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Interpreting Musical
Gestures, Topics, and Tropes
Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert

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Introduction

The book you are about to read complements my first book, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* (1994), as part of a larger inquiry into musical meaning. Those who have not read the first volume, however, will find this one self-sufficient in its explanation and application of several key concepts: markedness, style types, strategic tokens, topics, expressive genres, and tropes. The latter part of the Introduction reviews some of these ideas in a fresh context, applying them to works of Mozart and Schubert. Those more familiar with my theoretical approach may wish to skip these basic illustrations and begin with Chapter 1, a more nuanced case study that integrates interpretation (the expressive significance of a passage) and theory (the reconstruction of a style type) in a close reading of the opening of Beethoven's *Ghost* Trio, Op. 70, no. 1. Chapter 2 features a new style topic, *plenitude*, generalized from a close interpretation of the Andante of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 130. Another topic, the pastoral, is reconceived in Chapter 3 as a *mode* with affiliations to the literary pastoral; I demonstrate how its expressive meaning expands in Romantic works such as Schubert's Piano Sonata in G Major, D. 894. Part One concludes with Chapter 4, in which I examine the troping of topics and genres, here in a wider context ranging from Bach to Mahler.

Part Two is the core of the book, six chapters devoted to a new theory of musical gesture. Gesture is introduced from an interdisciplinary perspective in Chapter 5, developed for music in Chapters 6 and 7, applied to works of Beethoven and Schubert in Chapters 8 and 9, and related to agency and troping in Chapter 10. The approach to musical gesture addresses its synthesis of elements, its emergent expressive potential, and its role in both immediate and extended musical discourse. My interest in this area owes much to the groundbreaking work of Alexandra Pierce (1994) on movement as a means of analyzing gesture, structure, and meaning in music, and to David Lidov (1987, 1993) on the semiotic status of gesture and its importance for embodied meaning in music. The late Naomi Cumming (2000) shared my interest in gesture's synthetic and emergent aspects (including those qualitative dimensions of musical experience that are often relegated to the field of performance) and the emergence of an embodied subject in music. My approach is not that of philosophical aesthetics, as in Cumming; rather, I begin by surveying a variety of scientific studies to help ground the extraordinary role of gesture as one manifestation of an evolutionarily refined capacity to interpret significant energetic shaping through time. Human gesture may be understood as a fundamental and inescapable mode of understanding that links us directly to music's potential expressive meaning.

Having established a set of principles for human gesture, I then propose a speculative theory for musical gesture, exploring composers' negotiation of human ges-

tures within the constraints of a musical style (including its notational and performance practices). My primary focus is on the Viennese Classical tradition, from Mozart to Beethoven and Schubert. The emergence of Romantic subjectivity is reflected in Mozart, and even more prominently in Beethoven and Schubert, but it must be emphasized that each was trained in the gestural practices of a more Classical tradition which forms the substrate for their individual gestural explorations.

I should note that my theoretical treatment of musical gesture is not limited to what one might term the “default” level of phenomenal perception of nuances and cognition of their affective import, although initial perceptual synthesis and cognition of emergent expressive meaning are profoundly significant parts of our encounter with musical gestures. Beyond such practiced interpretive immediacy, a competent listener will grasp the thematic and rhetorical functions of certain gestures within a given musical style. Furthermore, although musical gestures are often made distinctive through specific articulations, dynamics, and pacing or timing—and given unique shape by the systematic potential of rhythm and meter, texture, and timbre—they cannot be fully described without reference to the more “syntactic” levels of musical structure and process.¹ These syntactic levels are shaped by the overlapping disciplines of counterpoint, harmony and voice-leading, phrase structure and form, and in many cases, motivic developing variation. Chapters 8 and 9 addresses complete works by Beethoven and Schubert in order to demonstrate how a larger dramatic trajectory may be generated by an expressively motivated discourse of thematic gestures.

Gesture challenges us not only in its negotiation with higher structuring, but in its internal synthesis and integration of elements. These elements are typically treated separately, not only in historical theories of music but also in treatises or manuals devoted to performance practice. Separation—characteristic of an *analytical* approach to musical understanding and often inadequate even to the explanation of structure and process—may be fruitfully complemented by a more *synthetic* approach. In my earlier book (1994), I linked a more structuralist account (oppositions, their marked asymmetries, and their expressive correlations) to a more hermeneutic interpretation—one that goes beyond general types of meanings to address their particularity as encountered in the unique contexts of individual works. The stylistic growth of *correlational* meaning may reflect the further articulation of general types, but this more logical process is counterbalanced by *troping*—the often unpredictable and even extra-logical process by which new meaning emerges from atypical or even contradictory associations between more established meanings. There is yet a further mode of meaning that was only implicitly addressed in my earlier book, most notably in the treatment of reversals or undercuttings. This more synthetic mode of understanding is best exemplified by the *gestural*, with reversals and undercuttings understood as a subcategory of *rhetorical* gestures.

