

# **Dissertation Proposal:**

*Thinking about Meaning in Music: a History.*

by

**Caspar van Meel**

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## Introduction

On January 12th, 2007 world renowned violinist Joshua Bell played an unannounced impromptu concert in the Washington D.C. metro. He was dressed in street clothes and there was nothing to distinguish him from the average street musician apart from his good looks and impeccable playing. He played for 43 minutes and 1097 people walked by of which 7 stopped to listen and 27 gave him a tip. He made 32 dollars and change during his performance (Weingarten, 2007)

The experiment conducted by Bell on request of the Washington Post challenges some of our fundamental preconceptions of musical perception and meaning. Mr Bell is widely recognised as a brilliant player and the musical works he performed on this occasion have been heralded as great works of art. Wouldn't the emotional content and meaning of the music be transported to the passersby to induce some kind of effect? Or is music simply fancy wallpaper readily to be ignored? An auditory cheesecake to be enjoyed when we feel like it?

As Judith Becker asserts the meanings ascribed to music are defined by the relationship between the listener and the music. On the one hand the music dictates a broad, yet limited range of interpretation (Cross, 2003, Cook, 2007) while on the other hand the listener as defined by his sociological-cultural background and biological-neurological constitution perceives and interprets the music in a certain way. People have a disposition to listen with a particular focus, expectations as to what emotions to experience and a somewhat predictable way of giving meaning to music (Becker, 2001). One might add that the specific environment and social context in which music is perceived also influences the perception of the listener (Müller, Osterhammel, 2012).

In her groundbreaking work 'A language of its own: sense and meaning in the making of Western art music' (2008) Ruth Katz showed how the Western conception of music emerged from the fundamental relationship between ideas and musical construction, between spiritual aspirations and musical import, a relationship that jointly produced the self-portraits, as it were, of Western art music. 'Many of these ideas and ,spiritual aspirations' deal directly with ideas pertaining to meaning in music. Not only did the ideas formulated by scientists, philosophers, critics and authors influence the production of the music itself but also the dispositions of listeners, composers and musicians in Western culture to perceive and experience music in a certain way.

This historical, embodied complex that informs and is informed by our emotional signification of musical practices can be described with Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* (Scheer, 2012). As Scheer points out the emotional norms in the habitus ,are informed and authorized by orders of knowledge' (Scheer, 2012, p.216). From Scheer's perspective, related to what is commonly known as practice theory, the totality of ideas on musical meaning forms an order of knowledge that stands in a reflexive relationship to musical practice and production. In other words, our ideas about how music expresses, represents and contains meaning have helped determine how we give meaning to music and vice versa: ,Musicological knowledge can shape perceptions.' (Cook, 2001).

*The central assumption behind my research is that there is a continuous development and interrelatedness between ideas in Western-European thought pertaining to musical meaning, many of which have shaped our historically, socially and culturally constructed expectations, emotions and dispositions towards music over the past two centuries.*

Of course the broad character of this assumption needs to be circumscribed by a few reservations to define and limit the scope of my thesis. The matter of musical meaning has been a constant theme in western musical thought, however I have decided to limit myself to a period which consists of roughly the end of the 18th century until the present. Apart from the fact that a larger timeframe would substantially reduce the thoroughness and cohesiveness of my argument, this demarcation is justified by the fact that an important part of the western contemporary concepts of musical meaning were arguably formed during the last two hundred years, beginning with the so called *Sattelzeit*.

My focus lies primarily on Western Europe countries like Germany, France, England and Italy, but especially regarding more contemporary thought and musical practice also looks at musical practice and ideas originating in Northern America. When I use the term ‚meaning‘ in relation to music I refer to the extra-musical concepts, emotions or ideas which music has been thought to represent, express or symbolise. Finally, it is clear that musical practice, production and discourse or reflection are inextricably intertwined. This being said, although musical practice and production figure prominently in my research, the emphasis will be on the development and interrelatedness of ideas on musical meaning.

In the remainder of this proposal I shall discuss the contribution my study will make to the field followed by a literature review, which will introduce the central themes of the debate briefly before engaging in a more detailed and in depth chronological overview of the literature. Next I shall outline and discuss the proposed structure for my dissertation as well as the interdisciplinary approach and methodological guidelines directing it. Finally I will present a conclusion summarising a few of the central points.

## Section I. Contribution to the field

My research aims to make a significant contribution to the study of meaning in music in several ways. First to my knowledge there is no structured work describing the historical development of thought on musical meaning over the last two centuries. The only similar works I have encountered are those by Katz (2012) and Chua (1999). These contain relevant and important insights that provide valuable information for my study but their emphasis is a different one. Chua's *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* focuses on the history of *one specific* view or concept of music and its meaning, namely that of the so-called absolute music. Katz' history describes the development and relationship between ideas on music and their influence on the harmonic concepts underlying western music. Her study, however, deals with a much larger timeframe and focuses on the impact of ideas on musical production. My study focuses on the development and interrelatedness of *different* ideas on musical meaning in a smaller timeframe and although referencing the impact of ideas on musical production this is not my main concern.

The second important contribution of my study is to clarify the premises and ideas behind our historically constructed dispositions that continue to influence our perception of music and the meanings we attribute to it. Emotional behaviour, for example, can partly be understood as an historical and social construct which is decidedly influenced by the culture in which one is rooted. Accordingly, accepted emotional behaviour relating to music is often influenced by cultural ideas and practices. To understand these ideas is to understand in part the background of our emotional response to music today (Becker, 2001). Conversely our ideas of musical meaning, throughout history, were shaped by contemporary conceptions of emotions. Also as we will see below in the literature review the various theoretical concepts of musical meaning often bear traces of past ideas.

This leads to my third point; the examination of historical and contemporary ideas on musical meaning promises to shed an illuminating light on the history of emotions. In their article *Musicological approaches to emotion* Nicholas Cook and Nicola Dibben outline several historical perspectives on music and emotion and state: 'All the approaches to musical emotion outlined in the previous sections have helped to bring about the very responses and practices which they purport to describe' (Juslin, Sloboda, 2001 p.66).

A fourth dimension of my research relates to the fact that musical performances as well as intellectual debates and ideas about music are a sphere wherein political and sociological relations become visible. Music is used to demarcate and strengthen positions between and within communities that define themselves through identification with certain aesthetic principles or artistic movements (Müller, Osterhammel, 2012). Some of the concepts and ideas pertaining to musical meaning have been developed and used in precisely these kind of contexts. Although it would go too far to discuss the social and political impact of ideas, my results will be able to help other scholars understand them better. One example is the appropriation of transcendental romantic ideas on music and meaning by the German middle class to emancipate themselves from the political aristocracy. (Müller, 2010).

A fifth relevant aspect of my study relates to the interplay between dominant ideas on musical meaning and the actual music produced within a certain timeframe. On the one hand composers like Wagner and Schönberg have clearly articulated their theoretical positions and thus engaged themselves in the discourse. Several of these contributions will figure prominently in my dissertation. Still the impact of ideas on the musical environment clearly goes beyond these select cases. Although it falls outside the framework of this study to describe the interplay between ideas and musical production in great detail, I will discuss several influential examples of music that serve as exemplary for specific concepts of musical meaning. For the rest I hope this study will help other researchers explicate the impact of ideas more fully.

Directly related to this is my final point that ideas on musical meaning and the music produced in a certain timeframe might be seen as expressions of a certain *Zeitgeist*. Katz states that her book ,deals with the ways in which the balance between the ostensibly rational and irrational was continually negotiated' in western art music. (Katz, 2010, p. xvii) In *from the Structural Function of Harmony* Schönberg seemed to imply a similar historical development when he named his own age and the classical epoch Apollonian contrasting it with the romantic Dionysian era (Dahlhaus, Katz, 1987). In reading the various texts on musical meaning these more general tendencies are difficult not to be perceived considering the shifts from romanticism to formalism then social constructivism and finally interdisciplinary contemporary approaches attempting more comprehensive explanations<sup>1</sup>. If this *Zeitgeist* hypothesis holds true, in providing a description of contemporary ideas on musical meaning my study might substantiate others' predictions of music that is yet to be made.

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<sup>1</sup> These shifts will be discussed in the literature review of this proposal.

## Section II. Literature Review.

In this chapter I will discuss some of the historical positions, contemporary approaches and central themes of discussion relating to musical meaning. A new student in this field can easily become overwhelmed by the multitude of opinions and lack of apparent structure. In this proposal I have chosen to give a chronological overview focusing on the central streams of thought although my dissertation will apply a different structure based on what I have called Time-slots<sup>2</sup>. For now however, this overview will help situate my own position and explain the suppositions and theories on which my thesis will be based. Also it will begin to make clear how our ideas on musical meaning have developed and influenced each other drawing attention to their historical contingency. Ideas are not developed in a pure intellectual sphere but rather arise within a definite social context from specific scientific, social and musical practices. Although mine is primarily a history of ideas it will - to a certain extent - take the practices and social context in which ideas emerge into account. First though I will roughly identify several central themes that appear in most approaches to musical meaning to provide some basic orientation to the reader. Of course these themes are all interrelated but for clarity's sake I will mention them separately.

First most of the authors discussed delve into the problem of musical representation which translates to the question: if then how does music transfer, represent or express meaning? In this respect the relationship between music's formal and structural properties and its expressive properties or extra-musical meaning is the focus of discussion. One might construct a scale on which to place the different theories depending on the level of expressive meaning they allow for. On the far left would be a strict formalist view and on the far right an expressionist viewpoint. Within this theme a crucial role is fulfilled by the *varying degrees of specificity* assigned to music in its representational function.

