

Dancing About Architecture in a Performative Space: Discourse, Ethics and the Practice of Music Education

by

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Abstract

British singer/songwriter Elvis Costello once said, “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture – it’s a really stupid thing to want to do” (in Brackett, 1995, p. 157). In this thesis I talk not only about music but I also talk about talk about music, perhaps an even stupider thing to want to do. But I do so because recent critical discourses in musicology and music education suggest talk about music is an inherent part of music, such that if we talk about music at all we must additionally talk about talk about music. But in talking about talk about music we are called upon to talk about talk. Consequently this thesis divides into five parts.

In Part I I talk about talk with a discussion of performativity. I outline three different conceptions of the performative, showing how ethics inheres in language, with talk about talk necessarily being talk about ethics to some extent. In Part II I talk about talk about music, showing how musicology has attempted to respond to this ethical dimension of talk with a “new” musicology. In Part III I write in a number of different genres, exploring the discursive norms governing genres of writing about music and musicians and how they impact what we take music to be. Thus I write in philosophical,

ethnographic, genealogical, narratological, autobiographical and literary forms, concluding that literary writing on music and musicians acts as a meta-discourse on music, bringing multiple different discourses into dialogue within a single unified text. In Part IV I explore the implications of literary writing about music and musicians for the practice of music education with critical readings of four novels, concluding with the recommendation that a “Non-foundational approaches to music education” course be offered as part of music teacher education programs, in addition to the more traditional “Foundational approaches to music education” course. In Part V I provide two annotated bibliographies for teachers interested in teaching such a course and for those who simply wish to further their understanding of music and music education through critical engagement with literary texts about music and musicians.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Why talk about music?

British singer/songwriter Elvis Costello once said, “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture – it’s a really stupid thing to want to do” (in Brackett, 1995, p. 157). Yet talk about music is pervasive. In bars, magazines, books, on the radio, on TV, and in academic contexts, people talk passionately about music. Are they all doing a very stupid thing? What drives this desire to talk about music? My focus in this thesis is on one particular kind of talk about music – that which takes place in academic contexts. Perhaps naively, I believe that if any talk about music is not stupid, it is likely to be that which is subject to the rigorous controls imposed on talk in academic contexts. Thus I begin by asking “Why do academics write about music?” and more particularly “Why do I write about music?”

The most simplistic answer to this question is, “To better understand music”. But this begs the question “For what purpose?” The tradition extending from Nietzsche through Foucault to Edward Said suggests the will to understand is rarely pure and disinterested, even when it appears so. Thus Said (1979) argues that knowledge of the “Orient” has most often been in the interests of Occidental self-affirmation and domination, even if it is not intentionally imperialistic. His call for Orientalism, the study of the Orient in the West, to examine its own configurations of power led to a number of other disciplines staging similarly self-reflexive inquiries. Among these was musicology which, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, underwent what amounted to an identity crisis, re-examining almost all of its operating norms. Don Michael Randel (1992), for

instance, in his article “The Canons in the Musicological Toolbox,” asks if canon expansion in musicology represents a “struggle for empire” (p. 15), a political move, an attempt at appropriation and/or domination? He asks if musicology is guilty of imperialism, insofar as it brings theories developed in the context of one set of works to bear in the interpretation of another set of works, and when those works resist the theories imposed upon them, the works, rather than the theories, are found to be lacking. Thus certain musics are kept out of the canon simply because they appear uninteresting when viewed through a particular lens. Even when new works *are* introduced, Randel suggests, it is because they leave the core concepts of the field unchallenged. Thus jazz was embraced by musicology “not because of what was most interesting or characteristic about it, but because it too presented us with a body of source material and variants to classify” (p. 17) – that is to say, allowed the fundamental methodological approaches of musicology to remain unchanged. While Randel accepts that scholarly tools have been remade in recent years, he claims they risk becoming ingrained and hegemonic in the same way the tools they replaced did, limiting subjects for future study and constraining the ways in which those subjects will be studied. The inverse, that new tools will continually threaten to undo themselves, that musicology will continually undo what it claims to know by questioning the bases on which it claims to know it, is also unsatisfactory for Randel, who concludes that “in the end we can only hope to be honest in our account of the canons of the past – and of the forces that created and maintained them – without, however, restricting their expansion in the future” (p. 20).

In the same volume the editor, Philip Bohlman (1992), similarly problematizes musicological practice, suggesting that, just as it is getting “harder and harder to talk

about ‘music’ in the singular these days” (p. 197), so it may become increasingly difficult to talk about ‘musicology’, as opposed to ‘musicologies’. “Getting used to ‘musicologies’ would probably be no more difficult than getting used to ‘musics’” (p. 198), he claims. The line between sub-disciplinary boundaries – between historical musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory, for instance – has become increasingly blurred such that the very validity and meaning of those boundaries is increasingly challenged. This is in part because, as Claude Palisca (1982) notes in a similarly reflective volume, the study of music “of all the arts, is the most difficult to circumscribe as a discipline. As soon as scholars probe its problems with any depth, it spills into neighboring fields – social and physical sciences, philosophy, literature, and history. It is easier to identify musicologists than to define musicology” (p. 15). In addition, it is not clear what the ultimate function of musicology is, with Joseph Kerman suggesting that all the various components of musicological research – paleography, transcription, repertory studies, archival work, biography, bibliography and sociology, for instance – are merely stepping stones to the ultimate goal of musicology which is criticism, and others arguing that these stepping stones are in fact legitimate ends in themselves.

D. Holoman (1982), in “Publishing and/or perishing”, takes this critique one step further by suggesting that musicology may be as much, if not more, about personal career advancement than about the disinterested pursuit of musical understanding. He claims scholars often write for professional advancement rather than because they have anything concrete to say. Writing of this sort, he claims, is often characterized by a severe style, that seeks to convince journal editors of its scholarly integrity and methodological validity. Holoman claims that good writing, in contrast, relies on craft, discipline and

technique – in a word, style. “Good” writing on music, he claims, as opposed to “true” writing, grasps “the fancy with the same qualities of structural coherence that we admire in musical composition; it should have convincing rhythm, tone quality, and pitch. It must, that is, exult in the language” (p. 122). In addition, good writing about music should be “seductive in the prose itself; it can even be memorable” (p. 123). And “we should be quicker to perceive writing about music as literature, not just as a technique of getting things said; musicologists should cultivate literary style” (p. 122-3). Holoman thus argues that while what is said in a scholarly work is important, the way in which it is said is equally important. He concludes that traditional and prejudicial notions of what is “appropriate” musicological writing need to be abandoned.

If in our haste to achieve legitimacy with those we imagine to be our judges we consciously address an ever shrinking public, consciously increase our distance from the well-educated musician, and dismiss as unimportant, unoriginal, or insignificant everything that does not meet demonstrably artificial standards of severity, we shall have meaning only for ourselves. If we do all this, no matter how much we will have published, we already will have perished. (p. 129)

In my own writing about music these various motivations co-exist. I write about music to further my own personal interests (in both senses of the word), my ethical commitments, and my commitment to those whom I feel indebted to for their time and energy, whether personally or culturally invested. While I believe this is true for most people writing a PhD thesis, I draw attention to it here because this thesis is about writing, and

consequently I feel an onus on me to critically account for my own writing (as much as this is ever possible) before considering that of others.

Why teach music?

Just as a critical discourse has developed in musicology in recent decades, so has one developed around music education. Beginning in the 1970s with Bennett Reimer's aesthetic philosophy of music education, the field has rapidly expanded to include a plethora of different approaches to music education based on competing conceptions of what music is and what its educational value is. While Reimer's original formulation saw music as organized sound which, if attended to in a "disinterested" way, was capable of educating feeling (Reimer, 1970, p. 76), David Elliott's praxial approach focuses more on music as a "diverse human practice" (Elliott, 1995, p. 43), with music performance promoting self-growth and self-knowledge. A vast number of additional philosophies of music education have grown up around these two dominant approaches, with many trying to reduce or limit the points of tension between them. Estelle Jorgensen's dialectical approach to music education, for instance, champions a "this-with-that" approach that resists premature foreclosure on competing alternatives. She invokes a metaphor of two actors on a stage, one of whom comes to the foreground at one time, the other at another, with neither one dominating the action over the full course of a play (Jorgensen, 2001, p. 343). Instead the voices, perspectives or theories represented by these imaginary actors come together in a number of different ways, including dichotomy, polarity, fusion, dialectic, fugue, peaceful co-existence, *mélange*, rhapsody and synchronicity (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 3). Indeed, "the richer and denser this analysis becomes, the more like art the

process of examining, assessing, combining, accepting, or rejecting them becomes” (p. 3). But Jorgensen falls short of advocating a wholly artistic or unsystematic approach to writing about music and music education, retaining dualities between theory and practice, procedural and propositional knowledge, universalism and relativism, that support a “this-with-that”, as opposed to a “these-with-those”, or even a “some-of-this with a bit-of-those and maybe a smidgen-of-the-other”, approach.

Other philosophers of music education (if the word “philosopher” is still appropriate here), most notably Eleanor Stubley and Roberta Lamb, have experimented with more artistic forms of writing about music education, while still publishing in academic journals. Eleanor Stubley’s “Meditations on the letter A: The hand as nexus between music and language” (Stubley, 2006), for instance, is creative in both its methodology and its organizing principle, imagining a time before writing, when voice and hand were extensions of one another, and bringing these imagined moments together using segues such as “The thought leads me to ponder ...” (p. 45), “As the image fades, I am moved to contemplate ...” (p. 46), “My thoughts drift ...” (p. 48) and “The sensation carries me to the image ...” (p. 49). Only in the Afterward does she account for the unconventional form of her writing, situating it as a response to the “vocabularies and grammars that we use to define its [music’s] possibilities [that] no longer seem relevant” (p. 50). Roberta Lamb, meanwhile, in a series of four feminist critiques of music education over the course of the 1990s, experiments with different modes of writing, drawing on multi-vocal, multi-disciplinary, musical-poetic, and fiction-theoretical forms among others. “*Aria Senza Accompagnamento: A woman behind the theory*” (Lamb, 1994), for instance, divides the page into two columns, one labeled Show, the other Text,

with the Show enacting the kind of feminist “aesthetic/practice/theory/music” (p. 6) called for in the Text. “Tone Deaf/Symphonies Singing” (Lamb, 1995), meanwhile, purposefully rejects linear argument as a way of writing about music and gender, as “neither music nor gender is linear” (p. 109). By writing in a non-linear style she believes “innumerable patterns” (p. 109) can be brought to bear in the interpretation of her text, some of which are articulated by Elizabeth Gould (2009) in her “Writing Trojan Horses and war machines: the creative political in music education research.”

Thus while the tension between Reimer’s aesthetic and Elliott’s praxial approaches to music education has led to a recognition that how we structure music education is necessarily tied to larger questions about “the kind of people we hope to become through music education” (Bowman, 2005), attempts to move beyond this tension have led to a growing emphasis on the discursive norms orienting debate about music education. In this project I focus almost exclusively on this latter concern – the discursive norms orienting debate about music education – because, as I argue over the course of this thesis, the problem of language is not simply one problem among many, but rather the fabric out of which other problems are woven.

The current project

I came to this study through the philosophy of education, and in particular questions about the kind of people we hope to become through public school education in multicultural, democratic societies such as Canada. In my MA thesis (Humphreys, 2002) I argued that the development of “pivotal postmodern virtues” (Nash, 1997, p. 176) in public school students is justified because for multicultural, democratic societies to thrive

and prosper they need citizens that possess these virtues; a plurality of ethnic, religious and cultural groups simply cannot peacefully co-exist over the long term without them.

They include

a sensitivity to the postmodern realities of incommensurability, indeterminacy, and nonfoundationalism; dialectical awareness; empathy; hermeneutical sensitivity; openness to alterity; respect for plurality; a sense of irony and humor; a commitment to civility; a capacity for fairness and charity; compassion in the presence of suffering, with an antipathy toward violence; and humility in the face of shifting and elusive conceptions of reality, goodness and truth. (Nash, p. 11)

These pivotal postmodern virtues derive from Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (1989), in which he argues that because truth claims about the world are always couched in language they can never accurately describe the world. Propositional language is a uniquely human phenomenon and as such it "cannot exist independently of the human mind ... Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own – unaided by the describing activities of human beings – cannot" (p. 5).

Consequently novel redescription, rather than Truth, is the best we can hope for from philosophy, as a redescription makes possible, "for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose" (p. 13). Redescriptions function as intellectual mutations that survive and prosper when the communities within which they arise deem them useful. Rorty claims this process of intellectual mutation and selection has been as much a part of intellectual history as genetic mutation and selection has been a part of biological history. "Our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of

small mutations finding niches (and millions of others finding no niches), as are the orchids and the anthropoids” (p. 16).

If, as Rorty claims, truth is contingent, ethical questions, insofar as they rely on truth claims, are similarly contingent, couched within a given vocabulary, or “mobile army of metaphors” (Nietzsche in Rorty, 1989, p. 17) in Nietzsche’s terms. Rorty, citing Freud, claims the vocabulary underlying the moral sense is often highly idiosyncratic, based on early childhood experiences within particular historical and cultural contexts. He claims the philosophical ideal of an atemporal, universal morality conceals and/or disavows the idiosyncratic nature of individual moral consciousness, and “at a certain point one has to trust to the good will of those who will live other lives and write other poems” (p. 42) – that is, live according to moral codes substantially different from one’s own. This in turn has implications for democracy, as a postmodern democracy that recognizes the contingency of truth and morality is content to call “true” (or “right” or “just”) whatever the outcome of undistorted communication happens to be. A postmodern democracy thus differs from Woodford’s modernist conception of democracy because it does not rely on “philosophical foundations,” as these prevent a genuinely free and open encounter between different vocabularies. Instead, it relies on a shared communicative ideal, with each citizen recognizing the “contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires” (p. xv).

While a subjectivity perpetually aware of its own contingency may be ideal in theory, it is almost impossible in practice, as Rorty’s reading of Derrida demonstrates. For while Rorty is explicitly committed to open-mindedness, he labors under the influence of his own analytic training, a training that structures his thinking in ways even

he is not aware of. Thus he describes Derrida's deconstruction as a "sustained argument against the possibility of anything pure and simple which can serve as the foundation of the meaning of signs" (Garver in Rorty, 1977, p. 674), even though Derrida specifically rejects "argument" as a way of doing philosophy. He distinguishes between normal and abnormal philosophy, classifying the latter as "writing that is *just more writing*, rather than preparation for an epiphany which will make further writing unnecessary" (p. 681), when, as Henry Staten points out, not all writing is more writing in the same way. Rorty's analytic training can also be seen in the number of binaries he invokes in his reading of Derrida. He claims Derrida "has little to tell us about language, but a great deal to tell us about philosophy" (Rorty, 1978, p. 144), when Derrida's project is overtly about the ways in which telling us about one is to necessarily invoke the other. Rorty's commitment to locating Derrida "in philosophical space" (p. 145) is already to circumvent something of what Derrida is about, which is the very disrupting of that space. And while Rorty notes constructive aspects in Derrida's work, Staten (1986) argues that the central constructive aspect in Derrida's writing is his *style*, not his arguments, or redescriptions, or concepts such as trace, arche-writing, deconstruction, or *différance*.

Thus Rorty mis-reads Derrida simply by virtue of the subjectivity he brings to bear in his engagement with Derrida's text, a subjectivity trained to focus on the content of a text rather than the form. For Rorty every term is situated within a language game vying for authority; even a word like *différance*, that specifically rejects its situatedness within a language game, necessarily exists for Rorty within a descriptive universe with metaphysical claims. Staten, however, claims a word such as *différance* "can be elevated,

but ... this would be to ignore the precise structure of its definition, a structure whose *sole purpose* is precisely to block the movement toward the master-concept” (Staten, 1986, p. 457). Rorty’s refusal to see anything in Derrida’s writing that is not just another instance of redescription is, according to Staten, a result of his “impoverished conception of ‘literariness’” (p. 457). For Rorty the literary is merely the new; there is no fundamental difference *in literary style* between Plato and Aristotle, Wittgenstein and Ryle, or Rorty and Derrida. But Staten argues that to read Rorty is to read “within the stylistic conventions of contemporary analytic philosophy” (p. 458) while to read Derrida is to encounter a wholly new style that differs from previous styles not only in its use of new metaphors, as Rorty suggests, but in its very conception of itself and its purpose. As Staten writes, “To reduce the question of what is distinctive about Derrida’s style to the question of his use of metaphors, as Rorty does, is absurd” (p. 458). Rorty assumes that “there is no problem in principle in separating what is said from how it is said” (p. 458) and in so doing he disregards “most of what is involved in Derrida’s *writing*” (p. 458) and ignores the most fundamental question concerning the difference between philosophical and literary reading and writing. Staten concludes that “Rorty has chosen to ignore not only *how* Derrida writes, but also most of *what* he has to say” (p. 461).

Rorty’s approach to reading Derrida – isolating the key aspects of his “argument,” summarizing his writings in traditional philosophical terms, quoting passages apart from their context, and placing him in a tradition of philosophers from Plato through Kant, Heidegger and Hegel – thus demonstrates the limits of open-mindedness, even when open-mindedness is specifically advocated. In statements such as “his [Derrida’s] great theme is the impossibility of closure” (Rorty, 1984, p. 8), Rorty imposes his own

categories of thought on Derrida's texts, reducing the richness of Derrida's prose to a single analytic position. Rorty is to be commended for tackling Derrida's deconstruction at a time when few analytic philosophers did, but it is clear that, despite his best intentions, he remains unaware of his own contingencies as they impact his reading of Derrida. Put simply, Rorty is closed-minded with respect to non-conventional aspects of Derrida's prose even when his own stated commitment is to open-mindedness. This need not be intentional on Rorty's part – his "circumvention" of Derrida, as Staten puts it, may simply be because having a view and at the same time recognizing that view as contingent – to "decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views" (Rorty, 1989, p. 371) – is impossible in practice. But that is not to say it is not worth striving for.

Rorty's "analytic bias" – that is to say, his tendency to translate the indeterminacy of Derrida's texts into concrete propositions that can be assigned truth values – is one I have struggled with myself. My educational background, which includes degrees in philosophy, psychology, communications, education and music – has furnished me with a range of analytic tools – philosophical logic, statistical analysis, music analysis, narratological analysis – that determine, to a considerable extent, how I "read" texts or "hear" music. But it has also furnished me with less rigid analytic tools – historical analysis, rhetorical analysis, and a variety of interpretive approaches used in the study of phenomena that defy easy classification (popular music, education, postmodernism) – tools that bring a richness and depth to my experience of texts of all kinds (including living "texts") that goes well beyond formal analysis. In addition, my engagement with literary theory has led me to distinguish not only between different methodologies but

also different styles of writing that similarly influence the representation and consequent understanding of phenomena, such that I find it impossible to commit to any one as an authoritative means of communication. Thus in this thesis I forego a commitment to any one methodology or style, exploring instead a variety of different methodologies and styles of writing about music and musicians with the intention of highlighting their discursive norms. The styles I have explored in this thesis are in no way exhaustive – they are mostly literate (in the sense of relying on the written word), and many non-literate approaches to the study of music, such as spectral analysis and CAT scan analysis, for instance, exist – but by writing in a number of different ways I seek to model a subjectivity that embraces a range of different approaches to the study of music, recognizing that these approaches, even when mutually undermining, need not be reconciled within a single vocabulary. Thus I seek to model at the level of form the kind of subjectivity citizens of multicultural, democratic societies need to develop if those societies are to remain viable over the long term (Humphreys, 2002).

This thesis shares something with prior attempts to ally music education with democracy. Most recently Paul Woodford argues in *Democracy and Music Education* (2005) that music education can significantly contribute to democracy by encouraging a respect for individual musical communities and their musical beliefs, values, and practices, as well as their own criteria for musical excellence. “Music should be judged on its own terms, or according to prescribed practice within a community, and not according to supposedly fixed, abstract, and universal musical standards ... One engages in criticism not so as to compare and compete for superiority but to understand” (p. 20). But at the same time he acknowledges, “music can be used for good or for ill. It can be

used or abused” (p. 28). He calls for “general principles, standards, and ideals” (p. 43) to guide musical thought and action, including open-mindedness, inclusiveness (p. 81), non-oppression (p. 82), “nondiscrimination, representation, toleration, and nonviolence” (Jay in Woodford, p. 84), “friendship, love, neighborliness, or mutual respect ... honesty, self-restraint, courage, and a willingness to compromise for the sake of some greater good ... good faith and generosity of spirit, of character and love for one’s fellow men and women” (p. 84), all in the service of creating a “glue that can bind us together as a society” (p. 84). Without these virtues there can be no sense of community and, like other virtues, these principles, standards and ideals must be modeled as much as taught. “It isn’t what we teach that instills virtue; it’s how we teach” (p. 85). Music education should thus be a “search for personal integrity and identity” (p. 86), with music teachers attempting to instill liberal values in their students by showing how music is “worldly and deserving of criticism” (p. 86). The ability to critically evaluate music and clearly express that evaluation should be part and parcel of a liberal education aimed at developing democratic values and their associated intellectual and moral virtues.

While I agree with Woodford that music education can and should play an important role in cultivating democratic virtue, I do not share his modernist conception of democracy and his outright (and uninformed) rejection of postmodern conceptions. As Michael A. Peters (2008) notes in his review of *Democracy and Music Education* Woodford dismisses postmodernism without citing any postmodernist thinker in any detail, repeating “the worst mistakes in academia by encouraging a kind of gossip based on hearsay and one’s own prejudices. The views loosely formulated are not attributed to anyone or any text – but unnamed ‘postmodernists’” (p. 94). Woodford’s critique of

feminism similarly lacks generosity (ironic given that this is the exact critique he levels at feminists), and his discussion of rhetoric, which he claims “is formalized or received knowledge that only imitates intelligence while masking or obscuring reality” (Woodford, 2005, p. 26), comes back to haunt him when he repeatedly uses the construction “radical feminist,” a particularly blatant and unsophisticated use of rhetoric, to describe Carol Gilligan (surely one of the most unradical of feminists). These and other ideological moments are not simply an oversight on Woodford’s part – they are endemic to his modernist conception of democracy and the philosophical foundations on which it rests. Thus, while I am in sympathy with Woodford’s basic premise, that music education in multicultural, democratic societies can and should contribute to the development of virtues necessary for the sustainability of those societies, I am at odds with him on what those virtues are and on how best to cultivate them. Thus while Woodford offers a modernist account of music education and democracy, I present a postmodernist account.¹

The thesis divides into five parts. In Part I I talk about discourse – its orienting norms and structures – with a discussion of performativity. I outline three different conceptions of the performative, showing how ethics inheres in language, with talk about talk necessarily being talk about ethics to some extent. In Part II I talk about talk about music, showing how musicology has attempted to respond to this ethical dimension of talk with what has been termed “new” musicology. In Part III I write in a number of

¹ Although Peter Dyndahl (2008) has summarized Derrida’s deconstruction for music educators in an article for the *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, the current document is, I believe, the first attempt to bring Derrida’s writing into dialogue with issues in music education.

different genres about music and musicians, exploring the ways the discursive norms governing different genres of writing impact what we take music to be. Thus I write in philosophical, ethnographic, genealogical, narratological, autobiographical and literary forms, concluding that literary writing on music and musicians acts as a meta-discourse, bringing multiple different discourses of music into dialogue within a single unified text. In Part IV I explore the implications of literary writing about music and musicians for the practice of music education, claiming literary subjectivity serves as a model for active citizens of multicultural, democratic societies, and consequently creative writing on music and musicians, as well as critical engagement with literary writing on music and musicians, can, and perhaps should, be an essential part of music teacher and music education. I conclude with the recommendation that a “Non-foundational approaches to music education” course be offered as part of music teacher education programs, and in Part V I provide a list of resources not only for teachers interested in teaching such a course but also for individuals who simply wish to further their understanding of music and music education through critical engagement with literary texts about music and musicians.

Part I: Talk About Talk

In this part I prepare the way for a discussion about discourse about music with a discussion about discourse in general. While the literature on performativity that I review here has no *direct* relationship with discourse about music and music education, and consequently may at times appear far removed from my central focus, it has a significant *indirect* relationship with discourse about music and music education. For the central concern of the literature on performativity is discourse, of which discourse about music and music education is a subset. Thus if “new” musicology, as I show in part two, represents a perspective *on* musicology – an opening of the field of discussion to include the discursive norms of the discipline previously taken for granted – this part, insofar as it goes one step further and looks at the discursive norms taken for granted in all writing, represents a perspective on “new” musicology – and indeed on any academic discipline. Thus the central purpose of this part is to prepare the way, with a discussion about discourse *in general*, for a discussion about discourse about music and music education *in particular* in the later parts of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Three Conceptions of Performativity

In the previous chapter I claimed that the practice of music education necessarily invokes questions of an ethical nature – questions about “the kind of people we hope to become” – and I provided a list of postmodern virtues that serve as a pragmatically justifiable ground for public education in multicultural, democratic societies. In this chapter I go beyond simply listing these virtues, offering a more complete account of the kind of subjectivity underlying them. In presenting this account I draw on the literature on “performativity,” an interdisciplinary term that cuts across philosophical, linguistic, gender and other discourses in an attempt to draw connections between thought, language, communication, truth, and ethics. Over the course of this chapter I trace the development of an increasingly complex conception of the performative through the work of British analytic philosopher J.L. Austin, French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida and American gender theorist Judith Butler. Each conception builds on its predecessor, with Austin emphasizing the extent to which context influences the meaning of an utterance, Derrida emphasizing the discursive norms that create the contexts that influence the meaning of utterances, and Butler emphasizing the extent to which the human subjects, whose discursive norms create the contexts that influence the meaning of utterances, are themselves discursively constructed. I conclude that the relational ethics implicit in Judith Butler’s conception of performativity is in line with the postmodern virtues listed above, with her conception of subjectivity serving as a model for citizens of multicultural, democratic societies.

J. L. Austin's Performative Speech

Austin's *How to do things with words* (1975) challenges the idea that an utterance can be true or false, irrespective of the context within which it arises. While he initially distinguishes between two different classes of utterance – those that describe, which he calls constative, and those that act, which he calls performative – he concludes after an exhaustive technical analysis that *all* utterances have both a constative and performative dimension, with implications for how we conceive of truth and meaning.

Austin begins his series of twelve lectures by questioning the positivist assumption that a worthwhile utterance is one that either accurately or inaccurately describes a certain state of affairs. He claims certain utterances, such as “I bet...” or “I declare war ...,” do not describe or report (constate) anything but rather perform an action, and as such are performative utterances. But Austin recognizes that while a performative utterance may be the primary event in the performance of an act it is not the only event. In the case of betting, for instance, it is not enough for me to say “I bet you ...” The “you” that I address must take up my offer, by saying “Done” for instance, if the bet is to occur. For a performative act to be successful, then, there must be:

- an accepted conventional procedure which includes the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances
- the existence of appropriate persons and circumstances for the invocation of a particular procedure and
- the correct and complete execution of the procedure by all participants

This final condition includes particular inner states that must accompany an utterance if it is to be a successful performative. When a performative deals with feelings, thoughts, or intentions, for instance, such as “I congratulate ...,” “I advise ...” or “I promise ...,” the speaker must experience the feelings, thoughts and intentions stated. If I say, “I promise ...,” for instance, when, at the time of utterance, I do not intend to follow through on my promise, the performative fails. Thus “for a certain performative utterance to be happy [i.e., to succeed], certain [other] statements *have to be true*” (p. 45, orig. italics). That is, if the words “I am sorry” are to act as a successful performative, the statement “Julian feels remorse” must be true. But this raises questions about the distinction between a constative and a performative act. If the success of a performative is so intimately bound up with the truth or falsehood of a constative, can the distinction be sustained? In addition, certain performatives may be implicit. While utterances such as “I bet ...” or “I promise ...” are explicit performatives (assuming all conditions are met), others, such as “There is a bull in the field,” *may* be a performative (“I am warning you, there is a bull in the field”) or may equally well be a constative (“Look, there is a bull in the field”), depending on the context.

Whether an utterance is performative or constative is thus not always readily apparent, but Austin remains convinced that there is a fundamental difference between utterances that begin with “I state ...,” for instance, and utterances that begin with “I promise” For while the former can be shown to be true or false, the latter cannot. He consequently attempts “a fresh start on the problem” (p. 91), going back to “fundamentals – to consider from the ground up how many senses there are in which to say something *is* to do something, or *in* saying something we do something, and even *by* saying something

we do something” (p. 94, orig. italics). In his second attempt at distinguishing between neutral, objective statements of fact and situated, subjective statements of value he foregoes the assumption that some utterances describe (constative) while others act (performative), beginning instead with the assumption that all utterances are an action of sorts because they always and necessarily involve someone who utters (despite the traditional distinction between “men [*sic*] of words” and “men [*sic*] of action”). In all cases of meaningful utterance, he claims, to say something is to perform the act of making certain noises (what Austin terms a phonetic act), to perform the act of forming certain words (i.e. noises of a certain type, a phatic act) and to perform the act of combining words in such a way that they have meaning (i.e. sense and reference, a rhetic act). But the difference between different kinds of utterance does not stop there. Rhetic acts can take different forms, which Austin terms locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. A locutionary act involves the saying of something, where that something has conventional meaning (i.e., “stating,” “saying”). An illocutionary act achieves something in the saying of it through conventional means (i.e., “informing,” “warning,” “ordering”). And a perlocutionary act achieves something by saying something through unconventional means (i.e., “convincing,” “persuading”).

But when these three different forms are looked at closely, the distinction between a locutionary act and an illocutionary one breaks down. For to “state,” “say” or “intone” something is not fundamentally different to “informing,” “warning” or “ordering,” insofar as I can say “music is ineffable,” argue “music is ineffable” and even warn that “music is ineffable.” Although illocutionary acts often have a perlocutionary object, while locutionary acts do not (whereas I warn or inform someone, I do not state

someone), this is not always the case (i.e., “maintain” is illocutionary but has no perlocutionary object). Austin thus concludes that every utterance is both locutionary and illocutionary, because an utterance is always issued in a particular speech situation, with “true” and “false” merely reflecting the extent to which an utterance is “a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions” (p. 145). Truth is always context-dependent, tied to specific intended acts in specific circumstances. There can thus be no purely descriptive utterance, because any and all utterances have both a performative and a constative dimension. Thus the notion of a simple statement of fact is “an abstraction, an ideal, and so is its traditional truth or falsity” (p. 148). True and false are “not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment – how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, &c., to which they refer” (p. 149). Intersubjective truth thus replaces objective truth as the most extreme form of validation a particular utterance can hope to obtain.

Jacques Derrida’s Performative Intentions

In the previous section I argued that because context inheres in the meaning of an utterance there can be no objective or universal truth, only intersubjective truth. Jacques Derrida, however, argues that there can be no intersubjective truth either, as the context of an utterance, which in Austin’s model determines the meaning of an utterance, can never be fully determined because words and concepts rely for their meaning on other words and concepts *ad infinitum*, with no shared or stable ground.

In “Signature Event Context” (1973/1988) Derrida begins by asking what the word “communication” means, whether it has “a determinate content, an identifiable

meaning, or a describable value” (p. 1). But to ask this question, he notes, is already to assume that the word “communication” is “a vehicle, a means of transport or transitional medium of a meaning, and moreover, of a unified meaning” (p. 1) – that is, it is to already give it a meaning. This assumption cannot be sustained because the timbre of a musical instrument, for instance, may “communicate,” even if it has no conventional, semantic meaning. Derrida recognizes that the “ambiguous field of the word ‘communication’” (Derrida, 1973/1988, p. 2) (the term “ambiguous field” here substituting for the problematic “meaning”) can be reduced by the limits of context, but context is never absolutely determinable. There is no rigorous or scientific concept of context and consequently no conventional meaning. This is especially true for written communication, for as soon as words are inscribed on a page they break with their context, which includes the circumstances of their inscription, the presence of the writer, his/her associated experience, and the specific intention or intentions of the writer. This break is what distinguishes written from oral communication – “for my ‘written communication’ to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general” (p. 7). Thus a particular instance of writing cannot be true or false in and of itself – cannot communicate a unitary meaning – because it lacks an original context for assessing its truth or falsity.

Derrida thus challenges the “presence to self of a total context, the transparency of intentions” (p. 17). He claims the kind of speech acts Austin specifically excludes from his analysis – “non-serious,” “parasitic” forms, such as words spoken on a stage, or words spoken ironically – are not fundamentally different from “serious” speech acts, as

they both rely on citation. As an example, Derrida takes Austin's claim that a signature stands in relation to a text as the first person present indicative active grammatical form (i.e., "I promise...") stands in relation to an oral utterance – that is, it guarantees the originating source of the utterance and thereby supports the intentional context necessary for the text or utterance to be fully determined and hence true or false. Derrida questions not only whether the written equivalent of this tie to the source is indeed a signature, but also whether the first person present indicative active does indeed guarantee the source of an oral utterance, as a signature implies the non-presence of the signer but at the same time "marks and retains his [*sic*] having-been present in a past now or present which will remain a future now or present" (p. 20). If a signature adequately ties a text to its source, it must be both singular (to guarantee this particular signature-event) and, at the same time, part of a chain of signatures which it cites. "To be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intentions of its production" (p. 20). This same chain of citation, Derrida argues, is present in oral utterances, even when they are in the first person present indicative active, because every concept exists within a systematic chain, a "general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc. ... [are] only an effect" (p. 20). The "non-serious" speech acts Austin excludes from his analysis – words uttered on a stage, for instance – are indeed citations, but in Derrida's analysis so are "serious" speech acts.

Derrida makes this same point more explicitly in "Limited Inc.", a response to American philosopher John Searle's "Reply" (1977/1988b) to Derrida's "Signature Event Context". In his "Reply" Searle refutes Derrida's claim that speech acts are not tethered

to particular intentions, claiming “a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act” (in Derrida, 1977/1988b, p 26). Derrida, in response, shows how even Searle’s own speech acts cannot be tethered to a single intentional source. Noting that Searle’s “Reply” includes a copyright, a signature of sorts, that reads “Copyright © 1977 by John R. Searle,” and a footnote that reads “I am indebted to H. Dreyfus and D. Searle for discussion of these matters” (Searle in Derrida, 1977/1988b, p. 31), Derrida asks if John Searle the copyright holder is not “divided, multiplied, conjugated, shared” (p. 31). Derrida suggests that maybe he, Derrida, should also be included in the copyright, because H. Dreyfus is an old friend with whom he has discussed and exchanged ideas, and consequently his ideas have traveled through H. Dreyfus and Searle into the copyrighted document. Assuming others similarly had indirect input into Searle’s “Reply”, Derrida describes the seemingly singular and unitary author as “three + n authors” (p. 36), where “n” stands for the unidentified number of others whose input remains unacknowledged. Later he refers to the author(s) of the critique as sarl, an acronym for “Societe a responsibility limitee” (in English, “Society with Limited Responsibility”), to emphasize the extent to which an “entire, more or less anonymous tradition of a code, a heritage, a reservoir of arguments to which both he and I are indebted” (p. 36) is involved in authoring the piece.

Derrida not only responds to the overt philosophical argument of Searle’s critique, but also its rhetorical structures. He notes Searle’s tendency to read a hierarchy in Derrida’s text, with expressions such as “the most important issue,” words such as “crucial,” and the prefix “mis-” (i.e., “misreadings, misunderstood, mistakes” etc.). He criticizes Searle for summarizing rather than citing his original text and questions

Searle's commitment to locating truth and/or falsehood in "Signature Event Context" (which Derrida abbreviates to "Sec"). "Does the principal purpose of Sec consist in being true? In appearing true? In stating the truth? And what if Sec were doing something else?" (p. 43, orig. italics). Derrida challenges Searle's claim that the intention underlying an utterance can be ascertained from the utterance alone and by responding to almost every aspect of Searle's text – its overt argument, style, conceptual ground, metaphors, values, intent, and in the process citing almost the complete copyrighted text – Derrida shows, in often humorous ways, how the signature, in the form of a copyright, appended to the text, does not – indeed cannot – confer interpretive authority on it. Derrida thus shows that an utterance only has meaning – quite apart from the truth or falsity of that meaning – with respect to the total speech situation within which it arises, and this total speech situation can never be fully determined.

Derrida illustrates this point in his discussion of Plato's *Phaedrus*, a text that suffers an irretrievable loss of meaning when translated. In the original Greek Plato uses the word *pharmakon*, which can be variously translated as drug, remedy, medicine, or poison. To translate the word simply as remedy, or drug, is to limit the possible interpretations available to the reader on each occasion the word appears, to disrupt "the relations interwoven among different functions of the same word in different places, relations that are virtually but necessarily 'citational'" (Derrida, 1981, p. 98). No matter how sensitive translators are to the nuances of the original, some of the indeterminacy of the original will be erased, the translator unwittingly imposing a particular interpretation of the text upon it in the moment of translation. Even if a translator is sensitive to this issue, and presents all possible translations of the word *pharmakon* as a footnote, the

chain of significations set up by the original word is still disrupted, because a word that does not appear in Plato's text – *pharmakos*, meaning scapegoat, evil and outside – is silently invoked by the word *pharmakon*, despite their different meanings. This invocation is lost when *pharmakon* is translated, no matter how careful and context-aware that translation is. This break in the chain of signification is not solely a result of translation; the distance in time between the act of writing and the act of reading effects similar changes in signification. Thus the irretrievable loss of meaning inflicted on a text by translation is simply a more extreme example of a process inherent in all textual interpretation.

For Derrida, then, neither written nor spoken utterances have a fixed meaning and consequently neither one can be true or false, even intersubjectively. We have thus moved from a conception of a text as having a universally fixed meaning irrespective of context (the classical conception), to a conception of a text as having a fixed meaning only within a particular discursive community (Austin), to a conception of a text as having no fixed meaning (Derrida). Or, put differently, from a view of language as constative (the classical conception), to a view of language as performative (Austin's conception), to a view of language, as well as the intentions underlying it, as performative (Derrida's conception). Or, put differently again, from a conception of truth as universal, to a conception of truth as intersubjective, to a conception of truth as subjective. In the next section I extend this trajectory one step further with a discussion of Judith Butler's performative theory of subjectivity.

Judith Butler's Performative Subjects

Judith Butler conceives not only of language and intentions as performative, but also subjectivity. Human beings, she argues, are formed through language, with classificatory categories, such as male/female and masculine/feminine, creating, rather than simply describing, human bodies. When these categories are conceived of as natural, rather than contingent, they unduly and unfairly limit the category "human" to those with certain kinds of bodies. However, as these categories precede human subjectivity they cannot be transformed by human subjects without the dissolution of those very same subjects. Consequently Butler advocates a relational ethics based on a recognition of the limits of personal responsibility and the inherent incoherence of the human subject.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990/2006), her earliest full-length work on gender performativity, she argues that gender is formed by "institutions, practices, and discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (p. xxxi). The categories male and female, for instance, are not natural, but discursively constructed, for a given individual may be anatomically male but chromosomally female, or chromosomally male but hormonally female, and only deliberation within a particular discourse can decide which one of these qualities ultimately determines sex. Discourse, in turn, arises within and through a particular social and political history that is already gendered – "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture" (p. 10). Identity, of which sex and gender are a part, is thus not substantive, unified, and internally coherent – we never "are" a sex or a gender – rather sex and gender distinctions

are multiple, fluid, non-substantive, symbiotic with, rather than a consequence of, gender discourses.

Gender, then, is not “a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (orig. italics, p. 191). New forms of gender arise from mutations in the repetition of acts – “in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (p. 192). There is no “I” that pre-cedes or stands opposed to discourse and culture. Rather, the “I” is itself a part of discourse and culture, a non-substantive entity that exceeds a finite range of identity markers. But discourse and culture can never fully determine a human subject, depriving it of free will, because “it” is “*not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition*”(orig. italics, p. 198). Agency is thus a result of the subject repeating or being repeated differently, with the tools that determine the subject’s intelligibility being taken up “where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there” (p. 199).

Butler thus conceives of gender transformation, as well as transformations in human consciousness more generally, as the result of a largely accidental process over which we have little control. This has led feminist philosopher and legal scholar Martha Nussbaum to accuse Butler of political quietism, ignoring the real situation of women and their political struggles in favor of needless abstraction. In ‘The professor of parody’ (1999) she claims feminist theory has historically been “not just fancy words on paper” (p. 37) but “connected to proposals for social change” (p.37). Feminists, she claims, have been “academics of a committed practical sort” (p.37), operating on the assumption that

legal and political action is needed to improve the material conditions of women with real bodies and real struggles (Nussbaum, for example, is cross-appointed in the Philosophy Department and the Law School at the University of Chicago). Judith Butler's brand of feminism, she claims, has foregone political and legal intervention in favor of abstract, and ultimately irrelevant, theorizing. Feminist theory has become "a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of women" (p. 38). Nussbaum devotes several pages to critiquing Butler's style, which she sees as needlessly abstract, lacking in adequate referencing and interpretation of its sources, and consequently unclear. Butler, she believes, is more concerned with impressing her readers through obscurantism than advancing sound philosophical arguments. "When ideas are stated clearly ... they may be detached from their author: one can take them away and pursue them on one's own. When they remain mysterious (indeed, when they are not quite asserted), one remains dependent on the originating authority" (p. 39). Butler, she concludes, is a sophist (one of the worst insults available to a philosopher), engaged in manipulative rhetoric.

From our discussion of Austin and Derrida, however, it should be clear that for Butler to write as Nussbaum would like her to – for her to make assertions that can be detached from their author as well as structural and/or procedural ethical claims – would be to write in such a way that her central emphasis on performativity is undermined. Nussbaum's hankering after a writing style in which ideas are expressed in such a way that they can be assessed apart from their context is to demand the kind of free-floating, constative assertions that performative conceptions of language specifically challenge. Nussbaum recognizes that Butler chooses to write as she does (she has seen her speak at

conferences with greater clarity), but instead of seeing her written style as consistent with her performative conception of language, she confidently asserts Butler's prose is deficient insofar as it fails to measure up to "philosophical" (here Nussbaum conflates philosophical and constative-oriented prose) standards.

Nussbaum's second and more substantial critique centers on the lack of a clear, explicit call for political and legal change in Butler's work. "She [Butler] doesn't envisage mass movements of resistance or campaigns for political reform; only personal acts carried out by a small number of knowing actors" (p. 41). (This is, I believe, a misreading of Butler, as political reform in Butler's account is not the result of "knowing actors" but rather unknowing actors). Not only does Nussbaum consider these personal acts insubstantial, incapable of effecting significant change, but also morally neutral, as likely to subvert moral norms as immoral ones. "Butler cannot explain in any purely structural or procedural way why the subversion of gender norms is a social good while the subversion of justice norms is a social bad" (p. 43). While Butler assumes her readers are in broad moral agreement with her (equality and dignity are good, discrimination is bad), she does not explicitly affirm any positive moral norms. "There is a void, then, at the heart of Butler's notion of politics" (p. 43). Nussbaum's second critique follows from the first because in order to engage with Butler's work as philosophy (or what Nussbaum takes to be philosophy) she translates Butler's performative utterances into constative ones. For example, whereas parody, for Butler, is the means through which willful circumvention becomes possible, Nussbaum sees it as the willful circumvention of dominant social norms. Nussbaum writes, in summarizing Butler's subversive parody, "When I find myself doing femaleness, I can turn it around, poke fun at it, do it a little bit

differently” (p. 41). But for Butler there is no “I” that can poke fun or “do it a little bit differently” in genuinely subversive parody. There are simply failures to repeat, deformities and parodic repetitions, none of which are conscious, willful acts. Nussbaum thus substitutes an agent who acts for an actor who cites differently (and most likely accidentally).

Nussbaum also misinterprets the political implications of Butler’s work. She characterizes Butler as politically passive because her theory does not translate into concrete calls for legal and/or political change. But this is to misunderstand where Butler situates the point of effective political intervention. Nussbaum takes the abolition of slavery in the United States as an example of concrete, large-scale political change that would have been impossible had African-Americans adopted the kind of resistance Butler advocates. “In Butler, resistance is always imagined as personal, more or less private, involving no unironic, organized public action for legal or institutional change” (p. 43). But it is not clear that the distinction between the personal/private and the public that Nussbaum introduces can be maintained, as the “personal, more or less private” struggles of public figures, such as Martin Luther King in the later civil rights movement, always precede large-scale legal and institutional change. Butler does not reject the kind of social activism Nussbaum advocates – she is merely more concerned with King’s personal transformation, at the level of human subjectivity, prior to his transformation of America. For Nussbaum to assume that large-scale political change can happen without such prior transformations at the level of individual subjectivity is to miss the central thrust of Butler’s work and the broader implications of speech act theory (Nussbaum characterizes Austin as undertaking “a rather technical analysis of a certain class of sentences” (p. 41),

which fails to capture the broader implications of his work). The central foci of Nussbaum's critique, then – that Butler's style is obscurantist and her ethics neutral – are directly related, as Butler's style is bound up with her "content" to the point where the two are inseparable. While it is possible to do as Nussbaum does and seek constative assertions in Butler's texts, berating the author when these are not close at hand, a more charitable reading of Butler's texts reveals a purposeful subversion of the quest for philosophical certainty in support of a different order of ethical transformation. For Butler's ethics inhere as much in the form as the content of her texts (and these distinctions are, as we saw in our discussion of Austin and Derrida, tenuous at best). By refusing to simplify for the sake of constative clarity, Butler pulls the reader toward an appreciation of the performative and its implied ethics.

In her more recent work Butler makes explicit the ethical implications of her performative conception of subjectivity. In *Giving an account of oneself* (2005) she claims "there is no 'I' that can stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning" (p. 7). The story of the 'I' is always a story of "a relation – or a set of relations" (p. 8) through which the 'I' came into being, and consequently the 'I' is always "to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence" (p. 8). Subjectivity is thus necessarily relational, emerging within a scene of address imposed from the outside. "I begin my story of myself only in the face of a 'you' who asks me to give an account" (p. 11). This Other in relation to which I construct myself can never be fully recovered - my body and mind has a history of which I have no recollection. Thus limits are placed on the comprehensibility

of my account of myself by the unknowability and unrecoverability of the immediate context (i.e., family, caregivers, schools etc.) within which I arose, as well as the larger social context (linguistic, social, cultural etc.). My account of myself is thus always partial, “haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story ... There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account” (p. 40).

Butler argues that acknowledging and affirming this inevitable lack of self-awareness allows us to recognize and affirm the incomprehensibility of others, to be patient with others, suspending the demand that they be fully responsible for themselves at every moment. Acknowledging the opacity of oneself and others does not make oneself or others any more transparent, but it does avert a form of ethical violence, encouraging, in place of punishment, generosity, humility and forgiveness. “By not pursuing satisfaction [the satisfaction of complete disclosure on the part of another] and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it” (p. 43). This ethical stance is based on a recognition that the question, “Who are you?,” while worth asking, will never be fully or finally answered.

Butler thus sees individual subjectivity not as an entity or substance but rather “an array of relations and processes” (p. 59) influenced by the scenes of address in which it was formed, with implications for how we conceive of personal responsibility. She claims the “very meaning of responsibility must be rethought” in light of the necessary incoherence of the narrated, intelligible self. If the relationality through which we come into being is “unwilled and unchosen ... a way of being acted on prior to the possibility of acting oneself or in one’s own name” (p. 87), we can never be fully responsible for our

actions. For there is no “I” without a “you” and who you are, who speaks to me, and to whom I speak when I speak to you, cannot be dissociated from the question of who is responsible for my actions. Responsibility is thus tied to the question “How are we formed within social life, and at what cost?” (p. 136). Butler concludes, paradoxically, that we can only become truly morally responsible when we accept that we are never fully morally responsible, when we forego the fiction of the coherent self in favor of a more diffuse relationality.

Butler’s response to Nussbaum’s critique thus echoes the words of Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1978).

A society which is based on the letter of the law and never reaches any higher is taking very scarce advantage of the high level of human possibilities. The letter of the law is too cold and formal to have a beneficial influence on society. Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relations, there is an atmosphere of moral mediocrity, paralyzing man’s [*sic*] noblest impulses. (n.p)

While Butler’s performative conception of subjectivity may not support large-scale political or legal intervention, it is not morally neutral either, as the demand to conceive of oneself and others as performative subjects carries within itself an implied ethics. While a relational ethics may be difficult to codify or administer in practice – how much sympathy, for instance, should we extend to sex offenders who, trapped within a cycle of abuse, may not be fully responsible for their actions? – the recognition that we are not discrete individuals, distinct from each other and the social contexts within which we

arise, opens up a space for compassion, empathy, charity and many of the other postmodern virtues identified in chapter one.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined three conceptions of the performative that challenge and substantially desediment common assumptions about discourse. Over the course of this chapter we have moved from a conception of discourse as neutral and *formed by* human subjects to a conception of discourse as inherently value-laden and *formative of* human subjects. Thus ethical questions, rather than being grounded in natural properties of the world, are inherently relational, grounded in language and communication norms that precede us and over which we have limited direct control. This conception of ethics is in line with the non-foundational virtues identified in chapter one, which I cite again below:

a sensitivity to the postmodern realities of incommensurability, indeterminacy, and nonfoundationalism; dialectical awareness; empathy; hermeneutical sensitivity; openness to alterity; respect for plurality; a sense of irony and humor; a commitment to civility; a capacity for fairness and charity; compassion in the presence of suffering, with an antipathy toward violence; and humility in the face of shifting and elusive conceptions of reality, goodness and truth. (Nash, 1997, p. 11)

Thus in this chapter I have provided a theoretical justification for the virtues listed in chapter one, which I have previously argued are essential for the long-term sustainability of multicultural, democratic societies. In developing these virtues, however, citizens are

called upon to develop a different kind of subjectivity, one grounded in relationality rather than rationality. In the remainder of this thesis I look at how music education in public schools might contribute to the development of relational subjectivity.

Part II: Talk About Talk About Music

In the previous part I looked at changing norms governing discourse in general with a review of the literature on performativity. In this part I focus more specifically on norms governing discourse about music, reviewing the ways in which developments in “new” musicology have substantially altered discursive norms in the academic study of music, with implications for how we conceive of music and structure music education.

Chapter 3: Developments in Musicology

In my discussion of performativity in the last chapter I showed how ethical questions are bound up with questions of language, communication and truth, with discursive and rhetorical norms preceding ethics. Talk about music, insofar as it is language, is similarly bound up with ethics, with descriptions of music imbued, overtly or covertly, with a value system that since the 1980s has been the object of increased critical scrutiny. Thus in this chapter I review key moments in the development of musicological writing, focusing in particular on those theorists who have explicitly addressed the ethical, discursive and rhetorical norms that determine what we take music to be, with implications for how we conceive of and structure music education.

Theodor Adorno

Theodor Adorno is widely recognized as the grandfather of “new” musicology. Using what has come to be called critical theory, which is not a “packaged system or a methodological recipe” (Leppert, 2002, p. 19), but rather a “loose amalgamation of philosophical principles” (p. 19), Adorno changed the discourse on music from one of disinterested aesthetic analysis to one of deep political engagement. Instead of focusing on the critical elucidation of music, or the narrating of a social history of music, he focused on the critical examination of music’s social and political impact. One of the most fundamental principles of critical theory is that facts, about music or anything else, are made into facts – “indeed even willed so” (p. 20) – by those in positions of power. The human subject that defines facts is not external to the processes within which facts are construed – rather it is formed by and within those processes. The rational human

subject, that stands apart from society, is inherently alienated, functioning on behalf of the self rather than the other. By othering nature we at the same time other the self, and consequently “Man’s [*sic*] domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken” (Adorno in Leppert, 2002, p. 31). In place of instrumental rationality as a structure for thought, critical theory adopts a dialectical method that values philosophical “leftovers” (Leppert, 2002, p. 33), or remainders – everything that has escaped traditional conceptual categories. Thus Adorno’s method preserves nonidentity, or difference, in the face of overwhelming identity and sameness. “Dialectics serves the end of reconciliation” (Adorno in Leppert, 2002, p. 34). But whereas other dialectical methods, such as Kant’s and Hegel’s, resolve dialectical tension through synthesis, Adorno resists the tendency to aim for wholeness, claiming “The whole is the false” (p. 35). Adorno is “haunted by the potential for untruth in the pursuit of untruth’s truth” (Leppert, 2002, p. 38), remaining relentlessly aware of the cultural and economic privilege that impacts the thinking subject and its theoretical formulations.

Adorno’s commitment to the emancipatory principles of critical theory is reflected in his writing style. Much of his writing consists of essays, which is a form Leppert claims is inherently anti-dogmatic and unmethodical. Leppert claims, “As a structure for philosophical thought, the essay is not predetermined by a philosophical first principle; the thought it reflects arises more directly from the material it studies and less from the concepts that precede the material and which always threaten to overwhelm it” (p. 65). Rather than writing to communicate, which Adorno saw as part and parcel of the instrumental and practical urge to know, he wrote with the intention to prompt

independent thought, seeing the power structures and ideological norms of profit-driven, capitalist society embedded within language itself. Only by incorporating new vocabulary, syntax and grammatical structures can these oppressive structures be disrupted.

Thus in writing about music Adorno combines talk about music's inherent qualities with talk about music's social and political context. In *Philosophy of New Music* (Adorno, 1947/2006), for instance, he claims music is not apart from society, but reflective of the social structures of which it is itself a part. Despite art music's attempt to resist commodification and defend its integrity, in this very resistance it creates a fixed identity that is itself a consequence of commodification, and consequently "it produces out of itself characteristics of the same nature that it resists" (p. 3). Adorno responds to the charge that Schoenberg's music is guilty of "intellectualism" (p. 13), that it "springs from the head, not from the heart or the ear" (p. 13), that it "is not sonorously imagined but only worked out on paper" (p. 13), with the claim that its very *raison d'être* is to disrupt the unquestioned acceptance of tonality as "given by nature" (p. 13). The "new musical means" (p. 13), he claims, represent a qualitative leap away from the "old tonal order" (p. 13), representing a direct challenge to the reigning ideologies of exchange, with which "all the tonal elements stand in profound agreement" (p. 13). Adorno thus sees "new" music as canceling the idea of the "consummate artwork" (p. 29) severing its ties with the public in order to reveal the fraudulent nature of accepted music culture. Adorno claims that "today, the only works that count are those that are no longer works" (p. 30), the lack of temporal extension in new music and the density and consistency of

their formal structure rendering them at odds with traditional conceptions of the musical artwork.

