

DECONSTRUCTIVE
VARIATIONS

Music and Reason in Western Society

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University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis
London

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Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky

The highest criticism is that which leaves an impression identical
with the one called forth by the thing criticized.

—Robert Schumann¹

We have always two universes of discourse—call them “physical” and “phenomenal,” or what you will—one dealing with questions of quantitative and formal structure, the other with those qualities that constitute a “world.” . . . Computational representations . . . could never, of themselves, constitute “iconic” representations, those representations which are the very thread and stuff of life. . . . Experience is not *possible* until it is organized iconically; action is not *possible* unless it is organized iconically. . . .

The final form of cerebral representation must be, or allow, “art”
—the artful scenery and melody of experience and action.

—Oliver Sacks²

Emotion and meaning are coming out of the musicological closet. The underground passages out of uncritical formalism, which Leonard Meyer began to chart more than thirty years ago, are in the process of being discovered by American musicology at large. This developing critique of musical formalism would be facilitated by a reexamination of what I would like to call “structural listening,” a method that concentrates attention primarily on the formal relationships established over the course of a single composition.

The general principle of structural listening has become so well established as a norm in the advanced study and teaching of music, at least in this country, that it is all too easy for us to assume its value as self-evident and universal and to overlook its birth out of particular historical circumstances and ideological conflicts. Likewise, it has become easy to “forget,” in Nietzsche’s sense, that

the object of structural listening, a structure that is in some sense abstract, constitutes only one pole of a more general, dialectical framework in which modern Western conceptions of music have been developed.³ The other pole—medium—is a historical parameter of music, signifying the ongoing relationship of any composition to a public domain of sound and culture, from the time of its initial appearance up to the present. This pole is defined principally through the presentation of sounds, organized by conventional or characteristic usages, into particular configurations called styles, as objects of a physical yet culturally conditioned perception. The precise nature of the relationship between sound and style is an interesting problem that cannot be given attention here. In the discussion that follows, the terms “sound” and “style,” as intertwined aspects of the common parameter of medium will often be treated as more or less interchangeable.

The present discussion, which developed from a much shorter critique in an earlier article, has resulted unintentionally in something very close to a deconstruction.⁴ Recognizing a hierarchical opposition between structure and medium as fundamental to the concept of structural listening, I have in effect tried to reverse the conventionally assumed priorities in this hierarchy, to undercut the distinction between its poles by presenting the mode and object of structural listening as a function of (or as a “supplement” to, in Derrida’s sense) those of nonstructural listening, and to expose some of the concealed ideological assumptions that the concept of structural listening reflects.⁵

The Case for Structural Listening

The variant of structural listening on which I wish to focus my primary attention is the one developed by Schoenberg and Adorno over the course of their writings. I know of no variant that offers on the one hand a stronger or more broadly applicable defense of structural listening and on the other hand a more explicit basis for its own analysis as a cultural construct. To be sure, the concepts worked out by Schoenberg and by Adorno are not identical. Schoenberg’s concept is more narrowly focused on the practical concerns of the composer; Adorno’s, on the theoretical concerns of the critic. Schoenberg’s philosophy is far more naive; and he by no means shared all of Adorno’s emphases or opinions, any more than Adorno witnessed without reservation all of Schoenberg’s compositional decisions. Nevertheless, the two men were in very close agreement as to the specifics of structural listening; moreover, Adorno’s concept of structural listening, like all of his music criticism, was not only developed in a full and informed sympathy with Schoenberg’s enterprise

but can in fact be read as a defense of Schoenberg. Thus the limited philosophical justification that Schoenberg provided for structural listening is consistently and persuasively grounded by Adorno's more ample account, and for present purposes the two concepts will be considered as one here. Schenkerian conceptions of structure and perception, such as Felix Salzer's "structural hearing," will not be considered here; hence the "Toward" of my title.

This concept of structural listening, as Schoenberg and Adorno presented it, was intended to describe a process wherein the listener follows and comprehends the unfolding realization, with all of its detailed inner relationships, of a generating musical conception, or what Schoenberg calls an "idea."⁶ Based on an assumption that valid structural logic is accessible to any reasoning person, such structural listening discourages kinds of understanding that require culturally specific knowledge of things external to the compositional structure, such as conventional associations or theoretical systems. This includes the twelve-tone system and the constitution of any particular "row," though it does not, and indeed cannot, exclude a cultural familiarity with the dynamic of tonality.⁷ In Adorno's formulation, knowing even the name of the composer or the composition in question could muddy the purity of the desired process.⁸ Structural listening is an active mode that, when successful, gives the listener the sense of composing the piece as it actualizes itself in time.

The concept of structural listening has complex roots in German musical, cultural, and philosophical traditions, with which both Schoenberg and Adorno felt a strong sense of historical continuity. The origins of the concept can usefully be traced to the final phase of the Enlightenment. Kant himself remained faithful to a representational notion of art and never drew the full range of aesthetic conclusions to which his own work pointed. Nevertheless, his *Critique of Judgment*, with its conception of disinterested aesthetic pleasure and especially its presentation of aesthetic judgment as a conceptless process involving the metaphor of a structural congruence between faculties, marks a crucial step toward the idealization, in Germany during the next century, of both structural autonomy in art and of music as the highest art. A comparable shift was initiated in the musical domain by the instrumental works of Haydn and Mozart, which served as a powerful catalyst for the rich and paradoxical development of formalistic attitudes toward music in nineteenth-century Germany.

I say "rich and paradoxical" because this formalistic movement was from the start marked by a dialectical opposition and intertwining of values that can be associated with musical autonomy on the one hand and with critical, often even verbal, ways of thinking on the other. Beethoven's music itself can be

construed as a self-conscious critique of earlier Classical musical conceptions. Arguing musically for autonomous structural values, sometimes through a physically thick and tonally extrinsic rhetorical emphasis, sometimes through a revisionist treatment of inherited structural conventions, Beethoven succeeded in undermining the abstract security of the very condition of autonomy he sought to establish, and suggested musical structure as at bottom a contingent construct, subject to concrete cultural limitations on its character and significance.

Likewise, the notions of absolute music as developed by such early Romantic figures as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, and as treated in the music criticism of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Carl Maria von Weber, and Schumann, are of a rich and concrete sort. Attending (in the case of the three music critics) with considerable detail to structural relationships within music, and at the same time affirming the inseparability of a musical structure from the poetic and spiritual associations and imagery that this structure evoked in the imagination, Romantic writing encouraged a kind of listening that was at once structurally abstract and full of content. The critic Edward Rothstein has suggested to me that we call this mode of listening "metaphorical"; Leo Treitler has called the quality to which it directed attention "narrativity."⁹ The word I would use to characterize the Romantic conception of musical structure is "replete."

This twofold conception of musical form underwent something of a crisis in Eduard Hanslick's landmark work, *The Beautiful in Music*, published in 1854. Often construed as a bracing antidote to Wagner's expressive or rhetorical "excesses," Hanslick's restriction of the problem of musical understanding to the purely technical parameters of musical structure can indeed be read as a manifesto for formalistic values of a sort that eventually reached beyond Germany and, by way of what Adorno calls Stravinsky's "phenomenology," right up to the present.¹⁰ For a work that is deeply conservative in spirit—and not just because its concept of aesthetic value points directly back to Kant's third critique—*The Beautiful in Music* proved remarkably prescient.

