

Re-Thinking Music: Disciplinary Implications

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Musicology and the Musical Experience

It seems fair to observe that, during the 1980s and 1990s, musicology was more polarized between established and newer approaches to its object of study than it had been before. It is therefore of interest to find David Gramit, in the opening essay of this volume, identifying a possible basis for an easing of partisanship within the discipline. That basis is the “musical experience”—that distinctively *musical* experience of the aesthetic, broadly conceived—which according to Gramit attracts “statements of allegiance [that] cut across the boundaries of otherwise conflicting musicological camps.” It is this experience that persuades individuals to become scholars, aficionados, and collectors of recordings. The observation that Arthur Mendel made over thirty-five years ago remains as true as it was then: “Music-historians are interested in musical works...as objects of delight” (Mendel 1962, 4), and this over and above the more professional questions that they engage in and that flow from their love of music.

These more professional interests, however, have tended to take priority over attempts to understand the “love of music.” In Mendel’s view, “[although the] direct relation of the music-historian to the work is necessary, it is certainly not sufficient for explanation” (Mendel 1962, 16). “Music history,” he noted, “being a young science, is still, to a greater extent than some other forms of history,

concerned with establishing basic facts” (Mendel 1962, 14). Claude Palisca was more blunt. “We cannot forget,” he argued, “that musical aesthetics is not musical scholarship; it is musical experience and musical theory converging upon a philosophical problem. Aesthetics does not rest on documentary or similar evidence, but on philosophical and psychological principles tested by experience” (Palisca 1963, 110). This preoccupation with documentary evidence rather than interests of a more aesthetic nature, which has characterized the development of historical musicology in particular, appears to be related to a concern Gramit attributes to many historical musicologists: namely, that to investigate the musical experience with a rigor equivalent to that brought to bear on documentary questions would be “to destroy it.” It is for this reason, perhaps, that the “direct relation of the music-historian to the work” believed by Mendel to be a necessary prerequisite for scholarly work must remain, as he put it, “unanalyzable” (Mendel 1962, 16). The love of music may be a necessary prerequisite as the *motivation* for the study of music, in other words, but it cannot itself be a legitimate *object* of study contributing to explanations of musical affect.

This tension between the motivation for musical scholarship and what musical scholarship will countenance has been the subject of some pointed remarks by Susan McClary: “I was drawn to music because it is the most compelling cultural form I know.” McClary entered musicology because she “believed that it would be dedicated (at least in part) to explaining how music manages to create such effects.” Musicology granted her access “to an astonishing cultural legacy: musical repertoires from all of history and the entire globe, repertoires of extraordinary beauty, power, and formal sophistication.” Yet McClary soon discovered that

musicology fastidiously declares issues of musical signification to be off-limits to those engaged in legitimate scholarship. It has seized disciplinary control over the study of music and has prohibited the asking of even the most fundamental questions concerning meaning. Something terribly important is being hidden away by the profession, and I have always wanted to know why (McClary 1991, 4).

Gramit has argued that, in contrast to the agnosticism of more established forms of musicology, more recent forms “treat...the foundational experience not as an article of faith but as the focus of inquiry.” This notwithstanding, both tendencies in musicology have expended considerable energy—either explicitly or implicitly—on debates as to what kinds of music should be studied in the academy, what aspects of music should be studied, what theories and methods should be applied to such studies, and what assumptions should underpin the study of music as a whole. It can be argued that these debates are largely peripheral to the issue of understanding the character of this “foundational experience.”

A major purpose of this essay is to suggest that Gramit’s insight about what musicologists seem to share deserves to be built upon if musicology is to move beyond these debates. We intend to show that there is much to be gained from attempting to understand the character of the “musical experience,” and little to be feared. Our conclusion is that the position of musicology within the wider intellectual and academic environment can be considerably strengthened as a consequence of this exercise, and that such strengthening is to be welcomed. Our first point in developing these arguments is that there are genuine intellectual reasons for keeping the “musical experience” front and center in contemplating future directions for the study of music. These reasons have a history going back at least to the early 1960s.

The Move to Criticism

In the early 1960s, in a reaction to the more conservative, positivist agenda for musicology set out by scholars such as Mendel and Palisca, Joseph Kerman considered explicitly the challenges facing musicology in the United States (Kerman 1965). The occasion for his reflections was an address delivered at a plenary session of the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in 1964. The catalyst for his reflections was the publication of a volume entitled simply *Musicology* (Harrison, Hood, and Palisca 1963) in the Princeton series, "Studies of Humanistic Scholarship in America." This series was intended to appraise the condition of the various humanistic disciplines in the United States at the time. Kerman initially observed that while "certain of the books [in this series] may be thought to glut certain of the fields...the one on musicology fills a void" (Kerman 1965, 61). He continued:

There have been few deeply-considered statements about American musicology—distressingly few...in recent years. The general unself-consciousness of American musicology perhaps reflects its newness as a field of study; much more discussion of aims and principles and premises is needed, as well as of actual working methods. Starting discussion is the first great virtue of the *Musicology* volume, to which I am paying a small tribute in the form of the present address (Kerman 1965, 61).

Despite this tribute, Kerman was quick to point out the difference between his views and the perspectives of scholars such as Palisca. The measure of this difference, and, in Kerman's opinion, the measure of the difference between musicology and other humanistic disciplines, was the absence of criticism. Nonetheless, Kerman remarked:

the serious study of criticism is barely mentioned by Palisca or Harrison, even in their more speculative passages. Whether or not this depresses us, it will not much surprise us, for in musical parlance criticism seems to refer only to daily newspaper writing, a field that has the reputation of an intellectual jungle, in spite of recent efforts by some musicological missionaries. However, the lacuna *will* surprise and may depress the non-musical reader of the book, such as, for example, the experienced academic person with no knowledge of the musical situation... (Kerman 1965, 63).

While Mendel and Kerman agreed on the youth of musicology, they saw its aims and principles quite differently. For Kerman, musicology could never be governed by documentary questions or by processes of "establishing basic facts," although these were certainly of considerable importance as the means to an end in the critical enterprise. For Kerman, the governing rationale of musicology should match that of other humanistic disciplines: the development of "critical insight," a task that "has always been as urgent as it is problematic" (Kerman 1965, 63).

While it may have been legitimately the case that musicology's youth as a discipline in the United States hindered the development of criticism as a disciplinary priority, the fact that Kerman was uttering an almost identical complaint twenty years later suggests that something much deeper was at stake. In 1985, in a context much wider than American musicology alone, Kerman lamented that

serious music criticism...does not exist as a discipline on a par with musicology and music theory on the one hand, or literary and art criticism on the other. We do not have the musical Arnolds or Eliots, Blackmurs or Kermodes, Ruskins or Schapiros. In the circumstances, it is idle to complain or lament that critical thought in music lags conceptually far behind that in other arts. In fact, nearly all musical thinkers travel at a respectful distance behind the latest chariots (or bandwagons) of intellectual life in general.... Semiotics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology are being drawn upon only by some of the boldest of musical studies today. Post-structuralism, de-

construction and serious feminism have yet to make their debuts in musicology or music theory (Kerman 1985, 17).

