



McCluskey, Iain Robert (2017) *Marvelous Minutiae: in defence of the details*. MMus(R) thesis.

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Marvellous Minutiae: In defence of the details

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MA (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Music

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June 2016

Abstract

Previous studies of music and meaning largely focus on the effect of overarching musical forms and features on listener's experiences or interactions between society and a piece of music to describe the mechanism by which listeners engage with musical works.

The following paper is an attempt to argue for a change in focus in musical analysis that pays more attention to the detail in subjective musical experiences to better account for how music is understood and evaluated by listeners, and how they derive value from musical works going forward.

Initially, this paper posits an account of musical understanding which identifies the shortcomings of Formalism in the description of the fundamental mechanisms of musical understanding and experience.

The account of musical understanding offered is one that describes the similarities between Concatenationism and computational heuristics to explain the fundamental principles by which listeners identify and process musical sounds thus rejecting the notion that apprehension of musical form is a necessary condition for understanding music.

Following on from this an examination of the limitations of cultural analysis of musical works is contrasted with an approach that concentrates on the effect of individual's dispositions in understanding how musical meanings and values are created for listeners.

The above study is undertaken by analysis and criticism of the work of various authors who have written about either musical understanding or the value and meaning of musical works.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to put forward a case for a shift in focus within musicology and aesthetics. Undoubtedly a tall order but one that I am convinced will be of no harm to any enquiries on music going forward. A problem I find is that explaining the concept at hand seems slightly awkward, but for the sake of concise introduction I would put it in relation to a well-worn question. What are the fundamental mechanisms by which individuals have reactions to music? Having an answer to this question, or certainly one quite like it, has been the goal of a great deal of effort in both musicology and aesthetics over the years; and the disciplines in question have such a range of enquiries that are different enough to question the validity of trying to make a point about both at once.

My argument for considering both of these kinds of musical enquiry together is my belief that in many works within musicology and aesthetics there is an assumption as to the answer to the question above inferable from their treatment of whatever the object of their enquiry is. I also believe there is a commonality between assumptions made as to the scale of the notions and features a great many works treat as being important to answering the above question, thus in turn influencing how other questions about music are being treated in the course of the author's examination.

There is a distinction to be made between big things and little things, that much should be obvious. One individual is small; a whole society is big. Similarly, a musical form is big, while an individual melody is small and the connections between one note and another smaller still. For this paper, I will describe the big things as macro-level and the small things as micro-level.

This distinction is important as this paper's argument is that there is a great deal of work in both aesthetics and musicology which focuses on macro-level features and notions thereby missing some useful insights that could be made from looking at the small stuff. In particular, this is true with regards to work that seeks to examine meanings available in music, and the underlying assumptions about the nature of musical understanding that are used as frameworks for these enquiries. Because both disciplines are somewhat connected; that they both have this tendency ought not to be surprising and as such I think it is justifiable to compare and consider pieces of work from both disciplines together.

For example, in the work of Peter Kivy and Roger Scruton (whose positions I will examine in more depth later) on questions surrounding musical understanding one can see a tendency to focus on the effects of the apprehension of macro-level musical forms on the listening experience. In a similar way, Susan McClary's application of feminist criticism to the texts of nineteenth century music focuses on the effects of overarching societal norms and conditions on audiences, texts and composers. The works of these author's all talk about the big stuff because they share a common theory about how musical understanding occurs. Kivy and Scruton are self-confessed Formalists, but McClary too argues for positions that appear to have Formalist assumptions at their core. They all might disagree on what meanings are available or even correct and true, but there's little disagreement between them on the nature of the mechanism by which these meanings become available. It's fundamentally about the big stuff; and micro-level observations are either actively dismissed or passively omitted a great deal of the time, not just by the authors above but by a great deal of pieces that talk about music and meaning.

As a result, this paper will be concerned with the exact opposite end of the scale. What I hope to achieve by the end of this paper is to have demonstrated that if one is discussing problems surrounding music and meaning there is much worthy of interest happening at the micro-level too. My underlying concern is that both the aesthetics and musicology may be struggling to keep up with the emerging landscape of musical cultures in the twenty-first century. New musicology for example is old enough to be the parent of a learner driver by now, so one ought not to flinch from questioning the focus of our musical enquiries in the contemporary era.

In the twentieth century the influence of big ideas and cultural movements, like Communism or the Civil Rights movement is undeniable. What is interesting about this fact is that the twentieth century was also the first century of real large-scale broadcasting whether via radio or television. What both these mediums have in common is that they allow a relatively small group of people to communicate with a far larger one while leaving the larger group mostly passive in the process of content creation. One listens to the radio and watches the television but one doesn't participate in the creation of the content broadcast on these mediums.

Compare that with the method of information dissemination available online today where end users can not only effectively curate what material they access on regular basis but also can contribute to the content available to other users; then it is not hard to see how fundamentally different these mediums are. It seems like this is a trend that

is only set to continue as more people start using the internet as their primary way of accessing information and entertainment over television or radio. This is especially true of music as there has been explosion in digital consumption that has profoundly affected the endeavour as an industry. I would argue it affects the cultural aspects of music also, as music is now able to be produced, shared and reinterpreted and shared again, in a time frame much smaller than ever before. This has the outcome of more music overall being available, and by extension allows for more selectiveness on the part of the end user. As a result, one can become much more discerning with one's cultural choices than ever before thus creating many more diverse and smaller musical cultures than have existed previously.

If content creation and consumption is now something that is more often being undertaken by individuals as opposed to large organisations I think it is worth shifting the focus onto individuality and how that affects meaning and understanding. That would require, I think, an attention on the micro-level mechanics and processes at work in the creation of musical meaning for individual subjects. That will be a challenge with regards aesthetics though, as appeals to universals are undeniably common.

Within contemporary cultural criticism it may be precisely because of the increased connectivity of the world that many authors seek to explain their ideas in terms of universal or essentialist concepts, in order to find conclusions that escape the minutiae and hint at commonalities that go beyond person, place and era. I wouldn't discourage any attempt at this - however I do think that if one is obliged to consider a lot more subjects than ever before, a bit more subjectivity might not be misplaced. If one directs one's attention to micro-level examinations of aesthetic experiences one can find much of interest with regard to questions being asked in music both academically and otherwise. This paper shouldn't be considered an attack on approaches up to now, rather it is an attempt to point out how attention to micro-level functions of musical experiences can give insights as to the manner by which music creates meaning for individual subjects, which other focuses may struggle to account for in their analysis. In doing so, this might help provide a more complete picture of the relationships between music, culture and individuals that is suitable for an emergent cultural sphere.

There may be those at this point who would question what place musical analysis would have in regards to the micro/macro dichotomy this paper attempts to describe. On the face of it, musical analysis often focuses its attentions on a similar level of detail that it appears is being highlighted here, so where does it fit in the scheme of things being discussed? For the purposes of this paper I would argue that most traditional

conceptions of musical analysis bear more resemblance to those concepts that would be considered macro-level, than micro-level. The reasons for this are that many conceptions of musical analysis start with the assumption that musical works are ‘the most plausible candidate for being the “universal language of art”’¹ and the attention to the detail of a given musical work is undertaken not to identify features that may possibly generate meaning for disparate and discrete hypothetical listener's but rather to uncover the big demonstrable truth of the work's inherent autonomous meaning. It should not be difficult to appreciate that a format of musical enquiry that assumes musical works have universal, acontextual and autonomous meanings is fundamentally distinct from the manner of enquiry being argued for here. As Aaron Ridley notes:

'Once it had been decided that pieces of music were essentially autonomous structures of sound...it seemed evident that the analysis of these structures would reveal the innermost truths about music...No one sensible doubts the capacity of technical analysis to reveal truths about music. But there is every reason to doubt that the truths of analysis are the only ones there are...'²

Given that musical analysis is largely the appreciation of the nature of large-scale structures in music, it lends itself to the Formalist account of understanding, the reasons for which ought to become clear as this paper progresses.

It is worth mentioning that many of the ideas being discussed in this piece will be from the philosophy of music and many of the conclusions drawn will not be universally accepted. What I hope to do here is to demonstrate that some concepts from the discipline are actually very helpful in enlightening understanding of the experience of music even if one can find fault with the conclusions and assumptions of the arguments in question. However, there are some practical issues with attempting a discussion like this that must be addressed before it can continue. Looking at papers from both the philosophy of music and musicology can lead confusion surrounding certain terminology, as both disciplines talk about things that are often similar. However, for the purpose of this paper I would say all the viewpoints discussed will have something to say about either how music conveys meaning to its listener or what meaning is possibly conveyed

1 Ridley, Aaron *The Philosophy of Music: Theme and Variations* Edinburgh Edinburgh University Press 2004 p8

2 Ridley, Aaron *The Philosophy of Music: Theme and Variations* Edinburgh Edinburgh University Press 2004 p10

to a potential listener. My argument is fundamentally that conceptions concerning the scale of the operation of the first mechanism has effects on the possibilities of the latter and examples from both disciplines can show this. As such, the questions can be seen as being about concepts of music and meaning and can be considered in tandem. However, terminology can still be difficult to navigate and as such requires clarification further.

Some Tricky Terminology

One of the problems in looking at meaning and music, is that a lot of the jargon used by different authors describes very particular aspects of the musical experience that are similar enough to cause confusion but still conceptually separate enough to warrant different terminology.

For example, the author of a socially grounded critique of a piece of music may be interested in advocating alternative accounts of the meaning of symbols and motifs in the piece by focusing on the societal influences that informed the time, place and producer of the music. Susan McClary's analysis of *Carmen* is an example of this kind of analysis, and within it she makes strong claims regarding subtexts and interpretations found in the work. On the other hand, someone who is working in the aesthetics of music may write on the topic of understanding music, the steps that happen when one reacts to the aural sensation of music in a cognitive as opposed to purely sensational way. An example of what I am referring to can be found in the *Aesthetics of Music*³, wherein Roger Scruton devotes a lot of time to arguments that hold apprehension of large-scale musical forms crucial in achieving a correct understanding of the music in question.

Now, both of these authors are talking about different things and from the standpoint of very different sets of assumptions and interpretive frameworks. The justification for considering these kinds of different viewpoints together is the fact that they are both concerned with the big picture rather than the small. McClary talks a great deal about societies in her piece and the role of certain persons as representatives of those societies within music; Scruton meanwhile argues for privileging meanings constructed in large-scale forms found in complex compositions.

This still leaves some practical issues though. At this point it is very difficult to provide concrete definitions for terms like understanding music, emotional reactions to music or the value of music. This is because most of the authors discussed in this piece use these terms in very specific ways or sometimes even interchangeably. As such, I will have to discuss each term within the context that each particular author uses it. In an attempt

3 Scruton, Roger *The Aesthetics of Music* Oxford OUP 1997

to maintain some degree of focus of attention, I think it is useful to consider that although a lot of these terms and the concepts they refer to are not always expressly talking about the same thing, there is reason to think that they are not necessarily completely removed from one another either. As a result, many views on certain subjects can affect and imply positions on other concepts too.

