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Recent years have seen far-reaching changes in the way music theorists and analysts view the nature of their disciplines. Encounters with structuralist and post-structuralist critical theory, and with linguistics and the cognitive sciences, have brought music theory and analysis into the orbit of important developments in present-day intellectual history, challenging previous ideas of their place in musical studies. This book presents the work of a group of younger scholars who, without seeking to impose an explicit redefinition of either theory or analysis, explore the limits of both in this new context. Essays on the languages of analysis and theory, and on practical issues such as decidability, ambiguity and metaphor, combine with studies of works by Debussy, Schoenberg, Birtwistle and Boulez, together making a major contribution to an important debate in the growth of musicology.

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Preface

To tackle music theory, music analysis, and musical meaning at one and the same time may seem ambitious. The nature of musical meaning, and indeed the very possibility of its existence, have occupied philosophers for several centuries. Music theory has an even longer pedigree, having been established in classical antiquity, and has for at least a millennium served composition and musical pedagogy both in a utilitarian way and as a medium of reflective thought. Analysis, a relative newcomer, has often paid more heed to ends than to means, putting itself at the service of performers, listeners and historians rather than politely working within the boundaries of ramified theoretical systems. Yet theory and analysis in music have always been interlinked – at the very least by virtue of their common subject matter, and sometimes by far more – so that the relationship between them has come to be constantly redefined across changes in the currents of intellectual history.

Within the past decade or so the change has been quite dramatic. It seemed that theory and analysis had for some time been locked in a dualism deriving from the perceived methods of the natural sciences – rather along the lines of hypothesis and experiment – which was reflected both in the format of academic papers and in patterns of argument. Quite suddenly, under pressure from forces elsewhere in musicology, analysis was refocused during the mid-1980s as a critical discipline.¹ A comparison between, for example, Allen Forte's monograph on *The Rite of Spring*, which expounds an analysis in order to demonstrate a theory, and the essays collected in Lawrence Kramer's *Music as Cultural Practice*, suggests a paradigm shift of major proportions.² Certainly, the attendant contrasts and controversies have been clearly observable, and it must be

1 I refer, in particular, to Joseph Kerman's 'How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out', *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), pp. 311–31, and *Musicology* (London: Fontana, 1985).

2 Allen Forte, *The Harmonic Organization of 'The Rite of Spring'* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

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said that some recent examples of critical writing do little more than revert to the indulgence in personal idiosyncrasy on which scientific theory and analysis had sought to improve. Yet, as has been recognised by a growing number of scholars, there is much about the practicalities of the new type of analytical writing that lies within the orbit of critical theory; and by projecting this awareness in their work – through an explicit concern with narratology, for example – these writers have demonstrated that a move away from certain kinds of music theory does not represent a retreat from theory *per se*. In this new context, analysis has come to be seen as one form of discourse or metadiscourse on music, raising the question of how music itself can be a text – sonic, written or remembered – and promoting analysis itself as a kind of theory through which a range of possible meanings can be described, prescribed or circumscribed. At the same time, and perhaps ironically, the interpenetration of analysis and theory – so evident in the explicitly scientific wave – has revealed theory, too, as a construction.

But it is not enough to characterise these developments as a re-orientation of analysis achieved simply through a divorce from music theory followed by a honeymoon with narratology. Bringing analysis into the orbit of recent developments in intellectual history has not displaced its traditional concern with explanation and technical description; and any discourse that incorporates technical description seems bound to use the terminology of basic music theory – crotchets, quavers, pitches, dynamics³ – even if the theoretical nature of such categories is not always acknowledged. Two concerns immediately flow from this: first, whether the use of such language is interpretive in the same sense as criticism is interpretive; second, whether the unhesitating use of such terminology, as if it were straightforwardly descriptive, reflects consistencies of musical cognition amenable to scientific enquiry. These are different sides of the same coin, of course, and the first is explored at length in this book's opening chapter by Naomi Cumming. With regard to the latter it is interesting to note, on the one hand, that a move in the direction of cognitive science was evident in theory/analysis circles just prior to the impact of Kerman's injunction to criticism;⁴ on the other hand, it could be said that the failure of many of those most prominently committed to the theory/analysis dualism to embrace cognitive musicology as some-

3 This seems to me to be true even of Thomas Clifton's attempt to avoid it, in *Music as Heard: A Study in Applied Phenomenology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

4 Notably in Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983) and the journal *Music Perception* (1983–).

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thing that was genuinely scientific – or, at least, potentially so – confirms that the scientism of formalist analysis was illusory in epistemological terms, however decisive the impact of scientism on analytical language.

Choosing to examine theory and analysis in relation to musical meaning might appear to be a symptom of desperation – no more than an invocation of ‘meaning’ as a constant in a time of doubt. Certainly, very many analyses have been presented in the professed belief that they expound some kind of musical truth; certainly, there have been attempts to justify various kinds of musical theory on the grounds that they allow music artefacts to be discussed in relation to apparently objective knowledge of acoustic phenomena. But such strategies are no longer thought to be satisfactory – if indeed they ever were. If many of the essays in this volume do, admittedly, take meaning as a cipher for something opposed to vagueness, they do so in full recognition of the endless provisionality that comes when the question of what it means to ‘mean’ is addressed – a semiological Pandora’s Box of differences, deflections and deferrals. But, if meaning is a journey rather than a destination, it is still a journey through terrain which can be mapped through an examination of linguistic usage, traversed sure-footedly through consideration of the pragmatics of the theory/analysis interface, and explored through the construction and evaluation of analogical narratives that are aware of their own status as text. The broad divisions of the book follow this outline.

Such relativism might appear to be decidedly at odds with the old analysis. Yet, as Jonathan Dunsby’s chapter makes clear, an examination of the various modes of analysis can avoid historicism while confirming that old habits die hard. One may question whether the search for deeper meaning is anything other than constructively deflected by the recognition that a web of potential meanings may be construed within ever expanding boundaries of signification. That there are new difficulties need not and surely will not prevent the continuation of analysis as an activity, though it may redefine the parameters of the discipline. If one may easily, though perhaps misleadingly, read these in terms of an antithesis between theory and practice, then by this criterion the chapters of this book possess aspects of both in more or less equal measure. It is, however, the nature of that ‘measure’ that is arguably the most fundamental concern of the following pages.

Acknowledgements

The impetus for this book came when Jonathan Dunsby convened a group of four British-based authors to present papers under the heading 'Analysis and Meaning' at the 1990 meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Oakland, California. That we were not alone in our concern for this topic was confirmed by other contributions to that conference, and by papers given at the Music Analysis Conference at City University, London, in 1991. The collaboration that resulted has led to this book in some cases more or less directly from conference materials, in others not.

Among those who helped this book on its journey, I should like to thank Robert Pascall, Derrick Puffett and Alan Street for their help in the early stages; Arnold Whittall for his constructive criticism of the book's concept and layout; and my colleague Robert Samuels for providing a second opinion on numerous occasions. For Cambridge University Press, Helen Beach, Claire Brodmann, Karl Howe and above all Penny Souster have made my task far easier than it might otherwise have been. At home, Angela and Lucy sustained the conditions which enabled me to give long periods of time to the production of the book. The assistance of others may more formally but no less gratefully be acknowledged:

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It goes without saying that a book of this kind is made by its contributors. By keeping to deadlines, by responding faithfully to enquiries and through their many fruitful suggestions, the authors whose work is gathered here have helped to make my self-appointed task a fulfilling and largely enjoyable one.

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