Yet it should not be supposed that Hanslick renounced altogether the full-bodied or replete character of the ideal of autonomy that had been developed between Kant's time and his own. Asserting that "the domain of aesthetics . . . begins only where elementary [mathematical] relations cease to be of importance," Hanslick argues that what "raises a series of musical sounds into the region of music proper and above the range of physical experiment is something free from external constraint, a spiritualized and therefore incalculable something."¹¹ This is not so far removed from Schumann's assertion that "if we

are to hear a convincing form, music must act as freely as poetry on our conceptual capacities"—or, for that matter, from his praise of Berlioz as similar to "Jean Paul, whom someone called a bad logician and a great philosopher."¹² If Hanslick proposes reducing the musical object of criticism to its phenomenological essentials, he arrives at this point through concepts of the aesthetic and of structure that idealize human cultural and spiritual capacities. If Hanslick encourages a reinterpretation of the musically formal as connoting something essentially negative—say, "mere," or empty, form, form as precisely that in music which does not express—the metaphysical spirit of the German traditions that formed his cultural context can and should still be discerned in his argument as what could be called, in Derridean terms, an important absent presence or "trace."¹³

This intertwining of German intellectual tradition with purely structural values continues to characterize the formalism of Schoenberg and Adorno.¹⁴ It marks an important difference between their aesthetic theories and Stravinsky's, as set forth in the latter's *Poetics of Music*, theories that otherwise converge on a number of more or less characteristic twentieth-century Western musical positions, including a common insistence on the need for some sort of structural listening. Both Schoenberg and Stravinsky, for example, define music as a field for the mastery of nature by culture, the latter of which is valued for its scientific and speculative capacities.¹⁵ Both wish to subject music to a governing, objective, and essentially universal principle of rational necessity, which would counteract the capriciousness of personal self-gratification, prejudice, and taste.¹⁶ Both would (theoretically) support an open-ended variety of musical works, which, so long as they were formally coherent, would have no need to justify their "kind" or existence;¹⁷ the internal necessity of the work, so to speak, would sufficiently guarantee for both men the outward necessity for it.

Both Schoenberg and Stravinsky celebrate the activity of musical construction and would confine musical meaning within the boundaries of the individual composition, exclusive of contextual relationships and (at least in theory) of intent.¹⁸ Both consider reception and effect extrinsic to the concept of composition—the functionalist craftsman Stravinsky no less than the endlessly explaining Schoenberg.¹⁹ Adorno's position on these matters is similar, though always more complicated. Although he sees no actual way of extricating musical structure from its embodiment of social values, and recoils from the hypostatizing of objects as a symptom of ideological dishonesty, he nevertheless maintains the achievement of a totally autonomous musical structure as a utopian ideal.²⁰ All three men end by locating musical

value wholly within some formal sort of parameter, to which it is the listener's business to attend.

There is a difference, however, in the kinds of formal parameters chosen, which one of my students has characterized rather aptly as the contrast between Platonic and Aristotelian enterprises.²¹ It is a difference that weakens, to the point of undermining it, Stravinsky's case for structural listening. Allowing for a civilizing speculative capacity, but disallowing all connection between music and philosophy, and recoiling far more successfully than Adorno from any taint of systematic thought, Stravinsky gives himself over to a spirit of empirical discovery that subordinates logical, or even quasi-logical, necessity to usefulness.²² Indeed, everything about Stravinsky's musical career, including his relationship to past musical history, the progression of his styles, and the inner ordering of his works, points to the same essentially negative pattern of throwing overboard whatever does not serve an immediate purpose.²³ At none of these levels do we sense any interest in demonstrating that steady continuity through which rational processes, especially those pertaining to logical necessity (as opposed to that which is dogmatic or arbitrarily imposed), might confirm their presence in the concrete world.²⁴ Nor does Stravinsky's *Poetics*, outside of a single evocative paragraph, offer any concrete, positive guidelines for the achievement of an unmistakably perceptible rationality in music.²⁵ The formal parameter of music for Stravinsky is simply sound as opposed to expression, that is, sound stripped of meaning;²⁶ and formal value, as characterized in the *Poetics*, amounts to nothing more than a persuasive impression that a particular combination of sounds "works."

By resting the case for a formalistic conception of music on such persuasiveness, Stravinsky, the arch-foe of Wagnerian rhetoric, forfeits the claim of music to validation by any universal principle of rational necessity. At most, he allows the composition to project a plausible rationale, which suggests no necessary basis for its own validity. For all his talk of "necessity," what the Stravinsky of the *Poetics* values in music is not the conceptual but the qualitative or stylistic attributes of objectivity.²⁷ For this Stravinsky, and arguably for Stravinsky in a good deal of his composition, music succeeds by attaining an appearance of elegance, control, and "cool" nonexpressiveness. This condition, though in itself not beyond the reach of disciplined criticism, appeals not to the rational faculties (at least as Kant defined them) but simply to what in elitist circles of the modern West—and the *Poetics* is unabashed in its elitism—is considered good taste.²⁸ The patrician British description of an embarrassing social error as not being "good form" captures the spirit of Stravinsky's formalism precisely. The casual ease with which Stravinsky can

cite the "tone" of his own work is in striking contrast to Schoenberg's attitude toward such matters.²⁹ In effect, Stravinsky redefines musical form to mean style, or even "high style," in our currently fashionable "yuppie" sense. In doing so he transforms music from a potentially universal symbol of integrity into a culturally specialized pleasure, leaving its fate to exactly those arbitrary standards of taste that his formalistic principles of appreciation were designed to escape.³⁰

Schoenberg and Adorno try to effect this same escape by distinguishing the formal parameter of music from mere sound or style.³¹ Instead, Schoenberg and Adorno define the formal parameter of music as an interconnectedness of structure that is both temporally established, and thus concrete, and also objectively determinable. Consequently, they define structural listening not as a sensibility to chic but as attentiveness to a concretely unfolding logic that can vouch for the value of the music. Practiced in the way prescribed by Schoenberg and Adorno, structural listening plunges us into the middle of what could be called the musical argument, allowing us to understand, from the position of an insider, not just the lines but the totality of the argument as it unfolds. Confronting at every moment the rationale of the composition from its own point of view, so to speak, the listener is ideally to be precluded from exercising negative prejudices or forming adverse judgments on the basis of stylistic uncongeniality or, in a sense, even (within moral limits) of philosophical difference.

Adorno, to be sure, who is in most respects far more preoccupied than Schoenberg with the philosophical and ideological implications of musical structure, is not only prepared but determined to reject music he finds morally offensive, including that of Stravinsky's *bête noire*, Wagner, and of course, that of Stravinsky himself. Significantly, however, Adorno never sees himself as having to choose between structural and moral value, because for Adorno the two are essentially synonymous; "no music has the slightest esthetic worth," he asserts, "if it is not socially true."³² From Adorno's standpoint, the virtues of the rationality that structural autonomy represents, and that render autonomy the highest condition of art, are not just logically abstract but historically concrete as well. The more a musical structure approximates the self-contained intelligibility characteristic of logic, the more it can and does free itself from what Adorno sees as the deceptions or falsehoods invariably fostered through social ideology in order to maintain the power of existing institutions.³³ Conversely, the greater the distance of music from the logical paradigm, the greater its entrapment in the special interests served by the conventions of social ideology, and the smaller its claim to the essentially

moral condition of aesthetic value. In other words, Adorno's characterization of a philosophical attitude in music as morally offensive is never separable from his perception of grave structural weaknesses in that music.

The concept of structural value offered by Schoenberg and Adorno, like their concept of the structural listening that can discern such value, is at once exacting and generous. Demanding an unflagging intelligent concentration on the part of the listener, these men require of the composer, and more generally of themselves, a no less stringent standard of discipline. The self-conscious consistency, the sense of integrity, and the devotion to logic with which Schoenberg tried to regulate every relationship in his own compositional domain—the inner construction of his pieces, the unfolding of his own stylistic progress, and the preservation and development of past musical tradition as a kind of sacred trust—have probably never been equaled by another Western composer. As in Stravinsky's case, his entire musical career can be read as an enlargement of his own compositional principles, but in a sense that is far more "replete."

