

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

# Theorising Style

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is concerned with the style of musical theory in the twentieth century. Its primary aim is to delineate the style in which the institution of music theory has been constructed during this period. Style is described as a mutable term that, so long as it goes unexamined, threatens to disrupt the stability of the music-theoretical institution.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the meaning of style as it is used in everyday discourse and in the specialised discourses of the arts and of music. It is observed that the word resists precise definition. Yet style functions as a point of reference for the entire literature of music theory, whether one thinks of style in terms of a composer's oeuvre, a historical period, or a technical motive. As such, it seems odd that very little research has hitherto been devoted to understanding the implications of style. Instead, style tends to be subsumed within an all-pervasive formalist epistemology. This thesis endeavours to provide a basis from which clearer consideration of these implications may proceed.

The central section of the thesis comprises an analysis of the institutionalisation of music theory in the twentieth century, from Guido Adler to New Musicology. This analysis does not attend to the methodological approaches involved, but traces instead the stylistic background to the thinking, mainly in terms of influences from an interdisciplinary history of ideas. Separate chapters examine this stylistic background in terms of a pedigree of formalism, passing from a rationalist notion of form, through a structuralist, cognitive notion of form, to a non-essentialist, broadly constituted notion of form. It is noted that a strong thread of idealism unites each moment in the pedigree, and therefore the institution.

Throughout, the thesis develops the idea that style, entrenched as it is within the musical institution, yet not a defined part of that institution, has a deconstructive capability such that it may enable the enterprise of music theory to be cast in a new, constructive light.

## CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Theorising Style: An Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Defining Style Style in the 'real world' p.19. Style in the academic world p.32. Institutional Style p.51.	19
Chapter 2: Formalising Style Introduction p.55. Tracing the formalist epistemology p.57. Form in <i>fin-de-siècle</i> Vienna p.67. Guido Adler: the forgotten foundation p.74. Formalising the laws of art p.87.	55
Chapter 3: Structuralising Style Introduction p.98. The cognitive turn p.100. Leonard Meyer: style and music p.109. Eugene Narmour: style as cognitive science p.122. The institutional psychology of music p.131.	98
Chapter 4: Deconstructing Style Introduction p.135. Deconstruction p.137. Music and deconstruction 1: the appropriation p.145. Leo Treitler: the postmodern style p.154. Music and deconstruction 2: the dialogue p.165.	135
Chapter 5: Theorising Style In the wake of deconstruction p.179. Ontology, Epistemology and 'the music itself' p.185. From work to text p.195. In lieu of conclusion p.201.	179
Bibliography	205

## **Foreword**

Style, the material topic of this thesis, is not a concept exclusively retained by the discipline of music theory and musicology. Rather, it riddles a broader canvas of ideas that incorporates philosophy, psychology, literary theory and art history. As a record of research, this thesis, and its bibliography, reflects my own interdisciplinary interest in each of these areas. It is not, however, intended as a contribution to any of these other disciplinary fields. Rather, it is written from the viewpoint of a music theorist, but one who is minded to consider especially the profound and far-reaching influence that the style of the institutions that support these various disciplines has both on the immediate topics and on the approaches adopted by those disciplines.

Much of this thesis is taken up with a construction and critique of music-theoretical epistemology, educed mainly from what theorists say and write about what they do, rather than from examples of what they have done. As such, the complete absence of musical notation herein may appear conspicuous to some. I hope that the philosophical argument that I develop in the thesis concerning the positioning effects of the institutions of music theory (including notation), and my emphasis on the on-going, processive nature of that philosophy, may serve to resolve this absence.

I am required to state that this thesis is the result of original work done while I was in registered postgraduate candidature. Having said that, I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, the many ways in which I have been assisted and encouraged by my supervisor, Professor Nicholas Cook.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, in loving memory.



## ***Theorising Style: An Introduction***

The aim of this thesis is to facilitate a reflective understanding of the style of twentieth-century music theory by engaging some of its texts and its attitudes in a deconstructive dialogue. The motivation behind the approach of this thesis is implied in the pair of words that stand as its title inasmuch as the structural permanence afforded them by the ink on paper is beguiling. The meaning of that title is forever ambiguous; it is not fixed hard and fast, it is not precisely formed, but may be differently construed according to the emphasis that is bestowed on each of the words. In order to avoid confusion, I should state at the outset that this thesis does not seek to specify, or theorise, a singular concept of style that may be deployed in the analysis of musical works. Certainly, in a small way, I shall be concerned in this thesis to observe some of the existing, often contradictory, concepts of style that are employed in the discourses of pedagogy, including music theory, and of the everyday. Yet this is but a means to end, a route towards my aim.

The main purpose, then, of this thesis is an explication of style in a broader sense, namely the style of music-theoretical epistemology. It is my belief that the study of style will provide a key to exposing some of the assumptions, often unrecognised and unexamined, that lurk in the background of much music-theoretical activity. As such, I understand the essential ambiguity of my title to reflect a process, a dialogue, an activity of reflection, a style of theorising. Through emphasising this imprecision of style I am seeking to survey some of the sectors that comprise the current terrain of music theory with a view to invoking a deconstructive rethinking and a reflective re-engagement with the broader terrain of the musicological institution. My own contribution to that rethinking within the chapters of this thesis will, inevitably, be preliminary in its

scope, but my work will, I believe, open up the field and provide a basis from which future work may proceed.

The history of style is the history of a paradox, and that paradox is the subject of my first chapter. As I shall show, style consistently resists attempts at abstract definition by always already supplementing itself with alternative, and often contradictory, meanings. It is therefore apt that style is itself thought supplementary to so many other words: form, structure, idea, content, and meaning, to name but a few. Yet style is also a pervasive term. It is used, it seems, with largely unreflective abandon in pedagogic discourse as in everyday life. And while its definitional contraries have been the focus of countless reams of intellectual speculation, style seems always to play a suppressed, non-speaking part to those valorised terms. In contrast to the hard, systematic characterisations of such terms as form and structure, style is inherently speculative, and this is precisely what the ideologies of formalism and positivism that sustained the institutionalisation of music theory, and so much else, during the twentieth century have worked to reject. As a concept that is essentially untheorised within the discourse that contains it, it would seem that style has the potential to act as what we might (a little perversely) call a 'classic' deconstructive lever, threatening always by its ambiguity to wrench from within the music-theoretical institution that is mustered around it.

My opening chapter sets a scene, and locates the music-theoretical considerations of my subsequent chapters within a wider epistemological picture. In this way I anticipate that it will gradually become clear through those subsequent chapters that the style of music theory is silently predicated on a metaphysics that is all-pervasive, and which is characterised by a hypostatised conception of 'form'. I start by introducing the abundance of the concept of style by seeking out some definitions of the word. I then go on to look at how the word is used in practical

situations in the world at large, in the world of the arts and music, and in the analysis of the arts and music. Between the world of music and the analysis of music I shall maintain that there is a significant difference. This opening chapter demonstrates that style is a difficult word to pin down. Like many words, its meaning isn't set in stone. Rather its meaning arises from its pragmatic usage at specific times in specific locations. But unlike many words, style sustains a multitude of meanings such that in one circumstance it appears that style can mean precisely the opposite of what it means in another. Inevitably, any attempt to arrive at a single definition is doomed by the perpetual and tautologous deferral and difference of one signification to another, in the way that dictionaries work. Rather than saying what style is, we often end up saying what style isn't; we define it by setting it in opposition to another, valorised term. And, at least as far as music theory is concerned, style is assumed to be something other than form or structure. As we shall see, while style is a term that is avoided by many, and actively denigrated by some, form and structure are concepts that occupy a central place in the philosophy of music theory in the twentieth century. And while, at first sight, these terms would seem quite contradictory to a common-sense understanding of style, we shall see that, in practice, they administer a controlling and suppressive function in relation to it.

Style is more often than not, to use Robert Hatten's (1994) terminology (itself borrowed from Howard Shapiro), an 'unmarked' term in music-theoretical discourse. Instead of playing out an independent function, one which that common-sense view would suggest to be quite contrary to the formalistic and positivistic preoccupations of twentieth century thought, style is more often subsumed by, or collapsed into, the concept of form, and its terminological successor, structure. In order to understand where and why this collapse comes about, it is necessary to set the prevalence of this formalistic attitude in context. The history of the form-structure aggregate, which I take up in my second

chapter, is long and remarkably assiduous. Chapters Two, Three and Four act as a kind of extended critical literature review, indicating the foundations and the extent of formalist thinking, not only in musicology, but throughout our institutionalised academic worldview. I should note here that, although I use this literature in order to construct what could be called a pedigree of form, that literature does not expressly relate such a pedigree. That is to say, the literature of music theory does not always itself expressly recognise or appreciate the extent of the formalist pedigree, let alone its place within it. Indeed the authors represented here have more often sought to create a distance between their own work and this pedigree. As such, an examination of the main claims made in their work seems to be a useful place to start the work of the deconstructive rethinking to which I have referred. In this sense, I regard these chapters as a review of a literature that stands in for another that does not actually exist.

The history of form that I describe in these chapters divides quite neatly into two main phases. The first phase may be said to have begun in ancient Greece where, in the writings of Plato, 'Form' is the name given to a metaphysical world of Ideas that are thought to determine from the outside the objects and events of human earthly existence, including pedagogic practices and music. According to Plato, Form is ethereal, immutable, but essentially rational. As we shall see, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Aristotle's subsequent incorporation of an empirical component to Plato's rational view, thereby permitting the project of formal classification, set the tone for the mainstream of institutional academic work right into the twentieth century. During the eighteenth century, however, most notably in the work of Kant, this first phase of formalism began to give way to a second, although the change is only completed during the twentieth century in the work of Saussure and his progeny. By this time, form was no longer thought to be some external force governing nature, but a human force through which the human mind gives shape to the world in which it exists: it

participates in the formation and structuring of the world. Thus the focus of the driving force gradually moved from some external theistic entity beyond mortal control to some internal theistic entity equally beyond direct mortal control, but in some way detectable and quantifiable through the classification and study of language and of art works. In these chapters we shall see that, unlike style whose meanings are many and variable, form (and its terminological successor structure) has remained surprisingly consistent in meaning and application. Its history reflects what it describes: the history of the concept of structure is static, or structural, and it is invariably located in opposition to, yet at the same time posited as the determinant of, style.

As I have already indicated, exposition of some of the ways in which style is deployed as an analytical construct in the theory of music is only one, facilitating aspect of this thesis. It is facilitating in the sense that, through an examination of work that expressly addresses the constitution of musical style as a theoretical ideal, the style of the institution within which that work was produced is thrown into relief. As a result, we shall see that, while purporting to valorise the radical function of style in the face of what appears to be an increasingly formalist *status quo*, it has proved curiously difficult for the authors whose work I shall examine herein to escape the wily power of that *status quo*. In other words, their activity in writing about musical style is opened to a deconstructive engagement because their own intellectual style is inevitably determined by the style of the institution of which they are a part. Thus this thesis is primarily concerned with describing the ways in which the style of the institution of music theory has been formed during the last hundred or so years. A reflection on the ways in which the institution of music theory has developed during that time will indicate that it has been guided by a colonising, controlling attitude, not dissimilar to that observable in society's main institutions. While a civilised society relies on the rule of law, enforced by police and judiciary, so it seems does the institution of music theory.

The connection between a general human society (that requires the rule of law in order to preserve peace between potentially violent people) and a cultural, institutional society such as music theory (that ought to have no particular problem with such violence but which apparently prefers the rule of law all the same) may not be immediately clear. Yet if we look more closely there are certain parallels. Both societies, the general and the particular, are ultimately predicated on some abstract goal of survival. And laws are introduced in order to prevent one society from being overtaken by another. The right to, and desire for, life controls all civilised societies. I therefore consider the role of rules and laws as determinants of the style of the institution of musicology and theory in Chapter Two.

Deconstruction, according to Jonathan Culler, ‘involves attention to the marginal’ (1983: 215). But in order to attend to the marginal (style) it is necessary to examine the mechanisms by which it has become marginalised. As such, my deconstructive examination of the formalism of the institution of music theory is perhaps akin to Foucault’s study of the institutional structures by which society’s ‘Others’ were repressed and marginalised. Indeed, I would contend that my idea of style names the ‘Other’ that is subsumed or denigrated by the formalist epistemology of music theory. As is well known, Foucault’s work encompassed a series of historico-philosophical analyses (published over a period of twenty years) of the attitudes of Enlightenment society towards madness and criminals, punishment and discipline, sex and knowledge. He established a system of epistemes that determined the ways in which the power wielded by the Apollonian institutions of society suppressed or marginalised these Dionysian ‘Others’. Foucault described an episteme as that which

delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man’s everyday

perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true. (1970: xxii)

Foucault's 'classical' episteme largely corresponded to the period traditionally called the Enlightenment during which the philosophical rationalism of ancient Greece enjoyed a revival. Curiously Foucault maintained a monolithic view of the epistemes in *The Order of Things*. The classical episteme, for example, ended around the close of the eighteenth century as abruptly as it had begun in the mid-seventeenth century. Yet I shall argue in Chapter Two that the formalism that was characteristic of ancient Greece, and of the Enlightenment period, is actually a '*transepistemic* stream of thought' (Merquior, 1991: 62) that extends in time either side of Foucault's classical episteme. Indeed the Enlightenment rehabilitation of the ancient classical models of instruction and training effectively perpetuated the classical episteme into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by providing the model for the institutionalisation of the human sciences (including art, literature, history and music) within the modern university.

The work of Guido Adler, a student of Hanslick, represents an opening into the modern institution of musicology and music theory. It is also an intelligible opening because Adler, as a pedagogue, set out his thoughts in a clear and precise manner for the benefit of students. Those thoughts, succinctly incorporated within a short article published in 1885, combine roles for both formal and historical approaches to the analysis of music. Adler began from the premise that if there was music there was also thought about music, in other words, musicology (*Musikwissenschaft*). His work shows the influence of its time in its use of the terminology of evolutionism and geology to describe periodic styles according to a process of organic growth and decay, and

especially in its Kantian idealistic underpinning. In its assumption of this terminology Adler's approach is predicated, *a priori*, on an external, structuring force that is beyond the control of human individuals. That is to say, it is formalist, even while it speaks of the stylistic. That Adler found himself at the leading edge of the institutionalisation of musicology and theory was, I suspect, largely an accident of geography. The University of Vienna proved to be something of an institutionalising hothouse during the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early years of this, and this was especially so in the realm of art history. During the early nineteenth century the history of art works had been characterised by an idealist, essentialist idea of form which was derived mainly from the philosophy of Kant (as described in Chapter Two). In the years immediately preceding the turn of the century, influenced no doubt in part by the colonial pursuits of European politicians at that time, the idea that the form of an art work was a reflection of the form of the human mind began to be broadened, or universalised. Formalism now came to be seen not only as an indicator of the logical connection between art works and human minds, but also as a universal common denominator tying together the world's cultures.

I shall not consider the work of Heinrich Schenker in detail in this thesis, for there is an ongoing interest, and ever-growing literature, relating to the intellectual background of Schenker's writings, notably in the work of Blasius (1996), Cook (1989a), Keiler (1989), Korsyn (1988), Pastille (1984, 1990) and Snarrenberg (1997). Yet the personal relationship between Adler and his Viennese neighbour Heinrich Schenker was an odd one. Adler enjoyed the privilege of University franchise, while Schenker remained mainly outside such institutions, albeit that he longed to be accepted into its fold. Yet, as is by now well known, Schenker's teachings provided the basis for a whole institutional paradigm. Quite why his writings should have become better known than Adler's is not altogether clear. It certainly had little to do with the relative merits of their



work in the abstract for, in spite of their personal animosity and rivalry, their onto-epistemological positions were not so very far apart. As we shall see, both entertained a rationalistic view of musical form as something abstract, natural, systematic and representative of a world unaffected by the vagaries of human interests or biography. Rather it seems that the promotion and ultimate institutionalisation of one over the other was the result of two circumstances: first, Schenker's pupils disseminated and promoted his work vigorously; and second, they were able to do this thanks to another accident of geography brought about by their forced flight to the USA in the 1930s. The establishment of Schenkerism as an institutional disciplinary paradigm was notable too because of its express refusal to entertain the possibility that analysis of, or at the very least some explicit reflection on, the role of style as a term of reference had anything positive to contribute to a rigorous discourse about music. As we shall see, Schenkerian disciples tended to regard the whole business of style as dirty, and dirtying. Thus the individuals whose work I have chosen to picture in this thesis (especially Meyer and Narmour) are not what we might now call the mainstream, canonical figures of our institution. Rather they represent, in a sense, an often-marginalised sector within the music-theoretical institution that refuses to accept the hegemonic institutional *status quo* as given. Their interest in the concept of musical style has resulted, latterly, in the positioning of these figures outside or apart from the mainstream style of the institution of which their work is a part. This marginalisation is especially odd in the case of Adler: while conventionally acknowledged as a founding father of that institution, and occupying a central place within it at the turn of the century, Adler has latterly been all but forgotten by the heirs to his institutional kingdom.

During the twentieth century there has been an observable shift in the history of ideas away from the Classical view of form and structure as abstract entities that impose themselves on the world, and are mediated only through a disinterested

respect for the objective musical work. The shift has been towards a view of these entities as arising from, and reflecting, the human mind, and mediated through a scientific (Sorrell, 1991), cognitive attitude to musical works. I chart this shift in Chapter Three. This changing attitude found its way into music-theoretical thinking somewhat later than in other disciplines. Such tardiness seems to be a defining attribute of musicology in this century. Better late than never perhaps, the years from around the mid-1950s saw the effects of this changing attitude through the enactment of an epistemological fissure. While the objectivity of approaches adopted at Princeton (by Milton Babbitt, Benjamin Boretz and later Fred Lerdahl) and Yale (by Allen Forte and David Kraehenbuehl) perpetuated the essential formalism of the earlier view, there was an observable trend elsewhere towards psychological modelling or profiling of a musical perceiver. Leonard Meyer paved the way towards this new subject for music theory in his popular book *Emotion and Meaning in Music* in which he first introduced the notion of an 'ideal listener', a category he refined and developed throughout his subsequent work. Meyer's work is of particular importance to this thesis. Indeed one might say that he has single-handedly cut a swath through the musicological institution by insisting always on discomfiting its received opinion about a variety of matters, not least its attitude to style and its internal schism of theory and history. While Meyer's intellectual probity is, I think, beyond question, I shall suggest that, in spite of his professed intentions, he has been unable to wrench his thinking clear of the structural institutional ties that ground his work. Perhaps his role within the musicological institution might be thought of as that of advance guard, providing a link between an 'old' musicology and a 'new', and a link that is arguably much deeper than that of the figure more often associated with the inauguration of the new musicology, Joseph Kerman (1985). Certainly Meyer has opened a space within which his successors have been able to grow and develop his ideas.

Among those successors, Meyer's first and truest disciple was Eugene Narmour. But whereas we could say of Meyer that his efforts were, in part, stunted precisely because he made no claim to world domination through them, we cannot say the same of Narmour. In Narmour the trend away from the determination and statement of abstract axioms comes full circle as he pronounces new axioms of human mental capability. From the start, many peers regarded Narmour's ruminations as those of an interplanetary visitor, a view that has not been helped by his extreme partiality for the abstruse language of brain science and bionics. I shall suggest that Narmour effectively shot himself in both feet as far as the mainstream institution of music theory was concerned, first by remorselessly attacking what had become by the 1970s the paradigmatic theoretical *raison d'être* of the music-theoretical institution (Schenkerism), and second by couching his alternative in a series of books whose prose is so thick that even those minded to entertain such an alternative have been loath to wade through them. That the psychological music theory produced by Narmour and others (including Fred Lerdahl) has itself, in turn, been brought within the institutional fold (through being championed by psychologists, especially Carol Krumhansl and her colleagues) is, I shall argue, an indication of the broader, underlying harmony of the formalist academic institution.

This second, cognitive phase in the history of the formalist music-theoretical institution in the twentieth century appears to have been afflicted in precisely the same way as the earlier, rationalist phase. While seeking and claiming to be scientific, and in spite of having allied itself to the science of psychology in an effort to achieve this, music theory remains fundamentally formalist and *a priori* in its activity. In order to minimise the impact of this state of affairs music theorists tend to append to their work some comments about its experiential utility, be that in terms of listening or in terms of performance. Carl Schachter, for example, represents this effort when he says that 'Learning to analyze means

learning to hear in depth; a good analysis is always verifiable by the educated ear' (1976: 286). When Aristotle introduced the empirical component to Plato's epistemology he did so with an ontological claim: 'this is the way it is'. But when music theorists introduce an empirical component into their work they seem tempted to do so with a prescription: 'this is the way it *should* be'. As such, they seek to coerce opinion about their conception of the objective unity of the musical work and its perception. Schachter, for example, is keen to emphasise the necessity of the educated ear. Taking the example of Narmour, and following Bohlman (1993), I shall suggest that the institution of musicology is political through and through.

In my fourth chapter I relate a story of musicology in the recent past. During these years there was a trend towards the dismantling of formalist and positivist institutional approaches to the discipline in the name of a 'new' musicology. In place of the rationalistic tendency of the earlier institutionalism, and perhaps as a logical progression from the nominally humanistic bent of Meyer's approach, music was now regarded by some as a socially constituted activity, what Lawrence Kramer (1990) has called a 'cultural practice'. One of the main impulses for the members of this 'new' musicological institution, of whom several have at some time come within the influence of Meyer, has been the upsetting of received discourses: discourses founded on *a priori* assumptions about musical ontology on the one hand and about music-theoretical epistemology and methodology on the other; in short, discourses fostered by a colonising ideology. This thesis may reasonably be thought of as being planted within this patch of theorising.

Like the earlier moments I describe in the formation of the music-theoretical institution, the impetus towards something 'new' has come mainly and strongly from outside the disciplinary boundaries of musicology, especially via art

history, psychology and literary study. In Chapter Four I shall focus my discussion on the impetus provided by the approaches of poststructuralism and postmodernism, especially deconstruction. As in earlier changes, this wave of extra-disciplinary influence arrived on the shores of musicology some years after it had washed over historical studies, art theory, literary theory and others. As a result it has been easy for those who resist such change to reject the new ideas as old ideas that have lost their initial impact. However, in spite of its protestations to the contrary, I shall argue that New Musicology as it was practised during the later 1980s and early 1990s succeeded only in replacing one hegemonic metaphysics with another that was, to many, even harder to swallow than the first. In the pursuit of an interdisciplinary approach, the jargon of the new could all too readily become an end in itself; a hierarchy was reversed, but not cancelled.

But this is not to say that all new musicology has been a failure. Among those that have been vigilant to the dangers of simple political reversal is Rose Rosengard Subotnik. In Subotnik's work the questioning of existing institutional allegiances and assumptions is brought to the fore as she seeks to challenge the normative and prescriptive status of music-theoretical structure in accounts of musical perception. To this end she has been concerned to develop a concept of style that has the capability to undermine structure's claim to truth. The problem for Subotnik, as for all 'new' musicologists, has been that the structures, the organs, of the traditional academic institution – peer-reviewed journals, PhD theses, and so on – by their nature resist the impulse to question the foundations and the direction of that tradition. Subotnik's failure to obtain tenure at Chicago amid the 'red-baiting' atmosphere of the 1970s, is surely a symptom of this. As Subotnik put it, 'nowhere in the ways of thinking handed down by one generation of musicologists to the next was there any room for the admission of any political viewpoint by a scholar' (1991: xxv). What Subotnik was indicating

was that the participants in academic activity have tended to assume that their work is free from the influence of politics and of ideology. As a result of this assumption, much new musicological work tends to be read, even when the authorial intention was otherwise, as an onslaught on the suitability of institutional structures, or else as something other than musicology.

However, while Subotnik may have been unfairly treated, not all the criticism of New Musicology was unwarranted. By going about the business of musicology and theory in what was specifically claimed to be a new, enlightened way, New Musicology was able to give the impression of objectivity and equanimity. But by neglecting to reflect rigorously on the conditions of its knowledge production, its institutional and philosophical foundations, it slid easily into an alternative representation of the mode of discourse that it imagined it was superseding. This blindness is the topic of my concluding chapter and I speculate as to what it might mean to move towards a deconstructive style of music theory. Seen in a Derridean deconstructive view such blindness presents the pedagogic institution of musicology and music theory with a potentially embarrassing problem. And while it's certainly possible to deny the problem in terms of institutional applicability – or in terms of a Wittgensteinian language game – it leaves a lively mind with the impression that the problem is being pushed to one side. There is always something left over that remains unaccounted for, or even suppressed, and, as I have said, in the world of institutional musicology and theory I believe that it is style that names this suppressed 'Other'. What deconstruction encourages us to do is to notice and engage with the difference between the main course and the leftovers, or between form and style, and to accept that what is pushed to the side may be as nutritious as (and possibly tastier than) what is in the middle of the plate. So while the idea of 'a conclusion' may not be an appropriate one in terms of the on-going activity of deconstruction, my thesis ends by offering some clues towards an active deconstructive reflection on the

style of the music-theoretical institution, specifically as regards the structural status of its notion of the musical work. I shall suggest that style may be one key to such a deconstructive reflection, inhabiting as it does the very core of musicological thought, yet remaining somehow, by definition, excessive, distant from, supplementary to, over, above and beyond the formalistic preoccupations of that institution.

Before embarking upon my analysis of the paradoxical existence of style I should close this introduction by introducing a terminological contingency. As I have indicated, my dissertation seeks to articulate a history of the style of the establishment and institutionalisation of musicology during the last hundred or so years. By 'musicology' I mean to integrate, at times, in a single portmanteau term, the nominally distinct activities that fall under the umbrella of the academic study of music. Among these activities are history, theory, and analysis. In terms of the broad view adopted in this thesis, the distinction drawn between these activities is somewhat artificial; in a way it says more about the people living the distinction, about their evaluation of a preceding discourse and their desire to shield their own work from its perceived taint, than it does about the activities themselves. And while I do not mean to suggest that any detailed, heuristic stimulation resulting from the distinction is irrelevant *per se*, I believe that the theoretical conclusions that emerge from such a distinction are, at best, partial. Since (and this is, I think, unequivocal) concepts of style cut all ways through the discourses of music history, theory, and analysis, even where explicit reference to the term has been deleted, my occasional unification of these discourses under a single rubric is justifiable, and not only for the sake of conciseness. Through the course of this thesis it should become clear that each of these aspects of the musicological edifice shares with the others a singular, formalistic and positivistic style. I might add that there is significant support for such a terminological unification. As we shall see, a number of scholars warned against

the schism of music theory and analysis from music history at the time of the formation of the Society for Music Theory in the USA in 1977. They saw then, and succeeding consolidation of the opposing camps has done nothing to prove that they were in any way misguided, that theory and history are inextricably interlinked and that they need to be contextualised in each other in order to prove persuasive. Among those scholars were Leonard Meyer, Joseph Kerman and Leo Treitler, each of whom has continued to range freely across the intellectual barricades erected to keep the theorists and the historians apart, and each of whom has influenced this thesis in a variety of ways.

The disguise that has enabled these people, and others, to act as methodological double agents (and even at times as *agents provocateurs*), working inside the institution yet at the same time representing an opposing point of view, is the cloak of style. Those who would call themselves, in the main, music historians tend to use the word without encumbrance. They might mean in one case a particular historical performance style, in another an axiomatic sonata style, or in another the compositional style of, say, Palestrina. In each case they presumably exhort intersubjective agreement, requiring no explicit debate, as to the meaning of the term. Meanwhile, those who style themselves as music theorists tend deliberately to avoid style as a term of reference. Indeed the Princeton composer/theorist Peter Westergaard has gone so far as to say that ‘In my business “stylistic” and “style” are dirty words’ (1974: 71). And yet it goes without saying that analytical techniques must be applicable to specific styles of music as defined by traditional music pedagogy. If they were not, there would be little point devoting a life’s work to their formulation, and we certainly would not need to worry about whether what we were doing was in any way musical or musicianly. In addition, treatises and textbooks invariably isolate a specific style for treatment, be it classical music, serial music, or sonata style. And postgraduate dissertations are anchored, almost without exception, to a particular



stylistic repertoire. In each case, while it is universally assumed, *a priori*, that music has style, the ramifications of the profusion of style are invariably suppressed from attention. And as such, style is the largely unsurveyed foundation upon which a musicological theory or a history is constructed and evidenced.

I begin therefore with a survey of its usage. In so doing I intend to clarify what it is that we are talking about when we talk of the style of the music-theoretical institution.

## **Chapter 1: Defining Style**

### **1.1 – Style in the ‘real world’**

I should begin, in traditional academic style, with a definition. By that definition I should seek to present a formal and concise statement of the meaning of the seemingly innocuous little word that is the topic of my thesis; I should specify, in the cause of clarity and identity, what I understand to be its unique criteria and its essential properties. But that topic – style – is not so easy because it is contaminated by a paradoxical network of signification that seems perpetually to resist concision, essentiality, and identity. Yet, I shall maintain that, in academic practice, this resistance of style is invariably collapsed into the defining essentiality afforded by other words, particularly form and structure. As such, it is the way in which style resists this essentiality, the way its ‘polysemy of concepts’ (Todorov, 1971: 29) causes it to be ambiguous towards such essentiality, that is the material topic of my thesis, as it were. So, in order to locate some inaugural points of reference in what is an expansive hotchpotch of style, I turn first to the *Oxford English Dictionary* for assistance.

The second edition of the compact *OED* (1989) devotes some ten columns, comprising over twenty-eight senses, to style. Far from offering a singular, precise definition (that would draw an immediate close to this thesis), the *OED* offers a raft of analogues that seem in fact to scatter the meaning of style within an extensive network of potentially contradictory senses. Since I take it that theory follows practice, we may presume that this definitional network reflects something of the way that style is used, or is observed, in ‘real world’ situations. Now it is not my aim here to pigeonhole this profusion of style and thereby to reduce the definitional network that I have just posited to a couple of singular positions. I should therefore state that the discussion that follows is not an attempt to impose my own, privileged categorisation, once and for all, on the

meaning of style; to do so would be, as we shall see, to arbitrarily valorise one particular aspect of style. But what strikes me as intriguing about the various synonyms offered by the *OED* is that they seem, in general terms, to reflect two somewhat contradictory positions. First, there are those synonyms that refer to what I shall call the general, abstract, grammatical, statistical, objective nature of style: brand, cast, category, convention, custom, essence, figure, form, genre, idiom, kind, make, method, mode, model, mould, pattern, shape, sort, species, system, and type. Each of these would seem to indicate that style is something tangible, fixed, and/or substantive. Second, there are those that refer to what I shall call the specific, concrete, performative, subjective nature of style: appearance, approach, characteristic, manner, rhetoric, spirit, and way. Each of these would seem to relate something much less tangible, more changeable, and/or contingent. Third, there are several synonyms that seem to embrace both of these apparent poles at the same time: craze, fad, fashion, rage, spirit, tendency, trend, vogue. Each of these, at first glance, would perhaps be listed with the latter group of meanings because they represent something contingent and changeable, but at second glance they actually appear to express that contingency directly in terms of the context afforded by the former group of substantive meanings. We might therefore be tempted to list them with this other group, but it's not unequivocal. There are also a couple of synonyms that appear to have no obvious connection with either of these groups: dagger, and point. These are derived from the word *stylus*, but since few of us today use either a quill-and-ink or a gramophone, this meaning has all but passed from our vocabulary. Indeed, you might say that, in some degree, this meaning of style has lost its point.

Now we can immediately place some of the definitions offered by the *OED* as concepts of style in our own vocabularies, either professional or everyday: category, form, genre, idiom, mode, and species are those which may be most

familiar in terms of the analytical activity of the music theorist. What should be immediately obvious, according to the polarity that I have just proposed, is that all of these meanings are located in the first group: those relating to the general, abstract, grammatical, objective nature of style. Each of these words relates to a conceptualised grammar or system (style) that provides a background, a set of rules, a standard, and/or a norm against which we may, for example, compare a selection of works, attribute a work to a particular composer or school, perform a work in a particular way (style), or create/compose a work of counterpoint. As such, we may suppose, like Schoenberg, that style conceived in this way, as a system of laws or rules, leads in turn to the kind of compositional pastiche which limits the composer 'to the little that one can thus express' (1984: 123).

If we next take a broader view and consider instead the way that these various definitions describe the institutional activity of music theory, we find that several more of the *OED*'s synonyms become relevant: approach, brand, characteristic, convention, essence, method, rhetoric, system and way may all be said to refer directly to the definition of style viewed at this more general level. (Sometimes we might also recognise the relevance of dagger, craze, and rage.) Thus, as practitioners of music theory, we may choose to pursue our work according to a particular analytical approach, we might work towards establishing professional conventions and systems, we might try to brand our work so as to demonstrate the differences between our own approach and that of our peers or forebears, and we would undoubtedly seek to employ a strong rhetoric so as to argue persuasively for our work.

We see then that, viewed solely as applied, practical applications, as tools of musical analysis, the terms of style have a limited, and limiting, scope, drawing only on meanings from my first group. But viewed as descriptors of the disciplinary activity that gives rise to these analytical tools, the significance of

style becomes instantly broader, incorporating some of those from the first and second groups. What does this imply? First, it implies that my division of style into these two categories (styles) is entirely arbitrary, which indeed it is; there are undoubtedly many ways in which we might reorganise the groupings, moving a meaning from one group to the other, or preferring to regard many more of those meanings as belonging somewhere in between the two. Yet, as we shall see, categorical divisions of this sort have been paradigmatic of the style of intellectual activity throughout the history of ideas, not least in the field of musicology. Second, it *might* lead one to suppose that all the subjective meanings of style (my second group) may be more readily grasped as deriving from, and given context by, the objective meanings (of my first group). In other words, we might suppose that the buzzing, blooming subjectivity of style is actually conceivable only as an epiphenomenon of the underlying grammatical component of style. Similarly, as we shall see, this has been a predominant view in the musicological institution throughout the period encompassed in this thesis. A third possibility, and the one which I find more plausible, is that no such distinctions can be confidently drawn between the two definitional groups. Rather, whenever we seek to rationalise style in terms of its objective definitions, for all our efforts, we never finally erase the contrariness of the subjective definitions; and vice versa. Style might thus be imagined as a ‘numinous entity’ (Dahlhaus, 1983: 18), or to use Arthur Koestler’s famous expression, the ghost in the musicological machine, always already inhabiting our rationalisations, and always exceeding whatever we happen to think it (style) is.

In the abstract, dictionary definitions tend to strike you as eminently reasonable, but often leave you none the wiser. By definition, the synonyms offered by a dictionary are always interrelated analogues which send you round and round in circles in pursuit of a truth, a singular meaning, an ultimate understanding of the word under consideration; they refer to some truth, but never quite allow us to

put our finger on it. Yet, it seems that there is no easy way, given that the dictionary doesn't really help this cause, to arrive at such truth. And this is perhaps because the meanings contained within the pages of a dictionary, while following practice, can often be far-removed, abstracted and reduced, from the way in which a word is employed in practice, in applied, everyday acts. A dictionary's definitions can at times mislead one into believing that a word's meaning is clear and unambiguous. Thus an example may help to bring clarity to some of the abstraction inherent in these definitions by locating them within a practical application. At the very least, an example, however mundane, helps by foregrounding the problem of the subjective/objective polarity.

Tin can opening involves style. The aim of our labours in using a tin opener is clear and it is, presumably, the same for each of us: to gain access to the delicacy contained within the tin. Yet the style with which, or the manner in which, we approach that aim may vary quite markedly from one person to another. If we try to isolate the specific kinetic actions that are associated directly with our implementation of the tin opener from those bodily mannerisms that are present more generally (such as posture, nervous twitches and such like) we may say that each of us has, or displays, a characteristic style. For example, one person's approach to tin opening may be fast while another's is slow, or one may be *legato* while another is *staccato*. But this is not to say that one style is necessarily better than the other: there need not be any value judgement attached to the notion of style conceived as an individual's characteristic traits. In this sense, style appears to be something subjective, quite separate from the object of the endeavour: style is a characteristic, or rather the various characteristics, that separate us out as individuals, made manifest in the opening of a tin can. Having said that, we may choose to derive from our observations of the different styles of tin opening some propositions about stylistic typologies or norms. Once established, these norms could become the basis of categories to which we may subsequently attribute the

styles of other individuals and which, in turn, we could use as a standard against which to determine whether a person's tin opening is good, or bad, skilful, graceful, or even forceful. In other words, we may evaluate a person's performance style, and we would evaluate it much as a member of a choir might evaluate the way a conductor conducts, comparing one conductor with others and choosing to prefer some characteristics more than others, thereby establishing some ideals. (That preference of this sort often has more to do with the quality of an individual's physiognomic characteristics than with their specifically behavioural characteristics confuses the issue of style even more.) When we conceive of style in this way, as some abstract norm, we provide ourselves with a category to which we may attribute characteristics, and we are thereby able to make evaluative judgements about the quality of one person's characteristics by comparing them with another's, or with an abstract ideal.

And this leads neatly to a further component of the meaning of style. Fashion is an *OED* synonym of style, but there is clearly some sense in which style and fashion are not coextensive. After all, we need not bother retaining both terms in the English language if they were. In this case it seems poetic that we can call on the testimony of a couturière – that is, a stylist rather than a stylistician – to help us understand this linguistic impediment. According to a television advertisement, screened in Britain during 1994, for Audi cars, a brand (style) whose claim of technical advantage apparently needs no translation (*'Vorsprung durch Technik'*), Coco Chanel once said, 'fashion fades, only style remains'. What this demigoddess was telling us is that fashion is weak and transient, while style is strong and enduring, and the phenomenon of Chanel's own little black dress presumably falls into the latter category (style). Fashion might therefore be thought of as deriving from style. As such, style could again be imagined as a background of constancy or norms against which figures (styles) of fashion occur, are replicated, and are defined: while some figures will prove durable over time and become stylish, many

others, as passing fads (styles), will simply fade away. So while fashion is certainly an aspect of style, it does not embody the whole story. Rather, the primary difference between fashion and style arises, as I have implied, as a matter of value judgement, of choice, for we are able, according to our use of the one term or the other in a particular situation, according to the style of its use, to attach a value (a price tag) to the object under discussion. If we regard an object as stylish – as opposed to merely fashionable – then we take it to be more valuable, classical, and always more durable. (I might add that, in most cases, items that are stylish are also considerably more expensive.) We label an object according to the stylistic norm that it is thought to express. Yet even in the realm of car advertising things are not quite straightforward for a 1999 television advertisement (for Volkswagen) plays upon the ambiguity and excess of style with the slogan ‘A car, not a label’. The implication of the advertisement is that this particular car is, and offers, so much more than a mere brand.