The picture has undoubtedly changed since Kerman made this observation. However, it remains the case that the cultural-theoretical and epistemological orientations that have furthered the development of critical approaches within musical scholarship continue to be derived from intellectual traditions—literary criticism in particular—that have hardly been influenced by the study of music. This explains in part the void so lucidly described by McClary.

We would argue that, until the character of the “musical experience” is addressed, the kind of criticism envisaged by Kerman will be difficult to develop. As a consequence, musicology will likely remain locked into essentially irresolvable debates about what music should be studied, who should study it, and how it should be studied. Debates about what music should be studied and by whom rest, ultimately, on judgments of relative value, whether spoken or not. Such judgments invite reflection on “meaning,” signification and identity, and how these elements relate to specific contexts. Debates about how music should be studied likewise beg questions about the character of musical processes, how these processes give rise to affect, and how these processes themselves involve processes of a subjective, historical, cultural, and social character.

In this situation, we suggest that an examination of music’s character as a *distinctive* signifying practice that is not reducible to the condition of other kinds of human activity would be valuable, although we recognize that to consider music in this way raises some very difficult questions, questions which we address in the following sections of the essay. We feel that until music scholars attempt to build in this way on what they might have in

common, musicology will continue to lag conceptually behind other disciplines, and to remain incapable of addressing some of the more central issues that confront it. The examination of music as a distinctive signifying practice should provide the basis for a greater understanding of the "musical experience," for the establishment of critical tools developed within the context of this understanding, and thus for the development of forms of criticism not dependent on models drawn from other disciplines. The main purpose of this essay is to sketch out the lines of such an examination. Our purpose in the next section is to rehearse two contrasting positions on music and signification with which we do not agree, and to identify the issues that they raise as a prelude to developing our own position.

Music and Signification

To suggest that music as a signifying practice displays specific characteristics that musicology needs to understand, and that, as a consequence, music can contribute to qualities of human expression, communication, and understanding in ways that are not reducible to other kinds of human activity, is immediately to invite charges of "essentialism" from scholars in disciplines such as sociology and cultural studies. Behind this charge lie twin suppositions: first, processes internal to music as a signifying practice are being fixed conceptually in such a way as to make signification through music insusceptible to negotiation through wider social processes; and, second, the notion of "music," together with the linguistic term used to denote it, are themselves social constructs whose relationship to particular musical phenomena or practices may be ambiguous or contested. There is a sense in which these charges are justified. According to Leonard

Meyer, some musicologists and aestheticians have wrongly contended that “the meaning of music lies specifically...in the musical processes themselves,” and that, as a consequence, “musical meaning is a thing apart, different in some unexplained way from all other kinds of meaning” (Meyer 1956, 33). Because of this, it is clearly necessary to render both the practices that give rise to musical affect, and the attendant epistemological and linguistic categories through which music is understood to be “music,” conceptually open to the possibility of wider social and cultural mediation.

There is nevertheless also a sense in which these charges of essentialism carry with them an element of the disingenuous. An equivalent claim that language displays specific characteristics that contribute to human expression, communication, and understanding in ways that are not reducible to other kinds of human activity is one that routinely goes unchallenged. Indeed, an accepted wisdom on how language signifies—drawn from the pioneering work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916)—has underpinned much cultural theory on signification across the whole range of human communication. The idea that there need not be a necessary or logical connection between the characteristics of the sounds of language (“signifiers”) and the characteristics of the mental concepts (“signifieds”) with which they are customarily associated, and the related notion that the relationship between the sounds of language and “what they mean” is as a consequence fundamentally arbitrary, have made easy and, in a sense, served to guarantee the argument that all meaning is socially constructed and therefore socially negotiable. For Saussure, because signifier and signified were arbitrarily yet seamlessly joined, language was guaranteed an irreducible role in human life: “the distinguishing characteristic of the sign...is that in some way it always eludes

the individual or social will" (Saussure 1966, 17). This same principle, however, was not extended to other forms of signification. Rather, it was assumed that other forms of signification occurred in the image of language. As a result, Saussure believed that the analysis of signification in language could form the basis for "the science of semiology." This belief in the primacy of language among human forms of signification has been reinforced in the work of others influenced by the Saussurean model, as Kaja Silverman observes. For the French psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan, she says:

the definitive criterion of a signifier is that it abandon all relation to the real, and take up residence within a closed field of meaning.... Language is consequently not the only source of signifiers...at the same time as we indicate the range of signifying materials, [however], it is important to note the privileged position enjoyed by language. For Lacan, as for Barthes, language mediates all other signifiers (Silverman 1983, 164-65).

Viewed against this line of thinking, any suggestion that the sounds of music may be involved in processes of signification in a manner other than the "arbitrary" becomes tantamount to claiming that "the meaning of music lies...specifically in...musical processes themselves," and in this way outside processes of social constitution and negotiability. Hence the charges of essentialism, and, indeed, idealism.

This line of thinking that has led many sociologists and cultural theorists to claim that the "meaning" or significance of music can only be grasped legitimately by examining concrete instances of music as integral aspects of the social and cultural circumstances of their practice. This approach in understanding the significance of concrete instances of musical behavior is certainly desirable, if not necessary. However, insisting on it as the exclusive way of grasping *processes* of signification in music (as that

which underlies the generation of actual significance in concrete instances) can only be based on three interrelated assumptions: that all forms of human symbolism signify in fundamentally the same way as language; that, as a consequence, there is nothing really distinctive about *processes* of signification in music; and that, in conclusion, any claim to the effect that processes of signification in music *are* distinctive inevitably places music outside the realms of social constitution and negotiation, and treats it as a thing apart. The disingenuousness of this line of thinking lies not in the arguments that have been made about modes of signification in language. It lies in failing to be sufficiently critical about the claims routinely made for the universal relevance of processes of signification exemplified through language, and underestimating the possibility that music might be a signifying practice with its own, distinctive processes of signification. As a consequence, it lies also in failing to grant music the same status commonly afforded language, namely, that of a signifying practice with its own, distinctive processes of signification that guarantee for it, as for language, an autonomy relative to the individuals who use it, the societies in which it is practiced, and other modes of signification with which it intersects and interacts.

If Gramit is correct in his observation that “statements of allegiance” to the musical experience “cut across the boundaries of otherwise conflicting musicological camps,” then a first step in contemplating the future of music studies might be to accept that its object of study is not constituted alone as a collection of individual works or practices, however these are selected and categorized. This is an important step because, to the extent that issues of affect and meaning have been consciously addressed within musicology, the tendency has been to argue from the particular to the general. In this, musicol-

ogy has tended to mirror the predisposition of cultural studies scholars who seem prepared to discuss issues of meaning and affect only in the context of the examination of specific musical practices as historically contingent. Musicology's object of study is not merely the conglomeration of particular single works or practices; rather, this object of study also includes music as a distinctive signifying practice that is constituted *socially and culturally*. This approach opens the way for the more successful contemplation of issues of meaning and affect, since arguing from the particular to the general often means remaining trapped within the respective conventions of musicology and cultural studies, neither of which are very well suited to understanding questions of signification in music.

