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The Legacy of Genius:
Improvisation, Romantic Imagination,
and the Western Musical Canon

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CHAPTER SIX

OBJECTIVE, NECESSARY, AND DEFINITIVE: MASTERWORKS BECOME CANONIC

> In me the most absolute respect for the masterpieces of the great masters has replaced the need for novelty and individuality.
>
> --Liszt

> The only cure of Romanticism is to analyze it.
>
> --T. S. Eliot

It was the early Romantics who, in the midst of the emergence of the new historical consciousness, began to define themselves as a new generation with the double imperative of being original and being true to their tradition. Among German-speaking music connoisseurs Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, three composers of the recent past, were soon declared the undisputable masters of the Romantic tradition, and their masterpieces became a necessary reference for any serious musical endeavor.[60] But it was in the second half of the century that these exemplary composers and their works became the core of a highly formalized musical canon around which the institutionalization of the Western classical tradition was organized.

The penchant for novelty and individuality that had characterized the Romantic period, which had coexisted with the veneration of an exemplary past, was superseded by "an absolute respect for the masterpieces of the great masters" (Liszt, quoted in Wangermee 1950: 245). This statement expresses not only a shift in Liszt's aesthetic ideals, but also a generalized attitude characteristic of the later part of the nineteenth century, when the process of canonization of Western music reached a high level of

[60] See for instance exchange between Felix an Fanny Mendelssohn quoted on p. 67.

formalization. By "formalization" I am referring to the late nineteenth-century confluence of institutional and epistemological developments that transformed what was until then an exemplary body of musical works into a fixed standard endowed with objective value.

In chapter four I addressed the nineteenth-century transformation of the Romantic historical consciousness into a systematic approach to the study of history. I argued that the formalization of history as a discipline influenced by positivistic methodology resulted in a focus on the accumulation and classification of documented data. I also argued that positivistic history became a privileged vehicle for the transmission and study of tradition, which contributed to the neglect of aspects of the tradition that could not become the object of positivistic methods.

In this chapter my main goal is to highlight how the predominantly scientist worldview of the second half of the nineteenth century affected the process of canon formation and, hence, the Western concept of musical greatness we have inherited. The canonization of a group of musical works and their composers was not simply the inescapable culmination of a historical trend, but it depended largely on decisions made at this time by individuals and groups with specific interests and allegiances who were responding to their own historical, political, and social circumstances. Most of these responses were strongly influenced by the belief in the superiority of scientific knowledge above all other forms of knowledge. The formation of the canon, therefore, took place under the requirements of scientific study, the single most important contemporary source of cultural legitimacy. Under the auspices of scientific legitimation, classical music's "symbolic capital" achieved its highest worth by embodying the primary cultural values of the time, particularly objectivity, necessity, and definitiveness. The other side

of this symbolic gain was the loss of important aspects of musical life that were antithetical to these values and, therefore, could not be legitimized.

Canonicity and the Written Tradition

> Music is process, action, activity; but once it is written down it yields up an object (a score) and is itself on the way to becoming objectified.
>
> --Joseph Kerman

In the last decades the phenomenon of canonicity has been undergone considerable critical scrutiny from within various disciplines in the humanities. By identifying the ideological make up of the canon and putting into question its mechanisms of legitimation and self-perpetuation scholars have also put into question the very foundations of their disciplines. Literary criticism has been one of the pioneer fields undertaking the task of reassessing individual works and groups of authors previously excluded from the canon. Special attention has been given to works written by authors belonging to historically marginalized groups, such as Blacks in America and women. Strategies to correct the discriminatory patterns reinforced and perpetuated by the canon include adding formerly marginalized works to the already established canon and proposing alternative standards for the judgment and classification of canonic works (see for instance Showalter 1986).

With respect to the musical canon, during the last two decades efforts have primarily been directed at expanding the canon by bringing in works of previously neglected historical periods, such as the Medieval or early Baroque periods (Treitler), or by including works by women composers (Koskoff). Other scholars have put into question the set of values set forth by canonic works, as well as the very idea of canon itself. This project has been variously undertaken by approaching canonic works with

deconstructive strategies (Clément, McClary); reassessing works previously excluded from the canon (Newcomb, McCreless); conducting ethnographic investigations of institutions devoted to the study and transmission of the canon (Kingsbury); devoting study and a place in the curriculum to popular musics that seem to contradict basic canonic standards (Walser, Frith); including in the study of canonic music the discussion of formerly taboo topics such as gender and sexuality (McClary, Solie, Brett); investigating the double-sided mechanism of self-perpetuation and exclusiveness of the canon, while suggesting alternative standards for making and judging music (Citron); and investigating the interdependence between the canon and music disciplines (Bohlman, Bergeron, Randel).

The dependence of the canon on a written tradition and its aesthetic and historical implications, however, remains largely to be explored. As Joseph Kerman noted, the concept of a musical work, and especially of a canon, depends to certain extent on the process of objectification music undergoes when is written down (1983: 108, partially quoted above). With this, he raised the concern that musical canonicity depends on a process extraneous to the fundamental nature of music. In the words of Philip Bohlman, "the fundamentally oral nature of music notwithstanding, musicology's canons arise from the field's penchant for working with texts . . .. We think of pieces of music as discrete texts, rendered so by the notation with which we study and represent music" (Bohlman 1992: 202). In this sense, musical canonicity presents a unique problem for, unlike the literary canon--the paradigm of canon in Western culture--a musical canon--demands the translation of music into a medium which is not its own. Music canon formation, therefore, involved not just a process of selection of the most exemplary and valuable music of the tradition, but also a process of selection of music and musical aspects that

could be represented textually. Whereas it is generally assumed that canon-formation involves a mechanism of marginalization of works that do not measure up to a set of standards, in the case of music, it also marginalizes creations that cannot be judged according to those standards. Improvised music was not judged to be flawed or below established criteria of excellence, rather it was ignored because it was incommensurable with those criteria.

It could be argued that the fleeting art of improvisation was excluded from the canon simply because permanence is a necessary canonic requirement. To be sure, the concept of a canon involves a body of exemplary works that will be transmitted to future generations. But, though a necessary requirement of canonicity, the preservation of exemplarity by itself is not a sufficient canonic criterion: not all modes of permanence for exemplary cultural models are suitable to form a canon. All traditions, oral and written, comprise a set of conventions passed down from generation to generation and with it a sense of what is valuable and appropriate within a given tradition. The written basis of the Western musical canon, on the contrary, has constituted the vehicle for the preservation of exemplary creations considered to be finished products.[61]

The degree of freedom for innovation within a context of continuity, as well as the borders between adequate and inadequate, authentic and unauthentic, permitted and proscribed, and so on, are flexible and varies greatly across music cultures and historical periods In musical cultures like the classical traditions of India, a core of traditional conventions--such as those constituting the raga system--are passed down from generation to generation. These conventions are preserved not in the form of finished,

[61] In the Western tradition it is possible to find musical aspects that are not part of the canon and that have survived as models for performance, as for example nuances in interpretation perpetuated through generational chains of teachers and students. But these elements do not form part of the canon per se and their claims to exemplarity are open to challenge.

fixed products but as the basis for improvised and individual variations. The dynamics of enforcement and preservation of these conventions also vary. Usually, they are developed in the context of a dialectic between tradition and innovation, and between communities and individuals. In a recent article, Ali Jihad Racy has written about how improvisation is the medium for such a dialectical process in Arab music. In particular, the taqasim genre both expresses cherished conventional aspects of Arab culture and introduces individual innovations in the context of the interaction between musicians and public:

> As a tradition bearer, the taqasim performer must also be innovative. In order to make representational sense, he must include the less ordinary components of the shared musical legacy. That renders his performance artistically engaging, as well as technically correct. In actual performances, innovation within the bounds of tradition can impress the diehard listeners and prompt them to indulge in judicious listening that in turn inspires the performer and shapes his or her improvised rendition (Racy 2000: 310).

