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Chapter 5

Musicology for Art Historians

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If you consider yourself a musicologist, this chapter may not be for you. As the title implies, my aim is not to break new ground in the field so much as to introduce the lay of the land, as I currently find it, to those whose disciplines do not ordinarily address music as an object of study. Since many scholars of visual culture will already be familiar with aspects of the academic study of music, the following pages are not intended as a beginner's guide or "how to" manual.

Instead, I propose a holistic, if necessarily selective and subjective, account of the history and priorities of (predominantly Anglo-American) musicology. What this brief survey lacks in detail, I hope it makes up for in usefulness. At any rate, my remarks and observations are not offered as conclusive statements on the discipline, but rather as a means of "joining the dots" and focusing further discussion. I begin by addressing musicology's problematic disciplinary identity before introducing some late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century figures whose work has formed the backdrop to a number of ongoing debates. I then consider what might be called the "privileged objects" of musical study as well as the challenge to music's object status signaled by performance-oriented approaches.

The chapter ends in optimistic mood with some personal reflections on the present state of musicology and speculation regarding future areas of research. While all of the above is offered with art historians in mind, I do not attempt to flag up each shared interest or every occasion for dialogue, but prefer to leave it to readers to establish such connections for themselves.

Discipline and Publish

Musicology has a discipline problem—in fact, it has several. Despite the distinguished position of something called “music” in the long history of the liberal arts, and the even longer history of musical enquiry reaching back to Al-Kindi, Aristoxenus, Pythagorus, et al., there remains a sense that musicology needs to justify its place in the modern academy. No doubt some of our colleagues in the “hard” sciences will always detect a whiff of dilettantism in the study of any form of art—I have been laughed at more than once by engineers and chemists when explaining what I teach to undergraduate students—and every musicologist has been exasperated at one time or another by the fundamental misunderstanding behind the question “what instrument do you play?” Yet the ever-present need to communicate our research and account for our positions is felt especially strongly in the current neoliberal climate wherein higher education

is increasingly instrumentalized as a means of providing intellectual labor for the administrative cadres of trans-national corporations. As the recent funding cuts made by the United Kingdom's coalition government demonstrate all too clearly, arts and humanities teaching is now considered a poor relation to the teaching of STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) on account of the latter being understood to add more value to the workforce of "UK Plc." In practical terms, this has already resulted in departmental closures and has forced all of us working under such hostile conditions to reassess the arguments we make on our subject's behalf.

Though such existential crises are hardly unique to musicology—or the UK, for that matter—they underscore the extent to which the history of any discipline is inextricable from its ideological and institutional contexts. Back in 1885, when Guido Adler (1855-1941) was preparing his now-famous essay on "The Scope, Aim, and Method of Musicology" for the first issue of the *Vierteljahresschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (Musicology Quarterly), his disciplinary circumstances were considerably different from those of the present day. As a salaried academic in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Adler was not especially concerned with establishing the social or economic impact of the new "music-science," but he was passionately committed to securing its independence from general historical studies and, just as importantly, its credibility vis-à-vis the better-established fields of art and literary criticism. In addition to exemplifying

the sometimes anxious positioning of musicology in relation to other forms of academic enquiry—musicologists, it seems, are perennially worried about “lagging behind” their colleagues in other subjects—Adler’s essay highlights another source of institutional tension when it proposes a division between *historische Musikwissenschaft* and *systematische Musikwissenschaft*. The precise differences between Adler’s “historical” and “systematic” approaches are less important than the pattern they set for subsequent distinctions within the study of music.