Adorno rejects all universal psychologies of music, claiming music's meaning can only ever be understood within a particular historical moment. "Music knows no natural law" (p. 31) because all compositional organization is marked by historical process, and the historical implications of any chord have become its nature. Musical material is "sedimented spirit" (p. 32), "self-forgotten subjectivity" (p. 32), and "the composer's struggle with the material is a struggle with society" (p. 32), society existing within the material itself. In rejecting tonal musical materials, Schoenberg rejects the society it represents. But Schoenberg's music is not solely reactive. Within its structural features it contains its own political commitments, replacing the progressive and teleological movement from one chord to another in tonal music with the "juxtaposition of mutually alienated sounds" (p. 67) and triadic harmony in which each tone's differences become subsumed within the whole in tonal music for the "law of complementary harmony" (p. 64) in his own music. Schoenberg's music thus represents, within its musical form, not only a rejection of tonal harmony, but also the instrumental reason contained within it.

Adorno thus talks about music in such a way that its inherent structural qualities are brought into dialogue with the social and political context within which it circulates. This is especially true for his analysis of jazz and popular music. In 'On Jazz', Adorno (1936/2002b) responds to the claim, prevalent at the time, that jazz acts as a necessary "corrective to the bourgeois isolation of autonomous art" (p. 473). He claims that jazz is not a true corrective but a "despairing way out" (p. 473). "The use value of jazz does not sublimate alienation, but intensifies it" (p. 473). Jazz is a commodity from its inception to

its marketing and reception, with “improvisation” just another marketing trick. In addition, its reputation as a “democratic” (p. 475) music is unfounded, as the biggest hits are those that are the most traditional and market-led. While the success of one jazz song over another is often attributed to its creativity, originality, genius, and/or inspiration, Adorno responds that it is nothing more than the anarchic forces of the social system creating random fluctuations that explain the seemingly inexplicable. “In an ideal society, a correlation between quality and success could perhaps be put forth, but in the false one, the absence of a correlative relationship is not so much proof of an occult quality as proof of the falseness of society” (p. 477).

Adorno questions the “extent to which jazz has anything at all to do with genuine black music” (p. 477). Apart from the rhythm, “all the more subtle characteristics of jazz refer back to [the impressionist] ... style [of Debussy and Ravel]” (p. 483). Sixth and ninth chords, as well as “the stereotypical *blue* chord” (pp. 483-4), are all “taken from Debussy” (p. 484). Jazz then misappropriates these devices, depriving them of their “formal sense” (p. 484), for while these “modern” harmonic and melodic features in Debussy “form their coloration and temporal surfaces from out of themselves following the constructive command of subjectivity” (p. 484), in jazz they become standardized clichés. The sexual innuendo of jazz also comes under attack, Adorno claiming “the symbolic representation of sexual union [is] the manifest dream content of jazz, which is intensified rather than censored by the innuendo of the text and the music” (p. 487). Jazz thus requires a giving over of oneself for the purposes of sexual fulfillment – by losing oneself, one becomes a part of the social group through which sexual satisfaction is assured. But in losing oneself, one loses one’s sexual self, leading to the paradoxical “I

will only be potent once I have allowed myself to be castrated” (p. 490). The individual constructed or hailed by jazz is thus not a productive one, but a weak one. Just as the modern surface of jazz masks a banal and conventional core, so jazz fans seek a false liberation by identifying with the mechanisms that oppress them. It is for this reason that jazz has been taken up by African-Americans, as oppressed peoples have learnt to identify with their own oppression, with this same process of identification being endemic to jazz.

Adorno writes in a similar vein about popular music, claiming “the whole structure of popular music is standardized” (Adorno, 1941/2002c, p. 438), from the largest structures (which aren’t that large) to the smallest details. A listener’s attention is focused on the details, because the form is invariant at thirty-two bars (Adorno was writing in 1941), but even these details are only minimally different, one from another. Whereas in “serious” music the details and the form exist in a symbiotic relationship, the details in a piece of popular music exist independently of the form. “The whole is never altered by the individual event and therefore remains, as it were, aloof, imperturbable, and unnoticed throughout the piece” (p. 441). Standardized music, in contrast, “aims at standardized reactions ... The composition hears for the listener” (p. 442). It offers the mirage of free choice through “pseudo-individualization” (p. 445), but ultimately prompts conditioned reflexes that are not genuinely free. Improvisation, for instance, appears to offer the opportunity of spontaneous composition, but the constraints of form and harmony render it ultimately futile. The detail contained within an improvisation never draws attention away from the underlying stability of form, and consequently “the listener always feels on safe ground” (p. 446).

Adorno points to the “minimum requirements” (p. 447) for a particular popular music piece to succeed, which include plugging the song, plugging the field, glamour, and baby talk. He also breaks down the process by which a popular music recording becomes popular, claiming the basic principle underlying popular music is one of repetition – “one need only repeat something until it is recognized in order to make it accepted” (p. 452). Initially, he claims, a song is understood as an instance of a particular kind of popular song. When, through multiple exposures, a song is recognized as a particular song, the listener, impressed by his or her ability to discriminate between the many instances of similar-sounding songs, identifies with the act of creation by claiming ownership of the song. This sense of ownership increases as the song becomes memorized, as the listener can now reproduce it at will and in ways that further the sense of individual ownership (i.e., through alterations of the melody etc.). At this point, a “psychological transfer” (p. 456) takes place, in which the gratification and enjoyment experienced in owning the music is transferred or attributed to the music itself, the song celebrated as “a good one!” (p. 456). Adorno claims that while this process does not occur consciously, it is nevertheless not far from consciousness, with listeners joining “the conspiracy” (p. 457) in an affirmation of good (corporate) citizenship.

Adorno claims popular music appeals to the masses because it offers distraction without attention. An alienated, fearful and exhausted public seeks “relaxation which does not involve the effort of concentration at all. People want to have fun” (p. 458). Popular music is produced in the same way the mass public is produced – through alienated labor, in which people are considered means instead of an end. “To escape boredom and avoid effort are incompatible – hence the reproduction of the very attitude

from which escape is sought” (p. 459). Consequently, music functions more as a “social cement” (p. 460) than a “language in itself” (p. 460). Popular music is ultimately unsatisfying even for its fans, as demonstrated by the fact that as soon as new music is promoted the public turns against the previously promoted music, making fun of it in order to “compensate for their guilt in having condoned the worthless” (p. 464). Any attempt to make fun of the most current music is doomed to failure, however, because “the disproportion between the strength of any individual and the concentrated social structure brought to bear upon him [*sic*] destroys his resistance and at the same time adds a bad conscience for his will to resist at all ... Resistance is regarded as the mark of bad citizenship, as inability to have fun, as highbrow insincerity” (p. 464). Those who point to the false consciousness with which the current music is embraced are spurned for their efforts, as “nothing is more unpleasant than the confession of dependence ... they turn their hatred rather on those who point to their dependence than on those who tie their bonds” (p. 465). Adorno concludes that enthusiasm for popular music requires the transformation of an external order into an internal order, a process that depends on an investment of libido energy controlled by the ego. “The ego, in forcing enthusiasm, must over-force it” (p. 466). Thus although popular music may appear harmless fun, it necessarily diverts energy away from becoming “a man”² (p. 468).

² Gender assumptions pervade Adorno’s prose and go well beyond the repeated use of the universal masculine pronoun. Several passages in “The Natural History of the Theatre” (Adorno, 1963/1992), for instance, reveal Adorno’s relationship with opera to be allied with what, since the 1930s when it was written, have been considered traditionally masculine positionalities. His desire to see “without being seen” (p. 73) is evocative of Laura Mulvey’s work on the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). His rejection of the social dimension of opera, allying “the need to cut a figure” (p. 72) with philistinism, can be seen as a masculine rejection of spectacle, traditionally aligned with women and homosexual men. His rejection of staging, which he willingly sacrifices in the interest of sound quality, can also be seen as a distancing of the visual, a downplaying of the feminine. And his desire to see behind the façade, to feel a part of the production,

The writing on music by Adorno that I have discussed so far – on “new,” jazz, and popular music – begins with particular genres of music and works out from those to a discussion of their social and political contexts. But in addition to these studies of particular genres Adorno writes about the contexts of music *reception*, including, physical, technological and human (i.e., subjective) contexts. In “The natural history of the theatre”, for instance, Adorno addresses the impact of physical setting on music reception, with a playful, at times literary, at times anthropological, study of a typical opera house. In “Opera and the long-playing record” Adorno (1969/1990) explores the consequences of new technology on music consumption. And in “Types of Musical Conduct” (1962/1976) Adorno provides a taxonomy of different listening styles, thereby accounting for the role of human subjectivity in music reception. These essays vary as much in their style as in their subject matter, leading Kofi Agawu (2005), in his paper “What Adorno makes possible for music analysis”, to claim that Adorno’s writing on music displays “evidence of analytical thinking ... alongside a near absence of anything that might be regarded as the application of standard analytical technique” (p. 49). Although he “has things to say about individual compositions, he never embarks on a blow-by-blow account of any passage” (p. 50). Instead he names and explores the possibilities contained in a piece of music, while always remaining aware of the incompleteness of such an endeavor. His writing refuses to routinize or reify musical details, finding “imaginative ways of naming without actually naming” (p. 51). It thus represents “a heightened and fully engaged poetical response that does not rush into

rather than reception, of an opera, can be interpreted as a masculine rejection of the passive role reception implies. See Fred Maus’ “Masculine discourse in music theory” (1993) for more on the ways gender assumptions impact discourse on music.

divulging ‘analytical details’ but maintains its dependence on them” (p. 53). It invokes images, metaphor, and language that at the same time draw attention to themselves as rhetorical devices, thereby highlighting the extent to which analysis is a mode of writing that can and perhaps should be explored. Agawu concludes that Adorno acts as a model for theorists who want to retain a provisionality in their writing, who want to take nothing for granted, who refuse to defer to the authority of past criticism, and who want to stage ongoing enactments and reenactments of the musical work, based on the assumption that “what has been said [before] may be false, incomplete, or inadequate, and that there is always more to say and especially to ask” (p. 55). Rather than seeking to finally define or describe a piece of music, Adorno operates on the simple assumption that “it is possible – indeed desirable – for one musician-writer to write something that other musicians find edifying” (p. 55).

While Adorno’s prose is not as self-aware as Agawu suggests (as previously mentioned there are deep-rooted gender stereotypes at work in Adorno’s rhetoric that deserve a full-length study of their own) Adorno has been influential in expanding the range of both what is considered appropriate content, as well as what is considered appropriate style, in academic writing about music. In showing how music is far from autonomous, he brought about the cultural studies approach to music study exemplified by Susan McClary, whose *Feminine Endings* is widely considered a foundational text in “new” musicology. McClary (1994) defines a cultural studies approach to writing as having “no single methodology, no fixed predisposition to either celebration or excoriation, no unifying ideology – except a belief that culture matters because it is through culture that we learn how to become socialized beings” (p. 70). Thus although

Adorno is rarely cited by “new” musicologists, discussions of gender, sexuality, and race in music creation and reception owe much to his critical theoretical framework. But while Adorno’s emphasis on the social and political contexts of music’s creation and reception has been taken up by a wide range of different voices in “new” musicology, his meta-theoretical emphasis – his admittedly less frequent writing about writing about music – has been taken up by only a few. In the next section I discuss the work of Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Carolyn Abbate, who have focused on the rhetorical norms governing discourse about music and their consequences for how we conceive of music and how we write about it.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Carolyn Abbate

Jean-Jacques Nattiez’ semiological theory of music, along with his semiological theory of discourse about music, highlights the extent to which rhetorical norms are implicit in our experience of music. While we may become aware of these norms, we can never circumvent them, for our experience of music, if it is to be anything more than “I like that” or “I don’t like that,” relies on linguistic description. Thus Nattiez brings a self-consciousness to writing about music that emphasizes the extent to which language and its associated ethics inheres in our experience of music.

Nattiez (1990) begins his *Music and discourse: toward a semiology of music* with a theory of music, which he later situates within a theory of discourse about music. His theory of music divides the “total musical fact” (p. ix) into three “levels” – the neutral or immanent level (the trace or structure of a work), the poietic level (the creative-generative process), and the esthetic level (the perceptive-receptive process). In this tri-

partite model a producer produces through a poietic process, a receiver receives through an esthetic process, and the trace – a score or recording, for instance – mediates between these two polarities. But the trace is never knowable in and of itself – it is only ever known from the perspective of its creation and/or its reception. And both these polarities rely on linguistic description for any account of the trace that exceeds a simple “I like it” or “I do not like it.” Consequently what we take music to be – or, put differently, what music is – depends on our descriptions of it, where our descriptions depend on discursive norms originating outside music. These discursive norms are themselves subject to investigation, however, with analytic approaches to music having their own poesis and esthesis. Thus in addition to critically engaging with trace works of different analytic approaches (i.e., journal articles, books of criticism, history etc.), we can engage with the origins and consequences of various analytic approaches. Nattiez thus sees semiological theory as infinitely expandable, functioning as a theory, meta-theory, meta-meta-theory etc., with each new level of analysis clearly and explicitly articulating its own analytic criteria. (While he claims semiological theory can subject itself to semiological investigation, he claims it is “not up to me to add to the pile of accreted metadiscourses by analyzing my own” (p. 197)). By showing how contingent analytic approaches to music’s meaning do not merely reflect, but also to a considerable extent determine, music’s meaning, Nattiez shows how the musicologist’s persona is always present behind his or her discourse.

But while Nattiez identifies the intellectual commitments underlying competing interpretations of a piece of music, he does not emphasize the extent to which all descriptive language relies on metaphorical and rhetorical structures, including his own.

His translator, Carolyn Abbate, is more self-reflexive in her own work. In the preface to *Unsung voices: opera and musical narrative in the nineteenth century* Abbate (1991) claims all music interpretation relies on metaphor, where metaphors are always contingent. She thus sees all words about music as “arbitrary” (p. x) to some extent, “verbal constructions ... placed upon musical reality. Verbally couched interpretations of music are performances that can only ever be more or less convincing, where “convincing” is as much a product of literary and institutional traditions, with recurring tropes in writing about music, as it is with the words themselves. No matter how descriptive, self-aware, and self-consciously reflexive we are in our choice of words, there is always something “lost in the jump” (p. xv) from music to descriptions of music – “what we all fear: what must remain unsaid” (p. xv). Interpretive certainty is thus an illusion, our experience of music necessarily bound up with writing about music.

There is nothing immanent in a musical work (beyond the material reality of its written and sonic traces), and our perceptions of forms, configurations, meanings, gestures, and symbols are always mediated by verbal formulas, as on a broader scale by ideology and culture. (p. xv)

Abbate concludes that literary theory – insofar as it exposes the workings of the analytic metalanguages – can contribute to our understanding of discourse about music which, in turn, contributes to our understanding of music itself.

Gary Tomlinson and Lawrence Kramer

We have moved, then, over the course of this chapter, from an understanding of talk about music as the disinterested analysis of music’s inherent structural features (the

classical conception), to talk about music as critical engagement with music and its contexts (Adorno's conception), to talk about music as a self-reflexive practice in which talk about talk about music is as much a part of talk about music as talk about music itself. The question then becomes, how much talk about talk about music is too much? Or, put differently, when is talk about music not sufficiently about music? In the next section I review the postmodern musicologies of Gary Tomlinson and Lawrence Kramer, and the debate between them over the relative merits of critical and ethnographic approaches to musicology, with implications for how we conceive of music and consequently structure music education.

In "Finding ground to stand on" Tomlinson (1996) advocates an ethnographic approach to music interpretation, based on the assumption that music can only be understood when the culture or cultures within which it arose is adequately understood. He claims "in order to understand individual human actions we need to interpret the cultural context from which they arise" (p. 351). As musical art works are the "codifications or inscribed reflections of human creative actions" (p. 351), they should be "understood through a similar interpretation of cultural context" (p. 351). But this can only be achieved when observation and theory work in a "reciprocal, evolving relation" (p. 354). An ethnographic approach to music thus recognizes that theory determines how we observe, and how we observe determines theory. It values "intelligibility, coherence, potential explanatory power" (Treitler in Tomlinson, 1996, p. 354) over verifiability and proof, accepting that there is always an unknown in critical writing on music – the "most mysterious of cognitive faculties, the artist's mind or creative imagination" (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 356). Rather than solipsistically attempting to describe the artist's intent, an

ethnographic approach takes present-day, personal engagement with the text itself as a starting point, working out from this nexus in the cultural web “along strands leading to nearby entanglements with other strands” (p. 356). In so doing both the text and the context take on “new and to some extent unexpected meanings” (p. 356). “The process is an endless one in which the art work and its culture take on ever-deeper significance” (p. 357).

Tomlinson (1993) thus argues for a musicology “characterized most distinctively by its insistent questioning of its own methods and practices” (p. 21). He rejects close listening as “the *sine qua non* of musicological practice” (pp. 21-22), seeing this tendency as modernist and aestheticist, advocating instead resolutely historicizing musical utterance, “exploding it outward through an imaginative building of contexts out of as wealthy a concatenation of past traces as the historian can manage” (p. 22). Such a method eschews traditional musicology’s emphasis on the imagined original situation of the music, focusing on localized contexts rather than universal ones. As such, it incorporates rhetorical and subjective criticism, but situates it within a larger self-critical project focused on the people who make musical utterances as much as the musical utterances themselves. “Then the primary stimulus for musicology, instead of our love for this or that music, might more luminously be our love of, concern for, commitment to, belief in, alienating distance from – choose your words – the others who have made this or that music in the process of making their worlds. Then study of music-making might open out on the study of world-making” (p. 24).

Tomlinson’s approach is modeled in his *Metaphysical song: an essay on opera*, in which he claims opera has expressed “changing models of subjectivity” (Tomlinson,

1999, p. 5) over the course of its history, where these are broadly aligned with changes in Western philosophical thought. In late Renaissance philosophy, the human being consisted of a body and a soul, the soul being “an extremely subtle, vaporous, or airy substance; or perhaps ... no substance at all, a congealed nonsubstance ... distributed through the body” (p. 11). Voice, song and music were allied with spirit, traversing both material and immaterial realms, with words remaining firmly rooted in the material realm. Late Renaissance song thus brought these two realms together, striking “systems of correspondence among different levels of sonic and verbal significance” (p. 13), where these correspondences were not considered arbitrary, or even contingent, because words contained within themselves an innate harmony that was muted in normal speech. A successful binding of word and music was thus more akin to a discovery than an invention on the part of the composer with recitative, as a result, considered more of a natural form of expression than speech. “Word and tone were always already joined in nature. It was merely a question of letting each be heard in equal measure, of sung rather than spoken speech” (p. 17). The singing voice could thus uncover natural correspondences binding the visible and invisible regions of the cosmos, presenting a supersensible reality through the spiritual manipulations of voice. The singing voice was thus one of, if not the, most direct way to access the supersensible realm.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, recitative began to be seen as an unnatural mode of discourse, and by the middle of the eighteenth century its unnaturalness was considered obvious. How did this shift occur? Tomlinson claims a new construction of the subject, one that conceived of the mechanisms of the spirit as fundamentally inexplicable, effected a new relation of voice to the highest, supersensible

realms of the cosmos. While Ficino conceptualized the spirit as capable of communicating directly with the body, Descartes introduced a dualism that saw mind and body, matter and nonmatter, as categorically distinct, out of touch with one another, and irreconcilable. Cognitive experience of the material world was mediated by spirit, which was material and connected to the body; the soul, however, was distinct from both body and spirit. While matter and nonmatter corresponded with each other, it was never directly, but rather as a result of the intervention of a benign and supreme God. The Cartesian subject was thus “transcended by a divine system of harmonious similitudes” (p. 38). The “void between body and soul is never really crossed. Instead sensation and cognition come about when movements at one verge of the abyss summon congruent impressions at the other. This process is *representation*” (orig. italics, p. 39).

The voice of early modern opera, Tomlinson claims, “sings from within the condition of representation” (p. 40). It conveys a “dualistic subjectivity” (p. 41), reflected in Lullian recitative and Italian aria. Arias allow for a single-mindedness of expression – a uniformity and consistency of emotion – that recitative, with its fluidity and flux, was denied. Recitative continued to live on in Italian opera, but “with diminished aspirations and altered capacities. By the late 1600s it came to serve as little more than a bridge between arias” (p. 49). Aria became the “minimum semantic unit” (Bianconi in Tomlinson, p. 49) in early modern opera, the “ideal musical sign of a single spiritual motion” (p. 50) or passion. While early aria relied on words to signify the nature of the passion represented, later aria relied on conventions to “represent effectively through *almost purely tonal means*” (orig. italics, p. 51). This in turn led to new opportunities for orchestral expression, with orchestral accompaniment “synthesizing meanings that the

voice must unfold across the space of its discursive, semantic operation” (p. 51). The accompaniment could then “function as an emblem or symbol, focusing representational powers necessarily dispersed in words” (p. 52). For the first time instruments, previously reliant on voice for representational meaning, were able to envoice subjectivity, pointing in the direction of later nineteenth century language-transcending instrumentalism.

However, in early modern opera, the voice is still primary in its ability to tap correspondences with the supersensible world – these can be “seconded, enhanced, and epitomized – but not utterly surpassed by the orchestra” (p. 59).

Mozart is, for Tomlinson, the transition point between Cartesian and Kantian subjectivity, and hence between early modern and modern opera. Mozartian opera attempts to “bridge through willful, unmediated vocal assertiveness the abyss of representation. It offers a song whose forcefulness threatens to short-circuit the parallel wiring of early-modern body and soul” (p. 62). Opera buffa, in contrast to opera seria, resists transcendent or metaphysical themes, its characters articulating a “steadfastly mundane vision, circulating and defining themselves in a purely material human interaction” (p. 62). But it is in Don Giovanni that the Cartesian dualism is challenged most forcefully – for Giovanni “proclaims his own selfhood with a violence that challenges, if it cannot quite overthrow, the power of any other force to transcend him” (p. 63). Giovanni is thus “not so much a dramatic character as a principle, a power, a force, a *passion*” (orig. italics, p. 65). For Kierkegaard, the confrontation between Giovanni and the Commendatore is a confrontation between sensuous immediacy and reflective consciousness, an opposition that becomes the key distinction in modern

subjectivity, in Kant's phenomenal and noumenal realms, and Freud's conscious and unconscious mind.

Kant's philosophy distinguished between the objects of knowledge, and the subject that knows. For the first time the psyche was assumed to contain within itself a transcendental element that allowed *a priori* conditions that allowed for intuition of the forms of space and time and understanding of the categories of relations among objects – substance, causality, unity, plurality, limitation, necessity etc. It is occupied “not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*” (Kant in Tomlinson, p. 74). Our experience of the world is thus based on appearances formulated according to our *a priori* categories of understanding and intuition, and hence there is also something that lies beyond the appearance of phenomena – what Kant termed the noumenon. The noumenon is the counterpart to phenomenon, but it is, by definition, something of which we can have no objective knowledge. It is the limit beyond which sensibility cannot proceed, neither objectively real nor a logical fallacy, an inconceivable “intelligible object” (Kant in Tomlinson, p. 76). Whereas the supersensible, metaphysical unknown was, prior to Kant, conceived as residing outside the mind and its experience, after Kant the supersensible is “introjected into the forms of subjective knowledge (p. 77). Freud reconfigured the noumenon as the unconscious, and called “uncanny” the “peculiar sensation aroused by confronting the noumenon” (p. 82). The operatic voice in the modern era is uncanny, as it mimics the “pure, non-signifying form of sonorous materiality that marks for the infant a mythical moment in its psychic history when it was not yet distinct from its mother” (p. 85) and by which the self became divided. The recognition of the mother as other, and the

separation anxiety induced by this recognition, is accompanied by a move away from non-signifying sonorousness toward meaningful utterance – a movement toward language set in motion by the assigning of meaning (i.e., “the baby is hungry,”) to the non-signifying cry. Opera evokes this primal cry, which stands beyond linguistic meaningfulness on the edge of the noumenon. It rarely makes the noumenon explicit, staying for the most part in the realm of intelligible signification, but it looks toward its own limit, and hence retains its association with the uncanny.

Tomlinson’s ethnographic approach thus situates music against a rich background of cultural context, drawing connections between changes in philosophical conceptions of the human subject and changes in opera’s inherent structural and stylistic features.

Tomlinson contrasts this approach with critical approaches that limit the horizon of their analysis to the music itself. But Lawrence Kramer (1993), who agrees with Tomlinson that “we should abandon the myth of music’s autonomy by broadening ‘the horizons of our musical pleasure’ and welcoming the complex situatedness of musical utterances in webs of extramusical forces” (p. 19), believes music criticism – the decontextualized, rhetorical, subjective analysis of music – is still a viable musicological approach because it is the primary means for broadening our experience of music. While Tomlinson sees criticism as putting an “ahistorical, aestheticist, sometimes even formalist spin on what might otherwise be conceived as our rich historical encounter of others’ musical utterances” (p. 19), Kramer sees Tomlinson’s approach as over-emphasizing music’s context at the expense of deep engagement with music itself. He claims Tomlinson wants “music under erasure: a music so decentered, so bought out or bought off by the entrepreneurial historian’s ‘wealthy ... concatenation of past traces’ that we can no

longer claim to know it, or claim it as ours to know” (p. 27). For Kramer, criticism is “the public record of our sustained, thoughtful involvement with some of the music we find moving, enlightening, provoking, oppressive, ambivalent, and more” (p. 28) and an appreciation and affirmation of diversity the natural byproduct of the dialogical and interdiscursive exchange of critical opinion. Criticism can critique critical norms, engaging historically and rhetorically with myths of the past, including modernist and aestheticist assumptions, thereby destabilizing them and proposing viable alternatives. And consequently, while critical commentary in musicological contexts does invoke issues of power, “the ability to propose knowledge is not necessarily the ability to impose it” (p. 29). “Criticism can interrogate both its own myths and the myths of art. And that is something an ethnographic contextualism cannot do by trying to steer around them” (p. 31).

Kramer objects to the opposition between criticism and ethnography that Tomlinson sets up, for if, as Tomlinson claims, music is a form of utterance, then it must be susceptible to multiple interpretations, and these interpretations – or what Kramer terms criticism – are a pre-requisite for musical ethnography. For “we cannot understand music ‘in context’, thick or otherwise, if we have no means of representing concretely what the music does as utterance” (pp. 31-32). While no representation will be complete or final, we are more likely to reach the goal of a genuinely postmodern musicology by “writing onward” (p. 34), deconstructing oppositions between self and other by asserting our subjectivities, rather than depreciating our subjectivities in the misguided belief that, in so doing, we will better appreciate the subjectivities of others.

Tomlinson (1993), however, in his response to Kramer, claims he is not against close reading, merely “the preeminence it claims in most current varieties of musicological research and pedagogy” (p. 37). He does not want to proscribe but rather “apply new pressures, to scrutinize marginal traces, to look sometimes elsewhere” (p. 37). Rather than being destructive with respect to music, he claims he is “truly deconstructive” (p. 37) insofar as he advocates exposing the “ways in which our musical languages and our languages about music bear within themselves, to speak in Derridean terms, a call for their own critique” (p. 37). He believes musicological writing necessarily reproduces “the mastery scenario” (p. 38, orig. italics), and consequently responsible scholarship requires that “the subject-position we adopt is not an *a priori* and little-conscious presumption subsequently ignored but the conscious, problematized material medium we inscribe at every moment of making history” (p. 39). While Kramer talks the talk of postmodernism, Tomlinson suggests, his practice of criticism rarely squares with those ideals. “It does not seem to be destabilizing of itself, rather the reverse. It does not sufficiently put its own world in jeopardy . . . as it depicts the worlds of others” (p. 39). And consequently it closes off, rather than maintains, “a space for others’ escape from our patterns of meaningfulness at the very moment in which we, interacting with them, masterfully map out those patterns” (p. 39).

Conclusion

We have moved, then, over the course of this chapter, from a view of music as aesthetic form, devoid of political or ethical content, to a view of music as deeply implicated in political and ethical concerns. This sea change in the attitude of professional musicologists has enabled traditionally marginalized musics – popular, jazz,

and “world” musics – to be included in “the canon of acceptable dissertation topics” (Randel, 1992, p. 11). But while musicology has acknowledged the extent to which writing about music is also implicated in political and ethical concerns – the debate between Tomlinson and Kramer is primarily an ethical one, each seeking to write about music in such a way that contingent cultural prejudices are not mistaken for objectively valid critical tools – their commitment to finding *a* best way to write about music from a postmodern perspective shows how far musicology still has to go in resisting foundational discursive norms. For while Tomlinson, in *Metaphysical Song*, argues that human subjectivity is contingent, the result of evolving cultural conceptions that render the unitary subject and its binary distinctions problematic, he nevertheless draws on binary distinctions, such as that between ethnographic and critical writing, in his debate with Kramer. And while Kramer resists this distinction, calling it a “mirage” (Kramer, 1993, p. 31), he nevertheless engages Tomlinson in a debate in which the theoretical language governing that debate is not available to critical scrutiny. In other words, the debating subjectivities remain the subjects, rather than the objects, of debate. This is inevitable to some extent, not only because, as I argued in chapter one, it is almost impossible to step outside the structures of one’s own subjective experience, but also because discursive communities have their own structural norms that, while contingent, are often not recognized as such. Thus while Tomlinson and Kramer go to impressive lengths to write about music in such a way that they do not lose sight of the contingency of their critical frameworks for interpreting music, they do not go to the same lengths in their writing about each others’ writing about music. That is to say, they do not overtly recognize that the critical frameworks they bring to bear in their interpretation of writing

about music are as contingent as the critical frameworks they bring to bear in their writing about music. If they did, they would accept that there are multiple, equally viable musicologies, just as there are multiple, equally viable musics.

Part III: Experimental Writing About Music

In the previous two parts I reviewed some of the ways in which philosophers and musicologists have addressed the norms governing discourse in general and discourse about music in particular, showing how language impacts the phenomena it describes despite our best efforts to mitigate this confounding variable. In this part I conduct my own experiments in language use, writing in a number of different styles about a number of different musics, looking to see to what extent the style in which we write about music impacts what we take music to be, and hence how we structure music education. While each chapter functions as a stand-alone engagement with a particular music from a particular perspective, I have ordered the chapters in such a way that they represent a steady movement away from foundational discourse. Thus while the first chapter takes the form of a philosophical argument, making a universal claim for the meaning and value of music, the last chapter is a fictional account of music and musicians that makes no truth claims whatsoever. While I would ideally like these various styles of writing to interact with no overt critical voice mediating between them, I recognize that any successful attempt at disrupting the foundational norms currently governing discourse about music and music education must strike a balance between capitulation to and confrontation with those norms. Consequently I include a “master narrator” that introduces and concludes each chapter, hovering above the text so to speak, ensuring the text’s adherence to the discursive norms currently governing a document of this kind. I hope that by drawing attention to it here I can mitigate its power somewhat.

Chapter 4: Philosophical Writing About Music

Philosophical writing on music typically focuses on questions of aesthetics, in particular the question “What is the meaning and value of music?” Its primary methodological tool is rational argument, although rationality has itself been the subject of much philosophical debate in recent decades. For the most part, however, the reader of philosophical writing on music is assumed to be “rational,” capable of evaluating the strength of an argument and accepting the conclusions of the argument as “true” if they cannot be successfully refuted through counter-argument.

Embodied Utterance

In this chapter I argue that music is meaningful because it is, at least in part, a bodily practice, with an inherently meaningful human body acting as music’s original citation or constative ground, and it is valuable because it opens up new possibilities for inherently meaningful bodies. My argument rests on a conception of the human body as, at least in part, pre-discursive, a conception Judith Butler explicitly challenges. Thus, in the first half of this chapter I argue against Judith Butler’s conception of the body as a discursive formation, seeking to return to bodily experience an inherent, as opposed to citational, meaning. And in the second half I look at the implications of situating music’s inherent meaningfulness in relation to a pre-discursive body with a discussion of the solo piano music of Thelonious Monk.

Butler’s conception of the body as discursive, as formed through language, derives from Austin and Derrida’s emphasis on the context of an utterance. As we saw in

chapter two, in Austin's account the force of an utterance is determined by the total speech situation – utterances along with their contexts. In Derrida's account, the context of an utterance is itself problematized, with contextual features seen as a product of the total speech situation. And in Butler's account speech is itself considered a result of the total speech situation, human subjectivity arising in relation to linguistic categories that precede us and over which we have little or no control. Yet in all three accounts, utterances are conceived as primarily syntactic and semantic, removed from the bodies that give them voice. In this section I argue that, while utterances do have syntactic and semantic meaning, they also have an auditory component that necessarily tethers them to bodies. Insofar as bodies are pre-discursive, they are inherently meaningful, and I argue that it is this inherent meaningfulness that music cites.

Consider the following passage written by James Ryerson (2002) about American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, which I excerpt in its entirety:

For all the important mysteries about Rorty, his colleagues call attention to one seemingly insignificant aspect of his personality: his voice. Rorty's voice is, as Daniel Dennett notes, “sort of striking—these firebrand views delivered in the manner of Eeyore.” When philosophers talk about Rorty, few can resist trying to imitate his distinctively somber delivery. Of Rorty's mode of presentation, the British philosopher Jonathan Rée says: “There's a tremendous kind of melancholy about it. He tries to be a gay Nietzschean, but it's an effort for him.” For Conant, hearing Rorty speak for the first time was something of a revelation. “It's easy to read his writings in a register of excitement and a heightened, breathless voice,” he

explains. “But the note that I heard when he was reading these sentences in his own cadences and rhythm was—for want of a better word—depression. I thought, this is the voice of a man who feels as if he's been let down or betrayed by philosophy.” Jürgen Habermas concurs that Rorty's anti-philosophy “seems to spring from the melancholy of a disappointed metaphysician.” And for Conant, this melancholy goes far in explaining the intransigence with which Rorty holds to his pluralistic philosophy of dialogue and playfulness. “It's as though he's been let down by philosophy once, and he's not going to let it happen again,” Conant says. (n.p)

In this paragraph Ryerson suggests the auditory component of an utterance substantially alters its force. Rorty's “cadences and rhythm” and “distinctively somber delivery” lead Dennett, Rée, Conant and Habermas to understand Rorty's philosophy differently. In the language of performativity, the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of Rorty's locutionary utterance changes as a result of the auditory context surrounding, or embedded, in it. Whereas Rorty's utterances may have convinced or persuaded without the additional information provided by his tone of voice, the total speech situation, including his words and the vocal cadences and rhythm with which he intones them, deter or even repel some listeners. Interestingly, Rée, Conant and Habermas all see Rorty's voice as revealing of an inner emotional state. That he may have *chosen* to speak with a depressed tone, in the same way he presumably chose his words, the speed and volume of their delivery and, up to a point, their accent, pitch, rhythm and emphasis, is never

considered. The aspects of Rorty's voice that Dennett, Rée, Conant and Habermas refer to seem to lie beyond the cognitive, in the realm of the corporeal.

Are the auditory components of an utterance thus pre-discursive, referring directly to inherently meaningful bodily states? While most of us are taught to read in such a way that the semantic structure of a text is accurately conveyed – that is, we accent words in such a way that what we take their intended meaning to be is accurately conveyed – we also cannot help but hear a timbre, grain, volume, and emotional emphasis in the voice with which we read. This is additionally true for writing – right now, I hear the words as I write them, and I hear them in an imaginary auditory space, which includes what I am calling the “tone” of my reading/writing voice. But what exactly is this tone and to what extent does it vary? When I read Plato is it different from when I read Barthes? Do I intone the text of a female writer differently to that of a male? If I have heard a writer speak, does that influence how I read her text? How much, if any, of a writer's own intonation inheres in the text – that is, does my intoning of a text take on some of the characteristics of the writer's own intoning, even if I have never heard her speak? If I am reading a novel, and see, “She screamed, ‘Get out of my sight’,” do I intone the scream, or do I merely cognitively process the quotation as screamed? Similarly, if a comment in an email is followed by the emoticon ☺, do I re-intone the comment, or do I merely reinterpret the comment cognitively? Does the “meaning” of the text change if I do one or the other? And how might the ways I privately and silently intone a text change its performative force? If I intone a text with a deep and resonant, as opposed to a thin, weak voice, for instance, does it act differently upon me? In the next section I argue that how

we intone utterances depends, at least in part, on our bodies, which are in turn, at least in part, pre-discursive and thus inherently meaningful.

Inherently Meaningful Bodies

In “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions” Judith Butler (1989) questions Foucault’s claim that bodies are constructed. If, as Foucault suggests, the body is “a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power” (p. 601), there must nevertheless be a material body that precedes inscription, that is potentially capable of resisting its own inscription. If this is the case, the body is not “culturally constructed, but is, in fact, the inevitable limit and failure of cultural construction” (p. 602). By describing the body as a “ready surface or blank page available for inscription” (p. 603), the body is conceived as outside the discourses and history that “write” themselves on the body. Foucault thus assumes a “materiality to the body prior to its signification and form” (p. 604), for culture is “not taken into the body, internalized or incorporated, but rather is written *on* the body” (p. 605). In contrast to Foucault’s stated aim of showing how the body is constructed through discourses of power and technology, then, the articulation of his aim rests on a distinction between the body and the discourses of power that inscribe it. Butler claims that for Foucault to adequately prove his point, he would have to subject the distinction between the body and the forces of history and culture that inscribe themselves upon it to the same kind of genealogical critique that he applies to discourses that see the body as non-constructed. In other words, “the culturally constructed body would be the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field with no magical

or ontotheological origins, structuralist distinctions, or fictions of bodies, subversive or otherwise, ontologically intact before the law” (p. 607).

In place of a constructivist account of the body, Butler posits a performative one, retaining the non-essentialism of a non-prediscursive body, while avoiding the paradoxical positing of a body that precedes its own inscription. In Butler’s account, the body is historically constituted through acts of repetition performed in particular social contexts. “Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts precede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (orig. italics, p. 519). While the ways in which one repeats one’s role is constrained by rewards and punishments conferred upon it by the social context within which particular performances of gender and sexuality take place, it is not wholly constrained, despite the fact the body is not discursively determined. Different sorts of repeating are available through subversive resignifying practices, that highlight the constative, rather than performative, underpinnings of particular performative acts.

Peter Digeiser (1994), however, argues that Butler’s performativity is “too pure to offer a theoretical account of identity or parodic subversion” (p. 662). It suffers from a similar kind of paradox that Butler identifies in Foucault, as any performative utterance, if it is to act at all, must do so in relation to a constative truth that, while itself open to reinterpretation as a performative, must in turn defer to another constative ground if it is to retain its status as a performative. This is as true for transgressive or parodic acts that subvert gender norms as it is for acts that uphold gender norms. In contrast to Butler’s reading of Austin, in which “the truth/falsehood dimension can be completely extricated

from the performative” (p. 663), in Digeater’s reading performatives are necessarily reliant on a truth/falsehood dimension. In the paradigm case of a wedding ceremony, for instance, the success of the performative statement, “I do,” relies on the (true) fact that the speaker of the utterance is not already married (and hence in contravention of the social convention that gives the performative utterance its power). Without a truth/falsehood dimension, the conventions on which a performative utterance relies fall away.

While the constatives underlying performative acts of gender and sexuality can themselves be deconstructed and reconceived as performatives, this process is, as Derrida suggests with his notion of *différance*, always ongoing. If a performative is to act, it must resist the tendency to defer its meaning to other performatives, relying instead on a “sedimented layer of practices” (p. 664) that, in a given time and place, function as constative truth. Consequently, “in order to reveal that the body is itself nothing but a performance, Butler has to show that the constatives that support this idea are themselves merely performatives” (p. 665). Given that the constatives that support the notion of a prediscursive body “include beliefs regarding why seat belts work, why I cannot walk through walls and whether it makes sense to doubt if my hand is in front of me” (p. 665), the project of deconstructing these constatives is at best lengthy and highly controversial. Even if it were possible to show that these and all other constatives are performatives in disguise, where would that lead us? Either Butler’s project succeeds in undoing itself, in which case all performatives are rendered inactive by virtue of having no constative ground, or it succeeds in highlighting a “persistent constative element” (p. 666) on which everyone agrees (at least as a pragmatic working assumption). Butler wants it both ways

– to undermine the constative character of gender and sexuality through performative acts of gender and sexuality. But for performative acts to function, they require constative truths, leading Digeser to conclude that “Butler’s description of the gendered subject as a pure performative is not only an insufficient account of the self, but it misconstrues the requirements for successful parody” (p. 667).

While Foucault and Butler’s accounts of the human subject differ, then, they both suffer from the paradox of relying on a distinction they seek to subvert. Foucault tries to show that the body is constructed, but in articulating his theory he assumes that the body precedes its own construction. And Butler conceives of the body as a result of performative acts, which depend for their effectiveness on constative truths – the exact same truths subversive performative acts seek to disrupt. Both these paradoxes result from a distinction that lingers, despite attempts to eradicate it, between the body and the cultural discourses and texts that define it. These paradoxes can be resolved, however, if we accept that a) “tone” inheres in utterances of all kinds (as I argued above); b) tonal variance is a result of biological bodies that differ in often subtle ways; and c) the ways in which bodies differ is not wholly a result of discourse. In the next section I explore b) and c) above.

The Body in Music

In her article, “Why performance? Why now?” Julia Walker (2003) describes how, in the early part of the 19th century, as an attempt to model all learning on a scientific model, texts became decoupled from their performance. Disciplines that did not fit neatly into a scientific framework – that were “found to be lacking in intellectual rigor” (p. 150) – were either absorbed into other disciplines or demoted to extra-

curricular status. Dramatic and narrative texts, which were considered primary and open to methodical inquiry, were divorced from elocution, acting and oratory, which were considered imitative arts at best, and this separation persisted throughout the early part of the twentieth century. An essentially arbitrary distinction arose between the literary, which consisted of words on a page, and performance arts, which consisted of “the bodies that give them voice” (p. 155).

Walker sees the recent emphasis on performativity as a “return of the repressed” (p. 155), an attempt to counteract the consequences of the text/performance split, which has resulted in an over-emphasis on the textual, to the point where every aspect of cultural life, including bodies in Judith Butler’s account of gender and sexuality, is now modeled on a metaphor of textual analysis. In Walker’s account, the body inheres in texts through voice. Vocal signification can “create, augment and/or reverse the presumed meaning of words by using pronunciation, tone coloration, and inflectional variation to speak to an emotional as well as conceptual register of ‘meaning’” (p. 160).³ Voice and gesture on this account appeal to a non-conceptual register of meaning – they do not function as “arbitrary signs within a system of difference” (p. 160) but in direct relationship with the body’s inherent meaning-making. Any attempt to analyze voice and gesture using a metaphor of language will fail because non-conceptual meaning is “registered within the body’s viscera” (p. 160) – it is pre-symbolic, and consequently offers a point outside of language from which we can resist language.

³ A similar argument is made by Eleanor Stubley (2006) in her article “Meditations on the latter A: The hand as nexus between music and language”.

The body is thus where agency resides. Words, and hence the discourses that define us, can only be reconfigured through the use of gesture and voice. Irony and ambiguity, for instance, two of the most powerful ways in which language can be reconfigured, both rely on metaphors of tone and gesture, with irony being a “‘tone’ that reverses the presumed meaning otherwise signified” (p. 166) and ambiguity a “‘stance’ that locates meaning in two places at once” (p. 166). These strategies of linguistic subversion enable language to retain its meaning while at the same time altering the ways in which those meanings function. “What is queered or torqued in performativity is not *meaning* per se but the *use* to which such meanings are put” (orig. italics, p. 167).

Walker claims the very notion of being inside or outside of language itself is untenable, because there are a multitude of different kinds of language, each with their own rules. Human subjects are free to enter and exit particular language games, contributing rules or modifying existing ones as they see fit. Rather than being inside or outside of language, they are at any point inside or outside particular discursive communities, which are in a constant state of flux. While individual human subjects have limited agency within a particular language game, they can experiment with different language games, and experience those in relation to their own bodies, and in particular in relation to their own forms of voice and gesture. For while the material body is defined, created and lived through language at a conceptual level, it is also experienced on a

visceral level, and it is at this visceral level of experience that the human subject can resist the power of language to define who and what s/he is.⁴

Walker thus suggests individual bodily differences act as a point outside of language capable of negotiating the human subject's relationship to particular language games and discourses. But how pure are these individual bodily differences, these idiosyncratic forms of voice and gesture? Suzanne Cusick (1999) argues that the visceral responses of the human body are themselves formed through discourse, with music, along with other activities that orient bodies to a particular purpose, being one of the primary means by which the body's viscera are encultured. Music performance, she claims, is in part the "culturally intelligible performance of bodies" (p. 27), with "ideas performed *through* bodies by the performance *of* bodies" (p. 27). While bodies precede musical performances, they are also altered in the performing of music. Although our voices are an inevitable consequence of our genetic organization, they are also culturally formed, with the act of singing "always an act that replicates acceptance of patterns that are intelligible to one's cohort in a culture" (p. 30). For Cusick singing involves "participation in a cultural system called Song, a cultural system that requires its participants to accept culturally specific disciplines to sites deep inside their bodies (as well as in their minds)" (p. 38). The throat, for Cusick, is an orifice through which Culture can penetrate the body's borders; singers can refuse or accept the bodily discipline required to produce Song, "the occupation of the lungs and throat by Culture"

⁴ Wayne Bowman and Kimberly Powell (2007) make a similar argument in their article "The body in a state of music", claiming "music is a foundationally corporeal event ... music is distinctively, perhaps uniquely, a form of embodied agency" (p. 1101).

(p. 38), and she gives two examples of this. Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam, she claims, constricts his voice in the act of singing, “avoiding the resonant spaces of his face and head” (p. 35). By resisting “correct” ways of singing, he demonstrates his rejection of society and culture’s right to control his body.

Vedder’s voice performs a refusal to accept the disciplines of Song, refusing thus to re-inscribe his subordination to Culture, refusing to submit to a set of laws (tonality, mode, group intonation, a particular sense of time) that might be understood as metaphors of Law itself. (p. 35)

In contrast, the Indigo Girls perform their enculturation by singing in a way that embraces the disciplines of Speech and Song. They “move within the disciplines of tonality, mode and intonation to ‘perform’ female bodies’ apparent acquiescence to penetration by Culture” (p. 37). Music, on this account, rather than being an escape from culture, is a primary medium through which the body is encultured, with individual performers and listeners negotiating their body’s relationship to culture through “resistance, evasion, liberation and joy” (p. 43). Music thus becomes a means through which we make and “remake our world” (p. 43).

Thus while both Walker and Cusick recognize the role of discourse, including music discourse, in subject formation, they both retain a space for the body’s inherent meaning making. For while Walker recognizes Judith Butler’s claim that discourses determine how we understand biological bodies, she also recognizes that how we interact with these discourses – the extent to which we take them up, or fail to take them up – is determined by bodies capable of sensations that exist outside discourse and consequently

are capable of negotiating the human subject's relationship with discourse. And while Cusick claims bodies are transformed through activities that orient them to a purpose, in particular music performance, she recognizes that this transformation is never complete, that there always remains an experience of the body capable of resisting the imprint of enculturation.

If, as I have argued, the body resists the imprint of language in part because the auditory component that is a necessary part of language is, also in part, pre-discursive and hence inherently meaningful, music, insofar as it draws attention to and experiments with the auditory, is meaningful precisely insofar as it cites the body, or cites citations of the body, or cites citations of citations of the body etc. etc. While any original citation of the body in music, from which all subsequent citations derive, is both theoretically and practically inaccessible, it is possible to show how music cites the body, and in the next section I look at how the solo piano music of Thelonious Monk juxtaposes citations of different kinds of bodies.

Citations of the Body in the Music of Thelonious Monk

Thelonious Monk's 1964 solo piano interpretation of "These Foolish Things" alternates between two distinct "voices" – a virtuosic voice, that cites the Western classical music tradition and its associated body, and a "visceral" voice that cites and authorizes a very different kind of body. While the virtuosic voice uses technical proficiency to mask the idiosyncratic body, the visceral voice draws attention away from the sound of the piano toward the idiosyncratic body producing it.

The first example of Monk's visceral voice occurs at the end of bar 1, when the tempo stalls, the downbeat of bar 2 arriving over a quarter of a beat late (the tempo is $\frac{1}{4}$ note = 73 so a quarter of a beat late translates to roughly a quarter of a second). "Stalls" is the appropriate word here, as the delay is not set up or gradual. Rather, it sounds as if he is looking for the right chord, deciding on a voicing, or in some other way deliberating. Delays of this kind interrupt the smooth flow of the music, drawing attention away from the sound of the piano toward the person playing it. Indeed, these effects occur so often in Monk's music that it amounts to a stylistic characteristic, a parodic citation of an unskilled pianist who searches for the right notes before playing them.

In bar 8 a similar citation occurs, this time with respect to touch. Nothing in bar 7 prepares the listener for the accent placed on the first beat of bar 8, a Cm7 with an F in the melody. The heavy-handed touch on this chord dramatically contrasts with the more traditional stride piano style in the previous bar and once again draws attention away from the piano toward the player. The sudden and seemingly random contrast seems to call for an explanation of some sort, yet no explanation is forthcoming in the music. And as with time delays, these dramatic but seemingly random variants in touch occur so often that it amounts to a stylistic characteristic of Monk's music in general.

Figure 1. Measures 7-8 of 'These Foolish Things' showing unanticipated accent on first beat of m. 8



Another example of Monk's visceral voice comes at the end of the second bridge with an exposed flubbed note. In preparation for the return to the A section Monk plays a chromatically descending sequence, starting on E7b5 and ending on Bb7b5. This descending sequence, with its directional inevitability, illustrates the meaning of the lyric – "I knew somehow this had to be." But the sequence culminates not in an expected Eb bass note, but in a "compromised" Eb preceded by a sustained D grace note, creating a jarring minor 2nd dissonance. While this may be heard as a commentary on the unexpected consequences of fate, it can also be heard as an inexperienced piano player accidentally hitting the D while reaching for the low Eb.

Figure 2. Measures 39-41 of 'These Foolish Things' showing "flubbed" note in m. 41

Handwritten chord notation above the staff: $E7(b9)$ $Eb7$ $D7(\#9)$ $Db7(\#9)$ $C7ALT$ $Bb7$ $Bb7(b9)$ Eb

But perhaps the clearest example of contrasting voices in 'These foolish things' occurs in measures 17-18 (see below).

Figure 3. Alternating "virtuosic" and "visceral" voices in mm. 17-18 of 'These Foolish Things'

Handwritten chord notation above the staff: $Gm7$ $Am7b9$ $D7$ $Am7b9$

The first of these two bars divides into four clearly delineated beats. The first beat consists of a Bb and a D in the left hand, the 3rd and 5th of a G minor triad (the bar is

preceded by a “turnaround” figure of Am7b5, D7 – that is, ii, V of G minor). The first half of the second beat fills out the triad with the addition of the root, prior to the Bb of the song’s original melody in octave doubling appearing on the second half of the beat. The third beat completes the melody figure with a G, also doubled at the octave, which sets off a 32nd note run outlining a G minor triad, culminating in a high G, the root, on the fourth beat of the bar.

The second of these two bars repeats many of the structural features of the first but substantially alters important tonal and rhythmic elements. The opening beat consists of a half diminished chord in a four-note voicing with the 7th in the bass. Compared to the G minor triad in the first bar, this is a dissonant sonority. This dissonance is repeated in the first half of the second beat, with the root and the 7th, an interval of a major second, played again in a higher register, supporting the C of the melody figure, again doubled at the octave, on the second half of the beat. The third beat completes the melody figure with an A doubled at the octave, which sets off a run that begins on a low D with 32nd notes before switching to 64th notes, culminating in a sustained high B, the 9th of Am7b5 or the 13th of D7 and an extremely dissonant sound, on the 4th 64th note of beat 4.

These two bars juxtapose what I have been calling the virtuosic and visceral voices in Monk’s music. The first cites the Western classical music tradition – the bar divides into four clearly delineated beats, the triad is clearly outlined, and rhythmic figures square perfectly with the beat. The second, in contrast, despite having the same essential structural features, includes dissonant sonorities, ambiguous tonal centers (the run begins by outlining a D7 chord (V of G minor) but reverts back to an Am7b5 chord

(ii of G minor) halfway through), undefined rhythmic figures, and seemingly “wrong” notes (the final B at the end of the run).

Contrasts of this kind are not uncommon in jazz. Louis Armstrong’s celebrated introduction to *West End Blues* (Armstrong, 1928/2004) features a straight, “classical”-style four bars followed by six bars of more syncopated, free form, chromatic and “blue”-note infested jazz (see below). But in neither instance does Armstrong’s virtuosity come into question.

Figure 4. Solo trumpet introduction to ‘West End Blues’ showing contrast between “classical” style (mm. 1-4) and “hot” jazz style (mm. 5-10)



In Monk’s music, on the other hand, his visceral voice, with its associated citation of an unskilled pianist’s body, does raise questions about his virtuosity. But the consistency and regularity with which “mistakes” occur in Monk’s music suggest a unique form of virtuosity is at work, one dedicated in part to challenging traditional notions of virtuosity. For while Western European virtuosity is premised on a universal body attuned to universal standards of perfection, Monk’s music, through specific techniques, celebrates the idiosyncratic body and its own, necessarily individual and unique, standards.

The visceral body is also present in Monk's extra-musical performance. In a New York appearance captured in Charlotte Zwerin's documentary *Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser* (1988), Monk stabs the notes and chords with flat fingers, his right foot thrusting in time with the music or with his own syncopations. When not playing he "dances" on the bandstand, "dancing" here loosely construed, as the relationship between his movements and the music is minimal – he spins around and around, moving his arms in part to balance himself and in part to suggest possible rhythmic emphases that may or may not be present in the music. When it is time for him to play again he lurches back to the instrument, barely having time to sit before once again resuming his aggressive interactions with the piano. These techniques and others de-sediment traditional piano performance conventions and their associated conceptions of the body. While Monk is not alone in this – Keith Jarrett is well known for wailing, groaning, thrusting, standing, crouching and writhing in front of the instrument when playing jazz – Monk incorporates these elements into both his musical and extra-musical performance.

