# COMING TO TERMS WITH OUR MUSICAL PAST

## An Essay on Mozart and Modernist Aesthetics

EDMUND J. GOEHRING

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Edmund J. Goehring

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For Yuko

It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing. People were talking about the end of physics. Relativity and quantum looked as if they were going to clean out the whole problem between them. A theory of everything. But they only explained the very big and the very small. The universe, the elementary particles. The ordinary-sized stuff which is our lives, the things people write poetry about—clouds—daffodils—waterfalls—and what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in—these things are full of mystery, as mysterious to us as the heavens were to the Greeks.

—Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*

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# Preface

Writing is a solitary activity. One person, alone with pen, paper, and thoughts, and relying, finally, on one's variable but persisting self as the arbiter of what ideas will stay, what will be discarded. But it would be misguided and ungracious to overlook how writing is, at the same time, a gregarious activity. There is always a reader, and not just imagined or implied, but real. The two I owe the greatest debt to are Nina Penner and Stefano Mengozzi. They not only read several drafts of the manuscript but spent pleasant hours discussing, agreeing with, and arguing against its ideas. When I first tried out a version of this essay at a Mozart colloquium, it was much briefer, and I was not sure what to do with it. Simon Keefe suggested that I expand it, and for that encouragement, as well as much else, I am grateful. It was gratifying to work with Ralph Locke, Julia Cook, and Sonia Kane at the University of Rochester Press. They lined up two very helpful referees, the more skeptical one no less than the one who summarized what I was trying to do better than I could, and the press's own suggestions helped to improve this book at every level, from overall organization to minutiae of individual arguments. Of course the press had to think about marketing, but I always felt that belief in the project drove the marketing, and not the other way around. Chris Kayler set the musical examples, Craig Darling assisted with copyediting, and Marilyn Bliss created the index. I knew that my friend Julia Marvin had many gifts, but I was not aware of how keen her eye was for the design of a book jacket. The cover you have before you owes much to her skill. I also want to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for material assistance and David Myska for that precious resource of research time.

There is also another kind of person to acknowledge, those whom I know solely through their writings. Karl Böttiger reports in his "Literarische Zustände" how, "when Herder was leaving Königsberg, Kant spoke with the then nineteen-year-old youth and admonished him not to brood over so many books but instead to follow his own example. He [Kant] was very sociable, and it was only in the world that one could educate oneself" (127). We all know what Kant means about the perils of book learning. Still, some books were like cicerones, guiding me into the modernist world and its alienated souls and then out again into a world—*this* world—of greater possibilities. The regard

I felt from reading them for the first time did not flag with later readings. A case in point comes with Marilynne Robinson. I first discovered her through the essay "A Great Amnesia" (*Harper's*, May 2008), one of the finest defenses of a liberal education I have come across. Some of her other work helped clarify the core values of and stakes in a modernist Mozart aesthetic. When I began to write this essay, a very hazy intimation guided it: that admiration for Mozart from the late eighteenth into our day could be seen as part of a continuity and, what is more, one where it was possible—indeed, necessary—to be absorbed, intellectually rigorous, and worldly all at once. Confrontations with Mozart's music spurred on the mind in its quest for understanding instead of arrested it with self-satisfaction. That seemed an unpromising or at least idiosyncratic line of argument, but then I came upon this passage, from Robinson, in an essay entitled "Cosmology": "Certainty is a relic, an atavism, a husk we ought to have outgrown. Mystery is openness to possibility, even at the scale now implied by physics and cosmology. The primordial human tropism toward mystery may well have provided the impetus for all that we have learned" (197). Oh. To forsake mystery is to surrender a central way of knowing the world. That thought helped illumine a path through a thicket of prohibitions that have hedged in Mozart criticism. Against recent bans on the use of transcendence and a host of related everyday words that have been used to describe Mozart's music and art more widely, I hope to show that such an older language of enchantment can still, after all this time, help us see more things, and truer things, in one corner of human achievement.

# Introduction

## Setting the Stage, and Then Exiting It

More than two hundred years ago, a theater journal from Hamburg reviewed a performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Its author was probably Bernhard Anselm Weber, a composer and music director. The evening's entertainment left a deep impression on Mozart's fellow musician:

> It is just as one would expect from Mozart: great and beautiful, full of new ideas and surprising turns, full of art and fire and genius. Now beautiful, charming song bewitches us, now a fine comic wit and tone make us smile; now we marvel at the naturally executed, masterful plot; now the splendor and magnitude of art overwhelm us."[1]

To Weber, *Figaro* looked like an animated thing. It awakened human passion; it extended and enriched life.

More than a decade ago, *Figaro* elicited a different kind of response from a journal, including to its famed penultimate scene, where the Count and Countess reconcile and in that ritual restore and renew a wider community:

> When the Countess pardons the Count in act 4 of *The Marriage of Figaro*, it is not that Mozart's music simultaneously gives voice to some more profound statement of or about forgiveness. Rather, it is the fact that there is a Countess, a Count, a specific dramatic situation, and ordinary words like "Contessa, perdono" sung out loud that has in quite precise ways predetermined the meaning to attach to Mozart's musical moment. These mundane, visible things feed a conviction that transfigured forgiveness—that specifically—is being conveyed by some very beautiful noise.[2]

Now, *Figaro* looks like an inert thing. The concluding "very beautiful noise" concedes a surface appeal, but in the manner of monumental alabaster—immobile and impenetrable to human interest. Where there is art, there is no life.

Of the many questions crowding in for attention, the main one this essay pursues is: What are the terms of this more modern argument about Mozart's music? Presupposed in that question is the availability of other vocabularies for describing art, in which case another question immediately intrudes: For whom are these values true? That question, of the durability and reach of what I call a modernist Mozart poetics, is much more difficult to answer. Although this essay attends to modernism's imprint on art criticism in the academy, its quest to resolve creative acts into simpler states extends well beyond that discipline and even that venue. One of the more public and visible places where that reverse alchemy can be observed is on today's operatic stage.

Consider the following recent productions of Mozart's operas:

— A *Così fan tutte* coproduced by the San Francisco Opera and Opéra Monte-Carlo in 2004 relocates the opera's setting of a café in eighteenth-century Naples to a Mediterranean luxury hotel on the eve of World War I.[3] For much of the staging, the change to a later time and a slightly more decadent place yields only minor alterations in behavior and character. Matters are different with the opera's much-discussed ending. True to form, Don Alfonso unveils the play-within-the-play and invites the original couples to celebrate the happy ending of a double wedding. Then, unruly history stumbles upon the opera's hermetic world and, in so doing, destroys it. The soldiers are once again called to war, only this time for real. As the two couples and their two instructors send them off with a Stoic hymn—"Fortunato l'uom che prende / Ogni cosa pel buon verso" (Fortunate is the man who looks at everything from the good side)—smoke from the battlefield fills the set. "*Exeunt.* Pursued by World War I."
— Another *Così fan tutte*, this time under the direction of Claus Guth at the 2009 Salzburg Festival (and revived at the Teatro alla Scala in 2014), discerns a less geopolitical, more private trauma in Mozart's resolution. The two couples' bearing is rigid and mechanical, and Don Alfonso, concealing himself behind a primitive mask, strikes a Picasso-esque pose, as if his natural state were Cubist, to which form he reverts at the end (see fig. I.1). The only character showing signs of sentient, or even animate, life is Despina. In a metaphysical sleight of hand, she exits the stage in a fit, in effect declaring, "I don't like the opera that I'm in, and I am leaving it to find a better one."
— A *Magic Flute* staged by Chicago's Lyric Opera in its 2005–6 season (and revived as recently as 2011–12) also concludes with characters who reject their own worlds. Described in elemental terms, Sarastro's victory is conventionally cast as a triumph of light over darkness. For example, David Hockney's set designs for the production at Glyndebourne in

Figure I.1. Mozart, *Così fan tutte*, production by Claus Guth. Berlin: EuroArts, 2010 (DVD).

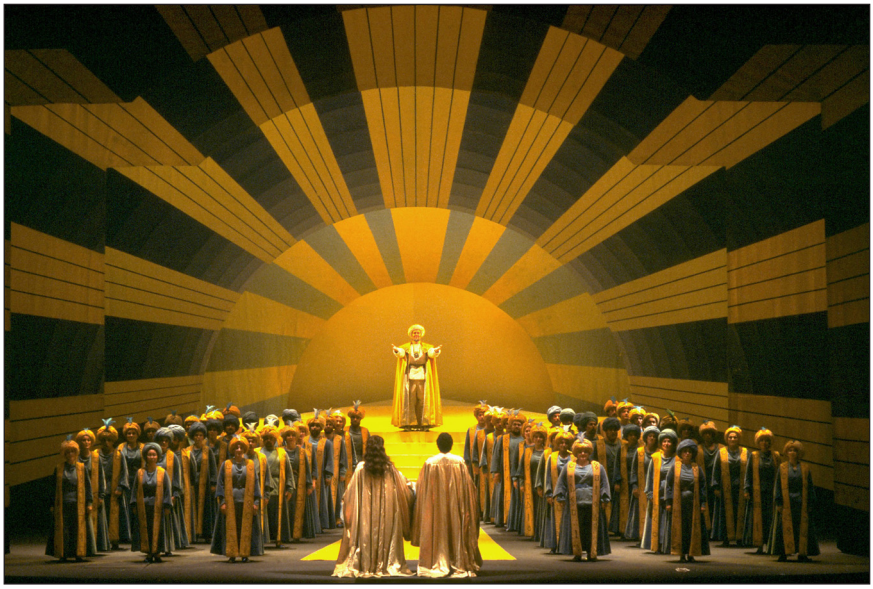

Figure I.2. Mozart, *The Magic Flute*, production by John Cox, design by David Hockney. San Francisco Opera, 1987. © Ron Scherl / StageImage / The Image Works.

1978 have a primeval splendor radiating out of the center of the stage (see fig. I.2). But in Chicago, darkness lies upon Sarastro and his entourage. Although Tamino and Pamina are supposed to take his place at the head of his enlightened order, they scorn the offer of a peaceful, nonhereditary transfer of power. A solitary spotlight illumines a narrow, oblique path by which they, too, exit the stage.

— A *Don Giovanni* put on by the Canadian Opera Company in 2015 subordinates a mimetic sensibility even more completely to a hypercritical one. The producer, Dmitri Tcherniakov, tries to sweep up from the opera every mote of improbability. Almost all the disguises are dropped, thereby cleansing the opera of most of its humor, and Don Giovanni is deflated from a dangerous, Bacchic character into an everyday alcoholic. Unlike the other productions mentioned above, Tcherniakov's does not devise an escape for any of its characters, but, like them, it does revise the ending in order to evade it. There is no "ultimo momento" (act 2, scene 19), because neither the Commendatore nor Don Giovanni dies. Instead, Tcherniakov makes *Don Giovanni* safe from myth. The grand drama where Heaven grapples with Hell is miniaturized into a domestic power struggle where everyone ends up suspended in modern-day Limbo.

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What unites these productions is much greater than what divides them, and all align with the modernist values that orient important academic criticism. Modernism, like all public, nonscientific language, resists a univocal definition. The term has been used to divide the Christian from the pagan worlds and Renaissance humanism and Newtonian science from everything that preceded them. It has accorded a special place to the French Revolution, to French visual arts from the 1860s, and to literature from the 1920s. I use it here to bring out a continuity between what in common parlance are called modernism and its successor, postmodernism. For all of their antagonism, these two constellations of thought have intersecting values, many of them instantiated in the opera productions described above. As a psychology, there is the distillation of human inwardness to trauma, and, as a poetics, the pulling away of the curtain of art to expose its mechanisms. Morally, there is the sententiousness, and, as an ontology of stage works, there is the projection of the director's objectivity onto characters, neither of whom is immersed in the drama but instead stands outside of it. In a word, the chief value promoted is that of self-consciousness.

Whether self-consciousness should be the guiding principle of an art criticism is a topic for many independent studies. For example, a theme of Jacques Barzun's *The Use and Abuse of Art* is that with an increasing self-consciousness

about art comes, for better or worse, a depreciation of art as an expression and amplifier of life.[4] Wye Allanbrook takes up that thread with respect to the music of Mozart's day. Against the "brooding self-consciousness" of both Baroque tragedy and its later incarnations in Romanticism and Modernism, the music of Mozart's era both taps into and extends a vital force, an "energy."[5] Julian Johnson, in contrast, is more receptive to the self-critical tendencies of a modernist habit of mind.[6] Of the many virtues of taking modernism as an attitude more than as a distinctive historical era, a leading one is that it allows us to think of music from around 1600 into the present as a continuity.

In the following essay, the concern goes less to the validity of self-consciousness than to its quality in Mozart criticism. It is not clear that so deanimated and dematerialized a view manifests greater self-awareness of his music, and of art more generally, than one that presupposes a necessary enchantment with it, enchantment referring to the mind's comprehension of some artifacts of human culture by means of a vocabulary designed for that purpose: concepts like intention, mimesis, author, genius, beauty, transcendence. But a modernist Mozart poetics has placed these and related terms on its Index of Prohibited Concepts. This essay ponders some historical, conceptual, and interpretive problems that arise from that embargo.

Throughout, I will turn to Mozart in general and *Figaro* in particular as touchstones of a richer appreciation of art and its possibilities. But inasmuch as this older vocabulary is banned chiefly for failing the test of a fully self-conscious art criticism, it is useful to begin with the term in the modernist lexicon that speaks most directly to that cool, objective orientation—that is critique itself.

Chapter One

# On Critique; or, Two Paths through the Art-Critical World

The term "critique" has two main uses in current academic writing. Following from Kant and the liberal arts comes the understanding of critique as reflection on the structure of a claim outside of its content, the search for limits to the claims of reason being a search for a moment of concord among dissonant positions. If, for example, someone were to aver, "There is no metaphysics," that would be to make a metaphysical claim, in which case it would be useful to revisit this particular characterization of the world, thereby to discover what can be stated coherently. The second usage, more a product of the social sciences, resembles Kant in that it, too, takes the architecture of thought as its point of entry. Unlike Kant, however, it seeks resolution outside of the mind and self. The conclusion reached resolves a particular manifestation of culture and consciousness into a prior, more generalized, simplified state. (In this it aspires to the status of science—or a certain understanding of science.) Coming upon a fork in the road, with one path narrowing downward to necessary and sufficient cause, the other opening upward to ever-expanding reason, this type of post-Kantian thinker chooses the subterranean path, working down to the power relations governing an inherently antagonistic social world, to the primitive impulses that tyrannize the psyche, to the economic or material machinery that turns below without concern for private and social aspirations above. Art, when viewed in this manner, does not mean so much as manipulate, and the only way to lift its spell is to reduce its utterances to mechanisms, codes, or discourses.

The main task of this chapter is to show how art-historical critiques in this second, post-Kantian sense fail as critiques in the first one.

For an example of what this failure might look like and how to take stock of it, I turn to one of the seminal representatives of this second mode, Michel

Foucault, and his essay "What Is an Author?" It starts with an assertion all the more breathtaking for its surface objectivity: "The coming into being of the notion of 'author,'" he states matter-of-factly, "constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas."[1] I had planned to dwell on the phrase "coming into being" to show how Foucault viewed (rightly, I think) authorship not as an indelible and unchanging feature of the world but as contingent on culture and history. Yet even here, from the onset, Foucault has structured his statement in a way that creates a strain between an interest in describing the complexity of culture and an interest in forecasting its course or, more ambitiously, in domesticating it. Why does he say that it is the *notion* of author (or of "author") that comes into being and not *authors* who come into being? It is probably too obvious to say that he wants to emphasize the term's conceptual status, where identifying authorship *as* a concept is to render it thin as the air. (Foucault's objective comes across still more laconically in his title, which, as Katharina Clausius pointed out to me, asks *what* rather than *who* an author is). But that concept, "author," is empty without actual people who wrote actual things, who authored them. The historiographical credibility of Foucault's essay is not completely vitiated by so great a skepticism about concepts, and he has rich things to say about how we have used authorship at different times and in different contexts. For example, about scientific writing from around the seventeenth century onward, he notes that the author function starts to fade away, or at least disperse itself among communities rather than staying concentrated in individuals. The truths of science, we have now come to understand, speak for themselves, and citing a name—"as Hippocrates says"—no longer carries much weight in the face of science's "established or always redemonstrable truth" (109).

One may question this and other observations. Maybe it is not only atavism that accounts for a still-common usage like "*Einstein*'s theory of relativity."[2] In light of recent scientific inquiry, can we credibly say that the truths of science speak for themselves? Or, more to the point here, is the concept of author really an Enlightenment invention? It is hard to make full sense of earlier works like the *Divine Comedy* or *Don Quixote* without reference not just to the author function—"Dante" and "Cervantes"—but to the historical persons—Dante and Cervantes. Such hesitancies are part of the point, however, and a virtue of Foucault's essay: it *is* possible to argue with him, because his claims have a falsifiable, empirical, and historical side. The mind can get some traction over them.

But that is not Foucault's main, or at least only, way of talking about history. His descriptive approach yields to one that corrals these insights into a a view of history where the conveniences we use to describe different eras—"Renaissance," "Classical," "Modern," and so on—acquire an "absolute and reciprocal impenetrability," in Séan Burke's characterization.[3] Foucault's

premise about the conceptual status of authorship fences in his conclusion. He all but foreordains that someone will come along to discover the evanescence, the "constructedness" of the concept "author." The truth has *always* been a matter of "what" and not "who."

That priority emerges most clearly as his essay arrives at this point: "The author is the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (119). There it is: the descent into the underworld of causes. For all of the postmodern insistence that there is no depth, there is only surface,[4] Foucault is offering a metaphysics. The concept "author" projects our self-interest, the advancement of which is our deepest motivation, in a world presided over by fear, to whose behests we are (all but a few of us are?) enslaved.

Foucault knows he has changed the pitch of his argument. He immediately follows up by saying, "I seem to call for a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author" (119). It is no longer a description, it is a "*call* for a form of culture." What troubles Foucault, however, is not the abandonment of description for manifesto but where that particular declaration is pulling him: toward "a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure" (119). And what is wrong with that? "It would be pure romanticism" (119). (To me it sounds like pure neostructuralism, a world comprised of drifting codes with no interfering human consciousness to organize them.)[5] Paradoxically, Foucault has wound up asserting authorial privilege; namely, his own. He rejects this "romanticism" because that is not how he wants the world to be. We are far from neutral observation, and necessarily so (because neutral observation is impossible). But if we cannot argue with Foucault's diagnosis, we can still examine its structure and seek clarification of his intentions.

A critique of the first type would have another question to put to this version of the second kind: what must be the case in order for Foucault's conclusion to be valid? For Foucault's proposition is not self-predicating. To start with, it needs a fuller account of self-interest. Related to that is the priority he gives to fear. How do we know that, when we have come upon fear, we have hit bedrock? Of all our possible responses to the world, why would fear be idolized as dismal Prime Mover and not, say, wonder or awe (which could encompass fear, but not the other way around)? After all, among the many ways that books, that authors, lure in readers is not through compulsion but through attraction and curiosity. Reading promises contact with an Other, with a mind that is not identical to the reader's. (And this is to assume that seeking *a* motivation is the way to go in the first place.) Foucault's position overlooks other ways in which cultures have responded to authors. Writers from Plato to Salman Rushdie have been viewed less as comforting than threatening figures not always because

they have allowed meanings to proliferate, but because they have meant certain things all too well.

The ostensibly liberal (or libertarian) sentiments intimated in the equation of the death of authors with the expansion of freedom also needs further examination, on evidential no less than logical grounds. From time to time, calls for the proliferation or negation of meaning have been sounded in order to entrench instead of dislodge the status quo ante. A classic case involves the Ninth Amendment of the United States Constitution. It runs, "The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." A constitutional "originalist" like Robert Bork thought its meaning impenetrable. There was a blot over it that made it permanently indecipherable.[6] It hits nearer the mark, however, to say that he is evading the text, whose meaning is inconvenient for a legal theory adhering to strict constructivism. An outlook holding that only the rights explicitly enumerated in the Constitution may enjoy the protection of the Constitution will necessarily stumble on a passage, in the Constitution, that says that its text must not be taken to exhaust the rights that may be guaranteed by it. As Laurence Tribe writes, the Ninth Amendment "reminds us of the essential truth that our Constitution must continue to protect human rights that lie beyond the boundaries of its expressly spelled-out provisions."[7]

This is one instance where Foucault's view of authors and texts can lead in the opposite direction from what he proposed. In the case of the Ninth Amendment, Bork is not saying that he dislikes or disagrees with the text but that it should be ignored because it is unintelligible. Blotting the text forestalls debate and conversation. Of those unspecified rights, what should be added, and under what authority? Or, for dissenters: If the amendment is a mistake, on what grounds, and should it therefore be repealed or modified? Such conversations on either side could not even arise absent the idea that the text means something, that its authors meant something by it. Contrariwise, accepting the validity of authorial intention can expand our horizons. Authors, including composers, can be, have been, figures by which we recognize and are shaped by remarkable attainments among the flux of human culture, achievements that could not have been foreseen before they appeared.

And therefore whose future cannot be foretold. The philosopher Raymond Geuss finds it *"inherently* odd" for critics to announce where art "must, could, might, or ought to go." Specifically, he was speaking of this prophetic tendency against how Adorno's music sociology applied Hegelian dialectic. Hegel's method, as Geuss explains, is "*essentially* retrospective and contemplative in character."[8] The necessity it uncovers is knowable only post facto. Although Foucault does not explicitly take Hegel as his authority, he makes an analogous move from what is to what ought to be in contemplating the future of the concept of authorship: "I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment

when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint—one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced" (119). Foucault does not seem to be moving within the genre of utopian critique like Rousseau's Second Discourse, which imagines a world that never was in order to magnify the deficiencies in what is. Foucault's world to come does not function as thought-experiment but as prediction. If that is so, then questions of the claim's testability resurface. How can he be sure that the world will unfold *this* way? And if it did, how would that world concern us or be intelligible to us? Or, in what ways would a future generation care about things that were important to us, other than to behold our errors with bewilderment or bemusement? True, Foucault pointed to a time before the author-function emerged. Why not return to that world, or, what would differentiate this new, nonauthorial form of constraint?

I pose such questions to highlight where such sociological critiques stop and the arbitrariness about where they stop, which is to say, what their metaphysics is. Why it might be worthwhile to register this formal objection has to do with the worldview that accompanies these sociological critiques. Assuming that the method that sees more is superior to the one that sees less, then Foucault's authorcide is inferior because it is contractionary. Exile authors, and meaning does not proliferate; there is no meaning at all, because meaning is a function of consciousness. Keep authors, and there is no constriction on the richness of their work but a dilation of it, because the search for an intention leads into culture, the point of contact among irreducibly complex individual, historical selves.

When it comes to musicological critiques following in the Foucauldian mode, the theoretical call for the proliferation of meanings (or the declaration that meaning is unattainable) will likewise have the practical consequence of narrowing the spectrum of meaningful phenomena down to clashes—clashes, moreover, that do not involve people and their actions and ideas but processes, like discourses and domains, that stand outside and loom over the sphere of human activity.[9] ("Activities," says Barzun, "are what we do and can imagine others having done; processes are what goes on unwilled or unknown.")[10] So formalist a vision of things leaves one with a world impervious to what Michael Frayn calls the "human touch,"[11] because when one asks Foucault's question "what difference does it make who is speaking?" (120), the answer given is, "none."

These are not the only places where one can stop. There are other places where, as Wittgenstein puts it, the critic imagines having come upon bedrock, and the spade is turned (*Philosophical Investigations*, Remark 217).

Here are some examples:

— In Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima asks Socrates what the lover of good things will receive upon possessing those good things. Socrates, with uncharacteristic assuredness, answers that such a person will be happy. Diotima concurs: "'Yes. The happy are happy by acquisition of good things, and we have no more need to ask for what end a man wishes to be happy, when such is his wish: the answer seems to be ultimate.'"[12] With happiness, the inquiry can stop.
— According to William James, the brilliance of Darwin's method lay as much in what he ignored—the *causes* of spontaneous variation—as in what he pursued—how a given organism responded to and was received by its environment.[13] Why a particular mutation in an individual member of the species? Darwin, wisely, did not even try to answer that question. James underscored this feature of Darwin's method in order to defend Darwin against some of his followers, especially Herbert Spencer. Spencer, says James, was not offering a scientific theory, although he probably thought he was, but merely "a metaphysical creed" pervaded by a "mood of fatalistic pantheism," which renders "the human mind passive and wholly subject to outer relations" (253). That "fatalistic pantheism" was where Spencer stopped.

To present *in nuce* what I try to develop throughout this essay, I propose that prominent critiques of Mozart and his oeuvre belong in the camp of Spencer and Foucault, and not of Diotima and William James, with whom I will be throwing in my lot. In going for the abstract over the particular, in rejecting the person as the source of meaning, in removing art from concourse with Being, in subordinating art to impersonal and exogenous forces—for these and other reasons, I will suggest that this modernist criticism stops too soon.

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Many questions arise concerning the framing of this argument, not to mention the conclusions that it draws. To start with, there could be more clarity about that stopping place. Is the problem that critique stops too soon because it stops in the *wrong* place, and there is a more suitable one, or, is it that there is no stopping place *at all*, and we should not delude ourselves into thinking otherwise? These questions suggest that my diagnosis is flawed because it treats as a unity what are actually two distinct modes of thought. On the one hand is critique, which is continuous with and largely sympathetic to the Enlightenment and its aspirations (the Enlightenment just did not go far enough along the path it set out). On the other is postmodernism, according to which repairing a fractured modernist landscape is impossible (the Enlightenment set out on the wrong path). At best, to continue the objection, my overview mistakenly

takes as normative what are really aberrations in these two ways forward from modernism. For postmodernism, that aberration would be a veering back into metaphysics, as in Foucault's choice to rest at the terrorized ego; for critique, it would involve letting itself get pulled back into the scientific, objectivist mode it had been decrying—the critic as Jeremiah, delivering objective but dismaying truths from on high: there can be no harmony between self and society; power is the lowest common denominator in human existence; beauty forces us to acquiesce to the unjust; our sense of ourselves as individual agents is really the product of false consciousness, a form of hypertrophy, whether social or biological. This liberation looks as if it were *from* the world, not *for* the world and, to reiterate, a departure from rather than continuation of critique. But I want to suggest that both heterodoxies are all but predetermined in a tenet shared by critique and postmodernism: the rejection of the self as a source of experience and its subordination to entities like language or power structures.

It is not as if all critique were heedless of or refused to acknowledge problems in its commitments and methods. Thus, another potential vulnerability in my exposition is that it is out of step with the times. It overlooks the fact that some areas of the social sciences have been conducting internal reviews. A leading example comes from the sociologist Bruno Latour, in the essay "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" Pondering the annihilation awaiting a civilization that denies the evidence of science—namely, global warming—Latour reflects on his own possible complicity and that of critique in corroding public confidence in science (226–27). That public cynicism has been abetted, he suggests, by various habits of thought common to sociological critique. There is the unchecked impulse to trace the "real" motives of any human gesture to an invisible and unknowable stratum, a suspiciousness that can verge on paranoia. (At least old-fashioned conspiracy seekers have the advantage, says Latour, of identifying real-life plutocrats in back rooms as the conjurors of treasons and stratagems rather than some impersonal force [229]). There is the presumption that we moderns have stepped over a threshold, thereby separating us from our own past, a claim Latour tries to foil with the riposte "we have never been modern" (236). There is the problem inherent in what he isolates as the core motivation of the critic, whose creed runs "never be duped" (239). That desire generates a paradox, since it affirms as performance the very possibility of objectivity that it denies as creed. In short, Latour concludes, there is a fatigue with "explanations" (243).

(For that and other reasons, it is a missed opportunity for Latour to reject the offer by Wittgenstein—whom Latour says is "wrongly . . . considered . . . the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century"—to winch critique out of the ditch that it drove itself into. "Philosophers," says Wittgenstein, "constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of

metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is 'purely descriptive.'"[14] Skepticism is unearned, says Wittgenstein, when it results from placing undue burdens on language. That insight could greatly help a chastened critique.)

Latour's confession is necessary, apposite, and also effective, as it yields a new (or, as a Kantian might interject, renewed) aim for critique: its work should not be to debunk, but to assemble (246). Even so, I want to suggest that it is not yet time to ask of critique, What took everyone so long? For there are still crucial things that it leaves unsaid in the confessional.

A glimpse into what those things are comes through a caution Latour makes about which path forward a chastened critique must *not* take:

> The mistake we made, the mistake I made, was to believe that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving *away* from them and directing one's attention *toward* the conditions that made them possible. But this meant accepting much too uncritically what matters of fact were. This was remaining too faithful to the unfortunate solution inherited from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Critique has not been critical enough in spite of all its sorescratching. Reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. (231–32)

The phrase "solution *inherited*" from Kant's philosophy leaves open the possibility that blame is to be laid only on Kant's followers and not on Kant himself. A passage immediately following, however, closes off that possibility. The Enlightenment, Latour contends, spawned a monster that turned on its own creator: "I want to show that while the Enlightenment profited largely from the disposition of a very powerful descriptive tool, that of matters of fact, which were excellent for *debunking* quite a lot of beliefs, powers, and illusions, it found itself totally disarmed once matters of fact, in turn, were eaten up by the same debunking impetus" (232). This is, at best, a partial reading of Kant and the Enlightenment. If the nonspecialized reader knows anything of the First Critique (aside from synthetic a priori judgments), it is that Kant was ultimately deploying critique for a positive end: "A critique that limits the speculative use of reason is, to be sure, to that extent negative, but because it simultaneously removes an obstacle that limits or even threatens to wipe out the practical use of reason, this critique is also in fact of positive and very important utility."[15] That "very important utility" was not something Kant invented. It was already manifest in the labors of epoch-defining scientists like Galileo and Torricelli, who "comprehended that reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design" (B xiii, p. 109). There is no way that Kant thought matters of fact were "all that is given in experience." What is more, to the extent that Kant was wiping out knowledge (of a certain kind), he did so, famously, "in order to

make room for faith; and the dogmatism of metaphysics, i.e., the prejudice that without criticism reason can make progress in metaphysics, is the true source of all unbelief conflicting with morality, which unbelief is always very dogmatic." A further, and remarkable, indication of Kant's aim in using critique to defeat and not enable cynicism is that his destructive project leaves untouched public confidence in the greatest "possession" of humanity: belief in the immortality of the soul, free will, and the existence of God. In fact, viewed from his system, such an inheritance "not only remains undisturbed, but . . . even gains in respect through the fact that now the schools are instructed to pretend to no higher or more comprehensive insight on any point touching the universal human concerns than the insight that is accessible to the great multitude (who are always most worthy of our respect)" (B xxxiii, p. 118). This is no mindlessly destructive or sanctimonious critique.

Latour must know this. Perhaps Kant's likening of reason to "an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them" (B xiii) encourages for Latour the legitimately troubling idea of man's total domination of nature, and so the necessity for a critique of the Enlightenment conducted in the terms of someone like Alfred North Whitehead, whom Latour proposes as one who does not think we can "pick and choose" from the world (244). But neither does Kant. A small but decisive qualifying phrase indicates something of the great respect Kant accords nature. "Reason," he says, "*in order to be taught by nature,* must approach nature with its principles in hand" (B xiii; emphasis added). Kantian critique does not ask that we impose our will on a resistant world. We have to be disposed to make sense of the world in the first place and the world able to reply, such that "the conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of *objects* of experience" (A158/B197; emphasis added). We can't know the world if we do not know ourselves, and also the other way around.

The recognition and philosophical elaboration of a self, or at least a subject, at the center of our experience of the world is a great achievement of Kant's system. His particular formulation is hardly unassailable, of course, and what is curious about Latour's response is its silence on one of Kant's greatest potential vulnerabilities—not that Kant pursued subjectivity but that he did not pursue it far enough. He stopped at the subject, but not quite at the person. Marjorie Grene explains the difference and its consequences for a theory of knowledge and, more widely, of human interaction with the world. The mind does not, *pace* Kant, operate in the way of "a strong acid," she says. The work of the mind is "a doing," and that means the activity of a particular person living in a particular moment. The Kantian I, in contrast, is deficient because it postulates "an agent with no identity, no individuality, no destiny."[16]

To be viably post-Kantian, then, would involve extending his insight into subjectivity to encompass our activity as living organisms endowed—uniquely

in the universe, as far as we can tell—with self-consciousness. But Latour rejects that path and, in so doing, reverts to and hardens the dualism, materialism, and reductionism he had been trying to overcome. To see how, and how that atavism can manifest itself in art criticism, it is useful to turn to an art-critical essay that takes Latour as a point of departure.

The essay, by Rita Felski, follows Latour's lead in giving a rich dissent from the standard operating procedure of critique. The title, "Context Stinks!" is itself a quotation from Latour (who, in turn, is quoting the architect Rem Koolhaas).[17] His exhortation is meant to assail critique's conventional use of history as a means of "quarantining difference"—that is, of thinking of history as a series of discrete eras instead of as a continuity.[18] Further in that revisionist spirit, Felski rejects the esotericism that critique has encouraged, one consequence of which is a separation of professional critic from public reader (574) (an attitude, as we have seen, that runs contrary to the deference that Kant gave the public). Yet because Felski reads the Kantian self as "a self-authorizing subject, an independent agent who summons up actions and orchestrates events," she does not accept individual agency as an effective inhibitor to a runaway critique. What is needed, instead, is, "as far as possible," a way of *overcoming* what Kant and German Idealism set down as "polarities": "subject and object, nature and culture, word and world."

For guidance on how to weaken if not defeat those Kantian polarities, Felski again turns to Latour, this time to his theory of the "non-human actor." This concept loosens Kantian subjectivity by spreading agency to just about anything. It allows us to place "animals, texts, and things on the same ontological footing" as people (583). Felski's inventory of nonhuman actors includes "speedbumps, microbes, mugs, ships, baboons, newspapers, unreliable narrators, soap, silk dresses, strawberries, floor plans, telescopes, lists, paintings, cats, can openers" (582).

A list of nonhuman actors will, by definition, not contain humans. Still, the absence says something about the viability of the concept. In such a world, one comes upon speedbumps, but not city planners; microbes, but not biologists; unreliable narrators, but not novelists. Presumably it would allow on its list the concept of the nonhuman actor, too, although not the sociologists who devised it. Right out of the gate of definition building, then, the theory of nonhuman actors stumbles. By suppressing the necessarily human element, the category sends to the margins an appreciation of difference and distinctiveness.

One way to start acknowledging the particularity of these various objects would be to sort them according to made things, like soap and floor plans and paintings, and given things, like cats and strawberries. Speedbumps exist because humans made them for a purpose, and although that is of course not true of microbes or strawberries, we note their existence at all out of human interest and classify them according to the ways we are equipped to do so.

Felski's commitment to weakening subjectivity, however, precludes divisions like that. Where the ambition instead is to establish an *ontological* commons, there is only one dimension where everyone will fit, and that is the level of matter and, what is more, nonobservable matter—various configurations of void and swerving atoms.

That reductionism poses a couple of challenges to the theory of nonhuman actors and the cause it was meant to serve. First, it views objects according to their composition and not their behavior. When viewed not by what they are made of but by what they do, the assorted items on the list start to manifest wild discrepancies. For example, only one member from that group flings its poop when it is angry. Second, the nonhuman actor theory forces Felski into a paradox, because she invoked it to defeat not only German Idealism but also "technological or textual determinism" (582). She does so by supplying a corollary to the main theory, which is that nonhuman actors acquire agency only "via their relations with other phenomena, as mediators and translators linked in extended constellations of cause and effect" (583). It is the relation, not the material, that determines meaning and agency. That shift of emphasis is useful. It allows Felski to contest the determinism guiding a sociology like Pierre Bourdieu's, which, she suggests, would associate something like silk exclusively with high-class taste and nylon with low-class taste. That equation is too facile, Felski counters. Silk and nylon "are not passive intermediaries but active mediators; they are not just channels for conveying predetermined meanings, but configure and refigure these meanings in specific ways" (583).

The coarseness of a materialism such as that attributed to Bourdieu is important to call out, and yet something in Felski's refutation is nevertheless not quite right. It has to do with the active voice. Silk and nylon cannot refigure meanings—only people can, within the constraints of the material itself. (And talk of "configuring" and "refiguring" meaning describes the life of the mind too instrumentally, as if people search for meanings out there that they then attach to things.) That is why the missing and determinative human presence in the nonhuman actor theory introduces more than rhetorical idiosyncrasies. For all of Felski and Latour's appropriate skepticism about how some social theory has used context, the theory of nonhuman actors amounts to another kind of context, just writ larger. The web, the constellation of meanings are variants on the idea of language (or, here, system) as prior to meaning.

Determinism troubles this theory even in its most powerful articulations, as when Felski describes a social-political world that is too vast to be cordoned off by context:

> These interconnections are temporal as well as spatial; woven out of threads criss-crossing through time, they connect us to what comes before, enmeshing us in extended webs of obligation and influence. Time is not a tidy

> sequence of partitioned units, but a profusion of whirlpools and rapids, eddies and flows, in which objects, ideas, images, and texts from different moments swirl, tumble, and collide in ever-changing combinations and constellations. New actors jostle alongside those with thousand-year histories; inventions and innovations exist alongside the very traditions they excoriate; the "past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted, and reshuffled."[19]

Felski's dynamic vision of history calls to mind what Barzun proposed three decades before (and also Hans-Georg Gadamer on history as an "open totality"):[20] "History, like a vast river, propels logs, vegetation, rafts, and debris; it is full of live and dead things, some destined for resurrection; it mingles many waters and holds in solution invisible substances stolen from distant soils. Anything may become part of it." But then Barzun brings in what Felski excludes, and that is humanity, which is the most mysterious, complex, and dynamic element of that totality—"that is why [history] can be an image of the continuity of mankind"—all this to drive home a critique of the social sciences:

> And it is also why some of [history's] freight turns up again in the social sciences: they were constructed out of the contents of history in the same way as houses in medieval Rome were made out of stones taken from the Coliseum. But the special sciences based on sorted facts cannot be mistaken for rivers flowing in time and full of persons and events. They are systems fashioned with concepts, numbers, and abstract relations.

Barzun's vision of a history with a human face culminates aphoristically rather than schematically: "For history, the reward of eluding method is to escape abstraction."[21] That is the nub of the matter. With Latour and Felski, there are patterns and systems and constellations and nonhuman agents. With Barzun, there is human activity.

To this point, everything said about Felski applies to Latour. But especially pertinent here is how Felski extends Latour's project into the area of art and its criticism. In many respects, their shared aversion to a noisome context reaches easily into this territory. In brief, Felski's concern is that art-historical categories like "Renaissance" or "Baroque" have become the masters rather than the servants of their instantiations.[22] Here, the breadth and power of Felski's counterrevisionism are reflected in a striking defense of artistic autonomy: "art's autonomy—if by autonomy we mean its distinctiveness and specialness—does not rule out connectedness but is the very reason that connections are forged and sustained" (584). It bears repeating how extraordinary that claim is in light of critique's long-standing characterization of autonomy as a nineteenth-century fabrication that spread false promises about human potential. And yet Felski is right to acknowledge in artistic autonomy a coherent, noninvidious,

and functional aspect of art. For example, Scott Burnham proposes that understanding "music as music, as an autonomous language," is indispensable "if we want to grant it the power to speak of other things: we could not reasonably expect something without its own voice to comment on anything." Likewise, Malcolm Budd notes how "music is fundamentally abstract in the sense that, whatever other kinds of 'meaning' it may have—semantic, representational, expressive—it has them only in virtue of its intramusical meaning; and only if this meaning is understood—only if this audible musical structure is heard—is any other meaning heard in understanding the music."[23] Both amount to elaborations of Kant: "Beautiful art . . . is a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and, though without an end, nevertheless promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication."[24]

This is to carry a regard for art very far, maybe as far as it needs to go. Yet there are places where Felski seems to retreat from that high estimation of aesthetic interest. What follows is a look at some of those hesitancies, all to express solidarity with those other moments where she promotes the aesthetic as an enriching and necessary rather than delusional or capricious aspect of human self-understanding and engagement with the world.

One source of wariness around aesthetic pleasure is sociological critique's tendency to look upon culture as a process that can be measured through the identification and tracking of causes. Felski cannot fully assent to a renewed interest in beauty and form because such an interest "conspicuously fails to answer the question of *how* texts resonate across time" (575; emphasis added). In this context, the question *how* can be resolved in a couple of different ways. One would be toward a given work's formal features. Identifying which ones draw our eye tells us something about that distant epoch and also about our immediate one. Answering this version of the question *how* requires taking aesthetic experience as a primary datum of an inquiry into art.

Felski, at least in the elaboration of her theory, rejects that option for another version of *how*. This one involves looking beneath the surface to isolate a cause, in this case, that which connects one text to another. As she asks, "Why is it that we can feel solicited, button-holed, stirred up, by words that were drafted eons ago? How do texts that are inert in one historical moment become newly revealing, eye-opening, even life-transforming, in another?" (575). It is difficult to see how this framing of the question is productive. Resonating across time is simply what literature has done, and the source, the "cause," is human culture. A reader of any era coming across Homer's portrayal of Argos—the decrepit, tick-ridden dog who, seeing his master for the first time after a twenty-year absence, weakly "thumped his tail" as he lay "castaway / on piles of dung from mules and cattle"—is likely to be touched, or at least to wonder, along with Eustathius, Perrault, Pope, Goethe, Glenn Most, and others, about Homer's style, and whether his unvarnished language mars

the dignity required of epic.[25] (And if someone did *not* wonder about Homer's decorum, then *that* would be an interesting feature of another era's response to him.) The aesthetic details of a work, its surface, in other words, qualify as substance and not accident. Certain questions about art can be answered only by an appeal to the text as an aesthetic object read by one willing to surrender to that text and cultured enough to know how. If that is so, then an appreciation of art's fine points does not cause the eye to glaze over or distract it with superficialities; instead, it expands one's sensibilities.

There are many indications that Felski endorses this view of what it can be like to experience art:

> No fan, no enthusiast, no aficionado . . . is indifferent to the specialness of the texts [he or she] admire[s]. And it is here that critical vocabularies with their emphasis on exemplarity and abstraction, on the logic of "the" realist novel, or women's poetry, or Hollywood movies offer little traction in explaining practices of discrimination *within* such generic groupings, our marked preference for certain texts over others and the intensity and passion with which such discriminations are often made. (585)

Discrimination is the right word. Felski calls up its older, liberal use, which links qualities of discernment and differentiation to an esteem for the individual and the particular.[26] It gets to a basic component of an art appreciation, which is that reading or viewing or listening does not primarily involve thinking of the particular as an instance of the universal, but as an instance of itself. When we listen to a sonata or read a sonnet, we are not usually (unless directed) thinking of Sonata or Sonnet; we are mostly wondering about how *this particular* sonata or sonnet goes, what *it* means.

Of course, one way to recognize a particular work as such is through tacit or overt comparison with other works. Frequently, an individual text all but commands us to think of certain other ones. When, for example, Virgil has Aeneas pick up Achaemenides, a crewman Odysseus abandoned on the island of the Cyclops (*Aeneid*, 3.588–691), Virgil is inviting a comparison with—or, better, pointing a finger at—Homer. It is common in some quarters to look on such occurrences as a form of play, as when Geoffrey Miles calls Virgil's reference part of a "metafictional game."[27] Yet this avowal misses both birds with the toss of the one stone. The notion of "game" trivializes Virgil's moral seriousness (or else lets him off too easily from charges of tendentiousness). On the other hand, the term "metafictional" makes into a special instance what is at once a routine and a necessity of writing and reading, and that is the possession of a culture of reading and writing.

At the same time, we cannot say that Homer *explains* the Virgil, as if his secret has now been unlocked. Only looking more deeply into the *Aeneid* and the world that Virgil has created can resolve that matter. An example like this

vindicates and amplifies Felski's claim that a question like "how can we do justice to both [art works'] singularity and their worldliness?" (576) is a false one, just as the exhortation that "we sorely need alternatives to seeing [works of art] as transcendentally timeless on the one hand, and imprisoned in their moment of origin on the other" (575) is a false distinction. Rather, as Carl Dahlhaus has shown, it is possible "to subsume historical knowledge into aesthetic perception, and by the same token to take aesthetic experiences as points of departure for historical investigations." That is because the aesthetic experience of a work of art "serves as the final arbiter in deciding which facts do or do not belong to the matter at hand."[28]

Even if not original, Felski's defense of aesthetic absorption as an integral part of our private and genial selves checks the cynicism and reductiveness that she sees driving much critique. That makes all the more puzzling her statement urging what looks like a retreat from that position. Why is it that arguments against contextualization and for bringing out the distinctiveness of the individual literary work have not gained much traction in critique? Felski speculates that they

> sometimes rely on a division between "exceptional texts" that exceed their historical moment and "conventional" or "stereotypical" texts that remain determined by it, reinstating a high/low culture dichotomy that has come to seem ever less persuasive to many scholars. And second, the repudiation of context can result in a rarefied focus on poetic language, form, and textuality far removed from the messy, mundane, empirical details of how and why we read. (574)

The disowning quotation marks surrounding *exceptional* and *conventional* pose at least two problems. First, they imply that where art is exemplary, it must also be ahistorical. But as the example of Homer shows, a canonical text or corpus of texts can come to define an era with a clarity and power that commonplace ones do not, even as Homeric epics have also lived beyond his day as more than social documents. The second implication is that the very category of artistic merit is arbitrary and distracting. To paraphrase Dahlhaus, however, thinking noncanonically is impossible. An art history always needs some kind of criterion of selection for there to be a history at all (which is not to say that canons are immutable things, either in what makes it onto the list or in the criteria for inclusion).[29]

Finally and most important, there is the worry that reading for pleasure would promote viewing the devices of art with a "rarefied focus." That concern may speak to certain modern poets who, as Oren Izenberg notes in a striking summation, "see the requirements of closure and perceptibility as an intolerable burden and an affront to human dignity."[30] Otherwise, however, language and form are key reasons why people read works of fiction and not

just synopses of them, and, further, read them with pleasure, instruction, and acuity all at once. To show more precisely what this experience may look like, I cite what would arguably count as a lapse into a "rarefied focus" in the act of reading:

> I have always thought of [Poe] as a man waiting out the endless night of his life with a book in his hand, some quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, noting the smell and feel of the leather binding, the pretty trace of gilding on the spine, almost too moved by the gratuitous humanity of the thing to open it and put himself in the power of whatever old music still lived in it.[31]

And then, as if in direct response to Felski's standoffishness about the sensuous pleasure of reading, and wholly unswayed by warnings that her interest might be untoward, that her imagination might be deceiving her, that she might be fetishizing the object, Marilynne Robinson concludes, "Runes and rhymes, labials and sibilants, trying the sound of them under his breath, while the long hours passed" (183). Perhaps a round distrust of literary pleasure is also a position that Felski means to question instead of take as a point of departure. As we have seen elsewhere, Felski allows for the kinds of experience Robinson records here, the kind that Weber recorded in hearing *Figaro* in 1789. But her reservations about a rarefied interest in the details of literature, together with the utter inadequacy of the nonhuman actor theory to account for those experiences, show how much ground critiques of this second kind have to make up. Having been invited to a great and sumptuous banquet, critique declines the invitation, standing aloof, with notebook in hand, recording, quantifying, but not understanding.

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What of critique and its discontents in music criticism? There are numerous strong dissents from outside or at the margins of critique.[32] Less common in music scholarship is the kind of dissent offered by Latour and Felski; that is, the entertaining of second thoughts about critique from *within* its own territory. A partial exception comes with James Davies's "Julia's Gift."

I qualify that claim because the essay's first part adopts what later on it will disown, somewhat, as a "'hard' anthropological approach" (302). That approach lays siege to human dignity's last bulwark against commerce, and that is music as a kind of gift. Davies's inquiry turns on a specific class of object—musical annuals from around the 1820s—as well as a specific object—the copy of *The Musical Bijou* (1829) that Elizabeth Oakley gave to her daughter Julia Eliza, probably for her eleventh birthday (287–88). Against the everyday idea of a gift as a free and generous act, often to acknowledge another person as

a unique self, Davies espies a darker purpose behind the mother's gesture or, more precisely, that is contained in the object itself and the social world that produced it. (Although Davies does not cite Latour or Felski, in ascribing agency to objects, he is in effect deploying their theory of nonhuman agents.) Beneath the benign surface of the gift there burrows "a lie of personalization" (294). As a commodity, Oakley's musical annual only serves "as a placeholder for genuine contact" (295). Rather than promoting freedom, it tightens the grip of the status quo: "Gifts are social objects, and gift-giving functions to reinforce social relations, acting in the perpetual recycling of society by stratifying interdependencies time and again" (292). In a tacit variant on Kant's notorious objection to music as the audible equivalent of perfume (*CJ* 5:330, §53, p. 207), Davies places the musical text in the company of other items that may charm the senses but not stimulate ideas: Oakley's musical annual "makes no sense apart from its accompanying effects: perfumes, soaps, her store of letters, ribbons, hairbrushes, undergarments" (305). The darkest metamorphosis of all happens to Oakley herself. The act of gift-giving transmutes the young woman into a gift, an object: "A demanding time lay ahead for [Julia's mother], she being required to instill in the bride-to-be an expectancy for the day of 'giving away,' for the hour of her family farewells" (298). Giving the *Musical Bijou* is meant to encourage in the daughter a talent for music, which in turn will make her into a more attractive "gift" for a worthy (read "wealthy") husband. All of this ideation operates outside of the consciousness of the actors. It is a version of the fatalistic pantheism that William James found in Spencer.

That the offering and receiving of gifts could be a complex exchange is not a discovery of critique or of the social sciences more widely. That is because the phenomenon itself well antedates consumerist culture. Genesis 4 tells of the rejection of Cain's offering and then the fratricide and exile following from that rejection. Homer begins his account of the Trojan War with Achilles's smoldering in his tent (and his Argive comrades dying from his petulance), because he was deprived of Briseis, a spoil of war whom Agamemnon promised to Achilles. An equally strong sense of proprietorship about historical thought (Felski's "quarantining difference") guides Davies's sensibilities about the culture surrounding music printing. Oakley's musical annual could have a dehumanizing effect because music had become "fixed as a commodity . . . around the late 1820s" (306). It could, further, have a sentimental effect because "*all* published music since the invention of the printing press—the late 1820s just happen to mark the introduction of lithography, stereotyping and the steam-powered press—taps into a heavily nostalgic ethos" (307; emphasis added).

Such assertions raise many questions. Why is it just printed music, and not all printed matter, that is inflected with nostalgia? What is different about music printing in the 1820s as opposed to its first appearance, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century? More broadly, this critique seems to turn on

a Gnostic attitude about the world of exchange: the only options are either pure gift, on the one hand, or tainted commerce, on the other. Usually, the interaction is more complex, and not in a way that is invariably dark or coercive. However this all may be, what is most germane is that the extent of Davies's commitment to many of his arguments is unclear. Hints of diffidence crop up throughout the first sections of the essay. "Anthropologists," he notes parenthetically but pointedly, "struggle with the notion of 'enjoyment'"; he calls the Marxist critique he offers at one place "celebrated though dated" (293); elsewhere, conceiving "the mother-daughter gift-exchange . . . in terms of the incest taboo" represents an instance of "extreme anthropological language" (296–97); and so on.

That unease acquires greater definition in the section entitled "Melancholy of Exchange" (302–6). With it, Davies turns his earlier critique upon itself: "Such an indictment of Julia's gift is sorely overstated: a 'hard' anthropological approach when a philosophical view of the gift might prove equally enlightening." Adopting that contrasting "philosophical" view yields a more open-handed and truer response, which is that "the commodity is turned, given authenticity and, by this act of giving and receiving (this act of being signed 'Julia Eliza'), humanized. We might interpret this action more charitably or positively as a way of trying to reconcile one to another, daughter to mother, past to present, signified to signifier, human to human" (302). Formally, this version of Davies's claim stands on firmer ground. The term "gift" describes more than a thing: it is a value that a person assigns to a thing. An object like Oakley's musical annual does not *have* to be a gift; it does not contain "giftness." What makes the object a gift is its *use*. It is at that point where the material object becomes a human gesture.