These internal divisions are perhaps clearest in North America, where there are separate graduate programs and scholarly societies for musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory. Traditionally, the first of this trio has been concerned with the history of European art music, while the second has attended to the musical cultures of the wider world, and the third has taken a more note-based, or “analytical” approach to the study of musical structures. In some ways, the boundaries between the three major groupings are becoming ever more porous: one recent conference, for example, brought together the annual meetings of the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the Society for Music Theory in a single all-encompassing event. Yet it would be misleading to suggest there are no antagonisms or suspicions between the established sub-disciplines, just as it would be misleading to suggest there are no other ways of differentiating the study of music. As you would expect, it is

common for professional conversations and solidarities to form around significant chronological periods, geographical areas, and/or sub-divisions of style. There is also a sizeable body of research incorporating the study of music into the psychological, neurological, and biological sciences, as well as work on music and dance, music in film, music therapy, music technology, arts administration, and, of course, performance training and composition. Taken as a whole, then, musicology—or “music studies” if you prefer, since musicology is more or less synonymous in North America with historical musicology—is a remarkably broad church. This breadth and diversity is arguably one of the discipline’s greatest strengths, but it might also be a strategic weakness when it comes to articulating a coherent account of the subject’s values in the face of the aforementioned threats to university teaching and research.

Landmarks in the Field

Musicology, like any such scholarly profession, has a number of “landmark” figures whose work is so familiar to practitioners in the field that it becomes a means of orienting oneself in relation to ongoing debates. Given the centrality of Austro-German repertoire in the early years of musical research—not to mention Adler’s status as a “founding father” of the discipline—it is unsurprising that

some of the most influential scholars of the early- and mid-twentieth century had names with a decidedly Teutonic ring. Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935), for example, developed a system of analysis based on the age-old principles of voice-leading and “species counterpoint” (essentially a set of practical instructions for composing multi-part vocal music) which encouraged users to look beyond the surface details of a composition in order to reveal—or arguably construct—the harmonic *Ursatz* (fundamental structure) underpinning the work as a whole. Schenker’s interest in the “organic” unity of musical structures was informed by a prominent strand of nineteenth-century German aesthetics, and one of the expressed purposes of his analyses was to establish the supremacy of certain Austro-German works within the broader European tonal tradition. It is surely no coincidence that Schenker was working at a time when this very tradition was perceived to be under threat by post-tonal composers such as Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), who was himself an influential music theorist. Indeed, it is well documented that Schenker was an arch reactionary whose analytical tracts are notorious for their aggressive nationalism and overt anti-Semitism. Luckily for him, however, the offending passages were edited out of the earliest translations of his works, thus leaving his techniques free to gain a lasting foothold in the music departments of the post-WWII United States.

Another German-speaking scholar to have a considerable posthumous impact on Anglophone musicology was the Frankfurt School social theorist

Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). As an anti-totalitarian leftist, Adorno was fiercely critical of both the “culture industry,” as he termed it, and any form of art deemed complicit in the suppression of autonomous subjectivity: notably Igor Stravinsky’s (1882-1971) anti-expressive neo-classicism and Jean Sibelius’s (1865-1957) symphonic “cult of nature.” Adorno’s polemics against the emotional manipulation of film music and the de-individualizing tendencies of what he mis-termed “jazz” have been poured over and parodied in equal measure. His championing of Viennese serialism—which has sometimes been used to bolster the claims of an infamously unpopular repertoire—also leaves him open to the charge of music-philosophical nepotism since he was not only a personal acquaintance of Schoenberg’s, but also took composition lessons from one of his best-known students, Alban Berg (1885-1935). Partly because of these criticisms—and also because of broader objections to work-centered analysis, which I shall come to shortly—the vogue for Adornian musicology has waned in recent years. Nevertheless, it would be hard to overstate the significance of his essays (and paraphrases thereof) to the course of recent debate: by insisting that the study of musical change was always already the study of social change, Adorno’s idiosyncratic approach to musical aesthetics encouraged a great many writers to take note of, and develop alternative approaches to, what Tia DeNora has termed the “music and society nexus.”¹

¹ Tia DeNora, “Formulating Questions – the ‘Music and Society’ Nexus.” In *Music in Everyday*