Returning now to my study of the tin opener, all of the preceding discussion ignores the fact that, in practice, many of us apply the tool in pretty much the same way. Here the distinction between a subject, the person performing the task, and an object, the tin opener itself, starts to become blurred. Although I like to imagine that I am free to adopt a tin opening style that is all my own, according to my own whim (my subjectivity), it appears that I may be forced, in large part, to apply the tin opener in a particular way by the design (that is, the formal/structural style) of the object itself. Thus the manner of behaviour may be necessary to my definition of style, but it appears that it cannot be a sufficient definition without some reference to the form, or the structure, of the object employed. But neither, it seems, can the style of the object be adequately defined without taking account of the behaviour involved in its implementation. The tin opener might be of the manual mechanical type that has a butterfly handle mounted on its right side. Equally it might be electrically driven. Or it might be nothing more than a hook of steel with which you



have to brutally penetrate and rip around the lip of the tin using some force. We would say that each of these is individually distinctive: each is a different style of tin opener. (An examination of the sinistral incompatibility designed into these tools simply confuses the definition again because the style of design appears to conflict with what may be an ingrained style of behaviour.) In addition, each of these individual styles of tin opener might itself be regarded as an expression of some higher, collective level of style that we traditionally call genre. So does common sense dictate that we use a tool in the most effective way? Is there a tin opening tradition that we inherit at our birth? Or is tin opening competence perhaps an (as yet) unexamined facet of our innate cognitive, grammatical competence, a part of the Chomskian notion of 'deep structure' that I shall discuss in Chapter Three? Whatever the case, it is clear that a simple either/or distinction between the style in or of an object and the style in or of the activity of a subject cannot be sustained. Both are necessary components to a satisfactory understanding of style; we cannot readily interpret one without also interpreting the other.

The perceptual psychologist J.J. Gibson offers an interesting angle on this predicament. According to Gibson,

When in use, a tool is a sort of extension of the hand, almost an attachment to it ... But when not in use, the tool is simply a detached object of the environment ... This capacity to attach something to the body suggests that the boundary between the animal and the environment is not fixed ... More generally it suggests that the absolute duality of "objective" and "subjective" is false. (1986: 41)

Gibson made this observation in the light of his ecological theory of affordances through which he sought to indicate how traditional, polar psychologies of mind (mentalism) and behaviourism were too narrowly conceived because they failed to

account for the influence of the environment upon perception. The environment, he said, afforded certain contexts such as terrain, shelter, water, fire, tools, other animals and such like which had to be considered if an accurate understanding of perception was to be reached. Gibson's theory was a non-dogmatic theory; he did not maintain that objective context was all-important, yet neither did he valorise the role of the subjective animal. Rather

An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer. (1986: 129)

This, I think, is a useful idea to hold as we try to interpret the appropriate location (subject or object) of the definition of style. Like Gibson's affordance, style seems to me to be both subject and object, both formal and behavioural. Ultimately it may be unhelpful to seek to pin style, immovably, to one category or the other. Yet, as we shall see, this is effectively what the institution of musicology has done in the present century.

The foregoing example, however inelegant, shows us that the history of style is the history of a paradox. Stated simply, the paradox is this: however you choose to define style, whichever definition, or amalgam of definitions, you select, you invariably find that the converse of that definition has, at the same time, the potential to be just as accurate, or just as relevant. In other words, any attempt to ground style in a particular, functional, objective or subjective sense seems to engender a supplementary sense which is excessive and so much more than simply functional. Style is an all-pervasive term in the everyday discourse of humankind. As the *OED* makes plain, within that discourse style has a fluid, unfixed quality such that it has the potential to mean all things to all people (or

indeed a different thing to different people at different times). And this is fine. Within the territory of our everyday language games there would seem to be little point in trying to fix the meaning of style for all time. Whatever style might be thought to mean in the abstract has little bearing on what it may actually come to mean in the heat of the game, at the moment of performance, so long as those involved in the performance are clear about what they understand at that moment. We may be content that communication and understanding in everyday discourse need not depend on hard and fast definition of the terms of reference.

But we would surely not want to say the same of the scientific, theorising activity that is our academic discourse. Here it has long been demanded that a thesis be clear and rigorously logical; how else are we to expect our peers to tune themselves to our wavelength, to ensure intersubjective understanding and scrutiny? Yet when it comes to the theorising of style in academic discourse we are pulled up short by exactly the same paradox of style. Just as in the discourse of the everyday, so in academic discourse, style is not, and is apparently incapable of being, tied down. Even while style is assumed to play a cardinal role in academic discourse about the arts, a fundamental, grounding, referencing role, it has surprisingly rarely been the explicit focus of theorising. As Hans Georg Gadamer has put it, 'The notion of style is one of the undiscussed, self-evident concepts upon which our historical consciousness is based' (quoted by Sauerländer, 1983: 253). In other words, it is my impression that the institution of the academy, and the discourse that it supports, may well be grounded, at least in part, on a term that is itself ungrounded. Across the human sciences, as long as it remains untamed in this way, it seems to me that style has a problematic potential.

Oddly it seems that it has habitually proved more comfortable to flatten the paradox of style, to suppress it, sideline it, or otherwise ignore it. As we shall see,

this has invariably led to its collapse into one or other of the terms from my first, objective group of definitions, most often the term form. It is, therefore, one of the aims of this thesis to foreground the paradox, though not, as I have indicated, with a view to defining and refining a singular and inclusive concept of style for use by the academy. Rather, I suspect that the imprecision of style may turn out to be both the making and the unmaking of our academic institution, and of the way we go about generating knowledge. To put it another way, style is, in my view, a lever that has the potential to invoke an interrogation of academic discourse, and thereby to call the entire constitution of the academy into question. Thus style surely has the negative power of a Trojan horse to bring about the decline of our academic institution, as it currently exists, from within. This is, without doubt, an obvious reason for its general suppression. But this negative capability is also the product of precisely that imprecision. As such, I believe that style also has the positive power to renew that institution by giving it the wherewithal to admit its own contingency, to value the yield of some of its fuzzier thinking, and to delight in the diversity that an acceptance of its own stylistic imprecision facilitates. In this way, each of my chapters may be understood as charting a selection of moments on the path of a deconstructive engagement with a conception of the traditional, modernist, formalist theorising style of musicology.

As I have indicated, I believe that it is exactly because it is not logically reducible to a singular category (either subjective or objective) that institutionalised researchers, especially music theorists, have more often than not tended to duck the paradox of style, rather than trying to confront it, and tame it as is generally their wont. As James Ackerman observed in 1962, theoretical exposition of style has been all but non-existent during the years since around 1910. His explanation for this apparent dearth was simply this: 'positivism has made philosophical speculation suspect' (1962: 230). And in spite of the best

efforts of people like Ackerman, Ernst Gombrich, Meyer Schapiro, and Leonard Meyer, the whole domain of style, some thirty-something years on, remains oddly underdeveloped throughout the academic institution. Certainly the positivism that Ackerman censured remains in some musicological quarters, and this in spite of Joseph Kerman's (1985) explicit observation of its presence. Yet it is the other questionable 'ism' that Kerman diagnosed, formalism, that has been the controlling and suppressive energy in music theory, and that has been, I shall argue, paradigmatic of its style during the past hundred or so years. I shall turn to a detailed augmentation of this claim in my subsequent chapters. For the moment I should add that it is my impression that the commitment of musicologists and theorists to positivism and formalism is essentially ideological, arising more from misunderstandings and exaggerated claims, intellectual insecurity and financial anxieties relating to academic tenure, than from a conscious and reasoned commitment. In other words, ideologies are always, to use Berger and Luckmann's (1967) terms, socially and institutionally constructed.

We may admit, then, as Ackerman suggests, that the concept of style is intellectually speculative; it is philosophical. But I cannot accept this as a legitimate reason for all but ignoring it altogether. Style is a word that we all use frequently and, invariably it seems, without thinking through what we mean by it. As such it is, at the very least, desirable that a greater awareness, and perhaps a greater understanding, of its role in the musicological academy (including music theory) should be teased out. I do not say this with a view to rehabilitating it as a blind and bland term in our traditional armoury of analytical applications, but simply so that those who choose to include the word in their professional vocabulary have some clearer idea of what it presupposes. While I may be intensely sceptical about its foundationalism, I am not suggesting, let alone exhorting, that music theorists abandon their existing armoury. That is neither a

desired, nor an anticipated, outcome of this thesis. I am not one of those saying, as Jonathan Dunsby might suppose, that ‘Schenker is probably not worth years of study’ (1994: 81). But there is an important point latent in the bluster of a conservative reaction to such statements that should not go unobserved. Unlike those theorists who defend both the propriety and the ‘musicality’ of their activity, I do not believe that our institutional discourse of and about music has an exclusive and unique hot line into the ‘object’ of our study. More importantly, it ought not to claim to possess such a line. Yet, as will become clear in the pages that follow, this is precisely the effect of the hegemonic, formalistic style of theorising that has characterised the institution of musicology, and so much else, during the twentieth century.

What my understanding of style leads me to think – and this is the crux of my thesis, my ideology if you like – is the possibility that there is an ontological abyss between music and musicology that no amount of epistemology can ever realistically hope to bridge, or formalise, once and for all. I am, for example, not the first person to observe that formalist analytical epistemologies tend to be far more palatable if you accept and try to think through their subjectivity and their dogmatism – one might call these stylistic qualities – rather than trying to make them appear to be autonomous, objective or scientific in their scope. This kind of thinking through is, in part, the work of deconstruction that I am seeking to mobilise in this thesis. As Rose Rosengard Subotnik has indicated, ‘musicology tends to be seen as an autonomous extension of musical autonomy’ (1991: 142). And Lydia Goehr has observed that the desire among analysts for ‘an essential core of the musical does not constitute a proof that there is one’ (1992a: 189). Thus, just as the idea of musical autonomy rests on a ground that is decidedly and increasingly unsure (what Goehr elsewhere (1992b) calls an ‘imaginary museum’), so does the idea of musicological autonomy. The value of musicology’s methodology lies rather in its nature as a discursive activity, in the doing and the dialogue of analysis,

rather than in some abstract ‘explanatory’ will leading inevitably to some final formal autonomy. So, although this fits uncomfortably with the idea of a dissertation itself as a statement of truth or fact, I believe that we should try to avoid making transcendentalising and hegemonising claims for our particular analytical dispositions, and we should start trying to accept them for what they are. And what they are, in my view, are historically contingent, playful, heuristic, ongoing, developmental, stylistic constructions of the imagination. To this end, I believe that style has an exemplary role to play because it has the potential to refuse, by the paradox of its own definition, to transcend the mundane. Because it always already inhabits our epistemology and the activities related to it, style always has the capability, whenever we are tempted to reify our analyses, or to allow them to transcend to become law-like generalisations, to bring us back down to earth with a bump.

## **1.2 – Style in the academic world**

As I consider, in this section, the specific application of style as a term of reference in musicology and theory, it is also appropriate to seek to tease out some general, often long held, but often ill-defined views about what style means, and how it comes to mean, in the discourse of the visual arts. As will become clear the visual arts was the breeding ground for the methodological applications of style in musicology that developed around the close of the nineteenth century. The benefit that a look at the broader realm of the visual arts brings is that, compared with the musicological domain, significantly more thinking time and literature space has been devoted, in recent years, to trying to understand the meaning and ramifications of style as both theoretical concept and institutional sensibility. Indeed, Roy McMullen has maintained that

Much of the terminology and nearly all the chronological framework for the history of style are inventions of specialists in the study of the visual arts. (1989: 149)

We shall find that the connections between the application of style in art theory and in music theory are also, in the main, manifest.

If a parallel is to be drawn with traditional art-historical conceptions, then style is most intimately and obviously connected with a particular interpretation of historical periods and schools of composition. Briefly, such interpretation most often involves the division of agglomerates of compositions and performances, and the subsequent labelling of them, according to their creator, the vicinity of their creation, or perhaps their formal similarity with others. In this sense style is 'a classificatory concept: a style is a set of features' (Duckles 1980: 840). We shall see in due course that this is a methodological approach whose roots extend very far back in time. The art historian Ernst Gombrich has defined style in this way:

Style is any distinctive, and therefore recognizable, way in which an act is performed or an artifact made or ought to be performed and made' (1968: 352).

Thus, in its application to art, style is, in the first instance, empirically descriptive and in the second instance, methodologically normative. To put it another way, style is classificatory, referential, productive, generative and, according to the final clause of Gombrich's definition, prescriptive. But it is also tautologous because the classification of art data is executed according to a normative standard of style, while the norm is itself procured by description of data. This is, of course, the paradox of style that I outlined earlier in this chapter and, at this



stage, we might also observe that it is a paradox that features throughout the style of traditional academic institutional epistemology as it has been handed down to us from ancient Greece, a story I relate in the next chapter.

It was the establishment of these supposed norms of style that facilitated the development of the industry of connoisseurship in art history. During the first half of this century Bernard Berenson (of Villa I Tatti fame) developed a skill for attributing works of art to specific artists (BB's lists) according to the stylistic fingerprints that he believed those artists left on their work. Berenson (1960) himself was apparently so adept at forensically deciphering these fingerprints, through what he called an 'ideated sensation' of the 'tactile values' of a work, that he was able to attribute paintings to specific artists and purchase them for himself before the traditional art-historical institution was able to validate them. The idea of style as a statistical tool for attribution (derived perhaps from connoisseurship of this kind) is one that some music theorists have taken up. Robert Levin, for example, has devised such an approach in his work on the Mozart *Four-Wind Concertante* (1988). Earlier in the present century (in 1923) Knud Jeppesen, a pupil of Guido Adler (whose work I discuss in Chapter Two), produced a scientific 'style' analysis of dissonance treatment in Palestrina. His aim was to adduce from his findings 'the laws of musical evolution' (1971: 8). He sought to do this by establishing the features of Palestrina's stylistic fingerprints and then to use these as a stable basis for moving backwards and forwards through musical history in order to compare one periodic style with another and to attribute musical works to particular periods. While, as we shall see, the outlines of this methodology were established by Adler as early as 1885, Jeppesen provided 'the detailed analytical procedure that Adler had left wanting' (Bent 1987: 44). His treatment of the composer's stylistic fingerprints as grammatical 'laws of syntax' also affords a link with the later semiological approach of Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) and also that of Robert Hatten (1982,

1989, 1994) for whom style is ‘the competency in semiotic interpretation presupposed by the work of music (1989: 1). This grammatical approach also forms the basis of the computerised style analytical implementations of Alfred Mendel (1969-70), Fred T. Hofstetter (1979), and David Huron (described in Hewlett & Selfridge-Field, 1996). As Hofstetter put it, the aim of such computerised analysis is to seek out those traits that ‘the composer leaves like fingerprints upon the music he creates’ (1979: 119).

The roots of style as a term applicable to the arts are traced by the *OED* to the late Roman age. *Stilus*, which until then had meant merely a sharp-pointed implement used for writing, began to be used to describe the manner or the tone of that writing, or of an oration; its rhetoric. Such description was made entirely according to pre-existent standards or norms of the *stilus*, and said nothing about any idiosyncrasy of the personality of the individual doing the writing or the speaking. Likewise such description applied at that time only to writers and speakers, that is, to the art of rhetoric, and never to painters, musicians or designers. Such was the case until around the beginning of the seventeenth century when, in Italy, musicians began to talk of the *stile moderno* as something opposed to the *stile antico*. The *OED* indicates that the first reference to an English language usage of style as a term related to the arts appeared in an entry in the 1728 edition of the Chambers *Encyclopaedia*:

Style, in Music, the manner of singing and composing. Thus we say, the Style of the Charissimi, of Lully, of Lambert; the Style of the Italians, the French, the Spaniards, &c.

It is interesting to observe, especially in the light of the comparative dearth of attention in recent times, that the development of style as a term applicable to the arts appears to have had some of its basis in the realm of music. Yet we shall

shortly see that the interpretation of style in terms of subjective manner, as opposed to objective matter, an interpretation that in some ways seems to tally rather well with a common-sense view, is actually quite a long way from the way in which it has latterly been understood. The *OED* also suggests that the first extant reference in English to style in painting dates from a 1740 translation of a book, originally published in 1706 in France, called *Art of Painting*. And English references to style in literature, oddly one might think given the basis of the word in Latin literary pursuits, only began to appear from around the middle of that century. During the following centuries the labelling of artistic data according to stylistic categories – such as gothic, decorated, perpendicular, rococo, baroque and so on – really took off such that by the beginning of the twentieth century an extensive repertoire of such stylistic references had been established. These periodic categories or norms form the basis of our present musicological understanding of the term, and of our textbooks.

But what is it that these labels of style are thought to represent? Style relates to many different aspects or circumstances of art, among which are its creation, its formal properties, and its consumption, evaluation or criticism, what Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) has termed the poietic, the neutral, and the esthetic levels. In terms of the poietic aspect we may say that style is the manner in which the artwork comes to be produced according to the application of its creating artist, and that this manner is something distinct from the artwork's matter. But to style an artwork in this sense does not relate merely to the fact of crafting it. It relates also to the way in which its crafting makes it in some sense different from what existed before. This is most often explained as involving an individual deviation from some stylistic norm or tradition, and it relates too to the way in which such deviation makes a work of art recognisable as an example of a particular style. So, to take a musical example, we might say that Mozart's style, that which makes Mozart's music recognisably and individually Mozart's, is determined by

the way in which his compositional manner caused his works to deviate from what we understand to be the underlying, known norms of the classical style. But to what are we actually referring when we make such observations? By what means do we quantify Mozart's style in relation to such a norm? Charles Rosen (1971) describes the Classical Style as a

coherent and systematic musical language which could be used by the three classical figures [Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven] and against which they could measure their own language. (20)

Thus, in general terms, he says that

A style may be described figuratively as a way of exploiting and focusing a language, which then becomes a dialect or language in its own right. (20)

In other words, the Classical Style is imagined as comprising a body of works whose language is largely unfocused and which, taken collectively, form a background of constancy, a normative state, a formalism. Yet, at the same time, the language of the Classical Style becomes, in the hands of a few, focused, integrated, and coherent, finding its apotheosis; it becomes *a* style. As far as Rosen is concerned, it is these individual moments that are of interest, and which become, in the main, the object of attention in his writing. As such, Rosen's understanding of the concept of style is evaluative; it aims at providing a means by which the wheat and the chaff may be sifted, as it were, in analysis. He therefore suggests that 'the concept of style does not correspond to an historical fact but answers a need: it creates a mode of understanding' (19). Style, in this sense, is conceived *a priori*, from a particular way of thinking about music. While proceeding inductively from an analytical engagement it comes to be posited as normative. Style, understood thus, is not, as one might assume, *a*

*posteriori*, something deriving from, and inherent in, the stylistic manner of its individual, subjective creator. In this view, what we take to be the norm of Mozart's style is really no more than our own, particular analytical spin – a created mode of understanding that we impose on the material under discussion. And Rosen, like many other canonical figures of twentieth century music theory (including Schenker and Schoenberg) pictures style in terms of, and as proceeding from, a general conception of musical form.

Somehow the single word, style, is presumed to represent both the normative container (the unfocused language) and the deviant variation (the focused language). We are able to presume this only because, in our methodology, we continually seek to erase the individuality of style in a bid to impose order, to get a handle on what we assume to be some more important form of knowledge. Of course there are undoubtedly many good arguments why reduction of this sort is useful, especially in pedagogic terms. For example:

Students of analysis can only benefit from a course of study that concentrates on fundamentals, that detaches technical matters from the more general historical and stylistic contexts to which they belong. (Dunsby and Whittall, 1988: 6)

The 'fundamentals' to which Dunsby and Whittall refer are those of style reduced to, collapsed into, its formal, grammatical, technical matter. These are the norms of a style. The concept of norm, and therefore the concept of style through which the norm and its deviations are expressed, is an interpretative construct. Again, we shall see in due course that this is a methodological presumption whose longevity is quite remarkable. In Rosen's definition the poietic aspect of artistic style appears to collapse into what we ordinarily call the formal (neutral) aspects of art, in much the same way that an individual style of

tin opening could be seen to be constrained by the form of the tool itself. Indeed the relationship between the objective, neutral structure of a work of music and the creative effort of its producer has invariably been taken as read. Yet only in the present century has it become fashionable to dissociate entirely the structure of a work from any consideration of subjective human agency, be it constructional or perceptual, and it is this divorce, through idealisation, that has become paradigmatic of the century's theorising style. The current understanding of style collapses the difference between manner and matter in favour of form, such that the time, the place and the human role in the creation of the artwork have become irrelevant. It has consequently been assumed that it is possible to separate the objective form of the work from its subjective content for purposes of criticism and analysis. Put in this way, one might reasonably wonder what value, other than pedagogical, an analysis that appears to start from such a hugely arbitrary position really has. The search for a satisfactory understanding of doubts of this sort about the style of theorising is one of the driving forces behind this thesis.

Anyway, assuming for the moment that it is possible to analyse a work purely in terms of its form, the pegs on which such analyses have been hung are, in practice, stylistic. As Meyer Schapiro has put it, 'To the art historian ... style is, above all, a system of forms' (1953: 287) which acts as a common ground against which innovation and individuality may be measured. The pegs or norms, in the case of music, are such stylistic terms as tonality, sonata form, fugue, or even perhaps *Ursatz*: 'Each level of a Schenkerian analysis represents a stylistic norm ... against which the elaborations of the next level stand out in all their particularity' (Cook, 1989b: 132). What is interesting about this is that stylistic categories appear to serve contrary functions according to the nature of the analysis they are deployed to support; they cut across the theory/history divide. Often we may choose to analyse the particularity of the subjective aspect of style

according to the ways in which a composition involves deviations from a norm. Alternatively, we may choose to examine how the objective aspect of style involves quite the reverse: the repetition of, and conformity to, a norm. Both the music theorist and the music historian adopt these methods at some time, indeed as Hatten observes, 'style is a historical construct for theoretical ends' (1982: 194). Yet both approaches are made possible by the assumption of an underlying, essential, formal sameness, an assumption shared by such figures as Adler, Schenker, Meyer, and just about every contemporary music-theoretical practitioner, irrespective of whether they choose to accept the usefulness of a concept of style or not. It is this formal ideology that both situates and approves the very existence of musicology and theory within the academic institutional scheme of things. In terms of the musicological institution, the subjectivity of style is subordinated to the objectivity of form; a Foucauldian power relation is thus established.

The whole issue of artistic style is, it seems to me, greatly confused by this fact that, on the one hand, style is said to be humanly distinctive and defining, while on the other it is orthodox and constraining. Thus we can choose to observe the style of a musical object such as a Mozart sonata in at least two ways. First, we can view it, somewhat vaguely perhaps, as distinctly Mozartian according to the way its constructional nuances cause it to be somehow different from what we take to be the unfocused contemporary norms of a classical style. But secondly, we can take the firmer view that it is simply a sonata, in an archetypal, generic sense, irrespective of the circumstances of its composition, or indeed its performance. And obviously by now the formal (neutral) and the poietic aspects of style have spilled over into the third aspect of artistic style, the evaluative (esthetic). Clearly, like Rosen, we would want to qualify our analyses of Mozart's sonatas by comparing and contrasting them with others, perhaps with those that deviate less recognisably from the norm that is the classical style and

which are thought, as a result, to be less interesting, exciting, or successful. One such evaluation, made popular by Peter Schaeffer's play *Amadeus*, would be to say that Mozart's sonatas are better than those of his contemporary Salieri. Indeed we might be led to say, confusingly, that Mozart has style, while Salieri has none. Obviously the music of Salieri involves style, but somehow we all know, instinctively perhaps, what we mean. Whether through nature or nurture, constitution or institution, we seem implicitly to understand the code of style. It is this implicit, institutional acceptance on the part of the many that has, it seems to me, led the few, by whom I mean professional music theorists and musicologists, to all but ignore the broader network of style. And they ignore this network both in terms of the analysis of the musical object of their work, and in terms of their approach to that work, preferring instead the safe, concentrated, quantifiable and evaluative advantages of form.

While, as we have seen, analysis of style in music, in painting, and in literature may refer to a formal creative choice on the part of the artist from among alternatives, it is not clear where, when or how such choice actually occurs. Is stylistic choice, for example, often, always, or rarely the result of conscious, nurtured deliberation? Or is it more the case that nature dictates that such will be so? Similarly, does choice arise within the constraints of an individual compositional technique or from within the constraints of a broader stylistic history? And to what extent can we be sure that such choice was really available to the artist or composer? Such questions are further complicated, as Rosen's definition made clear, by the distinction between the broad, corporate, historical status of style (the unfocused background) and an individual, personal (focused) style. 'Style' and 'a style' are clearly not the same thing. Yet this is not an issue, as Berel Lang (1979) makes clear, that has been considered at any length in the existing literature of style. Indeed the single unifying theme in the literature that seeks expressly to define style is the idea of novelty, newness, and contingency,



such that every foray into the explication of the concept has to start afresh. As Lang has put it

The study of style seems constantly to start anew, returning each time to the “beginning” of the concept. (1979: 14)

And this thesis is no exception. Style, it seems, comes to be by resisting any systematic basis of fact or definition. This is its paradox. Rather, style operates in the here and now, at the moment of experience. In terms of J.J. Gibson’s environment, style is not an intrinsically social, individual, or natural, phenomenon, but all of these and none. Viewed in this way, style is set in opposition to a whole academic tradition, an institution, which privileges a structural regulatory system of ‘fundamentals’ according to which analysis may be pursued. In other words, style seems always to resist the claims of the subjective, the objective and even of the intersubjective. It remains always supplementary, an excessive ‘Other’ to the formal work of music and the formal work of the musicologist. And this is why, as I have suggested, style betrays a deconstructive opening in the musicological institution, an institution that, as we shall see in the following chapters, has been marked throughout its history by a preoccupation with form.

Style, then, is an all too human word. Part of the reason for the short theorising shrift given it in recent decades is that it appears to involve rather a large input of human intention. As is well known, as both a consequence and as a cause of the institutional valorisation of form, many still deem it fallacious to talk about intention in polite academic circles. Nonetheless, style is thought to involve intention because it involves a choice, whether consciously reasoned or otherwise, from among a number of alternative stylistic norms. Leonard Meyer, whose work I shall consider in Chapter Three, defines style as resulting from

'choices made within some set of constraints' (1989: 3). Jan La Rue has likewise indicated that the recurrent patterns of style arise from 'shared choices' (1970: ix) made by composers. In both cases, however, what we might presume to be the intentional, subjectivity of a composer's choices is predicated upon an objective, grammatical, ingrained category, what Leo Treitler has referred to as 'an internalized vocabulary of forms and schemata' (1974: 63). This vocabulary provides for the analyst a bounded, systematic, idealised grammar from which the composer's performative choices are assumed to arise. 'A stylistic category, once it has been set up, can function as a norm against which data is assessed' (Duckles 1980: 840). By also assuming that the instantiation of that normative grammar can be read through the formal analysis of the data of musical works, the subjective intention of compositional choice (and of listening experience) is effectively erased. Or is it? Rather it seems to me that, however far one seeks to generalise style, there is always an excess remaining for 'if the style analyst wants to make his work historically useful he *must* be pragmatically willing to ignore many anomalies, even important ones' (Narmour 1977: 176). The anomalies that the analyst chooses to ignore are those that are implied by, and proliferate through, the network of style. In other words, the categories that the analyst establishes effectively collapse the anomalies, the differential network of style, into the singular, static formal category that I have described.

As a term of reference in the arenas of both the arts and of music, style is used as a means of bringing justification, clarification and exemplification to the work of analysis. But there is also the further anomaly that, even while stylistic terms are used, the users are also, at the same time, responsible for the maintenance of the various categories of style. Sonata style, classical style, Beethoven's style, Furtwängler's style, voice-leading style, xyz style are all abstract norms constructed and maintained by musicologists and music theorists. Yet in this double-endedness the entire activity of music theory might be thought to seem

suspiciously tautologous. Indeed it might come to seem positively totalitarian when we consider that all music pedagogy is oriented around style in one, or many, of its guises, and that this pedagogy is overseen by institutions which not only define the terms of the style, but also examine standards of stylistic proficiency. As such, style is perhaps not so much a term of reference that applies to and categorises music, as a term that expresses the activity, the approach, of music theory.

By way of illustration of the paradox of style as it applies in music pedagogy, we might consider the phases through which a student passes when learning to play the piano. Initially the student learns to copy the examples that the teacher patterns (styles), blissfully unaware that he or she is performing scales in the major mode (style), or generating consonant intervals on an equally tempered keyboard, let alone defining the proportions of sonata form (style). Now it is quite possible that the pleasure of this direct and ostensibly unmediated contact with music may suffice for a lifetime; indeed in by far the majority of cases it does just that. And yet it seems inevitable that, if the student is to gain full access to that heritage which is the pianoforte repertoire, he or she must, at the very least, learn to read music from a score. To put it another way, the student must learn to consciously conceptualise, to rationalise the music that he or she previously merely enjoyed. And as soon as this decision is made, the student enters upon a clearly defined pathway leading, via elementary and intermediate, to an advanced musical appreciation through musicology and theory. In Britain, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music is charged with grading the early education of musicians, and at a certain level study of the rudiments of music theory becomes a prerequisite for any further learning, or at least for any further institutional recognition of that learning. Later, universities and colleges take on the mentor's mantle and students discover something of the ways in which the rudimentary theory of notes, scales and intervals has been manipulated

by composers, at different times and in different places, to produce sonatas, symphonies and such like. Sometimes they perform or listen to this music, but often they do not. More and more the student's experience of music becomes the experience of the musical institution's rationalisations or formalisms. We learn to listen, for example, to scales in the mixolydian mode, to the Schenkerian *Ursatz* as it unfolds, to the distinctive character of a Ratnerian topic, to a Rétian cell, or even (if we try hard) to the combinatorial relations of a hexachord. In each case those rationalisations are based around the notion of style in one or other of its formalistic guises.

Inevitably the institutions of music get themselves in a tangle about the role of style in the definition of their status and functioning. On the one hand, if you want to be a performing musician you go to a conservatoire and follow a programme in which your practical instrumental studies are supported by a modicum of music theory and history. On the other, if you want to be a theoretical musician, or musicologist, you attend a university and follow an academic programme that develops your rational capacities. The argument turns on whether a performing musician is better than (as opposed to merely different from) a musicologist. Analysts have often claimed, or at least implied, that a pianist who really knows the music – that is, one who possesses the abstract formal knowledge that comes from a close reading guided or determined by one or another axiomatic method – will, *ipso facto*, interpret it better than one who does not: musical analysis is assumed to be necessary for good interpretation. In response, professional performers of music claim that you cannot learn to interpret music simply by reading about it in a book, or by turning it inside out in the way that analysis does: musical analysis is assumed to be far from sufficient for good interpretation. Indeed performers often find no evidence that it is necessarily necessary for good interpretation. There is a growing body of literature attached to what Nicholas Cook calls a 'subdiscipline' of 'analysis and

performance' (1999: 239) which considers the relationship between analytical theory and performance (see also Berry 1989, DeBellis 1995, Dunsby 1995, Howell 1992). At present, there seems to be no clear correlation between rational understanding of the forms and principles of music theory and the aesthetic evaluation involved in the interpretation of music in performance. Yet both fields are clearly riddled by the concerns of style.

This suggests that there is something odd about musicology's appropriation of the concept of style in that it doesn't seem to tally very well with our ordinary, everyday understanding of the word. Style in musicology seems to be concerned primarily with the construction of universal categories, with timeless, autonomous unities and rigid classes, with formal entities, and additionally with the elaboration (the institutionalisation) of some mechanism for its gradual, but always teleological, change. But in the ordinary world, for want of a better term, style, as I have suggested, is conventionally thought to have just as much to do with individuality, with diversity and fluidity of view, with decentralisation, spontaneity, difference and flair. It may well be possible to excuse this apparent contradiction to some extent by assuming that style sustains a number of parallel, but not necessarily coextensive definitions. Yet it is my impression that the paradox remains, a certain excess goes unaccounted for, and that excess constantly niggles in the background if you try to proceed with a working definition. This excess is illustrated by Schoenberg's well known opposition of style and idea in which the latter term is imagined to be the singular province of the individual composer's intellect, and the former term the rigid, predefined formal/normal construction that makes compositional pastiche possible in theory, however undesirable that may be in practice. And Schoenberg made no bones about which term he valued most highly, for

The tool itself [e.g. the Classical style] may fall into disuse, but the idea behind it [the composer's intent] can never become obsolete. And therein lies the difference between a mere style and a real idea. (1984: 123)

Taken out of context, Schoenberg appears to be endorsing something approaching an ordinary, everyday, subjective, individualistic conception of style. But it is not quite clear cut, for his idea seems to be both individually distinctive and universally timeless. A sceptic might just as easily reverse the terms and talk of "a mere idea and a real style", or even do away completely with the mystifying idea of 'idea' and talk of "a mere style and a real style", or perhaps "a mere fashion and a real style". For Schoenberg, style is the inevitable (and superfluous) consequence of a composer's fidelity to the idea. It is not something that the composer sets out from the start to establish 'so that musicologists should have something to do' (1984: 177). And in the same way that Rosen ultimately explains the Classical Style in terms of the formal properties of the work, so Schoenberg elaborated style as an epiphenomenon of the idea, the basic shape or '*Grundgestalt*' (Epstein 1979: 9), by which he meant the motives (themes, melodies, phrases), or the formal properties of the musical work. Elsewhere, Rosen himself summarised Schoenberg's attitude to form in this way:

Form was, for Schoenberg, ... an ideal set of proportions and shapes which transcend style and language. These ideal shapes could be realized at any time in any style; they were absolute. (1976: 96)

And the words of Hubert Parry summarise the tendency among musicologists, which will become the focus of my subsequent chapters, to collapse the concept of style into the concept of form:

Style appears in the light of being the general flavour or aspect of organisation. It is the outward effect of form in detail and in general, inevitably associated with form, and yet not form but something which subtly emanates from it. (1911: 105)

Yet still this indicates, if somewhat vaguely, that style and form and not in fact one and the same thing. The paradox remains.

One might suppose that a dictionary of music would help to bring clarity to the meaning of style in music, but this is not the case. In fact, the definition of style is something to which the various editors of music dictionaries have devoted surprisingly little attention. Take, for example, Arthur Jacobs's *The New Penguin Dictionary of Music*. First published in 1958, this is a basic and widely used reference, an Open University set text that has been reprinted many times over the years, yet this dictionary does not contain an entry under the rubric of style. One can only assume either that it did not occur to Jacobs to include an entry, or else that he did not deem it necessary. Either way it seems especially curious when, on the first page of the introduction to the fourth edition, Jacobs (1977) drops in a footnote in which he quotes, aphoristically, from another of his own books to the effect that 'All styles are the styles of now'. Quite what Jacobs was getting at is not altogether clear. The footnote appears in the context of a discussion about how the wider availability of record players has broadened the horizons of music-lovers in the 1970s when compared with those of their counterparts in the 1950s. If nothing else this indicates the fundamental role of style in the discourse of music, in musicology and theory, be that discourse in the form of dictionary listings or an analytical chronicle. That definition of style is absent from a book whose author assumes from the start that that word is a key term is symptomatic of what I take to be a general uneasiness, if not carelessness, towards style and all that that word implies. Yet style is not only lacking in

Jacobs's dictionary. Percy Scholes's *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Tenth Edition, 1991 – first published in 1938), another reference work commonly found on the shelves of the British music lover (both amateur and professional), likewise contains no entry. Of course the definition of style is complex and potentially long (this thesis stands as testimony to that) but one might reasonably expect to find some clarification of its scope in such reference works.

Among those reference books that do offer definitions of style is the *Collins Encyclopedia of Music* (1959, and unchanged in the Revised Edition, 1976) edited by J.A. Westrup and F.Li. Harrison. Describing the role of style as it relates to the history of music they say that

the style of a composition is its manner of treating form ... it is closely related to and limited by its medium, but not dependent on it, since features of the style appropriate to one medium may be transferred to another.

Initially we are told that style arises from the composer's treatment of the formal medium of the work; style is thus an epiphenomenon of form. But this certainty is then qualified by an indication that style cannot be permanently reduced to that medium since stylistic traits may also appear elsewhere. If we were to argue the toss as to the priority of form and style, we might deduce that style is in fact the context within which the composer manipulates form; form is thus an epiphenomenon of style. At the very least we may take the distinct lack of clarity as a further indication of the complex excessiveness of style; the confusion of the definition perhaps also hints at a reason for its absence in those other reference books. Elsewhere, Willi Apel's *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1966) contains an entry for style and he too determines the meaning of style in relation to form:

By and large, form and style stand in the relation of "fixed" and "fluid".



Again we see the qualification ('by and large'), but we should note that Apel then effects the same polar split that I proffered in the opening section of this chapter. On the one side he situates form (style) as something fixed, objective, grammatical; on the other he situates some ill-defined notion of style as fluid, what I described earlier as its subjective or performative character. Edward T. Cone, somewhat less equivocally, has described the relationship of form and style thus:

Form is an essential aspect of style – indeed, it should summarize all aspects of style. (1968: 58)

The problem, it seems to me, is that style is the paradigmatic construct of traditional musicology, be it nominally theoretical or historical, but it is also the context within which traditional musicology and theory operate. To put it another way: style is a rationalisation, a formalisation, and style also makes that rationalisation possible. Small wonder therefore that style, as a term of reference, is so often censured by practising music theorists who literally cannot afford to dig too deeply around the roots of their work. And, concomitantly, it's not so surprising that laypeople not initiated in the ways of music theory find it so bizarre that you can actually do a PhD in music (and thereby come to be styled 'Dr.'). In short, musicology bakes the cakes for its own consumption. But then the same may be said of every other institutionalised discipline, every subject that has found for itself a niche within the institutional system of the university; all are guests around a single table and everyone tucks politely into the manna provided by the university. That style is either absent altogether, or else imperfectly defined in the dictionaries that outline the terms of reference for the activity of discourse about music is odd, to say the least. Rather, it suggests that musicology in the twentieth century, having been conceived as an institutional

activity, has become self-supporting and single-minded in its suppression of the vagaries of style: after all, 'even the best dictionary is essentially just another trophy to positivism' (Kerman 1985: 225). Style, as I have indicated, is both the paradigmatic construct of institutional activities such as musicology and it is also the suppressed context within which those activities operate. Such a conclusion lends credence to one of the motivations of my thesis, namely that music theory can sometimes seem to have little to do with music and everything to do with itself.