Does it thereby also become a *humane* gesture? That seems to be Davies's verdict: "For me, the gift of Julia's mother represents a loving act of speaking tenderly . . . in the 'hard' social terms of a mass-produced object" (304). Yet here, too, Davies hesitates, although now perhaps inadvertently. "We *might*" judge this action more favorably, he says. As well, only personal conviction grounds his confidence in the gift as an act of kindness ("*for me*, the gift . . . represents a loving act"). These statements give rise to different sorts of reservations from the earlier ones. There, Davies explicitly distanced himself from "anthropological language" because of the severity and injudiciousness of its conclusions. Here, the deficiencies concern method and are not ones that Davies fully addresses (indeed, he may not think them deficiencies at all). To the extent that he adopts social theory, and to the further extent that social theory involves the development and application of abstractions, his method is unable to answer what that object meant for a particular person. From the evidence Davies gives, we cannot *know* that the gift was a generous deed—maybe it was ultimately a cruel one, or, as is usually the case with

human actions, it is likely that various motives were at play in such a gesture, motives, further, that were not fixed in the giving. That is because the giving of a gift is a chance that the *giver* takes, too. It takes place in the face of uncertainty about how it will be received.

We do have disciplines that deal with human motivation, among them, history and biography. But Davies rejects these: "In the absence of biographical evidence securing the personal significance of Julia's copy, a diary or letter carefully recording the meanings of the well-worn pages, there is little room for detailed historical maneuver" (291). There are two senses in which Davies might mean "maneuver." On the one hand, he might mean that, ideally, we would want to turn to biography, but, in the absence of such evidence (for now), we will have to make do with inferences drawn from social theory. On the other hand, "maneuver" might be meant to imply an artifice and pedantry in the historian's enterprise, so that social theory, no matter the quantity of biographical or historical evidence, is always the way to go.

The second option seems to prevail: "If the intention is to be bold—to ask what this gift represented for its recipient—a spacious approach recommends itself. Hence my turn, in what follows, away from biography and Julia toward interpretations of gift-giving and commerce, general theories of gift-giving and commerce, [and so on]" (291). As method, this is arguably a bold move. Davies is trying to bring a sense of imagination—generally thought of as a requirement of the historian[33]—to the more objectivizing, scientific endeavor of social theory.

In that spirit, we could extend the kinds of questions he imagines about an exchange, taking place some two hundred years ago, between a mother and daughter. How did the daughter receive her gift? Did it disappoint her, and, if so, would that have been because she was ungrateful, or because she wanted what she thought would be a truer token of love from her mother? Did she cherish that gift into later life, so that, after her mother had died, she looked upon it with affection (or melancholy) in having the memory of her mother and her childhood reawakened? In this respect, it might be that Davies takes too rationalistic, too "anthropological" a view of human nature in suggesting that an item like Oakley's annual represents only a "small static present" of a living memory (306). Rather, ours is not an imageless, propositional world of abstractions. An object can be a stimulus to the imagination, a visible and tactile reminder of the presence that someone had in our lives. Did later life treat the daughter cruelly, so that a recollection of earlier tranquility and ease might have been more torment than consolation? What would we hope to gain by knowing the answer to such things?

What of the mother? Was the gift a reward for her child's burgeoning love of and talent for music, or an attempt to lure a petulant student into a more assiduous study? Was it an easy gift to give, where the family had sufficient

income that it would not have strained finances? (Probably—but maybe the family grew up in poverty and was reflexively frugal with its gift-giving.) Did the mother think there might be something tasteless in such a gift but offered it anyway (as parents will do from time to time), anticipating how much pleasure her daughter would have received in it? Was this "girling," as Davies calls it, following Ruth Solie,[34] meant to open up possibilities for a better life for her daughter in the ways available to her time? Marriage to a wealthy husband might have been demeaning (but maybe not), but how would it have been more so than the life of, say, Emma Bovary's daughter, Berthe, an orphan working in a cotton mill?

I rain down such questions (they are inexhaustible, depending on one's interest) to suggest that, if one cares to know what this gift meant for this mother and daughter, questions of this kind are necessary. Yet social theory, at least in Davies's exposition, is ill-equipped to raise them. It cannot answer what that gift meant *for that person*—only biography and history can, areas that Davies abandons (whether from choice or perceived necessity). Thus, Davies's intention appears "bold" only against a narrowed field of vision. And in no case is the method of social theory "spacious." It is, rather, constricting. For all of the intimacy presumed in Davies's use of the young woman's first name, his inquiry risks committing the cardinal sin that social theory rightly preaches against: turning the person Julia Oakley into "Julia," an instrument—in this case, of social theory itself.

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The claim that this genre of writing pares down human activity to system is one its practitioners would likely resist. Much critique thinks of its task as a humanizing one, where human potential is released upon dismantling the apparatus that Romantics built to protect and isolate art. But as we take up the next taboo, transcendence, we will see the pattern repeat, now in a more overtly modernist Mozart aesthetic. Just as critique strayed into the objectification that it was trying to avoid, so, too, does a resistance to speaking of Mozart's music as transcendent, in the act of trying to loosen formalism, end up hardening it.

Chapter Two

# On Transcendence; or, Mozart among the Neoplatonists, Present and Past

> The woods of Arcady are dead,
> And over is their antique joy;
> Of old the world on dreaming fed;
> Grey Truth is now her painted toy.
>
> —Yeats, *The Song of the Happy Shepherd*

Surveying the world of Modernist art from Pissarro to Cézanne to Pollock, the art historian T. J. Clark identifies an axis around which these otherwise heterogeneous works turn: "the impossibility of transcendence."[1] That insight was not easy to come by in light of a basic problem of intelligibility posed by the era's art. "The modernist past," Clark eulogizes, "is a ruin, the logic of whose architecture we do not remotely grasp" (2).

However that condition may be for the artistic products of Modernism, its attitude toward transcendence remains in very good repair in present-day music criticism. Transcendence as a concept we have collectively moved beyond, or ought to have—and if we have not, then we have let ourselves fall back to history's *arrière-garde*—that confidence in having now explained the meaning and therefore neutralized the authority of transcendence permeates recent thinking about Mozart's creative achievement. It is hardly confined there, and yet the stakes are particularly high with him. If any single composer's music seems to have defied the gravitational forces of time and place or the earthly exigencies of labor, it would be Mozart's. As Burnham notes, it is hard to imagine the language of divinity and perfection being routinely applied to any other composer, with the exception of Bach.[2] Were Mozart to fall from that position, then everyone else would necessarily follow.

A historian of a certain positivist bent might demur. "We are not imposing a cultural value on Mozart other than what sober, empirical scholarship calls for," the response might run. "Any undelusional mind can see that Romantic idolatry of Mozart causes hyperventilation and generates error; we are simply easing the former condition so as to eliminate the latter." A certain kind of social critic might commend this newly gained insight about Mozart as the fruit of a long, patient labor of disenchanting the world. Here, as well, the sense of a durable achievement prevails. The modernist Mozart is not just Mozart for our time; he is one we can project back onto his day (and earlier) to achieve greater clarity about what was. From this perspective, no conflict holds between modernism and humanism. To demythologize Mozart is to lift from him an obscuring halo of divinity so that we may behold the man. Modernism is liberation.

So settled is the authority of a nontranscendent world as a truer world that only to a rustic sort might it even occur to ask, What does one mean by transcendence, such that we must deny its bearing on Mozart? In the following, I propose (a) that the question is valid; because (b) a cluster of concepts that an antitranscendent hermeneutics routinely excludes is necessary for criticism, leaves it wanting in the exclusion, or forestalls self-contradiction; in which case, (c) it is OK to use the word "transcendent."

One sign of the need for clarification is that objections to transcendence are not all of a kind. They can be grounded in empiricism or materialism or certain forms of idealism. The most skeptical versions will go on to sound cautions about art's ties to our nature as sociable creatures, where art's implication in, perhaps exacerbation of, the tensions of social life renders its truth status empirically unreliable and its surface charm morally treacherous. When pressed this far, the project of demystification runs up against an irony, probably unintended: if its initial ambition was to reestablish the native contact between art and worldliness that Romanticism had broken, it now contemplates an even more dehumanized or deracinated vision of art. The first is exemplified in the judgment that the supreme art is the one that alienates and the second in critiques that, faced with the unruliness of art, propose uprooting it to an island of neutrality.[3]

A tension also wends its way through another foundation of antitranscendent Mozart criticism. Here, the spell to be broken involves the hold of concepts. As contrived things, concepts are by definition unreliable things, with *concept* standing in opposition to *reality*.[4] If in theory it is possible to make a firm separation of concepts, on the one hand, and reality, on the other, in practice it is difficult to sustain so radical a skepticism. H. Gene Blocker has an economical way of illustrating why. "Suppose," he says, "you divide a sheet of paper into two columns. On the right you jot down what a given is really like; on the left you put down what you think it is like." There will not be a difference between the two, because "you cannot distinguish in your own case how

things actually are from how you think they are." If that is so, then "to analyze our ideas is to analyze the world."[5] It is no surprise, then that an antitranscendent cosmology has difficulty in maintaining theoretical discipline by affording some concepts a special status. A privileged few appear hard and objective and part of a hierarchy.

When it first appeared, Modernist art caused scandal by assailing prevailing academic canons. Today's modernist Mozart poetics, in contrast, feels more orthodox, more staid and institutionalized. It is just the way that professional art criticism is supposed to go. What can get lost in that sense of stability is just how radically the terms of the inquiry have been redefined, including in Mozart criticism. That is the case with some of the most penetrating and illustrious work on Mozart opera in the previous generation. What questions should we today be asking of a repertory that has been around for more than two hundred years? In some of Mary Hunter's important work, a leading question is whether these works are "about particular social circumstances, anchored to particular historical periods" or "about 'universals' (love, friendship, redemption, etc.) with little regard for particular structures of power."[6] That question gives an excellent illustration of the methods and priorities of a disenchanting poetics and can thus help clarify what it means by and finds objectionable in a term like "transcendence." What first bears noting is the devaluation of *universals*. It is not just that the word is a concept, as the cautionary quotation marks are meant to emphasize; it stands on the other end of "structures of power," with no concourse between the two. The implication is that "universals" severs art from its natural connection to human behavior, including the impulse to tell stories or to play.

Of course, *power* is no less a concept than *universals*, and so an ensuing question concerns the reasons for the disparate treatment. For clarification, it is useful to set these later priorities against those of two prominent earlier systems, from Aristotle and Neoplatonism. Famously, Aristotle accorded poetry a place superior to history precisely because the former deals in universals, the latter in particulars (*Poetics*, 1451b). What Aristotle meant is by no means settled, but Barzun's paraphrase is useful and credible: poetry offers "representative cases in clarified form."[7] Poetry abstracts from specific situations, so that following the misfortunes of King Lear tells us something about that character, but also about catastrophic folly, filial ingratitude, love, and so on. Hunter, in contrast, sides with history, or, better, with what Reinhard Strohm calls "context." The two are not quite the same. History, the past, is fluid and something I participate in. Context is something fixed, and I stand outside of it.[8] In speaking of "*particular* social circumstances, *anchored* to particular historical periods," Hunter takes the less historical, more structuralist path. In this view, Mozart's operas are less representations of actions than allegories of power, less works or achievements than documents and receptacles.

The qualities of this newer poetics become even more transparent when contrasted with a Neoplatonist outlook. By the old Neoplatonic cosmology, the chain of Being had at its summit a series of intermingled concepts (or ideas): the good, beautiful, and true. The topography of this firmament is such that, the farther down one goes, the more Being is corrupted in its manifestations, with originating Being fragmenting into parts, into things that are less fully good and true. The cosmology of a poetics like Hunter's is equally hierarchical, but with a different arrangement of its terms. It disengages the good and beautiful from the true and demotes them to accidents. Taking their place at the summit with the true is power. Like these older ideas, power is underived. It operates as an objective, external reality over which there is limited awareness and therefore control.

When it comes to the universals that Hunter subordinates to power—love, friendship, and redemption—it is true that they are not as old as creation. But they are as old, and as enduring, as civilization. Further, as examples like Lear's love for Cordelia or Othello's for Desdemona show, fiction does not necessarily isolate from their social and political lives the various passions people have for and commitments they make to each other. (The love and fortunes of Romeo and Juliet are another good example.) With *Figaro*, likewise, the characters' private desires are joined to their social roles. Figaro wants a marriage ceremony and the legal and social status it conveys because he loves Susanna; in pursuing Susanna, the Count, that "bizzarro amator," overturns not just a marriage vow but a law that he had promulgated, both actions hurling into disarray the social order, the political world, over which he presides. In all of these cases, there is no need to dig beneath the surface for the buried but coercive sociological conduit. When they flourish, love and friendship extend and enlarge social life and when they do not, they cause misery, and the quest for them is a visible, dynamic feature of this literature.

Indeed, an appreciation of universals occasionally steals its way into Hunter's discussion of individual works, and, when it does, in ways where gains in interpretive insight more than compensate for a loss in theoretical consistency. One fine instance out of many involves her interpretation of *La clemenza di Tito* and what enlightenment can ultimately mean in Mozart's last opera seria: "The message for Tito himself is perhaps more like that in *Così*: namely that to face the irrational side of both oneself and others and to contain rather than destroy it leads to a kind of enlightenment. The venue and manner in which this plays out [are] deeply unfamiliar to most of us, but the underlying message, if presented in a convincing performance, is not merely historical."[9] Again, one may question the conception of history used here, or the restricted sense of resemblance,[10] but none of that weaken's Hunter's insight into *Tito*'s capacity to exemplify, to deal in universals.

The concern about using a term like "universals" could be eased by replacing it with the more neutral "abstractions." "Our interest in humans often itself takes an abstract form," as Peter Lamarque explains. "We have a natural curiosity for ideas, attitudes, dilemmas, predicaments, feelings and emotions *in themselves* apart from any particular people who exemplify them."[11] Perhaps that further clarifies what Aristotle meant in giving poetry first place to history. (For what it is worth, Lamarque's insight also moves easily along the mainstream of Enlightenment thinking about the stage. Its chief advocates and reformers thought that theater's instructive power emanated from its capacity to make an abstraction like love look sensuously compelling. It was theater as a school of practical [rather than speculative] wisdom, as a guide to conduct through example instead of precept.[12] If that is so, then the more important question for us today might not be: What are the presiding power structures in these operas? but: Are the ideas about art that shaped a work like *Figaro* still alive today, and, if not, what do we do about that changed circumstance?)

In any case, the elevation of power to the status of Idea is hardly idiosyncratic in recent thinking about works of the imagination. Where Hunter applies a hermeneutics of power to a specific musical repertory, others extend the operations of power to a more fundamental cognitive level. This is what happens in a preface to a special issue of the *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* that takes up the topic of music and meaning. According to the volume's editor, Mark Clayton, many of the contributions look to identify "the various ways in which people attempt to fix musical meaning through analytical and interpretive discourses, the contingency of the meanings so fixed and of their relationship to 'structure' and the exercise of power in the fixing."[13] The first part of the claim makes an elliptical but unexceptional point. Music theorists use language ("analytical and intepretive discourses") to understand music ("fix musical meaning"). At the same time, that harder terminology, which speaks of meaning as something that can be cemented, is central to the second and more noteworthy part of Clayton's parsing. Truth is not the object of these inquiries but, rather, the structures and forms of power that bear putative assertions of truth.

This resembles Adorno's theory of identity thinking, where the very act of naming is an exercise in tyranny. To affix a name to an object is either to suppress or dominate it in some way.[14] A more traditional and less suspicious account of musical analysis views naming as a means of understanding music using the tools available to it—that is, language—all in order to impart that understanding to others, who can welcome or rebuff it, as they will. But for Clayton, there are two main reasons for thinking that such an activity is not so benign. First, music-analytical discourses necessarily act "to constrain or direct imagination" (11), as opposed to being expressions and constituents of the imagination (hence his implication that first there is musical meaning

and then, in a second step, an attempt to secure it linguistically). Second, the institutions that support and disseminate these discourses are unjust qua institutions, along whose corridors power-wielding agents impose ideologies on passive recipients. Upon identifying those intellectual oligarchs, however, Clayton's argument boomerangs. For the class he condemns—"social elites and scholars"—is one he belongs to.[15] In using that invidious phrase, his musical politics commits the very sin that it condemns in others. It equates thought with social status (as if *that* were a fixed or unitary thing). Where we think a person's rank and station tell us all we need to know, we no longer need to listen to anything a particular person has to say.

Art criticism of course has other ways of addressing power. For example, to apply Clayton's stronger sense of musical politics to Hunter's may miss by a wide mark the import and richness of her poetics. Much depends on where those structures of power are located and how they are said to operate. Above, I proposed ways that they could and do function mimetically, within the world of the fiction. In the case of *Figaro*, the Count knows he is acting autocratically and Figaro that his options as a servant to foil his master are limited. For him to have any chance of ordering the world to his desire, he, as Harlequin's offspring, will have to recruit craft and guile to his cause.

The path that the modernist allegorist proposes is not that one. The structures it speaks of do not come from the social world *of* the opera, but from the social world that *produced* the opera. Now, different questions step forward. For example, was Mozart himself aware of these structures? If not, we could be left with modernism as a rationalizer of Romanticism and not its nemesis. Peter Shaffer's Salieri proclaims, "I weakened God's flute to a thinness. God blew—as He must—without cease. The flute split in the mouth of His insatiable *need*!" (act 2, scene 18).[16] Just as Shaffer's Mozart is an instrument of God, so, too, is a modernist Mozart an instrument of social forces. On the other hand, if Mozart were aware of these forces and channeled them into his operas, then one of several pressing questions now becomes: What bearing does his artistic achievement have on these forces and their expression? In particular, is the musical beauty permeating his operas superfluous, or does it play some indispensable role in the allegory of power (perhaps as a parable on the treachery of beauty)? Another series of questions concerns the audience. Is, for example, the imperative to identify these structures meant to draw us into the opera's sensual world or (as I think more likely) to keep us at a skeptical distance? That last question amounts to whether Mozart's art should be regarded as an enlarger and adorner of life or seen as a means of contracting life and making it alien to us.[17]

Hunter's chapter devoted to *Figaro* helps to resolve some of these questions. For all of the discomfort with universal values, her poetics does not completely shed the old skin of hierarchy (nor is that her intention).

Although values like love and friendship are marginalized, that is not the case with power, which enjoys an unqualified universality. From this unity devolve all particulars. For example, in surveying *Figaro*'s moral terrain, Hunter notes that this musical comedy

> cannot avoid being about the power of privilege based both on rank and on gender. However, it is also about the power of suffering and the powers of friendship and love. It is obviously about power "within" the plot, as it were—that is, the capacity of some characters to compel the attention and even the behavior of the others—but it is also about the kinds of power that a work and its characters can have over the audience. (139)

Obviously, this is a more capacious sense of power than what Clayton, for example, uses. Indeed, it could describe *Don Giovanni*, or *Die Entführung*, or *Tito*.

These claims look unexceptional and yet, again, reorder the priorities of conventional art appreciations in pretty fundamental ways. It is not just that *Figaro* could, with equal plausibility, be said to dramatize the *limits* of power, not least for the Count. He, the most powerful person in this world, fails to compel others to give him what he wants (unless he is ultimately seen as learning to want what he can have). Maybe this is all that Hunter means—that power is a theme, not an essence, in these works. But if not—if all of *Figaro*'s surface activity is an expression of power—then we are approaching a poetics that arguably denies a basic experience of art. Art's invitation to the viewer, as Stanley Cavell reminds us, "is based *not* on power or authority, but on attraction and promise."[18] That is why, when the artist is judged to be bludgeoning us into agreement, we are likely to rebuff the gesture, even where we concur with the work's moral vision. Conversely, artists can get away with all kinds of indiscretions—the purple passages in Mahler, the hyper-Wagnerian love scenes in *Vertigo*—because of the respect that the artist has earned elsewhere in the work.

At the least, a poetics based on power overlooks other ways of making sense of Mozart's operas (and of literature in general). Here, for example, is a counterresponse from Vladimir Nabokov on whether art should be seen primarily as a social document: "We should always remember that the work of art is invariably the creation of a new world, so that the first thing we should do is to study that new world as closely as possible, approaching it as something brand new, having no obvious connection with the worlds we already know."[19]

Hunter's more modernist poetics seems to exclude even the possibility of that vision, and perhaps for good reason. The removal of the fictional world from any "obvious connection" to our own is troubling to the extent that it encourages a separation of art from life, a dehumanizing "art for art's sake" that produces a contempt for or exhaustion with the world. That turns out, however, to be the opposite of what Nabokov is saying, at least in another essay: "This capacity to wonder at trifles—no matter the immanent peril—these

asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness, and it is in this childishly speculative state of mind, so different from commonsense and its logic, that we know the world to be good."[20] Nabokov is baldly defying more recent uses of art as "detergent of life," opting instead for art as "enhancer of life," to borrow Barzun's categories.[21] Gazing on art's bedazzling particularity, followers of Nabokov's aesthetic do not find themselves blinded to its worldliness (as if patterns of light and sound, not to mention storytelling, were unworldly). In fact, those supposed accidents have priority formally and even causally. That is because what makes art draw and sustain interest as a social document is the *manner* of the telling. To give a rough example: As propositions, "Alle Menschen werden Brüder" and "We are the world" say more or less the same thing. The former rises above the cliché that burdens the latter because of the enlivening originality of its presentation.

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A poetics like Hunter's marks one recent instance of a reversal of the old Neoplatonic hierarchy. Transcendent, universal values like love and friendship are uncovered as mechanisms of power. Further, by speaking of power as a force that, at least at times, operates outside of the work itself (and perhaps outside of its creator, too), Hunter's poetics inclines away from mimesis and toward allegory. Again, this is a reorientation, and not a dismantling. Remaining undisturbed from the earlier systems is the hierarchical framework. In the case of one other attempt to reconcile the values of an older art with our own sensibilities, a different path forward is proposed. It aspires to the elimination of hierarchy, all while preserving and even expanding the reach of mimesis—something like a postmodern gloss on Aristotle. That is a leading ambition in the work of Wye Allanbrook.

Allanbrook's remarkable writings span a career of thinking through what Mozart can mean for us today at a time when Romanticism has, or should have, lost its powers to persuade. Here I can address only a few points from her rich body of work, and even those only glancingly, all directed to clarifying what Mozart looks like in a world without the possibility of transcendence.[22] For Allanbrook, "transcendence" operates, as it must, relationally, in opposition to other values. Mozart's musical world is secular rather than sacred, comic rather than tragic, democratic rather than autocratic, diverse rather than monolithic, attentive to surfaces rather than to depth, accepting of the world as it is rather than imposing an ideal against which it fails. In a word, the classical style of Mozart is, she says, "postmodern."

For a thinker with Allanbrook's immersion in eighteenth-century thought, it might seem startlingly anachronistic to champion what she disarmingly confesses is the "seemingly absurd idea" of Mozart as a postmodernist.[23] At

the least, though, Allanbrook uses the category in complex and highly circumscribed ways. Like most versions, Allanbrook's postmodernism rejects Romantic notions of depth. Truth is to be found at the surface of things.[24] Unlike harder versions of postmodernism, Allanbrook's is not purely relational. Her cosmos has a center, as opposed to ever-receding meanings. If only logically, that is a sound move, as there can be no relations without things that are their referents.[25] Her stopping place is also compelling: human nature. Such Aristotelianism is a constant in her writings. It is there in her first, pathbreaking book: "The music of the Classical style is pervasively mimetic, not of Nature itself but of our natures—of the world of men, their habits and actions."[26] And it is there in her last one. Although the building blocks of her system are musical topoi—marches, dances, fugues, and so on—these commonplaces are themselves rooted in the sociability of human beings: "An eighteenth-century instrumental work should be heard as a report on the composer's cosmos, a mirror of being, its polished surface reflecting all categories of human experience."[27]

When Cavell noted the challenge that modernist art posed in light of a loss of confidence in convention, and thus in the possibilities of shared intelligibility, he also identified the ways that modern artists had responded to that circumstance: through nihilism, confession, and the refashioning of convention.[28] Allanbrook, I think, takes a pass on all of these choices. Convention still links us with the past, if we choose to see, because, again, the rhythmic gestures that Mozart used were gestures that derive from our common humanity: "Because of their connections with certain universal habits of human behavior, these *topoi* are also largely in the possession of the opera-going audience today."[29] That makes the eighteenth century a place and a time that saw and strengthened the connection between life and art: "It is in this light that I have offered in these pages the secular commedia of the late eighteenth century—not the timeless Classic Arcadia imagined by those looking back on it, but a fragile order in which for the briefest of times the center did hold. The astonishing thing is that we were lucky enough to have it at all" (*SC*, 176). For an example of a time that did not understand that connection, that in fact broke it, there is the nineteenth century. Basically, Romanticism was the forebear of metaphysics, at least when it comes to thought about the nature and possibilities of music. Whereas I have been stressing a certain porosity between modernism and postmodernism, Allanbrook sees a more watertight boundary separating them. For her, there is much more concourse between Romanticism and Modernism, which is only another way of describing how Modernism became "barren and mandarin" ("A Millennial Mozart?" 2). Whether it is the allegorical reading in the mode of Adorno (*SC*, 170) or the "purities" that some present-day musical analysis seeks (51), these and similar strategies differ only in degree from the Romantic quest for that alluring depth or that world-transcending reverie.

In this case, then, Allanbrook can be seen as confessing her postmodernist orthodoxy against apostles who have strayed from the path. Among the apostates she names are recent scholars who have shrouded the singing that actual people do or the songs that actual composers write in abstractions:

> But these writers, modernist wolves in postmodern fleeces, still want to claim ineffability as the true condition of music. Whether figured in the Lacanian cry or in the uncanny irruptions into narrative famously theorized by Carolyn Abbate, this new transcendentalism focuses on moments when the voice is transformed into a "voice-object," when its sheer power to penetrate the soul overwhelms the word and swallows up significance. Rooted in recent opera studies, the freshly minted vocal aesthetic continues the nineteenth-century search for the transcendental, but under a new flag, the "noumenalism of the modern operatic voice." The paradox of the wordless voice becomes a new vehicle for the rejection of language and the celebration of music as the primal art of the ineffable. (*SC*, 50)[30]

Around a generation ago, A. D. Nuttall observed how the most famous manifestation of postmodernism, deconstruction, had, for all of its claimed rejection of metaphysics, a strong metaphysical current sustaining it. It should have come as no surprise, then, that its "anti-metaphysics" would resurrect "the old Romantic thesis that poetry is essentially mysterious."[31] There was always a metaphysics, a transcendentalism, accompanying deconstruction.

Allanbrook's postmodern rejection of transcendence thus renders an important service. At the same time, she has higher ambitions for a theory of musical topics. In coming upon musical topoi, she has found not just a (remarkably) useful analytical construct, she has come upon the primordial matter of a musical cosmos. Attending that central belief is a cluster of auxiliary propositions. How indispensable they are to her theory as a whole is difficult to judge. Perhaps they are more like additions than buttresses, in which case their modification or removal would leave the whole untroubled. Even in that case, though, I will suggest that these corollaries show the difficulty of constituting a rigorously depthless music criticism and, by implication, that topical analysis is at its strongest when it is relieved of the burden of having to explain everything.

A point at hand concerns Allanbrook's evaluation of tragedy, which she calls "the evil twin" of comedy (*SC*, 132). That epithet is likely delivered with a light touch, and, in any case, it could refer to the vacillations in taste that occur from one era to the next. To put it roughly, it was not an aversion to tragedy that led reformers of theater in Mozart's Vienna to choose comedy as the foundation of a national theater. In fact, they wanted to extend the more prestigious genre's nobility of sentiment and action to comedy. Rather, they thought that a virtuous stage would be more effective in stimulating the sympathetic imagination

were its characters to be taken from comedy's common stock of daily life and not from tragedy's distant or mythological past.[32]

In other respects, however, Allanbrook treats tragedy not in the way that, say, Paul Fussell accounts for the variety of genres in circulation. Genres have a certain "counterpoise," as in the pastoral/satire pairing. Further, we have more than one literary type because we have more than one psychological need. "The need to contemplate heroes is satisfied by epic, while the need to understand the decisions of heroes as ironic prompts the creation of tragedy," likewise with elegy, epitaph, epistle, and on.[33] Nor does Allanbrook approach tragedy as a genre having various strengths and weaknesses for which certain times would have greater or lesser affinities. Mozart's adoption of a style based on comedy rather than tragedy is, ultimately, not referable to questions of historical development but of normative truth. The fundamentally comic nature of Mozart's art advances, along with an alternative vision of the world, a truer one.

What is the locus of comedy's superiority and tragedy's concomitant deficiency? A lot can be gleaned from inspecting one of their common structural features, their endings. One architectural fault running through tragedies is that they "don't even *have* endings," at least when measured by the standards of comedy (*SC*, 132). Tragic tension generally peaks too early in the tale, in that agonized moment of recognition, and that flaw in design leaves the actual ending with insufficient strength to bear anything weightier than platitudes. As an example, Allanbrook cites the trite wisdom offered by the chorus after Oedipus has been blinded: "Look upon that last day always. Count no man happy until / He has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain" (*SC*, 132).

On the other side of that technical liability sits an ethical one. "Tragedy leaves us to our private, midnight reflections; it has no patent and public point of view to which it wants to persuade us" (*SC*, 133). Much of Allanbrook's unease with a Romantic and then modernized Mozart is encapsulated here. It resembles Kierkegaard's observation that "the [modern] tragic hero, conscious of himself as a subject, is fully reflective, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, race, and destiny, but has often even reflected him out of his own preceding life."[34] It was Mozart's good fortune to have been born earlier, at a time when convention was available as a creative opportunity. From that happy circumstance arose the possibility, which Mozart seized, of making an art that was at once congenial and uncompromising. The arrival of Romantic subjectivity ended all of that.

There are better things that can be said of tragedy. For one, the restoration of a public political order is virtually a requirement of the form. Oedipus's discovery of who he is allows Thebes to cleanse itself of pollution. From time to time, tragedies will even build a new order on the ruins of the old one.

This is as true of modern as of ancient works.[35] Along with the appearance of Fortinbras in *Hamlet*, one could cite the end of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, after the gate of Paradise has been closed to Adam and Eve:

> Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
> The World was all before them, where to choose
> Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
> They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took thir solitarie way. (12:645–49)

As to the sententiousness of tragic endings. Although it is true that they often rely on convention, that is also a hallmark of comedy, and one that Allanbrook generally applauds. "Unlike tragedy," she says, comedy "is cheerfully aware of its own conventions and can bring them to the surface without disturbing the comic contract" (*SC*, 133).

If the verdict on tragic endings seems arbitrary, it highlights an ambiguity in Allanbrook's sense of convention more broadly. When it comes to endings, the comic "apparatus . . . is elaborate and emphatic. Not because its conclusions are obvious, but because the end is both inevitable and up for question" (*SC*, 133). Likewise, "Secular comedy provides nothing so everlasting as salvation, hence no permanent homecoming or reconciliation, only edgy, contingent accommodation, brave brushing aside of doubts, the casting of a blind eye—read it as you will" (130).

This is treading a very fine line. The list culminating in "read it as you will" has the effect of negating the value of endings, in which case, they are not endings at all. As Daniel Mendelsohn says in defense of Aristotle's dictum that the plot of a drama must have "a beginning, a middle, and an end": without an ending, what one does prior to that ceases to matter. "Endings in literature, like death in real life, give retrospective meaning to what's come before: it's because life (or a novel) can't go on forever that what happens between the beginning and the end becomes precious, has value."[36] In "the casting of a blind eye," meanwhile, the long-standing dramaturgical category of recognition is simply invalidated and with it a decisive reason why a particular character might make a particular choice (as in the Countess's saying yes instead of no to the supplicant Count): out of a sense of hope and idealism, that out of this choice something better may come. But idealism is a feature of this Weltanschauung only as a temptation to resist. Thus Allanbrook on the pastoral hymn in the middle of *Figaro*'s second-act finale (and her identification and explication of this episode as an elevated gavotte-pastoral is characteristic of the erudition and nearly inexhaustible brilliance that suffuse her analyses):[37] "Because it is a hymn to a higher social order, to an ideal community consisting of free equals in virtue and reason, instead of the accommodations we are forced to make in the here and now, it must be buried in the middle of the

work. We pass right on" (*SC*, 134–35). This ensemble is perhaps the most radiantly idealistic moment in the opera, and Allanbrook's dismissal of it shows the extent to which she wants to suppress the transcendental from an experience of Mozart's theater.

One characteristic of an apotheosis is that it is discrete, finite, bounded by beginning and end. It flickers into being, grows, and fades. If it lasts indefinitely, then it is not an apotheosis. Yet although *it* wanes, *we* linger. After it, we cannot help but be different. Such evanescences of intensified awareness are beset with danger. They are confrontations with the Other, with possibilities that reveal the present as smaller than we imagined, and the newly perceived confinement can make us restive. Their peril exists even when the vision received is that the world is good and life meaningful, because borne on that insight is the imperative to realize it (and the challenge and hard work and thereby possibility of failure and despair come only when the ideal moves out of the realm of the impossible—where there is no price to be paid in "passing on"—and into that of the attainable). Against all this, Allanbrook's vision of Mozart's comedy starts to take on the hue of modernist tragedy. Its protagonists are not so much wounded as traumatized with the awareness that the ideal is only a false promise. As for the audience, it is as if it were asked to fast for forty days and nights and then test its resolve against the voluptuous temptations offered by a diabolical Mozart.

A world where the possibilities of experience are so circumscribed invites reconsideration of a further tenet of Allanbrook's poetics, although one that is especially attractive to a present-day audience. This is the characterization of Mozart's style as democratic. Often, Allanbrook makes "democratic" indistinguishable from "non-hierarchical." For example: "Simply by co-existing, . . . *topoi* frame and undermine one another, in the course of a single movement ceding stylistic authority playfully one to the next."[38] That is because "with comic flux—the mixture of stylistic modes—comes a democracy of thematic material not possible in the monoaffective style of the Baroque."[39] Arguments like this come perilously close to the allegorical thinking that Allanbrook so powerfully challenged above. A common problem with this line of thought is its arbitrariness. One could just as easily see Bach's pervasive polyphony as indicative of a more democratic worldview, whereas the classical style's hierarchy of melody and accompaniment makes it comparatively tyrannical. Equality in musical style is not the same thing as equality in political life.

Even from within the sphere of political discourse, the definition of democracy as a liberation from hierarchy needs refinement. The view of true freedom as a flattening of distinctions is shared by neoliberals, libertarians, consumerists, neostructuralists, communists, mercantilists, and anarchists. As these schools of thought are in many other respects antagonistic, it is an urgent task

to identify what regions of this nontranscendent, kaleidoscopic world are distinctively democratic.

One option would be to reaffirm a more classical tradition of liberalism. This one links the possibility of having values to the recognition, not effacement, of difference. To paraphrase Julian Johnson: expunging the older sense of discrimination from our lexicon—discrimination as the discernment of difference—has threatened the very individuality that democracy is designed to protect and nurture.[40] Where everything exists at the same level, then everything is the same, and nothing particularly matters. This older liberalism is richer, because it admits into its lexicon terms like "gracious," "open-handed," "generous." When it comes to *Figaro* interpretation, we can find such a liberality in Nicholas Till's elucidation of *Figaro*'s world, which, he says, is suffused with "a truly Catholic sense of the everyday immanence of the spiritual in the material world."[41] Put in less doctrinaire terms, a liberal view of *Figaro* would not describe it as a transcript of power relations but as a sensuous vision of folly and grace. That is, Mozart's dramatic world is governed more by "an ideal of plenitude" than by "an ideal of rectitude."[42]

Clarifying the meaning of democratic would also help resolve other tensions in how Allanbrook relates the politics of musical style to politics in its more conventional sense. Although the classical style is democratic, in *Figaro*'s social world (which is feudalistic, not democratic), happiness has a Stoical quality. It arises from recognizing and accepting one's place in a social order.[43] As Allanbrook specifies in a riposte to interpretations of *Figaro* as a political manifesto, Mozart shows "no desire to obliterate class distinctions, because for him the way to the most important truths lay through the surface of things as they are." That is because "true freedom begins with carefully articulated orders" (*Rhythmic Gesture*, 194).

Yet in other places, Allanbrook invokes the language of transcendence, and precisely because she discovers places in *Figaro* where convention becomes inadequate. In these moments, which form the moral core of the opera, convention now poses a hurdle to self-realization. A main instance of *Figaro*'s secular transcendence arises from one of the universals that Hunter's poetics subordinates to power: friendship, in this case, that between the Countess and Susanna. Through it, the two women are able to "step out from behind the masks of comic convention, and in doing so enable some of the other characters, touched by the humanity of the two women, to undergo a similar metamorphosis" (*Rhythmic Gesture*, 74). This conflicting and narrower sense of convention also controls her interpretation of the Count's last apology to the Countess. His "perdono" cannot reflect behavior coming "from the heart," as she says, precisely because it is a convention, "a ritual act of apology and forgiveness" (*Rhythmic Gesture*, 193). In the first instance, convention, the surface,

is a hurdle to be overcome. In the second, the surface is *not* to be trusted. In both cases, we're back to depth again.[44]

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In this overview of a Mozart poetics that, in light of the demythologization of the world, seeks an alternative to a Neoplatonist system, we have seen a response that inverts that system by placing power at the top, and another that rejects the notion of hierarchy altogether. At least one other alternative has been ventured, and this one retains some of the *language* of transcendence but denies to beauty the power to penetrate the "Grey Truth" descending over the world. That is the response of an opera poetics based on Adorno.

The idea that art or at least beauty is perilous is not new, of course. An ancient example is found in Homer, with Odysseus's voyage past the Sirens. Adorno says of this episode that the Sirens' "promise of a happy ending"—a promise that is musical in form—"is the deception by which the past entraps a humanity filled with longing."[45] One may question this argument as an instance of Homer interpretation (although Adorno and Horkheimer were probably not claiming themselves as Homer exegetes). Were ever a happy ending to life promised and then fulfilled, it would be what Odysseus receives from Athena, who "handed down her pacts of peace / between both sides for all the years to come." (One would, further, want to query Adorno's equation of historical consciousness with nostalgia, as opposed to history as knowledge of who we are.) Against this idea of the world as our home, Adorno envisions it as a place of trial and temptation. For a helpful summary of Adorno's position on the burden of being modern and the role art has in clarifying that alienated state, there is Richard Leppert: "Art with any claim to truth estranged itself from the here and now, because merely to aestheticize present reality perpetuated modernity's lie."[46] The true conflicts with the good (because the world moves either in indifference or hostility to our interests), which in turn cannot be rescued by the beautiful.

This caution about beauty requires a psychology that places volition outside of and above pleasure. Aestheticizing is something that one willfully *does* to the world and is therefore something that one presumably may choose *not* to do. Beauty is not a form of cognition essential to human life, where the beginning, middle, and end of an aesthetic experience help make the world intelligible to us and allow us to act in it. A position like Adorno's veers widely from, for example, John Dewey's. Dewey saw aesthetic experience as a necessity extending across the spectrum of sentient life, animal as well as human: "For only when an organism shares in the ordered relations of its environment does it secure the stability essential to living. And when the participation comes after a phase of disruption and conflict, it bears within itself the germs of a

consummation akin to the esthetic."[47] Proposing the aesthetic as a productive faculty does not seem even thinkable in this modernist view of cognition. Our duty is not to see *with* the aesthetic, but to see *past* it.

This characterization of Adorno may look out of true in any number of respects. Foremost is placing him in the company of modernists. Giving his thought that lineage overlooks, of course, his stated and sustained program of rejecting modernism. It might be, then, that a critique needs to be directed to a music criticism conducted in Adorno's name instead of by Adorno himself. I would suggest, however, that Adorno's followers are setting out on no false path from him, because Adorno's own breach with modernism is not total. Ideologically, he takes as an article of faith modernism's rejection of the possibility of transcendence. Historiographically, he follows his modernist predecessors in adopting the threshold narrative, with its promise of giving insights unavailable to earlier generations.

Rhetoric is not everything, of course, but there is another important link among modernism, postmodernism, and Neoplatonism that also has to do with language, now from the perspective of what language can say (and not just how it says it). All recognize some kind of shortcoming in language's grasp of the world. There is a totality out there, whether a unity-in-variety or discontinuity, that language can only brush against, never fully grasp, or that tantalizingly recedes the closer language nears it. Along with that diffidence about the powers of language, Adorno's music poetics further stipulates that the use of language is not always benevolent (an attitude that helps to account for the high degree of abstraction in his music criticism). When those two tenets are joined to the belief that art in some irreducible and urgent way still matters today, it is clear why Adorno would have little confidence in thinking of music criticism as a kind of positivist enterprise tasked with classifying music's various objects and mechanisms.

He describes the path forward for music criticism with language taken from idealism rather than empiricism. The job of art criticism is to discover or seek or articulate "das Mehr." By that term, Adorno means "an abundance that unfolds itself only by means of analysis." Adorno does not seem to think that analysis can fully penetrate the work, however, for "das Mehr" refers to "the truly 'poetic' in poetry, and the truly poetic in poetry is that which defies translation."[48] Although Adorno's affirmation could use clarification (can poetry contain things that are not "truly poetic"?), it is in important respects unexceptional. An interpretation cannot be the same thing as the work itself, and at least one of the things Adorno is saying is that the meaning of a work of art cannot be solely propositional in form.[49] In that case, the analyst's task is to pursue what autonomy looks like in specific works and the critic's to show what that autonomy says about art and society. If Adorno is only saying that, then he is moving in the vicinity of Kant's view of the aesthetic idea as rational but nondiscursive.[50]

But Adorno is looking to say more things, or at least other things, as are some of his advocates in music criticism. For Kant, a concept was not an abstraction or archetype; it was a norm or rule.[51] An Adornian antitranscendent art criticism, in contrast, and paradoxically, speaks of "das Mehr" as if it were a substance—hard, superobjective, prerational, causal. For comparison's sake, one can note the grammatical difference between Adorno's abstraction and one of the grandest abstractions of all, God, at least according to Anselm's definition as "that than which nothing greater can be thought." "Das Mehr" is a descriptive made into a substantive, and is something that also "unfolds *itself*." Anselm, for his part, speaks more circumspectly: through comparison ("that *than* which") and negation ("*nothing* greater can be thought").

In some musicological studies taking Adorno's lead, his reification carries over from rhetoric into substance. In particular, in an opera poetics that they develop out of Adorno, Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker render Adorno's "das Mehr" as "the above-and-beyond," hypostatizing hyphens and all.[52] To be sure, there is a space that a highly abstract substantive like "the above-and-beyond" can occupy without wandering into a metaphysical void. But that space is held by reasons and intentions, which is not where Abbate and Parker (or Adorno) mean to go. This is a main reason that, for all this criticism's separation of the good and beautiful from the true, it can be useful to think of it as an extension of Neoplatonism. Adorno's and Abbate and Parker's collective attack on the older system leaves unperturbed its conceptual architecture. Below, we will see what this high formalism looks like when applied to the interpretation of *Figaro*. For now, we can see this new objectification at its theoretical, conceptual level.

So, the point in bringing up Neoplatonism is not to induce nostalgia for a past that got it right, thereby to incite throngs with pitchforks and torches against a present that has it wrong. A system that believes in things like a sixth sense (intellect) or that mixing black bile with phlegm induces "sluggishness and torpor," as Ficino does, obviously has its limitations.[53] Instead, juxtaposing a demythologizing hermeneutics with the one it was meant to supersede helps to show modernist perspectives as choices rather than imperatives.

The web of inevitability, though, is strong. It is spun mainly of two kinds of thread. The chapter on critique noted the tendency of postmodern revisionism to oscillate between empirical observation and utopian edict. Just above, I introduced another trope in the corpus, which is that of a boundary that one crosses over, such that the world looks qualitatively different on this side of the divide. That is one consequence of, for example, Karol Berger's genealogy of the idea of art as a contemplative act. By his reckoning, that invention and the social/political crossroads it brought us to are a little more than two hundred years old: "The debate over the significance of the aesthetic state as preparation or substitute for a just political one, or more generally, as a utopian

unfolding of human possibilities or escape from our most central concerns—this *modern* debate that *began* in the new dawn of the Revolution shows no sign of coming to a conclusion."[54] Whatever new debate modernity has generated, it cannot be *that* one. There certainly was a time in the world where the question was not even conceivable, but wherever that point was, it was nowhere near the French Revolution:

> We shall require [the guardians] to turn upwards the vision of their souls and fix their gaze on that which sheds light on all, and when they have thus beheld the good itself they shall use it as a pattern for the right ordering of the state and the citizens and themselves throughout the remainder of their lives, each in his turn, devoting the greater part of their time to the study of philosophy, but when the turn comes for each, *toiling* in the service of the state and holding office for the city's sake, regarding the task *not as a fine thing but as a necessity*; and so, when each generation has educated others like themselves to take their place as guardians of the state, they shall depart to the Islands of the Blest and there dwell.[55]

Again, this is a common theme in the literature. Jacques Derrida, for example, takes it up in relating a confidence in the singular misery of being modern to a quantitative increase in the presence of evil in modernity: "Never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. . . . *In absolute figures*, never have so many . . . been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth."[56] I highlighted "in absolute figures" to concede one point in Derrida's argument. Assuming that human nature is a constant and that a number can be assigned to measure its cruelty (and, further, that the value will always be greater than zero), then, yes, where there are more people, there will inevitably be more cruelty. The arbitrariness of Derrida's reasoning stands in greater relief when one contemplates a different possibility: what may be distinctively troubling about today is that the promise of a better world has never been closer to realization than now.[57] Never have more people—although still woefully not enough—had more opportunity for self-realization than what modern, liberal democracies have brought. That position has all kinds of vulnerabilities, too, of course, but that is part of the point: so consequential a matter as what we have become deserves a far more thoughtful articulation than the coarse calculus Derrida devised here.

The point is not to efface all difference between past and present, to propose that the only available or valid questions are timeless ones. Indeed, more precise questions are needed in order to clarify our place vis-à-vis the past. For example, Lionel Trilling observed that, from a certain point forward in Western literature, questions of sincerity became meaningful, when before they were not. (It makes no sense to ask, for instance, whether Achilles is sincere.)[58] Or,

to operate more from Berger's perspective, there is Robert Pippin on a main challenge that modernity brings to art and that modern art in turn brings to earlier representational art, which "cannot adequately express the full subjectivity of experience, the wholly self-legislating, self-authorizing status of the norms that constitute such a subjectivity, or, thus, cannot adequately express who we (now) are."[59] If the world that produced Mozart's music has come to an end, where beauty and nature no longer hold their authority, then how Mozart's music might speak in this present world is not at all a question whose answer is self-evident, or that can simply be proclaimed.

Just as I do not want to use an older version of Neoplatonism to deny history, I also do not want to cloak in neutrality an affinity for at least one of its crucial regards: its respect for the mind. Although the mind also appears in the modernist hierarchy, it occupies a different position. The older system sets the mind at the crown of the created order and all of the culture flowing from it as irreducible to cause. The latter does not. The mind fully gives up its mystery to a less refined state, be that neuron or code.

This demythologizing position has great consequence for art criticism, including one centered on Mozart. It rejects or radically revises certain longstanding ways of taking in art that require a mental, imaginative engagement with it, that ask us to fall under its spell as a condition of understanding it. Undeniable contributions have accompanied these restrictions—in particular, a finer awareness of musical convention and its operation. But they have come at a high price, at least for criticism of Mozart and other canonical composers, like Beethoven. As a matter of cognition, a poetics that looks too closely at the codes and mechanisms of art misses the shape of art, despite its promise to show us more than had been seen before. As a matter of experience, an abandonment of "the Beautiful, the Profound, and the Moving" leaves us, as Barzun puts it, only with "the Interesting." "One cannot have it both ways," he continues. "Art as a sense-tickler and a joke is not the same art that geniuses and critics have asked us to cherish and support."[60]

Having proposed a likeness between Neoplatonism and a modernist, antitranscendent Weltanschauung and then, further, suggesting a certain advantage of the former to the latter, I would nonetheless hesitate to go all in for the older version. I am pretty confident that the modernist descendents of Neoplatonism taken up here propose a new high formalism at the expense of art as experience. I am less sure about the older one, but, to the extent that it does, too—that it speaks of form, perfection, and so on as residing outside of human intention and experience—then it also has something errant in how it frames the question of art, its meanings, and where to look for them. "Given that we experience art, what must be the case for us to have that experience?" That is a fertile question, but such approaches do not normally ask it.

To propose a productive way of relating art as form to art as experience, at least as a point of access to Mozart's music and its world: art indeed has a purchase on the true, good, and beautiful, but from *us*. There is a norm, and it is immaterial, but not as something that sits imperturbably "out there." It occupies the space of reasons, whose authority—always tentative and revisable, but also all that we have—derives from our sociable natures. "Das Mehr" in this sense designates a norm that one subscribes to in order for there to be art at all and the search for which necessarily leads one into the vastness of culture.

This vision presupposes the presence of selves who create art and then other selves who recognize it as such. That is as much as to say that art is something *intended*. That claim may appear so obviously true that no defense of it is needed. But it has met a lot of resistance (for how long turns out to be an interesting question, as we will see), and setting the terms of that debate and what it can mean for how we think of Mozart is the business of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

# On Intention

A metaphor like "the above-and-beyond" draws the gaze of an art appreciation upward. For all of that putatively Romantic inclination, some music criticism following Adorno peers downward, toward art as object. This cosmology grants art no relation to Being, not even as deformation. No animating spirit besouls art's mechanisms, to mime a vocabulary that appears antiquated and inefficient today. But the idea borne by so archaic a language still retains enough presence to attract refutations. An older poetics' deference to the mind's generative powers makes one of its most conspicuous imprints on contemporary thought in the idea of art as an intentional act.

In literary-critical circles, the conception of art as an object that, if competently executed, should be impenetrable to intention is best known as an inheritance of New Criticism. That position is most famously spelled out in William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy," from 1946. It is an axiom of art criticism, they say, that an author's intention is usually unavailable and always unnecessary. Their reasoning is that "if the poem succeeded" in realizing the poet's intention, "then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do," in which case there is no need to go outside of the work in search of an intention.[1] In music-critical circles, a campaign against intention has been going on for quite a while longer. Starting in 1854, Eduard Hanslick handed down an opinion that could have been cited by Wimsatt and Beardsley as legal precedent: "In music there is no 'intention' that can compensate for a lack of 'invention.' Whatever does not appear is simply not there in the music, and what does appear there has ceased to be mere intention."[2]

The long-standing effort at suppression has had uneven results. Its triumph seems complete in some academic circles, yet pockets of resistance continue to appear, especially, but not only, among the public. For that reason, more recent critics like Abbate and Parker have continued the argument that responsible criticism cannot move forward until the last strongholds of art as something meant have been cleared away. They do not look, however, to Hanslick or the New Critics for an anti-intentionalist aesthetic. Instead, they invoke Adorno: "One will

encounter this antipathy [toward musical analysis] again and again, above all in the rationalisation represented by that absurd though utterly inextinguishable question: 'Yes, everything you say is all very well and good, but did *the composer himself* know all this—was the composer *conscious* of all these things?'"[3]

There is a hesitation in Adorno's argument, and it may be consequential. In the immediate context of this passage, the contradiction in the phrase "absurd though utterly inextinguishable" is probably superficial. Adorno is merely calling out The Many for their incorrigible habit of asking naive questions of art. Within his criticism more widely, however, the contradiction becomes more substantial. Adorno is nagged by the thought that intention is indispensable to an appreciation of music. The essay "Music and Language" goes so far as to assert that "music bereft of all intentionality, the merely phenomenal linking of sounds, would be an acoustic parallel to the kaleidoscope."[4] Music is not just sound, but our organization of sound according to our interests in and interaction with the world. Although Adorno hastens to reject an "absolute" form of intention (whatever that means), even with that qualification, he is operating by a different set of laws than what Abbate and Parker use.

