8. Form, Reference, and Ideology in Musical Discourse

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The issues raised in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, edited by Steven Paul Scher, touch upon almost all of the aspects of contemporary discussions of language, discourse, and textuality: referentiality and theme, voice and expression, cognitive and ideological codes, audience reception and affect, poetics or style, figurative and literalist meaning, narration and description, and so on. Moreover, these issues are considered within the context of the continuing debate between formalists and historicists over the relevance of knowledge of sociocultural contexts to the understanding of the forms and contents of artistic, and specifically musical, artifacts.

Marshall Brown provides a cultural historical context for our consideration of these issues insofar as they relate to contemporary musicological research. First, he notes a specifically formal problem confronting the attempt to answer the question posed by Newcomb: namely, how might music mean? Brown points out that, in the musical work, structure is explicit and meaning difficult to discern, whereas in the literary work, meaning is easily discernible but structure is elusive. This insight alerts us to the danger of what we might call the structuralist fallacy: namely, the belief that when we have identified a structure in an artistic work, we have also found its meaning.

Next, Brown reminds us of a historical circumstance that should be borne in mind in any effort to explicate a relationship of similarity and difference between musical and literary expression: our own cultural moment is one in which literature has been “striving toward the condition of
music,” while music has been “striving toward the condition of language.” There has been, Brown argues, a tendency in both music and literature “to substitute embodiment for designation in order to restore expressivity where formal control has been lost” (85). There has been a drive toward an “atonal literature” corresponding to Schoenberg’s attempt to “emancipate dissonance” in music. Consequently, Brown concludes, the “polarizations” that informed earlier discussions of music and literature and of the possible relations between them have broken down. This implies that the critical terminology used in the analysis of both music and literature cannot be taken for granted and must be used with full understanding of its problematical nature.

While the breakdown of the familiar polarizations with which an earlier critical discourse operated has been disturbing, it does provide an incentive to a fresh consideration of the musical aspect of verbal expression, on the one hand, and the extent to which a semantic content, similar to that figured forth in literary expression, might be said to inhere in musical form, on the other. Efforts in these directions are undertaken in the essays in Music and Text. Therefore, in my commentary, I concentrate on our authors’ treatments of such topics as metaphor and figuration in music; plot, time, voice, mode, and theme in musical narration; and the relationship between the musical text and its historical context, which encompasses the problem of ideology, in musical expression. I then offer some general thoughts on the viability of looking at music in terms of literary theory and at literature in terms of musical theory.

Text, Ideology, and Context: Formalism and Historicism

The essays brought together in Scher’s volume permit us to see the ways in which the longstanding conflict between formalist and historicist approaches to the study of cultural artifacts has changed in recent years. Charles Hamm remarks on the general reaction in musicology to the older formalist and positivist methods, and Ellen Rosand speaks of a turn toward a “new historicism” in musicological studies today. The effects of this turn can be seen in the generally contextualist orientation of the essays by John Neubauer, Ruth Solie, Lawrence Kramer, Peter Rabinowitz, Hamm, and Rosand. All urge the desirability, as much ethical and political as it is theoretical, of studying the relation of music to the social context(s) in which it is composed, performed, transmitted, and received. They point to
the desirability of a hermeneutic operation, intended to reveal the ways in which the social context bears upon, determines, influences, or otherwise informs the production, form, content, and reception of the musical artifact and, conversely, the ways in which the artifact may affect its context(s). Even the essays by Claudia Stanger, Thomas Grey, and Anthony Newcomb, which remain rather more formalist in method, indicate the need to correlate what is happening within the musical artifact to its generally cultural and specifically musical “intertext.” In this respect, they too are more hermeneutic than formalist in their basic approach.

Hermeneutics, however, is no more critically neutral than any other method of analysis. It, too, presumes a number of different ways of constructing the relation between cultural artifacts and their contexts. When it comes to the hermeneutic consideration of artworks, two principal orientations predominate: aestheticizing, which presumes that the work of art transcends the social conditions of its production and consequently yields insights into the nature of human creativity in general; and politicizing, which presupposes that works of art at least reflect or may even be determined by the interests, political, cultural, economic, and so on, of specific social groups and classes at specific moments of historical conjuncture.

These two fundamental orientations of hermeneutic criticism extend to the consideration of the nature of both history and the kind of knowledge that we can have of it. As in aesthetic hermeneutics, so, too, in historical hermeneutics: the effort to historicize the relation between works of art and their sociocultural context(s) can take the form of an essentially aestheticizing or a more openly politicizing analysis. In the former case, the relation between works of art and their contexts will be construed as a matter of certain similarities and differences of form; in the latter, the relation will be conceived as a matter of an identity of semantic contents.

Consider, for example, Stanger’s approach to the problem of explicating the relation between the musical and the verbal elements in John Harbison’s “Flower-Fed Buffaloes.” She concentrates on the implicit strategies of structuration—the “codes” that authorize the complex condensations and displacements effected on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of both music and language, not on any superficial similarities of form or reference. According to Stanger, it was the implicit and latent content of the speech by Learned Hand, its structure of oppositions and contrasts and its ideology, which served as the inspiration of Harbison’s piece. Instead of setting Hand’s speech to music, Harbison apparently chose a number of poetic texts—by Vachel Lindsay, Hart Crane, Michael Fried, and Gary
Snyder—which he took to represent the deep structural content of Hand’s address as the matter to be represented in his song cycle.

Accordingly, the musical settings of these poems replicate and comment on the structure of relationships among the poems; this is what Stanger’s mentor, Louis Hjelmslev, would have called the substance of expression of Harbison’s work. The musical settings also reinforce the substance of the content (the ideology) of the poetic texts, by their supplementary revision of the form of the content of these poems’ thematizations. While generally sharing in the dire vision of America which these poems present, Harbison’s settings of them also represent a revision of the traditional musical ideology, the ideology that promoted the view that a musical setting of a verbal text could consist of a simple and direct translation of the meaning of the latter. The ideology of New Music, then, what might be called its politics, is shown to be nothing other than a discovery of the “multiplanar” dimensions of both music and the relations between the tonal and verbal elements in mixed forms such as song or program music in general.

In his essay on Haydn’s *Creation* oratorio, Lawrence Kramer mentions a general skepticism about music as a “bearer of meaning” (139). If such skepticism still exists, these essays, taken together, should help dispel it. All of them address the question posed by Anthony Newcomb: how might music mean? Can music mean or produce meaning-effects similar to those produced in lyric or narrative poetry? In fabulistic or novelistic prose? In didactic and conceptual(izing) discourse? Can music mean in the way that a picture, sculpture, or architectural monument means? Can music assert, predicate, describe, imitate, refer—in the way that speech permits?

Literary discourse (as against everyday practical speech) problematizes the relation between what Roman Jakobson calls the referential, the poetic, and the metalingual (or codifying) functions of language. The contributors to *Music and Text* have therefore inevitably focused on the extent to which musical utterance manifests the capacity to operate these functions, the ways in which it can be conceived to do so, and the similarities and differences between the meaning-effects produced in musical expression and in literary discourse. Understandably, then, most of the essays take, as their principal test cases for the consideration of our topic, texts that contain both music and words: song, opera, oratorios, program pieces, radiographs (Hamm), and the like. Only Newcomb and Grey chose to test the thesis that “pure” music, instrumental music unsupplemented with words, can narrate, can tell a story, complete with events, characters, plot
trajectories, and an identifiable thematic content. Arguably, this is the best course to pursue, because any analysis of the relation between music and words in a piece that contains a verbal text or gloss, in the form of a title, epigraph, or program notes, will tend to ignore the problematic relationship between the literal and figurative levels of the verbal matter. The tendency will be to treat the verbal text as a fairly easily discernible literal statement that the musical matter translates in one way or another.

