Music, Philosophy and Modernity

Andrew Bowie
MUSIC, PHILOSOPHY, AND MODERNITY

Modern philosophers generally assume that music is a problem to which philosophy ought to offer an answer. Andrew Bowie’s *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* suggests, in contrast, that music might offer ways of responding to some central questions in modern philosophy. Bowie looks at key philosophical approaches to music ranging from Kant, through the German Romantics and Wagner, to Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Adorno. He uses music to re-examine many current ideas about language, subjectivity, metaphysics, truth, and ethics, and he suggests that music can show how the predominant images of language, communication, and meaning in contemporary philosophy may be lacking in essential ways. His book will be of interest to philosophers, musicologists, and all who are interested in the relation between music and philosophy.

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This is not a book about the ‘philosophy of music’ in the sense which that term generally has within academic philosophy. Rather than seeing the role of philosophy as being to determine the nature of the object ‘music’, it focuses on the philosophy which is conveyed by music itself. This idea is explored via the interaction between philosophy and music in modernity which is largely ignored, not only in most of the philosophy of music, but also in most other branches of philosophy. The consequences of my exploration are, I suspect, more important for philosophy than for the practice of music, but musicians, and especially musicologists – who these days seem increasingly interested in philosophy – may find what I say instructive. If they do, it will be because I want, via a consideration of music’s relationship to verbal language, to question some of the ways in which philosophy has conceived of the meaning and nature of music.

The ideas for this book have been a long time in germinating, beginning during work on Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* for my PhD in the 1970s (Bowie 1979), and continuing with my work on the relationship of German Idealist and Romantic philosophy to contemporary concerns in the humanities during the 1980s and 1990s and beyond, and the ideas are, of course, by no means exhausted by what I have been able to say. Such a book is necessarily interdisciplinary, and the attempt to cover all the issues touched on in it in any detail would have resulted in an impossibly large volume. As a consequence this is also one of those books where lots of people have had important things to say about its concerns who are either ignored, or dealt with in too summary a manner. For this I can only apologise.

Motivations for the book have come not just from talking to friends and colleagues, but also from playing music itself. Like most people
who write about music who are not primarily musicians I always have the doubt as to whether I have the right to say anything about it. It was probably late-night discussions of music in Berlin in the late 1970s with Stephen Hinton that first persuaded me that I might have something useful to say, despite my lack of musicological training (and terrible sight-reading, which has, sadly, not got any better). Playing with the Blue Bayou Jazz Band in Berlin at that time made me realise how important music was as a means of communication: friendships from that period have been very durable. During the writing of the book the opportunity to play jazz sax with a whole series of excellent musicians in Cambridge and elsewhere, from Scandinavia, to Australia, to Japan, has proved to be a vital way of exploring what I wanted to say. The list of musicians could go on for a long time, but Pete Shepherd, Paul Stubbs, John Turville, John Brierley, Pete Fraser, Peter Mabey, Jon Halton, Laurence Evans, Adrian Coggins, John Gregory, Derek Scurll, Simon Fell, and many others from the various bands at the Elm Tree pub and elsewhere in Cambridge, have offered invaluable musical and other insights, as has my old friend and relentless critic of my playing, Eddie Johnson. It is not that we always talked directly about the issues of the book, though we sometimes did that too, but rather – and this is a key theme of the book – that we were involved in communication about the issues via music itself. A final thanks to Jody Espina in New York, who makes and sells in an exemplary manner the saxophone mouthpieces which at last stopped me buying new ones (only another sax player can know just what this means).

The list of philosophical and musical colleagues and research students who were indispensable is also long, and I apologise to those who are not mentioned by name, but who also contributed. Karl Ameriks, Jay Bernstein, Arnfinn Bø-Rygg, Susan Bowles, Liz Bradbury, Tony Cascardi, Paulo de Castro, Stanley Cavell, James Dack, John Deathridge, Peter Dews, Richard Eldridge, Manfred Frank, Neil Gascoigne, Kristin Gjesdal, Lydia Goehr, Christopher Hasty, Zoe Hepden, Lawrence Kramer, Bente Larsen, Nanette Nielsen, Peter Osborne, Henry Partridge, Robert Pippin, Richard Potter, Alex Rehding, John Rundell, Jim Samson, Robert Vilain, Nick Walker, and many others, all helped in a variety of philosophical and musical ways.

Talks given at, among others, the following universities: Loránd Eötvös Budapest, Cambridge, Columbia, Cork, East Anglia, Fordham, Harvard, Melbourne, Princeton, the New School, Oslo, Lancaster, and at the Internationale Hegel-Vereinigung, allowed me to test out the
ideas under ideal conditions, and I would like to thank the many people whose questions at these talks both made me see some of the problems inherent in what I was trying to say, and encouraged me in the idea that it was still worth saying.

The book would not have been possible without the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Research Council) Research Leave Scheme, and a Major Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Foundation. I am very grateful indeed to both bodies for allowing me to complete a project that might never have been completed but for their assistance. I am also grateful for the chance they gave me to do some more serious study, practice, and performance on the saxophone, which proved vital to the crystallisation of the book’s ideas. The German Department at Royal Holloway tolerated my extended absence, and I owe a special thanks to Ann White for her selfless leadership of the Department, to Maire Davies for her encouragement of my efforts, and to Jerome Carroll, who took my post for the duration of my leave.
INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and music

An ironic reminder of music’s central role in many aspects of life in modernity was given not long ago by the report that ‘music’ had – albeit only temporarily – replaced ‘sex’ as the word used most often in Internet searches. The likelihood of ‘philosophy’ becoming the most popular word in Internet searches is, of course, pretty remote. This rather crude sign of the difference in the contemporary importance of these two elements of modern culture can also be read as an indication of a deeper issue. Why this is so can be suggested by the difference between two moments in the changing relationship between philosophy and music in modernity. The heroic period of modern philosophy in Europe epitomised by Kant’s claims on behalf of self-legislation in opposition to obedience to traditional authority is contemporaneous with the development of the new ‘autonomous’ music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, as well as with the emergence of new ideas concerning music’s connection to philosophy. Professional philosophy, particularly in the Anglo-American world today, has, in contrast, tended to become a more and more specialised academic activity with little direct bearing either on people’s attitudes to or on the conduct of their lives. The idea that academic philosophy might now have a fundamental connection to music is, moreover, almost inconceivable in many areas. Music itself, on the other hand, has continued, in albeit sometimes problematic ways, to be a central feature of the everyday lives of people in modern societies.

One of the aims of this book is to show both that some recent directions in philosophy offer ways of re-establishing connections to music and that this is important for the future direction of philosophy. How far
such connections could affect the practice of music itself is a different matter, and the very difficulty of suggesting ways that they might is part of the theme of the book. ‘New musicologists’ have begun to use more resources from philosophy, such as the work of T. W. Adorno, in recent times, and this has led to some exciting new departures. It might seem, then, that what I propose would belong in the direction of new musicology, but this is not necessarily the case. In my view some of such work using philosophy to look at music puts rather too much faith in philosophy, and too little in music itself. This is a contentious – and somewhat indeterminate – claim, and it will take the book that follows to try to substantiate it. One example of what I mean by putting faith in music is suggested by Daniel Barenboim in a tribute to his recently deceased friend, Edward Said: ‘He wrote about important universal issues such as exile, politics, integration. However, the most surprising thing for me, as his friend and great admirer, was the realisation that, on many occasions, he formulated ideas and reached conclusions through music; and he saw music as a reflection of the ideas that he had regarding other issues’ (The Guardian, 25 October 2004). How this might be possible can be suggested by considering a few aspects of music’s relationship to philosophy in modernity.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the relationship between music and philosophy could no longer be established solely in terms of what philosophy had to say about music, because the development of music itself influenced philosophical thinking, and vice versa. This two-way relationship has largely disappeared in most contemporary professional philosophy, and I think this is both regrettable and instructive. My reasons for this view are not only concerned with the failings of the so-called ‘philosophy of music’, because what is at issue cannot, as we shall see, be confined to the topic of music. 1 Discussion of music in analytical philosophy often takes the form of attempts to determine what constitutes a musical ‘work’: is it the score, all performances which ‘comply’ with the score, any performance that gets near to compliance, etc.; as well as attempts to establish whether music can be said to possess ‘meaning’ in the way verbal language does, to define the concept of ‘expression’, and to ascertain whether music ‘arouses’ emotions or just has ‘emotional properties’. Even though the very status of philosophy is itself these days widely seen to be in question,

1 In the analytical tradition there is sometimes a disagreement over whether what is involved here is ‘aesthetics’ or ‘the philosophy of music/art’. I shall ignore this distinction, because, contrary to the claims of some analytical aestheticians, like Arthur Danto, aesthetics was from the beginning not just concerned with beauty.
such approaches unquestioningly assume that the task of philosophy is to establish which concepts can appropriately be applied to music.

My worry about these approaches might, though, sound rather odd. Surely, it is obvious that this should be philosophy’s task? There is, however, a growing sense these days that philosophy is actually not very good at establishing the ‘real nature’ of things, as opposed to exploring our different understandings of things and considering how the contrasting kinds of validity involved in those understandings relate to each other. One reason for suspecting ontological reflections is the simple fact that a useful criterion for valid scientific theories is that they allow one to make reliable predictions, and so do not necessarily raise ontological questions. Philosophical theories, in contrast, rarely allow one to predict, and are even more rarely widely agreed upon, though they may offer resources for re-interpreting an issue or a problem in a concrete situation. Doubts about philosophy’s role in such matters can be suggested by asking what would happen if philosophy were to come up with the true theory of the nature of music. Would listeners then be able to hear Beethoven’s String Quartet Opus 131 and know whether it meant anything or not, because philosophy offered irrefutable arguments that music without words does not ‘mean’ anything? But what if some listeners still thought it ‘meant’ something, even though they could not necessarily say what it meant? Furthermore, would such a philosophical theory invalidate all the ways in which this piece has been reacted to in the past – which from my point of view have to do with its meaning – that do not conform to the theory? Even though each of these ways will be inadequate in some respect, they may yet disclose something about the music.

Music’s ‘meaning’ might lie precisely in the fact that we cannot say in words what it means – why does music exist at all if what it ‘says’ could be said just as well in other ways? The important issue is, therefore, the differing ways in which something can be construed as ‘meaning’ something. Gadamer suggests why in his remark that in the everyday use of language: ‘The word which one says or which is said to one is not the grammatical element of a linguistic analysis, which can be shown in concrete phenomena of language acquisition to be secondary in relation, say, to the linguistic melody of a sentence’ (Gadamer 1986: 196). The tone and rhythm of an utterance can be more significant than its ‘propositional content’, and this already indicates one way in which the musical may play a role in signification. Judgement on whether music possesses meaning in the way natural languages do would seem to presuppose an account of verbal meaning that allows it to be strictly
demarcated from whatever it is that we understand in wordless music. Analytical philosophers of music tend to assume that an account of verbal meaning has been established, and that this is what allows them to attempt to determine the status of musical meaning. However, there are good grounds for doubting whether such an account really exists in the form relied upon by these philosophers.

The reasons for some of these doubts are already apparent in early-modern thinkers, like J. G. Herder and the early German Romantics, who regard language and music as intimately connected, because both are means of revealing new aspects of being, rather than just means of re-presenting what is supposedly already there. The limitations of analytical approaches are often apparent in relation to the ‘poetic’, or literary use of language. In poetic usage something is inevitably lost when the particular form of words is paraphrased or translated into another language.² It is implausible to assume that what is lost has nothing to do with what is meant in a poem, unless one restricts one’s sense of meaning to the idea of reference to concrete and ‘abstract’ objects (whatever the latter notion might mean). A related case is metaphorical usage, which causes difficulties for semantic theories which assume that words have specifiable ‘senses’. Is it possible to establish context-independent criteria for identifying when a piece of language can be understood purely literally, so that metaphorical, performative, ‘musical’ and other dimensions of language can be separated from it? The assumption that this is possible relies on the claim that the representational aspect of language is the basis of other forms of language, and there are strong grounds for resisting this claim. The sheer diversity of ways in which communication actually takes place in real contexts can suggest why. None of this, one should add, requires one to give up the idea that there are true ways of talking about the world. What is at issue is rather the functioning of language as a social practice, where what one form of language cannot say or achieve may be sayable or achievable by another form, including in ways which cannot be construed in semantic terms.

Meanings and music

Questions which arise in analytical approaches to music and language are, then, connected to questions about the very nature and point of

² Arguably something can also be gained, but that is not the issue here.
doing philosophy that relate to important tensions between the main traditions of modern philosophy. One of the relatively few analytical philosophers to have extensively concerned himself with music, Peter Kivy, has claimed that ‘Music, of all the arts, is the most philosophically unexplored and most philosophically misunderstood where it has been explored at all’ (Kivy 1997: 139). Kivy’s claim is already undermined by his failure even to mention many of the most important writers on philosophy and music, such as T. W. Adorno and Carl Dahlhaus, or to consider philosophers, like Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, or Davidson, who offer conceptions of language involving assumptions which contradict his own. Moreover, Kivy’s own manner of looking at music can be shown to rely on assumptions which seem likely to obscure the significance of music. In themselves the limitations of analytical approaches to music may not be particularly interesting; the motor of much of the analytical tradition was, after all, predominantly the success of the methods of the natural sciences. But if one regards analytical philosophy as a distinctive manifestation of modern culture, the questions raised by its problematic relationship to music can bring to light some major issues. The difficulty lies in how these issues are to be approached.

One of the main characteristics of modern philosophy has been a tension between two approaches to ‘meaning’. This tension relates to the tension between the analytical tradition of philosophy that begins with Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein, and the European traditions of philosophy that emerged with Vico, Herder, Kant, and Romanticism, and are carried on in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Critical Theory. The manifestations of the tension go right across the different disciplines in academic life, and across the different spheres of modern social life. In its more extreme forms – in some of the theories of the Vienna Circle, for instance – the first of these approaches takes as its starting point propositions which convey reliable knowledge in the natural sciences. These propositions are supposed to form the basis of what can properly be called meaning. The idea is that one can demarcate the forms of language which reliably connect with the world from those which do not, and can therefore employ the former to define meaning. The forms in question involve direct observation of objects and rely on a priori logical laws to order the sentences to which this observation gives rise. The other approach begins either with the endless diversity of ways in which people actually use language, or, more controversially, with the ‘world-disclosing’ aspects of literary language (see
Cooper 2003). It does so in order to explore meaning as the very substance of specifically human existence, and regards the natural sciences as just one, albeit understandably dominant, part of modern cultural practice, rather than as providing what Bernard Williams has termed the ‘absolute conception’ (on this see chapter 9 below). The reason the sciences could not in fact provide such a conception is that they rely on language in a manner which precludes them, on pain of vicious circularity, from using language to give an account of language in their own terms. We shall repeatedly return to this issue later. The assumption in the second approach is that if people understand a piece of articulation – which is apparent in terms of its effects in social contexts on behaviour, reactions, feelings, and so on – it must mean something. To this extent, as Bjørn Ramberg has argued in relation to Donald Davidson’s notion of ‘radical interpretation’, ‘We can, if we like, interpret all kinds of things as speaking’ if we can ‘correlate some identifiable complex state of our chosen subject with some identifiable state of the world’ (Ramberg 1989: 122).

The relevance of this view of language to music is apparent in the question of whether a series of acoustic phenomena is mere noise or is music: if it is the latter, it possesses a kind of ‘meaning’ that noise does not. This is in part because we may inferentially relate it to other things which we have interpreted as music. Our understanding of music depends on correlations between hearing the production of noises and an awareness that what is produced is not merely arbitrary and so is susceptible to and worthy of interpretation and evaluation in the widest senses, which can, for example, include dancing to the noises. Any noise can become music if it occurs in the appropriate contexts, rather in the way that non-literary language can change its status when incorporated into a literary context, or an object becomes a work of art if put into the right context. We can, furthermore, sometimes think that we hear language when what we hear is not language, and vice versa, because of the context in which we hear it, and the same applies to music. There is no need in these cases to rely on a fundamental division between the musical and the linguistic, because their very status as such depends in both cases on their intelligibility. The basic idea here is, then, that any form of articulation that can disclose the world in ways which affect the conduct and understanding of life can be regarded as possessing meaning. The deliberately open-ended nature of this claim does not preclude the examination of differences between putatively semantic and non-semantic forms of articulation, but it leaves open the question
of how fundamental this difference should be seen as being for the ways in which language and other communicative forms actually function. What is fundamental here is the sense that intelligibility in both language and music arises via connections between noises and marks, and states of and processes in the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds.

The founders of the analytical tradition increased the precision of some kinds of argument and got rid of certain confusions regarding the logical status of a number of issues in philosophy. However, they did so at the expense of restricting the scope of what was considered worthy of, or even amenable to, philosophical attention. In the process a great deal was staked on using the analysis of language to obviate traditional metaphysical problems. It is therefore easy to see how absurd speculation in Romantic philosophy about the significance of music as, for example, ‘the archetypal (‘urbildlich’) rhythm of nature and of the universe itself’ (Schelling: 1/5, 369), would appear in that perspective. We shall see later, though, that it may not really be quite so absurd. Plausible as the analytical strategy seemed to be in the light of the predictive and technological power of the natural sciences, the project of setting up a theory of meaning in this manner is now widely regarded as decisively flawed, and this has led to a new relationship of some analytical thinkers to the European traditions of philosophy.

