramatic structure? In some cases, the narrative is on the musical surface, yet the listener must do some work before its structure can be discerned. I had this type of experience trying to gain a better understanding of Berg's "Prelude" in his Three Pieces for Orchestra. At first the music seemed to make little sense; with repeated listening, I could discern a mirror-like structure, in which the second half of the piece could be heard as an inversion of the first.

In other cases, where there is no apparent or even concealed narrative on the surface of the music, we follow the music as if it were a narrative. When a narrative structure is not evident, we impose such a structure, or attempt to do so. We follow such music as a narrative despite the lack of clues as to how the various musical actions are to be ordered and ultimately resolved. We expect music to signal to us what is important and to indicate to which aspects we should pay most attention. We listen for such indications even when they are not forthcoming. We also listen for hints as to the music's ending — will the ending be signaled harmonically, with dynamics, or otherwise? As in the case of listening to works with an unambiguous narrative structure, we may need to revise expectations as the music continues. In listening

in this way, I suggest, we are imposing a narrative structure where one is concealed or absent.

6.3c Narrative and Understanding

Recognitional understanding of a work's narrative structure might be achieved in several different ways. In the case of structurally unambiguous works, discerning and responding to the music's narrative structure forms the basis of recognitional understanding. If a work lacks an explicit narrative structure, or if we cannot discern the structure, we impose one. Listeners with greater sensitivity to musical structure (typically, but not always, as a result of formal training) may find that a work's narrative structure rarely eludes them. The more a listener knows about music, the less likely it is that she will have to impose a narrative structure to make sense of a particular work.

I am now in a position to say more about my failure fully to understand Berg's "March." In my earlier discussion of this piece, I felt that I had failed even to come to an adequate recognitional understanding of it. While I noticed a sense of direction in the music, and had an idea of what was most important at any given time, the whole thing somehow eluded me. I suspect that my distraction was due to the relative absence of clues as to the underlying narrative structure. I knew that the music had a particular character (brassy, aggressive) and was

going somewhere, but I could not discern a narrative, and was not given enough indications as to how I could impose one. The relative length of the piece (about ten minutes) in comparison to the first two pieces (about five minutes each) made the lack of clear indications particularly challenging.

Lack of conscious understanding is often manifested as a negative affective response. The ease with which listeners can discern or impose a narrative structure seems a factor in the level of enjoyment they take in listening. I suspect that I found the "March" less appealing that either of the other two pieces by Berg partly because it seemed more recalcitrant to recognitional understanding. The particular challenges it presented, I am convinced, were due to the difficulty of becoming fully involved with the music. Involvement with the music might have been facilitated by a more transparent narrative structure, or clearer indications as to the narrative structure I might impose myself.

In chapter one, I contrasted "intrigued uncertainty" with both unmediated understanding on the one hand, and incomprehension and aversion on the other, as possible reactions to music. A listener who feels intrigued but uncertain is not quite sure that she has understood the music in question, and would like to hear it again. Why does some music that the listener does not fully understand

elicit a reaction of intrigued uncertainty, while other music prompts an aversive reaction? The answer to this question certainly has as much do with the listener as with the music. However I would suspect that some works more than others have a tendency to prompt reactions of aversive rather than intrigued uncertainty. Works which a listener cannot "get into," which eschew a clear narrative structure and give the listener few indications (in terms of tonal structure or otherwise) on how to impose such a structure, would seem to be particularly frustrating.

Intrigued uncertainty can occur before or after the listener has gained a basic recognitional understanding. My initial experiences of listening to Georgian music frequently prompted intrigued uncertainty. Before I could make sense of Georgian music as music, I wanted to hear more. Sometimes, the feeling of intrigued uncertainty disappears when recognitional understanding has been achieved. While I still find some of the harmonies in Georgian music slightly strange, I no longer listen with as much uncertainty as I once did. I have become able to allow the music, in the words of Tovey, "to make itself intelligible by its own self-consistency." I have learned to divest myself of some of the "prejudices" which come from years of familiarity with diatonic tonal music. I can follow the structural narratives of Georgian folksongs with

greater success, and am more attuned to the clues and indications on the musical surface.