The work of synthesis through which various musical elements combine into an *emergent* entity (not predictable as merely the sum of its parts) applies not only to gesture but also to *topics* (patches of music that trigger clear associations with styles, genres, and expressive meanings) and *tropes* (the interpretive synthesis of,

for example, otherwise contradictory topics that are juxtaposed in a single functional location or rhetorical moment). Thus, the larger project uniting the three parts of this book is a pursuit of a neglected synthetic (or at least fully integrative) approach to music. Gestures, topics, and tropes involve syntheses whose emergent interpretation cannot be merely after the fact, as a mere summing up of analytical detail. Nor, on the other hand, can critical interpretation ignore these processes by presupposing that listeners somehow “put it all together in their minds.” Rather, the modes of synthesis and emergence can and must be woven into the very fabric of musical explanation. Interpretation—whether at the level of perception or cognition, and whether evaluative in its judgment of form or creative in its participation in the emergence of meaning—relies on synthetic categories such as gesture from the start.

A strictly analytical approach cannot easily convey this aspect of an interpretive competency. While analysis plays a necessary role in discovering discrete building blocks as systematically encoded by a musical style (pitch inventories, scales, chords, rhythmic units, etc.), it must be complemented by a cognitively richer account of how listeners so successfully, and at times so transparently, combine these discrete elements into meaningful elements of musical discourse—indeed, how they serve the more flexible and malleable ends of expressive shaping at all levels of structure. Tree hierarchies (as developed by Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983) imply modes of cognitive processing that demand constant evaluations (yes/no, more/less) at every node—hardly an efficient model to explain the mind’s constant leaps to coherent structures and meanings. It would be like trying to claim that the tongue needed to complete a detailed analysis of ingredients before concluding that something tasted good—whereas the senses synthesize on a routine basis.

Nevertheless, synthetic entities such as thematic gestures can and do engage levels for which current analytical models are adequate. In analyzing the developing variation of a gesture, one need not reinvent Schoenberg’s insights into the developing variation of a motive. But one must distinguish the gestural from typical assumptions about motives and *Grundgestalten*, which are often defined in terms of pitch structure (generative cells) and rhythmic patterns, to the neglect of articulation, dynamics, and temporal pacing. When one works from a gestural perspective, these neglected elements may move to the foreground as essential constituents of a characteristic energetic shaping through time. A gestural perspective can thus lend significance to elements that are often overlooked by theorists or relegated to surface expressive nuance by performers. Ideally, a gestural approach can bring theorists and performers closer together as they share perspectives on various stylistic traditions. To put it simply, theorists can learn to appreciate the structural role of performers’ expressive nuances, and performers can learn to recognize the expressive significance of the structures analyzed by theorists.

One of the most interesting properties of gesture is its continuity, even across rests or articulated silence. This property has led me to consider the expressive effects of continuity and discontinuity in other dimensions of musical structure, notably texture and form. Chapter 11 addresses continuous texture and perpetual motion as marked features with respect to the more typical, articulated textures

of the Classical period. The second half of the chapter returns to the notion of plenitude as a possible expressive premise for three of Beethoven's late fugues. Chapter 12 explores discontinuity as a marked feature in the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132, and weighs the evidence for an underlying dramatic continuity. By contrast, the second half of the chapter grapples with the last movement's relatively continuous textures, noting how the lack of obvious topics provides yet another challenge for interpretation. Together, Chapters 11 and 12 raise some of the larger implications of my approach to synthetic categories involving continuity through time—specifically, how our capacity to synthesize and interpret emergent meaning affects our processing of stylistic innovation at all levels of musical organization.

Recent Orientations toward Musical Meaning

The past two decades have witnessed a growing interest among musicologists and theorists in defining and interpreting musical meaning. Musicology has been affected by two fundamental reorientations, which I will broadly characterize as the *critical* and the *ideological*.² The first significant new path for musical meaning was charted by Joseph Kerman (1985), who issued an impassioned plea for *criticism* as a broader interpretive endeavor. This important proposal, stemming from an even earlier “position paper” (Kerman 1965), was complemented by pleas for more historically informed criticism (Treitler 1989) and more stylistically informed critical analysis (Meyer 1973, 1989). Kerman urged musicologists and theorists to move beyond positivist historical and formalist analytical approaches in order to fully *interpret* (not merely classify, quantify, or describe) a far wider range of piece-specific and cultural evidence, with the goal of reconstructing a *historically contextualized* account of musical meaning.

The second, more *ideological* reorientation came hard on the heels of the first and was given a controversial feminist spark by Susan McClary (1991).³ A broader ideological agenda is programmatically set out in Lawrence Kramer's (1990, 1995, 2002) trilogy of books on musical meaning, a series of approximations toward, and appropriations of, a *postmodern* cultural critique. Kramer seeks to *deconstruct* the entire enterprise of musicology along postmodern lines, moving away from traditional conceptions of the work and the composer to consider musical *texts* as *situated* at the intersections of *cultural practices*.⁴ Meanings are then viewed as *mobile* and *contingent*, not governed by a single perspective (such as one might reconstruct as the composer's intent) but participating in the multiple exchanges of their use. In his interpretive forays Kramer often practices a freely associational approach in posing the discourses that might be occasioned by a musical text. These discourses are often launched by peculiar or unusual structural features that demand to be interpreted, opening up *hermeneutic windows* that lead to *cultural tropes*. Kramer's tropes are then diagnosed for their *ideological* content (constructions involving gender and sexuality, institutionalized power, and the like), and the interpretation often leads from the musical text to a cultural critique or even a radi-

cal *deconstruction* of a composer's ideological commitments as reflected in one or more musical works.