It is difficult to know how to weigh these competing claims. Does the passage that Abbate and Parker cite belong to the core of Adorno's thought, with the others occupying the margins, or is it the other way around? Perhaps Adorno did not work out the tension, so that his interpreters have to face the question, *which* Adorno?

One thing is certain: Abbate and Parker found their own opera poetics on the Adorno who takes a very hard position against intention. It is not the Adorno of the essay on music and language, the one who says, "music aspires to be a language without intention. But the demarcation line between itself and the language of intentions is not absolute; we are not confronted by two wholly separate realms. There is a dialectic at work."[5] Instead, it is the Adorno who has no dialectical second thoughts, as we can see in the continuation of his argument in the essay on musical analysis (a passage that, probably for reasons of economy, Abbate and Parker do not quote):

> I should like to say straight away that this question is completely irrelevant: it is very often precisely the deepest interrelationships that analyses are able to uncover within the compositional process which have been unconsciously produced; and one has to differentiate here—differentiate strictly—between the object itself (that is, between what is actually going on within the object itself) and the way in which it may have arisen in the consciousness or unconsciousness of the artist.[6]

Abbate and Parker are thus correct in suggesting that Adorno (at least this Adorno) thinks only immature critical minds are interested in intention. All the rest ought to have outgrown it.

There is one difference between the two parties, although it appears at first glance a slender one. What kind of person exemplifies the critically primitive thinker? For Adorno, that person is the operetta director, or at least one unfortunate soul in Hamburg who, following a talk Adorno gave on musical analysis, asked, unwisely, "'whether Mozart had been conscious of all these things.'" That question provokes an indictment against the lot of operetta directors: "This concern with the unconscious seems to go only too naturally with the profession of operetta director or operetta composer" (171). For Abbate and Parker, in contrast, the impediment comes from the music theorist as offspring of New Critic: "All too often," they explain, "practitioners of musical analysis labor doggedly to discover the hallmarks of autonomous structure, or coherence, or organic unity in a work. . . . Perhaps betraying an atavistic urge toward the calmer waters of earlier generations' critical battles, they end up producing a kind of New Criticism writ small."[7]

It is possible that by "writ small" Abbate and Parker mean that some musical analysis reflexively accepts a New Critical belief in the integrity of the work but has forgotten about New Criticism's interest in ambiguity. As we will see in the chapter on ambiguity, however, I do not think that is what they mean, because they will place authorial intention *at odds* with ambiguity. Otherwise, naming New Critics as intellectual adversaries destabilizes their argument. For in rejecting intention, Abbate and Parker are perpetuating, not shedding, New Critical orthodoxies (if one wants to adopt so monochromatic a view of New Criticism). More perplexing still is the recruitment of Adorno to their cause. He is the last man you would want on your side were your mission to attack the *integrity* of works of art. Like the New Critics, Adorno inveighed against authorial intention precisely to assert the privileges of the autonomous work. A typical example comes from his Mahler book:

> The over-hasty question as to what is intentional in Mahler's expression of overexertion and what is involuntary is as secondary as such concerns always are: in the art-work it is the form and its implications that count, not the subjective conditions of its genesis. To ask about the intention is to seek a criterion extraneous to the work and almost inaccessible to knowledge. Once the objective logic of the art-work has been set in motion, the individual producing it is reduced to a subordinate executive organ.[8]

In thinking of intention as one thing, the work another; of intention as a matter of genesis, the work as one of meaning; of the work as a self-moving object running on "objective logic"—in all these ways, Adorno's position is indistinguishable from Wimsatt and Beardsley's.[9]

The assertion of aristocratic privilege in Adorno's caricature of the operetta director and Abbate and Parker's simplification of the New Critic give pause about how the larger argument against intention is being conducted.

Intention may still need to go, but describing it as a now useless appendage of a ruder evolutionary critical state is too easy. Whether it is a follower of Wittgenstein like Stanley Cavell, or E. D. Hirsch, or Dewey,[10] there have been robust defenses of art as an intentional act over the past several generations, as well as much more recently.[11] Maybe Abbate and Parker feel that the work of refutation has been so convincingly done that there is no need to acknowledge even the existence of these arguments, just as today's astronomers do not feel pressed to contend with Ptolemy. On the other hand, when so penetrating a critic as Lionel Trilling observed, a half century *after* the beginnings of New Criticism, that "the day seems to have passed when the simple truth that criticism is not gossip requires to be enforced by precepts which forbid us to remark the resemblances between Stephen Dedalus and James Joyce," then it becomes unclear who stands on what rung along the literary-critical ladder of progress.[12]

This is no small impasse. To promise an easy way out of it would be to trivialize what is at stake regarding art and intention (basically, whether there is warrant to the claim for a creative self and, if so, whether that is a good thing). Still, there is one place where agreement more or less holds, and that is in the vicinity of definition building. *If* intention refers to a preexisting, discursive mental state that generates the artistic product, *then* criticism has no business considering intention. By that definition, intention is something that draws one away from the work. (It is what Kaye Mitchell calls the "blueprint" model of intention.)[13] Hanslick, New Critics, Cavell, Abbate and Parker share that position. The disagreement enters from that point onward. The anti-intentionalist accepts that definition as final, as in the case of Simon Frith, who cautions about getting "bogged down" in seeking the "'real' artist . . . lying *behind*" the music.[14]

Frith is speaking as a scholar of popular music, but his attitude toward intention resonates with critics across a spectrum of disciplines, including with Allanbrook and her conception of Mozart's musical language. In her view, Mozart's music is energized by a bustling, nonhierarchical world of musical gestures—the fugue lying down with the country tune, the minuet with the gigue. For that reason, there is no question of speaking of an authorial voice: "The impulse to posit a single guiding voice *behind* this expressive polyphony [of musical topics] . . . creates a superfluous layer of reference—an extraneous anthropomorphizing that enables analysts to overlook the often radically variegated mimetic content of the representations . . . from which they are made."[15] If I follow this correctly (and I am not sure why I am especially incredulous over this particular form of anti-intentionalism), an author is an *interference*. We are left with musical topics as kinds of nonhuman actors. (If so, then does this mean that an author is not an interference in the Baroque, which was a more univocal style?)

Being presented with such views, the intentionalist demurs, calling them "a bad picture of intention" (and, more trenchantly, one that comes from "reading unhelpful critics").[16] Better conceived, intention does not point to something prior to and outside the work. Neither does it necessitate a transcendental, world-rejecting vision of things. The credible intentionalist locates "das Mehr" in the space of reasons and ordinary language.[17]

For example, if a person said of a painting, "she put a lot of thought into that," it would miss the point to ask in which quadrant of the canvas all that thought is to be found. Just because you cannot point to the thought does not, however, invalidate the judgment. Testing its coherence would, crucially, require looking more deeply into the artwork—perhaps into the subject the artist chose, or some aspect of composition, like color or vanishing point. Those and other items may be invoked to answer why something is as it is and especially why someone would care to look at an object in that way, and those are questions of intention.

Although I proposed one point of agreement even among those who accept and those who reject art as necessarily intentional, that is not quite right. Some more recent defenses think it valid to speak of intention as a work's efficient cause, as in Alfred R. Mele's characterization of intentions as "executive attitudes toward plans."[18] Given how frequently intentions in this sense miscarry in almost all facets of our lives, it might be necessary to revisit the idea that intentions are thoughts that make things happen. Frayn, for example, shows that answering so simple a statement as "why did the motorist brake so suddenly" leads one into a labyrinth, even as he insists that "the explanation of our behaviour involves the concepts of motive and intention, which may have a superficial resemblance to the forces involved in physical causality, but which become less and less like them the more you examine them."[19]

The credibility of intention as a cause has a further hurdle to clear when it comes to an art apprecation, which is that the viewer must participate in the process. If I, lacking socialization in art, thought that the object hanging on the wall was simply canvas, wood, and paint, then no sense of destroying something irreplaceable or meaningful to a particular person would check me from adding it into the fireplace on a chilly evening. Intention, whether as cause or explanation, recognizes the nonmaterial side to an art appreciation. Art is not just an object; it is, instead, an object with agency (as in Roger Scruton's definition of tone as sound with purpose.)[20] In that sense, intention operates in the way that Claudio Guillén sees genre operating:

> A ship crosses the straits in the night and is determining its course with the help of two powerful light beams which accompany it from the heights with their rays. The light beams do not interfere with the navigator's freedom to maneuver; on the contrary, they presuppose and even favor it. The beams reach the boat's position but do not coincide with it. To whom would it occur

> to maintain that the direction followed by the boat "is" one of the beams? Or that the exact point of destination "is" one of the lights that guide it?[21]

An intention is not a thing out there that determines what one does. It is an explanation for what one has done. If that is so, then the search for intention in art does not belong to the field of science in its classical, deterministic sense, but to that of hermeneutics.

There are additional reasons for locating intention on the other side of cause, as explanation or, better, as wrapped up in the action itself—intention as a doing. One is that we do not always know what we have done until we have done it. For example, where Mahler started out in composing his Third Symphony was different from where he ended up. Intention as cause answers the question, What did Mahler write? with, A symphony—intention as reason answers that question in the direction of, *This* symphony.

A further advantage in conceiving intention as an action is that doing so challenges the confidence that intentions must behave despotically. That is what Foucault, for example, was suggesting in calling the author "a certain functional principle by which . . . one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction."[22] Foucault admits that his hoped-for future without authors would still need "a system of constraint" (in which case, it would be important to articulate how that system would not obstruct the various freedoms that he says our present-day interest in authorship undermines). Still, he largely accepts the idea that the yield of less constraint is more meaning. Dante thought that the *Odyssey* was written by a person named Homer. That constraint of authorship did not hinder him in the writing of the *Divine Comedy* (it was more an opportunity, a spur to his invention) or even from castigating Homer and his moral world by placing Odysseus and Diomedes in the eighth circle of Hell, among the false counselors. Or, to stay at the analytical level: even the proposition that "the author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning"—even that proposition sets a boundary; namely, that the realm of "authorship" is ruled over by anxiety and repression, and not their opposite. To liberate Foucault's intentional act from his own authorial constraint would not be to expand his meaning but to negate it. That is another way in which critiques in the sociological sense can fail in the analytical one. As is the case here, sometimes the things they say are self-igniting.

(In making a case for intention I am also making one for ethical criticism. This topic deserves a fuller airing than what can be given here, but, provisionally, one would begin by revisiting how the question is usually formulated. Here is one common version, as Mitchell presents it: "How do we mediate between these two positions: the ethical, which may be seen as undemocratic or elitist or

exclusionary, and the permissive or pluralist position[,] which may encourage a certain critical anarchy or amorality?"[23] First, as Wayne Booth has argued, ethical criticism is not optional. Even statements that seem secure in their neutrality, such as "she writes poetry," confer value. To call it poetry, even bad poetry, is to judge that it is not, say, doggerel.[24] Second, although it is true that "anarchy" can be a consequence of a "permissive" approach, the same does not hold for "elitism" as a product of an "ethical" criticism. The ethical mode is discerning, is discriminating precisely because it prizes the individual, the particular, such prizing being an object of liberalism. The equation of freedom with the proliferation of meanings is not coherent. But even if it were, the values underlying it are not democratic or liberal, but egalitarian and consumerist.)

Most of these objections to the critique of intention are destructive in nature. They urge greater skepticism about the claims of skepticism. That seems to be one of Cavell's leading aims, as when he implores New Critics to show "some caution with their several certainties,"[25] or when he notes how discussions about intention "are unreal in their confidence about what establishing an intention, or an attitude, would be like" (230). Turning back to Mahler's Third Symphony, for example, one might counter that Mahler simply replaced one intention (to write a seven-movement work) with another (to write a six-movement one and then use the seventh movement as part of another symphony). The argument here, however, is that it is not so easy to tell where the first intention ended and the second one began: the decision to go with six movements came in the act of trying to create a seven-movement symphony.

In other words, it is a deficient understanding of intention to think of it as the key that unlocks the mystery to a piece. Contrary to what Adorno and others argue, describing a work as an intentional act can be entirely compatible with thinking of it as nonparaphrasable. This is what Cavell suggests in an imagined conversation with Fellini about the potential influence of the Philomel legend on *La strada*: "Perhaps [Fellini] has said all he can, conveyed his intentions as fully as his powers allow, in the work itself—as if to say: 'You want to spare yourself the difficulty of understanding me, but there is no way else to understand me; otherwise, it would not have cost me such difficulty to make myself exactly understood'" (237). Cavell's scenario is speculative, of course. But the idea of intention he proposes—that it requires explanation not in the sense that rocks and hurricanes do, but that human utterances and deeds do (225), and that such an inquiry is evolving and dynamic, as is the case when we take stock of what we and others have done in our own lives—that idea gets at a certain kind of response we necessarily bring to engagements with art.

I would like to try to illustrate this point with an anecdote. In 2006, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival produced Molière's *Dom Juan*. It was a riveting staging, in part for the compelling liberties it took with Molière's text. (Colm Feore, as Dom Juan, was seduced to Hell by a beautiful dancer, all while the

Commendatore appeared overhead in a video projection, with the voice of Christopher Plummer reciting Byron, such violations of history not coming across as violations of Molière's work.) One such liberty, probably more trivial, involved Done Elvire's first appearance. She was *carried* onstage by Dom Carlos, her brother. I did not understand why, so I wrote Stratford and got a kind reply (I do not recall from whom). The answer was that it was up to me to decide.

Had I just been given the intention of the staging? No. That explanation was too unfocused; it could have been given for just about anything. "Of all the ways you could have allowed the audience to take its own meaning from your production," I might have replied, "why did you choose *this* way to introduce Done Elvire, and not some other?" Then a following question might be: Is the intention available at all, given the actual answer I had received? Yes. Now, however, it would be up to me to put into words the thought animating that gesture, to think through the import of that action.

Notice the complexity in this search for intention, and all that gets opened up when one is allowed to answer the question "What difference does it make who is speaking?" with, "Quite a lot."[26] Most basically, I had to be paying attention, and to the play *as* a play, so that it was Dom Carlos whom I saw carrying his sister onstage and not, say, a paramedic carrying an actress. For another thing, I needed to know Molière's play well enough to see this as the director's embellishment, as opposed to Molière's doing. In other words, I had to know the right person to ask, even when the person is unwilling or unavailable to answer. Further, I had to care enough about the play and what the director did with it to want to know more about that gesture. On the basis of many other choices the production made (including the licenses mentioned above), I respected it. Had I thought the production lazy or incompetent, I might still have noticed the manner of Elvire's appearance but would likely have assumed that no particular thought went into that decision, in which case I would not have felt the need to think it through, either.

These are some ways in which the search for intention is a mutual process; it initiates a dialogue (as opposed to conducts an interrogation) that requires the viewer's participation in discerning the boundaries that the author has set. But this exchange also shows another side of how to look for an intention. It can also happen that the receiver reveals an intention to the agent. I could have written back to Stratford and proposed the following: "Perhaps you wanted to show Elvire's vulnerability or some physical weakness, or to undermine her dignity, or to show a nobility in her suffering, or closeness to her brother." Merely posing those more precise questions on my part might have prompted a fuller response from Stratford. Perhaps they, not knowing *my* intentions, did not trust me with a richer, more revealing answer. Where I had earned some trust, I might have received a less guarded reply, whether as affirmation, modification, or rejection. All this shows how there is a necessary revisability in the working

out of an intention, including for its author. It is a dynamic process. Beethoven put words to the last movement of his Ninth Symphony. That he started drafting an instrumental version shows that he had second thoughts, that this was an action he had not fully come to grips with (as we have not, either).

The Stratford episode is meant to show how securing intentions belongs to everyday interactions. Intention does not require thinking of the author as a god, who imposes monotheistic meanings on polytheistic texts.[27] Part of that sphere of the ordinary includes responses to and evaluations of art. Questions of intention are so integral a part of these conversations that they can seem invisible. For that reason, cases at the margins can be especially useful in casting light on those shadowy assumptions. With Mozart criticism, one such category involves works of uncertain authorship, among them a concerto for wind ensemble that might have originated from 1778. For much of its reception history, the piece had been attributed to Mozart and therefore assigned a name, the Sinfonia Concertante for Winds, and a Koechel number, 297b. But not now. It has been cast from the Empyrean of authentic works into the abyss, where it wanders among the shades of Unknown Works.

John Spitzer, in a shrewd essay from 1987, surveyed nearly 170 reviews of the piece spanning almost a century. He noticed a pattern. Those critics believing that Mozart composed it generally praised the work; those who did not, panned it. And that is largely the causality that Spitzer proposes: belief in who composed the piece determined how one experienced it "more often than the other way around."[28] Functionally and cognitively, the separation of belief from experience is problematic, and to some extent, Spitzer is merely describing the practices of critics, most of whom are not very helpful precisely because they do not combine "belief and evaluation . . . in one ongoing process" (332). Only Donald Francis Tovey, of all those whom Spitzer quotes at some length, begins to deal with the possibility that the piece was by Mozart *and* also not very good (330–31).

Still, one cannot shake the idea that Spitzer is asking critics to be better by asking them to get out of their own way. That ideal of objectivity permeates his essay, including in its structure. Its introduction proposes a one-way causality, where the question of authorship "*may* influence" both the experience of the work and the assessment of its quality (320; emphasis added). That hypothesis is confirmed in the conclusion. Where critics are unsure of the piece's authorship, "doubt and insecurity" bedevil their evaluations of it (347).

And that is as it should be. Uncertainty about the person who wrote the text necessarily creates uncertainty about what the text itself is, and therefore what the work means. Was the Sinfonia Concertante composed by a twenty-two-year-old who would become (but was not yet) one of the greatest composers that Western civilization has known? Was it hastily or lazily (or assiduously) put together by a seasoned professional? Was it the result of a long labor from

an amateur? Did various composers collaborate on it? The work will look—will *be*—different, depending on the answer. Obviously, there are some things we know about the text in its present state, independent of its author, and it is not the case that discovering the author will answer all of our questions. (If it *is* by Mozart, and from his early twenties, what then?) But, at the least, knowing who the author is helps to frame more precise questions. That is because a work of art is an achievement, something that someone has made.

Even Hanslick holds that view. True, he will inveigh against intention in ways similar to Abbate and Parker, as in the passage cited above. In his continuation of the argument against the word, however, Hanslick approaches the meaning that someone like Cavell proposes: "Art comes from the ability to do something; he who cannot do anything is left with—'intentions.'"[29] That very old idea of art as a making, as poiesis, is, in fact, what a viable understanding of intention presupposes. Elsewhere in the treatise Hanslick also defends art as an action in which thinking takes place not outside of but within the mode of representation (all thinking involving the use of signs): "Our view regarding the seat of the mind and feeling in a composition stands in the same relation to the common understanding as the concept *immanence* does to *transcendence*. Each art has the goal of bringing to outer appearance an idea that had become alive in the artist's imagination." It might sound as if Hanslick is getting himself into trouble because of his implied separation of thinking from signs. Yet he immediately inflects "idea" against a context of music making: "In music, this idea is a *musical* one, not a conceptual one that is somehow subsequently translated into sounds."[30]

It is against this background of music, mind, and intention that one can fruitfully understand Hanslick's music aesthetics as a branch of scientific inquiry.[31] Of course, that proposal brings its own set of perils. Attaching the term "science" to the word "aesthetics" arguably hobbles a theory of art right out of the gate. As Mary Mothersill notes, a better point of departure is ordinary language, where art counts as whatever competent authorities say art counts as (among other reasons because aesthetic judgments are not valid at second hand: you have to have experienced the work in order to say something meaningful about it).[32] As for Hanslick, it is true that his understanding of science approaches our popular usage (science as opposed to the humanities). Still, he makes some crucial adjustments. He does not think of the science of aesthetics in mechanistic terms, with a mandate to derive formulas for measuring art or forecasting its future behavior. Nor is he arguing that art can or ought to be reducible to physical phenomena. What remains as scientific about aesthetics is a method of inquiry grounded in a more precise understanding of its object, which is music not as sound but as *organized* sound.

To avow that the subject, the mind, operates within the world, that it makes experience possible, seem too obvious to mention, except that doing so brings

out the quality of Hanslick's distinction between immanence and transcendence. It is the Romantic enthusiast over emotion who strays into the nebulous territory of transcendence, because he tries to found musical expression on something incapable of supporting it—an emotion, a feeling. (This, too, is a point he shares with an Adornian aesthetics.) The true stuff of musical ideas is tone. To put his argument diagrammatically—

mind:feeling::immanence:transcendence.

Hanslick's appeal to the human mind as the source of the musical work is what keeps music in the here and now.

This is all to say that immanence and authorship can go hand in hand. Intention is precisely the space where a formulation like Adorno's "above-and-beyond" can be meaningful. If that is so, then dissents writing off the quest for intention as a metaphysical wild goose chase (metaphysics not in the sense of the science of first principles but as a quest for the impossible object) lose cogency or, when nonetheless pursued, arrive at a paralyzing skepticism—something like what Cavell defined as the interpretation of "a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack."[33] Instead, seeing art as an intentional act opens up opportunities for understanding ourselves and others. How art, in expanding that sense of ourselves, thereby expands the possibilities of Being itself, is the business of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

# On Being

Intention as the mind's stay against entropy, or—to cast Adorno's resistance to intention in quasi-Platonist language—as a failed attempt to mend the breach between art and Being. That is, Adorno's separation of art from intention is central to his ontology of art. For the most part, this claim extends a familiar interpretation of Adorno's aesthetic theory. His poetics directs the eye to the rupture, the unresolved dissonance, because in the world as presently constituted, beauty and harmony can give no remedy to the inescapable and baleful tensions in social life. Music can offer modernity only the slimmest of consolations, which is as a sensuously embodied hope—but only a hope, a glimmer—against the large improbability of being both modern and happy, of being able to find a way over that "chasm separating praxis from happiness."[1] Here is how Julian Horton describes the Adornian knot as it constrains music: "If music pursues a notion of community, then it embraces a lie of collectivity; if music honours the material's immanent tendency, then it forever condemns the composer to isolation."[2] Horton, I think, gets this just right in syntax as well as in substance. Music is the agent, not humans, and yet even music has to lower a knee before, has to "honor," the "immanent tendency" of the material. It is easy to see how such a theory grants the person of the composer only a marginal presence. Indeed, with the finest art—especially late Beethoven—the artist as person nearly vanishes. One point this chapter develops is that Adorno's diagnosis relies on a wavering understanding of what material is and how composers use it, such that his conclusion about the disappearance of the living person from even "ravaged" works of art needs revisiting.

That said, there is another line of Adorno interpretation that coaxes out of some of the same writings a strikingly different conclusion. Although it does not go so far as to ascribe an intentionalist theory of art to Adorno, a learned and searching inquiry from Michael Spitzer describes, in the name of Adorno, a late Beethoven whose achievement epitomizes an idea central to theories of art as an intentional act, which is that composers have some ownership over the works they make. But that summation well understates the significance of

what Spitzer thinks Beethoven has discovered, which is nothing less than the "Grail of modern philosophy": a way of mediating between self and convention (Spitzer calls it the union of "the subjective and intersubjective paradigms").[3] Late Beethoven creates an art that ratifies the agency of the individual in his expressive freedom. Even more, such a freedom is necessarily, and happily, social: "Beethoven's late style teaches us to uphold a social paradigm which makes the reception of this music even possible, indeed, to affirm the paradigm as an act of individual self-fashioning and resistance to nature" (278).

Spitzer's interpretation is hardly idiosyncratic. It draws on the work of critics following (from) Adorno, including Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel, and, especially, Albrecht Wellmer. The last thing that Adorno wanted to encourage was a serene, Epicurean acceptance of a dissolved self, at least without a sober recognition of the great cost it would entail.[4] Rather, in Adorno's philosophy and criticism, Wellmer detects the possibility of a utopia that exists on *this* side of things, because the ideal Adorno employs "is rooted in the conditions of language," which is necessarily social.[5] By reading Adorno via Wittgenstein's counsel that we treat language according to its everyday use, Wellmer sees Adorno as mounting a challenge to the philosophical/critical method that strips away the veneer of language to reveal the dark, largely unconscious, and always invidious impulses lying beneath civilization. That approach, Wellmer contends, only bolsters the very metaphysics it sought to destroy (basically, because this critique-as-exposé treats a word as if it had *an* object rather than *some* uses). Wellmer's primary object is the "affirmative" variant of postmodern critique, especially as exemplified in a Nietzschean psychology. In a stirring exhortation, Wellmer reminds us of what such a world would and does look like, all to urge restraint from "those propagandists of a new era which shall have cast off the burden of the Platonic heritage, and in which rhetoric shall replace argument, the will to power shall replace the will to truth, the art of words shall replace theory, and the economy of desire shall replace morality. We have quite enough of all *that* to contend with, after all, in the world as it is now."[6] This second-generation critic describes or takes inspiration from an Adorno who allows for the possibility of self-realization within society.

The existence of that tradition compounds the challenge of evaluating Adorno. Which Adorno to follow, the one of Spitzer and Wellmer, or the arguably more familiar Adorno, the one for whom the artist is duty-bound to advance the cause of alienation? Some of the difficulty arises from deciding which texts best represent Adorno. Spitzer's "speculative reconstruction" of Adorno's Beethoven proposes the course of "circumventing" many of the musical texts, with their distracting polemics, for the philosophical ones, where Adorno was on surer ground and made more measured claims.[7] Indeed, an essay like "On the Problem of Music Analysis" may not represent Adorno's best thought: it originated as a public talk, probably semi-improvised, that comes

down via tape recording. Yet according to Andrew Bowie, the lectures are actually the better place to go than the *Aesthetic Theory*, which tends to "totalize his negative assessment of modernity" and cloak its verdicts in unnecessarily "cryptic" prose.[8]

However those textual problems may be resolved, it is true that Adorno at various points in both his denser and his more impromptu writings cracks open a door for intention to enter, thereby granting subjectivity a positive role in a theory of creativity. This is not entirely surprising in light of his broader application of critique, which was not focused on overturning but instead on extending the work of German Idealism, whose aspirations for freedom, he felt, were not foundationally wrong but historically unrealized.[9] But this second-generation promise of an intersubjective harmony must reckon with the many places—the essays on musical analysis no less than the one on late Beethoven—where intention, and therefore subjectivity, stands at the margins of Adorno's thought, where he thinks of it more like white noise in his data set or as a dark Romantic fantasy that must flee before the light of reason. That is the second thread running through this chapter. It suggests that the strain between Adorno's anti-intentionalism and idealism is such that his poetics diminishes the ways in which artists, in shaping their material, have concourse with Being and expand the possibilities of existence.

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Adorno sets out one of the plainest refutations of artists as creators in "Vers une musique informelle." His solution to the question of art and its possibilities for human freedom and self-realization turns almost entirely on the status of the materials of music. How do music's cadences, rhythms, forms, and the like relate to the individual who, at least on the surface of things, uses them? Adorno's system subordinates the latter to the former. Musical material, he says, is "nothing less than the objectified and critically reflected state of the technical productive forces of an age in which any given composer is inevitably confronted."[10] That position leaves Adorno open to the charge that he reifies art-historical periods, especially when this argument is supplemented with another from his cache of aphorisms, "We don't understand music; music understands us."[11] To speak of *the* productive forces of *an* age requires imagining the past as a rigid, closed structure instead of as an open one, and comes very close to a fatalistic subordination of the individual to Providence, now incarnated as musical material.

For Geuss, these priorities mean that "Adorno's basic approach . . . makes the whole process [of composition] impersonal in that the achievement of individual composers is not finally significant in determining the course of history—those composers are, of course, in one sense terribly important, but they

are important because they are drawing out 'objective,' almost logical consequences of tensions that exist in the '*Material*.'"[12] Adorno himself vacillates on what musical material actually is. Although officially speaking of the materials of music as things that make demands, sometimes he speaks of them as things that have tendencies.[13]

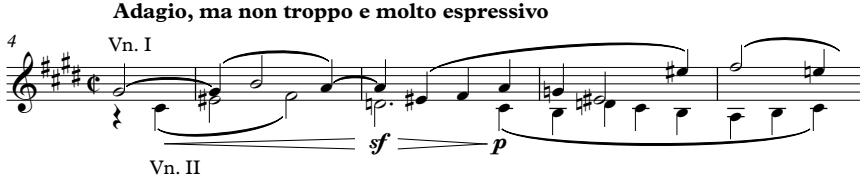
Where the manifold potential of material is instead acknowledged, the human has not only the possibility but also the necessity of acting. It is not exactly the case that the person determines the world, makes the objects of the world do things that they cannot, since the material has limits. It is the case, though, that the world lies ready to be acted upon. Yet Adorno's music poetics does not easily accommodate an interrogatory stance toward the world. Instead, the options are much starker: surrender or domination. So, when trying to work through the challenge posed by his monotelic conception of music's raw matter, Adorno is much less inclined to adopt any but the most limited intentionalism, much more to adopt a diametrically opposed argument, which is that the material has *no* meaning. This is the path his Beethoven book takes in proposing that the individual musical element is "insignificant *in itself*." In something like a gloss on Aristotle's idea of formal cause, Adorno avers that the particular acquires its identity qua the particular only through the form in which it appears: "Its meaning is rescued through its nothingness: the whole in which it is absorbed realizes the precise meaning which the particular wrongly claims."[14] That position is vitally important to Adorno, to keep him from a pre-Kantian dogmatism (where the objects of the world impress themselves upon us as passive receptors).[15] Geuss proposes that Adorno possibly has in mind something like this more supple relationship between composers and their materials. If the meaning of the material appears only in hindsight, then defining the material becomes a part of the act of composing itself, and not something that obtains prior to the composition.[16]

Yet if that is so, then two problems arise for Adorno's larger system. First, conceptually, he would need a theory of intention and subjectivity that is more robust than the concealment of subjectivity in its materials or, in this case, in history: "The historical moment is constitutive of artworks; authentic works are those that surrender themselves to the historical substance of their age without reservation and without the presumption of being superior to it. They are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch."[17] Phrases like "unconditional surrender" and "unconscious historiography" indicate with what force the composer is buffeted by the material, which listeth where it will.

Second, that position contradicts a key claim about the achievement of late Beethoven, which is that "the conventions find expression as the naked representation of themselves" (566). Just above, in the passage from *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, Adorno had said that the particular needs context in order to be coherent, in order to be something rather than nothing. Now, he

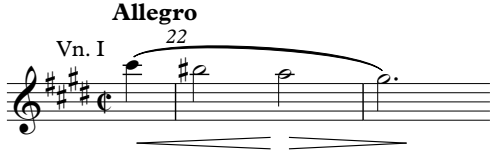
seems to be saying the opposite. Even if we look at this second claim independently, however, it would still need clarification. What counts as a convention? Do all conventions operate at the same level (say, movements that are nothing but fugues, as opposed to movements that have fugal episodes)? What bearing does the manner of presentation have? For example, the opening movement of opus 131 is a fugue, and therefore counts as a convention. Yet there is little conventional about its presentation, however one defines convention. It is unusual enough for a fugue to open a multimovement work. It is also unusual for the exposition of a fugue to answer its subject in the subdominant. For a fugue to express that subdominant function via the supertonic is, I believe, unprecedented. That must be one reason for Beethoven's *sforzando* on the downbeat of measure 6. He is using rhythm and accent to will that harmonic relation on us (see ex. 4.1).

Example 4.1. Beethoven, String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, op. 131 (1826), mvt. 1, mm. 4–8.




(As Charles Rosen notes, Beethoven's accents are often as much structural as expressive—as if there is a strong difference between the two.)[18] It is common wisdom in Beethoven analysis to see the rest of the piece as working out some implications of that unusual tonal opposition, whether in the second movement's reversions to C-sharp or, as many have noted, in a much more stable (because less harmonically ambiguous) figure in the finale (see ex. 4.2).

Example 4.2. Beethoven, String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, op. 131, mvt. 7, mm. 21–23 (first violin only).

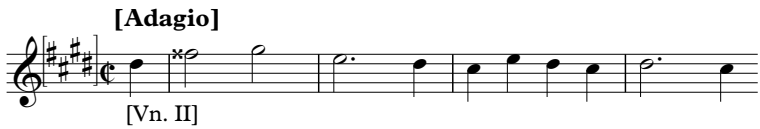



I used the term "logic," a concept also important to Adorno. Spitzer, developing Adorno's idea that, in artworks, "everything only *appears* as if it must be as it is and could not be otherwise,"[19] maintains that, "in practice, Bach

or Beethoven could easily have found another solution to their compositional problem, without prejudicing the illusion of logical 'inevitability.' Their structures do not *really* fall apart if one changes a note here and there."[20]

It depends on which note. (Further: "easily" misses the exertion that is so obviously a part of the ethos of Beethoven's compositions and their reception, and Spitzer's "appears" implies the existence of some harder, truer substrate that is not apparent to us.) To use the example of opus 131: An answer like that given in example 4.3, which is a possibility Beethoven sketched in an early version of the piece (a nearly real answer, but on the dominant, and hence without the Neapolitan inflection of the finished product), would have yielded, at the very least, a different judgment about the piece.[21]

Example 4.3. Beethoven, String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, op. 131, mvt. 1, sketch of fugal answer.




The *structure* may not have fallen apart, but the *meaning* would have changed. (And I hesitate to concede even the first part, as the structure would almost certainly have changed with the change of material—not that there is only *one* form that the material can take.) If nothing else, there was at least one person who felt that a change of notes was necessary (by whatever criterion of necessity), and that was Beethoven himself. Even discarding logical inevitability as a reason for the change, Beethoven still found *something* dissatisfying enough in this version that it could not stand, and one task of criticism is to consider why, and then why he stopped where he ultimately did. That search for an answer does not have to involve a standard of inevitability derived from logic. It could be a felt necessity or felt perfection, where perfection designates the completeness of something, or its suitability to a task.

Further, categories like necessity or perfection do not have to be absolute to be meaningful. This is ordinary, not scientific language. It has a pliancy that can accommodate different needs and uses. A case in point involves perfection in relation to the category of magnitude. A Homeric epic can tolerate many kinds of change, from the adjustment of words to that of entire chapters, whereas a much more compact form, like Yeats's "After Long Silence," could, with one misplaced or ill-conceived word, collapse as an admirable achievement.[22] That is, the failure does not have to be one of breaking a rule of math or logic, like claiming that one plus one equals three, for it to qualify as a failure. It could take the form of a betrayal—"I didn't know that this author could

be so lazy, or sloppy, and now I have to reevaluate work that originally I had respected"—or of a goad to further self-reflection: maybe *I* need to rethink my own criteria of judgment to see if I have been asking the wrong questions or seeing certain details in the wrong light. (This is where Colin Lyas's distinction between serious art and pulp art is illuminating.[23] To take Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* as an example, Brown has his characters routinely "shoot" glances at each other, sometimes on successive pages. We chalk up this annoyance to a lack of talent or to laziness and move right along. It is just pulp fiction. Were we to find such a flaw in a more serious and committed writer, then that defect would be much more conspicuous and problematic.)

So it goes with music. Referring to its logic in the way of universally applicable rules operating outside of human interest is the wrong standard to invoke (and is not what logic is, anyway), including as something that art's truth content might defeat. The norm subscribed to does not exist prior to and outside of the act. The "logic" is referable to reasons and intentions, and because that rule is generated in the deed and not available prior to it (that is, it is *not* "unleashed"), composing can be a genuinely creative act by a person, which amplifies our understanding of what is possible. In that regard, the act makes the reality.

All this is to say that, contra Adorno, there is a very strong link between intention and ontology. One potential objection is that my reading of Adorno's anti-intentionalism has been assembled from scattered phrases. For a more direct and systematic presentation of his argument against intention, there is this passage, also from "Vers une musique informelle." It asserts that the idea of artists as persons who create is a chimera:

> In the tradition of Western nominalism art had always imagined that it could locate its enduring core and substance in the subject. This subject now stands exposed as ephemeral. While it behaves as if it were the creator of the world, the ground of reality, it turns out to be what the English call a "fact," the mere trappings of someone who gives himself airs, sets himself up as something special, while scarcely retaining any reality at all. . . . Impossible though it be to conceive of music, or indeed any art, as bereft of the element of subjectivity, it must nevertheless bid farewell to that subjectivity which is mirrored in expression and hence is always affirmative, a form of subjectivity which Expressionism inherited directly from neo-Romanticism.[24]

This argument asks us to take a lot on faith. Is nominalism only a feature of the West? What would non-Western forms of naming look like? That is, Adorno's assertion is predicated on the availability of a stable, coherent definition of the West, whereas, to follow Manfred Frank, in reality a lot gets collapsed into that "remarkably daring collective singular '*the* West' . . .: the infinite number of stories and the countless writings, doctrines, actions, and treatises that have arisen

or glimpsed the light of day in Europe over the last 2,500 years." Along with being reductive, such a move is, as Frank continues, also ahistorical, inasmuch as "that period of human evolution that all of us without hesitation designate as Western has not always been viewed as the unity for which *we* take it."[25]

As to the substantive in "Western nominalism": The belief that the act of naming is tyrannical underpins Adorno's critique of what he calls identity thinking (see chapter 2). But if naming is so simple, constraining, and invidious a thing, then Adorno, by this very act, is perpetuating the habit that he is condemning and, further, elevating himself into an impossibly lofty position: how is *he* able to stand above, to *see* those who name, but not to *be* one of those who name? (This is one instance of critique losing sight of itself, where its original promise of offering reflection from within a given culture morphs into critique as an objectifying and alienating enterprise.) To inch along to the main clause of the same sentence, how can "art" stand as the subject of "had always imagined"? That syntax can work as a paraphrase of something like "artists and their public had always imagined an author who is the source of the work," but Adorno does not seem to be speaking metaphorically. Art, at least in these formulations, has an independence about it. It is impersonal and exogenous.

However central or marginal to Adorno's thought, the idea of music as a kind of process rather than activity has exerted considerable pull, even (or especially) in the criticism of music that Adorno was famously hostile to. It is in an Adornian spirit that Frith, for example, proposed the following as a main question for a sociology of popular music: not, "What does popular music *reveal* about 'the people' but how does it *construct* them."[26] Frith thinks that such a reorientation is necessary, because otherwise we would end up, as it will be recalled, getting "bogged down" in seeking that phantom artist sitting "behind" the music itself.

A position like this stands in an ambiguous relationship to Adorno. In accord with him is the idea of intention as efficient cause (which, as I suggested in the previous chapter, is the wrong place to be looking for intention). Yet Adorno would probably have resisted the specialized rhetoric and the ambition that it reflects, which is to give music sociology the status of a science. Indeed, in Frith's search for a "construct," another sociologist, Tia Denora, finds a way of overcoming the one main deficiency she finds in Adorno's system: its failure to explain "how the genie of Zeitgeist originally got into the bottle of music or, conversely, how music's organizing properties come to be decanted into society."[27] It is true that in places Denora calls upon sociology to resist the subordination of music to culture (5), yet the very design of her project does not address those concerns so much as it ignores them. The lure of science is too strong. Music sociology, she stresses, must involve questions of "process." The purpose is to "try to specify how the social comes to be inscribed in the musical, if one is to spell out an account

of how structural affinities or homologies between music and social formations might arise and change over time" (3).

To the extent that this is science at all, the model it most resembles is that of Newtonian physics and not, for example, the biological sciences. A music sociology adopting the latter approach might start by accepting the givenness of music *as* culture and then proceed to describe this activity in richer detail and what it says about us.[28] But the science in Frith's rhetoric and Denora's method amounts to a modernist recuperation of Boethius, only without the wonder, where music acts as a force that fills the vessel of the passive human. The music defines, "constructs," "the people," and not the other way around. Maybe the matter is only one of rhetoric. Frith may simply be giving a clinical way of describing music in its everyday uses, where people turn to it when they grieve, or rejoice, or seek solitude or companionship; or to explore the world and their place in it more fully, or to anesthetize themselves from the world; or to make money; or when they do not know what else to say or do; or just because they like music. Or, as Fussell says, "Song is where one places the sheer irresponsible feeling of happiness, occasioned by love and drink, when it occurs."[29] In sum, it is more useful and just truer to speak of music as an integral rather than "constructed" part of social life.

Again, it is an open question of how true these post-Adornian forms of music sociology stay to Adorno himself. The point here is not to establish a measure of Adornian orthodoxy but, rather, to observe the tendency even of explicitly antimodernist approaches to drift back into modernism in their exclusion of subjectivity and life in favor of system. Indeed, such drifting seems all but inevitable in an art criticism in which the subject has been "exposed as ephemeral."

That inevitability extends to specific acts of art criticism, too. For example, how would an earlier art that took the subject as substantive—say, Dürer's self-portrait—appear from this modern vantage point? (see fig. 4.1). Concede all the cynical things to be said about artists, especially one who uses his talent for self-promotion: the vanity in service of lucre; the blasphemy in the quasi-religious pose that is struck; a blindness to the injustice of artistic beauty, which creates objects that can be possessed (maybe) and whose possessors therefore have advantages over those who do not, a condition that forges an attachment to a particular that is in conflict with the common good.[30] Or, admit into evidence a certain psychologizing, diagnostic attitude that might uncover an unease behind Dürer's calm, assured exterior. Grant all these things, and that still adds up to telling us something affirmative about Dürer (and not, say, Kandinsky), at least about *his* ambitions or failings or delusions. However dark the revelation, his self-portrait enlarges our understanding of a subject named Albrecht Dürer, a person who went to the trouble to make art of a certain kind. The "real" person is not sitting "behind" the art but is clarified in the art and grows in the making of it.


Figure 4.1. Albrecht Dürer, Self-Portrait, 1500. © Print Collector / Heritage / The Image Works.

And this apology leaves by the wayside the potential for artistic technique, not just emotion and attitude, to express an individual's temperament and mind—how Dürer chose to present himself with a certain approach to perspective, to color, to texture, to the detail of his cloak, to the placement of his hand. As Herder put it, all of those features are revealing of the person, too, because "every poem" (or painting or composition), as the work of a "soul and life,"

> is a dangerous betrayer of its author, often where he least believed that he was betraying himself. One sees in the poem not only, for instance, as the masses proclaim, the man's poetic talents; one also sees which senses and inclinations governed in him, by what paths and how he received images, how he ordered and adjusted them and the chaos of his impressions, the favorite sides of his heart, and likewise often the fates of his life, his manly or childish understanding, the staffs of his thinking and of his memory.[31]

As will be recalled, there are places in Adorno's thought that are receptive to creativity as the individualized use of convention.[32] (This seems a pretty obvious point, however. If people as individuals are going to communicate, it would have to be through public language.) But if that is so, then it is too facile to equate subjectivity and expression solely with emotion or "personality," as Adorno does at least sometimes.[33]

Of course, this is to judge Adorno's negative subjectivity against art from an era that had yet to realize the ephemerality of the subject. A more just airing requires looking beyond Mozart to the first composer whose music is said to manifest this awareness, and that is late Beethoven. As in the more impromptu essay on musical analysis, Adorno's understanding of the late works hinges on a strict separation of intention from object. The more Beethoven's music is regarded as a vessel of his voice, the less it qualifies as art. This Romantic proclivity for folding artistic creation into autobiography produces, Adorno argues, a defective appraisal of late Beethoven's music:

> The usual view explains [the ascetic quality of Beethoven's late works] with the argument that they are products of an uninhibited subjectivity, or, better yet, "personality," which breaks through the envelope of form to better express itself, transforming harmony into the dissonance of its suffering, and disdaining sensual charms with the sovereign self-assurance of the spirit liberated. In this way, late works are relegated to the outer reaches of art, in the vicinity of document.[34]

His objections fall loosely into two categories. The first involves what he sees as a flaw in approaches toward art criticism generally (as opposed to the narrower field of Beethoven interpretation). Critics in the Romantic mode miscast art as "document," by which Adorno means autobiography, and by that he

means something like preexisting ideas or passions, formulable as verbal propositions, that are then made manifest in the work itself. Thus, "studies of the very late Beethoven seldom fail to make reference to biography and fate" (564). (Hanslick called this pathological listening.) This perspective, Adorno argues, produces an untenable separation of form from content and in so doing undermines the integrity and authority of art itself (the relegation of the late works to "document").[35] Further, the Romantic view encourages false hopes about transcendence, turning Beethoven into a quasi-Hegelian in "disdaining sensual charms with the sovereign self-assurance of the spirit liberated." Yet such a liberation is impossible for Beethoven, and therefore all the rest of us.

Second, and more to the practical business of music analysis, the Romantic looks upon convention as something to be overcome, to be broken through. At this point, a hesitancy enters Adorno's argument. On the one hand, to see personality as emerging out of the subversion of convention is to take a fraudulent view of anyone's art, full stop. The fixation on "psychological origins" rather than "the work itself" trespasses the boundary that "separates art from document" (564). On the other hand, "expression" does seem to be the bon mot for *middle* Beethoven. He calls a work like the "Appassionata" Sonata (op. 57) "more subjective, more autonomous, more spontaneous" than the late quartets. As for late Beethoven, conventions, lots of them, appear right before our eyes, and, on the basis of this overwhelming evidence, Adorno concludes that an appreciation of late Beethoven must proceed by nullifying "the first commandment of every 'subjectivist' methodology, . . . which is to brook no conventions" (565). That is what makes the late works not simply different from but superior to the middle ones, which perpetuate the enthralling lies of organicism and necessity.[36]

There is a real service to be rendered in scrutinizing sentimental attitudes toward art, such as the idea of convention as an obstacle to understanding, or of depth of feeling as art's true measure. But all of this—the Romantic's putative schwärmerei as well as Adorno's alienation—latches onto the same, hyperinflated sense of intention. A more modest understanding of intention does not turn the beholder of art away from the work and toward the document; rather, intention forges a link between art and the world. Take, for example, the Romantic idea of music as an art whose substance is emotion. To be sure, a statement like "Mozart was sad when he wrote the G-minor symphony" is suspect as a critical statement. Was he sad the whole time? Only in those sections where the piece is in the minor mode? Those problems do not, however, justify vacating questions of feeling tout court. Rather, to follow Nuttall, they need to be relocated to the area of hypothesis. Mozart may or may not have been sad when he wrote the G-minor symphony, but all of the symphony's "forms, moods, shapes of grief" would not, as Nuttall puts it, even be able to "'give the

impression' of sadness if they did not in some degree reflect what people say or suffer when they actually feel sad."[37] Of course, this counterargument may evade the radicalness of late Beethoven, whom Adorno really casts as a modernist avant la lettre. In showing musical convention *as* convention, Beethoven anticipates Schoenberg's project of doing the same at the more fundamental level of the tonal system.

But even granting that point, a formal difficulty persists in Adorno's rejection of intention (or in his confining it to negative expression). To see how, it is important to look at the deepest source of his confidence about what questions lead toward and what away from the work of art, and that is the authority he gives to the unconscious. Having come upon this wild, I want to limit brush-clearing to a few areas along the perimeter, by concentrating on how his division relates the creative process to the interpretive act. When Adorno insists that one has to "differentiate strictly" between the intention and the work, he is at the same time making an equally strong separation between the conscious and unconscious. Adorno's certitude is probably unwarranted. At least, an intentionalism like Wittgenstein's or Cavell's is skeptical about the clarity of these boundaries. In fact, Wittgenstein wonders about the very comprehensibility of the expressions "unconscious" and "conscious" thoughts (which is why I suggested Adorno's confidence is "probably" unwarranted):

> "Can we have unconscious thoughts, unconscious feelings, etc.?" The idea of there being unconscious thoughts has revolted many people. Others again have said that these were wrong in supposing that there could only be conscious thoughts, and that psychoanalysis had discovered unconscious ones. The objectors to unconscious thought did not see that they were not objecting to the newly discovered psychological reactions, but to the way in which they were described. The psychoanalysts on the other hand were misled by their own way of expression into thinking that they had done more than discover new psychological reactions; that they had, in a sense, discovered conscious thoughts which were unconscious. The first could have stated their objection by saying "We don't wish to use the phrase 'unconscious thoughts'; we wish to reserve the word 'thought' for what you call 'conscious thoughts.'" They state their case wrongly when they say: "There can only be conscious thoughts and no unconscious ones." For if they don't wish to talk of "unconscious thought" they should not use the phrase "conscious thought," either.[38]

Adorno insists that there are such things as unconscious thoughts and that they are knowable, at least enough for the music analyst and social critic to penetrate them (but not the composer). That confidence provides the conceptual support for his allegorizing poetics. Wittgenstein, in contrast, wonders whether an utterance like "I have unconscious thoughts" is even intelligible, not to mention true.[39]

If it is going to be meaningful to talk of the unconscious in art at all, then one needs to posit a concourse between it and the conscious as a condition for an art appreciation. Suppose, for example, someone had discerned a parallel structure in the following lines from Yeats—"The years to come seemed waste of breath, / Waste of breath the years behind"—but did not know the name of the particular rhetorical device used (anadiplosis). What, then, is unconscious? Only the term (or maybe not even that, because the term is *unknown* for this person, not unconscious). The meaning that the term points to is already known in the reader's perception of a parallel structure.

And this is so more broadly. William James reflects on how children will listen spellbound to a story, half of whose words they do not know. That phenomenon may seem odd to us, until we realize how "their thinking is in form just what ours is when it is rapid. Both of us make flying leaps over large portions of the sentences uttered and we give attention only to substantive starting points, turning points, and conclusions here and there. . . . The children probably feel no gap when through a lot of unintelligible words they are swiftly carried to a familiar and intelligible terminus."[40] A child's very first word is usually something like "car!" and not "noun!" in part because he does not know what a noun is. Or, rather, the child is correctly using a noun and just does not know the definition of noun—yet. That "yet" is an important qualifier. Intention is not something fixed; the understanding of it can change over time and, as noted above, even be revealed to the agent himself. This is no strange thing, or, if strange, then strange and yet deeply present to us. It is common for us to stop ourselves with the nonrhetorical question, What was I thinking? That is not just a performative utterance. Sometimes the question will not even occur to us until well after the deed that prompted it, perhaps because of a trauma we had no strength to face in that moment, or because new circumstances awakened that old event, where learning something feels like self-discovery. Otherwise, the revelation "I didn't know this about myself"—again, a fixture of our thoughtful selves—is absurd.

Intention as dynamic, as evolving, as involved with the transformation of lifeless signs into meanings. It is on the basis of this understanding that a concourse can emerge between art and Being. But that is not the usual way things go in a modernist philosophy of art. Roland Barthes, for example, famously averred that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing."[41] Barthes is glossing the idea, going back at least to the *Phaedrus*, that writing throws up a barrier between souls. Socrates (or Plato) thought that the problem was specifically with writing, an act that dries up dialectic's lifeblood; with Barthes, it seems as if the signs are dead to begin with, that the problem is with language itself, spoken as much as written. Yet language,

including writing, can also open up our psychic life to ourselves and to others. Words are like gondoliers of the soul, as someone once said. To be able to put a name to a feeling is to mature, to recognize one's self and others more fully.