Yet music which does not challenge understanding on such a basic level can also arouse intrigued uncertainty. For example, while I have little difficulty understanding as music and following Bach's great works for solo instruments (violin, cello, and keyboard), certain passages give me the feeling that the music has somehow eluded me. This type of uncertainty is not resolved through the attainment of recognitional understanding, although enhanced understanding may assuage it. If I were to study the score of, say, Bach's suites for solo cello, I would likely have a much better idea of what was going on in the music at particular points, of how the different parts related to one another, and a more sophisticated grasp of the work as a whole. This knowledge might be enough to end any feelings of uncertainty prompted by listening to the work.

However just as a poem sometimes gives the sense that it conveys a meaning beyond what would be contained in a literal paraphrase, music can give the feeling that following its progression does not result in complete understanding. I can imagine a sophisticated listener, perhaps even a skilled performer, who enjoyed an enhanced understanding of a work yet still felt that the music was somehow elusive. Such a listener might express this feeling in various ways. He might say that the music was "beyond

words" or ineffable; he might describe the music and feelings it aroused in figurative language. Here we approach what I described earlier as "interpretive understanding." Why do different people have such different reactions to music, often hearing different things in the same work? Attention to the narratological character of music might assist us make sense of its capacity to carry semantic weight for some listeners.

It will help here to recall what Goodman had to say about understanding music. For Goodman, understanding a work of art requires entering into the world of the work. What Goodman calls "entering the world of the work" I have been calling "involvement" with music, and I have tried to give an account of what this involvement amounts to. Musical performances, as artworks, are semantically and syntactically "dense." That is, there is no one-to-one relationship between the elements of the music and of the world. Each musical work can be seen as having a different symbolic structure and as utilizing different semantic relationships. The denotative relationships of representation, expression, and exemplification, are not universal or immutable. They must be "decoded" in each artwork we encounter, although knowledge of the artistic tradition and operative conventions will help us gain a better understanding of the work in question.

For example, an ascending chromatic passage need not signify the same thing in works by different composers, nor even in works by the same composer, nor even in two passages of the same work. Let us imagine a listener who hears such a passage in the context of a work which she understands fairly well. She has a sense that the passage holds some greater significance within the overall narrative structure of the work. The "dense" nature of music makes it difficult for her to say exactly what the passage signifies, and unlikely that there is any one "correct" answer. Her knowledge about the work — including its title, information about the composer and the circumstances of its composition — may lead her to favour one possible interpretation over another.

So far my discussion of narrative structure in music has been highly abstract. I have said nothing about the epistemic status or value to the listener of <u>specific</u> narratives applied to or heard in particular musical works. Examples of these include the narrative of destructive male sexual desire which McClary hears in Beethoven's ninth symphony (part of which was quoted in 6.2a), and the "drama of the outsider" that Charles Fisk finds in the first movement of Schubert's sonata D. 960.[222] Considering the question of epistemic status first, I would postulate that

[222] See Charles Fisk, "What Schubert's Last Sonata Might Hold," in <u>Music and Meaning</u> ed. Robinson, 179-200.

it is best to regard such narratives taking a cue from the way in which William James regarded the epistemic status of mystical experiences: These are real or true to the person who experiences them and may count as evidence in favour of his religious beliefs. They need not have significance nor count as evidence for anyone else.[223] If I listen to Beethoven's symphony with an open mind and fail to experience the music as McClary does, this would not count as evidence against her experience of the music, any more than the fact that she hears something I do not would count as evidence that my hearing was somehow deficient.

However the analogy with mystical experience breaks down quickly: we can discuss and argue about the interpretation of artworks in way that would make little sense if applied to mystical experience. For example, I do not find Fisk's narrative analysis of Schubert's sonata very compelling. If Fisk wanted to convince me of the appropriateness of his analysis, we could listen to the sonata together, and he could point out those elements which make him experience the music as he does. Perhaps he would convince me; perhaps not. Yet the value of such an exercise, like the value of considering specific narratives with respect to particular musical works, seems clear. Listening to the sonata with Fisk's narrative in mind, I

[223] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 331-34.

might come to hear the music differently and gain a greater awareness of its underlying structure, even though I might ultimately reject the specific narrative which he suggests. Anything which opens our minds to the possibilities inherent in music and helps us to hear different things in a work, or hear what we have always heard in a new way, is ipso facto valuable.

