

## Musical Semiotics—Science, Letters, or Art?

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This essay reviews three books, two tardily, one preemptively. I am tardy with Eero Tarasti's *Theory of Semiotics*.<sup>1</sup> I am still more tardy in responding to Márta Grabócz's *Morphologie des oeuvres pour piano de Liszt*,<sup>2</sup> but have the excuse that it was recently reissued in France following an ephemeral first edition in Hungary. Raymond Monelle's *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*<sup>3</sup> has not been published yet, but I think it will be evident why I want to include reference to his work in this context.

With the outstanding exception of Robert Hatten's recent writings, which are getting deservedly good press, I doubt that many readers of *Intégral* will know much of the circle of work in which Tarasti's plays a leading role.<sup>4</sup> Without offering anything like a full account, I would like to suggest the ambience of the (approximately) biannual International Congresses on Musical Signification (ICMS), which are one manifestation of this circle. Tarasti instigated these meetings. There have now been five of them—ICMS I in Imatra, 1986; II in Helsinki, 1988; III in Edinburgh, 1992; IV in Paris, 1994; and the most recent in Bologna. I attended all but the first. However essential his organizing initiatives may have been, Tarasti is not the center of this circle, nor is anyone else. Grabócz has participated in some of

<sup>1</sup>A *Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>*Morphologie des oeuvres pour piano de Liszt: Influence du programme sur l'évolution des formes instrumentales*, preface by Charles Rosen (Editions Kimé, Paris, 1996; first edition MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, Budapest, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Forthcoming from Indiana University Press.

<sup>4</sup>See Hatten's *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) and his "Schubert the Progressive: The Role of Resonance and Gesture in the Piano Sonata in A, D. 959," *Intégral* 7 (1993): 38–81. Hatten's *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* received the Society of Music Theory's Wallace Berry Award in 1997. A second exception with which readers of this journal will also be familiar is Alexandra Pierce, "Developing Schenkerian Hearing and Performing," *Intégral* 8 (1994): 51–124. Related work was reported to the ICMS (see below) in 1992 and 1994.

the ICMS congresses, and Monelle, who hosted the third, in all of them.<sup>5</sup>

Eero Tarasti heads musicology at the University of Helsinki. Before the last decade of recession, Finland was able to support some adventurous outreach in academic projects. In the 1970s and '80s, Tarasti was instrumental in developing a special interest in semiotics (not just musical semiotics) within his country. A number of special meetings and publishing projects in semiotics won governmental support. In the last ten years funding has deteriorated severely, as it has so widely, but it now shows some prospects of repair as a result of assistance granted under the European Economic Community's project of support for countries deemed to have specific deficiencies in their cultural infrastructure. This initiative, in turn, is part of the European response to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Finland always had a special position in the old regime: as a Western European coastal state on the Soviet border, it negotiated two spheres of influence. The academic community there found a few windows where the rest of us faced closed walls. In the first Congresses, funds were put aside to assist delegates from the Eastern block. Their attendance broadened the discourse in a very striking fashion. The E. E. C. has recently taken on some of that supportive role for funding. The Bologna meeting (in November 1996) drew over 100 participants. A majority were based in Italy, but papers were read by visitors from Estonia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Japan, Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, not to mention Western Europeans and North Americans.

At this last meeting, I had what I felt was the extraordinary privilege of a long conversation, drifting from English to German as the night wore on, with Jaroslav Juranek, from Prague. Juranek was a student of Mukarovsky, a central figure of the Prague Linguistic Circle, and so had first-hand knowledge about the sequellae of its work after its dispersal, and about the

<sup>5</sup>Both have also led the June post-doctoral seminars in musical semiotics hosted by Eero Tarasti at Turku in Finland. I have not yet had the pleasure of attending these.

consequences in academia of the Nazi takeover. I hope some scholar with more of a knack for intellectual history than I have will explore these developments while the testimony of participants is available.

As the congresses are small enough and leisurely enough to encourage interaction, the mix is stimulating, and the four official languages do more good than harm. Yet the inventory of what the guests have in common, even approached under the broad umbrella of Wittgenstein's "family resemblances," might be a very short document. The musicologists considered at length in this review share a concern to elucidate a 'semantic' interpretation of works of music within some kinds of theoretical constraints, but not even that loose characterization would cover all the presenters at the ICMS's. For example, the 1988 paper of Jan Roos (Estonia) sticks in my memory as emphasizing this diversity. His paper, entitled "The Study of Timing in an Estonian Runic Song," seemed, in its empirical positivism, to be at opposite poles from what most of the rest of us, looking for some language that would support representational interpretations, were worked up about. He pointed out to me that what we in the West had begun to find stale was quite a fresh light for his world, where musicology had been suffocating in the hegemony of Asafiev's thought for decades.<sup>6</sup> I had known of Asafiev (but not, I am afraid, of his oppressive tyranny!), the author of intonation theory, whom musical semioticians on my side of the ocean had just begun to glimpse as an obscure and neglected precursor of their own interests.<sup>7</sup>

Roos has not been the only voice for empirical science. To cite a stranger example, Fernande B. Mache treated us to a delightful analysis of the syntax of bird songs in 1992, arguing that the structural constraints and variants evident were inconceivable

<sup>6</sup>James Robert Tull, *B. V. Asafiev's "Musical Form as a Process": Translation and Commentary* (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1977).

<sup>7</sup>My background being as Western as it is, I was equally fascinated by Juranek's arguments for the continuing pertinence of Asafiev. I still believe that Asafiev's notion of "intonations" articulates intuitions that merit conceptualization, but his heritage does not seem to include any clear standards of evidence or sets of features for these.

without the support some kind of highly abstract data schema related to those we presume for language.<sup>8</sup> Without compiling a longer catalog of eclecticism, I simply wish to pose a question: can a movement of style or of thought—in this case let us say, tentatively, “musical semiotics” (terminology studiously avoided in the Congress title)—be a real factor in the work of a community when its members not only lack a common doctrine but fail to develop a consensus regarding technical vocabulary and goals? It would seem so, and I think I know why.

There is something close to a unifying problem for the ICMS: to find language to explicate signification in music and to assess the place of signification as one factor in a multi-dimensional aesthetic. The writings to which I turn in the next section, following an essential detour, certainly pertain to that agenda.

### Sense and Narrative in Greimas

The so-called Paris School of semiotics was founded by the Lithuanian linguist and literary theorist A. J. Greimas.<sup>9</sup> Both Tarasti and Grabócz draw on Greimas’s theory of narrative semantics; Monelle also flirted with it earlier. It was Grabócz’s *précis* of Greimas that persuaded me to revisit a theory that I had earlier rejected out-of-hand. If I remain unpersuaded by Greimas, I can nevertheless see (and try to explain) why his theory has been attractive to some musicologists.

