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On qualifying relativism

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Was the "Very Short Introduction"
too short after all?
(Herman Sabbe)[1]

"There is a strong sense", says Peter Nelson, "in which this whole book is about 'musicology' rather than music", and of course it's true, though only overtly so in the last two chapters. Though the series is now diversifying (and *Very Short Introductions* to Opera and World Music are in the offing), Oxford University Press originally conceived it as introducing different disciplines, and early volumes included *Classics, Archaeology, Literary Theory*, and *Psychology*: hence the publisher's claim, printed opposite the title page in the 1998 edition of the book[2], that "*Very Short Introductions* offer stimulating, accessible introductions to a wide variety of subjects, demonstrating the finest contemporary thinking about their central problems and issues". Readers will form their own opinion of that assessment, of course, but it explains the basic conception of the book not as the "ABC of music [...] followed by a quick romp through the repertory" that I referred to in the Foreword (and, of course, there are plenty of those already), but as an introduction to *thinking* about music, and at the same time to *music* as something to think about. I did in fact wonder whether it shouldn't really be called a *Very Short Introduction to Musicology*, but in Britain the term has a narrowly academic as well as rather old-fashioned connotation (if you say you're a musicologist, most people will say "what's that?"), while in America it means historical musicology, excluding theoretical and ethnomusicological approaches and thus perpetuating arguably outdated disciplinary schisms. So putting "musicology" in the title would have undermined my aim of drawing in a broad readership interested in music and conveying to them how music

(1) No, it was 5,000 words over the contracted length! (Which makes this special issue of *Musicae Scientiae* twice as long.) I would like to thank Irène Deliège for the invitation to contribute, and the featured writers for their attention. My thanks also to Julie Brown for help in locating references.
(2) *Music: A Very Short Introduction* was reissued in a slightly revised (and corrected) but completely reformatted and repaginated edition in 2000 (along with the rest of the series).

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is not only worth thinking about, but also something you *need* to think about as an integral dimension of contemporary culture.

But who exactly is that readership? This is clearly a puzzle for some of the contributors to this special issue of *Musicæ Scientiæ*. Rossana Dalmonte, for example, starts her review by saying that *Music: A Very Short Introduction* is only intelligible to a specialised readership, since it doesn't explain the rudiments (she then spends the rest of it demonstrating that the book does not conform to the requirements of a specialist monograph, which of course it doesn't[3]); but I think a lot of useful thinking about music can be done even if you don't know what a dominant seventh is, and that's why the book is written in such a way as not to require such knowledge. As for Michel Imberty, he frankly admits that he cannot imagine who could possibly find the book of interest, but (as pointed out in the Foreword to this issue) the market has fortunately not waited for his judgement. But who exactly is reading it?

(3) I shall restrict myself to one example: her complaint that I do not provide a source for Schoenberg's remark about serialism ensuring the dominance of German music for another hundred years (she comes close to accusing me of making it up). The lack of footnotes has nothing to do with my views as to what is or is not obsolete in musicology (as Dalmonte suggests), but is standard for the *Very Short Introductions* series, as for many English-language books specifically addressed to a broad readership. But in the References for chapter 3, I did cite Rosen (1976) in which appear Schoenberg's remark about the future of German music on p. 79 ("German", of course, because while himself Viennese, Schoenberg saw himself as working within a musical tradition that transcended national boundaries). It is odd that Dalmonte has never encountered this remark, considering the amount of discussion it has occasioned, but as Rosen does not himself specify its source I shall do so briefly. Rufer (1962:45) recorded that "It must have been about the time of the composition of the Prelude [of the *Suite for Piano*, Op. 25] (end of July, 1921) when Schoenberg told me, during a stroll in Traunkirchen, 'Today I have discovered something which will assure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years'. It was the method of composition with twelve tones related only to one another". From here the remark was disseminated in Reich (1971:130). Inevitably there has been controversy as to the authenticity of Rufer's account, but corroboration of the remark, if not its context, may be found in Smith (1986), which was based on recorded interviews with surviving members of the circle. In it Max Deutsch is quoted as follows: "You know the score of *Glückliche Hand*? That is the most important work of our century. The row technique is in it. So, [...] in 1923, when he came back from Amsterdam, [Schoenberg] called us for [an] appointment for a meeting in Mödling, [...] in the Bernhardgasse 6 in Mödling. And he spoke the first words, [...] 'I finally have found out that the new technique is the completion with twelve tones of the chromatic scale, but these twelve tones in interdependence from what' — that is, those were Schoenberg's words, and he added, 'And with that, our music,' he means Austrian music, 'they have for fifty years the leadership.' That was the words of Schoenberg [...]" (1986, p. 202). The purpose of this not so very short footnote is not only to defend the scholarship on which *Music: A Very Short Introduction* is based but also to suggest the impracticality of providing, in a book of this kind, the extensive critical apparatus appropriate to a scholarly monograph; you either write books for a broad public, accepting the constraints that go with it, or you don't. With a few exceptions I refrain from this kind of blow-by-blow response in the rest of this article.

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David Palmer sees it functioning "as preparation for an undergraduate student who is planning to undertake graduate studies" (and at Berkeley incoming graduate students are asked to read it against Kerman, 1985, as an index of disciplinary change in the near decade and a half that separates the two books). That is one notch away from a target market specifically identified by Oxford University Press for the series: the school leaver wondering whether to pursue a particular discipline in higher education (given the mismatch between the British and American educational systems the difference between this market and Palmer's is rather less than it might seem). And since I always like to write for a concrete readership, that is the group I specifically had in mind, but at the same time I was confident that a book which worked well for such readers would also be of interest to other groups ranging from concert-goers to students and scholars of other disciplines wanting to have some idea of what is going on in the study of music. What I didn't bargain for was the number of distinguished colleagues who would read it.

Palmer also notes the book's underlying bias towards Western classical music, implying that the Spice Girls, the *gu-ch'in* player Za Fuxi, and so on are something of a veneer. That's fair comment, reflecting not only where I'm coming from as a musicologist but also the disciplinary orientation of the book. A number of the other contributors to this collection, mostly though not exclusively from continental Europe, comment on the limited representation of contemporary "serious" music [4], and here some interesting aspects of cultural difference come into play. As Richard Toop (who works in Sydney but is closely associated with the European avant-garde) points out, composition occupies very different roles in different countries. In North America it has been almost inextricably entangled with universities since the early days of Babbitt (whose "social contract", as Herman Sabbe points out, "is with the academy"); the relationship is only a little less close in Britain, where composition is fully accepted as a form of research for purposes of institutional and national quality reviews. But in continental Europe, as Toop goes on to say, contemporary music revolves around festivals and radio stations; "One may be dealing with a heavily subsidized market place," he adds, "but it's a market place none the less." Makis Solomos also raises the issue of subsidy, contrasting the subsidization of contemporary music in France with the situation in Britain (where the subsidies do exist, incidentally, but they go towards propping up the social rituals of the Royal Opera House rather than into contemporary music).