Kerman, McClary, and Kramer often situate their interpretive preferences in opposition to a favorite straw figure, the systematic musicologist (or theorist) who labors under the illusion of scientific objectivity in an exhaustive pursuit of verifiable *facts*, avoiding problematic issues of interpretation in reconstructing, from "*safe*" evidence, a *chronicle* of music history, *definitive editions* of musical works in proper chronological sequence, and *systematic analysis* of their structures, with the latter leading to *taxonomies* and *comparative analyses of stylistic features*. But the grand generalizations, or *master narratives*, presupposed by this naive musicologist are shown to have undermined the pseudo-scientific enterprise from the start. For McClary, the pathetic straw figure is typically a man speaking with an authoritative, patriarchal voice and defending a position of cultural hegemony. Critical examination and deconstruction of these scholars' ideological biases (whether involving gender, race, nationality, or institution) inevitably reveals a sadly misguided and rigid *Musikwissenschaft* that ignores the very life substance of what it would attempt to explain.

Of course, historically this is something of a fiction, since hermeneutic strands constantly enlivened the discourse and artistic commitment of past generations of musicologists, even as these scholars worked on the necessary foundational tasks of the discipline. Ironically, there was a healthy tradition of hermeneutics in German musicology—to mention only the studies of Eggebrecht and Floros and the philosophical writings of Dahlhaus—that was often ignored when tying positivistic research to its roots in German musicology. Not everything earlier musicologists had achieved would have to be redone, even if new interpretive approaches suggested helpful alternatives, either by reframing earlier claims or by presenting new ones.

Enough of the negative stereotype of "scientific" musicology (as practiced in the United States) was on target, however, to foster an equal and opposite reaction. First, criticism could provide a means of penetrating closer to the *significance* of music, and second, postmodern cultural critiques could counteract the problem of meaning as *essentialized* (whether as inherent in a musical work, as intentionally controlled by a composer, as exclusively claimed by a listener, or as reconstructed too determinately by a scholar). Instead, meaning would be conceived as freely circulating among communities of interpreters. And those interpreters would be seen as inextricably part of an ongoing exchange of cultural meanings, of which music could be understood as one of many equal contributors (Kramer 1990).

This vision was anthropologically rich in its promotion of local knowledge and "thick description" (Geertz 1973) over grand systems. But ironically, at the same time criticism sought to bring scholars closer to the work's individual or particular meaning, a postmodernist cultural critique was encouraging other scholars to back away from the work's inaccessible, essentialist core and orbit more safely about its sphere of influences—those discourses, ideologies, and cultural practices claimed as crucial to the contextualization of its meanings (plural).

It is not surprising that such contextualization might lead away from the indi-

viduality of a work as carrier of distinctive meanings—indeed, concepts such as the individual work as carrier of distinct meaning were themselves suspect. But I would argue that an adequate explanation of style growth and change must include an account of internal generative processes, even if the initial impetus for change is an external motivation. An individual composer's choices within the constraints of a style—or extending beyond those constraints in purposeful ways—may well lead to growth or change from within.⁵ Viewed from these two perspectives (the importance of a work's individual meanings, and the need to account for growth and change), the postmodern approach may be seen as lacking a consistent grounding in the most important of cultural practices embracing a work as text: the *musical style* (or styles) from which it draws established cultural meanings, and against which it creates new meanings (Meyer 1989; Hatten 1982, 1994). In my own work I have defined style as “that competency in symbolic functioning presupposed by the work of art” (Hatten 1982) and argued for its reconstruction in tandem with historical reconstruction of a given work's meanings. In this sense neither close interpretation of the work nor historical reconstruction of the style warrants censure as “essentialist.”

The postmodern tilt toward ideological cultural contextualization suggests not only that the musical work is always vulnerable to such discourses in its interpretation, but also that its composer is equally vulnerable. As an alternative model, consider the following image: a musical work is surrounded in its compositional gestation by the placenta of a *musical style* that filters out those aspects of culture that are extraneous to its growth, while taking in all that is essential nourishment from that culture. But to extend the analogy, style is not a perfect filter—just as alcohol or caffeine can have a deleterious impact on the fetus, so pernicious ideological contents can be imposed on a work from the surrounding culture—whether directly influencing the composer's compositional choices, or indirectly influencing the listener's interpretive biases. In such cases of imposed ideological content, the work of McClary and Kramer can be brilliantly illuminating. Nevertheless each musical work (after granting its problematic status *as* a work, rather than merely an elusive intertext) is inescapably more (or other) than the sum of the cultural practices it sets into motion. How we reconstruct the stylistic context and interpret the work's negotiation within that context are the crucial issues.

In the face of postmodernism, I maintain that the “aesthetic” is no illusion. Within a realm of scholarly discourse that is increasingly aware of contingency and relativity, I maintain that we still have access to *relatively objective* (by which I mean *intersubjectively defensible*) historical meanings—both at the general level of style (which can be *reconstructed* to a degree that the evidence will allow) and at the more detailed level of a work (which must be interpreted not only from stylistic knowledge but also through hermeneutic inquiry). The latter requires a mixture of deep empathy for the potential expressive significance of a musical work, and careful argumentation that can justify unusual structures as the plausible outcomes of work-centered expressive motivations.