Monk's music shows how even instrumental, non-dance music, can cite the body and do it differently. By eschewing universalist aspirations and juxtaposing virtuosic and visceral voices, Monk brings his body and its inherent meaningfulness to bear on musical tradition by inverting the constative/performative distinction that orients that tradition. For whereas Western European music relies on a distinction between the untrained body, which acts as a constative, and the technically proficient, virtuosic body that acts performatively in relation to it, Monk's music situates the virtuosic body as the constative ground for the performative acts of the seemingly untrained body. Monk thus cites

citations of the Western European body, along with citations of his own body, to create a music that opens up new possibilities not only for music but for bodies also.

Characteristics of Philosophical Writing about Music

In this chapter I situated music as a citational practice, in which an inherently meaningful body is cited and re-cited in sonic form. I argued that music is meaningful because it cites an inherently meaningful body and valuable insofar as it opens up new possibilities for those bodies. I situated my argument within a pre-existing discourse on performativity, refuting Judith Butler's conception of the body as wholly formed through language by showing how language cannot exist without an auditory component rooted in the body. I then showed, with transcriptions of the solo piano music of Thelonious Monk, how the body is cited in music, and how these citations impact our experience of our bodies, and in particular the evaluations we apply to those experiences. Insofar as I presented 1) a "rational" argument 2) on a philosophical theme (i.e., a question of the kind "What is the meaning and value of ...") 3) drawing on a philosophical literature (i.e., Butler, Derrida etc.) 4) supporting my argument with concrete data (transcriptions of Thelonious Monk's music) I classify this chapter as an example of philosophical writing about music.

Chapter 5: Narratological Writing About Music

Narratological writing on music focuses on the constituent parts of narrative musical texts, drawing connections between the various parts within a single narrative text, as well as between the various parts of different narrative texts. Thus it asks “Who is speaking?,” “What is the ontological status of that speech?,” “How does that speech relate to other speech, either within the same text or in different texts?” and “How do these various forms of speech interact to create worlds?” In this chapter I focus on the intersection of rap narratives, life narratives and cultural narratives.

Song Narratives

Life After Death, the second and posthumously released CD by African-American rapper Notorious B.I.G (1997), includes raps that both exemplify narrative form and comment on narrative form. “Ten crack commandments”, for instance, presents ten “commandments” that function as a “manual, a step-by-step booklet” on how to deal crack without getting caught. The rules are presented in a colloquial style, with expressions that indicate personal knowledge and experience of the rules articulated. Most rules are presented along with their underlying rationale – “Never let noone know how much dough you hold / Cos you know the cheddar breed jealousy especially if that man fucked up get your ass stuck up,” or “that goddamn credit dead it / You think a crackhead paying you back shit forget it” while others are assumed to be so self-evident they do not require an explicit rationale – “Know you've heard this before / Never get high on your own supply” or “Never sell no crack where you rest at / I don't care if they want an ounce tell 'em bounce”, for example.

In addition to rational argument, B.I.G confers authority on his “manual” through the use of rhetorical flourishes that support his claims to insider knowledge. The expression “wig pushed back” displays an intimate knowledge of prison customs, the acknowledgement that rule number seven is “so underrated” suggests he may have personally suffered from not keeping his “family and business completely separated,” as does the line “If niggaz think you're snitchin' they ain't try and listen / They be sitting in your kitchen waiting to start hittin’.” His recommendation that freshmen stay away from consignment, which is “only for live men” suggests he falls into the latter category and an additional rhetorical flourish that is, strictly speaking, extra- to his argument, nonetheless confers status in a world in which homophobia is rampant. “Money and blood don't mix like two dicks and no bitch / Find yourself in serious shit,” the word “shit” here functioning both literally and metaphorically. The song concludes with B.I.G claiming anyone who follows the rules will have “mad bread to break up,” while those who don’t will have “24 years on the wake up.” The last line - “Gotta go, gotta go, more pies to bake up” – suggests B.I.G is still dealing crack cocaine.

In “Ten crack commandments”, then, B.I.G presents himself as an experienced cocaine dealer offering advice to other would-be cocaine dealers. But who, exactly, is B.I.G. in this context? In the account above, I have said “B.I.G. presents ten commandments ...,” “B.I.G claims following the rules will result in ...” and “B.I.G confers authority on his “manual” through the use of ...” etc. But it is not clear what or who this entity I have been referring to as “B.I.G” is? While the words issue from the mouth of Christopher Wallace, whose stage name is Notorious B.I.G, and the lyrics were co-written by B.I.G., it is an extra step – and an unjustifiable one – to assume that the text

is indicative of B.I.G's own perspective. For, as with literature, the author of a lyric may not be the "I" that narrates a lyric, and the "I" that narrates a lyric may present a perspective that is not his or her own. In this case, the commandments do not originate from the "I" that narrates, as indicated by the line "Number nine should've been number one to me," for, if the narrator of the commandments is the author, as he claims at the beginning of the song ("I wrote me a manual"), why is number nine not number one? If it "should've been" from the narrator's perspective, why isn't it? We can only assume that the narrator who "wrote me a manual" is distinct, in perspective if not in person, from the focalizer⁵ who presumably learnt the hard way that "If niggaz think you're snitchin' they ain't try and listen / They be sitting in your kitchen waiting to start hittin'." But neither of these perspectives – that of the narrator and the focalizer – are necessarily representative of the author's own perspective. Indeed, the author's perspective – and for now I refer simply to the author of the lyrics – is clearly *not* that of the narrator as B.I.G. is a successful recording artist, and presumably does not have "more pies to bake up" (if he did, would he publicly communicate that fact?)

When the authorship of the musical text is expanded to include the production, as well as the lyrics, the text's meaning becomes even more indeterminate. The introduction

⁵ I am here borrowing terminology developed by Mieke Bal (1985) in her *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*, in which she distinguishes between perspective or point of view and *focalization*, between the vision presented and the identity of the voice verbalizing that vision i.e., between "*those who see* and *those who speak*" (orig. italics, p. 101). In the sentence "As Mary got in the car, she saw a large rat on the dashboard," for instance, one person (the narrator) expresses the vision of another (Mary). But this "speaking for another" is not always explicit. In the construction "Mary got in the car. An ugly, fat rat was on the dashboard," for instance, Mary is likely the focalizer in the second sentence, because the word "ugly" suggests a subjective evaluation, even though there are no coupling signs (i.e., "saw") to explicitly indicate a shift in focalization. For more on *Narratology* see the annotated bibliography on literary theory in Part V of this document.

to the song, for instance, includes a sample of politically active Public Enemy rapper Chuck D shouting consecutive numbers from one to nine in quarter notes. The number ten is absent, despite the song being called “Ten crack commandments” and the lead vocal entry following the recitation of numbers beginning with the words “It’s the ten crack commandments.” As B.I.G. freestyles on the themes of coke, crack, and weed, sending a shout out to his “hustling niggaz” with whom he previously worked as a street corner crack dealer, the recitation of numbers that opens the track is repeated, with rhythmic alterations courtesy of a DJ scratch effect. In the penultimate bar of the introduction, the word “ten” appears for the first time, on the upbeat of four, spoken by a white-coded voice, digitally processed to sound as if spoken through an institutional P.A. system. This word “ten”, appearing on an upbeat, in contrast to all the other numbers that appear on the beat, represents a surprise of sorts. This unexpected intervention in the narrative sequence of events, together with the fact that it is spoken by a white-coded voice, and processed to sound like it is being spoken through an institutional PA system – a prison PA system perhaps – undermines the overt claims of the lyrics, suggesting that ultimately – for ten is the ultimate destination of the numerical series around which the lyric is structured – even if the rules *are* followed, jail is the likely outcome. “Ten Crack Commandments” thus affirms, and at the same time undermines, the racial stereotype of the violent, anti-social, drug-dealing African-American, giving voice to that stereotype while at the same time casting doubt on its origin, identity, and integrity.

While “Ten crack commandments” exemplifies narrative form and at the same time undermines some of the assumptions we bring to bear in our interpretation of narrative, “I got a story to tell”, also on *Life After Death*, explicitly comments on

narrative form. Lyrically, the rap divides into three parts, with the first part consisting of a single spoken phrase – “Who y’all talking to man?” – that precedes the song proper. It is not clear to whom this question is addressed – the speaker himself, his production team, an anonymous other? – or even the number of people addressed, the plural “y’all” vying with the singular “man” for dominance.

The second part, which consists of the first of two verses of the song proper, consists of a complete narrative beginning with a shout out “to all the niggaz that be fuckin’ mad bitches in other niggaz cribs,” thereby establishing who, in this instance, he is “talking to.” In rap rhymes B.I.G narrates how he [and here I am again conflating B.I.G with the narrator] met a woman who lives with “a player off the New York Knicks,” went back to her place, “fucked in his bed” while he was out “playing ’gainst the Utah Jazz,” only to be interrupted by the words “honey I’m home” while enjoying a post-coital smoke. B.I.G reaches for his “chrome,” as he instructs his “bitch” to “talk to him / Before this fist put a spark to him.” Before the sportsman reaches the bedroom, however, his partner “screams out ‘bring me up something to drink’,” a request that sends the cuckold back downstairs. B.I.G., meanwhile, is “cool as a fan” as he attempts to resolve the situation. He is prepared to “blast her man” if he has to, but then it comes to him “like a song I wrote” – he ties the woman up and pretends to be a thief holding her hostage. The basketball player enters the bedroom, screams “Don’t blast here’s the stash, a hundred cash just don’t shoot my ass, please!” B.I.G takes the money, leaves in the basketball player’s car, and immediately calls his friends, telling them to “Bring some weed I got a story to tell.”

In the third part, which follows directly from the second, albeit with an indeterminate sound – perhaps the closing of a microphone – signaling the shift in perspective, B.I.G recounts the exact same story in prose form – “Yo man, y’all niggaz ain’t gonna believe what the fuck happened to me. Remember that bitch I left the club with man? Yo, freaky yo.” In this version of the story his audience interrupts – jeering, cheering, and celebrating – in a dialogical exchange that stands in stark contrast to the monological narrative of the first verse. The facts of the story change also. In the rhyme version he admits no fear, while in the prose version he acknowledges he was “scared, I was shook Daddy.” The vocabulary used to describe marijuana changes from “grass” and “homegrown” in the rhyme version to “lye” in the prose version. And aspects of the story are elaborated and speculated on. The basketball game “must have been rained out or something,” and it “looked like the nigga pissed on his-self or somethin’.” We also learn that the idea to stage a hostage situation, which in the rhyme version he claims “came to me like a song I wrote,” is an established technique among his peers (“You know how we do it nigga, ransom note style”). Throughout the prose version the collective, rather than individual, experience is emphasized, with B.I.G twice saying “You know how we do it” and the story ending with a collective “I’m gone,” that his interlocutors predict will follow the words, “Two words ...” The prose version ends with a call for more “lye,” as the conversation, laughter and music fade out.

Like “Ten crack commandments”, “I got a story to tell” presents B.I.G. in a number of different roles. He is the author of the “facts” of the story, facts that may be true, partially true, or wholly fictional; the narrator of the rhyme version of the story; the narrator of the prose version of the story; the external commentator who, in asking the

question “Who y’all talking to, man?” at the beginning of the song, cryptically raises questions about the status of the text; the performer of the text; as well as the person “responsible” for the text, insofar as he owns at least a part of the legal copyright. But in addition to raising questions about the coherence of the narrator, ‘I got a story to tell’ raises questions about narrative. For the juxtaposition of the two different narrative forms, along with the opening phrase, highlights the extent to which narrative is never pure but always a co-construction, with “facts” ordered to a specific purpose by specific individuals with specific audiences in mind.

Life Narratives

In the previous section I brought a narratological approach to bear in the interpretation of musical texts. But musical texts themselves exist within narrative contexts, where these are similarly susceptible to narratological analysis. In this section I explore the ways in which different forms of narrative interact in the varied cultural production of African-American rapper and Bad Boy Recording artist Ma\$e.

In 1996 Ma\$e appeared as a guest rapper with 112, a collective produced by Puff Daddy (real name Sean Combs), also the producer of *Life After Death*. Situating himself as a “bad boy” (Combs’ record label is called Bad Boy Entertainment) Ma\$e raps that he is not “the one that will pay for your phone / Ma\$e be the one that will take you home / Even though I’m not the one that gave you the stone / All you nights alone I could make you moan.” Sexual braggadocio is accompanied by similar boasts as to his financial solvency, claiming “Bad boy get more money than you can count / Why I’m buying things you can’t even pronounce.” By 1997 Ma\$e’s identity as a “bad boy” is further enhanced when “Can’t nobody hold me down”, from Combs’ debut album *No way out*,

which again features Ma\$e as a guest rapper, became a Billboard number 1 single with the album winning the 1998 Grammy for best rap album. In his characteristic slow drawl Ma\$e celebrates the material benefits of music industry success (“I’m through with being a player and a baller / Just want me one bad bitch so I can spoil her”), affirming his commitment to being a “bad boy” (“Puff make his own laws, nigga fuck your rules (that’s right)”) and to increasing financial rewards (“If it ain’t about the money, Puff, I just don’t care (that’s right)”).

In the second verse, however, a less confident Ma\$e emerges. In an interjection Combs asks “Ma\$e can you please stop smoking lay lah?” to which Ma\$e responds “Puff why try? I’m a thug, I’m a die high.” Immediately after this exchange, however, a defensive paranoia creeps in, with Ma\$e claiming “I know the thug be wanting to slug me” (Combs affirming this supposition with an “Uh-huh”), followed by a search for why that might be – “Could it be I move as smooove as Buggy? / Or be at the bar with too much bubbly? / Yo I think it must be the girls want to lust me.” Envy – of his charisma, wealth, and sexual attractiveness – is the assumed motivation, with the last line of the second verse suggesting that those with a “PhD, a player hating degree” are also envious of him.

This suggestion is reiterated in Notorious B.I.G’s “Mo money, mo problems”, on which Ma\$e again is a guest rapper. In the first verse Ma\$e claims to be “the same old pimp ... You know ain’t nothing changed but my limp” (i.e., the size of his wallet), despite his overwhelming success. He celebrates his ambition (“Can’t stop till I see my name on a blimp”), his fame (“Nigga didn’t know me ninety-one bet they know me now”), his vocal style (“goldie sound”), his business acumen (“Stay humble stay low

blow like hootie”), and his success with women (“True pimp niggaz spend no dough on the booty”). Yet among these positive affirmations appear fissures, such as “Now, who’s hot who not / You tell me who flopped who copped the blue drop,” and “You don’t believe in Harlem world nigga double up / We don’t play around it’s a bet lay it down,” culminating in the claim “Can’t no PhD niggaz hold me down.”

In both “Can’t nobody hold me down” and “Mo money, mo problems”, then, the label “PhD” is configured as hostile to Ma\$e and his cohorts. But the claim lacks specificity. While we know Ma\$e and his fellow bad boys are young, materialistic, successful, black musicians, self-associated with drugs and crime, those configured as hateful are undefined and abstract. Indeed, the ambiguity of the accusation raises more questions than it answers. How are those with PhDs hateful? What experiences have led Ma\$e and his cohorts to believe “PhD niggaz” want to hold them down? Are they referring to a particular kind of PhD, or Western academia in general? And how should those holding PhDs respond, if at all? I will come back to this later.

Ma\$e’s antagonism toward Western academia is short-lived, however. In his autobiography *Revelations: There’s a light after the lime*, dedicated “To Jesus. I love Jesus for all He’s done for me” (Betha, 2001, p. v), Betha chronicles his conversion to Christianity after the murder of fellow rapper and Bad Boy recording artist Notorious B.I.G leading to an honorary doctorate in theology. Betha writes that

The Holy Ghost just snatched me up and I was at that altar crying. I don’t even know why I was crying, I was just crying. And when I finished, Ma\$e was gone. God was doing a new thing. Hallelujah! (p. 5)

This revelation occurred shortly before the release of his second album, reportedly on the eve of a multi-million dollar contract renegotiation with Bad Boy Entertainment, and the book is in part a challenge to the materialism of his former self and the hip hop community of which he was a part. In this respect his turn to God represents a 180-degree shift in perspective. “What I thought was everything was nothing. And what I thought was nothing was everything. Everything to Ma\$e was materialistic and that meant nothing to God” (p. 11).

The completeness of his conversion is captured in the rhetoric of the opening prologue. “On April 9, 1999 at approximately 8:05 p.m., Ma\$e, noted rapper who sold more than three million copies of his first Album *Harlem World*, was pronounced dead ... His cause of death: Jesus Christ” (p. xi). A similar emphasis on extreme transformation appears throughout the book, in claims such as, “When I was living wrong I would believe anything because I was 100 percent obedient to the devil. Now I believe Christ because I want to be 100 percent obedient to Him” (p. 54), in self-destructive actions such as “cracking every disc, breaking them in half, stomping on them. All my plaques and awards – all the things Ma\$e won – I threw in a pile in the middle of the room. I scooped up the mess in bags and threw it out” (p. 86) and in questions such as “What am I doing?” “Where am I going?” and “Who am I?” (p. 86).

Betha draws a firm distinction between the person he was prior to finding God (Ma\$e) and the person he became post-conversion (Mason Betha). Ma\$e “revolutionized rap” (p. 87), “lived for the moment” (pp. 86-87), was materialistic (p. 90), vain (p. 90), “a jerk” (p. 87), “working for Satan” (p. 88). Mason Betha, in contrast, lives for God, and there is no place for rap in God’s world. “Ever since that day I broke up all those CDs

[after his conversion], I was totally turned off to rap, hip-hop, and even R&B music. I no longer listened to that kind of music, even on the radio. I stopped watching music videos. And I don't even let people who visit turn to those stations" (p. 94). For Betha these traditionally African-American musics have a powerfully destructive effect on listeners. "I would ask you to go without watching rap videos or listening to that music on the radio for a week. And I want you to tell me the difference in your life in just one week. I guarantee there will be a difference. Is your conscience clearer? How different are the decisions you make?" (p. 95). For Betha "rap is a doctrine ... Rappers are prophets who are used by the devil and most of them don't realize it" (p. 104).

Post-conversion Betha submits to what he takes to be God's will, even when this is in conflict with his own desires. Thus he attempts to curtail his sexual promiscuity, fasting and praying that the "lust demon" (p. 122) will subside. Eventually he gets "to the point where I wanted to throw up after any sexual contact" (p. 123) before "God gave me a fiancée. He didn't want me to get married until I kicked the habit because if I didn't, I would have married the wrong person or gotten married for the wrong reasons" (p. 124). Indeed, Betha configures his engagement, like his conversion and other aspects of his post-Ma\$e existence, as the direct consequence of God's intervention – "God told me to keep speaking to her. So I did" (p. 131), "It was cool being single. The freedom. But God said, "You've got to do it." Not that I was forced into it" (p. 135). Yet at the same time he decries those who say "The devil made me do it." "The devil didn't do it. You did it" (p. 136).

Betha's transformation is seemingly complete when "on May 20, 2001 – exactly one year after I gave my first sermon, I received my honorary doctorate of theology from

St Paul's" (p. 146). He has eliminated "an entire self." "People made Ma\$. God made Pastor Mason Betha" (p. 158). His mission now is to remind people that "Hell is not full" (p. 176). "Either you will keep letting Satan use you or start to let God use you" (p. 207). Interestingly, the penultimate chapter echoes the refrain of Ma\$e's most well known hit. "With money comes so many problems" (p. 187), he writes. But whereas his rap on Notorious B.I.G's "Mo money, mo problems" celebrated his love of money, he now sees the love of money as the root of all evil. "It's impossible to love riches and try to love God" (p. 189), he concludes. "God is in control" (p. 189).

As extreme as Betha's transformation is, however, it is not complete, as Betha's post-*Revelations* life story reveals. In August 2004, only three years after receiving his honorary doctorate in theology which, based on his own account, represented the culmination of his struggle to "eliminate" Ma\$, he released a new rap album, titled *Welcome Back* (Betha, 2004). While the album foregoes overtly un-Christian content (such as curse words) it recites a materialism ("Ma\$e broke, that's a oxymoron / Forget a bus, I bought a drop to tour on / G-4's what I soar on / You thinkin' I ain't hot you so wrong") and a braggadocio ("I see the girls in the club, they gettin' wild for me / And all the pretty chicks all wanna smile at me / These rap cats man they all got they style from me / And if I ever said hey man they probably bow to me") that his post-conversion self clearly associated with the devil. While *Welcome Back* may be an attempt to resignify the rap genre, citing enough conventions to make the music recognizably rap while at the same time promoting a different "doctrine," one allied with God rather than the devil, his use of the same name (including the dollar sign substituting for an S) does not distinguish between his pre- and post-conversion identities (unlike, say, John Lennon, who as a solo

artist recording under his own name was able to substantially distance himself from his former identity as a member of The Beatles). While the video for the single “Welcome Back” (Betha, 2004b) goes some way toward acknowledging the irony of Pastor Betha’s return to rap, the introduction a parodic play on the popular children’s television show “Mister Roger’s Neighborhood”, the contrast between Betha as Mister Rogers and Ma\$e the rapper is not sufficiently emphasized in the execution of the line “We might get mail from the postman or we might just get a song from Ma\$e [said as Mister Rogers] ... because I’m back [said as Ma\$e]” for it to effectively distinguish Pastor Betha and Ma\$e’s identities.

Cultural Narratives

In the previous two sections I discussed musical narratives and life narratives from a narratological perspective. But narratological analysis can equally well be applied to cultural narratives, that determine, to a considerable extent, how individual life narratives play out.

In *Excitable Speech* Judith Butler (1997) claims words that wound do so by virtue of their prior, present and future use; that is, their power is drawn from “the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force” (p. 51). The speaker of the racial slur, for instance, is “citing that slur, making linguistic community with a history of speakers” (p. 52), with the context of the utterance determining whether it acts as a racial slur or not. The burning of a cross on the lawn of an African-American family, for instance, may be an expression of a viewpoint (a constative act), a racial slur (an illocutionary performative) or an overt threat (a perlocutionary performative), depending on the context brought to bear in its reception. Legislation aimed at curbing racial slurs is problematic, because it

uses performative speech to demarcate what counts as performative speech, regulating “the political field of contestation” (p. 54) by which these distinctions are arbitrated – that is, by legislating the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate speech acts, the courts limit the scope of discussion around what counts as an appropriate or inappropriate speech act, thereby limiting the likelihood of speech acts losing their illocutionary force over time. The illocutionary force of a racist slur thus depends on its context, with the legal infrastructure and its associated narratives paradoxically serving as the constative ground for injurious speech – in delineating the category of “publically acceptable speech ... the state produces hate speech” (p. 77). In addition, the legal emphasis on individual culpability, as opposed to more diffuse structural realities, confers sovereign power on individuals, locating the point of injury at the scene of utterance, when the utterance only has power insofar as it refers to previous and future invocations of that utterance (i.e., insofar as it is a “citation of itself” (p. 80)). The legal infrastructure thus invests the hateful utterance with illocutionary force, and at the same time serves as the body through which redress for that hateful utterance is sought. The judiciary is thus both cause of and cure for hate speech. Butler claims that to legislate appropriate forms of discourse is to risk engaging in that which legislation seeks to undo. It assumes univocal meanings of specific utterances, and prevents the possible resignification of hateful speech. Over time, “words that seek to injure might well miss their mark and produce an effect counter to the one intended. The disjuncture between utterance and meaning is the condition of possibility for revising the performative” (p. 87). But this resignification can only occur when potentially injurious speech is distinguished from actually injurious speech.

This has implications for how we conceive of other narrative texts. “Ten crack commandments”, for instance, both affirms, and at the same time undermines, the racial stereotype of the violent, anti-social, drug-dealing African-American, a stereotype constrained by legal imperatives. By representing that voice within the context of a musical text, “Ten crack commandments” circumvents those legal constraints, opening up the possibility of that voice, its utterances, and the legal performatives that condemn it, signifying differently. Indeed, both overtly and covertly, “Ten crack commandments” and “I got a story to tell” circumvent constraints on publically acceptable speech, opening up the possibility of the legally unspeakable losing its performative force. In addition, by challenging the assumption that narrators are coherent and narratives pure, they challenge the basis of Western legal institutions that rely on a particular conception of narrative in the administration of justice.

Similarly, the structure of Ma\$e’s attacks on Western academia mimics the structure of injurious speech, as in Judith Butler’s account “what is *unanticipated* about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control” (orig. italics, p. 4). Just as the time and place of injury remains unknown in a racial slur, so the time and place of injury in Ma\$e’s suggestion that “PhD niggaz” are morally suspect disorients through its inexactness. His accusation thus functions as a form of redress by turning back on the institution that serves, at least in part (insofar as it acts, like the legal system, as an arbiter and authorizer of particular kinds of speech), as the constative ground for injurious speech, the very kind of disorienting performative which that institution makes possible. In suggesting that the institution supporting

Western notions of justice and equality is hateful, Ma\$e pierces the conceit at the heart of that institution and the universal assumptions on which it relies.

Mason Betha's life narrative highlights the extent to which music, in both its creation and reception, is inextricably tied to other discourses. Insofar as it cites other discourses, it acts performatively upon them, resignifying univocal meanings (such as those associated with the label "PhD," for instance). And because it cites other discourses, it necessarily invokes those discourses, as well as the discourses those discourses invoke, in its reception (such as the discourses of Christianity in Pastor Betha's reception of Ma\$e's music). Music thus moves from being a closed system of citation, originating in the body and referring only to itself, to being a part of a larger discursive exchange, capable of substantially contributing to the political, social and spiritual life of a community.

Characteristics of Narratological Writing about Music

In this chapter I have shown how a narratological approach to musical texts and their contexts can bring music into a process of negotiation with legal and institutional narratives which, by demarcating what counts and doesn't count as appropriate speech, determines social and cultural reality. The musical texts discussed in this chapter challenge the authority of these narratives by undermining the structural assumptions on which they rely. Thus in writing narratologically about music I highlighted music's capacity to interact with non-musical narrative structures, including legal and academic ones, with political implications.

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Writing About Music

Ethnographic writing on music sees music as a social and cultural phenomenon that can best be understood in relation to its cultural context. It tries to avoid *imposing* interpretive frameworks on music, preferring instead to *derive* interpretive frameworks from rich but neutral (so far as neutrality is ever possible in language use) descriptions. Thus in this chapter I begin with neutral descriptions of the songs on Lily Allen's debut CD *Alright, Still*, working out from this "nexus in the cultural web" (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 356) to its immediate contexts, and working out from those contexts to their contexts. In the conclusion I interpret her music and its contexts on their own terms.

A Nexus in the Cultural Web

Many of the songs on Allen's debut album, *Alright, Still*,⁶ are based on short, repeated sampled materials from other popular songs. "Smile" is based on "Free Soul", a 1969 recording by the Soul Brothers; "LDN" on a 1970 recording by Tommy McCook and the Supersonics called "Reggae Merengue"; "Littlest Things" on the theme from the 1970s film *Emmanuelle*, written by Pierre Bachelet & Herve Roy; "Knock 'Em Out" on a 1964 recording by Professor Longhair titled "Big Chief"; and "Friend of Mine" on the Isley Brother's "For the Love of You".⁷ Those songs not based on prior recordings sustain the illusion of sampling, with artificial static ("Shame for You") or retro-sounding sections ("Everything's Just Wonderful") incorporated into the mix. Most samples, with

6 Lily Allen. *Alright, Still*. Audio CD. Released 17th July, 2006. Regal Records. ASIN: B000FMGWRS

⁷ "Music like dirt" blog. Accessed on December 7th, 2006. (<http://www.musiclikedirt.com/2006/09/27/lily-allen-alright-steal/>).

the exception of the theme from *Emmanuelle*, have a reggae or ska influence (five of the eleven tracks are overtly ska-influenced), and this has led to her music being classified as ska. In most cases, however, with the exception of “Friend of Mine”, additional drums have been added to create a blend of ska and R&B.

Most songs have between three and four sections: a Verse, that normally repeats at least once; a Bridge, that takes us from the Verse to the Chorus; the Chorus, which is the primary refrain or hook of the song; and a second bridge, that normally appears toward the end of the song. The introduction is often an instrumental version of one of these sections, without the added R&B drum pattern. Her two biggest hits, “Smile” and “LDN”, rely on ska/reggae samples with only two chords – a repeating pattern of ii-I in the case of “Smile” and a repeating pattern of I-V in the case of “LDN”. Her third single, however, “Littlest Things”, is based on an acoustic guitar, piano and bass sample that has a more complex harmony. “Friend of Mine” relies on a sample from the Isley Brothers, and differs from other songs on the album by using only the original drum pattern, in contrast to the other songs that all include additional R&B drum patterns. “Knock ‘Em Out” has a honky-tonk flavor, with a sampled acoustic piano riff supported by an acoustic drum pattern. “Shame For You” has a lazy funk feel, with a Moog bass line. And “Alfie”, probably the least conventional song on the album, references the children’s music genre.

Allen’s vocals have a number of defining characteristics, most notably her fake cockney, or “mockney,” accent, which clearly situates her as British. Her singing, although pitched and rhythmic, retains many qualities of speech, due to the extensive use of glottal sounds in “mockney” and the fast pace of her delivery. Her vocal tone is clean, intimate and vulnerable, and her voice is close-miked. In addition to the lead vocal lines

her voice adds texture to the songs' arrangements. "LDN" is the most obvious example, with the end of the song featuring her voice in four different roles – as the lead vocal singing the melody, as multi-tracked backing vocals harmonizing the melody, as held tones layering the instrumental harmony, and as background chimes. In many of the songs her vocal is doubled through multi-tracking, with one panned left, the other right. Her lead vocal also takes on a number of different guises, with "Knock 'Em Out", for instance, featuring Allen alternately as speaker, rapper, and singer.

Allen's lyrics tell stories of urban life through the eyes of a young, sexually active and self-consciously attractive woman. In the first song on the album, "Smile", Allen situates herself as the victim of an ex-boyfriend's infidelity. He has been "fucking that girl next door," and she can't understand why ("What d'ya do that for?"). She finds solace in her friends ("a little help from my friends"),⁸ who help her find the "light in the tunnel at the end." Her boyfriend, who has left her, nevertheless calls her up for a "little whine and a moan," which she puts down to him "feeling alone." The refrain celebrates his misery ("At first when I see you cry / Yeah it makes me smile, yeah it makes me smile / At worst I feel bad for a while / But then I just smile, I go ahead and smile"). In the second verse she reveals that he "messed up my mental health, I was quite unwell," but again, she recovered "with a little help from my friends."

"Knock 'Em Out" opens with, "Alright, this is a song about anyone, it could be anyone," before describing two situations, one in which a woman makes an unwanted

⁸ There are many drug references in Allen's songs, but in this case she seems to be referencing and at the same time resisting the Beatles' use of the term "friends" as a substitute for "drugs."

advance on a man, the other where a man makes an unwanted advance on a woman. In both instances the frustrations associated with an unwanted advance are articulated. “Can’t knock em out, can’t walk away / Try desperately to think of the politest way to say / Just get out my face, just leave me alone / And no you can’t have my number / Because I’ve lost my phone.” Although the song is situated as “about anyone,” the convention of a man asking a woman for a telephone number, as opposed to the other way around, suggests the paradigm situation described in this song is that of a woman harassed by a man. The bridge at the end confirms this bias. “Go away now, let me go / Are you stupid? Or just a little slow? / Go away now I’ve made myself clear / Nah it’s not gonna happen / Not in a million years.” So while the song crusades as a non-gendered call for the right to live free of sexual harassment, it speaks more immediately to women.

In “LDN”, her second single, Allen contrasts appearance and reality in her hometown of London. She says, “Everything seems to look as it should / But I wonder what goes on behind doors.” “A fella looking dapper” turns out to be a “pimp,” and a kid offering help to a woman “struggling with bags from Tesco” turns out to be a mugger who “doesn’t care if she’s dead.” Yet in the refrain Allen sings, “Sun is in the sky oh why oh why / Would I wanna be anywhere else?” Despite the fact that what seems “nice” often turns out to be “lies,” “that’s city life.”

“Everything’s Just Wonderful” shares some of the ambivalence of “LDN” but articulates an idealized vision of freedom and lack of societal constraint. She chides the “bureaucrats who won’t give me a mortgage” because of “bad credit” even though she’s “got your fucking money.” She resolves this tension through resignation. “Oh well I guess I mustn’t grumble / I suppose that’s just the way the cookie crumbles.” In the

second verse she expresses a desire to “change the ways of the world / Make it a nice place” but again resigns herself to the fact that we do “what we do / Screwing who we screw.” Later she takes up the theme of body image, claiming “I wanna be able to eat spaghetti Bolognese / And not feel bad about it for days and days and days.” She chastises the media for preying on women’s insecurities, claiming, “In the magazines they talk about weight loss / If I buy those jeans I can look like Kate Moss,” but ultimately resigns herself to the fact that, even though “it’s not the life I chose ... that’s the way that things go.”

“Not Big” describes Allen’s sexual disappointment with an ex-boyfriend. She asks, “How would it make you feel if I told you that you never ever made me come?” She then invokes a particular scenario of masculine pride (“I could see it in your face when you give it to me gentle / Yeah you really must think you’re great”) and threatens revenge with “Let’s see how you feel in a couple of weeks / When I work my way through your mates.” In the second verse she cites more sexual failures on her ex-boyfriend’s part – he “couldn’t get it up” and “became premature.” And in the chorus she claims he’s “rubbish in bed” and “small in the game.” Interestingly Allen’s attempts to emasculate her ex-boyfriend focus not only on highlighting his sexual failures, but his cluelessness about her drug use. “All those times that I said I was sober / Well I’m afraid I lied / I’d be lying next to you, you next to me / All the time I was high as a kite.” And while the song is almost completely free of self-doubt, she acknowledges that she may appear “kinda mental,” but puts this down to having been left “in such a state.”

“Friday Night” describes a night out with Allen and her friends. They stand in line for half an hour to get into a club, but when they “get to the front / [a] Girl on the guest

list dressed like a ...”⁹ asks security to check her for concealed drugs. Why the nameless girl makes the request is unknown, but Allen responds with, “There’s a lesson that I want you to learn / If you’re gonna play with fire then you’re gonna get burned.” In the song’s refrain Allen positions herself as the voice of maturity, claiming “I don’t know who you think you are / But making people scared won’t get you very far.” The song culminates in the beginnings of a fight between Allen and the girl. Lack of solidarity between Allen and other women is also evident in Allen’s comment, directed at an unidentified club goer, that her dancing is good “but you should of worn a bra.”

“Shame for You” sees Allen once again singing about an ex-boyfriend, one who is “not too cool” and “not so funny.” She accuses him of “spreading your seed all over the town,” of being “greedy and messing around.” In consequence she denies him the opportunity to sleep with her, claiming, “you must be joking me / If you think that you’ll be poking me.” In the second verse she threatens him with violence if he doesn’t leave her alone, claiming her brothers will “teach you a lesson or two,” leaving him “black and blue.” In the chorus she claims she has “shattered the lie” and as a result her “fuse is ready to blow.” Along with anger she adopts a position of moral disapprobation, criticizing her ex- for being promiscuous, for wasting her time and money, and for continuing to think they can “still be lovers.”

“Littlest Things”, her most recent single, is the closest Allen comes to a traditional love song. She fondly remembers key moments in a relationship with a former

⁹ Interestingly, the word “cunt” is censored, while “poke,” “fuck,” and “twat” are not. The liner notes include “c***” where the absent rhyme falls.

boyfriend, which include “play fighting,” “flirtatious disses,” and how they’d “spend the whole weekend lying in our own dirt / I was just so happy in your boxers and your t-shirt.” With longing she recalls how he would “take me out shopping and all we’d buy is trainers / As if we ever needed anything to entertain us.” She concludes that “no one in the world ... could replace you.”

In “Take What You Take”, a song Allen has since renounced with the words “I fucking hate that song more than anything in the world”,¹⁰ the two verses consist of unrelated idioms strung together in seemingly haphazard form. “A picture paints a thousand words / As one door opens another one closes” etc. In the bridge we learn that these clichés have issued from an older man as pieces of advice, to which Allen responds with, “What the fuck do you know? / Just cos you’re old you think you’re wise / But who the hell are you though / I didn’t even ask for your advice.” In the song’s refrain Allen offers her own advice, advocating authenticity as a guiding ethic. “Say what you say / Do what you do / Feel what you feel / As long as it’s real.”

A lost friendship with a girl friend is the subject of “Friend of Mine”, with Allen positioning herself as estranged from a girl she has known “since we were both at school,” who now “looks like a fool,” has “got no self-respect,” is being called a “whore,” and is unrecognizable (“Who are you, anyway?”) In the refrain Allen rejects her former friend, claiming “you’re no friend of mine girl / And I’ve known it for a while girl / You’re just a waste of time girl / Why don’t you have another line girl.” Her friend, it

¹⁰ Pitchfork Media. ‘Lily Allen: Interview by Scott Plagenhoef’. Accessed on December 7th, 2006. (http://pitchforkmedia.com/article/feature/39534/Interview_Interview_Lily_Allen).

seems, has succumbed to drug addiction.

The final song on the album, “Alfie”, is addressed to her brother, who she chastises for being “high on THC,” for staying in bed until “nearly quarter past three,” and watching TV in a room so smoky she can barely see. She tells him he’s wasting his life away, and that he should get off his “lazy arse” and use his brain. She asks him “how the hell do you ever expect that you’ll get laid / When all you do is stay and play on your computer games?” She feels guilty for “leading you astray,” and refers to him consistently as “my little brother” or “my baby brother.” Finally she calls him a “twat,” insults his “stupid fitted cap,” while at the same time telling him not to despair.

Promotional (Con)Texts

The most immediate contexts surrounding Allen’s music are promotional media that employ both traditional technologies (music videos) and new technologies (myspace weblog). The video to “Smile”, directed by Sophie Müller, who has also worked with the Eurythmics, Sade, Sinéad O’Connor and Coldplay, begins with Allen sitting alone on a bed eating chocolate and looking miserable, interspersed with images coded as memories of her and her ex-boyfriend embracing. Allen is next seen on an urban street corner talking to a man and giving him cash. He, in turn, is shown giving cash to other men and women, who attack her ex-boyfriend as he walks down the street. Next we see him being consoled by Allen in a local diner, while at the same time the hired thugs break into his apartment, smash his TV, throw his clothes down the toilet, and scratch the records in his DJ box, taking care to put them back as if they have not been touched. Meanwhile, as the boyfriend visits the washroom in the diner Allen laces his coffee with laxatives. He then

leaves the diner to return to his apartment, discovers the damage, but is clearly relieved that his precious record collection has not been touched. He once again turns to Allen for sympathy, and she again duplicitously consoles him, laughing to herself as he runs to the washroom as a result of the laxatives. The clip closes with him in a professional DJing situation, discovering for the first time that his records are all unplayable. Meanwhile Allen walks alone in a London street at night, smiling.

The video to “LDN”, directed by Nima Nourizadeh,¹¹ begins with a scene in a record store. Allen’s ‘Friend of Mine’ is playing in the background, as she asks two record store clerks if they have any

kind of like sort of punky electronica kind of rhyme kinda like new wave
rhyme kinda maybe like more broken beats like kinda dubby broken beats
but a little bit kind of soulful like kind of drum and bassy but kind of more
broken drum and bass like kind of broken beats like breakbeat kind of
broken drum and bass kind of ... dya know what I mean ... no?

The blank expressions on the record store clerks’ faces are interrupted by Allen’s cell phone ringing. She answers, and agrees to meet up with the caller. As Allen exits the record store and the song starts, the *mise-en-scène* shifts from one of muted grey tones to bright colors. Throughout the video a screen wipe is used to move from the portrayal of a scene in bright color to the portrayal of the same scene in muted colors, with key components altered. Thus a piece of candy on the street in high color is wiped away to

¹¹ The Nima Nourizadeh profile page on the Partizan website. Accessed on December 7th, 2006. (http://www.partizan.com/partizan/musicvideos/?nima_nourizadeh).

show the same scene in muted colors, with the candy revealed as a cigarette butt. Money is revealed to be dog faeces, a romantic suitor as a jilted husband, and a pencil as heroin works. Allen, meanwhile, acts as the stimulus for these revelations, the screen wipe following her movement across the screen – that is, as she walks from the left to the right side of the screen, the wipe follows her. The bright color scenes become increasingly absurd and magical as the video progresses, and by the time she arrives at the place where she has agreed to meet her friend, sailors in bright white uniforms mingle in what feels like a Caribbean carnival setting. When Allen’s cell phone rings, and her friend stands her up, the scene immediately switches to muted tones, and the carnival scene is replaced by a stark urban scene with maintenance workers and the sound of pneumatic drills. Allen, still in bright red frock, walks into the distance, kicking a large black bag of trash left out on the street as she goes.

In addition to music videos Allen promotes her music with a weblog hosted on myspace.com.¹² In her first posting, dated January 19, 2006, prior to the release of *Alright, Still*, Allen lists the tracks included on her first mixtape, an mp3 file posted on her myspace profile that users can download for free. These include four of her own songs (“LDN”, “Smile”, “Knock ‘Em Out” and “Cheryl Tweedy”) and nineteen songs by other artists, including Beats International, Creedance Clearwater Revival, The Specials, Vanessa Paradis, Rod Stewart, Squeeze and Ludacris. On February 15th, 2006, having made an additional track available for download, she writes, “Hope you all like my “Nan,

¹² Lily Allen blog hosted by myspace.com. Accessed on December 5th, 2006. (<http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.ListAll&friendID=36707169&MyToken=a1aa2311-5c7e-4c67-845d-edc7e9de3fd4ML>).

You're a Window Shopper" 50 cent piss take." By February 23rd, 2006, she is "in NME,"¹³ but laments the fact that "they did compare me to Lady Sovereign which is not great." On March 12th, 2006, she writes, "big thanks to Gilles Peterson, who played my song "LDN" on radio one,¹⁴ get ready for the takeover ."¹⁵ Five days later she is in a "posh" studio in London, celebrating the fact that "you get free tea and biscuits and proper food , which you can put on the bill, and the label picks it all up , SAFE !" Five days later she is "lying in bed in my lovely hotel in LA," feeling that she "should probably be by the pool but I'm too scared the skinny girls will make fun of me."

On March 27th, 2006, she writes

You may have noticed "knock em out " has been replaced by a new song called "everythings just wonderful" on the music player,¹⁶ I know some of you are unhappy about this , but that's the whole point isn't it ? I tease you with something and once you get comfortable , I take it away and the only way you're gonna hear it again is by getting off your lazy arses and going to "a good record shop" near you, and buying the 7" . ha ha . (only joking ish) . No the real reason I took it down is because I wanted your feedback on the new one.

¹³ *New Musical Express*, a British music newspaper

¹⁴ BBC Radio 1 is a national music radio station in the UK

¹⁵ I have retained the spelling, grammar and punctuation as it appears in the original blog entries.

¹⁶ The music player on a myspace profile page allows users to listen to or download song files

The next day she writes, “What the fuck ? my shit is on Limewire,¹⁷ you naughty people . Oh well , I haven’t got a problem with it , so long as a few of you buy the album , the main thing is that you’re enjoying yourselves.” She also says that she is “in the studio with Mark Ronson , my musical hero ,this week.”

On April 9th she writes, “I have to come up with my album title by the end of the week , so any suggestions would be much appreciated” and on April 30th she reviews the events of her week, which include the release of her first 7” single, “LDN”, a meeting with “Sophie Muller (a brilliant video director)” who “maybedoing my video for “Smile” (my next single)” and her brother throwing her laptop “into the street.” The next week she recounts how “the oddest thing happened.”

We were on the top of primrose hill , doing some shots in a red dress (ode to sugababes mk3) when we walked down and noticed a guy with a huge lens taking pictures , I looked behind me scanning fro a glimpse of.....? Who could it be ? Kate , Sienna , Donna Air, Kerry Mcfadden ? No , It was I, he was snapping , very strange indeed , good though , I won’t lie , I loved it , sick I know but I did .

In the same week she did her “First Gig.” During the first song “everyone sang at me so I don’t think anyone noticed how shit I sounded , but on the next song it was very apparent by the looks on peoples faces how rubbish I was , but then, as if by magic everything started working , and people danced and cheered , I laughed nervously and it was great.”

¹⁷ Limewire is a web-based resource for downloading music, often illegally i.e., without paying royalties.

On May 13th she posts an article written by Caroline Sullivan and published in *The Guardian*. In the article Sullivan claims Allen “now finds herself the focus of great expectations without actually having done anything.” Allen responds with, “saying I have “done nothing” suggests that making an album, sharing it with you lot and gaining a fanbase (1,300,000 plays)¹⁸ counts for fuck all, and that, I feel, is a little on the ignorant side.” She chastises Sullivan for not being able to distinguish between hype and “genuine interest.” She also responds to the criticism that, by singing with a “mockney” accent, she is “denying my middle class roots.” “The songs I sound mockney on I recorded when I was 18 and probably WAS pretending to be something I wasn’t, the album gets progressively posher though, infact the last thing I redcorded I practically sound like camilla parker bowles on.” Five days later, in a posting titled “I still don’t forgive that caroline sullivan but” she writes “tonight was a shit gig,” but claims this was due to technical problems. “I know a bad workman blames his tools and all that, but I had to fire my soundguy tonight, it was rubbish, and if i thought it was me I would put my hands up.” She offers to compensate those who came to the gig with “a mixtape or a t-shirt” if they send her “a message or something,” and ends the post with “I’m so embarrassed.”

By May 29th she has “shot my video for “smile”, it was directed by Sophie Muller who was amazing, I think the video turned out really well, it’s really sick and twisted but funny and sweet at the same time, so it suits the song and me perfectly.” By June 13 she feels “pretty big in the game right now” and posts a video of her Top of the

¹⁸ The metric “plays” refers to the number of times a song file on a myspace profile page is accessed

Pops appearance, but admits it's "a bit static I know , but Its my first time on tele and I was ufcking nervous." By July 1st she has completed her "first mini tour." She is "knackered"¹⁹ and "quite depressed because I've split up with my boyfriend." She writes, "This should be the happiest time in my life but to be honest , I feel alone and lost and find myself crying uncontrollably ." In the same post she thanks everyone who has bought "Smile", her "ironically titled first single," claiming she is "delighted" that it has been "No1 on the itunes chart for most of this week." By the time of her next posting on July 14th, titled "WHOAHOAH," she thanks everyone who "helped it ["Smile"] go to number 1 , I am so so grateful." When she was told by her manager that she was number 1 on the British charts she "couldn't fucking believe it , the best day of my life without a doubt." She then got "very very drunk" and "all that came out of my mouth for the rest of the day" was "Are you in a band ? cool , are you number 1 ? ... In other words I was being a right dick."

By October 2nd 2006 she is "finding it hard" to write a blog as "I'm knackered and fall asleep almost immediately after I start typing , and nothing funny has happened , and the press twist my shit and make me sound like a total cunt , maybe I am , I don't know anymore ." Her "solution" is to do a "picture blog ! yay , a picture with a caption . a video diary that doesn't move." By November 23rd, 2006, however, she is writing again, criticizing the editor of *NME*, Conor McNicholas, for saying women have "brought new energy to a scene dominated by men." Allen responds with, "we've always been here you arrogant prick." She accuses him of being "fucking patronizing" and tells him to "think

¹⁹ A slang term for tired or exhausted

about your responsibilities to youth culture , and to women in general .”

Answer Songs

Allen’s music, supported by its promotional context, elicited a variety of responses from mainstream media, music fans and other musicians, responses that constitute a secondary context for interpreting her music. Two of the most interesting responses are “answer” songs by well-known London-based rappers Example and Sway DeSafo. As the name suggests, an answer song answers a pre-existing song by retaining certain features of the original (normally the instrumental backing) while replacing others (normally the vocal track).²⁰ In Example’s answer to “Smile”, titled “Vile”, he takes up the subject position of Allen’s ex-boyfriend and directly references, responds to and expands on the narrative in Allen’s original. In the first verse he recounts how he bumped into one of Allen’s friends and was berated by her for “calling Lily every flipping day.” The friend tells him “Once you got your dick away you can’t just skip away and start getting jiggy with the whore next door.” Example responds by claiming Allen is a liar, that he didn’t cheat on her, that she cheated on him, that her public persona differs from her private one and if people knew what she was really like then “maybe they’d hate you [Allen] as much as you made ‘em hate me.” The chorus affirms this perspective, with the refrain, “At first you made me smile / It was nice for a while, but then you turned vile / I cursed I should have seen from a mile / You told them a pile / Why d’you act like a

²⁰ The concept became widespread in blues and R&B recorded music in the 1930s through 1950s. Answer songs were also extremely popular in country music in the 1950s and 1960s, most often as female responses to an original hit by a male artist. Today, this practice is most common in hip hop music, especially as the continuation of a feud between performers.

child.”

The second verse provides a back-story to the narrative in the original, again told from the perspective of the ex-boyfriend.

When we first hooked up it was pleasant and exciting
Dinner down the local, weekends in Brighton
Saturday watching Fulham play at the cottage
With our stoppage time goal and we both went mental
Now I'm being sentimental gotta stop doing that
Cos I can't stop thinking about you and that
Tosser from the chip shop he don't even like hip hop
But you still went behind my back
And it's killing me you're chilling while you're filling in your friends
Spilling rubbish out your mouth making me to be the villain
See I disagree yeah with your methods entirely
You can't write a song about me and be a liar
We both know I never shagged the girl next door
And I don't give you phone calls asking for more
You're switching it on me cos you're needy love
Look don't be bitter cos you ain't Cheryl Tweedy²¹

²¹ Cheryl Tweedy is a British pop star Allen has written a song about.

Example's "Vile" thus retells the story in Allen's "Smile" from a different perspective, retaining some features (the instrumental tracks, formal structure) while changing others (vocal delivery, lyrics).

London rapper Sway Desafo's response song to "LDN"²² also features key elements of the original, including the instrumental tracks and parts of Allen's vocal, but replaces the verse section with raps on topics as diverse as his "willy," his London background, his reasons for not doing drugs, and his disappointment that he didn't win the prestigious Mercury music prize. In the final verse he addresses Allen directly.

Lily, when I first heard you I admit I was a little mean
I was kinda thinking that maybe that you couldn't sing
I bought your album thought that it was alright, still
No pun intended but wow you do your own special thing
So I wrote you a myspace message you never replied Lily (Why?)
If I write you another one then what am I, Lily?
It often comes to mind that you would want to come to mine, Lily
If I manage to make you smile would you want to sit on my ...
No I haven't got a one-track mind, Lily
But I've got this one track in mind
That could be my single, are you single?
If not let's mingle, come and help me on my LP
I'll do a track for yours if you do a track for mine, Lily

²² Lily Allen featuring Sway. "LDN". Accessed on December 7th, 2006. (<http://hype.non-standard.net/track/181137>).

The song culminates with DaSafo asking Allen to “Holler at me / Get my number from somebody / I want to talk to you.”

Example and DaSafo’s answers to Allen’s most well-known hits are themselves an answer to a compositional strategy employed by Allen herself, as a track included on the American edition of *Alright, Still* and referred to in Allen’s blog entry of 15th February, 2006 – “Nan, you’re a window shopper” – is itself an “answer” to African-American rapper 50 Cent’s “Window shopper”. 50 Cent’s version begins with the statement “The top is so much better than the bottom / So much better,” a reference to his material success. Later he celebrates his “white Porsche Carrera,” in which he drives through poor neighborhoods, all the while keeping his gun close by in case he needs to set off a “full clip.” He refuses to take responsibility for the hardship of others (“It ain’t my fault you done fucked up your re-up”), especially when that hardship is caused by gambling (“At the dice game who told you to put a G up”). In the bridge, he once again invokes his car as status symbol, celebrating that “when we got the tops down, you can hear the system thump / Nigga when we rollin’ rollin’ rollin’,” while the threat of violence inspired by jealousy is kept at bay with the recognition that he’s “quick to put a hole in a chump / Nigga when we rollin’ rollin’ rollin’.” In the second verse 50 cent situates himself as a successful black male with an entourage of men and women at his beck and call. He watches “Cali girls freak off” as an antidote to the stresses and strains of business travel, spits “G at a bitch like a pimp man,” and conducts his “sex game” at the 4-star Mondrian hotel. In the bridge leading into the final chorus, sexual advantage and material advantage are directly allied, for while he is “holing, holing, holing” in luxurious surroundings, the impoverished other is defending himself against the

watchfulness of suspicious storeowners.

The promotional video for “Window shopper” builds on the song’s narrative of the self-made man. Before the music starts, a teenage 50 Cent looks longingly at a pair of sneakers in a store window. Two African-American boys stand behind him, pointing and laughing, while his friend reassures him that, “you’ll get those shoes one day, don’t worry about it.” The remainder of the video shows an adult 50 Cent in Monaco buying luxury goods, with the cost of each item purchased flashed on the screen (i.e., Cohiba \$300, Hamburger \$400 etc.) Most of the vendors are part of a wealthy white elite. When 50 Cent signals to an elderly, well-dressed man smoking a cigar outside a luxury hotel that he would like one, the man reaches in his pocket, hands him a Cohiba, and has some bills dismissively tossed at him for his trouble. The clip culminates with 50 Cent purchasing a \$16 million yacht, as the now grown-up boy who had been laughing at him in his youth struggles to keep his \$300 dinghy afloat.

In Lily Allen’s reponse to “Window shopper” she inverts much of the overt and covert values – both aesthetic and ethical – in the original. Rapping in a female register, she begins by inverting the direction of his opening line, claiming, “The bottom feels so much better than the top / So much better” (interestingly she also substitutes the subjective “feel” for the objective “is” in the original). This sentiment is supported by her use of mockney, a fake cockney accent. She then paints an erotically tinged picture of her elderly grandmother, a far cry from 50 cent’s depiction of glamorous, youthful sexuality. She retains certain words in their original placements, but alters their context to invert their meanings. Thus while 50 cent’s Porsche is “milky” white, the word “milky” in Allen’s version describes the way Nan likes her tea. Similarly the repeated word “rollin’

rollin', rollin',” which in the original describes 50’s Porsche, in Allen’s response refers to Nan’s bowling balls and later, her shopping trolley. In the final bridge, the line “I came up from doing my thing / Homey I’m holing, holing, holing” becomes in Allen’s version “You’ve got a leak in your colostomy bag / Yeah it’s got a hole in, hole in, hole in.”