Solomos's key observation, however, is that "en France, où les subventions existent, la musique contemporaine a un public". It does in Britain and America too, of course, but there the audience has traditionally been one of contemporary music buffs, a niche within a niche. (One should recognize the potential for change not only through the cross-over musical styles of composers like Glass or Zorn, but also

(4) I use this awkward formation because the term "contemporary music" is often used to refer to club culture. Having explained this, I shall in future omit the "serious".

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through the incorporation of contemporary music within educational and outreach programmes, which is why I said "traditionally": all part of the crumbling of barriers to which I referred in my Foreword.) And when taking part in conferences or workshops in such countries as Holland, Belgium, and Germany I have always been struck by the centrality of contemporary composition within the definition of what "music" is and what an intelligent interest in the subject might mean: it is simply taken for granted that one has an interest in and commitment to contemporary music, in a way that it would never be in a similar situation in Britain or America. But it seems that the position of contemporary music is even more varied than this might suggest, to judge by the comments of Robert Walker (who writes from the University of New South Wales, Sydney): "it is indeed ironic", he says, "that the academy can now include Beatles songs in analysis classes and research reports, but still not Berio's vocal music". And later he talks of Messiaen, Britten, Cage, and electronic music, and comments that "The music academy has shown comparatively scant interest in all this". That surprised me, not only because new music was high on the agenda when I was teaching at Sydney University (though that was back in 1988), but also because music from Messiaen and Cage to Berio and beyond is well represented in the British academy, far beyond any possible measure of the music's dissemination throughout society at large. It is popular music that is under-represented, resulting in a situation where the few PhDs in this area get quickly snapped up by university departments anxious to respond to the interests of their students.

The argument that my book, and by extension the academy at large, should pay more attention to contemporary music does not, of course, depend on measures of music's dissemination (it is sobering to consider just what the music curriculum would look like if the aim really was to replicate the balance represented by record sales or listener habits). In fact it amounts to exactly the opposite: rather than reflecting the global dissemination of popular musics, the musicologist's duty is to resist it, or at least to critique the commercial interests that drive it[5]. This is a matter not simply of concerning oneself with "la musique savante" (it's telling that there is no adequate English translation), but of releasing the inherent critical potential of that music. Walker reflects something of this when he contrasts the "titillation and exploitation" of Madonna or the Spice Girls with the "sophisticated exposition" of issues of sensuality and sexuality in Strauss's and Bizet's operas, adding in a passage that sounds like an updating of Hanslick that, of these, "One requires reflection and contemplation involving the higher cortex, the other the low level sensation akin to smelling wood smoke or bacon frying". He also argues (as does Solomos) for the critical potential of twentieth-century music as a whole, claiming that composers

(5) This is ideologically related to the distrust of popularity on the part of modernist composers to which I refer in chapter 3. If brevity has resulted in caricature at this point, as Solomos complains, then the argument is set out at greater length in Cook (1990, pp.178-84).

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like Stravinsky "deconstructed the basis of 19th century musical expression", thereby "effectively debunking the Beethoven myth before the 1st World War". One might however question the effectiveness of that debunking, in view of Stravinsky's (1947, p. 127) advocacy of the "great principle of submission" that reduced the performer's role to that of executor of the composer's will, not to mention his appropriation of genius-laden creation myths when he described himself as "the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed" (Stravinsky and Craft, 1962, p. 148); I have made the case that Stravinsky's influential writings of the 1920s and 30s were more than anything responsible for the maintenance throughout most of the twentieth century of the ideologies of musical autonomy and the concepts of performance based on them (Cook, forthcoming: a)

Peter Szendy offers some theoretical and historical reflections on the idea of music criticizing itself, of "music speak[ing] about music", and cites Liszt's transcriptions as an "intramusical" parallel to Schumann's "extramusical" criticism. But it is in relation to contemporary music that the issue of music as critique becomes most pressing. Jean-Marc Chouvel asks, "What has been so deeply wounded in our civilization this music accounts for?... This is a true question, and we are indebted to 'contemporary music' for its answer". Claude Ledoux speaks of composition as a means of transforming reality in a situation of sociopolitical powerlessness, and speculates about the possible impact on music of the internet (strange to think that when I wrote my book, around Easter 1997, most of us hadn't even heard of mp3s!): maybe, he says, musicians will become a focus for resistance to the growing stranglehold on cultural dissemination of a handful of multinational corporations. (It seems to me that the jury is still out on the question of whether the internet will in the end reinforce or dismantle current concepts of intellectual property.) But the issue is stated most pointedly by Anne Boissière, who asks why I don't raise "le problème de la musique contemporaine qui résiste à ce devenir consommateur", the result of which is that I pass up the opportunity to offer "une analyse critique de la société de consommation". And she adds: "Quelle pertinence, en ce cas, accorder à la référence à Adorno ?"

A simple answer to that last question would be that you can make use of Adorno's insights into the articulation between music and society without necessarily accepting the agenda of critical theory or replicating his attack on the capitalist system; is it really so self-evident, you might ask, that a 40,000-word book about the whole of "music" must necessarily offer a critique of consumer society, and at the expense of leaving out what? Is there really only one agenda for musicology, and who gets to set it? Doesn't the insistence on music's function as social critique perpetuate outdated divisions between art and commerce, "us" and "them" (I detect this also in Dalmonte's and Imberty's disdain for the marketplace and its discourses), and is this conception of the musicological agenda really in the best interests of our students as a means of preparing and skilling them for life in the twenty-first century? While I think these are reasonable questions, however, I would like to address Boissière's

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comments more directly, for (as she goes on to say herself) they are intimately tied up with issues of musical value. If my critique isn't motivated by some kind of moral or political commitment, she asks, in the way that Adorno's was, then what lies behind it but nihilism? And though nobody else goes quite as far as Boissière's accusation that I am providing a rationale for the death of music (shades of Kramer versus Tomlinson!), other commentators raise the same issue. Not that they agree with one another. Mario Baroni observes, and sees it as a "real and serious problem", that "we do not possess a consistent theory of aesthetic value", but warns that this does not justify a relativistic blurring of categories: "Certain distinctions", he writes, "are still important". For Walker, on the other hand, Baroni's admission would be tantamount to saying that there is no such thing as musicology, for "the role of the academy is to identify and clarify the issues surrounding value in more complex ways than either politics or commercially induced popularity is capable of". And so, Walker says, "To argue for a plurality whereby popular music and art music stand on the same pedestal as cultural products is to confuse the market place with the realm of ideals".