And correspondingly, Schoenberg's spirit of self-discipline results in a concept of musical structure, and of structural listening, that is far more positive and concrete in character than Stravinsky's formalism. Just as it is usually possible for any educated and reasonably sympathetic listener to perceive the retention of a capacity for individual expressiveness as a value in Schoenberg's music, so too, Schoenberg refuses in his writings to dehumanize either the individuals participating in musical life or music itself by separating structural rigor from an expressive capacity. For Schoenberg these last two are virtually synonymous: the deepest emotional satisfaction in music arises precisely through the achievement of an intensely expressive structural integrity (which is "independent of style and flourish" and communicable at least to those whose "artistic and ethical culture is on a high level").³⁴

Nor does either Schoenberg or Adorno shrink from specifying the concrete musical components of a structure that fully allows structural listening. Although Adorno voices serious objections to the twelve-tone method, which Schoenberg explained so painstakingly and generously to his readers, both men are thoroughly dedicated to the goal of reducing music to a condition of what could be called pure structural substance, in which every element justifies its existence through its relation to a governing structural principle. Hence both advocate the principle of "nonredundancy" in music, a principle with many compositional ramifications, including a rationale for chromaticism and dissonance, which they explore in detail; and both advocate the renunciation of preexisting, externally determined conventions,

such as symmetrical phrasing and refrains (which in fact often entail redundancy), as foreign to the generating idea of a composition.³⁵ Such renunciation, it should be stressed, is not to be confused with the simultaneous acceptance and liquidation—or, to use Hegel's terminology, *Aufhebung*—of artistically transmitted tradition, which both men demanded in their commitment to historical continuity and responsibility. Furthermore, as a way of distilling structural substance, both men place particular importance on the self-developing capacity of a motivic-thematic kernel, or on what they call “developing variation,” a process they often though not exclusively associate with Brahms.³⁶

The notion of development represents, of course, a continuation of structural concepts and values that originated in Viennese Classicism. (Actually, Schoenberg, with some support from Adorno, locates its origins in Bach.)³⁷ This notion was likewise prized by Hanslick, who is cited as a particularly adept practitioner of structural listening in one of the most detailed descriptions that Schoenberg gives of this method.³⁸ Although Adorno is clearly more sensitive than Schoenberg to the self-negating potentialities of development in post-tonal music, he is even more emphatic than Schoenberg in idealizing Beethoven for his developmental powers; and both men admire Brahms's tendency to transform composition into what Adorno calls “total development.”³⁹

At its best, Schoenberg's and Adorno's concept of structural listening makes a strong case, and certainly a more consistent case than Stravinsky's version does, for the values it wishes to sustain. Evoking as its ideal the possibility of reasoned musical discourse, and thus by extension the possibility of reasoned discourse itself, among differently situated individuals, their concept does not hold musical form accountable only for the connection of its own elements to a rationally governing principle. In addition, their concept ultimately demands that musical form, through its uncompromising integrity and renunciation of sensuous distractions, contribute indirectly but concretely, as well as metaphorically, to the betterment of society. In effect, 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.

It is as a service to just some such ideal, I believe, that we in musicology today would at bottom justify our firm and continuing commitment to various forms of structural listening. And yet, for all Adorno's self-conscious acuity, this concept is not without what Paul de Man might call its areas of critical blindness to its own epistemological weaknesses.⁴⁰

The Case Against Structural Listening

Cultural Inappropriateness

The concept of structural listening imagines both composition and listening to be governed by a quasi-Kantian structure of reason that, by virtue of its universal validity, makes possible, at least ideally, the (presumed) ideological neutrality and, hence; something like the epistemological transparency of music. This assumption of a congruence between the underlying principles of composition and those of listening is what lends force to the metaphor of listening to the musical structure “from within.” In actuality, however, in ways that I hope will become clear, the metaphorical listening position that structural listening encourages is less that of Schoenberg's and Adorno's structural insider than that of the externally situated, scientific observer. Indeed, it is very close to that of the empirically oriented (anti)hero of Stravinsky's *Poetics*.

This shift in metaphorical position might at first glance seem too slight to jeopardize the goals of structural listening. Scientific observation, after all, is our cultural paradigm of methodological objectivity. Based on concepts and values that are assumed to be universal, and thus presumably exempt from subjective distortion, such observation seems to offer us the power to focus intensely on a musical object entirely on its own terms. Thus a structural listening modeled on scientific observation might seem to offer us our best shot at a relativistic, ideologically neutral condition of tolerance in music, encouraging society to honor the music of all times and cultures equally, on terms set by the music itself.

But just as Western science has increasingly been criticized as a culturally limited and limiting construct, so, too, there is a strong argument to be made that the terms on which structural listening operates originate far less in universal conditions of music than in our own specific cultural predilections. Even at first glance it seems clear that this method does not lend itself with equal ease to all musical repertoires, even in the West. Just as tonal theory has been more fully developed than any other Western system of theory, so, too, structural listening seems to work most smoothly when applied to the “common practice” repertoires of Germany and Italy, say, between Corelli and Mahler, which form the basis of the Western canon.

This is hardly surprising, since structural listening is generally conceded to have “arisen” from the tonal canon. But why should this allegedly objective method of perception, which is supposed to concern itself with the structure of individual compositions, be used so regularly to confirm the aesthetic superi-

ority of whole styles, particularly Viennese Classicism, to other styles? (And how, for that matter, does the supposed objectivity of Stravinsky's formal perception, unless his very conception of structure is informed by stylistic prejudices, account for his denigration of Wagner's "symphonicism"?)⁴¹ Why, if all music is equal in the ears of the structural listener, do some styles turn out to be more equal than others? And why (except perhaps to serve our own interests as masters of the specialized training and discourse that structural listening in practice nearly always requires) should we academics suppose such listening applicable to music that falls outside the canon?⁴²

In fact, the concept of structural listening is considerably less widely applicable and objective a mode of perception than it seems. The choice of this method, as well as the identity of the music it prefers, reflects our own culturally conditioned stylistic orientation as its users. Like Stravinsky's "good form," what structural listening in all its variants offers us is less the conceptual attributes of objectivity than the stylistic impression of objectivity. Whereas it purports to examine music in terms of an intrinsic and potentially universal musical condition—structural autonomy—the notion itself of this condition is foreign to much, if not most, music. One can of course decide to impose this condition as an ideal on any music one chooses. But before one claims the basis for this ideal as universal and intrinsic, one needs some evidence that the music in question is presenting its own structure as fundamentally autonomous, or as "fixed" in various senses.

A fixed structure is discrete and whole; it has clearly delineated boundaries, which would be violated by any conception of this structure as a fragment. A fixed structure is also unchangeable; its internal components and relationships are presumed to have attained something like a status of necessity that disallows alternative versions. Neither of these conditions can persuasively be called characteristic, even as a projected ideal, of Western art music up until the eighteenth century. It could even be argued that they did not obtain fully until that point in the nineteenth century when improvisation was decisively excluded from the concept of art composition and a compositional ideal of precision arose. I mean here precision not just of pitch (which, somewhat paradoxically, the relativistic tonal notion of "key" had already established to the detriment of mode) but also of notation and instrumentation.

To be persuasively autonomous, moreover, a structure must show some evidence of trying to define itself wholly through some implicit and intelligible principle of unity. In music this requires that a composition have some technique for projecting itself as self-determining over time. Whether or not such a technique is suggested by Schenker's concept of linear organization, with the

debatable audibility of that concept, its relative inability to account for the particularities of a musical surface, and its reliance on archetypal musical structures as well as on nontemporal, visual schematics, is not a matter that can be analyzed here.