Discussion Forums

The texts that constitute part of the context of Allen’s *Alright, Still* are themselves texts in their own right with their own associated contexts. Consider the following exchange (Anons., 2008) posted on the popular video sharing website youtube.com in response to the promotional video of Example’s ‘Vile’.

- ichbineinbanana OMG I LOVE IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- hotFEmale1984: thats so sad!!! its like ur 1 frankies comeback 2 eamon-
SHIT!!!! get over it mate-its not like HE ever went wi lily
allen n the boyf the songs about has alredy admitted he DID
cheat n do all the stuff in the song!!!
- ornamcevoy: its not like he's pretending he went out with lily allen! it's
just a fun song, lily herself probably thinks this is funny,
example's quality x
- hotFEmale1984: i no he never went out wi her-i just think its really sad hes
jumping on the bandwagon!! total rip off and not even
funny!!! disappointed!!!
- richakooooooo: hotFEmale1984 u fool. its well adapted u mug and tbh it
works better than her own version, bizarrely. ur just bitter
he ripped of one of your MAINSTREAM ponces.
- hotFEmale1984: ok...so im not allowed an opinon am i not?? i think its a

cheap imitation n it sucks-u may feel its good thats your opinion!!! and im really not "bitter" cuz i have a life but im glad u admitted that he ripped it off-which was my point in the first place!!! THANK YOU!!! :)

psb87: he didnt rip it off....he took a decent song....and made it AWESOME!

WeOperateTheDeceased: hotFEmale1984 get over yourself, he covered someones song n changed the words to put it from the other point of view, its not like he stole the song ripped it off & made millions out of her is it, go & catch herpes you half wit slapper

hotFEmale1984: im so not getting in2 this again-it is my OPINION that i personally dont like the song-ok-get over it!!! im voicing my opinion-u dont have 2 agree!!! my god!! how sad!!

WeOperateTheDeceased: fuck off & take your shit opinion with you, go talk to eamon about his video reply, coz you knew psoting that one here would cause a stir.

This excerpt begins with an unsupported expression of enthusiasm for Example's 'Vile' by ichbineinbanana. hotFEmale1984 responds by decrying ichbineinbanana's praise on the grounds that 1) "Vile" is derivative, a copy of American popular singer Frankee's answer to Eamon's "Fuck It (I Don't Want You Back)" and 2) in contrast to Frankee's answer to Eamon, which was based on factual events, Example's response is imaginary, a pretense, a distortion of the factual record. Ornamcevoy responds with support for ichbineinbanana, suggesting Example is not "pretending" but simply having "fun." hotFEmale1984 concedes her second critique may not be justified, but maintains that "Vile" is derivative and consequently disappointing. Richakooooooooo responds with an

insult to hotFEmale1984, and the discussion quickly degenerates into more insults, with hotFEmale1984 maintaining she has a right to her opinions and others insulting her for expressing those opinions.

Interpretation

In this chapter I have described the music of Lily Allen, its immediate contexts and the contexts of those contexts. In this concluding section I suggest a framework for interpreting these cultural phenomena.

Revenge, resistance, resignation, aggression, violence, authenticity, dependency, and deception are just some of the themes recurring in the songs, videos and blog postings of Lily Allen. In many of her songs Allen situates herself as the hapless victim of the antisocial behavior of others, whether it be ex-boyfriends who cheat on her (“Smile”), men who hit on her (“Knock ‘Em Out”) or older men who give her unwanted advice (“Take What You Take”). She responds by threatening revenge through violence (“Smile” and “Shame for You”), public shaming (“Not Big”), or rejection (“Friend of Mine”). In situations that are impersonal, however, she responds with resignation, accepting that “city life” will inevitably involve hypocrisy, and living in the world requires accepting “the way that things go” – we “musn’t grumble.” The male characters in her songs are whiners, moaners, lonely, stupid, slow, sexually inadequate, arrogant, impotent, unfunny, uncool, greedy, and lazy. The female characters also lack dignity, with one “dressed like a cunt,” another “should of worn a bra,” and another “looks like a fool,” has no “self-respect” and is a “waste of time.” Even her own family is depicted negatively, with her brother described as a “twat” and “lazy,” and her grandmother as

stingy, senile, decrepit, odorous, suspicious and ridiculous. In contrast, Allen situates herself as the arbiter of moral authority. She claims her boyfriends were wrong to cheat on her, the girl at the club was wrong for asking security to check her for drugs, her (ex)-friend is wrong for doing drugs and getting a reputation as a whore, an older man is wrong for giving clichéd advice, her brother is wrong for wasting his time smoking drugs and playing video games, and the editor of *NME* is wrong for patronizing women.

The primary discriminating value in these affirmations and condemnations of social norms seems to be authenticity. In “Take what you take” she overtly champions personal authenticity (“Say what you say / Do what you do / Feel what you feel / As long as it’s real”), and authenticity is also an orienting value in her blog entries. She is seemingly honest about her desire for power (“get ready for the takeover”), her insecurities (“I’m too scared the skinny girls will make fun of me”), her performances (“tonight was a shit gig”), and her failings (“I was being a right dick”). In addition, she acknowledges her situatedness within a capitalist enterprise, saying she is “only joking ish” when she says, about removing a song from her free download area, that she has done it to increase record sales. There are also moments of self-awareness and self-definition, when she describes the video for smile as “sick and twisted but funny and sweet at the same time,” and this suits “me perfectly.” At other times she wonders if “maybe I am” a “total cunt” like the press make her out to be.

But the most unifying and consistent theme in Allen’s varied cultural production is not a theme at all but rather two qualities – irony and humor. In her blog she refers to

the “ironically-titled” “Smile” and in interviews²³ she has acknowledged that the line “I wish I looked like Cheryl Tweedy” (in her song “Cheryl Tweedy”, not reviewed here as it does not appear on *Alright, Still*) was “meant to be ironic ... it was a joke that not many people got.” She also claims her reputation as a cocaine addict in the British press was a result of an ironic “joke” that was willfully misinterpreted by the press.

I was having a long conversation with them [*NME*] about drugs in the music industry, and the next question after that was, “how are you going to celebrate your No. 1 [single] this weekend?” And I went, “Oh, *gak!*”²⁴ as a joke, because we had just had this whole talk about drugs.²⁵

Allen claims *NME* took the quote out of context and sold the story to the tabloids as a sensational admission of Class A drug use by one of Britain’s leading role models. This story demonstrates the extent to which irony, if it is to function as irony, is highly dependent on context and a shared frame of reference. The irony in “Nan, you’re a window shopper”, for instance, is only apparent if the listener is familiar with 50 cent’s “Window Shopper”, on which Allen’s version signifies. Only when heard within this frame does Allen’s song become less about her grandmother, and more about the differences between black and white, male and female, English and American cultures. Similarly, the irony in “Alfie” is only apparent when a background context of sibling

²³ Fametastic website. ‘Lily Allen: I wasn’t complementing Cheryl Tweedy’. Accessed on December 7th, 2006. (<http://fametastic.co.uk/archive/20060821/2252/lily-allen-i-wasnt-complementing-cheryl-tweedy/>).

²⁴ British slang for cocaine

²⁵ Pitchfork Media. ‘Lily Allen: Interview by Scott Plagenhoef’. Accessed on December 7th, 2006. (http://pitchforkmedia.com/article/feature/39534/Interview_Interview_Lily_Allen).

affection is assumed. As Allen herself notes

At first he [Allen's brother, about whom the song is written] was really upset about it, because he thought that I was just pointing out all of his bad points and attacking him. I thought it was really flattering [Laughs]. I thought he'd be really, really happy because it proved to him how much I love him, that I care about him, and I want him to do something with his life.²⁶

Allen's use of irony introduces a high degree of instability into her cultural production. Indeed, the multiple layers of contrast in her music, detailed below, create a fundamental incoherence in her music, that would not be the case if, say, the instrumental backing and the gender performance were congruent (a provocative femininity with a punk instrumentation, say).

Table 1: Multiple layers of contrast in *Alright, Still*

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Conventional accompaniment | Unconventional lyrics |
| Clean vocal delivery | Harsh glottal vocal sounds |
| Cockney (working class) | Mockney (indeterminate class) |
| Passive vulnerability in verses | Aggressive sadism in choruses |
| Passive and resigned in some songs | Active and outraged in other songs |

²⁶ Ibid.

This incoherence does not prevent her music reaching a mass audience, however, because whereas commercially-successful popular musicians in the pre-Internet era were dependent on A&R (Artist & Repertoire) departments, club owners, radio station managers, and the music press, that demanded coherence for the sake of marketing to niche audiences, new technologies in the Internet era allow for a more direct engagement on the part of audiences with the full complexity of musician's identities. Thus Allen situates her music in direct relationship with other musics through the distribution of mixtapes (thereby fulfilling the traditional role of a radio station), supports her music with her own blog (thereby fulfilling the traditional role of the music press), and allows her fans to interact with her directly, both in musical terms with answer songs and verbally with online chat forums (thereby deepening the musician-listener relationship). Allen is thus both the producer and the cultural institutions that support her music, bringing a seemingly marginal music (insofar as it does not conform to generic marketing distinctions) to a mass audience. It is for this reason she has been described as Pop Star 2.0²⁷ in the popular music press, her success attributed specifically to the use of new technologies in the broadband Internet era.

Characteristics of Ethnographic Writing about Music

In this chapter I described the music of Lily Allen and its contexts using an ethnographic approach, beginning with a single musical text and working outward to its surrounding contexts. In discussing Allen's music I kept my descriptions as neutral as

²⁷ Internet in the broadband era is often referred to as Web 2.0 (i.e., the second iteration or "version" of the web).

possible, resisting the urge to critically interpret her music or ascribe intentions in the absence of concrete data (although the choices I made about what to talk about clearly demonstrates the impossibility of neutrality). In conclusion I suggested possible frameworks for interpreting Allen's music, derived from my engagement with her music and its various cultural contexts. Thus in writing ethnographically about music I situated music as a cultural phenomenon, part of a complex web of meaning in which cultural context plays a pivotal role.

Chapter 7: Genealogical Writing About Music

Genealogical writing about music shares some of the qualities of ethnographic writing, but whereas ethnographic writing seeks to describe a text in relation to its context, genealogical writing describes a text in relation to its precursors and successors. Thus in this chapter I write genealogically about “Carmen,” a novella by Prosper Mérimée, a libretto by Meilhac and Halévy, an opera by Georges Bizet, a performance by the Metropolitan Opera and, as *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, a film by Mark Dornford-May, asking what, ultimately, the word “Carmen” refers to in this context.

Prosper Mérimée’s *Carmen*

The word Carmen was first used as a proper name by Prosper Mérimée in his novella of the same name published in French in 1845 in *La Revue des deux mondes*. *La Revue* was a non-fiction travel journal that occasionally published fiction, and although Mérimée’s story is fiction, this is not readily apparent, as the narrator, in the first paragraph, presents himself as an archeologist, intent on publishing a scholarly article showing that the battlefield of Munda is not in the territory of Bastuli-Poeni but in the Montilla area. The story of Carmen and her jealous lover don José is merely “a little story” (Mérimée, 1845/1984, p. 3) he tells while waiting “for my thesis to resolve, once and for all, the geographical problem that is keeping all the scholars of Europe in suspense” (p. 3). The fictional status of Mérimée’s text is further masked by footnotes that buttress the narrator’s claims to anthropological expertise. The sentence “I noticed that he [don José] didn’t pronounce his *s* in Andalusian style” (p. 5) in the narrative proper, for instance, is referenced to a footnote that reads “Andalusians aspirate the *s*, and

do not distinguish it in pronunciation from the soft *c* and *z*, which the Spanish pronounce like the English *th*. Just by the way he says *Señor* you can recognize an Andalusian” (p. 57). The footnote has little bearing on the development of the plot, but contributes to our understanding of the character of the narrator, which in turn opens up new meanings in the text (more on this later).

Mérimée’s *Carmen* consists of three chapters. In the first a nameless narrator meets don José in the high grounds of the Carchena plain and shares a cigar, food, and a room with him before learning that he is a renowned murderer and that Antonio, the narrator’s guide, is intent on claiming a reward by informing the authorities of his whereabouts. The narrator alerts don José of Antonio’s intent, thereby saving him from imminent arrest. In the second chapter the narrator meets Carmen, a Gypsy witch, in Cordova. Having invited himself to her home on the pretext of having his cards read, they are interrupted by a man “in a really bad mood” (p. 17) who turns out to be “my friend don José” (p. 17). Carmen and don José argue passionately, and the narrator leaves, later discovering that his watch is missing. Several months later, on returning to Cordova, he learns that don José is in custody and will be hanged. The narrator visits don José in jail, at which point the narrative voice is ceded to don José with the words “It is from his lips that I learnt of the tragic adventure that you are about to read” (p. 20).

In chapter three don José tells his story, which includes the following key plot points:

- 1) Don José, a Basque and a Christian, is a brigadier guarding the tobacco factory in Seville
- 2) Carmen, a gypsy, is one of a number of women employed in the factory

- 3) Carmen is flirtatious and popular with local men
- 4) Carmen flirts with don José by flicking a cassia flower at him
- 5) A fight breaks out in the factory and Carmen is arrested
- 6) Don José is charged with taking her to gaol
- 7) Carmen convinces José to let her escape
- 8) José is sent to gaol as punishment
- 9) José becomes increasingly obsessed with Carmen
- 10) Carmen arouses José's jealousy by flirting with other officers
- 11) José, in an act of jealousy, kills a lieutenant
- 12) José, to avoid the death penalty, leaves Seville to become a smuggler
- 13) Carmen's *rom* (husband), Garcia, is released from gaol
- 14) José, in an act of jealousy, kills Garcia
- 15) Carmen becomes increasingly fatalistic
- 16) Carmen falls for a picador named Lucas
- 17) José asks Carmen to go with him to America. Carmen refuses
- 18) José tells Carmen he's tired of killing her lovers and will kill her this time
- 19) Carmen says she always thought he would kill her. "It is written" (p. 47).
- 20) In a fury, José kills Carmen by stabbing her twice with Garcia's knife
- 21) José digs a grave and buries the body in a wood
- 22) José turns himself in, but will not say where Carmen is buried

These plot points constitute the central thrust of Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy's libretto for Bizet's *Carmen*. But Bizet's opera does not include the unnamed

archeological narrator, the first, second, or fourth chapters²⁸ as well as other key aspects of Mérimée's text. Do Bizet's opera and Mérimée's novella thus tell the same story, or do their narratives differ? The answer to this question depends on what we take the essence of a narrative to be. In the next section I look at Meilhac and Halévy's adaptation of Mérimée's story, asking at what point a narrative ceases to be itself.

Meilhac and Halévy's *Carmen*

Bizet's *Carmen* (1875/1989) takes the central plot points of chapter three of Mérimée's novella and sets them to music. I discuss the contribution of Bizet's musical setting to the narrative of *Carmen* later, but first I want to draw attention to various aspects of Mérimée's novella that are jettisoned by Meilhac and Halévy in their libretto for Bizet's opera. As previously noted, Mérimée's text consists of two different narrators. One, the unnamed archeologist, who situates the story of don José and Carmen in relation to his more expansive studies of Andalusian history, tells the story of his own encounters with don José and Carmen, and makes anthropological claims about gypsy culture; and the other, don José, who tells the story of his obsessive love for Carmen and its consequences. The relationship between these two narratives is highlighted when, in chapter three, Mérimée writes (as the unnamed archeologist recounting the words of don José), "It was round about then, sir, that I met you, first near Montilla, then later on in Cordova. I won't remind you of our last interview. Maybe you know more about it than I do" (p. 46). Don José is here referring to a moment recounted in the archeologist's

²⁸ While Mérimée's original text published in 1845 in *La Revue des deux mondes* had only three chapters, the novella published in 1847 included an additional fourth chapter in which the unnamed narrator of the first two chapters returns with anthropological observations on the physical characteristics, socio-cultural norms, spiritual beliefs, and language of Spanish gypsies.

narrative where “The door suddenly burst open, and a man, wrapped to the eyes in a brown cloak [don José], came into the room pouring out a volley of ungracious abuse on the Gypsy” (p. 17). Thus Mérimée presents us with the same moment in time at two different points in his text, viewed from two different perspectives. This narrative multi-perspectivism²⁹ (as opposed to character multi-perspectivism) is not present in Bizet’s opera.

Bizet’s librettists also jettison aspects of Mérimée’s text that draw attention to narrative itself. In chapter one, having helped don José escape imminent arrest, the archeologist wonders

If I’d been right to save a thief, and perhaps a murderer, from the gallows... Hadn’t I betrayed my guide who was upholding the Law? Hadn’t I exposed him to the vengeance of a wicked man? But the laws of hospitality!... The prejudice of a savage, I told myself; I will have to answer for all the crimes which that bandit will commit... But is it really such a prejudice, this instinctive conscience that resists all our powers of reasoning? Perhaps, in the delicate situation in which I found myself, I was going to feel remorse whichever decision I made. (p. 12)

In this paragraph the archeologist raises questions about narrative, asking a) to what extent actions consequent to decisions can be predicted (“Hadn’t I exposed him to the

²⁹ It should be noted that this narrative multi-perspectivism is strictly speaking the illusion of multi-perspectivism, for don José’s narrative is actually recounted by the unnamed archeologist, as indicated by the words “I was born – he told me – in Elizondo ...” (p. 20), and consequently may not accurately reflect don José’s own perspective i.e., the archeologist’s account of don José’s narration may be unreliable.

vengeance of a wicked man?”); b) to what extent the actions of others consequent to his own actions are his responsibility (“I will have to answer for all the crimes which that bandit will commit”); c) whether decisions with narrative implications can ever be rational (“this instinctive conscience that resists all our powers of reasoning”); and d) if certain situations inevitably require compromised decisions (“I was going to feel remorse whichever decision I made”). In raising these questions the archeologist differs from don José, who in a similar meta-narrative moment in his narration, claims

a man can turn into a rogue without even thinking about it. A pretty girl makes you lose your head, you get into a fight over her, there’s a nasty accident, you have to live in the mountains, you start out as a smuggler and before you’ve even thought about it you’ve turned into a thief. (p. 38)

Whereas the archeologist conceives of narrative as undetermined, based on concrete choices, even if those choices are often instinctual rather than rational, don José sees it as pre-determined, his own fate set in motion by factors beyond his control.³⁰ Neither one of these meta-narrative moments is present in Meilhac and Halévy’s libretto.

Merimée’s *Carmen* and Meilhac and Halévy’s libretto thus differ substantially in terms of their narration, but do these differences substantially alter the narrative? If we take the narrative of *Carmen* to be simply the essential plot points, as outlined in chapter three of Mérimée’s text, the rhetorical devices employed by Mérimée, such as multiple narrators and meta-narrative moments, do not substantially impact the text’s underlying

³⁰ This lack of control is conveyed as much in the form as the content of these two sentences, the universal “man” and “you” substituting for his own lived experience i.e., theory substituting for narrative.

structure. If, on the other hand, we take the complete text, including its various rhetorical devices, as part and parcel of the narrative, Mérimée's novella and Bizet's opera share a plot but not a narrative. Narrative and theory are thus intimately entwined, as we cannot develop a theory of narrative without that theory relying on a pre-existing conception of narrative. This problem becomes even more pronounced when we consider plot, which we took to be the minimal condition of narrative in the discussion above. In Bizet's opera, unlike Mérimée's novella, don José does not kill the lieutenant. Is the plot changed as a result? In Bizet's opera, Carmen has no *rom* (husband) and consequently don José does not kill him either. Does that substantially alter the plot? And in Meilhac and Halévy's libretto the story concludes with don José stabbing Carmen – there is no talk of burial, or of him turning himself in, as there is in the novella. Is the plot still the same? And how might we decide what constitutes the integrity of the plot without invoking some kind of theory of narrative that originates outside narrative itself? For what we take to be narrative is grounded in theory, grounded in narrative, grounded in theory etc. etc. Theory and narrative are thus co-dependent, defined in relation to each other in a never-ending circularity.

Bizet's *Carmen*

But what of music? How does Bizet's score function with respect to Meilhac and Halévy's libretto? Is it part of the opera's narrative or extra- to it? Whether Bizet's music can be said to narrate depends on what we take narration to be. If we identify narrative with plot, Bizet's music clearly narrates, as the singers sing words, such as "Cette bague, autrefois, tu me l'avais donnée. Tiens. (This ring that you once gave me – Take it)" (Bizet, 1875/1989, p. 571) that, along with accompanying actions, tell the story of

Carmen and don José. But the singers also sing in ways that do not directly contribute to the plot. Carmen's recurring use of the syllables "Tra la la la" (p. 191), for instance, contributes to our understanding of her character, but does not necessarily advance the action of the opera. Melody, harmony and rhythm also contribute to our understanding of her character, without necessarily advancing the plot. The chromatic melody of the Habanera and the flamenco rhythms of the Seguidilla, for instance, "describe" Carmen, just as the words "Hers was a strange and savage beauty, a face which at first made you stand and stare but which you couldn't forget" (p. 16) do in Mérimée's novella. While this kind of character description differs from plot description (i.e., "Don José took me by the arm, opened the door and led me out into the street" (pp. 17-18)) it can still be considered narration insofar as plot relies on characters, and characters must be described if they are to exist in any meaningful sense.

Narrative in Bizet's opera can also be considered metaphorically. In *Georges Bizet, Carmen* (1992) Susan McClary argues that conventional Western narratives require both a protagonist and something that stands in contrast to that protagonist. Don José, she claims, sees himself as the protagonist in a narrative of this type, with Carmen, subordinate with respect to gender, race and class, standing in for the contrasting other. Carmen, however, refuses to accept her subordinate role, hijacking the standard narrative through seductive cabaret tunes that marginalize the more traditional musical discourse of don José. Ultimately, though, *Carmen* capitulates to the standard Western narrative, with don José overpowering Carmen in the final scene, thereby reasserting the dominance of the protagonist over the contrasting other, even if an element of narrative slippage has occurred by virtue of don José's fate being undetermined at the close of the opera. This

theory of narrative allows McClary to interpret much of Bizet's score as both an instance of, and a commentary on, standard Western narrative conventions. The motive first introduced in the d minor section of the prelude and recurring periodically throughout the opera is, in McClary's analysis, "linked explicitly both to the gypsy Carmen and to don José's fatal, anguished attraction to her" (p. 66) by virtue of its augmented second, an interval that has "long been associated in Western music either with exotic Others (Jews, 'Orientals', gypsies) or (in say, the words of Bach) with extreme affective states such as anguish." Similarly, "slinky chromaticism" (p. 69) is linked to sexuality (both Carmen's and Micaela's), African-Latin rhythms are associated with physicality, and changes in key represent threats to narrative stability. On this view Bizet tells the story of Carmen using culturally determined musical symbols that directly enact the opera's plot.

Carolyn Abbate (1991), however, in her book *Unsung voices*, questions the value of seeing narrative in music as the enacting of a dramatic plot. She asks, "For what musical element, structure, gesture, effect, or device is 'narrative' a satisfying descriptive characterization?" (p. x). A narrative metaphor, she claims, is guilty of "interpretive promiscuity" (p. xi), to be applied indiscriminately to every moment of every piece of music. "How much intellectual pleasure do we derive from a critical methodology that generates such uniformity and becomes a mere machine for naming any and all music?" (p. xi). If narrative is to have any meaning when applied to music, we must be able to distinguish between narrative and non-narrative music, just as we distinguish between narrative and non-narrative texts. I will return to this statement later, but first I will explore Abbate's concept of diegesis more fully.

For Abbate narrative is closely associated with voice, where “voice” refers to “certain isolated and rare gestures in music, whether vocal or nonvocal” (p. ix) that transcend the actual historical composer, the composer as s/he exists within the work, any one of the voices of the performers, and the voices of the characters within the plot. Abbate thus presents a more restricted view of narrative in music, pointing to particular moments of diegesis, when temporally and morally distanced voices recount phenomenal events that “distance us from the sensual matter of what we are hearing, that speak across it” (p. xii), in contrast to the simple unscrolling or mimetic enactments of music that is congruous with itself. Narrative moments such as these are “disruptive and charged with a sense of both distance and difference” (p. xii), they “contain elements of the fantastic” (p. xii), they are a “zone of noncongruence in music” (p. xii), moments when we sense within [the events of music] the voices of commentators that enunciate them” (p. xii). Abbate asks, “How does this constructed ‘they’ seem to speak? Why do we hear them? What is their force? Precisely which musical gestures can be read as betraying their presence?” Because these narrating voices have been overlooked, and because they can only be accessed through “second hearing” (the aural equivalent of second sight), Abbate considers them “unsung voices.” Diegetic moments in music are rare, Abbate claims, because most music traps “the listener in present experience and the beat of passing time, from which he or she cannot escape” (p. 53). This is true of Bizet’s *Carmen*, which, in contrast to Mérimée’s novella, does not include any diegetic moments in its score. Mérimée’s epigraph (a quotation from Greek poet Palladas, which translates as, “Every woman is poison. But she has two good times: one when she’s in bed, and the other when dead” (p. 57)), his temporally and morally removed narrator (the archeologist) and his

final theoretical chapter (which contrasts sharply with both the archeologists and don José's narratives) are all jettisoned by Bizet's librettists with no equivalent narrative distance introduced by Bizet in the scoring of that libretto. Bizet's *Carmen* can thus be said to narrate insofar as it tells a story (i.e., brings characters, actions and events together in causal relationships), and insofar as its musical structures can be interpreted metaphorically (as McClary has done). But it does not narrate when narration is understood as diegesis, as the articulation of a voice that lies outside the plot and is both temporally and morally removed from it.

Performances of Bizet's *Carmen*

In this section I look at two film versions of Bizet's opera to see to what extent they incorporate moments of diegetic narration. Film adaptations of Bizet's *Carmen* tend to fall into one of two categories – those that merely record or chronicle a “live” performance of the opera (i.e., Glyndebourne, Metropolitan Opera) and those that re-write and/or substantially re-interpret the opera (*Carmen Jones*, *Karmen Gei*, *Carmen: A hip-opera*). In both instances possibilities for diegetic narration exist, with even seemingly insignificant elements opening up new intertextual relationships that allow unsung voices to enter in.

The opening credits of Deutsche Grammophon's video recording of the Metropolitan Opera's 1989 production of *Carmen* (Bizet, 1989b) appear in front of the water fountains in Lincoln Center where the Metropolitan Opera is housed. This highlights the context of the opera's production, creating a distinction between the action on the stage and the actions of the opera's production, which includes James Levine conducting, the musicians in the pit playing, and the audience applauding. Brian Large,

the director of the video, thus invites a reading not only of this particular production of Bizet's *Carmen*, but this particular production in its North American cultural context. The action on the stage and the context of the opera's production conflict because Micaela, played by Leona Mitchell, is African-American. By casting an African-American in the role of don José's maternally sanctioned love interest, and a white woman, Greek singer Agnes Baltsa, in the role of Carmen, the exotic, untamed "Other," racial stereotypes embedded in the context of the opera's production are desedimented and inverted. When Micaela sings of Carmen

Je vais voir de près cette femme dont les artifices maudits ont fini par faire
un infâme de celui que j'aimais jadis! Elle est dangereuse, elle est belle,
mais je ne veux pas avoir peur! Non, non, je ne veux pas avoir peur! Je
parlerai haut devant elle! Ah Seigneur, vous me protégerez!

I will see up close this woman whose accursed wiles have made a criminal
of the man I once loved. She is dangerous, she is beautiful, but I do not
want to be afraid. No, no, I do not want to be afraid. I will speak up before
her! Lord, you will protect me! (Bizet, 1875/1989)

she invokes stereotypes of the exotic Other that, in this instance and context, issue from the mouth of an exoticized Other. While we can fail to hear the "unsung voice" engendered by this disconcerting reversal of traditional roles by adopting a color-blind approach to operatic casting, seeing race as simply an incidental characteristic of opera singers, secondary to vocal and acting ability, *Carmen*'s libretto actively resists such an interpretation, with ethnicity not only playing a pivotal role in the opera's drama, but

specific lines, such as don José's "Tout vous dit Bohémienne (Everything declares you a gypsy)" situating ethnicity as an overt, primary characteristic.

If seemingly arbitrary consequences of operatic casting can introduce moments of diegesis into an otherwise purely mimetic opera, wholesale revisions of the opera can produce similar effects. British born South-African director Mark Dornford-May's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2006) revises the setting, characters, action, and language of Bizet's score to create multiple moments of diegesis that arise as a consequence of setting Bizet's opera in a contemporary South African context. The film opens with a quotation from Mérimée's *Carmen*, translated into Xhosa, spoken by an off-screen male voice. As the camera zooms in on the face of Pauline Malefane, the South African actress/singer playing Carmen, the voice comments on Carmen's "strange, wild beauty." The camera then pulls back at breakneck speed to reveal Carmen sitting in a shack in the poverty-stricken township on the outskirts of Cape Town, an exotic scene, but one that, in contrast to Bizet's Seville, frightens more than charms. This element of threat becomes more pronounced in the opening Chorus of the Dragoons, for the guards, who in Bizet's score attempt to coax Micaela to enter "chez nous," in Dornford-May's staging come perilously close to harassment or even rape in their treatment of Nomakhaya (Micaela). Prior to meeting her they sing (in Xhosa, translated in subtitles) "Watching people as they pass by / Check out the girls and rate their butts," which, accompanied by close-up shots of the guards' leering faces, creates a sexually charged context for their later suggestion that she "Come inside, see our quarters, you'll find a welcome there for sure." When she politely declines, one of the officers chases her down the street, creating the impression that *Khayelitsha* is a dangerous, lawless and corrupt township.

Further diegetic narration appears as commentary on township life. When Jongi's (don José's) new superior officer, Sergeant Mongezi, is first shown the cigarette factory, he is surprised that there are factories in townships with women working in them, which he attributes to changes brought about since apartheid. When Carmen first approaches Jongi after singing the Habanera, one of Carmen's co-workers presents him with a prophylactic, saying "You better use this condom if you want her." And when the police re-arrest Carmen, the sergeant beats her brutally, before presenting her with an ultimatum – "In return for sex I'll forget everything. Yes or no?" – to which she nods her head. When he returns later in the day to claim his prize, he is taken out and shot by one of Carmen's associates, an action Carmen explicitly affirms with the line "You give us no choice but to detain you ... indefinitely."

The film's soundtrack is also used to create moments of diegesis that cut across the mimetic narrative. Bizet's score is retained, but altered, both in terms of its immanent qualities (the libretto is translated into Xhosa) and its contextual surround (being performed in the dirty, dusty streets of an African township by an all-black cast). This revised score, that holds a contrast within itself, is further contrasted with music indigenous to South Africa. When Lulamile Nkomo (Escamillo), who in *U-Carmen* is a popular South African singer (not a bull-fighter, but someone who sings *about* bullfighters), arrives in the township he is greeted by fans who break into a spontaneous African-style song and dance, despite the fact Lulamile sings in English and was trained at a "New York school of music."

All four of these techniques – the re-introduction of Mérimée's unnamed archeologist's narration, the altered cultural context (from Spain to South Africa), the

additions to the libretto, and the contrasting music devices – introduce moments of diegesis into the otherwise mimetic narrative of Bizet’s score.

Characteristics of Genealogical Writing About Music

In this chapter I traced the development of “Carmen” through its instantiation as a novella, a libretto, an opera, a DVD of a staged performance and a film. In doing so I showed that what we take Carmen to be is wholly determined by the theoretical framework we bring to bear upon it, with the point at which Carmen ceases to be itself (i.e., ceases to share a sufficient number of properties with previous or subsequent instantiations) impossible to determine. Thus it is not clear what constitutes the narrative Carmen, or even whether Carmen is a narrative – it is neither, or both, depending on the theory of narrative we bring to bear upon it. But which theory of narrative we bring to bear in our interpretation of it depends on a prior distinction between theory and narrative. Susan McClary and Carolyn Abbate, for instance, have significantly different conceptions of narrative, leading to significantly different interpretations of Bizet’s opera. But these different conceptions are themselves based in personal narratives that rely for their coherence on a prior conception of narrative. A genealogical study of Carmen thus reveals not only the essential indeterminacy of its formal structure, but of all formal structure, with formal attributions inevitably relying on prior formal attributions, with no point outside those formal attributions from which to assess their value. In writing genealogically about music I thus showed how both music and the frameworks we use to interpret it are contingent human phenomena.

Chapter 8: Autobiographical Writing About Music

While autobiographical writing about music may draw on independently verifiable data, such as historical documents, photographs, etc. it primarily relies on the author's memory of events. Memoir, a sub-genre of autobiography, focuses on a specific episode or period in a person's life, and in this chapter I illustrate memoir as a genre of writing about music and musicians with a description of my experience as a chorister at New College, Oxford during the years 1978-1983.

The Chorister

In 2007 the Toronto Bach Festival, “an annual in-depth journey into the magic of the music of J.S. Bach” (Rao, 2007), focused almost exclusively on a single work, “the monumental St. John Passion, BWV 245” (Rao, 2007b). Through lunchtime talks with performers, musicologists, and theologians, as well as open rehearsals and lecture concerts with conductor Helmuth Rilling, Bach's lesser-known Passion was submitted to a multi-disciplinary analysis that evoked a host of memories from my childhood. For my engagement with the St. John Passion in 2007 differed sharply from my engagement with the same piece during the years 1978-1983, when I was a chorister at New College, Oxford.

At that time I was a young, pre-pubescent boy, the servant of the choir director, Edward Higginbottom, who was himself the servant of musical tradition. “Higgy,” as we used to call him, was a recently appointed don at the college, and would alternately persuade, cajole, berate, and inspire his sixteen choristers, all between the ages of seven

and thirteen, into realizing his musical vision. Most of the choristers were not from Oxford, and lived as boarders in New College School, located a short distance from the college. Twice a day, at lunchtime and after the end of the school day, we put on our squares and gowns and walked in crocodile formation to the college's Song Room, where we rehearsed the canticles, psalms and anthem for Evensong, which took place in the college chapel at 6:15pm every day except Monday during the university term. Depending on the time of year we also prepared for seasonal performances, such as the college's Christmas carol service, for recordings, such as the BBC's *Choral Evensong*, and for tours, mostly to Europe.

Bach's *St. John Passion* was performed by the choir in the college chapel every year at Easter, with a full baroque orchestra and professional singers in the solo roles. The two treble solo arias, however – 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' and 'Zerfliesse, mein Herze' – were performed by choristers in their final year who, at the age of thirteen, were in the unusually privileged position of having their solo performance accompanied by a professional orchestra and broadcast live on BBC radio. In 1983, my final year with the choir, I was in this position and to this day consider it a great honor. But the story of how I came to occupy this position fascinates and in some ways troubles me still.

*

Beginnings, beginnings ... I left home at eight years old, returning only for school holidays and the occasional weekend for the next ten years. It was not a decision I made, but it was not a decision I was unhappy with. My mother and I had little in common, and

I spent much of my time screaming and shouting in frustration about one thing or another.

My parents had married in 1967 – her first, his third – and my sister was born in 1968. By the time I arrived two years later he had left – they differ on the reasons why – and they never saw each other again. He moved back to British Columbia, Canada, where he was from, with the woman who later became his fourth wife, while my mother remained in the marital home in Finchley, North London, where my sister and I were raised.

Both my parents were professional violinists, and my mother, having made a commitment to not speak badly about her ex-husband in front of the children, would say only that he was a great musician. Until I met my father for the first time at the age of eighteen, that was pretty much all I knew about him – that he was a great musician. Consequently I too wanted to be a great musician, but weekly cello lessons and supervised daily practice was torture. Invariably, on being told by my mother to play D_b major scale one more time, I would press the bow as hard against the string as possible and scrub back and forth in protest, before storming out of the room. Despite these temper tantrums my playing improved, but my mother was increasingly concerned about the lack of male influence in the home.

When a friend of my mother's, whose twin sons were choristers at King's College, Cambridge, suggested I audition for a choir school, it represented a two-fold opportunity – not only would I receive a private school education, with a strong music education component, but I would also benefit from the discipline of a traditional British

boarding school. I was taken to a vocal instructor, who assessed my potential, and I was duly prepared for two auditions – one at St. George’s, Windsor, the other at New College, Oxford. I remember little about either audition, but my mother likes to tell the story (repeatedly) of how, on meeting the choirmaster at New College and being asked my age, I replied “I’m seven, sir, and how old are you?” Inappropriate responses aside, I was accepted at New College, and the following Fall I arrived in Oxford along with a trunk packed with the requisite number of underpants (12), pairs of socks (12), corduroy shorts (4), winter shirts (4), summer shirts (4), blazers (1), gown (1), square (1), black shoes (1), brown shoes (2), brown sandals (1), “mufti” casual clothes (1 set), sportswear (2 sets), all with name tags carefully sewn in.

The sixteen choristers were housed in two dormitories. Emanuel Fire,³¹ the ten-year-old head of the junior dormitory, consoled the seven-year-old new arrivals, whose tearful sobbing broke the dark silence after lights out. But after two days his patience wore thin, and the sounds of homesickness elicited no more than an angry “shhh” from the older choristers. I persisted nonetheless, but my tears were self-conscious, and I doubted their authenticity. By the fifth night I stopped feeling sorry for myself, and forgot about home.

Mr. Butterworth, the headmaster of the school, was an overweight, ponderous man who had been there for as long as anyone could remember. His nickname was Butch, which seemed wholly appropriate, given his comportment, but his wife, who

³¹ I am using pseudonyms to refer to my fellow choristers, all of whom were under the age of thirteen at the time.

managed the school's secretarial duties, was by association nicknamed "Bitch," which seemed wholly inappropriate, as she was, as far as anyone could tell, a sweet, demure woman. Butch ran the school on a system of reward and punishment, with Alphas and Omegas awarded for good and bad behavior respectively, the totals appearing on the student's term report. Particularly reprehensible behavior – most memorably, talking after lights out – earned "the wacks," three, occasionally six, forceful hits to the backside with a gym shoe, administered promptly in the headmaster's office.

If my mother sought discipline, she got it. During my first Latin class, taught by the headmaster, I was asked to stand up and say my name. "Humphreys," I answered, knowing the school was run on a strict last name basis. "Humphreys what?" the headmaster replied. I looked confused. "Well, Humphreys what?" the headmaster bellowed at me. "Er ...er ...," I stammered. "Humphreys, Sir!!!!" he roared at me. "You must refer to me and all your other teachers as sir, you hear me. Now sit down."

If discipline at the school was enforced through fear, discipline at the college was premised on respect. It was difficult not to be awed by the ancient walls, the immaculately manicured lawns, and the hushed calm that permeated the learned atmosphere of the college. From the moment we walked through the heavy, wooden, arched doors of the college on Holywell Street we were no longer schoolboys but choristers, continuing a tradition of musical worship instituted by the college's founder, William of Wykeham, in 1379.

Edward Higginbottom, our choirmaster, was a vibrant, energetic, beak-nosed man whose wife was perpetually pregnant, leading the men in the choir – lay clerks and

undergraduate choral scholars alike – to refer to his growing brood as “the higtlets.” In my probationary year he was simply Mr. Higginbottom, but one particular morning, arriving at the song room uncharacteristically late, he informed us that he was now a doctor and should be addressed as Dr. Higginbottom. I was confused as to why our choirmaster was also practicing medicine, but one of the older choristers informed me later in the day, in a somewhat offhand manner, that doctors did not always deal with medical matters, and our choirmaster was a doctor of music.

First year choristers were called probationers, and were distinguished from choristers proper by the dress worn during chapel services. Full choristers wore a white, starched ruff around their necks, a full-length black cassock over their school uniforms, a white, thin, cotton surplus over their cassocks, and black shoes. Probationers wore the same, minus the surplus. The choir was divided into two halves – descant and cantorus – with each half facing each other across the nave of the chapel. The head and deputy head choristers stood in the middle of each row, senior choristers at the end of each row, and the four probationers next to them. I stood next to Raymond Crink, whom I admired not only for his singing ability – he had a clean, clear, perfectly in tune tone, and was regularly asked to sing solos – but also for his relaxed attitude and casual personal appearance.

A casual appearance was difficult to achieve within the constraints of the school’s uniform policy. Older boys wore long black trousers, grey shirts and a black and red tie, and any deviation from this outfit (with the exception of Sundays when choristers remaining at the school were allowed to wear mufti – jeans and a casual shirt) was not tolerated. But Crink always found a way of customizing his regulation clothing to achieve

a casual effect. He would unbutton his top button and pull down the knot of his tie, or roll up his shirtsleeves, or wear scuffed up shoes (but not so scuffed that Matron would demand he polish them), to create the impression that he was his own person, that no one could tell him what to wear, think or do.

My experience of New College School changed dramatically one weekend in my second term. Most choristers lived reasonably close to Oxford and went home for the weekends, which began after Evensong on Saturday (around 7:00 p.m.) and ended before Evensong on Sunday (around 7:00 p.m.). But for those of us like myself who lived in London or even further away the trip simply wasn't worth making for a 24-hour period. Sometimes we stayed with fellow choristers who lived closer to the school and sometimes we stayed at the school and occupied ourselves as best we could.

This particular weekend Raymond Crink and I were the only two choristers at the school. We spent Sunday morning kicking around a football in the school gym, and after an hour we returned the ball to the large storage cupboard at the back of the gym (Crink had borrowed the key from the Headmaster's office). Crink suggested we sit down for a moment, so we sat on some rolled up gym mats and caught our breath. He asked me if I knew what wanking was, and I said no, not really. Would I like to try it, he asked, as he placed his hand on my thick, corduroy shorts. I didn't answer. He unzipped my fly, put his hand inside, and with a firm grip started moving his hand up and down. After a short while he asked me if I would do the same to him. I said OK and put my hand on his black, cotton trousers. He undid his fly, took out his penis, and brought my hand to it. I rubbed it, as he had rubbed mine, and after a short while he was satisfied. We rearranged our clothing. He told me not to tell anyone. I asked him if it was normal. He said

everyone did it, in the bathroom after lights out, especially Arturo Black and Charles Binder.

Overall and in retrospect I enjoyed my experience with Crink and would have liked to repeat it. But he never approached me again, and although I once broached the subject with him, asking for clarification on a point of procedure arising out of my own, private experiments, he looked embarrassed and refused to elaborate. But the dormitory environment now rang with an excitement it had not held for me before. After lights out I listened for footsteps creeping along the squeaky wooden floorboards from the senior dormitory to the bathroom and contemplated ways of catching Black and Binder (for I was sure it was them) red-handed. I even attempted, on one occasion, to visit the bathroom shortly after lights out, but Emanuel Fire, the dormitory head, ordered me back to bed.

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On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons the older choristers were permitted to go unsupervised into Oxford city center. Crink invariably returned with vast amounts of stationary – pens, pencils, compasses, erasers, rulers, and the like – that he liberally donated to whomever was in the choristers' dayroom at the time. A smiley face novelty pen, about three inches high, with a heavy, thick, rounded base that allowed it to move freely from side to side without toppling over, became a treasured possession of mine after Crink gave it to me, albeit with little ceremony. I later learned that it, along with every other item of stationary on proud display, had come to him *gratis* courtesy of W. H. Smith's lax in-house security.

That summer, back in London for the holidays, I tried my own hand at petty theft, targeting small corner-store newsagents with their varied assortment of candy bars. I had moderate success, and when, on a couple of occasions, I was caught red-handed, the owners did nothing more than threaten to call the police if I ever stepped foot in their premises again. But my fingers were not light enough to avoid a humiliating defeat when I placed a packet of polo mints in my duffle coat pocket one day as my mother paid for gas. Pointing at me, the man behind the counter said in Pidgin English, “He took polo mint.” My mother looked confused, and asked me if it was true. I shook my head. “He took Polo mint,” he said, louder and more indignantly. I went red, but denied the charge once again. My mother reached into my left hand duffle coat pocket – nothing. “Other pocket,” the man said, shaking his head from side to side. My mother struggled to reach across to get her hand in my right pocket and sure enough, there were the incriminating mints. I ran from the gas station, tears streaming down my face, humiliated beyond all reason. I turned down the first side street I saw and walked as fast as I could. I had no idea where I was, nor how I would get home without my mother. But the look of disappointment that had accompanied her discovery of my blatant dishonesty had affected me in ways I could not understand. Eventually her car pulled up beside me, she told me to get in, I refused, she insisted, I refused again, and after an extended back and forth I swallowed my pride and got in the car. “Everyone does it ... all the choristers do it,” I repeated, over and over, as she drove us home.

My mother never mentioned the episode again, and I never stole again. In my final year, my fellow senior choristers – Philip Wilkington and John Smith – were stopped by store detectives on Cornmarket Street, their blazer pockets full of W. H.

Smith's protractors, compasses and other assorted stationary, and for once I was not the one in trouble. Admittedly I was standing outside the store, waiting for them to bring me specific items I had requested, but as soon as I saw a blue-suited stranger place his outstretched arm on Wilkington's shoulder, and watched him blush in his characteristic way (he often blushed during choir rehearsals when Dr. Higginbottom made fun of him), I knew the game was up. I dashed through the Saturday afternoon shoppers, turning left on Market Street, and not stopping until I had skirted around the back of the Radcliffe Camera and was safely back on Holywell Street. My heart was thumping, and didn't stop until the following morning, when I definitively learned that, despite the fact both choristers had been arrested, their parents called to the school, and a formal police caution issued, neither one had revealed my complicity in their shameful acts.

Thinking about it now, my close escape on that occasion was strangely karmic, as in the run-up to my senior year I had been called into the headmaster's office on a weekday afternoon to be told – albeit masked in the form of a question – that although I was undoubtedly one of the two best singers in the choir, I would not be head chorister nor deputy head chorister in my senior year as I was not considered sufficiently responsible. Dr. Higginbottom was in the room, and I had the impression – or was it just wishful thinking? – that the two men had struggled to reach some kind of consensus. I knew that in Dr. Higginbottom's mind I was an exemplary chorister, but who I was at the college was not who I was at the school, and the headmaster clearly felt I could not be trusted. I was devastated. I wanted to beg, to say, "I'll change, I'll change. *Please* make me head chorister" but the headmaster's mind was made up and the best I could do was

acquiesce and tell them that yes, I understood, no, I wasn't hurt or offended, and no, I wouldn't tell anyone about our conversation.

Surprisingly, my commitment to Dr. Higginbottom and New College Choir only intensified as a result of this private meeting. Denied a clearly defined role in the choir, I designated myself "preferred soloist." And for the most part this accurately described my situation. I was consistently not asked to sing the solo part in one of my favorite pieces – Allegri's *Miserere* – but this was due to its infamous high C, a note only a couple of boys in the choir could reliably produce. Other than that, though, the designate held.

In the end, Wilkington and Smith were asked to be head chorister and deputy head chorister respectively, lending a strange irony to their run-in with the law. Wilkington was one of the nicest – and squarest – individuals you could ever meet. He was a true British toff, with an accent to boot. Smith, on the other hand, was a more conflicted being, who would often clench his fist, hold his arm out to the side, and with full force swing it against unsuspecting victims. I found myself in the latter role on multiple occasions, and each time vowed never to speak to him again. But invariably I would, most often for the sake of procuring time with him after lights out, in the choristers' bathroom, or during the day, in the green room, where we would wile away our spare time in lustful acts. It would be tempting to draw a connection between his violent temper and our illicit relationship, but he was remarkably untroubled by his impulses – at least, less troubled than I was, for I felt myself increasingly obsessed by sex, coaxing, cajoling, and coercing boys my own age and younger into compromising situations. Some boys proved themselves incorruptible, and I would eventually give up;

some consented, albeit with reservations; and some became ongoing, and increasingly willing and adventurous, sexual partners.

These erotic interests did not go unnoticed, however, and landed me in the headmaster's office on two separate occasions. The first time I was sent by the English teacher, Mr. Roberts, after he caught me reading Roald Dahl's *My Uncle Oswald* during supervised prep. I was a huge fan of Roald Dahl, having read all his short stories, which my mother owned, and when I learnt he had written a full-length novel about Uncle Oswald, a character introduced in one of his short stories, I couldn't wait to read it. I begged my mother to buy it for me, which she duly did, and took it with me back to school. Mr. Roberts, however, objected to the description on the back cover, which read

Uncle Oswald, the great rogue and fornicator, has discovered the world's most powerful aphrodisiac and a method of quick-freezing sperm. So with the help of the gorgeous Yasmin Howcomely, he sets out to preserve 51 living geniuses and crowned heads, from James Joyce to King Albert and Henry Ford

Believing the book contained subject matter inappropriate for a twelve-year-old boy, he sent me off, book in hand, to the headmaster's office. Butch was outraged. Where did I obtain such filth? he asked me. I told him my mother had bought it for me at Waterstone's in London. Unfazed, he ordered me to take it home with me at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, he would keep it. Two weeks later I asked for the book back and read it all the way home on the bus, all the next day, and when I hadn't finished

it by the time I had to return to Oxford, my mother insisted I stay and finish it, even if it meant being late for Evensong.

The second occasion arose from less literary pursuits. Smith, Wilkington, two other choristers and myself were rehearsing instrumental music in the school's main assembly hall late one evening when I suggested we put down our instruments and wank together. The suggestion met with some resistance, but before long Smith and I had persuaded the others that this was a perfectly normal, fun thing to do, and there would be no negative consequences. I remember being disappointed at the lack of enthusiasm with which Wilkington, in particular, went about his task, but we were all in it together, and there was novelty in that. Our exertions came to an abrupt end, however, when a single bang – like the sound of a door slamming – echoed from the back of the hall. Smith and I told the others not to worry, that it was just the wind, but neither of us was convinced nor convincing, so we packed our instruments away and called it a night.

Three days later I was called into the headmaster's office. In tangential words, he accused me of inappropriate behavior. I mentally rifled through the many possible behaviors he could be referring to. It wasn't until he mentioned the school cook, whose living quarters were adjacent to the assembly hall, that I caught his drift. My beating on this occasion consisted of six swift strokes to the hand with a thin tree branch, an improvised switch, in contrast to the usual gym shoe, perhaps because asking a young boy to bend over as punishment for this particular offense unnerved him.

*

Unlike alphas and omegas, the number of beatings a pupil received over the course of a term did not appear on school reports, so my mother was unaware of these and other details of my day-to-day life in Oxford. She would come to Evensong once a year, normally around my birthday, and beforehand we would either go to the Wimpy on Cornmarket, where I would eat a banana sundae, or to the Wykeham on Holywell, where we had cream tea. When it was time to consider my future, however, she was adamant that I not go on to Winchester College, also founded by William of Wykeham and a natural choice for many New College choristers. Instead, she arranged for me to audition for a music scholarship at a small school in Hampshire, which, unlike most private schools in the country, did not require the Common Entrance exam, but invited all candidates for a three-day visit to the school where, through close observation and a battery of written tests, suitability and “fit” were cleverly assessed. I fell in love with the school on sight, and when the headmaster called to offer me a half fees music scholarship I couldn't have been happier. The whole process was complete by January so for the rest of the school year, while my fellow choristers spent Wednesday and Saturday afternoons studying for their Common Entrance exam, I rambled through Oxford's colleges, parks and gardens, secure in the knowledge that before long I would be trading in the severity of that city's timeless traditions for the liberal, progressive, child-centered, anti-authoritarian – and most importantly co-educational – environment of Bedales.

My academic future assured, I was free to concentrate all my efforts on my self-defined role as preferred soloist. Over the course of five years the choir's core repertoire, including canticles by Weelkes, Gibbons, Howells, Purcell, Walmisley, Byrd, Stanford, Tomkins, Morley, and Tallis, anthems by Vaughan Williams, Monteverdi, Franck,

Harris, Rachmaninov and Britten, masses by Palestrina, Taverner, Haydn, Byrd and Stravinsky, and countless settings of psalms and responses, had become a part of me. Many of these pieces included coveted treble solos, but as the choir was first and foremost a collectivist endeavor, individualist ambitions were rarely voiced. High standards were demanded of soloists. When I missed an entrance in one of my earliest solos Dr. Higginbottom insisted I return with him and the organ scholar to the empty chapel immediately after the service to do it again – and right this time. Waiting for the congregation to leave, as the rest of the choir happily put on their gowns and squares for the walk back to school, I learned that being singled out for one’s strengths contains the concomitant risk of being singled out for one’s weaknesses.

But the risk was worth it. I vividly remember – or is it a fantasy? – the last time I sang Stanford’s ‘Magnificat in G’. The rolling introduction emerges from the organ loft, I know the choir, the organist, the chaplain, the congregation and, most importantly, Dr. Higginbottom, are relying on me to not only sing, but to sing well, to fill the fourteenth-century space with a sound that makes the text, sung five times a week since the chapel’s inception, fresh, alive, inspirited. “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my savior.” And my voice, pure, rich, angelic, pours out of me, filling the nave, preparing the way for the rich four-part harmony of the chorus, which picks me up and carries me forward to my next entrance, with its octave leap and steady swell on a high F#. “For behold from henceforth: all generations shall call me blessed.” “Blessed, blessed,” the choir repeats in waves, gently lapping at the shores of belief. “For he that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is His name.” I merge with the choir, relax into the warmth of their embrace, secure in the knowledge that, for now at least, I am safe,

nothing can disgrace, harm, embarrass or shame me. The dramatic swells of Stanford's setting, the shifting textures, timbres and harmonies, emerge as ordained, choir and congregation united in a single sentiment (what is that sentiment, exactly?) and all the while I am aware that before long I will once again be thrust into the spotlight. "And hath exalted the humble and meek." But before long I am repeating the choir's call – "For ever" – concluding my solo with a descending perfect fifth that, in its frail simplicity, expresses the vulnerability of my relationship with Dr. Higginbottom, with my fellow choristers, with God and the various parts of myself.

That was the last time I sang Stanford in G. My voice was breaking, and I knew that soon I would be banished to the back rows of some other choir, where others would sing the soaring soprano melodies. I would most likely join the altruistic tenors with their mangled, disjunct, inner voice parts. I secretly harbored hopes that one day I would return to Oxford, to sing in the back rows of the choir, as choristers before me had done. That I would once again be a part of college life, joining the mix of choral scholars and lay clerks, ranging in age from nineteen to eighty-five, that make up the men in the choir. That I would be a part of what as a chorister I had only witnessed – the revelry of the annual Gaudi, the in-jokes between the men in the choir and Dr. Higginbottom, the tomfoolery and pranks of a young and privileged elite. But for now I was cast out of the Garden of Eden, leaving only echoes of myself, encircling Lazarus at the westernmost end of the nave.