Enforcement of a set of conventions is sometimes a thoroughly communal affair, as in the case of the Aymara musicians of Peru studied by Thomas Turino (1993). In other cases only a particular group within a society is entitled to alter conventions, while enforcing the compliance of other groups with the decisions made. An example of this is described by Timothy Rice in his study of traditional Bulgarian music, where women were expected to sing the traditional songs exactly as they had learnt them and were discouraged from introducing variations, which were the prerogative of men (Rice 1994 : 97). But, as Marcia Citron has pointed out, there is a fundamental difference between bodies of cherished pieces, which could be called "folk repertoires," and the idea of a canon. The folk repertoire, being mostly oral, does not emphasize the idea of a "definitive version." Even when there exists a written record of a song, Citron notes that this version "would not be *the* definitive version--there would not be one. Instead it

would be one of many possibilities and takes on a multiplicity that strips away the veneer of moral authority vested in the ontology of the definitive version" (Citron 1993: 39).[62]

The first historical attempt to establish a musical canon in the Western world illustrates the canonic requirements of finished, fixed products and morally-invested definitive versions. As was earlier mentioned, this first instance of canon formation relied on a concerted effort to eradicate improvised elements in the liturgical chants of the Roman church, while enforcing the singers' compliance with a set of written models (see chapter one, pp. 9-10). For Charlemagne, the instigator of this ninth-century Gregorian reformation, the standardization of liturgical chants was a political tool serving his plans for European unification. Medieval political unity was inextricably bound to religious unity and the latter demanded a homogeneous musical practice. The promulgation of a written canon promoted the idea that there was only one correct usage of the chants throughout Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, and, hence, it aimed at either the elimination or the absorption of a rich variety of local versions that had previously coexisted. The improvisational character of the chants had formerly contributed to the manifestation of these regional identities within the vast and diverse territories of Western Christendom.

The political efficacy of this canonization was strengthened by conferring a transcendental import to a set of written models. According to accounts that circulated at the time of the reform, the chants that had become canonic were precisely those composed under divine inspiration by Pope Gregory I a few centuries earlier. But despite the holy prestige carried by these documents, regional versions continued to resurface.

[62] Citron also distinguishes between repertorial and disciplinary canons, although she notes that in practice they constantly "interact in flexible and fluid ways" (1993: 23). The concept of canon I am employing includes these two forms of canonicity and their interaction.

These deviations from the canon were labeled "corrupt" and "savage," and attracted Charlemagne's corrective measures time and again (see Kerman 1983; for historical documents see Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 44).

While ascertaining whether or not all processes of canonization are directly motivated by particular political or religious agendas is not the goal of the present chapter, it is noteworthy that the formation of the Western musical canon in the nineteenth century presents significant parallels with the Gregorian reform of ten centuries earlier: a) It involved the canonization of a body of written texts and excluded an existing improvisational tradition; b) the rhetoric surrounding the canonization of a body of exemplary music had explicit ties with a project of political unification;[63] c) the aesthetic judgments that supported the elevation of these works to canonic status were imbued with metaphysical and religious connotations; and, d) criticisms of deviations from these models were based on both aesthetic and moral judgments.[64]

Comparison of these two historical instances of canon-formation also highlights the large number of cultural variables involved in the phenomenon of canon-formation, as Citron has argued, and helps to identify the unique circumstances of the nineteenth-century process. In the first place, Charlemagne's program failed to completely eradicate the oral tradition and improvisation continued to flourish after the enforcement of compliance to a standard written repertoire. Nineteenth-century improvisation, on the

[63] In a recent article, Celia Applegate (1998) maintains that there is much exaggeration in current musicological discussion of the influence of nationalism in music. She mostly directs her criticism to recently published articles dealing with German nationalism in the early nineteenth century, especially those by Sanna Pederson (1994) and Stephen Rumph (1995). While I agree that in this period German nationalism was still a diffuse concept that can be applied to an array of heterogeneous phenomena, in my view Applegate downplays the importance that nationalism had in German culture from the latter part of the century onward. It is possible that Applegate, as well as the authors she criticizes are misled by the same problematic homogeneous view of the nineteenth century: Applegate extrapolates her assessment of the early nineteenth century onto later views, while Pederson and Rumph extrapolate their assessment of late nineteenth-century nationalism onto an earlier period.

[64] The last two points have been argued in chapters four and five.

contrary, disappeared almost completely from public performance at the time the Western musical canon became firmly established.[65] Secondly, unlike the Gregorian reform the decline of improvisational elements and the adherence to a body of written works in the nineteenth century was not the result of a specific command coming from political authorities. The nineteenth century process was a much more complex one that involved not only a strong nationalistic impulse, but also changing social and economic contexts for public music-making, a shift in intellectual and philosophical climates, and--in tension with these developments but not reducible to them--changes in aesthetic ideas. Also, the transcendental value accorded to the canon in the nineteenth century was established in a much more sophisticated manner than the medieval legends of Gregory taking dictation from the Holy Spirit. Ten centuries later, the metaphysical import of music was argued on the basis of complicated philosophical and aesthetic theories according to which the imagination of the genius could reach realms beyond the materialistic world of everyday life. Music, furthermore, was no longer at the service of religion, but was a kind of religion in itself.

Finally, the element that had a decisive role in the unique process of canon-formation in the nineteenth century was the ideal of scientific knowledge as arbiter of truth. Science had at this moment the incontestable authority that religion had had in Charlemagne's times, and music studies inspired by scientific approaches became a major source of legitimacy of the musical canon. This does not mean, however, that there was a mere substitution of one source of authority by the other. The scientific ideals of the culture of the time did not challenge the belief in the metaphysical relevance of music. Rather, scientifically-inspired music scholarship reinforced this belief by giving it

[65] There were instances of sporadic public improvisation until the late nineteenth century. For documentation on this see Goertzen 1996.

objective support. The formation of a musical canon in the nineteenth century counted, therefore, on both the prestige of an aesthetics rooted in a theological heritage and on its validation by science.

Musikwissenschaft: The Scientific Gates of Critical Heaven

> Arbitrating tastes; performing evaluation *qua* valuation; specifying favorites—what's good and what isn't; excluding and evading the noncanonic.
>
> --Philip Bohlman

These activities, Bohlman states, are implicit in the general musicological endeavors, though they are "considerably less neutral and objective in their communicative function" than what musicology as a discipline has claimed to be (Bohlman 1992: 199). The modern process of canon-formation has been inextricably linked to the emergence and development of music disciplines (see Bergeron and Bohlman 1992). To be sure, canon-formation is a complex phenomenon that exceeds the confines of scholarly activities. In Marcia Citron's words, "canon formation is not controlled by any one individual or organization, nor does it take place at any one historical moment. Rather, the process of the formation of a canon, whether a repertoire or a disciplinary paradigm, involves a lengthy historical process that engages many cultural variables" (1993: 19). But as Citron, and Bohlman acknowledge, this complexity should not obscure the fact that canon formation ultimately depends on agents. In other words, it is individuals and groups of individuals with particular interests, ideological allegiances, and circumstances, who make the judgments that underlie a canon. Susan McClary (1991, 2000), Lydia Goehr (1992), and Sanna Pederson (1994), among others, have shed light on the ideological underpinnings of the nineteenth-century musical canon, identifying specific

interests and allegiances involved in its formation.

Here, I want to focus on the impact of scientism on this process, a factor that pervaded all spheres of culture and was both the major source of legitimation for particular ideological agendas and also a sort of ideology in itself.[66] The birth of modern music disciplines was mainly an outcome of this scientist current. Inspired by scientific standards of truth, music scholars not only evaluated musical greatness, but aimed at demonstrating its objective and lasting value in a positivistic manner. Bohlman has written that "the concept of canon as commonly understood in musicology suggests both an object and the act of determining what that object is" (1992: 201). The fact that this object was determined to be a scientific one says much about both traditional musicology and the canonic standards it promulgated.