This tendency informs Ruth Solie’s study of the ideology of gender in Schumann’s \textit{Frauenliebe} songs, Kramer’s analysis of prefiguration in Haydn’s \textit{Creation}, David Lewin’s discussion of power relations in Mozart’s \textit{Figaro}, and Rosand’s characterization of the representation of madness in operas by Monteverdi and Handel. In these essays, the verbal content of the pieces analyzed can be taken for granted as the immediate referent of music insofar as it can be said to refer at all. By concentrating on musical pieces that contain no verbal matter, Newcomb and Grey are forced to confront the problem of identifying an equivalent of a verbal content in musical expression in musical (or musicological) terms alone.

\textit{Grey and Newcomb on Narration in Instrumental Music}

Thomas Grey uses a survey of nineteenth-century musical theorists’ notions of the idea-contents (heroism, pastoralism, bacchic fury) of Beethoven’s symphonies to pose the question of the metaphorical meanings that might reside in the “sound surfaces” of instrumental works such as Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. Concentrating on the metaphoric content and narrative function of the introduction, he discovers that the music produces a particular kind of figurative structure, the “tonal prolepsis,” which can be said to narrativize the musical structure of the whole piece on a level quite different from that on which a distinctive cognitive content or \textit{Grundidee} might be identified by a literalist reading of the musical code of the work. For example, Grey does not accept the “tonal progression C–F–E, in which E functioned as the flatted supertonic of the dominant” in the Vivace, as a sign of the idea of bacchic fury. He views it, rather, as a prolepsis of the “full-scale transposition of the rounded opening group of the movement to C” in the finale. The suggestion is that the musical figure of prolepsis endows the work with a kind of cognitive content quite distinct from the thematic material identified by nineteenth-century commentators.

We might call this kind of cognitive content narrational knowledge,
that is, the kind of tacit knowledge necessary for the telling and following of stories. This is a kind of extramusical or transmusical knowledge because it is implicit in narrational discourse in general: in jokes and fables, epics, novels, pictorial sequences, and even in architecture (or, at least, in the decorative surfaces of architectural monuments). Such knowledge is required in any effort to follow a story as much as it is required for the production of a discourse that is intended to be followed rather than to be grasped synoptically as a synchronic structure of relationships. Such knowledge, like knowledge of one’s mother tongue, need not be attended by or incarnated in any given corpus of information. It presupposes some kind of awareness of such categories as characters, actions, events, conflict, development over time, crisis, climax, denouement, and so on, and of the possible kinds of relations among these without which storytelling and story hearing would be inconceivable. We may call such knowledge, following Louis O. Mink, narrational—a kind of preknowledge of how to narrativize which precedes any explicit knowledge of any given story that might be told about any thing whatsoever.

Considered as a figure of sound, prolepsis can be said to mediate between the form of expression of Beethoven’s introduction and its substance of expression. This substance is nothing other than what is meant by the English translation of the term prolepsis: that is, anticipation. By the use of this figure, the composer signals that something will happen later on which will fulfill or actualize what is now indicated as only a possibility or potentiality. Grey calls the effect of this figure prefiguration. The music in which this figure is sounded does not — because, without the aid of speech, it cannot — posit a substance of content of the sort identified as bacchic fury. In a word, the music expresses a figure of narrativity itself: a substance of narrative without either concrete story elements or a plot.

As thus envisaged, music utilizing the figure of prolepsis can be said to project a possible story. This suggests that endings of musical pieces which resolve figures of conflict posited during the course of their articulation might involve the use of the figure of antanaclasis (bending back) or metalepsis (transumption). The important point is that Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony can be said to have a cognitive content of a specifically conceptual kind but that it indicates, refers, or represents this content only by way of musical, rather than verbal, figures. Moreover, music can be said to figure its content not, as in speech, indirectly but rather directly. On this view, music can be said to indicate literally the figurative nature of its conceptual context, which content is figuration itself.
But figuration need not be only diachronic in its articulation. A given figure of speech, such as synecdoche or metaphor, may operate on the paradigmatic axis of meaning production. In this case, the force of meaning is not produced by projecting “the principle of equivalency onto the axis of combination” (Jakobson’s definition of the “poetic” function) but is produced, rather, by the thickening, deepening, or condensing of connotative significance at specific points on the syntagmatic chain. Figures like prolepsis, metalepsis, metonymy, repetition, and so on produce the narrative effect, but only a part of it: because there can be no narrative effect (or diegesis) without utilizing discursive or descriptive (mimetic) procedures.

Grey tells us something important about musical diegesis—and especially about how beginnings and endings can be joined by figurations that operate across the diachronic axis of musical articulation to produce the narrative effect without really telling a story at all. The next question must be, can musical utterance represent the kinds of character and event which we would imagine to inhabit the genres of prose narrative, from the simple fable all the way up to the polylogical novel?

Tony Newcomb suggests that, in musical discourse, themes function like characters in novels. If this is so, then it is necessary to show how musical themes can be endowed with a kind of depth and complexity that we associate with characters in novels. In his analysis of narrative strategies in Mahler’s Ninth Symphony, Newcomb attempts to show how depth of character is produced by the intersection of three elements: “formal paradigm,” “thematic recurrence,” and “plot archetype.” Plot archetypes provide a content more conceptual than verbal at the level of what I have called, following Hjelmslev, the substance of the content.

But this conceptual content turns out to be, in the Mahler case, the sinusoidal plot type of the Romanticist Bildungsroman as interpreted by M. H. Abrams in his book *Natural Supernaturalism*. The conceptual paradigm of Mahler’s Ninth, often interpreted as an expression of death anxieties, is laid out in the contrast between “diatonic purity” and a “subverting, corrupting chromatism.” The “effect is one of placid stability undermined” in a succession of collapses, to each of which (what we must necessarily construe as) a heroic protagonist responds with a noble, life-affirming exertion. The meaning of the piece, then, “arises through an interaction of musical conceptual plots and paradigms” (131).

One meaning of Mahler’s Ninth, therefore, is the story that Newcomb is able to extract from the interaction between what we might call the substance of the (musical) expression and the substance of a (cognitive)
content. The former consists of a series of figures similar to Grey’s *prolepsis,* for example, what Newcomb calls slippage, crux, repetition; while the latter consists of the plot type of the Romantic *Bildungsroman.*

But what are the grounds for positing this plot type as a content of the piece? They appear to be two: first, the general diffusion of the Romance plot type in the culture of Mahler’s time—Newcomb tells us that “Mahler’s Ninth works with the same conceptual paradigm” as that formulated in Schiller’s “forward to Elysium”; and, second, Freud’s theory of the psyche as a mechanism that according to Newcomb, effects “the transformation of experience by memory.” The latter theme serves as the content of the narrative middle sections of the various movements and of the symphony as a whole. The symphony’s “many returns, . . . prepared by mimetic collapses and laborious rebuildings that precede them” are “attempts to work the primary experience through to a proper end.” Thus, “the incorporation of the past as past within the present through the play of repetition is an essential element in Mahler’s last movement” (135).

Now, if this reading of the symphony is credible, then it gives us some insight into the relation between Romanticism and that modernism which is usually interpreted as a reaction against (among other things) Romanticism. We can see how, in the case of the modernist Mahler at least, a Romanticist worldview—in the guise of Schiller’s injunction to “look, not backward to Arcadia, but forward to Elysium”—is the sublimated content of modernist atonal form. Diatonic harmonics equals spiritual purity, while chromatism equals corruption. The symphony as a whole affirms the desirability of a Romanticist purity over against the debilitating urgencies of modernist corruption. But, in Newcomb’s account, what Paul Alpers calls the mode of the piece remains distinctively modernist in its refusal finally, in its ending, to affirm or even to assert the possibility of human triumph over temporality. “The question as to whether the symphony presents the triumph of temporality or the suspension of temporality is left in a state of ambiguous uncertainty” (136). The difference between this uncertainty and the chest-thumping certainty of Romanticist heroism is the difference between modernism and Romanticism in general.

