Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology by Leonard B. Meyer. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

Review-Article by
Douglas Dempster and Matthew Brown

The primary goal of *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* is nothing less than to explain style change in music. Leonard Meyer tackles this ambitious project while remaining historically informed, philosophically deliberate, and analytically detailed—no small thing.

This book has, however, an even grander ambition. In our day, "understanding music" is pursued from many perspectives, including the historical, analytic, critical, philosophical, and psychological. None is more correct than another, yet all would benefit from clarification. A remarkable achievement of *Style and Music* is that it acknowledges the place of all these perspectives in a complete understanding of music, while clarifying the role of each. Within an intelligently ecumenical framework, Meyer explains the complementary relations among musical disciplines in ways that only a scholar with his breadth and persistence could pull off. *Style and Music* confirms Joseph Kerman's considerate judgment of Meyer:

> A genuine polymath of music, he has more or less systematically worked his way through the central problems of aesthetics, theory, modernism, criticism, history, and a great many of the attendant peripheral problems, in a series of patiently argued treatises.[1]

Style and Music is arranged in three parts. Parts I (Chapters 1 and 2) and II (Chapters 3–5) are theoretical discussions of style and the nature of historical style change. Part III (Chapters 6–8) plus the Epilogue is an applied study of the influence of cultural ideology on compositional practices and stylistic innovations during the

---

[1]Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 107.

transition from Classic to Romantic styles and on into the twentieth century. This last part works out and illustrates but one of the many research enterprises adumbrated in the preceding theoretical discussion.

Though extremely rich, the theoretical portion of *Style and Music* is also remarkably focused on three questions: 1) When does some set of musical characteristics constitute a style?; 2) How should musical styles be described or analyzed?; and 3) Why have musical styles changed and become entrenched as they have?

Meyer begins Part I by defining 'style':

> Style is a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in the artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints. [3]

This definition compresses many points magnified in subsequent discussions. A musical pattern is stylistic only after repetition, either within a work or among works; an isolated or unique pattern, say a particular motive or rhythm, does not a style make. [25, also 13, n. 25] Stylistic features of a work, *oeuvre,* or period arise from free compositional choices and not causal necessity. [142–149] Style-defining compositional choices are to be understood against the background of a hierarchy of "constraints" that composers, presumably, willfully allow to govern those choices. [8-12]

Meyer distinguishes three levels of constraints on compositional choices: 1) "Laws" are physical, physiological, or psychological constraints (e.g. Gestalt perceptual laws) and are thus "transcultural." [13–16] 2) "Rules" are intracultural constraints that distinguish large stylistic periods. [17–19] 3) "Strategies" are the repeated patterns chosen by composers as "solutions" [148] to the problem of composing within the constraints of perceptual laws and cultural rules. [20–23] The underlying point is that a musical style is characterized by the ways in which it achieves conformity to these regularities and not by its peculiar deviations from norms.

Musical styles can be analyzed at various levels of generality, depending upon how the reference class is defined (e.g. ethnically, by genre, by period, by composer, etc). [38] The preliminary goal of style analysis is to describe, in terms of background rules and strategies, the replicated patterns that constitute the style of some class of musical works. Meyer recognizes the importance of

defining style classes, sampling from them, and making inferences back to the reference class in statistically respectable ways, in order to avoid "ad hoc, informal, and unsystematic" analyses. [57–61]

Of course, an analyst's conclusions regarding a particular style class will be governed, to a large extent, by pre-analytic groupings of pieces into "styles." In other words, the norms or regularities that characterize the style of some class of pieces will depend entirely on what pieces we choose, pre-analytically, to include in that class. Accordingly, the same piece may be given two very different style analyses depending upon its classification. If the universe of music isn't "given" to us "cut at the joints" between styles and repertoires, then rationalizing the process of classification poses a challenge.

One may conceive of classification as a process governed by pre-analytic critical intuitions and criteria (e.g. "Baroque," "atonal," "Impressionist," "Wagnerian," "exotic," etc.). Subsequent style analysis of the class can, then, be understood as not just an articulate classification, but also as a reductive explanation of those pre-analytic intuitions. According to this view, style analysis is as much about the psychology and musical perceptions of those doing the classification as it is about the music itself.

Meyer's lengthy discussion of style classification suggests that he may endorse something like this view. He also, however, challenges the idea that stylistic classifications are ever made "pre-analytically." We classify pieces "with the recognition that in some repertory particular relationships and traits may be replicated on one or more levels of structure." [39] This is a claim hard to deny; all but the most naive classificatory schemes tend to beg at least some important theoretical issues. On the other hand, the process of pre-classification must be governed by *some* criteria independent of those governing the analytic process. If it is not, the entire enterprise of style analysis runs the risk of being an exercise in conceptual clarification or, much worse, a vacuously circular classification. In either event, style analysis will not be an empirical enterprise.