The problem for the analytical project is that, even with regard to the exact sciences, the relationship between words and the world cannot be explained as a relationship between fixed items in the world and linguistic meanings which mirror or ‘re-present’ – in the sense of ‘present again what is already there as such’ – those items. The relationship between ‘extension’ and ‘intension’, or between ‘reference’ and ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’, has, so far at least, proved to be impossible to characterise in a manner which specifies the role of each in isolation. This has led to greater attention being paid to the second approach to meaning. What things are understood to be depends here upon the kind of relationships in which they stand to other things, and something analogous applies to the meaning of words. Instead of the world being seen ‘atomistically’, as a series of discrete objects, it comes to be seen ‘holistically’, as an interconnected web, in which what things are also depends on how we speak about them and act in relation to them and to each other. A crucial point about this shift for the present book is that it involves the revival of the ideas of thinkers in European philosophy, like Schelling, Hegel, and Schleiermacher. These ideas were both rejected by the founding fathers of analytical philosophy, and accompanied and
were sometimes influenced by the emergence of the greatest Western music. We shall return to a more thorough examination of what I have had to caricature here in the coming chapters. For the moment I want to suggest a possible initial response to the consequences of the holistic understanding of meaning that can illuminate questions of philosophy and music.

Subject and object

A key element of holist conceptions is that they question attempts to fix what belongs on the subject- and what belongs on the object-side of what is intelligible to us. This doesn’t mean that such conceptions regard objectivity as impossible, but a philosophical understanding of objectivity does not depend on a characterisation of how the objective ‘content’ provided by the world is organised into reliable cognitions by a subjective ‘scheme’ provided by the mind or language. The holist model is often seen as open to question with regard to the physical sciences because there the content is supposed to consist in what John McDowell has called ‘bare presences that are supposed to constitute the ultimate grounds of empirical judgements’ (McDowell 1994: 24), that is, in pure data that do not require interpretation. There are, though, as McDowell and others argue in the wake of German Idealist and Romantic philosophy, good reasons for suggesting that we don’t have access to any such ultimate grounds because we don’t apprehend pure sense-data anyway, but rather apprehend tables, trees, chemical elements, notes, etc. Separating the conceptual from the non-conceptual content in perception is seen as involving a misapprehension of what perception is, because perception is of a world which is always already intelligible, not of some intermediary between us and reality, such as sense-data.

Interrogation of the idea of a fixed line between the subjective and the objective depends on the notion that we inhabit a world that cannot in principle be reduced to what it supposedly is prior to any understanding of it. Some of the problems which most concern analytical philosophers of music are themselves generated by the model of a spectatorial subjective mind confronting an objective world of which music is a part. A recurrent issue in such thinking is how to get from the description of a sequence of organised sounds in terms of physics – thus of frequencies, durations, etc., as objective properties of acoustic phenomena – to the characterisation of the same sequence as music. Whereas the former might be seen as the description of an identifiable object, the latter
makes no sense in these terms: what sort of ‘object’ is the music that is objectively manifest as frequencies, etc.? Is there a further property possessed by the frequencies which is lacking in sound-sequences that are not music? The problem is that the criteria for identifying something as music are of a different order from the criteria for measuring frequencies. Davidson (2001) points out that one can give any number of different numerical descriptions of something’s weight which express the same facts, because they will all rely on the relationship of the weight of one thing to other things. The metric one applies does not change the weight, and the same applies to frequencies. The assumption might therefore seem to be that something’s being music is irredeemably ‘subjective’, because it is just constituted ‘in the mind’ of a listener.

In one sense this is trivially true: there would be no music without listeners and players, whereas frequencies arguably exist whether we apprehend them or not. However, the apprehension of sounds as music also depends upon learning-processes which are not merely subjective, because they originate in the objective world of social action inhabited by the subject. This world is constituted partly in terms of socially instituted norms relating to, but not wholly determined by, the causal pressure of nature. This is the crucial point, because issues such as the ‘location’ of emotions with regard to music, which often lead to fruitless disagreement if one tries to show how a musical object has ‘affective properties’ in the way that physical objects have physical properties, look different in this perspective. A vital element in social learning-processes is language itself. Language is, though, also manifest as a physical object, in the form of frequencies, pitches, or marks on pieces of paper, etc. Significantly, the objectifying model has something like the same problem with meaning as it does with music: what makes these particular physical objects into comprehensible signs? The purely physical description of something which we understand as music and of something which we understand as language has to be complemented by an interpretative aspect. In both cases the supposedly purely objective turns out not to be separable from the supposedly subjective because it is inextricably bound up with human action. Ultimately this means that even judgements about physical facts that are available to us via causal interaction with the world involve interpretation because they are couched in a language which has to be understood. This does not, however, lead to subjectivism: the basic point is simply that all kinds of language use involve what Davidson and Habermas refer to as a ‘triangulation’
between the subjective, the intersubjective, and the objective. What is true about either music or language is independent of the vagaries of interpretation, but this does not mean that there is a reliable method for arriving at that truth which can avoid interpretation.

Foundational philosophy, and the musical alternative

These are still contentious points, and a serious defence of them here would require an examination of many issues in contemporary philosophy, which would prevent us even getting to the main themes of the book. This very situation is, though, central to what I want to say. The requirement to arrive at a philosophically reliable location before dealing with music might seem to make a discussion of philosophy and music effectively impossible. I want to claim that the consequence ought really to be the opposite. The very difficulty of arriving at this location is actually what is most revealing.

Schleiermacher suggested the difficulty involved in connecting aesthetics to the rest of philosophy in his *Aesthetics*. The normal assumption is that one requires a generally agreed system of philosophy in order to be able to establish aesthetic judgements on a firm foundation. Schleiermacher asserts, however, that ‘this would mean deferring the matter to infinity’ (Schleiermacher 1842: 48), because such a system requires universal consensus. He regards this consensus as a regulative idea, not as something actually realisable, and therefore thinks that aesthetics must get by without firm foundations. Even in the contemporary philosophical situation, where grand foundational systems have largely been abandoned, the problem for the ‘philosophy of music’ is that it must rely upon whatever other philosophical assumptions are adopted by the person producing it. Such philosophy is therefore likely just to confirm the non- or extra-musical assumptions that precede its application to music; indeed, if it did not, it would be incoherent. Given the wholesale lack of consensus about positions in philosophy, this leads, though, to the uninviting situation in which the ‘philosophy of music’ inevitably just limps behind whatever philosophical bandwagon happens to be running at a particular time or is adopted by the philosopher of music. There seems to be something mistaken about accepting the result of this situation, even though it is in one sense inescapable: am I myself not just following the bandwagon of contemporary pragmatism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics in my rejection of subject–object-based analytical models in relation to music? It might appear, moreover, that
the ultimate implication of my stance is that the very idea of a ‘philosophy of music’ is mistaken. This will indeed be what I want to claim, but that does not render concern with philosophy and music superfluous. So what is the alternative?

One possibility is to regard the ‘philosophy of music’, not as the philosophy whose job is conceptually to determine the object ‘music’, but rather as the philosophy that emerges from music, that is, to interpret the phrase in the subjective, rather than the objective genitive. Friedrich Schlegel once characteristically asserted that ‘One has tried for so long to apply mathematics to music and painting; now try it the other way round’ (Schlegel 1988: 5, 41). If one substitutes ‘philosophy’ for mathematics, the approach I want to develop begins to emerge. Schlegel suggests the basic problem for philosophy by the following remark, which brilliantly encapsulates the problem of philosophical foundations: ‘Demonstrations in philosophy are just demonstrations in the sense of the language of the art of military strategy. It is no better with [philosophical] legitimations than with political ones; in the sciences as well one first of all occupies a terrain and then proves one’s right to it afterwards (Schlegel 1988; 2, 111). Gadamer suggests what Schlegel’s inversion of the role of mathematics and music points to when he argues that, although the natural sciences are indispensable to human survival, ‘this does not mean that people would be able to solve the problems that face us, peaceful coexistence of peoples and the preservation of the balance of nature, with science as such. It is obvious that not mathematics but the linguistic nature of people is the basis of human civilisation’ (Gadamer 1993: 342). That linguistic nature relies on forms of communication which cannot all be mapped out in advance in a theory, and have instead to be engaged in via a constant negotiation which has no foundational certainties. For Gadamer, encounter with the other in the form of coming to understand their languages, including the language of music, can tell us more about what we are than many of the objectifying forms of studying human behaviour. It is when we don’t understand and have to leave behind our certainties that we can gain the greatest insights. Given that this situation is in one sense almost constitutive for music, which we never understand in a definitive discursive manner, it is worth taking seriously the idea that such non-understanding might be philosophically very significant.

The approach to music proposed here seeks to avoid merely confirming the philosophical and methodological presuppositions that one
adheres to before engaging with music. It is, in one sense, an appeal
to the importance of learning really to listen and play. This is by no
means easy, and may itself even be no more than an unattainable reg-
ulative idea. The problem of merely confirming one’s presuppositions
arises, for example, when the assumption is made that philosophy’s
role is to decide which properties can, and which cannot, be ascribed
to music. In the history of music what is said about music, including
by philosophers, does have substantial effects on the practice of music.
As Dahlhaus comments: ‘The language “as” which music appears is
not independent of the language “in” which music is talked about’
(Dahlhaus 1988: 322). However, the effects on music of talking about
music, and vice versa, are, as Dahlhaus shows, rarely direct. More cru-
cial in my view is the complex two-way relationship between music and
what is said about it (a relationship which Dahlhaus sometimes looks
at rather too much from the side of language). Consider, for example,
the question of the ‘properties’ of music.

A first step towards developing the approach I am interested in
involves looking at the issue of properties in normative terms. Rather
than thinking of properties in terms of concepts which represent
attributes of things, one thinks of concepts, as Robert Brandom has
argued, in terms of their inferential roles. The concept ‘red’ is under-
stood such that applying it, which is a form of social practice answerable
to others, means that what it is applied to is ‘coloured, not a prime
number, and so on’. This differentiates concept use from what a com-
puter does, and depends on the propriety of the inferences in question.
A musical note can be registered in terms of differential response to
its frequency, but it only becomes a note via its relations to a series of
other things heard in other contexts, so that it is defined by its func-
tion in a whole. This inferential approach seems to me to offer some
vital resources. However, music and other forms of art also pose certain
instructive difficulties for it, which will be considered in more detail in
chapter 4.

Even the relational functions of a note are accessible to a differential
response of the kind which a computer could perform in relation to a
score. What makes the note into part of a piece of music is, therefore, not
adequately grasped either by the idea that we know the significance of
saying that it is such because it relates to other notes in a rule-governed
manner, or even by the idea that we know it is music because we grasp the
conceptual content of the term music. It is not clear that the content in
question can be arrived at by thinking in terms of music’s being sound,
not being painting, for example. Music has to be heard as such, and this hearing cannot be fully explained in inferential terms. At a basic level one can make the inferential judgement that music is such because of its being sound, its occurring in the sort of contexts that other things called music occur in, but that misses something essential. At some level the conceptual judgement depends on norms which are not based on raw, unconceptualised feeling (the idea of which is probably a myth anyway), but which are also not fully explicable in inferential terms.

Stanley Cavell says that the giving of reasons for aesthetic judgements will often end in the situation where ‘if you do not see something, without explanation, then there is nothing further to discuss’ (Cavell 1976: 93), because one is appealing to something which cannot be inferentially articulated. The acceptance of the norms such judgements involve, which rely on a shared, but non-objectifiable understanding of the world, suggests why Schlegel’s inversion may be significant in making us ask what music can tell us about philosophy. In one respect the answer to this must be ‘nothing’, because music without words is not propositional (though it can function in a manner akin to propositional language when used in performative ways, for instance, as a signal to get people to do things). What interests me is how music’s resistance to philosophy is understood, and why this might matter to modern culture.

This is not an arcane question: it is already implicit in people’s puzzlement at why it is that what they experience or understand in music is ‘hard to put into words’. Although we may not be able positively to state what music’s resistance means, by explaining that music actually doesn’t mean things in the way language does, we might be able to suggest ways in which the limits of philosophy in relation to music could be shown. The question is what significance such a demonstration has for philosophy. Although there are major philosophers, like Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, and Adorno, for whom music is a vital issue, many other philosophers never mention music, even when their central concern is with human communication and with the normative content of human social existence. In the following chapters I want to explore whether the commitment to or the neglect of music by philosophy is a significant factor both in assessing the role of philosophy in modernity and in thinking about the future of philosophy.

It is worth making clear, finally, what this book will not be trying to do, as the issues it addresses have so many ramifications. The book will not be of immediate interest to those seeking illumination of specific
works and types of music, not least because I have not used detailed musical examples. This is in part because what I would have to say about such examples would generally not warrant my attempts being included. One implication of what I say is that there are good reasons for those who think philosophy vital to our engagement with music to learn from some of the most interesting writers on specific music, like Dahlhaus, Maynard Solomon, and Charles Rosen, rather than thinking that what has been missing from writing on music is ‘more philosophy’ (though there are circumstances where this can be the case). My focus is largely on German philosophy and music, simply because I think this is where the important issues are most effectively confronted. I could, of course, add to the list of the things I fail to discuss at all, or do not discuss in any detail. These include, in the theoretical realm, such topics as Hanslick, the specifics of the analytical philosophy of music, the relationship of post-structuralism to music, and many different genres of music in the practical realm. Although the experience of jazz improvisation has revealed itself in the course of writing to be more fundamental to what I have to say than I originally realised, I do not give a specific account of it, preferring to take up those aspects of philosophy concerned with music which relate to the intuitions I have gained from playing jazz. The very fact that it is hard to translate from the practice of jazz into a discursive account should, though, be seen as part of my argument. The underlying reason for many of the gaps in my agenda is the somewhat paradoxical one that the book is more interested in questioning philosophy via music than vice versa. Because the book is aimed more at philosophy, it becomes itself more philosophical than musical, while in many ways wishing to be the opposite. As a way of counterbalancing this consequence, I also want to suggest that one of the best philosophical things one can do is to listen to and play more good music.

Richard Taruskin has objected to my failure elsewhere to highlight the fact that I think the most important thinkers in the area of music and philosophy are German (in his review of Samson 2002 (Taruskin 2005)), so I do it here. Suffice to say, I find his objection tendentious, not least because he offers no serious alternative agenda for the topics that interest me, dismissing them as involving a concern with ‘the ineffable’. As will become apparent, I regard this term with some suspicion. A gesture, a musical phrase, or a dance may articulate something unsayable, without it being ineffable.
Form, meaning, and context

Philosophical writers on music who argue that wordless music does not mean anything sometimes refer to it as ‘pure form’. Peter Kivy says of Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony, for example, that ‘it has no content to reveal, no message to decode’, and that in the teaching of the work ‘few instructors, trained in the modern analytical and musicological traditions as they are, will be tempted to attribute any meaning to it’ (Kivy 1993: 29), it being, ‘in a sense . . . pure contentless abstract form’ (ibid.: 30). Kivy’s second claim is, of course, simply untrue: many professional ‘new musicologists’ would indeed attribute meaning to the *Eroica*. The sense in which it is supposed to be ‘pure contentless abstract form’ is not clear, but from the rest of Kivy’s arguments it would appear to have to do with the idea that the *Eroica* does not designate anything. The idea that a form, especially a musical form, can be ‘pure’ should, though, already be doubtful on the basis of what was argued in the Introduction. For a form to be a significant form at all, it has to be understood as such, rather than merely registered as a series of unconnected data. Contextual and background factors that do not belong to the data themselves must come into play here, and so must the inferential apprehension of patterns of identity and difference, of the kind required for language use. It is only when there are such patterns that we need to interpret, so the very notion of form relies on the sense that there is something to be further understood. Forms are therefore always open to re-description when new contexts arise in which they take on a different significance.