Secondly the role of emotion in the musical experience is central to most approaches on musical meaning. Indeed as Maus mentions (1997) musical meaning itself is often equated or reduced to the emotional effects of music. Sloboda and Juslin (2001) describe certain dichotomies relating to emotion in music that are prevalent. For example the opposition between emotion perception versus emotion induction. On the one hand music may represent emotions (as perceived by a listener) but also induce emotions (as felt by a listener). The intellectual concepts on emotion inform 'the sense of what is proper feeling in the performance and reading of emotional expression' in general and in music. (Scheer, 2012, p. 216)

Thirdly music is often seen as a mode of communication with the potential for promoting group solidarity and a strong community-building capacity. This is evident in romantic concepts of music as well as sociological (Adorno, McClary), social constructivist and biological (Cross) approaches.

Fourth the so-called nurture versus nature division has had an impact on discussions on musical meaning. Certain authors focus more on music's physical presence as evidenced in its structural properties and the biology of a listener's perception of music. Others tend to emphasise the cultural and social meanings of music often stressing the role of emotion. Although this is certainly a rough generalisation the dichotomy might be schematised as nature - biology- formalism versus culture - sociology - expressivism.

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<sup>2</sup> See Section III: Structure.

## A. Nineteenth Century

### *Early Romanticism*

From roughly the 17th century onwards music was regarded as executing the function of the Greek *Mimesis* or imitation of reality. In fact since language seemed to be doing a much better job at this the music mainly served to illustrate the text. Music simulated the feelings that were present in the drama (Cook, 2001). Instrumental music was considered inferior, or merely, as Kant put it ‚a play with aesthetic ideas ...by which in the end nothing is thought.‘ (Kivy, 1993). Instrumental or absolute music was regarded as a closed system of internal reference that in itself possesses no significant meaning. Whereas language obviously referred to a specific reality, the unspecific nature of music seemed to make it unfit for carrying meaning (Katz, 2008).

In the romantic paradigm the notion of music as mimesis is replaced with the concept of music as an expression of the self. Musical expression becomes a kind of purification of the soul through it's expression in music or what the Greeks called *Catharsis*. Musical romanticism is often said to begin with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1811) but was preceded and heavily influenced by literary romanticism. From around 1790 writing about music became a ‚*virtual mania*‘ and music a prominent theme in literature as evidenced by among others the writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Jean Paul and W.H. Wackenroder. (Longyear, 1969, p.9) These works can be an important source to identify early romantic concepts of musical meaning. It is also since the end on the 18th century that musical evaluation and debate in the press included information on the public, performers and the venue. Aesthetic journals were in a sense replaced by daily papers and journalists played a larger role in the shaping of public aesthetic opinion. These kind of texts may tell us a lot about musical meaning through the metaphors and musical categories that are used. (Müller, Osterhammel, 2012).

Concerning the expression of the self in music Wackenroder wrote: „In the mirror of tones the human heart learns to know itself, it is how we learn to feel feelings.“ (Longyear, 1969, p.9) Carl Dahlhaus mentions the impact Wackenroder had on romantic thought through his introduction of religious and metaphysical metaphor. (Dahlhaus, Katz, 1987). E.T.A Hoffmann emphasises that definite emotions in music are *inexpressible* because they come from another realm. Thus the expression of the Self through music is not limited to the expression of emotions but reveals knowledge of a world that cannot be expressed through any other medium. Hoffmann states that absolute music discloses a realm ‚that has nothing in common with the external sensual world that surrounds him, a world in which he leaves behind him all the definite feelings to surrender himself to an inexpressible longing.‘ (Solie, 1998, p. 151-155) Jean Paul thought that music echoes the joyous sound from a second world, be it heaven or elsewhere. Music conveys what words cannot convey: the inner melody for which there is no language or alphabet. Similarly Schopenhauer maintained music disclosed knowledge of a metaphysical primitive driving force he called the Will. (Katz, 2012)

An example of a critic who didn't write explicit aesthetic works on music but was very active in the Parisian music scene is Heinrich Heine. He admired music that expressed the truth and soul of the composer through music. Heine praised the popular composer Albert Gottlieb Methfessel for expressing ‚das Natürliche, das Organische hervorgegangene und mit dem unnachahmlichen Stempel der Wahrheit gezeichnete‘. (Heine, 2012)

Due to it's heuristical function music is now assigned a spot at the top of the hierarchical order of the arts. Ironically music is granted this position thanks to the unspecific nature of it's referential content (Cook, 2001, Katz 2010). Whereas in classicism

it's lack of specificity back-benched music, in romanticism the infinite space for interpretation made music ideally suited to fulfil it's newfound metaphysical function. As Lydia Goehr states the romantic strategy is twofold: ‚A formalist move which brought meaning from the musics outside to its inside‘ and a ‚transcendent move from the worldly and particular to the spiritual and universal.‘ (Goehr, 1993, p.153)

### **Formalism: late Romanticism**

The themes introduced by literary figures, philosophers, composers and critics such as Hoffmann, Schopenhauer, Beethoven and Heine form the background for many of the debates and theories on musical meaning in the nineteenth century. They laid the groundwork for new interpretations that integrated nationalist and historicist ideas and emphasised music's capacity to unite people and forge communities. The romantic composer was connected with the larger entity of his people whose culture and spirit he uniquely expressed through his music. For German composers music was ‚essentially social and political‘: ‚Ethics, politics, and aesthetics, they claimed, should all be seen in the light of a cultural goal, that of making the individual feel at home again in a newly structured solidarity.‘ (Katz, 2012, p.224) I will focus on one famous discussion known as the *Musikerstreit* to discuss some of the important figures and themes.

The *Musikerstreit* was based on a disagreement between a ‚progressive‘ group of composers and critics from Leipzig, Germany which were called the ‚*Neudeutsche Schule*‘ with among its most prominent advocates Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. The other camp was based in Vienna, regarded as conservative and centred around the composer Johannes Brahms and the critics Franz Brendel and Eduard Hanslick. The debate was politically motivated as part of a conflict for cultural hegemony between the cities of Vienna and Leipzig (Kimney, 2009), but for our purposes the interest lies mainly in the philosophical disagreement on musical representation and the old topic of the relation between music and words.

Wagner's position is summed up by his own words in the introduction to *Opera and Drama*: ‚der Irrtum in dem Kunstgenre der Oper bestand darin, daß ein Mittel des Ausdrucks (die Musik) zum Zwecke, der Zweck des Ausdrucks (das Drama) aber zum Mittel gemacht war‘ (Wagner, 1852). Wagner was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer who thought of music as the direct representation of the Will. (Schaeffer 2000, Nussbaum, 1999). In Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* we find this concept in the idea that the mythical drama was driven by a hidden force that was expressed in the music. His ambitions did not stop at the door of the opera house. Wagner wanted to aestheticize life itself and he was convinced that, by raising reality to the level of his fiction, he had found a formula for doing so.

On the other side stood Eduard Hanslick, a music critic and lecturer who heavily influenced musical thought in the 20th century with his book *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854). He laid the groundwork for the emancipation of musicology as an independent scientific discipline and many discussions on musical meaning take Hanslick as their point of reference<sup>3</sup>. Hanslick defended a formalist approach to music according to which music cannot represent extra-musical content in the sense of specific emotions or feelings. The beauty of music lies in the selfless contemplation of the structural, formal properties or pure tonal relations of the music (Budd, 1992). The musical work in Hanslick's view is an autonomous entity independent of personal, historical or political events and independent of the interpretation of the performer or listener. As is sometimes misconstrued Hanslick did not deny the relation between emotion and music. Hanslick contended that the formal

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<sup>3</sup> For example see Robinson (1997), Cook (2007)

structure of music is analogous to the dynamic features of emotions; it can represent the accompanying adjective but not the substantive. (Alperson, 2004, Budd 1992).

The difference of opinion between Wagners romantic conception of music and Hanslicks formalist approach led to personal animosity, both sides claiming rightful heritage to Beethovens legacy. An interesting position in this debate - one albeit taken from the sidelines - was occupied by another admirer of Beethoven: Friedrich Nietzsche. His views on musical meaning have been classified as both formalist (Dahlhaus, 1980, Janz), and romantic (Robinson, 1997) which is not surprising considering the apparent change of tone in his work. As a young professor of philology in Basel he was especially enamoured by Wagner and Schopenhauer as is evident in his first adult work *The Birth of the Tragedy*. Later in life his well documented personal break with Wagner led him to an explicit repudiation of Wagners Ideas.

Nietzsches philosophy of music is often interpreted as undergoing a radical change following his break with Richard Wagner. In fact the essence of his perspective on musical meaning in the *The Birth of the Tragedy* is in accordance with the philosophical ideas as presented in his later works (Moritz, 2002). I believe Nietzsches ideas on music foreshadow some of the late twentieth century approaches by combining formalist and romantic aspects.