One such writer was Carl Dahlhaus (1928-1989), whose wide-ranging studies were, in the best dialectical tradition, simultaneously informed by and critical of Adorno's sociology of music. The key term for Dahlhaus was "relative autonomy," a notion that signaled the limitations of both aesthetic hermeticism and social determinism.² Appropriately enough, this disciplinary stance appears to have been at least partially contingent on the political circumstances in which Dahlhaus worked. As Anne C. Schreffler has argued, Dahlhaus's position as a West-German musicologist operating at the height of the Cold War casts new light on his robust objections to the Marxist models of musical production favored by his East-German counterpart Georg Knepler (1906-2003). While the vast majority of Knepler's work remains untranslated, Dahlhaus's writings were something of a hit in English and North American music departments throughout the 1980s. The questions he raised about the objects and methods of musical enquiry may well have been shaped by the intellectual climate of Cold War Berlin, but they also marked a turning point in the history of the discipline: whatever the shortcomings of his own approach, musicology after Dahlhaus was more ambitious, reflexive, and theoretically literate than it had ever been before.

Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-20.

² See, for example, Carl Dahlhaus, "The 'Relative Autonomy' of Music History." In *Foundations of Music History*, trans. by J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 108-128.

Treasure and Pleasure

The surest sign of disciplinary upheaval in the 1980s and 1990s was the critique of the musical “masterpiece.” Once upon a time it was self-evident that the purpose of musicology was to attend to the great works of genius bestowed upon the present by the great men of the past. Chief among these feted figures were the likes of J. S. Bach (1685-1750), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), and Richard Wagner (1813-1883)—all of whom, we might note, were German-speaking composers. While there is no need to rehearse the discourse on canon formation here—still less to repeat the truism that universalist claims can be grounded in particular times and places—it is worth addressing how canonicity has played out in the performing, as opposed to plastic or literary, arts. You might think it was obvious that a performing art requires performers, yet the role of performance has not always enjoyed a prominent place in the academic study of music. Indeed, it was long assumed that the principle treasures of musicology were the objects made by composers (i.e., scores), and that the task of scholarship was first to establish the provenance and authenticity of such objects (usually by reference to principles of textual criticism imported from the discipline of philology), then to

consider the composer's intentions by relating the features of the object to what was known of the man—or, very, very occasionally, the woman—in question.

If the methodology described above sounds distinctly old-fashioned, it is only because a number of writers successfully campaigned against the fetishizing of musical objects in favor of a broader understanding of musical history and experience. One such writer was Lydia Goehr, whose account of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* located a tipping point—sometime around 1800—when music ceased to be considered an activity for doing and started to be seen as an object of contemplation. According to Goehr, the paradigm of the musical work—whereby performance is understood to be the realization of a composer's ideal aesthetic object—has functioned as a “regulative concept” ever since, with deleterious consequences for the vibrancy and creativity of musical culture.³

Richard Taruskin has argued along similar lines that the proponents of the historically-informed performance movement were not, as they had hoped, reproducing the music of the past, but in fact creating new music for the present. Both Taruskin's back-handed compliment and Goehr's interventionist history of ideas are typical of a broader shift in musicology from privileging the composer and his score to the performer and his—or, just as often, her—audience.

³ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7-8.

The implicit association of composerly authority with a masculine subject has been hugely important in the reconfiguring of the discipline. Most importantly, it suggested that composer-centered accounts inevitably perpetuate the erasure of women from music history because they relegate to the margins those roles—of singer, instrumentalist, patron, etc.—that women have most often been in positions to perform. Rather than attempting to rectify the inherited, and inherently misogynist, musical canon by adding a relatively small number of works by female composers, a new wave of gender-conscious musicologists in the 1990s sought to disrupt the conventional wisdom that a work was the product of a single authorial voice. As Carolyn Abbate demonstrated in *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, music's metaphorical polyphony is one of the conditions of its fascination. The fact that a performance exceeds any monological interpretation is both a source of pleasure and, crucially, a source of power. For once operatic agency is understood to be distributed between not only the composer and librettist, but also the singers, musicians, conductor, director, designer, and—last but not least—the audience, it is no longer convincing to organize discussion around the one name in large print on the front of the score. In part this is an argument in favor of reception studies, which has affected musicology no less deeply than it has the rest of the humanities, but it is also something more than that: by “decentering” the object of musical enquiry to the point that object status could no longer be taken for

granted, exponents of the polyphonic mode of interpretation came to celebrate the very intangibility of music and musical meaning. Needless to say, such dedication to the pleasures of imprecision were incommensurate with traditional score-bound analysis. Little wonder, then, that Abbate was not the only musicologist to question the validity of close reading and the methodological reliance on textual traces.