If such contextualisation is required to make sense of any phenomenon, philosophical claims about ‘pure’ form must look decidedly
unconvincing. The *Eroica*’s massive expansion of symphonic form is, in the terms suggested in the Introduction, part of what the *Eroica* means, part of its ‘content’. Apprehending this content relies on background knowledge and language, but so does apprehending anything as music at all, and, of course, so does understanding any linguistic utterance. Once one begins to take seriously the necessary role of context in the understanding of all meaning, it becomes easy to see that there can be no definitive division between verbal language and other forms of articulation. Eduard Hanslick’s objection to regarding Gluck’s aria ‘Che farò senza Euridice’ as expressing intense grief, because it could be heard as expressing joy, can just as easily apply to someone’s misunderstanding verbal and other expressions of grief from a culture with which they are not familiar. The fact is that we have to learn both language and music, and we are always capable of misinterpretation if we attach a piece of symbolic expression to the wrong contexts.¹

Claims about pure form often rely on analogies between mathematical and musical form. The temptation that results from these analogies is to limit what is said about form in music to the technical level, as Kivy claims musicologists do. This limitation has, however, proved to be notoriously difficult to achieve, not least because the relationship between mathematics and music is anything but direct. It is not just ‘new musicologists’ who have in recent times moved beyond analysis towards a more hermeneutic stance. The move is also made because analysis often comes up against undecidable ambiguities that resist ‘objective’ description and demand ‘extra-musical’ understanding. In composers like Schubert or Wagner, for example, who employ enharmonic changes as an essential part of their musical language, or in a lot of jazz, that resistance can be precisely what is most significant about the music. Musicologists therefore also adopt a more interpretative stance because analysis without interpretation cannot do justice to its object.² Attention to form is evidently essential to understanding music, but Adorno’s dictum that ‘Form is sedimented content’ suggests a more productive approach to form because it incorporates the sense that form is inherently ‘impure’.

¹ See Cook 2001, who tries to circumvent models which see musical meaning as being either wholly inherent in the piece or wholly socially constructed. Cook also makes illuminating distinctions with regard to the aspects of music that are more likely to be cross-culturally comprehensible.

² Adorno claims that it is impossible to perform a piece adequately without some kind of analysis: the question is the extent to which this can be ‘purely objective’.
Although many of the same points concerning the contextuality of the understanding of form can be made about the dependence of verbal meaning on context, this is not a reason simply to equate ‘music’ and ‘language’. It is precisely the kind of thinking which draws consequences in this manner that I am concerned to question. Either/or approaches, of the kind present in the familiar question ‘Is music a language?’, repeat a problem suggested in the Introduction: they assume that we already know what a language is, and can just apply the theory of language to music. Given that Donald Davidson has famously claimed that ‘there is no such thing as a language’ (Lepore 1986: 446), this could well be a mistaken short-cut. Davidson elucidates his remark by adding ‘if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed’ (ibid.). What they have supposed is that a language is something of which a philosophical description can be given, in terms of functions, rules, etc., rather than a series of ever-changing practices bound up with other human activities and affected by interaction with the world. One just needs to ask the question of when something begins to be language and when it ceases to be language to see the reasons for being careful here. Davidson regards understanding language as beginning with the mapping of someone else’s noise onto the sort of noises one makes oneself to see if they can correlate with anything one is familiar with in the world, and even this characterisation may be too restrictive in some respects. David Cooper suggests, for example, that understanding is already in play if something in the world is related to a context in some manner: ‘to explain an item’s meaning . . . is to connect the item to something outside or larger than itself’ (Cooper 2003: 29–30). The key issue is the appropriateness of the connection and the effects of that connection on the practice of life.

Instead, then, of working with the assumption that the best thing to do here is draw a line between language and music, the idea is to develop a conception in which these terms are not even assumed to require any kind of definitive explanation. If there is no such thing as a language, there need also be no such thing as music either. This might seem to be leading towards a completely implausible position. However, all I am claiming is that the idea that the distinction between language and music involves some generalised match between these terms, and language and music as entities in the world, is likely to lead in unhelpful directions. Of course we employ the distinction in many situations, but that does not mean it needs to be underpinned by a philosophical theory based on the drawing of a specific line. The problem with such a
line is that what is supposed to be on each side of the line cannot be said to be stable. Furthermore, the resources for drawing the line, that is, language itself, may not be sufficient to describe the musical ‘side’ of the line, which has to be experienced in ways language cannot circumscribe. The fact that attempts to describe music in other than technical terms almost invariably rely on metaphor can help to suggest what I mean. One uses metaphors, as Davidson maintains, to make people notice things, and one can use music to do the same in contexts where verbal language may not do the job adequately. Unlike the possibility of using a different metric for the same facts about weight, where the context can be reduced to an infinite, but in principle determinable series of numerically different relationships which express something identical, in the case of music the context, in the form, for example, of a series of normatively constituted practices and of human emotions, is part of the phenomena themselves.

What I am proposing is, as I suggested in relation to Schlegel, a heuristic inversion of the philosophical procedure encountered in the ‘philosophy of music’, where success is seen as resulting from conceptual clarification and from the refutation of supposedly untenable theories. The reason for such an inversion is that the price of that success – a success which seems anyway to be remarkably elusive – can be to obscure too much of the significance of the social and historical manifestations of music. Is it so informative for the implication of a theory to be, for example, that if the Nazis had possessed a correct theory of musical meaning – for example, that it has none – they would not have needed to ban ‘entartete Musik’ and music by Jewish composers? This would obviously be a desirable consequence of conceptual clarification in this particular case, but it also suggests the extent to which philosophical theories can render crucial dimensions of the significance of cultural phenomena invisible. We need to understand how such perverse understandings as those of the Nazis are possible, and why music may generate what leads to them. To this extent, what people think they understand music to mean must itself in some way be part of what music does mean as part of the real historical world. If music is better understood as a practice than as an object, this claim should, though, not be controversial. Obviously one wants to say that the Nazis are wrong, but the important thing is to establish a way of doing so that reveals more than it conceals.

Unlike theories such as Ptolemaic physics, which can no longer be said to be true of anything, understandings of music cannot, in certain
respects at least, be wholly mistaken. They are anchored in something which cannot be denied, namely the feelings and associations that people have in relation to music, as well in bodily and other kinds of relationship to the movement of time, the shape of sounds, and so on, in the music. Gadamer suggests the kind of thing I mean in his notion of a ‘fusion of horizons’ between a work and its recipients. He, however, insists that one can only talk of different understandings, not better and worse ones, given that all understandings which are in any way worthy of the name form part of the life of a work of art. I think, in contrast, that it is possible to claim that understandings are open to criticism without giving up Gadamer’s justified avoidance of an overly objectifying approach to art. Even if musical understandings are based on feelings, which are, in one sense, immune to criticism, because one does not generally choose to have them, music still involves objective aspects derived from the public world of symbols, and so can be the location of legitimate cultural conflict. It is this dual status of music that is crucial to the argument. Music can give rise to affective states which transcend conceptual reflection in a manner that constitutes a valuable new dimension of experience of the world, but it can also just entail the surrender of rational justification to emotions that are derived from mere socially conditioned prejudice. The question is how to sustain the aspect of aesthetic value based on the immediacy of feeling, at the same time as finding ways of being critical when this source of value becomes perverted. If the symbolic associations which dominate a society are those of Nazi Germany, people’s understanding of music and their very manner of feeling must be shown to involve distortion.

Despite the difficulties occasioned by the inseparability of feeling and what helps articulate it in the objective world, questions of rightness and truth in music are inescapable. Analysis of the social functions of music must, for example, rely on the idea of norms which are not being adequately fulfilled. Such norms are, though, a further case where a subjective/objective split makes no sense. The norms are socially transmitted and therefore have an objective existence, but they have to be understood and, above all, found compelling by individual subjects, often on the basis of how they feel about them. The peculiar status of norms in this sense is the source of Cavell’s remark, cited in the Introduction, that communication about art is not wholly encompassed by explanation. At the same time, in a world where forms of communication are increasingly dominated by transnational media concerns, analysis of how the objective pressure of those media structure
subjective responses in reductive and impoverishing ways becomes very important. Coping with this complex mix requires one to extend the kind of norms relevant to music, and this is where things get interesting. One of the major reasons why music poses a challenge to philosophy is that it is not possible to offer a definitive theoretical model to deal with the relationships between the physical, and the cultural and psychological dimensions of music, relationships which are also involved in verbal language. The lack of such a model becomes particularly apparent with regard to music and emotions. The issue will recur in the rest of the book, but some aspects of it are best dealt with here.

Emotions and music

There is a sense in which emotions are private to the person who has them, because they cannot be directly communicated. I shall use ‘emotions’ here in a sense which can include what are sometimes referred to as ‘feelings’: the line between mere feeling, which supposedly has no cognitive content, and emotion, which does, seems to me less clear-cut than is often thought. If cognitive content is supposed to be exclusively propositional, for example, too many non-propositional states will be excluded which can tell us much about ourselves and the world. The private aspect of emotions is evident in the fact that you can’t actually feel my pain, or my delight (see Wellmer’s remarks in chapter 8 on Wittgenstein’s view of such privacy). On the other hand, the articulation and the communication of emotions affect their content, and depend, among other things, on the resources of intersubjectively acquired language and other tools of articulation. Theories of emotion range from those which deny the internal dimension altogether, regarding emotions solely in terms of objectively manifest emotion-behaviour, to those which regard emotions as intrinsically private. I shall for the moment just consider the question of where the emotions with which music is often associated are said to be located.

The first problem here is that a definitive answer would again have to presuppose some agreed description, this time of what emotions are. The facts in this case are, however, once again not like facts relating to

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3 Bennett and Hacker maintain: ‘It is perhaps tempting to suppose that the term “feeling” (as in “feeling angry, afraid, proud”) is confined to emotional perturbations, while “being” (as in “being angry, afraid, proud”) earmarks the emotional attitude. But that would be a mistake. For the most part, “feeling angry” and “being angry” are intersubstitutable’ (Bennett and Hacker 2003: 202). One does not have to know that one is angry to be it.
the weight of an object. The behaviourist and the believer in the radically private status of emotions ought to have difficulty even beginning to discuss the issue, because the former takes emotions to be something objective, the latter something subjective. More plausible theories, like that of Martha Nussbaum, regard emotions as judgements of value which emerge in relation to aspects of the world which are central to our flourishing but which we cannot control. This approach, which may somewhat overload the notion of judgement – perhaps one should think of what is at issue as ‘proto-judgements’, in order to avoid the sense that our primary relationship to things is propositional – already establishes a relationship between a subject and that which is valued in this particular way in the objective world. The underlying issue can therefore be understood in terms of the triangle of subjective, intersubjective, and objective. The point of triangulation is to avoid the situation where the failure to take account of one of the sides of the triangle leads to a split between self, others, and objective world that involves privileging one of these, at the cost of making it unclear how it connects to the others.

Such a split is evident when Kivy claims that there is a growing consensus for the idea that music is ‘expressive of the garden-variety emotions, such as sorrow, joy, fear, hope’, and that these are ‘perceived properties’ of the music itself (Kivy 2002: 31), rather than of a subject which has the emotions. The term ‘perceived properties’ is already strangely equivocal, involving the subject’s perception, but trying at the same time to suggest that what is perceived is somehow objectively there.⁴ Emotions, though, pertain to subjects, so how can they intelligibly be said to be properties of music? The problem is that Kivy obscures the differences between primary meanings of the life-world in which the mode of existence of things involves their relationship to a subject and is often inherently connected to subjective feelings, and forms of description used in the sciences, which attempt to establish the existence of properties independently of subjective apprehensions of them (see Merleau-Ponty 1945: 32–3).

Kivy analogises the idea of the perceived emotional properties of music to the idea that dogs’ faces can appear sad, that yellow is a ‘cheerful’ colour, whose ‘cheerfulness just is a part of its perceived quality,
inseparable from its yellowness’ (Kivy 2002: 33), as well as to a billiard ball possessing roundness as a ‘seen property’ (ibid.: 89). In doing so he ignores the fact that the perception of the dog and the colour depend upon a series of contexts, without which encountering these things as significant in such ways would be impossible. What is at issue here is what Wittgenstein explores with the notion of ‘aspect seeing’, of ‘seeing as’ or ‘hearing as’. Aspect seeing is not merely subjective. It is concerned with the ways in which things in the world are manifest as something intelligible at all, and so are the possible objects of true judgements. Seeing the billiard ball as round is seeing it in terms of the primary mode of perception in the life-world. We don’t need to know about the geometrical properties of a sphere to see it as round: children learn about roundness by feeling and seeing it. However, at a more reflective level, the ball can also be shown to be round by geometrical demonstration. Here there is also a different reason for ascribing the property, namely the fact, which concerned Kant in his account of ‘schematism’, that we pre-theoretically understand the existence of geometrical shapes that can subsequently also be theoretically expressed in non-perceptual, mathematical terms. In the case of the colour’s supposed affective properties, however, the same does not apply: the spectrum location of yellow has no objective, cross-culturally valid connection to cheerfulness. Is the bright yellow colour that suffuses some nightmare sequences in films, or appears in some of Van Gogh’s more disturbing paintings, ‘cheerful’? If it isn’t, the context of something in the world relating to emotions is inseparable from the emotion that occurs: even the dog may not appear sad in some circumstances. The alternative – and this is what invalidates the way Kivy makes the point about emotional properties – is to assume that there are as many different kinds of ‘perceived qualities’ of yellow as there are different emotions ‘perceived in’ it in different contexts. This assumption makes the notion of perceived properties empty, because there is no reason not to think that the different emotions depend on the subject and on the context, as much as on the object.

Kivy is rightly seeking to avoid the idea that musical emotions are located in the subject in a manner which would make them merely contingent. Someone may, after all, feel cheerful every time they listen to the last movement of Mahler’s Ninth. We can legitimately object on the basis of widely accepted interpretative norms if they then claim that the music is cheerful, and in that sense Kivy is right. The decisive point is the relationship between the differing ‘subjective’ and
‘objective’ aspects. In trying to get away from an invalid subjectivism, Kivy, though, tends just to invert the problem to which subjectivism gives rise. His use of the term ‘perceived properties’ therefore confuses the issue, as Wittgenstein’s reflections on aspect seeing suggest. Why not just talk of ‘hearing the music as sad’, which does not require one to feel sad on hearing it, but, crucially, does not preclude the possibility that one could? Dahlhaus sums this up well: “Someone who feels a piece of music to be melancholy does not mean that it “is” melancholy, but that it “has that effect”. And it seems melancholy without the listener himself having to be in a melancholy mood . . . Melancholy appears as an – intentional, not real – determination of the object . . . The expressive character inheres, looked at phenomenologically, in the object, but exclusively in the actual relationship to a subject’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 331).5

Kivy’s world is one of subjects with internal states and of objects with properties, but he does nothing to say how it is that they are connected. If one did not, for example, already have a non-inferential, non-objectifiable familiarity with emotions as part of one’s world – ‘world’ conceived of as what is never fully objectifiable, and not as something separated from one’s being a subject with feelings – how would one ascribe them as ‘properties’ to music? The prior aspect must be the need for modes of expression that articulate our evaluation of things. The need and what fulfils it can, though, never be separated, as this leads precisely to the objectification which mars Kivy’s account, or to an equally implausible subjectivism. In these terms it is clear that the relationship can go in both directions, such that a particular piece of expression can give rise to new forms of emotion. This possibility would be excluded if one perceives emotion as a property: how in that case would one do anything but register an already familiar emotion as embodied in the music? As Dahlhaus aptly puts it: ‘Music is not the more determinate expression of stirrings which are also linguistically graspable, but rather the “other expression of other feelings”’ (ibid.: 333).

A remarkable amount of the recent debate in the analytical philosophy of music (e.g. Kivy in nearly all his work; Ridley 1995; Sharpe 2000; Matravers 2001) seeks to establish whether it is right to say that

5 The Husserlian vocabulary, which tends to reintroduce a split between the subjective and objective – how do we get from the real determinations of the object to the intentional ones? – might be avoided here by talking of differing kinds of perception in the manner of Merleau-Ponty.
It seems obvious to me that there is no general answer to this question. Some people may become unbearably sad when they hear the last movement of Mahler’s Ninth, others may hear it as sad, but be more interested in its structural features. If they heard it with no emotional awareness at all it may, though, be worth asking if they could be said to be hearing it as music. The question is a normative one, but that does not mean that the claim that they are failing to hear it as music could not legitimately be made. The main point is that nothing is gained by advancing a general philosophical theory which ends up attempting to tell people that they don’t really feel what they may actually feel. Once one drops the idea of a subject confronted with an object called music, and sees the issue in such a way that subjects are affected by their relations to the object, and vice versa, this whole debate starts to look redundant. Why can there not be an indefinite number of ways in which people relate to music? The phenomenology of these ways is an important topic of discussion, but the participants in the analytical debate still seem largely unaware of the existence of phenomenology. The point Kivy should be making is made by Merleau-Ponty (1945), who rejects the objectifying language of perceived properties in favour of the idea that the perceived world, including music, is already full of meanings. These are of a kind which cannot be reduced to being ‘perceived properties’ because what they are depends both on the context in which they are encountered and on those encountering them.

The subjective need for expressive means is, then, itself inseparable (1) from the repertoire of possible means (a repertoire to which the subject can add), (2) from the objective possibilities offered by those means, and (3) from the need for both intersubjective, and individual, acknowledgement of the value of such means. If subjects are thought of as always already in a world to which they relate in affective ways, the ‘objective’ world affects the subject’s emotions: hence, of course, one of the roles of music. Subjects can, though, in turn, use objects to articulate their emotions, so changing the nature of the objects, as in the case of the sounds in music, which are something else when heard as music, rather than as mere noise. However, the important point concerning what can be understood both as a series of noises and as music is that the

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6 This chapter was initially written before Ridley (2004), in an admirable act of self-criticism, announced his rejection of this whole approach. Those requiring more detailed arguments against the analytical approach are referred to Ridley’s outstanding volume.
objective aspect is only made objective by reflection. In the life-world we don’t start with something objective, we start with music which has to be bracketed so that the merely objective sounds come to the fore. There could be no music if whatever is heard as music were not always already part of a pre-theoretically available world of human significances.