With a theory of musical gesture, I address our *embodied* access to musical

meaning—ironically, an arena highly favored by New Musicologists, who apparently do not sense any contradiction between essentialized meaning in the body and essentialist meaning in a musical work. I am not primarily concerned with my own, subjective bodily responses as they pertain to the embodied experience and pleasures of listening or performing, as artistically evoked by Suzanne G. Cusick (1994), although I will inevitably reveal my own “kinesthetic empathy” with the physiological aspects of musical performance, as Andrew Mead (1999) has defined them. In my heuristic suggestions for getting closer to gestural meaning through performance, I have been profoundly influenced by Alexandra Pierce’s (1994) interpretive pedagogy of movement and gesture for performers, which I summarize briefly in Chapter 6. My primary goal, however, is to sketch out a comprehensive theory of musical gesture, ranging from the biological and cultural to the music-stylistic and strategic, and from the thematic and dialogical to the rhetorical and tropological—all of which are relevant to the historical reconstruction and interpretation of embodied meanings *as they are configured within* musical works—and as they are revealed in performance.

In applying the theory to the interpretation of musical gestures in Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, I presuppose the situated subjectivity of an empowered composer, able to work not just *in* but also *beyond* the cultural practices of the time. This conception of intentionality, as revealed in the work, is critical to reconstructing the aesthetic core of the work’s possible meanings—a core not equivalent to the diffuse history of critical reception that often biases interpretation in light of later cultural needs and practices. I do not claim there must be one and only one musical meaning in my interpretive quest, but rather that we can propose plausible, contemporaneous meanings, at an appropriate level of generality, while recognizing that language is inadequate to specify the particular synthesis of associations and correlations triggered by a musical event. Nevertheless, even if a late work of Beethoven’s might have been fully understood in its time only by Beethoven himself, it is possible to demonstrate ways in which one could have understood what Beethoven so carefully achieved—the signposts are plentiful. On the other hand, I would not deny that we value (or critique) historical works for more than might have been intended by their composers. I simply contend that we should have a better idea of how such works could have been interpreted at the time of their creation, and that this is a necessary complement to the kinds of meanings they might have for us today, when we factor in the perspectives of all the styles, interpretive approaches, and ideological stances that have emerged or been reconstructed since their time.

While I freely admit that semiosis of all kinds—from the aesthetic to the ideological—has its place in a healthier, expanded field of musical studies, I am also concerned that some of the ideologically based interpretations fostered by the New Musicology may offer suggestive webs of association insufficiently grounded in a style or its analytical evidence.⁶ As I argued over twenty years ago (Hatten 1982), style does not exhaust semiotics; rather, it selects among possible meanings based on their relevance to an ongoing—and central—music-stylistic practice. I will at-

tempt to ground my interpretations of musical gestures, topics, and tropes within the constraints of a style, considered as that cultural context most relevant to a work. I have found that the deeper I go into the interpretation of a work, the broader my conception of the stylistic competency implied by its creation. But the reverse is equally true—the richer my understanding of a musical stylistic competency, the deeper my interpretation of its creative manifestations. This “methodological dialectic” (Hatten 1982: 100; 1994: 29–30) provides a series of “checks and balances” for those choices we make when reconstructing a style (as a plausible generalization from the evidence of several works) and when interpreting a work (as a plausible manifestation of a given stylistic competency). If an ad hoc interpretive claim leads us to propose an expanded stylistic competency, we must then accommodate the claim within a larger contextual interpretation of the given work, find examples in other works by the same composer, and explain the expanded competency as part of a plausible growth process in the style.

Chapter 1 offers an example of how one might proceed in “grounding” such an interpretive claim for a striking event in a Beethoven piano trio by contextualizing a larger interpretation and proposing a systematic growth process in the style. It also offers a model of the endless gathering of evidence, and the multiple perspectives of analytical and interpretive approaches, that can guide and sharpen our expressive claims. I do not pursue this exhaustive degree of rigor in subsequent chapters that deal with more than one significant musical event, for obvious reasons. My examples throughout have been chosen to provide a degree of cross-referencing that not only lends further support to my interpretive claims, but also helps clarify and strengthen my theoretical arguments for the importance of gestural, topical, and tropological interpretation.

Oppositions, Markedness, Topics, and Tropes

Those readers not familiar with my approach to musical meaning as developed in my work on Beethoven (Hatten 1994) may find the following three sections helpful, since they review the role of marked oppositions, topics, and tropes in interpretation. I have chosen my examples from Mozart and Schubert in order to demonstrate the wider applicability of these concepts.⁷ I first examine the problematic critical/aesthetic opposition between musical structure and musical expression, and then explain how markedness theory can help us interpret the correlations between oppositions in structure and oppositions in expression. The last section explores an opposition of topics that invites tropological interpretation.

Although Part Two of the book, devoted to a theory of musical gesture, forgoes an exhaustive analysis of oppositions in order to focus more on the synthetic interpretation of distinctive shapes in all their particularity, I do not mean to diminish the functional role that oppositions can play in grounding a systematic typology of gestures. For an early demonstration of this principle, see Allanbrook’s (1983: 67) oppositional modeling of the typical meters and rhythmic gestures of dances used as topics and styles in the operas of Mozart.

Rethinking a Problematic Opposition

One of the interesting aspects of the New Musicology is its embrace of Derrida's deconstruction of binary oppositions in culture, an approach that has also found its way into semiotic theory through the work of Raymond Monelle (1992, 2000). As an acknowledgment of the usefulness of a deconstructive approach, I offer my own critique of a binary opposition in the critical language I have inherited, a difficult opposition that has hampered efforts to explain expressive meaning in music.⁸ The terms "structure" and "expression" are often conceived in dichotomous fashion as though they were separate (if complementary) aspects of a musical work. Consider the following ways that relationship has been conceived:

1. Structure as the shell and expression as the filling (or structure as the cake and expression as that which is added, like icing).
2. Structure as static, background form (or coherence), and expression as dynamic, foregrounded process.
3. Structure as syntax, and expression as semantics.