Below is an extract from Stephen Davies' *Musical Meaning and Expression* which I want to use to explain this point. Before going further however, I would note that in this chapter Davies addresses similar issues regarding terminology in discussing meaning in music. He offers a schema which is quite detailed in distinguishing five different types of meanings arising from symbols that he thinks can broadly be applied to music.⁴ In his discussion of meanings arising from arbitrary and inherited conventions Davies writes:

'In Camille Saint Saens' *Danse Macabre* a solo violin represents Death (or a violin played by Death). The highest string... is tuned to E-Flat. A two note chord, A-Eflat (Ao-3) is often played on the two top open strings. The interval of three whole tones...was forbidden in plainsong, and in early polyphonic music under names such as the "devil in music" (*diabolus in musica*). Although the tritone is respectable in twentieth century music, Saint Saens' use of the interval involves a subtle pun on its name.'⁵

In this extract, Davies identifies the interval of the augmented fourth as being culturally encoded in Western society as evil or taboo. In the Saint Saens piece, he identifies it as a musical marker for the cultural concept of death within the structures of the work. I wouldn't disagree with anything that Davies has written here; certainly in many Western music cultures the augmented fourth persists as an invocation of negative energy or abrasiveness that persists even to this day. It is a trope used again and again in the scoring of horror and drama films and in many genres of popular music too it serves to invoke the demonic or peculiar also.

A comment one could make about Davies's analysis is that it betrays a privileging of cultural associations surrounding musical intervals in its construction of meaning. If one were perhaps more inclined to pay attention to the spectrum of frequencies available, you would perhaps state that the important element in Saint Saens' conception is less

4 Davies, Stephen *Musical Meaning and Expression* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1994

5 Davies, Stephen *Musical Meaning and Expression* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1994 p40

the interval itself and more the choice to play the interval as a double stop over two open strings. After all, the interval itself could relatively easily be played at another position on the violin's neck. Rather, the choice to detune the E string alludes to the tone of the fiddle (which is often tuned a semitone flat) which gives the piece its feel of a hellish hootenanny. Furthermore, the timbre of the double-stop when played on open strings as opposed to fingered positions gives the notes a quite preternatural feel, as the detuned upper E strings lowered tension in comparison to the standard tuned A gives the kind of queasy unease that one might expect in a piece about the dance of death. That combined with the unique resonance of open string playing on stringed instruments in general, makes for a potent sonic combination which one might miss the significance of with mere attention to the intervals being played.

The point should be clear now that the interactions between schema of meaning creation and understanding can have a derivative effect on the kinds of conclusions drawn about musical works. The content of musical meanings is a product of the machinations of the process of musical understanding. As such, I think it is reasonable to examine notions of musical understanding and meaning in terms of functions of a larger schema of human interactions with music as a whole.

I hope that the above example justifies the logic of considering similarities between very different analyses of music together to try and identify a common trend in thinking between them all. If a case can be made for paying more attention to the little things in the musical experience, then it stands to reason that examining a position on an issue that centres its assertions on the importance of overarching properties and themes with a renewed attention to possible excluded factors should be useful to prove the point.

My desire in doing so is not to disparage or deconstruct entirely the value of macro-level observations and criticisms. If by the end of this paper that is what had been achieved, then such a result would invalidate my justification for questioning the macro-level in the first place. Rather this attempt to redeem the esteem of the micro-level is done with a view to encourage engagement with some ideas that I think get less attention than they perhaps merit; particularly given the more interdisciplinary and collaborative direction in which research in the humanities is going. With this in mind, questions surrounding musical understanding are where I would like to begin, as I believe the differences between the micro and the macro approaches here are quite noticeable, thus highlighting the contrast that this paper seeks to identify.

Schemes of Understanding

There are a great many different positions and views that could arguably be included in the category of enquiries into musical understanding. For the purpose of this chapter, the views I will focus on are those which I believe are exemplary of the contrast between macro and micro. To this end, I would seek to compare some examples of what can be broadly termed as a kind of Formalism with those who frame musical understanding in a more atomic and serial manner.

In terms of viewpoints that would be best described as macro-level observations I would suggest the work of both Roger Scruton and Peter Kivy as being exemplary of these kinds of positions. Both authors show a commitment to the idea that musical understanding is mainly a case of recognising and perceiving large scale musical forms. They go about this point of view in quite separate ways though, and as such it is worth examining arguments from both separately and individually. I would note at this point that I believe both authors' arguments share a conception of musical understanding so narrow that it can be only a convincing account of how music is perceived in very specific contexts- usually on the page as opposed to on the stage. By way of contrast then I will also be examining Jerrold Levinson's conception of Concatenationism, as I feel this particular schema is an example of an argument that not only privileges the micro, but also actively rejects many of the tenets of formalist viewpoints such as Kivy's and Scruton's. So to begin, I will start with examining some of the arguments proffered by Roger Scruton in his *Aesthetics of Music*⁶, as I feel he formulates his positions in the most strongly macro terms.

In the *Aesthetics of Music*, Roger Scruton attempts to provide a fairly comprehensive account of the many questions surrounding musical aesthetics. In the chapter devoted to musical understanding Scruton makes his view on the nature of how understanding occurs quite unequivocally.

'Musical understanding is manifest first in the apt organisation of the musical Gestalt,... rather than mere sequences of pitched sound...Even in the smallest musical perceptions we can 'hear incorrectly'...although a good performance aims precisely to guide us to the right perception, no feature of the sounds and

6 Scruton, Roger *The Aesthetics of Music* Oxford OUP 1997

their production can guarantee this result, which depends upon the ear of the listener and the musical culture which informs it.⁷

What this section clearly denotes is that Scruton believes that the significant processes of musical understanding, and the circumstances that influence it, are those which operate on the larger scale. Furthermore, he appears here to also assert that the fidelity of micro-level musical experiences is judged in their relation to their directing the listener towards the apprehension of the larger musical forms found in the piece. It is in this manner that Scruton tells us what matters in musical understanding is the ability of the listener to grasp the musical Gestalt. In a justification of this view Scruton makes what I think is a somewhat curious statement regarding aesthetic sensibility which I think is rather enlightening in terms of understanding his views on the nature of the musical understanding generally:

'A useful comparison can be made with mathematics. Pure mathematics is not a human universal: only in certain historical and economic conditions do people break free from the prison of counting, and begin to treat numbers as abstract objects, bound by intrinsic laws...Similar remarks should be made concerning the judgement of taste. The aesthetic impulse is latent in rational nature, arising from the need to complete our instrumental reasoning with a conception of the end. It may lie dormant for centuries...Once noticed; however, the aesthetic experience expands to fill the moral space available.'⁸

I find this extract curious because it betrays Scruton's belief that musical conventions and schemas of aesthetic judgements transcend time and place, and exist rather as kinds of universal truths that can be discovered in various cultures over disparate eras. In the above extract, it seems like Scruton is saying that there is something about the 'aesthetic impulse' that extends beyond its instantiation; which is quite a strong almost Platonist metaphysical proposition, the justification for which is unconvincing. In essence, what Scruton is arguing for is that when the surrounding cultural conditions are favourable to it, the aesthetic sensibility that privileges the Gestalt in the process of musical understanding can re-emerge, allowing a musical culture to acquire the mechanism necessary to attain the 'correct' understandings of musical works.

7 Scruton, Roger *The Aesthetics of Music* Oxford OUP 1997 p230

8 Scruton, Roger *The Aesthetics of Music* Oxford OUP 1997 p477-478

My issue with this view lies with the fact that an argument that is primarily framed as being concerned with describing how musical comprehension operates seems far more concerned with justifying the dominance of a certain musical practice and canon than it does with actually explaining how musical understanding works in the conscious experience. It smacks of what could almost be described as being like a kind of aesthetic question begging, whereby understanding is achieved only if one arrives there by accepting the correct kind of understanding in the first place. Furthermore, this kind of naturalistic conception of musical values seems to frame itself within a kind of progressive historical narrative for which I doubt there is much actual historical evidence. Rather it seems far more plausible to understand the creation of aesthetic norms within cultures in terms of whatever group occupies the dominant position in a given culture, particularly when one considers how different aesthetic values can be so disparate from culture to culture, especially across history. Also it seems to ignore the way that musical conventions and norms are recycled and reformulated over time, something that Davies identifies in his examination of the contrasting manner in which diminished intervals are used in sixteenth and twentieth century music cultures.⁹

There are issues with Scruton's treatment of the individual within musical experience to be found as well. While he accepts that the nature of an individuals' musical experience can affect their comprehension of music, this is only in terms of how well they can match up to a kind of aesthetic bench mark required to properly understand music, and thereby continue to confirm the correct understandings. It is a doctrine that appears only to value the individual experience in terms of the degree to which it conforms to hegemonic values, which I think makes it a rather poor fit with the multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary mode of studies one finds increasingly more common in musical criticism in the contemporary humanities, given how diverse experiences have an obvious bearing on people can come to hold such diverse viewpoints.

Another author whose work I would like to examine at this point is Peter Kivy. Kivy writes in a narrower and more apologetic fashion than Scruton, but what their views share is an acceptance of formalist principles in constructing an account of musical understanding. Despite this, Kivy states very clearly that he is only discussing absolute music in his book *An Introduction to a Philosophy of music*¹⁰, and that he is only describing the process of understanding that occurs when one attends to 'music of

9 Davies, Stephen *Musical Meaning and Expression* Ithaca, London Cornell University Press 1994 p40

10 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p24-25

substance'. In the interest of being fair to Kivy, I would point out in this particular volume he rarely uses terms like understanding, rather he prefers to talk about 'enjoyment of' and of 'finding beauty' in music. However, my justification for including him in this chapter stems from his use of concepts like musical cognition and conscious interactions¹¹ which I think can reasonably be considered with other authors' concepts of musical understanding.

Kivy sets out by firstly noting that Formalism is a poor choice of name for the theory that he is in favour of. Afterwards, he then sets out describing what could be seen as central concepts in Formalism in general:

'Formalism is best defined, initially, in negative terms: in terms of what music isn't. According to the formalist creed, absolute music does not possess any semantic or representational content. It is not of or about anything; it represents no objects, tells no stories, gives no arguments, espouses no philosophies. According to the formalist, music is 'pure' sound structure; and for that reason the doctrine is sometimes called musical 'purism.'¹²

Later on he elaborates on what he thinks the listener privileges in their musical attention:

'According to formalism, we are interested, musically, in all of the 'sensuous' properties of the musical work, its form being one of those, albeit perhaps the most important.'¹³

For Kivy the importance of form seems to stem from a conception of musical enjoyment that requires listeners to engage in two kinds of 'game' while listening to music. The said games require a structure to operate in, and as such, form is considered to be crucial in framing and facilitating these games. Despite being at pains to point out that musical experiences are different from narrative experiences, he often refers to the idea of listeners playing with musical 'plots', the trajectory and denouement of which being where listeners derive the majority of their enjoyment.