Development, on the other hand, is widely considered by Western musicologists to be capable of projecting the impression of such self-determination. Schoenberg and Adorno quite openly define structural listening as developmental listening. But as virtually all scholars would concede, very little music, even Western art music, makes use of the technique of development (Schoenberg's perception of Bach's music as in some respects developmental [see note 37, this chapter] is not widely shared. Indeed, Bach's achievement is probably better characterized as the synthesis of a great diversity of generic concepts—concerto, trio sonata, dance, fugue, and so forth—than as structural self-determination.)

In its pure state, moreover, the condition of self-determination, or even the projection of such a condition, would require the renunciation of premises, organizational principles, purposes, values, and meanings derived from outside of a musical structure. Almost no Western music outside of certain Classical and contemporary endeavors has come close to accepting such a condition of renunciation. Up until the end of the eighteenth century, for example, most music was shaped to serve an external social function; and in keeping with deep-rooted mimetic or rhetorical ideals, the dominating paradigm of music throughout this period was music with a text. Furthermore, Western music has been assumed in most periods to owe at least some of its significance to a larger cultural network of extra-musical ideas or stylistically related constructs.

Structural listening looks on the ability of a unifying principle to establish the internal "necessity" of a structure as tantamount to a guarantee of musical value. At the very least this assumption challenges the spirit of Gödel's theorem. In practice, however, the principle on which structural listening relies more than any other to authenticate value is not one of self-evident rationality but rather one of its own choosing: individuality. Both Schoenberg and Adorno emphasize the responsibility of the conscious individual, whether composing or listening, to clarify actively the internal intelligibility of a structure, a process that, ideally, frees the meaning of that structure from social distortion and manipulation. Even in those instances when Schoenberg and Adorno concede the possibility of an instantaneous intuition of musical value, they attribute such intuition at bottom to a structural integrity in the music; and this integrity can be achieved only through an individualis-

tic “compositional force” (Adorno’s words), or through what Schoenberg terms an “originality [that] is inseparable from . . . profound personality.”⁴³ In such respects, both men are deeply committed to the governing status of originating intention.⁴⁴

This is not the same as saying that advocates of even a “replete” structural listening ordinarily reserve their highest praise for the music that is most commonly characterized as individual in the sense of personally expressive—that is, Romantic music. Even the most ardent German advocates of a “replete” formalism are seldom prepared to idealize music that values personal expressiveness over developmental autonomy. Certainly Adorno does not; his greatest reverence is for that metaphorically powerful “moment” of individuality—Beethoven’s middle-period style—in which the musical subject, determining its own action through uncompromising objective standards of developmental unity, turns itself into a locus of the universal.

Most of us in the Western musical world, at least until recently, have taken for granted some related inseparability of musical greatness and individuality, which in turn we equate with musical value. Yet even excluding non-Western traditions, it would be difficult to characterize with confidence most art music before the common-practice period through reference to ideals of individuality or even to a dialectic of individual and society. Even chromaticism, which we often interpret as signifying resistance to prevailing social norms, does not seem characteristically to be used by earlier music to place the power of individuality at its own ideological center. We recognize as much when we relegate Gesualdo, who might well have been a cultural hero in Mahler’s Vienna, to a pocket of historical eccentricity.

The apparent absence of an individualistic ideal of structural autonomy before the firm establishment of tonality as a cultural norm, together with our own commitment to such an ideal, in my judgment helps account for a certain lack of focus that can sometimes be sensed in our study and teaching of early music, and for a certain uneasiness that stems from the difficulty of distinguishing form from style in early music (see below, the text leading to note 73). On the one hand, given our reluctance to attribute the preservation of certain medieval and Renaissance music to either the overt power or the innate virtue of Christianity, much less to sheer happenstance, we want to assume the primarily structural value (and thereby the “greatness”) of the early music we teach. But on the other hand, lacking any noncontextual alternative to ideals of structural autonomy, we sometimes allow the teaching of medieval and Renaissance music, which does not strongly support our own structural

biases, to disintegrate into the uncritical presentation of shifting stylistic hallmarks that can be named and dated on an exam.

The absence of a clear ideal of autonomy in early music may underlie the often noted failure of modern scholars to produce a persuasive theory of pre-tonal music (as, indeed, of any primarily texted music);⁴⁵ conceivably the very notion of such a theory, at least in any structural sense, is self-contradictory. This absence may also account for a certain hollowness at the core of various encyclopedic surveys of Renaissance music, which seem to offer inclusiveness as compensation for the lack of an aesthetic basis for selecting and evaluating works of this period.

Such problems indicate strongly that structural listening does not encourage the open-ended sensitivity to diverse sorts of music that it promises. Even as this concept urges us to judge a work in terms of the work’s own chosen premises, it distances us from music that exhibits no interest in encompassing all of its own premises. In fact, there are ways in which structural listening can be construed as a cultural violation even of the one style, Viennese Classicism, that not only seems clearly predicated on some ideal of structural autonomy but also appears to have realized this ideal with some success. Not at least until Beethoven began to place rhetorical emphasis on many of his main structural junctures, in effect conceding the intrinsic intelligibility of structural relationships as a fiction, does the musical evidence suggest that composers valued active structural comprehension over the Enlightenment ideal, as articulated by Kant, of seemingly artless art.⁴⁶

Even more important, perhaps, is the secondary status that such listening accords to the musical parameter of sound. The ideal of structural listening has made our perceptions and analytical concerns as musicologists almost completely dependent on scores, as if the latter were books. One is tempted to argue that structural listening makes more use of the eyes than of the ears. Certainly, to an important extent, structural listening can take place in the mind through intelligent score-reading, without the physical presence of an external sound-source. But whereas the absence of concrete sound constitutes a debatable loss in the case of literature, it represents nothing less than a catastrophic sacrifice for music.

This is a sacrifice that Adorno and even Schoenberg, in certain respects, are actually prepared to make. Although their version of structural listening purports to account for every detail of a concrete musical logic, it depreciates the value of sound with unusual explicitness. Adorno identifies sound as that layer of music which, through its use of such historically conditioned resources as technology and conventions, bears the imprint of social ideology

and allows the social “neutralization” of structural individuality. Thus the status Adorno accords this “manifest” (as opposed to “latent”) layer is not privileged, to say the least. This explains his impatience with the archeological restoration of early musical sound to its original “purity.”⁴⁷ It also helps explain his low estimation of Romantic music, which calls explicit attention to the opaqueness of its own sound and style. To Adorno this concreteness signifies not an honest admission by Romantic music of its own social and ideological concreteness but a capitulation to the power and modes of society—an abandonment of the effort, however quixotic, to define universal individuality in music.

By Adorno’s account, in fact, “mature music,” which concerns itself with that “subcutaneous” structure where individual integrity can hope to resist or even transcend social ideology, “becomes suspicious of real sound as such.” Turning color into a function of total structural interrelatedness, such music makes color in itself essentially superfluous. Adorno praises Schoenberg’s ascetic “negation of all facades,” which he likens to that of late Beethoven, and projects a time when “the silent, imaginative reading of music could render actual playing as superfluous as speaking is made by the reading of written material.”⁴⁸

Adorno’s characterization of Schoenberg is echoed by Pierre Boulez’s reference to Schoenberg and Webern as composers “for whom the idea of timbre is almost abstract, and who never cared at all about the physical conditions of sound emission.”⁴⁹ In his writings, Schoenberg himself consistently subordinates the values of sound to those of structure, asserting in what may be the key passage of *Style and Idea* that the responsible composer “will never start from a preconceived image of a style; he will be ceaselessly occupied with doing justice to the idea. He is sure that, everything done which the idea demands, the external appearance will be adequate.”⁵⁰ This devaluing of medium has a direct musical counterpart in the naive certainty of Schoenberg’s later works that the tonal conception of “developing variation” can sustain its intelligibility in a radically altered context of sound. This contradiction is often noted, but its implications with respect to the notion of “medium” have not so far been fully recognized.