Meyer expects style analysis to be, in some fairly strict sense, explanatory, in addition to classifying and describing music. Style analysis "seeks to formulate and test hypotheses explaining why the traits found to be characteristic of some repertory . . . fit together, complementing one another." [43] These explanatory analyses may

have the form of intentionalistic explanations (e.g. Wagner employed leitmotifs in sequences and non-cadential progressions in order to create an intended effect of openness and mobility) [44–48] or more broadly teleological ones [138] (e.g. Classical instances of the "Adeste Fidelis" formal schema tend, (1) at the local level, to skip up from the fifth to the tonic, (2) to have end- or middle-accented rhythmic groupings, (3) to rise, on the large scale, from $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{3}$ in order to "give rise" to monolinear melodies.) [50–54] Meyer also correctly observes that 1) merely listing stylistic traits, 2) merely describing the relation between stylistic traits, or 3) merely characterizing some coherence among them does not, in itself, constitute a explanation of those traits. [48–49] A presumption of some motivating intention or goal, common to stylistic traits, is needed to make even such complex classifications genuinely explanatory.

Over the past several years, historical criticism has come to rival formal analysis as the privileged form of critical discourse about music. Even more than the modernists committed to formal analysis, critical historians are connoisseurs of music: they desire to understand and appreciate a piece of music in all the rich details that distinguish it as a unique, unrepeatable artifact. Unlike the formalist, however, critical historians believe that the uniqueness of a piece of music is due largely to its particular historical situation. And even more than formalists, critical historians deplore the pursuit of stylistic generalization as a framework for understanding particular pieces of music.

This attitude makes for tiresomely predictable criticisms of the generalizing tendencies in *Style and Music*. The connoisseur-critic will say, "We are concerned with understanding what makes particular musical works of art unrepeatably unique—not with the ways in which any one composition is like many others. Likenesses can be pursued ad infinitum, yielding an infinite variety of classifications, but none of that will contribute the least to understanding a single composition as a unique entity. The whole project of defining style classes, fitting compositions into style classes and periods of music history, etc., is an enterprise that not only misses, but grossly distorts, the point of understanding music."

Leonard Meyer calls this objection to style analysis and style history the "don't pull the wings off the butterfly" reply. And it's a discouraging fact that he has had to answer to this sort of objection over and over, despite his best efforts to make

conciliatory and pluralistic distinctions between style analysis and criticism:

> Though criticism depends on the generalizations of style analysis, it uses these to illuminate what is unique about particular compositions. Style analysis, on the other hand, is not concerned with what is nonrecurrent. Instead, individual works serve as the basis for generalizations.... [26]

What critic-historians may find offensive in this view is the suggestion that criticism awaits the generalizing results of style analysis before it can pursue its goal of individuating cherished works. Yet this suggestion seems a hard, unavoidable truth. Uniqueness is not some intrinsic property possessed irreducibly by some things and not by others. Every thing, in that it is somehow distinguished from every other thing, is trivially unique. Whether objet d'art or brick, each thing possesses some properties, features, characteristics, structures, meanings, significance, implications, or feelings that nothing else possesses. But we must not forget that we may discern such individuating sets of properties only against a background of norms and regularities. Consequently, the critic can plumb the depths of some composition's "uniqueness" only when he or she has a firm grip on what is normal, regular, customary, typical, or standard for works of its stylistic kind. After conceding that important point, the critic must then decide whether these regularities are to be discovered in an impressionistic, unsystematic manner, as the connoisseur-critic might have it, or, as Meyer suggests, by methods that are statistically rigorous. It is hard to imagine that there really is any choice so long as our object is to understand music and not just to amuse ourselves with talk about it.

Explaining style change, from period to period, composer to composer, and most particularly from Classicism to Romanticism, is the ultimate objective of *Style and Music*. Meyer offers something like a philosophy of music history as a foundation for this enterprise. His historiological disposition is also thoroughly intentionalistic: histories of style change depend upon hypotheses that relate style traits to "the reasons why those traits were chosen." [69] These "reasons" are not just any old causes, no matter how mechanical or non-deliberate. Rather they are rational reasons, attributable to a composer, which explain his or her compositional

choices in terms of the musical, artistic, or more broadly "ideological" goals they are intended to advance. [100–101; 147–148]

This may be the most central conviction of Meyer's view: that the engine of style change is not to be found in the causal powers of past influence over composers.[2] Such overt belief in the power of the past treats composers too much as instruments of impersonally remote causal mechanisms. Rather, Meyer is convinced that the composer's experiences, goals, and free choices among influences, drive the history of style change:

> In sum, what I am suggesting is that, beguiled by the blandishments (the seeming simplicity and certainty) of causal models, we have been looking for the reasons for style change at the wrong end of the creative process. It is not that I want to deny the relevance for music history of innovative invention, sources of influence, or origins of musical means. Rather, I am urging that what are primary and central are the bases and reasons for compositional choice. [149]