By enjoining one to hear any sounds in the life-world as music, John Cage revealed the derivative nature of the conception of music as involving the imbuing of sounds which are mere frequencies (but which also have life-world significances) with significance. If we were not always already able to hear something as music we could not reflexively extend this ability to ambient noise. There is, then, an interplay between the two notional sides, which makes them impossible to isolate from each other, not least because intersubjective means of communication and articulation are themselves both objective – they exist as marks and frequencies in the world – and ‘subjective’, in that they have meaning for subjects. The mystery which results from the question of how objective aspects of the world can give rise to emotions results because one has separated the inner and outer worlds a priori, rather than seeing how most, though possibly not all, emotions cannot be separated from intentional relations to an already meaning-imbued world. Brandom sums up the essential point here when he rejects the subject–object split, maintaining that in all areas of human practice ‘The way we understand and conceive what we are doing affects what we are, in fact, doing’ (Brandom 2002: 15). When we think we are ‘doing music’ this affects what we are actually doing.

Kivy argues that emotions heard as expressive properties of music occur in much more overwhelming ways in real life. He therefore asks why, if the emotions we purportedly experience when hearing music were as real as those in everyday life, we would deliberately wish to submit ourselves to emotions of sadness, etc. Consequently people are supposedly not saddened by hearing sad music. The opposite case of joyous music already makes his position questionable: don’t many people often feel real joy when they hear such music, and employ music to change their mood? I do: try Wagner’s Meistersinger prelude before embarking on something you are apprehensive about. Kivy again gets the phenomenology of listening to and performing music wrong because he fails to discuss the differing kinds of contexts in which the question arises. He also relies on a conception of emotions as states that can be given a name, rather than as processes with complex shadings and transitions that may depend on the particular means via which we
articulate them for their determinacy. Think of Wittgenstein’s discussion of gestures as affective responses to aspects of one’s world (see chapter 8 below) which are needed because words do not do the same job.

One way of overcoming the deficiencies in approaches like Kivy’s is by using the idea that music can be understood in terms of what it evokes, in the sense of ‘calls forth’ or ‘discloses’. As well as evoking emotions, we talk of music as being ‘evocative’ of landscapes, historical eras, memories, and so on. Here it is clear that the location of what is evoked is neither simply ‘subjective’, nor simply ‘objective’. With regard to Kivy’s worries about arousal of emotions, it is evidently the case that some of our emotions in relation to music are nowhere near as intense as those relating to some real-life events, and they generally have a different quality because of the differing intentional relations involved. Feeling sad about the departure of a loved person is obviously not the same as feeling sad when listening to music like Mahler’s Ninth. The latter clearly is about departing in some sense, but there need be nothing to which the sadness it evokes immediately attaches. Many people do tend, on the other hand, to link the feelings evoked by the music with personal associations. I find it hard to listen to the third act of Tristan without associating it with personal feelings and fears about irreparable loss. I don’t think this is an aesthetically inappropriate response, though it is only one aspect of such a response. As Dahlhaus maintains: ‘That a type of aesthetic experience can be driven to an extreme in which it turns into the opposite of itself – non-aesthetic perception – is, though, not a sufficient reason to reject the type as a whole’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 330).

The sadness evoked by some specific music may, then, become a vital shading of our apprehension of the world, rather than something just located as a ‘property’ of the music in question. We can, for instance, come to appreciate this shading as informing the loss of our youthful hopes that the world could become a happy place, a loss which might be evoked by the music of Schubert. Furthermore, the possibility that one might also have musical experiences which are more emotionally intense than much of what goes on in the rest of our affective lives

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7 Ivan Hewett (2003: 244–5) points to the danger that music can easily become seen as a mere commodity used to evoke some arbitrary bit of world culture, and so lose its autonomy from words. However, great music can evoke things in ways which are not reducible to what we say about them, its evocative aspect being only part of its identity as music.
is excluded by Kivy’s argument. The mixture of elation and sadness evoked by music can be more intense than all but the most devastating negative and positive emotions directed towards external non-musical events. Kivy’s position makes it just too hard to understand the depth and complexity of affective investment in art. It is trivially true, for example, that music can ‘express’ everyday emotions. However, it is actually very hard to give the word ‘express’ a really productive sense. Adorno says of the term expression that ‘where it was used for the longest time and the most emphatically, namely technically, as a musical marking, it does not demand that something specific, particular psychological states (‘seelische Inhalte’) be expressed. Otherwise expressivo would be replaceable by the names for the particular thing to be expressed’ (Adorno 1997: 7160). In Kivy’s case what is expressed would be ‘garden variety’ emotions, and what Adorno is pointing to would be lost. Making Kivy’s idea of emotion the dominant focus of the relationship between music and its recipients does little to account for the intensity that can go into the development and reception of new forms of expression in the history of music. The scenario, suggested by Kivy’s approach, of listening to the last movement of Mahler’s Ninth and thinking ‘That sounds pretty sad, but it has nothing to do with the real sadness that I felt when my partner left’, because the music just possesses the ‘perceived property’ of being pretty sad, really does not get to the heart of the last movement of Mahler’s Ninth. Something is obviously missing.

Mahler’s symphonies inaugurate new dimensions of musical possibility which absorb, articulate, and evoke other dimensions of emotion from their historical context besides ‘garden variety’ sadness (on this, see chapter 9 below). Furthermore, his symphonies can give rise to new kinds of feeling in their listeners. Think of the moments of barely controlled panic in the Sixth Symphony in a world that will turn out to be spiralling towards the First World War, or the symphonies’ sense of saying an ironic but melancholy farewell to forms of music which can no longer be naively employed in the face of the way the world is moving. We need an approach that allows us to appreciate the depth and complexity involved in important music as a cultural phenomenon, not one whose main aim is to settle the philosophical problem it sets itself by limiting the scope of the issue in the hope of making it more tractable. Music is world-disclosive: the world itself can take on new aspects because of it, and an adequate approach to music must be able to respond to this.
In seeking to establish a philosophical theory in the manner he does, Kivy gives too little space both to the specificity of particular music and to the significances it makes possible by that very specificity. Questions concerning the affective and other significances of the formal constitution of the work are effectively excluded by his model, even though he seeks to advance a ‘formalist’ position. If the sadness of Mahler’s Ninth were ‘garden variety’ sadness, it would be on the same level as the sadness of a banal pop ballad: garden varieties are, after all, supposed to be very common, and they do not vary much. The moods evoked by the symphony also have a temporality which cannot just be dealt with by trying to establish what emotion-states are being instantiated. A theory of heard properties might seem able to allow for the difference between Mahler and banal pop music, but it could only do so by moving away from the restrictive notion of emotion it entails. This move would, though, tend to obviate the point of the theory anyway, because the theory is based on recognising emotions with which we are already familiar from elsewhere. If that is all we get from Mahler on the affective level, it becomes hard to know why anyone bothers to engage with his music at a more than trivial level. It makes more sense, then, to argue that their engagement is generated precisely by the new ways in which Mahler’s music discloses the world and by the responses this can generate. My early experience of listening to Mahler was of a puzzled frustration, which resulted from the sense that nothing in the music ‘said’ things in the way other Romantic music ‘said’ them. Understanding why this was the case opened up a new dimension of experience that could not exist without this specific music.

Kivy advances his theory in the name of a formalism for which the ‘turbulence . . . in Beethoven’s symphonies no more denotes turbulence than does the turbulence of the Colorado river’ (Kivy 2002: 100). Not many philosophers these days would claim that music generally denotes anything – that idea went out in the second half of the eighteenth century – but how is it that we can understand the music as being turbulent at all, if it does not connect to our understanding of turbulence in the world we inhabit? If emotions are construed as forms of judgement there must be connections between the ability to apply the word ‘turbulent’ to a river, and the fact that we can hear and feel music as turbulent, or that music evokes turbulence. Much more important, though, is the fact that Beethoven’s specific articulations of turbulence offer new ways of experiencing and understanding turbulence, not just other instantiations of an already familiar ‘perceived property’. The context of that
turbulence in the music and culture of his era helps to give Beethoven’s music its specific power. The power of art to disturb and restructure our habitual sense of the world that is exemplified by Beethoven is essential to its role in modernity. Why, moreover, do people use music in films if its inability to denote states like turbulence, as opposed to its ability to evoke and disclose, is what is most significant? One cannot construct a defence of formalism on the basis of denying basic facts about our capacity both to understand the world and to transform understandings of it (on this, see Ridley’s devastating critique of Kivy in Ridley 2004).

The problem is that Kivy tends to locate the issue of musical emotions on the objective side of the triangle, and his approach depends on the assumption that music is a specifiable object. To the extent that the physical entity that is a performance of Beethoven’s Fifth is not verbal it can’t denote anything and could be regarded as belonging on the objective side, but that tells us almost nothing about what it is for it to be music. Essential aspects of music, such as mood and emotion, cannot be derived from the objective side, even if they are also inherently connected to it. Any approach to music that is to avoid the insufficiencies of Kivy’s approach needs, for example, to attend to the ways in which music can, as the word ‘evoke’ suggests, make something which has been repressed or has failed to reach adequate articulation available to an individual or a social group. Why is music therapy sometimes successful if, as Kivy suggests, one only perceives the ‘garden variety’ feeling in the music as a ‘musical feeling’, rather than as something which can affect the overall economy of one’s affectively laden world?

At the end of his essay ‘Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World’ John McDowell asks ‘how can a mere feeling constitute an experience in which the world reveals itself to us?’ (McDowell 1998: 130). Kivy’s position offers no answer to this question: this is underlined when he asserts that ‘Music, alone of the fine arts, makes us free of the world of our everyday lives’ (Kivy 2002: 256), because it has no ‘content’. This last claim makes it impossible for us to understand in Kivy’s own terms how music could have properties relating to feelings at all, given that such understanding derives from the world of our everyday lives, even if it is not reducible to feelings we have already experienced. Furthermore, even the enjoyment of musical form must relate

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8 When such music becomes more and more standardised, it actually comes closer and closer to denoting in a schematic manner, as Adorno will suggest (see chapter 9).
to understanding based on the pleasures of new kinds of anticipation, delay, and fulfilment, which are fundamental to the world we inhabit and which cannot be reduced to being ‘garden variety’ emotions. When Bruckner creates his strange mixture of erotic, emotional, and religious anticipation across huge stretches of his symphonies, where the climax depends precisely on the new symphonic proportions, the music cannot be reduced to erotic, emotional, and religious connotations, because it gives us the freedom to find new ways of experiencing the meaning and pleasure of anticipation.

The debate about music and emotions since Hanslick has been one of those philosophical debates which generates little but disagreement, where the positions advanced depend largely upon what philosophical assumptions the theorist has already adopted before looking at music. To this extent one either thinks the insights generated by the debate’s inconclusiveness are stages on a path to an answer to ‘the question’, or one thinks the debate itself may be mistakenly conceived. The idea, for example, that one might learn most from the very fact that music is resistant to being subsumed into a discursive theory, and yet at the same time possesses deep cultural significance, rarely occurs to theorists in this debate. This is not a call for the mystification of music, but rather a call to make our ways of talking about music do more justice to it. There are good grounds for being wary of philosophical debates which are just carried on between philosophers when there is little sense in which either the problems thrown up in the debate or the possible resolution of the debate significantly affect the thing the debate is about. The feeling when reading some analytical philosophy of music that what is being talked about doesn’t seem to matter very much, because the main thing is to get clear about how to determine its status, is an indicator of more than just argumentative failings in the approach.

Why is it, for example, that people may be convinced that they gain a deeper understanding of music when it plays a role in a literary text like Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* or Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* than when it is discussed in philosophical texts? The simple answer would seem to be that people value ways of talking about music which enrich the practice of listening to or playing music, rather than those which seek to tell them that music can’t do what they feel that it can. If we regard music as a human practice, the significance of that practice cannot, as we saw, be wholly divorced from the lives of those engaged in it. Many of the objections to the application of extra-musical terms to music rely on the idea that words must be clearly defined, rather
than the much more plausible idea that they should be effective in achieving our aims. The demonstration in some analytical approaches that music does not provide narratives in the manner of verbal narratives fails, for example, to deal with the fact that some of the most insightful performances of wordless music succeed because they convey a narrative sense which we can only seek to articulate verbally in metaphors. Brahms F-minor piano sonata, in which the fourth movement reuses material from the second to create a wholly different mood and atmosphere, only makes sense, and can only succeed in performance, if one appreciates the narrative element of the sonata, in which a move is made from something like passionate love to icy bitterness. The interplay of what can be said in words and what can only be evoked by the music offers dimensions of communication which the desire to establish a banal fact like the lack of narrative connectives, etc., in wordless music simply obscures.

Once we understand music as part of our being in the world its connections to other aspects of that being cease to be so mysterious. Underlying these arguments is a point which affects the very nature of what we think philosophy should try to achieve. If we think in terms of a ‘philosophy of music’ we can easily prejudge what is at issue in a manner which blocks access to vital resources. This occurs not least because the resources of the analytical philosophy of music tend to be the worn-out resources of the empiricism-based analytical tradition, rather than the resources of the most significant new philosophical developments. By attempting to specify a circumscribed domain of ‘aesthetic’ questions, the analytical philosophy of music fails to see that it is in the ways in which music connects to other aspects of philosophy that the interesting questions lie.

Analytical philosophers who have not taken on board the ideas of the later Wittgenstein continue to work on the assumption that language is primarily to be understood in terms of its ability to represent an objective world. The dimension of language which enables us to articulate the world via the employment of singular terms and predicates is therefore regarded as the key to language per se, and the main question is exactly how statements tie up with the world. This dimension of linguistic articulation is indeed a vital part of the basis of our ability to establish validity claims, but the dimensions of language and other kinds of articulation which play other roles can be neglected if one adopts an exclusively representational approach. In the present context it is therefore important to look at language as a multi-faceted
practice, rather than as predominantly a means of representation. If one tries to isolate music as an object in the world in the same way as one isolates the object of an explanatory theory, the first step causes the problem, because music and the world relate in ways which affect what both are understood to be. Hence my desire to see what happens if one experiments with a reversal of the priorities between music and philosophy.

If one tries to remain at the level of the physical description of a piece of music as an object in the world, the decision as to what is purely objective comes up against intractable difficulties. Does the quality of the acoustic space in which a piece is played come into the objective description, for example? Questioning of this kind of objectivity does not, however, render the issue merely ‘subjective’, because norms are inescapably in play in relation both to physical and to aesthetic aspects of music. Indeed – and this is crucial – there is a dimension of music in which norms have to be shown, rather than stated. The evaluation a performer makes concerning the rightness of how something is to be played is essential to music, and it is not merely arbitrary. It exists in a ‘space of reasons’, even though this space can often only be constituted by adverting to inferential relationships between different manners of playing something – thus in terms of comparative showing or doing, rather than in terms of verbal assertions. Verbal assertions will play a role in this, but they are not always decisive, and more is often achieved by gesture. Some great conductors do not say a great deal in rehearsal, but what they communicate by gesture has considerable complexity and intellectual cogency. The really fundamental questions are how the understanding of something as music and how musical understanding itself relate to other ways of articulating and understanding the world, on the assumption that each of these ways may disclose something that the others do not. The very fact that music changes its nature in relation to the development of human societies, so that, for example, certain kinds of sound either begin to be or cease to be culturally acceptable, cannot be understood without seeing music holistically as part of a world, rather than as an object.

Metaphysics and music

One way of exploring this issue is via a consideration of the relationship between music and ‘metaphysics’. Pythagoras assimilated music and metaphysics to each other, the essential order of the universe itself
being seen as musical. The ability of mathematics to describe the movement of the heavenly bodies is here substantially connected to the assumption that the harmonic series can be described in mathematical terms. It is no good, as I have already argued, just dismissing such theories because we now do not think them true: the universe made a specific kind of sense for that culture when seen in the light of music. Given that music involves patterns of intelligibility based on relations of identity and difference, and that the conceptualisation of nature also involves analogous patterns, the idea that the kinds of intelligibility are substantially connected is a rational, if in this form mistaken, inference. Ramberg’s comment that ‘We can, if we like, interpret all kinds of things as speaking’ if we can ‘correlate some identifiable complex state of our chosen subject with some identifiable state of the world’ suggests a more defensible way of linking forms of intelligibility. If we now consider an influential version of the question of metaphysics in a bit more detail, an instructive way of thinking about music emerges.