The positivistic and scientist currents that fostered the emergence of musicology had not introduce wholly new ways of thinking to Western culture, since they were directly connected to old rationalist and empirical tendencies that had never completely disappeared during the Romantic period. Around the 1820s these currents began to take the shape of a scientist movement that by mid-century had acquired the force of a new worldview. Scientism entailed a strong reaction against idealist metaphysics, as well as a critique of the vague and fantastic world of the Romantics. Franklin Baumer has referred to this confluence of intellectual and cultural trends characterized by the belief in the centrality of science to all other forms of knowledge as "the New Enlightenment." Among its adherents Baumer counts groups as various as the English Utilitarians and Radicals of the 1820s, the French Positivists, the German "Young Hegelians," and a variety of ""realists,' scientists, liberals and socialists everywhere in Europe" (Baumer 1965: 302).

[66] Joseph Kerman was one of the first musicologists to call attention to the impact of positivism on American musicology, especially with his influential *Contemplating Music* (1985).

It was August Comte who first categorized the post-Romantic period as the "age of positivism" and contrasted it to previous ages of metaphysics and theology (Baumer 1965: 153). After these eras of imperfect forms of thought, Comte maintained, rather than focusing exclusively on the "causes" of phenomena, positivism finally focused on the sole productive knowledge: the "laws" that ruled phenomena. Comte's positivist philosophy contributed in great measure to the intellectual frame of reference of the scientist worldview. Two other major philosophical developments that supported scientism were the return of the Marburg Neo-Kantians to transcendental apriorism, and the emergence of other currents of logical empiricism, especially that of John Stuart Mill. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, these two positions corresponded completely to Comte's ideal of positivist knowledge (Gadamer 1992 [1976]: 153).

The coalescence of these currents in the second half of the nineteenth century gave rise to a generalized belief that scientific method was the only acceptable path to true knowledge. Equated with metaphysics, philosophy came to be regarded as a field radically separated from, and in conflict with, science. Thus, adherence to a scientific position often implied the dismissal of philosophy at large. As we will see later, even Schopenhauer's brand of metaphysics, which became enormously popular in the late nineteenth century, had pretensions of empirical rootedness. Hermann von Helmholtz, whose scientific studies on sound contributed to the emerging *Musikwissenchaften*, was well aware of the problematic split between philosophy and science. In a lecture given in 1862 Helmholtz offered this reflection:

> The philosophers accused the scientific men of narrowness; the scientific men retorted that the philosophers were crazy. And so it came about that men of science began to lay some stress on the banishment of all philosophic influences from their work while some of them, including men

> of the greatest acuteness, went so far as to condemn philosophy altogether, not merely as useless, but as mischievous dreaming (quoted in Baumer 1965: 307).[67]

In order to better understand this radical separation between science and philosophy, we will recall that scientism meant "not merely the growth of science itself, but the attempt, in marked contrast to the romantic disposition, to answer all questions scientifically, to turn everything possible into a science, including in some respects even the humanities, and to apply the principles of science to the world of action" (Baumer 1965: 306). More specifically, the model for scientific knowledge was the natural sciences, particularly physics. All other "sciences," including the *Geisteswissenschaften* ("sciences of the spirit"), were supposed to follow the natural sciences model as closely as possible.

This particular methodological orientation not only shaped the kind of knowledge the humanities aimed at, but to a large extent also shaped the kind of "object" these disciplines studied.[68] In this regard, Michael Holly writes that "the positivistic models provided by the natural sciences allowed others . . . to produce analyses of works exclusively in terms of their material constituents" (Holly 1984: 25). The synthesis between material and spiritual concerns invoked by the very denomination "sciences of the spirit" (the original German term for "humanities") was therefore never attempted in practice. Whereas the "scientific" element in this expression needed no further justification and promised virtually unlimited possibilities for improvement, the "spiritual" element had been reduced to its material constituents so as to become apt for

[67] This separation constitutes according to Gadamer the origin of the split between philosophy and science of the twentieth century.

[68] The modeling of the humanities after the natural sciences was not always obvious or direct. Hanslick for example discusses at some length the limitations of physiology for the knowledge of music, and he warns: "let everyone take care not to seek from a science explanations which it cannot give" (Hanslick 1957: 55). His formalist aesthetics, however, shared with the sciences the goal of objective knowledge, whose paradigm was the natural sciences.

scientific study.

Musicology, *Musikwissenschaft*, was one such "science of the spirit." Created in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century, the new discipline--like the other modern humanities--had the goal of reaching objective truth about music. To achieve this goal, the "science of music" used fundamentally positivistic methodologies. Archival research, compilations, preparation of editions, and similar historiographical projects had been the backbone of musicological research from the beginnings of the discipline, and they remained so until recently. An example of the achievements of the early *Musikwissenschaft* was the publication, beginning in 1850, of the first complete edition of Bach's works. This project inaugurated a tradition of Bach research that, as Kerman noted in 1985, "has for some time been poised on the brink of the classic positivistic dilemma: more and more facts, and less and less confidence in interpreting them" (Kerman 1985: 54).

Thus, as I argued in chapter three, the historical revival of the early nineteenth century, Romantic in its outlook, became a few decades later a much more systematic, fundamentally positivistic project. Concerning this increasing positivistic bent in nineteenth-century research R. G. Collingwood wrote:

> Historians set to work to ascertain all the facts they could. The result was a vast increase of detailed historical knowledge, based to an unprecedented degree on accurate and critical examination of evidence. This was the age which enriched history by the compilation of vast masses of carefully sifted material . . . But all through this period there was a certain uneasiness about the ultimate purpose of this detailed research. It had been undertaken in obedience to the spirit of positivism according to which the ascertaining of facts was only the first stage of a process whose second stage was the discovery of laws . . . But philosophers who understood the positivist programme looked on at this enthusiasm with misgiving. When, they asked, were the historians going to embark on the second stage? (quoted in Kerman 1985: 43-44).

Chronologically, the new disciplines of music history and musicology lagged behind the developments in historiographical research described by Collingwood. In fact, Kerman quotes Collingwood to point out how similar the state of historical research in the nineteenth century was to that of twentieth-century musicological research, which until recently exhibited the same kinds of achievements and limitations of positivist scholarship. Positivistic-inspired music scholarship developed greatly after 1860. A variety of areas emerged to study music from different perspectives, and new terminologies and taxonomies were devised in order to have an overall conceptualization of the new field (see for instance McCredie 1971: 4ff). Music history, acoustics, aesthetics, theory, as well as other areas, underwent increasing systematization through the latter part of the nineteenth century. Along with the historical and analytical approaches to music developed at this time, there was a flourishing of scientific investigations of the acoustic basis of music. For instance, Helmholtz's studies of the harmonic series, which continued those conducted by Rameau in the light of the new scientific advances, were connected to the attempt to prove that tonal music was based on scientific laws (see Helmholtz 1948 [1877])[69].

It was not accidental that this booming of music scholarship occurred when Romanticism was in decline. As was mentioned earlier, the rise of scientism was in part a reaction against the Romantic worldview. T. S. Eliot summarized a widespread sentiment that reached its full articulation in the twentieth century when he wrote that "the only cure of Romanticism is to analyze it" (quoted in Fogle 1962 [1945]: 153). If in the

[69] It should be noted however that Helmholtz, though primarily a scientist and a highly accomplished one, did not completely accept the claims of scientism, and he maintained a cautionary attitude in front of the limits of scientific method and knowledge. For example, he considered that studies like his own were limited and believed that they needed to be complemented by aesthetic investigations not restricted by "natural philosophy." Helmholtz also made the perceptive remarks concerning the relations between philosophy and science quoted on pp. 232-3.