### **1.3 – Institutional style**

Throughout this chapter I have been concerned with setting-up a stall on which a number of potential, and often opposing, definitions of style have been laid. However, the issue of definition has not and cannot, I think, be laid to rest once and for all. I have taken a broad look at what style is thought to mean in the discourses of the everyday, in the arts, and in musicology. Yet the conclusion to be drawn from my attempt to determine this meaning is that there is no singular, specific meaning to be had: style has no ultimate truth content. Rather it seems that style comes to mean something as part of a context, within an environment, or an institution, yet at the same time style is responsible, to a very large extent, for defining the nature of that institution. Clearly the indeterminacy of the idea of style in music theory is bound up with how the institution that supports it, and employs or suppresses it, has been formulated. It is for this reason that, in the chapters that follow, I shall be largely concerned with examining the style of theorising that that institution has adopted.

Contrary to popular conception, the power of institutions, be they educational, religious or political, arises not from their methodological connection with some eternal, autonomous 'truth' but from their ability to direct the thoughts of their

players towards a particular, self-serving, socially constructed notion of that truth. That is to say, institutions, and the knowledge produced therein, are ideologically positioned and positioning. In being ideological, institutions habitually seek to suppress or otherwise oppose alternative ideologies while remaining largely oblivious to their own. Institutional music theory is no exception to this rule, its ideology, as we shall see, being that of formalism. For this reason Philip Bohlman (1993) describes musicology as a 'political act'. As such, music theorists adopt a position within their institution; they learn to behave in ways that are appropriate to their particular institution. Indeed there are structures in place that ensure the proper and continued functioning of that institution, among them systems of apprenticeship, peer-review, rules about format and content of publications (including PhD theses), performance practices, and so on. They are provided with manuals of style (for example, Holoman, 1988) that they use to ensure conformity to the rules. In these ways institutionalisation creates a conservative, intersubjective, common-sense attitude which is self-stabilising and self-perpetuating. By adopting such an attitude it is possible to operate, to build a particular body of knowledge about a particular subject, with an economy of effort. As Jim Samson has described it, an institution provides a lodging place for the categories that 'make knowledge manageable or persuasive' (1999: 35). Yet, at the same time, the institutional attitude also creates and shapes its subject/object. This is both the advantage and the paradox of the style that is an institution. As Berger and Luckmann put it:

Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, *ipso facto*, is apprehended by its performer *as* that pattern. (1967: 70-71)

It is this institutional pattern (style), one might almost think of it as a kind of brainwashing were it not for the fact that our academic institutions are regulated

by those we regard as our intellectual superiors, which I believe has caused the fluidity of the idea of style to become neglected in music theory. In short, because the institution of music theory has been constructed around a particular pattern, grounded in an overriding presumption of the work's objectivity, consideration of the differential fluidity and subjectivity of style has been sidelined. In the music theory of the twentieth century, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, style has been collapsed into a singular, grammatical notion of form and structure. Yet I shall maintain through the course of this thesis that, beyond the sustaining ideology of our music-theoretical institution, there is no clear justification for this collapse. Indeed, in the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990), it seems to me that the institution of music theory has exemplified a kind of 'epistemic violence' in the way that it patently valorises structure over style, matter over manner. I shall therefore maintain in a Foucauldian fashion that, beyond the particular demands of pedagogy, there really is no inherent justification for such valorisation: it is nothing more than a political, interested representation.

Since Berger and Luckmann go on to say that 'it is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced' (1967: 72) I shall seek to indicate the style of that process as it relates to the institution of musicology. In the chapters that follow I turn, therefore, to the issue of institution building and to an examination of the style in which the institution of music theory as we know it has come to be, and come to be characterised. In other words, I shall be seeking to determine the longevity of the formalist theorising style of the music-theoretical institution. I should note that my history of that institution is necessarily selective; I make no greater claim for my reading than to say that it is *my* reading. In a sense, as I noted in my introduction, that reading is constructed as an interpretative, heuristic review of an institutional literature that does not explicitly exist, in the sense that the

received wisdom about that literature 'spins' it in a different way. Rather than reiterate the roles of a series of figures that are by now well known, I have opted to construct my observations around what we might refer to as a few non-canonical figures in the music-theoretical institution of the last hundred or so years. It is not coincidental that these figures are also some of those whose work has gone against the formalist grain in concerning itself with the analytical construction of style, although their particular analytical representations are not my primary interest. Rather, as a result of this concern, these figures have also at times prompted reconsideration of the stylistic approach of the institution, even as it was being formulated. It is the difference between the way in which these authors understand musical style and the musicological style that is exemplified in those writings, that is of primary interest to me in this thesis.

Finally, I should observe that it is impossible to avoid the violence of epistemology when playing by the rules of academic discourse. Thus, while my non-canonical readings are intended to prove the rule of formalism in the music-theoretical institution, I realise that I shall, in effect, be reconstructing, bolstering the particular position of formalism, a position that is not perhaps as clear cut as my reading would seem to imply. Yet this appears to be a necessary and unavoidable process, almost perhaps a cathartic process, in the movement around a deconstructive engagement with that institution. It is the 'double articulation' of all deconstructions, the setting-up of the scapegoat in order to work through its effects. In short, I realise that my own work is far from being free from ideology. By seeking to spin a story of musicology's institutional formalism, by intentionally bringing a consideration of the stylistic epistemology of music theory to the fore, my work may be said to fall into that category that Ackerman referred to as 'philosophical speculation'. Yet, as we shall see in due course, this category has been becoming, in recent years, increasingly busy.

## ***Chapter 2: Formalising Style***

### **2.1 - Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, we saw how, in trying to establish an abstract definition of style, we are continually pulled up short by the difference between a subjective, everyday understanding of style as something changeable and individualising, and an analytical understanding of it as something objective, categorical and formalising. It was observed that the common, 'real world' assumption that style pertains to a subjective manner of behaviour, for example in the opening of tin cans, is invariably subsumed under a technical vocabulary characterised by an overriding notion of objective form, such as that of the tin opener; and yet, I argued, there is always a remainder. To put it in musicological terms, based on my observations so far, I would formulate the hypothesis that concepts of style in musicology seem readily to be collapsed into concepts of form in, and proceeding from, the musical work conceived of as a rational entity, but that style in fact remains, reconstituted as excess. This hypothesis will form the basis of my further consideration of the problem of style in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

In this chapter I leave behind the abstract definition of style and shall be concerned instead to sketch the outlines of the establishment and institutionalisation of the music-theoretical discipline whose knowledge-making processes seem to be particularly geared towards the facilitation of this collapse of style into form. I shall begin, in this chapter, by tracing, briefly, the theorising style of this institution from its intellectual roots in ancient Greece to its musicological exposition in Vienna in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Then, in subsequent chapters, I shall track the consistency of this theorising style through a number of phases to the present day. Yet I shall be only slightly concerned with the extant publications and analyses generated during this period.

Indeed these are largely well known, forming as they do the basis of the hegemonic discipline of musical analysis as it is taught at the current time. Rather I shall be concerned mainly with an examination of the style of thinking that underpinned the work produced at this time. In short, I shall be aiming to construct a general history of a particular mode of thought (abbreviated as formalism) that provided the basis for the nominally musical thinking developed during the twentieth century. I shall be seeking to establish some 'facts' about the style in which music was theorised during these years and, in so doing, I shall be aiming to engage the formalistic foundations that stylise that institution in a deconstructive dialogue.

Put simply, at a fundamental level the intellectual work of the twentieth century (drawing on an academic pedigree that, I shall argue, was established as far back as ancient Greece) has been epitomised by a preoccupation with, and a rationalisation of, form. Innumerable scholars of music have, explicitly or implicitly, characterised this preoccupation, not least those styling themselves as music theorists. The historical survey furnished by Ian Bent (1987: Chapters 2 & 3) that leads from Koch, through A.B. Marx (*Formenlehre*), to Otto Jahn, Adler, Kurth, Schoenberg (*Grundgestalt*), Schenker (*Ursatz*), and beyond, indicates very clearly that, as far as the musical analyst is concerned, the study of form is a primary objective. As my discussion of style in the previous chapter made plain, there has been a widely held belief among commentators, not just in relation to music, that style depends for its own existence upon the *a priori* existence of form; that style is but an epiphenomenon of form, or even that form and style are one and the same. This view is reinforced by the fact that 'The distinction often drawn between formal analysis and stylistic analysis is a pragmatic one, but is unnecessary in theoretical terms' (Bent, 1987: 1). Yet, as my earlier discussion also made plain, the erasure of that distinction through the collapse of style into form is perhaps neither as clear-cut nor complete (closural) as it might seem. So,

following Berger and Luckmann's advice (see page 53) about the necessity of historical awareness of the process by which institutions come into being, it seems essential that we seek to understand something of where the concept of form, and its twentieth century successor 'structure', is coming from. Clearly form, as it appears in the literature of music in the twentieth century, is not a concept belonging exclusively to the domain of the music theorist. Thus although, in light of the structuralist critique that I shall assess later, the idea of a 'history' of form and structure might be thought an oxymoron, I shall be seeking throughout the pages of this thesis to indicate the historical longevity of the *concept* of form and structure. I shall also observe the ponderous density of the ethical and epistemological baggage that that very longevity has created.

## **2.2 – Tracing the formalist epistemology**

The prevalence of the concept of form can be traced very far back, at least to the fifth century BC where it appears in the metaphysics of Plato. At this late stage in the twentieth century you might imagine that the relevance of what Plato had to say over two thousand years ago would have waned, or that it would have been superseded by newer, more relevant ideas. But Alfred North Whitehead's legendary aphorism about 'footnotes to Plato' (1969: 53) is more than mere platitude. While the metaphysics that Plato devised may appear somewhat fantastical to us in our technological age, it still constitutes in large part the fundamental conceptual scheme to which we appear to remain devoted today, and this in spite of the many exciting claims made for such recent narratives as structuralism and post-structuralism. That Plato's ideas have been the subject of a number of studies written under the rubric of these narratives indicates in itself the continuing and foundational importance of his philosophy in current thought. While it is obviously well beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough-going exposition of the intricacies of philosophical thought over two thousand



years, it is apposite, given the intriguing resonance of Whitehead's assertion, to sketch some of its key moments. I should add that I shall not specifically address the philosophical issue of musical aesthetics in this short survey, albeit that each of the figures represented wrote on this topic. While we should certainly bear in mind that 'the formal coherence of a work of art is, after all, not a modern ideal ... but the oldest commonplace of aesthetics, handed down from Aristotle' (Rosen 1971: 39), this is not my immediate interest here. Rather, the aim of this sketch is to interpret the ontological and epistemological bases of the thinking represented as opposed to illuminating its applied topics.

According to Plato our experience of everything in the ordinary world is but an illusion of appearances, like reflections in a mirror – or speleological shadows if we embrace one of his well-known allegories (*The Republic*: Part 7, §7) – of another, perfect world. He characterised this other, 'real' world as eternal and unchanging, a world of archetypal, ideal Forms (or ideas) among which are Beauty, Justice and, most importantly, Good. This perfect world was one of pure 'being', or *nous*, to which the ordinary world, a world of 'becoming', could only aspire. Our knowledge of this real world, he judged, could not be adequately derived from our subjective sensory perceptions of appearances in the ordinary world, but only from the use of our reason. In other words, if Plato had asked 'What is music?', and we had replied (anachronistically) 'Listen to Mozart's piano sonatas if you want to know what music is', Plato would have been dissatisfied. He wasn't asking for a collection of empirical examples of music, but for music itself, in its pure being. At best, he believed that our sensory perception affords a degree of probability about reality, but no more than that. Assumed knowledge of this other world derived through empiricism was, he claimed, really no more than opinion. As Richard Robinson observes, according to Plato

There is a difference of kind between knowledge which has the Forms for its object, and opinion, which has for its object this transitory and confused world. (1989: 243)

The proper pursuit of a philosopher was, therefore, in Plato's view, knowledge of the Forms, for only the unchangeable could be known for certain. This basic conception of formal sameness or unchangeability is, as we shall see, an essential idea (a formalism) that has remained largely intact throughout the pedigree of the academic institution for over two thousand years, not least in the musicological institution in the twentieth century.

Plato maintained that, once grasped through reason, the unchangeable Forms could be taken to explain appearances in the actual world, for the Forms create actuality. Or better, actuality merely imitates and aspires to the Forms. But without reasoned knowledge of the Forms Plato believed that opinion about the actual physical world is all but worthless. For example, in reference to the Form he called "Good" Plato wrote in *The Republic* (Book 10):

If a man can't define the Form of the Good and distinguish it clearly from everything else, and then defend it against all comers, not merely as a matter of opinion but in strict logic, and come through with his argument unshaken, you wouldn't say he knew what Absolute Good was, or indeed any other good. (1962: 303)

Thus Plato believed that only someone with rationalised knowledge of the Forms could have reasonable, accurate or appropriate opinions about the actual world. Yet beyond the level of abstract metaphysical thinking, the Forms also assumed specific political institutional relevance. Having witnessed the death of Socrates, who had been imprisoned by the state on 'the absurd charge of corrupting the

young and not believing in the city's gods' (Robinson, 1989: 241), Plato was sceptical about the possibility of decent government. As a result, in *The Republic*, he sought to establish his view of the necessity and direct applicability of formal knowledge by determining the political plan of an ideal society in the actual world. The rulers of that society would, according to Plato's plan, be philosopher-kings. Education (imparting knowledge of the Forms, of course) would ensure the longevity and future maintenance of the philosopher-kings and hence the society of good citizens. One might reasonably argue that the essential principles of Plato's approach provided an amenable model for the subsequent conceptual development of the academic institution, even if the precise terms of that model seem rather quaint today.

Indeed, the institutional formalisation of those principles was begun almost immediately, albeit in what seems at first sight to be a contrary way. Aristotle, one of the leading members of Plato's Academy (which is often cited as the model for the first European pedagogical institutions of the Middle Ages, some of which survive as our modern universities) took up the problem of form, revising Plato's view. Aristotle refused Plato's essential binary distinction that valorised rational knowledge of the world of Forms over that of actuality. He believed that, with the exception of God, there was no abstract, ideal world of Form, or, at least, not one that could be in any way demonstrable. He therefore set about classifying actual reality itself (empirical reality rather than some otherworldly semblance of it) in terms of 'categories' such as substance, quality, quantity and relation (Ackrill, 1989: 24). Of these, substances he deemed the most significant because they existed in themselves, while the other categories were predicates of a substance. In his pursuit of this actual, substantive reality he conceived a further binary distinction between immanent form and the matter from which the form was made. Thus he might have said that the immanent form of a house (its structural function) is separate from, yet consists of, its matter.

Form, he maintained, *must* be prior to matter, even though form appears to depend on matter, because only through the organic function of form does matter become stable (and therefore, presumably, available to empirical observation). Formal function was thus the 'final cause', the entelechy, of all reality.

Like Plato, Aristotle maintained that reasoned knowledge of form, albeit in his revised view an empirical rather than a purely rational knowledge, was the highest and specifically human achievement. We should note that the meaning of form thus acquired two potentially opposing facets which would become the locus of much debate through succeeding generations. While Plato regarded form as a matter of *a priori*, non-empirical fact, Aristotle viewed it as being concretised, and therefore detectable, in the objects of human perception; it was an *a posteriori* fact. We might suppose, given his methodological penchant for classification according to the categories of this formalism, that Aristotle's role was to refine the original Platonic syllabus for institutional academic study. Indeed one might say that, through being derived from his applied, classificatory approach to study, academic activity might just as accurately be described as consisting of footnotes to Aristotle as to Plato. The bipartite view of knowledge acquisition, combining what might be termed theoretical (rational) and practical (empirical) approaches, extended throughout learned society, especially via the European monasteries, during the centuries that followed. Innumerable thinkers, among them such names as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, grappled with the relative merits of the opposing views of Form and the respective approaches to knowledge during those years (for an overview see Scruton, 1984). Yet, perhaps inevitably, no final justifications were found, no killing arguments produced, to satisfactorily sustain the claims of one metaphysical view over the other. It seems reasonable to suppose that, although Aristotle appeared to contradict Plato at an ontological level, each effected a hypostatisation of the concept of form which, as far as the subsequent process of

academic institutionalisation was concerned, tied them together in a single epistemology. In other words, although describing an empirical method, Aristotle's approach, just as much as Plato's, was dependent on, and referenced to, an abstract, *a priori* conceptualisation of universal form. It was Immanuel Kant's recognition of this connection that provided the ground for his critical synthesis of the rational and the empirical claims to knowledge.

Kant is widely considered to be the most influential thinker of modern (post-Renaissance) times. Indeed Scruton contends that 'he was (and remains) the greatest philosopher since Aristotle' (1984: 138). Kant was concerned that, since classical times, the discipline of mathematics had been in a state of almost continual refinement while philosophy, on the other hand, had not. Kant sought to establish the reasons for this deficiency and to rehabilitate understanding of the metaphysical conditions of human knowledge – that is, ontology and epistemology – by means of a synthesis of Platonic rationalism (as pursued most famously in the intervening period by Descartes) with Aristotelian empiricism (as pursued most notably by Hume). Kant observed that the accounts of human knowledge constructed by exclusively rational or exclusively empirical approaches were fundamentally one-sided, and he saw this as the reason for philosophy's lack of development. One school believed that knowledge could be acquired only through objective, rational understanding alone, and such knowledge lacked any clear subject matter. The other camp believed that knowledge was derived from subjective, sensory experiences of the world, and therefore lacked the concepts necessary to describe that experience. The terms of Kant's critical philosophy are obviously, like those of the classical Greeks, very complex. But in order to indicate the extending longevity of the formalist view, and of its institutionalisation, his answer to the rational/empirical question may be boiled down to its bare essentials.

Kant's answer was, in effect, to refute the logic of the question itself by seeking what he thought to be a synthesis of its terms. He did this by classifying (or subsuming) empirical observations within a system of rational 'Categories': quantity, quality, relation and modality (Körner, 1989: 160). The Categories were implemented by means of what he called 'synthetic *a priori*' judgements about empirical data, and these, he maintained, were fundamental to all thought, especially in science. Kant conceived of such judgements as a third class, distinct from *a priori* judgements that related to 'analytic', non-empirical concepts that were beyond proof (like Plato's Forms), and *a posteriori* judgements that were 'synthetic', derived solely from subjective, empirical observations (like Aristotle's form). In Kant's view, the Categories of a synthetic *a priori* judgement made the individual, subjective impressions of empirical perception an objective reality, or rather an inter-subjective reality (since they are formed by the thinking subject). Kantian knowledge consisted of a synthesis of thinking and perceiving, but the synthesis was achieved by applying some preconceived notion of ideal formal Categories to empirical observations. This led Kant to call the synthetic *a priori* explanation 'transcendental' because it was impossible to assert the truth of any synthetic *a priori* propositions without presupposing their truth: 'The very attempt to establish their validity must at the same time assume it' (Scruton 1984: 140). We should note, too, that the formal Categories were also fundamental to Kant's discussion of aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgment*, a discussion that would prove influential throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Dahlhaus, 1967 and Goehr, 1992 indicate the extent of this influence in relation to the philosophy of music). As we shall see, the inability of many institutionally-based thinkers, post-Kant, not least in the realms of musicology, to recognise the transcendental nature of many grounding concepts and to accept that, in practical terms, the categories on which they are based are assumptions, has led to confusion, insecurity and an urge to reification.

What we might deduce from this sketch is that the history of ideas (which Scruton distinguishes from the history of philosophy, 1984: 11), the history of our approach to knowledge, has been grounded since ancient times in an idealised concept of formal categorisation that, in a sense, is assumed to tame and objectify the potentially subjective individualism of the empiricist view. That is to say, the 'footnotes to Plato' comprise of a continuing valorisation of the *a priori* role of the rational human mind in the construction of knowledge of the world. Plato established the foundations of this approach in depicting a world of archetypal Forms against which Aristotle could frame his perceptions of an empirical world. Kant's work might be seen as a reinforcement of the archetype through his erasure of the difference that Aristotle's empiricism seemed to engender. In essence, these figures represented the establishment of the *a priori* principles, the formal, normative and universal categories that were necessary to knowledge of any objective, 'real' world, perhaps including the world of music. By introducing the third classification (the synthetic *a priori*) Kant effectively brought empirical understanding within the purview of rational, analytical understanding. And he did this because he believed, like the Greeks, that genuine knowledge of the world could not be derived from a comparatively imprecise observation of that world, but was fundamentally constituted by the thinking, rationalising human mind.

What developed in ancient Greece was an attitude, a style, an approach to knowledge, to philosophy, and particularly to education. That attitude, I would argue, has persisted, having received renewed emphasis in the Enlightenment ideal that was reflected in the work of Kant (among many others), to the present day. It has persisted especially in academia, in the university institutions of Europe and North America for which the Greek Academy was an important model. That attitude, known as formalism, is characterised by a rigorous adherence to established forms of knowledge (especially the logical, the

scientific, and the mathematical) and facilitates the pursuit of such knowledge in terms of the categorical. That is to say, in the philosophies of both Aristotle and Kant we saw that the method of formal categorisation was introduced as a means of containing, or framing, the apparent vagaries of human perception. I'm not suggesting that, in technical philosophical terms, the idea of the Category is identical in Aristotle and Kant, but, in a general sense, categorisation seems to be an important, perhaps necessary tool in the formalist epistemology that may be thought to derive from their approaches. And this observation opens an intriguing link between the concept of form, as I have described it here, and the concept of style. In musical analysis the study of style, particularly in relation to the *Guidelines* developed by La Rue (1970), is often referred to as 'category analysis' (Bent 1987: 93). The systematic application of the preconceived categories (La Rue's 'SHMRG') is the means by which the perceptual complexity of the music under discussion is reduced in analysis. And, if we accept Bent's contention (see page 56) that the distinction drawn between formal and stylistic analysis is theoretically unnecessary, then we are perhaps justified in proposing that musical analysis (as an institutional activity) is a categorising enterprise cast in the mould of the philosophical approach that I have described in this section. Indeed, the very longevity (through institutionalisation) of these ideas might indicate that it would come as a surprise if musical analysis were *not* so cast. We might posit, therefore, that, in musical analysis, the notion of some objective formal category, just as in the philosophy I have outlined, is introduced in order to draw a frame around the subjectivity of our perception. To put it another way, in such category analysis, the subjectivity of style is reined back, or regulated, by the assumption of objectivity afforded by the formal category, yet it is still, arguably, never quite tamed by it.

Of course the longevity of the formalist attitude is not, these days, so often remarked. Few music theorists regard their work today as being but a part of a



long line of descent, and few would want to say that their work is but a footnote to anyone. However, here and there, there are clues to the continuing sense of connection between the ancient and the present. One such clue is found in the importance of Goethe's neo-Platonism around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries and exemplified in Mahler's invocation of these lines in the 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony:

All that is transient is but metaphor;

The insufficient here becomes an event. (Faust, Part 2)

Goethe was an acknowledged influence on intellectuals (including many composers and musicologists) through into the early years of the twentieth century. Webern displays this influence in his invocation of the primeval plant (the *Urplanze*) in *The Path to New Music* (1963: 53), and Gary Don (1988) and William Pastille (1990b) have indicated its importance in Schenker's thought, in terms of the *Urphänomen*, or 'fundamental questions ... which frame all others' (Bell, 1978: 993). Nicholas Cook (1989a: 420-21) has also pointed to the unmistakable influence of the neo-Aristotelian Schopenhauer on Schenker. We might also observe that the terms of Nattiez's analytical approach (poiesis and esthesis) are borrowed directly from Aristotle.

Another clue, appearing towards the end of the century, may be found in the name given to the Internet server operated by the USA's Society for Music Theory: Boethius. Boethius was a Roman philosopher, working in the first century AD, whose main claim to fame was as a translator of Greek texts, especially those that elucidated the systematic educational system based on the formal mathematical disciplines of Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astronomy known as the *quadrivium*. In his own philosophy Boethius expounded what we might see as a retrenched Platonic formalism in which knowledge involved a

turning away from ephemeral sensory perception (Aristotle's empirical reality) towards eternal (natural) truth:

A musician is the man who has acquired a knowledge of music by theory – not by slavish submission to the work, but by the rule of reason. (quoted in Kimmey 1988: 57)

My sense that the adoption of Boethius by the Society as its quasi-patron is more than apposite will become clear in due course. It is my contention, deduced from this short survey, that the effects of the ancient view of form are very far-reaching, and also that the implications of the embodiment of that view within academic institutions to this day are in fact only vaguely understood.

The historical-philosophical preamble of this section is intended to serve as a ground and a context for an examination of a founding figure in the first phase of the institutionalisation of musicology that began in the years leading up to the turn of the twentieth century. That figure is Guido Adler. Yet before looking at how Adler sought to establish the modern discipline of *Musikwissenschaft* we should look first at its immediate academic relations.

### **2.3 – Form in Fin de siècle Vienna**

It is interesting to reflect for a moment on the fact that the immediate impetus for so much twentieth century thinking can be traced to one small region of Europe in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of this: the city of Vienna. Among the areas of research that began to flourish in Vienna at that time – or indeed in some cases were conceived of as academic disciplines in their own right for the first time – were those of science, philosophy, psychology, society, art, mathematics, architecture, history, and of course music. Freud,

Wittgenstein, Klimt, Schiele, Kokoschka, Loos, Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler, Riegl, Mahler, Schoenberg, Schenker, Mach, Carnap, Neurath, Gödel, and Popper were just some of the names associated with Vienna during that period. All came to be seen as pioneers in their respective fields, and all would exert a far-reaching influence on the style of their own discipline, and of the broader academic institution, as it developed during the subsequent years of this century. That they surfaced more or less simultaneously in that single quarter of Europe is, to say the least, remarkable. Why was Vienna such a stimulating place to be during these years? And was it significant that a concept such as style should, as we shall shortly see, find a niche in such times? In order to understand this productive circumstance it is perhaps necessary to seek to understand something of the immediate environment that fostered it.

Throughout its history, Vienna has been characterised by a diverse ethnic mixture. Lying, geographically at least, in the heart of Europe, it is easy to imagine that Vienna must have served as a sort of trigonometric point for peoples and influences travelling from all points of the compass. The political fortunes of this focal point of the Habsburg empire had varied with the passing centuries, but by the middle of the nineteenth century its influence abroad was declining, especially as Bismarck's Prussia came into the ascendancy following its defeat of Austria in the war of 1866. Attention inevitably turned to domestic matters and, no doubt captivated by the effects of the reforms witnessed in France in the years after the revolution, the people of the newly unified Austria-Hungary demanded, albeit peacefully, similar rights of liberty, equality and fraternity. These they were duly awarded by what were known as the Fundamental Laws of 1867 which specifically decreed equality for all nationalities and languages, freedom of speech for all, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. The multicultural, multiethnic make-up of the country was not only officially recognised, but also effectively safeguarded in its constitution.

While this résumé of what was, without doubt, a consequential period in the country's history is necessarily truncated, it is perhaps easy to see that the scene was set for the period of open-minded thought that distinguished the second half of the nineteenth century in Vienna. These were years in which masked balls and the waltzes of Johann Strauss, picnics in the Wiener Wald and evenings at the Prater were enjoyed by many (as amply described by Spiel, 1987). They were years of relative political stability during the long rule of Emperor Franz Joseph I who oversaw the construction of the magnificent *Ringstrasse* in the 1870s. (There was little premonition at this time of the violence that was to come in the murder of his nephew, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, at the hands of a Bosnian Serb in 1914, nor of its wider significance.) But they were years, too, in which a ferment of intellectual activity, that would send reverberations throughout the academic world, was beginning. And the world of music was far from immune to these reverberations. As Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin (1986) make clear, there was a sure sense among those living in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna that they were part of something exciting, but especially that that something was not confined to a single intradisciplinary event, but was open and far-reaching. The driving force behind that sense, according to Janik and Toulmin, was the idealistic philosophy of Kant, Goethe, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche:

Everyone in the educated world discussed philosophy and regarded the central issues in post-Kantian thought as bearing directly on his own interests, whether artistic or scientific, legal or political. Far from being the specialized concern of an autonomous and self-contained discipline, philosophy for them was multifaceted and interrelated with all other aspects of contemporary culture. (quoted by Korsyn, 1988: 5)

Much as music theorists (and practitioners in a number of other disciplines) today draw parallels between their own work and that of linguists, during the years leading up to the turn of the century it was historians of art, influenced by this idealistic philosophy, that provided an important intellectual impetus for others to follow. Indeed, as we shall shortly see, upon his appointment in Vienna, Guido Adler immediately set about trying to create a space for musicology within the academic institution akin to that occupied by the fine arts. I suspect that Adler's remark (1934: 172) that his *Prinzipien und Arten des Stils* (published in 1911) had already for four years signified for music what Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* came to signify for the fine arts after its publication in 1915 is somewhat disingenuous. At the very least it seems a premature judgement given that the work of Wölfflin and the Viennese Alois Riegl (of whom more shortly) has remained an integral part of the literature of art history to this day, while Adler's has all but vanished from the mainstream musicological domain. It seems reasonable to suppose that Adler owed more to Wölfflin and his predecessors than they did to him. As is always the case where intellectual property is at stake, and contemporary occurrences are no different, the chronology of events becomes readily obscure. (I shall consider this issue further shortly.)

It should come as no surprise to learn, given the importance of Kantian philosophy, that what tied together the various art histories devised during the nineteenth-century was an idealist, essentialist idea of form – which the popularising Modernist art historians Clive Bell and Roger Fry (1961) would later label 'significant form'. This formalism came to be regarded as 'the universal common denominator of human things' and also 'made it possible for the history of art to become a kind of universal cultural history' (Summers, 1989: 375). In a sense the disciplinary distinction between history and art history now began to seem irrelevant as methods grounded in post-Kantian philosophy

(especially its Hegelian interpretation) apparently provided a means for explaining the entire human condition. As we have seen, this was a view that can in fact be traced somewhat further back than Kant.

One of the Viennese avatars of the new artistic *Wissenschaft* that accompanied this “discovery” of form was Alois Riegl. Though he never produced an explicit statement of method (in the way that, as we shall see, Adler did), in practice Riegl employed an idealistic, psychological notion of style: the *Kunstwollen*. By this term he meant to describe artistic volition, the will or urge of the individual artist in the formation of art: the ‘will-to-form’. The ancient distinction between a world of becoming that seeks to mirror one of being is made very obvious by this, as it is in this phrase: ‘Every style aims at a faithful rendering of nature and nothing else’ (quoted in Gombrich, 1977: 16). Riegl had studied philosophical psychology in Vienna under Robert Zimmermann. Zimmermann had, in turn, been a student of J.F. Herbart (a successor to Kant at the University of Königsberg and forerunner of the Gestalt methodology) and was a close friend of Eduard Hanslick. Indeed, Zimmermann was accorded the honour of dedicatee in several editions of Hanslick’s famous book. In order to gauge Riegl’s importance in the development of art history at this time we should perhaps note Horace Kahlen’s assessment that Riegl ‘might be said to occupy a place in the philosophy of visual art analogous to that of Hanslick in the esthetics of music’ (1942: 651).

In 1893 Riegl published a book called, simply, *Stilfragen*. The questions of style that he sought to answer in it concerned the persistence of patterns – ornamental motifs, or forms – in the visual artefacts of antiquity. Riegl regarded both the individual style of an artwork, and the higher historical level of style change, as resulting directly from the urgencies of design (that is, from the essential form, or formation, of the work) rather than from an artist’s mimetic intention. He

believed these urgencies operated rationally in the mind of the artist who could not but do as the work dictated. To put it another way, Riegl imagined that works of art acquired an existence separate and independent from human nature, and then developed, or evolved, according to their own internal laws of necessity.

According to Ernst Gombrich:

Riegl showed that questions of this kind could and should be discussed in a purely 'objective' manner without introducing subjective ideas of progress and decline. (1977: 15)

Riegl maintained that it is only possible to arrive at a true understanding of art in terms of its own absolute formal medium. The parallel between this approach and Hanslick's absolute view of music is obvious, as is its connection with Schoenberg's 'idea' (see page 47). What should also be clear is that such views are directly descended from the classical notion of rational form. Indeed formalist critics such as Riegl and Hanslick have always believed, and their progeny do still believe, that the inherent, essential significance of a work could be observed merely by gazing hard and disinterestedly at it. Riegl was as susceptible to the instinct to formal reification as were his peers (and his intellectual progeny) and he actually projected his conception of form as something desirable and humanising into the minds of the artists whose work he studied. Referring to the people of antiquity, Riegl wrote:

Their sensory perception showed them external objects in a muddled and indistinct fashion; by means of visual art they isolated individual objects and set them in their clear circumscribed unity. (quoted in Podro 1982: 72)

That Riegl should employ a concept of form in his criticism, given its long pedigree, and that he should refer to it as style, seems especially appropriate. His

analysis of a pre-classical art seems also to indicate an awareness of the specific philosophical pedigree of which he was a part. Indeed he effectively projected the concept of form, that I have traced to classical Greece, even further back in time to the Egyptian era.

A simple example should serve to demonstrate that Riegl's analysis of style was in fact a historicising gesture made according to an idealistic commitment to form. In *Stilfragen* Riegl indicated that the lotus motif, as observed in the art of ancient Egypt, evolved over time to become the palmette, the acanthus, and ultimately the arabesque. This evolution did not result from the artist's active involvement in the copying or miming of nature. Rather, it was assumed to arise from what Michael Podro refers to as an unconscious search for 'interconnectedness, variation and symmetry' (1982: 71) which 'manifests itself in the smallest palmette no less than in the most monumental building' (Gombrich 1977: 15). The *Kunstwollen* was, at a detailed level, an innate and inevitable psychological combination of discrete elements into patterns; an indiscernible willing on the part of the creating artist to establish formal symmetry; a process of becoming. Riegl (under the influence of Herbart and Zimmermann) presumed that these patterns were formed through psychological procedures of the type that the Gestalt psychologists would later refer to as grouping, gap-filling, closure and so on. When these patterns were translated to a larger level, they were presumed by Riegl to give all art (and artistic periods) a purpose, an entelechy, within a continuous developmental, historical process shaped by the Hegelian idea of 'universal laws' (Ferne, 1995: 116). As Hegel put it, each artist and work of art was 'treated as only one individual in the process of a universal history' (quoted in Allen, 1962: 92). For Riegl, then, style operated at two distinct levels. On the one hand it served a (Kantian) formal function at a detailed level, contained within and comprising individual works. But on the other it also served a (Hegelian) formal function at a broader level, as



a way of ordering (and valuing) works of art in a history. In this way we may conclude that Riegl's work demonstrated two important facets of the later nineteenth century institutional epistemology: an essential analytical formalism and an essential historical positivism.

This, then, was the intellectual climate in which Adler came to work. Indeed the dualistic notion of style (as both formal and historical) epitomised by Riegl was one which, through Adler's work, would be deployed in the field of systematic musicology. That this dualism should latterly lead to a schism in the realm of musicology (such that historians of music are now often wary of formal theorists of music, and vice versa) is perhaps unfortunate for this was clearly not the intent of musicology's founding father.

#### **2.4 – Guido Adler: the forgotten foundation**

Guido Adler is a curious figure. Many have heard his name, yet very few know his work in spite of the fact that he is often cited as one of the principal moving forces behind the foundation of a modern, institutional scientific musicology in the twentieth century (Kerman 1985: 11, Duckles 1980, Wellesz 1954). As Regula Burckhardt Qureshi has observed, 'Foundational though it is, Guido Adler's scheme of musicology soon became relegated to disciplinary invocations' (1999: 412) such that it survives only in the summary articles in such reference works as *The New Grove*. Publications in English by or relating to Adler, be they translations of his writings or biographical notes, are scant, to say the least (a single chapter in Leon Botstein's PhD thesis of 1985 being the single most thoroughgoing study). Yet those that were personally acquainted with Adler revered him as both a fine scholar and as a generous colleague. So, given this foundational role, Adler provides the opening into my sketch of the

epistemological style of the institution of musicology during the twentieth century.

Adler studied music at the Vienna Conservatory with Bruckner and Dessoff, and law at the University of Vienna. During his youth he enjoyed the company of the likes of Brahms and Wagner. Later he became a close friend of Mahler and wrote a short study of the composer in 1916 (translated in Reilly, 1982). In 1882 he became a *Privatdozent* (an unsalaried lecturer) in music history at the University of Vienna. Then, as Mosco Carner (who was personally acquainted with Adler) relates, in 1898, after a brief spell as Professor of Music at Prague, he succeeded 'the mighty Hanslick' (1944: 14) to the chair of music history in Vienna at a time of considerable institutional upheaval. During his period of tenure he was directly responsible for the creation of an entirely new department, the *Musikwissenschaftliches Seminar*. According to Carner, he appointed Schoenberg as a 'lecturer in musical theory' (1944: 15) at the University, although this is not corroborated by other sources. It seems more likely that Schoenberg was a *Privatdozent* providing private tuition in composition and theory to students who were 'simultaneously members of Guido Adler's seminar at the university' (Kerman, 1985: 38). Certainly Schoenberg taught a number of Adler's students including Webern, Nettle, Jeppesen, Kurth, Wellesz, and Geiringer, to name but a few. Adler also co-founded a scholarly journal, the *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, prepared more than eighty volumes of the *Denkmaeler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich* for publication, and authored or edited several textbooks including the *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* (1924) and *Prinzipien und Arten des Stils* (1911). Such was Adler's pedagogical influence that both Wellesz (1954) and Duckles (1980) regarded his model as the crucial, formative influence on the development of musicology in Europe and the USA in the twentieth century. Certainly, as Erica Mugglestone (1981: 2) has observed, when Adler began his work in Vienna musical scholarship, as an academic

discipline independent of general historiography, was significantly less developed than were those disciplines relating to the other arts, especially the visual (further evidence to cast doubt on Adler's claim, noted above, of his intellectual relationship with art history). It may have been inevitable, therefore, that the *Musikwissenschaftliches Seminar* came to enjoy a high profile and served as a model for the foundation of similar departments in universities across Europe in succeeding years. Yet it seems, in spite of this, that few scholars (particularly in the English-speaking world) today have much idea about what his methodology entailed. I attribute this deficiency, in part, to the fact that, where others used terms like organic causality, unfolding ideas, and other such overtly formalist constructs, Adler wrote of style.