The subordination of medium, toward which structural listening leads more strongly than most of us happily admit, represents one logical resolution of the dialectical opposition between structure and sound that has for some time been discernible in Western music, and which has antecedents in a tension between essence and appearance that can be traced back in Western thought at least as far as Plato. In effect, Schoenberg and Adorno, that quin-

tesential foe of ahistorical abstraction, take the same position as Derrida does when he interprets Aristotle’s categories as evidence for the priority of abstract thought over concrete language.⁵¹ Stravinsky, at bottom, draws the opposite conclusion, though in identifying essentially stylistic parameters of music as formal, he obscures the implications of his argument and restricts its usefulness.

But however characteristic this tension may have become in Western music, it has seldom been resolved through depreciating sound. On the contrary, as the anticorporeal bias of doctrinaire religion was left behind, Western composers, including the Viennese Classicists, came to place a high value on the sensuous actuality of their music. By the nineteenth century, as I have just indicated, specificities of instrumental color were considered normally constitutive of a musical configuration; they were among the components that “fixed” the piece as a distinctive, individual “organism.” Of course, Romantic music was typically contradictory in its attitude toward instrumental color. On the one hand integrating it into their notion of structure, the Romantics simultaneously emphasized color to a degree where it was bound to call attention to itself and, through the habit of associative listening, to things outside of music (the horns and the forest in Weber’s *Freischütz*, for example). But this double-sidedness hardly supports the case for structural listening. On the contrary, to the extent that structural listening encourages concentration on the perception of formal relationships at the expense of maintaining an active (though less easily formalized)⁵² sensitivity to sound itself, structural listening constitutes a cultural violation of this and many other styles.

This holds even in our own century if we make a clear distinction between the heirs of Schoenberg on the one hand and those of Debussy and Stravinsky on the other. In fact, the only body of music for which we can be fairly confident that structural listening, in its most consistent sense, does not pose a violation of originating norms is Schoenberg’s own. (One might, to be sure, extend this observation to Schoenberg’s descendants, including Webern, especially in the sense that the latter “out-Schoenbergs” Schoenberg or, to be more precise, that Schoenberg’s ideals constitute an essential trace in Webern’s music. Which means, of course, that in Webern’s music the “self-negating potentialities of development” mentioned above are fully realized.) But despite its appropriateness to Schoenberg’s compositional ideals, structural listening, in its devaluation of sound and style, involves another sort of epistemological limitation, which is nowhere more evident than in the application of this method to Schoenberg’s own music. This I shall now discuss.

The Need for Nonstructural Knowledge

We attach too much and too little importance to sensations. We do not see that frequently they affect us not merely as sensations, but as signs or images, and that their moral effects also have moral causes.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau⁵³

Given Adorno's idealization of structural listening, the actual character of his musical writings might seem surprising. His entire output as a music critic can be viewed as illuminating the irreducibility of the concrete medium of music. Actually, it was only through such criticism that Adorno could fulfill what he saw as the critic's principal obligation: to expose the destructive values of society as they manifest themselves in the public and conventional aspects of music, and to disentangle music from the corrupting power and effects of institutional ideology. This obligation required him to engage in continuous criticism of the musical medium (thereby performing much the same service that he praised in Schoenberg's and Webern's recasting of Bach's instrumentation).⁵⁴

Adorno scorned the very notion of an actual nonideological music. Insistence on the nonexistence of ideology in music was radically different for him from a continuing sensitivity to ideology as a force to be resisted, a sensitivity that he discerned in the uncompromising structural integrity of the late Beethoven quartets and Schoenberg's music. Certainly he was no less adamant than Barthes has been in condemning as a lie any attempt by a musical "sign," so to speak, to hide its own cultural artificiality, and to present itself as either a socially and historically isolated object or an ideologically innocent, neutral, or quasi-natural construct, for "merely" formal analysis.⁵⁵ Such self-deceptively nonideological analysis was far more consistent with the spirit of Stravinsky's *Poetics*, which can be shown to project a wide range of ideologically loaded, even antihumanistic subtexts.⁵⁶ And, indeed, Adorno's own criticism of Stravinsky's music shows him every bit as sensitive as more recent, unmistakably antiformalist critics such as Terry Eagleton to the chasm that separates narrowly formal intentions from a purely formal character, effect, or significance, whether in art or in criticism itself.⁵⁷

Adorno's constant preoccupation with social ideology, then, led him to a continuous engagement with that layer of music which he least valued, and to the establishment of an ongoing, relatively explicit connection between his own values and those of the various cultures represented in the composition, performance, or reception of the music he discussed. As perhaps the premier practitioner in our century of concrete social and historical criticism, who deplored systems and abstractions, Adorno set an unexcelled example for

those figures in current literary debate, such as Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, Marshall Blonsky, and Eagleton, who likewise stress the concrete social and historical responsibilities of criticism.⁵⁸

Furthermore, because Adorno viewed music as a part of a historically opened context of concrete social relationships, his principal focus as a critic was not the isolated work but the broader category of style. This, too, encouraged him to develop criticism as a mode of stylistic rather than structural analysis, even when dealing with elements of structure. In fact, what Adorno actually did in his musical writings was stylistic criticism of the highest caliber. By this I mean criticism of a kind that had nothing to do with the mere listing of characteristic musical devices but rather demonstrated the capacity of a rigorously fashioned critical language to analyze style incisively. Adorno's ability to find richly evocative yet succinct and precise metaphorical verbal equivalents for structural and nonstructural elements in music, and thereby to characterize persuasively the cultural and historical significance of both individual works and styles, is masterful, even uncanny.

It is sometimes asked whether Adorno really "knew" music. Frequently he is taken to task for not doing the thing he seems most to require of the listener—structural analysis. Moreover, Schoenberg regularly used charts and diagrams as well as the specialized terminology of academic structural analysis; and Adorno himself identified the ability to "name the formal components" as a sign of competence in structural listening. Yet his criticism rarely offers such signs. Probably this was because, for him, such techniques smacked too much of those anti-intellectual "proceedings in which general demonstrability of results matters more than their use to get to the heart of the matter."⁵⁹

But did Adorno get to the heart of the matter? I would argue that even if we reject vehemently the conclusions that pervade Adorno's metaphorical observations (a possibility allowed by the unusually honest and explicit presentation of his own values), Adorno's thorough familiarity with the music he characterizes as well as the aptness and importance of his metaphors are virtually always confirmed by a reconsideration of the music in question. "The genuine experience of music," Adorno wrote, "like that of all art, is as one with criticism."⁶⁰ For Adorno, in fact, no less than for the German Romantics a century earlier, metaphorical criticism of the characteristics, choices, and relationships that embed music in one or another sociohistorical context is not a "supplement," in Derrida's sense, to the possession of detailed structural knowledge but rather the very means of getting to the heart of such knowledge.