Romantic period analysis was thought to destroy the life of artistic creations, some decades later analysis became not only an appropriate way to judge great music, but also a way to explain away what was perceived as chaotic or vague. The changing views on analysis were coupled, therefore, with a shift in aesthetic values. Whereas formal traits suggesting imperfection, ambiguity and fluidity had been associated with great art by the Romantics, these very traits became later in the century symptoms of a diseased and unmanageable artistic style. Analysis, considered as an objective, scientific-like tool, became a preferred means to ascertain formal perfection on music generally accepted as exemplary, such as that of Mozart and Beethoven or, extrapolating from Eliot's perceptive remark, a means to elicit some sense of order from Romantic music, thus curing it of its chaotic and imperfect aura.

In sum, in order to measure up to the requirements of scientific knowledge, music had to become an appropriate object of scientific study. As pure sound music could be studied from perspectives of acoustic and physics; as historical document scores could be treated with the methods of positivistic historiography; and as fixed musical structures works could be analyzed in terms of their formal constructions. Hence, the study of music as acoustic phenomenon, historical document, or formal structure, undertaken by the emerging fields of musical studies had the common basis of treating music as an object of scientific study. Questions about music which could not be answered by applying scientific-like methods were deemed irrelevant.[70]

[70] Although the ideal of scientific objectivity was pervasive in the scholarship of the latter half of the nineteenth century, it should be noted that not every music scholar adhered to this ideal. August Ambros, for instance, developed his work on music history and aesthetics within the framework of Hegelian dialectics, and his book *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie*, published in 1856, contested Hanslick's formalist aesthetics. But Ambros's, as well as other approaches such as the Romantic hermeneutics of H. Kretzschmar (1848-1924), had far less influence than Hanslick's in the development of musicology. For the relationship between the disciplines of music theory and musicology see Kerman (1985) and McCreless (1997a). Although separated in the twentieth century as two distinct disciplines with different scope, methodologies and goals, musicology and music theory continued to share the positivistic ideal of the latter part of the nineteenth century.

But, embodying another paradoxical aspect of late nineteenth-century culture, this positivistic scholarship still participated in the construction of systems that explained the overall meaning of phenomena. Acoustic investigations, for example, not only shed light on the physical nature of sound, but they also served as an objective basis from which to explain the excellence of the tonal language. The study of harmonics in particular not only provided such a scientific confirmation of tonality, but also an explanation of the historical evolution of music: the intervals of the series forming a sound explained the successive historical appropriation of those intervals (Fétis, see Christensen 1996).

Music historians also strove to systematically establish the historical development of Western music through a succession of necessary steps. This project was philosophically supported not only by Hegel's metaphysics of History--which, unlike his aesthetics, had a lasting impact throughout the nineteenth century--but also by the evolutionary theories of thinkers such as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Spencer in particular had a more direct impact on musical historiography with his 1857 publication of an *Essay on the Origin of Music*, where he adapted biological evolutionary ideas to music. Many histories of music influenced by evolutionist theories were written in the second half of the nineteenth century. These histories traced the development of music from simple to complex, from primitive to cultivated, and from homogeneous to heterogeneous. An example is the work of the English historian Charles Parry, who tried to reconcile evolutionist approaches to music history with Hegelian dialectics. In *The Art of Music* (1893) Parry proposed the existence of three stages in the development of music, one characterized by "unconsciousness" and "spontaneity," a second by "self-criticism," "analysis," and "consciousness," and a third and final one characterized by

the synthesis of the two previous stages and exemplified by great masterworks .

The impossibility of studying improvisation formally or historiographically and the consequent dismissal of its value was reinforced by this kind of evolutionary thinking. Improvisation was regarded as part of an "unconscious" and "spontaneous" early period that, unlike the Romantic exaltation of these characteristics, was considered in the latter part of the century unsophisticated and immature. Machlis's statement quoted in chapter two, "the progress of music demanded the victory over improvisation," is a clear example of the persistence of this evolutionary scheme well into the twentieth century. Evolutionary views, however, could not by themselves explain the dismissal of improvisation, for improvised music had undergone similar stylistic changes as the written compositions of a given period. Also, Beethoven's improvisatory feats at the piano only a few decades earlier could not have been completely erased from memory at this point, and they alone would have refuted the idea that improvised music was a remnant of primitive and simple musical forms. But by providing a general theory that explained the inferiority of improvised music, evolutionary schemes also contributed to the dismissal of the practice.[71] Finally, the ideal of *Werktreue* in performance was another aspect of the primacy of objectivity in this period. It was believed that the more a performer could avoid his or her own subjective interpretation of the work, the more truthful to the work he or she was. At the same time, the less subjective a performance of a work was, the fewer the chances of opening the door to contingency.

In the end, the scientific aspiration of modern music scholarship meant an impulse to rescue music from subjectivism, legitimizing it by demonstrating its objective value. Under the dictates of all these calls for objectivity not only did improvisation nearly

[71] Evolutionary theories also brought to the fore a renewed interest in the origins of music. This interest was closely linked to the search for the essence of music, an important matter in positivistic approaches to music.

vanish from music histories, but the influence of improvisation on works was also downplayed or ignored. This attitude has remained firmly ingrained in musicological literature up to the present. In the *Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music*, for example, the entry "Impromptu" reads: "Properly, an improvisation, or a composition suggestive of improvisation."[72] This element, however, is hardly present in the impromptus of Schubert, Chopin, and other Romantic composers who obviously used the title in order to indicate the somewhat casual origin of the composition." But as we have seen, for the Romantic composers in general improvisation was an important source of inspiration, and for many it was a significant aspect of their careers as composers and performers.

Another aspect of the discrediting of improvisation is manifested in cases where works are not considered as candidates for the canon because their improvisational character is too prominent. Marion Scott exemplifies this attitude in a monograph on Beethoven first published in 1934. As part of her periodization of Beethoven's works she writes:

> In 1809 came another period of sonata writing--the Sonata in F sharp major, Op. 78, the Sonata in G major, Op. 79, and in 1809-10 the Sonata in E flat major . . .. With these it is convenient to bracket the Fantasia, Op.77, also composed in 1809, my reasons being that Czerny considered it a typical example of a Beethoven extemporization, and that Beethoven seems to have regarded it as a companion piece to the Sonata, Op. 78 (1974 [1934]: 143).

Scott does not elaborate on her reasons for the bracketing, nor on its implications, and she limits her comments on the Fantasia to noting that it is "curious, but interesting" (ibid.). It is clear, however, that in the context of her discussion of Beethoven's works the Fantasia does not quite hit the mark of the other works of the same period. Not only,

[72] *The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music*, edited by Willi Apel and Ralph T. Daniel, s.v., "impromptu."

then, is there a clear-cut separation between improvisation and works in the literature, but compositions that met the notational requirements of works were also set apart if there was evidence that at their core lurked the spirit of improvisation--a spirit of freedom, spontaneity, and subjectivity that at this point in history was regarded with suspicion and no little anxiety.

Traditionally, the Fantasie genre had embodied this spirit, especially until the early nineteenth-century.[73] It is not then surprising that other fantasies have also failed to satisfy scholars and critics. In his study of Schubert's Fantasie in C Major for Violin and Piano, Patrick McCreless (1997b) offers valuable insights concerning a work that has never enjoyed canonic status. Though much of the Fantasie's unpopularity among performers is due to its enormous technical difficulty, critics have based their negative assessments of the work on its formal flaws. For McCreless, various features of this work singled out by critics as formal incongruities are associated with the instability of the Fantasie as a genre in the late 1820s. He notes that

> in the social and expressive sphere, what ties these various features together is the notion of Romantic subjectivity itself. If Romanticism marks the birth of the modern subject, as is so often claimed, then the Fantasie is a central locus in which that subjectivity becomes conscious (McCreless 1997b: 216).

The ambiguous and eccentric form of this work--composed in 1827, nine months after Beethoven's death and three months before the triumph of Paganini in Vienna as McCreless points out--embodies important aspects of the Romantic aesthetics of imperfection that were strongly criticized a few decades later. McCreless sums up the problem: "We might speculate that much of what has been found wanting in the Violin

[73] Patrick McCreless cites a study by Peter Schleuning (1973) in which the author "notes the gradual disappearance, in pieces entitled Fantasie, of the unique, improvisatory forms of the eighteenth century in favor of formal plans that took more and more uniformly like sonata cycles" (McCreless 1997b: 214).