These familiar oppositions reflect the alignment of several terms: form, background, and static state are associated with structure; and meaning, foreground, and process are associated with expression. As I have cautioned (Hatten 1994: 278), one of the dangers of this perspective on expression is the confusion of what is focally *expressive* (foregrounded, hence "brought out" in performance) with *expression* in its entirety. Clearly we need a definition that captures the contributions of all levels of structure to the expressive meaning of a work. Consider another characterization of the opposition:

4. Structure refers to relationships inherent in the score and expression to those relationships as made manifest and embodied in sound (performance).

With this definition we come closer to the notion that expression is a *translation* of structure (or structural relationships) at all levels. But as Nicholas Cook (1999: 243) astutely observes, if the structures and processes revealed by Schenkerian analysis are "expressed" in performance as a literal sonic manifestation of the hierarchy of relationships among levels of voice-leading, this merely gives "a psychological interpretation to Hanslick's metaphysical model of musical autonomy." I would also observe that this definition overlooks the possibility that expression may itself be structured. Consider the following formulation:

5. Structure is the generative code for which expression is the structured result.

The analogy here is to genetic structure and expression. The DNA code provides the structure, and it is transcribed to the RNA on the way to being translated into, or "expressed as," the amino acids of proteins. The problem with this analogy is

that it assumes structure exists a priori, “in the genes.” It also risks confusing the structure of the *work* with the implied structures of a *style*. Consider an alternative construction:

6. The work is an expression of the potential structures of a generative style.

This formulation captures an essential distinction between work and style, but fails to account for the performer’s creative, not merely re-creative, role in the chain of “expressions”—or might we now say: *interpretations*?⁹ For, clearly, an expression of a structure, or expression that results in structure, depends on an array of interpretive choices that lend human distinctiveness and character to an otherwise disembodied realization of relationships (compare Meyer 1989).

Figure I.1 illustrates what would appear to be a complementary chain of expressive ideas leading to structures, and structures being in turn expressed, or *realized*, as structures in new realms. Its interlinked interpretations suggest Charles Sanders Peirce’s chain of interpretants.¹⁰ The last part of this chain captures the ambiguity in our use of the terms “expression” and “structure.” We could as easily state that we “structure an expression” as that we “express a structure” (see Figure I.2). Note also how these two verbs relate the processes of composing, performing, listening, and criticizing or analyzing, in terms of their shared functions.

Ausdruck and *Struktur*, the two concepts that have so often been put into opposition, now appear in an interpenetrating, *yin-yang* relationship, with balancing claims as both processive verbs and end-state nouns: we “expressively structure” (or “structurally express”) the “*Ausdrucktur*” of our creative interpretations. It is this constant fusing or *troping* of structure and expression that I will explore in my interpretation of topics, tropes, and gesture in the chapters to come.

Expression may indeed be richly structured, and *Ausdruck* need not be narrowly conceived as *Ausbruch*—the expressive outburst, or that which is most salient, foregrounded, or strategically *marked* in the work. An expressive point of intensity, or *crux*, is indeed “crucial” in the structuring of an expressive interpretation, but the expressive whole is more than the sum of its climaxes or marked moments. As we strive to realize the beauties of a processive *and* hierarchical (Meyer 1973) structure in its entirety, our goal is not, as I have cautioned earlier, “to pluck the fruits of expressivity off the branches of structural trees” (Hatten 1994: 278), but rather to achieve an appropriately balanced (structural and expressive) manifestation of foreground *and* background, melody *and* accompaniment, yearning *and* fulfillment.

With the theory of gesture to be introduced in Part Two, I will argue that gestural syntheses can complement and provide a corrective for overly analytical approaches to structure, helping bridge the gap in the unnecessary opposition “musical structure *or* expression,” and easing us past the conceptual logjam of their simplistic opposition. But this problematic binary opposition in our critical theory must not be confused with the irreducible (cognitively necessary) oppositions that play a crucial role in the development of musical systems—or any semiotic system that features complex syntactic organization. It is here that markedness theory can

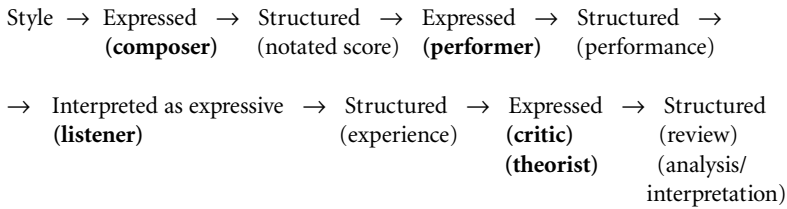


Figure I.1. Chain of expressed structures and structured expressions.