One story about metaphysics – the story told by the later Heidegger – begins with the idea that, from the ancient Greeks onwards, metaphysics is the attempt to map out the place of humankind in the universe by giving an account of the true nature of being. Modernity is inaugurated by the move towards the idea that we ourselves, qua thinking subjects, are the foundation of the true account, an idea occasioned not least by the growing success of scientific activity in arriving at more reliable descriptions of the world. As this success extends ever further, the role of philosophy shrinks in relation to the natural sciences. Heidegger puts it like this: ‘The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the end/completion (‘Vollendung’) of philosophy’ (Heidegger 1988: 63). He regards this end as the culmination of the ‘subjectification of being’ initiated by Descartes’ founding of philosophical certainty in the I: ‘The modern (‘neuzeitliche’) freedom of subjectivity is completely taken up into the objectivity which accords with it’ (Heidegger 1980: 109). He is thinking of what has now become the aim in artificial intelligence of recreating the supposed essential capacities of subjectivity via objective mechanisms. Metaphysics is therefore construed by Heidegger as itself becoming modern natural science, which increasingly determines the fate of humankind by objectifying nature in the name of predictive laws that enable us to control it.
However, plausible as some aspects of this story are – I shall consider Heidegger and music in the next chapter and in chapter 8 – it is instructively one-sided. Modernity has also revealed the fundamental fragility of the subject, and this suggests a different story, which conveys a different sense of how metaphysics might be construed. I shall refer to what is articulated in the first story as metaphysics and in the second as metaphysics. In her book on the ‘intelligence of emotions’, *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha Nussbaum points to how this alternative story could relate to music when she claims: ‘Musical works are somehow able – and, after all, this “somehow” is no more and no less mysterious than the comparable symbolic ability of language – to embody the idea of our urgent need for and attachment to things outside ourselves that we do not control, in a tremendous variety of forms’ (Nussbaum 2001: 272). The emotions music embodies are, then, forms of openness to the contingency of our existence in the world, where what we value can never be controlled by acts of will because we do not reflectively choose to value it. The symbolic structures in music relate to those emotions in a way which nothing else does, even if they may have close analogues in other arts. Nussbaum links music to tragedy, for example (on music and tragedy see chapters 6 and 7 below). Her aim is to get away from the image of emotions as arational or irrational and to see them as connected in complex ways to rationality. We may be driven by emotion to gain control over some aspect of the world which we previously did not control, and this links emotion to the sciences and to metaphysics, but we also require resources for articulating our responses to things that we cannot control which still demand our rational engagement with them.

Nussbaum’s construal of emotions as judgements of value suggests a way of linking emotions to questions of truth that adds a dimension to how one can understand metaphysics. In both cases what is in question is compelling because it forces us to acknowledge the resistance of the world to our will. Clearly, emotions are also the source of self-deception, but for them to be this they must first possess evaluative power. This power itself cannot merely be deceptive, precisely because it is not based on our will – although our will can, in turn, have effects on our evaluations – but rather on our encounters with aspects of the

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9 This distinction is heuristic: were I to try to make it substantive I would put myself in the position of having to develop a meta-position to adjudicate on the nature of metaphysics. The point of the distinction is meta-philosophical, in that it asks about the aims of philosophy as a practice.
world which we do not control. In the case of truth the temptation to self-deception is equally present, but the very idea of truth also entails that which is not just a result of the exercise of our will. We do in one sense produce truth by using language, but this does not mean that the truth of what we say is our product.

One can question some of the more emphatic accounts of metaphysics on the basis of these ideas. Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, much like Heidegger, interpret metaphysics in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as being generated by the fear of the threats posed by nature. Scientific truth is therefore generated by the need to control the natural world, rather than by the desire for objectivity. This assumption follows Nietzsche’s argument, in relation to metaphysical attempts to arrive at pure truths, that ‘It is something new in history that cognition wants to be more than a means’ (Nietzsche 2000: 2, 126).10 Truth is here seen first of all as generated by the resistance of the world to our needs and desires, which is apt for many aspects of truth, but it is then further interpreted in terms of its notional source. But what could make this interpretation true? What goes missing here is precisely the idea of the independence of truth from what is in our control. Even if the source of truth were an unconscious drive which employs the notion of truth as a means towards the goal of control, we would still need ways of validating this knowledge that did not depend on this source: otherwise the claim is viciously circular. The important thing is therefore to find a way of keeping in view what led to the conception of metaphysics of Heidegger and of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* without depending on questionable assumptions about the ground of metaphysics.

If the modern natural sciences are indeed the concrete result of what began as metaphysics, it is clear that, although they can reduce the threat to human survival by controlling many aspects of nature, they do not fulfill other demands which gave rise to philosophy. This is not least because their effects can also be at least as threatening as nature itself. Even though scientific theories are based on the pressure of an objectivity that we cannot overcome by our will, their effects in the context of a human world that is also constituted in terms of emotions can produce a ‘second nature’ which mimics the worst aspects of the first. The truth about this second nature must be located in the understanding of intentionality, and this is what resists explanation in terms

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10 I have used the Schlechta edition, as it is now available on a very reasonably priced searchable cd-rom.
of metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty describes the scientistic illusion which would explain intentionality in objective terms as follows: ‘Because perception gives us faith in a world, in a system of rigorously connected and continuous natural facts, we believed that this system could incorporate everything into itself, including the perception which initiated us into it’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 46–7). The denial of this possibility sustains space for what I am calling metaphysics.

Another way of construing metaphysics – metaphysics – is, then, the attempt to establish a meaningful place for humankind, both in the rest of a nature which we acknowledge to be a threat, and in a potentially equally threatening second nature. It is vital here to avoid some obvious traps. In their earlier manifestations such attempts could now be interpreted as a form of self-deception, having involved, for example, the teleological idea that nature necessarily develops towards more and more fully realised states, or the idea that the order of things is justified by its being grounded in a divinity. The aim of rendering the universe meaningful is now contradicted by a science which has progressively undermined the special position of humankind, reducing the earth to the status of a minor cosmic contingency, and humankind to being a result of evolutionary mechanisms. As more and more objectifying descriptions of what we are emerge, ‘our urgent need for and attachment to things outside ourselves that we do not control’ becomes a focus for the kind of philosophy that is suspicious of the scientism which is becoming so widespread today, particularly in the wake of the genetic revolution. What, though, are the resources for integrating ourselves into the social and natural world that do not entail a spurious rejection of well-confirmed science, and do not require a surrender of rational justification in the name of blind faith?

The power of modern scientific descriptions of humankind derives not least from the way that these descriptions can be integrated into descriptions of the rest of nature which are also arrived at via experiment and observation. Theological and other attempts to appeal to ‘spirituality’, or whatever, as a way of re-enchanting the human relationship to nature too often rely, in contrast, on mere invocation of certain kinds of emotions, and this gives little reason to take them seriously. However, the dimension of emotion is not irrelevant to countering some increasingly dominant self-images of humankind. The point is to locate emotion in the appropriate contexts, and the first step here is to counter the scientistic tendency. A defence of a non-scientistic conception can build on what Schleiermacher already argued in his *Dialectic*:
'Language never begins to form itself through science, but via general communication/exchange (‘Verkehr’); science comes to this only later, and only brings an expansion, not a new creation, in language’ (Schleiermacher 1942: 511). The expansion of language in modern science does increasingly colonise areas which formerly appeared inaccessible to science, including aspects of language and emotion themselves, and the scientistic assumption is that this process will eventually result in the disappearance of scientific no-go areas. Schleiermacher’s point, however, is that the prior, irreducibly normative dimension of human existence is constituted in terms of the ability to understand forms of exchange and communication without which the activity of science itself could not even get underway. There can be no science of this understanding which would not already invalidly rely upon what it sought to establish. The normativity of everyday life therefore cannot be subordinated to scientistic demands for objectivity. This is why societies can justifiably oppose the incursion of science into areas where scientific legitimacy would depend on an ability to explain understanding and communication in scientific terms. I am thinking, for example, of the incursion of managerial and other forms of technological control into many aspects of education which rely on kinds of interaction and communication that are damaged by such forms.

A crucial element in the practice of real-world communication is the affective dimension of interpersonal relations, which cannot be rendered fully objective and which therefore relies on the assumption of a potential community of feeling between participants. Without this assumption the very existence of many kinds of music as a shared social practice becomes hard to comprehend. The familiar difficulties concerning objective understanding of emotions derive from the fact that there is no public symbolic manifestation that can guarantee the identity of emotions in different subjects. The development of hugely diverse resources for attempting to overcome this lack is fundamental to human culture. One of the sources of the development of the imaginative capacity required to bridge the gap between self and other in this respect is aesthetic activity. This can convey affective expression in normatively assessable, concrete forms, which do not involve the objectivity of rule-bound cognition. Aesthetic activity is, moreover, largely immune to incorporation into scientific explanation. Even if music were, for example, to be adequately proven to have emerged from the desire to attract sexual partners – or whatever – this explains little or nothing about what motivates the development of autonomous
music in contexts where the supposed original occasion for the practice is absent.

Objections to scientistic visions of the future need not, then, be couched in terms of the damage such visions do to our self-esteem. John McDowell sees the problem with scientism as follows: ‘When we ask the metaphysical question whether reality is what science can find out about, we cannot, without begging the question, restrict the materials for an answer to those that science can countenance’ (McDowell 1998: 72). Moreover, it is not clear that the description of what we understand in terms of intentional vocabulary in terms of non-intentionally conceived causes of intentional states is intelligible at all (see Farrell 1996). Whatever we find out about the brain and cognition is at a different level from what we experience as subjects in a world. As phenomenology maintains (see Merleau-Ponty 1945), the modes of attention to the objective world, such as memory, anticipation, direct perception, as well as affectively coloured modes of attention – which play a crucial role in music – are not part of the objectifiable world, even if they are also inseparable from it. This is because the very idea of objectivity is generated by experiences of truth and falsity in intentional relations to objects of all kinds, from chemical elements to musical notes.

The decisive issue in the present context are the relationships between emotion, cognition, and music. These can suggest ways in which the contemporary significance of what is considered under the heading of ‘metaphysics’ is not exhausted by Heidegger’s story. Anthony Cescardi has claimed that ‘Feeling nonetheless remains cognitive in a deeper sense; affect possesses what Heidegger would describe... as “world-disclosive” power’ (Cascardi 1999: 50–1). Wolfram Hogrebe suggests, linking the idea to music, that ‘In feelings... everything is already wordlessly full of meaning.’ Hogrebe characterises this kind of meaning in terms of a ‘pre-linguistic existential semantics’ that is present in ‘Stimmung’, ‘mood’, or ‘attunement’ to the world (Hogrebe 1996: 10).

In Philosophical Investigations, after passages exploring the close relationship between understanding sentences and understanding phrases in music, Wittgenstein says: ‘If longing speaks out of me “If only he would come!” the feeling gives the words “meaning”’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 444), and he wonders at the fact that part of the very semantics of such utterances depends on feeling.

It is the idea of this world-disclosive, intersubjective power that leads in the direction of a possible alternative interpretation of the significance and fate of metaphysics in relation to music. If what is disclosed
by a form of articulation like music cannot be reduced to being part of how we deal with a world that is thought of as a constant threat, and instead attaches us to aspects of the world in new ways, the web of significances via which we make a life that takes us beyond ourselves is augmented. The very fact that music can have to do with ‘things outside ourselves that we do not control’, thus with experiences of transience, loss, and longing (as well, of course, as love, and joy), connects us with the world in ways which knowledge may not. The emotions attached to knowing that we all will die and that nothing ultimately lasts can be merely paralysing, whereas the musical articulation of the ways in which the world is disclosed in the light of such emotions seems to take one somewhere else, even if it does not redeem one from the facticity that it also evokes. The idea of such redemption is, of course, what modernity should have taught us to renounce. Having done so, we then need to pay more attention to the resources in modernity for responding to the consequences of this renunciation. As we shall see, this is one of the reasons why Adorno, for all his considerable faults, is so important to our topic.

Novalis says of philosophy that it is ‘really homesickness, the drive to be at home everywhere’ (Novalis 1978: 675), but it is a drive which he does not think can be satisfied: ‘The absolute which is given to us can only be recognised negatively by acting and finding that what we are seeking is not reached by any action’ (ibid.: 181). Music, in contrast, allows the mind to be ‘for short moments in its earthly home’ (ibid.: 517). One danger often associated with such claims is that music is then cited as a means of establishing a substantial connection of humanity to nature, of the kind which relies, for example, on the idea that the harmonic series is ‘natural’ and therefore resonates with a deeper ‘natural’ part of ourselves. Such ideas have been discredited by musicological, historical, and anthropological research, which shows that there are no transcultural aspects of music which can be said to be more ‘natural’ than others. Even if we feel that tonal music is more universally appealing than atonal, this tells us nothing about music and nature in any positive sense: second nature, in the sense of the realm of intentionality, is just not reducible to first nature.

At the same time, anthropological evidence also suggests that all cultures practise something that we can regard as music in ways which

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11 The same can apply to other arts. The major differentiating factor is the relationship of the differing arts to verbal language.
can, like natural languages (and often with much less effort), be comprehended by those outside a culture, despite radical cultural differences. The primary issue in the present context is how music relates to modernity, and to the accompanying processes of secularisation and disenchantment of nature by the sciences. Although there is a religious dimension to Novalis’ thinking, he is actually sometimes closer to Nietzsche than to the Church. His assertion about music is explicitly temporalised, and this is in line with his ‘conviction . . . that precisely the old lament that everything is transient can become the most joyful of all thoughts’ (ibid.: 433). Many other philosophers at the time regarded music as inferior because of its transient nature, but Novalis’ remarks suggest an alternative way of seeing music and modernity. His acknowledgement of the finitude of existence leads to a different evaluation of how we might attain a meaningful place within things. It is no coincidence in this respect that the beginning of modernity is accompanied both by the rise of new ideas about music and philosophy, and by the astonishingly rapid development of the capacity for expression of the temporal art of music itself.

Negative metaphysics?

What, then, does all this tell us about music and metaphysics? It will take the rest of the book really to make a plausible case concerning this, but consider the following. Herbert Schnädelbach has termed what I am calling metaphysics, ‘negative metaphysics’, ‘the warranted reminder that discourse does not have complete control of the true and the good: that there is something here which cannot be anticipated by a method, but which must show itself and be experienced’ (Schnädelbach 1987: 171–2). He associates this idea of ‘metaphysics’ with Kant’s ‘thing in itself’, Wittgenstein’s ‘the mystical’, Adorno’s ‘non-identity’, and Heidegger’s ‘being’. All of these terms stand for what resists being conceptualised in the manner that we conceptualise what can be objectively known. Schnädelbach’s idea can be elucidated as follows. His reason for talking of ‘negative’ metaphysics relates to Heidegger’s story of metaphysics. The empirical methods of modern science, which deal with the contingency of what there is by bringing it under causal laws, can be seen as replacing positive philosophical conceptions of metaphysics as a systematic account of the universe. One response of philosophy is therefore to attach itself to the sciences, at the risk of making itself redundant. The opposite response can lead to the danger of a turn to
some kind of ‘mysticism’, a positive appeal to something ‘unsayable’. The question is, then, whether this is the only real alternative to the dissolution of philosophy into natural science. A possible different view can be suggested via some remarks in the notes for the *Tractatus* which Wittgenstein made during the First World War. He talks here about the ‘mystical’, but he does so in a context which gives great weight to scientific truth.

The *Tractatus* itself claims that the only meaningful propositions are tautologous statements in logic, and empirical scientific propositions. This is echoed in the Vienna Circle’s claims that metaphysical assertions are nonsense because they cannot be verified. Wittgenstein’s claim – and the subsequent claims of the Vienna Circle about verificationism – must, though, themselves be ‘meaningless’ because they belong neither to the category of logical nor to that of empirical propositions. The *Tractatus* consequently cannot be said in its own terms to speak truly of what it is supposed to be about. So what is the point of its asserting what it does, if, indeed, it can strictly be said to assert anything determinate at all? There is already a sense, therefore, in which the text’s status comes close to that of music, which Adorno, for example, refers to as ‘intentionless’ because it does not directly refer to anything. In the notes of 1915 Wittgenstein claims that ‘The drive towards the mystical comes from the non-satisfaction of our wishes by science. We feel that even if all possible scientific questions are answered our problem is still not even touched at all’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 143). However, he goes on to ask: ‘But is language the only language?’, and ponders ‘a means of expression with which I can talk about language’, which is something that his conception seems to exclude via its strictures on what can be meaningful. He then startlingly surmises that one might assume that music ‘would be such a language: Then it is at any rate characteristic for science that no musical themes occur in it’ (ibid.: 144). Whereas science can talk about the world, it cannot talk about what enables it to talk about the world, namely the very fact that the world is intelligible to us at all. The implication is therefore that music can ‘talk’ about language in a way verbal language cannot. This may seem meaningless – which it is if one subscribes to verificationism – but the point is that what would ‘touch our problem’ could not come from the domain of science, and would come from a kind of language which provides another kind of ‘meaning’.