Fantasie is the result of a collision between a commission for a virtuoso piece and Schubert's own generically conditioned expectations for subjective utterance in a Fantasie" (ibid.). Even when captured in a composed work, subjectivity and virtuosity did not draw much interest from music scholars. Neither the brilliance and excitement of virtuosity in performance, nor the introversion and nuances of subjective expression translate well into formal categories. To be sure, works regarded as canonical also present these aspects in various degrees, but they exhibit other features that fare well formally and can therefore be "redeemed" through analysis.

As McCreless demonstrates, Schubert's Fantasie is in fact a well-crafted and original work that fully belongs to the great tradition of the genre. Does this mean, McCreless asks, that the work can be saved from "critical purgatory" or at least from "critical hell"? Rather than simply answering yes, thus offering an up-to-date version of the redemptive zeal of early music scholars, he concludes his essay by raising a much more interesting question :

> Does there *need* to be a critical purgatory, or a critical hell--or a critical heaven, for that matter? The Violin Fantasie offers us moments of artistic pleasure, and its odd position in Schubert's mature instrumental works stimulates useful and productive inquiry about form and genre, about virtuosity and subjectivity, about analysis and criticism. Need it to do more? (McCreless 1997b: 230).

These questions and the implied negative responses constitute a forceful critique of formalism. It is not clear, however, what this means in relation to the question raised in the title of McCreless's essay: "A Candidate for the Canon? A New Look at Schubert's Fantasie in C Major for Violin and Piano." With his conclusion, does McCreless mean that because this work does all the things listed in the last paragraph it deserves to be part of the canon? Or, does he mean that because a canon implies the existence of both critical

heaven and critical hell, his critique also targets the very idea of canon? I think that in the context of this essay both answers are plausible. In my view, however, only the last one would be fully convincing, for the concept of musical canon in itself demands a set of objective standards that works like Schubert's Violin Fantasie, not to mention improvised music, overtly defy.

Hanslick: On the Objective in Music

> Autonomous musical concepts (i.e., themes) have the trustworthiness of a quotation and the vividness of a painting: They are individual, personal, everlasting.
>
> --Hanslick

In 1854 the Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick published *On the Beautiful in Music,* the first treatise laying out the principles for a formalist aesthetics. His proposal of an aesthetics of music based on the ideal of objectivity was well received, and two years after the publication of his book he was appointed to a position at Vienna University, making him "the first professor of music in the modern liberal-arts sense" (Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 403). For Hanslick, the solution to the subjectivist aesthetics of the Romantics was to render irrelevant the sources of subjectivism in music--the composer and the listener. What was left for aesthetic investigation was the musically beautiful, that is to say, the musical forms themselves. Hanslick justified the focus on musical form by asserting the very *objective nature* of the beautiful in music and indeed of the very essence of music. Hanslick was still concerned with the Romantic coupling of Truth and Beauty, but for him this was to be found only in music's formal structures. The musical work was an objective product of the artist's mind, and the attitude of the listener was described in terms of the contemplation of objective beauty.

Hanslick's work did much to foster the idea that the musical canon could be justified not only as a body of exemplary works sanctioned by tradition and studied with historiographical methods, but also as works proven to have objective and universal value. This process of legitimation by means of formal analysis, which later constituted the discipline of music theory, culminated in the twentieth century when it achieved a high degree of systematicity and rigor. Schenker's theory is probably the most far-reaching attempt of this kind in both thoroughness and influence.[74]

Hanslick's work was eminently critical, for, as he notes in the prologue of his book, "the circumstances of the time" had forced him to emphasize the negative elements of his theory (Hanslick 1957 [1854]: 5). The musical circumstances he was responding to were on the one hand the disintegrating world of Romanticism with its aesthetics of feelings and the dilettantism fostered by it. On the other hand, he was also reacting to Neoromantic aesthetics and its claim that program music and the Wagnerian music-drama were the proper correctives for Romanticism and the only way to carry forward Beethoven's legacy. Hanslick became the most prominent defender of the "absolute music" group in the absolute/program music controversy that divided the German musical world into two camps in the latter part of the century.

The controversy arose between the supporters of Wagner and Liszt (who called themselves "the New German School") and those who, against them, defended the superiority of absolute music. Each group criticized the other as having misunderstood the significance of the legacy of the great masters and of Beethoven in particular. For Hanslick's group, the idea that the Wagnerian music-drama and program music were the

[74] Even if the scientific justification of the canon reached its full articulation in the twentieth century, this was a nineteenth-century ideal. In fact, as Kerman (1983) has noted, Schenker undertook his theoretical justification of the objective value of tonal music came when this music was already perceived as being under attack.

true heirs of the symphonic tradition was nothing short of offensive. In the words of Weiss and Taruskin, "the assumption by Liszt, Wagner, and their adherents that theirs was the only true way, that the mantle of Beethoven had fallen on their shoulders, and so forth, understandably provoked considerable indignation on the part of those who were not prepared to become converts to the new religion" (Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 380).

Hanslick opposed the Neoromantic idea that instrumental music should be taken to a higher level of accomplishment by attaching to it concrete meanings through words or images. He criticized the lack of independence of Liszt's music, as well as Wagner's insistence on expressing definite feelings through music. Music, Hanslick maintained, does not express definite feelings, for the only aspect of feeling music can represent is motion. His celebrated example of this is Gluck's aria "J'ai perdu ma Euridice" ("I have lost my Euridice"), which words, he argued, fit the music as well as they could fit an aria entitled "J'ai trouvé ma Euridice" ("I have found my Euridice") (Hanslick 1957 [1854]: 32). In sum, the only thing music expresses is musical ideas and the only subject of a musical work is its musical theme or themes, autonomous entities that are as objective as a painting (see quote above, ibid.: 83). That the only musical "content" worth of critical attention is that which conforms to objective standards is evident in the following assessment of improvisational preluding:

> we will perhaps call "contentless" that most spontaneous kind of preludising in which the player, relaxing more than working, launches forth into chords, arpeggios, and rosalias, without allowing an autonomous tonal configuration to come distinctly to the fore. Such free preludes are neither recognizable nor distinguishable as individuals; we might say that they have (in the wider sense) no content because they have no theme. The theme or, rather, the themes of a piece of music are therefore its essential content (ibid.: 82).

For Hanslick, musical greatness was to be found in pure sounds and formal analysis provided the means to prove it. For Wagner, on the contrary, pure sounds dissociated from poetry and concrete imagery, were vague to the point of being meaningless. The philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach had been decisive in Wagner's formulation of this stance against absolute music. Feuerbach, the philosopher better known for influencing Marx's thought, had attacked the Hegelian system proposing instead a sort of philosophical naturalism. The term "absolute music" was coined by Wagner inspired by Feuerbach's concept of "absolute philosophy." Feuerbach had used this term to refer in a negative sense to metaphysical discourses which had forgotten their roots in human consciousness and were now somewhat freely and aimlessly floating . Analogously, for Wagner "absolute music" was music that had forgotten its origins in poetry and dance and had grown rootless and meaningless. Also, just as Feuerbach had proposed a "philosophy of the future" Wagner proposed his "artwork of the future," which, analogous to the philosophical rootedness Feuerbach had called for, was supposed to recover the roots of music in poetry, myth, dance, and plastic elements (see Deathridge and Dahlhaus 1984). For Hanslick instrumental music devoid of programs or words was not "rootless" but was, on the contrary, "pure" music that could stand on its own, without external aids.

But this controversy should not obscure the coherence of the musical culture of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Even though these two groups apparently held radically separated views of music, they exemplified two ways of departing the Romantic world that had in common a strong positivistic influence. If Wagner's and Liszt's "music of the future" had departed from important aspects of the musical practice of the recent past such as improvisation, their adversaries in the absolute camp were not more

traditional than them in this respect and by invoking the verdict of science they contributed to this departure in decisive ways.