A couple of those echoes have survived. In my probationary year the choir recorded Taverner's Western Wind Mass for the crd label, and that recording has been re-issued on CD. Several Choral Evensongs, recorded by the BBC during that time, are

probably archived somewhere, and may even be available on the Internet. And two 90-minute cassette tapes, generously copied for me by a fellow chorister's mother, of the BBC Oxford broadcast of the annual St. John Passion recorded in my senior year, are still in my possession. Listening to the two treble solos in that performance now, I am caught between the memory evoked – my mother and sister in the pew closest to the altar, the baroque orchestra behind me, my nerves sticking in my throat – and a more dispassionate appraisal of the vocal performance itself. For as much as I am not the thirteen year old boy captured on that hiss-filled recording, I am he, and he me. His diction is unclear, and I want to correct it. His time is loose, and it bothers me. Why am I still so concerned with this boy who is me yet not me?

Characteristics of Autobiographical Writing About Music

In this chapter I wrote an autobiographical account of my experiences as a chorister at New College, Oxford, during the years 1978-1983. In doing so I selected from memories I have of that period, ordering them in narrative form. But the criteria used in making those selections are opaque even to myself. I could have, for instance, included detailed descriptions of rehearsals, of the choir's recording processes, of the cities and towns visited on our tours of Europe. But instead I focused on college traditions, sexual awakening, childhood initiations and musical expression. Is it because certain traces from my life at that time remain – physical traces, such as photographs and recordings, or psychological traces, such as emotional scars, regrets, and feelings of pride or sorrow? Or is it because I have structured my account to conform to pre-existing narratives on the Oxbridge experience, such as those by Evelyn Waugh (1945/1999) and E.M Forster (1971/1993). Have these and other writers influenced what I consider worth

writing – indeed, worth remembering – about my own experience? In response to these doubts I included various meta-narrative moments, such as “Beginnings, beginnings ...”, “or is it a fantasy?”, “what is that sentiment, exactly?” and the shift to the present tense when describing my experience of singing the solo in Stanford’s *Magnificat in G*. These interrupt the narrative proper, highlighting its artificiality. Thus in writing autobiographically about music I showed how musical experience is always connected to other elements of experience, the result of a process of negotiation between competing interests and desires that renders even un-theoretical discourses about music “compromised” to some extent.

Chapter 9: Literary Writing About Music

Literary writing about music draws attention to itself as language. While certain characters and events may be based on real-life people or events, literary writing is clearly demarcated as non-factual. However, when the style of literary writing – the *way* a story is told, as opposed to the story itself – is particularly convincing the word “true” is often applied to it. In this chapter I present a short story about music and musicians, showing how multiple different discourses of music interact within the literary form.

Nowhere Man

It is with a feeling of great pleasure and privilege that I speak to you today about the relationship between autobiography and music. As I am sure you agree, it has been a fascinating day of presentations and roundtable discussions and I would like to thank the organizing committee for putting together such a superb conference on a theme so dear to my heart.

Much of the literature on music and autobiography, as I’m sure you are aware, has focused on the extent to which musicians’ accounts of themselves serve multiple masters. Publishers want drama, fans want hagiography, and authors write with one eye – or should I say ear – focused on their musical legacy. The autobiographical data I will share with you this evening, however, which I have been preparing for publication later this year, does not conform to this model. Indeed, I have often felt like a voyeur – embarrassingly so, at times – during the editing process, as the raw, unselfconscious style of Jerry Manner’s self-disclosures often seems wholly unsuited to publication. However,

after extensive discussions with his estate, I have come to the conclusion that the ethical issues raised by publishing these documents pales in comparison to the invaluable insight they offer into the relationship between personal narrative and musical style.

In today's talk I will share with you some of the journal entries of the late Jerry Manners, emphasizing the ways in which the literary style of these entries reflects changes in his musical style – or vice versa. This vice versa is important, as the question of the directional flow of causality – whether literary constructions of the self should be seen as reflections of musical style, or whether musical style should be seen as the reflection of literary constructions of the self – is what I find most fascinating about these journals. I have yet to reach any definitive conclusions on this, so I hope we can return to it during the question period following my presentation.

The journal entries I will share with you today cover a period of less than two years, but show a remarkable change in literary style. At the time of the first entry, dated 8th August, 2005, Manners was a pick-up musician in Boston, having recently completed his studies at Berklee College of Music.

It was busy tonight. Stephanie looked like she was ready to quit. I felt sorry for her. It's one thing to be ignored as a piano player – I'm used to that – but to stand at the front of a stage, singing your heart out, and still be ignored? Rather her than me. People probably look at me and think the same though. Stockbrokers in Armani suits, who make what I make in a month in a day. "Better to be happy and broke, than rich and crooked," as my dad always says. Most musicians feel that way. All I want to do is get

better at what I do, earn the respect of my peers, and if I'm lucky, carve out a space for myself in music history. Right now I'm playing *KC's*, but who knows where I'll be in five or ten years. I have high hopes and dreams, and they don't include steakhouses on a Saturday night, that's for sure.

There is a remarkable lack of poetry in this entry. Short, staccato sentences convey only the most basic information. Stylistic concerns are perfunctory at best. He writes a stream of consciousness, with no audience imagined or intended.

Two months later his style is still colloquial, but a greater sense of order and form has crept into his entries, as well as a clear sense of audience. Take the following, dated 10th October, 2005, for example:

Auntie Mae wants me to come and live with her in Queens. Admittedly Queens is not ideal, but whatever, it's New York, and I can get to know people, check out the scene, maybe hit some jam sessions?

I told the trio and they didn't seem all that happy. I guess they had visions of us all moving to New York together. Tyler would never make it in New York, though. There are too many bass players down there already. Richie would, I reckon. I tried to persuade him to come with me and even asked Auntie Mae if he could stay, but she got all quiet, and I figured I was pushing it. He's applied for a Masters at Manhattan School, so who knows, maybe he'll come down in September. I've emailed everyone I know and told them I'm moving. That way there's no turning back. As my

dad always says, “Burn your bridges, son, and you’ll have nowhere to go but forward.”

He’s awesome, my dad, not your average guy. A huge jazz fan but doesn’t know anything about music! He’s always been there for me. I think he told Auntie Mae my situation, at the funeral maybe. He’s always looking out for me, one way or another.

I hope she’s not all morose and all. Her husband, my uncle, my dad’s brother, died of a heart attack a few months ago, and that’s why she wants me to come live with her, so I can protect her. She lives at 11th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, which is a bit of a scary neighborhood. It’s not far from Louis’ house. That’s the first thing I’m going to do when I get there – visit Louis. It’s a museum now, his house, and they’ve kept it exactly how it was when he lived there.

Although he still quotes his father in this entry, for the first time he offers a perspective on his father, with the words “He’s awesome, my dad.” This represents a new level of consciousness for Manners, a newfound ability to distance himself from the authority figures in his life. This distancing is further illustrated in the entry dated 1st November, 2005, in which he refers to his aunt, who he previously referred to as “Auntie Mae,” as “My Aunt.”

My Aunt lives in a pretty big house, and she’s given me free run of the basement. She had her old upright moved down here, and it’s not a bad piano, so I’ve been practicing a lot during the day, and then going into the

city at night. Shit is expensive here though. I was expecting to go out every night, check out a different club, hang at the Vanguard or Birdland or Blue Note, but even a drink at those places burns a hole in your pocket. They're pretty touristy anyway, those joints. I've found some smaller clubs that are more my scene, Iridium, Small's, 55 Bar.

I've checked out a few jam sessions as well – at the Blue Note, Fat Cat and a couple of other places – but people aren't that friendly. This one guy, Lloyd something, a drummer, a total asshole, gave me a whole load of attitude for not knowing the changes to Whisper Not. It's not like it's a well-known tune. He wasn't even that good, anyway.

Anyway, “don't let the suckers get you down,” as my dad always says. I've written some new tunes I'm pretty pleased with – modern, fucked up, weird forms and stuff. I've been hanging around the Manhattan School, looking for a teacher, but also for players I can session with. So far I've only met singers. “Keep your eye on the prize,” my dad always says. I didn't come to New York to do more of the same. But I have to make a living.

This entry also shows Manners at a psychological crossroads. Although he still quotes his father as an authority figure, he recognizes the authority of non-family members, such as the jam session drummer. Indeed, these two authority figures do psychological battle in him, as he invokes his father's words as a way of undermining the “attitude” of the drummer.

This entry also reveals, for the first time, Manners' inner conflict between artistic ambition and financial necessity, which dominates his journal entries from this moment on.

Take the following, dated 15th November, 2005.

This friend of my dad's who works in the music biz here in NY called me up and said he wanted to put me in touch with an artist management friend of his. I feel woefully ill prepared, as I don't even have a band, let alone a CD to promote. I have a demo from back home, with some original compositions, and it's not bad, but I listened to it again yesterday and I've got a lot better since then. But hey, an opportunity is an opportunity, and what's the worst that can happen to me? (Actually, I'd rather not think about that; he could say, "you'll never work in this town again," which would pretty much break my heart, but the chances of him saying that are pretty low, I guess.)

Later

I called him. Seems like a nice guy. Told me to come to his office tomorrow at noon and we'll "do lunch." How does that work, exactly? Do I have to pay?

The next entry, dated 16th November, 2005, describes the outcome of that meeting.

Bob, the manager, wants me to meet Leo Rivald, this producer. What, you haven't heard of him? Nor had I, to be honest, but I didn't tell him that.

I've looked him up since, and he's quite a big name. He's recorded a couple of albums, but he's mostly a remixer. He's worked with a whole load of big names – Michael Jackson, Madonna, Sade, Bjork. Apparently he's looking to “expand his musical horizons.” I don't know what that means exactly, but I guess he wants to get into jazz? Bob made me sign a confidentiality agreement, and said the reason he's sending me is because I'm a nobody and I know nobody. Not the most polite man, our Bob. Anyway, we're going to “meet and see what happens.”

While both of these entries retain the colloquial style of his previous entries, they also manifest a highly developed sense of audience, as indicated by the rhetorical “What, you haven't heard of him?” They also introduce ironic distance through quotation marks that offset conventional expressions such as “do lunch” and “meet and see what happens,” a device that allows Manners to both participate in New York's music business community and at the same time retain his psychological and artistic independence.

The following entry describes Manners' first fateful meeting with dance music producer Leo Rivald. (I should just say, for those of you familiar with media reports of this story, that Rivald and Manners were, as far as I have been able to ascertain, never lovers, and consequently I ask you to put those preconceptions aside for now. We can, of course, discuss this in more detail in the question period following my presentation.)

This entry dated 20th November, 2005:

So I showed up at the designated time at the designated place and surprise surprise, there's no one home. So I'm walking around the neighborhood a

bit, checking out Tribeca, and when I try again half an hour later there's still no one home. I called Bob, because I didn't want him to think it was my fault. He treated me like a moron, asking me if I was pressing the right buzzer. Anyway, he told me to just wait, he'd look into it, and get back to me. I told him I didn't have a cellphone. "Who doesn't have a cellphone?" he screamed. "It's 2005!" An hour later I was still sitting there, feeling like a chump, all ready to say fuck this, dance music's bullshit anyway, when Leo (I recognized him from the pictures I'd seen online) came swaggering around the corner. He was wearing a casual zip-up top, golfer's T-shirt, blue jeans and bright colored sneakers, and his hair was all gelled back against his scalp. I could tell he thought he was all that. He looked at me askance, as if to say, what the hell is this kid doing on my stoop, but I fought my natural inclination, which was to ignore him and leave, and instead jumped up, extended my hand, and said "Leo Rivald, I'm Jerry Manners. Bob told me to meet you here at four." He ignored my outstretched arm, reached in his pocket, pulled out a cell phone, and said, "It's five." Never one to take any shit, I responded, "I know. You're late." A vague smile appeared at the edge of his mouth. "Well, I guess you better come up," he said, in a noticeably British accent. He unlocked the door with an electronic key, held it open for me, and I stepped through the arch created by his arm on the doorframe into the dark, nondescript lobby.

But man, this dude had a private elevator. I'd never seen one before. The doors opened on the third floor and we were right in his apartment, which

was a massive, immaculately furnished, beautifully lit industrial space with exposed brick and huge windows. He still hadn't apologized for keeping me waiting for an hour, but he was being friendly at least, asking me how long I'd been in New York, how I knew Bob, what kind of music I was into and all. He asked me if I wanted a drink, and we sat in his living room area, each on our own luxurious white couch, drinking Perrier.

I could tell he was sizing me up. He asked me how old I was, where I was from, what my parents did for a living, where I was staying, and if I had traveled. I told him about my musical background, that I had been considered a child prodigy on the piano, that I discovered jazz as a teenager, that I went to one of the best music schools in the country and graduated with distinction, and that I was now looking to make a name for myself on the New York jazz scene. He seemed interested, but not impressed, by this account of myself, and I'm embarrassed to say that the more my achievements went unrecognized by him the more I felt the need to emphasize them. Eventually I grew disgusted by my boastfulness, and simply stopped talking.

At that point he asked me if I wanted to see his home recording studio, which of course I did. We walked to the back of his loft, where a wide, wrought iron spiral staircase led up through the high ceiling. At the top of the staircase was a series of soundproofed rooms, each one connected to a large circular room with carpeted walls that served as the studio's control room. A vast array of technological equipment, including rack-mounted

effects units, keyboards, mixers, computers, drum machines, amplifiers, samplers and speakers flashed their LEDs invitingly. Leo rolled one of two black leather swivel chairs toward me as he sat himself in the other. “You wanna make some music?” he asked.

His body swung into action as he rolled back and forth between mixing desk, computer station and rack. Before long he had a drum loop and bass line spluttering out of the Yamaha monitors and I was told to “just play around” with the Roland keyboard. I did as I was told – it was a simple I-V progression, so I played some voicings with 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths, and Leo messed around with the sounds, moving from a basic piano to a synth then a church organ before settling on a Rhodes. I was having fun. The consistency of the loop was driving me a bit crazy, but after a while its very endlessness had a hypnotic effect and I was pumping out some pretty cool licks, blowing in the right hand, Bill Evans voicings in the left, experimenting with some offbeat rhythms when, without warning, the loop came to a reverberating end and I was left exposed, mid-flight, the artificiality of the keyboard sample laid bare for all the imaginary dance floor mavens I had constructed in my mind to hear.

Leo swung his chair around to face me. “Not bad,” he said. “You don’t listen to much dance music, do you?” The inference was clear. I admitted that no, I didn’t listen to much dance music, and silently explained why not (the explanation included the word shit). “Ever been to a club?” he asked. My eyes pivoted downward, and I admitted that no, I hadn’t been to

a club. “I own a club on 52nd street,” he said. “It’s called LovedUp. Have you heard of it?” This part of the interview was not going well. “Uhh, not really,” I stammered. “No problem,” he said. “There’s always a first time. I’ll tell you what. You take me to a jam session and I’ll take you to a club. Deal? I’ve always wanted to go to a jam session. What do they call it? A cutting session? Yeah, I’m well up for that. A bunch of guys wankin’ off on their horns, cutting each other up. Yeah, you bet.”

I had no desire to take this guy anywhere, but I agreed to take him to Zinc the following Monday, which had become my regular hang, and in return he would take me to his club the following Saturday. He even gave me \$100 and told me to go get some decent clothes. I refused to take it initially, in part because I liked my clothes and had no desire to dress like him, and in part because I didn’t need his charity. But he said he paid all his musicians. It didn’t make sense to me, but he was insistent, so I took it.

I walked up Broadway after I left, through Chinatown and up through SoHo until I got to Union Square. For the first time since arriving in the city I felt depressed. I had nothing while others had everything. Behind each drab architectural exterior lives more glamorous and exciting than mine were being lived. I wanted what Leo had. Not the material objects (although I wouldn’t say no to the home studio), but the success, the unadulterated and pure pleasure of having made it. As much as I had committed myself to intrinsic pleasures, to musical creativity and its deep, but fleeting, gratifications, extrinsic pleasures now lured me in, sparkling

in front of me in all their seductive glory. To live as Leo lived, free of the sordid compromises that determined every detail of my daily life, from when I left the house, to what I ate for lunch, to where I went in the evening, to who I saw, liked, hung out with. Even the self-discipline I took such pride in, that allowed me to practice six hours a day, seven days a week, now seemed tainted by an ulterior motive, to avoid spending money that I didn't have and likely never would.

The first thing to notice about this entry is its length. It is approximately five times as long as any previous entry. Much of this is due to an increasingly descriptive prose style. Rivald's appearance is described in detail, as is his apartment, right down to the "wide, wrought iron spiral staircase." Manners also describes physical actions for the first time, in phrases such as "I stepped through the arch created by his arm on the doorframe into the dark, nondescript lobby." And he uses quotation marks not, as in previous entries, to distance himself from social conventions, but rather to more vividly remember his dialogic exchanges with Rivald.

Is it a coincidence that this change in the literary style of his journal entries occurs at the exact moment his musical style also changes? For this entry marks the beginning of Manners' break with the jazz tradition, his early experiments with dance music eventually leading him to the mixed-genre solo piano music for which he is justly celebrated.

His literary style continues to evolve, as evidenced in the following entry, dated 29th November, 2005:

All week I dreaded taking Leo to Zinc. I told myself the place was too small, too casual, too parochial. But in the end we had a good time.

We met at the club at nine – he was late as usual – and drank a couple of beers. We sat with a couple I’d met there before – Tony, a sax player, and Carla, a singer – and Leo was charming and friendly. He was taking everything in – the décor, the vibe, the music – and at one point started asking questions about how many jazz clubs there were in the city, how busy they were, what made one club better than another, how much the musicians got paid, et cetera. After an hour I could tell he was getting antsy, so I sought out the host, a tall, black drummer called Bo, and told him that Carla, Tony and I wanted to play and could we do it soon. Jam session hosts don’t like to be hustled, but he was OK with it, saying, “Whoa, all right my boy, don’t you worry, I’ll see what I can do” and a couple of tunes later he called us up to the bandstand.

Carla called the first tune, Days of wine and roses, in Bb. Not a bad choice. We kicked it off with the last eight, and she did a decent job on the head. Tony took the first solo, played a couple of choruses before handing it to me. I took a couple – OK, not great – and then we traded with Bo on the drums for a while. Carla came back with a scat solo, but she can’t really scat, so it was a bit of a train wreck for a while. She switched back to the melody for the second A and we took the tune out with a vamp, Tony wailing over a Latin groove Bo introduced.

The motley crew in the bar gave us our due and Bo indicated we were good for another one. Carla called a ballad – I fall in love too easily in Ab – which was a gamble, because nothing kills a jam session as fast as a ballad, but we went with it. We pretty much played it down, switching to double-time feel for the blowing and each taking a chorus. There was a lot of noise in the venue, but we got an atmosphere going and it felt like a club. I could see Leo from behind piano; he seemed to be into it. I don't know if he understood what exactly was going on – how we knew what to play and when – but he could feel the improvisation – in the members of the band, the tunes we played, and the music itself, and he was diggin' it. As we left the stage at the end of our set we got a surprisingly warm hand, with whoops and hollers and “Let's here it again for these remarkable young players” from Bo in the mic. I wanted to play more, but we were done for the night.

Leo congratulated each of us as we sat down. I could tell he wanted to leave, but he indulged us as we came down from our performance high. The waitress asked us if we wanted more drinks. Leo said he was OK, stood up and said, “I really must be going.” He thanked me for bringing him to his first jam session, he had found it very interesting. I wanted to know more, but now wasn't the time. He kissed Carla on the cheek, shook Tony's hand, and I accompanied him outside. His loft was only a short walk away, but he hailed a cab and, after shaking my hand and thanking

me once again, he was gone. I went back inside the club, a lesser man without him.

Although colloquial expressions still abound, this entry describes a particular, discrete scene using standard literary techniques. The temporal moment is introduced in the opening paragraph, along with its dramatic possibilities (“I dreaded ...”). The second paragraph provides context and creates tension, while the next two paragraphs build this tension through the use of vivid description of dramatic events. The final paragraph serves as a post-climactic coda, integrating this scene within the larger unfolding narrative.

Manners’ newfound attention to classical dramatic form represents a growing capacity for social and cultural intelligibility. But this is disrupted almost immediately when, in the next entry, dated 7th December 2005, he describes his first experience with the club drug Ecstasy.

Oh my good fucking Lord. Where to begin? So much has happened since I last wrote, I’m a completely different person. It’s like I just woke up from a long, deep sleep and opened my eyes to the world for the very first time.

So, when did I last write? Tuesday. So Wednesday morning Leo called me and thanked me again for our night at Zinc. He seemed genuinely grateful, and said it was good to see me in my element. He asked me if I still wanted to go to his club, and I said sure, why not. I would have liked to have been more enthusiastic, but to be honest I didn’t feel much of an

affinity with that crowd and couldn't imagine myself enjoying dance music played at full volume for more than a half hour or so.

Anyway, we arranged to meet at his loft at around 9pm on Saturday. He said we wouldn't go out until after midnight, but he had a surprise for me. When I told my dad that he said, "Son, are you sure this man's intentions are honorable?" Pretty funny. So I showed up at nine, the place was real cozy, Bud Powell playing in the background, and he gave me a Perrier. We shot the shit for a while – he liked my friends, how do I know them, does Carla sing anything other than jazz et cetera – but I'm dying to know what the surprise is. So eventually I just ask him straight out, "What's the surprise?" He looked bashful, which is a look I'd never seen on him before, and he started walking toward the spiral staircase. "I've just been working on a few things, and thought you might want to check them out." My heart sank. This was the surprise? But then I thought, well I guess this is a real honor, to be a trusted intimate of Leo Rivald. I should be grateful.

We climbed the stairs and I settled into one of the black swivel chairs. "Ready?" he asked. I had no idea what I was supposed to be ready for, but the computer sprang into action and out of the speakers a familiar, but at the same time thoroughly new and different, music played. Where had I heard it before, this jazz-funk-house-techno hybrid? And then it gradually dawned on me that it was me I was hearing, me as I might have been had I been a slightly different me. Sampled and sequenced, flanged and delayed, cut and pasted, my fingers wrenched from me and re-set, re-oriented to

another purpose, all without my knowledge or consent. No contracts had been signed, no permission given, I was not even aware I had been recorded, or sampled, or sequenced, or whatever had allowed him to possess me so completely, to own me in such a way that I no longer recognized myself in my own playing.

And yet, as I continued to listen, I realized that it worked. The me he had morphed me into was someone I liked, that I wanted to be. A hipper, happier, lighter me. This Jerry Manners didn't worry about "observing and honoring the jazz tradition," as my professors had exhorted me to. This Jerry Manners just played, had fun, had a good time. And why not? Nobody gives a shit about art these days anyway.

But that was just the beginning. The really big news is that I took my first E. What a head-fuck that was. After hanging out in the studio for a bit we took a cab up to 52nd street, where Leo's club is. I can't really remember much about it, to be honest, except that it was really well lit, not at all what I expected. There were tons of people, all dressed in crazy costumes, about an equal number of men and women but I think a lot of the men were gay. I was dressed pretty conservatively, but the fact I was with Leo compensated for it. He knew everyone – the DJs, the bar staff, most of the people there, and we just hung out at the bar drinking Perrier for the first couple of hours. By about 1am I was beginning to flag, and I couldn't understand why everyone else in the place wasn't. Steve naïve, that's me. Leo asked me if I wanted a pick-me-up, and I asked him what he meant

and he pulled a tin out of his pocket and said he had some good E. I was pretty surprised, I admit, because this guy was almost old enough to be my dad. He said he didn't really do it any more, he was too old for that kind of thing, but when he was my age he did it a lot and if I wanted to try it he would have some too. So I said, fuck it, why not, you only live once, and I swallowed that bad tasting pill with a Perrier chaser.

Nothing happened for a while, and I was beginning to think the whole thing was lame, but then I started getting glimpses of an altered state. The lighting seemed more vibrant, and the people on the dance floor were more alive, happy, glamorous. I felt sick, and had to sit down, and my face was contorting as my body reacted to the chemicals. Leo told me not to worry, it's all good, I would feel better in a minute, and he was right because before long I was having the best time of my life. I danced pretty much non-stop all night, but it felt like about five minutes. When we left the sun was up, people were having breakfast, walking their dogs, reading the papers. And I was a gibbering mess. All I could do was repeat the words, "Fucking awesome," over and over again.

The next few days I felt pretty blue, though. I couldn't really practice – I just didn't want to – and all I could think about was what an awesome night I'd had and when could I do it again. The biggest revelation was the music. It made sense to me now in a way it hadn't before. The driving beats, the funky bass lines, the pithy vocal refrains, all of which I had despised, if I'm honest, before taking ecstasy, now represented everything

that was meaningful about human existence – togetherness, unity, oneness.

Love, basically.

I'm seeing Leo again tomorrow. We're going to record some more.

Sometimes I wonder what he's doing with me. I mean there must be tons of keyboard players in the city, way better than I am. Why does he want to work with me? My dad called, asking how things were going. I told him not to worry, everything's fine. He said Auntie Mae hadn't heard me practicing for a while. What the fuck? Am I being spied on? I really hate living in Queens.

This entry, which I have presented in its entirety, brings together a number of different rhetorical styles, jumping from the seemingly spontaneous introductory questions, “Where do I begin?” and “When did I last write?,” to a descriptive account of his conversation with Rivald, to a reflection on art and music, to a confessional account of his experience with Ecstasy, concluding with a somewhat paranoid and angry outburst directed at his family. Is it a coincidence that this shift in Manners' style of self-disclosure should occur at the very moment he experiences himself dressed in new musical clothes so to speak? Has hearing himself in altered form, his fingers “re-oriented to another purpose,” led him to narrate himself differently? Or did the possibility of narrating himself differently precede Rivald's re-working of Manners' musical expression?

In the next entry I want to discuss, dated 9th January, 2005, the colloquial, uninhibited and spontaneous style of the first journal entries, dated only five months prior, is wholly absent.

We had another productive session yesterday. He [Rivald] played me a lot of classic house tunes, music I'd never heard before, and told me how the scene had progressed over the years. He was there right at the start, at clubs like Shoom, and then he worked his way up through DJing and remixing with a guy called Carl, who died a couple of years ago. I could tell he's pretty cut up over it. They were best friends and business partners, traveling all over the world under the name Carlee-o. No one really knows how he died; they just found him on a beach in Thailand. Leo hasn't really recorded anything since. I don't know if that means Carl did all the work, but he says he's not looking to replace Carl, he just wants to see what's out there, start having fun with music again, and if he ends up using anything we do together I get 15% of the profits.

I kinda wanted it in writing, but I didn't know how to say so without appearing rude. I guess I'll just have to trust him. He showed me how to DJ, on a pair of old-school Technics 1210s, which is a lot harder than it looks. He told me all about the early days of rave, about how exciting it was to show up in some godforsaken part of London, miles away from anywhere, and find a party in full swing, everyone off their face and tunes you'd never heard before, nothing even like them on the radio. No one knew what they were doing in those days, there was lots of scare

mongering about the long-term effects of E, but people did it anyway because it felt so damn good.

He talked about the utopian dream of early house, how inclusive the music was, how people from all over the world gathered in Ibiza and Goa for parties that went on for days and days, with no one ever getting hurt, there were never any fights, just good feelings. He played me Ce Ce Roger's 'Someday', Joe Smooth's 'Promised Land' and Mr Fingers' 'Can you feel it'. He told me about Carl, how they had met serendipitously, how they had worked together for ten years as remixers and DJs, remixing everyone from Madonna to Bjork and DJing to massive crowds all over the world. And how something had changed since Carl's death, how he no longer had faith, because hip-hop, with its message of violence and hate, had won the day, and what did that say about the world?

We know from other documentary evidence that from December 2005 until he was committed in April 2007, Manners completely stopped playing jazz. Indeed, so far as we can tell, for the whole of 2006 he worked only with Rivald on dance music productions that hold little interest for us today. Is it, then, surprising that Manners' journal entries for this period lack the spontaneity associated with jazz, relying on rhetorical tropes that are highly conventional, almost to the point of cliché?

It is only after Rivald's death that a more personal, confessional style returns to Manners' journal, albeit without the spontaneity of his earlier entries. Consider the following, dated 5th May, 2007:

The irony that I came to New York to follow in the footsteps of jazz giants and ended up here is not lost on me. Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, they all ended up here. I sense their presence, late at night, when the moans and groans of fellow inmates travel the corridors and I distract myself with imagined conversations. Bud has proven to be a great mentor. We talk about everything – not just music, but other things, deep things, pertaining to the soul. Dr. Wood tells me this is all part of a healthy recovery.

I've been seeing Dr. Wood for two weeks now. He's an old man, a jazz fan, as luck would have it. I like him. He has kind eyes that sparkle when I talk, making me think there's hope for me yet. He says I'm confused, but that's OK, life is confusing. He says I don't know who I am, and he can help me with that. And he says I'll be OK, I just need to be careful about the company I keep.

I think about Leo a lot. He's the reason I'm here. House music, clubbing, E, DJing. He got me into all that. I started seeing through his eyes, instead of my own. And in his eyes, anyone who believed in virtuosity, in music that said, "Look what I can do that you can't," was evil. For him, good music was music anyone could create, music that was democratic, born of love. He assiduously removed any semblance of virtuosity in my keyboard parts, cutting, copying, pasting and looping, until I became the person he wanted me to be. And I became that person, despising jazz for its extravagant displays of technical superiority, its rigid distinctions between

self and other, its stagnant conventions and over-eager audiences with their formulaic applause. Its pretensions were no longer mine, and I turned my back on it the same way I turned my back on the classical music of my youth.

I started DJing, going out every weekend, eventually moving to Manhattan to avoid the scrutiny of my well-meaning Aunt. My weekends became increasingly adventurous, with LovedUp being just the first stop in a series of club nights and after-parties that extended well into the following day. Before long my weekend schedule ran throughout the week, and I rarely saw daylight. Leo introduced me to other producers, who paid me to lay down keyboard tracks that I later heard, substantially altered, in DJ sets. I was making money, having fun, living the life.

But I could not appease the voice in my head that said, “What happened to Bach? What happened to Bud?” I had venerated musical genius for as long as I could remember, the skill, dexterity, and inventiveness of musical giants serving as spiritual sustenance. But now I admired no one – my parents, my teachers, Leo, not even myself. I suffered from a sickness of the will, an incapacity to aspire toward anything or anyone. All trace of human feeling had been removed from my playing, its fleshly origin masked by quantization and digital effects. I was neither a musician nor a non-musician, but a nowhere man, committed to nothing and nobody.

I'm not surprised I did what I did. I can't say I regret it either. I'm not happy the police got involved, but if they hadn't I wouldn't have come here, and I'm getting the help I need here. Dr. Wood during the day and Bud at night. I feel I'm well taken care of. I might even start playing soon. Dr. Wood says that whenever I want a piano he can get one for me. But Bud says I should wait. He says I should only play again if I'm sure I can conquer it. When it comes to the piano I trust Bud, so I do what he says, practicing silently in my head, moving my fingers just enough to know they're still there.

This entry, introspective, reflective, philosophical, was written at a time when Manners was developing, albeit strictly within the confines of his own imagination, his own unique musical style. A new interpretive paradigm is at work here, both in his emerging literary style and musical style. Over the next four years, in daily journal entries that run to twenty or more pages, Manners exhaustively explores the possibilities of narrative accounts of the self. In almost Proustian detail he revisits scenes from his childhood, describing his emotions, thoughts and perceptions with a richness that borders on the obsessive. And all the while he continues to practice the piano, albeit silently, his fingers running furtively over an imaginary keyboard.

It is not until the beginning of 2011 that he accepts Dr. Wood's offer of a piano, at which point all journal entries cease. Except one. On 12th June, 2011, the day before his untimely death, he carefully transcribes the following New York Times article, dated 11th June, 2011, into his journal:

From Bellevue to Blue Note

By Nathaniel Gordon

The redemptive power of music was on display last night at the Blue Note jazz club in New York City where Jerry Manners, who first graced the pages of this newspaper in 2007 when he was convicted of manslaughter after pleading diminished responsibility in the bludgeoning death of record producer Leo Rivald [the words “has been appearing for the past six nights” are in the original article but have been omitted in Manners’ transcription]. After a spell in Bellevue Psychiatric hospital, where he claims to have been in direct communication with former patient Bud Powell, Manners is now being hailed as the best hope for solo piano music in the 21st century.

Manners’ unique style, which reaches across genre distinctions, invoking at different times the musical vocabularies of Art Tatum, J.S. Bach, Brazilian bossa nova, and popular music, appeals not only to avant garde jazz fans but also New York’s glamorous set, who delight in the myth of this introspective genius, which seems to hang about him like an emperor’s robe.

Born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, he attended the respected Berklee College of Music before moving to New York in 2005. He found work as a session musician, most notably with renowned dance music producer and club owner, Leo Rivald, their collaboration yielding the

ubiquitous 2006 hit, 'Bop Da House'. Little is known about the events leading up to Rivald's death, but Manners' pre-existing psychiatric problems, compounded by excessive drug consumption, are believed to have played a role.

Manners is now managed by his former psychiatrist, Dr. Wood, who grants only limited interviews and vets all questions in advance. Manners still resides in Bellevue, and appears detached in person, with some claiming his remarkable capacity to improvise fugal passages at lightning speeds is a sign of autism. But while those suffering from autism are unable to develop the wide range of skills associated with virtuosic pianism – touch, phrasing, interpretation etc. – Manners references styles with a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of music history, and has impressed even the leading classical pianists of the day.

Last night's set consisted mostly of spontaneous compositions, inspired by suggestions from audience members. One man shouted "Happy Birthday to Shawna, who is 30 today" and without pause Manners broke into an extended improvisation, referencing the well-known 'happy birthday' melody, as well as others, such as Stevie Wonder's 1981 song for Martin Luther King, all within a cycling form of ten, six, and eleven measure sections, a play on yesterday's date. The delight of audience members increased when the closing cadenza, a canon based on an embellished happy birthday melody, lasted thirty measures, the exact age of the lucky Shawna.

The hold Manners exerts on an audience comes at a time when the vast majority of jazz artists have accepted a role as glorified dinner musicians. Classic recordings, such as Bill Evans' 1961 appearance at the Village Vanguard, include incidental sounds, such as wine glasses clinking. The Blue Note last night, in contrast, was as quiet as I have ever heard a music venue to be – and that includes Carnegie Hall with Leonard Bernstein conducting.

Jerry Manners' sold out weeklong residency at the Blue Note concludes tonight.

It should come as no surprise, given the argument I have presented today, that Manners' final journal entry, preceding his death by just a few hours, exhibits once again a new literary form. For in choosing transcription, the giving over of oneself to the words of another, at the exact moment when he relinquishes control over his musical style (for without life there is no musical style), he continues a pattern set in his earliest journal entries. Transcription is the ultimate flight from literary responsibility, just as Manners' death is the end of his musical responsibility. It is now up to us, as music scholars, musicians and critics, to write his legacy in our own words, thereby continuing the narrative of music of which his personal narrative is a part.

Now, are there any questions?

Characteristics of Fictional Writing About Music

The short story above illustrates how literary fiction can accommodate multiple different discourses within itself. In this example, different discourses of music enter into

dialogue with each other – the internal discourse of Jerry Manners, the academic discourse of the narrator, and the journalistic discourse of Nathaniel Gordon. Within those overt discourses are implicit discourses – of Leo Reitveld, for instance, whose speech is given by Manners in quotation. These discourses interact, but in unspecified ways, the literary discourse acting as a meta-discourse with no direct discourse of its own. Thus in writing literarily about music I have emphasized music’s capacity to mean different things to different people at different times, with no one discourse adequately capturing what music is within a particular cultural context or for a particular human subject.

Part IV: A Non-Foundational Approach to Music and Music Education

In Part III I explored a number of different genres of writing about music. In writing philosophically about music I situated music as a citational practice, in which an inherently meaningful body is cited and re-cited in sonic form. In writing narratologically about music I highlighted music's capacity to interact with non-musical narrative structures, including legal and academic ones, with political implications. In writing ethnographically about music I situated music as a cultural phenomenon, part of a complex web of meaning in which cultural context plays a pivotal role. In writing genealogically about music I showed how music, as well as the frameworks we use to interpret it, are contingent human phenomena. And in writing autobiographically about music I showed how musical experience is never pure, with even untheoretical discourses of music the result of a process of negotiation between competing interests and desires. In juxtaposing these different ways of writing about music, and highlighting the characteristics of each, I showed how discursive norms governing writing about music determine to a considerable extent what we take music to be, with implications for how we structure music education.

In the last chapter I suggested that literary writing about music differs from these other genres because it brings together multiple different discourses within a single unified text with no overt discourse of its own. Thus the short story *Nowhere Man* is about house music, homoeroticism, discourse, New York, genius and a host of other possible themes depending on who is reading it and how. The story represents different discourses, bringing them into relationship in indeterminable ways, without resolving the

tensions between them. It emphasizes the degree to which music can mean different things to different people at different times, with no one discourse adequately capturing what music is, even within a particular cultural context or for a particular human subject. As such, literary writing about music and musicians acts as a meta-discourse on music – a discourse on the discourses of music.

In this part I explore, through critical engagement with novels about music and musicians, the scope and potential of this meta-discourse for our understanding of music, concluding with concrete recommendations and resources for the ethical practice of music education in multicultural, democratic societies.

Chapter 10: Literary Critical Writing about Music

In this chapter I engage critically with novels about music, musicians and musicology. The first three novels I discuss, *The ground beneath her feet* by Salman Rushdie (1999), *Coming through Slaughter* by Michael Ondaatje (1976) and *The Piano Teacher* by Elfriede Jelinek (1983, trans. 1988), represent three different musical worlds – popular, jazz and Western art music respectively. The fourth novel, Herman Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* (1943/2002), is, at least in part, about musicology.

Salman Rushdie's *The ground beneath her feet*

The central characters of Rushdie's epic, complex, sprawling narrative – Rai, the narrator, and his friends, Ormus and Vina – are born and raised in Bombay, India, but over the course of the novel move to the West (London and New York). Rai describes this movement from East to West as passing “through the membrane” (Rushdie, 1999, p. 255), an image that recurs throughout the novel. But Rushdie's composite characters blur this distinction. Ormus and Vina are clearly based on the real-life John Lennon and Madonna, while the character of Yul Singh, a blind, Indian, New York-based record producer, possesses many of the characteristics of real-life African-American record producer Puff Daddy. Indeed, the enormous popularity of VTO, Ormus and Vina's supergroup, in America is itself a blurring of East and West, as musicians of Indian origin do not feature prominently in the (actual) history of American popular music.

The blurring of East and West in the novel's leading protagonists is part of the larger alternate reality of the novel, one related but tangential to our own. In the world of

the novel Basquiat and Schnabel are photographers, Kennedy wasn't killed in Texas, Watergate is an event in a political novel, and Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, is the author of the greatest novel of the twentieth century. Our reality exists, however, in the visions of Ormus, who "is caught up in a fantastic fiction of his own; except that it's no fiction. There is a world other than ours and it's bursting through our own continuum's flimsy defenses. If things get much worse the entire fabric of reality could collapse" (p. 347). In this "other world" (p. 350) John Kennedy gets shot, Nixon is President, East Pakistan secedes from the union and the British are not in Indochina – in other words, things are as they are in our reality. These "fairies from the fucking ether" (p. 351) are unwelcome intrusions for Ormus, which he controls through the use of an eye patch, but it is these same intrusions, this "double vision" (p. 388), that allows him to write music that prompts wild, "abandoned, Dionysiac scenes" (p. 391).

The novel's alternate reality is not the sole privilege of Ormus, however. The ghostly character Maria, who Ormus first meets on a plane from Bombay to London, and who later visits him while he is in a coma following a car accident, also visits Rai when he starts making experimental art pieces. He describes her as "a stranger, moving through a space that was and was not mine. As if I had penetrated a membrane and touched an otherworld" (p. 448). Maria occupies an in-between space, visible to others, her voice captured on audiotape, but materializing as if "from nowhere" (p. 315). She is both physically real and at the same time immaterial. As Ormus describes it, there is a "gash in the real" (p. 347); reality is like a movie screen with slashes in it, and behind the screen there are "a whole other set of things going on ... maybe another movie screen with

another movie playing ...” (p. 348). Maria visits Ormus and Rai from one of these alternate realities.

Against the backdrop of these multiple alternate realities unfolds a story of musicians and their music. We are told that Ormus, the hero of the novel, “within moments of his birth began making the strange, rapid finger movements with both hands which any guitarist could have identified as chord progressions” (p. 23). This absurd image – an airplay guitar playing baby – is the first of many parodies of musical genius. When Ormus is older he develops a prophetic ability to hear popular songs before they are composed and released, including the very first rock songs. Thus Rai, the narrator, claims, “the genius of Ormus Cama did not emerge in response to, or in imitation of, America ... the music came to Ormus before it ever visited the Sun Records studio or the Brill Building or the Cavern Club” (pp. 95-96). Rock and roll, on this account, is of the East, “we Bombayites can claim that it was in truth our music ... made in India, and maybe it was the foreigners who stole it from us” (p. 96). Indeed, when Ormus hears the songs he has previously heard only in his head performed and recorded by American artists he feels someone is “stealing his place in history” (p. 99).

Ormus hears songs from the underworld through the voice of his dead brother Gayomart. But Gayomart’s voice is faint. “He’s too far away; Ormus can’t make out the words. Just the vowel sounds” (p. 99). Thus Ormus’ version of ‘Blowing in the wind’, which he hears a thousand and one nights before it is released, has the lyrics “The ganja, my friend, is growing in the tin; the ganja is growing in the tin” (p. 141). Over time, however, he gets “better at hearing the words” (p. 181) and performs a complete version of ‘Yesterday’ before it is recorded or released. But his authorship is still parasitic, as Yul

Singh, an influential New York record producer who happens to be in the audience, asks “What bootlegging motherfucker stole it for you? ... The guy [presumably an alternate Paul McCartney] just wrote it, he just played it to me on his fucking piano in London ... if you ever sing that song again, I’ll have lawyers on you tighter than a straightjacket” (pp. 187-8).

Later, after Ormus wakes from a coma, Gayomart is gone. “He burst out of my head and vanished. I’m alone in here now. He’s free” (p. 348). But Ormus now has access to a different alternate world, one that he tells Vina is “not so very unlike here” (p. 349), as he describes people and events in our (the reader’s) world. She counsels him to “make it sing ... Write it with all your heart and gift and hold on to the hooks, the catchy lyrics, the tunes ... Music will save us” (p. 351). Ormus’s music is thus configured as a result of his double vision, his ability to see the “contradictions in the real” (p. 352) before others do. He is first and foremost a prophet because, as Rai puts it, “We’ve all caught up now. He isn’t here to see them, but the contradictions in the real have become so glaring, so inescapable, that we’re all learning to take them in our stride” (p. 352). Ormus recognizes the irreconcilability of the world before anyone else and creates original music as a result. While the songs he heard from the underworld via Gayomart were not original, those that come to him when looking “into the heart of the otherness” (p. 388), that are about “the collapse of all walls, boundaries, restraints” (p. 390), that describe “worlds in collision, two universes tearing into each other, striving to become one, destroying each other in the effort” (p. 390), are.

Musical creativity is thus configured as inherently dialogical, as well as tied to love and sexuality. When Ormus first meets Yul Singh, the renowned record producer

advises him to “Find her [Vina] and she’ll be the making of you” (p. 188). When Ormus arrives in England he explicitly parts from his mother with the words “Mother, you must let me go” (p. 255). The lack of unconditional love she has shown him “has prepared him for his great future” (p. 270) and he now “walks towards her [Vina], away from his mother, into the music” (p. 270). After he finds Vina and they become lovers and bandmates, Ormus asks her to marry him, but she refuses. He, in turn, refuses to make love to her for ten years. Rai, the narrator, ascribes the subsequent success of VTO to this stance. “At the epicenter of the American earthquake that is VTO lies this very Oriental disorientation. Abstinence: it becomes their rocket fuel, and flies them to the stars” (p. 372). When, after ten years, Ormus and Vina are eventually married, their songs explicitly link music and love and they claim their spirits made love every night they were apart in their shared dreams. Music “*is the sound of love ... Love is harmony. Harmony is love*” (pp. 422-3, orig. italics). The consummated love between Ormus and Vina allows Vina to sing “out of pure happiness” (p. 428), which in turn makes her “the world’s beloved” (p. 428).

But this narrative is both asserted and at the same time undermined by Rai, for he is Vina’s “spare prick” (p. 429), even after she and Ormus are married. Although Vina tells him Ormus has agreed to turn a blind eye to her *amours* so long as she doesn’t flaunt them, Rai believes that if Ormus were to find out that he had “enjoyed the favors of his beloved wife ... he must surely name his weapons” (p. 431). At one point he comes close to telling Ormus about the affair, but he realizes that “Vina was right to trust me after all. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t risk her withdrawal from my life. I too was an addict, hopelessly far gone, and she was my candy girl” (p. 432). But this secondary narrative is

also asserted and undermined. If Vina is, as Rai claims, beloved by the world, the temptation for him to claim that he was her lover, in the absence of evidence to the contrary (Rai is the sole narrator of the novel) may be irresistible. Indeed, his stated motivation in wanting to tell Ormus about the affair is his “invisibility in the story of Vina, the erasure from the public record of the great matter of my heart” (p. 430). But he could just as easily be falsifying the public record, in the absence of additional testimony to the contrary.

The ground beneath her feet thus blurs distinctions between East and West, reality and non-reality, all the while telling a story about music and musicians that both makes assertions and undermines those assertions at the same time. In addition the novel poses questions of a philosophical or aesthetic nature, such as in the following passage from the first chapter:

Why do we care about singers? Wherein lies the power of songs? Maybe it derives from the sheer strangeness of there being singing in the world. The note, the scale, the chord; melodies, harmonies, arrangements; symphonies, ragas, Chinese operas, jazz, the blues: that such things should exist, that we should have discovered the magical intervals and distances that yield the poor cluster of notes, all within the span of a human hand, from which we can build our cathedrals of sound, is as alchemical a mystery as mathematics, or wine, or love. Maybe the birds taught us. Maybe not. Maybe we are just creatures in search of exaltation. We don't have much of it. Our lives are not what we deserve; they are, let us agree, in many ways painful and deficient. Song turns them into something else.

Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world. (pp. 19-20)

But even here, in a passage where universal claims or suppositions are made, the text undoes itself, as Rai, the narrator, later claims “photography is my way of understanding the world” (p. 210). This view of song is thus explicitly acknowledged, despite its universal claims, as, at best, the view of one man, with his own unique way of engaging with the world.

Rushdie’s novel thus disrupts multiple culturally determined music discourses. First, by positing an alternate reality in which Indians, rather than African-Americans, dominate the American recording industry, Rushdie desediments cultural assumptions about race and musical ability, raising questions about the viability of this alternate reality – its believability – and the contingent factors that have informed the development of Western popular music. Second, in creating characters and events drawn from reality but radically transformed, Rushdie presents a re-reading of music history, bringing a fresh perspective to bear on sedimented cultural moments (such as the shooting of John Lennon, or Madonna’s altercation with a Toronto police officer in *Truth or Dare*), thereby opening up a space for new, and perhaps more creative, interpretations of these moments. Third, by attributing patently absurd qualities of musical genius to Ormus, Rushdie parodies attributions of genius in the larger culture, raising questions about what genius is and what can legitimately be considered innate (Ormus’s supposed ability to play the guitar moments after birth blurs the distinction between the contingent (i.e., chordal finger patterns on a fretted instrument) and innate genius). Fourth, insofar as the novel is a rewriting of the Orpheus myth, albeit with Orpheus and Eurydice transformed

into rock stars, Rushdie raises questions about narrative structure, its history and conventions, and the extent to which these inform our understanding of character and events, not just in literary, but also non-literary, discourses. And fifth, in bringing together a multitude of different discursive genres within a single text – philosophical, historical, descriptive, citational, biographical and autobiographical – the novel serves as a meta-text, its form a meditation on the different discourses of music and their orienting assumptions.

Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*

Michael Ondaatje's historical novel about jazz cornet player Buddy Bolden effects a similar desedimentation of music discourse norms, blurring the line between truth and fiction, form and content, music and writing about music. Ondaatje uses multiple narrators – Bolden, Bolden's friend Webb, bandmates Frank Lewis and Brock Mumford, Bolden's wife Nora Bass, and an image of Ondaatje himself – to write a quasi-poetic account of the life of a mythical jazz figure, one that seamlessly incorporates historical testimony and imaginative prose in a genre that raises questions about the status and authority of conventional biographical narratives.

The central character is Buddy Bolden, a real-life, early 20th century New Orleans cornet player. At the start of the novel Bolden is a normal, if hard drinking and gossiping, barber by day and jazz musician by night. His life has “a fine and precise balance to it” (Ondaatje, 1976, p. 7); he is a “good husband and father, and an infamous man about town” (p. 7). He is, however, also committed to exploring change, to resisting the probable, and resents his wife, Nora Bass, for her “certain answers” (p. 10). He is “almost

completely governed by fears of certainty” (p. 9). And he is terrified of death, a subject he returns to often in *The Cricket*, a scandal sheet he edits and publishes.

When Bolden disappears, his long-time friend Webb, a cop, goes looking for him. Webb is worried that without friends and family, Bolden will “fall apart” (p. 14). To track him down Webb talks to Bolden’s other friends and acquaintances, including Bellocq, a hydrocephalic with a “stoop” and a “hump” (p. 52) who photographs ships by day and the town’s whores by night. Bellocq, we learn, “was the first person I [Bolden] met who had absolutely no interest in my music” (p. 55). As such, he represented a “window” in the “furnished room” created by those who convinced him [Bolden] that he was “doing something important” (p. 55). Bellocq, without intending to, encouraged Bolden to move “gradually off the edge of the social world” (p. 64), because he “scorned all the giraffes of fame” (p. 88) and admitted to Bolden that he “didn’t think much of this music ... yet” (p. 88). Bolden “more and more ... said he [Bellocq] was wrong and more and more I spent whole evenings with him” (p. 88). Bellocq did not scorn Bolden’s music but was bored by it, and Bolden, “in my vanity” (p. 88), accused him of being tone deaf. But ultimately Bolden believes Bellocq was “offering me black empty spaces” and “wanted me to become blind to everything but the owned pain in myself” (p. 88).

The character of Bellocq, also based on a real-life figure in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, focuses the overt narrative of the novel on the themes of creativity, fame, and their interrelationship. Bolden’s wife Nora sees Bellocq as the cause of Bolden’s problems, and silently screams at him, when Bolden tries to defend Bellocq, “*Look at you. Look at what he did to you. Look at you. Look at you. Goddamit. Look at you*” (p. 127, orig. italics). Willy Cornish, a member of Bolden’s band, also believes “Bellocq

corrupted him [Bolden] with that mean silence” (p. 147). But Bolden finds “possibilities in his [Bellocq’s] silence. He was just *there* like a noon shadow ... he tempted me out of the world of audience where I had tried to catch everything thrown at me” (p. 89, orig. italics). For Bolden, Ondaatje suggests, fame and creativity are antithetical and, through Bellocq, Bolden chose creativity.

The overt narrative of *Coming Through Slaughter*, with its meditations on the motivations, beliefs, and attitudes of its central character, brings a depth of characterization rarely found in biographical or autobiographical accounts of musicians. But in addition, the multiple narrative modes through which that narrative is told are themselves meditations, on music, music history and writing about music. This meta-discourse in the novel is apparent in the epigraph, a citation from a scientific text, which shows three sonograph readings of dolphin sounds – a squawk, a whistle, and a click and a whistle sounded together – along with an explanatory note that concludes “No one knows how a dolphin makes both whistles and echolocation clicks simultaneously.” How are we to reconcile this epigraph with the rest of the novel? Is Ondaatje suggesting Bolden was capable of combining sounds in ways we only dimly understand? Is he, by including readings from a “machine that is more sensitive than the human ear,” raising questions about human perception? Is he situating music within the larger context of sound, the human within the larger context of the animate? Is he raising questions about the interrelationship between form and content? Or is he simply introducing uncertainty for uncertainty’s sake, the very uncertainty Ondaatje’s Bolden celebrates?

Uncertainty pervades the novel’s form, with its multiple narrators, some of them named, others nameless. In *Drifting on a read: jazz as a model for writing*, Michael

Jarrett (1999) mitigates some of this uncertainty by reading one of the narrative voices as the voice of Ondaatje himself (i.e., the self-conscious author of the novel). He claims the passage beginning

Why did my senses stop at you? There was the sentence, ‘Buddy Bolden who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade ...’ What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself? (p. 135)

is a self-reflexive passage that accounts for the existence of the novel, a self-interpolation on the part of the author that raises “a fascinating question. Why are we as writers or readers drawn to (and, in a sense, drawn by) certain texts?” (p. 54). Jarrett believes that, were it not for this passage, the novel would be “little more than an artful jumble of documentary materials, imagined dialogue and monologues, and poetic patches spread out in the manner of imagist poetry” (p. 55). He claims that by adding “personal (idiomatic) information to the public and professional levels of discourse” (p. 55), by including a “ground-zero anecdote” (p. 56) that demystifies the desire behind the text, a “primal scene,” an explanation for “why we write what we write” (p. 56), Ondaatje creates a novel that is “more than historical fiction” (p. 56).

But to read the novel in this way is to ally oneself with Nora and her “certain answers” (Ondaatje, 1976, p. 10). For the narrative voice Jarrett interprets as that of the author could just as easily be another voice of uncertain origin, an image of the author, as opposed to a representation of Ondaatje’s self-image. To read the novel in this way, to

resist a spurious identity between Ondaatje and the image of the author he presents, is to ally oneself with Bolden and his “fears of certainty” (p 9). While there is evidence to suggest Ondaatje is the narrator of this passage – both the narrator and Ondaatje are the same age – no definitive identity can be established (nor could it ever, given the fictional genre i.e., even if the narrator were to preface the passage with the words “I am now writing as Ondaatje, the author of this text ...” this could still be interpreted as a literary device).