In a retrospective review of his own work, Adler observed that 'the complex of questions and problems having to do with musical style was then coming to the fore' (1934: 172), that is, around the turn of the century. In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, style (meaning, of course, form) was *en vogue* not only (as we have seen) for art historians such as Riegl, but also for sociologists and psychologists. As early as 1885 Adler was working towards the definition of a science of music in which style (form) was the determining factor. What Adler envisaged was a concept of style that played freely between, and was equally applicable to, the constituent parts – historical and systematic (or theoretical) – of a single, rigorous, idealistic scientific edifice. In other words, what Adler expected his modern musicological methodology to achieve was a synthesis of the formal and the historical within a single scientific edifice. In this, Adler was surely seeking the kind of union that Kant had effected in his idealistic philosophy. But quite whether the methodology at which Adler ultimately arrived, and certainly whether the academic institution that derived from it, accurately reflected this vision remains to be seen.

In 1885, in the inaugural issue of the *Vierteljahrsschrift*, Adler published an essay titled *Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft* [Extent, Method and Aim of Music Science] which he himself later conceded 'helped to lay the foundations of modern musical science' (1934: 172). This essay has only comparatively recently been published in English translation in the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* (Mugglestone 1981), a journal which is orientated towards ethnomusicological studies. This perhaps indicates that Adler's theory has more resonance today in that specific area of comparative research than it does in the mainstream of the musicological institution. (This is confirmed by Bruno Nettl's recent survey, Nettl 1999.) Yet such marginalisation would no doubt have displeased Adler because the article, with positivistic precision, set out his vision for a systematic musicology of the future, and made it clear that he recognised important roles for both structural/formal and historical/bibliographical analysis in the scientific study of music. Indeed it is perhaps this aspect of Adler's vision that was to become most significant in terms of the subsequent development of the discipline. By stressing the divisions between the historical and the theoretical in his 'grand project' (Blasius 1996: xvi) Adler 'weakened the chances of an interaction' (Bujic 1988: 343) between the two. We may suppose that he in fact built in the basis for the ultimate failure of his scheme right from the start. Thus, while succeeding editions of the *Grove Dictionary* have continued to map the terrain of musicology in terms of Adler's schematic diagram (1885: 16-17) (which, incidently, Adler himself likened to that produced by the ancient Greek theorist Aristedes Quintilianus), the view on the ground has become somewhat less unified, not just as regards the separation of musicology and ethnomusicology, but also as a result of the schism of theory and history that I shall discuss in my next chapter.

The first clause of Adler's title, the 'extent' of music science, is swiftly dealt with. Adler saw music science as, quite simply, co-extensive with musical art *per*

se: 'All races that can be said to have a musical art, also have a musical science, even if not always a developed musicological system' (1885: 5). In other words, wherever there is music, there is also some degree of reflection about music. As regards the second clause of his article, method, Adler outlined a series of palaeographic procedures, divided into historical and systematic aspects. In Adler's view, the historical aspect of musicology was most important and had to precede the theoretical because 'theoreticians, for the most part, only follow in the footsteps of history' (9). He allied the study of music history to the 'auxiliary sciences' of general history, the history of literature, the history of mimetic arts and dance, the biography of composers, and liturgical history. Adler specified the remit of the music historian as encompassing knowledge of notations, the 'summing-up' of established categories ('usually called musical forms'), and the investigation of the laws of art, this latter being the 'focal point' of the musicologist's work. The theoretical aspect of his systematic musicology consisted of music theory ('which is really speculative' but included analysis of harmony, rhythm and melody), aesthetics, pedagogy, and comparative (or ethno-) musicology. The auxiliary sciences to which this theoretical aspect was allied included acoustics, physiology, psychology, grammar, and general pedagogics. Adler took it that the topics of his various auxiliary sciences were linked, and in some cases 'organically linked' (10), with music. We may suppose that it was precisely this link that facilitated the institutionalisation of music and the other disciplines within the fraternity of the university at this time.

As regards the third clause of Adler's title (the aim of musicology), having completed the task of palaeographic analysis one was able to go on to ask (and presumably answer) the question of style. This he conceived of as involving the attribution of a musical work to a period (epoch, school, or composer). In other words, answering the question of style meant, for Adler, attributing a work to a stylistic category. The main task of a musicologist working according to Adler's

schema was ‘the research of the laws of art of diverse periods and their organic combination and development’ (15) so that stylistic attributions could be reliably made. (This, as we have seen, is precisely what Jeppesen sought to do through his study of Palestrina – see page 34.) In other words, the aim of Adler’s methodology was the establishment, by induction from empirical observation of selected works, of a formal framework of laws that could then be used or drawn upon to date other works and place them within a historical process. This, Adler believed, would supersede the ‘hero-cult’ (Bent, 1987: 43) biographical history that had previously characterised the academic study of music. That Dunsby and Whittall continue to see a role for analysis as a remedy to the ‘lives and works’ histories that are still admired today (1988: 7) suggests that Adler’s belief may have been misplaced.

Adlerian music science was conceived as a vast, inclusive exercise ranging back and forth between the technical and the historical. Style, for Adler as for Riegl, was a synonym of absolute, idealistic form and that notion of form infused every aspect and all levels of the Adlerian musicological enterprise from the tiniest motivic unit to the macro level of periodic history. The ultimate aim of Adler’s stylistic musicology was the specification of music’s form in terms of an organic, evolutionary stylistic progression. Carl Dahlhaus has criticised Adler’s imposition of this external organicist model as an attempt to impose a regulatory system on ‘a corpus of mutually incompatible, self-contained complexes’ (1983b: 15). What Dahlhaus was indicating was that, in spite of his careful effort to derive the categories of this stylistic history from the study of works, Adler in fact elevated an analogy to the status of a law. Rather than letting his theory follow practice, Adler sought to impose his theory on that practice. Keith Falconer has been likewise critical of this procedure:

The problem with style history has always been that in order to account for changes in the form of musical works a number of structures are imposed from without. The work is reduced to a mere source of information and the chronological succession is subjugated to rigid frameworks of 'style periods' and national 'schools'. (1987: 143)

And Ernst Gombrich has described the same approach among art historians in this way:

Man is a classifying animal, and he has an incurable propensity to regard the network he has imposed on the variety of experience as belonging to the objective world of things. (1966: 82)

Thus while we might suppose that the organic, evolutionary model of style could conceivably serve some useful heuristic purpose as a way of thinking about the topic in hand, in Adler's usage it became the very meaning of style itself. In effect, Adler succeeded only in establishing a particular synthetic *a priori* concept (formalism) of style. The attribution of a musical work according to predefined stylistic (formal) categories seems always to result in the erasure of the individualism and incommensurability of that work. In other words, it does away with that facet of style that our common-sense view would take to be, in a sense, essential; it collapses style into form. Yet this formalisation, according to what Gombrich calls the 'fateful tool of systematic comparison' (1966: 90) and classification, is perhaps Adler's lasting bequest to the institution of musicology, not least music theory. For while appearing, methodologically speaking, to have completely neglected Adler, it seems that, in terms of its epistemology, the institution of musicology in fact owes him an enormous stylistic debt.

That Adler's work is not more widely known today is, it seems, symptomatic of the way in which the institution of musicology and theory has conducted itself during the last hundred or so years. Indeed, that comparatively few practitioners at the end of this century have any clear sense of the early history of the institutional discipline, apart from one or two hegemonic figures, is, to my mind, lamentable. For while it's quite easy to argue, on the one hand, that the detailed application of this or that system of enquiry, be it ostensibly structural or bibliographical, is in no way affected by the researcher's explicit understanding of the system's roots, on the other hand the resulting observations can only seem impoverished without such a sense. As Richard Rorty has put it: 'Every description of anything is relative to the needs of some historically conditioned situation' (1989: 103). And Bruno Nettl provides the view of an ethnomusicologist on the same issue:

The way in which musicians think musically, the ways in which they, as it were, 'think' their music, depends in large measure on ways in which they think their world at large. (1994: 147)

Without some feeling, be it respectful or otherwise, for where your thinking is coming from – and this need not mean that you have any clear idea of where it's going to – whatever you do, or say, or decree will inevitably appear insufficient to many others. This is exactly the charge levelled at the inexperience of youth. Students are discouraged from making rash proclamations based on insufficient evidence or misunderstandings, yet we all have a tendency to make just the same mistakes every day of our lives because, in the absence of detailed reflection on what it means to work within an institutional framework, we take so much on trust. Of course this is not something that the institution of music theory is entirely unaware of. Arnold Whittall, for example, has indicated (in a slightly different context) that



Not to make constant reference to one's awareness of context, or to one's critical response, is not to prevent those features from playing a major part in the analytical process. (1986-7: 20)

However, I would suggest that there is much to be gained by directly considering our critical response and the role that it plays in our approaches to knowledge. In the absence of such reference, the institution of music theory runs the risk of falling prey to a certain blindness, particularly in terms of its pedagogic functioning.

This risk is being countered, to some extent, by current work in the history of theory that aims to reconstruct the context within which Schenkerian epistemology, and by extension that of other approaches, is rooted (see especially the work of Blasius, Cook, Kassler, Keiler, Korsyn, Pastille and Snarrenberg, noted in the bibliography). But until the broader rethinking that this sub-discipline inspires filters through more fully into the day-to-day practices of the disciplinary mainstream, that risk, it seems to me, remains. It is my belief that if you include within your theoretical purview consideration of the interpretational framework, the epistemology, of the methodology (its *a priori* worldview perhaps) then you come to a much clearer understanding of the relative values of a methodology, and also of the institution that supports it; you start to appreciate the assumptions on which your work is based. Part of the usefulness of any particular methodology arises precisely, in my view, from the ability of the practitioner to stand back and interpret its findings according to the *a priori* interpretational scheme that grounds it. By this, I don't mean that one will necessarily accept the validity of such a conceptual scheme, but it's surely valuable to have some awareness of it. I shall return to a fuller consideration of this theme in my closing chapter.

By imposing a universal view of the laws of stylistic history on the subjects of his analysis, Adler effected a unification of musicology with the scientific formalism of the broader academic institution of his day. By stating his method in terms of a systematic, all-encompassing system, set out in tabular format, he also enshrined its positivism (Bujic, 1988: 341). Why, then, should his methodology come to be neglected by the musicological institution during the succeeding years? I think it is fair to say that music theorists would today see Adler's methodological outlines, as they are stated above, either as somewhat simplistic, or else as far too broad, when compared with the alternatives, especially Schenkerism. I should perhaps say, for the record, that I am not against Schenkerism. Since its methodology is very well known (having acquired hegemonic status as the method of choice within the music-theoretical institution), and for reasons of economy, I do not address Schenkerism directly in this thesis (although it clearly provides a backdrop against which much of my analysis is made). But I suspect that since, as I shall argue, its underlying epistemology is not so very different from Adler's, the adoption of the Schenkerian system says more about the prop of institutional adoption than it does about anything inherent, or inherently better, in the method. A primary theme in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) reading of institutions is that, once the processes of an institution take on the appearance of reality through being repeated, the world cannot easily be changed. In other words, once the initial contingency of the epistemological assumptions of an analytical approach are forgotten (or even suppressed) by the theoretical institution, we may also forget that there are other approaches worthy of our attention. This notion of forgetting, I suspect, describes the fate of Adler's systematic musicological methodology as far as the contemporary music-theoretical discipline is concerned.

Seen in terms of their *a priori* schemes (in abbreviated form: 'style' for one, 'synthesis' for the other), the approaches of Adler and Schenker actually appear to have quite a lot in common. Both devised a methodology based (in part) on observations of the score. But both regarded these simple observations as the springboard to a more inclusive interpretation of the music under investigation, to the framing of more general laws about music *per se*, and ultimately about the human condition. It was perhaps unfortunate, therefore, that Adler and Schenker, who was some thirteen years the junior, should have been working in Vienna at the same time. Inevitably, it appears, their relationship was strained.

Adler and Schenker had been on friendly terms for some years. Both had studied with Bruckner at the Vienna Conservatoire and both had studied law at the University. They would therefore appear to have much in common at a personal level. But it seems that, from around 1913, Adler became the target of attacks made by Schenker, and amply documented by Hellmut Federhofer (1985), on 'the leaders in the field of official musicology' whom he accused of 'a lack of artistic intent' (49). The role of Hans Weisse in the gradual breakdown of relations between the two seems to be particularly relevant. Weisse studied both in Adler's *Seminar* and privately with Schenker, and a series of entries in the latter's diary suggest that Weisse was acting as Schenker's agent within the institution, reporting back regularly to his mentor on Adler's *faux pas*. Schenker's attitude towards Adler is worth recording here for several reasons. First, it gives some indication of the extent of Schenker's paranoid alienation from the Viennese institution of the day, in spite of the fact that he desperately wanted to be a part of that institution. Secondly, we may infer from this that Schenker's pupils would have been less than sympathetic towards Adler which might be a clue as to one reason that Adler's methodology should come to be so utterly ignored by music theorists following the export (by pupils such as

Weisse) and adoption of Schenker's theories in the USA. And third, it makes for entertaining reading. Federhofer (1985: 50-52) quotes from Schenker's diary:

Weisse tells some funny and sheep-headed things about Professor Guido Adler.

... my writings are missing from the seminar library. This shows unambiguously that Professor Adler would rather hide them from his pupils.

... Guido Adler is very disgruntled about my attacks on the historians. So I have achieved my goal.

... [Weisse] is beginning to sense what drew me away from composition activity and placed me in the service of the rescue mission.

... Adler opined: The most important thing is admittedly formal analysis, but one cannot and should not undertake formal analysis if the historical contexts are not also expanded.

... [Weisse] declared that Adler had condescended to incorporate my theoretical works in the seminar library! So even this supposed tyrant is in reality only a coward.

Finally, in March 1915, Schenker wrote in his diary that

What was most amusing was how Adler would like to interchange 'causality', 'synthesis', that is, those expressions which I use myself in conversation with pupils and in my works, with the concept of 'style', which he himself is again propagating in his own work. This mania of Adler's is all the more grotesque because he doesn't even yet understand what Weisse, and I, understand by 'causality' and 'synthesis'. (Federhofer, 1985: 52)

Causality and synthesis, as Kevin Korsyn has indicated in his study of the relationship between Schenker and Kantian epistemology (1988), are both infused with Kantian meaning. Indeed Korsyn maintains that even the subsequent generations of Schenkerian votaries have failed to appreciate the full implications of these terms. Yet it seems odd that Schenker should claim that Adler did not understand these terms. As I have indicated, Kant's philosophy was widely discussed in Viennese intellectual society, and Adler was already using such expressions as early as his 1885 article, when Schenker was just seventeen years old. But more than that, it suggests that Schenker had failed, for whatever reason, to appreciate the similar idealistic underpinnings of Adler's theory, and that both he and Adler shared the goal of establishing the formal laws of music. In this way Schenker's polemics against Adler may be similar to those he deployed against Wagner, Kretzschmar and Riemann, which served 'to disguise the frequent affinities between Schenker's approach and those of his opponents' (Cook, 1995: 102). Of course it is likely that the demands of day-to-day pedagogy would have prevented Adler from pursuing the kind of speculative, philosophical vocabulary that Schenker employed; all of Adler's published work was devised with a pedagogical purpose in mind. Schenker, on the other hand, from his position outside the University, enjoyed greater freedom. Indeed Robert Snarrenberg has suggested that, in spite of his longing for institutional recognition, Schenker 'felt most at home ... being a lone prophetic voice in a cultural wilderness' (1997: xvi) while Robert Morgan has indicated that Schenker 'preferred to stress his conceptual isolation and to emphasize the innovative nature of his work' (1978: 72). Certainly the fact that Adler published little theoretical work between 1885 and 1911 suggests that he was preoccupied with the mundane administrative tasks of life as Professor at the University. But we should bear in mind that the extensive *Denkmaeler* project was ongoing throughout this period too. Thus Schenker was basing his criticism on the reportage of a student, which is undoubtedly a dangerous thing to do. Causality

and synthesis in Schenker, and style in Adler, are both part and parcel of the Kantian idealistic quest for the rules and laws, the categories, of formal knowledge. I would not wish to suggest that these terms (causality/synthesis and style) are simply interchangeable. They belong to quite distinct methodological approaches. Yet the point is made again that, without an understanding of the contexts within which terms and methodologies come to be established, there is an ever-present danger that those terms will be misconstrued.

By interpreting the variety, the subjectivity, of style according to a valorised, metaphysical formal objectivity (both at the level of ‘the music itself’ and at the level of its organic historical development), Adler instituted and set the tone for much twentieth-century musicology, including theory and analysis. While, as I have indicated, style and form are not always thought to be one and the same thing, in Adler the apparent differences were ultimately collapsed into the singular substantive category. As a consequence of its subsequent institutionalisation (partly through the effects of Adler’s grand project, but especially through the later reception and Americanization of Schenker’s), the category of form (and structure) ascended to a law-like status: it effectively became the *raison d’être* of the institution. In other words, the institution provided what was a socially constituted law with the impression of universal, natural status; form was hypostatized. In this way, the vocabulary of style was appropriated within the vocabulary of form and came to acquire its comparatively feeble, dirty status, while at the same time performing its foundational function. The paradox of its excess was instituted.

## **2.5 – Formalising the laws of art**

Adler and Schenker shared, at bottom, what I have pictured as a ‘Kantian’ preoccupation with natural musical laws. It may have been significant, in this

regard, that both studied law at Vienna University in the latter years of the nineteenth century when Kantian philosophy was in vogue. Indeed philosophy was a part of the curriculum at that time. Yet all intellectual pursuit in the West, not just that after music, has, it seems, always been a fundamentally juridical or law-based enterprise. In the beginning there was Plato who defined the Forms, the laws, the standards and criteria of correctness, relating to just about every aspect of nature and of human society, including music. The addenda (or footnotes) appended since that time are countless. Kant's search for the laws of knowledge represented an important moment in this story. But musicology, too, in many of its guises, and its current theoretical incarnation is no exception, seems to have been directed, constantly, towards defining those factors which, we presume, actively control or present the music that we perceive, rather than those which, we presume, adequately describe or re-present the music. There is a difference. It's one thing to define an ongoing working method, a 'performative epistemology' (Cook, forthcoming) if you like, through which to engage and capture your perceptions. But it's quite another to make declarations about the terms of that method, to reify them as laws, rules or norms, either for the musical object itself (whatever that may be), for the psychology of your perception of it, or indeed for your analytical representation of it. Yet humankind appears to be a colonial creature by instinct, confident (since Plato) of its rational supremacy, and cannot help but make metaphysical leaps of this sort at every opportunity. The paradox rears its head again: analytical description seems readily to lead to generalisation, and, through institutional adoption, the generalisation comes to be applied prescriptively in the analysis. This paradox is, it seems, no less than a defining attribute of all institutionally based thought. Some discussion of the concept of laws therefore seems appropriate at this stage in order to consider what the framing of the laws of musical style entails.

Those who choose to study the phenomenon of music have long been concerned, primarily concerned, and, it seems, perpetually concerned, with specifying the laws of music. But more than this, many maintain (adopting the Kantian position) that these laws are the means by which the object that is music, that thing “out there”, operates, and in turn determines, controls, or dictates our behaviour as composers, performers or listeners. Thus the twentieth century institution of musicology and theory has been constructed, from Adler’s initial definition and throughout the succeeding years, upon a supposed idealistic rock of juridical foundations. But the specification of the laws of the music that are studied by music theorists, and the presumption by some (most notably Schenker, but also, as we have seen, Adler) of a connection thereby with nature itself, has tempted many towards the presumptuous luxury that their work is in some way validated and afforded status by its evident lawfulness. Consequently we perhaps worry no further (if indeed we ever worried at all) that our interpretations, or analyses, may be forever ‘merely’ provisional, always already history, dated, superseded, partial, even wrong.

The trouble with all human, socially constituted laws, or perhaps the advantage depending on your point of view, is that they are self-supporting. Provided there is consensus among those living within the society or culture regulated by the law, the law stands firm. And so long as individuals resist all behaviour, not least intellectual behaviour, that calls the law into question, or worse actually breaks the law, then the will of the majority will prevail, although whether a law necessarily represents the will of the majority is doubtful in itself. It seems likely that the majority never actually give it much thought, trusting instead to the sage advice of a few individuals who are learned beyond reproach, and worthy of our respect: judges, catholic bishops, and university professors among them! And provided the law doesn’t impinge upon the style (individuality) of our everyday life we have no cause to consider whether it is just in practice. But neither, on the



other hand, do we imagine that the law is fixed so firmly that we, the people, could not change it if we so desired, if there were intersubjective agreement that this should be so. If we couldn't change the law we would surely come to see it as anachronistic, and totalitarian. So, assuming that we *can* change a law, if it is, not fixed for all time in tablets of stone, what must be its basis?

The basis of most law is moral, ethical, and often religious. In general terms, laws are intended to protect the moral well being of an advanced society from the immorality of the infidels, the savages, the depraved, the others. In other words, laws are designed to protect the lawful from the law-breakers. Of course there are degrees of law. All good, law-abiding citizens (the Platonic overtone is significant here) at some time or another find themselves at the fringes of what the law prescribes as decent, appropriate behaviour. And this is where, as the functioning of the law breaks down and we seek to assert our (stylistic) individuality, life often becomes interesting for many: where they "get a kick" from speeding on a motorway, neglecting to declare a tax liability, or otherwise beating the system, when their life may be generally so dull and regimented otherwise. In such circumstances it would seem that laws are necessary to protect the citizens from themselves, which is curious to say the least. And taken in the abstract the whole idea of laws seems patently tautologous. If a law is not fundamentally determined by human nature, why bother defining it in the first place? And why bother trying to enforce it? The answer, I'm sure, insofar as we are conditioned to accept the necessity of civilised society, is obvious even if it's often not that easy to articulate. (It is interesting, in the light of my historical study, to note that social contract theory was an important aspect of Enlightenment thought.) Yet while an ethical, moral, or religious law may provide an appropriate prescription to ensure the maintenance of society and the survival of the human species, it is unclear how a law of this sort might pertain to the work of music.

On the other hand, this kind of socially constituted law does carry over into the discipline of musicology. An academic institution is, in a sense, determined and perpetuated in much the same way as a broader human society, according to its standards (or laws) of behaviour. The laws that an institution defines in this respect have nothing whatever to do with the applied objects of its discussions (for example, music) but everything to do with the political nature of the institution itself. And this is something that, in recent decades, has come to be widely recognised, especially in the wake of such movements as feminism and the dismantling of colonialism. As I have indicated, Foucault's analyses seek to expose the power relations embedded in society's institutions, including academic institutions: 'Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry' (Foucault, 1989: 233). And Edward Said's *Orientalism* 'demonstrates the deep complicity of academic forms of knowledge with institutions of power' (Young, 1990: 127). In other words, academic institutions formulate rules and laws that are then used to hold sway over the members of that institution, and even, to some extent, over the intellectual life of society at large. Such laws also have a habit of growing exponentially.

So laws that are socially constituted, precisely because of their man-made status, are not always fixed. But the laws of nature ought to be different, for human beings purportedly have no control over their operation; they are constant. And this constancy provides an advantage, in practical terms, to those who study the law. The advantage is that, given a well-defined, broadly understood, and constant law, a scientist can predict specific empirical consequences of the law's operation. A physical scientist for example who understands the law of gravity can predict the empirical consequences of that law when a massive object is released from an aircraft thousands of feet above the earth's surface. There is

clearly immediate, life enhancing and perpetuating value to this kind of predictive capability. I am less sure that there is any sense in which this kind of predictive capacity could be thought useful in the study of music. I think I am safe in saying that the laws of music – those preserved by musicologists since the Enlightenment at least – have absolutely no bearing on the behaviour of massive objects, and even if they did, it seems unlikely that their empirical consequences would prove life-threatening. The laws of acoustics may be a different matter of course. Whether the empirical consequences of musical laws are life *enhancing* on the other hand is a moot point, a matter of value judgement, and therefore one more often avoided by musicologists.

Natural (scientific) laws are thus intended to describe the effects, the functions, the implications at work in empirical data, as, we may suppose, are the laws of art. Certainly Adler took considerable trouble to emphasise that his systematic establishment of the laws of style was arrived at inductively. He emphasised too that theory always follows practice. And yet, as I observed, in practical terms his method worked according to an *a priori* system of stylistic laws that formed the basis of judgements about the empirical data that he studied. Although purportedly derived from the data, Adler's laws were really, in the first instance, socially constituted in much the same way as the laws of justice are presumed to be. His laws of style, and the method that they facilitated, were important for his objective, namely the establishment and maintenance of an institutional musicological society. Only through a process of reification, thereby enshrining them within the systematic institutional system, were Adler's laws able to shake off the contingent effects of their social status and assume instead the higher, formal, regulating status of natural law.

In this way it appears that the relationship between the law, the lawful, and the lawless in the world of art is always political, directed towards some institutional

end, and not universally given. This is precisely the conclusion we reached earlier in relation to Plato's reification of his abstract law of Form into an ideal society. Plato had an objective (to establish a better system of government) and his law of Form was directed towards that end. Yet a law of this sort only makes sense seen in relation to the institution within which it is conceived. In musicological terms, this perhaps goes some way towards explaining the reluctance of Schenker's successors to compile the 'more substantial body of evidence' that Arnold Whittall has suggested (1993: 320) might help to persuade sceptics about the value of the Schenkerian approach. A sceptic might, if presented with a significant statistical sample of voice-leading analyses, come to see that the context into which Schenkerian analysis puts tonal masterworks is legitimate. In effect, what Whittall is calling for is the inauguration of a period, to use Kuhn's expression, of 'normal science' which is characterised by 'a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education' (Kuhn, 1970: 5). The difficulty is that the evidence produced by such an exercise would surely be circumstantial. That is to say, it is only evidence in so far as it makes sense within the wider epistemology of the method; as Blasius puts it, 'The evidence of theory is always constructed rather than factual' (1995: xiv). In the case of the laws of art, the burden of proof remains with the prosecutor of the law, and in the absence of material facts there really can be no case. I hesitate to ponder what a material fact for the Schenkerian prosecution would look like, but I think it is becoming amply clear that it is farcical to try to pursue, beyond a certain point, the concept of laws in relation to music; there are far too many mitigating circumstances.

At the end of it all, a law has to prove persuasive and just to a jury of one's peers, which is to say that there is space for interpretation and flexibility within such a legal system, or institution. The institution of British justice, based on the idea of a jury, and copied the imperial world over, has been in existence since the time of

Magna Carta. As such, it has acquired, in the abstract, the status of nature such that its axioms are, to many, beyond reproof. Yet we might do well to temper such a view by recalling that the feudal system was paradigmatic of the social institution at the time of Magna Carta. In short, there is no escaping politics when it comes to the workings of law. A juridical system is always supported by a notion of correctness, or justice, and underpinned by institutional adoption. The institution, in turn, is self-supporting and self-perpetuating via a rhetoric of persuasion (*pace* Whittall's suggestion). And, in a sense, this is a fitting analogy for the way the institution of music theory operates in relation to the laws apparently uncovered by its methodologies. In the absence of an institution to support the rule of law it seems clear that the laws of music could only appear redundant, and ill fitting. Seen in the abstract, separate from their supporting institutions, laws such as the Schenkerian *Ursatz*, the Gestaltist *Prägnanz* (that, in part, underpins the methodologies of Meyer and of Lerdahl and Jackendoff), or Adlerian style categories are, in empirical terms, simply nonsense.

Meanwhile many are loath to regard music in the way we regard language. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, language has been a field of significant influence for many in the later years of this century. One of the main reasons for that influence has been the observation of language's apparent rule-based operation. Thus linguists and philosophers of language, including Saussure and Chomsky, have sought (as we shall see in the next chapter) to abstract and specify the rules of language's operation. This has given rise to notions of innateness, of competent performance, and ultimately to the severely reductive idea that human beings are biologically hardwired to follow pre-rational, grammatical rules of behaviour. And the pot of gold that each of these theories purportedly conceals is an ultimate justification of our long held assumption of formal autonomy in so many areas of enquiry, not least in music. Thus, in more recent years, it has proved attractive to music theorists to pursue the possibility

that, while not semantically transparent in the way that some common-sensibly still presume language to be, music may, in fact, operate according to innate rules of human cognition in a similar fashion to those of language. Blasius has suggested, providing an alternative angle on his role as a founding father of the musicological institution, that Adler's conception of style could be interpreted as an important point on the way to this view:

Adler's agenda is important in that it typifies a new conception of "style" as a musically autonomous and definable quality of the particular piece or composer. Style is taken as a grammatical rather than a semantic attribute.  
(1996: 73, n.36)

Certainly the proceedings of the meeting of the IMS in 1972 are indicative of the subsequent development of this view. While nominally concerned with style analysis, many of the papers presented, including those by Ian Bent (1974), Peter Westergaard (1974) and Leo Treitler (1974), were suggestive of similarities between the theory of Schenkerian levels and the deep structure of Chomsky's transformational grammar. Lerdahl and Jackendoff's generative theory, which seeks a 'formal description of the musical intuitions of a listener who is experienced in a musical idiom [style]' (1983: 1), is perhaps the most sustained attempt to conjoin the theory of the formal (stylistic) rules of music and those of linguistic cognitive competence.

From a critical point of view, the difficulty is that to deny that music operates according to rules of some sort is to suggest that music is essentially unintelligible, or irrational. And if music is unintelligible, then we can hardly justify its position within the university institution. Rather we have to accept it as an *a priori* fact, however synthetic, that music is indeed rule governed. In so doing we of course concur with Kant:

Everything in nature, in the inanimate as well as the animate world, happens *according to rules*, although we do not always know these rules ... there is nothing at all *without rules*. (1988: 13; 9:11)

Yet I have a feeling that at some point the legal, law giving, and rule following mind ceases to be a human (in all the senses of that word) mind. To characterise human experience in this way is to suppress the individualising role of stylistic individuality such that a rule following mind becomes just a dull automaton in the way that a computer is. That is, in choosing to emphasise a rule-based explanation the excessive, animate, vital, changeable stylistic nature of human experience is suppressed. We risk losing the flexibility of changing attitudes, be they long thought out or a matter of whim, which can entirely alter the point of view, the relative position, and therefore the functioning of the system of rules or the judicial laws. In other words, it may be, as I shall explore in more detail in due course, that, in epistemological terms, it is the gaps between and around the rules that are the really interesting locations for study. As Nicholas Cook has put it in relation to Schenkerian epistemology:

The value of Schenkerian analysis, it seems to me, lies in the discrepancies that arise between the analytical representation and the familiar surface of the music in question. (1989b: 132)

Thus it is not simply the sameness, the reiteration and institutional repetition implied by the rules of form, however truthful that may seem from a particular institutional point of view, that is interesting or persuasive. It is not, in my view, sufficient to assume that the stylistic variety of a work of music is automatically explained by analysing it in terms of its formal unity. Rather it may be that it is the points where the rule of formal unity breaks down, where difference enters

into the equation, that are the appropriate concerns of anyone seeking to understand a world such as music. This, I believe, is the realm of style. I shall return to this topic, and to a consideration of the institutional status of 'the music' to which Cook refers, in my concluding chapter.

In this chapter I have explored the formalistic, law giving style of the institution of music theory as it came into being around the end of the nineteenth century. I have traced specifically its perpetuation of a longer, 'transepistemic' pedigree of formal thinking whose roots I have sketched from classical Greece, via Kantian philosophy, to the turn of the twentieth century. The story of the export of Schenkerism around the time of the Second World War, and its subsequent institutionalisation (or Americanization), is well known (and charted by Rothstein, 1990). And while the rules of the Schenkerian methodology became firmer, more law-like (to the detriment of the underlying system of belief), the formal, idealistic ontology remained intact. In the next chapter I shall extend my examination of the theorising style of the academic institution in the twentieth century considering how the next generation sought to develop an apparently new approach, but which effectively perpetuated the traditional formal paradigm. That new approach came to be known as the cognitive turn which, rather than supplanting the rational understanding of form, actually gave it a new, structural face.



## **Chapter 3: Structuralising Style**

### **3.1 - Introduction**

In this chapter I shall be seeking to extend my analysis of the theorising style of the musicological institution further into the twentieth century where it takes an interesting turn. Adler's rational, idealistic collapsing of style into an *a priori* notion of form, and the scientific, systematic, analytical methodology that he deployed to support this, was, according to both Wellesz (1954) and Duckles (1980), the archetypal model for musicology, at least during the first half of the twentieth century. As I suggested in the previous chapter, while the premises of Adler's analytical methodology were not so very far removed from Schenker's, it was the latter, especially through its institutionalisation, or 'Americanization' (Rothstein 1990), during the middle years of the twentieth century, that became the normal or normative mode for analysing tonal music. One might say that the pursuit of formal unity (equally characteristic of other traditions too, such as the motivicism derived from Schoenberg) in music was the driving force behind the desire of practitioners to establish the theorising of music as a discipline within the fold of the academic institution. That the study of style as a category should, as a result, come to be so completely denigrated, and this in spite of the observations that I have made about Adler's philosophical fit with the broader institutional worldview, is curious. In the first issue of the *Journal of Music Theory*, the Princeton theorist David Kraehenbuehl confirmed the extending formalist view of a new theoretical community:

In centuries past the formulation of laws regarding the practice of music was regarded as the highest aim for a musician. ... But in our own time it is the rare musician who knows how his art offers a key to universal understanding. Music theory has become a discipline in stylistic definition, or, still less, a system of nomenclature and classification that offers no valid

laws even regarding music. It is [to] the restoration of music theory as more than a didactic convenience, more than a necessary discipline, as in fact, a mode of creative thought that this journal is dedicated. (1957: 1)

By depicting the objective of this new theoretical community in this way, as a restoration, Kraehenbuehl confirmed the continuing presumption of the ethical necessity of the formalist view. He also ensured the continued subsumption, through a political (not rational) motivation, of the theorising of style under the formalist concerns of the theoretical community. That this attitude led inexorably to a breaking away of music theory from music history in the establishment of the *Society for Music Theory* in 1977 was, as we shall see, a cause for concern for many. Yet, in spite of this apparent retrenchment and hardening of view, throughout this period, due particularly to work in the study of language, the understanding of form (what Adler called style) as a purely rational entity began to be supplanted by an understanding of structure as an entity belonging to the realm of human cognitive capabilities, especially its language use. The terminological switch at a methodological level from form to structure was indicative of this underlying epistemological shift.

As I have characterised it so far, the style of institutional thinking has been rooted since Plato in a fundamental conception of form as an all-embracing, lawful, rational entity. One of the instruments of that conception was language. But during the twentieth century an epistemological shift occurred which saw language become the universal category of human cognitive capability. No longer was language deemed merely a function of, and reflection of, the structure of the mind. Rather, for many linguists and philosophers, the structure of language now became the very structure of the mind itself. Needless to say, it seemed logical to practitioners in other disciplinary fields to suppose that, if the

structure of the mind was revealed by one human symbolic, discursive activity (language) then it would also, equally, be revealed by others, not least music.

In the discussion that follows, I shall be seeking to indicate what I perceive as the uninterrupted importance of structure (at the expense of the individualism of style) in the institutionalisation of all academic disciplines during this century. Before focussing on the impact of the linguistic turn in musicology and theory, I shall first range quite quickly over the fields of linguistics and philosophy (for these two are closely allied during this period) with a view to pointing out some of the defining moments of that continued institutionalisation. These moments were clearly important influences on the development of the musicological institution during this period. As such, they will provide an important intellectual background against which my subsequent analysis of two musicologists, whose work addresses the cognitive-linguistic function of style, may be cast.

### **3.2 – The cognitive turn**

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure died in 1913 leaving no complete written record of his life's work. His *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) was cobbled together by two of his students from notes taken during lectures, which must, to say the least, cast significant doubt on the book's accuracy as a record of Saussure's thinking. Yet Saussure was to become one of the most influential figures in the intellectual life of the twentieth century. Some of the terminology employed by Saussure in his theory of the sign was new, but much of it was not. It is well known, for example, that Saussure conceived of a sign as being a combination of a signifier and a signified. Indeed these two terms have acquired almost legendary status as buzzwords of the twentieth century. Yet, taking a broad view, they might be regarded as little more than substitutes, analogues for two words whose longevity, if we recall our readings in the previous chapter, is

the underlying subject of this thesis: empirical form (as perceived by the senses) and rational idea (the mental concept).

Seen in this way we may wonder quite why Saussure's theory was so enthusiastically received. I suspect there are two main, but related, reasons for Saussure's posthumous popularity, both of which characterise in my view the general demeanour, the style, of twentieth century thought. Firstly, the way in which Saussure's theory was set out for publication – its lecture/textbook format – made it possible for others to pick it up and start applying it without too much concern for the process of selection (the rationalisation and reduction) by which Saussure had arrived at it. That is to say, any account of research activity, and this thesis is no exception, is forced by its symbolic and institutional nature to take up a singular position, often ignoring or suppressing doubts and feasible arguments for an alternative point of view in the process. By contrast, it seems reasonable to suppose that the fragmentary nature of Saussure's text left ample space for its interpretation and subsequent institutionalisation.

The second reason for Saussure's popularity was his preoccupation with language; he was an applied linguist by profession, not a philosopher like Kant or Plato. Indeed he imagined that linguistics would, in due course, replace philosophy as the 'queen of the sciences'. And language is the site that marks the difference between philosophy in the twentieth century and that which had gone before. Whereas form had previously been understood in terms of a higher plane of rational mental being, or mind, whose instruments included language, in the twentieth century language was taken to be the very form of the mind itself. This change is absolutely fundamental to an understanding of the generalised concept of form in intellectual history, and, as we shall see, of style in musicology, in the twentieth century. This is so not least because the turn towards language was an attitude that was largely created by philosophers on the one hand, and adopted by

applied practitioners in all classes of academic disciplines on the other. We should note, though, that even as the interpretation of form (as structure) changed, the underlying notion that form and mind were inextricably linked did not. The main difference, following the linguistic turn, was really one of emphasis. Form no longer represented an ideal realm divorced from human activity. Now form was believed to correspond to (was structurally coextensive with) human cognition, and as such could be approached directly by the emerging science of psychology.