Semantics is generally understood to concern the relation of signs to their objects. Any bright six-year-old may have a pretty good idea how we use the word “sign,” but either the unity this word constructs is an illusion or the nature of that unity is a difficult philosophical puzzle. There is a school of thought that holds the unity to be illusory; according to this school, to suppose

<sup>8</sup>François-Bernard Mâche, “Syntagms and paradigms in zoomusicology,” in *Musica Significans: Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Musical Signification, Edinburgh, 1992* (*Contemporary Music Review* 16/3 [1997]), 55–78.

<sup>9</sup>Algirdas-Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, translated by Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Veleie (originally entitled *Semantique structurale: Recherche de méthode* with an introduction by Ronald Schleifer (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

that the relation of smoke to fire and the relation of the word "fire" to fire are both instances of a single more basic relation is to mistake homonymity for a genuine identity. Others look for some sense behind the intuition that justifies referring to both as "signs." Dogmatism is easy here, so I find it striking that this is a puzzle Bertrand Russell acknowledged he could not solve and did not dismiss.<sup>10</sup> To say a sign is whatever represents something else is essentially circular. Ogden and Richards, who found that there were sixteen distinct meanings of "meaning,"<sup>11</sup> might be thought to have decided that the unity was an illusion, but they proposed one diagram (derived from Peirce) that covers many cases. Semantics, the study of significations, hinges on the same ambiguities as does the concept of sign.

Greimas's semantics offers a purely structural interpretation of meaning. In this regard he may seem at first like a late echo of the logicians of semantics, like Carnap, but there is a fundamental difference. Unlike any of these predecessors, who were constructing models of perfectly logical thought (assuming perhaps, but not demonstrating, that normal thought has this logic at its core), Greimas encourages us to understand his work as an explication of what actually goes on in literature and the bumpy language of daily life, and not just for language *per se*, but for all signification.<sup>12</sup>

For Greimas, two (or more) terms establish a semantic field if the assertion of one entails the negation of the other(s). This structure determines—allowing considerable latitude for translations of style—what Saussure called a "paradigm," Hjelmslev a "co-relation," and Jakobson the "axis of choice."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1940), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, with an introduction by J. P. Postgate and supplementary essays by B. Malinowski and F. G. Crookshank (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1923).

<sup>12</sup>What is called structural semantics in American linguistics (though certainly no less rigorous) is not the same. It does not, for example, accord the same privileges to pairs of positive terms.

<sup>13</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally

Greimas's scheme is not, however, merely a paraphrase of those. In those earlier structural models, successive choices from *different* paradigms or axes are bound together by a syntax. Greimas injects the syntax into a *single* semantic field. The minimal field of two contrary objects and their two negations comprises four elements. Greimas's typical syntax is a path connecting the four. (This is, of course, only the minimal structure; I shall not discuss how this minimal structure exfoliates.)

Greimas elaborated an analysis of narrative much indebted to Vladimir Propp.<sup>14</sup> The structural elements of a narrative are "actants," types of actions, which take "actors" as their arguments, recalling the linguistic syntactic or semantic schemas in which verbs are the deepest category and take nouns (subjects, direct and indirect objects, *etc.*) as their arguments. Typically, a Greimasian analysis of narrative suggests four actants grouped as two contraries with their two negations. For example, we might invoke a chase through the following four positions to paraphrase much of the plot of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*, as in Figure 1. (We would need a sub-diagram of "loving" and "loathing" to go much further.)

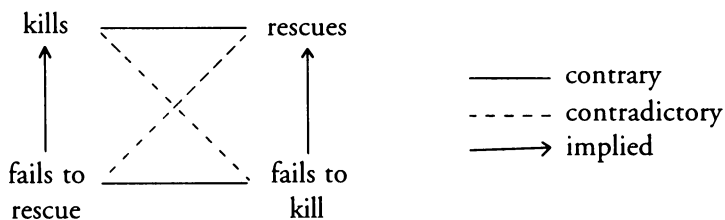
As he does with semantic relations, Greimas identifies narrative with one very particular structure rather than with a capacity for reference. The difference between the simple semantic square and the square manifested by a narrative is that components of the latter are given an order, a time series. Greimas's theory proposes that his elementary structures correspond with phases of (unconscious) cognition that generate meaningful stories. In this "generative course," the transitions between states of affairs represented initially by a static diagram attain temporality

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and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger, trans. and annotations by Roy Harris (London: G. Duckworth, 1983; reprint: LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986); Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" in Thomas Sebeok (ed.), *Style and Language* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960); Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. Francis J. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1961).

<sup>14</sup>Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Bloomington: Indiana Research Center in Anthropology, 1958).

Figure 1. A schema of actants for *Vertigo*.



through energies such as will, power, belief, and so on, which collectively he calls “modalities.”

Tarasti makes striking use of the idea of mode. Monelle was influenced primarily by the fundamental notion of semantic structure, but this background is not central to his recent papers or forthcoming book.<sup>15</sup> Grabócz’s adaptations of Greimas center on his notion of narrative as a temporalization, or ordering, of the four elements that comprise a semantic square. For all three, the motivation of their turn towards Greimas seems to have been, at

<sup>15</sup>Recent papers by Raymond Monelle include: “An Allegory of Ars Antiqua: Peter Maxwell Davies’s *Antechrist*,” in Maciej Jablonski and Jan Steszewski (eds.), *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology: Report from the Second Interdisciplinary Conference, Poznan, October 15–16, 1993* (Poznan: Society for the Advancement of the Arts and Science, 1995), 209–226; “Music and Semantics,” in Eero Tarasti (ed.), *Musical Signification: Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis of Music* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 91–107; “The Postmodern Project in Music Theory” in Eero Tarasti (ed.), *Musical Semiotics in Growth* (Imlatra/Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 37–56; “What Is a Musical Text?” in *Musical Semiotics in Growth*, 245–260; “BWV886 as Allegory of Listening,” in *Musica Significans: Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Musical Signification, Edinburgh, 1992* (*Contemporary Music Review* 16/4 [1997]), 79–88; “Scottish Music, Real and Spurious,” in T. Mäkelä (ed.), *Music and Nationalism in 20th-Century Great Britain and Finland* (Hamburg: von Bockel, 1997), 87–110; “Euphoric and Dysphoric Signs in Mozart’s Simple Recitative,” in *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the International Semiotic Society, Imlatra, 1993* (forthcoming); “Time and Temporality in Music,” in Gino Stefani and Luca Marconi (ed.), *Atti del Quinto Convegno Internazionale sulla Significazione Musicale, Bologna, 1996* (forthcoming).

least in large part, the possibility offered by his scheme of ascribing a semantic structure to music not logically dependent on reference to the world, but which can, nonetheless, support such references.