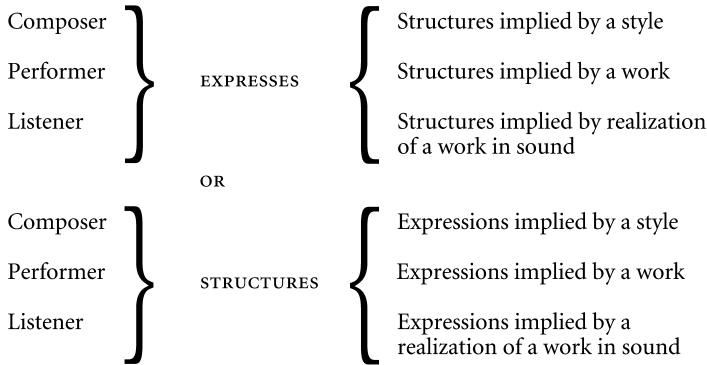


Figure I.2. “Expression” and “structure” as verb or noun.

play an important role, since systematic, stylistic oppositions have an asymmetrical structure that can be quite productive.

Markedness Theory and the Interpretation of Musical Oppositions

Markedness deals with one dimension of musical meaning, that which arises from difference, in the Saussurean sense that meaning is difference. Difference implies opposition, but the oppositions that are characterized by markedness are typically *asymmetrical*: one term is marked (with respect to some value or feature), and the opposing term (or field) is unmarked. The marked term is more narrowly defined and distributed, and, significantly, it has a correspondingly narrower realm of meaning than the unmarked term. For example, in some still current uses, the lexemes /woman/ and /man/ are in a marked relationship, with /woman/ more narrowly specifying /human female/, whereas /man/ is used to mean both /human male/ and, more generally, /human being/, when sex is not relevant to the context. Feminists rightly argue that power relationships lurk in such language, but the marked/unmarked coordination of opposition is at its base merely a fact of cognitive organization, and the marked term for sex can tilt in either direction. In the

animal kingdom, for example, the female is typically the unmarked term; “duck” and “goose” are used either to specify the female or generically to refer to any of the species when sex is not relevant, whereas if one wants to refer specifically to the male, one must use the appropriately marked terms—“drake” and “gander,” respectively.

There are three important consequences of this typical structuring of meaning for music. First, an opposition in musical structure (minor versus major mode) can correlate with an opposition in meaning (tragic versus nontragic, for the Classical style), which provides a systematic motivation for association that is stronger than association by mere properties or contiguities. This diagrammatic relationship, as C. S. Peirce would term it, enables a musical style to move beyond the most immediate or obvious of motivations for meaning, such as the straightforward iconicity of material similarity, or the immediate indexicality of contiguity and simple cause-and-effect relationships.¹¹ The symbolic level, based on habit or convention, is kept coherent by marked oppositions that support relatively stable types and their expressive correlations in a style. Musical works in that style can then develop strikingly creative tokens of those types—and provoke more challenging interpretations—while working from a coherent base of stable correlations. Thus, the systematic coherence of type identification and correlation *coexists* with the compositional flexibility of individualized tokens and the creative interpretation they foster. Of course, meaning as supported by marked oppositions can only be as specific as the given opposition affords, which is an advantage in reconstructing a style’s core of meanings in this way. One is not tempted to overinterpret when reconstructing a general type correlation for a style; instead, a hermeneutic approach is more appropriate to interpreting a given work’s variable tokens of a type.

Another advantage of markedness stems from the dynamic asymmetry of oppositions, which suggests a natural *growth* process by means of which styles carve out new niches of meaning by marking new features in creative tokens to form subtypes of the parent type.¹² Type generation results in further articulation of the oppositional network by introducing further oppositions within the semantic field of a marked term. Thus, meaning (the niche) and growth (its novelty) are inextricably linked in the model of markedness, since that which is new is marked, and the niche is more narrowly constrained in its meaning relative to the meaning of the parent type. And whereas the parent type may have originally been marked, it is now unmarked with respect to the new subtype.

To review: although systematic oppositions in a style may help guarantee underlying coherence and shared general meanings (*correlations*), a Classical composer such as Mozart will adapt the general to more specific ends, creating new meanings (*interpretations*) that go beyond the generic. On the other hand, in the case of a composer creating a new style, oppositions may appear to lie at the heart of a compositional poetics, as Danuta Mirka (1997) has demonstrated through her systematic analysis of Penderecki’s approach to composition during his sonoristic period.

Simplistic notions of binarism are often treated with disdain by those New Musicologists who propose more subtle interpretations through associations of musi-

cal and cultural practices, as Lawrence Kramer (1990) has termed them. These looser associations among the ideologies of a culture, with its endless constructions of gender, social hierarchy, religion, disease, or national identity—to say nothing of the further deconstruction of a culture’s inevitably repressed “other” or “supplement”—provide a rich field of cultural intertextuality and readymade cultural units to serve any interpretive end. Furthermore, the aesthetic intentions of the composer, as they might be reconstructed from a semiotic model of musical style and a hermeneutic approach to the expressive strategies of a work, are often displaced by consideration of the work as a cultural artifact. Ideological interpretation (at times ideological critique of a composer’s presumed failure to avoid negative stereotypes, even if unwitting) tries a work on the basis of standards that may be quite different from those motivating its creation and expressive purport.

For example (to choose another musicologist whose work I admire), Richard Taruskin (1997: 378–88) moves smoothly in his account of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* from the ostinato structures and nonprogressive harmonies of the music, to the biologism inherent in primitivism, with its loss of subjectivity and individuality, hence loss of compassion for the victim (a species of antihumanism), to the pronounced similarities with Nazi ideology, and by extension, “its roots in European history and ideas” (387), and ultimately, in the following essay, to an examination of Stravinsky’s anti-Semitism and self-interested concern to distance himself from Jewish musicians in a futile quest to preserve performances of his music in pre-war Nazi Germany (458). Whether or not this was Taruskin’s intention, how can our interpretation of the *Rite of Spring* not be tainted when we are left to presume a causal link in this infamous chain of associations? And should we then reject the music of Stravinsky? If the ideological is now irrevocably wedded with the structural and aesthetic, how can we be sure we have not obscured the latter by adopting an ideological slant too hastily?