Again, there are various reponses that could be made to this. One would be to point out that it is an important aim of the book, and arguably a priority for the discipline, to *recognize* the realities of musical production and consumption in today's world rather than seeking, perhaps prematurely, to interpret, explain, or critique them. (Solomos notes that I do not so much offer a thesis about universalization as record what I see as the relevant phenomena.) And one could extend this line of argument by saying that musicology should seek to distance itself from its origins in an apologia for national repertories and values, and see itself more in the light of a social science: sociologists, for example, do not limit their studies and statistical extrapolations to social phenomena which they personally consider valuable or tasteful, but study social reality as they find it, and I find it hard to see why musicologists should not do the same. (The point is not that Madonna is good or bad but that she's there.)[6] But I also have a more personal argument to make, which reflects my basic orientation

(6) I am surprised at Menger's dismissal from a specifically sociological point of view of such everyday musical practices as the rave, the garage band, and the teenager listening in her bedroom: "pour un sociologue," he says, "elles relèvent le plus souvent des lieux communs élémentaires". I suppose it depends what kind of sociologist you are; to me, one of the most fruitful cross-disciplinary developments is the ongoing convergence between musicology and the ethnographical sociology represented by, for instance, Tia DeNora's (2000) analysis of the role of music in temporal structuring and the mediation of interpersonal relations in aerobics classes. As for Menger's related question "Les musiques populaires ont-elles besoin d'une musicologie ?", my answer is predictably yes, at least to the extent that any music needs musicology. It's not just that popular music is there, indeed overwhelmingly so. It's not just that a music education which leaves our students inarticulate *in the face of the vast majority of musical practices in today's world can hardly be justified as* adequate training for tomorrow's citizens. It's not even that for many people the music itself is of

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as a music theorist rather than a musicologist in the narrow sense. I suggested in *Music: A Very Short Introduction* that musical analysis, as we know it today, originated primarily as an apologia for Beethoven's music, explaining how there was underlying coherence behind its apparently discontinuous or even bizarre surfaces. This intimate association of analysis and value judgement has continued in much of the twentieth-century analytical literature: Schoenberg used analysis to bolster his claim to be the successor of Beethoven and Brahms, Schenker used it to deny any such claims, Réti and Keller used it as a fundamental criterion of musical value, while Babbitt and Forte used it both to rehabilitate a particular modernist repertory and to secure the position of music theory within the post-war American academy. Quite simply, I see all such claims as empirically questionable, to say the least, and a major theme in my published work has been the incommensurability of analytical representation and musical experience (see *e.g.* Cook, 1990, 1999a and 1999b). I don't say that there might never be useful correlations of analysis and value, but I do feel that the discipline has a bad track record in this area, with analysis all too easily acting as a cloak of authority for whatever interests are being advanced. And so I prefer, for myself, to refrain from making such judgements.

Some critics, I am sure, will see this as an evasion of responsibility, perhaps disguised as some form of political correctness. More penetrating, I think, is Solomos's observation that my "*credo* neo-libéral", and the repertory focus that goes with it, expresses a free-market ethos typical of late twentieth-century Britain, resulting in a musicology — this is my way of putting it, but I think in the spirit of his critique — which knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. (Odd, by the way, that Solomos sees me as speaking for the post-Thatcher British establishment, whereas Imberty sees me as a leftover from 1968! Or perhaps not so odd, considering what some of today's leading politicians were doing in those days.) Well, I think there is some value in knowing the price of things, and like everybody I write against a background of received wisdom which I seek to problematize, including in my case the too intimate association of analysis and value, the excessive certainty, to which I have referred. (One of the main sources of cross-cultural misunderstanding, not an entirely irrelevant consideration in relation to this special issue of *Musicae Scientiae*, is the unsaid that lies behind the said, the absent text behind the present one.) More penetrating still, perhaps, is Molino's observation that "nous continuons tous, pour notre compte, à porter des jugements moraux et esthétiques, même s'il est de bon ton d'affirmer que nous acceptons tout"; I think

as much value as any other repertory (and yes, as Sabbe discerns, there is a difficult tightrope to be walked between taking the music seriously and canonising it). It's that, in its social embeddedness and irreducibly performative character, the study of popular music can show the way towards a more adequate understanding of the social functioning of *all* music, and towards a more critical understanding of such paradigmatic concepts in traditional musicology as the work, the author, and so forth. (I have developed this argument in Cook, 1996).

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"du bon ton" would be best translated "good form", which would reinforce Solomos's observation by giving a particularly British colour to the hypocrisy in question! Put more bluntly, pretending not to make value judgements is an excellent cover for sweeping them under the carpet instead of exposing them to criticism, and of course value judgements are implicit in all our work, even if only in deciding what work to do in the first place. A more acerbic critic than Molino might add that this kind of neo-liberalism comes that much easier when you speak from a secure position of institutional authority.

But it is Pierre-Michel Menger who hits the nail on the head when he says that the kind of relativistic approach embodied in my book trades critique for inclusiveness, deconstructing received hierarchies but at the expense of the distinctions to which Baroni referred (as Menger puts it, "qu'a-t-on dit quand on suspend des notions comme celle de compétence specialisée, d'innovation...?"). Given the aim of the book to "spread out a map that all music could in principle be put on to", as I rather incautiously put it in the Foreword, this might be defended as a reasonable bargain. But the question that immediately arises is what the cash value of this map might be, when "la perception et l'évaluation circulent dans un tourbillon pluraliste d'étiquettes, de préférences, d'engouements, de hit-parades et il n'y a plus rien d'autre à faire qu'à se réjouir ou à se lamenter du 'anything goes'". One obvious answer is, in effect, a performative one: when it comes to educational curricula or disciplinary purview, inclusion or exclusion is the fundamental "political act" (to borrow Bohlman's term, which I quote in the book), inherently significant rather than lent significance by means of some over-arching theory, critical or otherwise. And this applies even if, as Sabbe suggests, it is all too easy to confuse "plurality" (the simple fact that different musical traditions exist in close proximity in London, Paris, Toronto, Johannesburg) with "pluralism" (the interaction between traditions within individual experience that transforms multiculturalism into a state of mind): "Western audiences familiar with westernized, technologized versions by the likes of Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon," he writes, "often recoil when confronted with the 'originals', from Africa or elsewhere". But his own reference to Paul Simon reveals how far this is from being an open-and-shut case: despite the controversy over possible exploitation that *Graceland* created, it was highly effective publicity for Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who now have an international presence through tours and record sales. Are we then to claim that they are not "originals"? To do so, without reference to the hybridized nature of urban music in contemporary South Africa, and indeed to its centrality within the still developing South African identity, would be to fall into one of the classic patterns of ethnocentricity, the pursuit of a concept of "origin" whose roots are profoundly Western.