Approach and Reproach

In 1980, Joseph Kerman published an essay in *Critical Inquiry* entitled “How We Got Into Analysis, and How to Get Out.” The fact that a musicologist chose to publish his work in an interdisciplinary journal is itself worthy of note; that Kerman went on to expand his arguments into a book-length survey of the field—described by one reviewer as “a Who’s Who of musicology, and a What’s What of theory, analysis, and musical philosophy”—made his work compulsory reading for all music scholars at the time.⁴ The thrust of Kerman’s argument was that musicology, in the decades since WWII, had become a dry and dusty field of

⁴ The reviewer in question was Erich Leinsdorf, whose comments, written for the *New York Times* (26 May 1985), were proudly displayed on the front cover of Kerman’s *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

study. On the one hand, he took exception to an analytical enterprise that appeared to equate aesthetic worth exclusively with structural unity, and therefore ignored many of the aspects of musical experience most valuable to audiences and performers. On the other hand, he argued that music historians had become weighed down by their archival work to the point that they were good at collecting dates and facts, but indifferent—or worse—when it came to the interpretation of musical meaning. Both symptoms, Kerman suggested, could be diagnosed by the term “positivism,” which has echoed down the years as a stinging critique of any under-theorized or merely descriptive form of musical study. While the temperature of debate surrounding Kerman’s wide-ranging critique inevitably cooled in the decades that followed, his call for a more humanistic and hermeneutic form of enquiry set the standard for a generation of scholars whose work came to be known as the “New Musicology.”

Predictably enough, few writers have welcomed a label that was destined to grow old almost as soon as it entered circulation. Nevertheless, the notion of a New Musicology retains its currency to this day, and helps to identify a particular disciplinary “moment,” the like of which has not been seen since. In line with Kerman’s pronouncements, many of the practitioners who came to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s were concerned with building bridges between musicology and the broader humanities. Gary Tomlinson’s widely-cited essay on “The Web of Culture”—which, as it happens, was published in a special journal issue of

“Essays for Joseph Kerman”—advocated a contextualist approach to the study of music informed by the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Later on, Tomlinson combined Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutics with Michel Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge in his study *Music in Renaissance Magic*—a book that famously included not a single extract from a musical score. Lawrence Kramer’s *Music as Cultural Practice*, first published in 1990, proposed a method of interpretation that aimed to render music’s meanings no less legible than literature. Kramer’s next book, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, added yet more theorists to musicological reading lists, while placing particular importance on questions of poststructuralism and epistemology. The early 1990s also witnessed Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings*, which brought musicology—sometimes kicking and screaming—into conversation with gender studies. No less important, however, was McClary’s discussion in *Feminine Endings* of both popular musicians and high art composers: though it may now seem unremarkable for an academic career to take in Madonna as well as Moneteverdi, the initial breaching of sub-disciplinary barriers was yet another sign of the turbulent musicological times.

The New Musicology thus refers to both a new set of approaches to musical study and a broadening of disciplinary horizons in terms of repertoire, agency, and geography. One way of acknowledging this enlargement of interests is to consider the treatment of Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) by successive

generations of musicologists. For Dahlhaus, writing in 1980, Rossini represented the lesser of the “twin styles” that typified the musical culture of the early nineteenth-century: whereas Beethoven’s instrumental music embodied the full breadth and depth of artistic genius, Rossini’s operas belonged in the populist realm of spectacular entertainment. By the time of James H. Johnson’s 1996 account of *Listening in Paris*, this sort of critical evaluation was less important than understanding why audiences for both Rossini’s and Beethoven’s music became increasingly attentive and subdued. More recently still, Benjamin Walton has researched the reception of Italian opera in South America, thus challenging the tacit eurocentrism of traditional accounts of nineteenth-century music. Indeed, some historical musicologists now see their work as a branch of cultural history, just as ethnomusicology can be seen as a branch of cultural anthropology. Thanks to the opening out of disciplinary purview associated with the New Musicology, the academic study of music is far less isolated than it once was. Nevertheless, the subjects and objects of music studies retain a specificity that justifies a unique—if problematic—disciplinary identity.