Narrative construed this way is somewhat different from any of the theories advanced in the anthology of musical narrative theories published as Volume 12 of *The Indiana Theory Review*. Maus, for example, begins with the idea that the attribution of narrative character to music is ultimately a comparison between music and literary genres.<sup>16</sup> The Greimasian standpoint would seem to hold out the possibility that music and literature, when they are narrative, are independent realizations of the same “deep” cognitive schema. Greimas’s followers can have their cake and eat it too. The gambit unfolds thus: here is a musical structure, which, simply on the basis of its form, we are justified in describing as semantic and narrative, even if we cannot say with confidence what it refers to, but can instead guess at what it might refer to. I risk a *reductio* to draw attention to a possible ambivalence of epistemological position. I do not really mean to make light of the problems Grabócz, Tarasti and many of the rest of us have felt we faced in asserting a discourse about representation in music.

### Grabócz

Márta Grabócz, formerly of the Academy of Sciences of Budapest where she headed studies of electro-acoustic music, now teaches at the University of Strasbourg. Announcing her interest in attributing a narrative character to more abstract compositions such as those sonata movements of Mozart and Beethoven, Grabócz acknowledges a debt to Rosen’s *Classical Style*.<sup>17</sup> This book provided her an antidote to the romantic idealization of the Mozartean sonata form as a static architecture,

<sup>16</sup>Fred Everett Maus, “Music as Narrative,” *Indiana Theory Review* 12/1–2 (1991): 1–34.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971).



that is to say, its idealization as an antipode to romanticism. Perhaps English-language musicology suffered less from such stereotyping than French. In any event, she could well have quoted Rosen from *Sonata Forms*,

The sonata forms [provide] an equivalent for dramatic action, and [confer] on the contour of this action a clear definition. The sonata has an identifiable climax...which is symmetrically resolved... It has a dynamic closure analogous to the denouement of eighteenth-century drama...<sup>18</sup>

Grabócz's scholarly output includes extensive studies of Liszt's style (most recently, her book *Morphologie des oeuvres pour piano de Liszt* for which Charles Rosen contributed a preface), some studies of sonata-form movements of Mozart and Beethoven,<sup>19</sup> and recent writings on electro-acoustic music.<sup>20</sup> All of these exploit her characteristic technique, formulated in Greimasian terms, but also bring to mind in their methodical rigor the program of stylistic analyses envisioned by Jean-Jacques Nattiez.<sup>21</sup>

The Greimasian category of most fundamental importance to her work is the "isotopy." The notion behind "isotopy" is that of a unifying perspective, a semantic universe or sub-universe. Grabócz's application of the idea is cautious. The Liszt studies show the most developed version. First, through comparison ranging over several works, she establishes fairly broad categories

<sup>18</sup>Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980; revised edition, 1988), pp. 9–10.

<sup>19</sup>"Analyse du premier mouvement de la *Sonate op. 2 no. 3 en ut majeur* de Beethoven," in D. Pistone and J.-P. Mialaret (eds.), *Analyse musicale & perception* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1994), 122–42; "Introduction à l'analyse narratologique de la forme-sonate du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le premier mouvement de la Symphonie K. 338 de Mozart," *Musurgia: Analyse et Pratique Musicales* 3/1 (1996): 73–84.

<sup>20</sup>"La musique contemporaine finlandaise: Conception gestuelle de la macrostructure: Saariaho et Lindberg," *Les cahiers du CIREM (Centre International de Recherches en Esthétique Musicale)* 26–27 (1993): 155–65; "The Demiurge of Sounds and the Poeta Doctus: François-Bernard Mâche's Poetics and Music," *Contemporary Music Review* 8/1 (1993): 131–82.

<sup>21</sup>Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Fondements d'une semiologie de la musique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

called *sèmes*, textures or figures that approach semantic synonymy. *Sèmes* are the minimal units of reference. Her largest groupings of them refer to storms, to pastoral or pantheistic spiritualism, to heroism and battle, and to the macabre. It is hardly surprising to learn that right-hand *tremolo* over scales and arpeggios are typical signifiers of storms, but as such descriptive detail aggregates along with historical references (Paganini's portrayal of storms, for example) and references to poetic models, titles, letters, and so on, a very persuasive system emerges.

Grabócz then discovers a large group of *classèmes*, which contextualize the *sèmes*. As I understand it, this notion was developed by Greimas as a generalization of the class of features and structures (syncategoremic features) that indicate syntax in language. Grabócz adapts the term for references generated by phrase structures and themes rather than by smaller units. Such types are the "triumphal," the "lamenting," and so on. The *sèmes* and *classèmes* are related to what Ratner, Hatten and Monelle call "topics" and also to what Asafiev calls "intonations." (I don't want to suggest that all these notions should be construed as identical, though I will not be concerned with the differences here. The point in common is that they are all concepts which allow one to speak about semantic units in music as *components*, not the whole piece and not its whole meaning.) The isotopies are more complex groupings of *classèmes* and *sèmes* making, one might say, a sub-language, or a perspective of understanding.

No one has proposed a method of discovering these units, and one must indulge Grabócz's claim of objectivity as reflecting an aspiration rather than an attainment. The classifications always reflect intuitions that synthesize knowledge about a range of musical repertory, its surviving traditions and its cultural context. The role accorded to personal judgment is not, of course, an unlimited license. Grabócz's scholarship is meticulous by any measure. Her judgments of synonymy reflect close examinations of a broad musical repertory, associated documents and alternate drafts of compositions. I believe she has also been the first to

demonstrate in an articulate fashion the nature and extent of Liszt's debt to Beethoven.<sup>22</sup>

The final stages of Grabócz's analysis relate the successions of elements drawn from an isotopy as they are manifested in the course of a complete composition, establishing the structural equivalent of a plot. In her studies of earlier music she invokes Greimas's basic narrative categories of euphoric and dysphoric narrative, but not with very ample development. In the Liszt studies, she gives some attention to the question of modalization, but this is limited to a concern with the two categories "doing" (*faire*) and "being" (*être*). As Tarasti pushes the envelope much further in this domain, I will discuss modality in conjunction with his work. Among the works she studies extensively is one we encounter again in Tarasti's book, Liszt's *Vallée d'Obermann*. I have not made a full concordance of their results, but my impression is that they are mutually supportive.