In truth everything is controversial when it comes to cross-cultural interaction in music, and particularly to the viability of cross-cultural communication. Imberty describes my conclusion, in essence that such communication is always partial and provisional but valuable nonetheless, as "très banale", but it seems to have been

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complex enough to support diametrically opposed interpretations by different readers. For François Nicolas,

> La directive de cet ouvrage serait [...] que chacun reste dans sa culture — puisqu'il ne saurait être question de partager une culture qui n'est pas la nôtre (s'entend: la culture de notre naissance, donc de nos parents) — et se contente de saluer — à distance maintenue — les autres cultures dont l'altérité serait irréductible. Foin donc de chemins de traverse entre cultures, foin de rapprochements interculturels, foin de métissages qui ne seraient que reprises déguisées du vieux colonialisme : vous êtes nés auvergnat, ou pygmée, ou esquimau ? Restez-le, et pratiquez la musique de vos aïeux !

This characterization of my position is such a travesty that one might well wonder what Nicolas has been reading; fortunately it is preceded by three quotations from my book, so we can see where he went wrong. The quotations all come from a single paragraph describing what I call the "pessimistic" position regarding communication across cultures, a position I illustrate primarily through the writing of Gary Tomlinson; in fact the second of Nicolas's quotations is preceded by the words, which he omits, "as Gary Tomlinson suggested". The following paragraph of the book explains that in my view the "optimistic" position (previously set out with references to Philip Brett, Peter Sculthorpe, and my own experience of living in Hong Kong) is "more right, or more importantly right" than the pessimistic one. In other words the position which Nicolas ascribes to me, and then censures me for, is the one which I attempt to present sympathetically and intelligibly, but in the end distance myself from. Considering the low content-to-vitriol ratio of this review, it is disappointing that so much of it is based on a gross misrepresentation of my views, especially when accompanied by the charge that "toutes les décisions de pensée de l'auteur, loin d'être énoncées comme telles, sont présentées comme allant de soi, comme simples conséquences de faits indubitables". Given that in this case I carefully presented two opposing views, and then introduced my own opinion with the words "as I see it", I find it hard to imagine a more extravagantly unreasonable criticism[7].

Boissière, by contrast, understands what I am saying, but disagrees with it: "la fragmentation et l'atomisation des musiques que repère à juste titre Cook aboutissent en vérité à une fragmentation et une atomisation conséquentes des écoutes, c'est-à-dire des possibilités d'entente. Plutôt qu'à 'l'optimisme prudent' [...] de Cook, c'est à un pessimisme raisonnable qu'il faudrait plus justement adhérer."

(7) I will not comment on the other misrepresentations in this review, or on its (literally) venomous language, other than to suggest that people who write reviews without having read books properly might think twice before accusing the author of even unconscious racism ("exalter un 'chacun sa culture, ses coutumes, sa communauté' revient au poncif du 'respect des différences', lequel n'a, au bout du compte, et quelle qu'en soit la bonne conscience de Nicholas Cook, jamais encouragé autre chose que l'apartheid").

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That different musical traditions involve different patterns of listening is hardly in doubt (indeed as much is implied, in the diachronic domain, by my suggestion in chapter 5 that music history can be thought of as a history of listening). The question is how far these different patterns of listening are "musical" or "musicological", to adopt the language I used when discussing this issue in *Music, Imagination, and Culture*: that is, to what extent culture-specific patterns of listening revolve around the imaginative representation of music for purposes of production, reception, and communication ("musicological"), and to what extent one can distinguish this from a pre-representational mode of response to music which might be less culture-specific ("musical"). Boissière refers to my "conception abstraite, trop idéaliste, finalement naturaliste de la perception", and Menger makes a similar point when he refers to the aesthetic pluralism which I advocate being based on "une sorte de vérité simple, le signe que triomphent les moeurs naturellement bonnes de l'auditeur contemporain enfin débarrassé des diktats esthétiques". But then, maybe cross-cultural listening (the multicultural experience I referred to, rather than a bimusicality or multimusicality in Mantle Hood's sense) is, if not "natural", then at least rather simple as compared to the more aesthetically sophisticated patterns of listening on which the maintenance of cultures depends. It all boils down to how you value such listening: whether you see it as representing the lowest common denominator of the different traditions involved (so that if I listen to Indian music, say, what I take in is just that part of it that overlaps with Western patterns of perception), leading to what Imberty would doubtless call an "abusive" construction of the music of the other[8]; or whether on the other hand you think that all sincere attempts to communicate across cultural divides are worthwhile and that what in "musicological" terms is a misunderstanding may yet be a form of understanding in "musical" ones. Ironically it is Nicolas who best expresses my personal view, though in line with his general miscomprehension of my position he expresses it as something that I would not dare to think: "une telle attention pourrait conduire à une compréhension ou à

(8) For Imberty, even to talk of "Western", as opposed to non-Western, culture is an example of "abusive" simplification (he finds himself doing so a paragraph later, but blames that on me). I go out of my way, however, to define "Western" music in terms of at least partly shared patterns of conception and perception, adding that the same does not apply to "Chinese music" (let alone the ragbag category of "non-Western music"). Imberty's comment about simplification follows on his criticism of my account of Beethoven in chapter 2 and advice that I should have considered Romain Rolland's contribution to the Beethoven myth in its contemporary political context ("Cook aurait trouvé là un terrain autrement convaincant et pertinent pour développer [...] ses idées"); as noted in the References, I have discussed this in my book on the reception history of the *Ninth Symphony* (Cook, 1993), where I also draw a comparison between Rolland and Chinese commentators during and after the Cultural Revolution. Also "abusive", in Imberty's view, is the English-language chauvinism of my book (and, presumably, of Anglo-American musicology in general): no doubt that is fair comment, though in saying this I feel rather like King Canute.