That is what Ian McEwan is getting at in *The Innocent* in describing the inner odyssey of his naive protagonist:

> Leonard had never in his life spoken about himself and his feelings in such a way. Nor had he even thought in this manner. Quite simply, he had never acknowledged in himself a serious emotion. He had never gone much further than saying he quite liked last night's film, or hated the taste of lukewarm milk. In fact, until now, it was as though he had never really had any serious feelings. Only now, as he came to name them—shame, desperation, love—could he really claim them for his own and experience them. His love for the woman standing by his door was brought into relief by the word, and sharpened the shame he felt for assaulting her. As he gave it a name, the unhappiness of the past three weeks was clarified. He was enlarged, unburdened. Now that he could name the fog he had been moving through, he was at last visible to himself.[42]

And then there is William James again, this time talking presciently about the gaps we perceive in our mental lives as we seek the right words, but where the gap is not a stopping place but an irritant to further discovery:

> Suppose we try to recall a forgotten name. The state of our consciousness is peculiar. There is a gap therein; but no mere gap. It is a gap that is intensely active. A sort of wraith of the name is in it, beckoning us in a given direction, making us at moments tingle with the sense of our closeness, and then letting us sink back without the longed-for term. If wrong names are proposed to us, this singularly definite gap acts immediately so as to negate them. They do not fit into its mould. And the gap of one word does not feel like the gap of another, all empty of content as both might seem necessarily to be when described as gaps. . . . Every one must know the tantalizing effect of the blank rhythm of some forgotten verse, restlessly dancing in one's mind, striving to be filled out with words.[43]

This looks almost like Platonism. Ideas, in their interior movements—diving beneath the surface, resurfacing in a different place, taking on a new aspect when they do—look like they maneuver on their own. As Luigi Pareyson explains, however, ideas are all along working as part of us. And that fact about sentiment, by which Pareyson understands the complex containing "the whole unity of the person," *including* language, means

> that, far from representing an obstacle or an impediment to knowledge as a vision of forms, far from drawing a veil which can inhibit the grasping of

> reality, far from being a limitation fatally imposed upon us, [sentiment] is the fortunate disposition which makes human beings the possible interpreters of interpretable forms, the key to interpreting the world with a personal sense of things, and the catalyst of the congeniality which must be established between person and form so that interpretation can emerge as knowledge.[44]

The contrast with a late Beethoven in whom subjectivity disappears, or glows only through absences, is striking. For Pareyson, subjectivity serendipitously disposes us as individual persons to make sense of the world. For Adorno, the tendency is to negate or render tyrannical the things that make the world knowable and meaningful to a person, however incomplete such knowledge obviously must be (although my reticence in that last clause may be unnecessary, because if something claims to be comprehensive, then, whatever it is, it is not knowledge).

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Adorno's exclusion or thoroughgoing reconception of human agency peaks as art criticism with his separation of art from Being. As he says in the late Beethoven essay: "Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art" (566). This proposition may appear so true that there is hardly a need for proving or defending it. Nonetheless, it can be useful to retrace Adorno's steps, to see how, starting from the position that a subject is not a person, he concludes that not just art, but the self, too, has no concourse with Being.

By way of entry, here is Adorno describing Beethoven's treatment of form: "In general, in Beethoven's music, subjectivity—in the full sense given to it by Kant—acts not so much by breaking through form, as rather, more fundamentally, by creating it."[45] To understand the reference to Kant, it is important to lay out how Adorno relates musical form to those who create it. Basically, Adorno places subjectivity in opposition to convention. How Beethoven handled this elemental antagonism changes over his famed three compositional periods. In Spitzer's illuminating synopsis: Beethoven in his early period generates expression through the manipulation of convention; Beethoven in midcareer makes convention seem organic; Beethoven at the end of his life makes unalloyed convention expressive in itself.[46]

For all of the power of Adorno's typology, its strong distinction between form and subjectivity can also create a liability. A contrasting understanding of form offered by Pareyson can bring out some of those difficulties. In Pareyson, what he calls *Forma* has two orientations: form as a generating force (this is a variant on the very old idea of poetry as a "making") and form as that by which that activity is recognizable—*forma formante* and *forma formata*, as he says. His student Umberto Eco describes the two senses as "the individual rule, the 'forming form' that in some dark way precedes the work,

directing it as it is created, and appearing as the result and revelation of the formed form."[47] These are, again, two orientations rather than two discrete kinds of form. It is an understanding of art whereby the rule is invented in the creative process itself.

Adorno's theory might be amenable to this more dynamic understanding of form. Perhaps he means to say something like "subjectivity acts in Beethoven not so much by breaking through *forma formata*, as rather, more fundamentally, by creating *forma formante*." But if that is so, then a problem with circularity arises, because Adorno is describing not just a fact of Beethoven or even of creativity more broadly but of basic understanding. To say that Beethoven creates forms is to say what *all* artists do (and, beyond that, what all *persons* do). Further, that insight about art was available before Beethoven manifested it and Adorno theorized it. When, for example, Carlo Goldoni lauded the actors at the Comédie Française for an art that "concealed the study under the guise of nature," he was not articulating a new theory of art; he was tapping into an old (if by no means universal) aspiration for it.[48] If any of this holds, then the more productive question to ask is, *What* forms did Beethoven create?

Above, I have been using expressions like "Beethoven creates," with the implication that Beethoven is the author of, the person responsible for, what he does. Adorno, in contrast, usually does not make Beethoven the subject of his sentences. He does not say things like "Beethoven acts"; he uses the more cumbersome "subjectivity acts in Beethoven's music." That syntax is odd. Who, or what, is Beethoven (or "Beethoven") in whom (through whom?) subjectivity creates forms? Adorno's artifice goes to meaning and not just rhetoric. He uses it to stress that a subject is not a person, and their distinction helps to clarify his reference to Kant. The qualifier regarding subjectivity in its "full" Kantian sense expresses an ambivalence about Kant's system and its legacy. On the one hand, Adorno wants to rebut Kant, or at least his reputation as inventor of the meaning-making subject. That fiction ("what the British call a 'fact'") has produced a false sense of human autonomy and, consequently, the vain hopes for transcendence that modernism either has perpetuated or has been laboring to bring down to earth (depending on which definition of modernism one takes). In other ways, Adorno is speaking in favor of Kant, or a particular reading of Kant. A subject is not a person, because the Kantian subject is pure and stands outside of experience, outside of the empirical self. This, I believe, is the nub of Adorno's anti-intentionalist, impersonal view of art. But if that is what he means, then he is either misreading Kant or basing his theory on one of the more brittle parts of Kant's system. As Pippin points out, Kant, in calling all thinking judging, is working out how there can be thought with content. He is not positing "mysterious metaphysical or psychological activities going on 'behind' or before experience, like some Transcendental Wizard of Oz behind the curtain."[49] That defense does not necessarily require the recognition of

persons over and above subjects, a potential shortcoming, as we have seen, identified by Grene, with her concern that a Kantian universe is based on the inert, atomistic model of Descartes and Newton and not on the behavior of living organisms.

However beholden to Kantianism, as opposed to Kant's actual or most fragile thought, Adorno's separation of subject from person provides the rationale for his separation of Being from art. Here is one of his most lapidary expressions of the relation among form, Being, and subject in late Beethoven: "Touched by death, the hand of the master" (this, I take, parodies Wagner) "sets free the masses of material that he used to form" (that is, the material operates independently of Beethoven, because he merely sets it free); "its tears and fissures, witnesses to the finite powerlessness of the I confronted with Being, are its final work" (566). This is an even darker claim than what Robert Witkin identifies as the grounding idea of Adorno's music sociology, which is that "there could be no more pretense that individual and society were reconciled or that the sensuous life of the subject could find its fulfillment and expression in society."[50] It amounts, beyond that, to what Burnham summarizes as "the sound of the subject absenting itself."[51] Late Beethoven comes as close to pure objectivity as possible, where Beethoven the person disappears into convention: "With the breaking free of subjectivity, [conventions] splinter off. And as splinters, fallen away and abandoned, they themselves finally revert to expression; no longer, at this point, an expression of the solitary I, but of the mythical nature of the created being and its fall, whose steps the late works strike symbolically as if in the momentary pauses of their descent."[52] A passage like this may vindicate the thought of the second generation of Adorno criticism. The subject, the "solitary I," resolves itself into a dew that disperses itself in the vast, intersubjective ocean of myth.

There are, however, several reasons to be hesitant. First are the usual concerns about intelligibility. How can splinters be expressive, and, if they are, how does that fact square with Adorno's insistence that the particular is "insignificant *in itself*"?[53] Second, what is the relation, if any, between the "solitary I" and the "created being"? In particular, are the two wholly separate entities, and, if so, does that mean that we as individuals stand outside of creation? That would seem to be a difficult case to make, for a sense of "I" necessarily implies others: those who are not-I. Second, it is a constant of our felt experience, whether as burden or marvel, to say "I." The word is constitutive of experience. As Frayn puts it, "'I'—'me'—is the word that names and thereby brings into being the irreducible core, the bare quick, at the heart of all our narratives."[54]

This is all to wonder how Adorno's "I" can refer to something qualitatively different from "Being." It is not even clear that there can more generally be a *quantitative* difference between I and Being. At least, that is the implication of this meditation, from Marilynne Robinson, on the phrase "I am":

> These are words any human being can say about herself, and does say, though always with a modifier of some kind. I am hungry, I am comfortable, I am a singer, I am a cook. The abrupt descent into particularity in every statement of this kind, Being itself made an auxiliary to some momentary accident of being, may only startle in the dark of night, when the intuition comes that there is no proportion between the great given of existence and the narrow vessel of circumstance into which it is inevitably forced.[55]

Whatever Being is, and however dark our grasp of it, humans have a place in its order. More than that, humans are the most complex form of life in the universe (as far as we know) precisely because of that individuated mind, that irreducible self. One way we make sense to ourselves is through art. That activity is, further, not just reflective but also creative. It at once mirrors and enacts. If any of that is so, it does not make sense to celebrate, as Adorno seems to, a Beethoven who absents himself, as if what Beethoven achieved has not enlarged the possibilities contained in that phrase "I am."

Chapter Five

# On Chance and Necessity

The idea that the only trustworthy things in the musical universe are its materials is not confined to proponents of Adorno. Among those who are indifferent or even averse to German philosophy, some have sought to describe Mozart's musical universe in terms that also distill his music into some simpler state. In recent Mozart studies, two choices have prevailed: one resolving his music into system, the other into historical structure. Within that first category, that of rationalization, there is a further division, and it is especially germane here because it reenacts as music-theoretical inquiry a paradox manifest earlier, in modernist composition. As many have noted in various ways, two of modernity's leading and ostensibly antagonistic compositional schools—one striving for total randomness, the other for total organization—have the common interest of liberating art from authorship, and so from responsibility. Or, rather, these systems preserve a kind of agency but relocate it from the person to the system. There is either chance, or there is its doppelgänger, necessity.

Such mechanization is exemplified in a recent, ambitious study of some formal procedures in music at the time of Mozart. For a concise description both of their system and how a contemporary of Mozart would have approached the craft of composition, Warren Darcy and James Hepokoski use a metaphor that likens the act of composing to the operation of a software program. To raise an objection out of order: right from the start a structural problem arises, because the metaphor's required fourth element is unclear or missing.[1]

Composer:Work::Software User:???

But, again, that is to get ahead of things.

Here is their metaphor presented without interruption: "For novice-composers, one might wittily fantasize—provided that the image is not taken too literally—something on the order of an aggressively complex 'wizard' help feature within a late-eighteenth-century musical computer application, prompting the still-puzzled apprentice with a welter of numerous, successive dialog

boxes of general information, tips, preselected weighted options, and strong, generically normative suggestions as the act of composition proceeded."[2]

At least as rhetoric, Darcy and Hepokoski's summation does not help their case. It is marked by hesitations. They speak of the novice composer but apply the system to Mozart; it is not clear how "aggressively" can modify "complex"; and, most revealing of uncertainty, they caution us not to take the image "too literally." Accompanying the defensiveness are also self-congratulation—"one might wittily fantasize"—and, in a note at the bottom of that page, special pleading: "One willingly gives the authors some benefit of the doubt that the computer metaphor 'is to be worn lightly.'"[3] Thus, even the sympathetic reader is left in the dark about how to adjudicate responsible from wayward uses of the metaphor. In that absence, one may propose the following. The image might be apt, so long as it is not taken

a. to describe anything that actually existed at the time. Composers did not start with a program, but with a blank page and a culture;
b. to equate how the human mind creates with how a computer runs. As Goethe aphorized, "calculation is not invention" (Rechnen ist nicht Erfinden);[4]
c. to imply that the "software" is fixed. The "program" itself is changeable according to human interest and motivation; and
d. to give a theory of everything in that musical world, but only of one thing in it.

In a review of Darcy and Hepokoski, Michael Spitzer notes how another one of their metaphors, composition as "modular assembly" (15), "betrays a disturbing collapse of faith in the power of creative originality."[5] This is true, but their rhetorical inventions cannot clear an even lower hurdle. They misapprehend such basic activities as thinking, judging, and acting. Indeed, their vision of creativity is about as miniaturized as the present state of our culture allows, the Ancient muse, the Holy Spirit, the Romantic's mysterious biddings of the soul all being pixellated into a computer pop-up menu, and one so annoying that most users disable it. Finally, Darcy and Hepokoski's neglect of the human touch in musical expression creates a practical as well as ethical problem, in the flattening effect it has upon analysis. Where the rule has been determined in advance (those "pre-selected weighted options"), it does not really matter what follows upon what.

Of course, eighteenth-century composition has been described in other ways. One path holds out a promise not of certainty but of limitless opportunity, because it abjures, on the one hand, the systematization of an approach like Darcy and Hepokoski's along with, on the other, older, more Romantic shibboleths like Mozart as pioneer of new musical forms. Replacing Mozart as

paragon of formalism is Mozart as herald of freedom: his compositions give an audible form to *ars combinatoria*; or bespeak a "playing with signs"; or mirror in sound a crowded, motley street, where topics "jostl[e] each other about."[6]

As I intimated above, however, what divides the two—a language of system versus that of freedom—is far weaker than what unites them—the subjugation of human agency by chance and necessity. Not that it is impossible to conceive of art as at once an activity involving materials and expressive of human freedom. The all-important condition would be to insist that expression is not identical with its materials. With that proviso in place, topical analysis and its related methods could be seen as extending Schiller's idea that man "is only fully a human being when he plays."[7] They would, further, give a rich vocabulary for describing the character of a piece of music in its broadest sense: not just what moods it conveys, but how we can take stock of it as a human achievement—whether it shows expertise or amateurishness, daring or complacency, and so on.[8]

Some leading topical analysis, however, discards that view of freedom and creativity in favor of the course that modernist music embarked upon several generations ago. To see how, Cavell's discussion of improvisation and chance in that repertoire is illuminating. In everyday life, he notes, improvisation is tied to responsibility. We cannot realize an intention simply by willing it; in such a world, there would be "no human activity" at all. So, we have to take chances with what resources lie at hand. We have to improvise.[9] Grene, too, sees this disposition toward the world as basic to what humans as living, sentient organisms do: "The knower is the knowing person, in hazard, gambling on making contact with reality, and the reality he seeks contact with is the real world, though for ever eluding his ultimate, self-sufficient, systematic grasp."[10] But modernist music, to turn back to Cavell, tries to move art and artists out of that basic stance toward the world. It appeals to improvisation and chance in order to *foreswear* responsibility.[11] That abdication is no less profound in an aleatoric approach like Cage's than it is in total serialism. In both, the composer turns on the autopilot, as it were.

That is why, although games or play may look like forms of liberation from process, they are, in fact, servants of it. Games constrain freedom, because what happens in them is, as Cavell says, "described solely in terms set by the game itself."[12] The rule has been fixed *prior* to and not simultaneously with the composition. Cavell expands on the difference between playing a game and composing music by also noting that, for the composer, the material itself is not determinate enough, not expressive enough, to create its own rule. If that is so, then "the means of achieving one's purposes cannot lie at hand, ready-made. The means themselves have inevitably to be fashioned for *that* danger, and for *that* release—and so one speaks of inventiveness, resourcefulness, or else of imitativeness, obviousness, academicism."[13]

To place this thought in the context of Mozart criticism, there is Charles Rosen's response to a frequent complaint against him, which is that he gives short shrift to the role of convention and stereotype in late eighteenth-century music:

> A basic principle of late eighteenth-century aesthetics is that poetry overcomes the arbitrary nature of language by making the language seem natural—that is, reinvented at the moment to fit what was to be expressed. A similar process is at work in the handling of stereotypes when it is well done: the trick is to make the stereotype sound as if it were invented. In other words, the formula seems as if it were called into being for the occasion.[14]

For an example of what brought about these charges in the first place, there is this proclamation from *The Classical Style*: "'Expression' is a word that tends to corrupt thought" (21). Uncharacteristically, Allanbrook takes this passage out of context to use as evidence of Rosen's insensitivity to the surfaces of Mozart's music.[15] (As a rule, she is credible and reliable in presenting opposing positions.) For if one reads on, Rosen's position turns out not to be as "uncompromising" as Allanbrook contends. Indeed, it arguably proposes a more generous vision of its emotional range. Rosen permits everything from the "most naïve form" of expression (that is, as a reflection of artistic personality) to sentiments that Allanbrook either bans or minimizes: "a work by Mozart," as he says in that same passage, "may be as morbid, as elegant, or as turbulent in its own terms as one by Chopin or Wagner." It is true that he calls it "a gross and common error to define a style by specifically expressive characteristics," but that is because, finally, "it is the ease or the tension with which the language is used—the grace of expression—that counts so heavily in art." In other words, it is not just the expressive elements that draw (or repel) us, it is their manner of presentation: "At the point that grace begins to take on such importance, a style ceases to be strictly a system of expression or of communication." One might quibble with Rosen by countering that grace, too, is a kind of expression. But, if so, it is expression not in the way that Allanbrook conceives it. The gestures themselves will not say which are employed gracefully, which awkwardly. Further, a quality like grace implies human agency and thereby acknowledges a work of art not as a thing or an assembly of parts but as a gesture, a doing.

Has this been a fair exposition of how various kinds of topical analysis regard themselves? There is room for doubt, and the verdict would depend on whether the particular version of topic theory locates meaning in the gestures themselves or in the shape and disposition of the gestures. For example, in developing a theory of musical schemata as building blocks of galant music, Robert Gjerdingen wants to take care to avoid definitions that either "oversystematize" or "oversimplify."[16] When it comes to how he treats musical form, however, his theory has difficulty in holding that line. In his more polemical

formulations, musical form generally and sonata form in particular qualify as "fetish objects" in today's academic culture (415). Schools of music and conservatories fell into that trance, he continues, from heeding the Romantics, who "eviscerated galant content and named the hollow corpse 'form'" (416).

On historical grounds, this is an unusual argument, because the nineteenth-century academic version of sonata form gave priority to melody ("content") over harmony ("form"), in its famous (or notorious) "first-theme/second-theme" division. On conceptual grounds, the argument does not work well because it itself requires and extends a rigid separation of form from content. That dualism is present as much in the application of Gjerdingen's theory as in the theory itself. For example, he describes certain "musical patterns . . . as having a clearly defined form but a loosely specified content," as well as the other way around (21). This statement shows, if inadvertently, the great difficulty even conceptually in separating form from content, for Gjerdingen has incorporated the term into its very definition: after all, "pattern" is just another word for "form." For sure, Gjerdingen is not talking of form in the way that Eco defines it, which is as "the conscious translation of amorphous matter into a human dimension."[17]

More than that, terms like "schemata" or "topic" or "motive" presuppose some larger whole of which they are a part. Topics, for example, are topics *of* discourses, a point underscored by the pioneer of topical analysis, Leonard Ratner.[18] Grene elaborates on the interrelation of part and whole more widely:

> The parts are the *conditions* of the whole, which certainly could not exist suspended in some heaven of essences without them; but it is the whole that *explains* the parts, not the parts the whole. The whole is the system (the organism) that makes the parts the parts that they are, even though the parts are the conditions (in traditional language, the material causes) for the existence of the whole.[19]

Grene is talking specifically of the biological sciences, and at once warnings sound about applying principles derived from biology to musical form. Certainly one does not want to retain organic theories of musical form if they are intended to replace human agency with biological necessity. It is not as if composers' working methods involved planting motives, watering them, and then standing back to let them grow. That is to have choice yield to necessity. But the organic metaphor acknowledges how the whole of a piece is not identical to the sum of its parts, whose arrangement is somehow a matter of happenstance. That is to have choice yield to chance.

To be sure, identifying a piece as having, say, a sonata form hardly exhausts all that can be said of it (depending on one's interest). An often indispensable follow-up question runs, why *this* particular sonata form? Otherwise, analysis

has shown only how one particular piece is like thousands of others (which, again, could be fruitful in some circumstances) and not why it is the way it is. But even where a label like sonata or rondo or variation is inappropriate, everything has some form, some shape, some pattern. Otherwise, it would not be intelligible.

Another version of topic theory, Allanbrook's rhythmic gesture, lets in a wider set of possibilities for thinking about form in music. At least at times, it even circles around the idea of gesture as an instrument of meaning and not meaning itself. Any "particular expressive stance," as she notes in her first book, is "modified and clarified, of course, by its role in its movement and by the uses made of it earlier in the piece" (*Rhythmic Gesture*, 3). That theory is, further, put into practice with this evaluation of how gesture and harmonic pattern relate in Mozart's Piano Sonata K. 332: "Mozart makes palpable the harmonic drama of the section—the modulation from the tonic to the dominant—by imitating various human gestures along its arch" (8). Allanbrook's position likely draws inspiration from her mentor, Ratner, whose work turns on an insufficiently appreciated distinction between the materials and methods of eighteenth-century composition, on the one hand, and its meanings, on the other. Particularly judicious is his discussion of the eighteenth century's interest in ars combinatoria—roughly, a compositional method based on the casting of lots. Ratner weighs the method's convenience against the liability that music composed in this manner could sound "schematic, mechanical, perhaps frivolous in its intentions." What the category of chance cannot reckon with are those experiences where, as Ratner laconically puts it, the "schematic becomes vital."[20] There is at least a faint echo of the later Wittgenstein, who noted that merely heaping on more "inorganic" material would never bring life to a proposition. Only the function, the "use" of a sign could achieve that.[21]

Allanbrook's later work, however, veers away from that understanding of the lexical universe of eighteenth-century music. It is more inclined to assert the absolute right of topics to their own meanings. Here is a fuller version of the quotation excerpted above: "*topoi* articulate each other's differences in the same way as modern linguistics understand[s] phonic units as delimiting each other: by juxtaposition and opposition, by rubbing shoulders, 'jostling each other about'" ("Theorizing," 214). Just above on that page she uses expression and form as contrasting rather than as complementary terms: "Expression should be attended to as constantly and consciously as one attends to the tonal plan, formal nodes, or structural dissonances of any given work." The implication (or outright avowal) that form is one thing, expression another, that pieces amount to a "jostling about" (a metaphor that could suggest a neo-Darwinist as much as a laissez-faire politics), threatens to

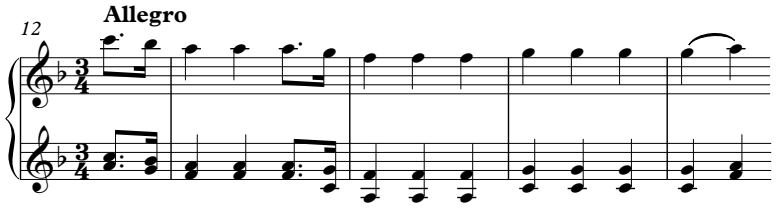
combine into one what A. B. Marx, as we will see below, thought of as two approaches to form, and both of them false: form as "arbitrary caprice or external compulsion."[22]

It is perhaps out of a concern to avoid that dualism that one other variant on topical analysis, from Kofi Agawu, seems to leave room for a less materialistic and mechanistic view of creativity in the eighteenth century: "Topics, then, are points of departure, but never 'total identities.' In the fictional context of a work's 'total identity,' even their most explicit presentation remains on the allusive level. They are therefore suggestive, but not exhaustive—which, of course, says nothing about their significance. And they dynamically shape our response to Classic music, without necessarily determining its limits."[23] I hedged in introducing Agawu's interpretation not because of a shortcoming in the formulation itself. Indeed, it subtly and credibly recognizes the power of that expressive surface without requiring the stronger claim for the equality of expression and style. Agawu solidifies this argument in a later work: "it is hard to see how topics can trump harmonic, contrapuntal, melodic, or rhythmic elements as the foundations of musical structure. Topics are always already auxiliary in application."[24] At some point in our appreciation of this music (or of the style of any art), what counts is the *manner* of presentation. It is that manner that turns "words" in a musical lexicon into musical works.

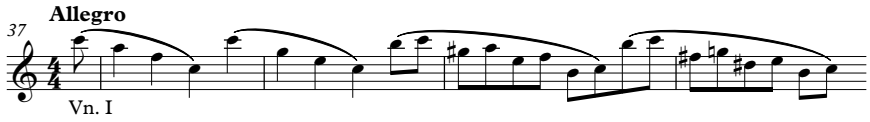
In at least one instance, however, regarding Mozart's C-major String Quintet, K. 515, that compelling thought does not seem to be extended to musical analysis. Agawu says that "even on first hearing, the richness and variety of content in the first movement of this quintet do not escape the attentive listener" (86). A chart goes on to list fourteen different topics, and it is that variety, that "play of topic," that prevents a feeling of redundancy from settling over so famously long a musical period (88–89).

What does it look like to be "an attentive listener"? Probably not to tarry over the number of topics. It is not as if K. 515 would be some 7 percent better were a fifteenth topic to be discovered. That is because the expansiveness of K. 515 is not primarily a function of topical variety or number. It does not ask us to identify its topics *as* topics. For a work that sits on the more self-referential side of the spectrum, there is, for example, the Piano Sonata in F Major K. 332. Its opening movement sounds much more like "a miniature theater of human gestures and actions," to use Allanbrook's memorable phrase (*Rhythmic Gesture*, 6). But even here, that quality has much less to do with the number of topics than with their deployment.[25] A melody like the one in example 5.1, has a much more discrete, more tuneful profile than something like the one in example 5.2, from K. 515, which sounds anodyne.

Example 5.1. Mozart, Piano Sonata in F Major, K. 332 (1781–83), mvt. 1, mm. 12–16.




Example 5.2. Mozart, String Quintet in C Major, K. 515 (1787), mvt. 1, mm. 37–41 (first violin only).




Rosen's description of K. 515 brings out the difference: "Not only does Mozart abandon melody, he also renounces much of the seductive harmonic color that appears in the first measures of almost all his other works which reach the expressive intensity of this quintet."[26] This is a vastly different experience than what Agawu describes, in part because Rosen speaks of an "expressive intensity" with little recourse to melody, not to mention musical topics. However one adjudicates these differing appreciations, Agawu's conflicts with the careful theory of topics that prefaced it. To note the variety of the movement's content, and, further, that such variety prevents fatigue, is, in effect, to marvel at a novel for the amount of words it has or at a play for the number of characters or scenes it contains.

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There is one last general way that Mozart's music has been described as the result of a process rather than an activity, and it involves a certain sense of history. Some influential schools find in the testimony of history itself, without recourse to social theory, sufficient evidence to overturn a theory of composers as creators. Mozart's milieu had no such pretensions about artists. They were, it is said, regarded as artisans working within a fairly stable, closed system. Thus, according to Gjerdingen: "The composer of galant music, rather than being a struggling artist against the world, was more like a prosperous civil servant."[27] This was a more irenic society than the one promoted by the cult of genius,

who, taking as axiomatic that appealing music must be inferior music, deliberately courted trouble with the public.

The conception of history as something that can be "boarded up" into self-contained eras, as Friedrich Meinecke put it, merits an independent study. Interesting here is how various practitioners of a modernist Mozart poetics use that sense of history to exclude much that culture had hitherto regarded as informative and mind-enlarging.[28] As we have seen, that more "quarantined" view has encountered resistance even from within sociological critique. The historical record itself gives further evidence that artistic ambition appeared in composers prior to the Romantic era. As a prime witness, there is Johann Schink, arguably the finest theater critic in Mozart's Austria, and yet no friend of an overly Romanticized art. For example, he rewrote *Macbeth*'s witches' scenes in order to bring them up to date for an audience that no longer believed in ghosts.[29] But here he is, in 1784, defending creative genius, and in nothing less than Biblical terms: "The artist is, like the poet, born: study and diligence educate the artist, but they do not make him. Art's holy flame issues from heaven, and no earthly effort can receive it. . . . It is a holy flame, the flame of art: but not everyone sees it, not everyone perceives its rays."[30]

It would be easy to summon other eighteenth-century witnesses to testify to this more reverential view, where art is a calling, not a chore. What is most relevant for present purposes, however, are the shortcomings in revisionist claims about individuals, their material, and the larger order in which they all participate. For example, where composers control their material, and not the other way around, the possibility arises of what Proust saw in late Beethoven. In authoring original, compelling, and challenging works, Beethoven also authored, brought into being, a new kind of audience: "What makes it difficult for a work of genius to be admired at once is the fact that its creator is out of the ordinary, that hardly anyone is like him. It is his work itself which, by fertilizing the rare spirits capable of appreciating it, will make them grow and multiply."[31] Elements of Proust's thought have a surface affinity with Adorno's. Both are attracted to a form of esotericism; further, like Adorno, Proust says that it is the *work* that is doing the fertilizing, not the person. Finally, though, their differences outweigh their similarities. Proust's meeting of minds occurs because the composer becomes the *author* of a way of listening, and not just its intermediary. Proust's Beethoven is no postmodern Pope Gregory transcribing codes broadcast from the neostructuralist Empyrean.

Of course, Proust's voice comes through the potentially unreliable form of the novel. Further, he is also speaking of a composer, Beethoven, who is routinely consecrated as the genitor of this more Romantic regard for composition. But the phenomenon he is describing is prior to Proust and also involves composers prior to Beethoven. Such is the case with Ignaz Arnold and Mozart. In 1803, Arnold published a life-and-works study of Mozart that, as biography,

had little new to offer (and much that is untrustworthy). As appreciation of Mozart's music, however, it was one of the first popularizing works to manifest a newer impulse in criticism. More than expressing pleasure, Arnold proceeded to muse on its source and quality in the actual compositions. At one point in his essay, Arnold steps back to wonder at his own engagement with Mozart's music and what kind of culture he would like to help build from it:

> Overall, I wish that every young composer would buy Mozart's scores for himself and, as the poet does with his Horace and Homer, make them part of his daily study of the classics. I myself own Mozart's, Haydn's, and Bach's works, devote every hour of my leisure time to their study, and come back each time with new yields. On the whole, you have to see Mozart, hear him, experience him for yourself; also, this cannot be done just one time. Mozart's unbelievable richness cannot be detected in one glimpse, and even the most practiced eye initially overlooks beauties that open up only upon repeated study.[32]

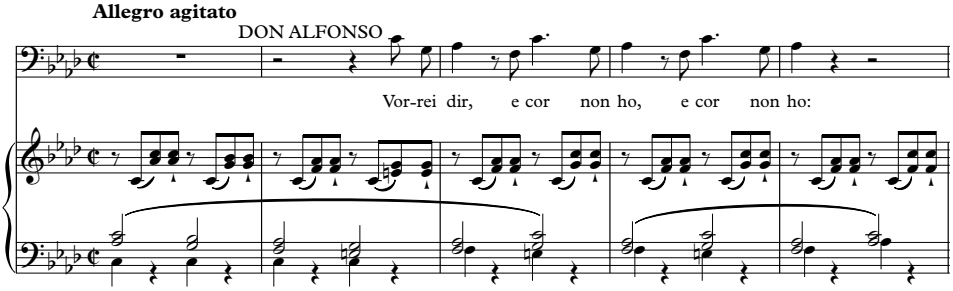
Arnold is not constructing an "author-function"; he is encountering a person whose particular musical mind he found compelling precisely because the general style, the material, yielded an inadequate vocabulary for describing that achievement. Confronting Mozart, Arnold became enlarged. In the process of seeking more fitting words to describe that experience, Arnold is trying to broaden an audience for Mozart, to identify those Proustian "rare spirits" and help them to "grow and multiply."

The year 1803, of course, sits just over that threshold where distinctively Romantic notions of creativity are said to have appeared. But Arnold's enthusiasm for an art that struck him as original and exemplary only echoes, or perhaps amplifies, kindred responses that had sounded since Renaissance humanism. And so Johann Tinctoris would "never listen to" composers like Dunstable, Dufay, and Binchois "without coming away refreshed and wiser. Just as Virgil took Homer as the model of his divine work the *Aeneid*, so, by Hercules, do I use these [composers] as models for my own small productions."[33] I do not know what, if any, routes of transmission linked Tinctoris to Arnold, but there was at least enough cultural similarity for the thought to persist over a great temporal expanse.

A heretical question intrudes here. How much is a general artistic style, finally, the product of a particular mind (or group of minds) that has then become normative, as opposed to thinking of the exceptional as an agglomeration of the conventional?[34] A provisional case can be made by pointing to places in works where the most economical explanation of a particular feature comes by reference to the individual mind and not general style. This is genius in both its more general sense (as individual guiding spirit, or one's own "genie," which we all have) and its narrower one of that talent for producing

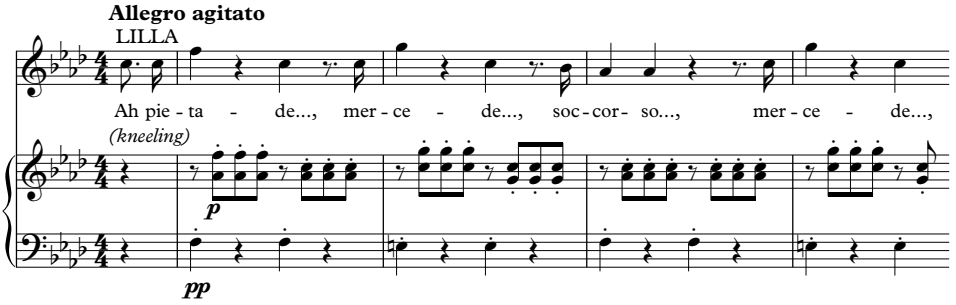
original and exemplary works of art (which few of us have). One of the easier places to detect the mark of genius involves instances where one composer copies another. In Mozart, this happens, for example, with the cavatina "Vorrei dir," from *Così fan tutte* (see ex. 5.3).

Example 5.3. Mozart, *Così fan tutte*, K. 588 (1790), no. 5: "Vorrei dir," mm. 1–5.




It seems pretty clear that he is parodying "Ah pietade, mercede," from Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara*, of 1786 (see ex. 5.4).

Example 5.4. Martín y Soler, *Una cosa rara* (1786), no. 5: "Ah pietade, mercede," mm. 1–4.

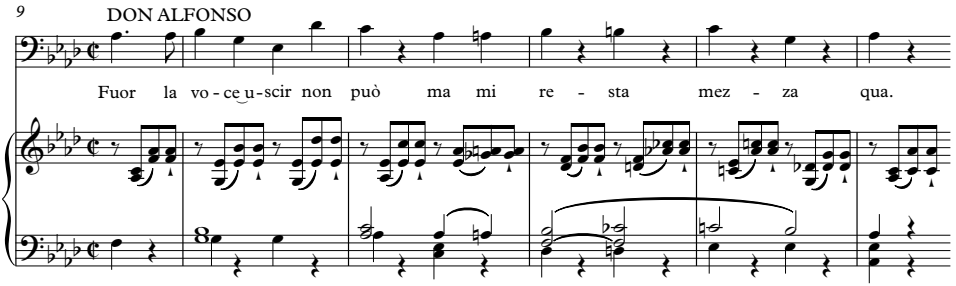



The list of common features is long: key, tempo, certain orchestral details (although Mozart is much richer with the obbligato writing), magnitude, emotional temperature, dramatic situation, position in the drama, and so forth. There are also differences, of course, and two formal ones are notable because they seem to produce competing conclusions about how they relate to the norms of distress cavatinas. The first has to do with the respective incipits. Here, Mozart's copy can be seen as superior to the original, superior, that is,

against the norm that the type itself has established.[35] Sentimental arias project spontaneity over formality, in which case starting in medias res, as Mozart does, realizes that aim more completely than Martín y Soler, who separates recitative from aria more decisively and whose melody emphasizes the tonic (as opposed to the less decisive mediant in the Mozart). In this case, what Mozart's mind evinces is a greater awareness of the potential in the material (or, more plainly, of how to use music to convey action and depict character).

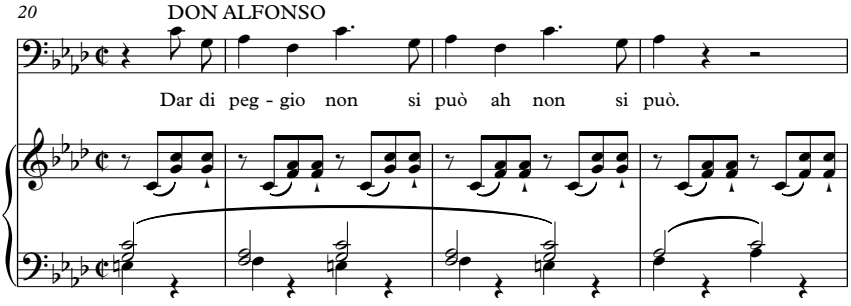
The second difference, having to do with subtle points of formal articulation in the Mozart, is more difficult to evaluate against an external, generic norm. Two areas stand out. First, Mozart establishes a second key area (with the cadence in A-flat at m. 14—ex. 5.5).

Example 5.5. Mozart, *Così fan tutte*, "Vorrei dir," mm. 9–14.




Second, he also returns the tonic and main melody (to a new text, to boot, which provides more evidence that Mozart's conception of musical drama is not exclusively text driven; see ex. 5.6). And all this attention to formal detail happens in a rapid vocal number of a mere thirty-eight measures.

Example 5.6. Mozart, *Così fan tutte*, "Vorrei dir," mm. 20–23.



No one who knows Mozart's music is surprised to see him do this; it is a recognizable feature of *his* musical mind (at a certain point in his life). That fact, however, makes it more difficult to evaluate the nature of his accomplishment as a music dramatist, because the earlier appeal to norms of sentimental arias no longer holds. Indeed, this instance of Mozart's feeling for form goes against the artlessness generally required of this subtype of cavatina. There are, of course, ways of excusing Mozart from charges of a hard and improbable formalism. Most broadly, as Budd and others have argued, an eloquence maintained even when life is imperiled (or in this case, when the peril is feigned) is a leading reason why we are drawn to fiction.[36] Protagonists who are incoherent in the face of adversity do not draw much of *any* response, admiring or hostile. (This theory amounts to a gloss on Neoclassicism's requirement that art remain art even with the most violent, least artful of emotions.) As for the artifice of this particular setting: the pervasive rhythmic energy of "Vorrei dir," which is typical of distress arias, minimizes the cadential points as discrete events, so that Mozart has concealed his art. Maybe these observations vindicate Adorno's idea that the material makes the man, that Mozart is unleashing the potential of sonata form. But even if that is so (and that would be to give too neatly Platonic a description of sonata form), it is *Mozart* who is doing that, and *not* Martín y Soler. Mozart has had to make choices in order to balance musical and dramatic exigencies in the particular way that he did. It is a feature of Mozart's musical mind to envision these possibilities, to find them interesting, and to have the talent to realize them. And *we* did not know such things were possible, could not have predicted them, until Mozart showed them to us.

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Intention always involves an individual and a culture, and so the search for it in art does not require thinking of artists as solitary individuals spiriting their materials into existence from the void. A question like, Who wrote this? can yield useful results even where the "who" is plural or unknown—as in a particular school, or where the repertory is anonymous or the expression of personality a priority neither in composition nor reception. There are more possibilities than either that the composer creates matter as well as form or that the composer loses control over, is not responsible for, the material.

Yet the pull toward dualism is very strong in the critique of artistic creativity as it seeks a cause behind the making of art. A case in point comes in Martha Woodmansee's influential essay tracing the rise of theories of genius to developments in copyright law in eighteenth-century Germany. For a standard Romantic formulation of artistic genius and what it does and how it operates, she turns to William Wordsworth:

> Of genius the only proof is the act of doing well what is worthy to be done, and what was never done before. Of genius, in the fine arts, the only infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility for the delight, honor, and benefit of human nature. Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, *if that be not allowed*, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown.[37]

Wordsworth's realm of geniuses is at once rich, varied, and yet worldly and realizable. A high ethical interest is engaged ("what is worthy to be done"), as well as a powerfully sensuous one, the genius being commended for widening "the sphere of human sensibility," all to the further expansion of our pleasure and instruction. But there is also a boundary in that praise, for what ultimately counts as ingenious art cannot be determined outside of culture but only by the effect it has on culture—that is its "only infallible sign."

Such modesty extends to the creative act, as well. Wordsworth hedges on whether the genius brings something new into the world or, instead, reinterprets what was already there, as the passage following the highlighted phrase indicates. But all this complexity is missing from Woodmansee's summary: "For Wordsworth, writing in 1815," she says immediately following this quotation, "the genius is someone who does something utterly new, unprecedented, or in the radical formulation that he prefers, produces something that never existed before" (430). It is as if Wordsworth had not written the last part of the passage that Woodmansee quoted. Just as Barthes needed a wildly inflated sense of authorship in order to declare the death of authors, so, too, does Woodmansee need to ascribe to the Romantics an untenable view of creativity in order to make claims to genius seem eccentric instead of drawn from the stock of everyday discourse.[38]

Again, well-framed questions of creativity always involve a person *and* a culture in which that agent acts. That is a position that Jean-Jacques Nattiez either consciously affirms or inadvertently stumbles upon in an essay on Wagner. I put it so equivocally because of how David J. Levin, in expounding a modernist theory of opera production, uses Nattiez's argument: "To say 'what Wagner [in this case: Mozart, Da Ponte, Sellars . . .] meant' is never to read his intentions directly but to construct hypotheses about his intentions and his poietic universe based on traces which we can read and contextual types of information—historical, sociological, philosophical, ideological, aesthetic, musical, and so on—which we have at our disposal."[39] Levin, I think, adduces this as evidence of the futility of seeking intention at all, or at least in having much confidence in what it could tell us. For example, he dismisses the intentionalist's call to fidelity as "a familiar mantra for those who would preserve conventional staging practices" (97). Maybe Nattiez means that, too. Yet his catalog

of "contextual types of information" indicates the potential fruitfulness of a search for intention, and how much learning and discernment are required to become a good interpreter of texts. That is because what Nattiez is describing in clinical language and tautological form ("contextual types of information" suggests the ready availability of *non*-contextual types of information) is, finally, the marvel of culture:

> The propaedeutic for all beautiful art, so far as it is aimed at the highest degree of its perfection, seems to lie not in precepts, but in the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*, presumably because humanity means on the one hand the universal feeling of participation and on the other hand the capacity for being able to communicate one's inmost self universally, which properties taken together constitute the sociability that is appropriate to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals.[40]

Nattiez's argument presupposes that it is meaningful to speak of a "direct" intention that stands apart from its mediation. Yet even the expression "state of mind" necessarily takes a form.

Throughout this and the preceding two chapters, I have been taking up various anti-intentionalist accounts of art and how they bear on human creativity. Mostly, the focus has been on Adorno and a later generation of critic, although I have been suggesting that Adorno and his modernist opponents are not as far apart as they both might think. By way of conclusion, it is worthwhile to revisit briefly Abbate and Parker's gloss on Adorno, where a modernist critique and a Romantic language of profundity ("das Mehr") intermingle with a neostructuralist dissolution of self.

It is possible that placing Abbate and Parker in this context may overemphasize a matter of only marginal interest to them. There are, however, two places where their deauthorizing position comes to the fore. Rhetorically, there is that gerund in their title, "Dismembering Mozart." (That Boschean verb demonstrates the extent to which a modernist poetics is a poetics of dead matter, not of life. It also gives credence to Adorno's concern that naming can be an act of violence.) Substantively, their neostructuralist priorities emerge in proposing a decentered reading of the closing of *Figaro*'s second act. The "disjunction" they perceive between dramatic situation and musical character "prevents the ensemble from becoming solipsistic: it is not the singular self, the perfect unity of action and music that exists; rather, a dialogue is conducted."[41] In support of their position, it is easy to accept the *results* they see following from this disjunction: that it is specious to talk of a "perfect unity" and that solipsism is a vice and dialogue a virtue. Further, there is a genuine need to call for more clarity in a language that speaks of perfect unities and singular selves. As tools for musical analysis, terms like "perfection," "coherence," and "unity" do not

mean the same thing, and too dogged a quest for them can obscure other things worth looking for. (As Fred Maus sagely notes, if unity can be a goal of analysis, then so can disunity.[42]) As a vision of creativity, meanwhile, a musical world composed of perfect unities oversimplifies music, thereby weakening its hold as an object of human interest and expression of creativity. If this is what the old Neoplatonism or the more recent Romanticism offered, then they are right to pass on it.

It is not in the virtues that Abbate and Parker advance that the problem resides but in how they arrive at them. None of them *necessarily* follows from authorial dismemberment. If the idea of a perfect unity derived from a singular self is too vague to be a useful goal of analysis, then the same holds for its denial. The objection to a musical analysis based on ideas of individual agency is framed in too inflexible a way, where the goal looks more like certitude than plausibility or understanding. Strip away hard modifiers like "singular" and "perfect," and a more credible, answerable kind of question appears: not, Why did such and such a work *have* to be this way? but more like, What does it mean for it to be as it is? From that question all kinds of potential answers present themselves for inspection, answers anywhere from incompetence, to genius, to indecision, to scribal error, to a different standard of coherence, to avarice, to artistic ambition.

And so, thinking that the experience of music has a "logic" to it does not necessitate positing a universally applicable, preexisting rule. The search is for the rule that governs a particular action. It is a search for how something is used, and that is the place, the credible place, of "the above-and-beyond" sought for in analysis. That place is not metaphysical in the sense of lying beyond culture or experience in some kind of pure realm untouched by human interest or apprehension. Nor is it to be found in the codes or systems or discourses that neostructuralists like Abbate and Parker propose. That is simply a metaphysics of another kind. Instead, that place is located in the sphere of reasons and intentions.

For all that, it could still sound as if talk of singular authors intending their works imposes a leveling, reductive perspective on an appreciation of art. A main task of the next chapter will be to show how authorial intention is not only compatible with but also necessary for the operation of one of the most compelling features of works of the imagination, and that is ambiguity.

Chapter Six

# On Ambiguity

To aver that there can be no ambiguity without intention is clearly not a position compatible with the poetics of Adorno or Levin or Abbate and Parker. Only with the overthrow of the author-concept can the virtue of ambiguity settle into and enrich the analysis of music. It is true that, with Adorno no less than Abbate and Parker, the erasure of the author is not complete. What Adorno presents as concession, that it is "impossible . . . to conceive of music . . . as bereft of the element of subjectivity," Abbate and Parker enact as concluding hope, which is that Mozart's "enigmatic smile" may "broaden a fraction" upon the acceptance of their dismembering method, which challenges our confidence in the coherence of opera, in the possibility that music, text, and staging could harmonize.[1]

Along with retaining a residual intention, Abbate and Parker's dismembering poetics grounds it claims on one other conventional authority, and that is history. Perhaps affirming in deed what they deny in word poses only a trivial difficulty for their argument, but also noteworthy is the *way* Abbate and Parker see the operation of history. There was a time when a truer image of Mozart prevailed and then a later one that pulled a screen over him. That concealment took place in the nineteenth century, with the advent of a Wagnerian musical hermeneutics: it is "the aesthetic of . . . the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [that] has been privileged by one hundred years of late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century opera criticism, and has become our dominant code for reading opera." That "code" has been retroactively applied to Mozart, with the result that his "mature operas . . . somehow remain perennially sacrosanct, impervious to the shadows of ambiguity" (188).

As Umberto Eco has observed, it is a tendency for any work that a culture has made "sacred" to attract "suspicious" readings. This revisionism happens not just to overtly sacred texts but "metaphorically sacred" ones, as well—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Joyce, in addition to Scripture.[2] Certainly with *Figaro* criticism, it is too tidy to trace its present-day status to the triumph of a Wagnerian aesthetics. For one, to claim "ascribing revelatory force to music

[as] a legacy of nineteenth-century musical aesthetics," as Abbate does in an independent essay, has many potential counterexamples to contend with.[3] Here, for example, is Augustine's experience of church music and what sounds like a very Romantic absorption in it: "I wept at the beauty of Your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of Your Church's singing. Those sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart."[4] Comparable sentiments about the possibilities of music persist much later, yet still well before the nineteenth century, as in this observation from the treatise *Il corago* (ca. 1630): "Musical speech is more to be associated with the concept of the superhuman than the concept and manifest notion of ordinary man; harmonic reasoning is sweeter, more elevated, masterly and noble than ordinary speech, and is thus naturally to be attributed to those characters which most embody the divine and sublime."[5]

Coming back to Abbate and Parker, perhaps they mean to say only that this aesthetic was *perpetuated* post-Wagner and not born there. For the understanding that a work of art, including opera, could project an integrity independent of its components antedates Wagner. The main question is, By how much? As just one of any number of examples from the late Enlightenment, there is this complaint, most likely by Karl Franz Guolfinger von Steinsberg, from 1788. He contends that many an opera-phobe ("Antioperist") mischaracterizes the genre by reducing it "to a collection of drinking or love or occasional songs," in which case, it "ceases to be opera": "One should not confuse categories: opera is opera, a unique kind of theater with music, just as ballet is for dance, and it is neither comedy nor tragedy, any more than botany and agriculture are the same thing. We do not want some collection of fraternity songs, we want the great effect of music in its most attainable perfection."[6] It may be philosophically suspect for Von Steinsberg to speak of perfection (although his usage mirrors the earlier classical understanding of perfect ideal), but then it cannot, of course, be Wagner who is at fault. Writing at the front end of that decade, meanwhile, there is Anton Cremeri (a figure who will come up again, in the context of a pleasurable stage). In 1780, he extolled opera as "an art in which all the other arts excellently unite themselves."[7] In saying that, he was simply being a good Aristotelian, if not proto-Wagnerian: "As then in the other arts of representation a single representation means a representation of a single object, so too the plot being a representation of a piece of action must represent a single piece of action and the whole of it; and the component incidents must be so arranged that if one of them be transposed or removed, *the unity of the whole* is dislocated and destroyed."[8] Abbate and Parker's argument might even have been strengthened in drawing attention to the longer historical sway that an interest in unity has held. Along with emphasizing the originality of their own position against the history of poetics, citing that history could have shown how ossified an earlier art criticism had become. (That might betray

their intention, however, insofar as they are speaking of *recovering* a truth that the nineteenth century had buried.)

If a concern for unity in art is much older than the nineteenth century, so, too, is an interest in ambiguity well older than the late twentieth century. Here again, Eco is characteristically enlightening. He traces that habit of mind back to Classical Antiquity, where two basic strands of thought prevailed: a rationalist one, in which reason involves a measure, a boundary; but also an opposing Hermetic one, which rejects the foundations of Aristotelian logic, like the principle of noncontradiction. The acolytes of Hermes take the world to be fundamentally mysterious but, crucially, where language only exacerbates the problem of its intelligibility: "Hermetic thought transforms the whole world theater into a linguistic phenomenon and at the same time denies language any power of communication."[9] Eco also notes that such a vision directs much postmodern criticism, in which "it is not difficult to recognize the idea of the continuous slippage of meaning. The idea expressed by Paul Valéry, for whom 'il n'y a pas de vrai sens d'un texte' (there is no true sense of a text), is a Hermetic one."[10]

Such counterexamples raise questions, on historical and logical grounds, about the viability of Abbate and Parker's separation of the ambiguous from the sacrosanct. Such a division would have puzzled, for example, Jesus, who, after all, spoke in parables, as it would a mystic like Bonaventure, who, in contemplating the Trinity, can verbalize what he sees only apophatically: "There, new, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of theology are hidden in the superluminous darkness of a silence teaching secretly in the utmost obscurity which is supermanifest—a darkness which is super-resplendent."[11] There is also an internal conflict in the way they describe a split between ambiguity and sanctity. On the one hand, Abbate and Parker's structuralism resembles the antirationalism of an early Romantic like Herder, "antirationalist" in the sense that meaning is not a function of individuals who produce reasons for what they do.[12] On the other hand, the "code" they speak of appears to render a sufficient and complete explanation of human creativity. It is like the empirical datum of the positivist who holds that the only things that count in the world are what we can point to. All else is sheer Romanticism. For this reason, as I will try to show below, "ambiguity" may not be the apposite word for the value they are professing.