If, on the other hand, binary oppositions seem too mechanistic, how might they be construed in a way that respects the ongoing evolution of musical meaning? How, in other words, might one go beyond the major versus minor, happy versus sad correlation, when there are more complex expressive meanings at work? In the following brief consideration of the Queen of the Night’s arias from *The Magic Flute*, I demonstrate how a marked oppositional analysis reveals consistent use of stylistic correlations, but also how these correlations are adapted to support different kinds of musical expressive meaning, as appropriate to the given dramatic situation. With the text and the dramatic scenario to guide us, the expressive import of each example appears fairly transparent.¹³

To begin with the text, there is a very clear binary opposition at work in the libretto of *The Magic Flute*, that between night and day. We need no better evidence of the way a Classical composer would map that distinction tonally than the act 2 finale, where the Queen of the Night (in C minor) is “vanquished” by Sarastro’s “speech act” (Austin 1962; Searle 1970), which wills into existence the sun’s bright rays (in E \flat major). When presented with any such negative-positive opposition, a composer in this style who chooses to underline it tonally will likely

assign the minor key or mode to the negatively valued and the major to the positively valued term. Thus, without necessarily claiming that every case of minor “means” sadness, or badness, or any particular thing, we could perhaps agree that oppositions in cultural meaning will map onto oppositions in musical structure in a consistent fashion. After hearing enough instances of such mapping, we may begin to associate minor more literally with particular properties. But the subtlety of markedness theory is that it applies to oppositions of meaning and their mappings in analogous music structural oppositions, rather than to the isolation of a single structure and the specification of its meaning. This principle corresponds well with Peirce’s diagrammatic conception of meaning, in that we represent the structure of the opposition, rather than imposing arbitrary reference on a given musical event.

Why might major have taken the positive pole versus minor? We can, of course, speculate on the raised versus lowered third, or on the greater number of dissonant intervals that occur in minor due to the options of raised $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$, or on the “chord of nature” as being major. But as important as these motivations are to that elusive, “complete” explanation, with markedness one need not explain “why” in order to substantiate the *consistency* with which, in a given style, the opposition major/minor correlates with positively/negatively valued oppositions in meaning.

Compare what might seem to be contradictory uses of major and minor mode, to see how this approach makes “binarism” more flexible. In her first appearance the Queen of the Night sings a dramatic recitative in regal B \flat major as she reassures Tamino. The regal character, of course, is not a correlation of major mode, but of the ceremonial march figures and dotted rhythms that allude topically to the French Overture style. After a positive B \flat major introduction, the Queen’s aria begins in G minor. If we assumed minor were simply “negative,” we might conclude that Mozart is warning us about the Queen’s true (evil) character. But, of course, this is not the case here. Instead, the operative word is *Leiden*, or “sorrows,” in m. 2 of the Larghetto, fitting a general correlation of sadness. Thus, in singing a minor-mode lament for her lost daughter, the Queen appears highly sympathetic (regardless of the selfish reasons that may lurk behind her “grief”). And since suffering is “dysphoric,” it must be mapped onto a minor mode.¹⁴

Analogous to the opposition between E \flat major and C minor in act 2, the tonal mapping here seems fitting and leads to further interpretation: B \flat major for regal power and authority, G minor for the Queen’s suffering and presumed weakness in not being able to prevent the abduction, and a return to B \flat major in the concluding section for the Queen’s attempt to embolden Tamino to rescue her daughter. Interestingly, both sides of the opposition between major and relative minor are employed by the Queen to enlist Tamino’s aid: the minor mode supports what we will later recognize as a manipulative attempt to generate sympathy. Thus, when the Queen’s true character is revealed, we can further interpret these apparently sincere meanings as somewhat hypocritical or manipulative.

In the Queen’s second aria, the D-minor, *Sturm und Drang* setting of “Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen” (“hellish revenge steeps in my heart”) is undercut

by a sudden shift to F major in m. 11 for the Queen's warning to Pamina. The Queen wants her daughter to kill Sarastro and steal his powerful sun-cross medalion, and she alludes in macabre fashion to his death ("if you don't thoroughly feel Sarastro's death pains . . ."). Why would Mozart choose the major mode for this image of death or murder? Simply because it is an outcome *positively* desired by the Queen—she sings it with power and pride (an ascending arpeggiation suggesting the heroic topic in mm. 11–12, capped by an exultant cascade on "Sarastro Todesschmerzen" in mm. 13–14 and 15–16). Furthermore, her positive attitude toward something so evil is guaranteed to produce a much more chilling effect on an audience (like the high, staccato figuration that suggests an evil witch's laughter later in the aria). The threat, were Pamina not to share in the Queen's plans and emotions, is indicated by the completion of the phrase "then you'll no longer be my daughter." Since losing her daughter would not be pleasing to the Queen, despite her threat, this passage features vii^{o7}/V moving to V in mm. 19–20. The use of a dissonant diminished-seventh chord is conventionally associated with anguish or grief; it appears here as a result of mixture within a prevailing major mode.