Thus, the story that we must construct on the basis of our understanding of the musical form and the culturally provided plot content is a story of the working through of the ambiguities and ambivalences of a Romantic worldview chastened by the experiences of a modern world deprived of its enabling illusions. This story is not so much implicit in the symphony (it cannot be deduced analytically from the music as such) as
latent within it. The story is, in a word, the unconscious of the text, a latent content of the text’s unconscious. In psychoanalytical terms, it corresponds to the dream-contents as against the dream-thoughts expressed on the musical surface. Such latent matter can be got at only through the postulation of some universal structure of consciousness or master narrative considered to be even more basic, more primary than the dream-images themselves: for example, the Freudian Oedipal drama or “family romance.”

Newcomb does not go quite this far. Instead, he posits a specific version of this psychic theater, the Romance version, which differs from the Freudian version by virtue of its sublimation of the son’s conflict with the father, or the social system that the father represents, into a melodramatic conflict of the “pure” youth coming to grips with a metaphysical enemy: time, death, mortality. This sublimation of the conflict between life and death, grasped in symbols of a conflict between purity and corruption, is the mark of ideological discourse in general. Another mark of ideologization is the tendency to leave the apprehension of the social dimensions of individual unhappiness unspecified—in short, to leave the conflict and its resolution in a condition of cognitive ambiguity and, moreover, to celebrate this ambiguity as a kind of higher knowledge or wisdom. Thus, we are compelled to ask whether the “ambiguous uncertainty” that Newcomb posits as the content of the ending of Mahler’s symphony is a function of Mahler’s ideology (is it really the “meaning” of the piece?) or of Newcomb’s (does he share the Romanticist illusion that the meaning of life is the conflict between purity and corruption, that the problem is time rather than our social condition, and that the height of wisdom is to leave the question of the conflict between “the triumph of temporality and the suspension of temporality” in a “state of ambiguous uncertainty”? Or is the meaning of the piece a product of an ideology of music which sees music’s value in the circumstance that it can, in Newcomb’s phrase, “embody” the “question” of the relation between “triumph . . . or suspension . . . concretely without having to imply an answer” (136; my emphasis)?

*Ideology and Narrativity*

The question of ideology is central to contemporary discussions of narrative inasmuch as narrativization is viewed as the principal discursive instrument of ideologization—considered as the production of self-repressing or self-disciplining social subjects. In this view, ideology is less a
specific thought-content or worldview than a process in which individuals are compelled to introject certain master narratives of imaginary social and life histories or archetypal plot structures, on the one side, and are taught to think narrativistically, on the other, that is, to imagine themselves as actors or characters in certain ideal story types or fables, and to grasp the meaning of social relations in narrational, rather than analytical, terms. Ideologies are apprehended as generic class or group fantasies addressed to the imaginary dimensions of consciousness where infantile dreams of individual wholeness, presence, and autonomy operate as compensatory reactions to the actual, severed, and alienating conditions of social existence. The effect of ideology is to reconcile the individual to the feelings of alienation (produced by real social abjection) by providing compensatory illusions of personal ennoblement through heroic endurance of pains actually caused by social, rather than by ontological, conditions of existence. The ideology-effect deflects the awareness of the social causes of alienation onto the cosmos, where abstractions such as purity and corruption, good and evil, do battle for the individual soul.

How Ideology Works: Kramer and Solie

The ways in which ideology does its work or plays its game can be seen in Kramer’s study of Haydn’s *Creation* and Solie’s analysis of Schumann’s *Frauenliebe* songs.

Let us begin with Kramer’s treatment of music as “a bearer of meaning” in his analysis of Haydn’s *Creation*. Unlike Newcomb and Grey, who deal with instrumental pieces, Kramer does not have to extract the equivalent of a verbal meaning from the music because the *Creation* already has a verbal text. But the text is uncertain. There are at least two and possibly three verbal texts. On the one hand, there is the manifest biblical account of the effects of the generative word(s) of the two testaments; on the other, there is the text of Laplace’s nebular hypothesis postulated by Kramer as an element of the work’s possible conceptual content. Kramer wishes to determine the extent to which the musical setting can be said to refer or to represent the cognitive contents of these texts. He wishes, as he puts it, to correlate the musical with the verbal content of the work by showing how the score “condenses” and “reinterprets” the “discursive field” by musical means. It is not a text-context relationship that is involved, Kramer tells us, but, rather, a “dialogical” one (141).
The key to the understanding of this correlation is a theory of musical metaphor, construed apparently on the basis of Peirce’s theory of signs and Austin’s theory of performative utterances (“speech-acts”). Taking the introduction of “the Representation of Chaos” as a preparation for the appearance of Logos, Kramer identifies an “unharmonized C” as an “Ur-sound,” which both signifies the primal Chaos and serves as a “nucleus” of “everything to follow.” In Grey’s terms, this unharmonized C is a figure of prolepsis; Kramer says that it “prefigures” the “harmonic significance” of the C minor that finally appears in measure 4 (144).

In his analysis of the “melodic representation of [the] divine word . . . that closes the music of Chaos,” Kramer hears in “this figure . . . a musical representation of the spirit of God descending to hover over the waters.” Here Kramer can be said to be moving from the expression plane to the content plane of the musical discourse. The movement enacts or performs a figure of descent, of divine catabasis.

Kramer grants that “agreement about the form [of this representation of Chaos] seems impossible to reach, but, he avers, “certain formal intentions . . . are unmistakable”: “recapitulation and movement towards an extended dominant.” Moreover, he insists, these intentions “contradict each other.” The dominant, he says, “commands immediate expectation,” but Haydn “drives the intelligibility of the dominant into the structural background . . . [the] classical recapitulation . . . is abrogated.” The “paradoxes” are what yield the figurated “fullness” of the utterance of the divine word. And the effect: to make the “light hearable.” The “ear of reason” is elevated over and made privy to a knowledge to which the “eye of reason” must remain blind (156–57).

Music, Kramer concludes, “becomes representational not in direct relation to social or physical reality, but in relation to tropes.” The (or a) “musical likeness” of Chaos or of “the spirit of God descending” or of the “divine word” represents these objects not mimetically but, rather, metaphorically. Thus, Kramer says that “the musical likeness is the equivalent of a metaphor,” and “music becomes representational not in direct relation to social or physical reality but in relation to tropes.” In a word, the references in Haydn’s Creation are to figures of thought, such as, for example, paradoxicality. Indeed, it is only by referring us to a figure of thought such as paradoxicality by way of the contradiction between the musical figures of recapitulation and movement that Haydn can posit the (catachretic) figure of a “seeing ear”—the ear that “hears” the “divine light,” and, in hearing it, grasps “the divine truth inscribed in the order of nature.” Thus, Haydn’s
narrative of Creation, in contrast to that given in the words of both Genesis and John’s Gospel, effects a synthesis of religious and scientific visions of truth — “touch[ing] our human senses as a primary image for Enlightenment itself” (161).