The influence of Kantian philosophy on Hanslick's theory is unmistakable. Lippman has stated that, "the *Critique of Judgment* provides a substantial foundation for the development of aesthetic formalism, and Kant's influence is often quite conspicuous in the authors who followed [Hanslick]" (Lippman 1992: 292).[75] It should be noted, however, that there is a stretch from Hanslick's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics and the idealist and Romantic interpretations of it. The role of subjectivity is a case in point. Hanslick, for example, in his zeal to attack subjectivism in aesthetics went so far as to state that "the beautiful is and remains beautiful though it arouse no emotion whatever, and though there be no one to look at it" (Hanslick 1957 [1854]: 10). This radical elimination of the subject is typical of the polemic tone Hanslick used in his treatise, and it is an instance of a style of argumentation that prompts Lippman to comment on Hanslick's being "seduced by the attractiveness of a negative argument and the easy opportunity it offers for a display of cleverness" (Lippman 1992: 300). But in eliminating the subjective from aesthetic judgment Hanslick was also contradicting fundamental tenets of Kantian aesthetics, the most important philosophical source of his formalist project. Thus, even though Hanslick draws heavily from Kant's aesthetics of form, his emphasis on the objectivity of beauty at the expense of the judging subject (fundamental in Kantian transcendental idealism) makes his formalism closer to mid-century neo-Kantian formulations than to the Kantian source. Hanslick therefore participated in the neo-Kantian misinterpretation of Kant's overall philosophy since neo-Kantianism had

[75] Other formalist approaches to music had appeared since the early nineteenth century, stemming directly from Kant's aesthetics of formal beauty. Lippman cites as the first proponent of formalism in the nineteenth century Johann Friedrich Herbart (1813, 1831) and Hans-Georg Nägeli (1826) (Lippman 1992: 298). Nägeli's formalism, however, as I will discuss in chapter eight, has certain affinity with some aspects of Romanticism and is quite different from the approach that developed after Hanslick.

focused almost exclusively on the First Critique, ignoring the fact that it was the aesthetics of the Third Critique that gave coherence to the Kantian system.[76]

This neo-Kantian influence distinguishes the formalist tradition launched by Hanslick's book from idealist aesthetics, which owed much to the Kant of the Third Critique. The distance between Hanslick's and the idealists' interpretations of Kant also helps to explain the "family resemblance" between Hanslick's aesthetics and Schopenhauer's. As with Hanslick, Schopenhauer's enthusiasm for Kantian philosophy had nothing to do with the Romantic reinterpretation of Kant.[77] Hanslick and Schopenhauer had drawn conclusions quite distant from those drawn by idealists and Romantics, such as the abstract nature of musical feelings defended by both Hanslick and Schopenhauer (see for instance Lippman 1992: 299).

There is therefore a certain conceptual affinity underlying the opposition between the defenders of program music and the defenders of absolute music. This affinity consists basically in a reinterpretation of Kantian aesthetics quite different from that of the Romantics, one openly opposed to idealist and Romantic ideas on art. Schopenhauer's and Hanslick's aesthetics of music shared the mid-century movement back to Kant aimed at correcting the supposedly Romantic misunderstandings of Kant's philosophy by means of approaches based on empirical and objective grounds. If Schopenhauer's philosophy was still metaphysical and if Hanslick's formalist aesthetics still presupposed an aesthetics of genius and a metaphysics of formal beauty, this attests to the cultural complexities of the latter part of the nineteenth century. The post-Romantic generation tried to bring together positivist knowledge and metaphysics,

[76] I am referring here in particular to the Marburg Neo-Kantians. Other neo-Kantian schools have been criticized precisely for their subjectivistic aesthetics.
[77] According to Jerry Clegg, philosophers such as Jung, Nietzsche,Wittgenstein and Freud "share a source in the post-Kantian revival of Neo-Platonism that Schopenhauer's writings represent" (Clegg 1994: 199).

empirical accuracy and universal Ideas, definite expression of feelings and overflowing expressions of the sublime. This project did not involve an attempt at dialectical synthesis but, rather, the transformation of the notions of metaphysics, universal ideas, and the sublime into concepts compatible with the prevalent ideals of positivism.

The Anxiety of Contingency

> What we experience as surprising, or, as we call it, original in music in none the less *necessary.*
>
> --Constantinus Julius Becker

Treitler has remarked that Hanslick's concept of form is one of "inner form" which involves a sense of "musical idea worked out in notes" (Treitler 1991: 289). It is the appropriation of early formalist approaches such as Hanslick's by generations of music scholars that has given rise to a highly static formal conception of music. This conception, according to Treitler, "embodies a value-gradient according to the principles of closure, symmetry, unity, and the idea that every note is necessary to the whole and no note is superfluous to it. This is the sense of form on which the identification of the essential traits of Western music has rested . . ." (ibid). Here, Treitler is pointing to a significant aspect of the consolidation of the Western musical canon, manifested in the ideal of objectivity in both scholarship and performance practice: the impulse to obliterate any traces of contingency in music.

As Constantin Julius Becker suggests, even what was experienced as surprising had to be proved "necessary."[78] Judging by the contexts of this and similar statements,

[78] Becker collaborated with Schumann in the editorship of the *Neue Zeitschrift* from 1835 to 1843. But his musical sensibilities seem to have been more in step with the orientation the *NZ* took later under Brendel. Among Becker's literary output are a novel entitled *Die Neuromantiker* and translations of writings by Berlioz.

what Becker and others meant by "necessary" in music referred at least to one, but usually to all, of the following meanings: a) musical elements that could not formally be otherwise; b) musical masterworks that constituted an essential link in the historical development of music; and, c) music that was not the product of whim or chance but of the superior design of the genius's creative mind. The characteristic post-Romantic anxiety in front of chance and disorder underlies the new preoccupations with respect to music. These preoccupations translated into the need to prove its structural coherence, its belonging to a necessary historical development, its having been willfully created by a superior mind, and, as the sum of these three traits, its objective and universal value.

Improvised music, once again, did not fare well with any of these safeguards against contingency in music, and it became a paradigm of musical shortcomings. Consider for example Hanslick's contrast between composition and improvisation: "Since the composition follows formal laws of beauty, it does not improvise itself in haphazard ramblings but develops itself in organically distinct gradations, like sumptuous blossoming from a bud" (Hanslick 1957 [1854]: 81). The most generalized attitude of music critics towards these "haphazard ramblings" was to simply avoid them and, ultimately, forget them. But mere oblivion was not always possible given the important role improvisation had played in the not-too-distant past. Liszt only gave up his career as piano virtuoso in 1848 when, in the wake of his "conversion" to the *Werktreue* ideal and his appointment at the Weimar court, he gave a new turn to his career, becoming mainly a conductor and composer. After this point Liszt, who never lost his skill and love for improvising, continued to do so privately. Liszt's student Arthur Friedheim wrote: "By nature, Liszt was a rhapsodist and improviser, and this lends a singular charm to his music, quite aside from all its other qualities" (Friedheim 1986: 189). But the

qualification of this activity comes right after this assertion: "But he was a rhapsodist in his own way; he never improvised without design. And he was always conformed to his own strict discipline, so that he was protected against errors in composition, as he was at the piano" (Friedheim 1986: 189). "Protected against errors" through discipline and superior musical genius, Liszt's private indulgence in the art of improvising was thus forgivable. But if Liszt allowed himself this relapse into subjectivity and contingency only in private, in the public sphere he played an active part in the eradication of these remnants of Romantic disorder and Baroque immaturity.[79]