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une intériorité par peur d'être taxé à son tour d'impérialiste. Mais une "attention" à une différence qui n'en est pas une compréhension, qu'est-ce que c'est ?"[9].

Molino emphasizes the two-way interaction between Western and non-Western music and comments that "Parler ici d'impérialisme ou de colonialisme ne sert pas à grand-chose". To insist on interpreting all cross-cultural interaction in political terms would of course be absurd. But we live in the Macdonalds age, when the gun has given way to the hamburger as an instrument of global hegemony. Or to put it another way, culture functions as a major arena for the negotiation of ideologies, and the most apparently innocent act of listening can become a political transaction. What I termed an "abusive" construction of the music of the other, like the "westernized, technologized versions" of world music to which Sabbe refers, can be seen as representing an appropriation and domestication of the other in precisely the sense of Said's orientalism. This is the logic behind Walker's assertion that "Cook's final optimistic suggestions about music being a way to break down barriers through negotiated meanings is arguably just another form of imperialism, especially to a culture about to be assimilated or destroyed". But Walker turns the argument in a less familiar direction, maintaining that "New" musicological interpretations of the past (I imagine he is thinking particularly of McClary on Beethoven) represent a similar form of imperialism. The charge of anachronism, of reconstructing the past in terms of present-day categories, has been frequently levelled against McClary's interpretations, and I shall not go into the possible defences that might be offered (that any interpretation of the past involves a transaction between period and present-day categories, for instance, or that the real object of McClary's deconstruction is not so much the historical composer as the mythologized "Beethoven" of present-day constructions of music's autonomy and transcendance). But what seems to me critical in any transaction with the other, whether across boundaries of space or time, is the extent to which we engage the objects of our investigation in dialogue, enabling them to "answer back", or alternatively substitute our voices for theirs through an act of interpretive ventriloquism.

And this brings us to the problematic area, which several of the reviews raise, of discourse, or more specifically of the extent to which the production and reception of music are discursively constructed. If it is indeed the case that language simply constructs reality, then interpretation is no more or less than politics: Walker

(9) This is precisely the position I argued when attempting to deconstruct the notion of musical "understanding" at the end of chapter 3 of Cook (1990). Given the number of contributors to this issue who identify me with the "New" musicology discussed in chapter 7 of *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, it is worth pointing out that the ideas about musical listening which I advanced in Cook (1990) were heavily criticized by "New" musicologists because of what was seen as their spuriously naturalistic assumptions (see in particular the review by Kramer, 1992). There is a strong affinity, incidentally, between these ideas and the "concatenationist" model of listening recently advanced in Levinson (1998).

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expresses this in a cross-cultural context when he asks "who is doing the negotiating, whose identity is involved, and from what positions of power are the negotiations occurring?", while Solomos makes the related point that "l'habitant du tiers-monde, dont sa culture est bradée dans les supermarchés occidentaux, n'a vraiment le choix du goût quant à ce qu'il peut consommer !" But the issue is a more general one, and Molino is not alone in complaining that "New" musicological interpretations reduce everything to issues of power ("la critique des modes d'enquête traditionnels a pour but de montrer qu'une seule voie de salut est overte : il faut prendre parti, parce que la musicologie doit être un acte politique"), while Nicola Dibben and Luke Windsor point out that any such interpretation is itself an exercise of power. What particularly irritates Molino is the black-and-white nature of such interpretation, with complex social situations being reduced to struggles between the oppressed and the oppressors, the good guys and the bad guys, almost along the lines of a Hollywood Western, whereas in reality "La société est beaucoup plus complexe que ne pretend la théorie critique : [...] si l'on parle de pouvoir, il faut se rendre compte qu'il n'y a pas *un seul* pouvoir ou une coalition de pouvoirs qui s'acharnent à dominer et à assujettir, mais une infinité de petits pouvoirs en lutte incessante les uns contre les autres". (If a concrete instance is to be cited, I would propose Leppert's (1987) work on musical representation in the British empire, in which there is little sense of the profound ambivalance, the intertwined sentiments of inferiority and superiority which coloured the relationships between rulers and subjects, and which emerge so strongly in such contemporary writing as the short stories of Somerset Maugham.) I share Molino's irritation, precisely because I see music as a privileged domain for the expression and therefore the analysis of this "infinité de petits pouvoirs", that is to say of negotiations of subcultural identity, of *bricolage*[10], and of resistance.

But how can music function as an expression of resistance if it is subject to the tyranny of the word? Here there seems to be a widespread misunderstanding of what I was trying to say in *Music: A Very Short Introduction.* To be sure, I emphased the role of discourse in the construction of reality, arguing that in music there is no "reality" that stands, ready-made, outside the domain of discursive interpretation. (Incidentally Molino misses the point when, arguing against this position, he points out that the eskimos do not create the different varieties of snow by naming them. Of course not: snow is not a cultural product.) But I never said that there was no reality other than discourse, or that music can offer no resistance to verbal interpretation. Quite the reverse: I see the incommensurability of musical experience and analytical representation to which I have already referred as a subset of a more general incommensurability between music and its representations, verbal or other. That is to say, I entirely agree with Ledoux's identification of the disparities between

(10) I have in mind the work of the Birmingham School of culture theorists in general, and Dick Hebdige's work on punk culture in particular.

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theory and practice ("L'analyse d'oeuvres actuelles et des discours tenus à leur sujet par leur concepteur peut parfois se définer comme formidable révélateur d'un hiatus épistémologique"), as well as with Nelson's obervation that we have a "deep intuition" that verbal and musical discourses are different, "and that the difference is worth defending". The processes of interpretation that give rise to musical meaning, then, involve an interaction between the interpreting subject on the one hand and the empirical resistance offered by the object of interpretation on the other. The point I am making is in fact exactly the same as Molino makes in terms of music's historical development: "it faut absolument faire une place à ce que l'on peut appeler, avec Max Weber, les "logiques propres" de la matière musicale — de la voix aux instruments, aux échelles et aux formules — : l'evolution de la musique émerge de l'interaction de la matière musicale, des conduites de production et des conduites de réception"[11].