Now, the ideology of knowledge revealed in Kramer’s analysis is one that seeks to convince that any contradiction that might appear between religious faith and scientific reason is only apparent, that in reality the two visions are resolvable in an apprehension of a higher truth than that which can be given by perception or by a thought unaided by revelation. The organ posited as the instrument of this insight is not that of any of the senses used alone or in combination but, rather, that of an organ (the ear) which has taken over the function of another (the eye). The “hearing eye,” like Addison’s “shining voices” of the heavenly “orbs,” figures forth — catachretically (like Milton’s “blind mouths”) — a truth unknowable to reason’s demands for a merely logical coherence.

But is this ideology Haydn’s or Kramer’s?

More Kramer’s than Haydn’s, I would say; but there seems to be a truth in it which points, metaphorically or figuratively, to a specifically musicological ideology: namely, the belief that the meaning borne by musical utterance has to do with rhythms, meters, and modes of bodily existence. Arguably, it is these that give to speech what Jakobson calls its “sound shape” in both poetic and prosaic, and therefore narrative, utterance. For whatever else narrative discourse may be, it differs from dissertative discourse in virtue of its efforts to capture in language the conflicts, dissonances, and contradictions of human existence and social being. Its resolutions or closes are always forced, arbitrary, partial in some way. By moving to a plane of pure relationships, beyond the messy ambiguities of incarnated existence, music can give expression to, represent, and mimaetically reproduce the kinds of conflict and contradiction that are structurally resolvable. But resolvable only in a figurative way: as catachresis, irony, oxymoron, and so on, are resolvable by being transsumed in a vision, metaphysical or mystical, of a coincidentia oppositorum.

The question of knowledge and power as the basis of ideologization is addressed in Ruth Solie’s essay on the gendered self in Schumann’s Frauenliebe songs. She analyzes the ideology of gender informing Chamisso’s poem cycle and Schumann’s setting of it. She argues that both the verbal texts and their musical settings reflect the patriarchalist-misogynist social code of early-nineteenth-century Europe. They do so, moreover, not so much by speaking to or about women as by impersonating women. Here
are two males presuming to masquerade as women and speak with women’s voices. The ideological content of the song cycle, then, is not so much its misrepresentation of women (indeed, the songs convey what the patriarchalist social system demanded of women in the way of subjection and abjection all too accurately) as the trick that is played on women by providing them with (falsely feminized) male voices.

Solie thus identifies the (expression of the) content of the song cycle as an idealized or imaginary story of the woman whose being is comprised solely of her function as a “reflecting mirror” of her heroic husband. It is thus he and not she who emerges as the real protagonist of the cycle and as the ideal author of whatever pseudosubjectivity the woman can ever lay claim to. Solie interprets the cycle, then, as an apparatus for the alienation of women from themselves and others and their transformation into little more than dummies of their ventriloquist male rulers.

How this apparatus operates can be seen most clearly in her analysis of song 3 of the cycle, a passage of which she characterizes as “the most strikingly alienated stanza in the song.” This song (“Ich kann’s nicht fassen”), she says, “is about misperception,” about the heroine’s “having been ‘tricked’ (berückt) and unable to understand her own experience.” The word tricked, she points out, “is first set with an appropriate diminished seventh chord, and its implications more fully played out in the song’s ending, which proceeds from deceptive (and altered) plagal cadential patterns [that are] further marked by a devious Picardy-esque shift to the major mode.” Thus, Schumann subverts the heroine’s “melodramatic wish for death by a major-mode setting, and her hopes for unendlicher Lust with a sudden turn to minor. . . . Whereas the poetic text moves, albeit limply, toward affirmation . . . , the composer, cycling yet again, returns her not once but twice to her original state of tricked bewilderment” (231).

The grounds for this interpretation apparently lie in the semantic contrast between a negative expression (a wish for death) and the putative positivity of a major mode setting and, conversely, between a positive expression (of hope for endless joy) and the presumed negativity of a minor mode setting. A negative is canceled out or subverted by a positive, and a positive is canceled out or subverted by a negative. What she has done is to identify the expressive dimension of the content of Schumann’s song.

According to Solie’s account, Schumann’s music emphasizes and, as it were, doubles the affective or conative force of the poems’ implicit verbal content. Schumann excises certain elements of the poems and substitutes other, more extreme versions of their misogynistic meanings. And, finally,
he fills in gaps in Chamisso’s narrative in order to figure forth an imaginary Frauenleben, the sole meaning of which is the idealized Herrenleben that is the music’s deep content.

All this is convincing, but it should be said that, in Solie’s account of the matter, the question of the substance of the content of both the poem cycle and its musical setting remains unspecified. For if, as she argues, this is a song cycle in which males impersonate women and speak in an (imaginary) woman’s voice, then it is the latent content of these men’s voices, and not in what they explicitly say or what is implicitly present in what they say, which constitutes the ultimate ideological dimension of the text. The explicit semantic content of the text is not ideological inasmuch as it is the literal meaning and as such is directly apprehensible by its auditor-readers. It is difficult to believe that any woman could not see through this dimension of the songs. How could any woman have been “tricked” by this representation of her life? So, there must be something more going on here than a trick.

In order to get at this something more, we must ask: what is the conflict for which Schumann’s song cycle might be considered an imaginary resolution? Solie suggests that gender relationships were undergoing radical—and to males radically threatening—transformations in the early nineteenth century. The patriarchalist response to these transformations, she argues, was to set up and disseminate the myth of “the eternal feminine” (“das ewige Weibheit”). Solie says that this myth was not available to earlier cultural formations, but in fact the myth is as old as myth itself. Therefore, it is not the myth itself, which appears wherever the patriarchy prevails, but its specific inflection in Chamisso-Schumann’s use of it that provides its historically specific ideological content.

Considered as an impersonation by males of an imaginary female voice, the song cycle might be viewed as an index of the ambivalence felt about male identity—and especially about the identity of the male artist—during this particular historical period. The period witnessed a deep transformation of the patterns of male homosocial bonding in which both the ideal of manliness and that of the possible relationships that males might have with other males, including homoerotic ones, were undergoing radical redefinition. Moreover, the domain of work, including artistic work, was being restructured; specifically, while middle-class women were being relegated to the domestic sphere as the sole place of their legitimate activity, the domain of artistic work was being “feminized,” which is to say, marginalized by being made the sphere of a sensibility more feminine than mas-
culine in nature. Considered as the domain of feeling rather than of rationality, artistic activity came to be thought of as being inhabited by social types whose gender ambiguity marked them as suspect in every regard.

I have no quarrel with Solie’s analysis of the musical content of Schumann’s songs, although I would like to have it documented that major always denotes positive and minor negative or at least was presumed to have been apprehendible as such at the time Schumann composed this piece. (This may be common knowledge among musicologists.) The crucial point for me turns upon the words being glossed by Schumann’s music at the point in the text focused on by Solie, *Traum* (dream) and *berückt* (tricked). In fact, the passage is not, as Solie claims, about misperception but about miscomprehension and disbelief (“Ich kann’s nicht fassen, nicht glauben”) and their cause (“es hat ein Traum mich berückt”). It is a dream that has tricked her. Can the word *berückt* be read as a “subversion” of the insight contained in the phrase “a dream has tricked me” or “I have been taken in by a dream”? Or can it be plausibly interpreted as a reinforcement of the insight contained in the expression? For, according to Solie’s account, the heroine has indeed been taken in.

But is this not an affirmation, on the figurative level, of the truth contained in the expression of tricked bewilderment on the literal level of the heroine’s verbal utterance? Is not Schumann suggesting, against the “moves . . . towards affirmation” of Chamisso’s text, that the heroine has indeed been tricked by a dream and that her perception of her own bewilderment is a true perception of her condition? Is not Schumann’s subversion of the heroine’s melodramatic wish for death and her hopes for endless joy more realistic than Chamisso’s representations of these feelings as evidence of her true passion?