The question must always be posed, regarding studies of musical representation, whether any of the solid results are more than structural descriptions of sound recast in a more florid idiom of description. In the case of Liszt, and with other composers too, tempo and texture play a large role in determining the categories to which Grabócz assigns materials. Retrospectively, the categories can indeed be identified by syntactic features. It is not the case, as it would be with language, that she discovers the kind of double articulation in which similarity of acoustic structure has no bearing on similarity of reference. However, at least for Classical and Romantic repertoires, there is no way that her categories could be predicted from a neutral assessment of the sound, and there is no way that the common acoustic characteristics within each of her isotopies could be predicted from a description of their representational function. (Where she is dealing with electro-acoustic music,

<sup>22</sup>Béla Bartók, in his appreciation of Liszt, writes of the earlier composer's unprecedented eclecticism in his sources, and makes a special point of noting the puzzling absence of Beethoven's influence. See Béla Bartók, "Liszt Problems," in *Béla Bartók Essays*, selected and edited by Benjamin Suchoff (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 501-10.

reliance on information about methods of production blurs the distinction between syntactic and referential descriptions. I certainly do not regard this as lessening the value of this more recent work, however.)

Little as I like to fuss about other people's low budgets, I have to complain that the publisher has released this complicated study of Liszt in what seems to be 8-point type. Of course this inconvenience is greater if you are older and less if you are younger, but I think the inconvenience is also greater in a second language, where the contextual clues come more slowly. The book might never attract large enough an audience to motivate translation, but it merits study by an important group of readers who are probably capable but not speedy with French. I hope the defects of the vehicle do not prevent them from an engagement with the content. Perhaps it is also my duty to complain that the computer-generated index has not been edited, but this is only a minor irritant.

To know Grabócz's work will allow the reader to enter Tarasti's, and perhaps even Monelle's, with more trust. Tarasti, brimming with philosophical impulses, has little space for the thoroughness of detail Grabócz offers in treating similar problems. Monelle, for whom a newly formulated species of 'topic' (roughly analogous to Grabócz's *sème*) is central, does not stint on detail nor on background information, but he resists setting boundaries somewhat. "Exhaustive" accounts are not on his agenda.

### Tarasti

Tarasti says that the two principal sources of his *Theory of Musical Semiotics* are Greimas and Peirce—the first predominantly, Peirce as a secondary theme. I find this a miscue. The borrowings from Peirce are very slight, a few terms adopted rather uncritically from the academic common-places of the day, with very little reference to Peirce's manner of feeling problems out. On the other hand, the study is thoroughly impregnated with the thought of Ernst Kurth. Tarasti avows that Kurth, whose

*Musikpsychologie*<sup>23</sup> we are indeed guilty of neglecting, will someday be seen as no less important than Schenker. Kurth provides the true counter-theme for the study, even if his terminology and his specific conceptual categories are not evoked persistently. Tarasti refers to Kurth as a "proto-semiotician of music." The term appropriately recalls to us Kurth's insistence that music is meaningful, but it is deceptive in ignoring what in Kurth is most unsemiotic. For Kurth, there is no real distinction between signifier and signified. The values of music are inherent in its substance. We may find that the tension between this point of view and the essential Greimasian basis of his discussion (maintaining from the outset the distinction between signifier and signified) is the ultimate conundrum of Tarasti's investigation.<sup>24</sup>

Tarasti divides his book into two parts. In the four chapters of the first, Tarasti provides an overview of his theoretical position. The seven chapters of the second part comprises a suite of analyses. Monelle's review is somewhat hesitant to endorse the complexity of these.<sup>25</sup> He advises the reader to begin with the briefer and more literary of the analytical chapters (Chapter 7 on Liszt and Chapter 8 on Mussorgsky) and to save the heavy stuff until one's muscles have toned up a bit. My counsel would have to be the opposite, reflecting an observation that Nicholas Cook offers in his also generally sympathetic review,<sup>26</sup> that the greatest difficulty of this book is that much of it is fragmentary. The most complete analysis is the one provided as Chapter 6.2 of the G-minor *Ballade* of Chopin. I say, do what you can quickly with Part I; that is, learn where things are in it so you can refer back to

<sup>23</sup>Ernst Kurth, *Musikpsychologie* (Berlin: M. Hesse, 1931; 2nd ed., Bonn: Krompholz, 1947).

<sup>24</sup>Do not confuse the failure (or refusal) to distinguish between signifier and signified with the observation well-known from Derrida and developed much earlier by Peirce that the element signified in one instance turns out to be only a signifier in the next.

<sup>25</sup>Raymond Monelle, "Review of Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*," *Music and Letters* 77 (1996): 147–49.

<sup>26</sup>Nicholas Cook, "Putting the Meaning Back in Music, or Semiotics Revisited," *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/1 (1996): 104–23.

them fairly efficiently, and then dive into Chapter 6.2 and work through it inch by inch. This analysis is the one, above the others, where Tarasti's thought can be fully engaged. In the discussions of Liszt, Mussorgsky, Sibelius, Fauré, and Debussy, I do not see how there is the slightest hope that critical readers will "buy in" unless they are equipped to imagine for themselves the level of detail that Chapter 6.2 offers. It is a tough slog, but it is the essential key to the rest. I will center my remarks on this section, with digressions to the theoretical topics of Part I as they are called up by Tarasti's methodical exposition.

The analysis begins by asserting a division of the *Ballade* into thirteen parts, identified with "isotopies" (pp. 154–56). Tarasti's isotopies here are not buttressed by comparisons across opuses, as are Grabócz's in the Liszt studies and his own earlier examples in *Myth and Music*.<sup>27</sup> Both Cook and Monelle criticize Tarasti's retention of this unfriendly Greimasian term for what turn out to be, as they see it, simply segments of the composition. I do not think this criticism is quite fair. Recall that the fundamental notion behind "isotopy" (if I have it right, and with Greimas I am never certain) is of a unifying perspective, a semantic universe or sub-universe. Neither the segmentation that Nattiez derives by comparing similarity and difference, nor the segmentation that form theory derives by imposing a predetermined notion of a schema, propose any guarantee of the internal coherence of the units they reveal. Tarasti is proposing that each of his sections will be found internally coherent (in relation to narrative functions). The difference is all the more striking if we note that our favorite theory of coherence, which still seems to be Schenkerian (essentially a theory of continuity) has no inherent sensibility for segmentation, however responsive it may be to segmental schemes derived from other perspectives.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Eero Tarasti, *Myth and Music* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

<sup>28</sup>See David Lidov, "Our Time With the Druids: What (and How) We Can Recupérate From Our Obsession With Segmental Hierarchies and Other 'Tree Structures,'" in *Musica Significans: Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Musical Signification, Edinburgh, 1992* (*Contemporary Music Review* 16/4 [1997]), 1–28.