## B. Twentieth Century

Thanks to a radical formalist interpretation of Hanslick's ideas musical meaning as a topic for academic discussion was off limits from the end of the nineteenth century through most of the 20th century. *Vom Musikalisch Schönen* was mostly wrongly interpreted as a definitive repudiation of music's ability to bear expressive or referential meaning (Cook, 2007). Thus in his history of Western Aesthetics Lipmann (1992) wrote that twentieth century musical aesthetics is distinguished primarily by its concern with musical form and disregard or even rejection of emotion and expression relating to music. In a similar vein Robinson notes: 'In recent times, formalism has distinctly had the upper hand, alike in composition, music theory, and philosophy of music' (Robinson, 1997). Formalist ideas were either actively propagated or used by composers like Schönberg, Webern, Boulez and Stockhausen. As Schönberg wrote: 'Beauty, an undefined concept, is quite useless as a basis for aesthetic discrimination, and so is sentiment.' (Dahlhaus, Katz, 1987, p.661) For example, focus on the role of emotion in music was, in accordance with Hanslick's views, often considered inappropriate behaviour on behalf of the listener.<sup>4</sup> (Lipmann, 1993). Susan Langer remarks that this 'somewhat unhappy effect' of formalism also had an effect on the ideas and attitudes of the general public. The obsession with form and structure led to the idea that someone not equipped with the proper tools for musical analysis is incapable of saying anything valuable about music. (Sloboda, Juslin, 2001. Langer, 1953)

### ***Enhanced Formalism***

The occupation with musical meaning in the sense of structural and formalist analysis can be divided in several approaches like semiotics, symbolism and heuristics (Lippman, 1993). Although formalist analysis was pervasive it does not mean that the expressive properties of music were always denied, but often the issue was dismissed as overly speculative, subjective or simply a small part of the problem. For example a work like Coker's 'Music and Meaning' (1972) does devote a chapter to so-called 'Extrageneric Musical Meaning' in a basically formalist work on musical semiotics. As my dissertation is first and foremost a history of expressive or representational meaning I have chosen to focus on formalist approaches that grant a central role and credibility to extra-musical meaning and have attempted to explain what is intuitively perceived as a connection of music and meaning. In this sense meaning is often equated with some form of musical emotion. Alperson (2004) distinguishes two central issues that an 'enhanced' formalist theory of musical emotion should address. First the problem of reconciliation i.e. how the formal and emotive aspects of music are related. Secondly the problem of intelligibility or how a non-human object can express emotion. Two important attempts at such a theory<sup>5</sup> are those of Susan Langer in her book *Feeling and Form* (1953) and that of Peter Kivy who, as Jennifer Robinson comments, 'has done perhaps more than anyone to formulate a contemporary philosophy of music.' (Robinson, 1997 p.2). Both Langer and Kivy played an important part in lending respectability and credibility to a musical criticism based on music's expressive properties in the 20th century.

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<sup>4</sup> Although Lipmann doesn't define the term his use of musical meaning seems to refer more to the 'sense' and 'internal logic' of music.

Susan Langer dismisses the romantic concept of self-expression in music on the grounds that if this were the case only the composer would be able to judge the true content of the work. Expression as an evocation of psychological states in the listener (*Catharsis*) reduces musical composition to 'a psychological ploy whose aims are not far removed from those of the advertising agent.' (Alperson, 2004, p. 264). This leaves Langer with explaining musical expressive qualities starting with, in her own words, 'the physics of sound as the natural groundwork.'

She does this by stating that musical forms are an auditory illusion or image of our subjective experience of time or what Langer calls virtual time. This virtual time is distinct from actual time (as determined by clocks, routines etc.) in that it is governed by *tensions* of a physical, emotional and intellectual nature and their subsequent resolution. In virtual time we experience the passage of time whereas actual time is simply an ordered sequence of moments. The focus on actual time is necessary for practical and scientific purposes but by ignoring virtual time we oversimplify our experience by pressing it into a conceptual and scientific form. Music can represent reality no more than philosophy but 'it presents us with a more adequate image of our sentient and emotional reality in a non-discursive image.' (Langer, 1953 p.177)

For Langer art is thus 'an epistemological datum' that can provide us with knowledge of a reality to which science and philosophy have no access. In this respect Langer's theory is reminiscent of romantic theories that stress the epistemological function of music to provide knowledge of an unknown realm. The romantics assigned this function to music as a reaction to the rationalism of the enlightenment and similarly Langer formulated her theory in a scientific climate dominated by formalism. It is also not difficult to see the parallel between Hanslick's idea of music as an analogy for the dynamic of emotion and Langer's concept of music as an image of virtual time.

Langer's theory is fascinating, captures our basic intuition that music has emotional meaning and was one of the first to acknowledge this in many years. While for Hanslick the musical work was essentially the composition for Langer the work of art is the result of its performance in a specific environment. (Alperson, 2004, p.13) Still the analogy between virtual time and music remains unclear. Also, her theory about a general domain of emotionally felt time does not explain why particular emotions are often associated with music. In addition, it is not clear why music should *only* be analogous to experienced time and not to any other extra-musical phenomenon.

Peter Kivy's approach is more formalist than Langer's. The value of music for Kivy lies in the fact that it does not refer to an extra-musical reality. It is in this respect that music differs from the visual arts which possess a specific representational content and are 'eminently particular' or 'revelling in its heccity' (Kivy, 1997, p.203). The contemplation of the contentful arts is always related to our imperfect world, whereas musical thoughts remain fully abstract and provide us with 'thought processes that, if the composer is up to it, can only succeed.' (Kivy, 1997, p.209). Thanks to its formalist nature music liberates us from the inconsistencies of real life. Kivy here leans on Schopenhauer who believed the arts can free us from the Kantian categories that govern our thinking.<sup>6</sup> While for Schopenhauer music receives its liberating quality due to its hidden, unspecified content for Kivy it is the lack of content that liberates music. The lack of specificity in musical content in Kivy's view cannot determine the value of music because it seems 'bizarre in the extreme' to appreciate a work of art for its content yet be ignorant of the nature of this content.

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<sup>6</sup> These categories are defined as: 1. causality, 2. space and time, 3. motive and action, 4. premise and conclusion.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume Kivy denies the expressive capabilities of music. On the contrary he supplies us with a theory that attempts to create an 'objective' base<sup>7</sup> for speaking about music in emotional terms. He starts out by making the important distinction between music expressing an emotion (expressionism) and music being expressive of an emotion (expressivism). We agree that a St. Bernard's dog generally has a sad face but this does not mean that the dog is sad all the time. The same is the case with music - although a composer may write a piece expressive of emotion (even his own emotion) this does not mean that he has to feel this emotion for the music to be expressive of it. (Kivy, 1980)

Kivy explains the expressiveness of music with the help of two theories. The first is the *contour theory* according to which certain features of music resemble certain features of human expression and behaviour that are frequently associated with human emotions. Music is not so much an analogy of emotion as *iconic of* behavioural manifestations of human feelings such as speech, gesture, facial configuration and movement. Since this theory does not account for the meaning of all musical icons Kivy supplements it with the convention theory. This simply states that certain musical icons have come to be associated with certain feelings through convention.<sup>8</sup> Kivy thus relates music's expressiveness to the universal human tendency to anthropomorphise the world around us. In this way he circumvents the problematic concept of music as analogous to extra-musical content as found in the work of Langer and Hanslick.<sup>9</sup> Critics of Kivy have remarked that when he is talking about the expressive properties of music he is just using different words to describe the formal properties. In this sense nothing had really been 'gained' for the case of bringing extra-musical meaning to the table as an independent factor in musical thought. (Cook, 2001)

### ***Expressivism - Expressionism***

Although formalist approaches were dominant in the 20th century there were a few authors who tried to formulate an account of music based on its expressive and representational properties. The first famous exception to the rule is Deryck Cooke's *The language of emotion* (1959). In this book Cooke tries to determine the emotional meaning of musical phrases all the way down to the level of specific musical intervals. For example a major second in his view is expressive of the emotion "pleasurable longing in the context of finality". The practice of attaching specific emotions to specific musical phrases has a long history that can be traced back to Plato.<sup>10</sup> In the Renaissance these ideas were again introduced and were particularly popular in eighteenth century classical music. In this view a certain musical sign has a fixed reference to an emotion, other music, the circumstances of performance or some extra-musical reality.

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<sup>7</sup> Or as objective as possible: 'Whether the blues is sad has as objective an answer as the question of whether the Saint Bernard's face is sad, or whether a certain set of human features and human behaviour is expressive of sadness' (Kivy, 1980, p.147.)

<sup>8</sup> Kivy's theory presupposes that the listener is a qualified competent listener with knowledge of the musical culture and the ability to read the expressiveness of music. Interestingly an autistic listener would not qualify and indeed it is well known that Idiot Savant may be technically adept at a certain art, but often fail to recognize the emotional expressiveness of art.

<sup>9</sup> Van der Schoot (1992) adopts Langer's concept of analogy and argues that the analogy cannot be described but only experienced: 'More often than not these sound trivial rather than illuminating: the best determination of emotions is not in their correct appellation, but in their being experienced.' (van der Schoot, 1993 p. 290). As an objective or at least intersubjective base for musical criticism this is obviously not very helpful.