One may draw from these examples a clear moral in applying markedness to music: one term of an opposition does not necessarily have a fixed meaning. As in Peircean theory, any general correlation stemming from a marked opposition must be further interpreted according to the context of its use. Nevertheless, with consistent use, terms of an opposition begin to take on what appears to be independent correlations (typical connotations, if you will), and it becomes easy to assume that X literally means (or stands for) Y. Indeed, this is one way correlational meaning congeals over time, producing the illusion of fixity at a later stage of presumed arbitrariness, when we no longer remember original motivations or attend to the underlying oppositions that contribute to the coherence of meaning in a style. It is because of this growth process that it is possible to assume (after the fact) a degree of "arbitrariness" in language—an emergent illusion deriving from the systematicity inherent in complex semiotic codes, enabling them to support coherent interpretation.

Does expressive meaning arise solely from markedness that is foregrounded for attention? It may be the case that only those marked moments in life cause us to question the unmarked continuities of existence, the repetitive, diurnal rhythms of life. And we may grant that investigations are often sparked by feelings of incompleteness in our understanding of a musical passage (compare Kramer's rationale for his proposed "hermeneutic windows"; 1990: 5–6). We may even be led beyond our unmarked stylistic understanding by marked aspects of the work's "surface," such as an unusual combination of stylistic elements. But the surface is only part of the *strategic* markedness a composer brings to bear at all levels of a work's structure; the use of unmarked stylistic material may also be expressive at some level (recall my critique of the opposition between structure and expression in the previous section). When typical material is combined in atypical ways, however, it may engender a *trope*. Like a metaphor in literary language, a trope is sparked from the collision or fusion of two already established meanings, and its

interpretation is emergent.¹⁵ The unpredictability of creative troping, as opposed to the more logical articulation of types into subtypes, makes it much harder to defend theoretically. Nevertheless, troping is an essential component of a theory of musical meaning; artistic creativity, after all, is often surprising and unpredictable.

Topical Opposition and Troping

The striking alternation of dance themes and sonata development is a marked aspect of Schubert's late Piano Sonata in E \flat Major, D. 567.¹⁶ Sonata implies drama and the consistent pursuit of a dramatic discourse, whereas dance revels in local figuration and climax within global alternation and repetitive schemes. Given the concatenation of dance and dramatic development as topical foci in this sonata, one is forced to look further.

I will claim that the "drama" of this movement is *tropologically* conceived as a working out of the opposition between the relaxed realms of dance, represented by the principal and secondary themes (Examples I.1a and I.1c), and the charged progressiveness of development in sonata, represented by the elaborations and transitions (Example I.1b) in the exposition and the development section. Marked moments of dissonance and turns to the minor (as in the transition, Example I.1b) can delineate stages in a drama by increasing agitation and leading to a crisis. The recapitulation's variation of the opening theme is self-consciously embellished by syncopation and diminution, as if reflecting the agitation of the development section. The closing theme of the exposition also develops the idea from m. 16, climaxing on a "crisis" diminished-seventh chord that is an established marker of dramatic tension.

Does the dance suggest the dialogic—the pairing of two dancers? Or is it already a metaphor for a single agent's internal states? I suspect the latter. Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E \flat Major, Op. 31, no. 3, also features internal contrasts and "drama" in its opening theme (see Example 7.20), with four different kinds of gestures but only one implied agent.¹⁷ Schubert's sonata thematizes the tension between two states, as implied by dance (nonconflicted, diatonic, idealized space) and drama (conflict-driven temporality, with injected hints of suffering in the use of modal mixture and chromatic harmony). The oscillation between states, or play of genres, becomes for sophisticated listeners an important *emergent* meaning for the work.

With Schubert we have prior understanding of the correlations inherent in each "type" of music, and these are clues toward the interpretation of the emergent trope. Indeed, the hybridization of style types is a phenomenon of style growth that can be predicted systematically. Elsewhere (Hatten 1994: 121) I constructed a matrix that showed the possible cross-referencing of thematic, developmental, and closural *materials* with their functional *locations*. In puzzling over the apparent contradiction between closural material in a developmental location, I realized that Beethoven had achieved just such a trope in the development section of the first movement of his String Quartet in B \flat Major, Op. 130. But it is one thing to systematically explore all possible combinations as displayed by such a matrix, and

a) *Allegro moderato.*

b)

c)

Example I.1. Schubert, Piano Sonata in E \flat Major, D. 567, first movement.

- a. First theme.
- b. Transition.
- c. Second theme.

another to interpret the expressive meaning that emerges from their unusual combination. To map the disposition of each “type” in the ongoing drama of their alternation, as in the case of dance themes and sonata material in the Schubert movement, is but one step toward interpreting the significance that emerges from their dialectical encounter—a significance for which verbal precision may indeed be too limiting.

I have said nothing thus far about musical gesture, which traditionally has been relegated to the field of expression, although the gestural character of the opening theme of the Schubert sonata is clearly relevant to its interpretation. Can gesture be conceived by the composer as one of the elements of structure? Is gesture sufficiently generative or thematic such that its “expression” can affect the resulting structure of the work, as well as its meaning? I will defer answers to Part Two, which introduces a theory of musical gesture. Having illustrated some of my approaches to musical meaning, I bring this extended introduction to a close. Chapter 1 will serve to demonstrate how an integration of these approaches might respond to the demands of critical interpretation and historical contextualization, as so eloquently urged by Kerman, Meyer, and Treitler.