But this was to speak of origins. Is the ensuing segmentation distinctive? Here we might like a bit more from the author in the way of comparisons of alternatives. His divisions largely follow notated tempo changes and gross changes of textures, so there is usually little about which to quarrel concerning the boundaries. Still, there are some characteristics of his divisions, independent of the theory, that are distinctive. His sections are of very unequal length, ranging from 6 to 33 measures even before the 45-measure section of the *Presto con fuoco*. They do not entail a further hierarchy of either subdivisions or larger groupings, and the assignment of certain boundary measures begs a rationale. For example, measures 105–6, which herald the concluding *Presto*, are grouped with that section, not the one before, of which they might be said to form the peroration. The narrative program which Tarasti attributes to the *Ballade* offers no choice. Could a different narrative program could take it the other way? That is not the right question. The point here is that there is a dependence between the narrative attribution and the segmental analysis. *Prima facie*, this relationship justifies an unfamiliar terminology.

Tarasti does not propose a *method* of segmentation; rather, it remains the task of the analysis to justify the segmentation adopted retrospectively, by describing the coherence of the sections and their interrelationships. The coherence of each isotopic section is sketched in advance by characterizing it in terms of the deepest modalities, “being” (*être*) and “doing” (*faire*), and their negations. If we may forestall for a bit both the criticism and the jokes which this particular reduction may inevitably call forth, let us take note of the very obvious and important intuition it expresses. For any sensitive listener in the European tradition of art music some passages seem active, some inactive, some to be on the verge of action (“not-doing” will be the formal term) and others, perhaps, characterized by the liquidation of a previous identity (“not-being”). The turn from ordinary speech to jargon is a legitimate attempt to invoke abstract categories which are *not language-dependent*. To illustrate, the seven-measure introduction to the *Ballade*, rich in

hints and suggestions but delaying a firm sense of direction, is “not-doing.” The magical codetta to the second theme (m. 45), where we can easily sense the melody we had just heard dissolving into a hazy distance is “not-being.” (This is described as “post-modalization,” for it is the previous theme which is now “not-being,” not the current texture [p. 155].)

The next two stages of Tarasti’s analysis characterize each of the thirteen sections first in terms of the “temporality” and secondly in terms of their “spatiality.” I confess grave doubts about the underlying premise. Simply to serve notice regarding an issue that I will take up again when we come to Monelle, the pertinence of these fundamental Kantian categories of intuition, which survive unscathed in Greimas, is a little too self-evident for my taste. Movement is a fundamental category of musical experience. Does the human mind necessarily deal with motion by parsing it as a change in spatial location over time? This is no empty question for musical phenomenology, but put it aside for now. Tarasti follows Greimas’s axiom that narrative schema are made concrete by distinct modes of manifestation in space and time. What Tarasti provides in his analysis of temporal articulation are descriptions that consider both salient structural traits and the qualities of movement to which they contribute. The second isotopy (mm. 8–35), for example, is characterized by its prevalent waltz rhythm, but contradicted by the syncopation due to the absence of a downbeat pulse in the bass and also by the “hesitant, lingering” that these structural features support. Spatial articulation concerns pitch, as we would all no doubt predict. Harmonic relations are characterized as occupying an inner space and registral relations as an exterior space. Tarasti notes how the middle register of the piano provides a home base for this composition and how ruptures of the predominating spatial configuration for each section provide the most typical ways of ending them.

The fourth phase of the analysis (pp. 161–65) is more distinctive and more immediately rewarding. The “actorial articulation” concerns thematic structure. Tarasti’s approach is fresh in that he deals frankly with a domain of ambiguity that



we have long been aware of but not learned to regard in a unifying perspective: the emergence and dissolution of themes. Schoenberg noted the “liquidation” of themes in development;<sup>29</sup> others have commented on Sibelius’s technique of inculcating the reverse process. We know that a figuration such as we find in the Baroque prelude is not the same as a theme, and that in a fugue a counterpoint is not necessarily a second subject. To my knowledge, however, there is no current terminology that unifies all of this, the scope of vagueness and concreteness in the presentation of thematic structure within elaborated composition. Tarasti’s Greimasian term is “engagement.” The music engages an *actor* as a theme or motive emerges that is sufficiently distinct and prominent to absorb our subjective identification, and disengages from that actor as it is varied or fragmented in a manner that weakens its identity.

This same notion of engagement had also figured in the description of temporality and spatiality. It served there to lend nuance and establish relations between different parts, but I am not sure whether it is quite the same idea in those contexts. Engagement in time or in space yields a firm reference point—a principal register, key, speed or style of movement—but perhaps only by exception can we feel that “engagement” corresponds in this context to the articulation of a distinctive object (or subject) as it does with themes.

For Tarasti’s description of the *Ballade* as a whole, variation of engagement is critical. The *Ballade* appears to have two principal themes (announced at mm. 9 and 68), but both emerge from the same matrix of motivic materials.<sup>30</sup> Their opposition as possibly alternate phases of some same substance culminates when the second theme, which in its first presentation seemed subsidiary

<sup>29</sup>Schoenberg’s concept of liquidation is addressed throughout his *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

<sup>30</sup>See his figure on p. 162; there is some confusion in the numbering of figures in this chapter. Tarasti doesn’t point out the most obvious common feature of the two themes, namely their reliance on a motive of three dotted half notes—strong, weak, strong—the middle one usually the highest, sometimes the lowest.

and which subsequently seemed to become predominant, dissolves (disengages) in favor of remnants of the first theme that regain engagement. To wrap up a description this way is already to evoke narration, but we are getting a bit ahead of the game.