Now it might well be said that "New" musicology, through its insistence on the socially constructed nature of reality, has failed to theorize the empirical resistance of scales, formulas, and indeed compositions, so creating the image of music passively receiving whatever interpretation is impressed on it. In effect the complaint is the same as Walker's: writers like McClary don't sufficiently allow the music to "answer back", and the result is the interpretive arbitrariness which Agawu (1997, p. 301) has complained about ("One's insights need not meet the test of intersubjective corroboration"), and which led Treitler (1999, p. 370) to comment acidly that McClary's analyses "seem precariously close to interpretations that are driven by little more than the need to make them". And if this is the case, the "persuasiveness" to which I referred in *Music: A Very Short Introduction* as a criterion of interpretive adequacy boils down to a question of power and authority, resulting (as Dibben and Windsor put it) in "a reality in which anything goes, but what is actually regarded as reality is that which is expressed with most power". The way out of this cul-de-sac, Dibben and Windsor argue, is adequate theorization of the empirical underpinnings of interpretation, and Baroni argues along similar lines when he calls for "a particularly careful study of the complex relationships between musical structures and musical interpretations". But how might we step outside the "tourbillon pluraliste d'étiquettes, de préférences, d'engouements, de hit-parades" to which Menger referred, and so achieve the requisite grounding of the interpretive process?

Andrezj Rakowski proposes a possible way in which this question might be answered when he speaks of "the ancient, natural code of communication among

(11) This provides the context for the remark on snow which I quoted earlier in the paragraph. As I read him, Molino is suggesting that pentatonic and heptatonic scales are as much a product of nature as snow is. But that is surely loosely expressed: such scales are cultural constructs based on certain affordances of physical and psychoacoustical reality (see the discussion of Helmholtz below). The interaction to which Molino refers, incidentally, contains the solution to the chicken-and-egg paradox which Menger raises (which came first, the word or the deed?).

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different people and among animals", according to which "Anger and threat may be represented by loud sounds, tenderness by soft and delicate timbre and so on"; he also refers to the sensation of pleasantness and unpleasantness associated with certain values of consonance and dissonance, which he ascribes to physical or psychophysiological universals, and invokes the authority of Helmholtz in support of the claim that "musical intervals and the tonal system composed out of them had been presented to us as a 'gift of nature'". But all this is problematic. Claims regarding the existence of a universal "language" of the emotions have frequently been advanced, for example by Deryck Cooke, but have always been open to empirical counterdemonstration, leading to the charge that Cooke passes off as "natural" what is in reality a purely Western system of associations (Cook and Dibben, forthcoming); if the kind of ecological factors to which Rakowski refers are to be incorporated within a comprehensive model of musical interpretation, and I think they should[12], then it will have to be one that also makes space for culture. As for Helmholtz, his position was not as straightforward as Rakowski's reference might suggest. At the beginning of the third section of his *Sensations of Tone*, following his exhaustive discussion of the physical and perceptual properties of tones, Helmholtz wrote as follows:

> Because in this third part of our enquiry we turn primarily to music [...] we tread on new ground, which is no longer purely natural-scientific [...] When we spoke previously, in the theory of consonance, of the agreeable and the disagreeable, we considered only the immediate impression made on the senses when an isolated combination of sounds strikes the ear, without regard to artistic contrasts and means of expression: we considered only sensuous pleasure, not aesthetic beauty. The two must be kept strictly apart, even if the first is an important means for attaining the second.[13]

For Helmholtz, then, "musical intervals and the tonal system composed out of them" are cultural products, inscribed on but not determined by nature.

The central issue might be put this way: how can we understand the cultural production of music as prompted but not determined by acoustical or psychoacoustical phenomena, and correlatively how can we see musical meaning as prompted but not determined by verbal or other discourse?[14] How in other words

(12) Huron's (forthcoming) synthesis of a wide range of empirical work on music and emotion perhaps points to the way forward: he sees listeners' responses to music as reflecting a cluster of independent ecological factors, resulting in such experienced qualities as cuteness, sexiness, and so forth.

(13) The translation is taken from Hatfield (1993, p. 542), corresponding to p. 234 of Ellis's translation (Helmholtz, 1954).

(14) I do not consider what I am saying here as inconsistent with what I wrote in *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, but it seems as if my use of the word "determine" has created a false impression despite my efforts to qualify it. Anthony Gritten, for example, cites two quotations involving the

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can we avoid the binary either/or that makes music *either* all nature *or* all culture, and that locates musical meaning *either* all in the music itself *or* all in its verbal or other interpretation? It is the second half of this question that forms the central focus of Dibben and Windsor's essay, and they seek the answer in an ecological approach, drawing upon the Gibsonian notion of constraint. So, they argue, the possibility of constructing a given interpretation of a particular piece of music, in other words the potential range of its meaning, depends upon three constraints: the acoustic and possibly visual information comprising what I termed "the music itself", the "nature of our bodies, including our perceptual systems", and "society, or more precisely the information which we gain from our surroundings". And they cite as an example the march, the duple metre of which affords (another Gibsonian term) a stability of associated body motion in a way a ternary metre would not, as well as the connotations that cluster around marches in our society (regimentation, totalitarianism — more shades of 1968! — and so forth). In short, meaning is socially constructed, negotiated within the framework defined by the three systems of constraint: it is emergent but not arbitrary. "Returning to McClary", Dibben and Windsor conclude, "it no longer seems quite so arbitrary to assume that certain passages in Beethoven afford interpretations of male aggressive behaviour. It is not her power as a musicologist alone which persuades us."

As a matter of fact I said something along similar lines in *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, not in the passage (which Dibben and Windsor quote) where I claim that the value of McClary's work lies in its persuasiveness rather than its "truth", but in one that comes a page later and which they do not quote:

> Metaphors focus music. They give a specific expression to its latent qualities. But these latent qualities must in the first place be there in the music, in its patterns of similarity, divergence and so on; otherwise the metaphor will be entirely unpersuasive. (Try imagining the final section of the first movement of Beethoven's *Ninth* as the depiction of a plane journey across the Australian bush, and you will see what I mean.) So McClary's interpretations, however apparently subjective, cannot be *just* subjective.

But this is quite a vague formulation, and so one of the first projects I embarked on after *Music: A Very Short Introduction* was to develop it into a fully fledged model of musical meaning, or to repeat Baroni's words of the "relationships between musical structures and musical interpretations". Like Dibben's and Windsor's proposals, this model builds on the concept of affordance, linking it to Lakoff and Johnson's concept of cross-domain mapping (the theoretical framework is largely drawn from

word: in the first I say that "it is *largely* words that determine what music means" (italics added), while in the second I say that the stories we tell about music "help to determine what music is" (the words "help to" are unhelpfully omitted by Gritten). If I were to write the book again I would avoid the word altogether.