This step, and the line of inquiry it requires is, however, as problematic for sociology and cultural studies as it is for musicology. There are good reasons why many musicologists and music aestheticians have clung to the idea that "the meaning of music lies specifically in the musical processes themselves," and that, as a consequence, "musical meaning is a thing apart, different in some unexplained way from all other kinds of meaning" (Meyer 1956, 33). Yet the idea that musical meaning could somehow be "intrinsic" or "immanent" to music's sounds does not stand up to critical examination based on the ways that people react to different kinds of music in everyday life. In an essay entitled "What is Good Music?" the sociologist Simon Frith gives an account of "four...moments when discourses about music have clashed, when accounts of 'good music' have contradicted each other to ridiculous or outrageous effect" (Frith 1990, 92). These examples are taken from a wide range of musical traditions—"classical," "traditional," and "popular"—and demonstrate that, in the nature of

the disagreements they accommodate, discourses constructed around these traditions have more in common than is customarily supposed. For example, a common point of contention derives from conflicting notions of what is artistically (which is to say, musically) “good,” what is commercially “good,” what is “authentic,” and what has been “accommodated” to commercial interests in all three traditions.

Listeners clearly hear different things in the course of these disagreements. In their tendency to side with the “artistic” and “authentic” viewpoints in these debates, it must be understood that musicologists are constructing one version of “meaning,” one version of the object of study, among many possible versions. This is the conclusion that Frith reaches. “What I have been trying to suggest,” he says,

is that arguments about the value of particular pieces of music can only be understood by reference to the discourses which give the value terms concerning their meaning. Arguments about music are less about the qualities of the music itself than about how to place it, about what it is in the music that is actually to be assessed. After all, we can only hear music as having value, whether aesthetic or any other kind of value, when we know what to listen to and how to listen for it. Our reception of music, our expectations from it, are not inherent in the music itself—which is one reason why so much musicological analysis of popular music misses the point: its object of study, the discursive text it constructs, is not the text to which anyone listens (Frith 1990, 96-97).

In other words, “ordinary” listeners are not concerned about the supposedly immanent meanings of music. They are concerned about what music means to them. What Frith seems to suggest is that if the meaning and value of music are not located in the materials of music themselves, then the only reasonable alternative is to locate them within the discourses through which people make sense of and assign value to music. For this reason, mu-

sic cannot be regarded as some kind of discrete object that is subsequently exposed to and affected by social and commercial forces. Music is made *through* these forces. "The industrialization of music," observes Frith, "cannot be understood as something that happens to music, but describes a process in which music is made—the process, that is, which fuses (and confuses) capital, technical and musical arguments" (Frith 1987a, 54). These are points to which we will return in the conclusion of this essay.

This trend in sociological thinking—that meaning in music is arrived at primarily through the linguistic discourses in terms of which people make sense of their musical experiences—is consistent with the view that sounds in music must ultimately signify in a way that is not appreciably at variance with the way that sounds in language are taken to signify. It is this kind of thinking that makes musicologists nervous, and rightly so. The risk, to quote Lawrence Kramer, is "the dispersal into context of what we usually grasp as the immediacy of music" (Kramer 1993, 27). The principle of the arbitrary—which in the case of language guarantees it an autonomy relative to the individuals who use it, the societies in which it functions, and other modes of signification with which it intersects and interacts—can in the case of music constitute a threat to its "integrity." If the principle is applied to music in a situation where the character of processes of signification and the ways in which they invoke wider social processes remain unclear, then music can be *conceptualized* as being "blueprinted" by forces external to it. Without an understanding of how sounds in music produce meaning and significance, we are left with a vacuum only too susceptible to conceptual occupation through the positing of meanings extrinsic to the sounds which are placed in an arbitrary relationship with them. The essentialism and "immanence" of much thinking in

musicology can be thought to be pitched against a presumed centrality for the principle of the arbitrary in more general theories of signification. Many musicians and musicologists resist the idea that music's meanings are somehow arbitrary in their relationship to music's sounds. This idea seems to lead to the inevitable conclusion that music is somehow the *product* of processes and forces extrinsic to it. More specifically, the imposition of the principle of the arbitrary seems to reduce music to the condition of language and thus makes impossible the very thing guaranteed for language by Saussure, namely, a distinctive and specific status vis-à-vis other social institutions. Music in this way seems "defenseless" in the face of the arbitrary, a fact that may provide one answer to McClary's question about "why something terribly important is being hidden away by the profession" of musicology.

The line of thinking, which understands music fundamentally in terms of cultural-theoretical models drawn from the study of language, has been clear in the work of literary and cultural critics such as Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. Kristeva, for example, has argued that

while the fundamental function of language is the *communicative* function, and while it transmits a *meaning*, music is a departure from this principle of communication. It does transmit a "message" between a subject and an addressee, but it is hard to say that it *communicates* a precise *meaning*. It is a combinatory of differential elements, and evokes an algebraic system more than a discourse. If the addressee hears this combinatory as a sentimental, emotive, patriotic, etc., message, that is the result of a subjective interpretation given within the framework of a cultural system rather than the result of a "meaning" implicit in the "message" (Kristeva 1989, 309).

There is a suggestion here that sounds in music are equally as arbitrary in their relationship to processes of

signification as are sounds in language, except that, to the extent that sounds in music depend upon the arbitrary signifying processes of language in order to take on meaning through the linguistic discourses constructed around them, they are more distanced from and not as immediately implicated in processes of meaning construction as are sounds in language. Sounds in music could thus be said to float even more freely in their relationship to processes of signification than do sounds in language because they are not as directly burdened by the conventions of traditional associations between signifiers and signifieds. Thus, sounds in music can, in a sense, take on meanings assigned to them more arbitrarily than can sounds in language. According to this understanding of processes of signification through sounds, music becomes an “empty sign” in the sense that its sounds can be taken to be completely polysemic in nature, capable of all meanings because, in and of themselves, they are capable of none.

This is the approach that Barthes has taken in his writings about music. For Barthes, music became a pure and ideal “Other” to the world of conventional, ideologically loaded meaning. To talk about music was thus to compromise its “innocence.” “As soon as someone speaks about music,” said Barthes, “or a specific music—as a value *in itself*, or on the contrary—though this is the same thing—as a value for *everyone*—i.e., as soon as we are told that we must love all music—we feel a kind of ideological cope falling over the most precious substance of evaluation, music: this is ‘commentary’” (Barthes 1985a, 279). For Barthes, music therefore lay outside language in making its appeal directly to the body—but not, however, in a manner that would challenge the primacy of language. Music, said Barthes, “speaks, it declaims, it redoubles its voice: *it speaks but says nothing*: because as

soon as it is musical, speech—or its instrumental substitute—is no longer linguistic, but corporeal; it only says, and nothing else: *my body is put into a state of speech: quasi parlando*” (Barthes 1985b, 304).