Does this mean that all interpretations are created equal and there is no way to tell which of two specific narratives most suits a musical work? Not necessarily: Some interpretive narratives are better than others at making sense of the narrative structure of the music. We can judge interpretive narratives as more or less appropriate according to their correspondence with the musical structure. For example, while I fail to hear Beethoven's ninth symphony in the way that McClary hears it, I cannot deny hearing the elements of the work which she indicates in support of her interpretation — the tonal striving and conflict in much of the symphony as contrasted with the calm of the third movement. An interpretive narrative which failed to make sense of these features of the music would have to be judged inferior to McClary's. It is even arguable whether the notions of "striving" and "conflict" make sense outside of a narrative framework. To notice these features is already to hear a narrative, regardless of how described.

Why do some listeners get the feeling that there is more to music than what "meets the ear," so to speak? The human desire to know — which is a source of pleasure as well as the root of all scientific exploration, broadly construed — includes the desire to understand abstract patterns.[224] Perhaps our sense that some music calls for deeper understanding is nothing more than a misplaced desire for comprehension. However there are at least two reasons to resist such a conclusion. First, the human tendency to discern meaning is matched by a corresponding desire to communicate significance. The feeling that music is meaningful in the fully semantic sense and the desire to understand it as such is informed by a sense that the music is a human product. Music is composed, performed, and appreciated in specific social and cultural contexts, and becomes invested with significance in these contexts. However due to the syntactically and semantically dense nature of artworks, this meaning is rarely easy to interpret. The fact that music attains meaning in specific social situations does not make this meaning inconsequential. After all, words in a language are similarly meaningful only in a social context.[225]

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[224] In chapter 4 I briefly touched on Kivy's hypothesis that the human tendency to see abstract patterns as objects in the world helps account for the tendency for some to interpret sounds as meaningful in the fully linguistic sense. See his Music Alone, 1-13.
[225] This point is made by McClary in Feminine Endings.

Second, much remains unknown regarding the effects of music on human beings, both physical and psychological. Music brings about measurable physical responses in listeners, including heightened awareness, alertness, and excitement. Electro-myograph readings show marked increases in electrical activity in the leg muscles in subjects listening to music, even when they have been told to sit still.[226] Neurological research indicates that music can have a direct effect on the brain — whether therapeutic or harmful. Oliver Sacks has written movingly about his patients with neurological disorders who are given a respite from their condition through music. He describes one patient with Parkinson's disease who tended to remain completely motionless for hours a day; she regained ease and fluency of movement when she played the piano, heard, or even imagined music. Another was able to regain the use of her apparently paralyzed leg through music therapy after conventional physiotherapy had failed.[227] That music may act directly on the brain to harmful effect is indicated by the rare phenomenon of musicogenic epilepsy — seizures induced by hearing or (in very rare cases) imagining music.[228]

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[226] Anthony Storr, Music and the Mind (New York: The Free Press: 1992), 24-25.
[227] Oliver Sacks and Concetta M. Tomaino, "Music and Neurological Disorder" International Journal of Arts Medicine 1:1 (Fall 1991): 10-12.
[228] Storr, Music and the Mind, 35; and Donald Scott, "Musicogenic Epilepsy (2) The Later Story," in Music and the Brain: Studies in the Neurology of Music eds. MacDonald Critchey and R. A. Henson (London: William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd., 1977), 354-64.

Even this short discussion should demonstrate that the effect of music on human beings remains mysterious and in need of further empirical research. The philosophical implication I would like to draw is to suggest that music's direct physical effect may be differently manifested, depending on the listener. The pre-conscious physical and neurological effects of music may result, in different listeners, in different varieties of conscious response. For example, some listeners may be induced to imagine, while others may not.[229]

I said earlier that the more a listener knows about music, the less likely it is that she will have to impose a narrative structure to make sense of particular works. Perhaps it is also the case that the richer a listener's appreciation of musical structure, the less she will feel a need to describe her experience in figurative language. For these listeners, descriptions of musical structure may be largely adequate to their listening experience. Of course, this suggestion will only be plausible for some listeners, as we have seen that even some highly sophisticated

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[229] It is tempting to conjecture that as a listener becomes more sophisticated and more critical, the left hemisphere may become more involved in music perception, with the result that less importance is accorded to the emotional aspects of music. The topic of cerebral dominance for musical functions is still controversial, and many important aspects of musical function defy attempts at localisation. See N. Wertheim, "Is there an Anatomical Localisation for Musical Faculties?" in Music and the Brain eds. Critchey and Henson, 282-97. The literature on music and brain damage is difficult to interpret and inconclusive.

listeners (i.e. musicologists) testify to hearing "deeper meanings" in music.[230]

6.3d Why narrative?