'What do we enjoy or appreciate in absolute music. And I have answered: We enjoy musical 'plots', in something like the way we enjoy fictional stories,

11 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p75

12 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p67

13 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p68

except, of course that the musical 'plots' are 'merely' sequences of musical sound events, not stories about fictional events. Furthermore, I have tried to spell out two ways- not necessarily the only ways- in which we interact with musical 'plots' as we do with fictions: they are 'games'; the game of hypothesis and the game of hide and seek..¹⁴

Musical 'plots' I take here to be synonymous with forms, and Kivy argues that it is through the cultivated ability to discern the nuances of these plots that one can attain greater musical enjoyment. Specifically, he argues the point that the more you understand about music the greater your enjoyment is; which one could argue defines further appreciation of accepted conventions to be necessary to optimal musical interaction¹⁵.

Further on in the book, Kivy discusses how he thinks the expressive qualities of music operate. In so far as music can be expressive, Kivy writes that certain musical forms reflect certain perceptual properties in human experience, and these forms are revealed in this way eventually through repeated attention to the music in question. These forms possess these properties out with their instantiations and are a feature of emotive reactions to music.

'What was not contemplated was the possibility that music is sad in virtue of possessing sadness as a heard property; the way a billiard ball possesses roundness and redness as seen properties...For, if emotive properties like sadness are heard properties of the music they are just properties of the musical structure...'¹⁶

During this examination of the heard properties of music he claims that sounded qualities of individual notes, voices and chords are ultimately subservient to the greater formal structure:

'Furthermore, the beauty of individual chords, chord progressions, or modulations is frequently owed to how they are situated in larger musical areas: how they 'emerge' from the forms of which they are elements.'¹⁷

14 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p84

15 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p83

16 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p89

17 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p85

So, if I were to try and summarise Kivy's view it would seem that he is arguing that one of the ways people understand music is by engaging in some perceptual 'games' with the inherent heard properties of certain musical forms. It is through this process that emotive and cognitive interaction with music operates and the results of this process- enjoyment, excitement or even indifference- are important constituents of our musical experiences.

Before I critique the argument above I would like to point out that Kivy is very clear in this work that he is examining a very particular type of music, and a very particular mode of listening to that music. This narrowness of focus I think has its merits certainly, but I suspect this may be because if the object of enquiry were enlarged to include other kinds of music (and the experience of such music) that his conclusions would be a bit less assured. That said, many of the avenues of enquiry Kivy pursues I think are actually enhanced by approaching them contrary to the top-down focus Kivy himself provides.

If I take for my first example, Kivy's view concerning the heard properties of certain sound structures, what I take from his argument is that he is positioning these heard properties as being in some degree similar to Russell's Universals or Plato's Forms. If so that would explain the choice of name, but also would justify his comparison of heard properties of music with seen properties of billiard balls. I think that for that kind of comparison to work one must be in some way convinced that sound structures have properties that are just as obvious and tangible as those of physical objects. Which I think is true if one considers music on the page or as a collection of fixed yet abstract concepts; but it seems less convincing when one considers, for example, live performance. Now I reference this because Kivy himself talks of the performance in the concert hall so it is not as though he is not speaking to an experience that happens outside the page and the theory text. In live performance, by nature, not all performances are the same. As such the kind of Formalist construction of the properties of music Kivy argues for is probably too strong, and rather what Kivy should have done is to consider the musical properties of certain sound structures in terms of them being similar to tropes. This oversight is quite surprising given Kivy's extensive narrative analogies throughout the piece; and it is a pity because his argument might have been more convincing had he done so.

To borrow the narrative analogy, it could be the case that the heard properties of certain musical forms could be considered as being similar in essence to the kinds of tropes found in other media. What I think makes the concept of tropes more micro-level

is that unlike universals (which at their most strong conception are perfect instantiations of very specifically defined concepts); tropes are usually more akin to variations on a theme, again a concept not unfamiliar in music. For an example of what I mean, if one considers the fool in a Shakespearean tragedy and the archetypal 'stoner' or 'drop-out' character in early twenty-first century horror films, both kinds of character are functioning within their plots in much the same manner (comic foils to often horrific violence). However, the method of their deployment and the novel construction of these characters, I think sufficiently differentiates them to warrant attention to each separately. That is, I think, one of the things that makes instantiations of tropes quite interesting is their capacity to be constructed so differently from one another that their nature is not immediately obvious, and indeed the pleasure of identifying a trope or archetype in fictional narratives does not sound completely removed from the 'hide and seek game' to which Kivy refers.

So if one considers chord progressions instead of literary devices, I think that one could be convinced that the properties attached to these progressions derives from their status as tropes within certain musical cultures. However, for Kivy to make this point would be more difficult as tropes sometimes have meanings that are often rather arbitrary or assigned. For example, people know that banana skins are not particularly slippery and that mice are not particularly fond of cheese as opposed to anything else, but those tropes are constantly re-used because people understand them and their understanding of them is rooted mostly in a process of enculturation built on by the media and mediums of persons long before them. This point of view is not especially objectionable and I doubt Kivy would completely disagree with it however he does seem committed to some degree to arguing for a kind of essentialist quality in the properties of sound structures such as cadences and progressions which their conception as tropes seems too weak to justify.

For my purposes, in trying to show how considering the smaller end of the scale of things can improve a position, I think that Kivy's problems with properties can actually be solved by the nature of tropes. Often with tropes the interesting bit lies in the details; to return to my previous analogy the fool can be wise and the pothead prophetic, and this playing with convention is often what makes art engaging. Similarly, with chord progressions and musical structure contrary to what Kivy thinks it can be that the constructions of individual elements such as the timbre of the instruments or the construction of the chords can actually be of aesthetic relevance to the perception of the whole. The I- V- vi -IV progression is very widely employed but the manner in which it is employed is more important than Kivy's argument admits. The timbre of

different instruments, the texture of different rhythms and keys are, I think, as much a part of the musical experience as the apprehension of form. While Kivy does not deny completely that these elements have their effects, he talks about the sensuous properties of sound as being so obvious as to be of no worth discussing.¹⁸ This is an assertion I believe to be false and that in fact, there can be a great deal worth examining these elements in relation to the cognition of sound if we properly consider these smaller elements. Indeed, the effects of things such as tempo, timbre and metre can be the things that provide the obscuring elements that make Kivy's games both satisfying and possible in the first place.

While I am discussing Kivy's games, this is exactly the kind of concept that I would identify as benefiting from some consideration of the micro as well. For I agree that Kivy's conception of the experience of music as being like playing kinds of games, is correct for some kinds of musical experiences; it is to my mind more plausible that musical interactions have at their hearts the process of making some kinds of judgement. Now playing games involves making judgements too, but games also have rules which dictate exactly what kind of judgements and options are available. So the analogy for how music is understood seems weaker when considered like this. Rather, I would say that the interactions persons have with music actually bear greater resemblance to heuristics than games. I will expand on my reasons for believing this later in this piece, but for now I would state that I believe that the judgements people make when listening to music are derived from sets of assumptions closer to rules of thumb than to the laws of a game. As such while the general logic of each decision may be similar, their actual end results or methods of implementation can be markedly different when examined separately. This difference I think is worthy of interest, as different assumptions lead to different experiences and the reports of these can expand the sum of the collective critique and discussion of music, which I think is no bad thing.

Having examined what I think are issues with some accounts of musical understanding, I would at this point want to introduce a conception of musical understanding, introduced earlier, that I think has a lot of real explanatory value, that also functions I believe, on the micro as opposed to macro-level.

18 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p85

Concatenationism

Concatenationism is the name given to a theory of musical understanding proposed by Jerrold Levinson, in his own *Music in the Moment*¹⁹. Levinson sets out the theory of Concatenationism as a description of the mechanism by which musical experiences occur and the main hypothesis is that musical experiences occur by the aggregation of micro musical moments experienced sequentially through time, which are then constructed into a larger whole within the listener's consciousness. It is in this manner that we interact with and experience music, and our reactions to music are influenced by this process.

Before examining the theory in greater depth I think I should point out firstly why I think Levinson's argument is significantly different from the authors' above and secondly why I think it is a good example of a theory that is concerned with the small detail over the big picture. Concatenationism or ideas like it are probably not unfamiliar to those who have looked at musical understanding in the past. However, what can be a common reaction to these kinds of theories is the thought that they do not provide so different an account of the nature of human interactions with music as the Formalist theories they seek to distance themselves from.

For those unfamiliar with the theory though, it may be useful to provide some insight into what the theory purports to achieve and how it differentiates itself from other work in the field. In doing so I hope to illuminate what I think are quite noticeable differences between Levinson's theory and the work of Kivy or Scruton.

Throughout *Music in the Moment*, Levinson makes reference to the fact that musical understanding does not depend on apprehension of macro scale formal features of the piece, rather that musical understanding depends on the apprehension of a great many micro scale musical moments and the connection of these moments into a longer temporal string that allows the listener to perceive the music²⁰. This may not seem particularly different from any kind of Formalism, for the fact is that Levinson makes

19 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997

20 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997 p13

the point that these patterns and tiny moments are being aggregated in some way into a larger series of connections which one would be right to consider similar to forms.

I would argue that Levinson's construction is markedly different, and if one compares extracts from Levinson and Scruton, this becomes obvious. In the *Aesthetics of Music* Scruton notes:

'Music has often been compared to architecture...Like the composer, the architect establishes large-scale expectations within which small-scale events are situated and in terms of which they are understood...In just such a way, the large-scale organisation of keys and harmonic structures will cause us to hear musical details in relation to them...'²¹

So here Scruton is stating that the functions of meaning achieved by individual parts of music depend on their relation to an apprehended large-scale structure. By contrast if one looks at the first of the four principles Levinson states as central to Concatenationism, he tells us something quite different:

'1. Musical Understanding centrally involves neither aural grasp of a large span of music as a whole, nor intellectual grasp of large-scale connections between parts; understanding music is centrally a matter of apprehending individual bits of music and immediate progressions from bit to bit...'²²

If one were to provide a slightly silly analogy, the difference should be clear that a view similar to Scruton's would argue that one's excitement in riding a roller coaster is a result of the ratios and designs of the overall ride such as the distance between climbs and falls, twists and loops. By contrast, what Concatenationism implies is that the actual temporal experience of the ride as one moves through it is far more important to the experience of the roller coaster than these macro-level observations. Indeed, the discovery of the effect of the overall design and of these ratios of distance is utterly dependent on one being hurled through the ride in the first place. It is in the focus on the immediate experience within Concatenationism that I think the difference between the views lies, no-one denies that formal patterns in music exist and are appreciated however Levinson constructs these forms from the bottom up which means that it is the micro-level which is deemed foundational to understanding and therefore arguably more important. So for this reason, I believe Levinson's theory is both sufficiently

21 Scruton, Roger *The Aesthetics of Music* Oxford OUP 1997 p326

22 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997 p13

different from Kivy and Scruton to be contrasted; and also I believe it is a good example of a theory that privileges the micro over the macro. So with those concerns answered, I would like to continue my examination of Levinson in more detail.