For Barthes, music thus provided, through the directness of its appeal to the body, a kind of sonic, physiological ground that could subsequently gain meaning through its interpellation into the world of language. This line of thinking has had a perceptible influence in popular music studies, particularly in the work of cultural studies scholars such as Lawrence Grossberg. In Grossberg’s writings, music is not conceived as a cipher in reflecting social, cultural, and subjective processes. It is instead conceived as an instigator in their production, but an instigator whose inherent material qualities (sounds) seem to be of little or no consequence (apart from their “brute” presence) to the particular character of the processes articulated. Grossberg has argued more than once that meanings in rock music cannot be read from the surface of rock’s “text,” which we assume to mean the “music itself”: “rock and roll cannot be approached by some textual analysis of its message. Rock and roll, whether live or recorded, is a performance whose ‘significance’ cannot be read off the ‘text’” (Grossberg 1984, 233). Rather than beginning with questions of meaning and affect in music, therefore, Grossberg concentrates on processes that we would regard as more distant from—but certainly most relevant to—these questions: “In order to understand the relationship between rock, youth, and fan, I propose to look at the ways in which rock and roll organizes not the meaning we give to the world, but the ways we are able to invest and locate energy, importance, even ourselves, in those meanings” (Grossberg 1987, 182). There is therefore a sense in which music’s importance is displaced from the center of

gravity of its affective power—its sounds—and located elsewhere. By describing it as a formation, Grossberg wants “to emphasize the fact that the identity and effect of rock depends on more than its sonorial dimension.” Speaking of rock as a formation “demands that we always locate musical practices in the context of a complex (and always specific) set of relations with other cultural and social practices; hence I will describe it as a cultural rather than a musical formation” (Grossberg 1993, 41).

Without understanding exactly how the sounds of music produce meaning and signification *as a distinctive and irreducible signifying practice*, the presumed immanence of music’s meanings to music’s sounds becomes an effective mechanism in defending the “integrity” of music. If music is “true only to itself,” then its “integrity” cannot by definition be “compromised” by processes and forces extrinsic to it. As we have seen, however, this defense also has its problems. It is as if, in the terms of Theodor Adorno, we are caught between the worlds of the “jitterbug” and the “adequate listener.” As Murray Dineen observes in his contribution to this volume, the former is thought to be “the product of a social order,” while the latter takes “into account...nothing of the self and its historical necessity.” Critical to the resolution of this conundrum is the imagining of a new relation between the sounds of music and their “meaning,” one that shares little with the notions of the “arbitrary” and the “immanent.”

Music as a Medium

We wish to propose the concept of the “medium” as a way of explaining how musical sounds may allow a construction of meaning that remains socially negotiable (Wicke 1989 and 1990). The term “medium” is used here

in a very specific sense drawn from the world of science to mean an agent or a material substance in which a physical or chemical process takes place—and without which it *cannot* take place—but which remains unaffected by the process. As applied to music, the concept of the medium has two distinguishing characteristics. First, it conceptualizes the use of sounds in music as being of a purely “structural” character consistent with music’s evocation of a world that is fundamentally non-denotative. This world is also assumed to be powerfully material and corporeal in character, a theme to which we will return. Second, while the medium conceptualizes sounds in music as being structured *and* structuring (structured by people, and structuring in providing the sonic grounds for the construction of meaning), sounds do not determine meanings. They only make them possible through a mediating role.

Because of this second characteristic, the concept of the medium allows space within which the construction of meanings through music’s sounds can be understood as being socially negotiated but *not* arbitrary. Just as the characteristics of the medium in a physical or chemical process determine the kind of processes possible within it without determining their character, the characteristics of the medium of music are of decisive importance for the *kind* of cultural processes that may be realized through it. The characteristics of the sounds as medium, however, cannot determine the characteristics of the cultural processes they make possible. As a consequence, they cannot determine meanings. This notwithstanding, it is *equally* important to understand that the actual characteristics of the medium (or musical sound) in each particular case do not result from the music being an object of appropriation of the external world. Rather, they themselves constitute agents that *mediate* this process

of appropriation in a culture-specific form. As a structured and structuring medium for—rather than agent of—the construction of meanings, the sounds of music both restrict and facilitate the range of meanings that can be constructed through them.

We would argue that the notion of the medium allows for some progress in understanding the character of the “musical experience.” First, the way in which the medium is conceptualized prevents music from being reduced to the condition of its sounds which, as we have seen, is a noticeable trend within musicology. The medium is merely the *sounds* of music. Music is then conceived as the *processes* of interaction between the sounds of music and individual people. Although this might seem obvious, it is perhaps worth emphasizing that “music” cannot happen without sounds that people recognize as “*musical*,” and that people must construct and invest meanings in these sounds that are *suitable* for such investment. This leads to a second, important point. The connection between sounds and people is a concrete, tangible, and direct one which is structural in character, and which yet remains to a degree negotiable. The kinds of “meanings” that people invest in the sounds of music are thus grounded in forms of structured and structuring corporeal awareness (structured by the sounds of music and structuring the sounds of music). For this reason, the meanings people invest in the sounds of music must have a certain character that renders them amenable or suitable for such investment. The character of the musical experience is thus constrained and to a degree explained by the fact that only certain kinds of meanings are “musical” meanings (this because of the specifically corporeal and structural character of the connection between people and the sounds of music), and by the fact that only a certain range of meanings can be invested successfully within

any particular medium. These characteristics of the “musical experience” are explained further by Shepherd and Wicke (1997, 95-182).

What Is Music?

There are three important points to be made in the context of the arguments we have just presented. First, the relationship between sound and people which we have described as being “characteristic of music” should not be thought of as “defining” music, as if “music” were a phenomenon “given” to people rather than an epistemological and linguistic category constructed by them. Second, a crucial distinction therefore needs to be drawn between the epistemological and linguistic category of “music” and the kinds of cultural practices to which this term customarily refers. Third, it is the *character* of these practices, rather than particular concrete instances of them, that should underwrite the constitution of musicology’s object of study. We argue that musicology’s object of study should be configured in a more inclusive fashion to embrace people’s characteristic uses of sound, and not just *certain* cultural practices that have been judged—in a frequently *a priori* manner—to be “music.”

Musicology’s object of study is, indeed, “music.” We can now see that this object of study is constituted not just by the sounds of music (its medium), but by the processes of interaction between sounds recognized as “musical” (the medium) and individual people. In the previous section we argued that, for musicology to understand better the character of the “musical experience” *as thus constituted*, it needs to accept that its object of study is not composed solely of a collection of individual works or practices (which can now be understood to be distinguishable sets of “musical processes” involving

both people and sounds). It is also constituted as a distinctive signifying practice displaying these particular characteristics of interaction between people and sounds.