Why do we impose a narrative structure on music that does not exhibit one to us? For the same reason that we struggle to construct a narrative framework in which to comprehend events in the world which defy understanding. The quest to make sense of our experience, whether it is aural experience, experience with other people, or experience of natural phenomena, is a necessary feature of human life. The temporal framework of narrative seems especially apt for coming to an understanding of events across time. In addition, the flexibility of narrative — the fact that we can choose those features of experience which seem important and order them according to whatever variable we choose — means that a narrative account of experience can be particularly useful in helping us to grasp and make sense of the connections between events. Furthermore, creating and learning narratives is intrinsically pleasurable, and this pleasure can have an aesthetic component.

Why invoke narrative to explain the ground of musical involvement and understanding? Have I, like those whom Kivy criticizes, been misled by an analogy between music and literature? The answer to that question will ultimately be

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[230] I take up some of these issues briefly in the Appendix.

up to the reader, but I want to say a few things in my defense.

One advantage of my analysis of involvement with music as a type of narrative discovery or construction is that it is applicable to different listeners, and different types of music. I have tried to show that a narrative understanding of music underlies both sophisticated analyses of musical structure and ordinary language descriptions by more naïve listeners, as well as even fanciful accounts of musical significance. Furthermore, when we define "narrative" in a way that owes more to empirical psychologists of language than to literary theorists, it is flexible enough to help us makes sense of many different types of music. We can gain insight, not only into music composed with attention to the expectations created by diatonic tonality, but also into atonal, minimalist, and highly repetitive music. If my account is plausible, it should be equally applicable to art music, folk music, commercially popular music, and jazz.

An account of musical understanding as narrative in my sense helps to explain (without explaining away) the perennial appeal of other accounts of understanding music. I have already mentioned the comparisons often made between understanding music and understanding persons. It is likely that the comprehension of both relies on the discovery or imposition of a narrative structure. Attention to the narrative structure of music also helps to explain the

attraction which many have to the "music as language" hypothesis, even though this hypothesis has been found to be deeply problematic. If my arguments are compelling, then comparisons between music and language can be fruitful, but not as a comparison between musical phrases and sentences in natural language. The appropriate comparisons, rather, are between musical works, and larger structured units such as stories and novels.

In chapter three I briefly discussed Scruton's explanation of musical involvement as a "dance of sympathy." According to Scruton, the response to music's expressivity is a sympathetic response, awakened by another life or subjectivity. The life in music is abstract and belongs to the music process - there is no precise object of sympathy. Moving to music as well as silent listening can be a "dance of sympathy": "In dancing I respond to another's gestures, move with him, or in harmony with him, without seeking to change his predicament or share his burden. […Dancing] involves responding to movement for its own sake, dwelling in the appearance of another's gesture, finding meaning in that appearance, and matching it with a gesture of my own."[231]

Scruton's analysis has much to recommend it. In particular, it takes account of and helps us to understand the role of the body in understanding music — something

which my analysis of musical involvement as narratological does not do as well. However its flaws are serious enough to recommend rejection or at least reconsideration. First, the account of dance which underlies Scruton's analysis seems highly specific; while he does not state which form of dance he has in mind, his description corresponds to ballroom dancing and perhaps a few other forms. There are many types of dance which cannot be made to fit his description, including ritual dances with a sequence of strictly decreed movements, as well as dances in which a movement is meant to be imitated rather than responded to "for its own sake," and totally free-form or unstructured dances. The narrowness of his definition of dance raises the worry that the account of involvement with music based on this definition is similarly applicable only to a narrowly defined range of music.