Of course, we cannot decide the matter definitively. If Schumann’s music is a subversion of Chamisso’s verbal text, what is being subverted: the literal or the figurative, the denoted or the connoted content of the verbal assertion? When the heroine asserts that “es hat ein Traum mich berückt,” she is speaking figuratively: she asserts that she has been tricked by a dream. *Traum* here has to be read as “illusion,” and it is set in a diminished seventh chord. Why a diminished seventh? What does a setting in diminished seventh do? Does this setting subvert the force of the assertion and its possible truth or does it reinforce the sense of the illusory nature of the dream that is causing the heroine’s incapacity to comprehend and believe her feelings, perceptions, and so on? Does it mean that she really has been tricked or that she has not?
Solie’s discussion of the “figure of woman” in the Frauenliebe cycle reveals the relation between the expression plane and the content plane of a musical discourse that has been added to the verbal discourse of Chamisso’s poem cycle. This musical supplement is a product of a specifically musical figuration of an already figured verbal content. In the process of supplementation, the techniques of condensation, displacement, and symbolization are used to revise the verbal text in conformity to impulses both conscious and unconscious. The ideology of the piece consists of the relationships obtaining between these two kinds of impulse. This permits the distinction between what is implicit in the text and what is or remains only latent within it. The former content can be derived by logical analysis from explicitly stated assertions about the nature of reality—“a woman’s love and life.” The latter can only be derived by analysis of the figuratively connoted content of what is only denoted on the literal and manifest levels of the text (musical and verbal).

The distinction between the implicit content of a text and what is latent within it poses clear problems for the interpreter desiring to grasp the relationship of the text to its context and thus its ideological function. The implicit is what is logically entailed, both as necessary presuppositions and as possible conclusions, by what is explicitly said on the literal level of the text’s articulation. One can take what has been said explicitly and derive from it a long chain of possible beliefs, convictions, assertions, and so on, to which the speaker can be said to be implicitly committed by logical necessity.

Thus, when Chamisso’s text has the imaginary woman speaker present herself as living only insofar as she can bathe in the reflected glory of her husband, “the Lord of All,” the implication is that husbands are “Lords of All” and that women properly live only insofar as they can bathe in the reflected glory of their husbands. Similarly, when Schumann sets the phrase in which the heroine expresses her hope for “endless joy” in a diminished seventh chord, the literal implication is that Schumann intends to diminish the basis of such hope.

If, however, one reads both the verbal expression “endless joy” and the musical expression “diminished seventh” as figures, which they undeniably are, then the question becomes: what literal meaning had to be repressed, avoided, or swerved away from, such that it could only be expressed indirectly or figuratively? Actually, “endless joy” is an example of the figure of hyperbole and “diminished seventh” is, or at least functions here as, an instance of the figure of litotes or understatement. Could we gain a more complete understanding of the work under study, and more-
over of its ideologizing function, by augmenting our logical analysis of what it explicitly says with a rhetorical analysis of what it figuratively expresses and therefore latently contains?

Such an operation is or seems to be the purpose of Ellen Rosand’s study of the representation of madness by musical means in her analysis of operas by Monteverdi and Handel. She begins by pointing out that, in dramatic conventions in the West, madness is often represented by a character’s lapse from speech into song. The musical setting of the speech of a character represented in the libretto as mad often serves to intensify the madness-effect by “subordinating its own logic to the illogic of the text,” thereby “reinforcing and complementing” the sense of the words. But, according to Rosand, music can figure madness in its own right and does so by the violence it enacts upon whatever stylistic regularities it has originally laid down as the manifest sign of its own normality (242).

This is a nice insight, telling us something important about musical expression in general. If one test of sanity is the capacity to use grammatically correct speech and logically coherent discourse, then any lapse into singing in the midst of speaking and discoursing must be viewed as a kind of temporary insanity. Or, to put it another way, if a test of sanity is to be able to operate the difference between the literal and the metaphoric uses of speech, then any lapse into singing in the midst of speaking indicates a lapse into pure figuration. (A seventeenth-century definition of madness was the attempt to live a metaphor—in the manner of Don Quixote.) According to this view, one could argue that musical expression or the conjoining of music and words inevitably erases any possibility of distinguishing between the literal and the figurative levels of utterance. This does not mean that an analysis of what is being expressed in musical utterance is impossible; but it does mean that techniques of figurative, rather than of logical or grammatical, analysis are what are called for.

Rosand shows us the ways in which music can represent madness, not by referring us to a specific conceptual content of the idea of madness prevailing at a given time and place (such as melancholia or hydrophobia or paranoia) but, rather, by the way in which music can do violence to and undercut its own feigned normality. It is the sheer conventionality of a given style of expression, whether in words or in music, which is exposed when madness is allowed to irrupt into the scene of expression or representation. Or is it the madness of conventionality itself, the violence that it enacts upon the self and subject of speech, that is being figuratively suggested in music charged with the task of representing madness? Rosand
suggests as much when she concludes: “The portrayal of madness is an exercise in operatic consciousness raising. For just as each individual mad scene sheds light on the stylistic conventions of its own period, so all such portrayals, in exploiting the tension between text and music, raising it to a level of primacy, call attention to the precariousness of ‘normal’ reciprocity, of the balance of operatic discourse in general” (287). But, we might add, so too, for music in general and, beyond that, all poetic speech or stylized utterance. So even for Schumann’s song cycle, which, in its attempt to impersonate the woman’s voice, also “calls attention to the precariousness of ‘normal’ reciprocity” and the impossibility of representing either a life or a love except by figurative means.

**Voice, Mode, and Latency in Poetic and Musical Expression: Alpers**

In the case of a musical setting of a poem or piece of prose, we are inclined to concentrate on the extent to which the music translates or glosses the verbal text or, as stressed by Solie and Rosand, the ways in which the music revises and edits the text, reinforcing, supplementing, or subverting its manifest meaning. The danger, I have tried to suggest, is that the manifest meaning may be stressed at the expense of the latent meaning. Among the kinds of latent meaning that might be supposed to inhabit the repressed sectors of a literary text is that which is manifested in the mode in which it is cast.

The relevance of the concept of mode to any interest we might have in a historical or ideological analysis of works of art is indicated by Alpers’ characterization of mode in literature. He defines mode as “the literary manifestation, in a given work, not of its attitudes in a loose sense, but of its assumptions about human nature and our situation” and, more specifically, assumptions about human “strength [or weakness] relative to [a] world.” The presumption of strength or weakness is manifested, as Northrop Frye tells us, in two kinds of relationship represented in literary texts: first, the protagonist’s relationship to his or her environment, both physical and social; and, second, the artist’s presumed relationship to his or her intended audience.

The only difficulty with translating these precepts into operational terms is that the specifically poetic text (with the possible exception of epic genres) typically takes for granted the problematic nature of both relation-
ships as the condition necessitating its composition. It is the problematic nature of these relationships that constitutes a latent content of the poetic utterance, however confident it appears to be in the expression of “strength relative to world” on its manifest level of expression. Thus, for example, Alpers shows us how Herbert’s “Vertue” plays off a “fairly direct equation of rhetorical and spiritual firmness” against the “suggestion” that “not only the poet’s physical being but also his poetry is subject to mortality. The firm conclusions of [the poem’s] rhetoric are made out to share the mutability of natural things.” Moreover, the trope of the third stanza, in which “the death of natural beauty” is figured as “a sequence of musical cadences,” suggests to Alpers a “manifestation of a sense of vulnerability central to the poem’s [own] rhetoric” (67).