Feeling Hopeful

Predicting the future is a fool's game, but forgetting the future is no less foolish. From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, the New Musicology looks a lot like the New Orthodoxy. What emerged as a series of sometimes acrimonious disciplinary arguments about the aims, methods, and scope of music studies has now settled into a relatively familiar curriculum of performativity, anti-elitism, and identity politics. While I am the first to welcome these considerable intellectual advancements, the current generation cannot simply rest on inherited laurels. Our responsibility to the present is first to historicize past achievements, then attend to what remains undone. In arguing for continued progress—and, yes, there is such a thing as progress—I wish to draw attention to more than the inevitable mellowing of critical voices when repositioned as the declarations of authority. In fact, some recent commentaries on the history of the discipline have suggested that the critical edge of the New Musicology was never all that sharp in the first place.

James R. Currie's 2009 essay on "Music After All" investigated the cultural politics underlying the contextualist approach to musical study, arguing for a strategic return to widely-debunked notions of "the music itself." Currie's claims rest on the possibility that music's relative autonomy, to borrow to Dahlhaus's well-worn phrase, harbors a promise of freedom, which any progressive scholar ought not to waste by immediately reducing the aesthetic to the level of the social. Another leftist musicologist, J. P. E. Harper-Scott, has

ventured a more strident critique of contemporary musicology by focusing on the work of its best-known exponent, Richard Taruskin. Specifically, Harper-Scott suggest the latter two volumes of Taruskin's *Oxford History of Western Music* are deliberately biased toward Russian and American subjects so that the work as a whole can reach its climax in the post-Cold War triumph of North-American liberal capitalism. This "end of history" narrative, Harper-Scott argues, does considerable ideological work in support of a free market approach to the making and receiving of musical "products." The fact that Taruskin has elsewhere criticized scholars for privileging art over entertainment leads Harper-Scott to describe Taruskin's work as "the longest suicide note in musicological history."⁵

It would be misleading to suggest that the two authors discussed above represent a large section of the musicological community, but that is beside the point: their work suggests that ideology critique—which has been linked too closely in musicology with the single figure of Adorno—has a significant role to play in the future of the discipline. This role need not be as resistant to contextualist or sociological approaches as Currie and Harper-Scott might suggest. The late Adam Krims's essays in *Music and Urban Geography*, for example, combine analyses of popular music and political economy in order to elaborate on the relations between modern cities and expressive culture. Krims's

⁵ J. P. E. Harper-Scott, "Modernism as We Know It, Ideology, and the Quilting Point." In *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

work also belongs to a broader category of studies that can be grouped under the banner of “music, space, and place.” Significantly, this emerging body of research does not fit easily into any of one of the three disciplinary sub-groupings listed earlier in this chapter. Michael Bulls’s *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, Steven Feld’s *Sound and Sentiment*, and Daniel M. Grimley’s extensive writing on English and Scandinavian composers’ associations with landscape, all draw on symbolic and material geographies to inform our understanding of particular practices of listening, singing, and composing. Above all, the concern these writers share for “re-materializing” the study of music—both in terms of the tangible objects of musical culture and the ephemeral materialities of acoustic encounter—holds great promise for future enquiries and suggests a link, if not a merger, with the relatively new field of sound studies. This may seem an odd place to end a survey of musicology for art historians, since sound studies and visual culture are not the most obvious of colleagues, but it may be precisely in attending to the locations of expressive culture—whether noisy, spectacular or a combination of these and more—that our disciplines might find most common ground.

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