Coming through Slaughter thus blurs the line between reality and fiction, to create a commentary on those very distinctions. In a ‘Credits and Acknowledgements’ section at the end of the book Ondaatje writes, “There have been some date changes, some characters brought together, and some facts have been expanded or polished to suit the truth of fiction” (no page number). But Ondaatje does not specify which dates have been changed, which characters brought together, and which facts expanded or polished. He acknowledges in the ‘Credits’ section at the end of the book that “Dude Botley’s monologue appears in Martin Williams’ *Jazz Masters of New Orleans* and appears with permission of the Macmillan Publishing Company” (n.p), but in the body of the novel the monologue is prefaced with the words, “Dude Botley ... tells this story which some believe and which others don’t believe at all” (p. 77). Botley then relates how he heard Bolden play the Devil’s blues and sacred hymns at the same time.

He’s mixing them up. He’s playing the blues and the hymn sadder than the blues and then the blues sadder than the hymn. That is the first time I ever heard hymns and blues cooked up together ... Something tells me to listen

and see who wins. If Bolden stops on the hymn, the Good Lord wins. If he stops on the blues, the Devil wins. (p. 78)

This apocryphal story serves as one of the founding pillars of 20th century popular music, re-appearing in the myths of Robert Johnson at the crossroads and countless other contexts (for a recent iteration see the movie *Ray*). But by citing it in its entirety and attributing it to its original source (Dude Botley), while at the same time re-contextualizing it within a work of fiction, using a fictional narrator to question the reliability of Botley's testimony, Ondaatje desediments not only the Buddy Bolden myth but the very idea of reliable, factual testimony.

Distinctions between fact and fiction are further highlighted by the varied genres of writing Ondaatje accommodates within a single text, which include, as freestanding sections, replicas of institutional documents (p. 154-157), poems (p. 148), a list of band names (p. 105), interview transcripts (p. 103), song lyrics (p. 82), a list of song titles (p. 17), first-person testimony (p. 32), a photograph (n.p), the previously discussed sonograph reading with explanation (n.p), as well as third person (p. 9) and first person narration (p. 42). Within these different genres narrative conventions are disrupted by indicating temporal information at the end, rather than the beginning, of a passage (p. 15), moving freely between past and present tenses (p. 40), switching narrators within a passage with no warning (p. 70), writing in fragments (p. 72), addressing the reader directly (p. 89), integrating dialogue and narration (p. 123), using page turns as a narrative device (pp. 135-136) and using typesetting to distinguish between different genres of writing (p. 139). Thus at both the micro- (i.e., within a single genre) and macro- (i.e., in the spaces between these different genres) levels, the novel blurs the distinction

between fact and fiction, thereby raising questions about the authority of more conventional music history narratives.

Coming through Slaughter is thus an inquiry into the facts of music history, the way those facts are presented, and the relationship between the two. In refusing to conform to traditional modes of storytelling (it can usefully be contrasted with a work such as Donald M. Marquis's *In search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz* (1978/2005)) it not only performs a critical function, but also, through specific narrative techniques, models the non-conformity of the music it takes as its subject matter. For many of the attributes Ondaatje ascribes to Buddy Bolden's music are present in Ondaatje's prose. Bolden was "never professional in the brain" (Ondaatje, 1976, p. 8), and would "stop and talk to the crowd" (p. 8). He "tore apart the plot ... hunting for the right accidental notes" (p. 32). He was "formless ... tormented by order" (p. 32). His music was "covered with scandal and incident and change ... was coarse and rough, immediate, dated in half an hour" (p. 38). He "showed all the possibilities in the middle of the story" (p. 38); he wanted people to "be able to come in where they pleased and leave when they pleased and somehow hear the germs of the start and all the possible endings at whatever point in the music that I had reached *then*" (p. 92, orig. italics). He refused to "control the world of my music because I had no power over anything else that went on around me, in or around my body" (p. 98). He wants "to overcome this awful and stupid clarity" (p. 99). In short, Ondaatje illustrates, rather than merely describes, Bolden and his music, using a literary style designed for that specific purpose.

The following paragraph shows how Ondaatje's writing illustrates Bolden's music. Bolden has returned home after two years to find Willy Cornish, his friend and band member, living with his wife, Nora.

The three of them entered a calm long conversation. They talked in the style of a married couple joined by a third person who was catalyst and audience. And Buddy watched her large hip as she lay on the floor of the room, the hill of the cloth, and he came into her dress like a burglar without words in the family style they had formed years ago, with some humour now but not too much humour. Sitting against her body and bending down to smell her skin and touching with his face through the flesh the buried bones in her chest. Writhed his face against her small breasts. Her skirt still on, her blouse not taken off but apart and his rough cheek scraping her skin, not going near her face which he had explored so much from across the room earlier. When Cornish had still been there. (p. 109)

The paragraph begins with "the three of them" – Cornish, Bolden and Nora – having "a calm long conversation." In the second sentence, "they talked in the style of a married couple joined by a third person," but it is not clear whether Nora and Cornish, or Bolden and Nora are talking (i.e., it is not clear who is the couple and who the third person). In the middle of the paragraph Bolden and Nora become physically intimate, presumably with Cornish present. But in the final sentence we discover that time has elapsed over the course of the paragraph, that Bolden had explored Nora's face from across the room earlier, "when Cornish had still been there," but at some point, perhaps before or at the

onset of physical intimacy between Bolden and Nora, Cornish left. By structuring the paragraph this way Ondaatje creates tension in his prose in the same way his character creates tension in his music, through tearing apart the plot, incorporating scandal, incident and change, showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story etc.

Donald Marquis, in the 2005 epilogue to his 1978 biography of Buddy Bolden, reports that

Around 1977 I was visited in my office by Canadian author Michael Ondaatje. He said he was interested in writing a biography of Bolden and asked, “Do you know anything about him?” I told him my manuscript had been accepted by LSU Press and was in the printing stage.

“Well, I will forget that.”

Ondaatje then wrote a very interesting novel based on Bolden, called *Coming through Slaughter*. (Marquis, 1978/2005, p. 157)

While *Coming through Slaughter* may have had its genesis in conventional biography, as historical fiction it subverts conventional biography in multiple different ways. First, it prioritizes the truth of fiction, rather than the truth of fact, propagating half-truths (that Bolden was a barber) and falsehoods (that Bolden and Bellocq were friends) to create a narrative that serves as a detailed illustrative example – a case study, if you will – of a creative life. While the data for this case study may be drawn as much from Ondaatje’s own experience as Bolden’s, it forces us to ask to what extent the fantasies and ideological commitments of conventional biographers influence their accounts of the

lives of others. Second, through the use of multiple narrative modes, the novel raises questions about who writes and for what purpose, particularly with respect to historical accounts of music and musicians, and whether that purpose may be better served by lessening our commitment to historically verifiable facts and conventional rhetorical tropes. Third, through the use of a prose style that re-creates the experience of the music it describes, Ondaatje's novel shows, rather than tells, the story of Buddy Bolden and the unrecorded, uncertain pre-history of jazz. Thus *Coming through slaughter* represents music and musicians, and at the same time raises questions about representations of music and musicians.

Elfriede Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*

In 2004 Elfriede Jelinek was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for “her musical flow of voices and counter-voices in novels and plays that with extraordinary linguistic zeal reveal the absurdity of society's clichés and their subjugating power” (Nobel, 2004). In her most celebrated novel, *The Piano Teacher*, Jelinek (1983/1999) desediments the societal cliché that Western art music is ennobling, portraying it instead as violent and hostile to nature and sexuality.

The piano teacher of the title is Erika Kohut, a woman in her late thirties, who teaches at the Vienna Conservatory of Music. She lives with, and sleeps in the same bed as, her mother, who “is old enough to be her grandmother” (p. 3). Erika's father “exited” soon after she “entered” (p. 3), and she is now “trying to escape her mother” (p. 3), “recognized as Mother by the State and by the Family” (p. 3). Jelinek uses the pronoun “SHE” to describe the adolescent Erika, the capitalization signifying the extent to which she is “the exception to the norm that surrounds her so repulsively” (p. 15), an

exceptionality that is “explained to her very meticulously” (p. 15) by her mother. Her exceptionality is a result of her being “Mother’s only child” (p. 15), and a “genius” (p. 25). After an important but disastrous public performance, however, a career opportunity that “knocks but once” (p. 27), Erika has to forego her ambition to be a concert pianist, instead becoming a piano teacher, for “what else can she do but become a teacher?” (p. 27). The majority of Erika’s spare time is then spent with her mother, watching television that “prefabricates, packages, and home-delivers lovely images, lovely actions” (p. 5). As an escape from her mother’s oppressive influence, however, Erika visits Vienna’s red light district where she “becomes nothing” (p. 51). She watches women strip from a booth in which she “fits exactly” (p. 51), despite the fact that “nothing fits into Erika” (p. 51). “Erika feels solid wood in the place where the carpenter made a hole in any genuine female ... Nature seems to have left no apertures in her” (p. 51).

Walter Klemmer, an engineering student and one of Erika’s most talented piano students, “would love to be friends with Erika” (p. 65) and over time Erika opens up to him, telling him that her father “lost his mind and died in the Steinhof Asylum” (p. 71). But Klemmer’s clear sexual interest brings back memories of previous sexual relationships and these memories “aren’t good” (p. 74). Despite her shrieking, pounding and scratching during the sexual act, she has “felt nothing, she has always felt nothing” (p. 74). Klemmer’s hobby is white water rafting, which he sees as a way to “develop a sense of your body, through your body” (p. 78). He tells his professor that she “wouldn’t believe how much a person can enjoy his own body ... ask your body what it wants and it’ll tell you” (p. 78). But Erika enjoys “cutting her own body” (p. 86), which she has been doing since she was a child. Klemmer tells Erika that, “a human being attains his

supreme value only when he lets go of reality and enters the realm of the senses” (p. 119). His favorite composers, Beethoven and Schubert, “with whom I feel personally involved” (p. 119), “despise reality and regard both art and the senses as our sole reality” (p. 119). Erika, in contrast, believes feelings and passion are a substitute for spirituality, and consequently she prefers undramatic music, such as Schumann.

Klemmer wonders if “perhaps Erika Kohut is far too withered to understand him” (p. 123), but he nevertheless still wants to “take on his teacher ... to conquer her” (p. 124), which he eventually does, in one of the conservatory bathrooms, where she cooperates “like a good girl” (p. 178) and “pulls out his dick” (p. 178). But just as he is “getting to enjoy the situation as well as the feeling in his body” (p. 180), despite the fact that she “deliberately hurts him” (p. 180) by inserting “her fingernails under his foreskin” (p. 180) and digging “her teeth into the crown of his dick” (p. 180), she stops before he reaches orgasm. He “begs her not to stop for God’s sake” (p. 181), but she insists that “she doesn’t want to touch it any more” (p. 181). Instead she tells him she will provide him with “a list of all the things he can do to her” (p. 180) in the future.

When Erika and Klemmer next meet they are both “seething with love and a comprehensible desire for more love” (p. 189). Erika produces a letter that she gives to Klemmer, “just as she has pictured it at home a thousand times” (p. 190). They go to Erika’s house, barricade themselves in Erika’s room (which has no lock on it), and ignore Mrs. Kohut’s repeated attempts to interrupt them. Klemmer “gazes at Erika in love and veneration as if someone were gazing at him gazing at Erika in love and veneration” (p. 213). He is keen to “get the show on the road” (p. 214) but Erika insists he read the letter, and after reading it he “can no longer see her [Erika] as a human being” (p. 215).

In the letter Erika expresses a desire to be punished, to be tied up “solidly, intensely, artfully, cruelly, tormentingly, cunningly” (p. 215), to be physically abused – “she wants him to smash his fists in her stomach ... to be dimmed out under him, snuffed out” (pp. 215-216) – and to be called insulting names, such as “stupid slave” (p. 218). She wants him to “ignore any request coming from her” (p. 217), to “pay no attention to my pleading, that’s very important” (p. 217). Klemmer finds it hard to believe that a “woman who plays Chopin so marvelously” (p. 226) wants to “stick her tongue in his behind when he mounts her” (p. 226). She “pleads for rape” (p. 226), asks to be treated “brutally but thoroughly” (p. 226), and “wants to choke on Klemmer’s stone-hard dick when she is so thoroughly tied up that she can’t move at all” (p. 226). But he recognizes that, paradoxically, “written illegibly between the lines” (p. 226) is “please don’t hurt me” (p. 226). Klemmer reacts to the letter with confusion. He wants to “get out of this apartment, which has become a trap” (p. 216), “finds it all so funny” (p. 216), says, “Maybe,” “Absolutely not” (p. 228) and then, “We’ll have to wait and see” (p. 230). Eventually he “leaves without saying goodbye and slams the apartment door behind him” (p. 231). But “after a breather and some deliberation, he is reluctantly impressed by the limits she pushes against in an attempt to expand them” (p. 235).

The next time they meet “Erika Kohut drags the student into the cleaning staff’s cabinet” (p. 240) where Klemmer “shoves the woman’s mouth upon his genital like an old glove” (p. 242). But he is “afraid of the piano teacher’s inner worlds” (p. 241), and because “he *must* [get an erection], he *can’t*” (p. 241). Erika in turn mentally disengages, her attention drawn to the scene outside the window, where “natural forces rule with overwhelming power” (p. 245). Klemmer “presses his all into her face” (p. 245),

“stuffing himself into the woman’s mouth” (p. 245), but still “can’t give his best today” (p. 245). Erika, struggling for air, “throws up into an old metal pail” (p. 245) and is berated by Klemmer for getting him “all mixed up” (p. 246). He tells her that she “stinks to high heaven” (p. 246) and prepares to leave, despite the fact Erika “would like to watch him squeeze her throat shut” (p. 247). They part ways after Klemmer “recommends that she leave town” (p. 247) on account of “how nauseating her bodily vapors are” (p. 248).

The next day Klemmer comes to the Kohut’s home late at night and viciously attacks Erika and her mother. After masturbating outside the building he phones Erika and demands she let him in. She “opens the building door and trustingly puts herself in the man’s hands” (p. 262). But despite the fact Erika “would not remind the man of his body’s failure for all the tea in China” (p. 262), he “pushes” and “slaps” her. Mrs. Kohut wakes up and is outraged by Klemmer’s behavior. “If anyone is going to slap Erika, it’ll be Mother,” she thinks to herself. Klemmer continues to degrade Erika, treating her “like a piece of athletic gear” (p. 264). Mrs. Kohut “indignantly points out that he is damaging someone else’s property, namely hers!” (p. 264). Klemmer locks Mrs. Kohut in the bedroom, then “smashes his right fist, not too hard and not too soft, into Erika’s belly” (p. 266). He “kicks her in the ribs as she lies on the floor” (p. 269), believing that “she brought this on by trying to control him and his desires” (p. 269). Erika begs him to stop, “reminding him of what she used to be for him” (p. 269), but he hits her harder, enters her and ejaculates. He then “advises her not to tell anyone” (p. 273), apologizes, says he “just couldn’t help it” (p. 273), and after a long goodbye, leaves. The novel ends ambiguously, with Erika walking through Vienna dressed in an “irresolute semi-

miniskirt” (p. 277) and ill-fitting top carrying a knife. “Youth laughs at Erika because of her exterior. Erika laughs at youth because of its interior, which has no real substance” (p. 277). Outside the university’s Engineering department she sees Klemmer with his arm around a female student. She watches as the students “interrupt themselves with their own laughter” (p. 280). “With no burst of rage, fury, or passion, Erika Kohut stabs a place on her shoulder, which instantly shoots out blood” (p. 280). She then “heads home” (p. 280), knowing “the direction she has to take” (p. 280).

The Piano Teacher is clearly violent. But it is violent in a number of different ways. First, it depicts acts of physical violence that are described in graphic, often gruesome, detail. Erika “yanks” (p. 8) at her mother’s hair, she “furiously kicks a hard bone” (p. 17) of a stranger in the streetcar, one of her students has “a slashed, bloody hand” (p. 170) after Erika puts broken glass in her coat pocket, and “a hole opens” (p. 180) in Klemmer’s penis after Erika deliberately hurts him. Klemmer, in turn, “smashes his right fist ... into Erika’s belly” (p. 266) and “licks and beats her alternately” (p. 273). Even minor characters are physically violent. While walking in the red light district Erika sees the head of a four-year-old “thrown back by a mother’s slap of hurricane strength” (p. 46). When the child then “emits horrible sounds ... the impatient mother promptly knocks it out of plumb again” (p. 46).

Second, these graphic depictions of physical violence take place within the context of a more prevalent and diffuse emotional violence. As a child, “Erika is not allowed to associate with ordinary people” (p. 26). She is not to “be bothered by love or pleasure” (p. 33). She “shouldn’t get involved in athletic competitions” (p. 25). Her hands “are supposed to practice, not scoot under the blanket like ants and scurry over to the jam

jar” (p. 52). These imperatives, that amount to a prohibition on nature and sexuality, do not originate in Mrs. Kohut, but are rather endemic to the process of enculturation itself, for culture requires, for its continuation, coercion. “Some students rebel against their piano teacher. But their parents force them to practice art, and so Professor Kohut can likewise use force” (p. 12). Western musical culture, Jelinek suggests, *requires* emotional violence, which in turn licenses physical violence.

Third, the narrator of these scenes of physical and emotional violence is also violent, insulting its characters and ascribing the least charitable impulses, desires, and motivations to them. Erika is described as a “shapeless cadaver” (p. 65), a “flabby bag of tissue” (p. 65), a “pathologically twisted joke of a creature” (p. 65) and a “rapturous idiot” (p. 65). When a student asks her what her goal is, she answers, “Humanity,” which the narrator interprets as a ploy to gain power and social standing – she is “summing up Beethoven’s *Heiligenstadt Testament* for her pupils – and squeezing in next to the hero of music, on his pedestal” (p. 13). A musicologist who studies Mozart is also assumed to be parasitical. “She bites a hole in the flesh of one of the great geniuses and pushes her way inside” (p. 20). And Erika’s mother and grandmother, who “stand guard, rifle in hand, to protect Erika against the male hunter lurking outside” (p. 33) do so because they have “dried, sealed vaginas ... the two old women have turned into siliceous stone” (p. 33). In sum, the narrator ascribes no positive motivations to, and demonstrates no compassion for, any of the novel’s characters.

Fourth, the narration is also violent in its form, incorporating the thoughts, feelings, words and actions of its characters within an undifferentiated text that prevents

them from speaking in their own words and from their own perspective. Take the following passage, for instance:

Erika keeps her whimpering down because of the neighbors. Mother perks up her ears. She is forced to realize that her daughter is being degraded into something like a piece of athletic gear. Mother indignantly points out that he [Klemmer] is damaging someone else's property, namely hers!
Mother concludes: Get out of here at once. And as fast as you can. (p. 264)

In this paragraph the last two sentences are Mrs. Kohut's words. But they are not offset typographically, using conventions indicating direct speech (i.e., quotation marks). Rather, her speech is recited by the narrator, who exerts complete control over the text at all times, thereby preventing alternative, and potentially dissenting, perspectives from challenging its authority.

And finally the overarching narrative itself is violent, consisting of a series of physically and emotionally violent encounters that are never resolved. At the conclusion of the novel, bleeding from her shoulder and holding a knife, Erika "knows the direction she has to take. She heads home, gradually quickening her step" (p. 280). The ambiguity of this last sentence adds to its menace. Is the direction she has chosen simply geographical or moral? Has she decided to go home or to attack her mother? Or herself? Or both? At the end of the novel, no tension has been dissipated, no conclusions reached, no problems resolved. Nothing has fundamentally changed.

The novel is thus violent through and through. It depicts acts of physical violence – Klemmer hits Erika, Erika stabs herself, Erika injures a student. It depicts acts of

emotional violence – Mrs. Kohut taunts Erika, Erika scorns her students, and Klemmer verbally abuses Erika. Its narrator is violent, insulting characters and ascribing the least charitable motivations to them. It is violent in its form, an anonymous, omniscient narrator preventing characters from speaking for themselves, their thoughts, feelings, actions and words constrained by a faceless, nameless authority. And finally, it is violent in its overarching narrative, which concludes with the suggestion of more violence to come (most likely suicide or matricide). Yet this violence, by virtue of being self-consciously literary, draws attention to itself. While cultural narratives of Western art music are diffuse, pervasive, without clear origin and unavailable to critical scrutiny, the violence in Jelinek’s prose is explicit. Her counter-narrative, focused on the hypocrisy, back-stabbing, power grabs, and coercion implicit in Western art music culture, desediments dominant cultural narratives about Western art music. In challenging the idea that exceptional geniuses create timeless masterpieces that in turn make people more human, *The Piano Teacher* opens up a space for more personal, idiosyncratic narratives of Western art music culture to emerge.

Herman Hesse’s *The Glass Bead Game*

In the previous three sections I discussed novels about music and musicians. In this last section I turn to a novel that is, at least in part, about musicology. The central premise of German author Herman Hesse’s 1943 novel *The Glass Bead Game* (2002) is that it is possible to translate “the total contents and values of our culture” (p. 15) into a single “language drawing upon several sciences and arts, but especially mathematics and music (and/or musicology)” (p. 15). This universal language makes possible “the expressing and establishing of interrelationships between the content and conclusions of

nearly all scholarly disciplines” (p. 15). The contents and values of culture thus become like the manuals and pedals on an organ.

All the insights, noble thoughts, and works of art that the human race has produced in its creative eras, all that subsequent periods of scholarly study have reduced to concepts and converted into intellectual property – on all this immense body of intellectual values the Glass Bead Game player plays like the organist on an organ. (p. 15)

The Glass Bead Game thus plays with the contents and conclusions of cultural history, much as a musician or composer plays with notes.

In the introductory chapter, titled “The Glass Bead Game: A general introduction to its history for the layman”, Hesse parodies 19th and 20th century cultural life. He describes the “Age of the Feuilleton” (a feuilleton is the art and literary section of a German newspaper), which reached its height in 1900 and out of which the Glass Bead Game arose, as “by no means uncultured; it was not even intellectually impoverished. But ... that age appears to have had only the dimmest notion of what to do with culture” (p. 18). It is individualistic, bourgeois, gossipy, passive, escapist and primitive. But out of it came the new science of music, with its “exemplary methodology, characterized by care and thoroughness” (p. 25), which in turn ushered in a new era of “self-discipline and dignity of the human intellect” (p. 23). Itinerant musicians capable of performing “the music of earlier epochs with perfect ancient purity ... as if all the subsequent modes, refinements, and virtuoso achievements were still unknown” (p. 26) introduced a new concept of culture, one that emphasized the re-use of pre-existing works of art over the

production of new works. A new relation to classical music was born, one that “differs totally from that of our predecessors in the creative ages” (p. 27). While the era of the Glass Bead Game is “uncreative” (p. 28), unable to produce new works of art, it has “uncovered the secret of what we now call classical music” (p. 28), its spirit, virtue and piety, and taken that as a model for the culture as a whole. Mathematics and music, rather than philosophy and literature, have become the dominant forces in intellectual life.

The Game, we learn, arose out of an exercise employed by a small group of musicologists and musicians in Germany and England, a “witty method for developing memory and ingenuity among students and musicians” (p. 31). An abacus-type frame, with wires serving as staves and glass beads serving as musical note values, was used to represent musical quotations or invented themes, which were then inverted, transposed, or otherwise altered for the sheer fun of it. After losing favor among musicians the game was taken up by mathematicians, who developed the device in such a way that it could represent complex mathematical processes, which were then elaborated and transformed, again for the sheer fun of it. Over time the Game became an exercise in “concentrated self-awareness for intellectuals” (p. 33), taken up by all the scientific and scholarly disciplines, with each discipline creating its own language of formulas, abbreviations and possible combinations.

These multiple different Glass Bead Game languages, each with their own disciplinary affiliations, did not immediately come together in a universal language due to a “profound and justified fear of relapse into the sin of superficiality and feuilletonism” (p. 36). But after a half century a Swiss musicologist with a passion for mathematics invented the principles of a new language, a “language of symbols and formulas, in

which mathematics and music played an equal part, so that it became possible to combine astronomical and musical formulas, to reduce mathematics and music to a common denominator” (p. 37). The Glass Bead Game then became a universal means of communicating across disciplines, with mystics, artists, musicians and intellectuals of all types turning to it as a means of achieving synthesis and exchange across disciplinary boundaries. The Glass Bead Game became a single universal symbol system, “the quintessence of intellectuality and art, the sublime cult” (p. 37).

But it did not reach its final stage of development until dazzling, virtuosic, but ultimately superficial, displays of memory were banned and contemplation was introduced as a key component of the game. Players were required to perform silent meditation on the content, origin and meaning of all hieroglyphs prior to their manipulation, thereby preventing the game’s symbols from becoming “mere empty signs” (p. 39). The introduction of contemplation represented a “turning toward the religious spirit” (p. 38), which in turn led to Games becoming international public ceremonies, often lasting days or weeks, with players setting values in relation to one another and manipulating them “according to musical or mathematical rules” (p. 39).

One theme, two themes, or three themes were stated, elaborated, varied, and underwent a development quite similar to that of the theme in a Bach fugue or a concerto movement. A Game, for example, might start from a given astronomical configuration, or from the actual theme of a Bach fugue, or from a sentence out of Leibniz or the Upanishads, and from this theme, depending on the intentions and talents of the player, it could either

further explore and elaborate the initial motif or else enrich its expressiveness by allusions to kindred concepts. (pp. 39-40)

Thus seemingly hostile themes or ideas, such as law and freedom, or individual and community, could be brought into dialogue and reconciled through formal techniques similar to those used by composers of the Baroque and Classical eras.

Over time the Game became institutionalized, with a World Commission of master game players set up to rule on the introduction of new symbols and formulas, as well as modifications to the practice of the game. “If the Game is regarded as a kind of world language for thoughtful men, the Games Commissions of the various countries under the leadership of their Magisters form as a whole the Academy which guards the vocabulary, the development, and the purity of this language” (p. 42). These “high functionaries in cultural life” (p. 42) are trained in elite boarding schools from an early age, and it is “the dream of almost every fifteen-year-old in the elite schools” (p. 43) to rise to the level of Magister Ludi.

The remainder of the novel, following the introductory chapter on the history of the Game, focuses on Joseph Knecht, a Magister Ludi. As a boy, in part because he plays violin and surrenders himself to the “lovely, congenial lines and figurations” (p. 54) of a fugue, Knecht is admitted to an elite school for boys in Castalia, a tranquil and serene region of Germany and the center of the Order of Glass Bead Game players. Castalians forego the “appearance of freedom” (p. 73) – the freedom to choose their profession – in favor of a greater freedom. For although the Castalian does not “imagine he is a better judge of his own talents than are his teachers” (p. 74), he is free to study whatever he

likes once his early courses are completed. “He knows nothing of the struggle for money, fame, rank; he recognizes no parties, no dichotomy between the individual and the office, between what is private and what is public; he feels no dependence on success” (p. 74). He is free of earthly struggle – “saved from that ‘freedom’ of career which means such terrible slavery” (p. 74).

But despite this freedom Knecht is curious about the world in which there are “loving mothers and children, hungry people and poorhouses, newspapers and election campaigns” (p. 99). With Plinio Designori, a “hospitant” student (a guest at the school with no intention of joining the Order), Knecht publicly debates the merits of Castalia, pitting the “intensive cultivation of the mind” (p. 107) against the “natural life” (p. 107). But Designori, in line with the Order’s emphasis on seeing contraries as opposite poles of a unity, privately expresses an appreciation for the Castalian way of life, thereby transfiguring the contrast between Mind and world, two irreconcilable principles, “into a double concerto” (p. 108).

Father Jacobus, a Benedictine monk, also challenges Knecht’s commitment to Castalia. Jacobus convinces Knecht that the Castalian understanding of world history is

bloodless and lacking in reality ... You treat world history as a mathematician does mathematics, in which nothing but laws and formulas exist, no reality, no good and evil, no time, no yesterday, no tomorrow, nothing but an eternal, shallow mathematical present. (p. 168)

Jacobus also accuses Knecht of having no real knowledge about the human race. “All you know is the Castalian, a special product, a caste, a rare experiment in breeding” (p. 188), and consequently he can have no true wisdom.

Knecht’s exposure to these external challenges – first of Designori and later of Father Jacobus – along with his own reservations about the over-intellectualization of music in Castalia, eventually lead him to quit the Order, but not before he has been appointed Master of the Glass Bead Game, or Magister Ludi. From that vantage point he sees that

Castalia and the Glass Bead Game are wonderful things; they come close to being perfect. Only perhaps they are too much so, too beautiful. They are so beautiful that one can scarcely contemplate them without fearing for them. It is not pleasant to think that some day they are bound to pass away as everything else does. And yet one must think of that. (p. 264)

Castalia exists within a historical trajectory, and consequently is, like all products of the mind, essentially transitory.

When Knecht hears from his old school friend Designori, who has been living outside Castalia since leaving the elite school, “how far Castalia has moved away from its motherland ... how alien our country has become from her noblest Province” (p. 297), his curiosity about life outside Castalia is piqued. He visits Designori, meets his wife and child (members of the Order are not allowed to marry or have sexual relations) and feels “a hitherto idle and empty part of his self, of his heart and soul ... demanding the right to fulfill itself” (p. 342). He wants to leave Castalia, and writes a letter of resignation to the

senior members of the Order, criticizing the “conceit that can be observed among the members of our Order” (p. 348), the “smugness and self-praise” (p. 349) and the “intellectual specialism” (p. 349). He accuses Castalians of not feeling responsibility for events in the outside world, caring only for the “cultivation of the scholarly disciplines for their own sake” (p. 349) and prophesies the end of the Game, which, he claims, by virtue of being non-utilitarian, is unlikely to survive political upheaval.

Knecht’s superiors respond by asking “What would become of our hierarchy if the Order no longer assigned each man to his place? What would become of Castalia if everyone wished to assess his own gifts and aptitudes and choose his position for himself?” (pp. 367-8). Yet Knecht is committed to leaving, and meets with the President of the Order to explain his reasons. He has had a “spiritual experience” (p. 394), an “awakening” (p. 395), where “I really feel as if I had lain asleep or half asleep for a long time, but am now awake and clearheaded and receptive in a way I never am ordinarily” (p. 395). Since his student years he has conceived of his life as a “perpetual transcending, a progression from stage to stage” (p. 397).

I wanted it to pass through one area after the next, leaving each behind, as music moves on from theme to theme, from tempo to tempo, playing each out to the end, completing each and leaving it behind, never tiring, never sleeping, forever wakeful, forever in the present. (p. 397)

Knecht’s work as Magister Ludi has become “eternal recurrence, an empty exercise” (p. 401) done “without joy, without enthusiasm, sometimes even without faith” (p. 401), and he consequently urges the President of the Order to accept his resignation.

But the President of the Order, claiming, “I do not speak for myself, but as President of the Order” (p. 402), responds, “I cannot simultaneously believe in our system and in your personal right to violate it – *please, don’t interrupt me*” (p. 403, emphasis added). This interruption, which is not further elucidated, I take to be an attempt by Knecht to point out the hypocrisy of the President’s position. For while Castalia’s overt commitment is to the non-ideological pursuit of intellectual game playing, by not accepting Knecht’s resignation the President turns that very commitment into an ideology. He refuses to admit that life in Castalia “might in some circumstances not be satisfying to a man, might mean renunciation and imprisonment” (p. 343). While Castalians subscribe to the view that “we should be so constituted that we can at any time be placed in a different position without offering resistance or losing our heads” (p. 82), the President of Castalia has to perform breathing exercises “used by members of the Order in moments of sudden danger to regain self-control and inner calm” (p. 385) when Knecht tells him of his determination to leave Castalia, whether or not his resignation is accepted. On this reading Castalia, the institution dedicated to the preservation of the Glass Bead Game, values its own continued existence more than the values and principles of the Glass Bead Game itself.

In creating Castalia, a parody of Western academia, Hesse’s *Glass Bead Game* raises multiple questions about the role, purpose and function of academic discourses, and in particular academic discourses of music. First, it asks whether musical forms – and in particular, those of the Baroque and Classical eras – can act as methodologies. What might it mean to take a “counterpoint form” approach to the free will-determinism debate, for instance, playing with these concepts in the same way we might play with

musical notes? How would this approach differ from those based on philosophical logic, linguistic analysis, or neuro-psychology, for instance? What could a musical approach to resolving (or, indeed, not resolving) contradiction contribute to cultural life? Second, it asks whether musical form can serve as a model for life. Knecht conceives of his life as a series of stages, with each stage “leaving each behind, as music moves on from theme to theme, from tempo to tempo, playing each out to the end, completing each and leaving it behind, never tiring, never sleeping, forever wakeful, forever in the present” (p. 397). Music, like life, is temporal, and consequently serves as a model for how life can be lived “forever in the present” (p. 397), with no loss of intensity between stages. Third, the novel points to the dangers of institutions, and in particular those committed to the preservation of non-utilitarian goods. Castalia is corrupt because, as an institution, it does not adhere to mathematical-musical methodologies. Knecht’s resignation is refused because the President of the Order “cannot simultaneously believe in our system and in your personal right to violate it” (p. 403) – in other words, he subscribes to the law of non-contradiction, a logico-philosophical tenet. Why is this so? The President makes it clear that he is not speaking “for myself, but as President of the Order” (p. 402). Are we to assume that he personally can resolve the contradiction (which presumably, as a master Glass Bead Game player, he can), but as President of the Order he cannot or will not? This last point raises significant questions about the self-preserving nature of institutions. To what extent is there a disjunct, for instance, between the institution of academic music studies and the individuals that make it up? To what extent are the values and methodologies of academic music studies in line with the values and methodologies of music? And to what lengths are we prepared to go as individuals to protect music we find

so beautiful we can scarcely contemplate it without fearing for it? In raising these questions Hesse's text offers a perspective outside academic discourses of music from which to contemplate their orienting norms and conventions. It turns the collective subjectivity of academic music studies into an object of critical scrutiny.

Characteristics of Critical Writing on Literary Writing About Music

Critical writing on literary writing on music brings a variety of interpretive tools to bear in the reading of texts about music and musicians. It embraces uncertainty, both in the texts it studies and in its own interpretations, accepting that the words a particular piece of music can inspire are potentially infinite. While it imposes order on a text, it accepts that order as contingent, a textual formation that is itself subject to literary critical scrutiny and ongoing revision. Thus it celebrates music's complexity, as well as the complexity of writing about music, accepting that music will always transcend descriptions of it, just as those descriptions themselves transcend description.

Chapter 11: Writing About Music Education

In this chapter I look at the implications of the different ways of writing about music explored above for the theory and practice of music education. In the introductory chapter I argued that music education has an ethical dimension, that questions about how we do music education cannot be separated from questions of who we are and who we want to become through music education. I also argued, on purely pragmatic grounds, that citizens of multicultural, democratic societies must develop a number of virtues – what, borrowing from Robert Nash, I termed postmodern virtues – if these societies are to be sustainable over the long term. In this concluding chapter I argue that music education can be oriented toward the cultivation of these virtues if music educators are prepared to forego philosophy as a foundational discourse and adopt the kinds of subjectivities modeled in literary texts and develop those subjectivities in their students through engagement with music.

Since the early 1970s the practice of music education has been informed by philosophies of music education, most notably Bennet Reimer's aesthetic and David Elliott's praxial philosophies. Both offer an account of the nature and value of music, and both assume that how we structure the practice of music education follows directly from how we conceive of the nature and value of music. In presenting their philosophies little attention is paid to the nature and value of the discursive norms that orient their prose – they write as if writing is self-explanatory, a disinterested medium capable of conveying their ideas about music and music education with little to no interference. But this attitude is not fundamentally different to that of the person who says, “Who needs a

philosophy of music? I hear what I hear, and if I like it I like it.” In other words, the very same people who promote a systematic inquiry into the nature and value of music, do not engage in, let alone promote, a similarly systematic inquiry into the nature and value of writing. While this may be equivalent to a violinist who says, “I don’t have time for philosophies of music – I’m too busy playing,” there comes a point in time when stepping back from the routine performance of one’s craft becomes necessary. I believe that point for the field of music education is now, because the points of tension between aesthetic and praxial approaches cannot be adequately understood, let alone reconciled, without stepping back and examining the discourse within which those points of tension arise. Such a stepping back is equivalent to a performing musician working on their technique. Just as a new bow hold, playing posture or hand position can bring relief to pain and suffering previously believed to be endemic, so a recognition of the technical constraints limiting current discourse on music education can bring relief to seemingly insurmountable philosophical disagreement.

The emphasis on philosophy as a foundational discourse for music education was first introduced by Bennett Reimer in 1970. In the first edition of *A philosophy of music education* he claimed a philosophy of music education is necessary “if one is to be effective as a professional and if one’s profession is to be effective as a whole” (Reimer, 1970, p. 2). Such a philosophy answers the question “Just what is it about my work that really matters?” (p. 7). Thus philosophy, the systematic and careful deliberation between competing perspectives, with one perspective ultimately proving itself, through rational argument, superior to all others, is the means by which music education can be justified by those who practice it. Though David Elliott’s competing praxial philosophy of music

education (Elliott, 1995) differs in its conception of what music is, it does not significantly challenge this conception of what philosophy is. Thus an ideal music teacher for both Reimer and Elliott is someone who knows, through philosophical deliberation, what the meaning and value of music is, and who can share that knowledge with others.

In this thesis I have challenged this ideal in four ways. First, in chapter two, with a discussion of speech act theory and performativity, I presented a philosophical argument for the context-dependence of truth, arguing that questions pertaining to the meaning and value of music can never be decided outside of a particular discourse of music. Consequently the best that a music teacher can say is, “Working within the conventions of my discourse about music, music has x meaning and value for me. I have not explored all possible discourses of music, nor could I ever, and hence the discourses you, my students, bring to your experience of music may be different, but in no way inferior, to my own. Consequently, let’s stage an open-ended dialogue in which our various discourses interact, celebrating the tensions within and between those discourses rather than attempting to resolve them within the constraints of a single dominant discourse.” Second, by experimenting with different ways of writing about music in chapters four through eight, I showed how the way we write about music impacts what we take music to be – a citational practice, a narrative structure, a cultural phenomenon, a contingent distinction, a negotiated experience. Together these different ways of writing about music showed the extent to which discursive norms impact what we take music to be, and hence how we structure music education. Third, in writing a short story about music and musicians in chapter nine, I showed how multiple different discourses of music can interact within a single unified text to create a meta-discourse on music. These

different ways of writing about music, and the different conceptions of music contained within them, are not reconciled within a literary genre, with one proving itself ultimately more valuable; rather, they exist side-by-side, their relationship negotiated through indeterminate formal means. Thus in contrast to philosophical discourse, which seeks to resolve differences between competing perspectives, literary discourse seeks simply to represent competing perspectives (in the form of characters), letting readers resolve those differences in their own idiosyncratic ways. Fourth, in critically engaging with novels about music and musicians using a variety of theoretical tools in chapter ten, I showed how discourse about music and musicians can be both critical and non-foundational. Literary critical discourse highlights the relationship between different discourses and the constitutive assumptions underlying them, bringing the idiosyncratic resolutions of individual readers to the fore.

Thus, over the course of this thesis, I have argued for an extra layer of complexity in discussions about music education. Instead of seeing philosophical discourse as a master discourse within which questions about the meaning and value of music and the purpose and structure of music education can be authoritatively decided, I have situated philosophical discourse as simply one more discourse, with its own norms and biases, that is no more authoritative with respect to the phenomena it addresses than other discourses. Indeed, I have argued for a literary approach that 1) represents different discourses and brings them into dialogue in literary form and 2) critically engages with those literary forms using a variety of tools and techniques (some of which may be derived from or have much in common with philosophy) as a more complex way of understanding music education and its role in the lives of individuals and in society. This

switch in emphasis is not simply a call for a different kind of discourse – it is a call for a different kind of subjectivity. For the subjectivity modeled by literary writing – a subjectivity that can convincingly represent multiple different perspectives, without seeking to resolve the tensions within and between them – is a subjectivity in line with the postmodern virtues identified in chapter one. The techniques that differentiate narrative literature from philosophical literature – voice, point of view, personality, shape and organization, consistency, generality, precision, explanations, and genre – are the very perceptual and conceptual techniques an appreciation for pluralism demands. Thus when music educators develop an appreciation for these techniques, in addition to the philosophical techniques of rigorous, systematic, logico-rational thought, they become ethical citizens of multicultural, democratic societies, capable of nurturing these same virtues in their students through music education.

A music education in line with this ethical conception thus not only represents different musics within a public school music curriculum, but additionally represents different vocabularies and genres of writing about music. In addition to a philosophical subjectivity that knows what music is, it promotes a literary subjectivity that embraces not knowing what music is, developing what Milan Kundera terms the “wisdom of uncertainty” (Kundera, p. 7). While theoretical engagement with literature can mitigate this uncertainty to some extent, its primary purpose is to explore meaning and open up discussion rather than to (over-)determine meaning and close down discussion. Thus literary writing about music and musicians, as well as critical writing about literary writing about music and musicians, nurtures a very different kind of subjectivity and a very different kind of music educator. While the ability to write philosophically about

music education may still be necessary in order to justify music education in a public policy environment in which philosophical discursive norms prevail, the increasingly present and pressing demands of multicultural, democratic societies call for the ability to write literarily about music and musicians. I consequently conclude with two recommendations for the field of music education.

Recommendations for the field of Music Education

First, the inclusion of a “Non-foundational approaches to music education” course as part of music teacher training programs. This course develops:

- 1) The ability to write literary accounts of music and musicians that resist the imposition of a master discourse and
- 2) The ability to critique literary accounts of music and musicians using a variety of literary theoretical tools

By learning how to bring multiple different discourses of music into dialogue, as well as how to mediate between them in ways that open up, rather than close off, dialogue, music educators develop a subjectivity, and are able to model a subjectivity, that supports the development of active citizenship in multicultural, democratic societies. Second, a new research area in music education focused on non-foundational approaches to music and music education. This area supports a variety of interpretive approaches to texts of all kinds, in particular literary texts, in the service of better understanding music, the purpose, meaning and value of music education and the discursive norms governing music teacher education. Thus researchers engage in multiple and varied readings of novels about music and musicians, experiment with their own creative writing about

music and musicians, and engage with non-literary texts using literary critical tools. In doing so music educators and their students are able to explore points of tension between competing perspectives without feeling compelled to resolve them. Talk about music then becomes, in contrast to Elvis Costello's claim, an eminently sensible thing to want to do.

Part V: Resources for Further Study

In this part I provide two annotated bibliographies. The first, a selection of novels about music and musicians, shows the range of issues addressed in literary accounts of music and musicians, issues that can be taken up by music educators and their students through engagement with these texts. The second, a selection of books and articles that fall under the broad rubric of “literary theory” (often abbreviated simply to “theory”), shows the range of critical tools available for the interpretation of literary texts, tools that music educators and their students can employ in their reading of novels about music and musicians, as well as other kinds of texts about music and musicians, in such a way that their understanding of music is enhanced and their music education practice improved as a result.

Chapter 12: Annotated Bibliography of Novels about Music and Musicians

An Annotated Bibliography and Reference List of Musical Fiction by Kellie D.

Brown (2005) catalogs a vast range of different kinds of fiction about music and musicians by reading level and musical genre. Below I offer a much shorter but more thoroughly annotated bibliography of literary fiction about music and musicians.

Amis, K. (1971/1980). *Girl, 20*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

Douglass Yandell, a London-based music critic and friend of renowned composer Roy Vandervane, is the narrator of *Girl, 20*, a 1971 novel by Kingsley Amis. Vandervane is having an affair with Sylvia, the 17-year-old daughter of Yandell's boss, Harold Meers, and as a friend of both Vandervane and Vandervane's current wife, Kitty, Yandell finds himself in a number of compromising situations. The situation is not made any easier by Yandell's sexual interest in Vandervane's daughter, Penny, who is involved with Gilbert, the manservant in the Vandervane household.

The title of the book comes from Vandervane's claim that "there was some chap, in some book by a Frenchman I seem to remember, who said he couldn't read 'Girl, 20' in a small-ad column without getting the horn" (p. 74). "Girl, 20" thus becomes a synonym for that which arouses sexual excitement due to its being "off the beaten track" (p. 75). Thus Vandervane's sexual interest in Sylvia is based in part on the fact that she is "Girl, 17" (p. 76) and he is "just old enough to be her grandfather" (p. 76).

This notion of "off-the-beaten-track"-ness is a leitmotif in the representation of music in the novel as well. Much of the conversation between Vandervane and Yandell

revolves around Yandell's conservative musical taste, and the driving force in the novel is Yandell's attempt to prevent Vandervane performing his new composition, *Elevations 9*, with pop group Pigs Out. Yandell even goes so far as to sabotage the premiere performance of *Elevations 9* by greasing Vandervane's violin bow, but Vandervane, equally committed to his vision of music, subverts the sabotage attempt by playing his violin with great virtuosity using a double bass bow. In the end, critics make positive comparisons between *Elevations 9* and Beethoven's pioneering *First Symphony*, despite the fact that Yandell only heard "the popping of the bongos, the wailing of the sitar and the sticky thudding of the bass guitar" (p. 224).

But Vandervane's commitment to the new, exciting and edgy plays havoc with his family. His youngest son is out of control, his other son is complicit in a plot to blackmail him, while his daughter, Penny, becomes a heroin addict. When Yandell challenges her claim that "Nothing's going to last" with "What about Beethoven? He lasts", she responds, "He won't last me. I'll never be good enough. You've got to find out what your limitations are. I've found out mine, and I can arrange my life to fit in with them exactly" (p. 253). Despite Yandell's attempt to help her, we are left unconvinced that he is capable of doing "what Gilbert couldn't do?"

The novel thus represents a challenge to the reader – live off the beaten track and be happy (which Vandervane and Penny both do in their own ways) or live within the circumscribed norms of tradition and remain ineffectual (the path taken by Yandell).

Bernhard, Thomas. (1983/2006). *The Loser*. New York: Vintage International

In a highly idiosyncratic style, Bernhard tells the story of three piano virtuosi – the narrator, Wertheimer and Glenn Gould – who meet when all three are studying with Horowitz in Leopoldskron. Wertheimer has recently committed suicide in a particularly vengeful way, and the narrator reflects on the role frustrated piano ambitions played in his friend's untimely death.

The novel consists of 175 pages with no paragraph breaks, and one page, the first, with three paragraph breaks. Most of the narrative consists of the internal reflections of the narrator, with this aspect of the narrative construction highlighted (i.e., “Glenn locked himself in his North American cage, I in my Upper Austrian one, Wertheimer said, I thought” (p. 38)). The narrative present consists of the post-funeral actions of the narrator, who goes to stay in an inn often frequented by his dead friend.

The novel presents a bleak account of musical obsession. Gould is portrayed as a genius whose outstanding ability led to the destruction, in part, of both the narrator and Wertheimer. All three were accomplished pianists, but after meeting Gould their musical aspirations were torn asunder.

Gould is also characterized as self-destructive, however, with Wertheimer and the narrator imagining that “Glenn would destroy himself ... with his *music obsession*, with his *piano radicalism*” (p. 5, orig. italics.). But ultimately it is W. and the narrator who decide “*no more piano*” (p. 8, orig. italics.), the narrator devoting himself instead to philosophical matters, including the writing of a book titled *About Glenn Gould* (p. 34). Wertheimer, too, turned to writing, but he “kept changing his manuscript, changing it so

often and to such an extent that nothing was left of the manuscript, for the change in his manuscript was nothing other than the complete deletion of the manuscript, of which finally nothing remained except the title, *The Loser*” (pp. 53-54). Wertheimer criticizes Gould and other performers for becoming “*art machines*” (p. 92, orig. italics), but at the same time “envied Glenn this art” (p. 92). Wertheimer let himself be so dazzled by Glenn that he became paralyzed, despite being a significant piano virtuoso himself (p. 105). “Wertheimer had recognized the genius Glenn Gould and was mortally wounded, I thought” (p. 106). And as a result of independent wealth, and having been “born at quite a different table, he said, not at the table of simple people” (p. 144), he became isolated.

The narrator concludes that “*The loser was a born loser, I thought, he has always been the loser*” (p. 146), but only Glenn, with his “thoroughly open Canadian-American manner ... ruthless and open, yet healthy ... dared to call him the *loser*” (p. 146). Wertheimer set about his life with false assumptions, while Glenn had right assumptions. The true cause of W.’s suicide, the narrator believes, was not “his sister’s departure for Switzerland but the unbearableness of Glenn Gould ... suffering a fatal stroke at the height of his artistic powers” (p. 148). “Glenn’s interpretation of the *Goldberg Variations* as well as his *Well-Tempered Clavier* was to blame for this suicide, as indeed for his disastrous life” (p. 152). “Glenn Gould *said the word loser out loud in a crucial moment, I thought. We say a word and destroy a person*” (p. 153, orig. italics). But if W. was the loser, Glenn was “the *refuser, I thought*” (p. 156).

The novel closes with an image of W., prior to committing suicide, playing on a “*completely worthless, a horribly untuned grand piano*” (p. 169, orig. italics), while Gould’s *Goldberg Variations* plays on the record player.

Davies, Robertson. (1988). *The Lyre of Orpheus*. New York: Penguin

The main characters in this book – Arthur Cornish, head of the Cornish Foundation, Maria, his wife, Simon Darcourt, a writer, Geraint Powell, an actor, Hilda Schnakenburg (Schnak), a composition student, and Dr. Gunilla Dahl-Soot, a renowned composer and supervisor of Schnak – come together in a tale of light-hearted farce culminating in a performance of a newly-completed opera based on an unfinished Hoffman composition.

Davies, Robertson. (1958/2006). *A mixture of frailties*. Toronto: Penguin Canada

Part of the Salterton Trilogy, this Canadian novel recounts Monica Gall's journey from small-town Salterton to internationally acclaimed opera singer. Three aspects of the novel are relevant to music studies: 1) Monica Gall's subjectivity and the multiple "voices" in her head 2) Monica Gall's musical development, including lessons with Molloy, Domdaniel and Giles Revelstoke and 3) Monica's sexual development and its relationship to her musical development.

Monica's subjectivity is characterized by the imagined "voices" of others. Thus "her mother's saltier remarks kept intruding themselves into her mind" (p. 151), and she hears "Giles' voice, hatefully bawdy, as she had last heard it on the train to Venice" (p. 347), mocking her interest in Domdaniel from beyond the grave. In her conversations with Johnny she explores this aspect of her subjectivity. While Johnny interprets the world from a literary perspective – "books give shape and focus" (p. 160) to his life - Monica claims to "hear music all the time" (p. 161). Her mother warned her when she was young that it would drive her crazy, but it was only when she accepted that music was a part of "my way of feeling things" (p. 161), when she accepted that "my mind

worked that way” (p. 161), did she lose the “fear of going mad” (p. 161). Johnny is “the only person I’ve ever told about that” (p. 161).

The first substantial writing about music comes when Sir Benedict Domdaniel and Monica Gall meet in London. Domdaniel introduces significant distinctions – between the sexual singer, who seeks to seduce, and the bardic singer, who seeks to communicate through music. Domdaniel believes it is best for a young singer to aim for the former, even if they ultimately succeed with the latter. He also distinguishes between Thanatossers – “the Permanent Opposition” (p. 101) – who are against life, and the Eros people who are for life. Domdaniel considers himself an “Eros man” (p. 101), and thinks Monica may also be for life, despite having been surrounded by Thanatossers in her hometown of Salterton.

Monica’s relationship with Revelstoke is characterized by Domdaniel as broadening her “range of feeling” (p. 197), a characterization Monica takes exception to:

“I hate you damned superior Englishmen!” said she. “Murtagh Molloy tells me I have no emotion; Giles Revelstoke treats me like the village idiot because I haven’t read everything that’s ever been written, and you tell me to fall in love because it will extend my range of feeling! To hell with you all! If I haven’t got your easy, splattering feelings I’m proud of it.” (p. 197)

Domdaniel apologizes, but claims he was merely speaking as her “teacher and advisor” (p. 198). He claims a love affair does extend one’s range of feeling, even if “that isn’t why one does it” (p. 198). The artist, he claims, needs to not only *experience* spontaneous

feelings, such as those that arise when one is in love, or when someone important dies, but *recapture* those feelings, and “transform them into something which we can offer to the world in our performances” (p. 199). (Molloy shares this conception of the artist when he says, “I’ve had no more experience than most men. But I know what to do with mine, and I know how to get at it” (p. 105)).

But music is also capable of instigating a new range of feeling. Monica’s experience of singing Bach is “deeply unsettling ... a monumental rebuke to the life she was living” (p. 216). Bach awakens in her “a degree of religious sensibility of which she had never previously been conscious” (p. 217). Her lover and teacher, Giles Revelstoke, notes the change in her sexual sensibility, complimenting her on her “Lenten mood ... For a while I had begun to doubt if you could make love in anything but the key of C major, but this is a far, far better thing” (p. 217).

DeLillo, Don. (1973/1994). *Great Jones Street*. London: Penguin Books.

Originally published in 1973, *Great Jones Street* is a haphazard tale told from the perspective of Bucky Wunderlick, a rock star. Bucky has quit his band, leaving Azarian, his bandmate, in control. His manager Globke, neighbor Fenig, girlfriend Opel, and dealer Hanes visit him in his apartment on Great Jones Street, where he has holed up to avoid the excesses of fame.

Doyle, Roddy. (1992). *The Commitments*. In *The Barrytown Trilogy*, London: Martin Secker and Warburg Limited

This is a short novel about the formation, performances and demise of an Irish soul band. The central character is Jimmy, the manager, whose motivating cries include “Yis want to be different, isn’t tha’ it? Yis want to do somethin’ with yourselves, isn’t

tha' it?" (p. 11) and "The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads ... An' Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland" (p. 13). He encourages them to play music with sex and politics – not "mushy I'll hold your hand till the end o' time stuff" but "real sex" (p. 12).

The other main character is Joey the Lips, a trumpet player who is the only "professional" in the band. He has played with James Brown, among others, and sees soul in everything, including "Jaffa Cakes" (p. 29) and "Guinness" (p. 66), which he claims are "soul food" (p. 29). Despite being old and bald, and much to the chagrin of the other band members, he is popular with the female backing singers in the band, all of whom sleep with him at one time or another.

The book portrays the sense of community that results from being in a band, the direct, if sometimes emotionally intense, communication that develops between band members (the keyboard player's relationship with the singer turns toxic) and how difficult it is to keep a band together.