Concatenationism and the Micro-level

'Musical Understanding centrally involves neither aural grasp of a large span of music as a whole, nor intellectual grasp of large-scale connections...; understanding music is centrally a matter of apprehending individual bits of music and immediate progressions from bit to bit...

Musical enjoyment is had only in the successive parts of a piece of music, and not in the whole as such, or in relationships of parts widely separated in time...

Musical form is centrally a matter of cogency of succession, moment to moment and part to part...

Musical value rests wholly on the impressiveness of individual parts and the cogency of the successions between them, and not on the features of large-scale form per se; the worthwhileness of experience of music relates directly only to the former.²³

Levinson's first assertion is one about the nature of the mechanism by which the process of musical understanding operates. As I noted above, Levinson here is suggesting that the tendency of previous theories to be concerned with how we apprehend large forms is misguided. He expands on this point like so:

'Hearing musical movement is necessarily hearing a sonic entity not all of which is sounding at any instant, while at any instant, one hears the sounding notes as belonging to a musical flow, or as contained within a musical process, of which they form a part...An appropriate term for this sort of perceptual experience, I suggest, is quasi-hearing...'²⁴

It is understandable at this stage if one thinks that a concept like 'quasi-hearing' sounds no less implausible than Kivy's 'heard properties' but I think what lets Levinson down is simply his choice of terminology. This is unfortunate though as I think it actually describes a process which is fairly easy to grasp. One explanation of the term would follow like so:

23 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997 p13

24 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997 p15

When one is listening to music one is only apprehending very short pieces of sound at a time. These small pieces are constructed into a chain of sound in a linearly temporal manner and the aggregation of previous little bits of sound sets up an expectation of the sounds that are to follow. Thus while one is only literally hearing a couple of seconds of sounds at any one time, within the consciousness one has the ability to recall and relate pieces of the previously heard sound to the sound currently in one's perception. In doing so one sets up what Levinson terms a 'vivid anticipation'²⁵ of the sounds that follow. Anticipation I think is what is of importance here because I think the listener's expectations and predictions, as Kivy noted, do have a fundamental importance in how they react to music. There is a line to be walked between the completely predictable and the totally unexpected. For an example of what I mean, if one considers substitutions in chord progressions, a progression that plays only the triads of the relevant scale degrees will likely sound cogent and comprehensible, but may not be overly exciting or engaging. Borrowing the occasional chord from a parallel key or adding one or two seventh chords will likely make things more interesting but the extreme of having every chord in the progression being completely contrary to listener expectations is likely to illicit a response of confusion and disengagement.

While Kivy seems to make this point in his discussion of the hypothesis game, what he misses is something that Levinson explicitly states; the fundamental role of cogency in the construction of form in the minds of listeners. For Kivy, if the hypothesis guessed in his game is wrong then understanding is still possible, but what Levinson correctly identifies is that there comes a point when if anticipations are not met often enough, then the ability to understand the music can deteriorate completely. As a result, it seems more sensible to accept that the micro-level connections of bit to bit are more fundamental.

In even something as basic as the theory of modes of the major scale one can see the logic of Levinson's thought; while the overall ratios between the intervals is of course very important to a mode's structure, it is the sequence of these intervals that defines their ratios and given that we experience music in a temporally linear way (given by the nature of music existing only for short spaces of time when in the air) the notion that we construct music cognitively through an aggregation of little bits seems a lot more convincing. The process of aggregation is facilitated according to Levinson by a process he terms quasi-hearing, a kind of reflexive navigation of musical stimulus. Now the account above gives an explanation only of what quasi-hearing does, it does not seem to

25 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997 p16

inform the reader what quasi-hearing actually is. Is it the same mental process as plain old hearing, or is it function of memory or imagination?

Indeed, given contemporary work in the psychology of music, there may be the temptation to be somewhat dismissive of the notion and I do accept that it is extremely implausible that we will one day be able to locate the physical activity in the brain responsible for 'quasi-hearing'. This is not a failing of Levinson's theory however, rather another example of how terminology in the study of music and meaning can cause unwanted confusion.

Quasi-hearing is much better understood as being similar to a kind of mental process called a heuristic. Heuristics are generally conceived of as being adaptive strategies for making judgements of a certain kind, normally from a standpoint of incomplete information. As I promised previously, later on in this piece I would like to examine the role of heuristics in musical understanding in more depth. But I would note that it was in my reading of quasi-hearing that I first considered heuristics in musical understanding in the first place. In Levinson's explanation, he sets out that one's current experience of sound compared and related to the previously apprehended sounds sets up an expectation of what the next sound we may hear will be. So as a result, quasi-hearing appears to be a way that human beings make judgements about stimuli in their environment based on the incomplete information given by said stimuli being computed in reference to a broad strategy based on previous experiences with similar stimuli. The product of this interaction is an expectation of what should happen next, based on a prediction made by the reference of the particulars of the stimuli to the broad strategy held in the memory.

That may seem a very odd explanation of how musical understanding comes about; but what struck me about it was its similarity to how persons make some far more mundane judgements in everyday life. Consider for example the process by which someone would cross a road. The subject sees a vehicle in the distance and at once takes account of the distance of the vehicle from themselves and the speed the vehicle is travelling at and makes a decision as to whether or not to cross the street.

When one tries to conceive of how the subject would express this decision making process in words, a phrase like: "I expect, *ceteris paribus*, that if I cross the street now I should be able to get to the other side before the vehicle reaches me." is something one could reasonably imagine being used.

The subject in the above example does not have the exact information on the speed of the car, the distance that they are from the car, and how long it will take them to get to the other side of the street; all they have is guess work based on previous experiences of crossing the road. It is with this guesswork that their judgement is made, and with which they set about interacting with their environment. The idea of an adaptive strategy for making decisions based on limited information is at the heart of heuristics. Why I think it is useful to think of persons interacting with music using heuristics rather than formal frameworks or rules of a game, is that I do not believe that all musically relevant information is available all at once to a listener when they are listening only to the music. In his discussion of the problem of rehearing music, Kivy admits much the same²⁶, and if one considers heuristics as being in essence a way of getting understanding out of incomplete information, then quasi-hearing being thought of as similar to a heuristic makes the concept more concrete and plausible. Furthermore, with this heuristic reading of quasi-hearing, I think that it could be argued that Levinson's position that little chunks of musical information being aggregated together according to rough inferences and assumptions is at the heart of music understanding, actually does better at explaining the process of how people understand music than either Kivy or Scruton. It seems far more likely to me that persons understand musical features and events not in terms of either assigned or innate qualities of macro-level formal structures but in terms of a kind of guesswork informed by their past and present musical experiences. This is not to deny that some meanings are encoded in the manner Scruton and Kivy suggest, however I think it is obvious that the calculations of a musical heuristic alone are not sufficient to arrive at the understandings the Formalists allude to. As a result, I think there is good reason to consider the micro-level relationships that Levinson describes as being in some way more fundamental to musical understanding.

I would argue that if one considers 'quasi-hearing' as a kind of mental process that is akin to those used in making judgements and decisions, then it also goes some way towards my aim of rehabilitating some ideas from the philosophy of music. I think a heuristic conception gives the notion less of an abstract element and gives a sharper focus to what it is and what it does. In the following sections I will expand on these assertions in more depth, but I mention them now because I think that if we examine Levinson's other assertions in light of this information we can draw some other points of interest.

26 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p76

In the second point from the quote above, Levinson states that musical enjoyment is centred on these moment to moment musical experiences. I would add that given that the assimilation of these moments happens as a function of memory and experience, the contents of one's own mind have a very large bearing on whether or not we will find enjoyment from the music we are hearing. If one's expectations are a product of our unique phenomenological experiences, then I think that some examination of how the listener's disposition interacts with their conscious experience is certainly warranted. This I would argue is another example of the benefit of examining the role of micro-level individual experiences in one's construction of musical understanding. This is especially important when one considers judgements about meaning and value, which is an issue I will approach later.

In the meantime, the final two points Levinson makes with regards form and its role in musical value also could benefit from some clarification. I do not think that Levinson is denying that appreciation and cognition of musical form is relevant to musical understanding and/or enjoyment.

Rather what he is arguing here is that appreciation of macro-level musical forms is neither necessary nor sufficient for musical understanding. This is perhaps a peculiar notion, but I think it not impossible for one to be able to identify formal qualities of a piece of music, particularly on the page, while being utterly unable to follow it when listened to. If one were to seek an easy example of this, I would suggest considering a piece of music which is performed with an extremely high tempo. One may be able to identify chord progressions, melodic features and time signatures when one looks at the music on the page, but once it is performed it is done at such a speed that one is literally incapable of keeping up with it. Even if the composition is relatively simple, I would argue that there comes a point when the tempo reaches such an excessive level that one may struggle to identify any large formal aspects simply by virtue that one cannot keep up with the barrage of stimuli in the music. Indeed, some sorts of music that are generally accepted in Western culture to be somewhat inaccessible to the uninitiated (such as some of the more extreme formulations of electronic music) are considered as such as a direct result of the tempo at which the music is performed²⁷.

²⁷ Some genres of electronic music pride themselves on the sheer velocity at which they are performed. For confirmation of the point I made about the inaccessibility of this music, I would suggest listening to any composition that classifies itself as belonging the speed-core genre. Much of this music is performed at tempos in excess of 250 beats per minute, some going into excess of 300-400 beats per minute also. As such, I do not think it is unfair to describe some aspects of the experience of listening to this music as challenging to the uninitiated listener.

What is happening here is a proof of Levinson's point regarding the 'impressiveness' of the music, which is a quality I think analogous to Kivy's 'expressiveness'; that is if the individual parts repeatedly fail to connect with the listener then any construction of a larger musical framework will be extremely difficult and as result, the expressive capability of the music would be diminished. Furthermore, the connections between sections of individual music must be cogent enough for the listener to be able to, as it were, be taken along for the ride: as noted above, while the perceiver of music can tolerate and even take pleasure from the occasional bump in the musical ride, complete derailment is rarely considered a desirable or worthwhile outcome.

So far I hope I have demonstrated that Levinson's theory is an example of a theory concerned with the micro and that it has just as much if not more merit in its conclusions with regards to how musical understanding operates than its Formalist counterparts. In the interest of fairness, I would note that Kivy and Scruton both make references to some of the notions that Levinson puts at the heart of his position. However, both authors' references are somewhat dismissive and their commitment to the notion that form provides the framework for meaning means they overlook much of the detail to be found in the little bits and pieces of the musical experience. For justification of this statement I would return to Kivy's games. Earlier, I had mentioned that I believed Kivy's focus on macro-level concerns had led him to miss the point that musical interactions are better compared to heuristics than playing a game. In the course of demonstrating what can be missed by concentrating on the large scale, I would like now to expand on this point.

Heuristics

As I discussed previously, Kivy believes what is going on in human interactions with music is that the listener is playing games with the music in order to generate the expectations that are necessary for musical cognition. I agree with the premise that expectation plays a large role in forming reactions to music, but I think that Kivy's idea of it being akin to games is misguided.