I shall try to unravel in more detail how we can understand these remarks in chapter 8. For the moment the point is that, at the limits
of what he thinks philosophy can say, Wittgenstein invokes music as a means of showing something that cannot be said. He does so, remember, in a context which gives full weight to the validity of scientific truth claims. In the *Tractatus* itself Wittgenstein considers the question of the means of expression that would allow one to ‘talk about’ language in terms of what he calls ‘logical form’, which is what allows one to represent the world. He uses an example from music to explain: ‘The gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the sound-waves all stand in that representing internal relationship to each other which exists between language and world. They all have the logical structure in common’ (ibid.: 27). There is, then, ‘a general rule’ which is the ‘law of projection’ of a symphony into the language of notes and of the ‘translation of the language of notes into the language of the gramophone record’ (ibid.). However, the content of this rule for the transmission and translation of intelligible structures cannot itself be represented. It can only be ‘shown’: ‘The proposition can represent the whole of reality, but it cannot represent what it must have in common with reality in order to represent it – logical form’ (ibid.: 33).

There is very little agreement on precisely what Wittgenstein means, and he later ceased to defend much of the view advanced in the *Tractatus*, although he does continue to make connections between philosophy and music. The notion of logical form is intended to overcome the problem that, although we can describe nature in scientific terms once there is language that is ‘representational’, we are unable to describe in language what it is that makes language able to do this. In grappling with this question Wittgenstein is led to think about the intelligibility of forms which do not represent in the manner of the language which represents the objective world, but which instead reveal meaning in the world in a way philosophy in his restricted sense cannot. This capacity involves a prior kind of intelligibility, of the kind Heidegger will soon seek to explore through the question of ‘being’, and this is what Schnädelbach intends with the idea of negative metaphysics. The danger of linking ideas about what cannot be said to music is that they can just invoke some underlying – positive – metaphysical principle, like Schopenhauer’s ‘Will’. This leads Schopenhauer, as we shall see in chapter 6, to attribute the same basic significance to all music, namely that it conveys in a tolerable form the inherently riven nature of all being. Schnädelbach, however, insists on the *particularity* of that which ‘must show itself and be experienced’. If music were just endlessly to show the same thing there would be no point to its kind of intelligibility.
Music is essentially particular and yet is also connected to general ideas and emotions that are part of living in a world which is intelligible in ways that cannot be reduced to what can be said about those ways. This is what makes music’s relationship to philosophy so significant for certain thinkers in modernity.

At the same time, however, an apparent paradox emerges here. In terms of the dominant assumption of modern scientific method, the success of an analytical philosophy of music would be measured by the extent to which it explains the phenomena which are its object. To this extent such a theory can be understood in terms of metaphysics, although this leaves it open to the problems I have outlined. The inversion I have proposed is undertaken in order to explore how an alternative vision of metaphysics and meaning can seek resources in what cannot be explained and in what can only be revealed by specific engagement with a phenomenon or a practice which resists wholesale discursive explanation. The problem for any theorist seeking to explore ‘the unsayable’ is obvious, and was already indicated by Wittgenstein’s self-refuting stance in the *Tractatus*. A successful theory in these terms must actually be doomed to failure by its own success, because the more it explains, the less what it explains is revealed in a non-theoretical manner. Metaphysics would therefore begin to become metaphysics. However, there can be more than one way in which talking about something can be successful. A literary response to a piece of music may do more justice to it than a theoretical account which seeks to describe its essential nature in technical terms. The notion of doing justice to things is central to what I have to say because it offers a way of linking discursive understanding of music with the kind of non-discursive understanding present in the performance and reception of music, and in related aspects of human life for which music is significant. Quite simply: one does not always do justice to something by explaining it in general terms; there may be other kinds of response to it which bring out its value and significance more effectively.

Towards the end of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says ‘Not how the world is is the mystical, but that it is’ (ibid.: 85), and suggests limiting philosophy to what can be said, i.e. to propositions of natural science. His philosophical questions have to be ‘overcome’ as meaningless if one is to ‘see the world correctly’. There is a fundamental ambivalence here. On the one hand he adheres to the demands of empirical scientific rigour as the only way to generate meaningful propositions about how the world is, but he also thinks that these propositions do nothing to
make life meaningful by responding to the fact that the world exists at all as something intelligible. Music, in contrast, seems to have to do with the latter, but this cannot be propositionally stated. One way of interpreting Wittgenstein’s gnomic remarks is in the light of the widespread sense today that philosophy has not succeeded in explaining scientific knowledge by epistemological reflection. Whereas very few scientists seriously disagree, for example, about key aspects of the theory of quantum mechanics, because of its proven predictive capacity, few philosophers agree about how to explain the success of the theory. This could suggest that meta-reflections on the nature and history of the epistemological enterprise may now offer perspectives which working predominantly within epistemology does not. The propositions of natural science can be said to fulfil the demands of metaphysics by explaining how things are. The attempt to explain how it is that they are able to do so is what Wittgenstein regards as leading to ‘nonsense’. Nonsense is, though, highly significant.

As the later Wittgenstein will contend, it is primarily as practices which enable successful prediction and control that the natural sciences have come to play the irreplaceable role they do in modernity. Sceptical objections to the forms of validation applicable in the sciences simply have no grip in this respect. The philosophical aim of explaining that the sciences are good at predicting because, for example, their propositions ‘correspond to reality’ leads, on the other hand, to scepticism-threatening dilemmas concerning the explanation of the notion of correspondence. So what does this tell us about music and philosophy? Music is also first and foremost a human practice, with an enormously diverse number of manifestations and significances, which is, in many respects, self-legitimating, because it is part of what it is to be human. If one suspects that the ‘philosophy of music’, in the sense I wish to question, faces at least as many difficulties as the kind of ‘philosophy of science’ that tends to lead to scepticism, what is the concrete alternative for thinking about philosophy’s relationship to music?

In the light of the approach I have begun to sketch, the initial premise is, we have seen, that it is no good just looking at the matter from the side of philosophy, as though philosophy had already legitimated itself by producing convincing theories which can then be applied to music. Whatever one thinks of the philosophical enterprise – whether one thinks it has come to an end as far as the forms it has taken since the Greeks are concerned, or thinks that the pursuit of the regulative idea of solving major philosophical problems is an ever-developing
task – there is a problem in adopting current philosophical assumptions in the name of a metaphysical determination of the status of music. At the same time, the practice of philosophy \textit{itself} is also part of what it is to be human, which, like music, may play a world-disclosive role: think, for example, of the effects of Kant on the wider cultural development of Romanticism, which have no immediate connection to whether his arguments are ultimately defensible. To this extent interest in how people have attempted to establish and answer philosophical questions is also self-legitimating. Both philosophy and music have, then, played a historical role in articulating what it is to be human and to be part of a world that we can never finally control. What makes their relationships interesting in modernity is suggested by the tension between metaphysics\textsubscript{1} and metaphysics\textsubscript{2}. The method I shall adopt in the coming chapters therefore involves considering the ‘entanglement’ of philosophy and music in modernity.\textsuperscript{12} Rather than offer an exhaustive history of modern music aesthetics, or an alternative kind of philosophy of music, each chapter that follows will examine a constellation or constellations in which the entanglement of philosophy and music has led to new questions about the nature of each.

Wittgenstein’s friend, Frank Ramsey, famously asserted in relation to the argument that an infinite conjunction could not be considered to be a proposition because it could not be written out, that ‘what we can’t say we can’t say, and we can’t whistle it either’. One simple answer to Ramsey lies in the fact that one can express an infinite conjunction like \( \ldots \) recurring as the fraction \( 1/3 \) (see Holton and Price \textit{2003}). It can, moreover, be that one form of expression \textit{does} what another cannot. Friedrich Schlegel once claimed in relation to verbal language that ‘communication and representation must be added to; and this happens through \textit{music} which is, though, here to be regarded less as a representational art than as philosophical language, and really lies higher than mere art’ (Schlegel \textit{1964: 57}). Such a hyperbolic remark only becomes possible in the light of aesthetic and conceptual changes which are rooted in some of the deepest challenges posed by modernity. My claim will be that it is worth taking remarks like this more seriously than many modern writers on philosophy have tended to do.

\textsuperscript{12} I adopt the term from Hilary Putnam’s insistence, against the tradition of logical positivism, that fact and value are inextricably entangled, which is in certain respects part of what I have to say about music and philosophy anyway. Another way of thinking of this is in terms of the ‘interference’ between music and philosophy.
MUSIC, LANGUAGE, AND THE ORIGINS OF MODERNITY

Language and modernity

The contrast between two notional kinds of ‘metaphysics’ adumbrated in the previous chapter can be understood as another way of characterising the tension between a ‘positivist’, science-oriented, conception of modern philosophy, and a ‘Romantic’ conception which is oriented towards what the arts reveal that the sciences cannot. This tension is too often seen in rigid terms, and I want to develop a more nuanced version of it via the issue of music. In the last chapter I employed the notion of metaphysics\textsuperscript{2} to suggest ways of rehabilitating the claim that philosophy should be concerned with the idea of what constitutes a meaningful world, without falling back into no longer defensible, ‘dogmatic’ theological or metaphysical conceptions of meaning. Part of this rehabilitation relies, though, precisely on the possibility that it is when the limits of philosophy become apparent that other means of revealing meaning in the world, like music, may become most significant. The resistance of what is manifest in terms of metaphysics\textsuperscript{2} to the terms of metaphysics\textsuperscript{1} suggests both new possibilities and instructive difficulties. The initial difficulty is that any positive explanatory assertion about these kinds of meaning has to take one in the direction of metaphysics\textsuperscript{1}, even though metaphysics\textsuperscript{1} does not offer resources for meaning of the kind that form the focus of metaphysics\textsuperscript{2}. This also implies, however, that the discursive demands of many kinds of philosophy cannot be fulfilled by the resources of metaphysics\textsuperscript{2}.

The result is a tension between the ‘sayable’ and the ‘unsayable’. This tension should, however, not be thought of as between two sides which are wholly separate from each other. Any attempt to characterise either as a whole would just be another form of metaphysics\textsuperscript{1}, which
would not capture what is revealed by metaphysics. What is intended with the idea of metaphysics, in contrast, only emerges because of the way in which key dimensions of modernity come to be seen in terms of metaphysics. Some version of this tension is inherent in any attempt to understand the nature of modernity. The objectification of subjective opinions, and the rendering sayable of the unsayable by explaining what was previously inexplicable are fundamental to modernity’s culture of public legitimation. However, the aim of objective explanation is itself susceptible to normative scrutiny like any other human motivation: as Putnam (2004) argues, fact and value are inextricably entangled. The resistance of central aspects of communication in the life-world to objectifying modes of description underlines the importance of normative perspectives which, while accepting the findings of well-justified scientific theories, do not rely on scientistic assumptions. What is intended by the heuristic idea of the two forms of metaphysics is illustrated by the case of metaphor. Metaphor can be understood as belonging to both forms, when, for example, what was a metaphor becomes literalised, or when a piece of literal usage becomes a metaphor. The significance of metaphor lies precisely in its relationship to norms which go beyond what can be discursively articulated. If metaphors matter because of what they make us notice, their success can often lie in how they change our relationship to an aspect of our world in ways which may not be captured by what we can say about the change. We saw a related case in the example of communicating by gesture how a piece of music should go. Metaphorical and gestural communication can be more in touch with ways of playing music than literal instruction.

It is important here to avoid the attempt just to answer the ‘philosophical problem’ which metaphor, gesture, and music may be seen as entailing. This attempt is likely to exclude precisely what is intended by the experiment of reversing the roles of the philosophical and the musical that I derived from Schlegel. One way of construing this reversal is, of course, in relation to the concern with the limits and dangers of natural science during the second half of the eighteenth century. Too often such concern has, though, either been, or has been construed as being, ‘anti-science’, natural science being regarded as a threat either to the divine order, or to authentic human existence, or as undermining humankind’s relationship to non-human nature. Many of the critical responses to the Enlightenment are, however, much more complex and interesting than this, and they cannot be regarded as being hostile to natural science, or indeed to many of the goals of the Enlightenment.
Looking at how music plays a role in these responses can suggest ways of examining the limits both of philosophy and of scientific explanation. The question which then arises concerns the status of music, philosophy, and science, if none of them can be given the grounding role in relation to the others.

In Heidegger’s story of metaphysics, the activity of the subject in scientific investigation becomes the ground of all truth, and this can lead to the scientific claim that all questions must ultimately come into the realm of the sayable by being given scientific explanations. Heidegger’s alternative to this conception will concern us in more detail later, and much of it depends on his understanding of language. Tracing elements of the tradition of reflection on language to which Heidegger belongs can therefore bring to light a recurrent connection to music which has too rarely been taken into account by many philosophers. Philosophers’ conceptions of music are often rather uncritically derived from the dominant theoretical assumptions about music of their period. This means that it is not necessarily when philosophers directly address music that it plays the most important role in their conceptions. Instead it is often when they examine the nature of language or investigate epistemological questions that the role of music can be more decisive.

Language’s new role in philosophy in the second half of the eighteenth century has been much discussed (see, e.g., Bowie 1997, 2003a; Foucault 1970). What has less often been discussed is the significance of how this role connects to the new understandings of music in this period. The decisive factor is that it ceases to be clear what language is. At the same time the significance and nature of music itself changes, so that it is no longer clear what music is either. This conjunction relates to the wider sense in modernity that the world can no longer be seen to be ‘ready-made’: previous ontological assumptions, including ones about the nature of humankind itself, become open to question. The continuing debate in certain areas of the analytical philosophy of music about whether music is a language is therefore a symptom of a wider historical issue. The debate can best be approached by considering the interactions between differing forms of expression and articulation which occur in differing cultural contexts, rather than by seeking a definitive answer to the ‘philosophical’ question of what a language is.

The scientific revolution increasingly takes over questions about how and what things are by establishing laws of nature based on empirical observation and mathematical calculation. One consequence of
this is Kant’s question about what makes scientific knowledge itself possible, which he seeks to answer in terms of the a priori rules of thinking that must be involved in any intelligible judgement of experience. J. G. Hamann already claims in 1781 that Kant does not see how the categories must depend on natural languages. A vital question raised by Hamann’s objection to Kant concerns the relationship of the explanation of language to scientific explanation. Any scientific account of what language is necessarily involves the circularity of using language to explain language. It is not, of course, that meta-linguistic statements are problematic per se: we make use of them lots of the time. The problem lies in the status of meta-linguistic statements when they claim to give a scientific description of language, that is, a description in which the object of the analysis must be of a different order from the analysing language. The aim in logical empiricism of constructing a logically purified language makes the difficulty apparent. Can there be a ‘purer’ language which explains ‘impure’ natural languages in a manner which natural languages themselves cannot achieve, and, if so, how would we understand this language, if not on the basis of our prior understanding of a natural language? We saw a version of this problem in Wittgenstein in the last chapter, and he regarded music as a possible response to it. The basic point was already made by Schleiermacher in the remarks I quoted from his Dialectic on the dependence of science on natural languages. None of this, of course, explains what it is to understand and how it is that we understand in the first place.

These questions can only arise once traditional metaphysical assumptions about language, of the kind present in the idea of the divine origin of language, cease to be defensible. The theory of the divine origin relied on the assumption of a grounding divine language from which natural languages derive. The problem from early modernity onwards is that, even though this theory comes widely to be seen as merely dogmatic and as not really explaining anything, nobody seems able to give a plausible alternative account of the origin of language. What is too rarely appreciated, however, is that the difficulty of doing so derives at least as much from the question of what language is as it does from any other consideration. Establishing which source of evidence could be used to answer questions about language’s origin has to be secondary to the problem of characterising what it is whose origin is to be explained. Is language a means of representing things in the world or of communicating information, a means of expressing emotions, a
form of social action, a manifestation of Geist? How would one make a decision as to which of these descriptions of language is prior, and how does that decision relate to the form of language in which the decision is articulated? At what point does something become language, and at what point does something either cease to be or fail to be language? Any initial answer to the question of what language is will already determine the answers to subsequent questions.

It is increasingly clear that the failure of the analytical tradition to attain any substantial agreement on a theory of meaning has not least to do with a failure to agree on what it is that the theory is really about. This situation is part of what the approach I am adopting here wants to interrogate, by seeing what happens if one does not draw a strict line between language and music. Many of the issues that I want to examine have to do with the relationship between two basic questions: ‘What makes a noise or mark into a word?’ and ‘What makes noises or marks into music?’ Davidson says that ‘A creature may interact with the world without entertaining any propositions. It may discriminate between colours, tastes, sounds, and shapes. It may learn, that is change its behaviour, in ways that preserve its life or increase its food intake’ (Davidson 2001: 104–5). What makes the creature count as being able to have thoughts is, though, its ability to discriminate between ‘what is believed and what is the case’ (ibid.: 105). Plausible as this may be for many kinds of interaction between subjects, other subjects, and the world, the concentration on belief excludes those realms of experience which cannot be characterised in terms of belief. Mere discrimination between sounds does not constitute hearing or playing something as music, where having a musical ‘thought’ can consist in playing, singing, or writing something which might never reach the propositional level. It could be argued that this notion of ‘thought’ lacks aboutness, and so is merely metaphorical. On the other hand, musical thought does not lack coherence, intelligibility, or the potential to influence other subjects. I do not, however, wish to make an extended philosophical case on this basis. Nietzsche and Foucault argue that the history of science should be as interested in why things were held to be true as in whether they were true, and something similar applies in relation to ideas about music and language, especially if one thinks that making

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1 For those who find all this too speculative, it is worth remembering J. L. Austin’s assertion that ‘Even if some language is now purely descriptive, language was not in origin so, and much of it is still not so’ (quoted in Cavell 2005: 152).
a clear demarcation between the two is likely to obscure as much as it reveals.