<sup>10</sup> For example the Dorian Scale to Plato was expressive of bravery and the Phrygian of prudence and considerateness,

One of the main problems with this approach is that the relation between a musical sign and its meaning is subjective, dependent on musical, social and cultural context and therefore in fact contingent. Cooke's theory presents us with an additional complication. For Cooke the connection between a sign and its signifier is a natural, physical law so when Cooke states that a minor third is sad the sadness is in some way inside of the music. We might call this view expressionist in that the music is a direct expression of the emotion - an opinion reminiscent of romantic theories of musical representation. What Cooke and these theories also have in common is that they are basically ethnocentric. Research of non-western musical cultures has shown that most of the laws as stipulated by Cooke do not apply outside of western music. Also in Cooke's approach meaning is identical to personal emotion which is a typical 19th century, western bourgeois idea. (Cook, 2007)

Another much discussed exception to 'formalist reign' is Leonard B. Meyer's psychological approach to music in his book *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. In essence his idea is quite simple: 'An emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited.' (Meyer, 1956, p. 14). Thus his theory is based on the popular notion that musical tension is based on the frustration and fulfilment of expectation. When, for example, tendencies conflict the result may be doubt or insecurity. In both cases the mind seeks clarification and stabilisation of these tendencies.

Meyer makes an important distinction between several historical positions of which the first two, the formalist and the expressionist, have already been discussed. Additionally Meyer distinguishes absolute expressionists, those who propose music does not refer to anything outside itself but can induce emotions or feelings in the listener and the referential expressionists who state that music refers to a content outside of itself and can excite feelings in the listener *in lieu* of this capacity. Meyer himself occupies a position that allows for both the formalist and expressionist position: 'The formalists are confronted with a problem very similar to that confronting the expressionists: namely, the difficulty and necessity of explaining the manner in which an abstract, non referential succession of tones becomes meaningful.' (Meyer, 1956, p.4)

Although Meyer does not deny referential meaning in music he simply states it would require a separate study. Cooke's (2001) criticism of Meyer is that he explains musical meaning only to the extent that it can be 'reformulated in terms of relationships between musical elements.' This is not surprising as in light of the qualifications made above it seems that Meyer intended to do just this. Although Cook recognizes this, Meyer's theory remains problematic. In fact neither Cooke nor Meyer present us with a valid account of musical meaning. Nevertheless their work has been and remains an inspiration to the next generation of researchers through their recognition of the importance of emotion and meaning in musical thought.

## C. Contemporary approaches

In the last twenty to thirty years the various disciplinary fields relating to the study of music have shown a renewed interest in the study of musical meaning. Several books have appeared that give a good overview of contemporary research on the topic, while often stressing very different aspects according to their disciplinary backgrounds or specialisation (Robinson 1997, Juslin and Sloboda 2001, Pearsal and Armin 2006). Pearsal and Armin, for one, comment on the 'instability of the interpretive landscape' indicating the extreme diversity theories on musical meaning have displayed in recent years. They use an amusing Indian parable to explain the situation. Three blind men come upon a elephant. One has the elephant by the tail and thinks it is a rope, the other is touching his trunk and believes it is a snake, while the third feels the elephants' feet and imagines it is a tree. Of course, the elephant in this story resembles music: 'Like the blind men in the parable, we music scholars, in our analysis of music, grope around the various aspects of music and then, as William James observed, we 'substitute the aspect for the whole real thing.' (Pearsal and Almen, 2006, p.3)

### **Social Constructivism**

Since the 1980's the renewed interest in musical meaning is often attributed to scholars that have been grouped under the banner of New Musicology. Under the influence of Adorno's social critique, analyses of musical works were undertaken, approaching music as a cultural construct reflecting and shaping social relations, ideologies, gender division and political ideas. Among the most prominent of these writers are Susan McClary and Lawrence Kramer<sup>11</sup>. Their social constructivist approach, however, has been criticised for (again) not providing an adequate explanation for the relation between the musical sign and the social relations signified by it. As Cook notes (2007) the only model for the relation is apparently provided by the classical Saussurean model defining the relation between sign and signifier as arbitrary, thus providing for an unlimited number of interpretations which cannot be empirically or objectively verified. In this sense we are reminded of 19th century theories (for example of Wagner) that used the ineffability of musical meaning to project their own subjective interpretation or ideologies. Although this cultural relativism is problematic social constructivists have made an important contribution by pointing out the influence of culture and ideology on musical meaning.

Anthropological and ethnomusicological approaches have contributed in highlighting similar aspects of musical meaning. As we have seen authors like Hanslick and Cooke present us with musical theories that claim universality for their principles. As is now commonly known research of other musical cultures has shown that the same music may receive very different interpretations depending on the cultural background of the

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<sup>11</sup> See: Susan McClary's "Constructions of Subjectivity in Franz Schubert's music." In *Queering the Pitch*. Ed. Brett, Wood, and Thomas. New York: Routledge, 1994. 205–33 and Lawrence Kramers 'Musical Meaning: toward a Critical History' (2001). The title suggests an historical approach similar to mine but due to its essayistic and loosely structured character it can not be seen as a history of musical meaning.

listener<sup>12</sup>. Within one culture the range of interpretations may be smaller but still exhibits major variation according to subculture and social background. <sup>13</sup>

Indeed insofar as musical meaning relates to emotions the concept of emotion itself is not without its difficulties. Becker (2001) states that in Western culture emotion is seen as an authentic expression of the individual. As we have seen this supposition underlies the romantic conception of music as expressive of the Self. In other cultures the display of emotion in relation to music is often viewed as an expression of social relations. 'Emotions relating to music are culturally embedded and socially constructed and can usefully be viewed as being about an individual within a community, rather than being exclusively about internal states.' (Becker, 2001)

This insight shifts the focus away from the musical work as sole contributor to musical meaning. Instead the attention is directed towards the social, cultural and political context in which the work is perceived and performed. Ironically Katz (2010) remarks that this idea might be said to find its pendant in romantic nationalist ideas on music as expressive of the *Volksggeist* or spirit of the nation. The cultural movement of which Wagner was an important representative emphasised political self-determination of the national people which entailed separateness, distinctiveness and independence from other nations: 'In retrospect it appears that the decline in theoretical universal cultural assets harboured from its inception implications for ideas that were to reach fruition only toward the turn of the millennium as manifested in postmodern thought and multicultural trends.' (Katz, 2010, p. 195)

So far the approaches discussed tend to focus mainly on certain aspects of the equation; either the context in which the music is produced, its expressive properties or the music itself <sup>14</sup>. Even if they claim to be talking about music's expressive properties some of them wind up talking about its structural properties. If they -rightly- stress the social construction of meaning the music itself disappears from the picture. The authors in the next section try to provide a more comprehensive account by either aiming to overcome the supposed dichotomy between issues of musical structure and those of affect or by granting equal importance to both sides.

### ***The Neurological-Biological Approach***

Ian Cross is director of the Cambridge Center for Music and Science and addresses directly the new insights provided by anthropology and social constructivism. His interdisciplinary approach draws on ethnomusicological, neurological and evolutionary-biological research to show that by looking at the *function* of music as an adaptive trait in evolution we can 'make sense of the varieties of music, of the multiplicities of roles that music plays in human lives and of the myriad and divergent meanings that have been attributed to music.' (Cross, 1999, p.2)

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<sup>12</sup> A classic example is that the musical interval minor third in Western Culture is often regarded as sad, whereas in other cultures this is not necessarily the case.

<sup>13</sup> The universality of musical meanings is also an important theme from a neurological perspective. Research by Stefan Koelsch and Tom Fritz shows that the region of the brain responsible for the semantic processing of linguistic content is also active in the processing of musical phrases. The same experiment conducted with the Mafa tribe of Kamerun yielded similar results. Further comparative experiments suggested a similar reaction to dissonance and consonance and idiosyncrasies in harmonic progressions even though to the former the Mafa didn't react as intensely. (Koelsch, Fritz, 2007)

<sup>14</sup> Although for example Becker does propose a fusion of nurture and nature her insights don't really incorporate evidence from the sciences or other disciplines.

As in other disciplines in neurology a formalist conception of music as being 'simple sonic patterns produced and received for aesthetic or hedonic reasons' has been prevalent. Also the conventional scenario for musical analysis, that Cross terms music-on-display (Cross 2010), has been the classical western situation of a performer on stage and people listening silently. The results from this scenario show an underlying biology involving mainly the neurological domains for perception and motor control.

As noted the western paradigm of serious music as a product to be consumed and appreciated passively seems to be quite rare on a global scale. Even in our own culture this scenario can be said to have surfaced only in the last two hundred years. In most cultures music involves an active participation of the attendants in which music and dance are not necessarily separable: 'This second type of musical situation – engagement with music through interactive performance and appraisal – is probably more characteristic of music in the majority of world cultures.' (Cross, 2010, p.1). This interactivity is evident in most musics cyclical event-structures following an underlying pulse allowing for the coordination of musical behaviour in time (Cross, 2003). The biology underlying this second type of situation or scenario has to be understood as a neurological process addressing social interaction and communication and not only perception and motor control. Thus music is 'probably rooted in neural circuitry and social processes that overlap, or share features with, those that constitute the matrix of language.' (Cross, 2010)

To understand this last remark we have to know that from a neurological standpoint language is involved with various cognitive domains at the same time. Language is not domain-specific but address a multiplicity of domains simultaneously. According to Cross, music is also domain-general facilitating redescription and integration of representations across domains. It is due to this capacity of music that it possesses what Cross calls a *floating intentionality* which means that music can be about several different things at the same time. (Cross, 1999) Contrary to a social constructivist view the meanings ascribed to music are still rooted in a secure cognitive base, thus not allowing for unlimited interpretation, but rather providing a wide but limited frame of reference.