“How does the poem negotiate the tension between spiritual vulnerability and firmness?” Alpers asks. Is Herbert’s (or the poem’s) voice one that, as Helen Vendler has it, “never gives” (68)? Or is it one that yields to an apprehension of its own mortality in what Alpers calls “the rhetorical force” of the last line (“Then chiefly lives”)? Or does it both yield and not yield? Does it both affirm and deny, at one and the same time, its own mortality? If so, the poem states a logical contradiction and expresses a feeling of ambivalence about the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Or does it, rather, simply posit the aporetic nature of an incarnated spirit, consciousness, or conscience in the elaboration of the rhetorical figure of paradox? If so, the contradiction expressed on one level (the expression of the content) is deprived of its force at another level (that of the substance of the content) in much the same way that what appear to be contradictory character traits of a person become, when apprehended as paradoxical, both interesting and attractive as evidence of that person’s depth.

Alpers raises the question of how one might set Herbert’s “Vertue” to music. Obviously, it could be set in any number of ways—and with perfect freedom, on the part of the composer, to set it in whatever way he or she might choose. Would there be any obligation on the part of the composer to remain true to the poem’s form or its content or to both of these? It is difficult to say. Should, for example, the composer credit his or her readings of the text, in the way Harbison apparently took responsibility for discerning the real content not only of Learned Hand’s speech but also of the poems by Lindsay, Crane, Fried, and Snyder? Should the composer consult critics’ interpretations of those literary works they have chosen to set to music? What would be gained in the way of understanding the task either of translation or of revisionary setting?
Actually, Alpers’ readings of the poems he has chosen to deal with show that something could be gained from such a collaboration. What he has done is to suggest that the meaning of the poetic text is not a matter of form alone or of content alone but is, rather, a function of the modalities in which the relations between forms and contents are figured. Thus, he alerts us to the difference between the ways in which a discourse produces meaning by way of codification, on the one hand, and by way of poeticization, on the other. The difference is that which Alpers specifies as obtaining between genre and mode. We can ourselves characterize genre as a codifying protocol, mode as a poeticizing one.

Roman Jakobson pointed out that the metalingual and the poetic functions of verbal utterances both work to project the “principle of equivalence [by which referents are endowed with ‘meaning’] from the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic axis” of articulation. But, he insisted, these two functions are opposed in the kind of equivalences they feature: whereas the metalingual or codifying function makes unities out of equivalences (“A=A”: *Horse* is a species of the class *Equus caballus*), the poetic function makes equivalences out of unities (A=Not A: “My music shows ye have your closes”; “America, like a hounded shark”; “Women have served . . . as looking glasses,” and so on). The principle of equivalence utilized in “*Horse* is a species of the class *Equus caballus*” is that of direct predication; the code is implicit but derivable by grammatical analysis of and logical deduction from the explicitly stated elements of the utterance. The principle of equivalence utilized in “*My* music shows ye have your closes” is not metalingual; it does not tell us what the elements of the object-language of the phrase (*My, ye, your, shows, have, music, and closes*) mean. There is a code implicit in the phrase, but it is a local and arguably idiolectal code of figurative condensation and tropical displacement. This code is not derivable by a grammatical analysis of and logical deduction from the explicitly stated elements of the utterance. The meaning of the phrase, consequently, is latent, which is to say psychophysiological, rather than implicit. The structure of the phrase can be analyzed rhetorically, but such analysis will not provide a basis for a literal translation or paraphrase of its full semantic content. Recall Marshall Brown’s reminder: the structure of a text is not to be confused with its meaning; a structure is a means of meaning production.

The semantic content of a text consists as much of the specific figurations and tropes by which the principle of equivalence is projected from the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic axis of articulation as it does of what the phrase seems to be literally asserting. These specific figurations and the
tropes that effect their specific successivity mean precisely by their evasion of every literalist, lexical, and grammatical expectation.

Thus, the referent of music in Herbert’s phrase “My music shows ye have your closes” is utterly undeterminable. Even if it is read as a metaphor for the poem or the poetry of the poet, the idea that music could show anything, even in the sense of “manifesting,” “displaying,” or “demonstrating,” is absurd—a catachresis; but the notion that this music could show that the “Sweet spring” apostrophized in line 1 of the stanza has its “closes” (like the “box where sweets compacted lie” to which the spring is likened by apposition in line 2) is even more absurd. For even if closes is read as “cadences” (a sixteenth-century usage), thereby saving the logic of music as a figure for poetry, it makes no sense to say that either music or poetry “shows” that “spring” has its “cadences.” But the logic of the phrase consists of the figures of alliteration (My music, ye . . . your) and internal rhyme (shows . . . closes) and the poetic necessity of having an end rhyme for roses, which ends line 1 of the stanza. Too much meaning or not enough? Or meaning of a kind different from both grammatical sense and extratextual referentiality?

So, what might be the composer’s obligations to the poetic text that he or she might decide to set to music? According to Alpers’ view of the nature of the poetic text, the composer should be especially attentive to the mode in which the work is cast, the feeling of strength or weakness relative to the world that pervades the text. In other words, it is not so much a matter of finding musical equivalents of what the text literally says or what it suggests by the use of specific figures of speech and tropes. It is a matter of suggesting by musical means the mode of relationship to the world that is the poem’s own latent content.

Formalism and Ideology: Cone and Lewin

A consistently formalist approach to the study of musical artworks is represented in this collection by the essays by Edward Cone and David Lewin. In Cone’s consideration of the nature of voice in song and of the persona of the singer in Schumann’s lieder, there is no reference to the social context in which specific notions of both voice and persona function as elements of a specific ideology of poetic creativity. There are many references to the cultural and specifically musical context of Schumann’s songs, but the relationships presumed to exist between the sung text and the
cultural context are those of a perfect identity of formal contents. Indeed, Cone appears to have embraced the ideology of poetic creativity predominant in Schumann himself if not in Romantic aesthetics in general. This embrace results in deep insights into the internal dynamics of the songs referred to by Cone in his explication of the relations obtaining between words and music in specific lieder. It yields forceful instruction for the performance of these songs. It leads to the identification of a specific kind of irony in a composer traditionally thought to be lacking in irony altogether. In short, it permits us to view and to hear Schumann's songs from within their culturally provided interior.

But the interpretation of vocal persona as the persona of the composer (rather than that of the poet-singer) remains historically unmediated by any reference to the ideology of poetic creativity prevailing during Schumann's time. As a result, at the level of the theoretical payoff of Cone's essay, he ends up reasserting and affirming the very Romanticist ideology of poetic creativity that he wished to analyze.

That Cone is more an advocate than an analyst of this Romanticist ideology is indicated by the extent to which he adverts to a hypostatized notion of a poetic-musical consciousness seemingly perfect in self-knowledge and control of its own thought-contents and processes. While Cone refers to the conscious and subconscious elements of the hypothesized composer's persona, he nowhere suggests that this kind of persona might have an unconscious, which is to say, might be the unconscious bearer of values, fantasies, and illusions as well as of genuine insights—especially regarding the nature of personae themselves—of a given time, place, and sociocultural condition. The ignoring of the possibility of an unconscious dimension of the composer's persona no doubt reflects a suspicion of a currently dominant notion of selfhood, Freudian or generally psychoanalytical, which is itself ideological in nature. But without a theory of consciousness which features some version of an unconscious and generally ideological motivation in the composition of selves and personae, the notion of a specifically poetic creativity remains subject to the Promethean illusions of its Romanticist formulation.

David Lewin's perspicuous reading of a phrase in Mozart's *Figaro* is similarly formalist in method and similarly seeks to avoid consideration of the possibility that the work or its composer(s) operated under any kind of unconscious motivation. His essay, however, is much more pragmatically oriented than Cone's, being more concerned with the derivation of possible
stage directions from a rigorously formalist analysis of the score than with the persona of either the author of the libretto or the composer. What emerges from Lewin’s analysis, however, is something like an ideology of the stage director and, indeed, of the musical analyst which resembles the Promethean and timeless “composer’s persona” projected by Cone.