Now in a way all of this amounts to saying that the kind of structural knowledge that interests Adorno and the German Romantics alike is culturally con-

crete, encompassing, or "replete." But here it must be explicitly acknowledged that the concept of replete structural listening is itself a concrete, metaphorical account of perception, not a logical principle. Not only does the concept of replete structure itself point to a condition that is characteristic only of music in certain styles, and thus first to a stylistic rather than to a structural condition. In addition, this concept depends, no less than Stravinsky's chic formalism does, on a culturally defined, stylistic sensibility in the listener for its intelligibility, persuasiveness, and usefulness. This stylistic particularity of replete structural listening as a principle helps explain how this concept can readily be misinterpreted by those of us from outside Adorno's culture and not privy to its stylistic nuance as justifying far narrower practices of structural listening. But the fundamental sense in which Adorno's concept of structural listening as well as Schoenberg's compositional choices were both governed by needs more stylistic than structural in character was something Adorno did not and probably could not recognize—any more than he could assess the degree to which his own aesthetic convictions represented cultural preferences.⁶¹

Nor, therefore, was Adorno willing, any more than Schoenberg was, to understand the widespread unresponsiveness to Schoenberg's music relativistically, as the reflection of something other than an immature unwillingness or intellectual incapacity on the part of the public to master the technical demands of structural listening (see note 64). Grounding structural listening on a supposedly universal rational capacity, Adorno was utterly unable to criticize as "ideological" the elite social standing and the long years of education that were ordinarily required for the exercise of this capacity. He could not bring himself to characterize either Schoenberg's unpopularity or nonstructural modes of listening as functions of legitimate differences, among listeners, in cultural or stylistic orientation.

This is not to say that Adorno was oblivious to actual characteristics and effects of his or Schoenberg's style.⁶² On the contrary, Adorno explicitly considered irreducible stylistic "difficulty" necessary to the structuring and value of both men's work. From Adorno's standpoint, a "jagged physiognomy" did not only signify the resistance of individual usage to the conventions of ideology. It was also needed to preserve the integrity of "subcutaneous" argument from social "neutralization." Such integrity required a refusal by structure to compromise itself by "smoothing over," as Adorno accused Brahms of doing, or by obscuring a dehumanizing contradiction between the rational ideals of structure and the ongoing antirational force of society, as represented in the musical medium.⁶³

Where Adorno's self-critical capacity failed him was both in his attribution

of a universal necessity to social analysis and the conviction that explained such stylistic choices, and in his inability to imagine alternative, equally honest, stylistic definitions of or solutions to the social problems surrounding music. What drew Adorno to Schoenberg's music was not just its structural idealism but also the ugliness, by conventional standards, of its sound. But while it is true that Adorno valued this ugliness for its "negative" capacity to scorn the ideological blandishments of "affirmative culture," it is by no means clear that he would have been similarly drawn to the jagged qualities of grunge or punk rock or Laurie Anderson's music, much less that anything could have convinced him to view Leonard Bernstein's choice of the popular route as socially responsible. Adorno was sympathetic to Schoenberg's ugliness because he understood its cultural significance. And he understood this significance because he operated within the same set of concrete cultural assumptions, expectations, conventions, and values that Schoenberg did. He could listen to Schoenberg's music with the advantage of an insider's knowledge, not of a universal structure, but of a particular style.

Schoenberg, too, was inclined to dismiss objections to his style as signs of a "childish" preoccupation with pleasure of the senses rather than of differences in cultural orientation; just as form for Stravinsky is sound stripped of meaning, so style for Schoenberg is sound devoid of "idea."⁶⁴ In emphatically replacing the aesthetic notion of beauty with epistemological notions such as truth and knowledge as the central philosophical problem of music, Schoenberg revealed in his writings the hope of weaning listeners away from sensuous preoccupation.⁶⁵ And yet instinctively he recognized the need to draw the listener inside his own stylistic world. Again and again in his writings he explains the numerous "lost" historical origins of his works, including the tonal system and earlier German compositional techniques, which although literally absent from his works are nevertheless constituent elements in the conception and significance of the latter.⁶⁶ One would be hard pressed to find a composer whose work is more fully and clearly characterized by elements of Derrida's "trace"—or for that matter a critic whose intelligibility depends more than Adorno's does on a knowledge of absent subtexts. In both cases, these traces and subtexts consist precisely in ideas and values defined in a surrounding cultural context. They are functions not of a literally present structure but of a more open-ended style.

Both Schoenberg's work and that of Adorno provide massive evidence of the degree to which the communication of ideas depends on concrete cultural knowledge, and on the power of signs to convey a richly concrete open-endedness of meaning through a variety of cultural relationships.⁶⁷ Their work

supports the thesis that style is not extrinsic to structure but rather defines the conditions for actual structural possibilities, and that structure is perceived as a function of style more than as its foundation. Even in a crude sense I would argue that if we are forced in musical analysis to grab hold of one end or the other of the dialectic between a style and a structure that are always affecting each other, it makes most sense to define the composer's starting point as his or her entrance into a preexisting musical style. Certainly such a notion has large currency in our own culture, where its status as a cliché ("the medium is the message") no doubt accounts in large measure for our perception of Stravinsky as more modern (i.e., less dated) than Schoenberg.⁶⁸ And certainly for those who begin interpreting either Schoenberg's or Adorno's work from the vantage point of a stylistic outsider, any relatively abstract, structurally rational argument is likely to constitute not the most but the least accessible parameter of meaning.

This is precisely the situation that confronts us with any culturally distant music. Did medieval music, for instance, once define structurally the value and power of individuality? Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that too much distance from the wealth of associations that once informed medieval usages prevents us from answering this question conclusively. To the extent that our perception of medieval culture and its signs remains what anthropologists call "etic" (that is, external and merely physical) rather than "emic" (that is, internal and literate), we are not in a position to view individualities of structure as signifying much more than a stylistic aberration.⁶⁹ (Why are we so much more inclined to apply the name "Mannerism" to early than to recent artistic styles?) Certainly the kinds of medieval musical "structure" that our culture allows us to perceive are nothing like the system of relationships that Adorno's structural listening would have us grasp from within.

Ever since the crystallization of the notion of "Art" in the early nineteenth century, it has become a truism of Western culture that the proper evaluation of any structure as "Art" requires the perspective of time. And in a culture that explicitly allows individuals, such as artists, to alter the conventional cultural meanings of signifiers, some time lapse undoubtedly is required for a full understanding of the altered medium. By this time, however, it has probably already (or more likely, as Derrida likes to say, "always already")⁷⁰ become impossible to understand the full import of those changes at the time they were made, or hence, to claim an insider's access to arguments structured within that medium. By this point, as Hildesheimer suggests in his biography of Mozart, crucial aspects of an original significance have become unrecoverable.⁷¹ The listener is already hearing overtones of intervening knowledge and experience,

which drown out or "erase" various responses that could have originally been intended or anticipated, while adding others. This condition of difference and delay, which Derrida has termed "*différance*," calls increasing attention over time or distance to the irreducibility of style, both in its concrete physicality and in the ever-changing face it presents to new contexts of interpretation, as a source of signification.⁷² In other words, the more culturally distant the music is, the more inescapably aware we become of its style—of its style as a barrier to understanding, and also as a condition of any structural perceptions we may form.⁷³

The overtones of which I speak are in actuality so inseparable from all communication, even within a single culture, as to suggest themselves as essential to the very possibility of communication; without the possibility of misreading, as some poststructuralists have argued, reading itself becomes an inconceivable act. And such a situation seems nowhere more explicitly to obtain than when we are faced with interpreting an object that to most of us seems as directly dependent on the concreteness of a medium as music does, or as powerful in its ability to express, project, or evoke a good deal besides a commitment to its own logic. Invoking our own cultural disposition to label certain music "Art" after a time lapse is no proof of an acquired ability to hear musical structure in its original sense. If anything, the use of this label probably signifies the degree to which we remain excluded as interpreters from the original inner dynamic of most music.