This view, however, almost automatically raises some very famous problems of interpreting events in terms of the intentions of those active in those events. Not the least of these is that the intentions, experiences, and thoughts of composers can be, under even the best circumstances, viewed only darkly through the glass of history. Beethoven left abundant indications of compositional intentions in his prolific sketches. This has, however, fueled more interpretive controversy than it has settled. Under the worst circumstances, we must infer a composer's intentions from the very compositions that those intentions are supposed to illuminate, a conspicuously circular inference. [108]

Meyer is well aware of these difficulties and argues this way in response to them:

---

[2]Of course, Meyer thinks that many histories of music are little more than successions of style changes and make no effort at exposing the principles that govern these successions. [101]

> [C]omprehending the intentions of composers (collective as well as individual) is crucial for understanding the choices that result in the compositions on which a history of music is partly based. But—and this cannot be sufficiently emphasized—*it is not some kind of idiosyncratic, personal intention that is crucial for such a history, but the sort that is implicit in the stylistic constraints that define the goals of the "game of art" itself.* [138] (*italics in original*)

This is nice because it frees the historian from the duty, perhaps unsatisfiable, of psychoanalyzing composers across the gulf of time and place. It also, however, turns the composer's intentions and choices into something of an explanatory fiction, a blank slate to be filled in and adjusted, as needed, to fill explanatory gaps between what was actually composed and the surrounding cultural and artistic conditions. This view would seem to devalue the privileged position of the composer's free will. It encourages a conception of the composer as the "normal," or perhaps "ideally rational," person within a culture, doing what would "come naturally" under those particular cultural and artistic circumstances. [93–94] In light of this point, it is worth considering whether the central concepts in Meyer's account of style change might be "convention" and "custom" rather than "intention" and "choice." This modification would certainly complement Meyer's commitment to musical style being an irreducibly "institutional" fact.[3]

Meyer treats human history, quite generally, much the same way as he conceives of a single musical composition.[4] The factual "patterns" of human history are a product of interpretive selectivity, cognitive laws, cultural rules, and explanatory presuppositions. [69–73] This makes for the possibility of many "correct" interpretations of the past with no privileged account of the past to

---

[3]In *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), John Searle distinguished "institutional" from "brute" facts as part of his effort to introduce conventions into purely intentionalist accounts of language meaning.

[4]Indeed, Chapter 3, in which he lays out his philosophy of history, is taken from a manuscript originally titled "Music as Model for History." [xi]

adjudicate among them. While Meyer concedes that not all historical accounts are equally "accurate" or "objective," and some are more consistent and less distorting than others, he also insists that historical accounts, no matter how objective, are neither true nor false. [72–73] Historical accounts are, like performances and criticism of particular musical compositions, "re-presentations or explications" of some past event and not "general propositions" about it. Since they are not general propositions that can be confirmed or disconfirmed, he argues, they do not bear truth-values. [73] The historian, he proposes, presents "an interpretive performance of . . . events, designed to enable the reader partly to share the experience of the events." [73, n. 8][5]

Complementing his view of history as the sympathetic reconstruction of past thought, feelings, and experiences, Meyer also argues for the explanatory goals of historical accounts. Music history is, after all, an attempt to explain why, in Meyer's view,

---

[5]This "reconstructive" goal of history may be what leads Meyer to insist that history is possible only if "human nature itself is fundamentally invariable," at least with respect to the "basic principles constraining human behavior" (e.g., needs for food, air, shelter, etc.) and especially with respect to human behavior being the "result of intelligent and purposeful choice." [76] "Without some such assumption," he says, "the behavior of our contemporaries as well as that of past composers and protagonists would be inexplicable." [76] The term 'explication' may suggest either the goals of historical *explanation* or historical *reconstruction*. (In the tradition of analytic philosophy, 'explication' was contrasted, as stipulative or legislative, with terms like 'definition' or 'explanation', which were regarded as more purely descriptive.) It is not immediately obvious that one could not *explain* the behavior of creatures with natures fundamentally different from our own. After all, ethologists explain the sophisticated social organization of bees, anchovies, or geese, whose natures are as different from ours as one could want. Sympathetically *reconstructing* the experiences of another creature, however, is another matter. A basic difference of natures may make it impossible for us to sympathize with, for instance, what it's like to be a bat, to take a famous example. (See Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review,* October 1974.) And if past composers have fundamentally different natures from our own, we should expect little success in accurately reconstructing or re-presenting their experiences.

composers made the stylistic choices they did.[6] Music-historical explanations take the form of hypotheses about style changes. These hypotheses are the sort of general principles latent in all historical explanations and framed in terms of "institutional" (i.e. social and cultural norms), rather than naturalistic (e.g. . acoustical, neurophysiological), characterizations of musical works and compositional choices.[7] [77–78] Explanatory hypotheses take temporal and nontemporal forms. [79]

Meyer argues for music-historical explanations of style change taking the form of noncausal, but nonetheless lawlike temporal explanations. Viewing the history of music on the model of a piece of music, he conceives of the connection between events, either historical events or compositional events, as "implying" rather than merely causing one another.[8] [84–86] What distinguishes implicational relations from causal relations is that if event *x* caused event *y*, then *y* must have occurred. But if *x* only implied *y*, *y* needn't have occurred.[9] [96] Implicational explanations take

---

[6]A compositional choice may be recognizable as a style-defining choice only in retrospect.