Language as representation

Let us now look at a few of the ways in which language and music were understood prior to the changes in conceptions of language in the eighteenth century. Whether on the basis of traditional religion or of rational theology, language is broadly assumed to be grounded in a stable reality, and one major task of language is to represent that reality accurately. The difficulties involved in achieving this are often not regarded as inherent in the nature of language, and are seen rather as being generated by human failure to understand things clearly. The perceived substantial tie between word and world is evident in many ways. In the ‘doctrine of signatures’, for example, nature is itself ‘linguistic’, it furnishes ways of ‘reading’ itself that allow its truth to be manifest in resemblances between its differing parts. When such ideas become less convincing in the light of the advance of science the process of disenchantment of nature compels thinking about language to change. One consequence of this is the idea that music may be a survival of a kind of language that still has the sort of relationship to reality that was present in the doctrine of signatures. Even though this idea cannot now be defended, it underlines the importance of looking at why music was understood in such ways.

Modernity is a contested term, being characterised in different ways and located at differing times by different theories. Much of the debate over this issue revolves around what the essential changes are regarded as being that ‘modernity’ brings about. To this extent it is possible to use music itself as offering a way of characterising modernity, the changes in music at the time being closely connected to other social and cultural changes, but not simply determined by them. In the Pythagorean and Platonist conceptions that dominate the Middle Ages and much of the Renaissance, music consisted of Harmonia, Rhythmos and Logos: "By Harmonia one understood regulated, rational relations of notes..."
brought into a system, by Rhythmos, the temporal order of music . . . and by Logos, language as the expression of human reason’ (Dahlhaus 1978: 14). Music reflected an objective order of things.

The beginning of the revolution in conceptions of music parallels Descartes’ initiation of the turn of philosophical attention from the object to the subject that thinks about the object, and he is also the first theorist to consider music primarily in terms of the listener. In the *Compendium Musicae* of 1618 he claims that music requires imaginative activity on the part of the listener if the differing bars of a piece are to be made into a discernible unity: ‘when we hear the end we recall at this instant what there was at the beginning and in the rest of the song’ (Descartes 1987: 60). This theoretical claim is accompanied by related changes in music praxis: from the seventeenth century onwards European music increasingly becomes a spectacle, rather than just a ritual or a collective participatory activity. The listener’s role becomes more individualised, and more attention is paid to music’s subjective effects. Especially in Italy, the rise of opera in the seventeenth century also occasions theoretical debates about the relative priority of music and language. In the first half of the eighteenth century, immediately prior to the advent of the main ideas associated with modernity as the era of human self-determination, concern with the subject’s responses to music leads to the dominant conception being that music represents human feelings. The combination of attention to subjective feeling and attention to language constitutes the matrix in which the new conceptions will develop. The major differences between the conceptions relate to the idea of representation and to the notions of language associated with it.

Ideas from the earlier part of the eighteenth century about the relationship of music to a verbal text presuppose a straightforward notion of representation. In his 1704 *Comparison of Italian and French Music*, Le Cerf de la Viéville had demanded in rationalist vein, for example, that music ‘apply such proportionate tones to the words that the verse is indistinguishable from and lives again in the music’ (Strunk 1998: 681), and thinkers like Abbé Dubois claimed that music imitated the sounds which nature makes to express feelings. A recurrent feature of views of music and language during the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century lies, as John Neubauer (1986) has shown, in the connection of the theory of the affects to the theory of rhetoric, rather than, as in the previous two centuries, to mathematically oriented Pythagorean theories of the kind referred to by Dahlhaus. The connection of affect theory
to rhetoric, which is first made explicit by Johann Mattheson (1681–1764), presupposes a transparent relationship between language and music, with the former as the dominant partner. Neubauer suggests that ‘Rhetorical theories tend to focus on the pragmatic question of how to affect an audience, but they tacitly or expressly upheld the representational, imitative function of the arts’ (Neubauer 1986: 60–1). Mattheson talks, for example, of how an ‘Adagio indicates distress, a Lamento lamentation, a Lento relief, an Andante hope, an Affetuoso love, an Allegro comfort, a Presto eagerness, etc.’ (Strunk 1998: 699). For eighteenth-century representational theories there is always a verbal equivalent of what music says, the apparently non-representational aspect of music being catered for by an underlying representational or mimetic conception of language as that which can render explicit what is only implicit in the music.

We shall look later at just how thoroughly such ideas come to be rejected by many thinkers in the last third of the eighteenth century. However, it is important to ask just why they were held, and what sort of sense they made of the world. Given that these views probably seem merely wrong to us, how should we react to them? The most obvious factor is that such views of music do not entail a division between metaphysics and metaphysics. Both art and science are included in an overall conception of representation which is sustained by the sense of inherent order in the world which is to be mirrored, in differing ways, by all forms of articulation. Music can therefore only ever be secondary to language, the prior form of articulation of the contents of a world that is inherently ordered and in principle rationally accessible. Even when a tension arises between the older mathematical conception and affect theory it does not lead to any fundamental sense of crisis. Mattheson maintains, for example, that ‘the art of notes draws its water from the well of nature and not from the puddles of arithmetic’ (Mattheson 1739: 16). The nature in question is still, though, a nature conceived of in rationalist terms, which composers imitate with the intention of arousing moral sentiments in their listeners; they do not seek to make the listeners undergo the emotions depicted in the music in a manner which may have nothing to do with moral sentiments. To the extent to which these conceptions dominated much of the Enlightenment they can be said to rely on a model of world-disclosure in which representational equivalents for different aspects of the world, from words, to notes, to images, to feelings are assumed in the last analysis to be capable of harmonising with each other. Mattheson just thinks the wrong
representational equivalent is being employed when mathematics is seen as the basis of music, not that the whole model of representation is mistaken.

It is when the sense that words are essentially representational comes into question that a great deal else comes into question as well, and music suddenly takes on very different significances. This change is closely associated with the shift in the status of wordless music from being a lower form of music to its being regarded, in some cases, as the highest form of all the arts. From Saint-Evremond’s declaration in 1678 that ‘The Musick must be made for the Words, rather than the Words for the Musick’ (Saint-Evremond 1930: 210), one moves by the end of the eighteenth century to Wilhelm Heinse’s remark in 1776–7 that ‘Instrumental music . . . expresses such a particular spiritual life in man that it is untranslatable for every other language’ (Heinse 1795–6: 3, 83), to W. H. Wackenroder’s claim in 1797 that music ‘speaks a language which we do not recognise in our everyday life’ (Wackenroder 1910: 167), and to J. N. Forkel’s assertion in 1778 that music ‘begins . . . where other languages can no longer reach’ (Forkel 1778: 66). Some of the reasons for such a radical change in the understanding of music can be observed in the work of J. G. Herder, and tensions in Herder’s work point to some of the most significant questions about music and philosophy in the modern period.

The origin of language and music

Herder’s own conception of music is neither very original nor very convincing. What matters about his work in our context is how he confronts the possibility that there is no inherent order of things which is represented in natural languages. Because Herder explores how humankind can understand the world on the basis of what he regards as its naturally given powers, he refuses to exclude consideration of the role of any of those powers. This is one source of his enduring opposition to Kant, who, he thinks, ignores the historical development of different human relationships to the natural and social world. Charles Taylor (1985, 1995) has argued that Herder’s significance lies in his development of the idea that language is primarily ‘constitutive’ of what we understand, against the idea, which dominates empiricism and much of the analytical philosophy that derives from it, that language is primarily ‘designative’, in the sense of representing either ideas or objects which pre-exist their representation. What makes Herder’s ideas revealing is
his attempt both to give an account of the origin of language and to
describe what he sees as fundamental differences between the nature
of a language early in its history and when it has fully developed. His
concern with the latter, which is shared by Condillac and Rousseau, is
made more urgent because of his location in a country where the lan-
guage has yet to develop into a generally accepted form. Indeed, Herder
himself made substantial contributions to the formation of the German
language as we now know it. Music plays an explicit and implicit role in
both these issues.

Taylor sees Herder as inaugurating a tradition of ‘expressive’ theo-
ries that leads in the direction of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, in which
language is primarily ‘world-making’, or ‘world-disclosive’, rather than
representational.\footnote{It might be fairer to give Hamann the credit for this, but the two did develop many of their ideas in a dialogue with each other.} The notes for and student transcriptions of Heideg-
ger’s course in 1939 on Herder’s 1772 Essay on the Origin of Language
(Essay) have recently been published (Heidegger 1999). It is charac-
teristic of the phenomena which I wish to highlight that in these texts
Heidegger does not once use the word music, even though music plays
an important part in Herder’s arguments. Furthermore, music plays a
decisive subterranean role in what Heidegger has to say, and this affects
his approach to Herder’s text in ways which are germane to his whole
later approach to language and metaphysics. To appreciate the issues
raised by Heidegger, which will be considered in the last part of this
chapter and in chapter 8, we need first to locate Herder in relation to
other manifestations of the concern with music and language in the
eighteenth century.

In his account of French Enlightenment theories of music, Downing
A. Thomas sums up the role of music in Condillac’s Essay on the Origin of
Human Knowledge (1746) and Rousseau’s Essay on the Origin of Languages
(published 1781, possibly written 1755):

conceived of as a natural sign of the passions, music predates all con-
ventional language. As such, it constitutes a natural model for all rep-
resentation . . . and thus paves the way for the subsequent elaboration
of conventional sign systems and signifying practices . . . As a signifying
practice which is nonetheless still part of the natural world, a primordial
system of musical tones sets the stage for conventional language and the
culture that exists within language.

(Thomas 1995: 9–10)
Music functions in these theories, then, as the bridge between the non-semantic and the semantic, which are seen in terms of the natural and the cultural. As Thomas maintains, following Derrida’s arguments about Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, the problem of describing the origin of language lies in describing the transition between the non-linguistic and the linguistic. How does one use what one is seeking the origin of to describe its own origin, without it failing to communicate what preceded itself? Understanding a state in which language is absent cannot be achieved within language, but stepping outside language seems to involve transgressing the bounds of sense. What is required in relation to the origin of language would seem to be something which is not yet language, but is still comprehensible, and music is seen as playing this role. Condillac and Rousseau regard verbal language as representational and as constituted by conventions. This separates it from a preceding, non-conventionalised ‘natural’ condition in which ‘language’ was directly connected to passions generated by the pains of natural existence.

The transition to language in Condillac begins when the cry of someone in pain, or some other feeling-state, is recognised as such by someone else. This is the condition of possibility for language to begin to become a convention. The vital element is the possibility of an identity being established between one token of the cry and another (this identity is the condition of possibility of there being tokens at all). The issue of identity is the crux of many questions to do with music and language. Because the cry is not yet language, but is apprehended as significant by another, it has an ‘in-between’ status, which Condillac regards as ‘musical’. The awareness of the other’s feeling he regards, like Rousseau, as instinctive. His argument does nothing, though, to explain the issue that concerns thinkers from Fichte to Husserl, Sartre and beyond, of how it is that intersubjectivity develops at all. Why does one being begin at a certain point to interpret another being’s perceivable behaviour as a sign of an internal affective or other psychological state that cannot be perceived as such? For Condillac, as language develops, the instinctive immediacy of the sensation of something particular is diminished in favour of grasping the thing via repeatable signs which have no direct affective relationship to what they designate, and which eventually become merely arbitrarily related to it.

Music thus plays a role in Condillac’s attempt to explain the problem for empiricism of how the data of the senses can come to form repeatable concepts that are designated by repeatable signifiers. The data do
so, he thinks, by a process of erosion, in which sensuous immediacy is lost as the determinacy of the concept is established by the exclusion of particularity. This model plays a vital role in eighteenth-century conceptions of language and beyond. In its original state the imagination is seen as possessing a vividness which is diminished as the other dimensions of thought develop. Conceptual language develops at the expense of the affective and creative dimensions of the imagination: ‘persons not as yet accustomed to instituted signs, have the liveliest imagination’ (Condillac 2002: 123). What Condillac terms the ‘language of action’ (ibid.), by which he means the gestures which accompany pain etc., and in which he includes dance, becomes the language of words, and so weakens the imaginative power which motivates the former. As Thomas puts it: ‘Force is lost for truth; passions give way to analysis’ (Thomas 1995: 81).

Given Nietzsche’s and Adorno’s opposition to empiricism, it might seem odd, but this model of the relationship between the identity instituted by the sign and the resultant loss of sensuous particularity will play a role in their work (and many who are influenced by them). Both, moreover, regard this process as fundamental to their criticisms of empiricism and of aspects of the Enlightenment. The question is whether this kind of model can still be used in this manner if the borderline between the sensuous and the conceptual cannot be characterised in the manner it is here. The idea of an initial immediacy, of ‘sensuous particularity’, which is lost via conceptual thinking, is a version of what Wilfrid Sellars calls the ‘myth of the given’, the idea of self-authenticating experiences which do not rely on their relationships to anything else for their significance. The idea that this initial immediacy is a myth leads to the further question as to whether music’s role in modernity is therefore to compensate for something lost, or whether this conception itself relies on a nostalgia for a mythical original state.

Rousseau is famous for the way in which he links the origin of language to music: ‘the first languages were sung (‘chantantes’) and passionate before being simple and methodical’ (Rousseau 1990: 67). Language is not generated by natural needs, but by human emotions. Needs give rise to ‘gestures’, passions to ‘voices’, and it is the voice that is essential for music. Without the existence of language there can therefore be no music, although the real nature of the division between the two is by no means easy to specify in these terms. Like Condillac, Rousseau sees the historical move of language away from its sensuous
origins as a move away from the musical, so that ‘language becomes more exact, more clear, but more listless, more dull, and more cold’ (ibid.: 73), and writing ‘substitutes precision for expression’ (ibid.: 79). Language moves in ever more deadening directions with the development of ever more ordered forms of social life.

Whereas Condillac accepts the necessity of the move from sensation to conceptual thinking as the condition of possibility of knowledge, for Rousseau the move involves a kind of ‘fall’, a regrettable loss of a way of being that corresponds to what he thinks is humankind’s real nature. Further evidence of this fall are the facts that ‘poetry was found before prose; that had to be, since passions spoke before reason’ (ibid.: 115), and that music began as melody before becoming dominated by harmony. Music is an art of ‘imitation’, in which ‘melody does in music what draughtsmanship does in painting’ (ibid.: 118–19). The fundamental aspect of music is that ‘it will not directly represent things, but will arouse in the soul the same sentiments that one feels when seeing them’ (ibid.: 133). The modern period is characterised by music’s becoming ‘more independent of words’ (ibid.: 139), so that song finally becomes ‘limited to the purely physical effect of the conjunction of vibrations’, and music ‘finds itself deprived of the moral effects which it had produced when it was doubly the voice of nature’ (ibid.: 142). Language also suffers from a similar loss of motivating power, being no longer capable of appealing to a large crowd because of its loss of sonority.

Herder writes his text on the origin of language in opposition to both Condillac and Rousseau. The key point is that, even though both Condillac and Rousseau agree that music is fundamental to the origin of language, they interpret what is lost in the emergence of language in paradigmatically conflicting ways because of their different evaluations of the role of conceptual thinking. The value of what was supposed originally to be there can therefore be regarded in both positive and negative terms, either as something which reveals a desirable state that we cannot recover, because language and concepts have destroyed it, or as something which had to be overcome for the achievements of the modern world to be possible. The positive and negative assessments can, though, easily be conflated or can co-exist in relation to different aspects.

5 The argument is directed against Rameau’s privileging of harmony over melody in their bitter dispute about music. Rameau, as Thomas shows, tries to derive a whole metaphysics from the supposed mathematical foundations of harmony.
of modernity. Underlying both positions are metaphysical assumptions about nature, human and non-human. These assumptions give rise to analogous problems to those involved in philosophy’s relationship both to language and to music, where initial assumptions determine the rest of the investigation. Why should anything be regarded as being lost at all when what is seen as music and what is seen as language become more separate? The separation might, for example, equally be seen as giving rise to new possibilities for both, and the history of music immediately following these texts would appear to confirm this.

The eighteenth-century tendency to link the question of the origin of language to music has, as we saw, to do with the problem that characterising the origin of language within language depends on something which is not yet language. One has to say in language what it is that begins when language begins. The assumption in much analytical and other philosophy that language is the means by which human beings seek to represent the true world gives rise precisely to a version of the problem for Condillac and Rousseau which led them to employ music as the bridge between the pre-conceptual and the conceptual, the non- or pre-linguistic and the linguistic. How is the move from the absence of true representation to its presence intelligible at all?