What limits the application of structural listening to Schoenberg's music is not the technical difficulty of this method but its misdirectedness. For most listeners, the barriers of Schoenberg's style, which in many ways seem to simulate a condition of great cultural distance, are simply too formidable to be penetrated and discounted as secondary by a focus on structure. Most listeners stand a chance of becoming engaged by Schoenberg's music only in the sense that by gaining sufficient access to the usages and characteristics of his style they might come to recognize its affinities with their own twentieth-century cultural experience (much as they recognize such affinities when contemporary music accompanies a film).

According to the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, theories of literature that take into account only those aspects of style conditioned by fundamentally formal demands for comprehensibility and clarity, while ignoring the culturally interactive aspects of style, "take the listener for a person who passively understands but not for one who actively answers and reacts."⁷⁴ Applied to music generally, such an argument would suggest that structural listening reinforces not active engagement but passivity on the part of the

listener, suppressing an inclination to participate in some sort of active dialogue with music. And applied specifically to twentieth-century music such as Schoenberg's, this argument suggests that only something akin to "stylistic listening" would permit contemporary listeners to exercise any prerogatives they might have as cultural insiders. Such an argument accords with my own observation that such prerogatives can be exercised in relation to twentieth-century art music, and with considerable insight. As I have noted elsewhere in some detail, I have found that college students almost invariably write more perceptively and articulately about the "difficult" contemporary music they hear at concerts than about any other style of Western art music—once they have allowed themselves to focus on aspects other than such a composition's structural cohesiveness.⁷⁵

But this is precisely the point. Of all methods, structural listening, even in its "replete" version, seems the least useful for entering the semiotic domain of sound and style. Carried to its logical conclusion, this method in all its versions, as an exclusive or even as the primary paradigm for listening, cannot define much of a positive role for society, style, or ultimately even sound in the reception of music. Discounting metaphorical and affective responses based on cultural association, personal experience, and imaginative play as at best secondary, not only in musical perception but also in the theoretical accounts we make of such perception, this method allows virtually no recognition to nonstructural varieties of meaning or emotion in the act of listening. Since these are, of course, precisely the varieties favored by the overwhelming majority of people, structural listening by itself turns out to be socially divisive, not only in what it demands but also in what it excludes or suppresses. Such divisiveness by no means necessarily serves the best interests of music. Indeed, to the extent that structural listening brackets off the intuitive apprehensions of music that even specialists have, it unnecessarily limits the benefits of musical education, a point to which I shall return in my conclusion.

Stylistic knowledge is to some extent intuitive, but this is by no means a fatal epistemological liability. To say this is only to admit the inarguable—that the very act of getting to know music begins with an extra-rational apprehension of sound—and also to argue that all of the musical knowledge we acquire is (or ought to be) a process of confirming, modifying, or rejecting that apprehension through rational modes of thought. In other words, the rational substratum of musical knowledge rests finally on some act, choice, or principle that is not itself rationally demonstrable.

It has been argued that this is the condition of all knowledge.⁷⁶ I find this argument persuasive; but even if one does not, there can be little question that

in music, where we begin with a sound that can to some extent be analyzed into a style and a structure, intuition is epistemologically valuable and in many respects indispensable. Certainly without such intuition (honed always by fact) there would be no hope of distinguishing responsibly between music that resists ideological deception and music that selfishly refuses to participate in the discourse of society. No amount of formal analysis by itself could ever arrive at a rational basis for making such a distinction. And yet the distinction is worth making, or at least attempting.

But this is not all. To place emphasis in listening and analysis on sound and style as prior to musical structure does not absolve the serious critic from a need for rigorous, self-critical discipline in the development of critical methods or of a critical language. Such an emphasis does not remove the historical responsibility of trying to sort out the meaning and values that may have been initially imprinted or subsequently imposed on a composition, even if, as I believe, this can be done only through some sort of dialectical interaction with the present, history being "now" as well as "then." Likewise, such an emphasis does not remove the need for an exacting examination of one's response to the parameter of medium as a function of one's own tastes and prejudices—even though it is probably the case that the inescapable blindness of which Paul de Man has written is more than anything else a blindness to our own stylistic limitations and their effects on our knowledge. Nevertheless, although such an emphasis does entail the fullest possible recognition and analysis of one's own cultural predilections, it does not justify a capitulation to one's own biases, or a refusal to attempt sympathetic entry into an unfamiliar stylistic domain.

Nor, on the other hand, does a stylistic emphasis absolve the serious critic from what I see as an ongoing obligation to seek carefully reasoned ways of investigating and assessing the social and moral significance of the values discerned in music. The desirability of cultural relativism ought not to condemn us, even at the level of theory, to a positivistic tolerance for totalitarian musical styles and practices. It should not exclude us from confronting head-on the moral issues posed by Wagner's music or from giving thought to the overtones of prejudice in the Bach Passions or even *The Magic Flute*. Moreover, such an emphasis should not blind us to the wide-ranging implications of diverse compositional choices, whether these choices involve an uncritical acceptance of extant conventions and conditions or a total, even narcissistic disregard for either the needs of an audience or a public interest in music. It should not render us unwilling to analyze the implications, both literal and symbolic, of the metaphorical characterizations to which disciplined criticism leads us. And

although such an emphasis does question an uncritical reverence for structural autonomy, or even complexity, as self-justifying virtues, it does not deny the importance of trying to understand as fully as possible the ongoing dialectical interaction between stylistic means and possibilities on the one hand and structural choices on the other.

Such an emphasis does require a constant effort to recognize and interpret relationships between the elements of a musical configuration and the history, conventions, technology, social conditions, characteristic patterns, responses, and values of the various cultures involved in that music. And such an effort almost invariably requires a willingness to recognize at least the possibility of some positive value in the kinds of immediate, though often diffuse and fragmented, sense that sound and style have for nearly all musical listeners. This is a recognition that Adorno and even Schoenberg, despite his wistful desire to be liked and even despite various efforts to defend his own intuitions, cannot permit.⁷⁷ In part they cannot permit it because judgment on grounds of style, without attempts to understand associated particularities of argument, can be abused to justify an unlimited irrationalism in human interaction. Though I dispute the priority of structure in communication, I do not deny the notion of structure or the value of efforts to give a rational account of the dialectic between medium and structure—if, that is, those efforts are morally as well as intellectually rigorous in the sense of being genuinely self-critical. For otherwise the possibility of another abuse arises: stylistic biases that are denied rather than confronted can smuggle their way into ostensibly rational objections to structural logic. This, too, is a form of irrationalism.

But there is a second reason for the refusal of Schoenberg and Adorno to assign positive value to the musical medium. A medium, as the word implies, tends to elude the possession, control, and to some extent even the conscious awareness of any single individual who makes use of it. Thus, valuing the medium of music tends to remove the individual from the center of music. Such a tendency in turn makes clear the vulnerability of music, and music criticism, to a condition of communicative contingency and, even worse for these men, of what I might call moral indeterminacy. The inability to countenance such moral indeterminacy may be the greatest intellectual weakness of their position.

A willingness to entertain moral indeterminacy in music criticism involves not just a recognition of the incompleteness of any single interpretation, which Adorno, in his exquisite sensitivity to the dynamic character of history, surely has. It also involves acknowledging the possibility of limits on one's own moral certainties.⁷⁸ In music criticism this means acknowledging the poten-

tially positive as well as negative aspects of human experience that enable every listener, culture, and generation to interpret, and even to perceive and identify, differently the particular elements through which metaphorical distinctions are formulated between something called "structure" and something called "style." This means acknowledging the ability of any listener to regard as highlighted "foreground" elements of music that others have dismissed or ignored as inconsequential "background." And it therefore means acknowledging the possibility of legitimate differences in the ultimately moral values that can be ascribed to the same music. It is precisely this sort of eternal indeterminacy that constitutes the poststructuralist concept of "text." (There may even be some cultural significance to the choice of opposing metaphors, in this connection, by Adorno—and Schenker—on the one hand, and the poststructuralists on the other: whereas for the former the principal bearer of meaning is the subcutaneous layer, not the surface, of a construct, for the latter, interpretation focuses on the foreground rather than looking through it.)