In Lewin’s essay, there is no suggestion that the social roles of the director or the analyst might be historically specific, that what it meant to be a stage director or a musical analyst was different in Mozart’s time, place, and sociocultural condition from what it means in our own historical moment. Indeed, both stage direction and analysis are viewed as Promethean activities: the latter leaves no element of the text and score undisclosed, the former supposes a level of self-conscious knowledge of and control over the singer-actor similar to that posited by Cone for the composer’s persona.

Nonetheless (and perhaps this is a result of the pragmatic purpose informing Lewin’s analytic exercise), ideology—and moreover, ideology understood as a practice reinforcing of structures of domination and subordination—insinuates itself into Lewin’s handling of his materials. It appears in his characterization of the themes of the opera and especially of the passage he analyzes. Note that Lewin recommends “the idea of command” as the “point of departure for continuing and elaborating our [his] analysis-cum-direction” of the opening of the first-act trio of Figaro, “Cosa sento!” According to his interpretation of the passage, it is an allegory of outrage and confusion passing over into the count’s taking command of self and situation and then “issuing a command” (165).

Lewin makes a persuasive case for the idea that the count’s utterance “Cosa sento!” refers to the music of measures 1–3 (a “loud agitated tutti that elaborates a dominant seventh harmony, demanding resolution”) and portrays the “confused outrage” of the count expressed in his words only in measures 2–3. This provides the basis for the generalization that, first, the count takes his cues primarily from the music, rather than from the words preceding, and that, second, “Mozart . . . consistently displaces the actual words forwards in time” in relationship to the musical motives that always precede them. Whence, then, the interpretation of the count’s persona: “Mozart’s Count does not give impetus to the music by his verbal utterances, as an effective authority figure should. . . . Rather, he consistently takes his verbal cues from whatever music he has just heard.” And the consequent direction to the actor playing the role of the count: “The actor should take the loud agitated music of measure 1–3, and not Basilio’s earlier
disparaging gossip [about the count] as a cue for the reaction ‘Cosa sento!’ Thus, Lewin concludes, “throughout the first half of the trio, . . . the Count continues to take his cues, both thematic and tonal, from preceding music,” while “Basilio and Susanna struggle to take control of those cues. They contend in initiating themes and harmonic moves to which the Count responds; each thereby tries to win the authority of the Count to use against the other” (166–67).

What we have here, then, according to Lewin, is a dramatic musical representation of the loss and recovery of control, authority, and the power of command by the count; a power struggle between subaltern figures, the music master Basilio and the count’s inamorata, Susanna, to expropriate that authority for use against each other; and the triumph—at least in Basilio’s solo following upon the passage in question—of a “fawning hypocrite” (Basilio) over both the lecherous aristocrat (the count) and the lying and dissimulating woman (Susanna) (171–72).

The whole passage, and especially Basilio’s solo, as analyzed by Lewin, fairly cries out for an ideological analysis of the extent to which it participates in or resists complicity with the dominant structure of social relationships, class and gender roles especially, of the historical moment in which they were composed. In the “infinite tennis game” between Basilio and the Count, Lewin perceives a figure of “a struggle for power and control between the two males” in which the woman, Susanna, “has no place whatsoever.” In Lewin’s interpretation, Basilio’s victory in this game derives from the “hypocritical fawning” that in both Da Ponte’s text and Mozart’s musical setting is, in contrast to Beaumarchais’s original version, elevated from the status of a “flat character trait” into a supreme instantiation of “manipulative mastery” through parody. Basilio’s music not only “apes his master’s model right up to the final cadence, as if he were about to confirm the Count’s tonic closure,” but it also trumps (could we say, deconstructs?) the model by substituting “C-minor-to-F” for the count’s “final harmonies, F-to-Bb” (172–73).

Moreover, this manipulative mastery is extended to encompass Susanna as well, and by a similarly parodistic gesture, in this case, to the love aria (“Non so più”) previously sung by Cherubino to Susanna. This gesture functions, according to Lewin, as a weapon in the duel between Basilio and Susanna “for the Count’s authority”; it serves to “outwit and foil Susanna” by making sure that “she knows [Basilio’s] suspicion” that she has been dallying with Cherubino and “suspects his certain knowledge.” Lewin
“imagines” (his term) that “while Basilio’s solo is manipulating the Count,” he (Basilio) is “casually perusing” a score of Cherubino’s song (which may have been dropped in flight from the approaching count) and “darting one sly leer at Susanna.” Thus, while “manipulating the Count in all sorts of ways,” Basilio can also keep “a tight grip on Susanna” (175).

Now, Lewin’s manifest admiration of the genius of Mozart and the talent of Da Ponte takes the form of a celebration of the power — indeed the manipulative power — of the former over the latter and of both over Beaumarchais, the original author of the story. Beyond this: it leads to the suggestion that Mozart and Da Ponte must have admired the manipulative power of the “fawning hypocrite,” manipulator of men, and suborner of women represented by the character Basilio in Beaumarchais’s story. Beyond that: it leads Lewin to celebrate the manipulative power of music over words in general. And, finally, beyond that: in his (admittedly imaginary) characterization of Basilio as a manipulator whose principal instrument is, on the one side, his music and, on the other, his talents as a “musical analyst” (he is imagined as “casually perusing” the score of Cherubino’s song while his “solo is manipulating the Count”), Lewin appears to be indulging himself in a fantasy of the power of analysis over performance.

Such celebrations of manipulative power are easily recognizable as compensatory responses to the apprehension of those who make them to their own relative social powerlessness. This is not to demean Lewin’s interpretation of the passage in question. On the contrary, his analysis of this passage amply demonstrates the especial fascination that manipulative power held for Mozart, his generation, and the social groups of his historical epoch. Moreover, in their ascription of this power to such a petit-bourgeois figure as Basilio, who is, after all, only a music master, Mozart, Da Ponte, and Beaumarchais alike can be seen as participating in a fantasy of “the democratization of power” that overrides any consideration of birth or social status (though not of gender). This is a fantasy quite other than that of “the power of democracy.” Lewin shows the extent to which this fantasy of the democratization of power, a fantasy that would be theorized in different ways by thinkers as diverse as Rousseau, Diderot, Hegel, Stendhal, Marx, and Nietzsche, pervaded the consciousness of Mozart himself. But Lewin leaves this fantasy “unanalyzed.” He simply or, rather, complexly shows how the fantasy works in Mozart’s music to endow it with a content or meaning that can serve as a basis for the stage director’s manipulative control of the actor-singers subject to his command.
Contextualization and Reception: Hamm, Neubauer, and Rabinowitz

The question of the relation of the musical work to its historical context has been raised in a variety of ways in *Music and Text*, but most explicitly and most radically by Charles Hamm, John Neubauer, and Peter Rabinowitz. Unlike those who relate the musical work to the context of its original time of production and in terms of its ideological content, these three critics take their point of departure from the postmodernist notion of the openness of the work of art and the function of the performer or audience in the production of the work’s possible meaning.

Thus, in his consideration of the reception in Black South Africa of Lionel Richie’s “All Night Long (All Night),” Hamm first stresses the difficulty of imputing any specific meaning to the work itself; it is, in his view, a generic pop hit. This means that the song is a mélange of codes and pseudocodes that do not—in Hamm’s reading—add up to any determinable meaning. Specific meanings are produced, Hamm says, “only at the moment of reception” and are “shaped by the cultural capital of the listener” (25–26).