Thanks to its floating intentionality music enables a riskfree interaction between musical participants. It 'allows each participant to hold to their own interpretations of the meaning of the collective musical act without ever having to make those interpretations explicit for each other. At the same time, music's immediacy of meaning -it's *apparent honesty*- legitimates the sense that what each participant feels and understands is also felt and understood by others.' (Cross, 2011, p.6) Also the cyclic periodic structures coordinate the whole group creating the impression that participants are sharing an experience. Thus music should be understood foremost as a communicative medium that may promote, create and maintain social relationships and ingroup solidarity. It is in this sense that Cross shows how music has functioned as an innate adaptive capacity of human beings with evolutionary advantages.

Cross' ideas may provide a basic framework to understand the theories discussed up until now. As Cross states the definitive meanings attributed to the musical act are still to be understood as a product of the cultural, historical and social context. His ideas are just an account of the evolutionary *function* of music. However, Cross addresses head-on the problem of diversity as addressed by social constructivist and anthropological approaches. Also by calling attention to musics capacity for addressing multiple cognitive domains the need for an interdisciplinary approach to music becomes clear. Going out on a limb this might also account for and legitimise the diversity in musical theories on meaning. It is difficult not to see the parallels between Cross' emphasis on cyclical periodic structures and Langers concept of music as virtual time or Maus' and Larsons' theories on music and motion and Cross' incorporation of music as action. Finally the concept of

floating intentionality provides us with a possible explanation of the crucial role assigned to musics (un)specificity by most of the theories discussed.

### ***The Performative Approach***

Cook (2007) uses a similar concept of *unspecific* meaning to evade the arbitrariness of social constructivism and rigidity of formalism. His *conceptual blending* approach sees musical meaning as emergent from two sources.

First there is the music itself and Cook agrees with Cross that a musical work is not simply the composition but rather the act of performing, recording or playing a piece on a sound system. Cook is mostly concerned with Western musical practice and unlike Cross does not necessarily make the connection with dance. For Cook a musical piece has an indeterminate but not unlimited number of possible interpretations. Drawing on theories on drama developed by Susan Melrose he sees a work of music as a cluster of semiotic potential which in the German article receives the name ‚Materiellen Spur‘.

Secondly to account for musics expressive properties Cook goes back to Hanslicks concept of music as expressive of the *dynamic* of emotions, although instead of dynamic he uses the term *nuance* of emotion. Which expressive properties of a piece emerge is dependent on the conditions of reception as determined by the music and its performance. Thus the meaning a piece occupies within a culture is dependent on its emergent properties: ‚so das die einer gegebenen Materiellen Spur zugeschriebene Bedeutung je nach den Umständen ihrer Rezeption variiert. Es ist demnach falsch zu sagen, dass Musik bestimmte Bedeutungen hat, vielmehr hat sie das Potential dafür, das bestimmte Bedeutungen unter bestimmte Umständen emergieren. Musik hat keine spezifischen Bedeutungen, aber sie Bietet Empfindungen von Liebe, Anmut, Prestige, Begehren usw. an.‘ (Cook, 2007, p. 101) In their interpretive, analytic and conceptual work critics choose certain properties of the semiotic cluster over others thus influencing the meaning that is given to a piece within a culture.

The concept of a musical work as a cluster of semiotic potential enables Cook to draw the distinction between actualized and potential meanings. Although we might not be able to actualise i.e. articulate all potential meanings we do experience them at a prelinguistic level. Cook concedes that the perception of potential meanings can also be dependent on cultural background but maintains that there remain a host of possible cross-cultural associations.<sup>15</sup> Tentatively Cook suggests that these potential meanings may form the base for an unarticulated feeling of solidarity between the participants in a musical act.

It is in this prelinguistic domain that the nuance of emotion becomes apparent and so again we find the emotional expressive meaning of music in the ineffable. Cook aims to rehabilitate this underestimated somatic experience of music to provide a counterweight to analytic and interpretive discourse. His work is in this sense ‚a critique of the marginalisation of the somatic in favour of the categorical, the written and the visual.‘<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to see how Cook's theory is based on the unspecificity of music and specificity of language. In a way his ideas are almost romantic yet like Cross his account of the ineffable is grounded in a material, cognitive theory thereby evading any transcendental connotations. He gives an intelligible account for the muteness that so often overcomes us in trying to articulate musical meaning: „Dieses Auseinanderweisen

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<sup>15</sup> For instance those relating to perceived energy to dynamic and tempo or visual brightness to sound.

<sup>16</sup> My translation. The original text was ‚einer Kritik an der theoretischen Marginalisierung des Somatischen zugunsten des Kategorischen, Geschriebenen und Gesehenen.‘ (Cook, 2007)

zwischen der Instabilität der Musik als Urheber von Bedeutung und der Fixierung, in der ihre kulturellen Repräsentationen vorliegen, steht, so glaube ich, hinter der merkwürdig geschwätzig Unartikuliertheit, die uns so leicht erfasst, wenn wir über Musik sprechen.' (Cook, 2007. p. 114 -115) Also his concept of music as essentially a performative act and a cluster of semiotic potential successfully combines the narrow formalist notion with the social constructivist concept of a musical work. What remains unclear and is unfortunately not expanded upon is the analogy between music and emotional nuance. The same could be said of Cross' theory that simply mentions that music mimics the prosody of linguistic speech but also does not go into detail.

### ***Narrative Approach***

I would like to conclude this literature review with a short description of what is known as the narrative approach by looking at one example. In general this approach treats the *whole* structure of a musical work like a literary work thus implying a certain linguistic analogy.<sup>17</sup>

According to the narrative approach advocated by Maus (1997) a succession of musical phrases is seen as a series of actions and reactions by an imaginary agent with their causes in the accompanying psychological explanations. The description of music in this manner 'breaks down' the difference between structural and expressive meaning. Also the centrality of emotion in the musical experience is challenged since it becomes just one among many possible explanations for an action. The descriptive analysis of a work can thus only be achieved through a combination of both formalist and expressive vocabulary.

Although this kind of explanation successfully overcomes the dichotomy it can hardly be seen as an objective description. Indeed as Cook (2001) notes some of these authors like Fisk (1997) and Guck (1994) explicitly acknowledge this fact presenting their analysis of musical pieces as *one possible* interpretation and a suggestion to the listener. In this way musical theory and analysis are implicitly seen as an intervention in musical practice aiming to influence the ways we hear music. Seeing musical analysis in this manner is what Cook terms the 'performative approach' to music.

As I briefly mentioned in the introduction this concept is important to my approach.<sup>18</sup> I will approach the literature on musical meaning as interventions in musical practice that actively shape the interpretive landscape rather than simply being exemplary of it: *'Understood this way, analytical and critical practices are less concerned with how the music is than how it might be heard to be; they aim less a proof than a persuasion. This is the basis of what we term the 'performative approach to music and expressive meaning'* (Cook, 2001, p. 65).

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<sup>17</sup> See also Karl and Robinson (1997), Hatten (1997). For a recent book on this topic see Klein and Reyland (2013) *Music and Narrative since 1900*.

<sup>18</sup> See also the section on methodology.

## SECTION III: Structure

In the following section I would like to discuss the structure of my dissertation. Although in the literature review I have presented the various concepts and ideas in a chronological fashion, structures of musical meaning often overlap and exist simultaneously. Events that cause structures of meaning to collide may result in conflict and force previously implicit meanings to be made explicit. I believe these conflicts, sometimes the cause of social scandal, often mark the transition between one structure of meaning to the next.

I will identify a number of such pivotal events or timeslots over the last two hundred years that will function as departure points for my discussion of the various concepts of meaning in musical ideas and practice. These Timeslots may in turn be divided into four basic categories that bear as working titles the names of major cultural movements: Romanticism, Formalism, Postmodernism and Reflexive Modernity. As a preface I will include a short, basic introduction to classical musical esthetics of the 18th century. Many of the events discussed were cause for scandal in their time, while a few simply serve to illustrate some of the concepts discussed in the literature review.

This Timeslot-approach has several advantages for my research. In directing my attention towards specific events I can give my research a concrete historical and empirical departure point. It allows me to focus on the description of central ideas related to these events instead of describing ideological or philosophical movements. Although these movements do provide an overarching structure they are not the focus of my research. Finally this approach lets me incorporate such sources as reviews of performances in a self-evident manner.

### A. Romanticism

The first section of my thesis is dedicated to the development of the romantic ideas on musical meaning by focusing on three important musical events that all caused significant controversy in their time.

#### ***Early romanticism: Beethovens Eroica.***

The first timeslot would take as its departure point the premiere of Beethovens third symphony: the ‚Eroica‘. The path Beethoven started down with the Eroica would finally culminate in the IX symphony in 1824 which is often considered as the start of the musical romantic era. The way Beethoven is appropriated by many romantic critics and composers makes this a good place to start. His status as a composer seems above reproach and he is often seen as the penultimate romantic composer. In this timeslot I will discuss philosophers like Schopenhauer, authors like E.T.A. Hoffmann and Wackenroder and also critics like Heinrich Heine. As shown in the literature review the romantic ideas that came to fruition in this period would prove very influential on future ideas on musical meaning.