What made Saussure's approach significant, as it were, was his determination that the relationship between form and idea – signifier and signified – is not natural, or universal, but simply arbitrary, albeit constantly and dynamically so. In Saussure's view there is no specific something inherent in either the form or the idea that dictates the necessary applicability of word to concept. Rather the signifier acquires its formal status according to convention or agreement among its users; it is *a priori*. Neither is that relationship autonomous, for it depends on the location of the linguistic sign within the wider network, or system, of language *per se* wherein it is afforded a value in relation to the other terms in the system before it acquires direct signification, or referential reality. That is to say, a sign is determined in part by the other signs that it is not, or by difference. As we shall see in the next chapter, Saussure was to prove an important influence on the differential, deconstructive tendency of later twentieth century thought.

In establishing the systematic nature of language Saussure introduced another pair of terms: *langue* and *parole*. The former refers to the code, the innate substrate of understanding, which is shared by all speakers of the language, and the latter to the individual speech acts, or performances, through which the language is externalised. And this is interesting, because Saussure appears to be reintroducing, formalising even, the dualistic notion of style that I described in

my opening chapter. On the one hand, *langue* would seem to correspond to the formal idea of style as something concrete, shared and immutable, while on the other, *parole* seems to imply the common-sense notion that style is individual and variable. Yet, in much the same way that Adler employed a dual methodology in the service of an ultimate aim to establish a single, unified and indivisible stylistic formalism, so Saussure was aiming at the formal specification of the grammar against which linguistic performance could be judged. At the end of the day, the stylistic particularity and subjectivity of *parole* is overrun by the structure of *langue*. Style is but an epiphenomenon of linguistic structure. Or, as Pierre Boulez has put it, in relation to the language of modern music, style is 'the inevitable consequence of language' (1971: 354-5). Style becomes grammatically insignificant in terms of the structure of language, which, as far as the institutional structuralist view is concerned, means that it's insignificant, period.

Immediately before Saussure, philologists had been mainly preoccupied with etymology and the historical (and often organic) development of the meaning of specific words within a language. In order to facilitate the scientific study of language as a system, which could make analysis of meaning itself possible, Saussure contrasted this 'diachronic linguistics' with 'synchronic linguistics'. In the latter, the regularities of a language system could be studied in a relatively stable historical state – or 'slice' – without reference to its evolution in time. It should be noted that Saussure maintained that diachronic study remained a relevant and necessary component of the linguist's activities, a point which is invariably 'forgotten' (in Nietzsche's sense) by subsequent theorists. Charles Seeger (1977: 1) observed that this was also a forgotten aspect of the view held by Guido Adler in his methodology for a *Musikwissenschaft*. And if, as we have seen, Adler's positivistic portrayal of his systematic musicology in terms of two distinct halves led to its ultimate disintegration, Saussure's may have been similarly flawed. But the ultimate aim of synchronic linguistics was the

construction of a 'grammar' which would describe (as opposed to determine) the elementary processes by which meaning was generated in language. This was achieved by reducing the language slice to its constituent components such as phonemes, syntagms and morphemes, examining each of these as separate (stylistic) entities and correlating them with each other with a view to uncovering regularities (invariably organic in nature) which could indicate the rules of the grammar. In this way the project of structuralism could be seen as an immediate extension of the formalist approach such that 'Much structuralist analysis is formalist in the sense of separating form and content and giving form priority' (Raymond Williams 1976: 258). This kind of work is, as we have seen, precisely what was done under the rubric of 'style analysis' in the study of music and art in the late nineteenth century. It is interesting to note that Saussure's work was, in terms of its contemporary intellectual setting, not so exceptional. From this angle, quite why Saussure's work should have become so widely read and so hugely influential is not clear. And that Schenker's theory, given his animosity towards Adler's ideas that appear to share so much with Saussure's, should have latterly been reinterpreted in terms of post-Saussurean cognitive linguistics (which I describe shortly) is ironic to say the least.

As it happened, Saussure's theory, and not least his bent for binarisms, would prove agreeable in some degree to just about every theorist, not only in linguistics, throughout the years following the publication of his *Course*. Thus we may suppose that Saussure's thought represented a point of overlap between the older concept of form and a modern concept of structure. Certainly it was as a consequence of the construction of language as system that the venerable word 'form' began to be replaced in the literature by 'structure'. In much the same way that Adler had taken style to describe the laws of the formal organic relationship of one music to another, so structure was now taken to refer to the systematic relationship of linguistic parts according to a grammar. It seems that the shift in

parlance from form to structure was performed as much for political as for practical reasons. That is to say, it was performed in order to mark an institutional separation and distancing from an earlier approach. Form, as we have seen, had become associated in philosophy with a metaphysics of mind that involved a transcendental view of nature and its organic development as an *a priori* higher authority beyond the material world of mankind, but begetting that world. Saussure, like Aristotle and Kant, concluded that such a transcendental authority could well be the origin of all things, including language, but since such an origin is essentially unknowable there was little point expending energy in its pursuit. Where Saussure departed from Kant was in his assumption that language is itself an *a priori* category. For Saussure language was prior to thought, and nature was but an effect of human interests. This is effectively a direct reversal of Plato's view, but perhaps the logical extension of the Renaissance desire to extend the control of humankind to nature. Thus the term 'structure' was introduced in order to distinguish this new attitude from the old understanding of form. During the years that followed this systematic view of linguistic structure began to find its way into the academic institutional establishment in the form of structuralism, an approach that rapidly ascended to the status of meta-narrative, encompassing such apparently diverse discourses as philosophy, psychology, linguistics, literature and music.

Structuralism, according to Fredric Jameson, attempts 'to rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics' (1972: vii). Structuralism is the name given to the intellectual movement that developed Saussure's linguistic model, as outlined previously, into a more general science of signs – a 'semiology'. The fundamental idea in structuralism, derived from Saussure's distinction between *parole* and *langue*, was that it was possible to pass behind the stylistic surface events of the object under examination, be it language, anthropology, politics, or media, in search of its concealed, underlying structure of signification. This same



possibility was exploited in the structural recasting of Schenkerian theory following its export across the Atlantic. In its explicit and uniform concern for this underlying, deterministic system, structuralism was essentially anti-subjective. Structuralism was thought to have nothing to do with meaning in terms of individual intention, and everything to do with the identification and description of the irreducible rules or codes at work within a self-contained system that itself made meaning possible. By employing Saussure's binary terminology – *langue* and *parole*, signifier and signified, synchronic and diachronic – structuralists believed that they could demonstrate how disparate and apparently unconnected phenomena were in fact related by shared underlying structural patterns.

Perhaps the most impressive attempt to apply this linguistic scheme to an ostensibly non-linguistic topic was Lévi-Strauss's anthropological analysis of myth and ritual. It is interesting to observe that, although an anthropologist in name, although empirical research was an important aspect of his work, Lévi-Strauss was not an empiricist. That is to say, he did not believe that societies or cultures could be understood simply by observing their functioning in the raw. In essence what Lévi-Strauss believed was that behind the, often considerable, surface differences of the world's cultures and nationalities there exist deep regularities or rules of behaviour. Most readily approachable among these deep structures are laws and taboos about elementary themes such as incest, fratricide, and cannibalism. These were especially obvious because they invariably gave rise to the myths that he found to be commonly invoked by the cultures in question. And a myth, he said, is 'language functioning at an especially high level' (1978: 210). Thus we can see that, in spite of the change in vocabulary, the structuralists were, in their penchant for seeking out the laws and rules that they took to explain human behaviour, continuing the ancient project of rationalising

form, albeit that 'the structuralist theories of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss represent a distinctively modern reformulation of this notion' (Tunstall 1979: 56).

In *Structural Anthropology*, for example, Lévi-Strauss sought to indicate how the principles of human thought rest on a universal logic, a basic, pre-rational logic, that is shared by human beings the world over. By studying the myths of South American Indian tribes (by breaking the myths down into individual 'mythemes') he believed that he could extract the structure of this universal logic in an unadulterated form, such that it was uncontaminated by western technological preoccupations. The conclusion of Lévi-Strauss's analysis was that while no two myths related precisely the same thing, they revealed a series of basic shapes (including nature/culture, animal/man, gods/men, death/life, wild/domesticated, and raw/cooked) which he took to form the universal shape of humankind's cognitive structures. In short, the binary concepts that structure the myths of human civilisations were thought by Lévi-Strauss to represent the structure of the minds that made them. Rather than recounting any particular tale, myths were, in Lévi-Strauss's view, 'devices to think with, ways of classifying and organizing reality' (Eagleton 1983: 104).

Lévi-Strauss's anthropological structuralism is but one facet of the broader school. As I have indicated, the influence of structuralism spread freely across disciplinary boundaries during subsequent years. Jacques Lacan came to structuralism from the direction of psychoanalysis, Roland Barthes from the direction of literary and cultural criticism, Jean-Jacques Nattiez from the direction of music. Countless others have likewise searched for the hierarchies that would betray the immutable cognitive structures underlying their own interests as historians of society and politics, as critics of the arts, and as philosophers. But structuralism continued to be a source of research within linguistics too in the hands of Chomsky. Albeit that the rubric 'structuralism'

never really gained favour in the United States, there can be little doubt that Chomsky subscribed in principle, if not in interdisciplinary allegiance, to a worldview in many ways akin to that of the European structuralists. He sought to extend Saussure's notion of a descriptive linguistic grammar, arrived at by empirical observation of linguistic performance, by contrasting it with an ideal, non-empirical level of 'deep structure' and innate competence. In this way Chomsky hoped to account for the way in which an ideal speaker could use and understand grammatical sentences without ever having experienced them before. The crux of his approach was a generative grammar, essentially a finite set of rules for sentence transformation, which constituted the speaker's linguistic competence. Chomsky's transformational grammar enabled a whole new programme of research aimed specifically towards the reduction of the rules of sentence construction to the smallest possible number. It also enabled the interdisciplinary studies of the musician Fred Lerdahl and the linguist Ray Jackendoff (1983) who aimed, similarly, to reduce the rules of music's formal construction. But beyond this Chomsky linked his generative grammar, somewhat backwardly we may imagine, to a pre-Kantian view of language as a window on the mind. Whereas most twentieth century structuralists took it that language was *a priori* to the human mind, and in some sense gave structure to that mind, Chomsky apparently found the older metaphysics more persuasive.

So in Chomsky we appear to have come full circle. Linguistic structure is still regarded as a straightforward consequence of some higher cognitive structure. And yet, for all the various epistemological nuances, it would seem that the preponderance of form and structure shows, in essence, the continuing resilience of intellectual activity to change. We should look now at how the transformation from form to structure, from rational to cognitive, manifested itself in the style of the musicological institution in the post-war years of the twentieth century.

### 3.3 – Leonard Meyer: style and music

During the years following the publication of Saussure's text, perceptual psychology was taking a new turn too in the form of Gestalt theory. Before the rise of Gestalt approaches, psychology had been concerned primarily with analysis of isolated sensory stimuli, a scientific approach that took no account of human values in constructing perceptual reality. Helmholtz described the psychologist's method at this time in this way: 'we have to leave the realm of the senses in every explanation of natural phenomena and turn to the unobservable objects that are determined only by concepts' (quoted in Cook, forthcoming). In a departure from such approaches Gestalt psychologists took what they thought to be a major step forward in aiming to account for the mental processes involved in perception of whole configurations of stimuli, or forms. A perceptual form was thought to be a mental structure that corresponded directly with, indeed arose from, the structure of the brain processes involved in perceiving that form. The experiments of the early Gestalt psychologists – Wolfgang Köhler, Max Wertheimer and Kurt Koffka – indicated that perception of form does not depend on direct perception of the individual elements making up that form. As I indicated in the previous chapter, these were issues that were under discussion in Vienna in the latter years of the nineteenth century, and there are clear overtones in this terminology of Aristotle's metaphysics and of Kant's critical philosophy.

These psychologists set about formalising their theory of Gestalt perception by describing the innate, universal procedures by which they imagined structural 'wholes' were formed in perception. The axiom underlying these procedures they called the law of Prägnanz, which Koffka tersely phrased thus:

Psychological organisation will always be as 'good' as the prevailing conditions allow. In this definition the term 'good' is undefined. (1935: 110)

The aim of a 'good' organisation is closure of a gestalt unit. In musical terms a unit might consist of a motif, a phrase, a period or such like. Indeed in later years music came to be seen as an ideal illustration of Gestalt mechanisms in action, and its principles, if not its theoretical basis, have determined several approaches to the psychology of music since the 1970s, as described in Deutsch (1982) and Sloboda (1985). The aim of Gestalt psychology, then, was to bring an understanding of perception in terms of whole, organically unified configurations. Wholeness, as the name implies, is the entelechy of the Gestalt approach. And Gestalt approaches were to have a strong influence on a particular player in the institutional theorising of music during the post-war years. That player was Leonard B. Meyer.

Meyer is, without doubt, the scholar of music who has contributed most during the last generation to our understanding, or at least, our interpretation of musical style, and the style of music theory. His work has often been maligned as being unscientific, insufficiently focussed, lacking in academic rigour, and this despite its bias towards the language of information theory, Gestalt psychology and cognitive science, a language which makes, at times, for difficult reading. Meyer demands much of his reader. Clearly, a good deal of the criticism to which Meyer's work has been subject has been generated more by differing ideological positions, that is, assumed positions of institutional authority and correctness, than from specific oppositions to what he has written. Meyer has often found himself at the periphery of the musicological institution as a result of his refusal simply to yield to the security of the formalist institution. For example, referring to the effects of the establishment of the Society for Music Theory (to which I referred above), Meyer said, in the quixotic style that must, at times, have antagonised many within the serious theoretical institution:

The time has come, this walrus thinks, for music theorists and psychologists to consider the claims of culture, and of history. (1991: 251)

Meyer published five books between 1956 and 1989. His first was the much acclaimed *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956), a book whose perennial reprinting testifies to its continued popularity. Winthrop Sargeant may not have been overstating the case when he said, in a review for *The New Yorker* (and these words are reproduced on the cover of the 1961 paperback reprint): ‘The realm of thinking about music will, I feel, never be quite the same again’.

Certainly Meyer’s first book broke new ground in the field of musicological theorising and has been an essential text for students of music theory and interested lay-people alike for more than forty years. This drew extensively on the terminology of Gestalt methodology, describing what gap-filling, good continuation, closure and countless other Gestalt terms might mean in relation to the perception and analysis of musical melody. Several more volumes followed. *The Rhythmic Structure of Music* (1960), which Meyer co-authored with Grosvenor Cooper, extended his early thinking about melodic analysis to the domain of rhythm. *Music, The Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture* (1967), which comprised a selection of essays previously printed in various journals and addressing diverse topics of cultural theory. The main topic of *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (1973) was further demonstration of his expectation-response approach to the analysis of melody. And his tour-de-force, *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* (1989) represents a summary, a combination and a final statement of ideas mooted and variously developed in his previous books. As such, I propose to examine some of the themes that underlie this tome, since these exemplify his method, taking the widespread familiarity with Meyer’s other work as read.



Meyer prefaces *Style and Music* with the following confession:

I am not one who yearns for "oneness". Rather I delight in distinction and difference, in contrast and comparison, and especially in paradox and the discomfiting of received opinion. (1989: x)

This immediately throws the issue with which I have been primarily concerned in this thesis to the fore. Meyer recognises quite clearly that his particular methodology does not fit comfortably within the received wisdom of an institution, as typified by the words of David Kraehenbuehl noted above (page 98), that has worked so hard to unify itself behind the rubric of structure. Rather, Meyer has always claimed that his own approach was to seek to go beyond the hegemonic institutional approach to analysis in terms of abstract structure to examine the contextualising, individualising functions of culture and history. His interest in the concept of style is clearly a reflection of this urge. Unfortunately, for all his declarations otherwise, Meyer was, in my view, constrained by that institution rather more than is generally realised. Meyer summarises his method as

modestly empirical. What is observed - the data - is the culturally qualified behaviour of human beings in specific historical/cultural circumstances. (x)

While I shall take issue with the 'modesty' of Meyer's empiricism, and again with certain aspects of his method, it is difficult to doubt his motives. We should note too that, in seeking to account for human behaviour as a constituent part of musical meaning, Meyer was expressing a trend observable in ethnomusicology at that time. We might suppose that, by expressing this view from within the theoretical mainstream of the musicological institution he was, in a sense, opening a way for a new generation, a whole new style, of musicology and

theory that will be the subject of my next chapter. It is perhaps most useful to read *Style and Music* in this light.

Meyer opens the first chapter of *Style and Music* with a definition that forms the basis of his subsequent analysis:

Style is a replication of patterning, whether in human behaviour or in the artifacts produced by human behaviour, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints. (3)

But Meyer's definition strikes one as a rather bland hotchpotch incorporating a rehashing of a well-worn term (patterning) from the old Gestalt psychology somewhat paradoxically conjoined with a dash of behaviourism. Even after several readings, you are not entirely sure that you can agree with it, but on the other hand you can't actually disagree either. What exactly is Meyer getting at? He seems to be straddling a boundary between the rational and the experiential, between the formal and the behavioural, a boundary that, as we have seen, a lot of energy has been expended in erecting and preserving. One might readily accept replication as one aspect of style. Certainly, in the light of the definitions discussed in my first chapter, and in view of Adler's methodology, we might be led to doubt the possibility of calling something musically stylistic if it was a one-off, never to be repeated phenomenon. Similarly, as musicologists, we would probably have little problem, given the longevity of the formalist/structuralist attitude that I have described, with the idea of style as a set of constraints. The idea that we are able to make a choice from among those constraints might be harder to swallow for some. As we have seen, it was part and parcel of the linguistic turn that grammatical rules were biologically contained and constraining, a matter of nature as opposed to nurture, and, as such, well beyond the purview of human choice. Meyer's emphasis on choice appears to rehabilitate



precisely that aspect that the institutional valorisation of objective structure has, I have argued, sought to subsume: the subjectivity of style.

It is that bit in between the parentheses in his definition, ‘whether in human behaviour or in the artifacts produced by human behaviour’, that provides the wherewithal for Meyer to relate the structural features of the musical object, a category to which he clearly remains committed, to the subjective, human, stylistic features of individual learning and culture. And this indicates some bravery on Meyer’s part, for he appears to be saying, quite unequivocally, that he regards the actions of human beings – their behaviour, their psychological energy – in producing and perceiving a musical artifact (a ‘work’) to be at least as important as the abstract characteristics (the structure) of that artifact. (There are obvious parallels here with Nattiez’s tripartitional scheme). And this, of course, runs contrary to the mainstream orthodoxy of music theory as an institutional activity in the twentieth century that seems to have been directed explicitly towards suppressing this view under the narrative of structuralism. In expressing a partially behaviouristic, socialistic, cultural view of music, Meyer appears to be assenting to precisely the view that music theorists at least since Hanslick have been trying to disavow. Maybe we should just dismiss the entire definition, indeed the entire work, as the ramblings of an old, and somewhat eccentric, man. But this would be to dismiss an essential aspect, an undercurrent perhaps, of all of Meyer’s work, and the aspect which, arguably, is the most durable and influential in terms of the New Musicology that is the subject of my next chapter. It could be that that old man, no longer needing to ‘get on’, no longer needing to worry about tenure, about paying the mortgage, or about all those other mundane, practical reasons that academics do what they do, now finds himself in an area of neutrality in relation to the musical institution. Yet, as will become clear, for all the bravery of his attempt to depict musical style, at least in part, in terms of a culturally constructed phenomenon, Meyer does not, perhaps cannot, escape the

dominating institution of structure. Thus the behaviouristic aspect of his concept of style comes to seem little more than a decoy, an adjunct to the valorised position of structure. At the end of the day, Meyer is as committed to the idea of the defining cognitive structuralism of the work as any other.

For good or ill, choice is the pivot on which Meyer chooses to balance his theory of musical style. On one hand, he believes that a composer's compositional choices create a style, while on the other hand, an examination and explication of those choices enables the construction of a history of music. But how can Meyer be sure, how can he demonstrate that a particular choice was made by the composer? Of course the only way to effect such a demonstration is to fall back on the structural evidence of the musical work. And this is precisely what Meyer does, although he muddies the water by discussing the difference between present, conscious subjective choices in the act of composition and choices that are forces of habit. Thus Meyer indicates that choice may be in some sense subjective, but it need not necessarily or always be the exclusive property of an individual. This is a difficult idea to reconcile. As I indicated in Chapter One, it is commonly assumed that stylistic choice is a freedom enjoyed by an individual, and one might have assumed that it was this that Meyer was indicating in his definition of style. Yet Meyer chooses to stress instead the structuralist tenet that humans, in spite of what they may believe, are not always free to choose but are constrained by the particular rules of a linguistic (structural) grammar akin to that discussed in the previous section. In other words, Meyer's theory of style (as a replication of patterning in human behaviour that is grounded in a system of constraints) is itself grounded in the ages old notion of autonomous form, hypostatized as a cognitive construction, that effectively serves to delete the role of the composer. Just as Adler rooted his theory of stylistic development in a rational notion of organic formalism, so Meyer roots his theory of style in a notion of structural cognitive constraints. What Meyer fails to observe is that the

structural system of constraints, against which the variegated choices of style may be measured, is itself but a particular style, a particular point of view, with no greater, intrinsic claim to certitude than any other. It is the institutionalisation of the structuralist/formalist view that has provided the prop for its claim to certitude.

In addition, Meyer's notion of style incorporates exactly the same paradox of circularity that I discussed earlier: style defines the 'choice' even while the choice determines the style. Thus the way in which a style arises, the manner, is obviously in the purview of the composer's choice, but so, says Meyer, is the matter of the style. To his credit, Meyer directly observes the paradox:

Our knowledge of style ... is antecedent to and determines the relational traits we regard as significant and choose to include in our analysis. (58)

At the broadest level, a style is constrained by a repertory of alternative structural/functional relationships, that is, those permitted by the structure of human perceptual capacities and by cultural (institutional) agreements. This seems to me to be much like the store of linguistic competence that is attributed by Chomsky to each and every individual. Meyer's notion of style is constructed upon what is effectively an abstract, intangible grammar, existing somewhere 'out there' (or rather deep 'in there') and which only becomes concrete in an individual act of instantiation. Those who would study that grammar can work only on the shadow projected by it, and never on the grammar itself, in much the same way that Plato's Forms are never directly observable. In the contemporary parlance of cognitive linguistics, the grammatical deep structure of cognitive competence is assumed to give rise to the linguistic performance being analysed; performance, in turn, paradoxically confirms the existence of the deep structure. As such, Meyer's notion of style is irrefutable in much the same way that Roy

Harris (1981) has indicated Chomsky's notion of deep structure to be. Yet, whereas Chomsky would deny *tout court* that the subject is in any way necessary to the working of the grammar – a correct sentence just is correct – Meyer, as we have seen, continues to be preoccupied in his discussion with the role of subjective intervention, or choice, on the part of the composer and/or the listener.

Meyer is working here on some very unsure foundations, as though he is allowing the ground of rational institutional certainty to open up beneath him as he crosses back and forth between the controlling influences of the mental and the behavioural. At one moment we think we can pin him down on the one side, while at another he appears to be working at the other extreme. But within such an environment of uncertainty, when one is feeling for the way, there is always the temptation to alight, finally, in an area in which the terrain is well marked. In this case, that area is, inevitably, the structural, work-centred concept of style with which music theory has all but exclusively concerned itself during recent years: a concept grounded in Meyer's case by the presumption of psychological necessity and validity. Meyer succumbs to this temptation (often in a big way) and at times appears to contradict much of what he has already worked to create. That is to say, while he has created the circumstances for a reintroduction of the subject into music theory, he continues to seek the security of the objective work as a reflection of cognitive competence. Thus he has invested much energy in the construction of an elaborate analytical system which, at bottom, offers an abstract structural description of the work that is in many ways much the same as other preexistent systems, but hedged around with experiential statements. To get a clearer idea of how the contradictions appear in Meyer's work we should consider, briefly, the analytical system described in *Style and Music*.

Style analysis must, of course, begin with description and classification.

(10)

Taking his lead from Adler (and La Rue) Meyer jumps in with a vengeance in constructing a complex scheme for description and classification which employs and systematises some traditional ways of thinking about music, but develops them into an elaborate and well-defined, and somewhat demanding, analytical approach.

His system for the description and classification of musical style is hierarchical in nature. At the highest level he locates what he calls the style of a culture (such as 'Western Music' in the Grout-type textbook terminology). From this pinnacle, descending the hierarchy, we alight on the style of an epoch (for example, the baroque), the style of a movement (impressionism), individual style (Mozart) and the style of a work (sonata). So far this corresponds exactly with our popular understanding of music's stylistic history since Adler. Indeed Nattiez offers a hierarchy of 'stylistic relevance' very similar to this (1990: 136), and Rosen (1976) bases his theory on the same notion. These are presumed to be real, tangible categories that both ground our individual analytical activity, and make for a clear and readily interpretable understanding of the work of our peers, whether they be analysts, historians, programme writers, or broadcasters. The terms of this hierarchy of style are well-learned, not simply by the members of that culture which goes by the name of musical, with its attendant technical resources and lexicon of terms, but also by those who regard themselves as interested listeners, as amateurs, but as appreciators or connoisseurs perhaps.

Having defined his hierarchy of style *per se*, Meyer proceeds by elaborating upon the terms (choices and constraints) of his original definition and locates these (inevitably it seems) within a hierarchical framework to which he as good as attributes, thanks to their replication, a normative status. The constraints on musical style are, he says, psychological and cultural, as opposed to physical or

biological, and as such must be inferred 'from observable data' (10); and again, 'proximities and disjunctions on which groupings are based are discovered in the data' (39). I wonder immediately just how modest Meyer's empiricism really is: are there actually degrees of empiricism in relation to a musical work conceived within an institutional context? It seems to me that his statements could be taken as evidence of the same deep-seated commitment to the traditional structuralist epistemology (the style of the institutional discourse of music theory) that I have sketched throughout this thesis. In other words, he's actually looking, like Adler and Schenker, for 'things' (structures) that are assumed *a priori* to be there in the music (or rather in the mind of the ideal musical listener/composer for, in Meyer's case, the assumption is expressed in terms of a cognitive interpretation). Anyway, these constraints operate on three different levels: that of laws, that of rules, and that of strategy.

Laws, Meyer believes, are transcultural and universal. These laws are (as one might have predicted) the constraints on human perception embodied in the terms of Gestalt psychology to which Meyer retains a lasting commitment. Laws may be subdivided into primary parameters (such as melody, rhythm and harmony which are syntactical, and closural by convention), and secondary parameters (such as dynamics, tempo, sonority and timbre which are statistical, and closural by nature). In practical terms, analysis of laws comprises observation of Gestalt operations such as similarity, proximity and continuation. Thus Meyer looks for the connection produced by the proximity of notes, the disjunction that causes separation, and regular patterning that continues to a point of stability. These are procedures that are well known from his earlier publications. Rules (Meyer's second level) comprise intracultural constraints that 'specify the permissible material means of a musical style' (17). Here Meyer includes the culturally sanctioned rules of harmony, counterpoint and voice leading which are, of course, the institutional formalisations of traditional analysis.

Yet it is the third level of constraints, that of strategies, that is most interesting. Meyer reckons that strategic constraints provide a potentially infinite palette of alternatives that are available directly to the composer at a detailed compositional level, and that, consequently, this is the level at which most style changes occur. This is a confusing idea; as it slides between the various levels of the hierarchy Meyer's concept of style cuts across both the objective and the subjective understandings of style that I outlined in my opening chapter. If we admit, for example, that a system of constraints actually offers a potentially infinite number of alternative choices, then it's hard to see how one might describe the system. Meyer attempts to describe (formalise) it according to yet another hierarchy, this one encompassing a range of *strategies* from the level of a dialect (which may be shared by several composers), through an idiom (which is an individual's preferred strategic repertory), to intraopus style (which is formal replication within a single work). But the very idea of strategy seems to work contrary to the idea of constraints; it implies that the contingency of an individual strategic choice retains a degree of freedom above, or beyond, the structural system of constraints. Meyer is clearly keen, through his avowed interest in the diversity rather than the formality of style, to allow an individualistic notion to enter his discussion. Yet, by seeking then to explain that notion in terms of a unifying hierarchical structure, the stronger, itself constraining, structuralising impulse ultimately comes to the fore. At the end of the day, Meyer is seeking to formalise, to systematise, a structure that may be employed to explain (and therefore tame) the subjectivity of style.

So how does Meyer's theory fit into a musicological institution whose defining characteristic is its idealism of structure? That Meyer himself sees that institution in this way, and also that he recognises the longevity of the view, is indicated by his description of analytical formalism as 'Platonism in sheep's clothing' (195).

Yet, as I have observed, for all his confessions to delight in difference and diversity, Meyer's thought remains irrevocably tied to the hegemonic structuralism of the institution. For all his efforts to work around the sway of that institution, Meyer is unable to prise his own thinking free of its tradition. The human behaviour for which he seeks to account is theorised (as his opening definition of style implied) on the basis of its artifacts; and Meyer theorises those artifacts in the idealistic, structural, way that I have indicated is the style of institutional thought. To take his greatest influence, that of Gestalt psychology, it is clear that the notion of wholeness (of Gestalt) is prior to the elements whose goal it may be to combine to create that whole. For Meyer there is no question that such wholeness is the goal, the entelechy, and that this wholeness is a defining feature of, or is even coextensive with, his understanding of style across its multiple hierarchical levels. Structural wholeness is thus an ideal, *a priori* category for Meyer, just as much as it was for Adler, for Schenker or, indeed, for Schoenberg. In Meyer's case, that that wholeness arises from the cognitive activity of an interested listener – an ideal listener – as opposed to being a reflection of some pre-existent, natural category is simply a sign of the times in which Meyer was working. As Jean Piaget observed: 'Gestalt was the most spectacular form of psychological structuralism' (1971: 53).

Indeed Meyer's 'ideal listener' seems to me to represent for music what Piaget referred to as the 'epistemic subject' that, in structuralism, replaced the actual, human individual subject and led subsequently to Foucault's famous depiction of the erasure of man, the actor (or listener, or composer) 'like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea' (1970: 387). If, as Meyer claims, he is concerned with understanding the role of human behaviour, then one might reasonably expect his work to be primarily interpretative of, and empathetic to, the vagaries of that behaviour. Yet my overriding impression of Meyer's work is that it is, and indeed that it aims to be, scientifically predictive and, ultimately, controlling..



While starting from a position that ostensibly has the potential to invoke a deconstruction of the opposition that the institution maintains between theory and history, Meyer proceeds to impose, to use his terms, a higher-level, valorised structuralism. Just as in Adler's, so in Meyer's work there is a professed recognition that the schism of theory and history is methodologically illogical, and that it reveals a political rather than a necessary, practical impulse. But by anchoring the scope of style (a term which he clearly adopted because he recognised its potential to blur the boundaries of this schism, and also of his own system) so firmly in the grounding unity of the concept of structure, Meyer short-circuits the effect of the deconstruction even before it has been given time to work. In short, in spite of his best efforts, Meyer falls under the epistemological effects of the same acontextual formalism that he sees continuing 'to flourish, trumpeting *forte* through the realms of academic music theory' (345).

Yet for all its apparent contradictions, Meyer's work has been influential on some and thought provoking for many. Indeed he fostered a whole generation of students who, like him, profess to be interested in exposing and rethinking the intellectual shortcomings of the institution of music theory. Chief among those students is Eugene Narmour.

### **3.4 – Eugene Narmour: style as cognitive science**

Eugene Narmour's career in musicology has been an interesting one from the point of view of an analysis of the formulation of the institution. It began with what came to be seen by many as an onslaught on a mode of thought that was rapidly gaining hegemonic status at the time, a status that it continues to enjoy and preserve in many quarters today. That mode of thought is, of course, Schenkerism. What makes Narmour's onslaught especially interesting is that it came from within the institution. Whereas attacks on authority tend to come from

the excluded or the disenfranchised (the diary entries of Schenker, recounted in the previous chapter, add weight to this assertion) Narmour had enjoyed a privileged musicological education, an education that culminated in his study with Leonard Meyer at Chicago.

Narmour's first book, *Beyond Schenkerism*, was published in 1977. Its initial diagnosis of 'the need for alternatives in music analysis' was more than enough to raise the hackles of many within the institution of the day. Indeed, with hindsight, we may have some sympathy for these people who were actively, often passionately, and honestly (if sometimes a little blindly) seeking to further the cause of music theory as an institutional discipline, to raise its profile, and to make it a respectable bedfellow for the longer-established academic institutional disciplines. The means by which they were doing this was by initiating the attitude called theory and analysis, complete with all the scientific and scientific paraphernalia that this attitude summons. That Narmour's book was published in the same year that the Society for Music Theory was founded (as described by McCreless, 1998) seems especially poetic. Yet, to be confronted by a book with so audacious a title, one so potentially damaging to their effort, and that from a person only recently received into the fraternity of scholars, must have been somewhat irritating. And this must have been especially so when they had just begun to believe that the voyage towards their goal – the security of institutionalisation – was at last underway. This irritation was reflected in the emotional terms with which contemporary reviewers responded to the book's publication. Of course, whether the discipline of music theory was underway and actually making way during this period is hard to say. But at least most of the perceived chinks had been caulked and it was no longer foundering. Rather, it seemed that the music-theoretical restoration, heralded by David Kraehenbuehl back in 1957, was at last becoming reality.

Now if some had been tempted to regard the acerbity of Narmour's title as the charm of youth, there can have been little doubt in their minds about the ferocity of his subsequent attack. At the outset Narmour stated his aim in *Beyond Schenkerism* to be an explicit attempt 'to refute the principal beliefs of Schenkerian theory' (ix), hence David Beach's assessment of it as 'a thoroughly negative contribution' (1987: 174). To this end, Narmour outlined three main areas that concerned him in the Schenkerian edifice: its apriority, its idealism, and its severe reductionism. Each of these, Narmour maintained, was present in the fundamental Schenkerian concept of the *Ursatz*.

The *a priori* error that Narmour discerned (1977: 18) also encapsulated his other criticisms. The error concerned the way in which the reasoning of Schenkerians appeared to jump from empirical generalisation (the severely reductive aspect) to assertion of a specific law of operation (the idealistic aspect). (We might note that this is essentially the same paradox that I observed in relation to Adler's and Meyer's theorising of style.) That is, while the *Ursatz* started life as a working hypothesis, gleaned through careful and patient empirical observation of the way in which a sample of musical works were constructed (and ultimately thought meaningful), in analytical practice it appeared as a basic musical truth. What concerned Narmour about this process of reification was that at no time was any attempt made to examine seriously the structural foundation of the first, or *a priori*, generalisation. And this being so, the logical validity of the generalisation – and therefore of the law derived from it – must be suspect. In Narmour's estimation, the *Ursatz* was metaphysical through and through and, as such, came from the same, defective mould as the psychological *Gestalt*, the biological *will*, the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*, and the Chomskian *grammar*. In each case an epistemological assumption had been made about the ability of some 'deep structure' to afford order and control, and this assumption was then turned

around and promoted to methodological status. In Narmour's estimation this resulted in circular reasoning; adjectives effectively became substantives.

It seems likely that this apparent paradox would not have concerned Schenker himself, given that he was steeped in the contemporary post-Kantian (Hegelian) philosophical tradition of the day. But the attitude of the Schenkerian disciples (such as John Rothgeb) as they sought to institutionalise his thought really ought to have been more guarded because they were transplanting the system from one epistemological context to another one. Instead, they appear to have accepted from the start that the Schenkerian *Ursatz* really was a universal law of nature. Yet Narmour's attempt to probe the rationality of the Schenkerian analytical system was greeted with hostility and branded irrational, even foolish, by those who occupied a position of hegemony within the music-theoretical institution. Certainly there was truth in Joseph Kerman's later assessment that 'One cannot help feeling a sense of overkill about Eugene Narmour's full-scale attack on Schenker' (1985: 86). And Arnold Whittall's comments were representative of contemporary reaction to the book's publication:

There is no good reason why Narmour could not have stated and illustrated his own theories fully without bringing Schenker into the picture at all. Nevertheless, ... he clearly feels that an adequate start can only be made to his own edifice if he builds into its foundations the rubble of theories so strongly advocated elsewhere. (1979: 97)

While we may sympathise with Whittall's conservative view, he didn't indicate what the corresponding 'bad' reason why Narmour felt it appropriate to bring Schenker into the picture might have been. *Beyond Schenkerism* was only secondarily about stating Narmour's own theories. Its primary, albeit negative, goal was to dispel the myth that Schenkerism was a complete, consistent, and

truthful system of thought by refuting its principal beliefs. Certainly the terms in which Narmour expressed his refutation betrayed an incipient totalitarianism that would find fuller statement elsewhere (a subject to which I shall return shortly). Yet while an outright refutation may have been an impossible goal (precisely because an institutional hegemony, as I have already observed, makes refutation impossible), the critical insight that Narmour's book brings to a retrospective understanding of the formulation of an analytical paradigm, even while it was being formulated, is perhaps considerable. Certainly it seems altogether less radical twenty years on. That contemporary historians of theory (see page 82) have likewise (though more sensitively) sought to dispel some of the myths of Schenkerism seems to indicate that Narmour was opening an interesting line of enquiry.

By questioning the foundations of the discipline, then, we may suppose that Narmour was pre-empting the kind of work that has latterly become fashionable. I suspect that Narmour's original touting of this volume as the first in a series explicating an alternative to Schenkerism was little more than good academic etiquette. The rules of engagement in traditional academic discourse demand that any criticism be followed up by positive, well-argued recommendations for tweaking or replacing the object of that criticism. It seems reasonable to suggest, though, that criticism such as Narmour's can have a heuristic value that need not necessarily lead the critic in person to provide replacements for the object of that criticism. Certainly the time span between the publication of Narmour's first book and its successor (some thirteen years) would support the notion that Narmour didn't at that time have any clear idea what a realistic alternative to Schenkerism would look like. (His few intermediate publications chart the gradual development of the alternative.) In itself that is no reason to think that his criticisms are any less convincing. But the interpretations of people like Beach and Whittall are influential in the creation of reputations. Thus Narmour's book

became one of those musicological texts, in a way like the work of both Adler and Meyer, that most have heard of (perhaps by reputation), but few have really taken the time to examine seriously.