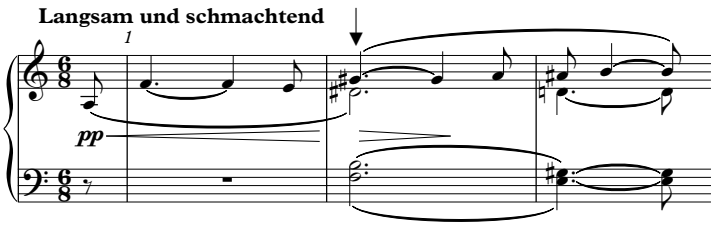
In the meantime, though, these reservations about historical framing do not necessarily weaken the substance of Abbate and Parker's argument, which is that there indeed is a music/analytical strand of thought coming *post* Wagner (but perhaps not *propter* Wagner) that feels distinctively contemporary and yet sees no room for ambiguity in music. As evidence, Abbate and Parker cite this argument from Bruce Campbell: "Of course, ambiguity in music does not really

exist. Some musical phenomena can be understood in several ways—a popular example is the diminished-seventh chord—but surely one of the functions of analytical insight is to show how all but one of the apparent or 'theoretical' possibilities are artistically untenable in a given context" ("Analyzing Opera," 3). Abbate and Parker leave off here, but it is worth reading the continuation of Campbell's argument:

> Without a firmly fixed point of view, it is difficult to maintain any perspective or coherent vision. Certainly, the performers have to decide where the music is going (how does one perform ambiguously?), and the composer had to know where he was going. If the import of a segment or short passage by itself does not seem to be entirely clear, it may very well be that it is the larger context in which the passage is found that directs the eventual outcome of a passage. A powerful analytical system, such as [Heinrich] Schenker's (regardless of whether his method can account for all details of a composition), will at least be able to relate the details with which it is concerned (in Schenker's case, voice leading) to the larger structure, and thereby resolve any and all matters of seeming local "ambiguity"—certainly no mean accomplishment.[13]

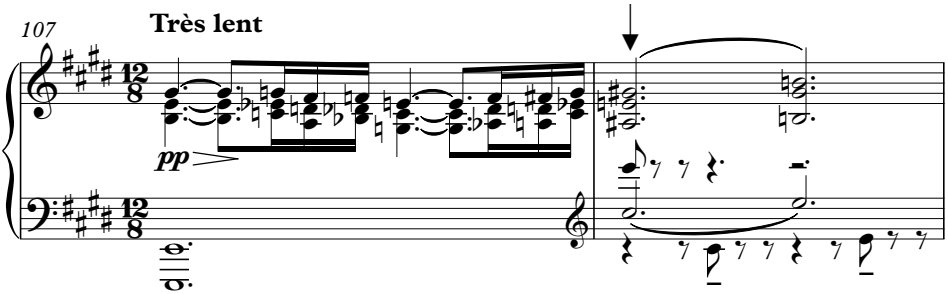
Although I will wind up siding more with Abbate and Parker than with Campbell on this issue (if only Campbell had said "point of view" instead of "*firmly fixed* point of view"), there certainly is such a thing as false ambiguity, a problem that appears as a problem only because the wrong question is being posed. Further, Campbell's theoretical approach is flexible enough to accord different functions to an object. That "firmly fixed point of view" can come from use rather than nature, or so he seems to imply. For example, it does not commit him to insisting that the *Tristan* chord *must* resolve to the dominant (see ex. 6.1).

Example 6.1. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* (1865): Prelude, act 1, mm. 1–3.



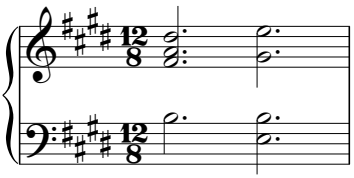

That position would leave him at loose ends when it comes to Debussy's more vertical use of it, as in example 6.2.

Example 6.2. Debussy, *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (1894), mm. 107–10.




The analytical system has been adjusted to reflect the changed use of the element. Had Debussy devised a way of ending his *Prelude* with a perfect authentic cadence, as in example 6.3, it would have sounded as foreign in that world as Debussy's cadence would have in Wagner's.

Example 6.3. Hypothetical resolution of example 6.2.



Still, the confidence that *all* musical ambiguity can be resolved given a sufficiently "powerful analytical system" is puzzling. Is there some analytical system that would explain all human intention and motivation, which is basically what we are talking about when we are talking about music? So, one can see why Abbate and Parker think it adequate merely to quote Campbell: the thought seems to condemn itself (although an ensuing question would then be whether Campbell's idea is idiosyncratic or is shared more widely in the discipline).

Perhaps, however, there is a basic miscommunication dividing the parties, in which case it is worth testing the claim denying ambiguity in music against a few examples. The logic of Campbell's argument, if I follow it correctly, renders the concept "ambiguity" meaningless. That is because a variability between sign and signified is a condition of communication. Perhaps various aspects of music might be exempt from this rule, but not performance (at least of the kind of music that is the focus here, which involves a score and a realization). Performers do not just follow orders but make choices: the activity takes place against a recognition of other valid possibilities. That is the reason

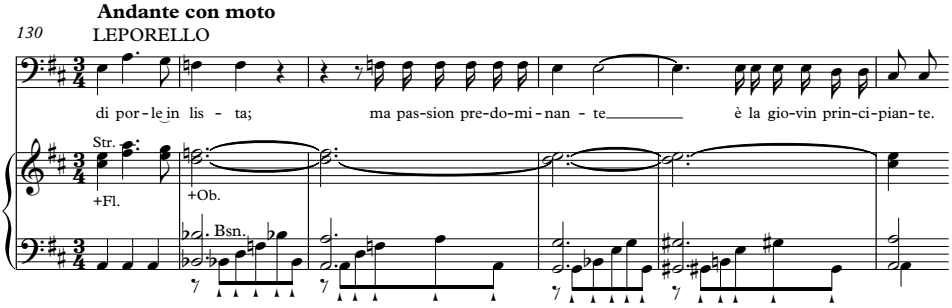
behind everyday responses to music such as "I like her rendition" or "I don't like his" or "I wouldn't have done that, but I respect the director." It may be true, as Agawu says in support of Campbell, that performers, unlike theorists, cannot "afford to sit on the fence" when confronted with an ambiguity,[14] but the acknowledgment of other possibilities is still a necessity of thinking of performance *as* performance. (This is basically to gloss Charles Rosen's idea that "it is essentially the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of notation that has allowed the monuments of Western music to survive, to escape the ruinous erosion of time. In fact, it is the basic antagonism of score and performance, of concept and realization, that is the glory of Western music.")[15] Finally, such a position conflicts with the very nature of works of the imagination, which exist in part because basic unambiguous propositions (if there even are such things) cannot fully satisfy our understanding of ourselves and the world about us, and, further, the most meaningful works to us, the ones that are at once original and exemplary, resist paraphrase or subordination to a comprehensive theoretical model. (That is one way in which Adorno's "das Mehr" responds to a real need of criticism, even if that is not what he means by it.)

When Iago proclaims "I am nothing if not critical," he is being ambiguous, not to mention when he sounds another self-annihilating proclamation, now as blasphemy: "I am not what I am." Lest it seem that only the wicked take to ambiguity (although Goldoni damned metaphors precisely because of their ability to mean two things at once, a view shared by his compatriot the aunt in Michael Radford's 1995 film *Il Postino*, who thought the metaphorical mind a concupiscent mind), there is Desdemona, who "wished that heaven had made her such a man." Does she mean that she wishes she had been a man, or that heaven had made an Othello for her (or, on a more melancholic note, that heaven could not consecrate such a union, as various of the tragedy's characters wonder from time to time)? Presumably, Campbell would say that, at least in performance, an actor would have to choose one of these possibilities. I do not think that this has to be the case, at least here, because Desdemona could mean all things at once—she *means* to be ambiguous, or that even *she* is not sure which of the two she means. (And, it seems safe to say, *Shakespeare* was probably aware of the multiple meanings of what he wrote, in which case ambiguity is a component of intention.) Reject all that, and it is still hardly the case that one of these choices would be "artistically untenable." Campbell avers that a composer has "to know where he was going." Setting aside the many cases in which composers do not know where they are going until they get there, one of these points of arrival can be ambiguity.

These examples are lifted from literature, of course, and maybe music constitutes a special case. Nonetheless, they should raise a general caution about the possibility of thinking that we may catch the musical wind if only we had the right conceptual net. If ridding ambiguity can repress some of our responses to

literary characters and their utterances, the same can hold to our response to music. What, for instance, does one make of the passage in example 6.4, from the "Catalog Aria"?

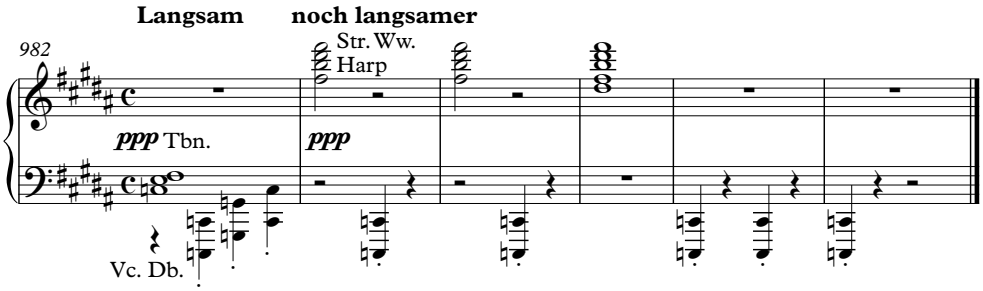
Example 6.4. Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, K. 527 (1787), no. 4: "Catalog Aria," mm. 130–35.




Certain things about it are not ambiguous: it is in the minor mode, for example, and is, in fact, the aria's most sustained passage in the minor mode. It is also introduced by way of a deceptive cadence. Maybe that is all Campbell means, and that he allows for ambiguity to exist at a different level, between music and drama. But why did Mozart highlight this, of all places, on the servant's difference-erasing catalog? It expresses Leporello's disapproval of his master; it is a rebuke, in musical form, of Don Giovanni's particularly unnerving passion for the novice at love. Perhaps he (Leporello and Mozart, or just one of them?) directs it at Donna Elvira, who was once one of those *naïves*. (That the obbligato bassoon reappears at the cadential "Voi sapete quel che fa" [mm. 150–54] lends credibility to this interpretation.) Given that this shadowy passage is in the key of the opera, it is also plausible to think of this as an intrusion of a voice beyond Leporello's ken, an adumbration of what awaits Don Giovanni. None of these particular propositions logically excludes the other, in which case it is not necessary to resolve them.

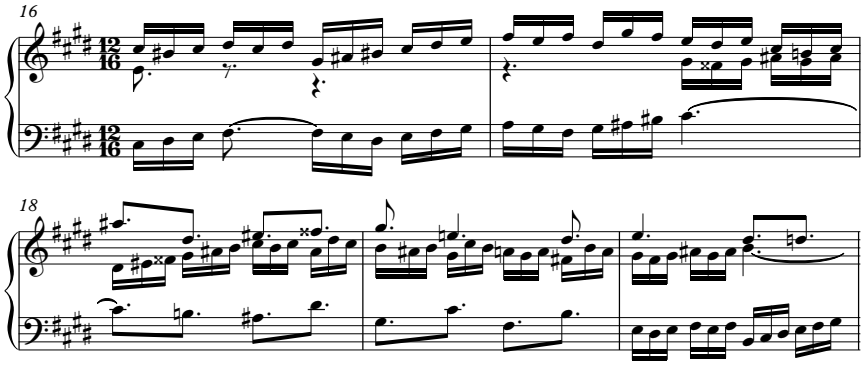
Again, Campbell may be thinking only of instrumental music, and not even of something programmatic, like *Also sprach Zarathustra*, about whose close it seems fair to ask, and yet impossible to answer once and for all, "What key does it end in, C or B?" (see ex. 6.5).

Example 6.5. Richard Strauss, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896), mm. 982–87.




To stay, then, within the realm of artificial music, as Dahlhaus calls it, example 6.6 gives a passage from the Fugue in C-sharp Minor from Book II of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (BWV 873), where Bach introduces a cadence in E (m. 20).

Example 6.6. Bach, Fugue in C-sharp Minor, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bk. II, BWV 873 (1742), mm. 16–20.




Bach dramatizes the arrival of this perfect authentic cadence through an intricate coordination of rhythm, counterpoint, and harmony. The subject's length of a measure and a half helps to give the middle of Bach's 12/16 measures as strong a sense of a downbeat at their formal beginnings, as if the piece were actually in 6/16. The answer in the middle of measure 17, however, extends that pattern, with a suspension and syncopation in the top voice of measure 19 displacing cadential weight more to the downbeat of the next measure, a feeling that is reinforced with a new statement of the subject in the bass voice.

At some point before the middle of measure 20, however, we realize that this had not been a cadence *in* E but *on* E. The turn to B major now sounds like the more decisive cadential point, in which case it is necessary, retrospectively, to revisit where the phrase began. From this new vantage, the top line at measure 20 appears to initiate a new phrase instead of resolve an old one. (Bach also uses the subject to create ambiguity about what counts as a beginning: although a new statement of the subject begins on the downbeat of measure 16, the sequential continuation of its answer, in the middle of measure 17, culminates in the middle of measure 20, with the cadence in B.) It is as if Bach is demonstrating in tones how it is possible for *P* and *not-P* to be simultaneously true.

It is difficult to know what simile best works here. That of the magic trick is inadequate, for that is the ratiocination of the cynic, who falters by being unable to explain why the magic persists even once its secret is out. The idea of an over-brimming cup gets at the superabundance of Bach's invention but is too popish. For better guidance on why this experience is necessarily ineffable and leaves us with awe that human consciousness could produce such wonders, we might look out from Cöthen not over to the southwest, to Frankfurt, but to the northeast, to Königsberg:

> In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.[16]

Or perhaps to Stratford-upon-Avon:

> O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention.

Or to Giacomo Leopardi:

> Così tra questa
> immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
> e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare. ("L'Infinito," ca. 1819, ll. 13–15)
> (So sinks my mind in this immensity, and sweet is it to founder in such a sea.)

One thing is certain. A poetics of austerity is inadequate. Writing off such reveries as instances of "a rarefied focus" on the devices of music, an attentiveness

"far removed from the messy, mundane, empirical details of how and why" people listen to music, is of no help.[17] If you don't love cadences, you won't hear what Bach has to say. Or, rather: hearing, acknowledging, what Bach has to say can make one fall in love with cadences.

The primary analytical questions here—Where did this change occur? Where does the phrase begin?—do not permit simple (unambiguous) answers, but that does not make the questions ill-conceived. They arise out of the common yet no less remarkable feature of an experience of music. One might dismiss this all as making molehills seem mountains. "There is no problem, no ambiguity. E becomes a pivot to B, a regular feature of tonal music that makes modulation possible." It is true that such a reply acknowledges one aspect of the temporal nature of music, which is that its patterns are irreversible in all but specialized cases (it is not as if anyone would argue that B modulates to E at measure 20). Still, it does not fully capture the time-bound nature of much musical experience; it asks us to listen with the outcome already known. And that is to listen with insufficient naiveté, to miss out on how contact with a Bachian *harmonia mundi* at once satisfies and overwhelms the intellect.

This is all to say that Abbate and Parker are right to wonder how it is that music cannot be ambiguous. But my halting efforts at a quasi-Neoplatonic analytical manner, however remote in style from what mature criticism is taken to look like, are trying to point to a different operation of the concept. A neostructuralist project like Abbate and Parker's thinks that responding to art with awe conflicts with an appreciation of ambiguity. That is the rub in their rejecting an earlier criticism for bowing to Mozart's mature operas as "perennially sacrosanct, impervious to the shadows of ambiguity."[18]

What they describe, in others words, is nearer to disenchantment than to a mind-expanding Neoplatonic unity in variety or an early German Romantic delight in "indissoluble miscegenations."[19] Giving adequate voice to that difference probably requires pressing a different word into service. What Abbate and Parker prize as ambiguity looks more like what Hirsch calls indeterminateness:

> Ambiguity or, for that matter, vagueness is not the same as indeterminateness. This is the crux of the issue. To say that verbal meaning is determinate is not to exclude complexities of meaning but only to insist that a text's meaning is what it is and not a hundred other things. Taken in this sense, a vague or ambiguous text is just as determinate as a logical proposition; it means what it means and nothing else.[20]

Ambiguity, as Hirsch describes it, is not incompatible with intention. Indeed, ambiguity works by reference to a speaker, to a consciousness. If a text is ambiguous, it is because an author meant it that way. (If Mozart hedges in ambiguity the reconciliation of Donna Anna and Don Ottavio in the last act

of *Don Giovanni*—will he have to wait another year, after this one?—that is Mozart's meaning.)

It depends on the strength of Abbate and Parker's neostructuralist commitments, but their endorsement of ambiguity may therefore not be logically sustainable. If ambiguity is a function of consciousness—if even ambiguity always involves an utterance, in which case it requires *some* limitation ("she wished that heaven had made her such a man" may mean anything from *A* to *O*, but cannot possibly mean *P*)—then it is not clear how there can be ambiguity *and* codes and discourses. In the passage below, Pippin works through an implication of Kant's revolutionary insight that all thinking is judging against the kind of principles advanced by Abbate and Parker:

> A structure of possible differentiability or articulability, a language or cultural code, an episteme, a discourse field, the system of forces of production, does not and cannot do anything to make possible intentional or semantic or symbolic content. In this version of Kantianism, thinking or uttering A or in any way being directed toward A by an utterance or sign or image is possible only if intending A has *various other material implications,* if intending A entails various other commitments and entitlements and exclusions.

What Pippin says about the relation of code to thinking applies to that between code and ambiguity: "Elements of a code, material signs in a system," he continues, "cannot take up and follow through such commitments and proprieties. They do not dwell with the 'space of reasons' necessary for thought"—or, to my point, necessary for ambiguity.[21] Campbell thought that ambiguity could be resolved, if only the proper system were in place. The same thing seems to be going on with Abbate and Parker, just at a more abstract level.[22]

It does seem, however, that Abbate and Parker bet the house on a neostructuralist opera poetics. By their account, a hybrid genre like opera unavoidably disperses authorial intention, which makes coherence among the various domains of music, text, and drama impossible, no matter how hard a composer tries to draw them together. The great achievement of recent opera criticism, then, has been to bring opera into the ongoing modernist demystification of an earlier art criticism's futile quest for unity. They are right, of course. No *perfect* correspondence can bind text, music, and drama. (The result would not then be correspondence, but replication.) That is precisely how there can be *meaningful* correspondences.

Rosen is sometimes regarded as an apostle of formalism in its academic sense—form as something that stands on the other side of experience.[23] And yet his poetics comes much closer to opera as a phenomenon than do Abbate and Parker's, as here: "When the music [of an opera] achieves absolute intelligibility without the drama, it detaches itself, lives on . . . independently . . . and ceases to exist as opera. The attainment of the ideal would kill the species

almost by definition" (*Classical Style*, 154). The impossibility of there being a perfect harmonization between music and drama is a condition of there being opera at all. Where an exact match obtained (but what would this look like, and how would we know it or care about it?), then the music would be identical to the drama, and therefore dispensable.

For argument's sake, however, set all this aside, and grant that opera is a fundamentally disharmonious form of drama. If that is so, then where does that leave not just intention, but mimesis, that category under which the elements of plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song (*Poetics*, 1450a) were conventionally said to cooperate in the creation of a drama?

Chapter Seven

# On Mimesis

Like indeterminacy, mimesis is a word that Abbate and Parker do not use. Instead of "imitation," they opt for "correspondence." There is some ambiguity in their usage. Occasionally, "correspondence" functions as a synonym for mimesis, as when they call it "a classical aesthetic category." Mostly, however, they shade the concept in ways that diverge from Aristotle and much of the following history of poetics, where fiction enacts a basic human impulse to imitate. That tonal and qualitative shift is highlighted in the piece they use to illustrate correspondence, a Mark Morris choreography, from 1987, of Mozart's Fugue in C Minor, K. 426 (1783). Abbate and Parker say that the gestures of Morris's dancers correspond "exactly . . . to every musical turn" of Mozart's piece. Now, correspondence looks much more structuralist. Morris's purpose is less to animate the mechanisms of Mozart's fugue than just to show that it has them. Abbate and Parker acknowledge that robotic turn, but Morris, they think, still has done something nobler than toss off a caricature or pursue an idle experiment. They see a salutary "resistance" in his eccentricity: "By engendering banality, predictability and ridicule through such precise means, Morris subverted a fundamental assumption that all of us bring to 'reading' ballet: that gesture and motion should be generated by and correspond to music" ("Dismembering Mozart," 187). By this point, "correspondence" has lost almost any connection to a "classical aesthetic category." Instead of acting as a synonym for mimesis, correspondence sounds a challenge to mimesis.

Grammatically, that devaluation happens by making adverbs shoulder a lot of weight. Summarizing the logic of correspondence theory, Abbate and Parker say its demand is that, "*ideally*, the musical will correspond *precisely* to verbal or staged events, and unfold in parallel to text and action" (188). They highlight the first adverb to argue that the unification of music and drama may be speculatively thinkable but practically impossible or, if in fact realizable, then aesthetically unsatisfying. I highlight the second one to emphasize the burden that is being placed on the concept. Levin, too, uses similar modifiers to raise the hurdle that mimesis must overleap. There is no such thing as

"*absolute* musical mimesis," he says; it is "*merely* a consensus about presumed correspondences between musical expression and stage representation."[1] The implication seems to be (1) that something cannot be valid or useful unless its value is absolute, and (2) that criticism has available to it some other, more viable standard than consensus. In any case, conceding that music and text are not the same thing and, further, that correspondence, however defined, cannot be ideal, it does not follow that a weaker form of mimesis must be excluded. Rather than producing a breakdown in communication, a gap among domains is a precondition of meaning and source of creative energy. That is why composers have found it worthwhile to set some poems and dramas and not others, just as we can imagine more than one practicable choreography of that Mozart fugue. The different perspectives can be brought into relief by analogy to a puppet play. The absorbed viewer accepting mimesis allows herself to enter into the fiction, although of course wondering at the puppeteer's skill at the same time. But the viewer beholden to correspondence sees only the trick, only the person pulling the strings.

High formalism, of which a poetics of correspondence is a species, has undeniable powers to elucidate the devices and mechanisms of art. By equating design with material, however, it also impedes an art appreciation by stopping the inquiry in the wrong place. The flaw now found, the rift now exposed, the task of interpretation appears finished. Thus, for example, Adorno on late Beethoven: "Of the works themselves, [subjectivity] leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself."[2] Stepping back from this general kind of argument (along with its older sibling, an approach seeking "an underlying, secret, and abstract common denominator that redeems unity"), Burnham wonders whether "we are letting our anxiety about wholeness and closure dictate the terms of the experience. In doing so, we may lose sight of the nature of these contrasts." And thus a vital question is not getting asked: "Why *these* contrasts?"[3]

That question clears out a lot of brush. If contrast is the object, then any will do (and are we sure we know what counts as a contrast?). The more recent hermeneutic emphasis on failures and fissures presents a paradox, albeit a lower-order one. The complaint against an older, Romantic aesthetics was that it sacrificed the intellect on the altar of creative genius. The wonder permeating the mind confronted with genius halted rather than facilitated thought. But now another graven image takes its place, this time to the *Opus absconditum*. Coming upon this shrine, the music-analytical adventurer is stymied by quests he cannot fulfill (the search for the "exact" correspondence, for "absolute" mimesis) and is drawn away from ones that he can.

With respect to mimesis, what might it look like to formulate a question based on a less mechanistic view of art? Cavell gives an example regarding an

episode far more implausible by just about any standard of realism than what concludes *Figaro*: the ending of *The Winter's Tale* (where Hermione appears as a statue). Although Cavell's main interest is not in defending mimesis, what he asks of this highly theatrical and flatly impossible moment presupposes the integrity of the drama: "How it is that we are to understand Leontes' acceptance of the 'magic' that returns [Hermione] to flesh and blood, and hence to him." Cavell is not saying, "People do not turn into statues in real life, in which case, Shakespeare is summoning us outside the tale to have us look at its mechanisms, perhaps with dismay at the contrivance, perhaps to marvel at his theatrical derring-do." (That is, however, the kind of question that grounds Tcherniakov's *Don Giovanni*, cited at the beginning of this essay). Cavell accepts the fittingness of that chain of events within the tale's own universe, within the psychology of its fictional characters (a variant on the old but durable Aristotelian intuition that the probable impossibility is superior to the improbable possibility; 1461b): "So I am asking for the source of Leontes' conviction in the rightness of that fate."[4]

The deromanticizing critic does not usually ask this kind of question. For Abbate and Parker, there is only a conflict of discourses; for Abbate on her own about *Figaro*, only "a Countess, a Count" and "ordinary words" and "beautiful noise"; for Levin, the unreliability of culture and therefore of consensus. An exception comes in Richard Will's essay on *Figaro*'s denouement.[5] It hovers between a modernist and an older poetics. As we will see below, part of his argument goes full in with the present-day predilection for ironic distance over mimetic engagement. Yet he also identifies one character in the opera who stands out *as* a character, one whose musical/dramatic utterances we can trust and whose fate can stir a sympathetic response. That is the Countess. Singling her out for this interest might sound like playing the game by two different sets of rules, but there are important reasons why he has done so.

Here is a synopsis of his argument: Romanticism and its continuation into the present have treated the reconciliation between the Count and Countess to an affirmative gloss that covers over the actual ambivalence that the Countess feels in responding "sì" to the Count's "perdono." Recent performance practice has perpetuated this false image of an easy, world-denying absolution by imposing a grand ritardando on the reconciliation scene's original andante tempo. Consequently, what Mozart intended to be musically perfunctory and dramatically impermanent now falsely appears sublime and lasting. The ending offers up no shared pleasure arising from a renewed community—comedy's usual gift to the viewer—but instead a clarified ambivalence from the isolated Countess. She has been through too much at the hands of the incorrigible Count for a lasting reconciliation to be believable.

There is a very strong operation of mimesis in this interpretation. Further, it is not necessarily problematic that Will applies it almost exclusively to the

Countess. As F. R. Leavis and others have noted, some characters within the same drama can appear more like persons, others more like plot devices, just as *Figaro* does not invite us to wonder much about Antonio's inner life.[6] Further, for Will to sense a deep ambivalence in the Countess is to stop short of calling her a postmodern, decentered self. An instance of that contrasting approach to a character from *Figaro* has to be sought elsewhere, as in Heather Hadlock's interpretation of Cherubino. For her, the tension between how the page sounds and how he looks is irresolvable, including by conventional theories of mimesis. What is left is a disappearing Cherubino, whose vanishing is described in language resembling Bonaventure's: "The pageboy casts the audience into a figurative darkness, a clouding of the mind's eye that results from the never-explained clash between the page's visual and vocal incarnations; in some sense, the trousered soprano who plays the page is also doomed perpetually to obstruct our view of him."[7] When Aeneas encounters his father in the underworld, he tries to hug him: "Three times he tried to fling his arms around his neck, / three times he embraced—nothing . . . the phantom / sifting through his fingers, / light as wind, quick as a dream in flight."[8] Here, a Cherubino that you cannot even see, much less touch, brings no analogous sense of loss. That is because the ancient impulse to tell stories is suppressed. In Will's ethic, in contrast, the Countess *is* a self, although anxious, modern, and divided. And that is to say that there is a rule in operation here, as opposed to a rejected one that leaves a perpetual vanishing.

Those are the main ways that Will's interpretation turns on mimesis as a mindful act more than on correspondence as an automated one. Still, it is obvious that his argument also diverges in significant ways from what would be recognizable as earlier applications of mimesis. To see these differences and thereby highlight the choices and stakes in this position, it is helpful to consider his view of the possibilities of theatrical characters against some earlier responses to Aristotle.

A helpful place to begin is in Renaissance Europe, where, as Jane K. Brown has noted, the *Poetics* began to be read through Horace's *Ars Poetica*.[9] That conflation did not end up overturning Aristotle's requirement that a drama should be probable, but it did alter where probability was to be sought. For Aristotle, probability implied idealized standards: what ought to be (hence, poetry's superiority to the "what was" of history). Verisimilitude, Brown's synonym for Aristotelianism but not for mimesis, starts from a different point: "human reality and character rather than idealized human actions" (53).

That was not an entirely happy development. Among its most recognizable legacies are the notorious Unities, which tethered the dramatic imagination to social decorum. In the eighteenth century, that idea was most associated with a critic and reformer like Johann Christoph Gottsched, although the literal-mindedness that this perspective could induce would also overcome

the occasional playwright, including one as prominent as Goldoni, who, for example, gave his Don Juan Tenorio time to dry off his clothes after his shipwreck. It can also be found in at least one member of the Mozart family who was also troubled by a staged disembarkation. The case at hand is *Idomeneo*. As its first act was being drafted, Giambattista Varesco, the librettist, originally had Idomeneo land without a retinue. In this case, the sterner Gottschedian was not the son, but the father. The King had to land on shore with his attendants and then dismiss them, because, Leopold insisted, kings did not do things like land alone on shore. Leopold persisted, Mozart capitulated, and the law of social decorum prevailed. To be sure, there are also signs of Gottschedianism in Mozart himself. Regarding the transition between scenes 6 and 7 in *Idomeneo*'s last act, he says that it is "impossible" for the King to kneel down in the temple by himself. "He must come accompanied by his whole suite."[10] (But perhaps Mozart was looking for a dramatic pretext for incorporating a march, with its public, ceremonial character.)

These coarser sides of Gottschedianism are routinely rejected today: the distrust of the imagination, the conservatism inherent in the defense of the status quo ante. Yet Gottschedianism also proposes a richer, more durable value, one that asks better questions than whether one can physically cover six German miles by foot in eighteen hours, which was the question that Gottlieb Stephanie the Younger affirmatively answers of his *Macbeth* (1772) in order to assure any excitable Gottschedian that no Unity had been violated.[11] That finer value, as Brown again explains, is secularism. Gottschedian drama, rejecting the probable as a criterion for imitation, takes as its unit of measure the social world, a community that exists "in history" (56). *This* value has had some staying power. When, for example, Allanbrook avers that "the music of the Classic style is pervasively mimetic, not of Nature itself but of our natures—of the world of men, their habits and actions," she is throwing in her lot with the better Gottsched.[12]

Richard Will's Gottschedianism is more ambiguous. In some respects, he approaches convention in a thoroughly un-Gottschedean manner. The kind of technical failure he sees projected in *Figaro*'s last reconciliation scene evinces a foundational skepticism about the authority of convention. Thus, in characterizing an older view of the Countess's mercy as a gesture that brings "about true reconciliation with the Count *rather than* merely satisfying social or comic convention,"[13] he is rejecting the conclusion but taking the premise as axiomatic: that what is true to the self *must* conflict with our roles as social creatures. To take up a convention is to hide, or to deceive.[14]

Or perhaps this reading is too narrow, and Will is only clearing out a weaker kind of convention in order to make room for a more potent one. Proposing the Countess as a divided self does not place her outside of convention, but only within a different one, something cognizable as a modernist, tragic vision of drama. As Nuttall explains, whereas ancient tragedy placed the cosmos

at its center, tragedy in the modern mode gives that position to the isolated individual. Among other things, that reconception changes the nature of anagnorisis. Instead of being left with the "open sorrow" of the ancients, the modernist hero lives on with a "clarified despair."[15] That unease works itself up to the social world of such dramas. The violence and pathos of tragedy can sometimes make us forget how they will often end with an order restored or renewed—the plague over Thebes lifted, Malcolm crowned King, and so on. But for the modernist tragedian, no such order settles in. Likewise for comedy, no serendipitous vision of communal life radiates out from its center. Comedy represses. Where the convention of the happy ending is rendered incapable of assuaging the despairing private self, responses like joy or satisfaction become unavailable. What remains at the conclusion is a subliminal disquiet. That is the gist of this response from Will to *Figaro*'s putative surface improbability: "If the characters do harbor residual anger or insincerity, they bury it so deeply as to leave no mark on the musical surface" (51). I think he is right in seeing no such trace on that musico-dramatic surface, but the assumption is that if that unease is not found there, then it must exist someplace else. In this case, it is transferred to us, the viewer.

Richard Louis Levin noted an insatiability about the appetite of the ironic hermeneut. If you don't like the reading you have, you can always revise it to get the one you want.[16] (Donna Elvira says she will spend the rest of her life in a convent, but who knows what will happen after the curtain goes down? Maybe she will find a better spouse and live happily ever after.) Adopting a hermeneutics of infinite revisability raises the important theoretical point of what constitutes a valid question of a fictional work. But since all inquiries, including ironizing ones, have to stop somewhere, that broader question does not need to be settled as a condition of asking where *these* interpretations of *Figaro* stop, and why they stop where they do. So: The Countess as someone possessing a soul that we apprehend beneath the surface of her words and gestures and whose motivation we want to understand—*why* she acts, and not just *that* she does. The value producing that kind of question is also an extension of Aristotelianism's shift from plot to character. Whereas Aristotle himself, to continue with Brown, was "less interested in why characters act than simply that they do act," Aristotelianism transfers causality from external plot to inner character (59). With that priority in place, it becomes possible for love to be the basis of a tragedy (as with Racine), and the tragic knot can tighten not just from the individual's pulling at one end, the external social or moral cosmos at the other; the conflict can arise from within the individual herself.

No necessity drove what followed from this reorientation of Aristotle, of course, but it does prepare the way for one of today's most prominent standards for evaluating drama, that of psychological realism. A modernist, secular poetics replaces Gottsched's rule of social decorum with the laws of psychology

as the touchstone of probability. The mode is so widespread today as to seem a plain fact of drama, as much in public as in academic circles. One more recent instance from the world of performance appears in Atom Egoyan's staging of *Salome* for the Canadian Opera Company, from 2013. Egoyan's commentary adopts a rationale that comes straight out of psychological realism: "Just as Wilde reinterpreted the story, I felt a pressing need to make certain things clearer—to find some justification for Salome's horrific behaviour. Why is this young woman so violent? What is it in her *upbringing* that has brought her to demand the murder and mutilation of her object of lust?"[17] Starting from a dilemma that might face any viewer—what is Salome's motivation?—Egoyan looks to (a certain model of) psychology for resolution. His answer to the question of upbringing takes the form of a video projecting a young girl out in a wood on a swing. That innocent, pastoral scene, however, ends up with a gang rape. And that is why Salome wants the head of John the Baptist.

Egoyan's argument evaporates with the slightest breath. Not every victim of such an atrocity becomes a Salome, in which case Egoyan has not helped us understand *her* and the fictional world against which Strauss's opera sets her crime. The fragility of the argument might suggest it is not even worth challenging at all. That it could work its way onto a leading stage and, further, seem unexceptional in doing so, however, says something about how much psychological realism is a sign of the times, about how this perspective is thought to provide crucial insight into the self. Yet Egoyan's diagnostic approach to the psyche at once robs inwardness of its complexity and theater of its ability to open a window onto human motivation, which is not fully comprehensible discursively or diagnostically. Hoping to show us the particularity of an individual, Egoyan's staging ends up reducing her to stereotype and thus has a blunting effect on the sympathetic imagination. For a compelling dramatization of the inner life, psychological realism, at least in this form, is not the way to go.

Will's psychological realism is more sophisticated, but it remains an open question if it is so in degree or kind. The linchpin of his argument is that *Figaro*'s ending cannot be happy because the Law of Time contravenes the Law of Beauty: "However beautiful, a minute of peace cannot put to rest hours of animosity" (51). That argument brushes up against the more literalistic side of Gottschedianism in how it treats the Unity of Time, as when Goldoni has a statue of the Commendatore commissioned at the beginning of his Don Juan play so that no one would wonder how the monument got built so quickly at the end. (Goldoni really did not like the Don Juan tale.) When it comes to Will's understanding of how the self and time relate on the stage, things look less literalistic. His main tenets are that emotions belong to us, exclusively (my resentment is mine alone); that emotions define us more than thoughts do; that darker feelings are truer, have more depth, than more joyous ones (although not quite in the exhilarating, sublime sense that Melville gives in

*Moby-Dick*, where "even the highest earthly felicities ever have a certain unsignifying pettiness lurking in them, but, at bottom, all heart-woes, a mystic significance, and, in some men, an archangelic grandeur"[18]).

Yet all of these assumptions need further scrutiny, even against modern standards of psychology. For example, it is not tenable to make so strong a separation of emotions from thought. The two are more entwined, as Budd acknowledges in defining emotions as "positive or negative reactions or attitudes to how the world is represented."[19] There is, further, the question and opportunity that confront the historian: How intelligible are these priorities against eighteenth-century ones and how Mozart conceived his characters? Rosen, for example, discerns a different psychology at work in Mozart, a more "leveling" view of human nature, where

> all men are the same, all dominated by the same motifs; *così fan tutti*: they all behave the same way; the differences between Fiordiligi and Dorabella are only superficial, the one like the other will end in the arms of a new suitor. One of the most revealing moments in *Le Nozze di Figaro* is when the valet, misled by Susanna, becomes as blind with jealousy as his master. Eighteenth-century comedy springs from the tradition of masked players, but it made the mimes drop the masks as the century went on, as if the fixed grimace were irrelevant to the blander, more mobile, real face underneath.[20]

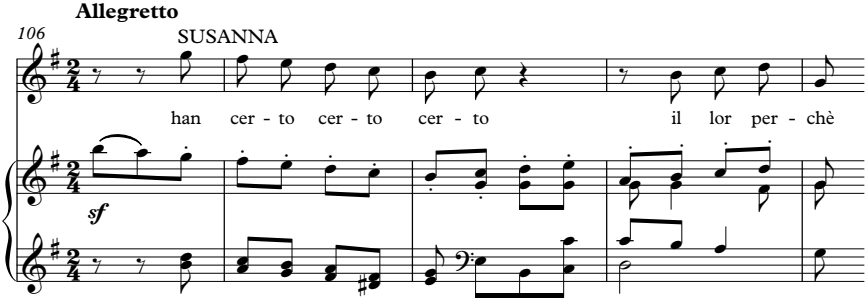
Something of a rationalist theory of emotion governs the psychic life of Mozart's characters. Emotions are objective and thus transferable, often with a velocity that may strike us as improbable. At the very least, Rosen's theory helps to account for the emotional lability elsewhere in the opera (as well as in the wider repertory): along with Figaro's and Susanna's changes from rage to joy, there are the collective changes of heart in the third-act sextet, where Bartolo and Marcellina start off as committed adversaries of the younger pair, only to discover they are family. Whereupon emotions instantaneously turn from swords into plowshares.

There is one other reservation to make about psychological realism's compatibility with *Figaro*, whether as a work of art or as a social document. The lead comes, once again, from Nuttall and something he says in explaining why there was "a greater profusion of basic iconic symbols" in Elizabethan England than there are today: "The growth of literacy has led to the gradual usurpation by writing of the function of symbolic images."[21] A similar tension between word and symbol was felt in Enlightened, Catholic Vienna. As James Van Horn Melton has shown, the shift from a visual to verbal culture in eighteenth-century Austria was late in coming, rapid when it did happen, and somewhat remarkable for happening at all.[22] The official push to reorient Austrian cultural life away from a reliance on external ceremony was meant to cultivate a more intimate virtue and piety among the citizenry. Given the contemporary

appeal of theater as a potent tool for moral formation, it is not surprising that such a verbal orientation found a place in theater politics. Basically, most of the reformers mentioned here (Christian Gottlob Klemm, Franz Heufeld, Joseph von Sonnenfels, maybe Anton Cremeri, as we will see below) wanted to evaluate theater as a verbal rather than visual (or aural) medium. But that transformation was nothing like complete, and more than a residue of a Counter-Reformation ceremonial culture persisted in Mozart's Vienna.

Such an appeal to history might only amount to a capitulation, to an admission that the world of Mozart has become opaque to us. If such elaborate arguments are needed to explain him, then that is a sign of how his operas have become more museum pieces than vital things, and a fuller or at least different appreciation of their quality would have to await the arrival of a different sensibility. But not too much squinting is needed to see that, in *Figaro*, abstractions, ideals, can possess a sensuous potency that their instantiation in a particular cannot fully describe. The obvious example is Cherubino. He metamorphoses between, on the one hand, an adolescent boy in whom we recognize the burgeoning of erotic love and, on the other, a representative of the God of Love himself (and whose androgyny is itself explicable in the Aristophanic vision of the restoration of a divided originary man). The big point here is that the abstract, idealized Cherubino shines no less brightly than the sensuous one. When Mozart rains down from the rafters the deification of Cherubino given in example 7.1, it settles over Cherubino as person and then over everyone else as the ideal of Love (not that there is much of a difference between the two).

Example 7.1. Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*, K. 492 (1786), no. 13: "Venite inginocchiatevi," mm. 106–10.




Or: When Figaro vaingloriously complains that he is "the new Vulcan of the age" ("nuovo Vulcan del secolo," 4.13), it is insufficient and perhaps a little condescending to say that Da Ponte is flattering his audience with a show of erudition. This is no esoteric reference for the cognoscenti. It is Mozart and Da Ponte's way of generalizing his rage. In an earlier generation of opera, the

baleful cuckold announcing "I rage" came close to describing Rage as a person. So, too, with Mozart and Da Ponte: "I am Figaro." "I am Vulcan." "I am Rage," to move up the ladder from a mortal, past a god, and then to an Idea, with no loss of power or intelligibility. Mozart's gesture "sees the specific in the general," as Goethe said of the poetic as opposed to the allegorical, which looks for "a specific correlative to an abstraction."[23] Figaro's reference is at once general and concrete, grand and marvelously comic. Thus the power and persisting intelligibility of a psychology that is expressed sensuously, through the glow of sign and symbol, and not their veiling.

Chapter Eight

# On Pleasure

Vulcanic barbers, faithless husbands, desperate wives, libidinous pages, drunk gardeners, rebellious chambermaids, scheming parents, lawyers: Put that way, it seems odd that watching such characters, even on Mozart's stage, would bring people pleasure. Odd, and also perhaps censurable. One strand of criticism, going back to Plato, holds that theatrical enjoyment coarsens our native sympathy, inures us to suffering, makes us mock virtue. That old objection has some contemporary authority in modernist responses to a Mozartean beauty, which must be resisted because it makes palatable some lie about the social, political world, where "music oft hath such a charm / to make bad good, and good provoke harm" (*Measure for Measure*, 4.1.14–15). But the dissent can go still deeper, to operate independently of any particular content. The problem is with representation itself. Clean up his indecencies (the way he incites fear of death or distrust of the gods, for example), and Plato would still demand that Homer cast everything in his own voice. When Homer speaks in the voice of Chryses, for example, he is lying (*Republic*, 393c).

The modernist resistance to representation is like that. An older poetics found in beauty at least a sign of a harmony between nature and freedom. The modernist, not thinking it possible to feel at home in the world, reconceives art's task as one of aiding in, making clearer, that naturally alienated state. There is a moral imperative in stopping our ears to beauty, or at least in lashing ourselves to the mast as we sail past it.

What is interesting is what happens when theoretical certitude about beauty's corrosiveness runs into the practical fact that few people are going to stop enjoying things like the conclusion to *Figaro*'s mad day anytime soon. They might rather resent the censoriousness, or just scoff at it. Faced with this problem in the area of a modern, "experimental" poetry that is "hard to love," apologists have, as Oren Izenberg notes, redescribed pleasure variously as "'the fascination [of] what's difficult,' the penetration of the veil of the esoteric, the masochistic pleasures of derangement, the politicized shock of estrangement, the tranquilizing or meditative dwelling in the ambient."[1] Much *Figaro*

criticism, for its part, declared an uneasy truce: pleasure can remain, but on the condition that its object be changed. Again, the values of modernist art indicate where to find that object. Modernism's loss of confidence in transcendence left a void in the creation and evaluation of art. What filled it was the value of self-consciousness. This story has been told many times. A characteristically lucid account of this complex process comes from Barzun: "Hegel's afterthoughts forecast the very evolution of art from the time it assumed the role of religion. I mean the drive toward more and more abstract, disembodied forms to signify the ineffable; in short, art repudiating nature and the senses like religion itself."[2] From representing nature and people, art more and more came to reflect on its own nature and possibilities—the painting about painting, the play referring to theater. Now, what remains to debate is whether representational art is therefore to be abandoned altogether or whether it will just not occupy the place it once held. Or, in an opera criticism like David Levin's, the debate is over. For him, there is no going back and, what is more, no need to go back, no reason to regret the loss of an earlier rapport between work and realization. "In the wake of the scenic innovations of the past century," he all but decrees, "I can see no grounds for an imperative to match music to conventional gestures beyond our interest in the historicity of that consensus."[3]

Setting off to the side his narrowing of mimesis to a formulaic process of "matching" instead of communicating (as well as his equally constrictive senses of history and convention), one can see Levin facing head on a real challenge that his modernism poses for the producer and critic: "In the absence of such a mimetic imperative, how can we think through the relationship between musical and dramatic expression in mise-en-scène?" His answer comes in showing how opera *fails*, necessarily, to satisfy its own imperatives. Modernist self-awareness produces a highly objectified opera stripped of sensuous appeal and harmonizing power. In so radical a reconception of theater, pleasure cannot maintain its older status as a guarantor of a work's craft or virtue. Pleasure has to come from some other source. It comes from witnessing the clarification of that failure.

Thus, a modernist opera poetics does not completely elude an older interest in pleasure, but it is of a different quality—more like the pleasure that comes from viewing a ruin. At least two other remnants of ancient thought persist in modern revisions. One of them is fidelity. There is, of course, no question that today's opera producer should try to find a harmony between music and drama. That day is over. Instead, a subtler fidelity guides the producer. It is to the "fundamental and underlying tension—we might call it an underlying infidelity of referentiality—that characterizes *any* work" (97; emphasis added). The other remnant is mimesis. It, too, has not entirely vanished. It leaves an afterglow, where the best productions—that is, the most self-aware ones—highlight its very impossibility. To state the differences between the old and the new

economically, if roughly: A director from earlier generations would be charged with telling a tale. A director from today is charged with showing why it is no longer possible to tell tales and making us enjoy that insight.

Levin's argument has an undeniable formal coherence. It comes, however, at the steep price of reductiveness. The producer is to show *that* the work is trying (and failing) to represent something and not *what* the work is representing. And that is as much to say that one version is as good as another, because what we are really being asked to attend to is not the opera but the production. (It is not even clear that this theory can accommodate a meaningful distinction between work and performance.) One of the questions not being asked is, again, Why *this* incompatibility?

Although he does not put it so explicitly, that *is* the kind of question that Richard Will looks to answer in his discussion of *Figaro*'s happy ending. He pays a price, too, in some dilution of theoretical consistency, although it is well worth it. At times, Will follows Levin in rejecting out of hand the availability or usefulness of mimesis. For example, he demurs from one influential interpretation of *Figaro*'s reconciliation scene, from Ivan Nagel, because it suggests that "the absolution transcends the plot to signify universal experience."[4] Mimesis in its traditional forms allows for, indeed requires, a concourse between our knowledge of the world and what we see onstage. Will, in contrast, raises a wall at that border. It tries to block our imaginations from wandering back and forth between the theater and the world.

On the other hand, as we have seen, Will's interpretation of the Countess and her inner life implicitly invokes the category of mimesis. *Figaro* is not only a tale of formal failure but also of the travails of a modern, alienated soul. That spirit of rapprochement between older and newer poetics extends to his discussion of pleasure (always so hard to separate from mimesis) in an experience of the opera's reconciliation. It, too, is relocated, from sympathetic response to the tale to its status as fiction. "What remains to confirm" once the story of *Figaro* is over, he explains, is "what a good time everyone has had in making it or watching it unfold." "Everyone" sounds catholic in its reach, but a certain class of person is not invited to the banquet—the characters themselves: "[*Figaro*'s] references to happiness and to music as its agent are typical of *buffa*, and neither one nor the other belongs to the characters as much as to the performers and the audience." (This is also another example of an equation of convention with conventionality. Because such references are *typical* of the genre, there is no reason to think of them as *meaningful*.) A little further down the page he expands upon that claim: "Whether the dramatic characters find peace is not clear, and less important than the reminder that while the pleasure they derive from the reconciliation is fictional, the joy of watching it is real." Where, then, is the pleasure? In the *failure* of *Figaro* to attain mimesis: the finale's "swift and easy disposal

of the noble couple's incompatibility exposes the artifice of the spectacle and encourages the audience to marvel at its complexity" (52).

These are pretty extraordinary claims. After all, the dramatis personae actually say, "Ah tutti contenti saremo così"—ah, now we will all be happy. Skepticism of this order—an ironic reading that "aspires to the condition of total distrust of the dramatic work," in the words of Richard Levin[5]—annihilates the possibility of talking about fiction.[6] That distrust overlooks a fundamental quality of statements from fictional works, which is that they can enact their own reality. If Shakespeare says that Othello kills Desdemona, then we have to take that as irrefutably true. This is a fact of the play, if not one subject to empirical verification.[7] Although less a matter of ontology than of judgment, the idea of complexity could also use clarification. How does Mozart's complexity distinguish itself from incompetence? For all the ways in which some earlier music analysis may have insufficiently thought through terms like "perfection," "unity," and "coherence," an art of any ambition has far more difficulty achieving a compelling unity than it does disharmony. Anyone can be incoherent. Why, then, should the finale's failure occasion wonder rather than disappointment or just indifference?

Perhaps Will means to acknowledge something heroic in Mozart's attempt to make a convincing reconciliation scene and yet failing of that, just as we can admire the ambition to overachieve, even when it falls short. Still, granting that no work of art, even *Figaro*, can show us everything about ourselves and therefore is a failure in that respect, when *Figaro* appeared, so did an expanded understanding of what was possible in human endeavor. In any case, I do not think Will means to say that Mozart's failure was heroic (or timorous), because the breakdown seems to come from Mozart's *refusal* to conceal the artifice of the drama. If that is so, then *any* work announcing its artifice will also fail, in which case Will has not explained what is special about *Figaro*'s complexity.

Will is hardly alone in turning from the representation of an action to its mechanisms as a source of whatever meaning and pleasure *Figaro* may yield. Here it is useful to revisit Abbate on the same scene:

> When the Countess pardons the Count in act 4 of *The Marriage of Figaro*, it is not that Mozart's music simultaneously gives voice to some more profound statement of or about forgiveness. Rather, it is the fact that there is a Countess, a Count, a specific dramatic situation, and ordinary words like "Contessa, perdono" sung out loud that has in quite precise ways predetermined the meaning to attach to Mozart's musical moment. These mundane, visible things feed a conviction that transfigured forgiveness—that specifically—is being conveyed by some very beautiful noise.[8]

At the beginning of this essay, I cited this passage to illustrate the modernist propensity to take the life out of art, to decompose it. This is criticism as

a kind of autopsy. Here, the interest is in the rhetoric and logic supporting that approach. Those places where the language imparts the strongest feeling of rigor all require greater clarity. "The fact that there is a Countess"—does that fact refer to a fictional creation in whom we may project a whole range of cultural knowledge and private experience, or does it indicate a cipher, "Countess" being a sense without a meaning? (I think it is the latter, but perhaps Abbate means something different.) By "ordinary words," the idea seems to be that there is nothing overtly poetic about Da Ponte's text (which is true). But what would *un*ordinary words look like, and would their presence then authorize thoughts of transfiguration? Abbate's explanation seems to preclude the possibility that the gesture's very ordinariness, its artlessness, could be a source of power and a point of contact between us and the fiction. (Almost all of us have said the ordinary words "forgive me" from time to time.) And then there is the word "forgiveness" combined with the inflection "transfigured." Is "transfigured forgiveness" of a different order from "forgiveness" unmodified? In order for the scene of forgiveness to be characterized even as a *failure* of forgiveness, the term must be available publicly. Is the rejection of transcendence (or transfiguration) founded on a metaphysics that places meaning outside of the use of signs?

It seems to be. Further down the page, one reads of the opera as something that "both prescribes and affirms music's emotional power and signifying capacity by *attaching* musical gestures to specific human situations or passions." The all-important word here is "attaching" ("attach" also performing a similar function in the lengthier passage cited above). It implies an artificiality, a contrivance about music and language more broadly, where emotions exist somewhere outside of their expression. (That was also the gist of Will's objection to Nagel and the latter's suggestion that *Figaro* pointed to things outside of itself.) If that is so, then there is no rational basis for finding something exemplary in *Figaro*'s action. *Figaro* now starts to look like Las Vegas: what happens in *Figaro*, stays in *Figaro*.