[7]These general principles would seem to be the sort of general propositions that could bear truth-values. If so, historical explanations that included, for instance, a false general hypothesis as an explicit or latent premise could sensibly be described as "false explanations." That, admittedly, would be a bit misleading, because in formal semantics, truth values are normally assigned only to single propositions or sentences expressing propositions. Longer chunks of discourse, like an argument, explanation, or narrative, may include many propositions, and thus are not categorically the sort of things that are said to bear truth-values. But certainly, whatever epistemological criteria govern our evaluations of these larger chunks of discourse, some will be a function of the truth-value of constituent propositions (e.g., the soundness of an argument or the comprehensiveness of an explanation).

[8]Implicative connections can be lawlike so long as they instantiate sufficiently strong general principles about the relations between certain kinds of events.

[9]Implication is a logical relation that clearly requires three terms (unlike causation, which requires two): *x* implies *y* for some third party *z*, where *z* is presumed to be capable of consciously representing the relation between *x* and

account not only of the sequence of events as they actually occurred, but also of the alternative sequences that would have seemed likely or plausible to someone immersed in those events as they were unfolding. Understanding the sequence of events in this much richer, implicational framework is important to understanding the rational deliberations of composers (to consider only the case at issue here) in their attempts to fulfill artistic goals under constraint. [90–94]

Exactly this point explains why the reconstructive and explanatory goals of historical discourse may be complementary, in Meyer's view, and need not be competing, independent enterprises. To explain why a musical style changed as it did, we must first understand why composers chose as they did. To understand compositional choices, we must understand the conscious and unconscious artistic goals and deliberations of composers. To understand these goals and deliberations, we must reconstruct the composer's experience of events, with all their perceived significance or implicational variety. [86]

Understanding the "ideological" context of a composer's choices is central, in Meyer's view, to clarifying the goals that guide those choices:

> [C]ompositional choices are difficult to explain because, from a historical point of view at least, the most important goals of composers are established to a significant extent by the often unconscious and unconceptualized beliefs and attitudes of the larger culture—above all, by ideology. [100]

An ideology is the "complex network of interrelated beliefs and attitudes" shared by members of a culture, including fundamental metaphysical conceptions of, say, space and time, as well as the many unconscious categories, premises, and metaphors that

---

y. The relation also entails no existential commitment to the occurrence of the implied event, *y*. That suggests the entire relation is, what philosophers call, an intentional state: the relation describes some complex state of mind about experienced events, rather than any relation between events in themselves. The alternative is to attribute actual implications to each and every human event, which results in a bloated ontology by almost any standard short of the most sanguine Platonism.

"channel and direct our perceptions, our cognitions, and our responses." [157] A composer's ideology governs his construal of surrounding social, political, and cultural phenomena. And the composer employs some sort of "translation code" in order to "transform" these interpretations of events into "one or more dimensions of sound." [128] Meyer provides taxonomical schema for compositional "translations" of human events into music: permutation, combination, displacement, extrapolation, imitation, transcription, mimicry, metaphoric mimicry, analogic modeling, metaphoric modeling. [122–134] In the second half of the book he examines the translation of Romantic ideology into actual compositional choices.

Much of the remaining theoretical discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 is directed at elaborating the ways in which ideology constrains both the stylistically "innovative" choices of composers and the compositional choices that "replicate" and lead to the entrenchment of these innovations. These are complex, often subtle, and inaccessible matters, all of which is duly acknowledged in Meyer's treatment. In the face of these subtle complexities Meyer doesn't elect, as many do, the all-purpose solution of celebrating with starry-eyed irrationality the unique irreducibility of artistic creation. In fact, Meyer proposes at least five distinct empirical laws, or hypotheses, of stylistic innovation and replication. Here are two:

> The tendency toward change, and to some extent possibly the rate of change—but emphatically not the kind of change or innovation—is correlated with, and perhaps even a function of, the number of parameters differentiated in and conceptualized by a culture. [118]

> [S]election and replication are more likely if innovations conform to the Gestalt principles of pattern comprehension—that is, if they are characterized by properties such as similarity and difference, good continuation and symmetry, return and closure, and above all, functional differentiation and hierarchic ordering. [140]

Although still too general to be easily testable, these are not empirically empty laws of style innovation and replication.