This understanding of the expansion of musicology's object of study leads to the three points we need to make. In thus expanding musicology's object of study, its character is changed somewhat. The object of study is now *explicitly* understood to subsume a specific use of sound by people. This use of sound can be distinguished from the characteristic use of sound by people in language. The characteristic use of sound by people in relation to language can be termed "arbitrary." The characteristic use of sound by people in relation to music can be termed "structural." Discovering some exclusive and defining characteristic of language or music is not the goal here. More important is the realization that, as a material phenomenon presented to us by the external world, sound displays a number of potentials for signification that people, at various moments in history, have taken up to develop "language" and "music."

The arguments we made in the previous section could lead to the conclusion that the particular relations between sounds and meanings that we have identified as "characteristic of music" constitute *the* exclusive and "defining" characteristic of what is commonly understood to be "music." It could be thought that music's structural and corporeal character bestows on it genuine status as a distinctive signifying practice with an autonomy *relative* to the individuals who use it, the societies in which it is practiced, and other modes of signification with which it intersects. It has to be understood, however, that the basis for this common understanding does not involve a particular relationship between sounds and the meanings whose construction they both facilitate and constrain, a relationship that then exclusively constitutes the object

of study customarily referred to as “music.” This, indeed, would be to essentialize music. The meanings invested in the term “music” are *not* consistent. They are contested. As Line Grenier has observed, the term “music” is “highly polysemic” (Grenier 1990, 28). The basis for common-sense understandings of the term “music” therefore lies in the manner in which the particular signifying potential of sound as a material phenomenon has *by choice* been subsumed *by people* as a central, if not fundamental, component in the various and often conflicting ways in which “music” as an epistemological and linguistic category has been constructed. Understanding “music” as a distinctive signifying practice with its own relative autonomy does not mean, therefore, identifying some essential characteristic which is consistently symptomatic of it, and which as a consequence unambiguously defines it as something presented to us *by* (as opposed to “in”) external reality. Rather, it means emphasizing a particular signifying potential of sound *as a material phenomenon* (a phenomenon that, as a consequence *is* presented to us by external reality), which people use—in conjunction with other signifying potentials of sound (the “mimetic” or imitative, and also the “arbitrary”) and the signifying potentials of images and movement—to constitute “music” as a performance event.

The distinction we are drawing is, perhaps, a subtle one, but it *is* important if music is not to be essentialized. The second point follows from it: a critical distinction should be made between concrete cultural practices involving the use of sound, and the epistemological and linguistic categories such as “music” and “language” that are used to refer to them. All human societies use sounds to communicate, and they use sounds—in diverse social and cultural contexts—in ways that draw in different degrees and combinations on the various signifying poten-

tials of sound as a material phenomenon (as well as on these signifying potentials in relation to the various signifying potentials of vision and movement). These complex modes of sonically based signification and communication then come to be grasped and categorized in various cultures in relation to both the characteristics of these modes as socially and culturally constructed, and the epistemological and linguistic categories that are constituted in relation to these modes and their characteristics.

It should be remembered that there are many cultures that do not possess an epistemological and linguistic category equivalent to that of "music." Actual practices of sonically grounded human signification and communication are always couched within an understanding, categorization, and formulation of these practices based on the ways a society or culture may reflect on them through an extension of these very same practices. The concrete practices and their epistemological and linguistic categorization are powerfully and indissolubly linked in the sense that they emanate from the same, related modes of communication and metacommunication. It is nevertheless important to understand that, in acting on these practices, these epistemological and linguistic categorizations *are* in a certain sense distinct from them. It must therefore be recognized that signifying practices which in certain cultures might be recognized as "musical" might not be recognized as such in others. Some observations made by Charles Keil are pertinent here. Keil discusses the epistemological and linguistic biases that Western scholars can bring to the study of non-Western musics. These biases can be highlighted by studying the musical terminologies of other cultures. This exercise, says Keil, "serves to remove some of the blinders, biases, and distortions inherent in our own vocabulary." He continues: "Coming to terms with (or with terms to) another system

of musical thought, we are forced to question the axioms of our own musicology.” Keil concludes:

The problem of our biases hit me rather forcefully when it became clear that a word corresponding to our term “music” could not be found in one African language after another.... It is easy to talk about song and dance, singers and drummers, blowing a flute, beating a bell, but the general terms “music” and “musician” require long and awkward circumlocutions that still fall short.... (Keil 1979, 26-27).

In this sense, we must remember that neither “language” nor “music” are phenomena “given” to people. This is true both for the practices to which such terms customarily refer and for *the terms themselves*. There are no such “things” as “language” and “music” which develop and exist independently of human volition. It is true that the practices which these terms gather up, grasp, and present to us are indeed given to us in the sense that they constitute a very important aspect of the *constructed* reality of the social world. It is also crucial to realize, however, that the epistemological and linguistic categories that are used to understand and refer to them are also social constructs with a *particular* history and politics. As Keil comments, “if it should turn out that West African cultures are typical and that the vast majority of the world’s peoples do not bother with a word for ‘music,’ it’s conceivable that we may eventually think it silly, ethnocentric, even pompous to be designating disciplines with names like ‘musicology’ or ‘ethnomusicology’” (Keil 1979, 27). The point here is not that scholars should avoid examining and attempting to understand cultural practices for which we use the term “music.” Instead, we need to “get beneath” the surface of language and the established ways of thinking that language perpetuates to grasp the characteristics symptomatic of the practices that are customarily thought of as “musical.” This is our third

point. As we have seen, such an approach will require an expansion in musicology's object of study.

One final point does, however, need to be made. The issue of the relationships between terminologies and objects of study, and between disciplines and objects of study, is not just a philosophical one. It involves real issues of power. Consequently, it is essential to understand how knowledge comes to be constituted, established, and thereby controlled as a basis for the exercise of power. It is all the more essential to develop such an understanding because epistemological and linguistic categorizations come to render the world as "natural" and unexceptional—as given rather than constructed. Richard Middleton has made this issue clear in relation to the thorny question: "what is popular music?" The answers provided to such questions can influence what is and what is not regarded as a legitimate object of study, who should study it, and how it should be studied. As Middleton argues,

much recent historical work, notably Foucault's, has stressed the importance of investigating the discursive formations through which knowledge is organised. If we do not try to grasp the relations between popular music discourses and the material practices to which they refer and at the same time the necessary distinctness of levels between these, we are unlikely to break through the structures of power which, as Foucault makes clear, discursive authority erects (Middleton 1990, 7).

For these kinds of reasons, as Middleton has argued in his contribution to this volume, there needs to be an acute awareness of what music is being studied, by whom, and for what reasons.