But that's not the end of the Narmour story. During the years since the publication of *Beyond Schenkerism*, Narmour seems to have worked continually to refill the brush of antagonism with which his critics painted him. Not content with shooting down the high priest of the musicological institution, by couching his subsequent work in the often impermeable languages of psychology and brain science Narmour has gone on to befuddle even those who had been sympathetic to his cause. As a result, his location within the mainstream musicological institution has become increasingly marginal so much so that he is now in the curious position of being at the same time both highly regarded by psychologists and all but outcast by musicologists. And this has been compounded by the totalitarian tendency in his work to which I just referred. For while his original title had democratically stressed 'the need for alternatives', plural, it has become more and more the case that what he is actually recommending is a single alternative, namely his 'implication-realization' model. As Kerman has put it, 'Beyond Schenkerism lies a new monism: Narmourism' (1985: 87). But worse than this, the passage of time between his first and second books appears to have led him to forget the details of his own diagnosis of the need for alternatives.

The implication-realization model received its first statement in *The Analysis and Cognition of Basic Melodic Structures* (1990). To say that a first look at this tome is daunting is something of an understatement. As David Butler commented in review, 'The book's mass and complexity will intimidate some readers and may simply wear them down' (1992: 251). What makes it all the more daunting is that this is but the first volume in a series of four which promise to explicate, if that's the right word, the implication-realization model in full. To date only two

have seen the light of day (1990, 1992). Towards the end of *Beyond Schenkerism* Narmour had declared that 'The great problem facing us in the formulation of an implication-realization model – as I see it – is the lack of a good psychological theory of meaning' (1977: 213). In his later statement of the implication-realization model he clearly believes that he has created a good psychological theory. Quite whether his good psychological theory is also a good musical theory is a moot point.

Very briefly, Narmour's implication-realization model addresses the implications for continuation that are contained within, or generated by, musical structures. These implications relate both to the 'idiostructure' of the piece (the implications generated within and by the piece in performance, its internal structure) and to its 'style structure' (the implications generated by the stylistic, contextual structure of the piece, its external structure perhaps). Like Meyer, Narmour is attracted by this objective/subjective, theoretical/historical disparity. Inevitably there is some contradiction between the implications generated by these two structural domains such that any particular implication is rarely fully realised. However the *potential* for realization – perhaps a Schopenhauerian (or Rieglian) 'Will' to realization – remains, and this potential carries with it a force that is perceptually strong, stronger possibly than the realization itself. While full realization results in what the Gestalt psychologists called 'closure', partial or 'non-realization' results in 'non-closure'. And as long as the moment of full closure is suspended or deferred, the perceptual drama of a piece remains mobile. Stated thus, the implication-realization model sounds eminently plausible, indeed it is not so very far removed from certain other 'post-Schenkerian' theories, including Lerdahl and Jackendoff's generative theory (1993) which is similarly allied to perceptual psychology. Reading between the lines, in Narmour, as implicitly in Adler and Meyer, there is a suggestion that the meaning of a phenomenon such as music lies somewhere in the gaps between and around the theory that is proposed to

explain it. But, following through the totalitarianism of his view, Narmour seeks to fill those gaps with his own theory. One might say, to extend Whittall's attractive metaphor, that Narmour tips the rubble of his own theory into those gaps.

The problem with Narmour's approach is that, in spite of his protestations to the contrary, it isn't at all democratic. He doesn't give you any "take it or leave it" option whereby you can pick the bits you like and ignore the bits you don't. This is odd, given that he accepts that Schenkerian theory is not all bad. When reading Narmour, it seems that you must either accept his entire edifice (or at least go along with it for pedagogic reasons), or else you must refuse it all. There's not really any halfway house as there might be, for example, in Meyer's work. As such Narmour's approach represents a most extreme version of the cognitive turn. Narmour is telling you that this is the way it is. Period. And if it's not, then it should be. This prescriptive authoritarianism is nowhere more obvious than in an article published in a *Festschrift* in honour of Leonard Meyer that Narmour co-edited with Ruth Solie (1988). In the article 'On the Relationship of Analytical Theory to Performance and Interpretation', Narmour begins by declaring that

The ultimate aim of any theory is not utilitarian or didactic but explanatory: good theories of music illuminate the various syntactic meanings inherent in a given musical relationship. (1988: 317)

At first reading the words perhaps seem harmless: a gentle introduction to an innocuous subject. Yet this sentence embodies a tendency that is far from innocuous for here we see that Narmour's thinking has performed a U-turn. In *Beyond Schenkerism* Narmour had spent a considerable amount of time explaining his reckoning that Schenkerism was faulty because of its *a priori*



error. To recap, Narmour noted that the *Ursatz* had come into being as an empirical generalisation while in analytical practice it had assumed a natural, law-like status. It had passed from being a utilitarian or didactic construct or metaphor, a way of imagining a piece of music in analysis, to serving an explanatory function. And this he thought was bad because the validity of the *Ursatz* had become an unsupported epistemological assumption. Certainly, the way Narmour describes it, Schenkerism would seem precisely to fit the bill outlined by Kraehenbuehl in 1957. Yet it now appears that Narmour's original criticism of Schenkerism was not so much directed at its *a priori* but rather, as some might have suspected, this aspect of his criticism was simply a veil for his belief that Schenkerian theory was insufficiently watertight. In Narmour's words, it was not a 'good' theory because it could be shown to be refutable through logic. As such, we must now interpret Narmour's theory of musical implication-realization as being, primarily, a theory of science, rather than a theory of music. It does not seek to *interpret* music, to offer a conditional, subjective appraisal open to argument in the way that Meyer couched his theory. Rather, it seeks to *explain* it, objectively, as an unconditional fact. And it explains it in terms of psychological (cognitive) processes that are universal, and that is, of course, simply the latest (and perhaps most extreme) manifestation of institutional structuralism. As we saw above, in his theorising of musical style, Meyer recognised and sought, democratically and candidly, to valorise the subjective, differential aspect of style. But, for all his good intentions, this was ultimately found to be conceptually ungrounded and I concluded that Meyer's style of thinking (his theorising style) in fact remained rooted quite firmly in the traditional institutional structural epistemology. Yet what had been treated 'modestly' by the teacher, comes to be treated quite immodestly by the student such that, in Narmour's hands, the structuralist style of institutional thought is expressed in a most exorbitant, totalitarian way.

Thus Narmour maintains that the *sine qua non* of any theory is that it be falsifiable (as opposed to refutable) in Popper's sense; that is to say, a theory cannot be proved to be true, but it may be demonstrated to be false. Yet it appears that Narmour does not believe that his musicological theory can be falsified in any substantive sense so long as it is allied to a scientific psychological theory. In forming such an alliance it effectively avoids the possibility of logical refutation like that he had performed against Schenkerism. It may be, however, that the psychology will be falsified, indeed Narmour actually offers in conclusion to his *The Analysis and Cognition of Basic Melodic Structures* some suggestions for experimental topics to be carried out by psychologists in the pursuit of such falsification. As a result, no doubt, of the interdisciplinary nature of the theories produced by Meyer, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, and Narmour, it became fashionable to look to psychology for support for (or falsification of) this or that point of view. Indeed there has been a widespread belief that psychology holds the key to a complete and impartial understanding of the human condition, including its artworks. It is appropriate therefore to conclude this chapter with a brief examination of the style of the psychology of music for, as a part of the same academic institution, it has much in common with music theory.

### **3.5 – The institutional psychology of music**

Musicologists seem increasingly to be looking to psychology for clarification of, and justification for, the ways in which they think about music. Indeed, one of the routes by which I came to the subject matter of this thesis was an assumption that psychology could provide just such a justification. Since there can be no ultimate assurance that our metaphysical theory leads us anywhere near the experiential object of music, we are tempted instead to locate our theory in the more 'scientific' certainties of psychology. But, in thinking in this way, we

invariably fail to appreciate that musicology and psychology share the same stylistic background – namely their structural, institutional foundationalism. A recent television advertisement (for British Telecom) highlighted the extent of this foundationalism. It portrayed a proud mother relaying the news of her son's exam success to her husband with the words 'He's got an -ology'. The implication of the message was that if it's got an "-ology" it must be good. My point is that, given their shared foundations, it is surely inevitable that psychology and musicology (theory) will readily provide each other with mutual support. That is surely the whole point of the academic institution.

The psychologist Carol Krumhansl has devoted significant energy to trying to discover, at the level of methodology, common ground between music theory and psychology (see Krumhansl 1991 & 1995 for references). Indeed she has carried out a series of empirical tests aiming to substantiate both Meyer's and Narmour's theories. But Eric Clarke (1989) has issued a warning to 'mind the gap' when seeking to draw comparisons between the musical theory and the psychological theory. Clarke maintains that the aims, concepts and criteria of the two fields are not directly comparable because the disciplines evaluate the results of their theories in different ways. In short, they are looking for different things. And perhaps at the level of method Clarke may indeed be right. But what I have been seeking to facilitate throughout this thesis is the possibility that, at the level of its epistemological background, in terms of its theorising style, all institutional thought is tarred with the same brush. As Krumhansl puts it,

Psychology as a basic science is patterned on the physical sciences in its concern with experimental control and quantification and its search for general principles underlying complex phenomena (1990: 3).

It is precisely through the assumption that there are 'general principles underlying complex phenomena' that institutional thought, as I have traced it here, finds its apotheosis. It should, then, come as no surprise if experiments such as those suggested by Narmour, and carried out by Krumhansl, do indeed support his theory. In fact it might come as a surprise if they did not, for Narmour's entire edifice has been thought within a single, unified, structuralised mindset. Musicology and psychology are not mutually exclusive modes of thought. Rather, they are parts (albeit relatively autonomous parts) of a higher thought, a meta-thought if you like, which I have characterised as structuralist institutional thought.

It is often said that the camera never lies. Yet we see more and more these days that it can be made to lie. The truth of an image depends completely on, or is relative to, the point of view of its observer, and therefore on the photographer's ability to manipulate that point of view. In much the same way, we assume that the psychologist (or rather the psychology itself) cannot lie because the laws and rules employed are hard and fast, they are scientific and empirical, not adrift on a sea of emotion (style) in the way that music is sometimes presumed to be. Yet if we look closer, psychology, and all institutionalised thought, is afflicted by exactly what Narmour diagnosed as a defect in Schenkerism: institutional thought always transforms adjectives into substantives; its overriding impulse is idealistic and this leads invariably towards the reification of hypotheses; it always seeks to reduce the variegated subjectivity of the phenomenon of its study to some basic structural constituents. This being so, neither the musical theory of implication-realization, nor the psychological experiments designed to test it, can avoid being styled by that institutional thought.

I turn next to a new phase of theorising style that has collided head on with the structuralist paradox of the music-theoretical institution and has specifically

addressed the issues of scientific sameness, replication, and objectification that have concerned us here: New Musicology.

## ***Chapter 4: Deconstructing Style***

### **4.1 – Introduction**

In the preceding chapters I have sought to indicate how the pedigree of the academic institution has been marked by a particular style of thought whose longevity is quite spectacular. That thought has been characterised by a rationalist, idealist formalism, and a corresponding cognitive structuralism, that seeks to explain and reduce (or tame) the subjectivity (the stylistic excessiveness) of the phenomena on which it is turned. The preponderance of this attitude in twentieth century musicology and theory was observed at two key points. It was first observed in relation to Adler's conception of musicology as a systematic branch of academic study. Secondly, it was observed in Meyer's analytical theory of style that was, in part, a reaction to the establishment of music theory as an activity distinct from that of music history. I indicated that, in spite of his preoccupation with the terminology of style, Meyer's work continued to reveal the deep-seatedness of the formalist/structuralist epistemological style, a style that led, perhaps, to the totalitarian statements of Narmour. But I suggested, too, that Meyer's overt attempt to qualify style, at least in part, as something more than what analytical reduction made of it, was evidence of an awareness that the structuralist approach was missing something. This view positioned him, in epistemological terms, at the periphery of the analytical mainstream of music-theoretical institutionalisation as it developed during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and allowed him to be a herald of the disciplinary realignment that was to come in the form of New Musicology.

In this chapter I shall be concerned with exploring the style of musicology in the recent past and I shall be seeking to specify something of the nature of the institutional phenomenon that has come to be known as 'New Musicology'. In these recent years new methodologies have been developed, in what we might

call a backlash of sorts against the objectifying, *a priori* reductive epistemology of the academic institution that I have characterised in the previous chapters. As we shall see in this chapter, a collection (they do not really form a unified body, although their numbers are growing rapidly) of practitioners within the musicological institutional fold have been concerned to re-examine what the particular style of structuralist institutional knowledge entails. Some have been working towards what they regard as better, more ecologically appropriate styles of knowledge production about music. Others have simply sought to supplant one mode of knowledge production with another, often without due regard for the differences, or otherwise, between the two.

As far as music theory is concerned, while the influence to re-examine has come very strongly from outside the immediately theoretical purview of the discipline, theory has been the definite target of much New Musicological criticism. As we have seen, it seems often the case that the discipline of musicology comes upon new ideas some time after its institutional affiliates. The flow of ideas has also invariably been only in an inbound direction, in spite of Jonathan Dunsby's curious protestations to the contrary (1994: 80). As Michael Broyles has indicated, 'musicology has played a virtually negligible role in intellectual history' (1983: 191). There are, no doubt, good reasons why the broader academic institution has been unable or unready to adapt musicological models. These reasons are surely connected with the ontology of music, and especially with what Jim Samson calls 'the contingent nature of music itself' (1999: 47). In the terms of this thesis, we might posit that this contingency arises precisely in the resistance of style to be contained by formalist discourse. By way of apologia, as music theorists we would protest that, in order to understand, in all its intricacies, the knowledge that musicology generates, it would first be necessary to spend many years in its service. But this is, I think, in terms of the proposition I have offered here about the shared, institutionalising outlook of the

academic disciplines, a parochial and mystifying view. In a way, it serves only to perpetuate the myth of musical impenetrability that the very institution of academic musicology seeks, in part, to supersede. In fact, precisely because of this shared outlook, and as the example of the psychology to which I referred at the end of the previous chapter bears witness, it should be quite conceivable that a working understanding of musicological methodology could be readily attained by those working beyond its immediate disciplinary borders. Such an understanding would be directly comparable to that acquired by musicologists who supplement their work with interdisciplinary study in psychology, or art history, or literary theory. On the other hand, we may interpret the lack of outbound influence in terms of chronology: it's easy to see why a discipline that has already been swept by the tide of, for example, structuralism, should have little to gain from musicology's somewhat belated demonstration of its effects. So, before looking at the re-examination of the music-theoretical discipline by the new musicological one, we should look first at the source of its influence. In so doing, we shall see how the ethical status of the structuralist pedigree of the broader academic institution has been called into question.

## **4.2 – Deconstruction**

Establishing the meaning and ramifications of new modes of thought is a difficult and often precarious affair. This is so for a number of reasons. First, our temporal proximity to that thinking is an immediate and weighty obstacle to our ability to extract the key features of the thought. Often a new style of thought involves a variety of different approaches whose features potentially conflict with each other. Second, and this perhaps locates the source of the first obstacle, it is difficult for us to comprehend, or get our heads around, these new ways of thinking because we are practised in executing precisely the kinds of thinking that these new approaches seek to displace. As will become evident in this



chapter, this has been, on occasion, a particular difficulty for music theorists to overcome. Third, particularly when we are looking at any new thinking that is adapted from some other discipline, we come up against new terminology, redefinition and such like that obscures our understanding even more. Certainly, as we have seen, this has been a problem for the musicological reception of Narmour's psychologically orientated work. Fourth, these new modes of thought invariably invite us to reconsider our existing knowledge, and our approaches to knowledge production, in terms not only of method and epistemology but in terms also of ontology. We are required to consider not just how we go about producing our knowledge, but also what the status of that knowledge, of all our knowledge, is in relation to the subjects and objects of that knowledge. In other words, we are required to consider what our knowledge is actually knowledge of, and, as practitioners in our own small disciplinary field, this is not something that, until quite recently, we have been used to contemplating out loud.

The various alternatives to the traditional, hegemonic, institutional mode of thought that I have characterised through the course of this thesis have assumed a number of labels. Thus terms such as poststructuralism and postmodernism have entered the vocabulary of academic discourse. Each term is intended to describe something special, different, differing about the new thought, and to set it apart from, beyond, and after existing modes of thought. But, as will become apparent, these terms are also intended, by some, to create an intellectual separation, a distance, or a partition from the existing thought.

In the previous chapter we observed that a basic aspect of Saussure's thought was the concept of difference. To recap in brief, Saussure maintained that linguistic meaning was dependent on a system in which each word was defined by its not being another word, or by its difference. As we saw, there is a very clear 'family resemblance', to use Wittgenstein's terminology, between the approaches of

Saussure's linguistic progeny and the various techniques for musical analysis (neo-Schenkerism, Nattiez, Meyer, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, and so on) that seek out the deep structural regularities, the formal rules, that ground the elaboration of a perceivable musical surface. And just as Saussure influenced the development of structuralist thinking, so he has been a major source of influence on poststructuralism. But whereas structuralism was based on a specific implementation of Saussure's ideas, poststructuralism is built on the idea, contrary to the earlier reception of Saussure, that the static system of language, *langue*, does not, indeed cannot, delimit meaning. Rather, poststructuralists maintain that the logical upshot of what Saussure took to be a delimiting concept of difference is actually infinite difference. In other words, poststructuralists are not content to analyse the meaning of a phenomenon in terms only of its structural, systematic underpinnings, but choose instead to focus their attention on the idea that meaning arises from, or exists in, an infinite process of difference.

The poststructural approach of course has interesting ramifications for the idealisation of linguistic structure as cognitive structure. If, as the structuralists tell us, we exist through language, and we then follow the poststructuralist view of language as infinite difference, then we can have, as individuals, no singular presence, no permanent point of existence. And it was this idea that led the poststructuralists, parodying their structuralist forebears, to proclaim not just the death of the author, but the end of humankind itself as a distinct, real category (Foucault's erasure). To poststructuralists, meaning is not then a simple, common sense matter of self-evident, objective, structural existence in the present. Rather, meaning and existence are observed in an infinite oscillation, a play between presence and absence, between being and not being, between happening and not happening, between reality and not reality, or perhaps between structure and style. But presence and absence are not to be thought of as exclusive polarities,

as binary opposites of the kind that a structuralist might assume. The two are not part of a single hierarchy in which one term is to be privileged or valorised over the other. Thus poststructuralism does not seek to establish non-structure (style) as an alternative to structure. Poststructuralism, like its predecessor, involves from the start, *a priori*, a choice about style, about choosing to pursue one mode of knowledge production as opposed to another. Where this *a priori* choice differs from the former is that its mode of knowledge production does not presuppose anything about the knowledge that will be produced. In music-theoretical terms, a poststructural approach does not, or intends not to (although I am wary of making prescriptions in this regard), posit as a matter of fact that analysis of non-structure – be that analysis of social function, gender issues, narrative function, historical contexts, word painting, or whatever – is in any sense more appropriate, more accurate, more necessary, nor even more human than analysis of structure traditionally conceived. Rather, it aims to recognise that, like love and marriage perhaps, you cannot have one without the other. Meaning is, at best, incomplete if we ignore one or the other. At worst, it is simply not factual; it is a fiction.

As I have indicated, a number of different labels have appeared to describe this new approach to understanding. Poststructuralism is perhaps the more useful label from the point of view of this thesis because it indicates a temporal relationship to structuralism, and therefore to formalism, if not a precise intellectual relationship. Of course it may also be that its assumption of structure as a term of reference also affords it some status in institutional terms; perhaps it can be made to fit more easily into our existing modes of thought.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, is perhaps, as it stands, less helpful as a term of reference. This is partly because modernism itself is not a clearly defined moment in the history of ideas. That modernism has its roots in Enlightenment thinking, which has been characterised by the rejuvenation of archaic classical

ideas, is hardly a firm beginning. But it is also because the reception of postmodernism has seemed to suggest an implicit value judgement that diminishes the importance of the entire body of western thought built up since the Enlightenment. Rather than simply coming after modernism, postmodernism, when effected by the likes of Jean Baudrillard (of whom more shortly), appears to a modernist mind to be nothing more than a nihilistic overthrow of all modernist, rational thought. As such it is an especially awkward term to employ. In addition, postmodernism has already acquired in popular circles certain connotations as being less than serious, even irrational and anarchic, and its acquisition of these labels has not always been unfair (for further discussion see Habermas, 1987 and Norris, 1992 & 1993). Within the portmanteau terms of poststructuralism and postmodernism there exist a variety of styles variously referred to as intertextuality, hyperreality, dialogics, and deconstruction. I do not wish to suggest that these are simply alternative names for a single methodology, just as I do not wish to suggest that they are rooted within a single academic school. But what these styles share is an idea of difference, of play, of indeterminacy and contingency as, and at, the situation (for want of a better word) of all understanding. I propose, therefore, to sketch very briefly the implications of just one of these styles: deconstruction. And I do this with the express aim of laying out the terrain so as to facilitate an analysis of the effects of the introduction of deconstruction into the style of institutional music theory in recent years.

Deconstruction commenced in the 1960s in the writing of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. I use the word 'commenced' in preference to the words 'born', 'founded', 'was conceived', 'has its roots' and so on after careful consideration. For, as my earlier discussion suggests, deconstruction is not best thought of, in my view, either as an event, a moment, or a method. As such it has neither a single point of origin nor a telos. Rather, deconstruction is more usefully

imagined as a sensibility, a style of thought, whose only concept is its perpetual resistance to static, systematic conceptualisation in any traditional sense. That this, of course, makes it a most uncomfortable bedfellow within the university institution has often given rise to irritable squabbling. As such, during the 1970s and 80s, deconstruction was the locus of tenure wars in institutions across the USA, and it engendered bitter battles among the dons of Britain's oldest academic establishments. Yet for all its controversy, it is likely impossible to present a coherent, unified summary of what deconstruction means when applied in analysis. However, formalisation of this sort is exactly what a thesis demands, so I must seek to explicate its main features while remaining mindful that, by pinning it down, I am effectively reading deconstruction against the grain. Indeed, even to adopt the word 'deconstruction' as a singular reference is effectively to exclude, or at least to reduce, the sense of deconstruction as an activity and a circumstance.

But in seeking to make of deconstruction, albeit temporarily, a specific methodology, there is a precedent, for deconstruction may be defined in terms of two distinct colours. The first is its philosophical colour, mixed and re-mixed, mainly by Derrida himself, over some thirty years. The second is its literary colour, mixed by literary critics in the USA, especially at Yale during the 1970s and 80s by the followers of such figures as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman. I should add that the latter has not been an especially pretty colour, comprising rather liberal quantities of traditional black and white, while at the same time trying to masquerade as a new glorious technicolour. Thus in my discussion we may find that, by painting deconstruction as a monochrome, locatable, manageable methodology, we may at times come closer to expressing the literary-critical colour of deconstruction than the philosophical. We should at least bear this possibility in mind.

Derrida's work has ranged across a number of the areas upon which I have alighted in my inquiry into the style of institutional thought in this thesis. His work has addressed the writings of Plato, Kant, and Saussure to name but a few. And he has addressed them specifically in terms of first principles, the *a priori*, what he calls their location of, and reliance upon, an idealised, 'transcendental signified', such as a god, a Cartesian 'self', an author, a listener, or a mind. Thus Derrida has aimed to probe, to unsettle, to constantly rethink, the existing pattern (or stylistic pedigree) of Western thought which is characterised by this *a priori* logic of identity. As is well known, Derrida refers to this logic as a 'metaphysics of presence' and by this he means to indicate that traditional, institutional knowledge is built upon an unanalyzable, unassailable assumption. As laconically stated in Descartes's 'Cogito ergo sum' (and as we saw in my second chapter) Western thinkers have assumed since ancient times that meaning and reality are self-evident, beyond reproof, if they are identified by, with, or even in opposition to the consciousness or the thinking mind of a subject. Derrida's theorising of the metaphysics of presence therefore addresses precisely the issue with which this thesis is primarily concerned. He is not interested in dismantling, rejecting or otherwise criticising the results of applied analysis within a discipline. As I have already indicated, such results are made inevitable by the *a priori* institutional assumption as to what kind of meaning, what kind of knowledge should be the upshot of any analysis. Instead, Derrida looks behind and beyond a writer's methodology to examine that very assumption about knowledge. Yet he does not simply say that such knowledge is wrong, he does not simply seek to replace such knowledge with his own version. Derrida takes great pains to stress repeatedly that it is impossible and pointless simply to overturn or displace the entire history of ideas and of philosophy. For example:

The passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way*. (1978: 288)

Derrida believes that one must work within and through what already exists, watching for those areas within a body of knowledge that betray the assumptions on which its history and its institutionalisation is based. Derrida looks for those areas in an edifice where the writer has sought to contain and to suppress those assumptions. He looks for places where the purported rigour of the definition and conceptualisation of terms breaks down. Such holes he calls *aporia*, and he seeks them out so as to problematise them, and to allow them to play a positive part in the construction and the creativity of knowledge. The activity of deconstruction as Derrida envisages it is not then merely a nihilistic enterprise that seeks simply to subvert all claims to knowledge. Nor does it aim simply to reverse a binarity such that one term, or one approach, is merely substituted for another. Rather it is a rethinking and re-examination of the suppressed paradoxes and contradictions that circumscribe the body of what we understand as knowledge. And this rethinking is as relevant to (and consequential for) the field of music theory as it is to all the disciplines gathered under the umbrella of institutional knowledge.

I do not propose to rehearse here what are by now well known blow-by-blow accounts of the process or method of 'classic' (categorical) Derridean deconstruction (for such accounts see Norris 1982 & 1987, Culler 1983, and Eagleton 1983). By learning about deconstruction in this way we tend to learn mainly about the totalising structuralist epistemology that deconstruction works to displace. Indeed it is my impression that the easiest way to learn about the methodology of structuralism itself is to come at it from the point of view of a preliminary understanding of deconstruction. What is important in terms of the argument of this thesis is the different intellectual attitude, the differing style that

is deconstructive thinking, and the way in which this impacts on traditional forms of theoretical and analytical discourse. It should by now be clear that I do not believe that deconstruction is usefully thought of as just another analytical appliance in the music theorist's toolbox, one that can be used to de-construct (or analyse) the preconceived object of music. As I have already indicated, this would seem to me to presume from the outset both the factual and truthful existence of such a structure and further the possibility of de-constructing it. There is however a growing body of examples of musical analysis that seek to make just such a tool of deconstruction.

#### **4.3 – Music and deconstruction 1: the appropriation**

In 1987 Robert Snarrenberg published an article in which he attempted to apply a new analytical method to Brahms's *Intermezzo* Op.118 No.2. His method was based on what turns out to be a superficial reading of that 'thing' which Derrida has called *différance*; as Raymond Monelle observed, Snarrenberg 'consistently misunderstands' (1992: 316) Derridean terminology. I suspect that Snarrenberg's misunderstanding of *différance* is the result, at least in part, of his reading of those guides to deconstruction (Norris and others) that seem to categorise the features of a deconstructive analytical methodology. While such a guidebook may serve a practical pedagogical purpose as a convenient and manageable introduction to a topic, there is clearly a significant danger that, by taking and applying its précis of a complex method, we risk missing or misconstruing the broader ramifications of the method. This seems to me to be one of the most common failings of institutional pedagogy: we get so bogged down in applying the details of a particular method that we have too little time remaining in which to consider the broader intellectual picture. For example, one would be loath to say that the clutch of guides to musical analysis that were published in the UK around 1987 (Bent, Cook, Dunsby & Whittall) in themselves provide sufficient



grounds for a replete understanding of the nuances of the various methods of musical analysis that they describe; that is quite evidently not their point. Likewise, there is a clear danger that the various guidebooks to the deconstructive method can induce a similar failure of reflection, leading one to suppose that one has acquired the tools of the trade and is thus equipped to start practising that trade. But it seems to me that all too often critics and fanatics alike base their interpretation of deconstruction on such popular accounts of its method, reading them as instruction manuals. In this regard, Robert Samuels's (1989) response smoothly indicated the error of Snarrenberg's way:

Snarrenberg's use of new terms acts as a subterfuge for precisely the mode of analysis that it is his declared intention to avoid (1989: 45).

That is to say, because Snarrenberg appropriates and applies a debased misunderstanding of *différance* as a material tool for analysing a traditional conception of a material musical work, he ends up doing more or less what a pre-existing armoury of other tools might also have done, and might even have done more convincingly.

At base, as Samuels indicates, Snarrenberg's is an *a priori* error arising from his interpretation of *différance* as a 'neologism' (1987: 1). Yet, according to Derrida, *différance* is not to be construed as a word in any traditional sense. It has no singular meaning that might be encapsulated in a definition. Rather, *différance* is Derrida's own invention, a 'neographism', a part of his notion of a generalised science of writing, or grammatology (1976), whose aim it is to resist such definition by keeping the 'playing movement' (1982: 11) of deconstruction in suspension. In other words, *différance* is not an object, an analytical tool for dissecting structure, but rather, like 'deconstruction' itself, a way of announcing the sensibility (the experience not the description) of deconstruction. The terms

of deconstruction are 'a challenge to the very idea of structure: for a structure always presumes a centre, a fixed principle, a hierarchy of meanings and a solid foundation (Eagleton 1983: 134). But by pinning *différance* down as a word identifying what is, in effect, a single concept (paradoxically re-combining the senses of differing and deferral), Snarrenberg creates for himself a tool that he can apply to the structural analysis of music.

Snarrenberg goes on to ally his new tool with the graphical representations of an existing analytical method, Lerdahl and Jackendoff's (1983) generative theory, which is itself extensively dependent on Meyer's theory (1956, 1973, 1989) of an ideal listener's expectation and response to the 'deep structure' of musical understanding (to use Chomsky's terminology, since he is the other primary source of influence in the generative theory). At first sight this alliance seems a strange move, yet it ultimately serves to confirm our suspicion that Snarrenberg's conception of *différance* has little to do with the ongoing process of Derridean deconstruction. Meyer's notion of the ideal listener (see page 121) might be viewed, perhaps, as the most precipitate example in recent music theory of the transcendental signified that Derridean deconstruction is concerned with. As such, one might say that Snarrenberg's invocation of such a category within his nominally deconstructive analysis is utterly perverse. Yet he is clearly aware of this criticism, pleading in a footnote ('*caveat lector*') for a difference between an ideal listener who may follow and interact with the unfolding structure of the musical work, and a subjective 'I'. Quite how far Snarrenberg's subjective listener differs from Meyer's ideal listener is a moot point. Samuels makes a convincing case that Snarrenberg's listener, far from being relativistic and unconditioned, 'is clearly a listener who adopts a particular role, who chooses to listen in a certain way' (55), just as does Meyer's ideal listener. In other words, Snarrenberg's listener is prepared to react in particular ways (invariably in surprise and bewilderment) to the implicative events, the differences and the

deferrals, of the musical experience. Thus Snarrenberg's subjective listener attends to the structure of the work just as much as does Meyer's ideal listener, albeit that each subjective listener need not experience that structure in precisely the same way. As such, the listener, whether ideal or subjective, represents or occupies a particular transcendental point. Far from 'deconstructing' this position, once and for all, Snarrenberg's *différance* serves only to repeat and, in effect, to reinforce it.

But Snarrenberg deserves no scorn for his attempt. By presenting his analysis as something personal and potentially unrepeatable (similar, in a way, to Meyer's qualifications of style) he sought to avoid the perils earlier encountered by pragmatist literary theorists such as Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty who were keen to pigeonhole deconstruction in order to get a useful analytical handle on it. Yet Snarrenberg is not alone in seeking to apply a concept of deconstruction as an analytical tool to musical works. Among the others who have sought to employ such a deconstructive methodology are Susan McClary (1991, and in Leppert 1987), John Shepherd (1991), Lawrence Kramer (1990), and Martin Scherzinger (1995). Yet it seems to me that wherever deconstruction is applied in a 'close reading' of some material musical work, even when that reading is additionally animated by some other political point (as is so in the cases of both McClary and Shepherd), the result is hardly more interesting than a repetition of the kind of structural analysis that deconstruction seeks to unpack. In my view, deconstruction does not, and cannot be made to, apply to the analysis of music so long as that work is anchored (explicitly or implicitly) in the traditional terms of autonomous work and structure. But it is, I believe, in terms of an analysis of the institution of music theory that supports that tradition, that the play of deconstruction can be set free. Such analysis is, it seems to me, an essential requirement on the road to a clearer understanding of what musical knowledge entails. While Snarrenberg's essay was an early attempt to incorporate a

deconstructive approach into musicology, there are more recent examples to be found of a similar misconception of its terms and its uses.

In 1996 Jonathan Walker published an essay provocatively titled 'The Deconstruction of Musicology: Poison or Cure?'. In this essay Walker sought to go back to its roots to critically examine the claims made for deconstruction by Jacques Derrida. Unfortunately Walker likewise misses the point of deconstruction as I have described it here, such that, in the words of Gerald Edelman, Walker is not even wrong. Edelman responded to critics of his biological neuroscience (1994) by suggesting that they were unable to comprehend and, therefore, ask pertinent questions about his work because their understanding was rooted in a framework to which the processes he described were completely alien. It seems strangely poetic, given the subsequent institutionalisation of his work, that Schenker should have made a similar statement, invoking Kant who said that 'the danger here lies not in being disproved, but rather in not being understood' (1994: 1). One could say that Walker's criticism of Derrida is similarly contaminated by this *de facto* failure of understanding.

What Walker tries to do in this essay is to state the case for a common-sense reality that, by virtue of its unquestionable existence, disproves what Derrida alleges in his deconstructive analyses, and thereby indicates the misguidedness of the entire deconstructive project. In other words, Walker is aiming to prove the truth of the untruth of deconstruction as an analytical tool. The main problem with Walker's approach is that he tries to make deconstruction submit to a trial according to the standards of truth and untruth enshrined in the traditional practices of the academic institution. But, given that Derridean deconstruction is conceived precisely in terms of the absence of specific claims to truth, it is difficult to see quite how such a trial could be conducted in. The various aspects

of Walker's critique can be boiled down to one main preoccupation arising from the texts that he chose to examine: linguistic idealism. In essence, Walker believes that the entire enterprise of deconstruction went wrong from the start because Derrida misread Saussure and was, at the same time, ignorant of Chomsky:

Derrida, in *Grammatology*, ignored the Chomskian revolution and took Saussure's lectures of 1917 to be the last word in language and meaning ... And so we arrive at a kind of linguistic idealism which treats the world as a creation of language. (1996: [14])

Thus Walker decries the loss of referential function, of language-independent reality, and therefore of meaning, that this idealism occasions. Yet in suggesting, at the expense of Saussure, that Chomsky should have been Derrida's starting point, Walker himself misses, or ignores, some significant facts. First, Walker 'forgets' that Derrida is well aware of other linguistic theories. For example, Peircean semiotics is of immediate importance to the deconstruction of Saussure's structuralism. Derrida himself indicates that

Peirce goes very far in the direction that I have called the de-construction of the transcendental signified, which, at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign. (1976: 48)

Secondly, by the time of Derrida's early writing the work of Chomsky and its retrogressive, ultra-rationalist concept of 'deep structure' (to which I referred on page 108) was already suspected by many to be an impossible project for linguistics. That Chomsky read Saussure quite the other way around to most critics (Lechte 1994: 52-3), that is, as privileging *parole* over *langue*, meant that he did not represent the view of the institution that Derrida sought to address.

Derrida could not have ignored Saussure because Saussure represented for most people, as I indicated in the previous chapter, the archetypal twentieth-century exponent of what is actually the primary target of his criticism: structural, foundational, systematic, transcendental institutionalism. Additionally, as Michael Payne has put it,

Saussure's project is important for Derrida's own because Saussure was on the verge of understanding language as logocentric metaphysics. (1993: 134)

Walker's reading of Derrida is therefore based, at best, on a restrained view of what Derrida implies when he talks of writing, speaking and logocentrism. Walker takes all of these to mean that Derrida has simply adopted Saussure's view of language lock, stock and barrel. But it is obvious from Derrida's later work that the 'linguistic idealism' observed in relation to Saussure is but one example of the disruptive recasting of institutional norms, of accepted, hegemonic attitudes, of transcendental metaphysics, that Derrida has pursued (under the rubric of a 'generalised writing', or *grammatology*) in relation to Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, feminism, modernism, structuralism, linguistics, and many others.

However, claiming to have demonstrated the error of Derrida's view of language, its misrepresentation in relation both to Saussure and to Plato, Walker goes on to consider the consequences of the textualist and interdisciplinary strategies that Derrida's deconstruction appears to sanction. In so doing, Walker is essentially criticising the derivative, domesticated literary deconstructionism to which I referred earlier, that plays nihilistically with linguistic allusion and metaphor. Certainly Walker's repetitive use of the phrase 'close reading' would seem to betray this application. Again, it is a common misreading of Derrida's

‘misreading’, arising from the undeniably rich stylistic complexity of his writing, that he is concerned more with playing games with language than with making serious arguments. Yet Walker rises to the bait and declares that the linguistic idealism of deconstruction simply

removes the referential function from language, and without reference, truth claims must also be abandoned ... [and] since all is text, the boundaries between the disciplines is illusory. ([16])

This, he believes, has clear consequences for music theory, primarily because the

dissolving of disciplinary boundaries in favour of generalised text removes all justifications for specialist technical knowledge in this field or any other. ([17])

And here, of course, Walker comes close to offering a categorical defence of institutional music-theoretical practice as I have painted it throughout the preceding chapters. Walker might just as easily have said that the textualist, interdisciplinary style of deconstruction that he has characterised fails to give due regard to the objectivity of the music, that is, the musical work as evidenced by our specialist, intersubjective, technical, theoretical epistemology. The difference is that the way in which Walker couches his assessment is designed to appeal directly to that part of the institutional disciplinary psyche that feels threatened by alternative styles of theorising. What is especially intriguing about Walker’s appeal is that, taken out of context, his words could just as readily be read as referring to the structuralist epistemology that I have described. This is surely further evidence of the deep-seated longevity of that epistemology within the academic institution.