But in any event, it is precisely such indeterminacy that Schoenberg tries to forestall by marking certain musical voices "*Hauptstimme*" (principal voice) or "*Nebestimme*" (principal subsidiary voice). Such a tactic is tellingly futile, for even such explicit stage directions cannot guarantee that the listener will be able, even with strenuous effort, to share the composer's own perception of a structure. The struggle of humans to live together is thoroughly pervaded by honest as well as dishonest differences in the perceptions on which interpretations are built.

The reluctance to acknowledge such indeterminacy characterizes and limits not only Schoenberg's and Adorno's concept of structural listening but also the many versions of this concept that focus more narrowly on supposedly "fixed" musical structures. This limits the capacity of current formalistic educational methods to develop a new paradigm for the relationship between musical responsibility and society. As one counterbalance to such limitations, the poststructuralist perspective is surely useful, and it is interesting to note that Roland Barthes has given explicit attention to the reintroduction of affect into both musical listening and performance.⁷⁹ And it may well be a recognition of such limitations that has led an increasing number of Western composers in recent years to reject ideals of structural autonomy, and to concentrate instead on a redefinition of the musical medium as replete with connections to many elements in the cultures of the twentieth century.⁸⁰

In concluding, I would like to note a few of the ways in which my own education in structural listening has convinced me of its limitations. My first second

language was Roman numerals. In my college harmony course, use of the piano was forbidden. Whereas scoreless listening was unheard of in my university education, soundless keyboards were fairly common.

As a music major I was required to take a course on Beethoven and pressured to take a seminar on Bach; only nonmajors were advised to study Italian opera. Performance was never a matter for serious intellectual analysis in my education (except as it pertained to the authenticity of early performance practice). In numerous seminars on early music I transcribed reams of manuscripts, of which I never heard a note or discussed the musical value. As a music major, and later as a teacher, listening to scratched and otherwise dreadful monophonic recordings, I developed a strategy of listening that I have never entirely shaken, whereby I mentally "correct" for inadequacies of sound or performance that distract from my structural concentration. These experiences, if not universally shared by musicologists of my generation, are not, I believe, altogether exceptional.

Yet I am not at all sure that any of this structural discipline has made me a more competent listener than my brother, who travels eight hours a week to the opera houses of New York to hum the tunes and listen to certain sopranos. I'm not even sure that the composers whose works I teach would necessarily prefer me as a listener.

I have heard it argued that structural listening is beneficial because it requires repeated listenings to the same work. But even if repeated listening is considered an unqualified good—in fact, it may exact some cost in terms of a living musical culture—does structural listening really produce the illusion of an ongoing active process of composition? Or does it rather confirm the passivity implicit in Barthes' sense that "being modern' [is] but the full realization that one cannot begin to write the same works once again"⁸¹ To this sad finality that Barthes associates with the analysis of closed "works," he opposes the "pleasure" of enjoying the open-ended "text."⁸² Is it the "plot" or the sensuous moment that draws us back again and again to the same music? (Are we more likely to revisit an Agatha Christie mystery novel or an Alfred Hitchcock movie [not to mention an Astaire-Rogers musical]?) Are there not ambiguities and dynamics in music of which we structural listeners, as well as ordinary listeners, are in some fundamental sense aware, but to which we alone do not allow ourselves, at least in our professional mode, a full response?⁸³ Is it not significant that I, today, with all my specialized training, find myself virtually illiterate with respect to the principal musical media of my own culture, those of electronic audio and video?

If the Western dialectic of structure and medium is still with us, should we

not be trying in the classroom to develop intellectually rigorous ways of analyzing sound and style as well as structure? Is it not possible that encouraging less dependence on the score when we listen, and on ways of perceiving that the score itself suggests, might help us to develop new and richer ways of speaking about music? And might not such an expanded language enhance even our conception of how structure operates, and what it signifies, in music?

In the end, the concept of structural listening, despite the rigorous consistency with which Schoenberg and Adorno sought to define it, is deeply flawed by inconsistencies between what it promises and what it delivers. Designed to protect music as a preserve of individual integrity within society, and thereby ultimately to contribute to the betterment of the individual's position within society, this concept in Schoenberg's and Adorno's version begs off its social responsibilities no less than the stylistic snobbishness of Stravinsky's formalism does. Because they make no effort to overcome the cultural narrowness of their own convictions, the distinctions Schoenberg and Adorno draw between "replete structure" and medium can be used to justify the same results that Stravinsky's doctrine encourages: the adherence to a positivistic and socially narrow concept of form by numerous practices of structural listening that fall between the extreme positions represented by these masters.

Only some music strives for autonomy. All music has sound and a style. Only some people listen structurally. Everyone has cultural and emotional responses to music. These characteristics and responses are not uniform or immutable but as diverse, unstable, and open-ended as the multitude of contexts in which music defines itself. And yet, the world of knowledge opened up to us by acknowledging the bases of this indeterminacy as the foundation for our concept of music is far more encompassing than the domain that the supposedly universal principle of structural listening can hope to control without violating or exceeding itself. For whereas a restriction of knowledge to determinate structures provides no access to crucial aspects of music as it takes part in history and as it is actually experienced, an admission of those aspects as the starting point of musical knowledge precludes neither a concomitant analysis of structure nor an extension of rational thinking to an ever-greater area of that domain of experience where the significance and value of music are ultimately, and continuously, defined.

All of us who study music are caught in the Western dialectic. To an extent, all of us in the West who study anything are caught in that dialectic. Against the values we can protect by insulating abstract modes of thinking from the contingencies of concrete experience, we have to measure the risk, well symbolized by Schoenberg's paradoxical career, of coarsening through over-

refinement our sensitivity to other responsibilities of knowledge. But music offers a special opportunity to learners, for it confronts us always with the actuality of a medium that remains stubbornly resistant to strategies of abstract reduction. In this respect, it provides an ideal laboratory for testing the formalistic claims of any knowledge against the limits of history and experience. To ignore such an opportunity is to handicap musical study needlessly, and to consign music itself to a status of social irrelevancy that it does not deserve.

4

The Closing of the American Dream? A Musical Perspective on Allan Bloom, Spike Lee, and Doing the Right Thing

In general, everyone wants to be scientific and at the same time
to respect the dignity of man.

What happens to poetic imagination when the soul has been subjected to a
rigorous discipline that resists poetry's greatest charms?

—Allan Bloom¹

At what could be called the decisive moment in Spike Lee's 1989 film, *Do The Right Thing*, a young man named Mookie picks up a garbage can and hurls it through the window of the restaurant where he has been working, thereby galvanizing the people around him into mob violence, which destroys the restaurant—and the restaurant owner's dream.² The impact of this act is so powerful that it has broken through the fictional boundaries of film to stir up passionate controversy in the American public itself. Was Mookie's act reasonable? The response of viewers to this question has borne out Lee's prediction, "This film is gonna make people pick sides."³

Controversy has become increasingly characteristic of American public life in the past decade. In the visual arts, acrid debates have arisen over paintings, photographs, and other displays. Among the books and reports that have generated controversy, a number have involved the content and direction of American college education. Those of us involved in college education should be gratified by this situation, for it suggests that what we do matters to people outside the campus. And among recent books on education, none has been used more vigorously both to support and to attack old-fashioned ideals of education than Allan Bloom's 1987 best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Disturbed by developments in higher education