The increasing importance of the orchestra, considered as a plural instrument unified under the direction of the conductor, was a major factor in the new outlook of musical performances. Wagner wrote that the orchestra was the organ that ensured the unity of expression adding, "let us not forget, however, that the orchestra's equalizing moments of expression are never to be determined by *the caprice of the musician,* as random tricking out of sound, but *only by the poet's aim"* (Wagner 1964: 228, Wagner's emphasis). Wagner's statement cannot be sufficiently explained as responding to the needs of homogeneity in orchestral playing as opposed to solo playing. For Wagner individual caprice was just as inappropriate for solo players, since also in this case the single most important rule of interpretation was strict adherence to the composer's intentions: "The highest merit of the executant artist, the virtuoso, would accordingly consist in a pure and perfect reproduction of the composer's thought: a reproduction only

[79] If as a performer Liszt found a refuge for improvisation in the private sphere, as a writer he found this refuge in the music of the Roma people of Hungary. In his book *The Gypsies and their Music in Hungary* Liszt wrote about the fundamental role of improvisation in their music, describing their techniques of ornamentation, paraphrase, and interpretation in a way, as Friedheim remarks, reminiscent of his own improvisatory style (Friedheim 1986: 169-70). Hungarian folk music, of which Roma music was an important component, remained an important cultural reference for Liszt. His way of dealing with the demise of improvisation both in practice and in theory was, therefore, more than a mere marginalization. It was a way of preserving improvisation at a personal level while presenting in public a perfect picture of the German priest of the art-religion.

to be ensured by genuine fathering of his intentions, and consequently by total abstinence from all inventions of one's own" (Wagner 1991 [1840]: 139).

The "caprice of the musician," so valuable in Hegel's aesthetics of music and in Romantic musical practice, acquired the negative connotation of randomness. As opposed to this, the "poet's aim" came to signify the necessary designs of the genius. Wagner, despite his firm position on the performer's fidelity to the work, took great liberties when conducting the works of other composers and occasionally expressed the opinion that an interpreter needed to add fantasy and imagination to the interpretation, lest it be lifeless.[80]

Werktreue, therefore, seemed to mean different things for different people, according to their musical talent. A merely talented performer or conductor had to strive for reproducing the works of the masters as faithfully as possible; a genius, on the other hand, could take the liberty to *interpret* another genius's intentions. After all, the late nineteenth-century genius was considered both the heir to previous masters and someone positioned at a more evolved historical stage. And as Goethe and Herder had declared, only a genius could truly understand another genius: "only soul can discover soul; only genius can understand, stimulate, and censure another genius" (Herder, quoted in Nori 1995: 8). In some cases, a genius could even understand another genius better than himself, as seems to be the case of Wagner when he re-scored as well as "corrected" the works of other composers.[81] For all others involved in the art, the business, and the study of Western classical music at this time, total respect to the masterworks was the main rule.

[80] This was one of Wagner's criticisms of Brahms's musicianship. It could be speculated that in this context, the contradiction with a strict ideal of *Werktreue* might respond to Wagner's interest in demonstrating Brahms's lack of true genius and ability to open new paths for music, a task Wagner thought was his own mission.

[81] Wagner, for example, arranged Beethoven's Ninth symphony for piano at four hands (never performed in concert), Palestrina's *Stabat Mater* (first performed in 1848), and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (first performed in 1850). See Deathridge and Dahlhaus 1984: 186-187; Dorian 1942: 284).

This contradiction in performance practice also constituted for Wagner an aesthetic problem of crucial significance for his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Whereas in some writings, as we just saw, he gave priority to "the poet's aim," in others he gave priority to the actors, stating that in his "self-sacrifice" for the actor, "the poet fulfills himself" (quoted in Deathridge and Dahlhaus 1984: 77). This is so because, in enacting the musical and scenic present moment, actors embody a decisive aspect of the opera--the "mimetic-cum-improvisatory 'liveliness'" (ibid: 75). In 1871 Cosima Wagner recorded in her diary Wagner's idea that "an improviser such as an actor must belong entirely to the present moment, and never think of what is to come, indeed not even know it, as it were" (ibid.: 78). Improvisation for Wagner, therefore, had not only a negative connotation (he associated it with the problem of "German formlessness"), but also a positive one: it was the guaranty of 'liveliness.' Wagner tried to reconcile this artistic need for freedom and spontaneity with his ideal of closely-knit large dramatic forms. The solution he found, according to Deathridge and Dahlhaus, was no other than the technique of the leitmotif: "On the one hand a leitmotif (singular) operates in isolation, and often is linked only loosely with what has already happened and what is to come: . . . it accentuates the scenic and musical present moment. On the other hand, the leitmotifs (plural), as a system of musical dramaturgy, constitute a form which embraces the entire work" (ibid.: 79). It follows from this argument, therefore, that the leitmotif meant for Wagner--at least at a given moment of his theoretical development--the new reincarnation of the spirit of improvisation, the last redoubt of spontaneity. That the alleged dialectics between freedom and design, improvisation and composition, results in a technique such as the leitmotif is perhaps an appropriate symbol of the Neoromantic masquerading of the Romantic spirit.

If Wagner still valued the spontaneity of the present moment at least in theory, most music critics of this period set themselves to the task of certifying its absence from the masterworks while ascertaining the necessity of their formal design. Consider for example the following 1864 passage by Kahlert:

> The primeval form that underlies all musical structure was constantly in Beethoven's heaven-storming, Titanic mind. Even when the composer appeared to be acting in an arbitrary manner, he was none the less honoring the eternal law that must be observed if a musical work is to be as comprehensible and enjoyable to others as it is to its creator (in Le Huray and Day 1988: 561).

Here, as opposed to Romantic assessments of genius, spontaneity is not a value in itself, but stands as only a deceptive appearance. I argued earlier that in Romantic aesthetics the genius' spontaneity was also considered a surface phenomenon that covered a deeper sense of agreement with eternal laws. But the Romantics *believed* that this was the case--they did not need to prove it. The chaotic appearance of an artistic creation was valuable in itself and needed no further justification. In the post-Romantic period, on the contrary, comprehensibility and enjoyment of a work depended on a clear sense of its conformity with allegedly eternal and objective laws. Works or passages that did not clearly express this conformity had to be explained in order to be considered exemplary.

Becker's writings in the late 1830s had already articulated this view which would become prevalent after 1850. He compares music to architecture claiming that, just as happens in good architecture, there is no room for error or contingency in good music. Like most of his contemporaries who wanted to leave Romanticism behind, Becker's concept of music was nonetheless grounded in a Romantic metaphysics of beauty. Music symbolized for him "the spiritual idea of truth in the form of beauty" (quoted in Le

Hurray and Day 1981: 331). But Becker's "spiritual idea of truth" differed from Hegelian metaphysics, according to which the ideality of the "soul-life" was best expressed by the temporal, fluid, and open character of music. For Becker, on the contrary, the truth symbolized by music and the other arts, "necessarily excluded chance and coincidence, be the work of art simply the idealization of a model or its complete physical or moral representation." And from this it follows "that what we experience as surprising, or, as we call it, original in music is none the less *necessary*; anything that is contrived or irrelevant to the idea either makes no impression on us or causes disquiet" (quoted in Le Hurray and Day 1981: 331).

Becker's exclusion of the arbitrary is coupled with his fundamentally static and atemporal concept of music. Drawing again from the comparison between music and architecture he affirms that a musical theme is "exactly like the basic motif that governs the design of a work of architecture" (ibid.: 333), and that "the architectural development of the sketch is equivalent to the musical development of a theme" (ibid.: 333). This comparison was for him not just an abstract conceptualization, but it also referred to his way of experiencing both arts, or so he describes it when he writes of his experience of "seeing" Bach's music "in stone" when contemplating the Strasburg Minster (ibid.: 332).

Hegel's comparison between music and architecture led him to quite different conclusions. For Hegel music is fundamentally a temporal and fluid art and is, therefore, quite different from a spatial art such as architecture. Music, he writes, "annihilates not merely one form of spatial dimension, but the conditions of Space entirely, which is completely withdrawn into the ideality of the soul-life, both in its aspect of conscious life and in that of its external expression" (Hegel 1991 [1835], vol. 1: 87). Becker's opposite emphasis on the static structures of music represents another aspect of the move away

from idealism and Romantic aesthetics that triumphed in the second half of the century and which was a basis for the emergence of modern music scholarship. Not surprisingly, Becker invokes "rigorous analysis" as the way to comprehend the affinity between music and architecture. Likewise, rigorous analysis was also a privileged means to ascertain the "necessary" formal aspects of a given work.