My reason for this is that games are more often than not defined by rules or determined roles in some way. Even the simplest games you can play with a dog has its roles, (human throws, dog fetches is traditional) and what I think speaks to Kivy's interest in overarching schemes are that rules are quite often cross-cultural and universal. When one plays Monopoly in different languages or in different locales, the rules remain much the same similarly with video games or even simple playground games too. However, I don't think Kivy's explanation is convincing enough to persuade that one can conceive of musical understanding in this way, even if solely related to the very narrow case of musical experience he restricts his attentions to. Heuristics by contrast I think offer a better account of how persons navigate musical stimulus; as an adaptive behaviour that is based functions of memory and repeated exposure to the situation is question sounds exactly like the kind of thing that could be the product of a process of enculturement.

I think it is of use at this point to try and offer some definition of exactly what a heuristic is. In the abstract for *Homo heuristicus: Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences*²⁸ Gerd Gigerenzer states that heuristics can be described like so:

'Heuristics are efficient cognitive processes that ignore information. In contrast to the widely held view that less processing reduces accuracy, the study of heuristics shows that less information, computation, and time can in fact improve accuracy.'²⁹

28 Gigerenzer, G. & Brighton, H *Homo heuristicus: Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences* Topics in Cognitive Science Volume 1 Issue 1 January 2009 Retrieved at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2008.01006.x/full>

29 Gigerenzer, G. & Brighton, H *Homo heuristicus: Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences* Topics in Cognitive Science Volume 1 Issue 1 January 2009 Retrieved at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2008.01006.x/full>

Further on in the piece he also identifies some common examples of real world heuristics also:

‘Imitate the majority (Boyd & Richerson, 2005)

Consider the majority of people in your peer group and imitate their behaviour

...A driving force in bonding, group identification, and moral behaviour.

Imitate the successful (Boyd & Richerson, 2005)

Consider the most successful person and imitate his or her behaviour...

A driving force in cultural evolution.³⁰

What Gigerenzer is stipulating above is that heuristics can be thought of as kind of mental crib sheets that persons use to make decisions and solve problems in the real world. They have previously been described as by-products of the limitation of human cognition and as Gigerenzer notes have sometimes been derided as poor schemas for decision making and inference. While Gigerenzer does give a compelling account of why one should consider that the use of heuristics is something that one ought to do when making decisions and extracting information, what seems apparent about the examples above is that they are very succinct accounts of how people very often actually behave when making decisions or judgements in the face of restricted evidence or data.

One could easily assert that the two modes of decision making described above are ones that have been used by the vast majority of people at one time or another. While I think it is too strong to think of music as a kind of puzzle that does not exclude the fact that it is possible for music to be puzzling and as such people need to have some internal method for how they derive information from musical works and use that information to make judgements about those musical works. What is notable is that heuristics are often described as adaptive behaviours, that is, a pattern of action and reasoning determined by repeated exposure to certain environmental conditions. The process of enculturation in most discussions of it has aspects of an adaptive behaviour, and as such this would justify consideration of the idea that an adaptive behaviour involved in making judgements about music could be thought of in the same terms as adaptive behaviours used in making judgements about other things; that is as a heuristic.

30 Gigerenzer, G. & Brighton, H *Homo heuristicus: Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences* Topics in Cognitive Science Volume 1 Issue 1 January 2009 Retrieved at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2008.01006.x/full>

In terms of a relationship with quasi-hearing, I would suggest that the following examples are useful in understanding what kind of heuristic quasi-hearing could be thought of as:

‘Recognition heuristic (Goldstein & Gigerenzer)

...If one of two alternatives is recognized, infer that it has the higher value on the criterion.

Fluency heuristic (Jacoby & Dallas, 1981)

...If both alternatives are recognized but one is recognized faster, infer that it has the higher value on the criterion.³¹

One should recall that in the description of quasi-hearing it is stated that quasi-hearing operates by the apprehension of one sound at once held in relation to the previously heard sound coalescing to set up an anticipation of what comes next. The above two heuristics, recognition and fluency could be thought of as central to that process.

If we cannot recognise a musical sound as such, we will struggle to understand the music it is part of, that much ought to be obvious. In the event of two sounds competing for attention, those identified as musical will be given preference in the construction of musical apprehension. For an example of this, one need only look to the film soundtrack, in which diegetic sounds such as speech or gunfire as normally excluded from the musical comprehension of the film's score. Similarly, the concept of fluency in musical sound is fundamental to Concatenationism as a theory as the theory operates on the assumption that music is understood sequentially. Ergo, pieces of musical information that are in-keeping with and assimilated into the whole faster and more fluidly than others will be preferred in the conscious construction of musical sound. If one considers how quite often during live performances the occasional mistake is normally undetected by the audience, this would be an example of how information that is not fluent with the surrounding musical sequence is effectively ignored in the audience's perception of the music.

However, I think that one of the strongest reasons for considering quasi-hearing as a heuristic can be found in Gigerenzer's description of how one selects the heuristics that one does in relation to various scenarios:

31 Gigerenzer, G. & Brighton, H *Homo heuristicus: Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences* Topics in Cognitive Science Volume 1 Issue 1 January 2009 Retrieved at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2008.01006.x/full>

'Table 1-2 shows 10 heuristics in the adaptive toolbox of humans. But how does the mind select a heuristic that is reasonable for the task at hand? Although far from a complete understanding of this mostly unconscious process, we know there are at least three selection principles. The first is that memory constrains the choice set of heuristics and thereby creates specific cognitive niches for different heuristics (Marewski & Schooler, 2010)...³²

If we compare this conception with Levinson's formulation of quasi-hearing there are undoubtedly similarities:

'Quasi-hearing can be conceived as a process in which conscious attention is carried to a small stretch of music surrounding the present moment and which involves synthesizing the events of such a stretch into a coherent flow...None of that, however, entails that one is consciously aware of quasi-hearing...while one is doing so, or conscious that one is consciously aware of only a small extent of music surrounding the presently sounding event.'³³

What I think one can infer from the above extracts is that Levinson is positing the existence of a mental process that is normally executed unconsciously in order to understand information from the outside world. Gigerenzer also notes that heuristics are generally unconsciously operated and may well be influenced by the effect of memory on previously encountered situations that present similarities to the one currently being experienced. It is this reference to the directive effect of memory which is useful in considering musical understanding. It would seem fair to assert that this effect of memory affecting decision making processes is very similar to the effect of enculturation alluded to by previous works.

If persons acquire the use of quasi-hearing through repeated exposure to musical stimulus and from then on, revert to it unconsciously as it is the most effective way of understanding and gaining information to have a musically worthwhile experience then in this manner, one can easily account for issues like how music from unfamiliar cultures may not be comprehensible to the uninitiated listener. Similarly, one of the

32 Gigerenzer, G. & Brighton, H *Homo heuristicus: Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences* Topics in Cognitive Science Volume 1 Issue 1 January 2009 Retrieved at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2008.01006.x/full>
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2008.01006.x/full>

33 Levinson, Jerrold *Music in the Moment* Ithaca Cornell University Press 1997 p18

core elements of heuristics are the assumption in their use that not all information is either available or worthwhile obtaining when attempting to make judgements. This gives us an account of how music can be understood in general while still being able to accept that not all musically relevant information is available at every time of listening. That this is possible is something even a committed Formalist such as Kivy can accept:

'...the so-called problem of rehearing music has a fairly straightforward solution. To begin with, the rehearing problem exaggerates the degree to which most listeners, even expert ones, can remember the course of musical events in any musical composition beyond the most trivial...So most music of substance will bear many rehearsals before the danger of total familiarity looms.'³⁴

Leaving aside value statements such as 'trivial' and 'music of substance' one can ascertain that there is the admission that not all musical information will be available upon every listening of a piece of music. Given that the listener can come to some kind of understanding with regards to the piece, it would seem safe to assume that not all musically relevant information is necessarily required to understand music on some level. What one can see here now though is that by considering the process of musical understanding in terms of it being a heuristic one does not need to either a) have all musically relevant information at one time of listening or b) necessarily attend to the same pieces of musically relevant information each time we listen. In this manner, we can account for things such as how some pieces require repeated listening to really get into them as it were. Some composers' works are so very multi-faceted and dense that it can take a few listens to really get under the skin of. To my mind personally Mahler or Schoenberg are good examples of this, though others will have their own too. What relates this phenomenon to heuristics is the role of memory, one remembers little bits and pieces as one goes along with the piece; and with the repeated listening each repetition leaving a different impression from the last, thus expanding the musical object and aiding comprehension. In this way musical information deposits itself like sediment on a riverbed, layer upon layer in a fluid not fixed structure.

Heuristics as noted above, are deployed in relations with memory, therefore problem solving in the musical context is determined largely by the identification of a sound as musical. Unconsciously, it could perhaps be argued, that once one hears what one identifies as music one immediately applies the process of quasi-hearing as this adaptive behaviour has in the past allowed for information from musical stimuli. Thinking of

34 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p76

quasi-hearing in terms of a heuristic also helps with situations where the process of understanding is not effective and the listener does not understand the music they are listening to. Given that heuristics generally assume a margin for error, they are explicitly stated as an attempt to get a satisfactory inference from incomplete information. So anyone who would expect this method to give one hundred percent accurate results is probably asking too much, especially when the one hundred percent accurate result is neither fixed nor widely agreed upon. That sometimes it would be useful to know other pieces of information not revealed by quasi-hearing in relation to understanding some elements of one or other particular piece of music does not invalidate the usefulness of thinking of quasi-hearing heuristically.

Quasi-hearing may not be what ought to be done in all instances, but one could argue that if one was trying to come up with a conception of how persons might interact with music that relies on as little technical knowledge of music as one is able to, then quasi-hearing is likely to be applicable to more people's experiences of music than any account of musical understanding that requires knowledge of the rules and traditions of a particular canon. A heuristic formation does not exclude Formalist considerations and can incorporate them without affecting their nature as heuristics. However, these notions are not necessary to the heuristic account in anyway, and it can operate as effectively in their absence. So then, if you consider quasi-hearing as a kind of knee-jerk reaction to hearing music, as opposed to some pseudo-psychological process which is invoked every time we listen to music, it is apparent that the concept has explanatory value and is not completely alien to some of the other accounts of meaning in music I have examined.

The point I think I need to elaborate on further though, is why I think that heuristics function on the micro as opposed to macro-level. After all concepts like 'Imitate the majority' or 'Imitate the Successful' sound quite axiomatic, certainly no less than rules of a game do. What I would argue in this regard is that even the examples above are significantly more open to subjective interpretation than the rules of a game would be. What is defined as either the majority or the successful in the above examples is far from universal. However, a rule of game like Monopoly (for example, rolling a double entitles the player to another turn), is much more objectively stated. Even hide and seek, the game Kivy borrows from has clearly defined stipulations and roles for the players. I do not think that heuristics can be seen as objectively as rules, given the subjectivity in their application and variability of their results.