Though very persuasively defended, modelling music history after music is surely the most provocative feature of Meyer's elaborate view. He proposes that explaining music history and understanding style change are essentially like understanding a piece of music. A consequence of this is a likening of the historian to the music critic or performer. His reasons for holding these views are clear. Style "innovation" and "replication" must be explained in terms of the rational compositional choices of composers immersed in rich social and cultural contexts. People, whether composers or carpenters, make choices not with perfect knowledge of the causal laws governing the world, but rather with a dim sense of the "correlations," "implications," and "significance" of events. Thus explaining why a composer chose as she did requires an understanding of the rich implicational relations that seem, to the composer anyway, to structure the world. The chain of causal relations linking human events is everywhere interrupted by layers of interpretation, significance, intention, and choice.

However, recognizing the implicational nature of composers' reasons and choices does not preclude causal explanations of those choices. In fact, it's hard to see how composers' choices can be explained *without* appealing to something like causal necessities. Every individual acts as he or she does on the basis of more or less well-informed guesses about the facts, about how events are linked, what "meaning" they carry, what is "likely" to happen under various circumstances, and so on. And we are painfully fallible in all these regards. These guesses nonetheless become reasons for choices and actions. But we are equally fallible in our self-reflective judgment about why (i.e. what reasons we have) we act as we do. We make mistakes in judging our motives not only in hindsight, but also, often, at the moment of action. (Though the adequacy of Freud's theories is widely challenged, no one seriously doubts that behavior is often governed by motives inaccessible to the individual.)

Consequently, explaining the compositional choices of a composer, like explaining the behavior of any person, cannot be a matter of exhaustively reconstructing the thoughts, experiences, interpretations of events, etc., of that composer or his typical contemporaries. Only some of those will have any genuine relevance to why the composer chose and acted as he did. The question is, which ones? As Meyer rightly points out, not even the seemingly privileged testimony of the composer should be presumed

reliable: "[Creative artists] are no more reliable witnesses to their own motives—the basis for their choices—than are other protagonists of history." [94] The historian must discover, or guess, which of these various "reasons" and "motives" really made a difference to the composer choosing as she did. It is hard to imagine what distinguishes these "real motives" from the epiphenomenal ones other than that the former have some causal efficacy.

It is widely thought that explanations of teleological and functional events, of which biological phenomena and human action are paradigmatic cases, are fundamentally different from causal explanations of events not influenced by future events, goals, purposes, ends, etc. However, several philosophers have shown that teleological and functional events can be straightforwardly accommodated within common causal models of explanation.[10] These views are perfectly compatible with Meyer's philosophy of history. They do, however, greatly diminish the importance of the "re-presentational" or reconstructive task of the historian. [73]

In Part III Meyer sets his theoretical machine in motion to explain the change from Classic style to Romanticism. Chapter 6, "Romanticism—The Ideology of Elite Egalitarians" describes, in more or less familiar ways, some main features of nineteenth-century thought common among European intellectuals. For Meyer, Romanticism is grounded in the notions of acontextualism and naturalism. Following the growth in skepticism and scientific empiricism during the Enlightenment, the Romantics "not only repudiated . . . hereditary privileges, but insisted on the irrelevance of *all* origins, lineages, and contextual connections whatsoever." [167] Since "inheritance was . . . replaced by inherence," Romanticism is essentially egalitarian. [163–7] Socially, this change in values coincided with a weakening of traditional political institutions, a decline in patronage by the Church and nobility, the growth of an affluent middle class, a diversification of culture, an

---

[10]See Wesley Salmon, "Four Decades of Scientific Explanation," in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. XIII: *Scientific Explanation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989):111–116; Larry Wright, *Teleological Explanations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); John Bigelow and Robert Pargetter, "Functions," *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987):181–196.

increase in audience size, and a decrease in their sophistication. [164, 205] These acontextual values also gave rise both to the Romantic Genius, whose prowess is intuitive and innate rather than learned and culturally acquired [171–5], as well as the Masterpiece, the structure of which is original and individual, rather than conventional. [177–9, 218–22] Meyer notes that acontextualism eventually fostered the formalist view that "each work of art contains its complete meaning within itself and, correlatively, the principles appropriate to its own analysis." [188]

The trend towards naturalism prompted Romantics to explain music in organic rather than linguistic terms. These explanations focused on emergence, divergence, and openness, instead of stability, conformity, and closure. [163, 191] Meyer proposes that, since organic processes are often concealed, Romantic critics had to look beyond surface appearances to find an underlying unity. [194–5] This unity was based on complex motivic transformations, extramusical programs, and the careful treatment of secondary parameters (e.g., rhythm, dynamics, timbre). [200–5, 211–217]