Embodied Schemata

One purpose of this essay is to suggest that breaking through disciplinary power structures by expanding musicology's object of study is not something to be resisted, but something that can be welcomed. In order to demonstrate why this is so, it is necessary to return to the question of music's corporeal character, and to expand on the idea that the meanings that people invest in the sounds of music are grounded in forms of structured and structuring corporeal awareness—structured by the sounds of music and structuring the sounds of music. By developing an understanding of this embodied structuring and its role in music, it becomes possible to “get beneath” the surface of language and the established ways of thinking that language perpetuates to grasp the characteristics symptomatic of the practices that are customarily thought of as “musical.” In addition, grasping the characteristics of these practices furthers an understanding of how music can contribute to qualities of human expression and communication in ways that are not reducible to other kinds of human activities, and consequently how musicology can strengthen its position in the wider intellectual and academic environment.

An insight into the character of this embodied structuring is provided by the work of Mark Johnson. Johnson develops his ideas on embodied structuring in relation to signification in language, rather than signification in music. Johnson's motivation lies in contesting dominant theories of signification in language (as developed within linguistic philosophy) which have ignored the role of bodily awareness. He says:

I am perfectly happy with talk of the conceptual/propositional content of an utterance, *but only insofar as we are aware that this propositional content is possible only by virtue of a complex web of nonpropositional schematic*

structures that emerge from our bodily experience. Once meaning is understood in this broader, enriched manner, it will become evident that the structure of rationality is much richer than any set of abstract logical patterns completely independent of the patterns of our physical interactions in and with our environment. Any account of the "logic" of a chain of reasoning thus would have to make reference to such schematic structures and to figurative extensions of them. The inferential structure of our abstract reasoning is a high refinement upon orderings in our bodily experience, a refinement that ignores much of what goes into our reasoning (Johnson 1987, 5).

Johnson's arguments can be put in context by noting that people have a location in the material environment as a consequence of bodily placement, and can only ultimately operate on this environment through their bodies. To the extent that people have a sense of their location in the environment, and a sense of the significance of this location in relation to the material world (which includes other people), they thus have it through their bodies. It can as a consequence be argued that senses of the world and of individual identity and significance in the world *must* be rooted in the body. The process of grasping the character of the connections between embodiment on the one hand and experience, feeling, rationality, and imagination on the other rests on what Johnson terms a "geography of human experience." Such a geography, says Johnson, "seeks to identify the chief contours (structures) and connections that our experience and understanding exhibit. It...explores the emergence of comprehensible form and organization in our experiences and the means we have of making sense of it" (Johnson 1987, xxxvii). "*Any adequate account of meaning and rationality,*" concludes Johnson, "*must give a central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world*" (Johnson 1987, xiii).

Johnson argues that two phenomena are basic to the survival of people as biological organisms. The first is

the material environment which makes life possible but which, in any particular instance, makes life possible in some ways rather than others. The second is force. Interaction with the environment cannot occur without the exercise of force, but because some forces of interaction are possible in any particular situation and others are not, force comes to be channeled and therefore exercised in some ways rather than others. This lends a certain logic, a certain form of organization to the exertion of force which in turn lays the ground, the material ground, for the experiencing of the world and the meanings the world holds for people. However, the structuring of force can only have meaning for individuals because it is rendered internal and experienced. *This* structuring of force is referred to by Johnson as a gestalt structuring of force. The gestalt character of structurings of force emphasize that they are “inherent, meaningful, unified wholes within our experience and cognition. They are a principle means by which we achieve meaning structure. They generate coherence for, establish unity within, and constrain our network of meaning. Most important, these ‘experiential gestalts’ are neither arbitrary, nor are they ‘mushy’ forms that have no internal structure” (Johnson 1987, 41).

The materiality of the body as the site for the construction of awareness (as well as the materiality of the body as a biological organism that makes such construction possible) thus displays the same capacity for facilitation and constraint as the materiality of the environment. The materiality of the body is not, however, completely dependent on or governed completely by the forces extrinsic to it insofar as its *precise* configuration in relation to awareness is concerned. This is a principle that we have already established concerning the relation of sound as a medium in music to the meanings whose

construction it facilitates. Imagination constitutes a critical link between the structured forces of the external world and our structured experience of them. For Johnson, "imagination is the very means by which we have any comprehensible structure in our experience." This "sense of imagination is not commonly acknowledged today," continues Johnson, but "it tends to suggest...notions of artistic creativity, fantasy, and fiction" (Johnson 1987, 29). This capacity for an exercise of the imagination that is grounded, structured, and disciplined enables individual people to contribute to the social negotiation of meaning through music.

Through imagination, we constitute the "structures that organize our mental representations" within the constraints proffered by the external world (as well as by the materiality of our bodies as biological organisms). These structures, argues Johnson, are "embodied schemata." As such they "are not propositional." Neither are they "rich, concrete images of mental pictures" (Johnson 1987, 23). They are "structures that organize our mental representations at a level more general and abstract than that at which we form particular mental images" (Johnson 1987, 23-24). Embodied schemata are fundamentally experiential in character. Embodied schemata are therefore not cognitive, abstract ("non-material"), or static in character. They are experiential, material, and grounded in a world of organized and meaningful action. Meaningful experience thus depends on ordered action and the schemata to which ordered action can give rise:

in order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about, there must be pattern and order to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. *A schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordering activities.* These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of

our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions (Johnson 1987, 29).

These recurring patterns or abstracted (“non-denotative”) yet materially embodied schemata can “structure indefinitely many perceptions, images, and events” (Johnson 1987, 29).

Johnson is clearly arguing for something far more basic and comprehensive in understanding the processes through which awareness is constructed than the constitution of the “mental” alone. His arguments are not pitched solely at the level of the cognitive and the linguistic, but at the more inclusive level of the corporeal as mediated powerfully through the materiality of the external world. In this way Johnson provides us with a framework within which it is possible to understand what it is in individuals to which the sounds of music appeal, what it is they serve to structure, what it is in individuals that structures the sounds of music, and what it is that characterizes a musical experience as being, indeed, a musical experience.

Showing and Saying

It should be remembered, however, that Johnson’s arguments were developed in relation to language, not music. This suggests that there is some way in which language and music appeal to the same areas of human experience and understanding, albeit in different ways symptomatic of their status as distinctive signifying practices. At this point, it begins to become apparent how music can contribute to qualities of human expression in ways that are not reducible to other kinds of human activity. A case for the ways in which language and music appeal in different ways to the same areas of human experience and under-

standing has been made by Manfred Bierwisch. Bierwisch draws an important distinction between the logical form as the meaning of linguistic signs and the gesticulatory form as the meaning of musical signs. For Bierwisch, “the central category of the logical form is the proposition,” defined as “the conceptual representation of a (real or fictitious) fact” (Bierwisch 1979, 50). The relationship between propositions, logical forms, facts, and signs is as follows:

Propositions are abstract reflections of facts generated by the processing of cognitive information. Their structure is determined on the one hand by the facts they are reflecting, and on the other by the form of the processing of the facts reflected. The former means that there have to exist structural similarities between the facts and the propositions representing these facts; the latter that these similarities are abstract in nature. This is so because propositions represent different kinds of facts—spatial, temporal, causal, social, ideational states or processes—in principle in the same way as logical forms. Logical forms have in common with identified facts only a logical structure. Logical forms, so to speak, are without dimensions and can therefore only be grasped as the structure of something in which they are manifest. The manifestation of interest to us is the process of linguistic encoding through which the logical form is turned into the meaning of a linguistic sign, transformed into the structure of linguistic sound patterns (Bierwisch 1979, 52).