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Abbate follows a branch of opera criticism that sharply distinguishes thought from sensation. On the one side, there is the story and whatever judgments we may render about that and, in a resurrected theory of pure instrumental music, "very beautiful noise" off to the other. This is hardly the only instance in which so strong a tension between ethic and pleasure governs a poetics of Mozart opera. It also guides, as we have seen, Will's interpretation of *Figaro*. One important contribution he makes to this discussion involves the nature of the evidence he cites, and that is the testimony of history. Here, his point of departure is Hunter's study of the opera buffa repertory in Mozart's day and

the ideas sustaining it. Driving the design and reception of this music was a distinction between theater as entertainment and theater as instruction. Here is how Will applies that idea to his interpretation of *Figaro*'s happy ending: "The allegro which follows [the scene of reconciliation] observes the convention by which *opere buffe*, to quote Mary Hunter, 'assert from within the *merely* pleasurable nature of the occasion [their] function as escape or diversion from, rather than model for, daily life.'"[9] According to Hunter, opera buffa obeyed a different poetics from drama more broadly, especially German spoken drama: "In terms of public rhetoric, . . . Vienna's opera buffa was starkly differentiated from the nation-building, proto-bourgeois, and generally edifying ideals of German drama" (13). Only the latter genre could provide a sufficiently durable foundation for erecting a morally compelling stage, precisely because it was *not* oriented around pleasure-seeking.

Much evidence supports that position, as well as the way the question is framed. Hunter cites leading Viennese reformers of the stage, from Christian Gottlob Klemm to Joseph von Sonnenfels, all of whom inveigh against opera buffa's empty pleasures (9–11), what Klemm itemizes as "Punch-and-Judy gags, zany, artificial turns of plot, and exaggerated things."[10] One could add Johann Pezzl to that register. He was relieved that an earlier decade's theatromania had finally broken and given way to a less febrile, more healthful appreciation of theater as "a pleasant, decent, and tasteful entertainment."[11] Perhaps Mozart himself ends up joining that chorus in making the widely cited complaint about those "miserable" Italian comic opera texts he had to pore over in search of something worth setting (if by "miserable" [elend] he meant morally and not just technically deficient).[12]

That common objection should not obscure an important area of difference, however. Mozart was largely unconcerned with a libretto's independent literary merit——"In an opera, the poetry must be the obedient daughter of the music," he declared in that same letter[13]—but the reformers took a different view. They thought that spectacle's seduction of the mind corroded public taste, whereas literature improved it. That such concerns about spectacle could come from places as far away as Berlin shows something of the range of that attitude:

> One discovers that the literary Berlin public judges more correctly than the theatrical one. Prevailing among the latter is an inordinate attachment to things that fill the eye and ear: glittering foreign finery, decorations, jousting, funeral processions, military processions with ringing bells, sounds of battle, canon and gun fire, witch scenes, materializations of devils, dungeons, scaffolds, crucifixes, homicidal invectives, and on and on—these always attract the largest number of viewers. The souls of the audience are not touched thereby but are instead convulsively shaken, wounded, lacerated, and shattered.[14]

Further, the stage's destructive pleasures were not just a topic in the relatively recent "public rhetoric." They had long been on the agenda in official circles. Maria Theresa, for example, had been trying to clean up the German theater since the 1750s.[15]

All of these examples justify Hunter's use of qualifiers like "sheer" and "mere" to winnow what an eighteenth-century poetics found pleasing from what it found useful (that is, morally instrumental). In addition, by describing the poetics of Viennese opera as governed by entertainment, Hunter is not proposing a critique in the mode of Adorno, who objected to entertainment insofar as its derivative pleasures blinded us to the presence of evil in the world.[16] Rather, her framing of the problem responds to a specific historical situation. That moment can be further clarified by looking to the influence that Neoplatonism wielded in eighteenth-century theatrical activity.

As Ernst Wangermann has shown, Neoplatonism had a formative role in the exposition of a morally instructive *and* sensuously appealing stage. The main idea, taken from Shaftesbury and transmitted into German-speaking lands especially via Moses Mendelssohn, was that example is superior to precept, and the more sensuously appealing the example, the more you will *love* the good, desire it, and not just agree to go along with it.[17] The intellectual sources of a sensuous stage were not, however, strictly secular. Clerics lent aid to its cause, too. Lead among them was one of Voltaire's teachers at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, the Jesuit Charles Porée, who, in 1732, delivered an influential oration concerning theater. His quasi-defense (the stage is corrupt, but only through *our* depravity, not from any inherent deficiency) had enough authority and appeal that the anticlerical Klemm translated excerpts from it in the *Patriot*.[18] Regarding pleasure, Porée's overarching point is that the stage's considerable theoretical power as a school of morals (and it is remarkable enough for a cleric to offer up even so modest an endorsement) is in practice diffused when pleasure is severed from virtue. Significantly, that argument applies to the musical as well as spoken stage. Porée rebukes the defenders of music for having too *little* regard for its capabilities, as if music were nothing more than a kind of "royal Garden, which generally is not planted with useful Trees but diversified with regular Walks, . . . and with no other view than merely to charm the Eye and Ear" (86).

The object of Porée's disappointment, it is important to reiterate, is not music itself but its unambitious Epicurean use. Those who regard music (or drama) merely as a pleasurable diversion neglect its potential for inculcating virtue, and Porée tries to vex his opposition with a series of rhetorical questions: "'Twas for this [i.e., mere pleasure] that *Phœbus* inspired you with such easy, such graceful Numbers, and with Verse so well adapted to musical Sounds! For this *Apollo* created *Orpheus*'s [numbers] with Voices so exquisite, and skilled in every Species of Harmony!" (92).

The idea that theater's or music's stimulation of emotion might spur one toward virtue is not a constant in the history of poetics. Aristotle ascribed a more Stoical quality to tragedy's handling of emotion. It was not that certain emotions were cleansed and thereby made into better emotions; emotion itself was to be purged. Porée's theory, in contrast, resembles more of a Renaissance Aristotle, as in Sydney's *Defense of Poesy* (ca. 1579).[19] As Nuttall sees it, Sydney articulated a radical reconception of what it means for poetry to be imitative. Aristotle's idea of the poem as the thing that does the imitating gives way to the poem itself as the object of imitation. We, the readers, imitate it, the poem. Reading the *Aeneid* should make us want to be more like Aeneas (again, according to Sydney). Poetry offers us an ideal representation of the world such that we are moved by it, are inspired to bring about that imagined world in daily action and comportment.

That enthusiastically ethical vision inspires perhaps the most ardent theatrophile of eighteenth-century Austria, Anton Cremeri, a censor in Linz; ballet student of Noverre; author of a Don Juan play; advocate for orphans; and, most famously or notoriously in his day, pro-Catholic, pro-Enlightenment polemicist against conservative Catholics. In 1780, he acknowledged Joseph II's ascendency to sole regency with a treatise on, of all things, theater, which he defended as a school of virtue for a nation. Among the various kinds of support he offers, easily among the strangest is a reference to the episode from *Don Quixote* in which Cervantes's hero chances upon a puppet play (bk. 2, ch. 26). The fiction so bewitches the errant knight that he attacks some of the figures on stage in order to guarantee the triumph of virtue. And Cremeri cites that episode of the deranged follower of Amadis de Gaule as an *appealing* example of theater's moral sway: would that we, too, were so absorbed in the stage as to "conspire to hate all evil and to love all good."[20]

There is something self-sabotaging about Cremeri's example. He wanted, after all, to mount a defense of theater against clerics and others who thought it overexcited the emotions. (The more temperate Porée, for example, sustains the old complaint against Racine for inflaming "the Breasts of the Audience with [Cupid's] tender, destructive Ardors" [62].) It was as if Cremeri were going out of his way to goad his more theatrophobic contemporaries. If that were his intention, he got his wish. He was cast down as a heretic for the optimism in human nature necessary to sustain his belief—itself mocked for being naive—that theater could improve people.[21] Perhaps Cremeri was imitating Erasmus and Sydney in playing the fool whose folly confounds the wise. And yet most of his treatise does not follow that mode (and some of his counterresponses, which could be quite acerbic, did not stay in the character of the amiable provocateur). Even his reference to the Cervantes does not come directly from the novel but via a more redoubtable (i.e., philosophical) source, Johann Georg Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (the entries on "Künste" and "Täuschung").

Cremeri's hermeneutics of folly might not only look back to Sydney but also adumbrate early Romanticism's preoccupation with Socrates as the archetypal ironist. As Friedrich Schlegel presents the argument, "The truly transcendental buffoonery . . . of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo*" allows poetry to rise "infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius."[22] However that may be, a conviction that it was in the nature of none of the arts, least of all music, to divorce pleasure from morality persisted to the other end of the century. An entry in an early volume of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, for example, takes essentially the same position as Porée.[23] The main difference is that the object of dismay is to be found in Kant, at least the Kant who placed music as the lowest "among the beautiful arts (just as it occupies perhaps the highest place among those that are estimated according to their agreeableness), because it merely plays with sensations."[24]

It confounds the essayist that music's relationship to morality (Sittlichkeit) could even be a matter of suspicion "to many otherwise serious professionals and philosophers" (sonst manchem ernsten Geschäftsmanne und Philosophen). Against them he replies that "the art of composition is assured of its triumph even before the judgment seat of reason" (selbst vor dem Richterstuhl der Vernunft ist die Tonkunst ihres Triumphes sicher). Although addressing these philosophers "von Plato bis auf Kant" with "the greatest reverence" (mit aller Ehrfurcht, col. 817), the apologist cannot help but let slip that Plato, perhaps for kicking out the flute-girl once things got serious in the *Symposium* (176e), and Kant, for thinking of music as a kind of sonic wallpaper, are showing a want of urbanity: "It is true that those who approach only the threshold of [music's] temple or wander only her antechambers might see it that way, but not so the truly initiated, for whom the engagement with music is never as with a craft: a mere diversion or empty play of senses."[25]

Nor was Kant's dissociation of artistic beauty from morality winning adherents elsewhere around this time, even where people enlisted him as a supporter. Here, for example, is a paean to the *Magic Flute* offered in Ignaz Arnold's biography. "In *The Magic Flute*," he marvels,

> are solved all aesthetic problems of musical composition. If it belongs to the inner beauty of a dramatic work—actually, of any art work that can yield an aesthetic judgment—that absolute perfection (i.e., morality) is the chief condition of eudaemonism, where harmony in the course of the plot, pure feeling, and peaceful inner joy rejoice as the *telos* of the cultivated mind: if that is so, then *The Magic Flute* is rightly the most exquisite object of pleasure for the connoisseur endowed with a true sense of art.[26]

Surveying thought on the arts in the early nineteenth century, Berger says that it was "suffused" with "a soft Kantianism" that provisioned "the educated and half-educated with a repertoire of ready-made notions and images that

could be taken for granted without necessarily being examined."[27] That last part seems a little unfair in light of the complexity of Kant's thought (which is still a subject of debate today), as well as the obvious effort of even the more popular writers cited here to think through some of these aesthetic questions. Still, perhaps Arnold's accolade regarding the *Magic Flute* gives an example of how Kant could be misapprehended. For Arnold says strange things in the name of Kant. That is probably so because his main source does, too: Johann Heusinger, whose *Handbuch der Aesthetik* was a leading popularization of Kant's aesthetic theories.[28] It is odd for nominal Kantians to think an encounter with art could so easily and necessarily be a moral one, given Kant's Rousseauian view on how the true man of taste ought to act in the presence of art:

> This preeminence of the beauty of nature over the beauty of art in alone awakening an immediate interest, even if the former were to be surpassed by the latter in respect of form, is in agreement with the refined and well-founded thinking of all human beings who have cultivated their moral feeling. If a man who has enough taste to judge about products of beautiful art with the greatest correctness and refinement gladly leaves the room in which are to be found those beauties that sustain vanity and at best social joys and turns to the beautiful in nature, in order as it were to find here an ecstasy for his spirit in a line of thought that he can never fully develop, then we would consider this choice of his with esteem and presuppose in him a beautiful soul, to which no connoisseur and lover of art can lay claim on account of the interest that he takes in his objects.[29]

There might be some openings here for a morally efficacious art. (And in no case is Kant saying that sensuous pleasure is the *only* thing art can yield, as it is also capable of bringing "a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions" [5:353, §59, p. 227].) In formal terms, art can be more beautiful than nature, and such ethical problems as may arise in contemplating it have to do with the great difficulty in sustaining that "immediate interest"—to attend to the object itself and not be distracted by vanity, mere pleasure, covetousness, and all the other vices that art can encourage.

Indeed, Kant seems to waver on this topic.[30] A little later in the Third Critique, he leaves open the possibility of "the beautiful as the symbol of the morally good," an analogy, to be sure, but one that is a part even of our common language, as when "we call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent" (5:354, §59, p. 228). If we make sense of the *given* things in the world by ascribing values to them, so much the more do we do that with *made* things: this painting, we say, is ambitious, or contrived, or noble, or a trifle, and so on. Elsewhere, in the metaphysics lectures of 1794, Kant goes so far as to propose taste as the foundation of morality and not, as in the Third Critique, the other

way around. Concerning the "artes liberales," he says, "the human being, who otherwise is acquainted with nothing except what belongs to sensation, is determined to action by the mere representation of the beautiful and the good (thus through something that carries with it no interest at all)."[31] That is a more subdued version of Cremeri's enthusiasm for a stage whose sensuality seduces one into the good.

The stronger difference between Kant and his Mozartean followers instead involves art and its rules. Heusinger and Arnold are inclined to a more rule-bound sense of art than what Kant would likely have tolerated. Heusinger makes the very un-Kantian move of laying down criteria for determining, a priori, validity in art. (Even here, though, Heusinger is at least somewhat following Kant in looking for his criteria of art in the disposition of the viewer and not the object.) He proposes three: a work of art must please, it must correspond "exactly" to the artist's conception, and it "must be able to promote the morality of one's disposition."[32] Kant, for his part, would almost certainly have rejected this view of art as too autocratic by a wide margin: "The beautiful arts are such that they do not coerce approval from people, but leave their judgment free, so that their approval is given spontaneously. In them no rules can be despotically prescribed, they are rather a free play of the imagination; but since this is a great assistant to the understanding, namely in providing intuitions for concepts, it promotes freedom."[33]

Nonetheless, the *Magic Flute*'s ravishing music, together with all of the maxims strewn about it, must have made it hard for Heusinger and Arnold to resist thinking of that opera as proof of the consubstantiality of the true, beautiful, and good, or at least as a precious moment in the history of art where one could behold the light of the one pooling into the light of the others. Heusinger's and Arnold's commentaries may not have been very good as philosophy, but they work as criticism. Their quasi-Kantianism at once gives voice to and widens their appreciation of how morality works in the *Magic Flute*. As many have noted, part of the opera's ethical vision appears as simple moralizing, in the charming sententiae that are the common currency of singspiel: do not lie, be steadfast, and so on. But the opera also embraces and, more than that, enacts, a richer kind of morality. It is a Boethianism made audible, here celebrated as *musica humana*—

> If every honest man
> could find such bells,
> then his enemies would
> disappear without effort;
> and he would live without them
> in perfect harmony

> (Könnte jeder brave Mann / Solche Glöckchen finden, / Seine Feinde würden dann / Ohne Mühe schwinden; / Und er lebte ohne sie / In der besten Harmonie)—

and here as *musica mundana*—

> Through the power of tone we tread
> joyfully through the dark night of death
> (Wir wandeln durch des Tones Macht, / Froh durch des Todes düstre Nacht)—

where music achieves philosophy's highest ambition, which is the overcoming of the fear of death.

That moral sense is sensuously embodied even in the opera's plot: "The external beauty of the whole indeed consists partly in its agreeableness, but it is also partly achieved through the ever-growing participation and the ever more determined and more predominant sign of the main feeling."[34] And what is this prevailing *Hauptgefühl* (a Kantianism that acknowledges in aesthetic experience more than the passive absorption of agreeable stimuli)? It is "the serene yet continuous striving for a goal, and the quiet joy at its attainment. A quintessentially moral goal—one could even say, morality itself, insofar as it can be reflected in a feeling."[35]

However distant from Kant or philosophically suspect, these accounts spanning the long and persistent eighteenth century bear witness to ideas that people from our past acted on: that the pleasure afforded by art was more than just empty, and that among the arts possessing such aesthetic-moral authority was opera, and not just spoken drama. Indeed, the occasional theatrophile would elevate opera to the status of primus inter pares precisely for its unmatched potential to burnish virtue with an irresistible luster. Such a Neoplatonic enthusiasm for the stage peaks, it will come as no surprise, with Cremeri. For him, Joseph's introduction of the singspiel crowns all theatrical achievement—in the entire history of the European stage—precisely because of music's superadded sensual appeal: "From a conviction about the power that the most splendid of the dramatic arts, opera, holds over the hearts of men, an art in which all the other arts excellently unite themselves, especially because of its music, about which Aristotle, Plato, and, in a word, all philosophers have preached so much—from this conviction, Joseph II introduced the newer, that is, comic opera."[36]

Part of Cremeri's interest in opera is formal, in its ability to achieve a unity-in-variety. But that formalism exists *in tandem* with opera's promise to enchant and instruct; it does not annihilate it. Cremeri explains how that can be so, again by silently weaving Sulzer into his argument:

> Whether it is illusion or actual fact that convinces me of a truth or corrects me from error is irrelevant if I am, in fact, convinced or corrected. To conclude, however, that illusions should thereby serve only to provide pleasure and entertainment is sophistry. For illusion bears on morals and intentions as much as on taste, which, quite unnoticed, is improved through good *exempla*. Such illusions can be ordered to various good examples; consequently, they can instruct me, convince me, and correct me, because the senses are our instructors, benefactors, and ravishers.[37]

That last word, "Verführer," has a Neoplatonist (and maybe even Augustinian) ring, where the soul, through the stage's sound and sight, is ravished into a love of the good.

One could see how a Neoplatonist ethic would redound to the estimation of opera, given music's added aural stimulus.[38] It is true that Cremeri confines his discussion to singspiel and is silent on opera buffa, but that has to do with the practical question of language. The repertoire of a national theater had to be comprehensible to the local populace. There was no principled or dogmatic animus toward the genre.

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Such fluctuations, entanglements, and hesitations about art and morality raise skepticism about reports of a univocal and errant turn in Romantic aesthetics. The record shows, rather, the nineteenth century as *our* century, as one whose concerns are still with us. But the threshold narrative is deeply inscribed in a modernist Mozart poetics, a tale that tells of the nineteenth century's casting a spell of myth over a secular eighteenth century, a spell that only we moderns have learned to recognize and then lift. For example, Allanbrook identifies A. B. Marx as a prominent agent in the Romantic project of relocating music from its native land of this world to an inaccessible, otherworldly region. That large ambition to turn music theory into a branch of theology can be encapsulated in Marx's use of a single word, "Geist." That gloomy, monosyllabic Teutonism would go on to obscure Mozart's colorful surfaces for generations, and it would take, Allanbrook continues, the application of a Gallic "playful *esprit*" to restore that original luster.[39] The baleful consequences of Marx's theologized music theory were also felt in ethics. A theory of music as Geist gave philosophical justification for reprimanding the kind of listener whom someone at least as far back as Porée had inveighed against: those Epicurean purveyors of music as "mere sensuous enjoyment, like that afforded by food, odors, the play of colors and"—to anticipate the guiding image of a postmodern poetics—"lines in a kaleidoscope."[40]

Does Marx's disdain for sensuous pleasure thus lead to or bespeak a disdain for life? Marx all but formalizes their divorce here: "Music stands the farthest

from the appearance and language of worldly life; because of this, life offers only the faintest clue for music and its deepest enjoyment."[41] That announcement comes not from the more polemical essay "The Old School of Music in Conflict with Our Times," from 1841, but from the essay on form, from 1856. The thought's location may seem inconsequential to its meaning, but Allanbrook sees in it another indication of the large incompatibility of German Idealism with the composition of music. Writing music is a craft, a practical business. The abstruseness and moralizing found in Marx are irrelevant to that task, at best, impediments to it, at worst.

Were we able to ask Marx, he would probably have resisted this interpretation of his philosophy and method. First, he is not trying to isolate music from life, per se, but from "the *appearance and language* of worldly life." That distinction might sound eristic, but it clarifies how he thinks of music in itself and in relation to the other arts. Music is not sound alone but, he says, sound organized: "sounds, vibrations, tones, noises, temporal events: these are themselves not music but rather for music." What, then, gives sound that order? Marx's answer, "Geist," may only magnify concerns about infiltrations of foreign ideologies into his music theory. But the way he speaks of Geist has something of the ordinary about it. To invoke spirit (or one from a cluster of its synonyms, like reason, intellect, mind, *nous*) is only to say "that music is not a simple element, recognizable by the physicist or philosopher, but is partly something formed and determined from different elements and their motions and partly a concept deduced from yet other elements" (61). Crucially, then, Marx is not proposing composers as inventors of material. That is because, one can infer, the material has *some* properties—you cannot do just anything with it. (This is a point Marx might have stressed rather than assumed had he fully anticipated these later, anti-Romantic objections.) But the ultimate shape or form that the musical work will take is not identical to those elements.

And that brings us back to the initial point Marx was making about music's distinctively otherworldly aspect. The other arts, he says, take their patterns from the world, but not so music. A (representational) painting of the human figure takes its form from a human figure. (With the advent of Modernist art, all that changes.) But what in the world does a sonata take its pattern from? It can be described by way of analogy. The design of a sonata is like that of a Classical temple, or of a piece of oratory, or of a magnificent system, or of a tale, or of a software program. But that act of imagination, no matter how necessary, will always yield varying degrees of likenesses rather than identities.

There is one other reason for thinking that Marx is trying to describe what humans do when they make music and not force music-making into a theory. Equating Geist with rational creative activity allows him to secure a theory of form against two competing but erroneous conceptions. The errors are not only recognizable in today's academic and informal conversations about

musical form; they also anticipate two of the main paths that modernist music would take in the next century: "arbitrary caprice and external compulsion."[42] From these two false values, he elaborates, issue two false choices: "either to resist form and struggle free from it or to subjugate oneself slavishly to some external precept that would campaign on behalf of 'Form,' perforce losing the freedom of one's own spirit, that first condition of artistic participation" (62). This argument may qualify Marx as a German Idealist, but not as a Platonist (in its conventional usage). There is no incursion from the beyond, nor is the mind seen as a falsehood, a "fake" made or taken up by German Idealism. Geist belongs to a person, is rational, and interacts with the world of objects and with others.

Marx's further elaborations on Geist bring out an even stronger affinity between German Idealism and cultural secularism, of his allegiance to the Hegel who said: "No matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is of no help; we bend our knee no longer."[43] The cultivation of Geist, Marx emphasizes in this continuation of Hegel's secularism, "is fundamentally nothing other than a coming to consciousness" (18). That term is no less fraught than "Geist," of course. Again, however, context is everything. Marx is using "Geist" not to ratify but to *challenge* a conventionally Romantic approach to creativity, which he calls "that old misunderstanding about the dreamlike unconsciousness of genial creativity" (19). Thus Marx's application of the concept of consciousness is superior to the kinds of self-consciousness evinced in the modernist art criticism discussed throughout this essay. It can see more—at once the material and also the mind, the person, who uses them.

For these reasons, I think what Allanbrook sees as an overlooked rhetorical fault in Marx is actually what he would openly promote as a structural and conceptual strength. Geist works in tandem with practical musicianship: "It must be emphatically pointed out . . . that our greatest artists were additionally possessed of educations most propitious for their task, and that, despite the greatest natural aptitude, their works remained defective precisely at those points where some part of the necessary education was lacking." Geist requires rather than negates culture (one wants to say, Geist *is* culture). As an exemplifcation of his idea of creativity as reflection taking sensuous form, Marx offers up none other than Mozart himself, whose letters reveal "a remarkably clear consciousness of his intentions and their execution" (19).

It would certainly be consequential for the history of art and poetics to have the values of "criticism, meaning, and a kind of self-education" supplant ones "founded on taste, beauty, and pleasure," as Pippin describes the change.[44] It would take generations to work through its implications for the social function of art, the availability of convention for understanding ourselves and others, the authority of beauty in art and its criticism, the capacity of the past to speak

to the present. But that is to get ahead of things. To stay with Marx: In using the criterion of self-consciousness, he does not thereby commit himself to the most distinctive feature of a Hegelian aesthetics, which is the dematerialization of art, such that the natural world becomes of no relevance to art. After all, Marx is *linking* self-consciousness to art, whereas Hegel thought that art could only point us to the ineffable instead of actually express it.

As for the cluster of other thinkers cited here—a Jesuit, a clerical Neoplatonist of the Enlightenment, Kant, quasi-Kantians, early Romantics. For all of their pretty widely diverging attitudes toward art and pleasure over a really long eighteenth century, they nonetheless find some common ground. First is the collective rejection of an empiricist aesthetics, with its sense of the aesthetic self as a passive receptor of pleasurable sensations. As a corollary, art as entertainment, it was agreed, was inescapably a value judgment. It was not a neutral category. Criticism of the actual art at hand took place against an idea of what it ought to be or what it might become, and there would have been no complaints about its superficiality were it not seen as capable of or actually manifesting better things than were being asked of it.[45] Second, opera buffa was not, at least theoretically, treated as a genre independent from the spoken stage. The entirely valid question about how the particular Viennese repertory related virtue to pleasure belonged to a centuries-long critical tradition that was pan-European and pan-generic in character.[46]

One other strand of eighteenth-century poetical talk pertains here. It is in most respects a slender one, not much taken up by eighteenth-century proponents of a sensuous stage. It bears noting, however, because it clarifies the purpose of the repertory and what benefits people thought writing or performing or simply attending plays might accrue to them. The source is less Aristotle as transmitted via Horace than via Aquinas, and the main representative is Cremeri. The earlier part of his treatise sought to reassure contemporary theatrophobic clerics that the historical church had actually welcomed rather than fulminated against actors and their craft. This is a pretty desperate argument, especially when it comes to an intractable theatrophobe like Tertullian. With Aquinas, however, Cremeri finds a legitimately congenial soul. Further, in bringing in an Aristotelian (of sorts), Cremeri opens up a new front in his defense. Through Aquinas, theater can now be seen as something that is not just instrumentally good but, in its expression of the basic human need to play, natively so. Play, says Cremeri citing Aquinas, is "a necessity of social life," because pleasure itself—now he is citing Antoninus—is "as important to human life as salt is to a meal."[47] Hunter, it will be recalled, uses "mere" to set the particular pleasure of Italian comic opera outside the aegis of instruction. The genre's sensuous beauties do not hand down morals to us but, rather, stay at the surface of things. And that is the way many eighteenth-century observers of the stage saw the matter. But in Cremeri's Thomistic moment, pleasure, like

play, seems to stay at the surface for a different reason: because that is where the inquiry stops. There is no point in asking why one wants to be happy.

I think that Cremeri, whose love of theater was *alogon*, genuinely believed this about the stage and its pleasures. I bring that up as a possible matter of doubt at all because, formally, his Thomism conflicts pretty strongly with his Neoplatonism. At least in their eighteenth-century incarnations in theater criticism, Neoplatonists thought of virtue as essentially discursive in character and propositional in form. Pleasure may have been necessary to inspire virtue, but there was no thought of considering it equal to, autonomous from, much less better than, virtue. For example, Schink inaugurates a series of theater reviews with a Neoplatonic apostrophe to beauty: "Under the serene, mirthful sky of the finest people on earth, the fine arts, born under the mantel of the Greeks, had only one law: Beauty!" Immediately, however, Schink starts to tamp down his initial hedonism: "They judged that which was not beautiful, noble, and good as contrary to the purpose of art and outside of its territory." Schink is already qualifying beauty, and by the time he has gotten to the bottom of the same page, he has wound up subordinating beauty to truth: "Now, nothing is beautiful other than what is true, and only truth touches the human heart."[48] As for Cremeri, I doubt that he much cared about working out internal tensions in his apologia. He wanted to defend theater however he could and drew his arguments from whatever he happened to see on the shelf. With a readership composed partly of clerics, he was not going to omit one of Christendom's greatest intellectual authorities simply to bow to system (which is kind of ironic, considering that this was, after all, Aquinas).

However haphazard its presentation, Cremeri's Aristotelianism opens onto a pleasurable theater where the promise is not of an escape from life but instead of a more intimate engagement with it. The mainstream of critics from Cremeri's time largely ignored this possibility. They may not even have recognized it as a possibility at all. There is at least one remarkable exception to that rule, and that is Schiller and his speech on theater, from 1784. His defense uses a lot of the imagery of the Neoplatonists cited here, but his argument is founded on an idea inimical to the vision of Vienna's main reformers: theater can penetrate into places where the law cannot. The whole force of the Austrian reform was to subordinate image to word and stage to law (hence the sobriquet *regelmäßiges Theater*—a theater taking the law as its measure). Schiller's sense, in contrast, is not fully instrumental, for theater is a good in itself. By such a view, instruction and pleasure are not antagonists, or pleasure a simple accompaniment to instruction—the honey that rims the cup of truth: "The stage is the institution where instruction and pleasure, exertion and repose, culture and amusement are wed; where no one power of the soul need strain against the others, and no pleasure is enjoyed at the expense of the whole."

For Schiller, even escape acquires a power and necessity that Hunter's poetics of entertainment resists. The temporary departure from the world for the stage is restorative (and this assumes that we, upon stepping into the hall, actually leave the world instead of becoming more fully engaged with it):

> When grief gnaws at our heart, when melancholy poisons our solitary hours; when we are revolted by the world and its affairs; when a thousand troubles weigh upon our souls, and our sensibilities are about to be snuffed out underneath our professional burdens—then the theater takes us in, and within its imaginary world we dream the real one away; we are given back to ourselves; our sensibilities are reawakened; salutary emotions agitate our slumbering nature, and set our hearts pulsating with greater vigor.[49]

Leaving the world, we rediscover ourselves again in the theater, therefrom to return renewed.

If there is at least one person, Schiller, in whom a more salubrious idea of entertainment and escape appears, there is also a site where that idea is actualized, where a pleasurable stage appears large and vital: the repertory itself. The librettos themselves evince a closer relation between pleasure and morality, where morality involves not just the delivery of maxims but the representation of actions. *Homo ludens* as moral agent is at once subject and object of the repertory, including in works that Hunter cites as evidence for an escapist stage in its more world-abnegating sense.

Below are the texts of closing ensembles that she selects as representatives of "pleasure for its own sake," which is to say, pleasure "without moral justification":[50]

*Fra i due litiganti* (Sarti/[after Goldoni], 1782):

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|---|---|
| Più fra noi non si contenda | Let there be no more strife among us, |
| Ma cantiam con lieto cor: | but instead let us sing, with happy heart: |
| Viva sempre, e qui discenda | "May sweet peace and gentle love |
| Bella pace, e dolce amor. | live forever and descend upon us here." |

*La frascatana* (Paisiello/Livigni, 1774):

| | |
|---|---|
| Non si parli più d'affanni, | No more talk of misery, |
| Non si parli di dolor; | no more talk of grief, |
| Non si parli più d'inganni, | no more talk of deception, |
| Ma si parli sol d'Amor. | but let's talk only of Love. |

*La vedova scaltra* (Righini/Goldoni, 1774):

| | |
|---|---|
| Sù beviamo, cantiamo, balliamo, | Come, let's drink, let's sing, let's dance, |
| Ci ritorni la pace nel core; | let peace return to our hearts, |

| | |
|---|---|
| Scenda Imeneo congiunto ad Amore, | let Hymen, joined to Cupid, descend, |
| E ci faccia vieppiù giubilar. | and let celebration follow upon celebration. |

There is no shortage of Neoplatonic glimmering here. All anthropomorphize, idealize, or deify Love, and the outer two add to that the mechanism of descent. Not everything that descends from on high (or glimmers) is Neoplatonist, but a lot is, including here. Love and Joy acquire a perdurability, a reality existing beyond the temporary, imperfect individuals who aspire to them, where whatever allotment of earthly felicity may come to them is never complete, could always be more.

Set all this aside, and still questions remain about the quality of this pleasure, and its relation to the fuller human being as an organism who thinks and feels in interaction with the world. The dramatis personae are happy, it seems clear (are we allowed to say this?), but their happiness is not quite a kind of unalloyed sensual pleasure. Taking that position would reduce human experience of the world to the passive absorption of physical stimuli. But pleasure, as Budd says, is more than sensation. It "is an intentional state—pleasure is always pleasure *in* or *at* something or *that* something is the case."[51] An emotion, like pleasure or happiness, is a response to a state of affairs in the world. In the case of these choruses, that state of affairs is of a community restored,[52] the emotion is gratitude, and the forms that the emotion takes are those of hymns to long life, happiness, peace, and love. Those sentiments and gestures are intelligible also because we recognize them in life outside the stage, in rituals like the wedding, the birthday celebration, and the baptism. All of those activities give public recognition and validation to various private desires, and that gives them a moral quality. "This is what is good in life," these ensembles say; "this is what is worth celebrating." As Allanbrook concludes about the end of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* (1733), often identified as the prototype of Italian comic opera: "The anticipated happy ending, the resolution into connubial bliss—the ratifying of the social contract that protects their topsy-turvy world. The affairs of this world and its well-being are the concern of comedy" (*SC*, 33). The difference I am trying to articulate can be distilled into a verb. Hunter says that the moralizing ending rarely occurs in opera buffa, but that, when it does, it "typically *dissolves* into a call to celebration" (29; emphasis added). I would say, rather, that the psychic, moral energy of these farewells *crests* in a call to celebration.

If this sounds like an anachronistic, vaguely Hegelian view of art—unlike morality, which delivers only propositions, art shows to ourselves that life is inherently worth living[53]—a version of that idea was, as I have suggested, available well before Hegel (this is Hegel's observation, not his invention). The eudaemonism found in Enlightened Vienna's operatic repertory (and more

widely) is not so distant from what prevailed in earlier generations of opera (although, of course, the suggestion of a continuity between Baroque and Enlightenment sensibilities would have provoked Enlightenment apologists determined to purify the stage of Baroque barbarism). Here is an example from a *dramma per musica* by Antonio Sartorio and Aurelio Aureli, *Orfeo a torto geloso* (Bologna, 1695):

Prologue

| | |
|---|---|
| Dalle Sfere stellate, e serene | From the starry and serene spheres |
| Porta un raggio di gioia il Piacer; | Pleasure brings a ray of joy. |
| E divoto a le Regie Pendici, | And, faithful to the royal slopes |
| Che del Pò fan le sponde felici, | that make happy the shores of the Po, |
| Lieto viene a far l'Alme goder. | pleasure joyfully comes to bring delight to souls. |
| Quì dove arte ingegnosa | Here, where ingenious art, |
| Tra nove Scene di Teatro augusto | with the new scenes of this noble theater, |
| Drammi prepara a spettatori Illustri, | prepares actions for an illustrious audience, |
| Vo' la base fondar a la mia Reggia: | I wish to establish the foundation of my palace: |
| Quì vo' che il Mondo veggia | here I want the world to see, |
| Dell' Alpi a la Regal Sede famosa, | from the Alps to the famous royal seat, |
| Dalla gioia indiviso | laughter served undivided from joy |
| Servir ma sempre riverente il Riso; | (but always with reverence). |
| Quì vo', che la Pittura, | Here, I want painting, |
| Musica, e Poesia, | Music and Poetry, |
| Il Ballo, e l'Armonia, | Dance and Symphony |
| Al suon festoso di canori accenti | to offer up, to the festive tone of sweet strains, |
| Spettacoli graditi offra ai viventi. | pleasing spectacles to the living. |
| . . . | . . . |
| *Discendono dalle nubi li Geni* | *Cherubs descend from the clouds*[54] |

Citing a passage like this might not be the wisest of moves. First, following a modernist poetics, self-referentiality is usually seen as a disenchanting gesture. It is said to draw the mind away from the theatrical conceit toward the mechanisms that sustain it. But that is not the case here. The prologue acts less like a screen pulled over the world of the stage than like a door opening upon it. Having stepped over the threshold, one meets a pleasure not unlike Idea: exogenous, objective, entering into the vessel of the human who is yet not able to contain the whole of it. Second, Aureli's prologue largely runs in blissful neglect of pleasure's darker side (although there is the qualification "ma

sempre riverente"). Enlightened reformers were hostile to Baroque contrivances because of the moral problems that they thought stuck to them: the pursuit of pleasure as a distraction from the business of nation-building, a toppler of the social order, a drain on the economy, an inducement to sloth, an assault on authority, superstition's fomenter, not to mention a spur to the libido—all of which makes for a pretty fair way of describing Don Giovanni:

| | |
|---|---|
| *D.G. (piano a Donna Elvira)*: | *D.G. (quietly to Donna Elvira)*: |
| Idol mio, non vedete | My dear, don't you see |
| ch'io voglio divertirmi? | that I want to amuse myself? |
| *D.E.*: Divertirti, | *D.E.*: "Amuse" yourself, |
| è vero? Divertirti. . . . Io so, crudele, | it is? Amuse yourself. . . . I know, cruel man, |
| come tu ti diverti. | how you "amuse" yourself. |

But that is not all that is understood by pleasure. However inimical an older Neoplatonist allegorical poetics to an Enlightenment discursive one, both the Neoplatonist prologue and the secular Enlightenment envoy celebrate pleasure as a social good. The former unveils a pleasure so powerful that it could break through "ye murky clouds" (voi torbide nubi) that conceal from us a larger potency. The latter often dispenses with the theatrical apparatus not because the ethical vision was incompatible but because it was dramatically supererogatory: what is super-objective in the former is for the later immanent in human social existence.[55]

❧ ❧ ❧

The social world as a dispenser of pleasure and satisfier of deep interests marks one of the sharpest points of conflict between older and modernist visions of art and culture. Critiques of our sociable nature were, of course, available in Mozart's day, including dissents so deep as to amount to a revival of the doctrine of original sin. Rousseau traced this depravity to the need for public presentation: once we had to show ourselves to others, the game was lost. The strongest modernist critic does not reject that diagnosis outright but does add to it a more fundamental cause. It is found in the architecture of our minds.

Chapter Nine

# On Concepts and Culture

> For who is it that the philosopher punishes when
> it is the mind itself which assaults the mind?
>
> —Cavell

As we have seen, many forms of music criticism that either reject the above-and-beyond or seek it outside of human agency have the quality of a distillation. Refining art to its simpler elements is said to liberate criticism from theologies of transcendence by showing music in its natural state. In its strongest, most rationalistic forms, the ambition to secure art from false promises of escape prompts a questioning of the work of culture itself. The core of the problem with art and its criticism is, finally, that it is made, not begotten. Intention, idea, sentiment—this traditional nomenclature for art is understood as something that the mind has fabricated, and that very status undercuts its authority.

There have been other ways of relating made things to given things, and without resorting to metaphysics. The philosopher and historian Giambattista Vico, for his part, inverted their authority. The very fact that humans are the authors of concepts means that concepts should be *more* intelligible to us than the givens of nature, whose author is God: "For the first indubitable principle above posited is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our own human mind. And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also describes them."[1] By this view, it is false to distinguish what is true (*verum*) from what is made (*factum*). "'The true is precisely what is made' (*Verum esse ipsum factum*)," as Vico describes the learning of the first Italians.[2] Yet the strong modernist skeptic views made things as unstable and accidental things.

And thus also corrosive. So fundamental a distrust of the mind leaves a deromanticized art criticism in a tricky spot. It is undeniably true that concepts as well as social norms are fabrications. The problem is not with that fact, but with the implication that some measure of certitude is available against which norms and rules can be seen *as* corruptions—which begs the question,

corruptions of *what*? Thus, even as it calls for "a more empirically grounded critical musicology," as is the case with Paula Higgins's revisionist account of an ingenious Josquin, that exhortation takes place against an explicit utopianism.[3] The strain between the empirical and the utopian comes to the fore in the closing of her essay. Taking as axiomatic Adorno's diagnosis of modern society as "antagonistic,"[4] Higgins turns to Barthes for a way of protecting music from corrosion. Her Barthes-inspired solution is to place art on "an oasis of neutrality wherein pleasure offers a safe haven incapable of being colonized by any collectivity or ideological system" (495).

This is where the quandary arises. It is not clear how so chaste a world could have any art in it at all. That world might be better than the one we have and worth the loss of art (arguably a crowning achievement in the imperfect world we have now), but one can only speculate about its climate and topography. Would it look like Homer's island of Calypso, where Odysseus is trapped in a beauty-filled but miserable immortality? Perhaps it is anticipated in Molière's Alceste, who flees the social world using the same rationale that Barthes does to insulate fiction from the world: "Deceived on all sides, overwhelmed with injustice, I will fly from an abyss where vice is triumphant, and seek out some small secluded nook on earth, where one may enjoy the freedom of being an honest man."[5]

Paradoxically, one can find a far more earthbound view of artistic creation and judgment from Kant, who is otherwise accused of having sent forth Romantic disciples to preach a world-rejecting gospel of artistic autonomy. Kant speaks of a necessarily social/cultural component in aesthetic judgment. "Taste," as he says, "is that which is valid *not just for an individual mind* but for the mind of everyone. . . . All taste is social; a man who was entirely alone would not be able to see what pleases according to taste."[6] So, even if Barthes's imagined world could have art in it, it is hard to see how it could have any readers. Becoming a discerning reader of texts, acquiring the sensitivity that heightens our pleasure in the text, even the matter of what we hope to get upon opening that first page of a new novel (pleasure, instruction, vocabulary building, escape, stature, community, solitude, an expansion of sympathy, an entrenchment of prejudice)—these interests come about, necessarily, in relation to our social world and its priorities.[7]

Still, as we have seen numerous times in this genre of critique, the nineteenth century as the source of profound delusion about the musical universe of Mozart and his peers abides with the tenacity of a cliché. In Gjerdingen's variant, the concern is especially with how Romanticism has distorted the way we listen to music of the generations leading up to it:

> In the world of classical music, habits of listening became transformed in the nineteenth century. If I might be permitted to caricature Romantic listening, which still dominates the reception of classical music, I would note

> that it favors music that affords sonic analogues to a thrill ride, a quest, the supernatural, or a melodrama. By contrast, eighteenth-century courtly listening habits seem to have favored music that provided the opportunities for acts of judging, for the making of distinctions, and for the public exercise of discernment and taste.[8]

In at least one sense, there is no caricature here. The sonic thrill ride is a kind of expectation familiar to us all. It is even valid to call it Romantic in a loose sense, or, better, as "a debased Romanticism's substitution of the stimulation and exacerbation of feeling in place of its artistic control and release," as Cavell calls it.[9] For any number of leading (and often lesser) artists and thinkers from the nineteenth century would have had a hard time recognizing Romantic music, at least in its finest forms, in Gjerdingen's characterization. For example, a rallying point for early German Romantics was the perceived philistinism of contemporary public taste. The movement's leading members, like Johann Friedrich Reichardt and the Schlegels, tried to check the influence of what they deemed the trifles of composers like Friedrich Heinrich Himmel or Peter Winter, and the standard-bearers of their counteroffensive were, among others, Gluck and Mozart. Romantics were promoting Classics, to use our categories, in the hopes of forming a more discerning musical public.[10] (And this is not even to take up the topic of the sublime and the influence it wielded over art and music from Mozart's day.)

This episode of early Romantics' warding off the musical hoi polloi appears, of course, from after Mozart's death. For an example of how he could be understood during his life, there is the apostrophe to *Figaro* from Weber cited at the outset of this essay. I cite it again as an example of Gjerdingen's Romantic listening habits, but from 1789: "It is just as one would expect from Mozart: great and beautiful, full of new ideas and surprising turns, full of art and fire and genius. Now beautiful, charming song bewitches us, now a fine comic wit and tone bring a smile out of us; now we marvel at the naturally executed, masterful plot; now the splendor and magnitude of art amaze us."[11] One might want to identify and then quarantine Weber's praise as so much dark matter in the soon-to-materialize Romantic formation of Mozart as creative genius. But it is just as much a validation of Proust's idea that composers teach their audiences how to listen to them.[12] The vocabulary of a galant ethos may have suited other critics at the time as they tried to describe other composers, but it was not sufficient for Weber as he tried to describe Mozart. Instead, he needed a language of genius to move his experience of *Figaro* out of fog and into understanding. Mozart reception from the late 1780s marks a particular instance where the idiosyncratic achievement of an individual mind was so powerful as to appear normative, thereby setting a new standard for art.

Other aspects of a narrative like Gjerdingen's also need more testing against the record of eighteenth-century musical activity. Haydn, Carpani reported,

would use the conceit of a ship voyage as a spur to invention.[13] Is that so much random noise in eighteenth-century theories of the creative process, or is it evidence that the "quest," which Gjerdingen locates exclusively in Romanticism, is indeed an available and potent metaphor in Haydn's day? More broadly, there is the matter of what to call the artistic period spanning a large part of the eighteenth century. A number of other disciplines have opted for "Age of Sensibility." Gjerdingen would, I think, reject this sobriquet on the grounds that composers were no more interested in expressing "deep personal feelings" [7] than their aristocratic patrons were in hearing them. But the Horatian adage "Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi" [if you want me to weep, you yourself first must grieve] gained considerable authority in musical discourse from the later part of the century. Dahlhaus explains what that shift meant for the concept of style, and it does not correspond to Gjerdingen's definition of galant style "as a particular repertory of stock musical phrases employed in conventional sequences" [6]. In "the aesthetic of 'expression,'" as Dahlhaus calls it, "style became an expression of the personality 'behind the work,' not simply a type of phraseology that a composer could master only to discard it in exchange for another whenever subject or circumstance demanded." That aesthetic stance did not have to mean thinking of the composer's personality in biographical terms—although it could—but, as Dahlhaus again explains, as the "'intelligible ego,'" as "artistic persona."[14] The acknowledgment that in confronting a musical style we are confronting an individual musical mind and not just a lexicon guides an anonymous review of Haydn from 1782. Haydn's "mingling of humors," his "Temperamentsmischung," exasperates the reviewer precisely because it does not seem to correspond to stylistic norms. Not finding a sufficient explanation in public style, the reviewer turns to qualities of Haydn's particular mind for an answer: Haydn composes the way he does "because he must, if he wishes to compose naturally."[15]

An art-historical plan that puts up a border fence at the nineteenth century generally does so on the basis of certain concepts identified with specific cultures, not with concepts and culture themselves. Still, it is as if doubts created by art-critical concepts that were identified as Romantic property impelled a reexamination of concepts en masse. Portions of Berger's essay on music and modernity go in that direction, for example. Its conclusion explores Kant's influence over a particular stream of Beethoven reception and, from there, charts its course into modern praxis. Berger's point of departure is the long-standing observation that Beethoven's music, especially the late style, seems guided by a contemplative spirit that did not preside over earlier music. Working back to the headwaters of this impression, Berger finds it more in the history of ideas than in the history of art.

Some earlier criticism regarded a contemplative bearing as a property of Beethoven's music. For example, Rosen notes the "essentially meditative"

nature of the late works, a nature that makes one aware of the extent to which Beethoven's "exploration of the tonal universe was an act of introspection."[16] Perhaps it is only a superficial part of his argument, but, at least rhetorically, Berger shifts emphasis in a way that recalls the distrust of concepts pervasive in sociological critiques, especially ones involving the artistic imagination: "Beethoven's music may have been heard as occasionally staging its own mode of reception, dramatizing the act of aesthetic contemplation and absorption in the transcendent realm disclosed by art, in short, as embodying the aesthetic state itself."[17] The passive voice, the equivocation ("*may* have been heard"), the deployment of theatrical vocabulary like "staging" and "dramatizing" is the kind of language used in an exposé rather than an appreciation. The items point to something written onto rather than discovered in Beethoven.

If, to pursue this thread, it is true that a contemplative tone is no property of late Beethoven, such a conceit about the music has to have another source. Berger traces it to Kant, but not the one whom Mendelssohn called the "all-destroying" (allerzermalmender) for his attack on metaphysics.[18] This is, instead, a Kant who pointed the way to "a transcendent realm disclosed by art." Kant is the author of late Beethoven, as it were. Berger does not state it so directly, and perhaps my paraphrase misreads him, but his historical narrative turns not so much on the birth of a new musical style as on that of an idea. Here, in the coincidence of Kant and Beethoven, is born the myth of artistic transcendence. This is where impossible aspirations for art acquired philosophical grounding and then went on to shape an entire epoch.

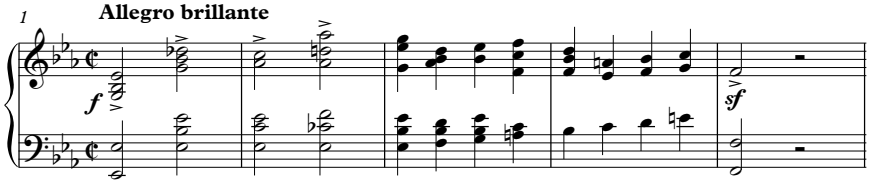
But the transcendent realm does not need to be art's only object of contemplation, and there is at least one way to speak of a contemplative attitude as a property in late Beethoven without being lured into otherworldliness. Rosen again shows how. Although often criticized for striking a grand, oracular manner, Rosen actually makes a more modest claim about late Beethoven than does Berger. For only the emphasis in his music is new, not the phenomenon itself: "Beethoven is perhaps the first composer for whom this exploratory function of music *took precedence* over every other: pleasure, instruction, and, even, *at times*, expression."[19] Indeed, Berger's whole conceptual apparatus occupies a more idealistic plane. By Berger's account, Beethoven's object of contemplation is the noumenal realm out there; by Rosen's, it is the tonal universe down here, in the world of human culture. (The other qualifier I highlight, "at times," is meant to show how Rosen's summation of late Beethoven also rings truer to that repertory than what Adorno says here: "Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny, [the late works] do not surrender themselves to mere delectation."[20] Sometimes, but hardly always. Going by Adorno's formulation, a person not knowing the late works might think that they all sounded like the Grosse Fuge and that the first movements of opuses 101, 109, and 110 or myriad other disarming beauties were so much

statistical white noise in the late style, and so had to be renamed "late works without late style.")

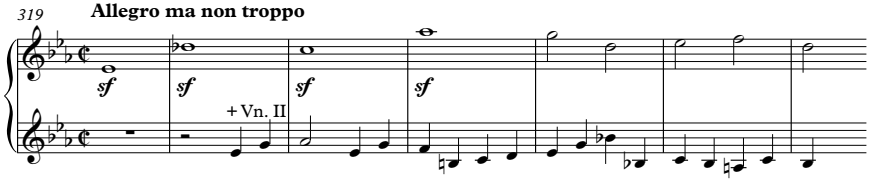
The critiques cited so far argue that the legacy of German Idealism has deafened us to the music that preceded it. A question following from that project runs, If we cannot trust Romantic attitudes toward music, what can we trust? One answer directs attention to the manifoldness of history, where we may find habits of listening tailored to their own times. By this line of thought, the main sin of Romanticism was that it universalized its views on music, when in truth they spoke only for music of their particular time and place. But there is a much stronger argument in circulation, which is that the nineteenth century introduced errors in the way *music itself*, always and everywhere, was made and understood. Now, history and culture are deposed as sovereigns and replaced by positivism (that is, positivism as the belief that the only meaningful things are precultural, physical phenomena and that the only trustworthy account of them comes from a neutral, objective observer).[21]

That is the path followed, for example, in Richard Taruskin's argument that cultural knowledge, in its very nature as construct, has steered music criticism in the wrong direction. To show how our minds have erred about music, he turns to a piece squarely from that heyday of high ambitions for art, Schumann's Piano Quintet. Taruskin is particularly interested in a common response to its celebrated closing section, where the main theme from the first movement (see ex. 9.1) appears in the finale as part of a double fugue (see ex. 9.2).

Example 9.1. Schumann, Piano Quintet, op. 44 (1842), mvt. 1, mm. 1–5. Piano part only.




Example 9.2. Schumann, Piano Quintet, op. 44, mvt. 4, mm. 319–25.



"Appears," but not "returns." Taruskin will not authorize the latter term. "Return" is a topos and, therefore, obscures what is really there.[22] One might think that viewing this episode as a return would open up possibilities for understanding, however provisional and revisable. The concept clarifies a response to the music; it draws one's mind to other returns against which Schumann's can be compared and assessed; it enlarges our understanding of the Schumann and, reflexively, those other instances.