Joey the Lips has strong opinions about jazz. He laments the fact that Dean, the saxophone player in the band, is listening to more and more jazz. Joey claims Charlie Parker "had no right to his black skin ... they should have burnt it off with a fucking blow lamp" (p. 108). He claims Parker's use of polyrhythms was a compromise to satisfy "middle-class white kids with little beards and berets" (p. 108). He admits that Parker could "play alright" (p. 109), but "he abused it, he spat on it. He turned his back on his people so he could entertain hip honky brats and intellectuals" (p. 109). Joey worries that if Dean listens to more jazz he will become a jazz purist ("the words almost made Joey

the Lips retch” (p. 109)) – he will kill his soul, because jazz is “for the mind”. He “won’t want to play for the people any more” (p. 109).

Later Jimmy the manager notices that, during a public performance of ‘Stop in the Name of Love’, “Dean’s solo was good. It was really good, but it was new. It wasn’t the one he’d always done” (p. 115). This “spoiled Jimmy’s enjoyment” (p. 115) and Joey the Lips tells him later that his dissatisfaction is a result of the fact that “Dean’s solo didn’t have corners” (p. 115). Soul solos, he claims, have corners. “The solo is part of the song” (p. 115). He admits they aren’t really solos at all, but they fit with the song. There are “no gaps in soul. If it doesn’t fit it isn’t used. Soul is community” (p. 115). A jazz solo, on the other hand, is “a real solo” (p. 115). “It didn’t fit. It spiraled. It wasn’t part of the song. It wasn’t part of anything ... That’s what jazz does. It makes the man selfish” (p. 115). Dean “doesn’t give a fuck about his Brothers” (p. 115).

When Jimmy talks to Dean about his new musical direction, Dean claims soul music is “too easy. It doesn’t stretch me ... It’s limitin’ ... It’s good crack but it’s not art” (p. 122). With jazz there are “no rules. There’s no walls” (p. 122). He complains that there are “too many rules in soul. It’s all walls” (p. 123). When Jimmy tells him that Joey calls them corners, Dean replies, “That’s it ... Four corners an’ you’re back where yeh started from” (p. 123). He agrees to stay in the band, though, as “it’s good crack” (p. 123) and “I fancy Imelda [one of the backing singers] a bit” (p. 123).

After the conversation Jimmy realizes that all the male members of the band fancy Imelda, including him, and “Imelda might have been holding The Commitments together” (p. 124). Jimmy’s insight is confirmed when it is discovered that Joey and

Imelda are an item, and the band breaks up. In that moment of revelation, Dean is reported by Outspan, the singer, as saying “he was fucked if he was goin’ to waste his time jammin’ – Jammin’! – jammin’ with a shower o’ wankers tha’ couldn’t play their instruments properly” (p. 131) – suggesting that the “crack” of being in the band was mostly a result of his enjoyment in being around Imelda – so long as she was not committed to any particular member of the band. Ironically, the continued existence of *The Commitments* is premised on one of its backing singers remaining sexually available – that is, uncommitted sexually or romantically.

Hesse, H. (1910/1974). *Gertrude*. New York: Bantam books

The main theme of *Gertrude* is free will and determinism, a theme introduced in the first paragraph with Kuhn, the narrator and central character, reflecting that, “If what matters in a person’s existence is to accept the inevitable consciously, to taste the good and bad to the full and to make for oneself a more individual, unaccidental and inward destiny alongside one’s external fate, then my life has been neither empty nor worthless” (p. 1). The secondary theme of the novel is music, and its role in the life of the individual.

Despite Kuhn being “untalented” at school (p. 2), he discovers “a world of my own, a sanctuary and a heaven that no one could take away from me or belittle” (p. 2) – the world of music. He feels his life “has been tuned in a single key and directed solely to one star” (p. 2) and consequently, when his friends start thinking about their careers, he decides to “make a career of that which filled my thoughts and alone gave me real pleasure” (p. 5).

Music also influences his romantic inclinations. When he hears a girl he has fallen in love with sing, and she sings badly, he is immediately “no longer in love with her” (p. 6). Similarly, when he hears Gertrude sing, “it was the sweetest thing I had ever heard in my life” (p. 94), and his love for her flourishes.

In his formal music studies he is burdened by “demands, rules, difficulties, tasks and trials” (p. 9), all of which stand in contrast to his expectations of “pleasure, exaltation, radiance and beauty” (p. 9). After a reckless toboggan ride results in a lifelong physical deformity, he considers alternative careers, but when his professor visits him in the hospital and assures him he is a “passable student”, he returns to his instrumental studies, and in addition takes up composition, which enables him to create “my own music, born and experienced within me and never heard anywhere else before” (p. 30).

His composition of a song leads to a friendship with a local singer, Muoth. Through his interactions with Muoth he discovers a less critical musical world, one that is not concerned with whether “the composition is good or not” but whether “there is experience and feeling in the song ... something that seems individual and that I want to sing” (p. 38). Kuhn’s relationship to Muoth, however, is complex, as they are fundamentally different characters – Kuhn is private and introverted, finding solace in art, whereas Muoth is public and extroverted, finding solace in wine, women and song. When Muoth publicly draws attention to Kuhn’s physical disability, Kuhn is humiliated and angry (p. 51). But Marian, one of Muoth’s female friends, chastises Kuhn, saying, “when we see someone suffer and be ill-mannered because of his suffering, we ought to be indulgent and forgive him” (p. 52), leading Kuhn to re-evaluate his new friends, recognizing they are “not gods or saints ... but mere mortals” (p. 53).

Once his studies are complete Kuhn has no choice but to return to his hometown where he becomes a violin teacher. During this time he also flirts with theosophy, as his old school teacher, Lohe, has become a convert. However, after 10 months he is “dragged away from my unprofitable existence” (p. 68) as Muoth has found him a job as a violinist in “R.” (p. 68). While there he reacquaints himself with Muoth, who has a girlfriend called Lottie, and makes new friends, most notably with a fellow violinist called Teiser, a simple man who is “not tormented by any desires for the unattainable” (p. 80), and his sister Brigitte. He also becomes acquainted with a widower, Imthor, “a lover of music and a patron of young talent” (p. 82), who has recitals in his home. It is at one of these recitals that Kuhn meets Gertrude, Imthor’s twenty-year-old daughter.

Kuhn, with the help of Gertrude, writes an opera, and hearing her sing the last act for the first time prompts him to kiss her “on the forehead and on the mouth” (p. 98), an act that remains “unmentioned, though unforgotten” (p. 99). The opera is a secret between Kuhn and Gertrude and “belonged to us both and brought us both pleasures and cares” (p. 99), but the time comes when it requires “other people and assistants” (p. 99). When Gertrude asks who will sing the principal part, Kuhn replies, “Muoth”, who is ideal for the “impetuosity and violent emotions of the character” (p. 99). Gertrude, however, is surprised, saying, “Are you serious? I don’t like him”, to which Kuhn replies, “He is a friend of mine, Miss Gertrude, and he would be suitable for the part” (p. 99). Kuhn the narrator, speaking with hindsight, notes, “A stranger had already come between us” (p. 99).

Despite the opera being complete, Kuhn continues to visit Gertrude, and her father, Mr. Imthor, approves of their friendship. When she goes away for the summer,

however, and sends him some flowers, he decides, “it was better for her to know how I felt” (p. 108), and he declares his love for her in a letter. She writes back, claiming to be “embarrassed” (p. 109), asking that, “things remain between us as they were until we can see each other again and talk things over” (p. 109). When she does return, Kuhn cannot “bring myself to mention my letter and the nature of it, [and] she also remained silent about it” (p. 114).

Gertrude, Muoth and Kuhn meet to sing through the opera, and despite Gertrude’s fear of Muoth – a result of having seen him perform on stage – she is “captivated” when singing with him (p. 115) and finds herself singing “without restraint” (p. 115). She remains ill at ease with him when they are not singing, however, but over time, she becomes “glad to see him” (p. 116) and “more reserved with me [Kuhn]” (p. 117).

During this time Kuhn’s father falls ill and Kuhn returns to his hometown to visit him. His father tells him he will “make a really good husband; intelligent women will soon notice that” (p. 121), which gives Kuhn hope, but when he returns to R. he finds Gertrude troubled, worried, depressed, and uncertain. He in turn withdraws, visiting her less often, despite wanting to reopen the discussion first broached in the letter. On visiting Muoth one day, however, he “accidentally saw an envelope with Gertrude’s handwriting on it lying on the table” (p. 124), and he realizes, with a “feeling of horror and bitterness” (p. 124), that Gertrude is in love with Muoth.

He visits Gertrude to ask for confirmation and tells her “Muoth will not make you happy” (p. 126). He then makes plans to commit suicide, but just as he is about to take his own life a telegram from his mother arrives, asking him to “come at once” (p. 129) as

his father is dying. He leaves for his hometown, and arrives in time for his father to ask, “Still composing music?” His father express “a tired, ironic wisdom that had nothing more to impart, and I felt that he looked into my heart and saw and knew everything” (p. 134)

When he returns to R., he finds “everything as it had been, except that Muoth had gone to Munich and he and Gertrude were engaged to be married” (p. 148). When Kuhn later meets Muoth, and challenges him about his treatment of Lottie (Muoth’s former girlfriend who confessed to Kuhn that Muoth beat her), Muoth replies that, “No woman is beaten if she doesn’t want to be” (p. 157). Muoth in addition chastises Kuhn for not saying, “Leave her alone, leave her for me!” (p. 157) before Muoth fell in love with Gertrude. Muoth tells Kuhn he is a child for not fighting for the woman he loves. “She might have been happier with you. Every man has the right to woo a woman. If you had only said a word to me at the beginning, if you had just given me a hint, I should have kept away” (p. 158). Later Muoth tells Kuhn, “You are the artist type in every way ... a poor soul who is being suffocated with surplus riches ... It is a fallacy that there are happy artists” (p. 160). Kuhn writes an organ piece for Muoth and Gertrude’s wedding ceremony, but does not publicly attend (he looks down at the ceremony, concealed by the organ).

Kuhn spends more and more time with the Teisers, and dedicates a piece to Brigitte. Brigitte, however, eventually discovers that Kuhn is in love with Gertrude, who Kuhn still feels belongs “to me and my life” (p. 175). Kuhn notes that the moment Brigitte, who he considers a “good friend ... which was all I desired” (p. 184), discovered his love for Gertrude it was “the same for her as it was for me when I discovered the

letter at Muoth's house" (p. 184). Although this makes him feel sad, "I could not help but smile" (p. 184). (It is not clear whether this smile is malevolent or ironic).

Mr Imthor and Kuhn become increasingly aware that Gertrude is not happy with Muoth, but "none of us knew how terribly these two fine people suffered in secret. I do not think that they ever stopped loving each other, but deep down in their natures they did not belong to one another; they only drew close through passion and in the intoxication of exalted hours" (p. 190). Kuhn finds solace in music, for "when music stirred my being, I understood everything without the aid of words. I was then aware of pure harmony in the essence of life and felt that there must be a meaning and a just law behind everything that happened. Even if this was an illusion, it helped me to live and was a comfort to me" (p. 192). Mr Lohe finds comfort in theosophy, Teiser in the surface of things, Muoth in passion, and Kuhn in art.

Muoth eventually commits suicide, after telling Kuhn "it is just as difficult for me to alter and give up drinking as it is for you to dance" (p. 206). Gertrude in turn suffers an emotional breakdown, but at the close of the book she and Kuhn see each other every day, although "she has never kissed another man" (p. 214). He accepts "that no change could be made in our relationship with each other. She is my friend, and after lonely, restless periods, when I emerge from my silence with a song or a sonata, it belongs first and foremost to us both" (p. 214). Gertrude, he believes, "looks back on the springtime of her life as on a distant valley seen during a journey a long time ago, and not a lost garden of Eden" (p. 214). Kuhn, in turn, hears his youth "like a wonderful song which now sounds more harmonious than it did in reality, and even sweeter" (p. 215).

All of the characters in *Gertrude* are flawed in different ways. Gertrude is beautiful, but, if Kuhn's father is to be believed, not very intelligent. Kuhn is physically flawed – and psychically scarred as a result. Muoth is excessively passionate, but this is, at the same time, what makes him successful.

Hornby, Nick. (1995). *High fidelity*. New York: Riverhead Books.

High Fidelity begins with the narrator, Rob Fleming, listing his “top five most memorable split-ups” (p. 3), followed by brief accounts of each one. We learn that at about twelve or thirteen he “discovered irony – or at least what I later understood to be irony” (p. 4), and much of his life is framed in terms of popular culture in an attempt to maintain an ironic distance (i.e., “I lost the plot for a while then. And I lost the subplot, the script, the soundtrack, the intermission, my popcorn, the credits, and the exit sign” (p. 23)). This tendency to live life through the metaphor of popular culture is itself questioned, when he asks himself, “What came first – the music or the misery? Did I listen to music because I was miserable? Or was I miserable because I listened to music?” (p. 25). He claims, “The unhappiest people I know, romantically speaking, are the ones who like pop music the most; and I don't know whether pop music has caused this unhappiness, but I do know that they've been listening to the sad songs longer than they've been living the unhappy lives” (p. 25).

Rob runs his own business – a music retail outlet – and has two employees, Dick and Barry. All of them have a vast knowledge of popular music, which they codify in “top five” lists (i.e., “Top five records to play on a wet Monday morning”, “five best side one tracks of all time” (p. 147) etc.). They feel disdain for those with “inferior” tastes, with Barry berating a potential customer wanting to buy ‘I just called to say I love you’

for his daughter with the judgment that it's "tacky crap ... Now, be off with you, and don't waste our time" (p. 53). Rob chastises Barry for his behavior, but acknowledges that, when the store was doing well, they "used to take the piss out of anyone who asked for anything we didn't like" (p. 54). Barry justifies his behavior by claiming, "he offended me with his terrible taste" (p. 54), and accuses Rob of "going soft in your old age ... There was a time when you'd have chased him out of the shop and up the road" (p. 54).

Rob has just split up with his live-in girlfriend, Laura, a lawyer ("although when I met her she was a different kind of lawyer from the one she is now" (p. 89)), who has taken up with the guy who used to live upstairs, and whom they used to hear having sex. This brings up a number of insecurities – sexual ("Why do I care so much about how long he can go on for?" (p. 73)), professional ("for that six-month period when the club was popular, I was as happy as I have ever been" (p. 87)) and moral ("Like Liz said, I'm an asshole" (p. 91)).

His insecurities are allayed – or at least deferred – through his engagement with popular music. After Laura moves out he reorganizes his record collection autobiographically, claiming, "what I really like is the feeling of security I get from my new filing system; I have made myself more complicated than I really am. I have a couple of thousand records, and you have to be me – or, at the very least, a doctor of Flemingology – to know how to find any of them" (p. 55). His record collection is "my life" (p. 54) and Rob finds it "enormously comforting" (p. 55) to reorganize it in a highly idiosyncratic way. Laura understands this and, when she returns to the flat to collect her things, asks if he has done "the Great Reorganization" (p. 105). He, petulantly, responds

with, “Don’t you think there are more important things to talk about than my record collection?” and she replies, “Yes, I do, Rob. I’ve always thought that” (p. 106).

Rob finds a kindred spirit in Marie, a talented, if unsuccessful, American folk musician living in London. Marie, he feels, understands that “what really matters is what you like, not what you *are* like” (p. 117), and they have “one of those conversations where everything clicks, meshes, corresponds, locks, where even our pauses, even our punctuation marks, seem to be nodding in agreement” (p. 117). However, despite the fact they “got on brilliantly” (p. 133) and had “sex that humiliated neither of us” (p. 133), they ultimately have “nothing much to say to each other” (p. 134).

In renegotiating his relationship with Laura, Rob recognizes that he “no longer speaks to anybody he has ever slept with” (p. 157) and, in the hope that he will “feel clean, and calm, and ready to start again” (p. 158), he gets back in touch with the women on his “top-five most memorable split-ups” list. Meanwhile Laura’s father dies, and he goes to the funeral. He realizes, “for the first time, how scared I am of dying, and of other people dying, and how this fear has prevented me from doing all sorts of things” (p. 247). In particular, it has prevented him from “sticking with a relationship, because if you stick with a relationship, and your life becomes dependent on that person’s life, and they die ... well, you’re up the creek without a paddle, aren’t you?” (p. 247).

The novel ends with Rob and Laura reconciled. Rob accepts that “Laura might be the person I spend my life with” (p. 274), although he still struggles with what he sees as the “*disrespect*” (p. 274) implicit in the fact that his “little-boy notion of romance, of negliges and candlelit dinners at home and long, smoldering glances” (p. 274) are not

being accommodated. His life has become more like “an episode of *thirtysomething* rather than an episode of ... of ... of some sitcom that hasn’t been made yet about three guys who work in a record shop” (p. 278), and he is more able to accept individual differences, that when it comes to taste, “Each to his own” (p. 280) and “maybe ... it’s not what you like but what you’re like that’s important” (p. 280).

But there is ambivalence in Rob’s transformation. He accepts that life is better since Laura returned, that he’s happier, that living with her is “quite nice” (p. 284) – but he believes these perceptions do not “come from down deep. But somehow there’s less time to think since she came back. We’re too busy talking, or working, or having sex ... or eating, or going to the pictures. Maybe I should stop doing these things, so as I can work it all out properly, because I know these are important times. But then again, maybe I shouldn’t; maybe this is how it’s done. Maybe this is how people manage to have relationships” (p. 284). On Laura’s suggestion, Rob hosts a personal appearance by Marie at his store, “Like at HMV!” (p. 282), and this makes him feel “*more of a man*” (p. 288). He realizes that he will “have to do something about the shop ... and find myself a career” (p. 289), because “men don’t work in quiet, deserted side streets in Holloway” (p. 288). He doesn’t “even feel as if I’m at the center of my own world, so how am I supposed to feel as though I’m the center of anyone else’s?” (p. 288).

The culmination of Rob’s transformation comes when he realizes that “I’ll never see her [Laura] for the first or second or third time again” (p. 315), but maybe their history and relationship is more valuable than the thrill of the new. He proposes to her, based on the realization that “if you got married to someone you know you love, and you sort yourself out, it frees you up for other things” (p. 318). While he decries Laura’s

pandering to the values of his parents – “She [Laura] doesn’t think twenty-five pounds is a lot of money, but she knows they will, and my mum duly gives a loud, terrified, twenty-five-quid shriek” (p. 297) – in the final moments of the novel he moves from egoism to empathy, compiling in his head “a compilation tape for her [Laura – compilation tapes are the currency of love in the novel], something that’s full of stuff she’s heard of, and full of stuff she’d play. Tonight, for the first time ever, I can sort of see how it’s done.” (p. 323).

At (at least) two points in the novel Rob addresses the reader directly. “You thought there was going to be nothing left in the video shop, didn’t you? You thought I cut such a tragic figure that I’d be reduced to watching some Whoopi Goldberg comedy-thriller which never got a cinematic release in this country” (p. 215). And “I know what you’re saying: *You’re a pathetic fantasist, Fleming, you wish, in your dreams*, etc. But I would never in a million years use anything that has happened to me today as the basis for any kind of sexual fantasy” (p. 253). Who is this reader addressed by Rob? Is the assumption of a negative, punitive, uncompassionate audience symptomatic of paranoia? How does this projection impact us as readers? And to what extent is it part and parcel of the assumption of shared pop cultural references embedded in the novel? In other words, are his assumptions that we share his taste in music and that we wish him ill mutually reinforcing? And what does this tell us about popular music?

Mann, Thomas. (1947/1997). *Doctor Faustus: The life of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn as told by a friend*. New York: Vintage Books.

The narrator of Doctor Faustus, “Dr Serenus Zeitblom, Ph. D” (p. 9), writes in order to commit his friend, the composer Adrian Leverkühn, to posterity. The book is

thus in part a study of genius – in this case, musical genius – with the narrator playing the part of the straight man, who finds employment at a secondary school and marries in order to conform, and Adrian the tortured genius, who can barely engage in informal human contact.

We learn, however, that for a long time no one who knew Adrian made any connection between him and music. He was, rather, expected to become a scholar, being consistently at the top of his class at high school, despite being a “poor student” (p. 49). The one subject he is actively interested in, however, is mathematics and he calls Zeitblom a “slouch” (p. 50) for not liking it, claiming, “order is everything” (p. 50).

To keep boredom at bay, he “putter[s] and diddle[s]” (p. 50) on a harmonium, figuring out for himself some of the basics of music theory and voice leading. He claims, “It’s all relationship. And if you want to give it a more exact name, then call it ‘ambiguity’” (p. 51), before showing how a single collection of notes can take on a different harmonic function depending on its context. His uncle, with whom he is living, suggests he take piano lessons with Kretzschmar, to “get a foundation under your castles in the air” (p. 52) and despite Adrian’s protestations that piano lessons are “‘hifalutin’ and girlish” (p. 52) he agrees to having two lessons a week.

Kretzschmar is a comical character with a stutter and a penchant for offering public lectures in a small town on obscure musicological topics such as, “Why didn’t Beethoven write a third movement for his last piano sonata, Opus 111?” (p. 55). Nevertheless, Adrian develops affection for his teacher, praising him for his “sense of order, and even foolish order is always better than none at all” (p. 75). Through his

contact with his teacher he gains an appreciation for music “rigidly following its rules” (p. 75), claiming “music has so much warmth of its own ... that it can use all sorts of lawful means for chilling things down – has itself always yearned for them, too” (p. 76). Adrian’s appreciation for rules is also reflected in his belief that interest, rather than love, is the strongest human emotion, with interest defined as “love that has been deprived of its animal warmth” (p. 77).

Zeitblom finds Adrian’s attitude to music arrogant, noting that he “spoke of music as if of a foreign power, some marvelous phenomenon that did not, however, touch him personally, spoke of it from a critical and condescending distance” (p. 83). Yet despite his fascination with music, and his increasing knowledge of music literature, he decides to study theology at university. He justifies this in part by reminding Adrian that “through the liturgy and its history, music plays a considerable role in theological affairs – a more practical and artistic role in fact than in the areas of mathematics and physics, in acoustics, that is” (p. 91). Zeitblom sees this as an attempt by his friend to get at the foundations of all knowledge, for the two friends had previously agreed that philosophy is the queen of the sciences, but theology makes of philosophy a “handmaiden, an auxiliary science” (p. 90). But Adrian’s decision to study theology, Zeitblom claims, is not based on intellectual humility, but on pride – pride that in time leads to a fall, as Adrian cuts his studies short, but not before he catches his first glimpse of the devil at his teacher Kumpf’s house (p. 107).

In this foreshadowing of Adrian’s own encounter with the devil, Kumpf describes the “Mocker, the Killjoy, the sad, sour spook” (p. 107), in the corner of the room, who “will not suffer our hearts to rejoice in God with meat and song!” (p. 107). The devil is

presented as a threat to be struggled against – “But he shall not have the better of us, the Archvillain, with his sly, fiery darts!” (p. 107), Kumpf yells, before hurling a “hard roll” (p. 107) into the corner where he believes the devil lies in wait. Zeitblom is shocked by Kumpf’s outburst, but Adrian responds with “fits of laughter out on the street” (p. 107), which subside only “under the diversion of conversation” (p. 107).

Adrian eventually realizes that theology is not for him, and Zeitblom shows us why by “reproducing the speeches of these young men just as they were given ... flinging stilted, pretentious phrases at one another with unpretentious virtuosity” (p. 129). While Zeitblom feels that for the other theology students, the philosophical debates of their student years will seem to them “the grandest period of their lives” (p. 135), for Adrian they would not be. For Adrian, despite being a theologian, appeared as “a guest among them” (p. 135). Zeitblom notes “an abyss between his own life [Adrian’s] and the destinies of these striving, high-purposed young men” (p. 135). While they are excellently average, destined for the bourgeoisie, Adrian appears “invisibly singled out” (p. 135) for a life-long intellectual journey. His reluctance to become part of the “we” of his fellow theology students, or to use the informal pronoun with anyone other than his childhood friend Zeitblom, leads Zeitblom “and presumably the others” (p. 135) to think that Adrian is as aware as they are of his fundamental difference. This awareness leads Adrian to cut his theological studies short “even before his first exams” (p. 135).

Adrian returns to music and becomes “even more himself” (p. 169). He comes into contact with a prostitute, initially by accident, in which “the arrogance of the intellect had suffered the trauma of an encounter with soulless instinct” (p. 158), and subsequently has sexual relations with her, leading to a sexually transmitted disease, most probably

syphilis. This leads Adrian to a wholly negative view of sex, which he sees as “naturally evil” (p. 200), with Christian marriage being a “clever makeshift” (p. 200) that ultimately doesn’t change the inherent evilness of sex. Zeitblom objects, claiming that in rejecting the possible goodness of sex Adrian is “slandering the wellspring of life” (p. 200) and in negating the works of Creation he becomes an advocate of nothing and hence allied with the Devil” (p. 200). Adrian responds with a “curt laugh” (p. 200), accusing Zeitblom of not getting the joke, for he was speaking only as a theologian.

Adrian then presents a philosophy of love that aligns him with humanism and psychology more than theology, which in turn leads into a discussion of music, the role of conventions, the need for organization (which is “everything” (p. 204)) and the definition of “strict style” (p. 204) as “the total integration of all musical dimensions, the neutrality of each over against the other by means of complete organization” (p. 204). Adrian then articulates for the first time his theory of composition in which “free notes would no longer exist” (p. 205), which Zeitblom describes as “wholesale rational organization” (p. 205). Harmony on this account results from neither conscious choice, nor random chance, but rather is “left to the constellation” (p. 207) and if the constellation happens to produce a convention (i.e., a major triad) then it has “renewed what was worn-out” (p. 207).

The apex of the novel comes when Zeitblom presents a transcription of “Adrian’s secret manuscript” (p. 237) telling of his dialogue with the Devil. The document begins with Adrian determining to keep “mum” about his experience. He will “mum it all down on this music paper here” (p. 238), “out of shame alone and to spare mankind” (p. 238), for the Devil assumes a familiarity with him, using the familiar pronoun, and Adrian

finds it impossible to resist the devil's charms, despite his making "false pretence, feigning you had not long since expected me" (p. 241). Despite being overcome by an "unutterable loathing" (p. 242), the devil takes multiple forms, moving from bawd to better gentleman to forked beard and back again. They talk about music, among other things, the conversation alternating between bitter irony and angry vehemence.

The devil tells him that, "precisely minds of your sort" – minds that speculate upon speculation – "constitute the population of hell" (p. 263). He reveals that, "From early on we had an eye on you, on your nimble, haughty mind" (p. 263). When Adrian switched from theology to music, they thought they might lose him to "things elemental" (p. 263), but all the while knew that he is "too prudent and cold and chaste for what is elemental" (p. 263). In their diligence, they sent Esmerelda, the prostitute, so he could experience the "illumination, the aphrodisiac of the brain" (p. 263), such that he is now promised to the devil in his blood. The devil concludes by promising Adrian that if he renounces "all who live" (p. 264) and agrees to a "total chilling of your life and of your relations to humans" (p. 264) the resources of hell will be put into his service and he will profit from them. Shortly after, and not before one more wave of revulsion on Adrian's part, the devil is gone.

Adrian moves to Pfeffering, where he ends up living for the next eighteen years with the Schweigestills, who amount to a second family. During that time he composes prolifically, with the attitude that "it suffices if it is heard just once – that is, when the composer conceives it" (p. 278). The local copyist describes Adrian's music as "more intellectual than artistic" (p. 278), which Zeitblom takes exception to, claiming Adrian's compositions merge archaic and modern elements that interpenetrate. Adrian also proves

himself to be a talented storyteller, inventing a tale of visiting the bottom of the ocean in a diving bell “quite as if he had made the descent himself” (p. 284).

New characters are introduced into the story at this point, including Clarissa and Inez Rodde, their mother Frau Senator, Dr. Helmut Institoris. Inez is in love with Rudi Schwedtfeger, but ends up marrying Institoris, while continuing to have an affair with Schwedtfeger. Zeitblom recognizes that Institoris is unattractive to women, believing Inez conceived his children “purely out of an acquiescent sense of duty, looking the other way, so to speak” (p. 347), but he finds her flaunting of her affair shocking nonetheless. Meanwhile, Schwedtfeger becomes depressed with the situation, claiming “I did not seduce her, she seduced me” (p. 368) and “I have never loved her ... it has, on my part, all been merely a matter of my doing my duty as a cavalier” (p. 368).

Meanwhile, Inez’s sister, Clarissa, kills herself after having been blackmailed by a former lover, leading Inez to feel “abandoned” and “terribly unhappy” (p. 405). She turns to morphine to numb the pain and in contrast to some of her friends, who show signs of genius or social acumen under the influence of the drug, Inez appears merely semiconscious, “with glassy eyes and a nodding head” (p. 407). Zeitblom builds suspense by telling us that her “bourgeois existence” (p. 407) came to an end two years later when she committed a capital crime, while separately informing us that Schwedtfeger is dead at the time Zeitblom is writing. Only later do we discover that Inez killed Schwedtfeger after he became engaged to another woman.

Schwedtfeger’s intended was a woman Adrian had desired for himself. Schwedtfeger had become familiar with Adrian, first as a potential homosexual love

interest, then as a professional colleague (Adrian wrote a violin concerto for him), and then as a close friend addressed with the familiar pronoun. Schwedtfeger thus conquered Adrian's "brittle lonely solitude" (p. 435) through his "absolutely undauntingly confiding familiarity" (p. 435) and "flirtatious nature" (p. 436). When Adrian falls for Mademoiselle Marie Godeau, a woman described as "sympathique" (p. 439), on a chance meeting in Zurich, he eventually asks his friend, who is a lot more experienced and comfortable with women than he is, to ask, on his behalf, for Marie's hand. Schwedtfeger resists the request, admitting that he is "not indifferent" (p. 460) to her himself. Adrian then asks Schwedtfeger if he intends to ask Marie to marry him, and when Schwedtfeger replies that he has "not thought of that yet" (p. 461), Adrian decides "to stick firmly by my request" (p. 461). Schwedtfeger thus nobly agrees to "go and, to the best of my ability, plead your cause" (p. 461).

Zeitblom is "certain that as far as Schwedtfeger himself knew, he had gone to Marie Godeau with the best, the most correct intentions" (p. 464). But when Schwedtfeger proposes to Marie on Adrian's behalf, she is clearly upset, informs Schwedtfeger that she does not feel romantically toward Adrian, and would rather not see Schwedtfeger again. Schwedtfeger leaves, but immediately writes her a letter proclaiming his love for her, and they become engaged. The news spreads quickly, and before Adrian, who is living in the country, has received the news of his own rejection, Schwedtfeger has been shot by the jealous Inez. Zeitblom, hit with an "overwhelming pity" (p. 472) at Schwedtfeger's passing, and realizing "I had always loved him" (p. 472), takes it upon himself to inform Institoris that his wife is a murderer and is now under arrest.

The concluding chapters of the book describe Adrian's further fall from grace, despite his creative flourishing. His sister leaves her son, Nepomuk, nicknamed Echo, with Adrian at the Schweigestills, on account of his failing health. Adrian enjoys having his nephew around, and everyone is agreed that he is obedient and charming. "That creature of strange grace" (p. 496), however, is "taken from us" (p. 496), but not before his illness has manifested itself with "fits of teeth-gnashing" (p. 499) giving the impression of "a child possessed" (p. 499). Adrian interprets the child's death as the devil acting through him, and shouts, "Take his body over which You have dominion. But You will have to be content to leave his sweet soul to me" (p. 500). Zeitblom attempts to alleviate his friend's pain, encouraging him to stop "torturing yourself with absurd self-incriminations for a blind stroke of fate" (p. 501).

The climax of the novel comes when Adrian, by now looking distinctly eccentric, invites an audience of friends and acquaintances to Pfeffering to hear a piano rendition of excerpts from his most recent composition, *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*, a work that expresses, in its final moments, "the lament of God for the lost state of His world, like the Creator's sorrowful 'I did not will this'" (p. 515). Thirty people come, and Adrian publicly confesses that "I have already since my twenty-first year been wed with Satan ... out of a wish to find fame in this world" (p. 521). He explains how Esmeralda charmed him, and "I was initiated and the promise sealed" (p. 522). But he admits that even before his encounter with Esmeralda his soul, "in its conceit and pride, was upon the road to Satan" (p. 523) and that he studied theology "not for God's sake, but for the sake of that Other" (p. 523).

As he speaks, many of the audience leave, while others attempt to find poetry in his words. Eventually a numismatist (a specialist in the study of coins and money) declares, “This man is mad” (p. 527), finding it “regrettable that no one representing psychiatric science is part of our circle” (p. 527). Eventually Frau Schweigestill, his surrogate mother and representative of nature, orders everyone to leave, claiming, “You haven’t the least understanding, you city folk, and there’s need of understanding here” (p. 527).

From that moment on Adrian is a burned-out shell, “nothing to do with the man called Adrian Leverkühn” (p. 529). He is taken to Munich to visit a private mental clinic, before returning first to Pfeiffering, under the care of Frau Schweigestill, and then to the family home in which he was born and raised, under the care of his mother.

In 1940, the man whose “love, anxiety, fear, and pride” (p. 534) constituted the “essential content” (p. 534) of Zeitblom’s life, dies. At the funeral are close family, Zeitblom and other friends, and “a muffled, unrecognizable stranger, who had vanished again as the first clods fell on the lowered coffin” (p. 534).

Zeitblom, writing toward the end of the second world war, when Germany “plummets from despair to despair” (p. 534), describes himself as a “lonely man” (p. 534) and asks God to have mercy “on your poor soul, my friend, my fatherland” (p. 534).

In this final paragraph, Mann conflates Adrian Leverkühn and Germany, and the parable, in its moment of conclusion, is revised as an allegory that says as much about Germany and its relationship to culture as it does about Adrian as an individual representative of that culture.

McEwan, Ian. (1999). *Amsterdam*. New York: Random House

The four central characters are introduced in the opening scene of the novel, the funeral of Molly Lane. Clive Linley, a composer, Vernon Halliday, a newspaper editor, and Julian Garmony, the foreign secretary, are all ex-lovers of Molly, while George was Molly's husband. Clive and Vernon are friends and, horrified by how quickly Molly died and how George handled her in her final weeks, they agree to look after each other by helping the other to die with dignity, should either one of them find themselves in a similar situation.

Soon after the funeral George finds photographs, taken by his deceased wife, of Garmony dressed as a woman. He offers them to Vernon for publication in his newspaper, *The Judge*. Garmony attempts to suppress them, but Vernon, committed to bringing about the political downfall of Garmony, fights the legal injunction, the more traditional voices on his editorial team, and his friend Clive, to have them published.

Meanwhile Clive is working on an orchestral commission, which is nearly complete, and shortly to be rehearsed in Holland. In order to induce the creativity needed to finish the piece, he decides to take a walking holiday in the Lake District. While there, in the belly of nature, the final melody comes "as a gift" (p. 90). As he is writing it down, he hears an altercation between a man and a woman nearby. He is tempted to intervene, but is worried his "fragile inspiration" (p. 93) will be lost. He decides it is "not his business" (p. 96), despite the woman's "sudden pleading whimpering sound" (p. 95), and hurries off to write down his melody before returning to London.

Clive tells Vernon of his experience in the Lake District, and when, at an editorial board meeting shortly after, Vernon hears about a “Lakeland rapist” (p. 123), he puts two and two together and encourages Clive to tell the police about his experience in the Lake District. Clive doesn’t want to, to which Vernon replies that it is his “moral duty” (p. 130). Clive tells Vernon he is in no position to speak of “moral duty”, and the conversation becomes tense and heated. Vernon tells Clive, “If you won’t go to the police, I’ll phone them myself and tell them what you saw” (p. 130). The conversation ends with both men telling each other to “fuck off” (p. 131).

Mrs Garmony, meanwhile, calls a news conference in which she claims that she knew about her husband’s proclivity “at the beginning” and although it was “a little shocking ... it was nothing that their love could not absorb” (p. 134). She reveals the photos herself, thereby spoiling the impact of Vernon’s front page, due to be published the following day. She also calls Vernon a “flea” (p. 135), leading the other newspapers to conclude that *The Judge* is “out of step with changing times” (p. 136), as we “live in a more reasonable, compassionate, and tolerant age” (p. 136). As a consequence of the moral backlash against his newspaper, Vernon loses his job.

When Vernon receives Clive’s note, which was written immediately after their argument and reads, “Your threat appalls me. So does your journalism. You deserve to be sacked” (p. 149), he believes Clive is celebrating his bad fortune, reading the accent as falling on *deserve* rather than *sacked*. As a result he concludes that Clive has “lost his reason” (p. 161) and, remembering their agreement made after Molly’s funeral, he enquires about medical euthanasia in Amsterdam. Clive, meanwhile, after helping the police identify the Lakeland rapist (Vernon having followed through with his threat to

call the police), arrives in Amsterdam having also made enquiries about medical euthanasia. Both men meet, feign renewed friendship, drug each other with a glass of champagne, before Dutch doctors obtain their signatures and effect their deaths.

In the concluding chapter Julian Garmony and George prepare to travel to Amsterdam together to collect the bodies – “George as an old friend of the Hallidays and as Vernon’s sponsor on the Judge, Julian at the behest of the Linley Trust, as Clive’s advocate in cabinet” (p. 189). They learn that the piece Clive considered a work of genius is in fact “a dud” (p. 190), with the melody born in the Lake District a “shameless copy of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, give or take a note or two” (p. 191) and that in contrast to what the press supposed, the deaths were not a result of a “double suicide” (p. 191) but of a “mutual murder” (p. 191). The novel ends with George content in the knowledge that, were he to hold a memorial service for Molly, “he alone would make the speech” (p. 193) and there would be “no former lovers exchanging glances” (p. 193). He is also considering asking Vernon’s wife out to dinner, as she “used to be rather wild” (p. 193).

Seth, Vikram. (1999). *An equal music*. London: Orion Books.

An equal music is narrated by Michael Holme, the second violinist in the Maggiore quartet. His fellow quartet members are Piers, the leader of the quartet, first violinist and homosexual brother of Helen, the violist. Billy is the cellist. Michael has a lover, Virginie, a young French woman who is also his student, but he is hung up on a former lover, Julia, who he knows from his student days studying violin in Vienna. Other looming presences in the book are Carl Käll, Michael’s former violin teacher in Vienna, Alex Foley, Piers’ former lover and the violinist Michael replaced in the Maggiore

quartet, Mrs Formby, who has lent her Tonnoni violin to Michael, and Julia's son, Luke, and husband, James.

Much of the book is taken up with descriptions of the ins and outs of being in a professional string quartet – rehearsals, concerts, meetings, travel, and other arrangements. These on the whole ring true. The story, however, is mostly focused on the relationship, or lack thereof, between Michael and Julia, and in this respect the novel functions as a psychological exploration of the mind of a particular musician – in this case a moderately successful one, who is deeply confused and unhappy nonetheless.

Julia and Michael met in Vienna when they were both students, and “from the moment of our first meeting I [Michael] could think of nothing but her” (p. 102). Michael, the son of a butcher from Rochdale in the north of England, learnt from Julia, whose father was a university professor, about art, music, German, and bridge – the trappings of middle-class life. Despite their intense and reciprocal love affair, he leaves Vienna as “a fugitive” (p. 104) when a conflict with his professor, Carl Käll, erupts. He appears to suffer a breakdown of sorts, and by the time he is well enough to contact Julia and attempt to make amends, she has become disheartened and wants nothing more to do with him.

When he encounters her again ten years later, none of his feelings for her have diminished. She, on the other hand, has married, borne a son, and lives in middle-class comfort in London, having moved with her Boston-bred husband from the States. They resume their sexual relationship, despite Julia being happy with her family life, and we learn that she has, since Vienna, become deaf. This part of the story is handled very well,

as she does not initially tell him about her condition, and consequently he interprets much of her behavior as simply odd or irrational, not recognizing that it issues from a simple inability to hear. By building up to the revelation of her deafness in this way Seth not only builds suspense, but also highlights the extent to which we rely on and take for granted our sense of hearing for simple, mundane, social interactions.

Having chosen to keep her deafness a secret, believing it will negatively impact her standing in the London music profession, she finds herself booked to play the Trout Quintet with the Maggiore quartet in Vienna. During rehearsals her deafness comes to light, but the concert is a success anyway. Michael and Julia spend time together in Vienna and Venice, but make themselves unpopular with the rest of the quartet because, quite simply, Julia brings out the worst in Michael – obsession, jealousy and nostalgia.

The book concludes with Michael quitting the Maggiore for no good reason, Mrs Formby bequeathing him her violin, Julia refusing to see him, and his acceptance that he is a “selfish, self-centered bastard” (p. 477). On hearing Julia perform Bach’s ‘Art of fugue’ at the Wigmore Hall, however, he realizes that “music, such music is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness; why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from day to day and to hear such music – not too much, or the soul could not sustain it – from time to time” (p. 484).

Chapter 13: Annotated Bibliography of Literary Theory Texts

Literary theory: a very short introduction by Jonathan Culler (1997) provides an overview of the main schools and movements in literary theory, with suggestions for further reading. Below I offer my own select annotated bibliography of literary theory texts.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

This book contains four essays, which I summarize in turn:

In “Epic and Novel” Bakhtin claims the novel “is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” (p. 3). The novel, he claims, “gets on poorly with other genres” (p. 4) in part because it “parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language” (p. 5). In addition it parodies itself as a genre, thereby maintaining the plasticity of the genre. “It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Such, indeed, is the only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality” (p. 39).

The novel presents problems for literary theory, as there are few, if any, characteristics of the novel that can’t be challenged with counter-examples. Thus the novel has been described as a multi-layered genre, a plotted and dynamic genre, a complicated genre, a love story, and a prose genre, but there are many examples of

single-layered, purely descriptive, purely entertaining, devoid of any love element and verse novels. So what exactly is the novel?

Bakhtin claims the novel is a “genre-in-the-making” (p. 11), distinguished by a) its stylistic three-dimensionality b) its temporal reconfiguration and c) its contact with the present in all its open-endedness. These three characteristics are all interrelated, a shared consequence of the encounter between different cultural and linguistic communities in Europe in the modern age. This polyglot world allowed languages to “throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language” (p. 12), and with the relativity of national languages came an increased awareness of the relativity of dialects, jargons, literary, social and epochal languages. Only in the Renaissance did the present begin to feel a closer affinity with the future than with the past, situating itself as a “new and heroic beginning” (p. 40).

Whereas the epic genre is a “completed and finished generic form” (p. 15) focused on a fixed and sacred past, the novel genre is determined by experience, knowledge and practice situated in the present and oriented toward the future. The spirit of the novel, and its origins, can be located in serio-comical genres that used humour to destroy the epic by destroying the distancing and valorizing of the past on which the epic relies. “As a distanced image a subject cannot be comical; to be made comical, it must be brought close. Everything that makes us laugh is close at hand, all comical creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity” (p. 23). The plane of laughter allows us to “disrespectfully walk around whole objects” (p. 23) in time and space, seeing things from above, below, in front of, behind, earlier, later, past, present, etc. It resituates the human

subject as an object of familiar investigation, exposing “the disparity between his surface and his center, between his potential and his reality” (p. 35).

The novel genre, Bakhtin concludes, will continue to develop in response to contemporary realities, reflecting and incorporating visions of the past, present and future.

In “The Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” Bakhtin identifies five different approaches taken by literary critics to a novelistic discourse. Thus a critic may focus on: a) the literary techniques of the author (i.e., metaphors, comparisons etc.); b) the total range of language employed by a novelist; c) the elements of a novelist’s language that represent a particular historical school (e.g., Romanticism); d) the personality or individual style of the author; and e) the rhetoric contained within the text. Bakhtin claims all these approaches are rooted in analytic devices appropriate to poetic genres, but “remote from those peculiarities that define the novel as a genre” (p. 42). The differences between the novel and poetic genres “are so fundamental, so categorical, that all attempts to impose on the novel the concepts and norms of *poetic* imagery are doomed to fail” (p. 43).

Bakhtin introduces the concept of “intonational quotation marks” (p. 44) to highlight the novel’s unique ability to treat with irony or parody other genres. In Pushkin’s *Onegin*, for instance, Tatiana’s language is an image of the language of a provincial miss combined with the language of folk tales and peasant songs. This hybrid, or “internally dialogized combination” language, is represented by Pushkin in Tatiana’s

speech, but is in addition *spoken* by the author in Tatiana's "voice-zone" (p. 46) (i.e., when the narrative voice is inflected with Tatiana's speech style).

Bakhtin claims "almost the entire novel breaks down into images of languages that are connected to one another and with the author via their own characteristic dialogical relationships" (p. 47). Thus it is the same languages that do the representing as are represented in the novel. "The author participates in the novel (he is omnipresent in it) with *almost no direct language of his own*. The language of the novel is a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language" (p. 47). The author "cannot be found at any one of the novel's language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect" (p. 49).

Bakhtin claims this feature of *Onegin* is typical of all "authentic novels" (p. 49 – how is authentic being used here?) Every novel, he claims, is a "dialogized system made up of the images of 'languages', styles and consciousness that are concrete and inseparable from language. Language in the novel not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation. Novelistic discourse is always criticizing itself" (p. 49). Consequently, critical analysis of a novel should focus on the multiple languages contained in the novel, their typology, their interaction, the spaces and movements between them, and their dialogical interrelationships (p. 50).

For Bakhtin, polyglossia, the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system, "frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language" (p. 61). A consciousness thus

freed recognizes that even monoglossia is “always in essence relative” (p. 66), for “one’s own language is never a single language” (p. 66). Both between and within languages there is a struggle for “the unity of a literary language and for the unity of its system of genres” (p. 66). Indeed, rarely, if ever, is a language unitary. Each language has its comic other, its latent parody, creating a dialogue within itself. “Every parody is an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another” (p. 76). The novel is thus dialogized from top to bottom – in its representation of single languages that are inherently dialogized, in its narrative voice that brings dialogized languages into dialogue with each other, and in its image of the author, who is everywhere yet nowhere.

In “Forms Of Time And Of The Chronotope In The Novel: Notes Toward A Historical Poetics” Bakhtin claims time and space are inseparable and a “formally constitutive category” in literature. He thus coins the term *chronotope* to refer to the time- space continuum, the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (p. 84). Different genres, he claims, are defined by their different chronotopes, by the different ways they treat time-space, and the “image of man” in different forms of literature is intrinsically chronotopic (p. 85).

Bakhtin reviews some of the different chronotopes in ancient and modern literature. These include *adventure-time*, a time set off from “historical, quotidian, biographical ... biological and maturational” considerations” (p. 91), where *chance* controls the characters, and *meeting* is the central motif; a mix of *adventure-time and everyday-time*, in which identity and transformation are explored through moments of crisis that show how an individual becomes other than what he was; *biographical time*, in

which the complete life of an individual is portrayed in its outward manifestations – what might be called the “public self-consciousness of a man” (p. 140) – through soliloquy; *the miraculous world in adventure time*, in which elementary temporal relationships are violated to achieve an emotional or lyrical effect etc.

Each chronotype, Bakhtin argues, contains within itself a value dimension. “Art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values* of varying degree and scope” (p. 243). Just as changes in musical performance spaces alter the kinds of music that are composed and performed, so changes in time-space relationships in the novel change the kinds of characters that can be portrayed. “In the novels of Stendhal and Balzac a fundamentally new space appears in which novelistic events may unfold – the space of parlors and salons” (p. 246).

Chronotopes are thus “the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied” (p. 250). Indeed, all language, in its very essence, is fundamentally chronotopic, containing within itself notions of time and space that co-exist, interweave, “replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships” (p. 252). The represented world is not the same as the one represented. “The represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary work is to be found” (p. 256). Consequently the image of the author in the work is never to be confused with the author herself.

Bakhtin concludes that, “every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (p. 258).

Finally, in “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin lists five “basic types of composition-stylistic unities into which the novelistic whole usually breaks down: a) direct authorial literary-artistic narration; b) stylizations of everyday oral narration; c) stylizations of everyday written narration (i.e., letters, diaries etc.); d) literary extra-artistic authorial speech (i.e., philosophical analyses, moral deliberation, ethnographic description etc.); e) stylistically individualized speech of characters. These five stylistic unities combine within the novel to form the “higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it” (p. 262). Thus “the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its ‘languages’” (p. 262).

The “internal dialogism of the word” (p. 279) and heteroglossia allow for double-voiced discourse that “expresses simultaneously two different intentions” (p. 324) – the direct intention of the character speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. There are thus two voices, two meanings and two expressions, contained within a single utterance. These two voices are themselves dialogically related – they “know about each other” (p. 324), are in conversation with each other. The author “encases his own thought in the image of another’s language without doing violence to the freedom of that language or to its own distinctive uniqueness” (p. 409). Thus an “unresolved conversation begins to sound in the image itself. The image becomes an open, living, mutual interaction between worlds, points of view, accents ... the image becomes polysemic ...

thus are created the immortal novelistic images that live different lives in different epochs” (p. 410).

There is, then, no single language of the novel, but rather a social speech diversity, an artistic system of images of languages, “and the real task of stylistic analysis consists in uncovering all the available orchestrating languages in the composition of the novel, grasping the precise degree of distancing that separates each language from its most immediate semantic instantiation in the work as a whole, and the varying angles of refraction of intentions within it, understanding their dialogic interrelationships and – finally – if there *is* direct authorial discourse, determining the heteroglot background outside the work that dialogizes it” (p. 416).

Bal, Mieke. (1985). *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bal attempts to provide a “*systematic* account of a theory of narrative for use in the study of literary and other narrative texts” (p. ix). She claims narratology is allied with neither structuralism nor deconstruction, but rather helps in the interpretation, and hence in the teaching and discussion, of narrative texts.

Narratology is thus a “theory of narrative texts” (p. 3). A narrative text is a “text in which an agent relates a narrative” (p. 5), where that narrative consists of a *story* which presents, in a particular manner, a *fabula*, a “series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (p. 5). An event is a transition from one state to another, and an actor is an agent, not necessarily human, that causes or experiences an event. There are thus three primary categories in Bal’s naratology – the

fabula, the story and the text, and her book is structured with these primary categories in mind.

The *fabula* is a “specific grouping of series of events” (p. 19), which together constitute a process. Within any fabula there are three phases: the possibility, the event and the result of the process, although none of these are necessarily present in any given fabula. The overall process may be one of improvement or of deterioration, and often consist of an actor aspiring to a certain state, or intending a certain outcome. Often the aspiration or intention of an actor is brought into relationship with external powers over which s/he has little or no control (i.e., the weather, other people, society etc.), leading to the incorporation of psychological and ideological relations into the fabula. In addition, time is a necessary component of the fabula, as a process necessarily takes place over a period of time. This period may be short (a few seconds) or long (a few centuries). Finally, location is implicit in the fabula, as events must happen somewhere.

The *story* is distinguished from the fabula by the *specific angle* with which it views the events of the fabula. “If one regards the fabula primarily as the product of *imagination*, the story could be regarded as the result of an *ordering*” (p. 49). Ordering consists of chronological arrangement, including chronological deviations or *anachronies* (p. 53). These in turn can take place on different narrative levels (i.e., within the consciousness of a character), or within the top-level, “primary story-time” (i.e., the time in relation to which other units are defined) (p. 57). Anachronies are defined by their distance in time from the narrative present, their function within the narrative as a whole, and their span (i.e., the stretch of time covered by an anachrony). While most anachronies are retroversions, they can also be anticipations. When it is impossible to define the

nature of a particular anachrony in terms of its distance, function or span, it is considered an *achrony*. Other aspects of a narrative that reside at the story level include *ellipsis*, the omission of fabula time, *semantic axes*, the meaning dimensions by which a character is defined (i.e., man-woman, rich-poor etc.), and *heroism*, the attribution of heroic status to a particular character (p. 92).

The story aspect considered most important by Bal is *focalization*. She uses this word, rather than perspective or point of view, to highlight the distinction between the vision presented and the identity of the voice verbalizing that vision (i.e., between “*those who see* and *those who speak*” (p. 101)). In fiction and reality, she claims, one person may express the vision of another. The focalizer is the point from which the elements are viewed. Focalization may be internal (i.e., of a character in the fabula) or external (of an anonymous agent situated outside the fabula). There are also different levels of focalization – an external focalizer (EF) may yield focalization to an internal focalizer (CF), but that internal focalizer is still being presented within the all-encompassing vision of the EF. Sometimes the point of yield is obvious (i.e., “As Mary got in the car, she saw a large rat on the dashboard”). The “saw” in this sentence is a *coupling sign*. At other times, the point of yield is less obvious (i.e., “Mary got in the car. An ugly, fat rat was on the dashboard”). In this instance, the inclusion of the word “ugly”, a subjective evaluation, suggests Mary is the focalizer in the second sentence, although there are no coupling signs to explicitly convey this shift in focalization.

The final category in Bal’s narratology is the *text*, through which a *narrator* tells a story. Bal is keen to distinguish the narrator from the author. In addition, the narrator should not be considered identical to the focalizer, although “the three agents

that function in the three layers – the actor, the focalizer, and the narrator” (p. 121) – may overlap in the form of a single fictional person. The narrator differs from the focalizer, however, as “it” (p. 191) narrates. A focalizer, on the other hand, merely focalizes. Thus the narrating subject is always a first person, no matter whether the story is told from a first-person or third-person perspective, as in both instances it is an implicit ‘I’ that narrates – that is, (I say): “I went into the room” or (I say): “She went into the room”. This ‘I’ that narrates can either be a character within the fabula, or remain external to the fabula. The textual layer also allows for *argumentative passages* that do not refer explicitly to the fabula, but introduce ideological information external to the fabula. The ideological positions taken up in argumentative passages cannot necessarily be taken at face value however, as they may contrast with positions taken up in the fabula or story layers of the text. *Description* is also part of the textual layer of a narrative. Finally, there are different levels of narration, with the narrator taking on characteristics of an actor through the use of personal language that signifies an emotional response to specific actors or events in the fabula.

Bloom, Harold. (1973/1997). *The Anxiety of Influence: A theory of poetry*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press

In the preface to the second edition of his influential book on influence, Bloom claims, “we are now in an era of so-called ‘cultural criticism,’ which devalues all imaginative literature, and which particularly demotes and debases Shakespeare. Politicizing literary study has destroyed literary study, and may yet destroy learning itself” (p. xvi). This alarmist statement sets the tone for the book, which focuses solely on white, male, canonic poets and the role of anxiety in the creation of great (or in Bloom’s terms, “strong”) poetry.