Propositions, in other words, take on a structure in mediating between facts, their cognitive processing as information, and the logical form encoded in the linguistic sign through which both form and proposition take on life. The difference between a proposition and a logical form can be illustrated as follows:

the phrases “the novels of Kafka” and “Kafka’s novels” are propositions because they represent a matter of fact in reality. Both phrases encode the same logical form, the relationship between Kafka and novels. This relationship is defined by a logical structure (the novels written by Kafka) which is in reality the same as in all linguistic expressions of it. Between the terms “novels” and “Kafka” there has

to be constructed by linguistic means a logical structure identical with the logical structure in reality. In both phrases this is achieved through different grammatical means but the logical structure remains the same. Translated into German the same propositions are encoded as “die Romane von Kafka” and “Kafkas Romane.” The logical structure between the terms “Romane” and “Kafka” is the same as in the English phrases, i.e., the same as in reality. “The novels of Kafka,” “Kafka’s novels,” “die Romane von Kafka,” and “Kafkas Romane” are different encodings of the same logical structure. They have the same logical form and therefore the same meaning (Bierwisch 1979, 52).

On the other hand, the structure for which Bierwisch suggests the term “gesticulatory form” is “related to the entirety of emotional, affective and motivational states and processes in a manner similar to the way in which the logical form is related to cognitive structures and processes” (Bierwisch 1979, 53). The *gesture* for Bierwisch becomes to the gesticulatory form what the proposition is to the logical form. It is, so to speak, “the emotional sense of a complex of physiological states or processes” (Bierwisch 1979, 55). However, the basis of the relationship between the proposition and the cognitive structures and processes it evokes on the one hand, and the basis of the relationship between the gesture and the emotional, affective, and motivational states it evokes on the other, are quite different, as Bierwisch makes clear:

While a proposition has, so to speak, an extensionless logical structure whose projection onto the temporally organized forms of linguistic signs remains more or less external in nature, a gesture is as such of a temporal nature. *It is the structure of a state or process and does not just replace it.* A proposition can represent facts with any temporal structure and temporal classification you like, but in an indirect and abstract manner. A gesture, on the other hand, is directly and in and of itself a temporally structured pattern (Bierwisch 1979, 55, our italics).

Unlike propositions, which are connected in a logical and therefore linear manner, gestures must be capable of ar-

articulating emotional, affective, and motivational states and processes that are simultaneously multidimensional. A gesture, therefore, "can be subdivided in itself. A basic gesture might be overlapped by modifying gestures or might be superseded temporarily. Qualitatively different gestures can overlap each other, give way to each other or get around each other. To put it simply, propositions are logically connected, gestures are temporally connected" (Bierwisch 1979, 56). As a consequence,

The basic principle which turns gesticulatory forms into the meanings of musical signs is clearly that of analogous encoding. The dimensions of sound patterns are assigned to the dimensions of a gesticulatory form through a partly discrete and partly continuous encoding displaying different degrees of differentiation. The simplest correspondence is to be found in the temporal dimension. In all other dimensions the assignment is less direct. Intensity appears as volume only in relation to the overall character of a gesture. Movement of pitch represents movement in emotions through something like an abstract "space in motion" which can be grasped through its synaesthetic relatedness to the physical field of movement, to its characteristics of gravitational force, distance and height (Bierwisch 1979, 56).

At this point, Bierwisch elaborates on the different ways in which he understands language and music to articulate meaning by reference to the concepts of "saying" and "showing." According to Bierwisch, music shows something acoustically:

If one separates "showing" from the condition that it has to happen in an optical manner, and if one does not interpret it in the narrow sense of "making visible," but more generally in the sense of "making perceptible," then it is possible to introduce naturally the idea of acoustical actions of showing. Music can therefore be defined as a system of signs through which it is possible to show something acoustically.... Musical signs show the gesticulatory form encoded in them, and they make emotional patterns perceptible by showing their gesticulatory structure (Bierwisch 1979, 59).

Music can “show” gesticulatory forms *directly* without having to “say” anything. This, presumably, is because a gesture “is the structure of a state or process and does not just replace it” (as propositions do the structures of facts and things), and because “the basic principle which turns gesticulatory forms into the meanings of musical signs is clearly that of analogous coding.” We should stress here that the process of coding is complex, and, through the exercise of imagination, necessarily entails the symbolism crucial to the social negotiation of meaning (see Shepherd and Wicke 1997, 153-203). However, it remains the case that “the specific, language-evading possibilities of music are characterized by the fact that something can be shown that cannot be said” (Bierwisch 1979, 61). Language, on the other hand, can “say” things directly, but only through the logical forms implicated in its manner of “saying”:

However a conventional system of signs constitutes or changes itself, the logical form of its meaning contains a structure which shows the structure of the facts about which something is being said. Only through this structural equivalence which connects the meanings of signs with things and facts in reality is it possible to say something with conventional signs. Behind the possibility of saying something in a form ruled by convention is the condition of showing in an abstract manner the structure of what is being said.... Within what is said something is always shown which cannot itself be said (Bierwisch 1979, 61).

For both music and language, therefore, a structure is “shown” which cannot be “said.” In the case of music, however, this is because there cannot be anything to “say” that emanates directly from the area of meaning that music invokes. Music’s “showing” is, in a sense, language’s “saying.” The manner of music’s “showing” is thus concrete and direct, although it does remain symbolic because, as we have already argued, the medium of

music cannot determine meaning. It depends upon imagination as embedded in processes of social negotiation to provide the basis for meaning construction. In the case of language, something is “shown” which cannot be “said” (because there *has* to be something to “say” emanating directly from the area of meaning that language evokes), which is why Johnson is correct to insist on embodied schemata as the basis for meaning in language. “Showing” in language, although essential to “saying,” can only be revealed *indirectly* through “saying.”

These areas of meaning that Bierwisch understands music and language respectively to evoke are not, however, discrete. They overlap considerably, and they are distinct only because the signifying practices of music and language serve to render them so. As Bierwisch argues:

Cognitive processes—including their linguistic articulation—always have a more or less structured emotional aspect; emotions always have a more or less clear skeletal content of cognitive connections to reality.... That cognitive and emotional factors are mutually dependent is a general condition. However, the connections obtaining between them are determined respectively by the actual contexts in which they occur, not by the logical structure of the thoughts and also not by the character of the emotions. Cognitive and emotional factors stand out from each other as separate components the more they are structured and fixed within this unity by respective and specific systems of signs (Bierwisch 1979, 53).