In terms of the heuristics I suggested could be thought of with regards to music, the concepts of recognition and fluency are going to depend heavily on the disposition of the individual in question and therefore it would appear to again support the notion that they are better framed within the micro as opposed to the macro-level. That is not to say I think any heuristic conception of the mechanism of quasi-hearing need displace or disprove many of the assertions of Kivy and Scruton. Rather I think that they can co-exist as it is perfectly possible that persons disposed to look for clues of larger forms in their musical experiences will do so, while others who are not so disposed will not. So by the end of this section I now hope to have convinced that micro-level considerations are at least as worthy of attention as their larger counterparts and in doing so, hope to have demonstrated how attention to the smaller scale of phenomena can be just as illuminating as looking at the macro-level features alone.

At this point I would like to move on to examining other approaches to the problems of meaning and music that would not be fairly categorized as theories of musical understanding. These other approaches come from socially grounded musicology and popular music studies. A disparate choice one may think but I move on to these subjects for a reason. Firstly, the works I have examined above are all to a greater or lesser extent positioned in contexts of discussing 'absolute music', even Levinson's argument can be seen to be informed by this sort of position. By contrast, some of the authors I will examine in the following chapter have set their positions out in direct opposition to these kinds of ideas, so I was curious as to whether or not they too privileged the macro in the construction of meaning. I found that some did, though in a different way than the authors above. As a result, I thought it would be of service to the goal of arguing for consideration of the micro-level if one can demonstrate its neglect is more widespread. So with that in mind, I will move on to discussing questions of value, meaning and disposition with regards to aesthetic judgements about music.

Value, Meaning and Understanding

In the previous chapter I examined viewpoints that could roughly be lumped together under the umbrella of the philosophy of music, and more specifically viewpoints concerned with explaining the processes of musical understanding. However, given that many of these enquiries are concerned with the nature of what is termed 'absolute music', if I am to make a convincing case for the change in focus in academic enquiry that I am arguing for, it might be worthwhile see if other kinds of examinations of music would benefit from the micro-treatment as well. As a result, I now want to turn my attention towards viewpoints that are explicitly not concerned with 'absolute music', for the reason of discovering whether or not a neglect of micro level considerations is unique to those writing from a purely philosophical bent or not.

With that in mind, I feel it is fair to start by examining some of the positions taken up by Susan McClary, in particular within her own *Feminine Endings*³⁵. My reason for choosing McClary is that if one were to seek out an author who positions her analysis outside the framework of 'absolute music' then to my mind McClary is quite exemplary:

'I am especially concerned with deconstructing the Master Narrative of "Absolute Music", with removing that final fig leaf for open critical discussion, for I believe that it is this denial of meaning in the instrumental repertory that has systematically blocked any attempt at feminist or any other sort of socially grounded criticism.'³⁶

My interest in McClary is not simply limited to her antithesis to 'absolute music'; rather McClary is notable for not only being influential on the works of other authors who frame their analysis of music within examinations of wider society, but also because McClary's approach to looking at music involves the application of traditional musical analysis in a revisionist manner. For example, while their politics are likely poles apart, I believe that McClary and Scruton both agree largely on the Formalist conception of musical understanding. The disparities in opinion between them arise not from disputes of process but rather about the inputs and outputs of the process. McClary includes in

³⁵ McClary, Susan *Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality* Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 2002

³⁶ McClary, Susan *Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality* Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 2002 p55

her analyses factors that were traditionally excluded from musical analysis; gender, race and class for example. This has proved to be hugely influential on many kinds of musical analysis particularly, I find, within studies on popular music. By allowing people to seriously consider factors aside from music, this has led to studies of music that often times do not talk about the music itself (by which I mean the kind of things focused on in traditional analysis) but rather things like the gender representations of performers, the class identities of audiences and the politics of the era in which the music was made.

For the purposes of this investigation though, it is worth noting that concepts like the interaction of music, gender and society or the politics of subcultures surrounding popular music cultures would still be concerned as macro-level observations. My reasons for believing this are that if one is making assertions as regards meanings available to persons of different classes, genders and races one is self-evidently talking about societies not subjects. Subcultures might be smaller than established cultural hegemonies but it should be clear that they are still large enough to be considered macro, as opposed to micro nature of the individual subject.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how attention to micro-level considerations markedly improved musical analyses that were rooted in the philosophy of music, particularly absolute music. My intention in this chapter is to do the same with analyses that follow McClary's lead, an example of which is Keith Kahn-Harris's article in *Policing Pop, Death Metal and the Limits of Musical Expression*³⁷. An article about the lyrical content of the works of Death Metal bands may not seem an obvious follow on from McClary's analysis of Bizet, but her influence on Kahn-Harris's work is quite obvious. He makes observations about gender, subcultures and wider society which are arguably informed by systems of value set out in the New musicology of which McClary was a part.

In Kahn-Harris's case I want to demonstrate that by attention to micro-level details his analysis would be far improved, and in this case the micro-level detail in question is the disposition of the individual listener or performer, as I believe that shifting focus down to the micro in this case can be useful for the purposes of understanding how personal values and morality can affect the processes by which individuals interact with and derive meaning from the music they listen to.

37 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003

Values and Musical Value

'What makes the opera fundamentally a paranoid fantasy is that Carmen's music (constructed by Bizet-there is no woman's voice in this piece) is made to be undeniably more powerful, more alluring than José's well behaved discourse of masculine European classical music...'³⁸

The above quote I think is exemplary of McClary's analysis of Bizet's *Carmen*, which during the course of her critique, McClary suggests is typical of nineteenth-century music's tendencies with regards to the treatment of gender. McClary's aim with this piece was an attempt to apply the traditional schemes of musicological critique (which had hitherto been considered only in terms of 'music alone') through a lens of feminist analysis. McClary's analysis throughout *Feminine Endings* and indeed in her other output has been both controversial, lauded and influential depending on which responses to her work one is examining at any given time. For the purposes of this paper, I would note that while her alternative viewpoint is of great interest and merit, it is still a view that I believe functions primarily on the macro-level.

My reasons for believing so are that McClary is interested in examining musical works in terms of the exchange of influence between the larger society and the musical work itself; which it should be clear is a position concerned with overarching large scale structures- both artistic and social- present within Western culture. Furthermore, as her analysis is grounded in the methodology of traditional musicology the musical features that she identifies as being instrumental to the construction of meaning are of the macro-level variety also. As I mentioned above, I was struck by the similarities in the conception of the mechanism of meaning generation found in McClary's work with those conceptions identified in my analysis of Formalism; for example it would appear that Scruton and McClary would agree on what features found in musical works contribute to the listener's understanding of that music while disagreeing quite sharply on what meanings are available for the listener to arrive at. So while it appears these views both privilege macro-level concerns, they must differ on some other level in order to explain the differences in the kinds of analysis of musical works both authors' examinations offer.

³⁸ McClary, Susan *Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality* Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 2002 p59

I would suggest that this difference can be accounted for by reference to the differences in schemes of values, both moral and aesthetic. For while McClary does point out that dismissing Carmen as simply another example of the misogyny prevalent in nineteenth-century music is unwarranted³⁹, one cannot help but notice that McClary perhaps does indeed feel the value of this music is compromised by what she identifies as its patriarchal and parochial treatment of the other.

Carmen's place within the opera as both female and non-European serves the role of the other and her character's treatment within the narrative, and the musical features attributed to the character, serve as semiotic placeholders for this. I find little evidence in McClary's analysis that indicates she believes the character of any of the musical features of the piece contribute to its comprised musical value, indeed she points to its persisting influence of the opera on musical work since⁴⁰, so therefore it appears her criticism derives from a cultural or ethical standpoint. That ethical standpoint, I would argue, is that Western society is patriarchal in nature, which leads to its structures and traditions being frequently misogynistic. As misogyny is a bad thing, those cultural artefacts which to any degree reinforce those misogynistic assumptions are not only morally decrepit but are aesthetically compromised also. As for McClary's treatment of the micro-level within her analysis, I would argue that the micro-level is largely ignored throughout this piece, though I would note I find it interesting that her analysis of Bizet speaking through Carmen is rooted not in any portrayal of Bizet as an individual but rather it shows Bizet as speaking from, and as a representative of, a larger temporal-social grouping of nineteenth century males appealing to their in-group's collective values and insecurities. This use of Bizet the individual as a placeholder for generalisations about a whole group of persons has its similarities to the role she assigns Carmen in the opera, i.e. as a representative of a moral and cultural other.

This tendency to equate musical value with the degree to which the meanings identified by the critic conform to their own moral compass, has arguably been very influential on socially grounded music criticism that has followed. As I mentioned above, I would like to examine as an example of this Keith Kahn-Harris's article *Death Metal and the Limits of Musical Expression*.⁴¹ Again, one may be forgiven for thinking that my inclusion of an

39 McClary, Susan *Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality* Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 2002 p65

40 McClary, Susan *Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality* Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 2002 p55

41 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p80

article about Death Metal in same chapter as McClary's analysis of Carmen is perhaps strange, however I would offer reassurance that Kahn-Harris's article is an example of the problems that arise when one attempts to apply macro-level moral judgements about the artefacts of different musical cultures. In the introduction to the piece Kahn-Harris spells out his reasons for examining Death Metal in general and the Cannibal Corpse song 'Fucked with a Knife' in particular.

'This investigation is motivated by my own concerns about the song and the larger body of the band's work of which it is part...When I first encountered these lyrics during my research on the global Extreme Metal scene, I had an inchoate feeling that these lyrics "must" in some way be harmful and "must" contribute to misogyny in male listeners.'⁴²

Having opened with this statement of intent it should come as a surprise to no-one that Kahn-Harris reaches conclusions about the Death and Extreme Metal scenes such as this:

'Although there is sizeable minority of female fans, few women are involved in an institutional capacity (as label owner, fanzine editors etc.) and there are virtually no female musicians...Although women can and do get involved in the scene, that involvement depends on not questioning the overall dominance of men.'⁴³

These kinds of assertions are somewhat questionable given that the list of female Extreme Metal performers is long enough that their characterisation as virtually non-existent seems perhaps a touch hyperbolic. For example, at the time of publication, one of the most successful and widely known Death Metal bands, Arch Enemy, had a female vocalist, and furthermore artists like Katherine Katz of Agoraphobic Nosebleed, Marta Peterson of Bleeding Through and Otep Shamaya are hardly unknown to those who were familiar with the genre at the time of writing. Similarly, his factual inaccuracies about the relationship between Death Metal and Grindcore⁴⁴, coupled with his cartoonish

42 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p81-82

43 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p91-92

44 Kahn-Harris states that Grindcore is a sub-genre of Death Metal (p86) despite the fact that Napalm Death, an act considered one of the progenitors of the genre, formed in 1981 whereas one of the most seminal acts in death metal, Death were formed in 1983. The two genres are certainly connected and influenced by one another, but Kahn-Harris's description of Grindcore as sub-genre is nevertheless inaccurate.

depiction of a typical interview with a participant in the Extreme Metal scene would⁴⁵, I think, perhaps invite the conclusion that Kahn-Harris has let his personal moral concerns about the genre inform his depiction of both the music culture and its participants in a fairly prejudicial manner.