Rhetoric aside, it seems to me that the logic of Walker's argument here is suspect. As I have already indicated, I see no necessary connection between an interest in poststructural or postmodern theory and any dumbing-down of existing structural practice; it's hard to see how Walker gets from interdisciplinarity to a loss of technical knowledge. On the contrary, and as my earlier discussion implied, it is surely the case that interdisciplinary study demands great intellectual efforts on the part of the theorist if he or she is to come to terms with the techniques of the various disciplines that such work encompasses. In any case, if my analysis in the previous section is anywhere near convincing, then it is deconstructive practice that has been dumbed-down by being appropriated into existing disciplinary practices. That Walker has chosen to ignore the plot of deconstruction becomes clear when he says that

while music theory can challenge, modify or replace parts of its technical repertoire, it cannot survive the removal of all specialist technical knowledge. ([17])

If deconstruction should prove, to use Walker's rhetoric, to be the poison of musicology (which I doubt) then this can only be because whatever alternatives may come along in its wake turn out to be more persuasive. If, on the other hand, deconstruction proves to be the cure for musicology's 'overweening theoretical ills' ([24]), then we shall be forced to recognise that there was some sickness to be cured. Either way we would do well to heed the warning of Deleuze and Guattari: 'How necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger' (1988: 160).



I shall have more to say about Derrida and deconstruction in due course. For now we should turn to an analysis of the style of the so-called New Musicology that was extensively influenced by the terms of deconstruction.

#### **4.4 – Leo Treitler: the postmodern style**

What then is *new* musicology? What is its style? The phrase seems to be contaminated by the same suspicious, untested and unproven, anathematic resonance as certain other ideas that share the prenominal ‘new’. A few examples spring to mind: the ‘New Testament’, the ‘New World’, ‘New Criticism’, and, of course, ‘New Labour’. All of these appeared, at least in the first instance, thoroughly bizarre, contrary, and often grievous, to adherents of the traditional, entrenched points of view that they were intended to revise or supersede. New Musicology, since it began to emerge in the mid-1980s (notably following the publication of Kerman’s *Musicology* in 1985), has been similarly received in many quarters of the ‘old’ musicological institution. Irrelevancy is the worst charge that you can level at what seeks to be a serious discipline, yet this is basically, as will become clear, the charge made against New Musicology by those wedded to the rationalist epistemology of institutional music theory that I have sketched in my previous chapters. But to what is this new theorising style relevant, or irrelevant? Of course it is irrelevant if you seek only to understand the knowledge constructed by the New Musicology in the terms of what we might call the old musicology; only if you choose to be receptive to a new methodology, if you approach it with a particular aim, can you perceive its relevancy. Certainly, and paradoxically, this was the case with the acceptance and ultimate institutionalisation of Schenkerism that was made to fit the mould demanded by Kraehenbuehl (1957). Yet it is easy to see why the relatively youthful discipline of music theory, having so very recently won for itself acceptance within the institutional fold, should feel threatened by the rise of a

new, postmodern musicology that openly threatens to dispossess it. While the reaction to this threat has been varied, in the worst cases it has caused the music-theoretical discipline to regress to the stage of demanding what Patrick McCreless has vividly described as ‘a Schenkerian tooth for a Foucauldian eye’ (1996: [1]). Certainly the proclamations of this New Musicology have given traditional theory much to think about, and, to be fair, many younger music theorists have been receptive in some degree to its claims. The rush of recent articles in *Music Theory Online* (the Internet journal of the Society for Music Theory - <http://boethius.music.ucsb.edu/mto/>) bears ample testimony to this, as do a number of the essays published in *Rethinking Music* (Cook & Everist 1999).

Meanwhile, in a somewhat guileful article, Leo Treitler has sought to determine what he regards as ‘Postmodern Signs in Musical Studies’ (1995). Treitler of course was one of those who, along with Meyer and Kerman, had been critical of the way the institution of music theory actively and at times aggressively split itself from the main body of musicology in the formation of the SMT around 1977. He was one of those who believed that music theory and analysis risked becoming a myopic activity if separated from the contextualising and tempering influence of traditional historical musicology. Thus one might expect that Treitler would be sympathetic to the cause of a postmodern, new musicology in its bid to displace the scientific bent of musical theory, particularly if this new musicology could reform those lost links. To an extent, he is indeed sympathetic, but this article is often far from commendatory about what it means to think in postmodern terms. As such, it is useful to examine in some detail what Treitler has to say, not least because the approach of the article itself illustrates something of what thinking and writing in a postmodernising style seems to entail.

We should note at the outset that Treitler's article does not conform to the traditional format of an academic paper. In four sections, the last consists simply of a series of aphoristic quotations from a variety of sources ranging from St. Augustine to Samuel Pepys to Roger Sessions. And the article begins with an opt-out clause through which Treitler explicitly leaves it to his reader to consider the relations between the article's sections, which is clearly not a traditional approach to the exposition of an academic thesis. As in the case of the Snarrenberg article discussed above, and also in the various qualifiers introduced by Meyer's prototypical work, there is a clear sense that subjectivity and open-endedness are in some way a necessary feature of a new musicology.

In the first section, Treitler relays and reflects upon the infamous newspaper article written by Jean Baudrillard in 1991 (and published alongside a traditional analysis of the situation by Josef Joffe) in which he proclaimed, six days before it began, that 'The Gulf War will not happen'. The article generated many reactions, many less than complimentary, and led Christopher Norris to ask the question 'How far wrong can a thinker go and still lay claim to serious attention?' (1992b: 11). Treitler takes Baudrillard's article to be paradigmatic of the style of postmodern thinking in the way that it problematises the conceptualisation of some reality rather than presuming *a priori* the reality of that reality, so to speak. Yet, as we shall soon see, Treitler does not really allow himself to think through the full consequences of that problematisation. Like Meyer, he seems ultimately incapable of suspending his clear allegiance to the traditional institutional mindset of structuralism. Treitler describes Baudrillard as 'a fashionable sociologist/philosopher of the French Post-Structuralist school' (3). While I take issue with Treitler's suggestion that such a school (in traditional institutional terms) exists, his invocation of the word 'fashionable' is interesting from the point of view of this thesis. Treitler appears to be using the word as a criticism, indicating something transitory, ill conceived or weak about

Baudrillard's work and, by implication, about the intellectual attitudes of his followers. In other words he is invoking the debased notion of style that I outlined in the opening chapter of this thesis. This seems to me especially strange given that Treitler's own essays, collected in *Music and the Historical Imagination* (1989), have been built around a consideration of the subjectivity of musical style and the contextualising function of historical criticism as an alternative, or necessary adjunct, to structuralist analytical theory. It may well be merely fashionable (in a debased sense) to follow Baudrillard's thinking, but for all that his writing is undeniably stylish and concerns itself with the style of institutionalised thought; in short, it encourages us to think about the style of our own thinking.

In opposition to this style, Treitler describes Joffe's analysis as objectivist and rationalist, yet here also one is not sure whether Treitler is condoning or condemning the approach. Treitler seems to concur with Joffe that George Bush's position, unlike Saddam Hussein's, is, without question, rational and coherent. But Treitler also hints at the possibility that I have been exploring in this thesis that we only recognise such a position as coherent because we assume from the start that the way in which we arrive at that position is correct, logical and true, that is to say, because we adopt a position of authority in relation to the object under discussion. Thus Treitler notes that it was common at the time of the Gulf War for journalists to question the rationality of the Iraqi people, while few ever thought to consider their (our) own rationality. Clearly to question the rationality of the Western mind would also have meant questioning one's patriotic allegiances at a time when confidence in the validity of one's position was essential. This perhaps mirrors a certain tendency within the academic institution to defend an intellectual position in terms of duty and allegiance. Yet Baudrillard, bravely or foolishly, took the opportunity to effect just such a

questioning of Western rationality, by analysing the role of the media in the construction of our knowledge of the looming war.

According to Norris,

Baudrillard is undoubtedly right ... in his argument that public opinion (or what counts as such) can be swung so far that it completely loses touch with any knowledge of real-world issues and events. (1992: 22)

In allowing ourselves to become intoxicated by television representation of reality we do not, in Baudrillard's view, experience a singular true reality, a structural reality of the kind that exists in the pedigree of the footnotes to Plato. Rather our experience is virtual or 'hyperreal' such that there is nothing but representation and re-representation: 'Hyperreality effaces the difference between the real and the imaginary' (Lechte 1994: 236). How then can we know, how can we be sure, that what we assume to be real really is real? Ultimately of course we can't. But Treitler, taking a Platonic lead, interprets Baudrillard's position as solipsistic and childish and he questions its ethics. By interpreting the (undeniable) event of the Gulf War in this way, says Treitler, Baudrillard draws aesthetic conclusions where he should have drawn ethical ones. That is to say, because Baudrillard refuses to accept any facts about the event as given, as beyond the interpretation of media representation, his judgements are 'more about their style than their substance' (1995: 6). Again we see Treitler, contrary to his avowed intent, invoking an opposition in which substance or form is valued more highly than style or interpretation.

In the second section of his paper, Treitler makes a seemingly abrupt turn to discuss the topography of a 1970s department store. We are presumably to interpret disjunction and discontinuity of this sort as characteristic of a

postmodern writing style. His discussion revolves around the modes of classification used in the store, ranging upwards, in a hierarchical tree-like fashion, from natural classes (for example male/female), to genre (sweater, jacket), to functional category (leisurewear, eveningwear), to style. Treitler then observes that, in a reversal of fortune, in the 1990s style is situated at the base of the organisational tree. Each boutique within the store now sells clothing in several genres, while distinctions of gender and function have much reduced emphasis (unisex and all-day wear). The basic organising principle in each boutique is now the manufacturer's brand, or style, an image created through advertising media. As such, whereas the 1970s store was organised according to what we traditionally call real, natural categories, nowadays it is hyperreality (or style) that forms or creates organisation. And such organisation is, by its nature, fragmentary, protean, and always prone to change; in short, it is differential. But was it not always so? What I have been seeking to demonstrate throughout this thesis is that style has always already been the largely unrecognised organising principle of another department store, namely the formalist academic institution of musicology. And Treitler makes, in general terms, this same point about style. Thus he says that to act in a particular style, to be a member of a club,

was usually a lifetime commitment, whether one was born into it or adopted it later in life. If one gave it up, it meant a change of life-style.

Postmodernism is out to reverse modernism at every turn, but it may do so by picking up modernist traits and magnifying them beyond recognizability.

(9)

In other words, Treitler has identified two things about the relationship between modern and postmodern thinking. First, he has observed that one becomes, whether nominally modernist or postmodernist, committed to a particular style, whether for patriotic or social or institutional reasons; one positions oneself

politically. Treitler realises that it takes a conscious decision on the part of the player to break that singular commitment. Secondly, he observes that, in order to effect such a break, one need not, perhaps one cannot, simply replace that commitment with another one that is potentially just as singular by seeking to overturn (invert) the hegemony of the earlier approach by misinterpreting its traits. Rather, as most poststructural or postmodern thinkers have at some time indicated, one has to make use of the existing traits of that thought to which you may formerly (and formally) have been committed. To think beyond or after a mode of thought, which, after all, is what most institutional activity involves, is a parasitic activity that cannot occur in the absence of that which is being consumed. As a result, it is difficult to escape the criticism that a purportedly new style of thought simply does just what has always been done, while merely doing it under another name. Yet in adopting the existing methodological traits one will not simply repeat them, but focus upon them to observe what effect they may have on the institutional system of which they are a part. No longer are the implications of such traits allowed to disappear, to lose their identity, inside the workings of the system. Rather such traits are analysed for their specific effects on and within the epistemology. In making this point, Treitler is clearly criticising the approach of the new 'postmodern' musicology.

This becomes his focus of attention in the third section of his article. Here Treitler seeks to discern what is so compelling about the condition of postmodernity, especially to the younger generation of scholars. (Treitler does not actually cite any specific names in connection with this postmodern musicology, but it seems reasonable to suppose that he has in mind the work of the likes of Susan McClary 1991 & 1993, Carolyn Abbate 1991, Lawrence Kramer 1990 & 1995, and especially Gary Tomlinson 1993 & 1996.) Treitler notes a parallel between the postmodern style and the development of ethnomusicology which has often vigorously sought to distance itself from 'the

grand schemes of style history ... that were once settled onto our field for reasons that then seemed so sound' (10). We might also recall that my discussion of the stylistic subjectivity valorised by Meyer in *Style and Music* seemed to indicate a similar parallel with ethnomusicology. Thus we are all now observant, indeed we are positively required in the name of political correctness, to distance ourselves from colonising habits when dealing with distant musics and musical cultures. Yet Treitler does not address directly the potential that the same kind of anti-colonialism might have if turned on the analysis of our indigenous institutional habits. Certainly he notes that these habits – the application of such concepts as work, structure, hierarchy and unity – have not been usefully pursued in understanding early medieval European music (Treitler has extensively analysed the style of medieval chant). But he resists considering whether such habits are always usefully pursued in a more general understanding of the phenomenon of music. Nor does he consider whether the reality, the knowledge, that such conceptualisation produces is itself as obviously transparent as it is ordinarily assumed to be.

The choice facing musicology, Treitler believes, turns on whether we 'recognize a difference between historical "reality" and its linguistic representations', whether we choose to proceed 'as though there were nothing outside the text' (11). Thus, in Treitler's analysis, the modern and the postmodern seem to be simply reverse sides of a single coin, a binary opposition, a simple either/or choice between one and the other. Treitler comes down on the side of the *status quo*, the existing hegemonic, institutional assumption of structural reality that I have been exploring in this thesis. He clearly sees little point in choosing to replace one hegemonic approach with another equally hegemonic one. In this Treitler believes that he has history on his side, thus he notes that historians have retreated from what they regard as the imprisoning extremity of the linguistic turn that postmodern musicology seems to entail. But more than this, Treitler



believes that to accept the claim of this postmodernism would be to withhold 'what by wide agreement may claim to be as strong evidence as there can be for a reality before and after its description: music' (12). I shall have more to say about Treitler's 'music' in due course. As far as his invocation of 'it' is concerned, he appears to make a rationalising gesture, attempting to short-circuit further argument, close it off, by grounding the experience of music, and the epistemology of the musicology that seeks to pursue it, in a transcendental category. From the point of view of an institutional discipline that models itself as a scientific activity, it would seem to me to be ultimately anti-rational (if not irrational) to reference that activity in a category of this sort. Yet, on the other hand, in keeping with his own ambivalent, differential style, Treitler continues:

Belief in the absolute autonomy of music and in the permanently closed-off character of the experience of music has given us some bad history, indeed, but that is not sufficient cause to abandon the belief that a provisional personal engagement with a musical utterance for the moment unrelated to anything else is not only possible but a necessary condition of eventual understanding of it in its most dense connections.

Here Treitler seems to recognise a middle road where the concrete experience of music always has the potential to subvert the presumed hegemony that the musicological institution (whether 'new' or 'old') affords its discourse about that music. This potential arises, as I have already suggested, precisely to the extent that style (the excessive other) is not contained by such discourse. In Treitler's view, we have always to return to the 'musical utterance' to seek validation for our discourse, yet, portrayed in this way, the 'musical utterance' sounds suspiciously like another objective, transcendental category, a font of all knowledge. Treitler's utterance is clearly not the same as Bakhtin's utterance (Korsyn 1999: 57 *passim*). As such, Treitler believes that disregarding the

musical work, in the way that Kramer, Tomlinson and other 'new' musicologists would have us do, is simply absurd because doing so erases the stylistic evidence of the work itself. This leads Treitler to invite us to consider

whether the proposal to turn away from "the music itself" and our feeling about it is not something like Baudrillard's turning away from the event of the war itself and our feeling about that. (12)

Treitler's words seem to epitomise those of many traditional institutional observers. Its rhetoric relies on a form of intellectual coercion (not dissimilar to that adopted by Walker) that invokes an ethical requirement to accept a common, intersubjective reality as the ground of all reasonable thought. As such, it seems to me that he has ultimately retreated from making the intellectual adjustment from modern to postmodern with which he has been concerned in this article. By this I do not intend to stake a claim to the moral high ground by suggesting that he is intellectually impoverished as a result. Rather I mean to indicate that, on the one hand, he has adopted certain preliminary characteristics of a postmodern style (as attested by his preoccupation with such vocabulary as 'play', 'choices', even 'style', his contingent, multidirectional and open style of writing, and his interest in the advantages of interdisciplinary study). On the other hand he has ultimately refused to follow through the ramifications for the style of thought that his own analysis of postmodernism seems to me to imply. Thus he is fully aware of where postmodern thought is coming from; he understands very well what the effect of careful and reasoned use of postmodern terminology can be in problematising a field of knowledge. Yet he refuses to entertain the logical extension of the problem from a basic, rhetorical methodological level to the broader epistemological level of the style of knowledge production itself. And he refuses this because, at bottom, he regards the postmodern condition (as exemplified in the Kramer-Tomlinson approach) as a simple reiteration, through

reversal, of the modernist condition. Having at first observed the problematising potential of postmodern thought, he retreats from the opportunity to turn this problematisation on the claims made by the New Musicology.

As such, Treitler seems to regard the new postmodern musicology as starting and ending in the choice between modern and postmodern, between substance and style, between 'the music itself' and some hyperreal representation of it. As my earlier observations about Snarrenberg and Walker made plain, it is easy to see how Treitler arrives at his conclusion. Yet I believe he is wrong to characterise *all* postmodern thinking in this way, although his doing so marks the turning point, what he himself referred to in his introduction as the 'focal point' (3), of his article. From here on Treitler's article works to bolster his view that postmodernism is wilfully ignorant of (indeed it avoids) the 'widely agreed' advantages of the modernist notion of 'the music itself'. Having come so close to realising the possibility that the modernist epistemology based on that notion is itself ignorant, and having gone out on a limb to explore what it means to be postmodern, Treitler now beats a hasty retreat into the certainty that an institutional view affords. Having emphasised contingent processes of historical and stylistic study in his own analyses, under the weight of what he perceives as a threat to the *status quo* from postmodern thinking Treitler now aligns himself behind the protective fold of the hegemonic formalism of the institution. In so doing he denies the postmodern notions of 'reading' and 'text' as a means of suspending singular, exclusive judgements, notions that might (as I shall argue in my closing chapter) facilitate a more open intercourse with the phenomenon of music without presupposing either that that phenomenon exists in a particular way, or that it is accessible through a particular style of theorising.

Treitler closes his article by declaring that, if subjected to the style of thought that he has called postmodern,

music is left unable to draw attention to its peculiar character or quality, or to *be* a particular way; it is assigned the function of an icon, standing for something else, or of a directional sign pointing away from itself. (13)

I cannot help but feel that Treitler could have written elsewhere exactly the same words about music when it is subjected to a modernist, structuralist style of thought. And this being so we should perhaps conclude, with Treitler, that there is, at base, no difference between modernism and postmodernism. This is a point of view that would no doubt fit well with the feelings of many institutional practitioners. Alternatively, we should conclude that Treitler's analysis of postmodernism is wrong, or else that he has analysed something that isn't actually *postmodern*. It is, I believe, this last possibility that comes nearest to the mark, no doubt because, as we have seen, much of the work that has positioned itself under the rubrics 'new' and 'postmodern', simply inverts the hierarchy by removing authority from internal structure and relocating it in external function of some sort. In other words, the hierarchy is reversed, but not displaced. That Treitler's analysis is directed towards this arbitrary reversal of authority, rather than towards the effects of a displacement of that authority, indicates something about the reception of postmodern musicology, even among those who profess sympathy for its ideas. Yet such a reception was perhaps inevitable.

#### **4.5 – Music and deconstruction 2: the dialogue**

Returning now to the topic of deconstruction, this time as an epistemological activity (rather than an analytical tool), what has been its influence within the music-theoretical institution to date? Through the 1970s and 80s it acquired buzzword status in institutional circles and was the focus of a good deal of discussion throughout university faculties. However, while the word has entered

the discourse of the institutions and many practitioners now use it freely, most music theorists show little comprehension of the disrupting potential that it represents. (This may, of course, represent a survival instinct since most theorists are aware of the explosive effects that deconstruction has had on literature departments.) As I have indicated, it seems to me that, for many musicologists and theorists, deconstruction has become nothing more than an analogue for the act of dismantling or de-structuring the objective musical work as constituted by traditional, institutional, formalist analytical approaches. As such they are either oblivious to its potential, or else interpret it as a superfluous duplication. This has led Rose Rosengard Subotnik to remark that

Even now, well into the 1990s, whatever effect deconstruction has had on American musicology has been far less sweeping and direct than the enormous impact this school has had on American literary study. (1996: 40)

Contrast this with the words of Robert Samuels, writing of deconstruction in 1989 that 'it seems certain that application of their terms and procedures is to become increasingly common' (1989: 45). Yet there are only very tentative signs that the preliminary work of deconstructive engagement with the epistemology of the music-theoretical discipline itself is really taking shape. As I have already suggested, I do not believe that deconstruction, in spite of the way in which its name has been received by musicologists, is explicitly concerned with analysis of the musical work. Deconstruction is not a methodology, a pre-existing tool to be picked up and used in the creation of knowledge; it is too slippery for that. Yet, as Richard Littlefield notes

such domestication (or emasculation) of Derrida's powerful readings is commonplace in music studies ... to reduce Derrida's ideas to simple

analytic or heuristic “tools” robs them of their subtle complexity – they simply are not amenable to summary. (1996: [2.2] n.9)

So there appears to be a consensus forming that deconstruction is not usefully applied in the kind of analytical narrative such as that enacted by Snarrenberg in his article, and nor is it usefully imagined as a metanarrative like formalism or structuralism in the way that Walker perhaps conceives it. Rather, the work of deconstruction falls somewhere between these two for, as Derrida has written,

There is no such thing as a deconstructive *enterprise* – the idea of a *project* is incompatible with deconstruction. Deconstruction is a situation. (1989: 222)

In other words, deconstruction is not a singular epistemology, but rather reflexivity itself in operation. It is the activity of a philosophy concerned above all with contexts rather than with instances. In short, *deconstruction is the very style of theorising*, and its operation may be observed in those areas of an institution, those categories, where ontology and epistemology coincide. In the field of music theory one such category is that of the listener. It can, after all, hardly be coincidence that the role of the listener should feature prominently in the new musicological analyses of Snarrenberg, McClary and Treitler, among others. The listener has likewise been an essential category throughout the development of the formalist music-theoretical institution that encompasses Adler, Schenker, Schachter, Cone, and Lerdahl and Jackendoff. Yet, as we have seen, the person most readily and overtly associated with the development of this category was Leonard Meyer.

The publication of a *Festschrift* in honour of Meyer was notable for two main reasons. First, it amply demonstrated the impressive breadth of Meyer’s singular

influence and erudition in a realm of ideas that extends far beyond the parochial disciplinary horizon of institutional music theory: ‘Meyer, more than any other modern theorist, has spoken up from within the profession for those outside it’ (Kerman, 1985: 109). This seems to me to be the most significant, exemplary, and under-observed aspect of Meyer’s contribution to that discipline and, perhaps, the aspect that permits us to consider him an essential herald of a new musicology itself. Secondly, the volume confirmed that although, as I argued in the previous chapter, Meyer’s own work appeared ultimately incapable of breaking out of the structuralist tradition in which it was rooted, the work of some of his students is not so restricted. I say *some* of his students advisedly for the essays contained in the *Festschrift* make up something of a hotchpotch. This is to some extent inevitable precisely because of the range of their subject content, but it also has much to do with the varied epistemological approaches of its contributors. We should remember that it was within this volume that Eugene Narmour made his totalitarian proclamation about the link between theory and listening that I discussed in the previous chapter (page 129). By comparison, Rose Rosengard Subotnik’s essay ‘Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky’ is one that stands out from the crowd. It does so, in my view, because it deals lucidly with a theorising style that is potentially very dense, because it challenges received opinions about a topic that is absolutely central to the institution of structuralist music theory, and because it seeks genuinely to persuade rather than to prescribe and to regulate. All of these are qualities that Leonard Meyer has promoted.

In her essay Subotnik enacts a kind of quasi-judicial process (somewhat more even-handed than Walker’s I might add) in which she first presents a sympathetic case for the defendant, structural listening, before continuing by constructing a case against that defendant. I report on her proceedings here not merely for the record, but in order to indicate that her criticism translates readily from the level

of an applied music-theoretical methodological concept – structural listening – to that of general ontological and epistemological assumptions about music as structure *per se*. Although she does not make a direct claim in this regard, it seems to me that the thrust of her argument is aimed at precisely this possibility.

Subotnik declares at the outset that structural listening is a normative state within the purview of music theory. Clearly anybody who has passed through the educational regime of the institutionalised music theory could hardly argue otherwise. The ability to hear and to comprehend the internal structural consistency, unity and rationality of an autonomous piece of music continues to be, in large part, the goal of advanced, institutional musical education at the present time. It would be patently absurd to deny the supremacy of the attitude that is structural listening, and Subotnik is fully aware that there is little to be gained by just pronouncing that structural listening is wrong while something called non-structural listening is right. As we have seen, simple reversal of a political hierarchy in no way changes the nature of the relationship between the terms of such a hierarchy. Thus there is, at bottom, nothing to be gained by simply choosing, arbitrarily, to valorise non-structure over structure. But just as importantly she sees no reason to assume that the pertinence of the structural norm is either self-evident or universal. Rather, Subotnik indicates that she regards ‘structure’ as occupying a fluid, dialectical environment with ‘medium’, such that it is impossible to determine logically which term has priority over the other. I should note that Subotnik, reflecting the general imprecision of the concept of style that I outlined in my opening chapter, regards medium, sound and style as interchangeable terms. Indeed it is precisely this ambiguity as to the priority of structure and style that makes her deconstruction of structural listening thinkable. Joseph Dubiel’s (1996) criticism of this aspect of Subotnik’s essay seems to miss the point – the work of deconstruction does not just happen *ex nihilo*; it has to start somewhere. Thus Subotnik seeks to upset the *status quo* by



exploring the possibility that structural listening might just as readily be a function of non-structural listening. In Derrida's terms, Subotnik is suggesting that structural listening might actually be a "supplement" to non-structural listening. That is to say, Subotnik is positing, in order to problematise the relationship, that structure is an adjunct, but a *necessary* adjunct, to non-structure, or style.

That of course requires Subotnik to define the nature of the supplement by defining the thing (medium, sound, style, non-structure) to which structure is supplementary. Thus she says that medium is

a historical parameter ... signifying the ongoing relationship of any composition to a public domain of sound and culture, from the time of its presentation up to the present ... defined principally through the presentation of sounds, organized by conventional or characteristic uses ... as objects of a physical yet culturally conditioned perception. (1988: 88)

The inclusiveness of this definition leads Dubiel to question how much is actually precluded from entering the domain of non-structure. Indeed Dubiel likens this definition to the defence given by Benjamin Boretz upon being accused by Nelson Goodman of being 'an ardent formalist'. Boretz replied:

Since what I call 'musical structure' is just the coherent juxtaposition of *everything* relevant to the identity of the musical work, I can't see what an exclusive concern with musical structure excludes. (Quoted by Dubiel, 1996: [11])

Clearly there is a possibility that one may make one's definitions so broadly inclusive, excluding so little, that the compass of the theory that they support cannot logically be contested. Of course some might view this as a distinct advantage and a useful defence mechanism in a theory. But such a move may reasonably lead us to be suspicious both about the rigour of the theory itself (since the rigorous analytical application of theory is an essential aspect of the formalistic and positivistic style) and also about the confidence with which its proponent states it. At the very least we may suspect that all is not as it seems. Dubiel confesses that Boretz's statement has become a sort of *idée fixe* in his own life:

What it has stimulated, above all, is a mistrust of the idea that attributing structure to a work means showing the work to manifest a self-contained logic of a predetermined kind; an inclination, instead, to try to think of anything that I hear in a work as open to audible interaction with anything else, in relationships that can affect its perceived identity, its meaning for me as sound. (1996: [11])

That of course sounds laudably democratic. Yet I think that Dubiel is perhaps ignoring the fact that Boretz's openness to nominally non-structural ideas actually serves to support a more basic assumption about the structural ontology of the 'identity of the musical work'. Criticism abounds that structural theory is exclusive, that it ignores cultural and social contexts, that it bolsters gender or racial bias, that it cannibalises square pegs to make them fit into round holes. In the light of such criticism it is perhaps all too obvious that the 'ardent formalist' should seek to present an alternative, inclusive face in the way that Boretz does, and in the way that Arnold Whittall has in speaking of the theorist's sense of history (see page 186). Perhaps Subotnik is guilty, in reverse, of exactly the same movement in relation to her non-structural definition, though my own feeling is

that she performs this move in order to problematise the field, not to make a contrary existential claim. It seems to me that, whenever a formalist analyst seeks to broaden the purview of his or her activity, for whatever reason, the new features or categories that are introduced serve as parergon to the Kantian ergon that is the objective musical work. In other words, style, sound, the listener, performance, history, social circumstance, biography and all the countless other examples are employed as adjuncts, as supplements, as supports that frame and bolster the autonomous work. This is a possibility to which I shall return in due course.

Getting back to Subotnik, in her case for the defence of structural listening, she traces the historical origins of that category to the Kantian idea of disinterested aesthetic contemplation. Briefly, Kant contended that an object and its observer were entirely separate entities and that the judgement of taste by the latter did not depend either on the actual physical existence of the former, or on any particular relationship between the two. Rather, judgement depended on an idealised structural congruence between faculties. Kant puts it in this way:

The judgement of taste is simply *contemplative*, i.e. it is a judgement which is indifferent to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. (1988: 48)

As Kant describes it, in the abstract, disinterestedness seems an odd creature for while it purports to be objective it appears to have no object. Yet it was an attitude which proved highly influential on succeeding generations. Subotnik records its influence in a number of moments: in the structural autonomy of eighteenth century classicism, especially in the music of Haydn and Mozart; later in the Germanic formalism of the nineteenth century, notably in the absolute music propounded by Wackenroder and others and in Hanslick's celebrated

philosophy; and ultimately in Schoenberg and Adorno's concept of the concretely unfolding logic of an 'idea'. While I would not wish to claim that these views are directly equivalent, they are linked by an essential, *a priori* image of the musical work as autonomous, self-determining, developmental and objective, a work whose ultimate and necessary meaning and value lies solely within its material, formal parameter. And further, according to Subotnik's reading of Schoenberg and Adorno, it is a work which, in some way, demands on moral grounds that a listener attend expressly to its structural parameter:

Schoenberg and Adorno offer structural listening as nothing less ambitious than a method for defining and assessing the moral soundness of every relationship that bears on music. (1988: 99)

This autonomy is clearly an image that persists to this day, and it is precisely the image that music theory as an institutional activity continues to promote. In effect, to make structural listening methodologically possible, the institution has first to enact the reduction of music to a condition of pure structural substance. Then, in order to justify the methodological propriety of structural listening, a moral imperative is introduced that treats as insufficient every other way of imagining music. This circularity would seem to indicate that structural listening – to say nothing of the institution that produced it – is intellectually precarious. It certainly ought not to be thought of as in any strict sense scientific, relying as it does at bottom on a gesture that is more ideological than logical; more rhetorical than rational; more stylistic than formal. On the one hand the musicological institution sought to proclaim the universal rationality of structural listening, thereby suppressing the possibility of its criticism on ideological grounds. Yet, on the other hand, the ideological nature of structural listening is betrayed by the very fact that so much effort is expended in its promotion. And if it is ideological, it is unlikely also to be universal.

Subotnik pursues the ramifications of this conclusion in her case for the prosecution. Here she alights upon two propositions that, as she states them, seem simplistically contrary and yet, if taken seriously, raise a cogent argument. She points first to the cultural inappropriateness of structural listening, and secondly to the need for non-structural knowledge about music.

The ideal of structural understanding imagined by Schoenberg and Adorno implies an internalist (autonomous) view of music in which the (ideal) listener is somehow absorbed into the piece, becomes one with it, and experiences its workings from within in an environment untainted either by social or by ideological distortions. In short, it presupposes the kind of congruence that Kant imagined in his *Critique of Judgement*, in this case between the musical object and the listening mind. As I indicated in my earlier discussion of Treitler's reaction to postmodernism, and his grounding notion of a 'musical utterance', it is widely believed that some kind of mystical union between musical and perceiving entities is not beyond the realms of possibility. This would presumably be the condition towards which, in Walter Pater's famous words, 'all art constantly aspires'. Indeed this would seem to me to correlate with the fact, anathema at times to certain music theorists from Schenker to Babbitt to Narmour, that the experience of music by one not initiated in the ways of music-theoretical veracity might be just as important, relevant and potent as one who enjoys that privilege. This undeniable fact would seem to offer strong support for my proposition that the excessively stylistic nature of music is never finally subsumed by the structural representation of our traditional analyses.

However, as Subotnik observes, the ideal of structural understanding activated by the institution is far from tractable. It is that of a scientific observer peering in from the outside, poking, taking careful notes, creating models, analysing and

dissecting the entrails. As such, the predilections – personal, social, cultural and moral – of the observer cannot but affect the way in which the work is carried out. There is no concrete suggestion of any quantifiable congruence between observer and observed. Because it is so conditioned by the predilections of its administrators, this kind of structural understanding confers only what Subotnik calls the ‘stylistic impression’ of objectivity (101). And by contenting itself with such an impression it effectively violates the very autonomy of the music itself even while it selects exactly this autonomy as its first principle. By violating the music in this way, and the canonical status or otherwise of that music makes no difference to this argument, structural listening cannot always be culturally appropriate. Because structural listening depends on an elevated view of structure as institution – that is, on structure *per se* as a universal cultural norm – it fails to treat the specific event of its object with respect. Rather it imposes a particular, colonising point of view on it. Paradoxically, as a result, it not only colonises early music, contemporary music, non-western music and so on, it also colonises canonical, common practice music, the very music that it has been formulated to explain.

In order to examine her estimation about the need for non-structural knowledge, Subotnik looks in detail at the dialectical theoretical approach pursued by Adorno. Interestingly she observes that

Adorno’s constant preoccupation with social ideology led him to a continuous engagement with that layer of music which he least valued.  
(108)

In other words, although it was his express intention to devalue non-structural listening, Adorno was continually resistant to the effects of the formalist institutional ideology on the concrete social relationships involved in music. As

such he was suspicious of systems and abstractions which tended to suppress the cultural and historical significance of music. While obviously not identical, we should note that there are clear parallels (and lines of descent) between the idea of dialectic (especially I think Adorno's 'negative' dialectic) and the idea of deconstruction (see Ayrey, 1998: 350-51). Adorno's own musical analysis is, as a result, less inclined to observations about form so much as observations about what we might call style. The non-structural elements in music very often played, for Adorno, a greater importance than the structural, as witness his lecture 'On the Problem of Musical Analysis' in which he emphasised the concrete, individual nature of an analysis that is 'derived from each work anew' (1982: 185). Ultimately for Adorno the meaning and significance of an individual musical work was determined by its immediate context in a concrete cultural-historical arena of assumptions, expectations, conventions and values. That is to say, musical significance was determined by its stylistic context. From this Subotnik concludes that

Style is not extrinsic to structure but rather defines the conditions for actual structural possibilities ... structure is perceived as a function more than as a foundation of style. (112)

Of course Subotnik's reprioritisation of style and structure could be viewed as a merely rhetorical gesture. And in one narrow sense it is no more than that because it relies to some extent on that ancient conundrum about a chicken and an egg. Style may indeed, as institutional music theorists might argue, be an epiphenomenon of structure. But what Subotnik is trying to indicate is that it might just as readily not be. Rather, it may be that style is the phenomenon that gives rise to the very possibility of structure. And although our institutional educational backgrounds tend to steer us towards rejecting this scenario, it may be enlightening to accept it as a proposition worth exploring, if only temporarily.

In this way we might find heuristic value in probing the construction of our structural epistemological assumption, even if we never anticipate any chance of its ultimate rejection. The danger that prevents many from even entertaining such a train of thought is that it is a fine line between successfully draining the bath to make room for some clean hot water, and carelessly losing the bath's young occupant down the plug hole in the process. Clearly, since Hanslick, there has been some suspicion of the 'warm bath effect' (1986: 59). It is all too possible to imagine that this epistemological probing would hopelessly undermine the very foundations of institutional musicology, and thus cast doubt over the value of the work that that institution begets. We might envisage the initial probe as leading inevitably to an impasse: we've come too far and seen too much to be able to go back to the old certainties, but we can't go on either to accept what would amount to a simple reversal of power. The impasse is potentially the perceived deadlock of aporia that all too readily leads to a nihilistic slide, in the manner of American literary deconstruction, into an abyss where 'anything goes'. Yet Subotnik clearly believes this is a risk worth taking, and it's surely, by now, no surprise that I agree with her. Like her, I envisage neither an impasse nor any particular threat to the continued existence of the institution of music theory from an open and active rethinking of its epistemology.

So how does Subotnik's essay fit in relation to the hegemony of institutional music theory as I have described it? As her title suggests, she does not in this article 'complete' a deconstruction of structural listening. Rather she sees her activity as moving *toward* such a deconstruction, her essay accommodating the sense of that deconstruction as a continuing performance. In this way she indicates her awareness of deconstruction, indeed perhaps of all postmodern thinking, as an on-going activity and, in so doing, it seems to me that Subotnik has taken a most important step on Treitler's middle road towards rethinking one small, but fundamental aspect of the institution. This essay represents the kind of



work that may lead to the realignment of the music-theoretical society to which I alluded above. Nowhere does Subotnik claim to have determined any truth, either about structural listening or about the structure of the musical object. She simply presents her well-argued analysis and invites us to make of it what we will. This attitude is, I shall maintain, central to what it means to theorise in a deconstructive style.

In my closing chapter I shall consider how we might allow the effects of this deconstructive style of theorising to play out in the field of musicology, especially as regards the relationship between the formalist categorisation of the objective musical work and a free, contingent notion of 'text'.

## **Chapter 5: Theorising Style**

### **5.1 – In the wake of deconstruction**

In 1987 J. Hillis Miller, one of the Yale-school deconstructionists, declared that ‘The era of deconstruction is over’ (283). This rapidly became a mantra that has been recited in pedagogical institutions across the world in subsequent years. Having basked in a spotlight of intellectual fascination during the 1970s and early 80s, the time of deconstruction, at least as far as its antagonists are concerned, has now passed. And in a certain sense I accept that this is so. Indeed I might say that I am content that this is so, for it is well known that during these years deconstruction earned itself a bad name and came to be labelled as something of a nihilistic, pointless activity. That Derrida himself has shown little concern for the fate of deconstruction so conceived is an indication of how wide of the mark the various appropriations that led to these claims may have been. And it is surely a sordid coincidence that the New Musicology began to pick over the body of deconstruction just as its death was being announced.