The Eroica premiere in 1805 provoked great discussion and marked a significant change in musical direction for Beethoven that some of his contemporaries found difficult to accept: ‚Referent gehört gewiss zu Herrn von Beethovens aufrichtigsten Verehrern; aber bei dieser Arbeit muss er doch gestehen, des Grellen und Bizarren allzuviel zu finden, wodurch die Übersicht äusserst erschwert wird und die Einheit beinahe ganz verlorengiht.‘ (Anonymus, Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung VII, 1804, p.55)

These kind of reactions are helpful in evaluating the esthetic categories used by his contemporaries to judge Beethovens music and to understand the contemporary musical practice. As Werner Klüppelholz remarks in the introduction to his compilation of various

reactions to Beethovens Eroica: ‚Gewiss erweckt die Lektüre dieser Texte erstaunen darüber, wie fraglos der musikalischen Inhaltsästhetik vor allem des 19e Jahrhunderts das Verfahren war, uneindeutige Klangkonstellationen in außermusikalische Bedeutungen und Begriffen zu definieren.‘ (Klüppelholz, Bosch, 1983, p. 54).

### ***The politics of romanticism: Tamburini scandal***

In this timeslot I would like to discuss a scandal in London as an illustration for the social background that resulted in the widespread reception and dominance of romantic musical ideas. In 1840 ‚Her Majesty’s theatre‘ failed to engage the famous Bass Antonio Tamburini to perform in that seasons’ concerts. What followed was an outrage under the aristocratic class in London, an uproar in the concert hall during several performances and a lengthy debate in the local newspapers. What was at stake was not so much the performance itself but rather the position of the aristocratic class who aimed to assert their dominance over the rising bourgeois middle class: ‚Die Londoner Aristokratie betrachtete den öffentlichen Raum der Oper gleichsam als ihre Privatsphäre und beanspruchte hier einen exklusiven Vorrang‘. (Müller, 2013, p. 166) As discussed in the literature review this class-struggle played a role in the development of romantic ideology and 19th century musical practice. These developments are important not only to understand this ideology but also because many of the authors discussed in my thesis (for example Adorno) refer to this phenomenon.

### ***Absolute music: Musikerstreit & Wagner***

A third timeslot presents itself with the premiere of Wagners Tristan & Isolde on the 10th of June, 1865 and the premiere of Parsifal in Bayreuth on the 26th of July, 1882. The reception of Wagners Tristan clearly shows the radical impact his harmonic innovations had on his contemporaries. Tristan led to some very creative criticism and was alternately described as a ‚psychological torture chamber‘, a music designed to torture the souls of ‚musical villains‘ in hell and some even suspected the composer had succumbed to the ‚demon of the Unorganic‘ (Klüppelholz, Bosch, 1983, p. 155-159, My translation). The impact of Wagners musical language and ideas on future composers, critics and thinkers concerned with musical meaning cannot be underestimated, therefore it seems fitting to choose these works as a departure point for discussion. Coinciding with the premiere of Parsifal we also see the definitive break between Nietzsche and Wagner. This will form the context for among others a discussion of the Musikerstreit as documented in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*<sup>19</sup>, Wagners conception of music, Hanslick’s formalism, the establishment of Musicology as a discipline and Nietzsche’s concept of music interestingly forming a bridge between romantic thought and formalism.

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<sup>19</sup> See literature review p.6–7

## B: Formalism

In the beginning of the twentieth century there are two simultaneous developments that affect musical practice and with it ideas on musical meaning. The boundaries of Western tonality, long since challenged by composers like Wagner, Stravinsky and Debussy, finally collapse, resulting in the search for new musical material that eclipses the interest in musical meaning or content, which in turn reinforces the position of formalism as the dominant musicological discourse. Adorno states in reference to the *Neue Musik* produced in Germany in the 1950's: ‚Was musikalisch heute überhaupt geschieht, trägt den Charakter des Problems in der unverwässerten Bedeutung des Wortes; der einer zu lösenden Aufgabe; einer zudem, der von vornherein die Schwierigkeit der Lösung eingeschrieben ist.‘ (Adorno, 1958, p. 9) Musical thought and practice in this period is pre-occupied by the question of medium and material as opposed to matters of content and meaning. The development of the 12-tone system, the use of non-pitchrelated sounds and the early use of electronics may be seen in light of this development. This section will discuss several answers to the ‚problem‘ posed to composers and thinkers in mostly the first half of the twentieth century as they lead to -again- three scandals.

### ***The emancipation of dissonance: Schönbergs 12-tone music & serialism***

On 31 March 1913 Arnold Schönberg conducted the *Wiener Konzertverein* in the *Musikvereinssaal* in Vienna performing works by Alban Berg, Webern and himself. It would turn out to be the most severe of several scandals and a tumultuous uproar in the concert hall. In 1941 Schönberg wrote: ‚Die methode der Komposition mit zwölf aufeinander bezogenen Tönen entstand aus der Notwendigkeit,...neue konstruktive Voraussetzungen für die formalen und strukturellen Unterscheidungen zu schaffen, die früher durch tonale Harmoniefolgen bewirkt wurden.‘ (Nono, Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik, p.25) Thus the development of the 12-tone system might be seen as a direct result of the collapse of tonality. In fact Schönberg considered his method as the logical consequence of tonality: ‚there is nothing new about the state in which music finds itself when it ceases to seek help from tonality.‘ (Dahlhaus, Katz, 1987, p.651)

Schönberg was concerned with the unity of a musical piece and through his rigid 12-tone system he hoped to achieve the unity that the tonal system had previously provided. Concerning the expression of extra-musical meaning in music Schönberg was quite clear: ‚Music does not express the extra-musical‘ (Dahlhaus, Katz, 1987, p.654).<sup>20</sup> Schönbergs ideas were further developed by such composers as Pierre Boulez and Karl Heinz Stockhausen in serialism which might be seen as the most strict musical application of formalism. Musicians and theorists alike aspired to the conditions of science and mathematics. Indeed it was this movements‘ earlier work in the 1950's that provoked Susan McClary to state that, in both musicology and compositional practice, ‚music mattered precisely because it had managed to transcend mere meaning.‘ (McClary, 2009, p.29).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On the other hand he did acknowledge that the character of a certain piece refers to the emotion a piece should produce in performance.

<sup>21</sup> The relationship between Schönberg and his followers remains to be discussed, but as a tentative thesis one might state that although Schönberg definitely laid the groundwork for serialism, the universalist, positivist attitude seems foreign to him and in a sense Adorno was correct when he called him conservative.

### ***The Art of Noise: Pierre Schaeffers' Orphée 53***

In a sense a more radical attempt to go beyond tonal harmony within the Western musical tradition, was presented by the incorporation of sounds previously not associated with the musical domain at all. As early as 1913 Luigi Russolo, a member of the Futurist Avant-Garde, wrote in his manifesto *The Art of Noise*: 'We must enlarge and enrich more and more the domain of musical sound. Our sensibility requires it'....'This need and this tendency can be totally realized only through the joining and substituting of noises to and for musical sound.' (Russolo, 1913, p.11).

In his *Musique Concrete* the french sound engineer Pierre Schaeffer hoped to achieve this goal. In collaboration with Pierre Henry he wrote an opera with the title *Orphée 53* fusing new sounds with the traditional form of the opera. The piece premiered at the Donaueschinger Musiktage in 1953 but was not received kindly by the German public. The journalist Walter Dirks reported: 'Am Schluss des "Orphée 53" waren eine griechische Hymne an Zeus, das Geheul der Furien und anderes, nicht Identifizierbares so ungeheuerlich und so maßlos ausgebeutet, dass der ganze Saal um Mitternacht ins Toben geriet, es war nicht mehr zu unterscheiden, was wütender Protest, was fanatische Zustimmung, was amüsiertes Ulk, was Nervenentladung – und was das Stück selber war. Mit solcher Musik könnte einer eines Tages einen Krieg entfesseln.'

What provoked such extreme reactions from the audience? Perhaps it was because in this musical concept the question of musical meaning simply becomes a part of the way we give meaning to sound in general, thereby radically challenging our preconceptions concerning the ontology of music.<sup>22</sup> In this section I will consider this and other consequences these practices had and still have for our ideas on musical meaning.

### ***Social Musicology / Musical Sociology: Luigi Nono's Intolleranza 1960***

An early reaction to the radical formalist conception of serialism and 12-tone music, but retaining an essentially modernist stance, can be found in the music and writings of Luigi Nono. In 'Geschichte und gegenwart in der Musik von Heute' (1959) Nono complains that his contemporaries ignore the historical and cultural context in which music was and is created.<sup>23</sup> Later in writings like 'Musik und Revolution' (1969) his ideas take on a Marxist tone and the social context, he claims is ignored by his fellow composers, seems to refer mainly to the capitalist society towards which musicians should take a stance. Although in his anti-capitalism Nono is clearly a child of his time<sup>24</sup>, his insistence on cultural and historical context as well as his imperative to be aware of music's social role and responsibility, precedes the introduction of these ideas by the New Musicology movement some twenty years later (see Literature Review p.6–7). Nono did not only theorize about these concepts. In 1961 Nono's musical theatre *Intolleranza* had its premiere in Venice and caused a big scandal on the grounds of the music, the text and the political views expressed in the work.

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<sup>22</sup> In a different way John Cages conceptual work 4'33 from 1952 also calls into question the boundaries between music and sound or noise.

<sup>23</sup> For example although he is critical of John Cages work he is even more vehement against European composers that unquestioningly adapt the methods of this typical american composer and place them in their European context.

<sup>24</sup> At the latest from the moment he calls Cuba the first free country in the America's and explains he has undertaken extensive voice analysis of Fidel Castro's voice (Nono, 1969), the red tinted glasses through which he sees the world become clear.