Second, music and dance are so intimately related and their origins likely so intertwined, that it is not legitimate to explain one in terms of or prior to the other. Such a strategy ultimately raises more questions than it can answer. Scruton's account of involvement with music pushes the problem of understanding music to another level — the problem of how we are involved with and understand dance. One advantage of my approach to musical involvement as the discovery or creation of a narrative is that it encompasses

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[231] Scruton, Aesthetics of Music, 355.

both music and dance and might help us make sense of the latter as well as the former.

In chapter five, I discussed briefly how Kant's notion of the sublime might be applied to music. Certain musical works — because of their length, formal complexity, or intense expressivity - can arouse the feeling that something overwhelming has eluded us temporarily, while testing our capacities. The experience is not one of utter perplexity, rather a feeling that we have not quite "got it all." Music which is too recalcitrant to understanding may simply cause a aversive response — turn that off, I don't want to hear it now. However a listener can appreciate or enjoy music which is difficult, yet does not completely evade understanding. The experience of the sublime can be seen as one of "controlled" or "safe" misunderstanding: The listener experiences feelings of confusion combined with understanding, or within the context of an overall basic (recognitional) understanding.

Attention to the narratological aspects of musical experience, together with an awareness of different levels and varieties of understanding music can help illuminate the experience of the musical sublime. The experience that one has failed fully to understand music can occur at the level of recognitional, enhanced, or interpretive understanding, depending on one's knowledge and level of exposure to the type of music in question. Of course, not every experience

of misunderstanding is also an experience of the sublime. The difference between the two is that music which evokes feelings of the sublime makes us aware of the limits of our cognitive capacities. Our attempts to discern the narrative structure of such music or to construct our own continually evade our impressions of the music.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

At this point I propose to consider some of the possible shortcomings of my account of understanding music as fundamentally narratological in character.

I have taken a cognitive approach and assumed that art and music are objects for the mind, as much as they are objects for the senses. Art is something to be understood; responding to a work of art on a purely sensual or visceral level, while possible, is less rewarding than attempting to understand it.

There are at least two possible criticisms of the approach I have favoured. First, it risks treating the value of art as instrumental in nature, rather than treating art as something to be esteemed for its own sake. My response to this is that learning from art is not incompatible with being delighted by it or appreciating it for its own sake. Although art may become an instrument in the acquisition of knowledge, it need not be a mere instrument. Artworks that we learn from are not like ladders to be thrown away once we have reached the summit.

Perhaps their capacity to allow us to learn from them is inexhaustible. However unlike merely utilitarian objects, we can continue to appreciate artworks even if we no longer feel that we benefit from their presence.

Second, a critic might charge that a cognitive approach to art fails to take seriously the role of emotion and affect in the appreciation of art. If this were the case, it would indeed be a powerful indictment of the cognitive approach. However such a criticism has force only if a cognitive approach assumes a rigid separation between mind and body, between intellect and affect. While I have not offered a comprehensive philosophical psychology, I have tried to avoid such dualistic thinking.

Coupled with my cognitive approach to art, I have argued for the merits of a semiotic over a formalist orientation. However I have tried, at the same time, to preserve the strengths of formalism, in particular its insistence on the importance of attention to an artwork's perceptual qualities. A common criticism of semiotic approaches to art is the charge that they treat artworks as codes to be deciphered. I would argue however that in the best semiotic accounts of art and art appreciation, such as Goodman's, this criticism is misplaced. The relationship between the elements of an artwork and what it denotes or exemplifies is not an uncomplicated or one-to-one connection. Understanding a work of art, then, is not a

matter of deciphering its codes but of entering into the world it presents.

Finally, in my discussion of understanding music I have said relatively little concerning physical reactions to music. I have not taken up how understanding music might be manifested and expressed in the lived body. Possibly this criticism is just. However in my defense I would note that any adequate account of music and the body needs to be underwritten by a comprehensive philosophical psychology, which itself must take seriously the mental or cognitive aspects of understanding music. Perhaps the account I have offered will provide one of the stepping stones to such a philosophical psychology.

Appendix

Further Directions

In the course of my research on understanding music I became acquainted with some fascinating material to which I could not devote the time to do it justice. In this Appendix, I would like to propose some possible further directions for research related to the issues and problems discussed in the previous six chapters. These remarks are meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. They fall into two groups — issues related to philosophical psychology, and issues related to the phenomenological investigation of musical experience.