Hamm stresses the multiplicity of contexts—national, regional, ethnic, class, political, and so on—that could have determined how Richie’s piece might have been received. Moreover, he suggests that these contexts are so different from that in which the song was originally written and produced that any reference either to the tradition of rock-’n’-roll, on the one hand, or to anything identifiable as a clear reference in the lyrics, on the other, would be irrelevant to an interpretation of its true or dominant meaning. Indeed, Hamm notes that the nonmeanings or “ambiguities deliberately built into Richie’s song” were perhaps the source of its popularity. Individuals and groups in a wide variety of social contexts could read into the song a host of meanings that could endow it with a power it would otherwise lack (37).

Hamm’s broader purpose appears to be to challenge the conventional notion of the “canonic” musical work as an “ideal object” possessing “an immutable and unshifting ‘real’ meaning that is to be unfolded by the scholar.” He concludes his essay by asking whether classical music might not be as generic in its content as Richie’s pop hit and as open, therefore, to as many interpretations as there are contexts in which it might be heard (37).

The implications of Hamm’s position could be unsettling to critics, I should think. For notice that the critic’s role would consist not of determin-
ing the real or true meaning of a given musical work but, rather—insofar as one were interested in meaning at all—in identifying the contexts in which it may have been heard and surveying the various meanings imputed to it by listeners in those contexts. What is the status of this suggestion? Is it descriptive of the difference between a musicologist’s interest and that of the ethnomusicologist or historian of music? Or is it prescriptive of what musicologists ought to be doing when they study any piece of music, old or new, native or exotic, traditional or experimental? If the latter were the case, in what would the musicologist’s expertise consist? If there is nothing specifically musical about the meaning of a given piece of music, this could imply either that musicologists should not concern themselves with meaning or that they should concentrate on ethnohistorical studies of musical works. In the former case, one could justify the most austere formalism; in the latter, the most fulsome historicism.

Similar issues and choices are raised by the essays of John Neubauer and Peter Rabinowitz. Both address the issue of whether not only modernist and postmodernist but also classical works of art can be said to contain “intrinsic meaning.” Neither suggests that there is no meaning in musical compositions, but both appear to believe that whatever meaning may have been built into a work by the composer either is irretrievable or, if retrievable, enjoys no special status in the determination of a work’s potential meaning. Neubauer bases his conclusions on a conception of the ineluctable openness of the artistic work, while Rabinowitz founds his on the power of the listener legitimately to attribute meanings to works of art which their composers could not even have imagined.

Thus, Neubauer begins his essay with a consideration of the constraints that institutions (both formal and informal) bring to bear upon composers, performers, and listeners alike. He then proceeds to reflect on the crucial role of the performer of the musical piece, the relation between performing and listening, and the similarities between performing and reading. He concludes by questioning the possibility of distinguishing, on ontological grounds, among “closed,” “open,” and “in progress” works. Thus, he points out, even performance authenticists such as Koopman and Harnoncourt, who pretend to perform earlier works “as they really were,” run up against the limitations of systems of musical notation that will “encode only a fraction of what composers have in their mind.” He goes on to remark on the irony of Harnoncourt’s preference of eighteenth-century classical over nineteenth-century Romantic music; it turns out that the former granted an interpretative freedom to performers that the latter de-
Thus, while “advocates of authentic performance practices seek to recreate a lost pristine tradition,” they “actually . . . offer exhilarating new interpretations that manifest a contemporary preoccupation with performance. Authentic performance practices destabilize the text by privileging the performer and blurring the line that separates him from the author” (11–13).

This circumstance allows us to recognize how important is the performer’s (and by extension, the listener’s) share in the realization of any given work’s potential meaning. Not that the performer or listener is perfectly free. (Who is?) The institutional constraints on listening and performing are quite as effective as they are on composition. The challenge, Neubauer concludes, is to work out an analytical model that will focus on the relationships among composition, performance, reception, and institutional structures all at once.

This is a tall order, and it appears to be the project on which Peter Rabinowitz has embarked. Like Neubauer and Hamm, Rabinowitz begins by questioning the notion of the musical (or artistic) “thing in itself” and quickly moves on to consider the ways in which conventions “shape and control the experiences of the listener.” He envisages a “model of listening” based on a “model of reading” which would feature the identification of levels of comprehension (technical and attributive), on the one hand, and certain “rules of listening” (rules of notice, signification, configuration, and coherence), on the other. This combination of levels and rules would, according to Rabinowitz’s account, permit conceptualization of the active aspect of listening and determination of the ways in which the listener attributes meaning to the work even when it is so open as to defy interpretation. He speaks of “attributive screens,” which function like a grammar and syntax of listening and correspond to the codes (linguistic and cultural) that must be operated in the acts of reading, writing, and speaking alike (40 ff.).

A similar notion of speech and writing led in poststructuralism, and especially in the work of Derrida and de Man, to the doctrine of the “undecidability” of the literary work of art. Rabinowitz does not go this far. He remains within the structuralist ambit, envisaging the possibility of communication between cultures and across different epochs within the same cultural tradition in virtue of the possibility of the critic’s translating between different attributive screens. But this is to place the critic’s activities in a position denied to composers, performers, and other listeners. Rabinowitz appears to suggest that critics, unlike other listeners, would not so
much attribute meaning to other people’s attributive screens as actually know what these attributive screens consist in.

However, as the history of poststructuralism demonstrates, when one begins to theorize the idea of the open work, it is difficult to resist extending it to include the theorist’s own ideas. And so, too, with the notion of the audience’s share in the production of meaning. If the work of art is conceived less as an object possessing a determinable form and identifiable content than as a kind of Rorschach blot onto which the audience can freely project whatever its attributive screen suggests, why should not the critic’s work be conceived in exactly the same way? Yet, surely Charles Hamm would not wish us to believe that the meaning of his essay is solely or even primarily a function of the various contexts in which it is received and read. Nor would Neubauer wish us to consider his essay as an open work.

But how should we mediate the differences between our intention to communicate clearly and effectively and our audiences’ power and right to interpret what our discourse means as well as what it explicitly asserts? Hamm, Rabinowitz, and Neubauer force us to consider this question anew and with respect to our responses as critics and theorists to musical discourse in particular.

Where does that leave us?

It is, of course, difficult to find a single thread running through such diverse and diversely conceived essays and impossible to derive a single moral from consideration of them. Nonetheless, it seems possible to say the following: What all these theorists appear to envision is a kind of historical-formalist approach to musical criticism. On the evidence of the essays in *Music and Text*, we can see the extent to which this new approach is indebted to recent work in structural linguistics, semiotics, textology, narratology, literary hermeneutics (including reception theory, speech-act theory, New Historicism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction), cultural materialism, and feminist theory. We can see how much practitioners of the new approach have learned from recent literary theory about the ways in which the artistic text can be related to its historical context. We also see how literary theorists might learn from musicological theorists about the formal aspects of literary texts, the ways in which they might, as Carolyn Abbate has expressed it, fail to mean and escape explanation. But in addition, we can see the difficulties confronting efforts to construe musical works on the analogy to literary texts and how attempts to relate both of these to their historical context(s) require a full theorization of what is meant by history itself.
Beyond that, it should be remembered that the very effort to import literary theory into musicology implies fundamental differences between literature and music. It is unlikely that any set of critical or theoretical principles devised to deal primarily with verbal discourse can effectively address the principal problems of musical criticism and theory. What literary theory and criticism can contribute to musicology and music criticism is insight into the nature of discourse in general. It would follow that musicology could profit from this exchange only insofar as music could be considered as a form or mode of discourse. And in that case, exchange would run both ways, for if music were a form or mode of discourse, then literary theory would have as much to learn from musicology as music criticism has to learn from literary studies.