Bloom claims attempts to historicize or politicize Shakespeare will be in vain, because we are all “over-influenced” (p. xviii) by him – or at least all except the French. When cultural critics “persuade themselves that they speak for the insulted and injured of the world by denying the aesthetic primacy of Shakespeare” (p. xvii), or claim aesthetic eminence is a capitalist mystification, or see themselves as social revolutionaries or cultural rebels, they are revealing their anxiety in the face of Shakespeare’s influence. Acknowledging our own anxiety in relation to Shakespeare may “cleanse” (p. xxv) us of the resentment associated with scholarly belatedness, but historicizing, politicizing or feminizing Shakespeare is redundant, as Shakespeare “always was there before us” (p. xxv). We are created in the image of Shakespeare, and hence can never successfully turn the tables on him.

In the book proper, Bloom attempts two things. Firstly, to de-idealize accepted accounts of how one poet influences another, and secondly, to change the way critics approach poetry in light of this de-idealized account. His central argument throughout the book is that strong poets misread other strong poets “so as to clear imaginative space for themselves” (p. 5). Bloom defines a strong poet as one who is a “major figure” (p. 5), prepared to “wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death” (p. 5). Whereas “weaker talents idealize” (p. 5), strong poets misread in order to create themselves.

Bloom identifies six “revisionary ratios” (loosely based in readings of Freud and Nietzsche) for understanding how strong poets emerge:

- 1) *Clinamen* – poetic misreading or misprision. Clinamen is a kind of misreading that suggests a former poem was right up to a point, but failed to swerve in the direction that the new poem now moves in.
- 2) *Tessera* – completion and antithesis. Tessera is a kind of reading that retains the terms of the original poem but completes the poem by reconfiguring the meaning of the terms differently. The precursor “failed to go far enough” (p. 14).
- 3) *Kenosis* – a breaking-device similar to the defense mechanisms employed against repetition compulsions. Kenosis is a kind of misreading that attempts a discontinuity with the precursor through an apparent humbling that deflates the power of the precursor.
- 4) *Daemonization* – a movement toward a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor’s Sublime. Daemonization is a kind of misreading that generalizes away the uniqueness of the earlier work.
- 5) *Askesis* – a movement of self-purgation to attain a state of solitude. Askesis is a kind of misreading that whereby the imaginative power of the later poet is yielded to the precursor in an attempt to separate himself from others, and in so doing, the precursor’s imaginative power is also yielded.
- 6) *Apophrades* – a return of the dead. The later poet holds open his work to the precursor (rather than it *being* open, as it was in earlier stages) and in so doing makes it seem as if the later poet had written the precursor’s most characteristic poems.

Each chapter of the book is dedicated to exploring one of these revisionary strategies, highlighting some of the key differences between poets and critics in the process. Strong poets, he claims, refuse to be judicious when reading the poems of others. Judiciousness is a sign of weakness and “really strong poets can read only themselves” (p. 19). Great poets engage with precursor poets aggressively, and the tradition of Western poetry is a history of “anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism” (p. 30). Only weak poets, he claims, benefit from generosity of spirit – “the more generosity, and the more mutual it is, the poorer the poets involved” (p. 30). Even as critics, therefore, we should not aim for “accurate” readings of poems, but for creative misreadings. “The stronger the man, the larger his resentments, and the more brazen his *clinamen*” (p. 43). Rather than examining poems as fixed and discrete entities, critics should look for the ways in which poets have deliberately misinterpreted precursor poems. “Know each poem by its *clinamen* and you will ‘know’ that poem in a way that will not purchase knowledge by the loss of the poem’s power” (p. 43).

A critic’s relationship to poetry is different from that of a poet’s, for while later poets are “ephebes wrestling with the dead” (p. 65), at constant risk of “castration” by their forbears, critics are more like necromancers. But critics can still be aware of “the anxieties in them [poets] that made anxieties for others, though not for ourselves” (p. 65). The commodity in which poets deal is priority – “they own, they are, what they become first in naming” (p. 64). Later poets come to a story that is already partially told, and consequently are faced with the voice of the precursor who paradoxical says, “Be me but not me” (p. 70).

Bloom thus argues for a criticism that no longer sees a poet as an autonomous ego, but one “caught up in a dialectical relationship (transference, repetition, error, communication) with another poet or poets” (p. 91). In his interchapter, titled ‘A Manifesto for Antithetical Criticism’, he sums up his central thesis.

A poem is a poet’s melancholy at his lack of priority. The failure to have begotten oneself is not the cause of the poem, for poems arise out of the illusion of freedom, out of a sense of priority being possible. But the poem – unlike the mind in creation – is a made thing, and as such is an achieved anxiety (p. 96).

See Whitesell, Lloyd. (1994). ‘Men with a past: music and the “anxiety of influence”’. *19th-Century Music*. 18(2), pp. 152-167 for a critique of Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* from a music studies perspective.

Bloom, H. (2000). *How to read and why*. New York; Toronto: Scribner.

In the Preface and Prologue to *How to read and why*, Bloom claims reading is a great and healing pleasure. It “returns you to otherness ... and as such alleviates loneliness” (p. 19). He claims there is no way to read other than with your whole self, when “your self has been fully molded” (p. 19). Reading, then, should be “experiential and pragmatic, rather than theoretical” (p. 19), and the purpose of the literary critic should be to make explicit what is already implicit in a book.

Reading must always be for and in the best interest of the reader. Reading prepares us for change, and in particular, the ultimate change – from life to death. Our most pleasurable reading experiences are those when we feel “one nature wrote and the same reads” (Emerson in Bloom, p. 22) – that is, when we feel a direct “spiritual” (for

want of a better word) connection with the author. Reading also engages us in “weighing and considering” (p. 22) certain ideas, perspectives, realities etc. Reading is, then, ultimately a selfish pleasure, and we should be wary of “any arguments whatsoever that connect the pleasures of solitary reading to the public good” (p. 22). Indirectly, however, good readers serve as beacons for others to gather around and gain sustenance from.

Bloom offers five concrete suggestions for how to read:

- 1) *Clear your mind of cant*, in particular academic cant
- 2) *Do not attempt to improve your neighbor or your neighborhood by what or how you read*. There are no ethics of reading. Self-improvement is enough.
- 3) *A scholar is a candle which the love and desire of all men will light*. In other words, becoming an authentic reader will elicit responses from others that “confirm you as an illumination to others” (p. 24).
- 4) *One must be an inventor to read well*. Read creatively, or misread, and search out minds that are “more original than our own” (p. 25).
- 5) *Recover the ironic*. Be aware of when a character or narrator says one thing but means another. Develop the ability to sustain antithetical ideas, even when they collide with one another – that is, avoid being rigid or ideological when interpreting a text.
- 6) *Read humanly, with all of you*

Bloom claims “we cannot know enough people profoundly enough ... we need to know ourselves better ... [and] we require knowledge, not just of self and others, but of the way things are” (p. 29), and reading is the means by which we gain this knowledge. Reading is a “difficult pleasure”, second only to falling in love, but when we read deeply, “not to believe, not to accept, not to contradict, but to learn to share in that one nature that writes and reads” (p. 29), we achieve a state of secular transcendence.

In the remainder of the book Bloom examines concrete texts from the Western canon, including poetry, drama and novels, highlighting their notable features and encouraging a particular way of looking at the texts.

Brooks, Peter. (1994). *Psychoanalysis and storytelling*. Oxford: Blackwell

Brooks claims psychoanalytic approaches to literature have tended to focus on either the author, the reader, or the fictive persons in the text. Brooks argues for an approach based on the assumption that “the structure of literature is in some sense the structure of mind” – not of a specific mind but the mental apparatus that is common to us all – that is, the basic structure and dynamic of the psyche (p. 24). He acknowledges that this assumption depends on a belief or intuition that the psychoanalytic version of the human psyche is “true”, that it corresponds to one’s own experiences and insights (i.e., the belief that humans are “radically determined by sexuality” (p. 25)), including infantile fantasies of satisfaction and loss, personal notions of gender difference, as well as genitality.

Brooks argues that novels function in relation to their readers much as a psychoanalyst functions in relation to his patient. “In the transference, the analyst

constitutes himself as a subject by way of the dialogic and dialectic presence of the analyst, in a dynamic of erotic interaction” (p. 42). The transferential relationship is metaphoric, as it is based on the analyst assuming, at least in the mind of the analysand, the role of the analysand’s past figures of authority. Within this relationship, the psychological investments of the analysand come to the surface. Reading literature from a psychoanalytic perspective enables the “erotics of form ... the dramas of desire played out in tropes” (p. 44) to come to the fore.

Brooks is keen to point out that he is not making a claim for psychoanalysis as a metalanguage for interpreting literature – we must “resist the notion that psychoanalysis ‘explains’ literature” (p. 43). Rather, the “intertextual relation it holds to literature” (p. 43), which is fundamentally different from the intertextual relation between a poem and a novel, or a novel and another novel, “creates a tension which is productive of perspective, of stereoptical effect” (p. 43). Bringing psychoanalytic and fictional discourses together highlights the ways the mind “reformulates the real, how it constructs the necessary fictions by which we dream, desire, interpret, indeed by which we constitute ourselves as human subjects” (p. 44). In contrast to narratological approaches, which he claims portray a “sterile formalism” (p. 44), psychoanalytic readings address the “symbolic and fictional map of our place in existence” (p. 44).

In the transferential relationship, the analyst seeks to occupy a position that brings to the fore the analysand’s desire to “be called to as desirable” (Lacan in Brooks, p. 70). By “setting aside his own person” (p. 70), resisting a “totalitarian foreclosure of interpretation and meaning”, the analyst enables the analysand to hear the echo of his own desire through the transference. The transferential relationship, although “difficult

and agonistic” (p. 72), enables a deeper understanding of the narrative self and its unconscious desires to emerge. Reading texts, Brooks claims, is able to effect a similar change, as the textual reader is modified “by the work of interpretation and construction, by the transference dynamics to which he has submitted himself” (p. 72).

There is at least one obvious difference between a text and an analyst, however, as the text is fixed in a way the analyst and his responses are not. Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, Brooks writes “the novelist is necessarily isolated, invisible, a hidden god who does not have the capacity to enter into colloquy with his fellow man, and thus cannot communicate that wisdom that is good counsel” (p. 81). The novel is an “autonomous discourse” (p. 85) that exists outside of any given context – it is “detached from its author and belongs, strictly speaking, to no one” (p. 85). It cannot be directly responded to or questioned.

Brooks counters this argument by claiming that the novel contains within itself a context as a result of its self-conscious awareness of its own “communication situation and status” (p. 86). The “gaps, moments of passage, moments where something falls silent” (p. 86) allows a transference to occur between narrator and narratee. In addition, following Bakhtin, Brooks claims the word is necessarily dialogical, and even when fixed in a concrete text, exists in a situation of exchange. “It never belongs wholly to the speaker, it is never virgin; it is always borrowed, and it carries with it the vestiges of all the other locutions in which it has already served. Thus despite the detachment, solitude, privacy and lack of context that characterize the novel, the simulation of orality allows, or “even demands, the impassioned, even erotic, participation of the reader in the game” (p. 100). Just as in the analytic situation the analyst and analysand co-create

wisdom, so with the novel. “There is an irresolvable shuttling between these two positions [between the analyst and the analysand, the narrator and the narratee] ... the truth of narrative is situational, the work of truth reciprocal. Wisdom comes from conviction, however you construct it” (p. 101).

Derrida, Jacques. (1992). “This strange institution called literature”: An interview with Jacques Derrida. In Derrick Attridge (Ed), *Acts of Literature*. Routledge: New York.

In this conversation between Derrick Attridge and Jacques Derrida they discuss the relationship between philosophy and literature, and the nature of Derrida’s interest in the two fields and in writing more generally. Derrida claims that the first writings he became interested in were not literary or philosophical, but rather confessions, and in particular those of Rousseau, Gide and Nietzsche. He argues that philosophical discourse is a strategic or economic formalization of the need to catalogue the various sedimented internal polylogue’s that constitute one’s autobiography.

Literature, on the other hand, is an institution that “allows one to *say everything, in every way*” (p. 36, orig. italics). This can be taken in two ways – as totalizing, in the sense of formalizing experience, gathering “all figures into one another” (p. 36), but also as destructive of totalizations by breaking down prohibitions through the development of new formal structures. Consequently literature is an institution that “tends to overflow the institution” (p. 36). It is both a historical institution with conventions and rules, but at the same time an institution that within itself is committed to breaking free of rules, to questioning the “traditional difference between nature and institution, nature and conventional law, nature and history” (p. 37, cf. Adorno). Fiction thus has no fixed meaning or mission – not even a critical one.

Derrida admits, however, that “I have probably never drawn great enjoyment from fiction, from reading novels, for example, beyond the pleasure taken in analyzing the play of writing, or else certain naïve moments of identification” (p. 39). Rather he is more interested in literature that questions literature, or philosophy that interrogates the relationship between speech and writing. He claims much 20th century modernist fiction bears within itself a critical questioning of the nature and value of literature. “These texts operate a sort of turning back, they *are* themselves a sort of turning back on the literary institution” (p. 41). They are not wholly self-reflexive – they still reference something beyond themselves, but they “question, analyze, transform this strange contradiction, this institutionless institution” (p. 42).

But a literary work is never wholly *in itself* literature – it requires an intentional relation to the text, which is not merely projective or subjective, but called for by specific aspects of the text that recall the “convention, institution, or history of literature” (p. 44). There is no natural, ahistorical essence of literature, but rather an experience of literature based in a subjectivity linked to an intersubjective and transcendental community (p. 44).

In contrast to those who claim a text is literary insofar as it resists a transcendental reading, Derrida claims no text resists it absolutely, for “absolute resistant to such a reading would purely and simply destroy the trace of the text” (p. 47). As there is no essence to literature, “a literature that talked only about literature or a work that was purely self-referential would immediately be annulled” (p. 47). Consequently there is no literature without some relation to meaning and reference. Similarly, metaphysical assumptions are built into literature. “They aren’t faults, error, sins or accidents that could

be avoided” (p. 49) – they are structural. However, the metaphysical assumptions inherent in literature are offset by a form of suspension – often called irony – such that literary rhetoric is of itself deconstructive, both putting forward a metaphysical belief or thesis and at the same time detaching itself from that belief or thesis. Thus a literary work that presents traditional metaphysical norms and assumption, through the operation of its writing alone, can be more destabilizing of those metaphysical norms and assumptions than a work that directly attempts to destabilize traditional metaphysical norms and assumptions but does so using very traditional language. Thus the *form* of writing can subvert the overt meaning of the text (Derrida gives the example of texts that while overtly phallogentric, “through the audacity of a writing which in fact disturbs the order or the logic of phallogentrism” (p. 50) become paradoxically anti-phallogentric).

Thus a good reading of literature, or literary criticism, requires “a literary signature or counter-signature, an inventive experience of language, *in* language, an inscription of the act of reading in the field of the text that is read” (p. 52). The distinction between literature and literary criticism is therefore not as great as it would initially appear, and Derrida claims he “wouldn’t distinguish between “literature” and “literary criticism,” but I wouldn’t assimilate all forms of writing and reading” (p. 52). Rather we should “give up on the purity and linearity of frontiers” (p. 52) and acknowledge the “essential possibility of contamination” (p. 52) between oppositions such as literature and criticism.

Derrida concludes by claiming that literature can tell us something important about writing, including other kinds of writing such as philosophical and scientific writing. Whereas it shares some of the self-reflexivity of juridico-political writing, it

allows for a more radical critique of its own institutional foundations by virtue of its having “nothing, or almost nothing, in view ... and by producing events whose ‘reality’ or duration is never assured” (p. 72). But even literature has its institutional bias, and consequently Derrida dreams “of a writing that would be neither philosophy nor literature, nor even contaminated by one or the other” (p. 73), although he still wants to maintain the “memory of literature and philosophy” (p. 73). The dream of a “new institution without precedent, without pre-institution” (p. 73) is, Derrida claims, the dream of every literary work and he cites Joyce as an author who betrayed that dream – first by revealing it, and then through his failure to achieve the dream (Ulysses is ultimately filed under fiction, and situated within a canon).

Derrida, Jacques. (1992). *Before the Law*. In Derrick Attridge (Ed.), *Acts of Literature*. Routledge: New York.

In this essay Derrida riffs on a short story by Kafka called ‘Before the Law’, a title that “sums up in advance and formalizes what is at stake” (p. 183). The story tells of a doorkeeper who stands at the gates of the Law and denies entry to a man from the country who wants to enter in. The doorkeeper is prepared to let the man enter, but advises him that there are many more, and more fearsome, doorkeepers ahead, before he will reach the Law. The countryman believes the Law “should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone” (p. 183), but he “sits for days and years” (p. 183), always attempting to enter in, yet never succeeding. Eventually he has “reached his end” (p. 184), and only then is told by the doorkeeper, “This gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it” (p. 184).

Derrida begins his analysis with several axioms that structure our reading of it – that the text “has its own identity, singularity and unity” (p. 184); that the text has a non-fictional (i.e., responsible) author; that “events are related” (p. 186) in the story, and the relation belongs to what we call literature (i.e., the text has narrative form); and the text has a title that “names and guarantees the identity, the unity and the boundaries of the original work which it entitles” (p. 188), and we distinguish this title through the convention of placing it above the text proper.

Derrida then juxtaposes our understanding of *Before the Law* with our understanding of the law, asking, “if the law, without being transfixed by literature, shared the conditions of its possibility with the literary object?” (p. 191). On the one hand we think of the law as being impartial and “without history, genesis, or any possible derivation ... pure morality has no history” (p. 191). But on the other, the “as if” in Kant’s categorical imperative (“Act *as if* the maxim of your action were by your will to turn into a universal law of nature” (Kant in Derrida, p. 190)) seems to introduce “narrativity and fiction into the very core of legal thought” (p. 190).

If the law is based on an imaginative act of fiction, it is impossible to stand before it. “The story of prohibition is a prohibited story” (p. 200). The law rests on a convention that, in the Kafka story, is symbolized by the “invisible line” (p. 201) that separates the title of the story from its incipit (the first words of the story are also “Before the law ...”). This invisible line, by which we distinguish the title from the body of the text, relies on a convention that is “never present” (p. 201) in its originary form, and, like the man from the country, we are consequently “in front of the law without ever facing it” (p. 201).

In Derrida's reading of the story the doorkeeper does not say "no" to the countryman, but rather "not yet". The law denies access to itself, not directly, but through perpetual deferral, and it is the law itself that mandates this deferral. "What *must not* and cannot be approached is the origin of *différance*: it must not be presented or represented and above all not penetrated. That is the law of the law, the process of a law of whose subject we can never say, "There it is," it is here or there. It is neither natural nor institutional; one can never reach it, and it never reaches the depths of its original and proper taking-place" (p. 205). The law remains forever silent – "We do not know what it is, who it is, where it is. Is it a thing, a person, a discourse, a voice, a document, or simply a nothing that incessantly defers access to itself, thus forbidding *itself* in order thereby to become something or someone?" (p. 208).

Kafka's text functions in ways similar to the law it portrays. It "does not tell or describe anything but itself as text" (p. 211). We are before it, and it remains "inaccessible to contact, impregnable, and ultimately ungraspable, incomprehensible" (p. 211). As a copyrighted, original text we have no way of altering it or disfiguring it – "its 'form' presents and performs itself as a kind of personal identity entitled to absolute respect" (p. 211). Critics, publishers, translators, heirs, and professors stand in relation to the text as the multiple doorkeepers stand in relation to the law in Kafka's story. Much as the law relies on conventions that remain inaccessible for its ability to defer access to itself, so literature relies on a similar process to protect itself and render itself intangible.

Derrida concludes by asking, "What would allow us to judge that this text belongs to 'literature'; and, anyway, what is literature?" (p. 212). The question is itself naïve, Derrida claims, as it makes the same mistake the man from the country made in

assuming that the gateway to the Law was a universal gateway, rather than one made “only for you”. Derrida claims the countryman “had difficulty with literature” (p. 213), as he was looking for a universal where there is only the unique and singular. Thus “Kafka’s text tells us perhaps of the being-before-the-law of any text ... The text also points obliquely to literature, speaking of itself as a literary effect – and thereby exceeding the literature of which it speaks” (p. 215). But Derrida claims *all* literature exceeds literature – the work “does not belong to the field, it is the transformer of the field” (p. 215).

Literature has the capacity to make law, sidestepping existing laws while at the same time it “derives protection and receives its conditions of emergence” (p. 216) from those laws.

Derrida, Jacques (1968). *Différance*. In Jacques Derrida, *Margins of philosophy*. Translated, with additional notes, by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

In this paper, a “writing on writing” (p. 3), Derrida outlines some of the ways in which *différance*, “which is neither a word nor a concept” (p. 3) functions. He claims the *a* in *différance* can be read and written, but it cannot be heard, for in French it is pronounced the same as *différence*. When he speaks of *différance* with an *a*, then, there is a “*written text* that keeps watch over my discourse” (p. 4). If language, as Saussure claimed, is the “play of difference” (p. 5), then when it comes to *différance* it is a “silent play” (p. 5). This is significant as the founding oppositions of philosophy, such as sensible/intelligible, present/absent are challenged by *différance*, which escapes the opposition between speech and writing, existing “*between* speech and writing, and beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two” (p. 5).

Derrida claims *différance* is the other to “*everything*” (p. 6), and consequently has “neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent” (p. 6). It attains this status by virtue of its double meaning of “difference” and “deferral”. *Différance* is “irreducibly polysemic” (p. 8), referring to both the ways in which words mean with respect to other words (i.e., they signify within a chain of linguistic meanings based on difference) and the ways in which words signify with respect to signifieds that are never present – and hence their meanings are always deferred.

With respect to difference, *différance* is not a concept but rather refers to the possibility of conceptuality – the process whereby meaning is generated through the play of difference. It is for this reason that *différance* is not a word or a concept, in the sense of a “calm, present, and self-referential unity” (p. 11) – it is, rather, that which produces differences. It is not *before* differences, but is “the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name ‘origin’ no longer suits it” (p. 11).

With respect to deferral, *différance* represents a breakdown in consciousness, because if signification relies on its capacity to refer to a present (as opposed to absent) element (one that appears “on the scene of presence” (p. 13)), and the present is itself necessarily divisible into moments of past and present, presence is illusory. Thus *différance* refers to the “becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*)” (p. 13). Differences are thus produced by *différance*.

Derrida asks, “What differs? Who differs? What is *différance*?” (p. 14) but immediately questions the form of these questions, for they assume a consciousness that

is “present to itself” (p. 15) and if, as Saussure suggests, we are “inscribed in language” (p. 15) and language is based on *différance*, these questions originate from a concept of consciousness that is itself undermined by *différance*.

But this assumes that consciousness is necessarily a product of language. Is there not the possibility of a presence that precedes speech or signs? Derrida claims “consciousness offers itself to thought only as self-presence, as the perception of self in presence” (p. 16) and consequently the privilege granted to consciousness “signifies the privilege granted to the present” (p. 16). Challenging the privilege of presence is to challenge the bias of Western metaphysics, and to see the oppositions of activity/passivity, as well as many other binary oppositions, as based on this fundamental privileging of presence over absence. The attempt to reorient thought along a system of *différance*, rather than presence, is, Derrida claims, implicit in Nietzsche and Freud, and explicit in Heidegger, and results in “every apparently rigorous and irreducible *opposition*” being understood as a ““theoretical fiction”” (p. 18).

Différance “maintains our relationship with that which we necessarily misconstrue, and which exceeds the alternative of presence and absence” (p. 20). Like Freud’s notion of the unconscious, *différance* allows for a continued respect for that which “differs from, and defers, itself” (p. 20). Consequently *différance* shakes the foundation of being, “instigates the subversion of every kingdom” (p. 22), while at the same time, “governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority” (p. 22).

Derrida concludes by discussing the limitations of the word *différance*. What the word attempts to describe is actually inherently unnameable. That's not to say it is an ineffable Being, such as God, but rather "this unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects" (p. 25) that the word *différance* is itself enmeshed in. Thus we must question "the name of the name" (p. 26) and affirm, rather than shrink from, the unnameability of *différance*.

Derrida, Jacques. (1976). *Of grammatology*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Derrida begins his study of grammatology – the science of writing – by suggesting that "such a science of writing runs the risk of never being established as such and with that name" (p. 4), even when all technical, epistemological, theological and metaphysical obstacles are overcome. Because the idea of science and the idea of writing – and consequently the idea of a science of writing – is only meaningful within the domain of its own subject-matter – "is meaningful for us only in terms of an origin and within a world to which a certain concept of the sign ... and a certain concept of the relationships between speech and writing, have *already* been assigned" (p. 4).

The problem of language, then, is not simply one problem among others – it is the horizon of all problems in our historico-metaphysical epoch. Any attempt to circumscribe a problem devoid of the problematics of language is doomed to failure for representation of all kinds – physical, musical, pictorial, sculptural, political – are structured on the model of language. Even the private self is conceived relationally, in communication with "the divine voice" or its representatives on earth.

Any science of writing is thus constrained in its scope and validity by the fact that the very idea of science was born in a certain epoch of writing and was thought and formulated in a language that contained within itself a particular conception of the relationship between speech and writing (p. 27). Grammatology, then, if it is to aspire to purity of purpose, must question the possibility of science, becoming a science “which would no longer have the form of *logic* but that of *grammatics*” (p. 28). Such a science would challenge the positive sciences, which rely on a repression of the uncertainty embedded in the language underpinning the philosophical logic on which they rely.

But grammatology is only possible when we know what writing is, and this is never possible. For any and all questions about writing assume that writing has an origin, when that origin can only be determined with a preconceived notion of what writing *is* – for otherwise, how would we know it when we see it? “What is writing? How can it be identified? What certitude of essence must guide the empirical investigation?” (p. 75). Derrida claims, “*all concepts hitherto proposed in order to think the articulation of a discourse and of an historical totality are caught within the metaphysical closure that I question here*” (orig. italics, p. 99).

Derrida, Jacques. (1982). The Supplement of Copula: Philosophy before Linguistics. In Jacques Derrida, *Margins of philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In this essay Derrida addresses the question, “Is philosophical discourse governed ... by the constraints of language?” (p. 177). Philosophers have previously asked what “language” means in this question – a family of natural languages, or a “formal code elaborated on the basis of these natural languages” (p. 177)? But this distinction, between natural and formal, are already produced by philosophy, and

consequently antecede rather than precede the question. This is part of the larger problem, that “whoever alleges that philosophical discourse belongs to the closure of language must still proceed within this language and with the oppositions it furnishes” (p. 177). Or put another way, “philosophy always reappropriates for itself the discourse that de-limits it” (p. 177).

Derrida then reviews the ways the question has been conceived by previous philosophers. Nietzsche, he claims, saw philosophical language (i.e., that based on logic) as an impediment to freedom, with the concepts and forms of language being based in the imaginative act of metaphor. Metaphor was, for Nietzsche, “the very structure or condition of possibility of all language and of every concept” (p. 178). Derrida claims Nietzsche’s emphasis on the role of metaphor in the metaphysical philosophical project is not something that can be analyzed logically, but is rather “a textual strategy and stratification that must be analyzed in *practice*” (p. 179).

Derrida then turns to Benveniste’s framing of the problem. The linguist acknowledges that thought “cannot be grasped except when formed and made a reality in language” (p. 181), but he asks if it is possible to “recognize in thought such characteristics as would belong to it alone and owe nothing to linguistic expression?” (p. 181). Rather than addressing this question in the abstract, he wants to look at a specific thought expressed in a specific language in a specific historical situation – Aristotle’s description of categories.

Even before looking at Benveniste’s conclusions, he articulates the assumptions underlying Benveniste’s framing of the problem. For it relies on a) a

distinction between language and thought b) the concept or category of the category and c) that the problem can be framed in such a way that it doesn't already rely on a history of thought and expression derived from the very object of its current study – that is, Aristotle's thought. In other words, the question presupposes a distinction between language and thought, which in turn presupposes categorization, which is based on an intellectual history that includes Aristotle.

Benveniste concludes that what Aristotle took to be categories of thought (see p. 185) are in fact categories of language, that Aristotle “could not think outside the Greek language, or against, it, but only in it and with it” (Benveniste, in Derrida, p. 188) and that “what Aristotle gave us as a table of general and permanent conditions is only a conceptual projection of a given linguistic state” (Benveniste in Derrida, p. 189). But Derrida faults Benveniste for basing his analysis on a historical document that cannot be extracted. For “it is a mistake to believe in the immediate and ahistorical legibility of a philosophical argument” (p. 188). Similarly, no scientific analysis of a metaphysical text can be valid without a “prerequisite and highly complex elaboration” (p. 188) – that is to say, scientific analysis is just as reliant on categories derived from past philosophical traditions as textual readings are.

The problem becomes more intractable when Benveniste acknowledges that “beyond the Aristotelian terms, above that categorization, there is the notion of ‘being’ which envelops everything ... this concept reflects a very specific linguistic quality” (Benveniste in Derrida, p. 194). For Derrida, this “notion of being” is the possibility of the field of categories, the “transcategorical condition of the categories” (p. 195). When Benveniste claims that the verb “to be” does not exist in all languages, Derrida asks “how

the absence of the (unique) verbal function of ‘to be’ in any given language is to be read. Is such an absence possible and how is it to be interpreted?” (p. 199). He cites Heidegger’s claim that if the verb ‘to be’ did not exist in any given language, there would be no language at all. Both science and philosophy are subject to the “authority of the *is* whose possibility is to be examined” (p. 202) – their very existence depends on it. Consequently neither philosophy nor linguistics has the last word on the nature of being.

Forster, E. M. (1927). *Aspects of the novel*. London: Edward Arnold and Co.

Forster defines a novel as a “fictitious prose work over 50,000 words” (p. 15), as there is “no intelligent remark known to me [that] will define the tract as a whole. All we can say of it is that it is bounded by two chains of mountains neither of which rises very abruptly – the opposing ranges of Poetry and History – and bounded on the third side by a sea” (p. 15). A novel is good when we have an “affection for it, as it is the test of our friends and of anything else which we cannot define” (p. 38). The novel is “sogged with humanity” (p. 38), and Forster has purposefully chosen the word “aspects”, an unscientific and vague term, to orient his critical approach as it encompasses both how readers read and writers write. He identifies five aspects of the novel – the story, people, plot, fantasy and prophecy, and pattern and rhythm – claiming “there are in the novel two forces: human beings and a bundle of various things not human beings, and ... it is the novelist’s business to adjust these two forces and conciliate their claims” (p. 138-139).

Forster eschews a chronological approach to criticism, rather thinking of “all novelists writing their novels at once” (p. 25). The novel does not develop in line with its subject matter, he claims, but “when it acquires new sensitiveness” (p. 34). The self that writes novels is not “the self that is so active in time and lives under George IV or V. All

through history writers while writing have felt more or less the same. They have entered a common state which it is convenient to call inspiration” (p. 35). Consequently, while “History develops, Art stands still” (p. 35).

Story

The most fundamental aspect of the novel is the story. A story is a “narrative of events arranged in their time sequence” (p. 43) and without it a novel cannot exist. Its merit is in “making the audience want to know what happens next” (p. 43). It encompasses the life in time and the life by values, and additionally encompasses space.

People

The actors in a novel lead us to ask, “To whom did it happen?” thereby appealing not only to our curiosity but to our intelligence and imagination. Most actors in stories are humans, and consequently “there is an affinity between [the novelist] and his subject matter” (p. 64). The novelist, unlike the historian, is able to furnish information about his characters that are not observable in their actions, and consequently can show how “thought develops into action” (p. 67). “People in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed” (p. 68). This is not the case, Forster claims, even with our closest friends, as mutual secrecy is “one of the conditions of life upon this globe” (p. 68).

Forster compares Homo Sapiens and Homo Fictus and finds that characters in novels are in large part structured according to the demands of the genre and differ substantially from their real-life equivalents. A fictional character is “generally born off,

he is capable of dying on, he wants little food or sleep, he is tirelessly occupied with human relationships. And – most important – we can know more about him than we can know about any of our fellow creatures, because his creator and narrator are one” (p. 79). Fictional characters speak to us not because they are life-like, necessarily, but because they are convincing – and they are convincing when they live in accordance with the novel’s own laws, which are not those of daily life. Fiction can sometimes be truer than history, however, because it goes “beyond the evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence, and even if the novelist has not got it correctly, well – he has tried” (p. 88). While the secret lives of real people are invisible, the secret lives of fictional characters are visible or might be visible. Novels can thereby provide solace, as “they suggest a more comprehensible and thus a more manageable human race, they give us the illusion of perspicacity and of power” (p. 89).

The novelist, Forster claims, has a “very mixed lot of ingredients to handle” and these ingredients do not always fall in line with each other. Characters, like people, “try to live their own lives and are consequently often engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book ... if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces, and if they are kept too sternly in check, they revenge themselves by dying and destroy it by intestinal decay” (p. 92). These tensions can be managed in two ways – by introducing different kinds of characters, and by shifting the point of view from which the story is told.

Forster distinguishes between two kinds of character – flat and round. A flat character is one that is essentially one-dimensional – he or she can be summed up in a single sentence. Flat characters are “easily recognized whenever they come in ... they

never need reintroduction, never run away, have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere” (pp. 94-95). In addition, they are often memorable, as they do not change over time and are easily fixed in the reader’s imagination. But flat characters, precisely because they do not change over time, are most effective when they are comical – when they are serious or tragic they are “apt to be a bore” (p. 100).

Consequently, if the reader is to be moved to “any feelings except humour and appropriateness” (p. 101), round characters, “capable of surprising in a convincing way” (p. 106), are necessary.

Point of view, the second technique for managing the tension between story and characters, enables the writer to “bounce the reader into accepting what he says” (p. 107). There are no fixed rules about how shifts in point of view are to be handled – “a novelist can shift his view point if it comes off” – that is, if we don’t “catch them at it at the time” (p. 111). The ability to “expand and contract perception” (p. 110) is “one of the great advantages of the novel form” (p. 110). A novelist can “either describe the characters from outside, as an impartial or partial onlooker; or he can assume omniscience and describe them from within; or he can place himself in the position of one of them and affect to be in the dark as to the motives of the rest; or there are certain intermediate attitudes” (Lubbock in Forster, p. 107). A novelist can also share confidences about the universe, generalizing “about the conditions under which he thinks life is carried on” (p. 112). But Forster warns novelists not to take their readers into their confidence with respect to their characters, claiming it creates a “drop in the temperature ... Intimacy is gained but at the expense of illusion and nobility. It is like standing a man a drink so that he may not criticize your opinions” (p. 111).

Plot

By capitalizing on point of view, the novel writer can “talk about his characters as well as through them” (p. 114). The writer may know his characters better than they know themselves, as he can “peer into the subconscious” (p. 114). This allows for plot, which is, like story, a narrative of events, but this time, instead of the emphasis being on time-sequence, it is on causality. While story answers the question, “And then?” the plot answers the question “Why?”

Understanding of plot requires intelligence and memory – intelligence, because the reader must be able to pick out salient aspects of the story, and memory, because s/he must be able to remember those aspects when they are taken up later in the story. “If by the time the queen dies we have forgotten the existence of the king we shall never make out what killed her. The plot-maker expects us to remember, we expect him to leave no loose ends” (p. 119). Because of the psychological need for closure on the part of readers, nearly all novels are “feeble at the end” (p. 127) because the plot has to be “wound up” (p. 127). At the end of a novel, “there is this disastrous standstill while logic takes over the command from flesh and blood. If it was not for death and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude. Death and marriage are almost his only connection between his characters and his plot” (p. 128). While characters are multiple and have a life of their own, the plot is singular and often at odds with its characters.

Fantasy and Prophecy

Forster claims “there is more in the novel than time or people or logic or any of their derivatives, more even than Fate. And by ‘more’ I do not mean something that excludes these aspects nor something that includes them, embraces them. I mean something that cuts across them like a bar of light ... we shall give that bar of light two names, fantasy and prophecy” (p. 140). Fantasy “asks us to pay something extra” (p. 143), it introduces a special effect that thrills some readers and offends others. A fantastic book “implies the supernatural, but need not express it” (p. 146). To dislike the fantastic in literature is not to dislike literature, nor to lack imagination, but to be disinclined to meet certain demands made on the imagination.

Prophecy does not introduce the supernatural, but suggests something about the universe through “tone of voice” (p. 162). To appreciate prophecy in a novel requires “humility and the suspension of the sense of humour” (p. 163). Dostoevsky, Forster claims, is a prophetic writer because his “characters and situations always stand for more than themselves; infinity attends them, though they remain individuals they expand to embrace it and summon it to embrace them; one can apply to them the saying of St. Catherine of Siena that God is in the soul and the soul is in God as the sea is in the fish and the fish is in the sea” (p. 172). Emily Bronte is also a prophetic writer, as “the emotions of Heathcliffe and Catherine Earnshaw function differently to other emotions in fiction. Instead of inhabiting the characters, they surround them like thunder clouds, and generate the explosions that fill the novel ... *Wuthering Heights* is filled with sound ... a sound more important than words and thoughts” (p. 187). Prophetic writing “gives us the sensation of a song or of sound” (p. 176); “what is implied is more important ... than what is said” (p. 188).

Pattern and Rhythm

Pattern refers to the shape of a novel as a whole, and is nourished by plot. For a novel to have a clear pattern, however, other aspects must suffer, as the unity imposed on the form means “most of human life has to disappear” (p. 205). Not only must all the characters tend toward a single theme, but those characters who diverge in any way “must be pruned off as wanton distraction” (p. 206). The aesthetic effect of pattern is thus obtained at a high price, as it “shuts the doors on life” (p. 209) and, for “most readers of fiction the sensation from a pattern is not intense enough to justify the sacrifices that made it” (p. 210).

Rhythm, on the other hand, “defined as repetition plus variation” (p. 215), allows a book that is “chaotic”, “ill constructed” (p. 211), and with no “external shape” (p. 211), to hang together “because it is stitched internally” (p. 211-212). The ‘little phrase’ of Vinteuil in Proust, that reappears throughout the novel in different forms, makes us “feel that we are in a homogeneous world” (p. 212) while, in “its lovely waxing and waning” (p. 214), fills us with “surprise and freshness and hope” (p. 214). It is independent of the characters, yet brings the novel together as a whole. And just as music aims at expansion rather than completion – “not rounding off but opening out” (p. 216), the notes having been “liberated” (p. 216) – so fiction, by employing rhythm, can “lead a larger existence than was possible at the time” of reading (p. 217). In music fiction is likely to find its nearest parallel (p. 216), Forster claims.

Forster concludes by suggesting that if human nature changes at all it changes imperceptibly slowly as a result of individuals looking “at themselves in a new way” (p.

220 – cf. Rorty). The history of the novel, insofar as it shows how individual novelists have attempted to see themselves differently, thus reflects the development of humanity.

Frye, Northrop. (1957). *Anatomy of Criticism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Frye's most celebrated and influential book, in which he attempts a "synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism" (p. 3), is intended to be useful, for "whatever is of no practical use to anybody is expendable" (p. 3). In the 'Polemical Introduction' he challenges the assumption that critics are failed artists and that criticism is "a parasitic form of literary expression" (p. 3). Rather, he sees criticism as a "structure of thought and knowledge existing in its own right, with some measure of independence from the art it deals with" (p. 5). While the arts are "dumb" (p. 4), "not heard but overheard" (Mill in Frye, p. 5), criticism "can talk" (p. 4). But if criticism is its own field of activity, it must have its own conceptual framework, where this is neither literature itself, nor something outside literature (i.e., sociology, philosophy etc.). Frye claims the solution to this dilemma is to be found in "an examination of literature in terms of a conceptual framework derivable from an inductive survey of the literary field" (p. 7). Frye allies his approach with the sciences, claiming "the presence of science in any subject changes its character from the casual to the causal, from the random and intuitive to the systematic" (p. 7). He is, however, open to the words "systematic" or "progressive" (p. 8), for those with an aversion to the idea of a science of the literary.

Conducting "an inductive survey of the literary field" (p. 7) presents its own problems, however, as it is often difficult to distinguish between "genuine criticism" (p.

9) that makes “the whole of literature intelligible” (p. 9), and “the history of taste” (p. 9), which is closely allied to prejudice. The scientific criticism Frye strives for “is to art what history is to action and philosophy to wisdom: a verbal imitation of a human productive power which in itself does not speak” (p. 12). On this account, “literature is not a subject of study, but an object of study” (p. 11); literature cannot be taught, just as action and wisdom cannot be taught. But criticism, history and philosophy – the study of literature, action and wisdom respectively – can be taught.

Frye sees his work as picking up where Aristotle left off in his *Poetics*. Aristotle, he claims, approached “poetry as a biologist would approach a system of organisms, picking out its genera and species, formulating the broad laws of literary experience, and in short writing as though he believed that there is a totally intelligible structure of knowledge attainable about poetry which is not poetry itself, or the experience of it, but poetics” (p. 14). Criticism needs to “leap to a new ground” (p. 16), adhere to a “coordinating principle” (p. 16), and “see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole” (p. 16). Consequently Frye makes, as the first postulate of his critical approach, the assumption that the field of literature is totally coherent. In addition, he assumes that, “just as there is an order of nature behind the natural sciences, so literature is not a piled aggregate of ‘works’, but an order of words” (p. 17). He urges criticism to “enter into relations” (p. 19), with other disciplines, without compromising its independence, and claims value-judgments should be seen for what they are – morally-motivated subjective opinions masquerading as objective assessments. Frye’s ideal criticism will “show a steady advance toward indiscriminating catholicity” (p. 25) – critics should resist their “itch to make weighty judgments” (p. 25), or to stipulate

requirements of worthwhile literature in the form of “must” or “should” statements. “Criticism, in short, and aesthetics generally, must (sic) learn to do what ethics has already done” (p. 26), acknowledging that “the good” is not merely that which “the author was accustomed to and found sanctioned by his community” (p. 26) but a site of almost unlimited contestation. When critics use the word “authentic” (p. 26) as a term of praise, they are guilty of a similar naiveté.

Literary criticism, then, is ultimately a “special skill, like playing the piano” (p. 28). It is not “the expression of a general attitude to life, like singing in the shower” (p. 28). While our subjectivity is influenced by words from childhood on, this subjectivity is distinct from the critical attitude we bring to bear on literature. Criticism is a body of knowledge in its own right, and the *Anatomy of Criticism* is an attempt to demonstrate one way in which the literary field can be schematically represented. It is, then, a “systematic study of the formal causes of art” (p. 29).

The remainder of the book is divided into four chapters, on modes, symbols, myths and genres, with Frye presenting what amounts to an archetypal theory of literature – that literature coheres around key archetypal characters, narratives and narrative forms. In the last section of his last chapter, titled ‘Theory of genres’, he addresses ‘The rhetoric of non-literary prose’, and in particular, philosophy as a literary genre. He claims a philosopher such as Mill attempts to speak “with the voice, not of personality, but of Reason itself” (p. 330), and this is a consequence of philosophy’s assumption that it is necessary to “detach and isolate the intellect from the emotions” (p. 330). While he accepts that logic may have grown out of grammar, he rejects arguments that reduce logic to grammar – for “to grow out of something is in part to outgrow it” (p. 332). He argues

instead that an ideogram is “neither purely grammatical nor purely logical: it is both at once” (p. 333-334). Ideogrammatic inner structures, “whether produced linguistically between two languages, or psychologically between two people speaking the same language” (p. 333), allow for language to be assimilated to rational thought. He concludes that while there is value in recognizing the metaphors embedded in linguistic communications, reducing arguments to their metaphors, or debunking arguments based on their metaphors, is “not to be encouraged” (p. 337).

In his “Tentative Conclusion” Frye claims his book does not “suggest a new program for critics, but a new perspective on their existing programs” (p. 341). Just as with mathematics we need to go from the concrete idea of three oranges to the abstract concept ‘3’, from two apples to ‘2’, so with literature we have to go from seeing literature as a “reflection of life to literature as autonomous language” (p. 351). “Both literature and mathematics proceed from postulates, not facts; both can be applied to external reality and yet exist also in a ‘pure’ or self-contained form” (p. 351). In addition, both literature and mathematics “drive a wedge between the antithesis of being and non-being” (p. 351), with mathematics requiring that we accept the absence of anything to be a thing (a concrete nothing becomes the abstract concept ‘zero’), and literature requiring us to accept the abstract concept “Hamlet”, even if he does not exist in concrete form.

Frye concludes by drawing a distinction between descriptive and constructive verbal structures, between content and form. While descriptive verbal structures represent external reality, constructive structures are based on metaphor. Questions of truth are normally concerned with descriptive verbal structures, with “content, not form” (p. 353). “Literature, like mathematics, is a language, and a language itself represents no truth,

thought it may provide the means for expressing any number of them” (p. 354). The social and practical result of criticism is thus the reforging of “the broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept” (p. 354).

Frye, Northrop. (1963). *The Educated Imagination*. Toronto: CBC Publications

Frye begins his six lectures by asking the reader to imagine being alone on a desert island, and uses this scenario to show how there is a fundamental difference in our minds between the world we live in and the world we want to live in. The world we want to live in, he claims, is a human one, not an objective one – one that is largely constructed by our imaginations. The imagination is “the power of constructing possible models of human experience” (p. 5), and has its own kind of language – literary language – that is different from the languages of ordinary conversation and practical sense. Literature, then, “belongs to the world man constructs, not to the world he sees” (p. 8). Literature uses language in such a way that it associates human consciousness with the outside world, using figures of speech such as the simile or the metaphor. As such, it makes the world a home, rather than an environment.

Literature is self-reflexive, insofar as “a writer’s desire to write can only have come from previous experience of literature” (p. 14) and “literature can only derive its forms from itself” (p. 15). Just as music’s forms exist only in music, so literature’s forms exist only in literature. Frye uses the example of a new baby, which despite being a new individual, is still an instance of the same human form. Literary writing, then, is not about conveying information, but about allowing a poem, play or novel to “take on its own form” (p. 17). If literature is about anything, it is about “the loss and regaining of identity” (p. 21), which Frye sees as the “framework of all literature” (p. 21).

Literature for Frye is also self-referential. There is a “complete world of which every work of literature forms a part” (p. 27), and the inspiration to write comes not from the real world, but from this literary world. There is no such thing as “self-expression” in literature – the poet is “taken over” by literature, as is the subject matter (p. 29). Consequently literature doesn’t contain beliefs or truths, merely different perspectives and assumptions – or at most, “unborn or embryonic beliefs” (p. 31).

Whereas literature encourages tolerance, “it would be the wildest kind of pedantry to use it directly as a guide to life” (p. 36); for “to bring anything really to life in literature we can’t be lifelike: we have to be literature-like” (p. 37). There is a difference between literary and non-literary writing, and literature “has no consistent connexion with ordinary life, positive or negative” (p. 39). Literature should not be related to life or reality, but to other works of literature. The role of the literary critic, then, is to see every work of literature in the light of other literature, to “keep constantly struggling to understand what literature as a whole is about” (p. 44).

Frye concludes that the skills developed in literary criticism, which include tolerance, irony and suspension of judgment, are useful in everyday life. He gives the example of two teenagers resisting the power of advertising, and the populace resisting the jargon or “federal prose” (p. 61) of government. More importantly, developing the imagination allows for a clearer vision of the world we want to live in, and without such a vision, the motivation that underlies many professional endeavors is absent. “Nobody can enter a profession unless he makes at least a gesture recognizing the ideal existence of a world beyond his own interests: a world of health for the doctor, justice for the lawyer ...” (p. 65) etc. While the world often appears fixed and beyond our control – “a gigantic

technological structure, a skyscraper almost high enough to reach the moon” (p. 67) – it is actually “a deadlock of human rivalries” (p. 67) that may “crash around our ears” at any time. Only by taking the time to exercise our imaginations and listen to the imaginative languages of others, will we be able to live in a world with “genuine human dignity” (p. 67).

Kundera, Milan (1986) *The Art of the Novel*. New York: Harper & Row

In “The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes”, the first essay in this collection, Kundera claims the founders of the Modern Era are Descartes and Cervantes. Whereas Descartes’ legacy is the diminution of “man’s concrete being, his ‘world of life’” (p. 4), with Cervantes a new art form took hold that is about “nothing other than the investigation of this forgotten being” (p. 5).

He claims the novel discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one. With Cervantes, the nature of adventure; with Richardson, the human interior; with Balzac, man’s relationship to history; with Flaubert, the everyday; with Tolstoy, the irrational; with Proust, the past; and with Joyce, the present. At the same time, Kundera claims the sole purpose of the novel is to discover what only the novel can discover. “A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral. Knowledge is the novel’s only morality” (p. 6).

In particular, the novel is well suited to developing the “wisdom of uncertainty” (p. 7), for at the heart of the novel is not a moral position but an inquiry. The novel is inherently ambiguous, portraying multiple viewpoints in a language of relativity.

There is no single moral truth, dogma or Supreme Judge in a novel – only a “welter of contradictory truths (truths embodied in imaginary selves called characters)” (p. 6).

The future of the art form is threatened from a number of directions.

Totalitarian regimes that value a single truth are threatened by the uncertainty portrayed in novels. “Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate what I would call the *spirit of the novel*” (p. 14). And while totalitarian regimes may have produced novels, they are not novels focused on the “conquest of being. They discover no new segment of existence; they only confirm what has already been said” (p. 14). Consequently, they don’t contribute to the history of the novel, but are rather situated outside that history. They are “*novels that come after the history of the novel*” (p. 14).

But is the novel not threatened from the inside, from having run its course, mined all its possibilities (p. 15). Kundera claims that the possibilities of the novel are endless, as it appeals to the human need for play, dream, thought and temporal existence. If it is threatened it is by a world that has grown hostile to life, and hence to the novel. The mass media, which distributes “throughout the world the same simplifications and stereotypes easily acceptable by the greatest number” (p. 18), has created a worldview that is contrary to the spirit of the novel, which values complexity. Kundera claims the challenge to see things in their complexity is the novel’s “eternal truth, but it grows steadily harder to hear amid the din of easy, quick answers that come faster than the question and block it off” (p. 18). In addition, the novel’s power comes from its continuity with the past – it’s interrelationship with previous novels. The spirit of our time is so firmly focused on the present “that it shoves the past off our horizon” (p. 18).

The novel then becomes just “one current event among many, a gesture with no tomorrow” (p. 19).

In conclusion, Kundera claims the novel can only continue to progress in opposition to the world, not just as it is, but even how it is envisioned to be in the future. Whereas he used to have faith in the future – that the future would be the best judge of the value of avant-garde art – he now believes the future will pass judgment on us, but “without any competence” (p. 20). His commitment, then, is not to the future, or any other value external to the novel (i.e., God, country, people etc.) – he is “attached to nothing but the depreciated legacy of Cervantes” (p. 20).

In another essay, “Dialogue on the Art of Composition”, Kundera compares his style of writing to Janacek’s style of composition. Janacek, he claims, attempted to divest his compositions of all superfluous notes. Rather than incorporating technical activity for the sake of following the rules of composition, Janacek would “always head straight for the heart of things: only the note that says something essential has the right to exist” (p. 72-73). Kundera claims the novel as an art form similarly has various techniques and conventions that define it – but rather than follow these conventions, he seeks to “to rid the novel of the automatism of novelistic technique, of novelistic verbalism; to make it dense” (p. 73).

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. (1990). *Epistemology of the Closet*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Sedgwick’s central argument is that the distinction between hetero- and homo-forms of sexuality has significantly impacted the development of modern Western culture and consequently any worthwhile critique of that culture must address issues of sexual

definition as they appear in literary texts. The most appropriate perspective from which to engage Western culture is thus gay or antihomophobic theory, and her book's "strongest motivation is indeed the gay-affirmative one" (p.1).

Interestingly Sedgwick herself is a married heterosexual, although she acknowledges that she is "someone who is, under several different discursive regimes, a sexual pervert" (p. 63). But under other discursive regimes, presumably, she is not, and it is the way in which discursive regimes determine, to a considerable extent, what counts and does not count as sexual perversion that her approach attempts to uncover. Thus she distinguishes between different kinds of silence ("There is not one but many silences" (p. 3)), just as there are many different kinds of knowledge. The silence of the closet, for instance, is a counter-discourse allied with the discourse of heterosexual normativity, rather than a non-discourse allied with all other forms of silence. The same is true of ignorance, which is not simply the undifferentiated absence of knowledge, but rather the ignorance of a particular knowledge.

As an example of the ways in which "regimes of truth" or discursive norms determine particular forms of both silence and ignorance Sedgwick highlights the dominance of hetero-/homosexual distinction as opposed to other possible distinctions. "It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another ... precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of 'sexual orientation'" (p. 8). She highlights a number of other factors that could equally well distinguish an individual's "sexual orientation" – their preference for particular acts, zones or sensations, physical

types, symbolic investments, relations of power or age, species, or number of participants – questioning why these are all considered secondary to the dominant and overriding factor of object choice.

Object choice itself, however, is not unproblematic, as the terms sex, gender and sexuality exist in a loosely defined relationship with one another. While gender has, since the 1960s, come to be seen as a social construct, loosely based on chromosomal sex differentiation, “sex” as a term extends well beyond chromosomal sex, with binary distinctions, such as heterosexual and homosexual, related not symmetrically but rather subordinately – that is to say, with one category always privileged over the other. Thus an antihomophobic reading of modern Western culture attempts to reverse the naturalness of standard binary oppositions, highlighting the extent to which even privileged terms stand in a dependent relationship with other terms. Indeed, Sedgwick claims that the homo/heterosexual distinction has had a primary impact on other binaries that structure modern Western identity, including secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine to name just a few.

If, as Sedgwick claims, modern Western subjectivities have been structured through the tacit homo/heterosexual binary, it is almost impossible to test the hypothesis that this contingent binary distinction has impacted other binary distinctions with which we more consciously structure ourselves and society. Thus she advocates a “method” that is “resolutely non-algorithmic” (p. 12), that does not reduce to a clearly defined and generalizable critical project, but rather reads texts (in this case by Oscar Wilde, Herman Melville and Proust), highlighting the extent to which they invoke, comment on, rely on and otherwise engage with homo/heterosexuality as an orienting distinction. This in turn

allows for more general claims to be made about the Western literary tradition and the social and cultural norms it reinscribes.

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