However, the moral stance that Kahn-Harris takes is not objectionable in and of itself, misogyny and gender prejudice are not good things either in small scenes like Extreme Metal or in larger society as a whole. However, his framing of a musicological analysis from this perspective leads to him drawing some false conclusions. For example, in his discussion of the relationship between aesthetics of Death Metal and its lyrical content, Kahn-Harris states that the music seems to be composed in such a way that it would complement the misogynistic lyrics, implying that he believes in many instances that the lyrical and vocal content of these kinds of songs is created prior to the musical accompaniment. Kahn-Harris's focus in this piece is his moral concerns about the content of the lyrics, and as a result he seems to be privileging these lyrics in his examination of the way this kind of music creates meanings for its audience and its performers.

As someone who has in the past been involved in creating music of this sort, I would assert that in my experience the compositional process of this kind of music is fundamentally different to many others. In most forms of pop and rock, a vocal melody is often the crux of the composition often complemented by a memorable or musically interesting instrumental line (the so-called hook). By contrast though in Extreme Metal the vocals provide very little that is similar to the melodic function they provide in most other genres. Rather the process of creation, more often than not, centres around creating the most arresting or intense combination of guitars, drums and bass, upon which the guttural and aggressive vocals are then constructed as typically a more rhythmic or textural part of the composition. The lyrical content is therefore created to suit the abrasive musical environment constructed by the other instruments, particularly the acutely transgressive mode of vocal delivery employed by most vocalists in the genre.

Kahn-Harris himself notes that this vocal delivery is a challenge to the listener in and of itself, given that many listeners' (particularly those unfamiliar with the genre) would struggle to actually understand what lyrics are being sung. Furthermore, he notes that a

45 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p90

lot of albums are supplied without lyric sheets either ⁴⁶which means that Kahn-Harris's concerns surround lyrics which are not intelligible to many listeners most of the time, not widely disseminated in written form, and neither are they much discussed or considered particularly aesthetically important by performers of the music. Kahn-Harris's article is featured in a volume about censorship, and his choice of focusing on the objectionable features of the most accessible part of this music (the lyrics) in this quite arbitrary way is definitely in-keeping with the overbearing manner in which most censorship itself is carried out. Indeed, I cannot help but be struck by the shallowness of Kahn-Harris's analysis; whereby any attempt to fully understand the aesthetics of this kind of music is eschewed in favour of a kind of intellectual hand-wringing over the potential for harm this music culture holds for its participants and wider society despite his own admission that there is very little evidence for this music being actually dangerous for individuals or society⁴⁷.

I would offer that Kahn-Harris's missteps are because he is ignoring the micro-level details of how this music operates aesthetically for the small culture that surrounds it, rather choosing instead to focus on macro-level conceptions of the relationship between misogyny in society and misogyny in music generally. As a result of this choice, Kahn-Harris's conclusions are at least ambiguous and if one were to be unkind, a little unsatisfying. Even in his admission that his attended study to texts in this genre, had tempered some of his concerns, he still in the end refers to gendered power structures inherited from wider society as being a cause for concern. This is a valid point of course (an unfortunately high percentage of musical endeavour seems to exclude those who are not gendered as cis-male) but I think it is little more than a depressing truth about musical practice generally than any specifically enlightening information about either Death Metal or Extreme Metal cultures. I hope by this examination of the shortcomings of Kahn-Harris's analysis that I can persuade of the problems that can arise from applying top down moral examinations onto musical cultures, particularly if one is not intimately familiar with the standards of the musical culture in question. I would offer that it is more often than not in the attention to the micro-level details that one can find points of interest in regards to musical experiences. A concept I would like to explore that I think is an example of this would be something I would term the individual disposition of the listener.

46 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p84

47 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p90

Disposition

Disposition is a term that is used in many different areas of study, and it has actually been used before in discussions of music also. The use of the term in these discussions usually derives from its definition when used in discussions of metaphysics. To explain briefly, in metaphysics disposition is used in the course of describing properties of objects in terms of their potential to do one thing or another. For example, a wine glass has a fragile disposition as it has a potential to break more easily than other objects, for example the face of a sledgehammer.

In their *Companion to Metaphysics*⁴⁸ Kim and Sosa define disposition thus:

'A tendency to be or to do something. Fragility, solubility, elasticity, ductibility and combustibility are all dispositions. Fragile things tend to break when struck; water-soluble things tend to dissolve when immersed in water.'⁴⁹

The above definition seems common sense enough when objects and their properties are being discussed. And in a similar way sometimes certain musical events are talked about in terms of having dispositions also. In particular, previous theories have posited that certain musical features have a disposition to cause one or more emotional effects. For example, an adagio written in a minor key could be said to have a melancholy disposition.

In chapter seven of *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*; Peter Kivy notes:

'Music...is described as 'melancholy', 'cheerful' and so forth because...it has the disposition to make listeners melancholy or cheerful or whatever...'⁵⁰

Having already discussed Kivy's found properties of music, I will not be returning to it. Instead, I reference it for the sake of comparison, as for this argument disposition does not lie with the sound perceived in music, rather it is fixture of the listener's consciousness. It is an aggregate of one's personal taste, one's past experiences of music and also of one's current emotional and intentional state. Indeed, individual dispositions

48 Kim, J, Sosa, E eds. *A companion to Metaphysics* Oxford Blackwell 1995

49 Kim, J, Sosa, E eds. *A companion to Metaphysics* Oxford Blackwell 1995 p215

50 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p110

have been considered in treatise of aesthetics previously; for example David Hume notes:

'We may observe the same effect of poetry in a lesser degree; ... that the vivacity they bestow on the ideas is not derived from the particular situations or connexions of the objects of these ideas, but from the present temper and disposition of the person.'⁵¹

At this stage, one might be tempted to dismiss this notion as so obvious as to be of little use. The unkind reader may remark that all this concept of disposition does is to appeal to the notion that people have different reactions to music because people are different. That is one of the most facile observations one can make with regards to music, and it would seem that to dress this concept up with analytic language really does not get anyone very far. However, I would defend the notion in these terms. My aim with this paper was to demonstrate how attention to micro-level issues can inform understanding of questions surrounding music and meaning, in ways not available to macro-level observations. As the experience of music can be a very individual activity, it shouldn't be too objectionable to try and account for the role of the individual listener in musical experiences in some way. Despite this, appeals to the individual are still not without its opponents within some conceptions of musical understanding and meaning. Peter Kivy notes for example:

'Now of course, there is one obvious way in which music can arouse the garden variety emotions that no one can deny...Hanslick called it music's 'pathological' effect. But he did not mean by 'pathological' anything like 'diseased'...Rather, what he meant was that, depending on the special circumstances of an individual listener's experiences...the music might, because of those special circumstances arouse a very real emotion like melancholy or cheerfulness in the listener. I prefer to call this the 'our-song' phenomenon...No one should doubt that these are real cases of real music arousing real garden variety emotions in listeners...The problem, as Hanslick long ago correctly concluded is that they have absolutely no aesthetic or artistic relevance at all...'⁵²

To understand Kivy's criticism of the pathological effect of music, it is necessary to understand that he has based this critique on some assumptions rooted in a conception

51 Hume, David *A Treatise on Human Nature* London : Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882. New ed. Section X

52 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p112

of Absolute Music. Kivy's reading of Hanslick may be influenced by Hanslick's assertions such as:

'Music has no subject beyond the notes we hear, for music speaks not only by means of sounds, it speaks nothing but sound.'⁵³

In his conception of the interaction of people and music, Kivy argues for a kind of emotional response that is similar to what he terms garden variety emotions⁵⁴ but of distinct and only musically related kind. What this point does not address though is the fact that all emotional responses will be conditioned by individual experiences to an extent and will be affected by the disposition of the listener. As such one could argue there is little justification for privileging this sort of emotional reaction over any other, especially if one is not convinced that emotional reactions to music are fundamentally different from emotional reactions to other stimuli. The experience of music may be very distinct but this does not necessarily imply emotional reactions to it would be specific enough to warrant a class of their own. So at this point, one should question why is it that the pathological experience of music is invalid, while other experiences are not. The most common response is that the pathological effect of music is subjective to an extreme degree. I would not dispute this, but what one is left with then is the idea that either subjectivity is to be avoided at all costs; or that there exists some sliding scale of acceptable subjectivity which prejudices genuine emotional experiences connected with music over enculturation to certain western musical values that ensure the 'correct' musical experiences

Neither of these thoughts are particularly satisfying explanations, and one can derive more insightful critiques of musical experiences by including reference to the disposition of the listener. If one can refer to disposition one can identify a more complete description of musical experience as a concept of disposition allows one to consider a greater variety of information, both musical and extra-musical, in one's examination of musical experiences. Also, one can avoid a regress of subjectivity by accepting that macro scale cultural practices, norms and assumptions can effectively limit the scope of responses to a number far below the infinite, but that these assumptions are internalised differently by individuals in such a way as to make reference to disposition of use in the construction of the analytic model. By ignorance of the circumstances and disposition, some arguments can effectively deprive

53 Hanslick, Eduard *The Beautiful in Music* New York Bobbs-Merrill 1957 p11

54 Kivy, Peter *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* Oxford OUP 2002 p112

themselves of some useful conclusions. For an example of what I mean, I would return to Kahn-Harris's article examined above:

Yet...women do become involved in the Extreme Metal scene. Indeed, some women have very prominent positions in scenic institutions. For example, Cannibal Corpse's UK press officer is female. Such women are generally vociferous in claiming that they are not offended by bands that use misogynistic lyrics. The following example comes from an interview with a British female scene member and band manager...

“Her Gash I did Slash- that was reviewed in a magazine and it's, the magazines are saying “Oh they won't be getting a lot of female buyers”. It's like the magazines are like making up this hatred, to make females isolated. It's like as a female I would buy that CD, I don't find it insulting at all...”

This quotation effectively represents the point at which the disengageability of text and practice is converted into an active refusal to engage with questions of power and textual politics within the scene.⁵⁵

The quote from the ‘female scene member and band manager’, serves as a good example of what happens when one seeks to ignore the individual's disposition with regards to their perceptions of music and musical stimulus. It would have been far more revealing if Kahn-Harris had asked why this listener does not find the music offensive against her gender, what does this music do for her that other kinds of music doesn't. Instead however, he effectively dismisses her opinion and engages in exactly the kind of patriarchal concern for so-called vulnerable females that this unnamed woman appears to be specifically complaining about, indeed she identifies that these kinds of critiques as actively isolating females within the scene. Kahn-Harris points out that studies have shown that heavy metal in general is much loathed among adolescent females⁵⁶, so surely it would have been of at least some interest to an academic study of gender and Death Metal to actually find out what female participants in the scene get from this music that their peers do not. Instead, because of Kahn-Harris's attempt to fit his analysis within a macro-level narrative of misogyny, art and society, this woman's opinion is dismissed along with the other ‘such’ women that he refers to, as being self-

55 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p91

56 Cloonan, M & Garofalo, R eds. *Policing Pop* Philadelphia Temple University Press 2003 p92

deluding and anomalous. I find his re-framing of the role of women in these scenic institutions (who presumably have worked very hard in a male dominated environment to get to where they are) as victims unable to challenge the hegemony of masculine power structures to be of little academic substance and at worst, quite disrespectful to the women he is talking about.