Anthony Newcomb, in a 1983 essay dealing with the changing critical assessments of Schumann's Second Symphony, has shed light on the alliance of analysis and the task of eradicating uncertain elements from the musical canon. He documents how early critics generally considered this symphony to be a masterwork and one of Schumann's best compositions, while later evaluations put into question its canonic status on the basis of its formal weaknesses. Most early reviewers of the symphony, the first performances of which took place in 1846, noted the difficulties of this work but nonetheless referred to it as "most interesting" (Moscheles, 1849), "one of the best instrumental works that we possess" (anonymous author, late 1850), "my favorite of the five [Schumann's symphonies]" (Brahms, 1855), the "boldest and most passionate of his works" and "the most masterful of Robert's orchestral works" (Clara Schumann 1847, 1859). By the end of the nineteenth century, critics began to offer more negative evaluations of the symphony. One of the first and most influential adverse critiques was that of Kretzschmar in 1887. After this, Newcomb reports, good and bad critiques of the work appeared, but by 1903 most critics and musicologists had reached a consensus regarding its weaknesses. Throughout the twentieth century, critics have insisted on the "formal problems" and "formal incoherence" of the work, even considering it to be "deeply flawed" (Carner 1952).

Newcomb argues that this shift in critical evaluation was the result of a shift in

critical methods. He points out that early (and positive) reviews of the work focused more on the interpretation of "content," understood in terms of "ideas" or "thoughts" carried by, among other things, the "succession and evolution of thematic character." For Newcomb, "here the crucial matter is not only the succession of thematic sections and movements as a formal diagram would present them, but also the manner in which one theme is generated by and interacts with another, which manner is laden with metaphorical meaning" (1983: 236). The essay thus highlights the shift of musical criticism towards formalism and how this shift influenced the standards of musical greatness. In order to situate this shift Newcomb contrasts nineteenth-century and twentieth-century views, the former being more concerned with questions of "content" and the latter with questions of form. To be sure, twentieth-century musical analysis and criticism developed ever more rigorous and sophisticated formal approaches to music that contrast with much of nineteenth-century criticism. But this formalist development had its aesthetic and cultural roots in the later part of the nineteenth century, when it originated as a manifestation of the pervasive positivistic cultural atmosphere of the period. When formalism reached a peak in the twentieth century, the cultural and ideological bedrock that made this development possible was already facing serious challenges (Kerman 1983: 114, see p. 107).

Particularly interesting for the present discussion is Newcomb's argument that a major cause of the dissatisfaction of later reviewers with Schumann's Second Symphony is the formal design of its last movement. Dahlhaus, for instance, is puzzled by the movement and finally declares it "formally incoherent" (Newcomb 1983 : 240). Armin Gebhardt (1968) considers the movement too sectional and patchy and recommends "cutting nearly half in performance" (Newcomb 1983: 239-240). For Newcomb, the

problem with these and similar evaluations stems from the critics "wanting to claim that the finale is in any *single* form" (Newcomb 1983: 240). For him, instead, the movement "starts as one thing and becomes another, and this formal transformation is part of its meaning" (ibid.). Newcomb expands on this thought in a footnote referring to the German writer Jean Paul's ideal of character and plot. Newcomb quotes the following passage by E. Blackall:

> [Jean Paul] downplays the importance of motivation as tending to produce a rather mechanical effect, and, secondly, he places therefore more emphasis on open characters, those who can act this way or that. Fixed characters he thinks are not good in a novel because their actions are far too easily predictable. . . . This throws light on . . . the contrast we often feel in his novels between inner development and external action, a contrast which is close to ironic (quoted in Newcomb 1983: 240, n. 17).

Newcomb's reference to Jean Paul is highly pertinent since this Romantic writer, who was enormously popular in Germany during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, had strongly influenced Schumann. In fact, critical assessments of the work of Jean Paul (whose real name was Johann Paul Friedrich Richter) are reminiscent of the critiques of the symphony discussed here, as well as to other works by Schumann and other Romantic composers. According to a contributor to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Jean Paul's novels are peculiar combinations of sentiment, irony, and humour expressed in a highly subjective and involuted prose style that is marked by rapid transitions of mood. His books are formless, lacking in action, and studded with whimsical digressions, but to some extent they are redeemed by the author's profuse imagination and equal capacity for realistic detail and dreamlike fantasy." And the *Encyclopaedia's* writer adds that "after the mid-19th century the unevenness and undisciplined form of his novels began to detract rather than add to his reputation, but the deep humanity of his finest

works has preserved them from oblivion" *(Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Britannica.com, s.v., "Jean Paul").

The formal aspects in Jean Paul's and Schumann's works that were objects of negative critiques in the second half of the nineteenth century had been considered positive traits not long before. The same features denounced by later critics as uneven, undisciplined, formless, or formally incoherent were regarded until around mid-century as a manifestation of their highest artistic values: imagination, creative freedom and originality. As Newcomb argues, analytical methods changed and, with them, so did the outcome of their critical evaluations. What I want to emphasize here is that the change in methods was largely due to the influence of scientism and positivism. If since the late nineteenth century the last movement of Schumann's Second Symphony has been considered to fall short of canonic status, this is because its aesthetic value was dependent on its adherence to formal standards: standards defined by scholars strongly driven by the aspiration to treat music as scientifically as possible.

Blackall's passage about Jean Paul quoted above also draws attention towards the particular aspect of attacks on contingency discussed here. Blackall refers to Jean Paul's dislike of a mechanical development of plot and characters and his interest in developing instead unpredictable, open ones. The same interest is manifested in early Romantic music and art at large or at least in the aesthetic ideals they aspired to. But if in the early Romantic period predictability was inimical to creative freedom and originality, after mid-century this concept acquired a positive connotation stemming from the prestige of scientific knowledge, and the concurrent new interest in the control and predictability of phenomena. The formal study of music was also influenced by this fundamental goal of scientific knowledge and, in consequence, issues of definition and predictability became

important aspects of music evaluation. Since formal analyses were considered an appropriate tool to reach musical knowledge, all musical elements that did not bend themselves to analytical study were deemed marginal and even detrimental to good art. Contingency, chance, and indeterminacy were such elements, the same ones that had made improvisation a preferred means of musical expression earlier in the century.

Conclusion

Freedom becomes whim. Spontaneity becomes lack of design. What is missing now is the grand Romantic synthesis within which ideas of freedom, spontaneity, and even chaos were conceived as part of the Whole. With the collapse of the Romantic project, belief in a grand-scale metaphysical synthesis was replaced with a belief in the progressive achievement of knowledge by means of applying scientific methodologies. But by the end of the century, there were clear signs in European culture that this belief in the omnipotence of science was unfounded. Underneath the optimism generated by the seemingly unlimited possibilities of scientific progress, there lurked in this culture, as Nietzsche denounced, a deeply ingrained insecurity.

Because the optimism of the positivist era is superficial, nothing can be left to chance; because instability and insecurity are at the heart of this culture of scientific progress, freedom and spontaneity become suspect. And it is only then, when the metaphysical ground of the infallibility of genius is suspect, that the genius's intentions and visions become dogmas. If the Romantics had a place for randomness in culture, it is because they believed that randomness was only a superficial phenomenon whose real meaning was to be a part of the organic universal Whole. In the late nineteenth century

randomness was no longer a superficial phenomenon but a real threat to the painstaking construction of a European self-identity on the pillars of scientism and art-religion. The fragility of this construction was paired with the urgency of its legitimation: aggressive nationalism, positivistic-friendly metaphysics, and an enshrined and untouchable form of musical art were all manifestations of the anxiety of randomness in a culture that mistrusted itself.