Music and language thus relate to Johnson’s “embodied schemata” in different and complementary ways. Whereas language selects and, in so doing, constructs and organizes the concrete and denotative “relata” of a structure’s relationships according to the logic of the propositional forms that are drawn out of Johnson’s embodied schemata, music evokes concretely, directly, yet *symbolically*, the gesticulatory form that has embedded within it the logic of Johnson’s embodied schemata. There is thus a level of signification in music which “lies beneath” and

supports that of language in the articulation of the structured states of corporeal awareness flowing from individuals' relationships with the environment. Music can thus be understood to contribute to qualities of human expression in ways that are not reducible to other kinds of human activity. It could thus be concluded that "music" is just as much a constitutive characteristic of human societies as "language," and that "music" is as equally implicated in the creation and maintenance of human societies as "language." This argument is developed further in Shepherd and Wicke (1997, 183-203).

Why Study Music?

Answers have, of course, been previously given to this question. They usually involve reference to an understanding of the way in which music serves to enhance or even ennoble the human spirit. In the case of popular music, reference is often made to the way in which music is believed to empower individuals. There is also, in the case of ethnomusicology and popular music studies in particular, a tangible sense of the cultural and social in the motivations expressed for studying music. Music is understood to provide a window on the social and the cultural as much as the social and the cultural are understood to serve as the basis for that which music communicates affectively. In light of the arguments we have presented in this essay, all these reasons remain good ones. Nonetheless, we feel that there is a need to expand the range of these answers. In studying "music," it transpires that we are studying a second, signifying potential of sound which, it can be argued, is at least as equally implicated in the creation and maintenance of human societies as the first, "arbitrary" one which has served as the basis for the constitution of "language." The imagination that

is exercised through this second signifying potential is—to use Johnson’s words—an imagination that is rooted in more than just “artistic creativity, fantasy, and fiction.” It is an imagination that has consequences for the logic of the materially grounded interactions of individual awareness and external social realities. This second signifying potential of sound, whose function we have described in terms of the sonic medium of music, seems to be assumptively subsumed within various constitutions of the epistemological and linguistic category of “music.” Thus it would seem appropriate to suggest that this second signifying potential of sound—together with the implications it holds for the creation and maintenance of human societies—should form a central and basic component of musicology’s object of study.

As we have observed, this would cause musicology to redefine its boundaries considerably. We believe, however, that there is good reason for doing this in terms of the motivations commonly given for studying music, and within the range of interests that various forms of musicology claim as their own. The character of the “musical experience,” which Gramit argues “cut[s] across the boundaries of otherwise conflicting musicological camps,” will not be grasped fully without an understanding of this second, signifying potential of sound and what it means for human cultures and societies. And if the character of this experience is not grasped in all its implications, it is difficult to see how the critical void identified by Kerman will be filled in such a way as to match the achievements, for example, of the literary disciplines. Various forms of musicology cannot defend themselves against the “incursions” of other disciplines simply by reducing music conceptually to the condition of its sounds, which has so far been a noticeable trend within the discipline. Consequently, we would argue that

musicology needs to be more aggressive in extending the range of its interests in the ways we have suggested.

In doing so, musicology will have to understand music not as something constituted exclusively by the medium of sound that underpins it, but as a process constituted through the interactions of individuals with this medium and within social and cultural collectivities. In this sense, the study of music will have to become increasingly interdisciplinary in character, and musicology will have to accept the contributions that other disciplines can make to understanding its object of study. It is therefore with good reason that Frith argues that “rather than agreeing, then, as a sociologist, that, of course, musicologists understand music and I do not...I want to suggest that, in fact, sociologists can make their own contribution to the analysis of musical meaning and value” (Frith 1990, 97). This kind of contribution should not be viewed with apprehension, as something that will cause “the dispersal into context of what we usually grasp as the immediacy of music.” Contributions from other disciplines should be able to aid in grasping the immediacy of music as an emanation of the direct and concrete, yet symbolic, interaction of individual people with the sonic medium, and should be assessed in terms of their capacity to so do.

If music has this “immediacy”—and if this is a fundamental characteristic of the “musical experience”—then it has to be understood that this immediacy and the affects which are symptomatic of it are *not* contained within music’s sonic medium. Meanings and affects are not, therefore, coterminous with music’s sounds. It is for this reason that Frith is correct to argue that music is not an object of industrial forces but an activity necessarily involving commercial and technological processes. The notion of authenticity is therefore largely a myth. Indeed,

in the context of rock music, Frith has argued that “the myth of authenticity is...one of rock’s own ideological effects” (Frith 1987b, 136). If music’s sounds travel across the world in a complex and not infrequently unethical web of economic exchange, then we should take comfort in the fact that it is not *musics* that are traveling, but only their *sounds*. This is not to say that the manner in which sounds travel, the ethically questionable financial arrangements that accompany such travel (or do not, as the case may be), and the undermining of musics and cultures that frequently results, are not of grave concern. It is simply to say that, within the constraints set by music’s sonic medium, the meanings and affects constructed always remain negotiable. Musicology should not as a consequence back away from its concern with music’s intrinsic sonic characteristics. It should study them in the knowledge that, because they *are* implicated in processes of meaning construction in a way in which sounds in language are not, there is a need to focus also on the ways in which music’s sounds are bound up in economies of exchange, as well as with the ways in which they are thereby implicated in the creation and maintenance of various forms of identity: sexual, gendered, ethnic, and so on.

In thus recasting the position of sound in the analysis of music, musicology would be better equipped than it presently is to take on board the contributions that other disciplines might have to offer in developing an understanding of its object of study. In making this move, musicology would, in a sense, be moving the study of music “beyond interdisciplinarity,” because the contributions that each discipline might make to this study would now be subsumed within a much clearer sense of purpose. Indeed, it is possible to argue that this kind of process will require some rethinking in other intellectual

traditions such as that, for example, of cultural theory (see Shepherd and Wicke 1997). However, such recasting and repositioning, together with the basis that is thereby provided for a more connected and organic sense of interdisciplinary cooperation, depends in the first instance on a firm grasp of musicology's object of study. For if it is accepted that music is in some ways distinctive as a signifying practice, that it contributes to qualities of human expression, communication, and understanding in ways that are not reducible to other kinds of human activity, then a failure to understand the constitutive characteristics and workings of music will constitute also a failure to understand certain important characteristics of human existence. Not only will the "musical experience" remain private and mythologized, something that is assumed to be "unanalyzable." So will various realms of activity vital and fundamental to human societies that percolate through into forms of expression, communication, and understanding other than music. Claude Lévi-Strauss was, perhaps, not just being rhetorical when he said that "music itself [is] the supreme mystery of the science of man, a mystery that all the various disciplines come up against and which holds the key to their progress" (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 18).

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