Contrast Kahn-Harris's approach with Gabriel Kuhn's research in *Sober Living for the Revolution*⁵⁷ we can see the advantages that taking individual experience into account can give us. The excerpt below is from an interview with Kelly Leonard, a prominent participant in her local hardcore punk scene. Hardcore Punk and the scenes that surround it are similar to those that surround Extreme Metal; in so much as they are male-dominated music cultures which have in the past been accused of being anti-female and the source of misogynistic lyricism. Leonard says of her experience of gender issues within the scene:

'I don't think the fact that hard core is male dominated is what makes the scene unattractive to many women. For some, it may be a big reason why they are attracted to it. From an outsider's perspective...hard core might be viewed as violent, extreme and dangerous. The music is aggressive, the shows are intense...'⁵⁸

What we see here is an explanation of what signs, meanings and significances this young woman gets from another genre that is considered by some to be very unfriendly to females. I think the information present here is far superior to Kahn-Harris's analysis and ultimately showcases what is at stake if one puts all the eggs in the big macro-level basket. What one gets from the Kuhn article is a unique perspective on gender and music, particularly an experience that goes against prevailing gender assumptions. What Kahn-Harris offers by contrast is another male academic telling everyone about what role women have in certain music cultures, which with the greatest of respect, there is probably enough of in musicology by now. In short, in an age of unbridled communication between individuals it seems like a waste of potential to not pay more attention to those individuated experiences in order to deepen collective knowledge of musical cultures, particularly when the ability to record, collect and curate these experiences has never been greater.

57 Kuhn, Gabriel ed. *Sober Living for the Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge and Radical Politics* Oakland PM Press 2010

58 Kuhn, Gabriel ed. *Sober Living for the Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge and Radical Politics* Oakland PM Press 2010 p233

I hope to have shown my reasons at this stage for questioning how fit for purpose many macro-level analyses are with examination of the contemporary musical environment. While analyses like McClary's and others may have been ground-breaking at the time, the mere fact that a movement within musicology that started over thirty years ago is still called New Musicology should perhaps justify the quest for a change of focus. I believe that attention to the micro-level details of individual musical experiences and cultures is a worthy suggestion to fill this role, simply because I believe that many of the assumptions that are at the heart of the analyses I have examined do not ring as true as they once did.

While work towards gaining true equality for all persons is far from over, it is apparent that the conditions of contemporary era are significantly different from the times that McClary or even Kahn-Harris are writing. We live in an era where issues such as gender equality and equality for LGBT persons are markedly improved worldwide in comparison to the situation thirty or more years ago but at the same time the gap in income between those who have and those who have not has returned to almost medieval levels. If culture is different, the music is different and the attitudes of individuals are different in our contemporary time then it simply does not make sense to continue to make one's aesthetic judgements using the same old schemes of value. I think that it is by attention to the experiences of individuals in music cultures, and by proper examination of the specific constructions of aesthetic features in music cultures that one has the best chance of formulating improved analytic models which can better examine and illuminate the vast plethora of musical experience available for study.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this piece I had stated my aim was to try and show the value of attending to micro-level concerns in discussions around the problems surrounding music and meaning. In doing so, I attended to two main areas I think could be helped by this revised attention, questions surrounding musical understanding and questions surrounding musical values and moral concerns. My hope in doing so was to try and foster a new kind of dialogue concerning music cultures and musical texts.

In the chapter regarding understanding, I suggested that macro-level assertions may not have as much explanatory value as some suggest, in describing the mechanism by which persons experience musical stimulus. I argued that Levinson's conception of Concatenationism gave an account of a more fundamental mechanism, which had useful conclusions that were not merely limited to accounts of absolute music. Furthermore, I gave an account of how musical understanding could be constructed as a kind of heuristic, which I thought could explain what is happening when persons perceive music on an individual level, in a manner which is not available if one pays attention only to macro-level influences and effects.

In the chapter discussing musical value and values, I noted that reference to the experience of individual listeners, their own accounts of their musical perceptions, would enhance understanding of musical cultures from without in a deeper and more detailed fashion than if one only applied macro-level ethical and aesthetic schema.

While remembering that the purpose of this paper is not to try and offer an all-encompassing theory of musical and meaning, I think that it would be conceptually helpful to attempt to show the interactions between the elements that I have identified thus far.

What this should achieve is a method for examining the workability of the elements as a cohesive whole, which should also illuminate the respective strengths and weaknesses of the individual concepts. With that in mind, I would offer the following construction of the operation of musical understanding and apprehension of meaning constituted from the elements so far in this paper:

The perceiving subject apprehends a sound and identifies this sound as music. Having decided to engage with this music, the subject attempts to unpack the relevant musical information (and therefore make an assessment of the piece) via the 'quasi-hearing'

heuristic, by which the currently perceived sound is held in relation to previously heard sounds. The combination of this information sets up an expectation of what the next sounds will be, and if these expectations are met to some degree then the subject will be able to get through the music temporally. The content and nature of these expectations will be dictated largely by the disposition of the individual in question. Disposition is defined here as an aggregate of past musical experiences and mental states, along with the current musical and emotional state of the subject. Disposition can be conditioned by a multitude of different factors, including processes of enculturation, musical training and also social influences on the subject.

While disposition is also at work in deciding the parameters of musical expectation for the subject, it is also at work in determining what meanings and emotional responses (if any at all) the subject can derive from the musical experience. Depending on the subject's tastes, experiences and intentionality, meaning will be constructed from sonic experience, within the bounds of that disposition. But it should be noted that neither the subject's disposition nor the meanings constructed from music need be permanently fixed.

In reference to the assertions I made at the start of the piece, I think the above model would appear to offer some small explanation of the mechanism by which these things would occur. Having examined this rather concise version of the model, I am now drawn to the discussions of problems within it:

Firstly, the mechanism of 'quasi-hearing' may still attract some derision as either unnecessary or implausible. One might still be tempted to think that one either hears something or does not, and this quasi-hearing idea is still too woolly, even when thought of as an unconscious process for problem solving. The difficulty lies with trying to find empirical evidence of a function that acts on conscious experience, given the difficulty in finding such evidence for many different aspects of consciousness beyond musical experiences in particular.

The best defence for my claim could be that given music is at heart an art-form concerning the organisation of sounds over a period of time, it would be of absolute importance that persons are able to retain and compute musical information temporally, with special attention paid to the sequential nature of these musical events. If one was unable to do this, then many conventions surrounding things such as chord progression construction and the modes of the major scale would not function in the way that we can observe that they do.

As such, quasi-hearing offers an account of the mechanism by which this occurs, and if constructed in terms of being heuristic can still operate as an explanation of this mechanism. By explaining quasi-hearing in terms of being a kind of heuristic, it is possible to move the concept from being a fairly unintuitive philosophical construction, into something far more everyday i.e. a method by which judgements are made from incomplete information.

The second issue that can be identified with the model is the reference to the disposition of the listener. There is always concern when notions of subjectivity are introduced into an argument that there may be a tendency for some kind of unwanted regress. As I noted earlier, the idea that people get different meanings from music because people are different is an unilluminating truism at best.

However, I think in my critique of Keith Kahn-Harris's article I have demonstrated that often attention to divergent individual experiences that perhaps go against one's critical intuitions can actually help force oneself to reflect on the assumptions that one brings to musical analysis and the limitations these assumptions burden one's critiques with.

This does not preclude agreement on certain meanings found in music, many assumptions, both musical and extra musical, will be widespread and cross-cultural. That said, these common cultural signifiers are not in any way guarantees of what meanings will be found. It is usually quite revealing when looking at the meaning reported by a listener to know something about that listener. In doing so, one can observe the action of disposition *in vivo* and thus find justification for its inclusion in many analyses of the musical experience.

The concept of disposition may still cause some unease, particularly for those who seek to coalesce judgements about art with judgements of a more moral nature. Quite often values are applied universally so that the effect of politics on taste can be observed. Also, the fact that many threads of aesthetics wish to moralise on art is indisputable, and subjectivity can be unwelcome if this is one's aim. However in response to this, it could be argued that it is difficult to accept that moral judgements and judgements of taste are always one and the same. Even if one says "that is a bad song" it should be argued this means something fundamentally different from saying "that is a bad person or action".

By moralising about music, what is achieved is a kind of reversal of the Euthyphro dilemma. That which one judges to be bad in art is not bad simply because it offends one's tastes; rather it offends one's tastes because it is inherently bad. This conception

of toxic art is of course at the root of most arguments about censorship, and certainly discussions about morality and art have their place. But this does not exclude the value of conceptions of meaning and understanding in music that are not framed within morality. An amoral theory of music and meaning, one that seeks to understand more and judge less, surely has more applications in the pluralistic artistic and cultural environment of our idiom than those that assert the same aged and accepted canons and dogmas from the previous centuries. As the humanities move towards the acceptance of more diverse interpretations and the examination of meanings constructed from previously marginalised viewpoints, one cannot deny the usefulness of a concept similar to disposition in this endeavour. What disposition does is allow for far more individualistic analysis while neither excluding social conditions nor learned information. It can serve as a manner to describe how phenomena interact with those structures around the individual, both musical and social, that many other analyses attempt to examine.

As I had stated at the beginning of this piece, my ambition was not to create an all-encompassing schema of music and meaning. The construct I have mentioned at the start of this chapter will no doubt be disputed and criticised. What I think I have achieved, though, is to demonstrate the usefulness of some philosophical concepts within musical analysis that I think would be of help in ongoing cultural efforts to examine the human experience of music.

That quasi-hearing can explain the mechanism of conscious interaction with sound in a manner that does not exclude those without training in either music or cultural theory is without doubt. By focusing on the micro as opposed to the macro, it can account for what is actually going on when we listen to music in quite a plausible way. Similarly that disposition can account for the differences between reactions to music, which can be so deep and varied, in a manner that other conceptions cannot, should convince us of its usefulness in musicological discussions, particularly as the humanities attempt to become more collaborative and accommodating than they were in the past.

By embarking on this examination of these concepts, I had wanted perhaps to disperse some assumptions about the usefulness (or lack) of concepts concerned with examining the micro-level in the study of musical phenomena. I believe that, having examined some micro-level concepts in some depth, there is a case to be made for occasionally changing focus when thinking about music. As I stated in my introduction, this is not in an attempt to disparage all macro-level notions and concepts, rather it is offered as a

potentially useful alternative analytic scheme which will serve only to deepen the collective body of knowledge regarding music.

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