Having identified the main elements of Romanticism, Meyer traces the influence of this ideology, through "codes" of "correlation" [122, 128–134], to specific compositional choices.[11] Chapter 7, "Convention Disguised—Nature Affirmed," begins by showing how Romantic composers used techniques of emergence and divergence to conceal tonal conventions. [223–226, 226–41] To support his case, Meyer cites the last cadence (mm. 103–6) of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. In particular, he claims the melody in m. 104 not only recalls the opening theme and the cadence in mm. 29–30, but it emerges from a linear descent that starts with the A# in m. 4.[223] Debussy disguised the cadence even further by overlaying a rising gesture to create a "divergent wedge." [225] Meyer then expands his discussion of divergence by considering changing-note schemas. These patterns include a melodic line that oscillates around $\hat{1}$ or $\hat{3}$ (e.g., $\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$ or

[11] "[A]s far as I can discern, conditions and events external to music can serve as sources for novel compositional strategies only under the very special conditions considered later in this chapter in the section 'Correlation.' " [122] These correlations take three forms: metaphoric mimicry, analogical modeling, and metaphoric modeling. [128-134]

$\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{4}$–$\hat{3}$) and a well-defined bass motion I–V V–I.[12] Although these schemas can be found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music, Romantic composers often disguised them by melodic embellishments [229], harmonic variation [230–1], and increasing size. [231–41] He illustrates each point with numerous examples from the Romantic repertory.

According to Meyer, Romantic composers did develop one new melodic type, his so-called "axial melodies."[13] While they are similar to changing-note melodies in that they also revolve around a focal pitch, they differ in that their supporting harmonies lack strong tonal closure. Syntactically open, axial melodies satisfy natural, cognitive tendencies, rather than learned conventions, and hence are classified as typically Romantic. [241, 244]

More provocatively, Meyer claims that the shift from changing-note schemas to axial melodies reflects a broader shift from script-based to plan-based composition. [245–58] Meyer borrows this distinction from cognitive studies of storytelling by Schank and Abelson.[14] Scripts are memory structures that list the actions that people carry out in stereotypical situations, such as going to a restaurant. Since these activities are standardized, scripts allow the individual to anticipate what will happen, to infer unstated events, and to recall associated characters and objects. Plans, meanwhile, are more abstract memory structures that explain less routine, goal-oriented, behavior. Instead of making predictions based on prescribed sequences of events, plans depend on identifying an individual's goals; when we know what goals the individual has in mind, we can make sense of what he says and does by tracing the causes and consequences of his actions.

---

[12]For extensive discussion of phrase schemata see Robert Gjerdingen, *A Classic Turn of Phrase: Music and the Psychology of Convention* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

[13]Meyer discusses axial melodies in a slightly different way in *Explaining Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 183–191.

[14]See Roger C. Schank and Robert Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977).

Meyer hypothesizes that Classical composition is script-like because it uses stereotyped syntactic patterns, such as changing-note melodies, antecedent/consequent phrases, full authentic cadences, and sonata form, whereas Romantic composition is plan-based because it prefers diverse, open-ended schemes, such as axial, complementary, and gap-fill melodies. [245–6] The chapter ends by showing how Romantic composers disguised Classical norms by stretching schemas, especially those involving appoggiaturas and other non-chord tones. [259–71]

In Chapter 8, "Syntax, Form, and Unity," Meyer turns away from the notion of concealment to consider some of the ways in which Romantic composers actually weakened syntactic relationships. Among the most important of these is "the disuse of relationships essential for the specification of a tonal center." [273] According to Meyer, Romantic composers often avoided strong functional hierarchies such as the progression from IV to V (which Meyer regards as crucial to defining tonal centers), in favor of more uniform successions. He then proceeds to show how tonal syntax is further eroded by the anomalous use of non-chord tones [281–5], the proliferation of plagal cadences [285–91], the preponderance of direct modal changes [291–2], the compression of chord progressions [292–6], the distinctive use of deceptive cadences and common-tone modulations [296–300] and a general flattening of functional hierarchies [300–303].

With tonal syntax weakened, the syntactic scripts typical of Classical forms were gradually supplanted by statistical plans.[303] He describes such a plan in a long analysis of the "Transfiguration" from Act 3 scene 3 of *Tristan and Isolde*. [311–325] According to Meyer this passage is apparently built from divergent wedges. Since these wedges do not stipulate syntactic relationships, they are plan-like: "their . . . linearity makes them . . . goal-directed, while their divergence makes them open and mobile." [319] The climax is statistical because it relies on intensification, especially of secondary parameters, rather than on syntactic closure. He adds, "The music is egalitarian: only the deaf or the hidebound could . . . fail to respond to its overwhelming force and passion." [322] The chapter closes with a section on unity and motivic relationships that touches, among other things, on the distinction between thematic transformation and developing variation. [326–335] According to Meyer, "as the repudiation of convention led to the attenuation of tonal syntax and form—as plans came more and more to dominate

scripts—motivic structure was . . . forced into a position of structural primacy." [335] Thus, one of the main compositional problems bequeathed by the Romantics, was that of "discovering . . . a set of constraints governing motivic succession in the absence of the conventions of tonal syntax and form." [336]