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my book *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Cook, 1998), published as it happens on the same day as *Music: A Very Short Introduction* but completed a year earlier). What is more, prompted by the underdeveloped nature of my account in *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, I used McClary's interpretation of the point of recapitulation in the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as my principal example (I also discussed Tovey's interpretation of the same passage by way of comparison). Without entering into details, since the article will soon be in print (Cook, forthcoming: b), I use what Lakoff and Johnson call "conceptual integration networks" to model the parallel features of the music and McClary's interpretation, thereby showing on the one hand the correlation between them that makes the interpretation viable, and on the other the composite meaning resulting from the blending of source and target domains; in this blend lies the critical content of McClary's interpretation. And on the basis of this I conclude that "*pace* Treitler, it can justifiably be seen as driven by the music and not just the need to interpret it".

However, unlike Dibben and Windsor's proposals, my article focusses on the dyadic relationship between music and critical interpretation, and so gives little consideration to the second of Dibben and Windsor's constraints, the body. In this way it lays itself open to Nelson's complaint that the kinds of meaning that musicologists talk about are much too closely "tied to words and verbal concepts" (though not, I hope, to his critique of what might be termed the "cheesecake and meaning" model of music, given what I have said about discursive meaning being negotiated rather than imposed). Instead, Nelson advocates a shift of focus towards embodied meaning, the meaning that is always already "in" the music as bodily experience; he explains what he has in mind by reference to such writers as David Sudnow who, he says, shows "a path which has already been signposted and along which musicology needs to go". I entirely concur with this assessment, and indeed I drew heavily on Sudnow's work in *Music, Imagination, and Culture*, but it is only recently and in the context of the analysis of performance that I have begun to have a clear image of the path to which, if I understand him correctly, Nelson refers. Sudnow is an ethnomethodological sociologist who trained in mid-career as a jazz pianist, and his brilliant account of what Nelson refers to as "body thought" in jazz improvisation is based on a phenomenological approach. While Sudnow persuasively demonstrates the inseparability of body and mind[15], however, I think that further progress in this area requires empirical studies of the body in performance; I have made a start in this area with unpublished work on the choreography of Jimi Hendrix's stage performances, building on my previous work in multimedia analysis, but Jane Davidson has already published a range of empirical studies of the performing body (for an overview see Clarke and Davidson, 1998).

(15) I will not comment on where this leaves Walker's invocation of the traditional mind-body split as a criterion of value ("better [...] means at the very least requiring a response of the intellect as opposed to that purely of the flesh").

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And I would suggest that unless we build the body into it, we shall never develop an adequate conceptualization of music as a performing art (rather than as a literary art that can be presented in performance, like poetry reading)[16].

But what exactly might all this have to do with musical meaning? The answer is again contained in the work of Lakoff and Johnson, and since both Nelson's approach to meaning and mine draw heavily on these authors, it is worth trying to relate the two approaches. As illustrated by the comparison between McClary's and Tovey's Beethoven analyses, I have drawn on Lakoff and Johnson's work as a means of correlating verbal and musical organization, seeing them as the two sides of a metaphorical equation. But, as Nelson explains, there is also a kind of root metaphor built into Lakoff and Johnson's approach, and that is the body: the formation of concepts is explained by virtue of a process of generalization from sensory-motor schemata[17]. It is presumably this which motivates the assumption, pervasive throughout Nelson's essay, that embodied meaning is the basic if not the only form of musical meaning, an assumption which prompts two comments. The first is that this approach has some affinities with the idea, most closely associated with Suzanne Langer but shared by many musicians and aestheticians from Hanslick to the present day, that music has emotional meaning because it embodies what Langer (1942, p. 238) called the "general forms of feeling". Quite apart from the troubling "naturalism" that I referred to in relation to Cooke, this idea is problematic in that it is hard to see what the "general forms of feeling" might possibly be, except insofar as they are embodied in music — in which case, of course, the resort to them has no explanatory force[18].

(16) I have developed this argument in Cook (forthcoming: c). Since I do not discuss the issue of music as performance elsewhere in this response, I would like to use this footnote first to echo Sabbe's call for a "historiography based on sounding sources", and second to welcome Nicolas Méeus's clarifications of the issue of notation. His point (derived from Genette) that there is no necessary relationship of priority as between the score and the performance fits very nicely with the argument I advance in "Between process and product" (linked to Richard Schechner's concept of "horizontality"), and I agree that this means my statement about the score concealing as much as it reveals is inaccurately expressed. While on the subject of mistakes, the word "all" which Palmer criticizes (notation is integral to "the ways in which composers, performers, and all others who work with music imagine or think about it") clearly should not be there, and will not be in future editions.

(17) For applications to music of the work of Lakoff and Johnson (and also the related work of Turner and Fauconnier), see Zbikowski (1997 and forthcoming) and Saslaw (1997). Walser (1993, pp. 31-2) draws specifically on Johnson's theory of embodiment.

(18) This argument is presented in greater detail in "Theorizing musical meaning". Incidentally, I also discuss there the relationship between "New" musicology and nineteenth-century hermeneutics; whereas Nelson sees the former as "reversing over the ground so hard won by, for instance, Gurney and Hanslick", I see contemporary developments as replaying the events of the second half of the nineteenth century. If that is right, the important thing will be to make sure that the predictable neo-formalist reaction does not turn its back on issues of meaning, as happened last time 'round, but instead embraces them within a more generous conception of theory.

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If Lakoff and Johnson's model can be defended against such critiques, then it will slot neatly into the holes that the ultimately vacuous Langer model leaves in existing aesthetic theory; if not, then we shall need to think of the musical body as constituting just another domain for purposes of cross-domain mapping, rather than ascribing epistemic priority to it.

Given the inconclusiveness of this first point, it is fortunate that the second does not depend on it: there can be no one theory of musical meaning, because there is no one kind of musical meaning for it to be a theory of. Nelson's assertion that music's "effect of meaningfulness has only tangentially to do with the meanings of words and cultures" is not really sustainable, because there are plenty of kinds of musical meaning that *do* have to do with the meanings of words and cultures, ranging from McClary's interpretations of the Ninth on the one hand to the connotations of the "Ode to Joy" as the official European anthem or the "Flower Duet" from Delibes's *Lakmé* as the British Airways signature tune on the other. Neither set of meanings can be reduced to the other: whereas in terms of embodiment the music is always already interpreted, discursive and associative meanings emerge from the very act of interpretation. The conclusion that follows from this, I hope, is that Nelson's approach and mine are complementary: each models a different type of meaning, and each helps us understand something of the experience of music's meaningfulness which, as Nelson says, is inseparable from the music itself. And in that case, of course, my claim is not, as Chouvel describes it, that "music is not 'music itself' but some sort of psycho-sociological phenomenon". It is that *music itself* is a psychological and social, and embodied and political, in short, a human phenomenon.