1. Music and Philosophical Psychology

I mentioned in chapter one that one of the methodological principles operative in my investigation of understanding music was the view that an adequate account of understanding must be sensitive to the character and scope of possible misunderstanding. The nature of misunderstanding music is perhaps nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the psychological and neurological literature on brain injury and amusia. Amusia may be receptive (loss of ability to appreciate music that one has previously enjoyed), or productive (loss of ability to sing or play a musical instrument). Underlying these defects may be deficiencies in the perception of pitch, rhythm, musical

affect, or some combination of the three. Related to the amusias are musical alexia (loss of ability to read music) and agraphia (loss of ability to write musical notation). Amusia sometimes occurs together with some form of aphasia; however there are cases of amusia without aphasia, and aphasia without amusia.

Although it is fascinating, the literature on brain damage and amusia is inconclusive and difficult to interpret. Patients with brain injuries are not routinely tested for amusia and the discovery that musical functions have been either damaged or spared may be fortuitous. To cite just one example, two patients with severe aphasia who were incapable of speech were discovered to have spared musical abilities when they surprised one of their caregivers by joining her in song.[232] Another source of difficulty is that it can be difficult to ascertain a patient's level of musical culture before his or her brain injury. Along with the considerable difficulties involved in quantifying musical abilities, relatives or friends may unwittingly exaggerate a patient's pre-morbid musical competence.

In chapter six I hypothesized that the pre-conscious physical and neurological effects of music may result, in different listeners, in a variety of different conscious

[232] O. S. Morgan and R. Tilluckdharry, "Preservation of Singing Function in Severe Aphasia," West Indian Medical Journal 31:3 (1982): 159-161.

responses. The fact that two patients with similar brain disorders will not both show musical disabilities also might be interpreted as evidence that some individuals show dissociated hemispheric dominance with respect to music.[233] While there is much evidence indicating that music and language activity are mediated by distinct neurobehavioral systems,[234] there are also cases reported which suggest that, in some patients, functions of music and language may share contiguous or even common areas within the left hemisphere.[235]

One likely place to start looking for differences among listeners which might underwrite such a variety of responses is to compare musicians with non-musicians. Some research of this type has been undertaken. According to one study, different nervous structures may be engaged in the processing of musical stimuli, depending on listeners' contact with music. While naïve listeners perceive melodies in a gestalt fashion, musically experienced listeners tend to approach sets of relations between musical elements. The authors conjecture that holistic apprehension is carried out

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[233] Arthur L. Benton, "The Amusias," in Music and the Brain: Studies in the Neurology of Music, eds. MacDonald Critchely and R.A. Hanson (London: William Heineman Medical Books Ltd., 1978), 378-97.
[234] See for example, H.R. McFarland and D. Fortin, "Amusia due to Right temporoparietal infarct," Archives of Neurology 39 (November 1982): 725-27; Isabelle Peretz, et. al., "Dissociations entre musique et langage après atteinte cérébrale: un nouveua cas d'amuise sans aphasie," Revue canadienne de psychologie expérimentale 51:4 (1997): 354-67; and J.L. Signoret, et. al., "Aphasie sans amuise chez un organiste aveugle," Revue Neurologique (Paris) 143:3 (1987): 172-81.

by the right hemisphere, and detailed, piecemeal analysis by the left.[236]

Besides suggesting further avenues for research, the difficulty in localising the components of musical function in the brain, and the possibility that music may be processed differently by different listeners, have implications for the modularity of mind thesis. According to this thesis, the human cognitive system is composed of physically separate subsystems, each with a specific body of procedural and declarative knowledge.[237] Most researchers in the field of the neuropsychology of music have been reluctant to adopt a modularistic view.[238] Philosophers wishing to defend the modularity thesis would do well to consider the empirical evidence offered by research in the psychology of music perception.[239]

2. Music and Time Consciousness

The philosophy of Edmund Husserl has had less influence in the philosophy of music than one might expect.[240] In his