In the Epilogue, "The Persistence of Romanticism," Meyer explores some of the ways in which Romantic ideology influenced composers in the twentieth century. Among other things he links the Romantic problems of motivic coherence to the rise of twelve-tone music [328–40], and suggests that during the twentieth century, secondary parameters eventually took over from syntactic constraints as means for delineating musical forms. [340–1] Also, Meyer rightly suggests that Modernist (or transcendentalist) attitudes toward structure, elitism, and autonomy are outgrowths of Romantic notions of acontextualism and naturalism. [343–52] Indeed, some scholars have traced the origins of modernism back to the writings of Bergson, Bradley, and Nietzsche.[15] We have also shown how particularism (what Meyer refers to as transcendentalism) recurs not only in the writings of Babbitt and his followers, but also in those of Kerman and the critical historians.[16]

From this brief synopsis of Part III, it should be clear that Meyer covers a lot of ground and draws on an impressive array of historical, analytic, critical, and psychological evidence. Given this enormous wealth of information, no one is likely to agree with every analysis, with each featured distinction between Classical and Romantic styles, or with all of his attempts to connect compositional choices with extra-musical factors. Virtually all of his claims are plausible and arguable, and more importantly, many of them are empirically testable, in some more or less indirect manner. One can hardly ask more from so ambitious a book. Nevertheless, a few responses to specific points are in order.

---

[15]For example, Sanford Schwarz has described Hulme's intimate knowledge of Bergson's work and T. S. Eliot's connections with the philosophy of Bradley, see *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot and Early 20th Century Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[16]See Matthew Brown and Douglas Dempster, "The Scientific Image of Music Theory," *Journal of Music Theory* 33/1(1989), 65–106.

Although Meyer rightly focuses much of Chapter 7 on the Romantic notion of concealment, some of his analytic evidence will be seen as controversial. Take, for example, his account of the *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. He is certainly correct to suggest that the motive in m. 104 can be traced back to the cadence (mm. 29–30) and eventually to the flute theme in m. 3. However, the suggestion that the B♭ in mm. 103–4 continues a linear descent from the A♯ in m. 4 is problematic. One of the most striking features of Debussy's score is the fact that the famous flute theme keeps returning on the starting pitch C♯; as the piece unfolds it becomes increasingly clear that this tone functions as an upper neighbor to B. For example, B is clearly presented at the cadence at mm. 29–30, and although the middle section (mm. 55–78) focuses on D♭/C♯, B is restored with the return to the main theme in m. 79. From a tonal perspective, the B♭ in mm. 103–4 is generated from the B in m. 79, not the A♯ in m. 4.

Yet, other examples of concealment do strongly support Meyer's general thesis. For example, as Charles Burkhart has shown, the whole-tone passage mm. 30–37 contains a concealed statement of the rising gesture G–A–B♭–C–C♯ from the opening flute theme, while the transition section mm. 37–54, includes nested repetitions of the motive B–B♯–C♯ also from the opening theme.[17] In fact, many other instances of hidden motivic repetitions can be found in this and other works by Debussy.[18]

Another portion of Chapter 7 that requires comment is the distinction between scripts and plans. While the distinction has obvious heuristic value for differentiating Classical from Romantic style, doubts have been raised about the psychological reality of these notions. As Alan Garnham explains:

> Some psychological experiments (e.g., Bower, Black and Turner, 1979; Graesser, Gordon and Sawyer, 1979) have

---

[17]Charles Burkhart, "Schenker's 'Motivic Parallelisms,'" *Journal of Music Theory* 22/1 (1978), 155–58.

[18]See, for example, Matthew Brown, "Tonality and Form in Debussy's *Prélude à 'l'Après-midi d'un faune'*," delivered at the South-Central Society for Music Theory, Spring 1992; and "Composers' Revisions and the Creative Process," delivered at Music Theory Midwest, Spring 1992.

> attempted to investigate the psychological reality of scripts. However, while the results are broadly consistent with Schank and Abelson's proposal, they are consistent with a wide range of other similar hypotheses. Indeed, Schank (see e.g., 1982) has revised his ideas about scripts quite radically. He no longer regards them as basic structures in memory, but takes them to be built up from units called Memory Organization Packets (MOPs).[19]

These MOPs try to explain the fact that many scripts have elements in common, and it seems unlikely that each script functions autonomously.

What's more, the scripts/plans distinction was invoked to cope with the memory structures of declarative, or fact-based, knowledge. Much of our knowledge of and about music is procedural, or skill-based. For example, playing a musical instrument and understanding tonal scale structures are both largely procedural. Indeed, according to W. Jay Dowling, although "music theory . . . naturally emphasizes declarative memory in relating memory and form . . . . procedural memory is essential to the listener's experience of music, and should be taken into account in our conception of how form is experienced."[20]

If scripts and plans are either not involved in musical competence or not psychologically real at all, then they certainly won't be relevant psychological constraints differentiating Classical from Romantic musical thought. Nonetheless, there may be good reason for metaphorically importing this distinction into the task of describing the cultural ideologies of Classicism and Romanticism.