In the 1950's Nono met Theodor Adorno at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse where they taught alongside other famous composers like Stockhausen and Boulez. Although Adorno and Nono certainly have their differences <sup>25</sup>both emphasize the role of the sociological aspects of musical practice, embedding it in a critique of respectively consumer culture and late capitalist society. Adorno considers the very structure of our tonal system as a product of *Bourgeois* society and champions the *Neue Musik* (serialism and twelve tone music) as a social protest aimed at ‚die Verschacherung der musikalischen Sprache an den Profit, gegen ihre Herabwürdigung zur Ideologie.‘ (Adorno, 1968, p. 13) Although he was deeply involved in the world of *Neue Musik* and emphasised the importance of technical coherence, Adorno was also critical of formalism and the positivist scientific attitude towards music: ‚Blindheit gegen den Sinn, oder Verzicht auf Sinn überhaupt gegenüber blossen Tun, hat mittlerweile derart sich verbreitet, dass an Sinn überhaupt zu erinnern sich dem Verdacht romantischer Rückständigkeit aussetzt, wo in Wahrheit auf die Raison d'être von Kunst reflektiert wird.‘ The question of artmusic in a post-tonal world was thus: ‚Wie verhalten sich konkret die technischen Maßstäbe von Stimmigkeit und Konstruktion zum Kunstwerk als einem Geistigen?‘ (Adorno, 1958 p.14) It is not easy to place Adorno in a certain mode of thought although he is often seen as the penultimate modernist. On the other hand a decade later his ideas inspired members of the New Musicology who advocates a return to musical meaning in musicology. However he is categorised, it seems that he had a sensibility for musical meaning that sets him aside from many of his contemporaries. In this context it is also fitting to discuss the ideas by Susan Langer and Peter Kivy described as enhanced formalism in the literature review.

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<sup>25</sup> Nono felt Adorno was not radical enough, only achieving a ‚Linkshegelismus‘ and limiting himself to what Nono called a liberal northamerican sociology. (Nono, 1969, p. 109) Adorno's view on history was also a different one.

## C: Postmodernism

The concept of postmodernism, in music as elsewhere, is not easy to define in any unequivocal manner. The term itself simply means 'after modernism' indicating that it was first and foremost a negation of the modernist and formalist tradition. Looking back at the start of the postmodern movement Susan McClary asserts that her generation rebelled against the idea prevalent in music and musicology that music mattered 'precisely because it had managed to transcend mere meaning'. (McClary, 2009, p.29). The postmodern generation rejected the historical narrative by musical theorists and musicologists that music was 'autonomous' from any cultural context, its patronage and even tradition. (McClary, 2009). In this respect the topics in this section are related, although for example the ideas on deconstruction in music or post-structuralism are not easy to reconcile with some of the ideas posed by New Musicology.

### ***New Musicology: Frank Zappa***

Susan McClary describes how in the 1980's two phenomena started taking place simultaneously in musical practice and musicology. First there was a renewed interest by composers in communicating with the audience and secondly a loose cluster of researchers labeled *New Musicologists* got interested in the development of cultural readings of music. (McClary, 2009) As we have seen these ideas were hardly new, but now they achieved a widespread legitimacy among composers and researchers.

McClary defines the following characteristics for postmodern music: eclecticism, mixing of popular and elite styles, access to sonorities identified with standard tonality and non-linear procedures. Famous examples include Steve Reich and Philip Glass but as a consequence of personal taste I will choose to focus on the work of Frank Zappa.

Although these concepts seem to eradicate the potential for scandal in the world of *Neue Musik* the return to tonality and easily accessible musical forms was considered controversial. The orchestral piece 'Morphonie – Sektor IV' by German composer Wolfgang Rihms that premiered in 1974 at the Donaueschinger Musiktagen was considered a scandal as a result of its break with serialism. Similarly composers like Philip Glass and Steve Reich have also been criticised for writing too popular and simple music. As discussed in the literature review the New Musicology movement and similar ideas that stress the cultural relativism and social construction of musical meaning have been criticised for failing to give a plausible explanation for extra-musical meaning.

In my opinion the eclectic styles of these composers and the irony with which they approach their material undermines the potential for musical meaning and emotion. In this sense they also undermine the agenda set out by the New Musicologists. Although Glass and Reich may have created a more holistic style than the collages of Zappa and Reich this criticism may also apply to them. Perhaps Nono's critique was correct that the uprooting of musical styles from their social and cultural context affects the perceived authenticity of a musical work. For example a recent review of Glass' work in The New York Times stated: 'Yet the mournfulness feels canned, the sense of tragedy simulated.' (Justin Davidson, 2012, 'Had I Never Listened Closely Enough? On trying to like Philip Glass, again and again and again'. <http://nymag.com/arts/classicaldance/classical/reviews/philip-glass-2012-2/>). I look forward to further exploring these matters in my thesis.

## ***Deconstruction: John Zorn***

Deconstructionism and post-structuralism are often seen as postmodern movements. In fact, the deconstructionist stance undermines the postmodern concepts as advocated by the New Musicology. Since in deconstructionism the meaning of a sign is only dependent on another sign and so eternally defers its meaning, to speak about meaning at all is ‚meaningless‘. In my thesis I will discuss similarities and difference between what are considered postmodern movements but only insofar as they concern concepts of musical meaning. The music of John Zorn forms an interesting illustration for deconstructionist ideas. He broaches the issue of his cultural background explicitly and uses a collage-technique in his compositions that doesn't discriminate between high and low culture.

## ***Ethnomusicology: World Music and the Buena Vista Social Club***

In the nineties the Cuban group Buena Vista Social Club took the world by storm thanks to their ‚discovery‘ and subsequent promotion by guitarist Ry Cooder. Their success was a part of the general euphoria surrounding ethnic music, commonly known as *world music*, that can be considered to mark the arrival of postmodern ideas on cultural diversity into the pop mainstream. I propose to take the world music phenomenon as a departure point to discuss some of the advances in ethno-musicology and anthropology as they bear on discussions of musical meaning (see Literature Review p.14-15).

## **D: Reflexive Modernity**

The final section of my thesis will discuss selected contemporary approaches to musical meaning. It uses as a working title a term coined by the German philosopher Harry Lehmann to describe the artistic period that comes after postmodernism (Lehmann, 2010). According to Lehmann the artworld is going through what he calls a Gehalts-aesthetic turn<sup>26</sup>. In Modernism and Postmodernism music and aesthetics were preoccupied with the medium instead of the message. This is obvious in the case of sound-art and serialism but in my view it equally applies to collage techniques or musical eclecticism. The specific aesthetic turn postulated by Lehmann seems to be in accordance with the general atmosphere in academics since the 90's to take musical meaning more seriously. As in postmodern times musical scandals are not easily provoked, therefore I will focus on a few examples to illustrate some of the contemporary approaches to musical meaning.

## ***The Performative and Biological/Evolutionary Approach: Brad Mehldau Trio***

In the writings and music of jazz pianoplayer Brad Mehldau we find parallels that serve to illustrate the concepts put forward by the performative approach as well as the biological/neurological approach as discussed in the literature Review. The following lengthy quote touches upon Cross' discussion of ‚floating intentionality‘ or, as Cook terms it, music as a cluster for semiotic potential, while also emphasizing music's potential for promoting in-group solidarity and communication: ‚Our very muteness towards music, though, is often the precondition of a deep solidarity that its listeners experience amongst each other. It involves a preternatural kind of group knowledge, a resounding “I know that you know.” I

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<sup>26</sup> ‚The German word "Gehalt" cannot be adequately translated into English. It is systematically differentiated by the author from content "Inhalt" which means, for example, something that can be represented in a picture. In contrast, "Gehalt" is always mediated content, meaning it is content only first made accessible through the experience and the interpretation of an artwork.‘ (Lehmann, H. (2010), Search, Journal for New Music and Culture, Issue 7. <http://www.searchnewmusic.org/index7.html>)

don't know what you know, but that's not important. I'm satisfied by the mere knowledge that music pushes your buttons like it does mine. There is something in the world out there that correlates with both of us immediately, albeit in different ways.' (Mehldau, 2013).

There are at least two reasons why these contemporary views of musical meaning can be illustrated adequately by a discussion of modern jazz. First I believe modern 'serious' composers have mostly ignored an important aspect of African music and its influence on popular music in a.o. funk and jazz namely the specific rhythmic feel or what musicians often describe as 'groove'. Ian Cross states that rhythmic synchronicity within a group and the resulting shared experience of time (group synchronization) offers opportunities for the promotion of group identity, collective thinking and the collective expression and experience of emotion. (Cross, 2001, p.7) This phenomenon becomes particularly clear in popular musical genres and jazz because their successful reception depends largely on rhythmic feel. Secondly jazz music in particular is extremely dependent on performance, social and cultural context and interaction with the audience in its attempts to create a meaningful musical situation. All of these factors figure prominently in contemporary discussions on musical meaning.

### ***Practice Theory: Evelyn Glennie***

Finally I would like to incorporate a discussion of the work and thought of master-percussion player Evelyn Glennie. She is a blind percussionist who can only 'sense' the rhythms and tones she produces. The fact that she is capable of producing meaningful music forces us to rethink our concepts on the perception of music and the role the body plays in this process. Besides hearing the perception of music in her view involves the sense of touch (the feeling of vibrations) and, of course in a performance setting, sight. These apparently obvious ideas have not been realized fully yet. I would like to use her work and ideas as a departure point to discuss what is known as 'practice theory' wherein the embodied perception of music and the consequences for our concept of musical meaning play an important role.