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[235] For example, S. Hofman, et. al., "Common hemisphericity of language and music in a musician: A case report," Journal of Communication Disorders 26 (1993): 73-82.
[236] T. Bever and R. Chiarello, "Cerebral Dominance in Musicians and Nonmusicians," Science 185 (1974): 537-39, as discussed in Antonio R. Damásio and Hanna Damásio, "Musical Faculty and Cerebral Dominance," in Music and the Brain, eds. Critchely and Hanson, 141-55.
[237] Isabelle Peretz and José Morais, "Music and Modularity," Contemporary Music Review 4 (1989): 279-80.
[238] Peretz and Morais, "Music and Modularity," 281.
[239] For a defense of the relevance of such research, see Mario Bunge, "A Philosophical Perspective on the Mind-Body Problem or, Why Neuroscientists and Psychologists Should Care about Philosophy," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 135:4 (1991): 513-23.
[240] For example, a search of The Philosopher's Index turned up only a handful of items.

work on the perception of time and temporal consciousness Husserl often uses musical examples and appeals to the perception of melodic gestalts. His thought on these matters is extremely rich and suggestive. Although Husserl examines music and time consciousness in order to come to a better understanding of the a priori nature of time, we can learn from his insights into the former without thereby committing to his conception of the latter. I propose to give a brief outline of some relevant aspects of Husserl's analysis, and suggest how these are significant for the philosophy of music in general, as well as for my own narratological conception of musical understanding.[241]

When we hear a melody, we do not hear a series of discrete pitches. Individual tones do not utterly disappear with the cessation of the musical stimulus; when a new tone sounds, the preceding tone has not simply disappeared. If it had, we would be incapable of noticing the relations among successive tones and of forming the representation of a melody; in each moment we would have a tone, or perhaps an empty pause in the interval between the sounding of tones, but never a melody.[242] Husserl's point seems to be that at least two tones must be "present" in consciousness for us to perceive a relationship between them.

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[241] My understanding of Husserl was greatly aided and influenced by David Carr, Time, Narrative, and History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), especially 21-29.

However, the abiding of tone representations in memory is not the end of the story. If these representations were to remain unmodified, we would not have a melody but a chord of simultaneous tones, or a disharmonious tangle of sound. The perception of a melody is possible only because every tone "awakens from itself" a representation with temporal determination, and only because this determination continuously changes. It is in this way that individual tones have their definite places and terms of duration within the representation of a melody.[243]

Husserl gives the name of "retention" or primary memory to this abiding of tones in memory. Retention is different from recollection, or memory in the ordinary sense. Only in primary memory do we perceive what is past and does the past become constituted; primary memory <u>is</u> perception.[244] The past which I retain is constitutive of the presence of the object I am perceiving. The present and the past function together in the perception of time somewhat as do the foreground and background in spatial perception. Expectation of the future, or "protention" is as much a part of experience as retention of the past. At a minimal level, we expect bodily coordination and equilibrium — the very

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[242] Edmund Husserl, <u>On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)</u>, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 11.
[243] Husserl, 11-12.
[244] Husserl, 43.

conditions for the possibility of continuing to experience — to continue into the immediate future.

In perception, a "grasping as now" takes place moment by moment, and in this grasping the actually present phase itself becomes constituted.[245] Apprehensions succeed and continually blend into one another, and terminate in an impression that constitutes the now; however, the "now" is an ideal limit. Retention and protention function as horizons for ongoing, present experience. How much is "taken in" by these horizons will vary according to the character of the foreground and may be quite extensive.[246]

For Husserl, then, the character of the objects to which we attend, as well as the quality of our attention, will together influence the temporal nature of our perceptual experiences. This phenomenon is illustrated in the experience of listening to music and other aesthetic contexts. If it has not happened to us personally, we have likely all heard of someone emerging from a concert hall or theatre to say, "I thought it would never end — it seemed to last forever," or "The two and a half hours flew by as though they were minutes."

Husserl's work has implications for the philosophy of music and suggests further avenues for phenomenological investigation. Different musical works (and different

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[245] Husserl, 32.
[246] Carr, 24.

narrative structures) can constitute time consciousness differently. For example, consider the way in which time is constituted by a work such as Arvo Pärt's Fratres, with its long, slow melodic lines, minimalist structure, and extensive repetition. Compare this to the time-constituting properties of the Gershwins' "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." Fine performances of either work could rightly be absorbing, but the experience provided by each will be very different. Not the least of these differences will be the otherworldly or "timeless" quality of Pärt's work, as compared to the robust "in the moment" character of a well-written popular song.

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