At least one important music theoretical matter deserves mention, however brief. One of Meyer's main contentions in Chapter 8 is that the progression from IV to V is crucial to defining a tonal center. In fact, he goes so far as to claim that this succession is even more significant than V–I:

---

[19]Alan Garnham, *Artificial Intelligence* (London: Routeledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 47–8.

[20]W. Jay Dowling, abstract for his paper "Form and Memory," delivered at the Fifteenth National Conference of the Society for Music Theory in Kansas City, 1992.

> The view that the most important harmonies of tonal syntax are the dominant and the tonic is, as I see it, both mistaken and misleading. That it is mistaken is evident from the fact that, for any competent listener to tonal music, a progression from subdominant to dominant unambiguously defines a specific tonal center *whether or not* the tonic of that center is actually presented. And it is equally obvious, even to a tyro in music theory, that a dominant to tonic progression does not define a tonal center, since that progression can be interpreted as I to IV in another key. [274–5]

Obviously, this is a bold claim with enormous implications for tonal theory. However, the view has difficulty accommodating the psychological evidence. First, probe tone experiments by Carol Krumhansl and others have shown that, in both major and minor keys, the tonic and dominant both have higher ratings than the subdominant. And, as Robert Gjerdingen notes, "the ratings of probes played after this [IV–V] context, have a correlation of only about .650 with the standard C-major profile. . . . While moderately high, it is no better than the correlation between C major and A minor."[21]

Second, Narmour and Rosner have shown that at cadences, tonal closure is most emphatically achieved by progressions from V to I. They explain:

> The perfect authentic cadence (V–I) is a strong progression partly because its intrinsic parametric properties make it perceptually unique: given an established tonality, it never substitutes for any other progression. Moreover, the schematic uniqueness of V–I lends itself perfectly to the recurrent syntactic needs of tonality by enabling listeners to parse and to store diverse chunks of tonal musical forms.[22]

---

[21]Robert O. Gjerdingen, "Review: Carol Krumhansl, *Cognitive Foundations of Musical Pitch*," *Music Perception* 9/4 (1992), 489.

[22]Burton S. Rosner and Eugene Narmour, "Harmonic Closure: Music Theory and Perception," *Music Perception* 9/4 (1992), 409.

This evidence isn't necessarily decisive. Gjerdingen may well be right that syntactic considerations and anomalies in short-term memory influenced the Krumhansl probe tone experiments, and an important distinction might need to be drawn between how to define a tonal center and how to create closure within that key. Either way, Meyer's claim is an empiric one, that deserves to be systematically and decisively tested.

One last point: While Meyer is absolutely right in charging music theory, and especially Schenkerians, with neglecting style analysis, it is not necessarily true that their methods are inherently "unable to account for style differences (between musics of different cultures) or style change (within the music of Western culture)." [189] Schenkerian analytic techniques have the potential for distinguishing at least some stylistic boundaries and for describing, if not explaining, style change. While the generalizations constituting Schenkerian "theory" obviously do not discriminate among tonal pieces or styles, Schenkerian analytic "practices" are often bent to the task of individuating tonal compositions within these generalizations. If Schenkerian analysis is sensitive to unique characteristics of pieces, then it could, very likely, also expose and formulate analytic generalizations at various levels of style.[23] Explaining why styles come and go, as Meyer rightly points out, is beyond the limits of so "acontextual" an analytic technique.

A conspicuous virtue of *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* is that it maintains remarkably eclectic scope while pursuing ambitious goals. However, Leonard Meyer's truly singular achievement is to combine his eclecticism and ambition with the respect for scholarly specialties that has led diverse disciplines to find his work plausible and provocative on many narrowly "expert" issues. Our many comments and criticisms of this book are, more

---

[23]At least some Schenkerians acknowledge, with Meyer, the importance of style analysis: "In my opinion, Schenkerians do not talk enough about style. This is not, as our opponents claim, because we do not recognize its existence. It is rather a matter of emphasis. Schenker demonstrated the unity of the tonal *language* over some two hundred years, and this was one of his most essential contributions. As for us, however, we should not only acknowledge but investigate the differences between individual idioms, between genres, and between historical periods." William Rothstein, "The Americanization of Heinrich Schenker," in *Schenker Studies*, edited by Hedi Siegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 202.

than anything else, a tribute to Meyer's tightly reasonable method and engagingly substantive views on a great diversity of historical, theoretical, psychological, and philosophical issues. Few writers have tried as hard to build respectful bridges between different disciplines; fewer still have done so, while so thoughtfully and humanely embracing the spirit of empiricism.