Before “narrative programs” take the floor, we would, if we stay the full course, scan the thirteen isotopies five more times to characterize each in terms of the principal modal articulations “will” (*vouloir*), “know” (*savoir*), “can” (*pouvoir*), “must” (*devoir*), and the complex family of “believe” (*croire*) (pp. 165–78). What are these modalities? Modality is a rather heterogeneous family if we take all the notions that bear this name to have important relations among each other, and I think we must do so for reasons of shared historical influence. We can exclude for convenience the modes (*i.e.*, scales) of music, which are not unrelated but which have been out-of-touch with the other cousins for some centuries. In traditional grammar, the modals are a set of specific verbs defined both by their manner of use and by their semantic effect, and identified somewhat differently for each language in which they occur. They comprise the verbs that indicate the intentions and convictions of a speaker with regard to a proposition expressed as a dependent clause (I think *p*, I doubt *p*, I hope *p*, *etc.*). In some kinds of formal logics, modal operators sort propositions by their applicability to various possible worlds. Tarasti acknowledges an interest in the modal logic of Wright.<sup>31</sup> Wright explains that his point of departure was the analogy between the operations of modal operators on sentences and of quantifiers on sets. Nothing of substance from this investigation survives in Tarasti. Tarasti uses some of Wright’s formalisms as a kind of punctuation, but his system derives entirely from Greimas. Yet, I am not sure that Tarasti’s interpretation of Greimas’s system fully squares with Greimas’s own exploitation of it. I say this most hesitantly, knowing that Tarasti worked with Greimas. The difference, if it is a difference, stems from a fundamental condition of musical narration. Tarasti’s system must largely obscure the distinction between the quality of an

<sup>31</sup>Georg Henrik von Wright, *Norm and Action: A Logical Enquiry* (London: Routledge and Degan Paul, 1963).

action and the quality of our attitude toward it (but see the discussion of “belief” on p. 20). Music, in his scheme, does not make that first Aristotelian cut between narration as enactment and narration as recounting.

It is really the heritage of Kurthian music psychology that guides Tarasti’s encounter with modes. Tarasti’s modalities are notions of the subjective energies of the events that unfold in the music. Although the point of his formality is to circumvent dependence on *ad hoc* paraphrase, I think a brief venture into paraphrase can suggest what is at stake. The modality of “will” concerns effort. After the first waltz theme is presented, it dissolves in a rhythmically and motivically intense passage which rapidly builds energy: disengagement from the theme, high manifestation of will. “Know” receives, I think, a less persuasive development from Tarasti. It is not wholly clear to me whether he is getting at the apparent sentience of a projected musical subject or simply indicating a rough measure of information content. What Tarasti intends by “can” could, perhaps, be better expressed as “power.” Note that in our spontaneous perception of music, power and effort, though linked, are quite different. A passage can appear effortlessly powerful. Tarasti identifies “can” with performance values, and virtuoso passages are understood to manifest this modality. I think this may be an unfortunate shortcut, but it is easy to follow. “Must” becomes identified with the obligations of grammar, the force of tonality and of other conventions. Here, too, a more subtle working-out seems called for, because not every convention has recourse to subjective energy and not every subjectively experienced compulsion can be identified with conventional rules—indeed, counterexamples abound! “Believe” involves a very complicated sublogic about making things appear to be what they are, or not, which I will not attempt to summarize, but within this category Tarasti makes what may be his most compelling observations about the *Ballade*.

Via this subsystem of modalities, the *scherzando* section beginning at m. 138 becomes characterized as a “deception.” Were I speaking of this passage in a literary manner, I might simply have likened it to a dream sequence in a film or a fantasy.

The effect is an important part of romantic aesthetic strategy. Think of the major-key stanzas in the first song of *Winterreise*; there we can anchor the sense of illusion in the text. I have noticed this “tone of voice” in many compositions and often wished for a better way to describe it. The suggestion that we might get at the underlying relations systematically is certainly an intriguing notion to me, or the sense of arrival at a moment of tragic “truth,” which Tarasti rightly identifies at the very end of the *Ballade* as its emotional culmination.

Note that our problem must be defined here, not as discovering a proof that such-and-such an interpretation of a passage is the correct one, but as discovering an analysis which finds the most fundamental entailments of that interpretation once it is proposed. Has Tarasti given us a systematic approach that gets to the heart of what is entailed in hearing a passage of instrumental music as situated in a world of fantasy or in hearing it as situated in a world of truth? He certainly does not claim to have finished the job. (Note his acute critique [p. 178] of a problem outstanding.) Whether he is on the right road, I cannot yet tell, but it is one that merits intense and patient investigation. My *Elements of Semiotics* reframes the issue of modalities broached here in a manner which is much simpler and, I think, clearer, but frankly, it merely restates the problem.<sup>32</sup> A fuller working out of Tarasti’s stance would seem to promise a more profound and, ultimately, more elegant perspective than the one I settled for.

## Monelle

I am, with some approximation, equally too late to review Tarasti and too early to review Monelle. I comment here, with certain constraints, on an essentially complete draft of his forthcoming book, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*. The rules by which we would like to play are that my reader could instantly obtain a personal copy with which to contest my reading. A partial compensation is provided by work of Monelle already

<sup>32</sup>Lidov, *Elements of Semiotics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, forthcoming).

available to the public, but some caution is in order there. Since his handbook *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music*<sup>33</sup> rolled off the press, Monelle's writing has taken a turn barely foreshadowed by that book. On the other hand, much of *The Sense of Music* expands and perfects papers Monelle has addressed to conferences and to university audiences on three continents.<sup>34</sup> Counting these other sources, then, I am not speaking exclusively about secret scripture.

Monelle resists grand summaries in his current writing, but I do not think the following misrepresents his position. Since music is part of culture and culture part of music, the description of specifically musical elaborations of cultural themes is a musical, not extra-musical, concern. It may not be evident at first glance what Monelle means by the musical elaboration of culture, but the idea is quickly made concrete by a multitude of cases.

He builds his first bridge between syntax and semantics by a thorough reworking of Ratner's category of topics.<sup>35</sup> We learn first that "topic" as proposed by Ratner is not an eighteenth-century conception but a twentieth-century one, which can be adequately defined only within our present consciousness of symbolic operations. His logic makes exceptionally sound use of Peirce's simplest distinctions (so often cited to no avail) between icon, index and symbol. Typically, a topic is an icon enchained to a symbol. Second, topic is a legitimate tool for the investigation of music generally, not just in the period where Ratner exploited the idea. Third, the specific repertory of topics proposed by Ratner is heterogeneous, of uneven reliability, and susceptible to much more exacting investigation.

The documentation of these claims becomes an exhilarating chase that crosses boundaries of media, nations and centuries. When it pauses, we have all the evidence we need to go to court, but also teasers aplenty for sequels. Perhaps one would not have

<sup>33</sup>Raymond Monelle, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (London: Harwood, 1993).

<sup>34</sup>See footnote 16.