Yet, at first sight, the death of deconstruction might seem an odd assertion, suggesting perhaps that my own preoccupation with a deconstructive rethinking of the style of musicological epistemology could be misguided, paradoxical even. In the eyes of many, as I have noted, deconstruction has been little more than a facile buzzword for an insincere concept that is applied in superficial ways to produce casual commentaries. Here I am referring in particular to that popularised, Americanized strain that sought to make of deconstruction an analytical methodology (see page 142). I would not wish to deny that the literary games played by adherents to this popular deconstruction were, from the point of view of established, institutional academic practice, superficial, so much so that its decline was perhaps inevitable. Rather this, in my view, was exactly the point of this particular strain of deconstruction: it went against the grain. But while

there is clearly a limit as to how long a game can be played before boredom sets in (or your preferred game is overtaken by a new trend), there are a few established games that are so firmly embedded in the identity of the institution in which they occur that they seem unlikely to be displaced. Football (soccer), for example, appears to be so important a part of the British national identity that it is almost inconceivable that it might be superseded by American football, nor cricket by baseball. Similarly, in institutional academic terms, it seems improbable that the rationalist, formalist, structuralist epistemology that characterises that institution could ever be displaced by some other game whose rules we do not understand. But substitution of this sort, as I have indicated, is really not the long-term objective of deconstruction, and neither is it the objective of this thesis. Rather, in the same way that British schools increasingly field a baseball team alongside their traditional cricket team, so deconstruction encourages us to re-evaluate both the formalism and the positivism of our traditional academic identity by inviting us to enjoy other intellectual games, at the same time.

Looking at it the other way round, I suspect that this strain of deconstruction became popular precisely because it introduced an element of fun and play into pedagogical practice. Again, I do not wish to suggest that the effects of the popular, playful deconstruction were altogether negative or nihilistic. Rather its repetitive teasing of the institution, its refusal to play the institution's game by the institution's rules, seems to me to have performed a positive part in opening up the field of academic practice. It has created an environment in which there is the potential for further academic game playing, a moment perhaps akin to someone picking up the soccer ball and running with it. We might view the role played by this domesticated deconstruction as a preliminary, acclimatising one in the sense that, by teasing, it problematised academic institutions and, in so doing, made it possible to rethink the nature of all institutions. This is, in my view, the

continuing locus of the activity of deconstruction and, as far as the field of music theory (let alone music history) is concerned, it has only recently begun. This tardiness is undoubtedly the result of the problem already observed that, in its popularised incarnation, deconstruction itself became an institutionalised activity, in much the same way as did the New Musicology that was in part derived from it. In effect this style (form) of deconstruction became a sort of new New Criticism that, like its predecessor, was applied through the 'close reading' of the literary and cultural work. Deconstruction in this sense became both the name of that particular arm of the institution and also the name of a discrete tool that could be applied in analysis, albeit an analysis not readily recognised as such by the traditional academy. And this in spite of the fact that it operated in ways that were seen, perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, to be strikingly similar to traditional styles of formal analysis, including musical analysis. In other words, this style of deconstruction, including the musicological derivative that was employed by Snarrenberg, Kramer and McClary, was really nothing more than another way of reading autonomous works of literature and of music.

It should by now be clear that my principal concern about institutional academic practice arises precisely from its proclivity to adopt and collapse whatever ideas come within grasp, irrespective of the ontological and/or epistemological baggage that those ideas bring with them, into a hypostatized conception of form. As a result of this proclivity the pedagogical practices derived from academic research practice, while surely intended to broaden the mind and to encourage self-reflexivity, can frequently, in fact, seem prescriptive and restrictive in the extreme. That deconstruction in whatever guise, having been variously labelled anti-human, anti-philosophy, anti-theory, anti-history, and much more, could so easily become theorised and find a niche within the academic institution, however precarious, is curious to say the least. It serves only to demonstrate further the stunning longevity of the tunnel vision of the rationalising, formalist,

academic, institutional style that I characterised in the central chapters of this thesis.

I readily accept, therefore, that applied deconstructionist methodologies of this sort are exhausted, and perhaps rightly so. But I do not believe that deconstructive thinking itself is dead. This style of deconstruction, this scepticism, also has a long lineage that stretches back at least to the rhetorical strategies of the sophists whom Plato sought to banish. The charge laid by the hegemonic institution against deconstruction was much the same as that laid against the classical sceptics: the charge of solipsism, of nihilism – that nothing can be known. But, on the contrary, we might reasonably characterise such scepticism more generously: as a refusal to content oneself with the assumption of a singular, *a priori*, essential ‘truth’ about anything. In this way deconstruction seeks to name the excess that results from the exercise of formalist reification. In fact, while the sophist has always been marginalised by the serious, hegemonic concerns of the academic institution, that institution has itself frequently relied on much the same rhetorical powers of persuasion and coercion in order to establish and sustain itself. In musicological terms, the excess of style has always already been a part of the way in which the institution projects its conception of music, often hidden or disguised, sometimes completely ignored, but always niggling, threatening to expose the paradoxical, one-dimensional nature of its structural autonomy. This excess is also implicit in what Marion Guck has called the ‘analytical fictions’ of musicology, the rhetoric, the verbal slippage that conveys the shaping involvement of the analyst in the construction of the analytical object. In my view, the deconstructive rethinking of musicological epistemology that I have been plotting here repeats Guck’s imperative: ‘It behooves us to be aware of what we ask others to accept’ (1994: 230).

This deconstructive style is not an easy one, and certainly not one easily dismissed by those who might wish to maintain the formalist academic enclosure. It is not an object that can be picked up at will and turned to accomplish whatever ends might be desired. It would, I suppose, be temptingly feasible to conclude this thesis by presenting a singular concept of deconstructive style as an approach to musical analysis. This would be a deconstructive package in which style, conceived of as a 'classic' lever, could be used to demonstrate how, in particular instances, structure creates an excess, an aporia. That approach might be weakly deconstructive in the sense that it could draw attention to those parameters of music that are not traditionally thought of as being structural, perhaps at the expense of those that are. In so doing it would take its lead from existing and well known examples produced by the likes of Susan McClary, John Shepherd, Lawrence Kramer, and others, who invoke a notion of 'criticism' that involves the repositioning of music (theoretically conceived) within its historical, social and cultural contexts. But what would be the point I wonder? As I have observed, the new musicological enterprise of recent years has in this way been seen to be little more than a subversion of the formalist and positivist institution which, insofar as it is only thinkable in terms of the object of that institution, has opened itself to precisely the charges of authoritarianism that it laid against that institution. There can be little doubt that a new deconstructive stylistic analysis, however radical it might appear to a few in the short-term, would likewise, from the start, fall into a repetition of the same old patterns of thought that continue to characterise the music-theoretical institution as I have sketched it. It would become just another way of reading the autonomous works of music. And the reason for this is that these new methodologies continue to inhabit precisely the same position in relation to the musical object (even those that disavow it) as the formalist approach of the hegemonic methodology. However genuine the deconstruction might appear in the first instance, it would inevitably become

formalised and formularised as a music-analytical method, and in so doing it too would summon the continual process of deconstruction.

Rather than seek to replace existing methodologies with an alternative, it seems to me that the work of deconstruction remains that of destabilising, or rather of probing the inherent instability of, our existing approaches to knowledge production. That, after all, is what I have been seeking to do in the pages of this thesis by drawing attention to the repeated attempts to subsume the profusion of style under the unifying function of form. And while it might seem defeatist to restrain the exciting, explosive potential of the deconstructive approach in this way, as things stand it's easy to foresee a time when non-structure (or, at least, a radically different notion of what structure entails) could have displaced structuralism as the hegemonic force in music theory, while leaving the institutions of the discipline just as they always were. Indeed, in spite of its purported political correctness, the New Musicology that I described in the previous chapter came lamentably close to realising precisely this situation. Deconstruction as I envisage it, then, is concerned always to refuse such hegemony, just as it seems to refuse the possibility of an ultimate point, and point of conclusion, to this thesis. Deconstruction is a ceaseless reflection on the style of the activity of theorising about music. It is a context, a process, and its only truth claim is that there is nothing outside that context, no structural point of certainty from which to make truthful observations about the truth of the object of study, and no end to the activity of study. Contrary to what many critics of deconstruction might suppose, this would seem to me in fact to bolster the chances of the survival of the academic institution in the longer term.

## 5.2 – Ontology, Epistemology and ‘The music itself’

From the outlook of the formalist music-theoretical institution that I have described the idea that deconstruction should perpetually aim to unsettle the institutional view may be difficult to come to terms with, particularly if it seems to imply a suspension of our belief (it is really no more than that) that what our existing methodologies tell us is accurate and truthful to the musical work. Certainly, as my earlier discussion of Treitler’s view of postmodernism intimated, this deconstructive reflection is not entirely without precedent and has much in common with an existing class of critical self-evaluation that was inspired by the ethical, anti-colonial considerations of such narratives as feminism and Orientalism, and by the work of ethnomusicologists such as Bruno Nettl (1994, 1999). Owing, no doubt, to the way in which the factions within institutional musicology are segregated, we still, at times, fail to appreciate how the attitude adopted by ethnomusicologists might bear on our own activity. Yet there are now signs that this sort of self-evaluation is just beginning to spread more widely. As I indicated earlier (see page 82), the sub-discipline of the history of theory has been very busy in recent years, drawing attention to the contexts within which particular epistemologies have been generated and pointing out the assumptions on which those epistemologies are based. Beyond that sub-discipline there are signs too that the rethinking that it seems to entail is beginning to filter into the work of the analytical mainstream such that the traditional presupposition that the object of analytical study is structurally unified is now being reconsidered.

An early such sign is found in Alan Street’s article ‘Superior Myths, Dogmatic Allegories: The Resistance to Musical Unity’ (1989). The article was published in *Music Analysis*, the primary organ of the analytical community in the UK, indicating that, as Kerman implied (1985: 88), the editors of that journal have been rather generous in their provision of space in which epistemological



rethinking could proceed side-by-side with the exposition of analytical methodology. In many ways, Street's article foreshadowed the topic of this thesis. In his examination, the analytical principle of musical unity (or form) is seen to reflect the 'foundational reasoning' that has been used to explain lifeless artefacts 'from Plato and Aristotle, by way of German Idealism, through to latter-day structuralism and phenomenology' (1989: 80). This is, of course, the story I have related in this thesis in order to indicate how the excess of style has been buried deep within the unitary, structural discourse of musicology. Street makes a similar argument, contending that

the unifying urge is by no means immune from doubt. Indeed, far from demonstrating its objectivity in every case, the same ideal constantly succeeds in exposing its own arbitrariness ... the championship of unity over diversity represents nothing other than a state of false consciousness: illusion rather than reality. (80)

Street seeks to show, polemically, how the assumption of unity, and the analytical progression towards atemporal formalism that both grounds and erases the apparent diversity of epistemological alternatives, has led the 'map of critical campaign' to reflect 'blanket occupation by formalist forces' (90). This is, of course, precisely the presumption of form (and the attempts to suppress the excess of style) that I examined in the central chapters of this thesis in relation to Adler, Meyer and the New Musicology. Street focuses his discussion on Joseph Kerman's call for an 'amalgam of analysis and historical studies' (1985: 228) and examines two 'revisionist attitudes' which seek specifically to address the importance of history in relation to analysis: Jonathan Dunsby's concept of the multi-piece, and Arnold Whittall's notion of the theorist's sense of history. Street concludes that, while both Dunsby and Whittall disavow 'unreflecting conformism', neither really answers Kerman's call for a more humane,

diachronic criticism. Rather, each adopts 'a modified extension of formalist dogma' which is itself afforded thereby 'an even more effective way of ensuring its autocracy' (1989: 99). Ultimately, 'each capitalises on the fact that the means and ends of informed perspective can both be put to use in the interests of a superior formalist product' (101), one which effectively subsumes Kerman's criticism. This formalist autonomy is the superior myth of Street's title.

The dogmatic allegory that Street proposes in its place is adapted from the work of Paul de Man whose notion of allegory was intended to complicate the purported self-sufficiency of such unreflective ideologies as formalism, positivism, and even, perhaps, Kerman's criticism. Allegory was intended by de Man to resist the hypostatisation that is characteristic of such ideologies by recognising that understanding is a temporal process encompassing very much more than the premature, static structures that such ideologies make available for self-present perception. In this way allegory seems somewhat akin to the rehabilitation of style that I have introduced in this thesis. As Craig Owens has put it, 'Allegory is extravagant, an expenditure of surplus value; it is always in excess' (1980: 1059). Indeed, insofar as it is irreducibly and unarguably temporal, Street believes that music, even more than literature, represents the 'allegorical art *par excellence*' (1989: 103).

What, then, is the implication of Street's deconstructive notion of allegory (and my own deconstructive notion of style) for the way musicologists imagine music? At bottom a deconstructive approach seems to me to cut across the distinction between ontology and epistemology: it obliges us to make ourselves more aware of the effects of the foundational assumptions that are projected, *a priori*, by our structuralist epistemology onto the 'thing' that we study. In the terms of deconstruction the epistemology called 'music theory' is the name of a problem. The view from inside the music-theoretical institution is (quite

reasonably) that, by and large, music theory does what it does, and what it does it does quite satisfactorily. Nicholas Cook, for example, has described the activity of music theorists in terms of the culture-specific, 'specialized knowledge' (1990: 2) that is brought to bear by the members of a musical culture in their conception of the structural musical object. And Joseph Swain has developed the idea of a 'musical community', equivalent to the 'scientific community' described by Kuhn (1970: 176-8), that affords the perception of that object a 'shared, or intersubjective, existence' (Swain, 1994: 317). To a point I agree that a musical culture provides the necessary context within which it is even possible to talk about music, and repeat that I have no motivation, ulterior or otherwise, to rubbish the work of music theory as it stands today. Yet to paint the significance of the activity of music theory in terms of its purely internal cultural significance is, at the same time, to make that activity fundamentally exclusive and exclusionary, and it is to divorce it from many wider ethical, aesthetic or even intellectual considerations. As such, tax-paying laypeople might fairly wonder about the adequacy of institutional music theory, much as they wondered about the Institutional Theory by which Duchamp's 'ready-mades' and Warhol's *Brillo Box* were afforded status by 'persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)' (Dickie, 1974: 34).

But more than this, to imagine the significance of music theory in this way, as an independent, unitary, 'constituted field of discourse' (Said, 1984: 180), is also to make it a small, parochial activity. It makes it even more difficult for music theory to connect with and influence its institutional bedmates, which seems to me to go somewhat against the aims of the universalising, normative institutional epistemology as I have described it. What I want to propose, therefore, is that the effort to embrace a more reflective deconstructive attitude (to recall Guck's words) 'behooves us to be aware of what we ask others to accept'. As such the activity of music theory, and the knowledge that it produces, could come to be

more fruitful, and more meaningful than it currently is. In so doing it would become theoretical in a much wider sense of that word, opening itself much more to the possibilities of interdisciplinary interaction while, at the same time, providing the wherewithal to encourage a *rapprochement* between structural music theory and historical musicology within its own disciplinary boundaries. But to embrace such a view we need to understand, or even emerge from, what I regard as the restricted and restricting enclosure of our traditional institutional discourse of structuralism. I hope that my thesis will prove persuasive in this respect. However, I do not anticipate that the institutional *status quo* will be easily displaced so long as its participants, including those like Narmour and the New Musicologists who claim to offer an alternative, are unready to rethink the role and the necessity of that enclosure.

As I have indicated, music theorists are generally careful to avoid the issue of musical ontology (Bohlman, 1999 and Dubiel, 1999 are some recent exceptions), preferring to leave such rumination to professional philosophers and taking it as read that their formalist epistemology is constructed in reference to a self-evident, structural category, often referred to as 'the music itself'. As Scott Burnham has observed, 'we are too advanced these days to speak of 'the music itself' without the qualifying addition of quotation marks' (1999: 215). That this is so leads me to suspect that it is here, in the gap between method and object, that work should be concentrated towards a deconstructive rethinking of the institution of music theory. Yet this leads me inevitably back to the place that I began this thesis, to the problem of definition. That problem arises, as I have indicated, from the fact that, until very recently, within the culture that supports the technical terminology and vocabulary of music theory surprisingly little time has been taken out from the applied work of analytical production to reflect upon the conditions and assumptions of that work. Within the protective confines of a musical culture (Cook) or community (Swain) there is clearly little call for such

reflection since, as members of the institution, music theorists are in intersubjective agreement about those conditions. Indeed Burnham has gone further to suggest that

something like a guild mentality has arisen in the theory community, with the result that theorists are perceived as self-willed musical insiders, as a privileged priesthood, keepers of music's voice, that most incorporeal of relics. (1996: [16])

Since the conditions of the object of music-theoretical knowledge production are inherent in the knowledge produced they do not, it seems, need to be explicitly spelled out by the producers. This, of course, has pragmatic benefits: by not fixing the terms and conditions of such knowledge production in stone we are able to adjust, to add to and subtract from, those terms and conditions as we produce. This is important, and has some equivalence, as we have seen, with the notion of socially constituted laws and trial by a jury of one's peers that allows for a degree of flexibility within those laws. That is to say, a jury is free, to some extent, to determine guilt according to the context of the crime under consideration, according to the particular extenuating circumstances. While such pragmatism is clearly a good thing in epistemological terms, the members of the music-theoretical guild also assume the role of guardians of musical ontology via their epistemology: to use Eagleton's words we are the 'custodians of discourse' (1983: 201). That, on occasion, a member of the guild may detach him or herself from the anonymous security of the guild's intersubjective alliance in order to speak out in defence of music-theoretical epistemology is curious for, in so doing, one presumably elevates oneself from jury to judge. Jonathan Dunsby, for example, has reacted against what he takes to be 'some sort of post-modern abandonment of critical orthodoxies' (1994: 85) by declaring his own 'Criteria of Correctness in Theory and Analysis' which Dai Griffiths has called 'more

judicious than opinionated' (1996: 390). Read as a part of the general backlash against political correctness that began in the late 1980s (see Williams, 1995) Dunsby's paper is of its type. But read as a defence of what purports to be an advanced and mature intellectual activity, one that is secure within the academic institutional fold, its posturing seems rather more neurotic than rational, and rather like special pleading for the appropriateness of the place of music theory within that fold.

Dunsby's definition of correctness encapsulates the tone of his argument. Thus correctness is 'a standard that gives us the confidence to publish our work, and the confidence to impede the dissemination of work we don't like' (1994: 77). I suspect that many of the members of the music-theoretical guild would not, these days, wish to state the case quite so emphatically. The originary target of Dunsby's backlash was Joseph Kerman (disparagingly referred to as 'Jo Musicologist') whose small book, *Musicology* (1985), had called for the birth of a new musicology, just about the time that deconstruction was dying. (There have been very many reviews, defences and reactions published in the wake of Kerman's seemingly innocuous book, of which Dunsby's is perhaps the most forthright.) Kerman, as we have seen, famously articulated the crimes of formalism in theory and analysis and of positivism in historical musicology. Interestingly, Kerman imagined a shelf life for his book of just ten years (1985: 221), but this seems to me to have been somewhat pessimistic; he continues to be quoted widely some fifteen years following the book's original publication. And this is surely because the musicological institution is only just beginning to consider the wider implications of what Kerman said, and of the New Musicological rebellion that it induced. As Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist have put it in the Preface to *Rethinking Music*, 'formalism and positivism ... are similar in that each embodies a stance of unproblematical authority' and what they 'have in common is more than anything else an attitude: the sense of an

established discipline, the sense that there is work to be done, and that there are known ways of doing it' (1999: vi-vii). What I have been seeking to demonstrate in this thesis is that, even if, as Street suggests, Kerman's own answer was insufficient, his diagnosis was accurate: by etching for itself a place within the academic institution musicology had been able to assume the authoritarian stance of the wider academic church. As such its discourse has been characterised by a one-dimensional view of formalism and structuralism. But I have also sought to show that the New Musicology that Kerman heralded did not manage to avoid taking up much the same stance. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has indicated, the 'critic' in the 'domesticated' (New Musicological) deconstruction continues to occupy exactly this stance of 'unproblematical authority' (1987: 16).

Cook and Everist go on to say that 'Under the slogan of "criticism", Kerman created the vacuum that was filled by what came to be called the "New Musicology"' (1999: viii). While I agree that Kerman's role was inaugural I do not agree that he created the vacuum but rather that he created some room for manoeuvre by which to observe the functioning and effects of that vacuum. In effect, Kerman drew everyone's attention to the vacuum that had always already existed within the discipline, a vacuum that was there in Adler's opposition of theory and history, and which was perpetuated by the institutional establishment of music theory through the 1950s, 60s and 70s. But more than this, I would maintain that that vacuum continues to exist (even in the wake of the various battles in the wars of authority within the New Musicology) within the essentialism of the formalist and positivist epistemology whose conception of 'the music itself' valorises knowledge of its immanent structure over that of its style. This is, of course, the continuing effect of the formalist and structuralist epistemology that I have depicted as characterising the academic institution since ancient times. In this area there is still the work of deconstruction to be done, although many of those (including Cook and Everist, but also Bohlman, Samson,

Korsyn, Fink, Maus and Burnham) who contributed to *Rethinking Music* are clearly aware of the value and importance, I hesitate to say necessity, of the kind of stylistic rethinking that I am proposing in this thesis.

Insofar, then, as the conditions for the functioning of music-theoretical epistemology are inherent in the products of the activity, those conditions are somewhat akin to the pragmatism of our everyday language use where we adapt our words, or what we mean by our words, to suit the particular circumstances with which we happen to be dealing. In other words we play Wittgensteinian language games. And this is all well and good. But why then do so many musicologists continue to rely on that category called 'the music itself'? What function does it serve within what is pictured as a pragmatic epistemology? The answer is that it functions as a formally replete, supposedly concrete, yet largely untheorised font of meaning and truth to which intersubjective (or subjective or objective) notions of authority about the activities and the objects of music theory and musicology can be referenced. In other words, 'the music itself' is the ultimate transcendental category that supports formalist structural music theory and positivist musicology, and just about everything in between. As Blasius has indicated, 'the arguments put forward by music theory are uniquely epistemological' and, as such, 'the evidence of theory is always constructed rather than factual' (1996: xiv). It is by virtue of the fact that it is a construction of the formalist epistemology that 'the music itself' has been able to assume the aura of what Eagleton has so evocatively described as 'something with four corners and a pebbledash front' (1983: 49).

At the same time, however, I would argue that 'the music itself' is also a category that continually heals, and shows for what it is, the ideological fissure between music theory and musicology. Music is not exhausted by whatever the formalist epistemology might seek to make it; its stylistic excessiveness is not



erased by such construction. As such 'the music itself' might be imagined as the bright light at the centre of a solar system around which a plethora of discursive satellites are in orbit. Among these are the various analyses – structural, historical, biographical, political, societal, sexual, receptional and so on – all presenting themselves as in some degree autonomous and accurate, yet all united by their dependence on that central light. Within the system, that life-giving light is the satellites' reason to be. The clarity of the light is ceaselessly circumscribed by the activity of the satellites, while, in return, the light shines like a beacon, dispersing the shadows and seeming to justify that very activity. It sounds like a piece of science fiction, and indeed it is. Yet it is surely not so alien that we cannot recognise therein a parody of the circumstances of much of our institutional activity. The category of 'the music itself' is surely constituted by musicological discourse, yet, at the same time, it is projected as preceding and determining that discourse. This is the paradox upon which the institution of music theory, indeed all musicology, is built. I am not suggesting that we are necessarily wrong to entertain the category of 'the music itself' as the locus of our activity; neither am I saying that we are wrong to seek knowledge of it. Quite the contrary, for to suggest either would be to begin the slippery descent into anarchy of the type for which those certain colours of deconstruction have been rightly rebuked. Yet I believe that the relationship between the musical object and the institutional knowledge-creating activity that we construct around it, whether analytical or historical, is insufficiently theorised. And it is the area between our idea of music and the research activity that it spawns that is the playground of deconstruction: between the musical work and the theory that captures it; between the musical object and its representation; between the idea and its reflection; or, in Nattiez's terms, between music and discourse. To call to mind Eric Clarke's (1989) useful expression, deconstruction encourages us to 'mind the gap' between musical (and musicological) ontology and epistemology

– for we can never escape, nor can we flatten, the omnidimensional context of ‘the music itself’.

### **5.3 – From work to text**

In order to recast the relationship between ontology and epistemology in a way that facilitates rethinking, postmodern and poststructural theorists have laboured to displace the rigid, authoritarian, political hierarchies that exist between these two sides of the analytical coin. They have done so by introducing a fluid, reflexive, dialogical notion of ‘text’. Derrida has characterised the relationship of discourse to the alternative notion of text in this way: discourse signifies ‘the present, living, conscious *representation* of a *text* within the experience of the person who writes or reads it’. That is to say, discourse seeks to contain the excessive stylistic nature of ‘the music itself’ by halting its movement in a moment of self-present perception. The text, on the other hand, always exceeds such representation; it is never merely what the representations of particular discourses take it to be, and it exceeds these ‘by the entire system of its resources and its own laws’ (Derrida, 1976: 101). And again, ‘the text is no longer the snug airtight inside of an interiority or an identity-to-itself’ (Derrida, 1981: 36). In other words, the text has what Michael Payne describes as ‘an internal avoidance mechanism that keeps it from being totally captured by a single act of reading’ (1993: 142). In music-theoretical terms, this internal avoidance mechanism, this deconstructive potential, is what I have referred to throughout this thesis as the excess of style. While style provides us with the categories and the points of reference within our discourse, it also refuses to allow the text of music, or of musicology, to stand still. Discourse is, then, an individual act of authorship. In traditional institutional terms, when we publish an account of our research activity we seek to represent the object of that research by describing the activity of our engagement with it. We make that object present to others that may be

interested to read of it, and we also expect to scratch our mark on history, to record our representation in a timeless act of authorship. Traditionally we also anticipate that the fellow members of our guild will find our representation in some sense valuable (or in Dunsby's case we hope that he will 'like' it). And traditionally too the mark by which our representations have been evaluated is our guild's intersubjective understanding of the same object, the work of 'the music itself' that we have represented through the metaphors of our analysis. But by substituting the notion of text in place of work, we seek instead to confirm a sense of contingency, or a recognition that a thesis is but a single, subjective pass through the network of the text. In this way we perhaps hope to resist the institutional impression that, in the words of Robert Pirsig, our 'essays always have to sound like God talking for eternity' (1989: 175).

In 1971, Roland Barthes, following Derrida, opened a passage 'from work to text'. (Barthes had been interested in the relationship of the classic literary notion of the work and the modern notion of the text as early as 1952 in *Writing Degree Zero*.) He characterised the work, conceived in the manner of the structuralist aesthetic of institutional music theory, as a fragment of substance whose internal form is externalised by a composer, performer or listener. The text he characterised as a whole methodological field, as plural, as an active, continual passage around a network of intertextual reference that has no singular origin. As such, the work is merely 'the imaginary tail of the Text' for 'the Text tries to place itself very exactly *behind* the limit of the *doxa* ... Taking the word literally, it may be said that the Text is always *paradoxical*' (1977: 157). In other words, the text is always resistant to singular categorisation and classification because it is irreducibly plural, 'woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony' (160). In Barbara Johnson's words, the Barthesian text is

'an open, infinite *process* that is both meaning-generating and meaning-subverting' (1990: 40).

Of course the notion of text is not something completely new to musicologists. The recent development in historical musicology of 'reception theories' (see Everist, 1999) that emphasise the historical contingency of the musical work in terms of the 'textual strategies' of Hans Robert Jauss's 'horizon of expectations' (1989: 84) has much in common with the poststructural notion of the open text. But music theorists have, at the same time, tended to remain wedded to the more traditional idea of an objective work, occasionally using 'text' as something additional to (rather than supplanting) 'work'. In the field of musical semiotics, for example in the work of Jean-Jacques Nattiez, the neutral level (the immanent, formal structure) of the tripartition corresponds to what Nattiez calls the text (the material trace) of the music. Indeed, in seeking to connect what seems a rather stagnant structural methodology with the contemporary intellectual rapids, he has written that

the flight from structure, characteristic of post-structuralism, involves turning away from the immanent, in order to rediscover the author and the reader. (1990: 27)

Yet elsewhere Nattiez expresses a rather more forthright, and negative view about the textuality of Derridean deconstruction which he regards as 'essentially a form of escapism' (1990b: 268):

We have a choice ... between two attitudes: we can either raise our hands in despair in the face of an infinitude of possible contexts and spend the rest of our lives signifying that signification is insignificant, or we can base our interpretations on explicit criteria while acknowledging that the search for

truth is asymptotic and that if Absolute Knowledge is not of this world, an understanding, however fragmentary, that is based on close study and human works is still better than the masturbatory self-satisfaction provoked by the headlong flight of meaning. (1990b: 274)

Clearly Nattiez does not regard deconstruction, or the notion of textuality that it encourages, as a positive approach. Rather, he equates the 'flight from structure' with the 'flight of meaning'. This has led Steve Sweeney-Turner to observe that, in Nattiez,

one realizes that the metaphysical tropes of structuralist formalism have not been overthrown at all, but simply re-emerge hedged around with qualifiers and an admission of certain inadequacies of the idea of autonomy. What the tripartition allows is the continuation of autonomy, as long as the 'provisionality' of its status is acknowledged. (1994: [1.4])

This is much the same criticism that Street made of Dunsby and of Whittall, and that I have made of Meyer. Clearly there is nothing to be gained, in the broader scheme of things, by simply introducing an additional category that leaves things exactly as they always (already) were. It is not enough simply to go through the motions of confirming the provisionality of one's epistemological categories if the implications of that provisionality are not also thought through.

But in the field of musical analysis there has recently been some indication that the musical text is beginning to be viewed in a more positively pluralistic way. Alan Street has pursued some of the implications of his earlier article by reading Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces, Op.16, allegorically according to three different narrative plots. His first allegory sees the five pieces as 'representing the compositional passage towards atonality' (1994: 170). His second allegory

seeks out the 'multiple meanings generated by the genre of *ländler*' (172). His third allegory regards Op.16 as 'a form of autobiographical narrative' (174) reflecting Schoenberg's melancholia. Street does not make transcendental truth claims for his readings of the sort that a first-phase New Musicologist might have implied; there is no suggestion that the narrative plots he imagines are in any sense in the music (structurally conceived). Rather, he considers explicitly how his readings actually illustrate the criticisms of musical narrativity made by Nattiez (1990c). As such, Street's approach might appear somewhat irrational, perverse even, as though he simply sets out to prove the point of Nattiez's criticisms. But there is method in his apparent madness for he uses Nattiez's remarks to work deconstructively against his own deconstructive allegories of Schoenberg's musical text. In so doing he depicts the likelihood that there will be no end to the activity of deconstructive theorising.

Another recent example that explores the textuality of music is Robert Samuels's analysis of Mahler's Fourth Symphony. Samuels draws specifically on Derrida's notion of the 'general text' to make much the same proposition that I have made in this chapter, namely that

the engagement with texts, the study of textuality itself is, if not the essence of life, at least that which must now replace essentialist thinking. This replaces the concept of ontological essence with that of intertextual difference. (1994: 153)

Samuels also observes that this notion of the general text holds out the possibility of a multidirectional interdisciplinary interaction by enabling the introduction of 'musical discourse into other realms' (154) of academic study. Samuels interprets the first movement of the Symphony in terms of the 'directional' and 'reversible' semiotic codes developed by Barthes in *S/Z* (see also McCreless, 1988) and

shows how Mahler's 'compositional technique is constantly self-aware and overtly intertextual' (157). For this reason Samuels concedes that Mahler is perhaps an unfair example of musical textuality. Certainly the famous intertextual collage in Berio's *Sinfonia* that is built upon the Scherzo from Mahler's Second Symphony has brought this aspect of Mahler's style to more or less universal musicological attention (although see Fink, 1999: 129 n.35 on Berio's later attempt to establish a quasi-organic 'party line' interpretation of the movement). That Mahler is an easy case has not deterred Samuels from developing an extended semiotic reading of Mahler's Sixth Symphony (1995) in terms of Barthes's generic categories. Elsewhere, Anthony Newcomb has also chosen Mahler as a model and has tried to establish the 'narrative archetypes' at work in the Ninth Symphony. Like Street's second allegorical reading of Schoenberg's Op.16, Newcomb examines the multiple meanings implied by the 'characteristic styles' of the ländler, the merry-go-round music, and the waltz that Mahler builds into his second movement. Newcomb observes that 'the crux of the movement lies in the referential potential both of the characteristic styles and of the way in which these styles succeed or displace each other' (1992: 124).

The analytical treatment of music as text is becoming a more common phenomenon. Yet there is a danger, as Eero Tarasti has observed, that in seeking to establish the text of music an analyst will assume that 'it must become something like literature, it must adopt literary forms like the plot of novels' (1998: 126). Tarasti suggests that this is not a necessary assumption, for textuality is something rather broader than simply a literary plot. It is 'a philosophico-semiotic phenomenon which can be manifested in various semiotic substances like musical pieces, ballets, movies, novels, poems, theatre pieces, spectacles, etc.' (1998: 126). As such, textual, narrative approaches seem also to recognise the potential of style to 'reveal the connections (if not necessarily a unity)' (Lang, 1979: 9) among the disciplines of philosophy, literature, fine art,

music and history. In speaking of text, we create an opportunity to reconnect the discrete disciplines within the field of the humanities. It seems certain that, as Hayden White has indicated, if music is treated as text, 'then literary theory would have as much to learn from musicology as music criticism has to learn from literary studies' (1992: 319). The notion of text invites us to examine the restraining implications of our assumptions about autonomous structure, of formalism, and to consider the expanding possibilities of the context of style.

#### **5.4 – In lieu of conclusion**

By aiming to realign our orbit around a fluid, plural notion of a musical text we create an opportunity to suspend any hard and fast ideas about what we believe music is. By suspending our beliefs about 'the music itself' we may come to recognise music to be very much more than what our formalist discursive representations traditionally lead us to think it is. At the same time, we may come to see more clearly the ways in which our discourses position us *vis-à-vis* particular ideologies. That is to say, we can perhaps admit and reflect upon the effects of our institutional allegiances, our guild memberships and apprenticeships in our approach to knowledge construction. Kurt Koffka, one of the Gestalt psychologists, observed that

Each thing says what it is ... a fruit says 'Eat me'; water says 'Drink me';  
thunder says 'Fear me'; and woman says 'Love me'. (1935: 7)

Yet ultimately, if we admit the role of those doing the discoursing in the creation of discourse, we can perhaps accept that there really is nothing intrinsic in the music itself saying 'Schenker me' or, more generally, 'Structuralise me'. Thereafter we may even give up our objections that sociologists of music study society not music, that music psychologists study psychology not music, that



feminists study gender politics not music, that historians study history not music, and even that music theorists study music theory not music. In other words, we might learn that there is an abyss (not just a gap) between the ontology of music and the epistemology of musicology (in whatever guise) that no amount of rhetoric can ever hope to bridge once and for all. There need be no formal, structural certainty. Structure is but one representation of the stylistic text of music.

To some the future of institutional musicology might now look bleak. Yet that future lies firmly within our control and depends entirely on our ability to live with and find encouragement in the difference between music and musicology, which is, of course, precisely the role of deconstruction. Only if we continually shift our relative positions within an abundance of alternatives (what we might optimistically call a *Kama Sutra* of positions) can the musicological orbit realistically have an exciting future. In other words, deconstruction demands of us a philosophical engagement with what it means to be a musicologist (or, if we continue to require these distinctions, a music theorist, a music historian, and so on). Being deconstructive means being reiteratively reflective about your theorising style, enjoying and rejoicing in what Lawrence Kramer has called the 'interdiscursive' (1996: 24) complexity of that style, rather than succumbing to the relatively 'comfortable rigours of formalism and structuralism' (Burnham, 1999: 195).

Where does the notion of style fit into this? I believe that style continues to be exactly what it has always been. Style is not a leading player. It has never really been happy acting out the role either of a formal category (of the sort that Adler tried to make it) or of a structural parameter (of the kind that Meyer tried to make it). Yet, at the same time, it has always appeared to play so very much more than a supporting role. Whenever it pops up in music-theoretical discourse it does so

in a variety of guises reflecting the essential ambivalence that the profusion of definitions discussed in my opening chapter implied. It is inundated by signification such that it appears to mean not enough, yet too much. Perhaps we can now usefully think of the role of style in musicological discourse as that of a supplement, a parergon that frames or ornaments whatever we happen to think 'the music itself' is, and that encourages us instead to think of it as text. This parergon embraces all our individual discursive activities including structural analysis, historical source study, political and social constructions and functions, reception theories, performance practices, scores, listeners (ideal or otherwise), performers, even perhaps, as Richard Littlefield (1996) has suggested, following Cone (1968), silence. In this way the style of the musical text is omnidirectional, always and already resisting and subverting our analyses.

As such style will undoubtedly continue to behave as a 'classic' deconstructive lever (supplement, *différance*, parergon, and more) always already inhabiting the insides of the musicological institution, keeping discourse circulating, resisting complacency and stagnation, and threatening always to instigate a violent disruption of that institution. As I have indicated in the course of this thesis, the pedigree of formalism and structuralism in the music-theoretical institution is long and deeply entrenched. Yet throughout, that institution, by conveniently burying the concerns of epistemology deep within its day-to-day discourse, has all but overlooked the defining effects that the unmarked term, style, has played in its foundation. As Derrida has put it:

What we need, perhaps, as Nietzsche said, is a change of "style"; and if there is style, Nietzsche reminded us, it must be *plural*. (1982: 135)

Changing the style of our epistemology is not a Copernican matter, as the first wave of New Musicologists supposed it to be, of simply throwing out the old and

convincing us, the community of theorists, to welcome in the new. As we have seen, such sedition invariably succeeds only in perpetuating the existing effects of institutional hegemony. Changing our style does not mean dumping our existing theoretical methodologies. Rather, a genuine change of style means coming to view those methodologies, and the knowledge produced by them, in a new light. And this sort of change can only come about gradually, over an extended period of time, perhaps by means of the Planck effect described by Kuhn (1970: 151). I have indicated a few of the signs that the process of change has begun. Yet such change will only continue so long as we are able to recognise the promise and the energy of plurality and thereafter engage in an active, continual, and continually deconstructive theorising style.

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