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Everything must come to an end, even this response, and there is not space to explore the ramifications of the qualified relativism I have outlined. But there is one issue that is raised by enough contributors to merit at least brief consideration, though I think the general lines of my argument can be predicted, and in any case I have set it out at length in another publication (Cook, forthcoming: d). One might come away from this issue of *Musicæ Scientiæ* with an impression that, for many people, there is a binary choice between the "anything goes" of relativism and the certainties of science, between the morass of subjectivity and the high ground of objectivity, even between ideology and truth (as if, at least in the area of cultural practice, there could be such a thing as a truth that was not already ideological). Put that way the proposition sounds so old-fashioned that I doubt if anybody would sign up to it as a matter of principle (and Sabbe is quite right to detect an echo in

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what I am saying of Dilthey's distinction between the modes of enquiry appropriate to the physical and the human sciences, a matter I discuss in "Epistemologies of music theory"). The problem, of course, lies in translating principle into practice.

Molino refers at one point to the aporias of political correctness (how can we avoid essentialism and yet condemn crimes against humanity?): music, he says, presents us with the same problem, and he adds, "Il n'y a pas de solution satisfaisante, mais il faut surtout éviter d'émousser le tranchant du dilemme". But it seems to me that a qualified relativism provides a principled way to pass through the horns of the dilemma, in which we recognize the constructedness and contingency of our critical activity but at the same time seek to ground it securely in the empirical resistance of musical sounds (and sights, and other embodied experiences). In his *Harmonielehre* Schoenberg speculated about the existence of immutable, exception-free laws governing music, but if there are such things, he said, "I believe they will not be discovered very soon", and so we should aim instead at a "system of presentation — a system [...] whose clarity is simply clarity of presentation, a system that does not pretend to clarify the ultimate nature of the things presented"[19]. And seen this way, we can justify the constructs and conventions of systematic music theory, the metalanguage to which Imberty refers[20], by reference not to an always elusive external "truth", but to the requirements of intersubjective understanding: as I put it in "Epistemologies of music theory", "It would hardly be going too far to define the established methods of music theory as means, above all else, of regulating the empirical resistance that distinguishes analysis from unfettered speculation, and of communicating the resulting insights to others". This is what I meant when, in *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, I spoke of Schenkerian analysis embodying a "highly regulated metaphor": unlike Molino, I see musical analyses as metaphorical constructs (indeed I have difficulty seeing what else they might possibly be), but it is precisely *not* a question of "simple usage de métaphores". On the contrary, theory and analysis constitute a highly regulated discourse whose principles are not only shared by specialists but also define the specialism.

Not that abandoning the gold standard makes life any easier. A discipline which is regulated not by some supposedly established "truth" but rather by a principled and empirically grounded intersubjectivity brings with it something of the rigours

(19) Schoenberg (1978, pp.10-11). I quote this passage in Cook (forthcoming: d), but discussed its implications in greater detail in Cook (1989, pp. 117-41).

(20) I have no idea, by the way, why Imberty thinks I would deny significance to any analytical construction not comprehensible to non-specialists (at least I take this to be the implication of his reference to astrophysics); I certainly never said so in *Music: A Very Short Introduction*. I do however believe that metalanguages can take on a life of their own, so that in employing them one should be clear about the epistemological status one is claiming for them, and that experimental studies can help in this. I have addressed the issue of the theoretical value of imperceptible analytical constructs in Cook (1987) and elsewhere.

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of zero-based budgeting: everything always needs justifying anew, and every case needs considering on its merits. Take for example Chouvel's commentary on Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben*, or to be more precise on the feminist interpretation of it which I borrowed from Ruth Solie:

> Because the work of Schumann is dealing with a text that is truly a kind of romantic male chauvinism, because this music was performed in a context in which male chauvinism was dominant, does it imply that the music of Schumann itself, played today, conveys this precise meaning to somebody like me that doesn't even understand German? My interest in Schumann's work lies somewhere else. Who cares about the sex of the interpreter or the composer when he listens to music? Not me....

There are two questions here. First, can knowledge of the work's social and ideological context be embraced within listening, or are these just so many extraneous facts, at best irrelevant to the aesthetic experience and at worst damaging to it (in the way that Schoenberg (1984, p. 114) spoke of the sophomore who would never be able to hear Schumann's symphonies properly because she had been taught that his orchestration was gloomy and unclear)? Molino, who makes a similar point concerning the putatively gay Schubert, addresses this issue: "le problème crucial pour la compréhension de la musique est de savoir quel rôle joue cette composante idéologique dans les diverses expériences musicales et dans la musique elle-même". Clearly there is a level at which we respond to music physically (what we term a "gut" response, though it is equally a response of the hands and the feet, and one or two other parts as well), and which is hardly amenable to rational persuasion or even discussion: the music is what it is. But clearly there are also levels of mediated response at which we can see (or hear, or imagine) the music one way or the other, in other words at which we can decide how we shall experience the music and take responsibility for that experience. It depends on the piece of music, and it depends on the individual, but the answer to the question must be yes, it is possible. So the second question follows: if we *can* embrace our knowledge of the work's social and ideological context within our listening, then does it follow that we *should*? For Chouvel the answer is no: 'My interest in Schumann's work lies somewhere else'. Well, that's his choice, and I have to admit that it's often my choice too, because in the end it's the good things to listen to that keep me listening, and there is nothing more comforting than curling up and immersing yourself in a piece of music in the same way as you might in a novel. And yet it's curious that this escapist mode of listening, one which keeps the challenges of the outside world firmly at bay, should have been so privileged within the traditional aesthetics of absolute music; it might be argued that when you listen to *Frauenliebe* this way you are turning it into something closer to absolute muzak. In short, I am not sure that it is terribly responsible to listen to music this way, at least in one's capacity as a musicologist (though why shouldn't we also listen for sheer pleasure, like everyone else, so long as we don't claim to be doing musicology at the same time?).

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Rather than a postmodernist free-for-all where anything goes, then, musicology under the sign of qualified relativism stands for some rather old-fashioned values: it asks you to take responsibility for your own perceptions, your own understanding, your own beliefs. In a word, Bakhtin's word, it makes you answerable to yourself, to others, and to the music. Maybe, after reading Gritten's essay, we should rephrase Bohlman's maxim and say that musicology is an answerable act[21].

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