## SECTION IV: Interdisciplinarity and Methodology

### *An interdisciplinary approach*

As a problem gets more complex over time it may come to involve more disciplines. While the question of musical meaning was originally mainly a problem for philosophy, the arts and music theorists, it came to involve musicology and then a host of disciplines from the humanities (sociology, anthropology and history) and the sciences (psychology, neurology and biology). Although it may seem a rather disparate group they are all concerned with answering the same question: How and why does music hold extra-musical meaning?

In this sense the topic of musical meaning fulfils J.T.M Millers (2010) description of interdisciplinary study as research that calls upon sources from different disciplines towards the goal of solving questions posed within multiple disciplines. As Almen and Pearsall state: 'Music is a complex phenomenon involving a host of cultural, phenomenological, cognitive, cultural and music-artistic factors. To understand music in it's fullest sense, then, is to be willing to entertain a variety of perspectives.' (Almen, Pearsall, 2006, p.2)

As mentioned in the introduction to the section on contemporary approaches different authors stress different aspects of the *same* problem according to their respective discipline or specialisation. Accordingly the following domains of research could be assigned to the various disciplines. This is of course a very general classification but it may provide an idea of how disciplines may cooperate and supplement each other.

First philosophy may provide conceptual clarity in the field. For example in the article *Language and Interpretation of Music* Leo Treitler (1997) argues that terms like referential, expressive, denote, signify etc. basically mean the same things and are all based on the same invalid metaphorical view on music. Musicology is especially involved with the relation between meaning and the structure of music as described by for instance western harmony. Psychology deals with the understanding of the process between the music reaching the ears and the moment that it is actually perceive. Also it might deal with the role of emotion in performing and composing music. (Sloboda, Juslin, 2001) A biological-neurological approach can shed light on universal human traits effecting our perception and meaning of music. By looking at the function of music it may develop an explanatory framework from which to interpret cultural phenomena. This does not mean reducing them to the biological base since the cultural diversity is so great it cannot be explained through biological explanations alone. The sociological and anthropological approaches show how music functions as a mode of communication strengthening ingroup solidarity and self-identity. In an similar vein an historical approach may show how throughout history, social relations were shaped and expressed through and in musical contexts (Müller, Osterhammel, 2012). From this last perspective texts and ideas on musical meaning become exemplary for the social, cultural and political relations of their time. As my study is a history of ideas it would be conducted from mainly an historical, philosophical and partly musicological perspective, yet describing and incorporating ideas from the other disciplines as well.

Before I expand on the methodological implications of this perspective, I would like to discuss two problems often associated with interdisciplinary research of which the last also has bearing on the methodology of my study. First interdisciplinary study concerning both the sciences and the humanities is sometimes characterised by mutual distrust. The humanities might accuse the sciences of biological reductionism while the sciences do not respect the sometimes speculative theories produced by the humanities. As Sloboda and Juslin (2001) point out in reference to Oatley music has been characterised as the place

where nature meets nurture. Our biological and neurological dispositions and accompanying cognitive endowment are particularised by culture and social interaction (Cross, 2003, Becker, 2001)<sup>27</sup>. If one recognises that musical meaning is as much the result of nature as of nurture it becomes a logical consequence that disciplines work together.

Also interdisciplinary study is often said to be complicated by the lack of a common methodology and conceptual apparatus. In this respect the study of music is no different. The consequences of ideas from one discipline to another are often not realised due to problems in communication. Unfortunately the study of meaning in music has not progressed far enough for such a common ground to arise. For my purposes I shall treat the discourse from other disciplines simply as further contributions to the field of musical meaning to be analysed from my historical-philosophical and musicological perspective. As Ian Cross (2003, p.8) states science ,provides discourses that can complement the culturally-particular musicological stories that can be told about music; after all, an understanding of the types of stories that may be told, of the manner of the telling and the ways in which they are understood is at least as informative about the cultural dynamics that give rise to these stories as cultural artefacts as are the subject matters of the stories themselves.' With this we come to the matter of the methodology I propose to use for my research.

## ***Methodology***

I will employ methods traditionally associated with the disciplines governing my research as described above. My study would thus be based primarily on the critical analysis of written works and some musical works such as recordings or written musical compositions. Also it allows for the possibility of interviews with artists whose work might serve as exemplary for a certain view on musical meaning.

The written works consist of first the primary written sources such as reviews of concerts by critics, romantic novels, philosophical works, scholarly writings from any of the various disciplines involved or books and articles by composers (for examples see the literature review of this proposal). The secondary literature consists of works that critically analyse the primary sources. It is not always possible to differentiate between secondary and primary sources. Almenn and Pearsal (2006) observe as a methodological similarity across disciplines that scholars discover meaning through a dialogic process i.e the interaction of contrasting ideas. This means that a primary source might simultaneously function as a secondary source by critically analysing primary literature and yet present original ideas in the process. Also, as will clear by now, there are apparently not very many historical overviews of the subject with some notable exceptions such as Chua (1999) and Katz (2012).

The relation of this study to the literature has several levels. First, on a basic level the literature is the source for analysis. In this respect I will provide a description of the source, explicate it's relation to other sources, the relevant paradigm, historical development of ideas on musical meaning and (in a limited way) the cultural and social

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<sup>27</sup> For example from an anthropological standpoint dealing with music and emotion Becker writes: ,Thinking of the relationship of music and emotion as a biological process with a codefined historically enacted ontology, as a group creation in which self-contained individuals have undergone structural changes through their interactions with other self-contained individuals helps to provide an embodied analysis of the relationship of music and emotion and mystery of musical affect.' (Becker, 2001, p. 154) Similarly Ian Cross from a biological-neurological perspective states: ,Evolution can be thought of as acting on the mind in terms of shaping infant predispositions; infants and children are primed to deal with certain types of information rapidly and expertly without being taught to do so. Culture, in the form of human interactions that are shaped by common ways of understanding, particularizes the developmental trajectory of those predispositions;' (Cross, 2003, p. 5)

context. Secondly as briefly outlined in the section on the narrative approach to musical meaning (see Literature Review) a work can be understood as an active intervention in the discourse shaping musical perception. This is what Nicholas Cook calls the intrinsic reflexivity of critical activity or performative approach: 'There is a sense in which writing about music has always been performative, and one of the most common ways of misinterpreting the documents of music history is by reading them as descriptions of actual practice rather than interventions in it.' (Cook, 2001, p.65) I view this concept as central to my approach to the literature. Finally, the literature also informs my own opinions and preconceptions of musical meaning and with it my analysis and description of it. In this sense the relation is essentially *reflexive* bringing with it the need to clearly define my own position.

## Conclusion

In this proposal I have shown that a history of ideas on musical meaning would make a significant contribution to the interdisciplinary study of music. Ideas on musical meaning are like a self-fulfilling prophecy simultaneously describing and shaping the way we hear, produce and experience music. My study would help explain the premisses and ideas behind the cultural and social dispositions that influence the meanings we attribute to music. In the literature review I have indicated that there exists a certain historical development and interrelatedness between ideas pertaining to musical meaning that deserves to be further explored. Throughout the last two hundred years authors have struggled with the same questions surrounding music's mode of representation, assumed ineffability, (un)specificity and its relation to emotion and community. Romantic ideas return in modern ideas on musical meaning, formalist approaches are expanded and Hanslick's ideas are paradoxically used to make a point about music's ineffability. These general shifts from romanticism to formalism and finally social constructivist and interdisciplinary approaches suggest a certain *Zeitgeist* or *Habitus* (in)forming the historical development of our concepts on musical meaning. As my study progresses I hope to further explicate these general tendencies.

Many of the ideas described in the literature review deal with the role of emotion in music. From the romantic notion of music as expressive of the Self, Hanslick's concept of music as an analogy of emotion, Meyer's and Langer's enhanced formalism to finally Cook's notion of music expressing the nuance of emotion. As Juslin and Sloboda state our ideas on musical meaning are dependent on contemporary concepts of emotion and conversely the musical emotions we experience are shaped by our concepts of musical meaning. Which emotions and meanings are deemed appropriate in music is culturally dependent upon convention and influenced by the discourse on musical meaning. In this manner a history of musical meaning will contribute to the writing of the history of emotion and might help understand our own emotional reactions to music.

There seems to be an interdisciplinary consensus among contemporary researchers from diverse disciplines as musicology (Cook), history (Müller, Osterhammel), anthropology (Becker) and neurobiology (Cross) that music may be understood as an essentially social practice and a mode of communication. Music strengthens ingroup solidarity and can define the identity of the group and the individual engaged in a musical situation. Musical performances are a sphere wherein social relations are made apparent and demarcation between groups becomes clear. Ideas on musical meaning shape these social practices and are shaped by them. Thus understanding these ideas may help us understand the musical practice and the social relations reflected in them.

This understanding of music implies that contrary to works of literary and visual art a musical work doesn't exist without it being performed or played. The meaning we attribute to a piece is determined by a complex of factors including the cultural and social context, the disposition of the listener and of course the music itself. This approach to music as essentially performance is reflected by the structure of my dissertation in timeslots. Each timeslot takes as its departure point for discussion a musical performance exemplary of a specific view on musical meaning that may be seen as dominant within that timeframe.

The structure of my dissertation in timeslots also reflects the final contribution my dissertation hopes to make. Ideas about music shape what is played by musicians, written by composers and vice versa. A history of musical meaning will shed light on some of the ideas underlying and influencing the production of music over the last two hundred years.

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