Taruskin demurs. The topos is "emotionally fraught" (it is not clear whether it is only this particular topos or topoi severally), and all the millennia of returns in cultural artifacts ranging from Homer to Dallapiccola amount to so much "baggage," as he calls the inconvenience. Culture has caused the mind to trick itself. That is because what generated the response to the Schumann from Taruskin's "unauthorized Kantian" ("unauthorized," because he finds more than just pleasurable sensations in this musical encounter, he finds ideas) "was a memory not of sounds alone, but of an emotional rush, and that the sounds he described in making his point were not simply the sounds Schumann notated but the sounds his memory had mediated through a topical association" (178)—as if, again, that fact of mediation were to hinder rather than expand our understanding, or as if that "emotional rush" were unmotivated, or as if Schumann himself were just notating *sounds* instead of activating *tones*. McEwan, as noted above, imagined a situation in which words—made things—lifted the fog over a person. For Taruskin, words or their equivalent here, topoi, are not instruments of recognition; they bring that fog back down.

But over what? Concepts have a curious status in this curious psychology. On the one hand, they seem like fabrications of the intellect, which is why they are called unreliable. "Return" is analytically untrustworthy because it is a word, not a sound. By implication, the job of criticism is to reach into the mind to pluck out those metaphors, like so many weeds. But if that is the case, then we cannot stop at topoi; we have to reexamine our most fundamental language for describing music. Words like "resolution" or even ones referring to motion are also, necessarily, metaphorical. In a C scale—a concept—we say that B resolves to C. In the physical world, no such thing happens. Those two sounds do not "resolve," and you cannot even say that one "moves" to the other without leaving the physical world for the imaginative one. The kind of analysis we would be left with as a result—"first the pitch B appears, then the pitch C"—may be more "precise," may be empirically "truer," but who would want to read it? On the other hand, concepts are also treated as emotions, which is to say, as capricious, insubstantial things. That is an awfully Manichaean way of thinking about the work of the mind. Even if one dismisses all of these objections, there is still a phenomenon that Taruskin's psychology closes the door on, which is that different people are experiencing essentially identical delusions. They hear a return at this specific place, and not some other place. Why there, and not elsewhere?

It is because works, and not just texts, have properties. That, too, is a position that Taruskin rejects. His argument about the ephemerality of topics is tied to a confidence that "aesthetic autonomy is not a property of artworks, even the most abstract or transcendent of artworks, but rather a way of viewing, describing, and valuing artworks" (171). It is true that a work of art does not *have* to be viewed autonomously. A painting can be used as decoration, a statue as a doorstop. To restrict those objects to those uses, however, is to ignore what can be seen in looking at art as an aesthetic object. Schumann's finale, for example, will yield up a few useful responses to the question, Why sound patterns? but the question yielding finer answers, Why *those* sound patterns, here, and not others? will not even get asked without regarding the Schumann as an autonomous work—that is, as a work of art creating its own rule. The fact of the receiver's "necessary cooperation" in art does not vitiate claims for the "autonomously efficacious" quality of art.[23]

This is one of those regions where the decenteredness of the postmodernist merges with the objectivity of the positivist. One by-product, a strict constructivist approach to art criticism, ultimately challenges the possibility of having valid, shareable meaning at all. By Taruskin's reasoning, one could, for example, argue that English is not a property of the letters used here; instead, it is a way of viewing or valuing them. (But are letters on paper objects in the way that rocks are objects?) After all, other languages use many of these letters; as well, letters on paper can be used in other ways—in a collage, or as anagrams, or for considering the design of the font. Nothing *compels* me to view them as combined in a certain way—unless I want to understand why these signs take this particular form, and what someone meant by arranging them thus. Aesthetic autonomy is no different in this respect. Works of art have numerous functions, but conceiving aesthetic autonomy as a form of deception makes it impossible to explain so fundamental an activity as why we dwell on paintings in galleries or attend plays, or why we like (or dislike) a particular novel. To say, coming back to Taruskin's example, that Schumann did nothing more than "notate sounds" obscures the intention that is inseparable from an artistic gesture. (Echocardiograms also notate sounds.) When it comes to listeners, Taruskin is entirely aware of this fact of artistic cognition. As he says, there can be no experience of music without "a consciousness that is equipped to invest [sounds] with meaning" (179). He does not or will not, however, say something like "to discover the meaning the composer gave the sounds." (Or, if that expression comes perilously close to a soul/meaning, body/sound dualism, then "to hear with understanding.") The meaning-making consciousness seems to reside only in the listener who hears the notes, not the composer who wrote them—hence his implication that "return" could not be an idea that Schumann as composer could have acted on. But if listeners can act on topoi, so can composers.

Chapter Ten

# The Flaws in the Finale

Throughout, I have been trying to identify what goes missing from prominent disenchanting accounts of music, missing either as something not seen at all or as seen but rejected as a willful or reflexive deceit. That "something" is experience, our ordinary response to art. To propose experience as that missing quality in a modernist Mozart aesthetic introduces its own set of problems. Abbate and Parker's (and, in his own way, Hanslick's) concern about hermeneutic solipsism has real credibility in the face of defensive appeals to experience, the ones where experience is used to halt self-reflection and conversation: "This is how I feel, and that's the end of the discussion." Weaker versions of arguments from experience can also be problematic. Experiences can change over time or new conceptual frameworks compel a different, perhaps more comprehensive evaluation.

In one sense, the matter does not involve validating a *particular* experience so much as identifying the conditions by which music, including musical drama, can be experienced at all. If you value ambiguity, then there must be a text as utterance, not only as object, that is intended that way. If opera is unsettled, then mimesis must be in play for there even to be unsettledness. If some fictional characters can be sad or ambivalent, then some can be happy and sure. If we use concepts in acting on and evaluating art, then there is no a priori reason to exclude "return" from an art-critical lexicon.

Still, a defense of intention and mimesis also has the responsibility of showing how these concepts can produce compelling interpretations of individual works of art. To turn one last time to *Figaro* as an example: What can be seen when it is experienced as an intentional object and a musico-dramatic representation? Showing how the neostructuralist misframes not just general theoretical but specific analytical questions about opera can be an opportunity to see more clearly what is there—in this case, in one of the operatic repertory's most famous reconciliation scenes.

To start to bring to the fore what highly formalist accounts marginalize in listening as experience, there is a typically sage essay by Umberto Eco entitled

"The Flaws in the Form." Its object is form in art and its purpose to identify the limits of decorum in assessing it.[1] Eco is primarily interested in resolving the question of what in a work of art qualifies as structure, what as content. He finds himself in a conundrum. On the one hand, he has misgivings about what he sees as a Neoplatonic enthusiasm for Pure Form, which imagines so intimate a connection between part and whole that any adjustment, be it ever so slight, destroys that totality.[2] This is the kind of quest that Abbate and Parker and others seek, with good reason, to waylay: a Mozart homiletics preaching that every note of a mature Mozart work is perfectly in place, not so much because Mozart intended it that way, but because nature intended it that way. It is as if Mozart were a discoverer instead of inventor, more botanist than composer.

On the other hand, Eco cannot bring himself to press his objection too far. A wholesale exclusion of Neoplatonism would leave one in the equally tenuous position of having a strict separation of poetry from form. Now, it would be easy to tell what in a work counts as a rose, what as trellis. Even as a polemicist, Eco is droll and affable, but he lets out some animus here—it appears in more than one essay[3]—toward Dante critics of a Romantic cast. This group thinks of all of the *Divine Comedy*'s theological disquisitions and descriptions of the heavens as mere scaffolding for the real purpose, which is to tell the stories of, for example, his relationship with Beatrice (202). But why can't theology be poetic, too? (In light of this, it might be worth revisiting Adorno's definition of "the truly poetic in poetry [as] that which defies translation."[4] It is one thing to say that the meaning of poetry cannot be reduced to propositions, another to say that propositions have nothing to do with poetic meaning, a position that Donne, Dante, Shakespeare, Stoppard, and others would likely resist.)

This is more to gloss Eco, but I would add that, like the term "transcendence," "perfection" need not raise alarms. The word has uses that do not of necessity seduce one away from the sensible world into the inaccessible dwelling place of pure, impassable ideas. Perfection can, for example, simply indicate the suitability of something to its end. If a chair functions as a chair, so that it does not collapse when you sit on it, then it is perfectly a chair, a sufficient example of chairness. As for a work of Mozart: we can imagine some notes in, say, a symphony, or certainly an aria, that could be other than what they are without doing harm to the work (and the fact that it is easier to imagine such adjustments in an aria than a symphony already says something useful about the differing natures of arias and symphonies), but there are other notes whose omission or alteration would radically alter the piece—if not mar it, then at least make it something else, or make other parts of it less intelligible. Otherwise, composers would feel no need to revise or reject.

Perfection can also express the side of our engagement with art that involves our disinterested response to beauty, where we marvel just that something *is*. Joel Weinsheimer notes how beauty has been regarded as the symbol of truth

because it does not distinguish between the apparent and the real. It makes no sense, he explains, to ask whether something *really* is beautiful. "If something *looks* beautiful, it *is* beautiful."[5] Indeed, we can have something close to a total surrender to art, where we cannot or do not feel the need to imagine its being anything other than it is. This is, in particular, a point that Eco might resist, but I hasten to add that such a surrender does not wipe out the recognition that we are still witnessing art rather than life. For example, we would not be able to enjoy a tragedy if we thought that the actor and not just the character were going to die. It is as if two selves operate in that surrender. The first is the one whose hair stands on end in reading how, say, an enraged Achilles attacks a river god, but there is another, coexisting, who says, "This is madness, but, somehow, Homer is pulling it off." An awareness of fiction as fiction is necessary for there to be understanding of and pleasure in it.

So, Eco has sympathy, albeit not a boundless one, for the problem that Neoplatonism is trying to address, even as he shuns its hypostatizing solution. His way out involves turning away from the realm of forms and toward that of phenomena. Neoplatonism is "too neat" (203); it misses the mark of our experience of a work of art. A core element of that experience can be ambivalence. Even those works we love ardently can confuse us or generate resistance in the reading of them. "The good interpreter, who has penetrated the work, is also he who, even at the peak of his enthusiasm for an author, says every now and again, 'I don't like this,' or even 'I would have put it better'" (204). Eco does not state it directly, but the language of subject and object misses the quality of this relationship. It is more that the reader and the work relate as an I to a Thou (as Weinsheimer says).[6] We approach a work of art as we approach a person; there is a kind of conversation going on.

It is technically more precise to say that we approach the work of art as we approach the *utterances* of a person, rather than the person. But we also respond to works the way that we respond to people: we can love them, feel betrayed by them, find them confusing or repugnant, barely notice them. That is why the notion of conversation is not entirely metaphorical, or is at once metaphorical and necessary. A work will not talk back unless you put the right questions to it (and not recognizing this necessary component of reading marks a crucial failure even of weaker versions of reader-response theory).[7]

The word "conversation" might, further, suggest a strong affinity with the value of dialogue that Abbate and Parker promote.[8] As I have been proposing, however, the antisubjectivist world of Abbate and Parker is much closer to Neoplatonism in that it accepts the intelligibility of the concept of pure form; it simply replaces eternal pure form with eternal fissure, fragmentation—the draining away of being instead of its flowering forth before and in the whole person. Dialogue suggests an equality not very compatible with so hierarchical a system. That is a main reason that "interrogation" is the *mot meilleur* for their approach.

The metaphysical positing of a perfection up there against which failure down here can be fathomed guides other recent theories of opera mentioned throughout, especially David J. Levin's. His study proceeds from the question of how opera as text relates to opera as performance. Because opera is unstable as essence, it should also be so as realization: "Although a stage production can unsettle a work that was thought to be settled," he says, "I will argue, opera itself is unsettled, and that stage performance, at its best, clarifies this condition and brings opera in its unsettledness to life."[9] Whenever we experience unsettledness in a production, a clash of discourses, it is not a sign of authorial or directorial incompetence or sabotage, it is a sign of truth, the truth of opera's native instability. This attitude, too, comes much closer to the Platonic idea of poetics as a branch of ontology than Aristotle's more anthropological perspective, the former finding fault in art for its distance from pure being, the latter asking for internal coherence and taking its standard from human conduct.[10] That Platonic spirit oversees Abbate and Parker's argument, which Levin approvingly quotes here, that "analysis of opera *often* reveals the imperfect, the ambiguous, the illogical."[11] I highlight "often" to point out a hesitancy in their argument. If opera is by its *nature* unsettled, then analysis should never, *can* never, do anything but show "the imperfect, the ambiguous, the illogical"—and, as I have suggested above, there is no way those terms are synonymous. What the modifier "often" takes away in purity, however, it could give back abundantly in opportunity. It would be fruitful to work out under what circumstances the discovery of imperfection would be the analytical outcome and under what circumstances perfection, or, if that cannot be legislated in advance, to show examples of compelling interpretations that demonstrate perfection or coherence or unity, as well as of unsettledness.

At one level, Abbate and Parker's ambition seems the most natural thing in the world. It joins a long tradition of contending with opera as the supremely baffling art. As many have noted in many ways, operatic pleasure can seem to increase in inverse relation to the logic of its musico-dramatic setting. On the operatic stage, so the complaint runs, "You find nothing but death made sensational, despair made stage sublime, sex made romantic, and barrenness covered up by sentimentality."[12] That this is G. B. Shaw on Shakespeare is not meant to trivialize the difficulties opera has traditionally posed to the intellect.[13] Instead, it is meant to show, first, that opera does not follow so independent a path from the other dramatic arts and, second, that this objection is comprehensible only if a conception of mimesis is in place. The perplexity arises only where opera is thought of as a dramatic form instead of as a discourse. "Why this musical gesture in service of this dramatic point, here?" or, "How is this character's motivation expressed musically in this particular passage?" are the kinds of questions asked not only by the person who is enchanted but, unwittingly, also by the disenchanted one.

But Abbate and Parker and Levin are operating on a much more abstract plane. When we go to *Figaro*, what we witness is not a drama, not a story, much less something that is morally instructive. We observe a clash of technical devices or of modes of representation. This criticism only hardens the older dualist view of the stage. If an earlier Neoplatonism was all harmonized form, this one is all undecipherable code. That is why their position is contestable on logical, not just synthetic grounds. To identify something in its *nature* as unsettled, where unsettledness is a predicate of opera, makes no sense, because there needs to be some standard of stability for its negation to mean something. Even Levin's conclusion that *Figaro* can be read as an allegory about fidelity in interpretation cannot work without granting some measure of stability—for example, that there is a count who is unfaithful.

Of the group, I think Levin is more attentive to the potential cognitive, if not ethical, problems arising from such a reduction. Here, for example, is what he says about the perils of abandoning mimesis at a particular spot in *Figaro* (the instrumental transition from the last-act finale's scene of forgiveness to its communal celebration, given in ex. 10.2 [below]): "To stage that transition is to place before the audience the mechanics rather than the effects of operatic discourse—akin to showing rather than merely effecting a change of scene."[14] I think he means by this that attending to mechanics rather than effects is to violate critical decorum.

In any case, mimesis is not the only item to be entered in the modernist edition of the *Index Conceptionum Prohibitorum*. Excluded from even the possibility for critical examination is the kind of experience Eco was describing—the ability to dissent from a work. Where a work becomes an object, dissent is not possible, just as you cannot dissent from a rock; you can only dissent from actions, statements. Paradoxically, indeterminacy ends up sheltering one from the complexity of intention and the responsibilities that inhere in all aspects of the culture surrounding the creative act: composition, execution, and criticism.

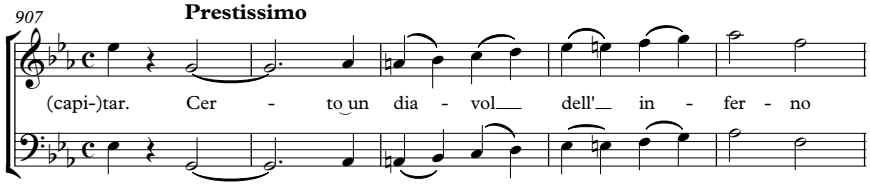
Looking at a couple of commentaries on closing areas of *Figaro*'s two main finales can show how a search for indeterminacy can create false problems at the interpretive as well as speculative levels. A matter that has drawn considerable interest here is the distribution of formal weight in Mozart's mature dramas. In particular, the end of *Figaro*'s second-act finale—Abbate and Parker call it a "harmonic juggernaut"[15]—dwarfs the closing finale in gravity, especially the latter's final chorus in D, which they call "a small coda, temporally insignificant in comparison to the final E♭ section of the second act finale." As a result, we lose confidence in "the notion that the [last-act] finale is musically 'coherent'; in fact, the music seems rather to foreground disjunctions and illogical juxtapositions" (195). Plotted over the arc of the opera, that close seems like an ironic outlier, as if in making the ending less secure tonally, Mozart meant for us to wonder about the reconciliation's permanence. Abbate and Parker

would probably object to the emphasis my paraphrase places on intention, but their argument amounts to one from design. At least according to Manfred Frank, that is a difficulty any neostructuralist account necessarily runs into: "I am convinced that neither structuralism nor neostructuralism nor, for that matter, any other form of systems theory has truly succeeded in explaining the process of signification and of the alteration of signification without relying explicitly or implicitly on the category of the individual. Even the reified statement 'Language speaks itself,' or even the systems-theoretical statement about the 'self-reflexivity of systems,' has to employ reflexive pronouns that then hypostatize what was earlier considered a characteristic of the speaking subject as a characteristic of language or of the system itself."[16]

Perhaps that is only a rhetorical issue, for *Figaro*'s finales, they argue, also present internal problems of coherence, apart from whatever difficulty comes up by way of comparison. That is especially so with the second-act finale. Its unbudging harmonic stability sits uneasily with the volatile dramatic situation. Musically, everything is closed, but, dramatically, everything is in disarray—thus, an exemplary instance of opera's indigenous instability.[17]

Such claims present purely analytic problems (in the sense of thinking of "instability" as a predicate of "opera"). But one can also quibble with the specific musical details that Abbate and Parker cite in proposing that the entity called *Figaro* is dismembered. Although they acknowledge the presence of syncopations and other rhythmic disturbances in the E-flat close of the second-act finale, they describe them as "tiny." I do not think that "tiny" quite registers the force of, say, the syncopation given in example 10.1.

Example 10.1. Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*: act-2 finale, mm. 907–11. Played and sung in unison and octaves by everyone onstage, in unison with the orchestra.




It *looks* trivial on the page, but to make it *sound* that way, musical elements would have to be heard in isolation from one another. In other words, *Figaro* would have to be heard as so severe a form of autonomous music that tone would almost decompose into sound, into chunks of tonality detached from other elements and from the dramatic situation. Only once the piece is reduced to rubble could there appear a monolithic E-flat, "attached to" a story that has reached a point of crisis.

In the physical world, the redefinition of a phenomenon or object to exclude subjectivity leaves untouched the status of the object. Heat is still heat, whether defined as a sensation or as increased molecular activity. Still, even here, the reduction limits how we use the term and what it can mean for us. We cannot see molecules, and the scientific definition of heat does not help a whole lot in describing what it is actually like to feel warm or cold. If the stripping away of subjectivity impoverishes how we describe our interactions with the physical world, so much the greater is the loss with a product of consciousness like music, where the reduction does not work, because the surface/depth distinction does not work.[18]

This is all to raise the question, Is it even possible to listen the way Abbate and Parker suggest? Were such "molecular" listening possible at all, it would come at enormous effort and require perfect pitch and an ability to filter out intervening music and drama—in effect, to listen with one's eyes closed. So then the more pressing question becomes, What is to be gained from such exertion? One nontrivial reward would be a fuller understanding of how form and tonality work in Mozart's operas or the Classical style more generally. That is the thrust of Rosen's observation that music from that era articulated closure through the *release* of tension, which generally required looser, more informal settings. A rhetoric requiring the last word to be the loudest word better characterizes the next generation of composition.[19] Where that is so, the contrasting qualities and dimensions of the two finales present no problem of musico-dramatic intelligibility. Neither is it difficult to wrap one's mind around the fact that *Figaro*'s second-act finale comes to a decisive musical close without an analogous resolution in the plot. At the end of the act, it is the easiest thing to say, "Well, that was quite a ride. I can't wait to see how Figaro gets out of this mess, but not before I have a glass of canary wine." Mozart's problem, such as it is, is not one of metaphysics; it is just a custom of the stage. This is precisely the kind of question that needs to be adjusted from, Why *must* it appear that way? to, Why does this appear as it does?

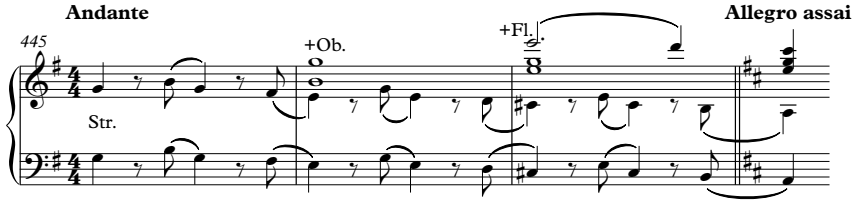
So, what are some more productive parameters for talking of form in fiction? Eco, following Pareyson, isolates places where devices really do seem to function as devices, in the way of hinges on doors. Pareyson calls them stopgaps (*zeppa*). The phrase "she said" in a dialogue is a stopgap. It is something we barely notice when reading but whose absence would make a dialogue incoherent or at least a lot harder to follow. As Eco says, you do not ask of the hinge that it be beautiful or that it draw attention to itself, but only that it work. (And you are more likely to notice the hinge at all when it fails in its job [205].) The stopgap's innate modesty presents a minor problem for criticism, because even observing its existence can breach critical propriety. If Neoplatonism poses the risk of living in pure form, and its rejection as separating form from expression, a modernist Platonism risks making the trivial determine the whole. But

Eco, unsurprisingly, approaches the stopgap with due circumspection. It may not have mimetic force, but it still can—inevitably will—evince values, like economy and efficiency, and the fact that they are values makes them objects of interest. Of course, that proposal assumes that it is always easy to distinguish form from content. Subsequent readings of a work, Eco goes on to say, can revise what counts as structure, what as poetry. One example he has in mind comes from Dante's *Commedia*. A certain reading might find theology the point of the epic, another one Dante's more personal odyssey.

It is not clear how thoroughly the category of the stopgap would apply to music (not that it has to). What would be the equivalents of poetry and theology in *Figaro*'s structure, for example? But two ideas from Eco—that structural devices express values, and that we can revisit them—are indeed useful, as can be seen in turning to a stopgap in *Figaro* that has drawn some recent attention.

The object is, again, the last-act finale, but a different part of it: the transition from the scene of reconciliation to the closing ensemble. It is the passage that Levin was talking about above—a three-measure cotter pin, as it were (see ex. 10.2).

Example 10.2. Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*: act-4 finale, mm. 445–48.

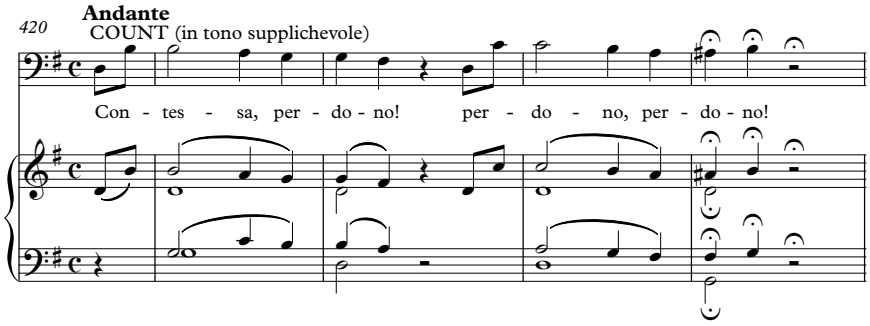



Levin cautioned that there would be something untoward in staging the interlude, in drawing attention to its status as a stopgap. Perhaps worried about overinterpreting, Levin doubles down on that point: "Let me repeat: the passage does not draw attention to itself as noteworthy" (86). Still, Levin admires how Peter Sellars's production uses this modest device to mark what he calls "an abrupt shift in modes of representation in the opera, from that of dramatic verisimilitude to that of pronounced theatricality." And that leads to this conclusion about the true nature of Sellars's achievement: "The Sellars production does not just arrive at the insight that the finale has less to do with dramatic than formal resolution, it stages that insight. . . . The Sellars production arguably offers a dramatization of dramatic *irresolution*, of the jarring and unprepared nature of the resolution of *Figaro*" (88).

This is where Eco's recognition that stopgaps express values comes in. It is not quite right to frame the matter as Levin does, by saying, "The passage does

not draw attention to itself as noteworthy." The question is not, "Is this passage noteworthy?"—it is *there*, after all—but, "In what way is this passage noteworthy?" Further, simply on grounds of economy, to say that this three-measure passage throws us out of the whole representational mode of the opera to force us to reflect on the nature of operatic representation itself seems awfully Ptolemaic. It is also tough to justify on hermeneutic grounds. For the sharp distinction between theater and life that Levin (along with others) makes is hard to sustain in *Figaro*'s world. Mozart's three-measure stopgap marks out the scene of reconciliation as a space apart. It is an episode that steps out of time in example 10.3 and now returns back to it. (Of course, an antitranscendent aesthetic will have none of this language.)

Example 10.3. Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*: act-4 finale, mm. 420–24.




In much recent criticism of the opera, it is common to speak of the public and private as inhabiting separate and incompatible spheres. By this quasi-Rousseauian view, the private realm is one that hallows grace and authenticity, whereas the public conceals and freezes people in ritual and theater. Thus Allanbrook's reasoning on why the Count's petition for forgiveness must take place in public: "The sight of the Count and Countess reconciled in anything but a bright public light would misleadingly suggest that the Count was moved deeply, when he is probably only moved by a momentary sense of choreographic decency."[20] But the opera is more generous than that. Filling the opera's public sphere itself are different shadings of solemnity and ritual. They range from the quasi-private reconciliation of Figaro and Susanna, to the public reconciliation of the Count and Countess, to the conventional happy ending. That is the service that Mozart's stopgap renders. It effects a transition, yes, but along a continuum that exists, *pace* Levin, *within* its fictional world. It moves from a solemn time to a festive time.

Whether this interpretation of the three-measure transition is convincing, criticism in the modernist mode cannot sustain the purity that it demands

from opera. Its highly formalist language of modes of representation cannot completely dispel the illusion that we are talking about characters and situations. Levin's and others' attempt to liberate criticism from those constraints has the further liability of confining works to a single plane, whereby the life of culture is excluded from the business of interpretation. As Nuttall described this habit decades ago, it cultivates a "cool, Olympian detachment" that prohibits the critic from moving "back from the public, manifest superficies of the work to the range of human activities and emotions which give force and meaning to fictions."[21]

Levin imagines *Figaro*'s plot as an allegory about fidelity in operatic interpretation. To follow that lead, but to a different conclusion: One might propose that Mozart's happy, formal fault confounds two kinds of Neoplatonist—the enthusiast for formal perfection, but no less its disappointed, objectivizing twin, who, unable to find absolute perfection, settles for a disorienting indeterminacy instead of a compelling ambiguity.

Exiting a discussion of the greatest opera that the world had ever seen up to that time here, with talk of deracinated forms, would be to leave off far short of the opera's magnanimity. *Figaro* schools the disappointed idealist not by counseling the abandonment of idealism but by showing a different place to find it. The opera offers a vision that is transcendent *and* of this world, all at once. That image appears apotheotically in the moment when the Count asks for and then receives pardon. The episode dramatizes two kinds of human gesture, and, to present them as questions: What does it look like to make a choice, and what does it mean to declare love through a ritual? The Countess, it is said, cannot possibly forgive the Count, given that so much has happened in so little time. But multiply all of those hours by whatever factor psychological realism calls for, there would still come a tipping point where she must choose: "dico di 'sì'" or "dico di 'no.'" The choice is of a moment. The arrow is let loose, at which point it is useless to revisit causes and fruitful only to live on with reasons. That is why brevity and simplicity—in ironic accounts usually seen as signs of perfunctoriness on the Countess's part—are of the essence.[22]

The economy of Mozart's dramatic vision is also what Stefan Kunze was getting at, although in a passage that Richard Will finds problematic:

> In this great moment, in which the characters and the world hold their breath, time stands still, and change and reflection happen simultaneously, in a flash. New awareness of all that has happened brings further awareness that happiness and fulfillment can only be experienced through the express affirmation of temporality. . . . What occurs silently, in the deepest interiority of the characters, becomes public in the Andante that then begins.[23]

Will thinks that Kunze is imposing a poetics of transcendence. The meaning of the ensemble, as he interprets Kunze, sits somewhere outside of "the Count's

and Countess's inner states." I do not see how the "change and reflection" Kunze identifies, not to mention his references to "the deepest interiority of the characters," can support that verdict.[24] The crucial difference between the two is not that one of them, Kunze, excludes interiority. Instead, Kunze and Will diverge on how inwardness relates to the opera's public sphere. For Will, the relation is basically antagonistic. Social relations are hard conventions that suppress the private self. For Kunze (and, I would say, the opera), there cannot be self-realization in the absence of the social world.

That vision culminates in a gesture of forgiveness, presented as a public ceremony. To get a sense of how we might think about the significance of such a ritual in a dramatic work, what Nuttall says about the end of *Much Ado about Nothing* bears on *Figaro*. A marriage vow (or in this case, an act of reconciliation) is a *promise*. I *will* be faithful; I *will* love. Cupid, of course, lets loose his arrows wherever he wants to. Even so, love is not just something that happens to a person. It is something that one *does*:[25] "più docile io sono, e dico di 'sì.'" This view is hardly alien today—good luck to the modern spouse who expects the feeling of love to persist uninterrupted through a marriage. The very act of uttering "I do" takes place against an idealism about a social institution like marriage. This idealism is not formed of one entire and perfect chrysolite—something hard and removed from human experience.[26] It is something that explains experience. It is an idealism that acts in tandem with human interest and motivation, not outside of them.

# Conclusion

## An Other Modernism?

This essay's main purpose has been to authorize trespassing beyond the various warning signs that a modernist music criticism has placed between us and the work of art—"Begriffe untersagt." "Mimèsis interdit." "Transcendence Not Allowed." It could therefore appear a fatal failure of self-awareness to propose a different prohibition: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." The last aphorism from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has commonly been taken to enshroud in silence the very topics discussed here, namely, ethics and aesthetics. It can, however, encourage a different kind of restraint and bring about a more exhilarating opportunity. Despair about what we can know about and expect from art settles in when asking language to do things it was not designed to do, like treat abstractions as if they were substances, or to submit language to an impossible standard whereby, if something is not absolutely true, then it cannot be true at all.[1]

Or, perhaps the objection to the modernist critiques evaluated throughout has credence, if anywhere, only at their far end, where *is* has turned into *ought*, where the call for a clear-eyed description of the empirical world about us has become a utopian prescription for a future we cannot know. But that approach is hobbled right from the start, because it demands that, for each concept, there be a corresponding ostensive object, a thing you can point to. Wittgenstein recognized that such thinking produced nothing more than "mental cramps" (*Blue Book*, 4), relief from which comes not by taking in more empirical data but by rescinding the inordinate demand placed on words. And that is where the real reward comes. The big deal is not the attainment of self-satisfaction with one's command of language and logic; it is a fuller recognition of the import of a human gesture. You can *acknowledge* more things. But the "je refuse" of modernist criticism turns down the opportunity for connection, however difficult to achieve.

Obviously, all kinds of objections or amendments come to mind. Even if the diagnosis and cure are misguided, however, agreement might still hold in

one area: good or bad, something has changed in, is different about, the more recent critical landscape. That is one of the many values in T. J. Clark's use of the term "modernist" (although words like "deconstructive," "postmodern," or, especially, "neostructuralist" could also serve).[2] The incomprehensibility that he saw in that art came about from a breakdown in the authority of convention. That theme recurs in the critical literature. Cavell, for example, identifies the modernist dilemma as one where "convention as a whole is now looked upon not as a firm inheritance from the past but as a continuing improvisation in the face of problems we no longer understand. Nothing we now have to say, no *personal* utterance, has its meaning conveyed in the conventions and formulas we now share."[3] Rosen relates that problem of convention to the discomfort that the music of Schoenberg and his school can still provoke. If the tonal language of Mozart's world provided "a semblance of stability, a way of distinguishing musical sense from nonsense," then "the so-called 'breakdown of tonality' at the end of the nineteenth century revealed to what extent this exterior stability was an illusion."[4]

Said another way, art criticism has caught up to science's discovery (or creation) of a disenchanted world. What science saw in the operations of nature, criticism now sees in art. Having gotten this far, some criticism does not want to let slip that hard-won achievement. In a modernism like Barthes's, pressing forward in a demythologized world means protecting music from culture by uprooting it to that "oasis of neutrality."[5] That does not look too different from a more conventionally positivistic modernism, at least as it appears in William Stafford's critique of Mozart as genius. Here, forward progress involves having "psychologists and sociologists" take custody of the term "genius" away from the humanists. Isolating its "genetic, social and cultural" causes would remove the unwholesome awe surrounding its use.[6] Just as Zeus is no longer needed to explain thunderbolts, so, too, is genius no longer needed to explain Mozart's creativity.

It is telling that "genetic" is placed alongside "social" and especially "cultural," as if each provided the same kind of explanation. But a cause is not a meaning, and the process by which we explain a storm is not the same as that by which we understand the "Jupiter" Symphony. If that distinction holds, then there should be room for art as an expression of intention even in a world where convention has lost some of its authority and where high formalism has robbed sensuality of her charms. The modernist music criticism cited here has filled in that space with a certain sense of self-consciousness as the highest expression of artistic achievement, which Clement Greenberg called "the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of [a] self-critical tendency that began with . . . Kant."[7] Granting its potential to illuminate art in some ways, where does that self-consciousness begin, and is it of one kind? Is it different from what Cervantes does in Book 2 of *Don Quixote*, where he has his hero

and servant explain plot inconsistencies in Book 1? Or from Milton, who, confronted with the epic's required invocation of the muse, adapts the old topos to a devastating meditation on his own blindness?

> but thou
> Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
> To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
> So thick a drop serene hath quencht thir Orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veil'd. (3:22–29)

Such examples would serve to cinch Julian Johnson's eloquent and learned case for musical modernism as a four-hundred-year-old practice. Once restored to its rightful place in a continuity originating in Renaissance humanism, which made man the center of things, music can be heard not only as echoing but as constituting a modern condition. That state acknowledges our presence in a ruined world in which we mourn the loss of an earlier wholeness and plenitude.[8] Crucially, Johnson's reason for not opening wide the doors of modernism to the whole of human history is that human activity from the Renaissance onward is "no longer underwritten by an overarching guarantee of unity or coherence" (8).

The central artistic metaphor Johnson uses to encapsulate this experience of loss, that of Orpheus, is a myth originating in Antiquity, of course. For actual historical turning points ushered in by "events that, for the times in which they occurred, seemed to divide absolutely the past from the present, moments after which the world would never be the same again" (3), he cites, earliest of all, the Black Death. That calamity—the Medieval historian Jean Froissart calculated that "a third of the world died" in it—invites comparison to earlier plagues, like the one in Athens that broke out during the second year of the Peloponnesian War, in 430 B.C. Thucydides registers the epidemic's cost not only in lives, but also in culture and civilization. One of its casualties was the destruction of a confidence in conventions, including those regarding law and piety:

> So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day. Perseverance in what men called honor was popular with none, it was so uncertain whether they would be spared to attain the object; but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honorable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them.[9]

At about the same time, Sophocles describes a fictional plague, in *Oedipus Rex*. This one also induced behavior that exposed the frailty of the laws and customs holding together a polis:

> No longer will I go in reverence / to the untouchable navel of earth, / or to the temple at Abai, / or to Olympia, / if these prophecies do not come true / for all men to recognize. / But O god of power, Zeus, lord / of all—if that is what you are—let none of this / escape you and your rule, deathless forever. / For they are wiping them out, / the oracles of Laius wither away / and nowhere does Apollo shine in honor. / Religion has perished.[10]

Whether a civilization in collapse should be taken as normative is an open question. But should that be the case, then in fundamental ways we have never *not* been modern.

This is not to turn an eye away from the decisive changes that have taken place in art and its criticism. In particular, categories like beauty and pleasure are deficient for making sense of some visual art after 1860, epoch-making music at the fin de siècle, or later experimental poetry. But the category of self-consciousness is harder to place. We have very old examples where self-consciousness works in tandem with appreciation and pleasure, and not in the service of exposing the flaw or fracture. Close to the beginning of things, there is Aristotle's relation of works of the imagination to the emotions that they portray. A tragedy, he argued, requires a recognition of its unreality in order for it to qualify and be enjoyed as tragedy. (An orator whips up emotion to rouse soldiers to war; a tragedian purges those emotions.[11]) That and other examples throw into question the cogency of any demystifying art criticism that seeks to exclude or attenuate the activity of the mind. A criticism that deanimates art into components, into codes and signs, winds up seeing less than one where the mind at once yields to and helps to cast the spell of intention and mimesis. Which is why it is hard to see how a modernist aesthetics exhibits a higher degree of self-consciousness.

Still further objections enter into my rendering of a modernist Mozart poetics, including that it is incomplete by a wide margin. Much more can be and has been said than that a modernized Mozart swerves procedurally toward reductionism and ethically toward nihilism. For an other modernism, there is, signally, Burnham's *Mozart's Grace*. It discerns in Mozart's music a synthesis between two categories that aesthetics historically has treated as antagonists: beauty *and* self-consciousness. In respect to the former, *Mozart's Grace* abounds with a language of pleasure and gratitude that is hard to find in the austere world of critique. For example: "Perhaps the perception of welcoming goodness, unalloyed benevolence, unstinting generosity lures us into the language of divinity—the divine at its most approachable; not just a forgiving, but a giving, divinity."[12] And: "The perception of beauty is a form of well-being, in which existence needs no apology" (101). In a world where beauty is sovereign, life validates itself. For many, that might be to go far enough, especially when Mozart's beauty is understood as being not just reflective but generative. It adds to existence, thereby showing that creation is not governed by necessity

but by superabundance. To contemplate a Mozartean beauty is to open oneself to what is at once intimate and strange.

Burnham thinks that is not to go far enough, however. Another sound accompanies Mozart's beauty. It is one that bears a recognition of our separation from nature: "This is the gift and the curse of consciousness in an age of irony, allowing us to conceive of nature as a redemptive force even while exiling us from that force" (101). Beauty and self-consciousness or, to cast it as a humanist allegory, luxury and melancholy, entwine themselves in Mozart's style.

What inroads this synthesis will make into the academy or culture more widely none can foretell, of course, and it bears stressing how distant it is from the common music-historical critique of Mozart's music and its legacy. More characteristic is the epilogue to Berger's study of musical modernity, which surveys the post-Mozartean world of Schubert's *Winterreise*. Berger gives a stirring account of the cycle as a vessel of the anguish of postrevolutionary Europe, which saw a better world not only as idea but as actuality, only to see it bloodied. The *vanitas* motif is a venerable one in Western art, but what makes the Schubert singularly devastating is that its meditation on the brittleness of civilization (and yet civilization had strength enough to enable Schubert to sing of its fragility) holds out no possibility of solace even in that classic refuge against social decay, the interior castle of the self. That is why Berger apostrophizes Schubert's song cycle as "our civilization's greatest poem of existential estrangement and isolation."[13]

In support of that, he recounts a tale involving a visit that Goethe had received from a certain poet. The visitor left Goethe in ill-humor toward his fellow poets, at least with those who felt compelled to "write as if they were sick and the whole world an infirmary. . . . This is a veritable misuse of poetry, which after all was actually given us so as to settle the small discords of life and to make men satisfied with the world and their condition. But the present generation is afraid of any genuine strength, it feels comfortable and poetic only with weakness."[14] Goethe in effect has foretold the crisis that modernism would provoke: whether art is to be an unguent that eases the pains of life or an antiseptic that sanitizes us from it. Berger, for his part, settles the question by filling in details of the identity of that visitor: "As it happens, this particular poet *was* sick: . . . He was Wilhelm Müller, the poet of *Winterreise*." These are the very last words of *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*. The closing argument seems to be that Müller won the case for poetry as disease because he got sick and died.

Berger's conclusion dramatizes how much modernism offers a poetics of death over life. For it's a pretty safe bet that Goethe was aware that men were mortal, even as he was defending poetry as a remedy for the Fall. There is also Nietzsche: "[In tragedy,] we have developed a need that we cannot satisfy in reality: to hear people in the most difficult situations speak well and at length; we are delighted when the tragic hero still finds words, reasons, eloquent

gestures, and altogether intellectual brightness, where life approaches abysses and men in reality usually lose their heads and certainly linguistic felicity."[15] The very act of declaring the Schubert a supreme achievement already wins life a round, however narrowly and temporarily, in its contest with death. If only for the courage and artistic clarity of Schubert's song, it is admirable and thus by definition no invitation to total alienation. Although there is only so much good to be said about mortality, it is only because we die that our choices in how we live mean something, that our lives count for something intended.

To acknowledge that art shows us that a life can be intended, that our actions can be "coherent and effective at all in the scene of indifferent nature and determined society," points modernism in a different direction.[16] This other modernism is not cynical. For example, in trying to verbalize what an art like Manet's gazes or Cézanne's nude bathers represents, Pippin starts by negation. It cannot be only the standard justifications given by critique, those "refusals or expressions of indifference or contempt or signs of only oppression or alienation."[17] Rather, this other modernism attains something at once more modest and more potent. More modest, because there is no illusion that art (and, what I have been arguing by extension, a modernist Mozart poetics) has solved a problem. More potent, because it recognizes that this problem is, in the nature of things, without final resolution. All that art can do—but it does this uniquely—is show that its task of seeking mutual recognition and understanding of selves remains a problem whose solution "involves, cannot but involve, an uncertain, unstable social task for the future."

Conceived thus, this other modernism poses a challenge also to the unreal certitudes that I have been trying to draw out of a modernist Mozart aesthetic. All of them involve, paradoxically, a kind of transcendence, a stepping over, whether that threshold is of history, beauty, sensuality, or agency. It is also true that adopting this more capacious, openhanded skepticism will require letting go various dreams, especially of art as redeemer of the world, with its rallying cry of art for art's sake. But that turns out to be a loss easily manageable, because from that undue burden on music issue very few of the virtues and very many of the liabilities of a demythologized poetics, with its proclivities to disappointed idealism, utopianism, or a metaphysics cloaking itself as science. Moreover, however great the loss, it is more than compensated for by what does get redeemed, which is our language about art. That old vocabulary, composed of words like "beauty," "intention," "transcendence," "genius," can once again take its rightful place, which is not in the cramped study of the specialist but out of doors, in public, everyday life, where the very looseness and ambiguity of the language is what makes it vigorous and meaningful. If the two other languages, that of Neoplatonism and its demythologizing twin, leave the world, the one rising too high, the other burrowing too deeply, this one places it right in the center of things.

Even so, there is at least one large question being evaded here: how does any of this pertain to Mozart? In what manner his music may persevere in a world where beauty and convention have lost some authority is hard to say. One response acts more as reminder than forecast, which is that we have not evolved into nonsensuous beings nor outpaced history. By that acknowledgment, exemplarity retains her necessity, and therefore Mozart his also, because a music like his gives us one of the most arresting images of what is possible. A Mozartean beauty—where the familiar, the superabundant, and the uncanny meet—reveals and sustains a world where disenchantment is not everything that is the case, and where mystery still beckons.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. "Sie ist so, wie sie von Mozart zu erwarten war; groß und schön, voll neuer Ideen und unerwarteter Wendungen, voll von Kunst, Feuer und Genie. Bald bezaubert uns schöner, reizender Gesang; bald erwecken uns feiner comischer Wiz und Laune zum Lächeln; bald bewundern wir den natürlich angelegten, meisterlich ausgearbeiteten Plan; bald überrascht uns Pracht und Größe der Kunst." *Dramaturgische Blätter* 3, no. 32 (May 30, 1789): 498. On the authorship of this review (which is signed "W"), see Deutsch, *Mozart*, 345. Translations to English in this book are the author's unless otherwise indicated.
2. Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" 522. The passages from Weber and Abbate are discussed in more detail in chapters 9 and 8, respectively.
3. This production appeared as recently as the 2016–17 season at Chicago's Lyric Opera.
4. Barzun, *Use and Abuse of Art*, esp. 18, 28, 37, 68, 123.
5. Allanbrook, *Secular Commedia*, 13–15. Hereafter, *SC*.
6. Johnson, *Out of Time*, 7.

## Chapter One

1. Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 101.
2. Roger Chartier questions whether "the rule of anonymity" prevailed in scientific writing even of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Order of Books*, 58–59.
3. Burke, *Death and Return of the Author*, 61.
4. For an exploration of how the postmodern rejection of depth for surface has guided some recent and prominent Mozart analysis, see especially Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation*, 3–13.
5. In using "neostructuralist" instead of the more familiar "postmodernist," Robert Pippin is placing critique's "antirationalist" and "antimetaphysical" orientation "within, not outside, the original French fascination with structure." Pippin, "On Not Being a Neostructuralist," 172. In this he is following Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?*
6. Barnet, "Ninth Amendment," 80.

7. Laurence Tribe, "Annotated Constitution," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, July 2, 2017.
8. Geuss, "Form and 'the New,'" 146.
9. Seán Burke also notes that leveling effect in the area of critical theory: "Critical positions which argue the irrelevance of the author will invariably propose determinist theories if they are concerned to discover alternative models of the constitution of discourse." *Death and Return of the Author*, 60.
10. Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors*, 96.
11. Frayn, *Human Touch*.
12. Plato, *Symposium* 204d–205a, p. 185.
13. James, "Great Men and Their Environment," 223.
14. Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*, in *Blue and Brown Books*, 18.
15. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxv, p. 114.
16. Grene, *Knower and the Known*, 143. Conceiving the mind's work as akin to the behavior of an acid recalls the central image of T. S. Eliot's famous "Tradition and the Individual Talent." It likens the impression that feeling makes on the artist to the interaction of oxygen and sulphur dioxide with platinum, a process in which the platinum (i.e., the mind) itself "has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged." "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 30.
17. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 148.
18. Felski, "'Context Stinks!'" 577.
19. Felski, "'Context Stinks!'" 578. The quoted passage comes from Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 75.
20. Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," 66. For an example of how Gadamer's insight about history looks when applied to musicological inquiry, see Strohm, "Musical Analysis," 67–68.
21. Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors*, 95.
22. Although not original, Felski's (and Latour's) objections to context are often insightful and urgent. In the matter of art-historical categories, however, Felski's resistance to context may be built on the misuse of historical periods instead of on any inherent flaw in style-analytical categories. That concern surfaces in a passage like this, which, as far as I can tell, Felski cites approvingly: "The [art-historical] period," according to Bruce Robbins, "should perhaps be seen as a sort of pseudoanthropocentric norm that has been adopted for a long time out of laziness. It is one level of magnification among others, no less valid than any other, but also no less arbitrary." Felski, "'Context Stinks!'" 581; Robbins, "Afterword," 1650. It is unclear how much Robbins believes his own argument. He calls periodization lazy and arbitrary and yet accords it some validity (without saying what it is). Further, he speaks of the fact that cultural periods are made things as if that were a problem unique to those concepts. But the usefulness of art-historical classifications does not stand or fall on their artificiality. They are not "pseudoanthropocentric" norms; they are anthropocentric norms. It is not as if there were some nonhuman criterion available for elucidating art. Style is a descriptive tool, and it can be used well or poorly. The same goes, incidentally, for genre. It, too, is a human norm, and yet Robbins proposes it as an inherently more flexible critical tool. That

certitude overlooks how genre, too, can be applied lazily and arbitrarily or else responsibly. As Alastair Fowler wryly observes, the usefulness of genre depends on whether it is thought of as a pigeonhole or as a pigeon. That is, does one use genre (or style) to absorb the particular into the general or to highlight the particular? Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 37. In the area of music criticism, Julian Johnson has argued that music history's reliance on categories like "Renaissance" and "Romantic" has obscured a larger continuity running from the end of the Renaissance into the present day. *Out of Time*, 4.

23. Burnham, "How Music Matters," 215; Budd, *Values of Art*, 127.
24. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:306, §44, p. 185. Hereafter, *CJ*.
25. Homer, *Odyssey*, bk. 17, ll. 331, 324–25; Most, "Second Homeric Renaissance," 57–64.
26. See chapter 2.
27. Miles, "Chasing Odysseus," 222.
28. Dahlhaus, "Significance of Art," 32.
29. Dahlhaus, "Value-Judgment," esp. 96.
30. Izenberg, *Being Numerous*, 3.
31. Robinson, "Cosmology," 183.
32. Especially penetrating are Strohm, "Looking Back at Ourselves"; Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation*; and Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, especially the chapter "The Persistence of Critical Theory," 262–80.
33. See, for example, Lukacs, "Future of Historical Thinking," 96–97.
34. From Solie, "'Girling' at the Parlor Piano." The links between consumerist culture and the objectification of women also could use some clarification. For example, does the former *cause* the latter? Further, that practice also well antedates consumerism, as in this item from Medea's famous plaint against the treatment of women by men (with Roach's translation making a pointed rhyme between "dowries" and "bodies"): "we bid the highest price in dowries / just to buy some man / to be dictator of our bodies." Roach, *Medea*, ll. 231–33, p. 40.

## Chapter Two

1. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 22.
2. Burnham, *Mozart's Grace*, 1.
3. Some of the millenarian, utopian tendencies in recent musicological critiques are discussed in chapter 9.
4. For a musicological critique of the distrust of concepts, see Strohm, "Looking Back at Ourselves," esp. 128–29.
5. Blocker, "Aesthetics," 7–8.
6. Hunter, *Mozart's Operas*, 4.
7. Barzun, *Use and Abuse of Art*, 99. See also Armstrong, "Aristotle"; and Pippin, *Philosophical Hitchcock*, 9–10.
8. Strohm, "Musical Analysis," 67.

9. Hunter, *Mozart's Operas*, 75.
10. Jonas Barish, as always, is eye-opening. Restricting the range of resemblance to the categories of status, time, and place undervalues theater's power by a wide measure. "With a scrap of resemblance the playwright can weave a dense tissue of identification, making us enter passionately into the fates of the most remote and unlikely beings." Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 265.
11. Lamarque, "Fiction and Reality," 70.
12. Very helpful here is Wangermann, "By and By We Shall Have."
13. Clayton, "Introduction," 14–15.
14. For a summary of Adorno's position in *Negative Dialectics*, as well some of the challenges it presents, see Pippin, "Negative Ethics," 101–3.
15. Clayton, "Introduction," 14.
16. Shaffer, *Amadeus*, 113.
17. This is a form of the question that Currie asks about the nature of our gratitude to Mozart: Should, he asks, we be grateful to him "for helping us to preserve the fundamental humanity that glows from out of the heart of our celebration of you? Or for helping us to forget the fundamental inhumanity of a world that, in our day-to-day lives, we are inextricably implicated in sustaining?" Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation*, 2.
18. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 199; emphasis added.
19. Nabokov, "Good Readers," 1.
20. Nabokov, "Art of Literature," 374. There is also Michael Frayn, who observes: "When I enter into the world of [a] story I do it not with the narrowed eyes of a detective entering a suspect's house, but rather in the way I enter France on my holidays. I'm there to enjoy myself, not to show up the corruption and hypocrisy of French society." *Human Touch*, 245.
21. Barzun, *Use and Abuse of Art*, 132.
22. Of course, evaluating Allanbrook's last work, *Secular Commedia*, is vastly complicated by its posthumous status. The editors, Mary Ann Smart and Richard Taruskin, faced the impossible task of reconstructing the thought of so learned a thinker and the prose of so singular an essayist.
23. Allanbrook, "Millennial Mozart?" 4.
24. A subtle and learned engagement with the postmodern side of Allanbrook's poetics comes in Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation*, esp. 1–8.
25. See, for example, Nuttall, *New Mimesis*, 34.
26. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 3.
27. Allanbrook, *SC*, 129.
28. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 202.
29. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 2.
30. The term "voice-object" comes from Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 10; and the reference to "noumenalism" from Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, 85.
31. Nuttall, *New Mimesis*, 40. See also Pippin, "On Not Being a Neostructuralist," 173.
32. See especially Haider-Pregler, "Wien probiert seine National-Schaubühne."