<sup>35</sup>Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980).

anticipated that the distinction between the "*pianto*" as a sighing motive or a weeping motive makes the liveliest musicology, but on this turns definitive sense of what musical symbolism actually entails. Or, for another case, what is at stake in musical indications of horses? Well, it depends which kind of horse, a musical, not extra-musical matter embroiled in dotted rhythms, tempo and mood as well as the paintings, poetry, military life and economies in which the horse played a vast and critical role in Europe for centuries. In Monelle's treatment of the technique, topic analysis becomes for musicology what "iconography" is for art history. Indeed, a precise comparison of the principles of these two methods would be a nice little study in semiotics, but I choose not to squeeze it in here.

Lest anything in the preceding suggest that Monelle is chiefly involved with ornamental matters, I must aver that this is not at all the case, although he has the rhetorical facility of using lighter problems to prepare more difficult ones. Among his most persistent, probing studies is his analysis of temporality (defined here as the cultural, rather than physical or biological image of time). He has constructed, I think, the first really persuasive interpretation of this term for musicology. He opens his discussion of this theme with a statement that struck me at first as patently wrong, but which, subsequently, he largely justifies. I cite the passage to highlight the problems: "Since music operates in time, it is peculiarly well equipped to present an image of the cultural conception of time; far better than language...literature, drama and film." On first view, is this not both a *non-sequitur* and false? To have an idea of anything, we must abstract it from its context. Music, thoroughly enmeshed in time, would seem the medium least equipped to suggest an abstraction of time. A painting of a rocky landscape immediately conjures images of changeless duration. A painting of battle calls up the dynamics of rapid change. Does not a painting make us think about time because it is outside of time, very much as Beethoven so consistently makes us think about vast spaces?

Monelle provides responses to these objections (though they are not quite lined up as such). He provides a nuanced semiotic

analysis that distinguishes semantic and syntactic marks in musical time-structure (the easier part) and that also shows where the syntactic impinges on the semantic (a far rarer achievement). He is able to argue, partly on the basis of meticulous analyses and rewritings of phrase structures in dance movements by Bach, that a double world of temporality emerged by stages in music during just that historical epoch when industrial technologies were forcing Europe more and more to live by a homogeneous and dehumanized clock time. These two principal temporalities are disengaged more dramatically in the Classical era. Monelle discovers this via an outstanding reading of A. B. Marx. The two primary temporalities, reflecting Marx's "Satz" and "Gang," which he terms "lyric" and "progressive" (never "linear" or "non-linear," thankfully), became in the nineteenth century the basis for a new *rapprochement* with the novel. Monelle explores this *rapprochement* via a synthetic review of literary theories of the novel, finding a persuasive analog to his two temporalities in a cross-section of these theories. Monelle's range is virtuosic, both in theory and in musical repertory. Other essays in this volume concern Mahler, in the perspective of text and *auteur* theory, Peter Maxwell Davies iconography in his *AnteChrist*, and an elaborate dissection of the A $\flat$  fugue from *WTC II* where an interior conflict of styles is treated, after the manner of De Man,<sup>36</sup> as an allegory of listening. Also included is a novel essay on Mahler's near contemporary (and fellow Manhattanite) Charles Ives.

The study of Mahler in terms of the image it constructs of a persona (identified fictionally but not factually with the composer) brings us to a further point of coincidence and difference in musical narratologies. In his discussions of both engagement and belief, Tarasti leaves room for a subject who is not an actor (*i.e.*, the author or narrator or auditor), as Monelle does here from another angle. This is also a perspective that

<sup>36</sup>See Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1971), and De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

Edward Cone evoked in *The Composer's Voice*.<sup>37</sup> Naomi Cumming, an occasional ICMS participant, is a writer engaged in exploring this territory with patience, breadth and analytic consistency and very original insight. Her article on the "*Erbarne Dich*" aria from the St. Matthew Passion blends a range of critical tools including Schenkerian and rhetorical exegesis to establish musical subjectivity as a coherent field of musico-logical investigation.<sup>38</sup> She shows how several subjects are in play in the area and how the music constructs relationships among them.

### Science or Letters?

*The Sense of Music* is not, like Tarasti's or Grabócz's books, a book devoted to the exposition of unified theory. To put these researches side by side raises currently popular questions about the place of constructive theory. Writing at present very much under the influence of Ricoeur, De Man, and Derrida, but allowing himself no rhetorical obscurantism whatsoever, Monelle does his semiotics nearly bare-handed. He seems to accomplish more with ordinary language, with the most minimal recourse to technical terms, than others of us do with a heavy artillery of jargon and formalisms. His argument flows, most of the time, with the ease of an after-supper chat. Certainly the grace and fluidity of the thought seem to have much to do with the priority accorded to criticism over theoretical architecture. Tarasti seems lumbering and difficult in this company and his heavier gait appears to have much to do with his loyalty to an abstract theory. I feel impelled to intervene on this issue, to resist this first impression, which nourishes an impatience with musical 'science'<sup>39</sup> in favor of 'letters,' and which encourages the illusion fostered by Derrida or his epigones that we can put unified,

<sup>37</sup>Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>38</sup>Naomi Cumming, "The Subjectivities of 'Erbarne Dich,'" *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997): 5-44.

<sup>39</sup>I take the word in the European sense, referring to rigorously organized knowledge, not necessarily empirical or experimental.



totalizing theories behind us as the error of another age, part of the evil age of masculinist, imperial capitalism. Monelle, himself, seems all too ready to endorse this error in his introductory chapter.

On closer inspection we will see that this first impression was misleading. There are some special difficulties for the reader in Tarasti's book, which I will come to in a moment, but looking carefully at both books, we see that general, abstract, "totalizing" theory—semiotic theory, in the present case—is essential to all the successes in either. Monelle's work in topics departs from one of the most widely generalized frameworks of semiotics, Peirce's trichotomy of signs as icons, indices and symbols. It is a scheme with some very, very murky philosophical entailments. Monelle obviously knows enough about the problems to avoid the pot holes. The chapters which rely on this abstract, global conception are the easiest ones to follow. There is a gradual transition. The later, certainly more difficult arguments depend on more local, *ad hoc* adaptations of literary, not semiotic theory. The results are brilliant but do not give the same powerful impression of a new way to go on with musicology. Peirce has given Monelle the kind of leverage that Hatten gets from the very general semiotic theory of markedness.<sup>40</sup> If Greimasian wings do not offer the same grace of flight to Grabócz or Tarasti, it is not because the theory is too abstract or too general but because it is too local and too specific. Though he claimed to be theorizing about the fundamental conditions of making sense, I am not convinced that Greimas really reflects on any sense other than literary sense. The theory lacks the generality we should demand from semiotics. Neither Tarasti nor Grabócz is saying "let us try Greimas's theory in music to see whether he was correct or not." The question might be pointless if we really expected a yes or no answer. Rather, the point of the question is that it leads to qualifications. The disinclination to correct or improve Greimasian theory by making it more general (*i.e.*, by subtracting from it what is primarily literary) is one factor that encumbers the work.