33. Fussell, "On the Persistence of Pastoral," 151–52.
34. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 141; see also Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 254.
35. Schier, "Tragedy," 83.
36. Mendelsohn, "New Television," 88.
37. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture,* 1–2. This hymn appears in measures 449 to 466 of the second-act finale.
38. Allanbrook, "Millennial Mozart?" 4.
39. Allanbrook, "Theorizing the Comic Surface," 203.
40. Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?* 26.
41. Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 140.
42. The plenitude/rectitude distinction comes from Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 116–17.
43. On the influence of Stoicism on political and social thought at the time of Mozart, see Beales, "Christians and 'Philosophes.'"
44. For the persistence of antitheatrical tendencies in Mozart criticism, see Goehring, "Ironic Modes." To reflect briefly on one other crucial concept for Allanbrook, the term "secular" itself: She gives no formal definition of it, perhaps because it is so obvious a part of Mozart's vision of things that it needs none. Looking through the *Secular Commedia*, however, one finds different uses of the term. Sometimes, "secular" is equated with "pagan," where Christianity is regarded as an interloper: "The happy ending—the *lieto fine*—is the second essential characteristic of Dante's *Commedia,* and perhaps its more defining one—no mere convention but a theological necessity. . . . But the happy ending of the commedia was a custom of the secular comedy, which Dante appropriated for his sacred theater" (*SC*, 33). In this sense, secularism is temporally *and* causally prior. And yet the secular/sacred pairing can also refer to a quality of thought independent of time, place, or institution (thus more normative than descriptive). "The secular happy ending," as Allanbrook says, offers no "transcendent home-coming but a contingent, edgy, and short-lived adjustment" (*SC*, 38). In that case, though, would the ending of the *Odyssey* count as sacred, because it leaves Odysseus with the promise of a long and happy life? Or would the ending in the Milton count as secular, because "The World was all before them"? Questions of a more historical orientation also arise. What, for example, would "secular" mean in Mozart's day? What of the Mozart of the Requiem, or the Mozart who wrote to Constanze that he wanted to carry a candle in a Corpus Christi procession? (See Wolff, *Mozart at the Gateway*, 140.) Probably, Allanbrook would find such questions rather dull-witted and pedantic, but I think her account presumes a harder boundary between the sacred and secular than what actually prevailed. Hers is a French, anticlerical, Habermasian Enlightenment and not the one of, say, Leopold Mozart, or Joseph II, not to mention Kant. On Habermas and his underappreciation of the religious side of the Enlightenment, see, for example, Melton, *Rise of the Public*, esp. 48–49; and, for a very recent example of the persistence of religious thought in the Enlightenment, Ripley, "'An Age More Curious.'"
45. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 26.

46. Leppert, *Essays on Music*, 514.
47. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 14.
48. Adorno, "On the Problem of Musical Analysis," 177.
49. See Geuss, "Form and 'the New,'" 143.
50. Kant, *CJ*, 5:314, §49, p. 192.
51. See Pippin, "On Not Being a Neostructuralist," 181.
52. Abbate and Parker, "Introduction," 1.
53. Ficino, "Three Books on Life," 117 (bk. 5, ch. 1).
54. Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 340–41; emphasis added.
55. Plato, *Republic*, 2:229, 231 (bk. 7, 540a–b); emphasis added.
56. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 85; emphasis added. Also cited in Currie, *Music and the Politics of Negation*, 1–2.
57. I am grateful to some graduate students in a recent seminar for proposing this alternative to Derrida.
58. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 2. Another powerful elucidation of differences in ancient thought appears in Bernard Williams's *Shame and Necessity*.
59. Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art?" 300. Here is another version of the challenge: "[Hegel's] claim is not that there will not be art or that it will not matter at all but that art can no longer play the social role it did in Greece and Rome, in medieval and Renaissance Christianity, or in romantic aspirations for the role of art in liberation and *Bildung*. Each of these historical *worlds* has come to a kind of end, and, the claim is, there is no equivalently powerful role in bourgeois modernity" (283).
60. Barzun, *Use and Abuse of Art*, 15.

## Chapter Three

1. Wimsatt and Beardsley, "Intentional Fallacy," 469.
2. "In der Tonkunst gibt's keine 'Intention,' welche die fehlende 'Invention' ersetzen könnte. Was nicht zur Erscheinung kommt, ist in der Musik gar nicht da, was aber zur Erscheinung gekommen ist, hat aufgehört, bloße Intention zu sein." Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 76. The same idea is present from the first edition, although without the artful juxtaposition of "Intention" with "Invention": "In der Tonkunst gibt's keine 'Intention' in dem beliebten technischen Sinne" (In music there is no "intention" in the familiar technical sense [1854], 42).
3. Adorno, "On the Problem of Musical Analysis," 171; Abbate and Parker, "Introduction," 2.
4. Adorno, "Music and Language," 3.
5. Ibid., 2–3.
6. Adorno, "On the Problem of Musical Analysis," 171.
7. Abbate and Parker, "Introduction," 3.
8. Adorno, *Mahler*, 128–29. I am grateful to April Morris for pointing out this argument to me. On Adorno's propinquity to New Criticism, see also Izenberg, *Being Numerous*, 13–14.

9. That is why I am not sure how consequential it is for Burke to argue, however correctly, that the New Critics remove the author as a *means* to conducting criticism, whereas the neostructuralists do that as criticism's *end*. Both are implicated in the reconception of art from an intended thing, an utterance, into a thing, an object. Burke, *Death and Return of the Author*, 15.
10. Cavell, "Matter of Meaning It"; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*; Dewey, *Art as Experience*.
11. See, for example, Livingston, *Art and Intention*; Mitchell, *Intention and Text*; and especially Laugier, *Why We Need Ordinary Language*, and Izenberg, *Being Numerous*.
12. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 8. T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," roughly the inaugural essay of New Criticism, originally appeared in *The Egoist* in 1919.
13. Mitchell, *Intention and Text*, 1.
14. Frith, "Music and Identity," 121; emphasis added.
15. Allanbrook, *SC*, 117; emphasis added. Allanbrook is treating as one what are two separate issues: the question of authorial intention, and the question of whether the themes of an instrumental work can behave like characters in a play or participants in a dialogue.
16. Cavell, "Matter of Meaning It," 227.
17. My use throughout of terms like "ordinary" or "everyday" obviously shows nothing like an expertise with ordinary language philosophy. I risk the amateurism, however, for a couple of reasons. Along with others, I think that a recognition of how ordinary language works can help defeat an insufficiently earned cynicism. To avow, for example, that there can be no *complete* union of music and drama does not have to condemn us to wander in metaphysical darkness. Illumination and liberation can be found just by asking how we use words like "union" and especially "complete." In taking the ordinary as a datum for inquiry, philosophy (or in this case, music criticism) affirms its position as a practical endeavor seeking wide dissemination, against contrary tendencies toward esotericism, speculativeness, and obscurantism. (For more on these competing approaches to philosophy, see, for example, Nussbaum's "Undemocratic Vistas." At the same time, there is the qualification offered by Sandra Laugier, who, from reading Austin, Cavell, Emerson, Kant, Thoreau, and Wittgenstein, reminds us that there is nothing "obvious about the ordinary." Laugier, *Why We Need Ordinary Language*, 86. Words like "love," "nature," "life," "genius," "comedy," and so on do not give up univocal, unambiguous definitions. But because they are also meaningful parts of our everyday sociable lives (it is not as if all of our problems, such as they are, will vanish once we find better words, or get rid of words altogether), the ordinary brings us "closer to the real" (96). The by-now common critical practice of taking terms like "genius," "work," or "author" and forming compounds by attaching "-concept" to them—all to expose them as products of false consciousness—is to make too strong a separation of reality from human thought. It dismisses as instances of hypertrophy ideas that people act on, actions that bring things into being.

18. Mele, "Deciding to Act," 100. Cited, with approval, in Livingston, *Art and Intention*, x.
19. Frayn, *Human Touch*, 178, 175.
20. Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, 18.
21. Guillén, "Sátira," 232. Cited in Dubrow, *Genre*, 14.
22. Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 119.
23. Mitchell, *Intention and Text*, 14.
24. Booth, *Company We Keep*, 95.
25. Cavell, "Matter of Meaning It," 223.
26. Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 120.
27. Most critiques of authors want to trace the theologization of the concept to Romanticism, usually conceived as a discrete historical era, but sometimes as a transhistorical mode of thought. That chronology, however, conceals its true point of origin, which is with critique itself. That revisionism is especially conspicuous, as Burke notes, in the person who sired the death of the author, Barthes. In delivering a manifesto calling for dethroning the author, Barthes relies on "an apotheosis of authorship that vastly outpaces anything to be found in the critical history he takes arms against." Burke, *Death and Return of the Author*, 25. In musicology, a critique like Higgins's follows that method precisely. Having started by challenging claims to Josquin as a genius, she concludes by denying that he is an author and, under the influence of Barthes, does so by collapsing "composer/author/deity" into one concept. Higgins, "Apotheosis," 494. This is one way in which critique, for all of its animus toward Romanticism, looks more like a distended form of Romanticism than a genuine alternative to it. One might also add that, along with requiring a wildly exaggerated view of authors, this version of critique relies on a severely truncated view of divinity, as if the only thing that gods of any stripe did was legislate.
28. Spitzer, "Musical Attribution," 344.
29. "Kunst kommt aber von Können; wer nichts kann,—hat 'Intentionen.'" Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 76.
30. "Unsere Ansicht über den Sitz des Geistes und Gefühls einer Komposition verhält sich zu der gewöhnlichen Meinung wie die Begriffe *Immanenz* und *Transscendenz*. Jede Kunst hat zum Ziel, eine in der Phantasie des Künstlers lebendig gewordene Idee zur äußeren Erscheinung zu bringen. Dies Ideelle in der Musik ist ein *tonliches*, nicht ein begriffliches, welches erst in Töne zu übersetzen wäre." *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 65–66. This wording stays pretty constant from the first edition onward.
31. That the work of the mind itself can be an object of scientific inquiry anticipates what Freud would later propose in developing psychoanalysis. He thinks of the new field as a logos of the psyche that meets a need that the physical sciences cannot satisfy: "This is the gap which psychoanalysis seeks to fill. It tries to give psychiatry its missing psychological foundation. It hopes to discover the common ground on the basis of which the convergence of physical and mental disorder will become intelligible. With this aim in view, psychoanalysis must keep itself free from any hypothesis that is alien to it, whether of an *anatomical*,

*chemical* or *physiological* kind, and must operate entirely with purely psychological auxiliary ideas." That last sentence, in particular, shows how thoroughly Freud wants the mind and idea, not the brain and biology, to be the object of this particular kind of scientific inquiry. Freud, "Parapraxes," from *Introductory Lectures*, 1:45; emphasis added.

32. Mothersill, "Beauty and the Critic's Judgment," 165.
33. Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," 263.

## Chapter Four

1. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 12.
2. Horton, "Dialectics," 119.
3. Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 280.
4. Wellmer, "Dialectic," 63.
5. Wellmer, "Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation," 14.
6. Wellmer, "Dialectic," 70–71.
7. Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 8–9. On a related front, Spitzer justifies the density of Adorno's writing in light of an ambition to make philosophy and criticism look and act like art: "One can insist that Adorno's texts remain resistant to interpretation in their difficulty, just like complex music is" (6). If art cannot be paraphrased (but only "complex" art?), then neither should its criticism. More broadly, Adorno's elliptical and aphoristic prose style is meant to avoid the identity thinking that he finds so problematic a legacy of the Enlightenment. It protects the uniqueness of the particular. That aspiration for criticism introduces a new constellation of challenges, however. For one, it assumes that expository writing can be ineffable in the same way that art is. (And that assumes that nondiscursiveness is a defining attribute of art, an idea that would need more clarification against, say, the syllogisms in a Donne poem or the theological disquisitions in Dante's *Paradiso*.) One might venture, instead, that art is something precisely meant (within its sensuous medium). Certainly, our everyday critical vocabulary permits us to say that a given work of art is, on its own terms, poorly or excellently conceived, its ideas or its character clear or muddled, and the like. Even if one grants the validity of Adorno's aim, where the circuitous route presents the only access to art-critical and philosophical insight (and it would not be the first time that philosophy would care about the form of its presentation, whether in Plato's dialogues, Lucretius's heroic verse, or Kierkegaard's fragments), then the criteria of evaluation change. The categories move away from true/false or even good/bad to coherent/incoherent or authentic/fraudulent. It is as if Adorno's style repeats for philosophy and criticism a question raised by modernist art, which involves the possibility of intelligibility, of how something can be meant. And if that is so, then the difficulties of Adorno's style cannot be resolved with the categories he himself uses to evaluate art that is not his own. We would have to seek his intentions. For some of the other problems that arise when the critic abandons "midwifery" (70) for the status as cocreator (72), see Barzun,

"What Critics Are Good For." For a literary style of philosophizing that abjures system and spectatorship and yet is not dense for its own sake, there is the later Wittgenstein. Cavell calls his mode "confessional" in its richest, most rigorous sense, with its requirement for self-scrutiny. Cavell, "Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," 70–72.

8. Bowie, *Adorno*, 139.
9. See Pippin, "Negative Ethics," 111–12.
10. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," 281.
11. Adorno, *Beethoven*, xi.
12. Geuss, "Form and 'the New,'" 149.
13. Ibid., 149–53.
14. Adorno, *Beethoven*, 22. See also Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 46.
15. Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 60.
16. Geuss, "Form and 'the New,'" 153.
17. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 182.
18. Rosen, *Classical Style*, 393.
19. Adorno, *Beethoven*, 136; emphasis added.
20. Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 57–58. Adorno's argument about logic may also be predicated on an overconfident or at least antiquated view of what logic is and the nature of the truths it can hand down. As Frayn has noted, quantum mechanics has dealt a fatal blow to laws like that of the Excluded Middle (*Human Touch*, 164). More generally, it is no easy task to relate the propositions of logic to states of affairs in the world (165).
21. The sketch is reproduced from Nottebohm, *Zweite Beethoveniana*, 7. I am grateful to Ethan Lacey for drawing my attention to this example.
22. On the Yeats and its various revisions, see Booth, *Company We Keep*, 101–10.
23. Lyas, "Relevance of the Author's Sincerity," 22–23.
24. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," 280.
25. Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?* 14.
26. Frith, "Music and Identity," 137. Also quoted in DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 5.
27. DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 3.
28. Also consistent with the ambitions of a prequantum mechanics are attempts to remove the observer from the equation. DeNora gives such examples (approvingly) in music sociology in *Music in Everyday Life*, 6.
29. Fussell, "On the Persistence of Pastoral," 151–52.
30. Pippin is characteristically insightful on this last point. See Pippin, "'Force of Felt Necessity,'" 275–76.
31. Herder, *Vom Erkennen*, 208. Translated in Herder, "On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul," 218. See also Budd, who says that what we observe and admire in a particular author is, among other things, the quality of his mind: his particular "intellect, understanding, imagination and artistry." *Values of Art*, 223. That resembles Lyas's characterization of a work of art as a "chronicle of choices made, of temptations avoided or succumbed to and of attitudes expressed," and—all importantly—that "when we make this judgment of the controlling intelligence we do not *infer* to a mind existing independently

of the work; we see a mind in action *in* the work." Lyas, "Relevance of the Author's Sincerity," 36.

32. Horton, "Dialectics," 117.
33. Although its main point is not to defend subjectivity, an essay by Reinhard Strohm, in arguing for thought over structure or context as the proper object of history, offers along the way a brilliant example of how an analysis of the supposedly impersonal devices of music can open up onto the quality of a particular musical mind. Coming to the end of Strohm's last main analytical example (of a movement of a Haydn quartet), one can exclaim, "Ah, I see how a certain economy guided Haydn's use of phrase and rhythm and meter at this point in his career." The argument elucidates the individual—how Haydn was thinking—*and* the historical—how he was thinking at a certain time with the materials available to him. See Strohm, "Musical Analysis," 77–81.
34. Adorno, "Late Style," 564.
35. Dahlhaus presumably has Adorno in mind in making this counterargument about the relation between music as aesthetic object and as document: "In the aesthetic of expression the artistic side of music was by no means incompatible with its documentary character, i.e. the view that a musical work is also a piece of evidence about an individual. On the contrary, the documentary and aesthetic aspects interlocked." Dahlhaus, *Foundations*, 22.
36. See Leppert's commentary in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 519.
37. Nuttall, *New Mimesis*, 90. See also Budd's chapter on "Music as an Abstract Art," which shows how music can take emotion as its object without a loss of autonomy, because, to put it very much in brief, "the musical expression of emotion is . . . the expression of *abstract* emotion." Budd, *Values of Art*, 128.
38. Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*, 57–58. Cavell frames Wittgenstein's skepticism this way: "What is the origin of the idea that intentions must be conscious? It is not clear what that means, nor that it means anything at all, apart from a contrast with unconscious intentions; and it is not clear what that means." Cavell, "Matter of Meaning It," 233.
39. See Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, xix.
40. James, *Principles*, 1:264–65n.
41. Barthes, "Death of the Author," 142.
42. McEwan, *Innocent*, 120–21. Grene is also penetrating here: "Human language . . . becomes itself a growing world of meanings within meanings, which we not only use for practical ends but dwell in as the very fabric of our being, while at the same time changing it by our participation in it, enacting the history of our language in our history." *Knower and the Known*, 174.
43. James, *Principles*, 1:251.
44. Pareyson, *Existence, Interpretation, Freedom*, 86. An excellent overview of Pareyson's thought comes in Carravetta, "Form, Person, and Inexhaustible Interpretation."
45. Adorno, "Late Style," 565.
46. Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 59.
47. Eco, "Flaws in the Form," 202. See also Carravetta, "Form, Person, and Inexhaustible Interpretation," 99–100.

48. "L'art cache l'étude sous l'apparence du naturel." Goldoni, *Mémoires*, pt. 3, ch. 5, p. 456.
49. Pippin, "On Not Being a Neostructuralist," 182.
50. Witkin, *Adorno on Music*, 67.
51. Burnham, "Intimacy and Impersonality," 70.
52. Adorno, "Late Style," 566.
53. Adorno, *Beethoven*, 22.
54. Frayn, *Human Touch*, 235.
55. Robinson, *Absence of Mind*, 110–11.

## Chapter Five

1. Barzun, "What Critics Are Good For," 71.
2. Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 10.
3. Ibid., 10n21.
4. Cited in Marx, *Musical Form*, 19.
5. Spitzer, "Sonata Dialogues," 178.
6. Ratner, "Ars Combinatoria"; Agawu, *Playing with Signs*; Allanbrook, "Theorizing the Comic Surface," 214.
7. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education*, 106–7.
8. I think Allanbrook, for her part, would consider my use of "expression" to be too profligate. To be sure, she gives "expression" a very great compass. As she says, *nothing* in a work of Mozart's day is "expressively neutral," including conventions like cadential material (*SC*, 117; emphasis added). But, as far as I can tell, she limits expression to the musical devices of that world (like marches, gavottes, horn calls, and so on) and not the way a particular composer has deployed them. One does not read in the *Secular Commedia* of particularly ingenious or banal arrangements of topoi into a piece. (I wonder what she would say of *A Musical Joke*?) It is, of course, vital to her understanding of eighteenth-century comic theater that the virtue or baseness of its *personaggi* is determined more by action, by gesture, than by utterance. (See, for example, *SC*, 14–16.) But the acknowledgment of the work *itself* as an action, which we could then deem ingenious or contrived or in many other ways, rarely surfaces in the *Secular Commedia*. (One exception is with Beethoven and some of his grander endings. Here, Allanbrook glosses a tradition of thinking of them as delusions: "I'm not sure that Beethoven in his colossal acts of symphonic closure did not sometimes forget that these endings 'do not have to be what they are.' With him, artifice regresses (or progresses, as he surely thought) to the organic" [*SC*, 151].) If, again, I am reading her correctly, I believe that her silence is intentional. Inquiring into the achievement of the individual mind would be to give into that "willful and brooding self-consciousness" (15) that destroyed the two-thousand-year reign of mimesis and thereby art's sociability (55).
9. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 199.
10. Grene, *Knower and the Known*, 152.

11. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 194–95.
12. Cavell, "Matter of Meaning It," 236.
13. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 199.
14. Rosen, *Classical Style*, xvii.
15. Allanbrook, *SC*, 116.
16. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, 11.
17. Eco, "Form as Social Commitment," 155–56.
18. Ratner, "Topical Content," 615. See also Agawu, "Topics and Form," 474.
19. Grene, *Knower and the Known*, 208.
20. Ratner, "Ars Combinatoria," 361.
21. Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*, in *Blue and Brown Books*, 4.
22. Marx, *Musical Form*, 62. As something of a side note: assuming I have characterized Allanbrook's sense of form fairly, it strikes me that it bears almost exclusively on her *theoretical* approach to topoi and not on her actual analyses. The latter bring out not just the vocabulary of Mozart's music, but also its thought, its grammar—that connecting *filo* that shows why certain topics appear when and as they do. Her analyses, in short, are never just servants of the system.
23. Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 34.
24. Agawu, "Topics and Form," 474.
25. Again, I think that Agawu recognizes this property in theory, if perhaps he is not applying it in this instance. As he says in "Topics and Form," "topics assume different degrees of salience. While some are direct, immediate, and palpable, many are subtle and distantly sensed or felt" (474).
26. Rosen, *Classical Style*, 269.
27. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, 6.
28. Meinecke, *Historism*, 75.
29. Goehring, "Jesuit and the Libertine," 59.
30. "Der Künstler wird, wie der Dichter, geboren; Studium und Fleiß bilden den Künstler aus, aber sie machen ihn nicht. Der Kunst heilige Flamme stammt vom Himmel, und keine Erdenmühe kann sie geben. . . . Es ist eine heilige Flamme die Flamme der Kunst; aber nicht jeder empfindet, nicht jeder sieht ihren Stral." Schink, *Literarische Fragmente*, vol. 1 pt. 3, p. 307.
31. Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, bk. 2, ch. 9, p. 107.
32. "Ueberhaupt wünschte ich, daß sich jeder junge Tonsetzer Mozarts Partituren ankaufte, und sie, wie der Dichter seinen Horaz und Homer, zu seinem täglichen klassischen Studium machte. Ich selbst besitze Mozarts, Haydns und Bachs Werke, widme jede Stunde meiner Muse ihrem Studium, und kehre jedesmal mit neuer Ausbeute zurück. Ueberhaupt muß man bei Mozart selbst sehen, selbst hören, selbst empfinden; auch ist es mit einem Male nicht gethan; der ungeheure Reichthum läßt sich nicht mit einem Blick erspähen, und dem geübtesten Auge entgehen im Anfange Schönheiten, die sich nur bei wiederholtem Studium entfalten." Arnold, *Mozarts Geist*, 196–97. I am grateful to Bernd Steinbock for assistance with this translation.
33. Tinctoris, *Art of Counterpoint*, 15.
34. Edgar Wind, at least, takes the irreducibility of the exceptional to the commonplace as an "axiom" of art historiography. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, 238.

35. Bruce Alan Brown points out that Da Ponte, for his part, improved his text for Mozart over his one for Martín y Soler "by making all of Alfonso's stuttering lines end *tronco*." Brown, *W. A. Mozart,* 137.
36. Budd, *Values of Art*, 120–23.
37. Sarker, *Companion*, 2:687; Woodmansee, "Genius and the Copyright," 429–30; emphasis added.
38. See chapter 3. On other reductive tendencies in Woodmansee's theory of the origins of genius, see Von Mücke, *Practices of the Enlightenment*, 1–3.
39. Nattiez, "'Fidelity' to Wagner," 80; quoted in Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 97n55. The bracketed passage is Levin's.
40. Kant, *CJ*, 5:355, §60, p. 229.
41. Abbate and Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," 195.
42. Maus, "Concepts of Musical Unity," 171.

## Chapter Six

1. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle," 280; Abbate and Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," 195.
2. Eco, "Overinterpreting Texts," 52–53.
3. Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" 518.
4. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 9, ch. 6, p. 172.
5. Translated in Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, 175.
6. "Die Oper würde sich also aus ein paar Sauf- oder Liebes- oder andere Gelegenheitslieder reduziren, und würde aufhören Oper zu sein. Man verwirre nicht die Begriffe, Oper ist Oper, ein eigenes Schauspiel für die Musik, wie Ballet für den Tanz, und ist weder Komödie, noch Tragödie, eben so wenig, als Blumenkunde und Feldbau das nämliche Ding sind. Wir wollen keine Sammlung Bruderschaftslieder, wir wollen die großen Effekte der Tonkunst in ihrer möglichsten Vollkommenheit." [Von Steinsberg,] "Fragment über die Oper," 177–78. The initials H. G. v. S. appear on the last page of the article. I am grateful to Peter Heßelmann for suggesting Von Steinsberg as the author.
7. Cremeri, *Eine Bille*, 76.
8. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 33 (1451a); emphasis added.
9. Eco, "Interpretation and History," 32. The citation comes from Valéry, Œuvres, 1507.
10. Eco, "Interpretation and History," 34–35.
11. Cousins, *Bonaventure*, 114. Bonaventure is borrowing from Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystica Theologia*, 997.
12. Pippin, "On Not Being a Neostructuralist," 173.
13. Campbell, Review of *Beethoven's Compositional Choices*, 193.
14. Agawu, "Ambiguity in Tonal Music," 98.
15. Rosen, "Future of Music," 60.
16. Kant, *CJ*, 5:316, §49, p. 194.
17. Felski, "'Context Stinks!'" 574.

18. Abbate and Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," 188.
19. "Unauflösliche Mischungen." Schlegel, *Vorlesungen,* lecture 25, 6:161.
20. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 230.
21. Pippin, "On Not Being a Neostructuralist," 183; emphasis added.
22. For a more mordant response to this issue, there is Nuttall. He does not get too excited over the presence of "a void which yawns between words and reality. . . . It is because words are conventionally ordered and thus separated from other things that they can be used to refer or describe. You don't point at a cat with a cat. You use your finger, or a word. The conventional nature of language, its difference from what it denotes, is necessary to its referential function." Nuttall, *New Mimesis*, 53.
23. Abbate, for example, uses the epithet "formalist Charles Rosen" with no further elaboration. "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" 515n26.

## Chapter Seven

1. Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 81; emphasis added.
2. Adorno, "Late Style," 566.
3. Burnham, "Intimacy and Impersonality," 70. To be sure, at least some Adorno interpreters pose Burnham's more productive question, too. Notably, Spitzer speaks not just of the disharmony of Beethoven's late style, but of its "peculiar" disharmony. Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 59.
4. Cavell, "Othello," 125.
5. Will, "Ambivalence of Mozart's Countess."
6. Leavis, "Diabolic Intellect," esp. 261.
7. Hadlock, "Career of Cherubino," 69. Cited in Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 96.
8. Virgil, *Aeneid*, bk. 6, p. 205. Ellipses points in original.
9. Brown, *Persistence of Allegory*, 52.
10. Letter of January 3, 1781. Anderson, *Letters of Mozart*, 704.
11. Stephanie, *Macbeth*, xxiv.
12. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 3.
13. Will, "Ambivalence of Mozart's Countess," 31; emphasis added.
14. The idea of convention as a thing to be overcome also guides some of Hunter's poetics, but at a more metaphysical level: "The 'performed' nature of many of opera buffa's reversals—the virtuosic performance of rhetorical collapse by the buffoon, the servant's temporary control of the auditorium (as well as the stage) in the course of organizing the lives of his or her betters, and the suffering woman's powerful appeal to the sentiments of the audience—allows them all to one degree or another to *escape* the controlling frames of comedy and mere pleasure." Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 21; emphasis added. This ontology of fictional characters endows them with the awareness that they are in an opera from which they seek liberation. How this liberation is possible or intelligible is hard to say, since those characters are defined by, take their life from, the opera from which they seek escape.

Hunter's theory enacts as criticism what, for example, Claus Guth's Despina enacts as staging.

15. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 254. Nuttall is glossing Kierkegaard's essay "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern," in *Either/Or*.
16. Levin, *New Readings*, 124.
17. Egoyan, "Director's Notes," 2; emphasis added.
18. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 386.
19. Budd, *Values of Art*, 138.
20. Rosen, *Classical Style*, 313. To be sure, Rosen's position is a matter of debate. Allanbrook, for example, sees a much sharper psychological division between the Baroque and Classical eras than he does, with the latter style allowing for a "luminous particularity" in its characters that was unavailable in the earlier one (Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 327).
21. Nuttall, *Two Concepts of Allegory*, 77.
22. Melton, "From Image to Word."
23. "Es ist ein großer Unterschied, ob der Dichter zum Allgemeinen das Besondere sucht oder im Besondern das Allgemeine schaut." Goethe, Maxim #279, in Bergemann and Hecker, *Aufsätze*, 2:555. Translation from Brown, *Persistence of Allegory*, 218.

## Chapter Eight

1. Izenberg, *Being Numerous*, 11. "The fascination of what's difficult" is the first line of a poem by Yeats that continues "Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent / Spontaneous joy and natural content / Out of my heart" (1912).
2. Barzun, *Use and Abuse of Art*, 30.
3. Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 84.
4. Will, "Ambivalence of Mozart's Countess," 36; Nagel, *Autonomy and Mercy*, 33–34.
5. Levin, *New Readings*, 124.
6. On how "reading works of literature forces on us an exercise of fidelity and respect," see Eco, "On Some Functions of Literature," 4.
7. On the nature of the claims of fiction, and how they are not like empirical or logical claims, see, for example, Eco, "On Some Functions of Literature," 5, and Pippin, *Philosophical Hitchcock*, 8–9.
8. Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" 522.
9. Will, "Ambivalence of Mozart's Countess," 51–52; Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 28.
10. "Concetti, geschraubte, gekünstelte Wendungen, und übertriebene Sachen." Klemm, *Theatralalmanach*, 114; Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 10 (with a different translation).
11. "Eine angenehme, anständige und geschmackvolle Unterhaltung." Pezzl, *Skizze,* 317. The excerpt comes from chapter 102 ("Nationaltheater") and the translation from Robbins Landon, *Mozart*, 110.

12. "Mit allem dem Elend was das buch anbelangt!" Mozart, *Briefe,* 3:167. Letter of October 13, 1781.
13. "Beÿ einer opera muß schlechterdings die Poesie der Musick gehorsame Tochter seÿn."
14. "Man will finden, daß das lesende Berliner Publikum richtiger urtheilt, als das theatralische. Es herrscht dort ein überschwenglicher Hang zu Dingen, die das Auge und das Ohr füllen; glänzende ausländische Trachten, Dekorationen, Turniere, Leichenbegängnisse, Soldatenaufzüge mit klingendem Spiel, Schlachtgetöse, Kanonen- und Pistolenschüsse, Hexenszenen, Teufelserscheinungen, Kerker, Ketten, Blutgerüste, Kruzifixe, Todschlagstiraden ac. ac. bringen immer die meisten Zuschauer.—Die Seelen der Spektatorn wollen nicht gerührt, sondern konvulsivisch erschüttert, verwundet, zerfleischt, geradebrecht! seyn." Anon., *Dramatisches Pantheon*, 48. Cited from a review of this journal in the *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Litteraturzeitung* 38 (March 30, 1791): col. 601. The review is signed "L. W."
15. Brown, *Gluck and the French Theatre*, 64–66.
16. See, for example, Geuss, "Art and Theodicy," 100; Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, 26.
17. Wangermann, "By and By We Shall Have," 4–9.
18. Porée, *Theatrum.* Excerpted in Klemm, "Fernere Betrachtungen," 353–60.
19. Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* 15–26.
20. "Wider alles Böse Haß, und gegen alles Gute Liebe zu haben uns verschwören." Cremeri, *Eine Bille*, 65.
21. See, in particular, Steininger, *Antworte dem Thoren.* More of this controversy is recounted in Goehring, "Of Theologians and Libertines," 321–27.
22. "Es lebt in ihnen eine wirklich transzendentale Buffonerie. Im Innern, die Stimmung, welche alles übersieht, und sich über alles Bedingte unendlich erhebt, auch über eigne Kunst, Tugend, oder Genialität: im Äußern, in der Ausführung die mimische Manier eines gewöhnlichen guten italiänischen Buffo." Firchow, *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde,"* 148; Behler, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 2:152.
23. Anon., "Etwas über den Werth der Musik überhaupt," col. 817–23. I am grateful to Julie Nord for pointing out this essay to me.
24. Kant, *CJ,* 5:329, §53, p. 206.
25. "In der That könnte wohl denen, welche nur bis an die Schwelle ihres Tempels gekommen sind, oder die in den Vorhallen wandeln, . . . aber nie den tiefer Eingeweihten, welchen die Beschäftigung mit Musik kein Handwerk, kein blosser Zeitvertreib, kein leerer Sinnenkitzel ist" (Anon., "Etwas über den Werth der Musik überhaupt," col. 817–18).
26. "In der Zauberflöte sind alle ästhetischen Aufgaben der Tonkunst gelöst. Wenn es zur innern Schönheit eines dramatischen Tonstücks—eigentlich jedes Kunstprodukts, das einer ästhetischen Beurtheilung fähig ist—gehört, daß absolute Vollkommenheit—Sittlichkeit—die Hauptbedingung des Wohlgefallens ist, wenn Harmonie im Gange der Handlung, reines Gefühl, ruhige, innige Freude am Ziele des Gebildeten Sinn erfreut: so ist die

Zauberflöte gewiß der vorzüglichste Gegenstand des Wohlgefallens für den mit ächtem Kunstsinn begabten Kenner." Arnold, *Mozarts Geist*, 249.

27. Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 337.
28. Heusinger, *Handbuch*, 148–49. In many instances, Arnold quotes Heusinger directly, although without attribution, as in his chapter on genius, which even cribs Heusinger's title ("Ueber Künstlertalent oder Genie"). In the case of his commentary on the *Magic Flute*, however, Arnold only paraphrases.
29. Kant, *CJ*, 5:300, §42, p. 179.
30. See Canon, "Moral Value."
31. "Artes liberales sind die Künste, die die Freiheit cultivieren. Hier wird der Mensch, der sonst nichts kennen lernte, als was zur Sinnenempfindung gehört, durch die blosse Vorstellung des Schönen und Guten (durch etwas also, was gar kein Interesse bei sich führt) zu Handlungen bestimmt." Kant, "Vorlesungen über Metaphysik," 815; translated in Kant, *CJ*, 387n19.
32. "Ein Kunstwerk muß den Sinnwerkzeugen des Körpers, durch welche es vorgestellt wird, angenehm seyn" (86); "Der Künstler muß eine richtige Vorstellung von dem Gegenstand, den er verfertigen will, haben, und das Verfertigte muß dieser Vorstellung genau entsprechen" (87). "Ein Kunstwerk muß die Sittlichkeit der Gesinnung befördern können" (88). Heusinger, *Handbuch*.
33. "Die schönen Künste sind von der Art, dass sie den Menschen den Beifall nicht abzwingen, sondern sie lassen ihr Urteil frei, dass durch Spontaneität der Beifall ihnen gegeben wird. In ihnen können keine Regeln despotisch vorgeschrieben werden, sie sind mehr ein freies Spiel der Einbildungskraft; weil diese aber eine grosse Gehülfin des Verstandes ist, Begriffen nämlich die Anschauung zu verschaffen, so befördert eben dies die Freiheit." Kant, "Vorlesungen über Metaphysik," 815–16; translated in Kant, *CJ*, 387n19.
34. "Die äußere Schönheit des Ganzen aber besteht zum Theil eben darinn, worinne die Annehmlichkeit liegt, zum Theil wird sie durch die immer wachsende Theilnahme und die immer bestimmtere und hervorstechendere Zeichnung des Hauptgefühles erreicht." Heusinger, *Handbuch*, 149.
35. "In diesem Werke herrscht durchaus Ein Hauptgefühl, das Gefühl des ruhigen aber ununterbrochenen Hinstrebens an das Ziel, und ruhige Freude bei Erreichung desselben. Ein äußerst moralisches Gefühl, ja man kann sagen, die Sittlichkeit selbst, so weit sie sich in einem Gefühle abspiegeln kann." Heusinger, *Handbuch*, 147–48.
36. "Aus Uiberzeugung, welche Macht das prächtigste der Schauspiele, die Opera, in der sich vorzüglich alle schönen Künste vereinigen, besonders wegen der Musik, für die Aristoteles, Plato, und mit einem, alle Philosophen, so sehr das Wort reden, über die Herzen der Menschen habe; führte er die jüngere, nämlich die komische Opera, ein." Cremeri, *Eine Bille*, 76. Cremeri died in 1795 but left, as far as we know, no comments on the *Magic Flute*. I wonder what he thought of it.
37. "Denn ob ich durch Illusion, oder eine wirkliche Thatsache von einer Wahrheit überzeugt, oder einem Fehler geheilet werde, ist einerley, wenn ich nur überzeugt, oder geheilet werde. Daß aber Illusionen nur einzig dazu dienen

sollten: Gefallen, und Unterhalt zu verschaffen, ist Gauckeley. Denn *es verhält sich mit den Sitten, und Meynungen wie mit dem Geschmacke, welcher ganz unvermerkt durch gute Muster verbessert wird.* Diese Illusionen aber können auf derley gute Muster gerichtet seyn, folglich können sie mich belehren, überzeugen, und heilen, denn die Sinnen sind unsre Lehrer, Wohlthäter, und Verführer." Cremeri, *Eine Bille*, 49–50. The sentence rendered in italics here also appears in Sulzer, *Vermischte philosphische Schriften* ("Philosophische Betrachtungen über die Nützlichkeit der dramatischen Dichtkunst"), 161–62.

38. Cremeri, of course, does not mention all five senses (or six, if you deal in Ficinovian Neoplatonism). Although it is hard to see how taste or smell would figure into a sensuous stage (apart from the complaints of the reek occasionally produced by various theatrical pyrotechnics), his silence about touch is noteworthy at a time when thinkers like Diderot had given it a more prominent place in human cognition (as in *D'Alembert's Dream*). It could be that Cremeri inherited the older Neoplatonist animus toward touch, taste, and smell as primarily concupiscent senses. Thus Ficino: "Love regards the enjoyment of beauty as its end. That pertains only to the intellect, to seeing, and to hearing. Love, therefore, is limited to these three; an appetite which follows the other senses [of touch, taste, and smell] is not called love, but lust or madness." Ficino, *Commentary*, 41 (speech 1, ch. 4). Ficinio's priorities are also Kant's. See, for example, Savile, *Kantian Aesthetics Pursued,* 151–52.
39. Allanbrook, "Theorizing the Comic Surface," 200.
40. Marx, *Musical Form*, 22; Allanbrook, "Theorizing the Comic Surface," 198.
41. Marx, *Musical Form*, 61–62; Allanbrook, "Theorizing the Comic Surface," 198.
42. Marx, *Musical Form*, 62.
43. Hegel, "Aesthetics," 103.
44. Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art?" 290.
45. It is interesting to set these historical debates, which treat entertainment as an unavoidably ethical issue, against Hunter's methodology, which carefully circumscribes the term so as not to "imply a value judgment in opposition to 'art' or 'great art.'" "To study [Mozart's *opere buffe*] as entertainment in this sense," she continues, "does not deny or diminish their artistic value; rather it connects them with the context in which they were embedded and enriches our understanding of their claims on our attention." Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 4. But when a contemporary critic called something entertainment, it was often to deem such art defective and to weaken its claims on our attention. Value judgments were part of that "context in which" that repertory was "embedded." Paradoxically, it is not judgment but neutrality that introduces anachronism.
46. This point embellishes Jane Brown's thesis that "the history of European drama is a unity." Brown, *Persistence of Allegory*, x. See also Jörg Krämer, who concludes that "German musical and spoken theater of the eighteenth century form a far-reaching unity—not only in the sphere of dissemination but also in production and reception, as well as in a mutual influence and resistance at the level of content and structure" (Das deutsche Musiktheater und das deutsche Sprechtheater bilden im 18. Jahrhundert weitgehend eine Einheit—nicht nur im Bereich der Distribution, sondern auch in Produktion und Rezeption

sowie in einer gegenseitigen, inhaltlichen wie strukturellen Beeinflussung und Abstoßung). Krämer, *Deutschsprachiges Musiktheater*, 1:29.

47. "Das Spiel . . . ist zum Umgange des menschlichen Lebens nöthig." Cremeri, *Eine Bille*, 10; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q. 168, a. 3, ad 3. "Welches dem menschlichen Leben so nothwendig ist, wie das Salz den Speisen." Cremeri, *Eine Bille*, 12; Antoninus, *Summa Theologica*, p. 327, pt. 2, sect. 1, ch. 23, par. 14.
48. "Die schönen Künste unter dem heitern, lachenden Himmel des feinsten Volks der Erde, im Schoos der Griechen geboren, hatten nur ein Hauptgesez: Schönheit! Was nicht schön, edel und gut war, hielten sie wider den Entzwek derselben, und ausser ihrem Gebiet." "Nun aber ist nichts schön, als was wahr ist, und nur Warheit wirkt auf menschliches Herz." Schink, *Dramaturgische Fragmente*, 1:15. An essayist from 1792 is more direct in subordinating beauty to truth. The artist, he explains, "learns excellently how to assemble the scattered, individual features from nature and to unify them into, as it were, an ideal whole, but without injury to truth, to which beauty must always be subordinate" (Er lernt vorzüglich, die zerstreuten, einzelnen Züge aus der Natur zu sammeln, und sie zu einem, gleichsam idealischen Ganzen zu vereinigen; jedoch ohne Verlezzung der Wahrheit, welcher die Schönheit immer untergeordnet bleiben muß). Anon., "Ueber den Schauspieler," 160.
49. "Die Schaubühne ist die Stiftung, wo sich Vergnügen mit Unterricht, Ruhe mit Anstrengung, Kurzweil mit Bildung gattet, wo keine Kraft der Seele zum Nachtheil der andern gespannt, kein Vergnügen auf Unkosten des Ganzen genoßen wird. Wenn Gram an dem Herzen nagt, wenn trübe Laune unsre einsame Stunden vergiftet, wenn uns Welt und Geschäfte anekeln, wenn tausend Lasten unsre Seele drücken, und unsre Reizbarkeit unter Arbeiten des Berufs zu ersticken droht, so empfängt uns die Bühne—in dieser künstlichen Welt träumen wir die wirkliche hinweg, wir werden uns selbst wieder gegeben, unsre Empfindung erwacht, heilsame Leidenschaften erschüttern unsre schlummernde Natur, und treiben das Blut in frischeren Wallungen." Schiller, "Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne, eigentlich wirken?" 25–26; Schiller, "Theater," 218; emphasis added.
50. Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 28. Translations based on Hunter.
51. Budd, *Values of Art*, 17.
52. Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 29.
53. Geuss, "Art and Theodicy," 91.
54. I am grateful to April Morris for bringing this text to my attention and to Stefano Mengozzi for help with the transcription and translation.
55. See also Starobinski, who links pleasure with the "awakening of the individual" in post-feudal Europe. Starobinski, *Invention of Liberty*, 54. "The most representative men of the century," he says earlier, "sought enjoyment, but also critical understanding" (10).

## Chapter Nine

*Epigraph*: Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?" 18.

1. Vico, *New Science*, bk. 1, sec. 4, p. 104.
2. Vico, *On the Most Ancient of the Italians*, 46 (ch. 1, pt. 1). Leo Treitler discusses ways in which Vico's typology has grounded music historiography of the last generation. See "Response to the Plenary Addresses," 31–32.
3. Higgins, "Apotheosis," 496.
4. Ibid., 495; Adorno, "Classes and Strata," 229.
5. "Trahi de toutes parts, accablé d'injustices, / Je vais sortir d'un gouffre où triomphent les vices; / Et chercher sur la terre, un endroit écarté, / Où d'être homme d'honneur, on ait la liberté." Molière, *Le Misanthrope*, 52 (act 5, scene 4).
6. "Der Geschmack ist das, was *nicht blos für einen individuellen Sinn gilt*, sondern für den Sinn Aller. . . . Aller Geschmack ist gesellig; ein Mensch, der ganz allein wäre, würde nicht darauf sehen, was dem Geschmacke gefällt." Kant, *Menschenkunde*, 1096.
7. See Pippin, "'Force of Felt Necessity,'" 277–78.
8. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, 4.
9. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 189.
10. See, for example, Goehring, "Much Ado about Something," 78.
11. [Weber], *Dramaturgische Blätter* 3, no. 32 (May 30, 1789): 498.
12. Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, bk. 2, ch. 9, p. 107.
13. Reported in Carpani, *Le Haydine*, 69–70.
14. Dahlhaus, *Foundations*, 21.
15. "Hayden setzte so, wie er setzen mußte, wenn er natürlich setzen wollte." *Musikalischer Almanach auf das Jahr 1782*, 20. See Wheelock, *Haydn's Ingenious Jesting*, 49.
16. Rosen, *Classical Style*, 448.
17. Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 337.
18. Cited from Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, 139.
19. Rosen, *Classical Style*, 445; emphasis added.
20. Adorno, "Late Style," 564.
21. As Margaret Bent and others have noted, positivism in this sense should not be confused with science. Bent, "Fact and Value," 1–2.
22. Taruskin, "Is There a Baby in the Bathwater?" 178.
23. Ibid., 179. Wayne Booth extends this argument even to Vico's *res datae*. You cannot know the properties of, say, a rock, if you do not ask the right questions of it. Booth, *Company We Keep*, 86–87.

## Chapter Ten

1. Eco, "Flaws in the Form," 201–11.
2. Eco casually mentions that this perspective on structure has nothing to do with the "post-Saussure axis" ("Flaws in the Form," 202). In a way, I am trying to pursue here what he leaves to the side.
3. See, for example, "A Reading of the *Paradiso*," 16–22.

4. Adorno, "On the Problem of Musical Analysis," 176–77.
5. Weinsheimer, *Eighteenth-Century Hermeneutics*, 5.
6. Ibid., 13. That the respect accorded a work of art is like the respect accorded a person is also an argument made by Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?* 56–59.
7. On that failure, see, for example, Booth, *Company We Keep*, ch. 4, "The Threat of Subjectivism and the Ethics of Craft," 80–122.
8. Abbate and Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," 195.
9. Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 1.
10. See, however, Gianni Vattimo, who proposes that we might be missing the boat in thinking that Plato separates art, or at least beauty, from being: "The luminosity of the beautiful [in a Platonic aesthetics] is not the appearance of static being; rather, it is the imposition of the living being, well proportionate and adapted to live." If that is so, he continues, "it is equally true that the being of which the beautiful is manifestation and splendor is nothing other than living being, that is, man." Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 11.
11. Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 2; Abbate and Parker, "Introduction," 23–24; emphasis added.
12. Cited from Shaw, "John Bunyan and William Shakespear," 119.
13. I borrow the gambit of concealing a diatribe against Shakespeare as one against opera from Gary Schmidgall, "Introduction: The Great Shakespearean Orange," in *Shakespeare and Opera*, xi.
14. Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 86.
15. Abbate and Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," 194. Rosen notes the oddness of their use of the "juggernaut" metaphor in *Classical Style*, xxiii.
16. Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?* 10–11.
17. Hunter makes a similar argument about the entire opera buffa repertory: "The ends of [its internal] ensembles . . . often lock the participants in cheerful musical unanimity at the same time as they express conflict, despair, or confusion." Hunter, *Culture of Opera Buffa*, 24.
18. The argument of this paragraph is drawn from chapter 5, "Reductionism and the Irreducibility of Consciousness," of Searle, *Rediscovery of the Mind*, 111–26. What Frayn says about a certain understanding of science is also highly germane here: "An explanation in terms of scientific laws and principles appears to be an opening up of the surface of the universe, and the revelation of some genuinely other world beneath, made of a stuff that is different in kind from the physical stuff that confronts us; a world of abstractions whose nature is incorporeal. But scientific laws and principles are not separate from the physical world. They are generalisations of the way in which the physical world behaves. They have no existence outside that world. The move is once again from the less general to the more general. We are not opening the lid on to a world within—we are holding up a wider selection of this world." Frayn, *Human Touch*, 68.
19. "There was, after all, nothing except his sensibility to prevent Mozart from writing a last movement as complex and closely knit as a first movement." Rosen, *Classical Style*, 275. Of course, Rosen is speaking of instrumental music, but this principle of closure also applies to dramatic works, where a looseness

of structure is essential to a last-act finale's function of wrapping up an entire work (305).

20. Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 186.
21. Nuttall, *New Mimesis*, 94.
22. I am grateful to Adeline Müller for some of these thoughts about how brevity, choice, and dramatic probability are all of a kind. On the equation of brevity and simplicity with insincerity, see, for example, Will, "Ambivalence of Mozart's Countess," 51.
23. "In diesem großen Augenblick, in dem die Personen und die Welt den Atem anhalten, die Zeit stillsteht, ereignen sich blitzartig zugleich Umkehr und Einkehr. Das läuternde Bewußtsein von all dem, was geschah, geht auf, das Bewußtsein auch dafür, daß das Glück, die Erfüllung nur in der ausdrücklichen Bejahung der Zeitlichkeit erfahren werden kann. . . . Was sich im tiefsten Innern und stumm in den Personen ereignet, wird offenbar im danach einsetzenden Andante." Kunze, *Mozarts Opern*, 265; translation from Will, "Ambivalence of Mozart's Countess," 35.
24. Shortly following that claim, Will calls out Kunze for actually using that word "transcendence" and not just implying it. Here I think Will hits the target, and it is puzzling that Kunze, as discerning and judicious a critic as there is, uses it in unnecessary ways. To say that the music of *Figaro*'s close "transcends the boundaries of the comedy, indeed of the theater" (die Grenzen der Komödie, ja des Theaters übersteigt, 265) misses how Mozart's opera affirms theater as a place where the human values of mercy and forgiveness become visible to us. (Maybe Kunze means *this particular* comedy and theater, as opposed to comedy and theater in general, or that Mozart's comedy satisfies Aristotle's sense of the universality of poetry.) That is not to say that we encounter Forgiveness herself, whole, complete, perfect, but only that *Figaro* enlarges our understanding of what forgiveness can look like. Theater is thus not something to transcend or overcome.
25. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 253.
26. Karl Ameriks gives this very helpful account of philosophical idealism in its positive sense, as a term *"adding* rather than subtracting significance": "'Ideal' features or entities . . . need by no means be thought of as having to be projected into 'another' world; on the contrary, they can be taken to be simply the purposive structure or ideal, in the sense of optimal, form of our one world of ordinary objects, once these are properly understood." Ameriks, "Introduction," 8.

## Conclusion

1. In music criticism, a recognition of the limits of language is one of the many great, if less heralded, virtues of Rosen's *Classical Style*. His preface to the first edition addresses the matter with his usual wit: "There is a glaring inconsistency in the pages that follow: 'classical' has always a small 'c,' while 'Baroque,' 'Romantic,' etc., are proclaimed by their initial capitals. The reason for this is partly aesthetic: I have had to use the word 'classical' very often, and the

capital letter—turning it into a proper name *as if it denoted something that really existed*—was too much to face on every page. Although I believe the concept of a style is necessary for an understanding of the history of music, I should not wish to dignify it with the status of solid fact." Rosen, *Classical Style*, xii; emphasis added.

2. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 2.
3. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 201.
4. Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 19.
5. Higgins, "Apotheosis," 495.
6. Stafford, "Genius," 194.
7. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 4:85.
8. Johnson, *Out of Time*, 13–19.
9. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, bk. 2, ch. 7, p. 90.
10. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, ll. 896–910, pp. 254–55.
11. Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* 16.
12. Burnham, *Mozart's Grace*, 19.
13. Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 351.
14. Eckermann, *Gespräche*, 248; translated in Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow*, 352.
15. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §80, p. 134. Cited also in Budd, *Values of Art*, 121. Schier is also very helpful on this question of what insight even the darkest of tragedies, including *die Winterreise*, can bring us. Schier, "Tragedy," 83–84.
16. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," 198.
17. Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, 142.

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