<sup>40</sup>Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*.

Semiotics must be a comparative study and it must compare media. At the heart of the enterprise is what I call the comparative study of articulatory structure. To put in a nutshell a matter which merits full elaboration, music composed with notes (not electro-acoustic music) is more fluid than language and less fluid than painting.<sup>41</sup> These are conditions of the signifiers that deeply affect what can be signified. Greimas's orientation to polar oppositions and to logical exclusion lose much of their force when transposed to musical analysis. Tarasti handles the transition with good effect, I think, when he considers "engagement." He faces the problem head on when he admits the problematic character of subject/object distinctions. At other times the strain and stress of the adaptation is simply ignored. Does music really distinguish as unambiguously between "doing" and "being" as the French language may? A famous graffito anticipates this very question, and I think it lightly veils a worthy hint: "To be is to do"—Sartre; 'To do is to be'—Camus; 'Do be do be do'—Sinatra."

A systematic perspective on comparative articulation could only enhance Monelle's work on temporality. The particular capacities of music (*vis-à-vis* other media) to suggest or ambiguate boundaries, categories and hierarchies cannot be irrelevant either to the construction of his "lyric" and "progressive" time or to their connections with literary forms. Monelle nearly pins this down in discussing the role of period structure in the two types of writing he teases apart. Just what the relation is between metrical symmetry and the expanded present of lyric time (the present time of single scene in a novel) is not quite specified, however, beyond that they go together. Similarly, his sensitivity to language/music differences is, indeed, a great strength of the book. On a cue from Hatten he notes, for example, that musical topics may be more like a coloration than like a distinct stream of verbal argument, but I think these principles of difference can be pursued in more detail. No doubt they will be. One book cannot do everything, and to have offered these further horizons is the exceptional achievement of this author who is more systematic than he wishes to admit. I only suggest my mild complaints lest

<sup>41</sup>For the elaborated arguments see David Lidov, *Elements of Semiotics*.

we be lulled into a blithe conclusion that criticism can supplant theory. To carry the work further will require a dialogue between the ongoing 'science' of general semiotic theory (far from finished or closed) and the 'letters' of specific critical interpretation.

Construction (a "scientific" project of articulating unities and idealizing abstraction) and deconstruction (a literary project of exposing the fault lines of abstract constructions and insisting on concrete figural manifestation as content) are permanent, symbiotic and mutually dependent moments of thought. With all its monological density, we can still see an ancestry in the Derridean technique that links it with the ironic aphoristic manner of Schlegel and the grandfather anthology of after dinner speeches, the *Symposium*. Socrates and Alcibiades can "protest too much" that their matter is independent of the manner, only because the dependence of thought on figures has been so blatantly problematized through the whole dialogue. Derrida, who does not want to build systems, writes, so far as I know, only about philosophers who were devoted to doing so. If abstract thought has, in the extreme, some dangerous allegiance with totalitarian politics as De Man's followers claim, then figural thought shorn of such discipline surely has an equally dangerous allegiance with anarchy and brute force. (Bullies don't define their terms consistently.) Indeed, the idea that we are suddenly to be "post" a "modernism" unified by its reified abstractions and excessively general conceptions is surely in itself, a good example of "totalizing theory" run amok, an example which no sensitive architect of systems would be guilty of formulating. And besides this, absence of system is a bore. Unity is now sometimes said to be an overrated value in our analysis of music, but have these critics really confronted the opposite? (As I write this, I have been snatching a few moments here and there to learn the accompaniment of the Artunian *Trumpet Concerto*, foisted on me by a student. The harmonic progressions range aimlessly from those of the Baroque recitative to something like Prokofiev. The rhythmic styles are still more inconsistent. The sonority is

brilliant, but surprise in such a universe is as impossible as real passion.)

### Science and Art

Tarasti and Grabócz do music theory a real service, in my view, by their loyalty to an embracing philosophic and musical perspective in a decade which shows such impatience with system as ours does. Beyond whatever strains that effort entails, there is a further challenge for their readers—a language difficulty—which is related to but which must not be identified with the fact that Grabócz's book is in small typeset French or that for Tarasti, Finnish is his mother tongue and French the language of his graduate studies. The problematic language is the language of Asafiev, of Kurth, and of a nexus of Eastern European musicologists which is inevitably strenuous for us. No matter how felicitous the translations, ideas are enchaind in ways to which we are not accustomed. I well remember working through some of Kurth twenty-five years ago, sensing that it was terribly important, but having no idea what to do with it, beyond a vague reaction that Zuckermandl had not settled the whole matter.<sup>42</sup> Asafiev is now available in an English translation, but to have the text simply does not give us the whole context. Signifiers are not ready to hand in modern English academic writing for what these writers are signifying in linguistic traditions that Tarasti knows and that are new for many of us. The contacts are a gift and deserve our patience and merit much groping on our part. I am not in a position to judge how well Tarasti has represented these traditions, but as a partial outsider, I am grateful for the further access.

These are, I suggested earlier, also the sorts of contacts which the ICMS's had offered as conferences which bridge several linguistic communities and which do not have recourse, as perhaps international conferences on genetics or subatomic physics may, to any *lingua franca* adequate to the subjects at

<sup>42</sup>Victor Zuckermandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World* (New York: Pantheon, 1956).

hand. What happens at meetings where people imperfectly understand each other, where it is obvious that they fail to make full use of each other's results, where (as is always the case here) much amateurism is indulged, and where some of the lunches and suppers engender memories which, suspiciously, are sharper than those of some of the paper sessions? I doubt the ICMS's have any unique distinction in this regard, but there is a plain and simple explanation which ought not to embarrass us. Musicologists (and theorists) live in a work space which is partly like that of scientists but also partly like that of artists. To be sure, we have a place for research agendas of minimal ambiguity. But much good musicology also comes out of groping. The reason why this is so is that we are continually challenged to put on the table the entirety of our individual and social response to music, and to face the challenge of choosing what is most pertinent afresh. Musicologists may respond to a vision or a passion about what counts as most significant in their own musical experience. No boundaries need be set in advance. Some of our institutions and organizations command our loyalty because they do set the boundaries that support professional rigor, others, precisely because their doors are open wider. In that dialectic, the ICMS has held, thus far, a fairly biased position. The writings reviewed here afford some reassurance that its libertinage has not been unproductive.