Richard Rorty has suggested a way of trying to circumvent the problems that result from representational assumptions: ‘May we not think of true beliefs as reliable guides to human action, rather than as accurate representations of something nonhuman?’ (Rorty 1999a: 268). He asks, in the light of Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein: ‘At what point in biological evolution did organisms stop just coping with reality and start representing it?’ His answer is: ‘Maybe they never did start representing it’ (ibid.: 269). In consequence, ‘there was no decisive moment at which language stopped being a series of reactions to the stimuli provided by the behaviour of other humans and started to be an instrument for expressing beliefs’ (ibid.: 74). The idea of language as representation is, then, just a metaphor which we might be better off without. It is not that Rorty thinks that we do not use words to represent things. The point is rather that such representation cannot be said to correspond to differentiations between the things which pre-exist their articulation in language. Moreover, the approach itself does not lay claim to being the truth about language – which would just reinstate representationalism – but instead asks whether a different view of the practices which constitute language might not be more productive.
Rorty never mentions music in discussing these issues, and a dimension may therefore be lacking in his account. The fact that the historical move towards non-representational conceptions of language is often closely linked to reflection on music can, I want to argue, affect the understanding of the consequences of adopting a non-representationalist view of language. Music is evidently not ‘an instrument for expressing beliefs’ in the representational sense Rorty intends by this description, but is seeing it in terms of ‘reactions to the stimuli provided by the behaviour of other humans’ the best way of understanding its significance? For Rorty there ought presumably to be scope for including music as part of what we can think of as language in the broadest sense. The kind of line we draw between music and non-music is therefore not the same as the one representationalists draw between language and non-language. However, the behaviourist vocabulary of stimulus and reaction does not sit easily with Rorty’s talk elsewhere of the central importance of the creative imagination in opposing the idea of thinking as representation of a pre-given order. The spectrum between a reaction to a stimulus and an imaginative response to something which can change the very nature of what one is responding to requires more differentiation than Rorty sometimes offers. It is in this respect that the link to music of the development of alternatives to representational theories of language becomes significant. Herder’s elaboration of an ‘expressive conception’ is illuminating here.

Music, language, and reason

Establishing the link between ideas about the origin of language, and music depends on something that can articulate a pre-linguistic state as itself, rather than as a necessarily indeterminate negation of what can be said. Music seems an obvious candidate for the role of articulating what is prior to language, but this can lead in some questionable directions. Rorty’s version of anti-representationalism offers one way around the problem of attempting to speak of what cannot be said. Does Rorty, though, give any real grip on how music can be approached in pragmatic terms?

The early Wittgenstein pondered the idea of music as a means for articulating something which could not be described, namely how propositions ‘picture’ reality on the basis of underlying structures of intelligibility which allow for translation between different forms
of picturing. Rorty would, in contrast, regard music as just another communicative practice, albeit one which lacks the dimension that he sees as the basis of how we can distinguish behaviour which is ‘properly linguistic’ from what other organisms do when they produce signs. This dimension – which involves much the same argument as Davidson’s about belief cited above – is the use of ‘semantical metalanguage’ by putting language in ‘intensional contexts’ which require notions like meaning, in which we can ‘say things like, “It is also called ‘Y’, but for your purposes you should describe it as ‘X’”’ (Rorty 1999a: 65). Given that language in Rorty’s view is a tool rather than a medium, this should just mean that music is a tool for different purposes from those of verbal language because it cannot achieve the sort of things that semantical metalanguage can achieve.

Is there, though, a musical equivalent for the ‘properly linguistic’? What, for example, differentiates bird-song or instinctive human rhythmic cries from music? What constitutes the meta-level for music which metalanguage provides for Rorty’s conception of language? One way of thinking about this is via the idea that both verbal language and music are forms of articulation in which ‘getting it right’ is essential to the practice. The kind of difference between belief and truth that Davidson demands for thought is related to right and wrong in non-semantic forms of articulation: in the case of music, though, getting it right may not always be adequately grasped in terms of what can be said about what is right. Describing something as X or as Y for differing purposes, and playing or hearing something in the appropriate way both belong in a ‘space of appropriateness’ in ways that instinctual behaviour does not, even though such behaviour can also be successful or unsuccessful. The differences between language and music depend in this view on the appropriateness of each for different kinds of human goal, but both are normatively constituted. The interesting questions here therefore have to do with how human goals are understood and evaluated.

Herder’s view relates to Rorty’s, because of his concern with the diversity of human forms of expression, which he sees primarily in terms of their contribution to human well-being, rather than in terms of representational adequacy. This stance will, though, also be what leads to his more questionable reflections on the development of languages. In his remarks on the origin of language in On Modern German Literature. Fragments (1766–8) Herder insists that ‘no human invention is all there at once, least of all the first and greatest of all inventions, language! It
was not immediately what it became and is’ (Herder 1985: 445). In order to understand the very different constitution of different natural languages Herder, like his friend Hamann, considers languages in terms of their bearing the traces of their historical origins in concrete encounters between a people and their specific world. Responding to the argument for the divine origin, Herder contends that the fact that language transcends what any individual could invent is not a result of its being created by God, but is rather a result of language being a product of ‘whole millennia’ (ibid.).

This temporalised perspective moves him away from the idea that the primary function of language is what is expressed in Leibniz’s idea of a ‘universal language’ (ibid.: 499), towards his expressive conception: ‘Are there not a thousand characteristics in one language and millions of traces in the difference of languages precisely of the fact that peoples gradually learned to think through language and gradually learned to speak through thought?’ (ibid.: 448). In this formulation Herder, who elsewhere has trouble with the representationalist problem, that he identifies in Süsmilch and Condillac, of how humankind can have reason without already having language and have language without already having reason, gets close to the kind of circumvention of the problem proposed by Rorty. Instead of there being a point of wholesale transition to language or to thought, the expressive means of the species develop in a manner in which those means and intentional states cannot be separated because each is part of the other, there being no scheme/content relationship between them. How, then, does Herder see the development of language?

One crux of Herder’s approach to language – his notion of ‘Besonnenheit’, ‘reflection’ – is echoed by Rorty’s remarks on metalanguage as what allows one to talk of something as x or as y. Reflection, for Herder, enables one to foreground a characteristic of something, to ‘see something as something’, which means that it can also be seen as something else. The notion underlies the fundamental claim of inferentialist semantics, namely that terms gain their sense by their inferential relations to other terms. Herder’s sheep in the Essay gains its identity by having the characteristic of bleating, which means it is not some other animal with its own characteristic noise. As Taylor argues (1985: 230), Herder’s approach therefore presupposes a holistic view of language, which leaves open the question of how, if we need the whole of a

6 For a general outline of Herder and Hamann on the origin of language, see Bowie (2003).
language to understand a part of language, the understanding of words got underway in the first place. Underlying this problem is the question of how thinking relates to identification: the inferentialist approach to meaning relies on x not being y; but x also has to be x on different occasions for it to become something that can be designated at all. Its being x at all in turn relies on a repeatable sign for it to be distinct from other things, but the recognition of the sign itself as a repeated sign relies on that to which it is repeated. There must consequently be something identical between cases of x if they are to be apprehended as the same. This is what leads Kant to the idea of the transcendental unity of apperception, which assumes that the ‘I think’ must be able to be identical between differing experiences.

Importantly, the inferentialist approach to words is echoed in relation to notes in music, because each note gains its function or significance via its relationships to the other notes in a piece, and to a musical system. Descartes thought that the memory of the subject was essential to constituting something as music: the question is how this is to be interpreted. Inferentialism with regard to music functions at a level which need not become conceptually articulated: the relations between notes can be felt, in the form, for example, of the effect occasioned by the movement of a piece. Children are able to apprehend in this way before they can speak, responding to melodic consonance differently from unmelodically constituted dissonances or to random noise. Phenomena like these can help make sense of Herder’s often confused and confusing claims.

Herder portrays the development of language in terms of moves from the experience of an initial endless empirical particularity to an ordering of this particularity into forms of identity, and he interprets these moves in terms of what is lost and gained. In one of his accounts of the development of language he analogises ‘a person in their childhood’ to ‘a people in their childhood’. The basic point of this is the move from immediacy to mediation: both the child and the primitive people are frightened, then amazed, by ‘new, strange, unseen things’ (Herder 1985: 561). This pattern is reflected in the noises they produce, namely screams which develop into ‘rough, monosyllabic words’ to express the ‘most powerful passions and stirring objects’. This produces a language of ‘gestures and tones’ (ibid.: 562). The oldest languages ‘were drawn immediately by a sensuous imitation from sounding nature; modern languages, in contrast, are formed more according to intentional ideas’ (ibid.: 563). In the same way as children ‘pronounce their words in
high accents and their ears are delighted by singing’ (ibid.: 567), the oldest languages do not distinguish between singing and speaking. The historical pattern of linguistic development involves a move from the sung aspect of ‘Wohlklang’, ‘harmony’, which characterises a language in its ‘poetic’ phase, to its ‘philosophical’ phase, where concern with sound is lost and writing comes to dominate. When Johann Georg Sulzer suggests, in classic Enlightenment manner, that a complete language should have ‘a sufficient store of words and phrases through which every concept is expressed clearly and distinctly’, and that it would be useful to have ‘a universal philosophical grammar’, Herder therefore objects that ‘Suddenly the treasure of all my lower powers, experiences and sensuous ideas, is robbed’ (ibid.: 489–91) by the demand that all words be clarified in this manner. The clash of the logical empiricist demand for a logically purified language with the conviction of the hermeneutic tradition and the later Wittgenstein that these ideas involve a mistaken conception of the very nature of language is, then, another version of a concern of the Enlightenment which is closely connected to music.

Herder might seem to be arguing in the direction of the reversal of the relationship between music and philosophy that we have begun to explore. However, things are more complex than this. Herder’s remarks about music itself are scattered all over his work, but the remarks on aesthetics in Critical Woods of 1769 are probably most informative.7 The problem with his view of music is that in one key respect he tends to except it from the inferentialist, holist approach which he adopts with regard to language. Herder makes the valid point that acoustic and physical descriptions of a note, as well as practical instructions for the production of musical sounds, do not do justice to the aesthetic phenomenon of the note. However, he then makes the assumption, against Pythagorean and Platonist ideas, that the basis of what is to be understood must be a ‘given’, by insisting that scientific ways of describing notes ‘explain nothing of the simple note itself; nothing of the effect of its energy on the faculty of hearing; nothing of the gracefulness of the note’ (Herder 1990: 537). He wants to get to the inner feeling generated by the single note which cannot be characterised in terms of physics, but this desire relies on an immediacy which creates an implausible distance between music and language.

7 The remarks in Kalligone (1800) repeat much of what is said here, and were less influential because by the time they were written ideas about music had moved on in the ways we shall see in the next chapter.
The note is supposed to be experienced without being related to other notes: ‘Ear as ear feels a relationship as little as the eye immediately sees a distance and the sense of smell feels a surface’ (ibid.: 539). Herder fails to see that a single note without a context can be of no immediate significance; indeed, without the background context of the relationships between pitched sounds, it is not a note at all. It is when a note occurs in an expressive context, where it may then strike the listener with great force that the ‘energy’ Herder invokes can be manifest. Even the effect of hearing a beautifully played single note will require a context in which its nature is able to emerge: in the wrong context even a superb single note played by a great violinist might, for example, just sound irritating. His claim that because its effect depends upon single, simple sensations ‘the essence, nature and effect of music cannot be explained by relations and proportions’ (ibid.: 541) is false.

Herder’s misapprehension is not of any great importance in itself, being both a result of a widespread empiricist tendency at the time, and part of his and Hamann’s insistence that our primary encounters with the world are sensuous and affective before they are conceptual. However, his conception does have a paradigmatic significance, exemplifying an influential evaluation of the development of thought, language, and music that recurs in various guises in modernity. This evaluation involves reference to the loss of a more immediate state and is implicitly or explicitly critical of the tendency towards abstraction in more developed societies. What Herder claims is, then, not irrelevant to the growth of the importance of music to philosophy at this time: the sense that something is being lost which the ‘language’ of music may be able to restore should not simply be dismissed as misplaced nostalgia. It all depends on the context of the claim. Herder’s evaluative scheme does, though, get in the way of an approach to language and music that does justice to the complexity of the perception of the historical relationship between feelings and concepts, and so between the realms of metaphysics\textsubscript{2} and metaphysics\textsubscript{1}.

The main problem in Herder’s approach appears when he apostrophises the ‘muse of the art of notes’, suggesting ‘what inspirations (‘Eingebungen’) are in your hand to solve the puzzle of the human soul’ (ibid.: 550). His question is why the sense of hearing has the most direct connection to human feelings. The answer again has to do with the simple beauty of the sound of the single note. The person blind from birth may, he claims, feel in the experience of a single note ‘millions of times more than we do in the bright confusion of a whole piece’ (ibid.: 551),
because they have not gone through the development from immediacy to mediation which underlies his basic conception. This questionable assertion does, though, lead him to a more illuminating idea, which is also central to the *Essay*. He contrasts seeing, feeling, and hearing. The eye is the ‘cold observer’ of things from the outside. ‘Feeling’ is the general inner receptivity of all the senses which is initially too immediate to allow proper discrimination – ‘Humankind stepped into the world; what an ocean stormed in on it! What difficulty it had in learning to discriminate!’ (Herder 1966: 56). We are constantly subject to a mass of sensory input which we feel in some way or other, but what is vital are the things foregrounded from this input. Hearing is ‘the most inward, the deepest of the senses’ (Herder 1990: 555–6) and is the mediator between the clear but cold externality of seeing and the confused internality of feeling. The point of this description of the working of the senses is to describe ‘reason’ and reason’s relationship to language in a manner which does not rely on a priori rationalist principles and which accounts for the genesis of the capacities associated with ‘reason’.

Where does music fit into this conception? Herder does not think that music arose from the imitation of bird-song. His idea is that language and song are essentially co-extensive in the early stages of a culture because the early development of language is expressive, not representational. ‘Song’ and music are therefore not the same thing. Herder’s conception is close to that of Rousseau, for whom melody based on single notes stands for simple feeling, harmony for reflection and mediation. Ancient Greek music was ‘born of the language of passion’ and was based on simple melody with strong accents and much modulation; contemporary music, on the other hand, is ‘an art of notes of relationships and of reason’ (ibid.: 563–4). Music as a specifically aesthetic form is therefore linked to a more general modern process of rationalisation: ‘Song is still *language*. People must first forget this, for a few moments they must forget thought, feeling, the need to designate, in order to cultivate note as note and sequence of notes as such; from this moment on the step to the art of notes would be made’ (ibid.: 560). The source of what music can express is immediately present in the earlier forms of language which are the expression of affect, and then occurs in only a mediated, abstract way in the *art* of music. This means that ‘autonomous’ wordless instrumental music is regarded, not – as it soon will be – as the decisive kind of music, but merely as a modern result of the splitting up of previously unified means of
articulation. The same loss of sensuous immediacy supposedly occurs, as we saw, in the history of a verbal language.

Much of this is either just confused – Herder tends anyway to set little store by consistency – or is based on his mistaken fixation on Rousseau’s notion of the power of immediate expression of melody as opposed to the mediation of harmony that derives from his opposition to Rameau. Sometimes, however, this fixation seems to begin to fall out of the conception, for instance when Herder equates poetry and music.\(^8\) In the sequence of words in poetry there is a ‘melody of ideas and notes’; poetic forms involve ‘a melody of thoughts . . . from the chain of such dissolvings and flowings away . . . arises the effect of music . . . where every single moment is nothing in itself and the effect of the whole is everything’ (ibid.: 607). The holism which disappeared when Herder considered music is now common to both music and poetic language. If one takes away his Rousseau-like view of harmony, an illuminating conception which attempts to grasp different temporalised structures and articulations of intelligibility based on the differing roles of and links between the senses now emerges. His attention to the more fundamental structures and relationships shared by language and music as responses to the human need to constitute a world suggests why concentration on representation as the basis of language is inadequate to the diversity of what language is. What now matters most about Herder’s ideas in our context are the assumptions involved in how music and language relate to ‘reason’, above all with regard to the relationship between the original state of a particular form of articulation and what succeeds it.

Heidegger’s Herder: reason and the repression of music

Heidegger produces his work on Herder’s Essay in the phase during which he becomes concerned with Hölderlin’s poetry and with language as the ‘house of being’, rather than, as it had been in Being and Time, as a pragmatic means for dealing with the world. As in his work on Schelling around this time, Heidegger interprets a thinker from the past in such a way that they just become a further confirmation of his larger conception of metaphysics as the ‘forgetting of being’.

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8 Herder is often more interested in trying out where an idea will lead than in whether he thinks the idea is true. This attitude is consistent with the notion that language is in some sense ‘constitutive’, rather than representational.
He concentrates on one aspect of Herder’s account at the expense of other aspects of that account. In doing so he never uses the word music, though he uses many words associated with it. This is peculiar, because Herder’s text is unthinkable without music. Herder lists, for example, a whole range of human feelings, commenting that ‘There are as many forms of feelability (‘Fühlbarkeit’) sleeping in our nature as there are also kinds of sound/keys [‘Tonarten’, which now almost exclusively has the musical sense of ‘key’]’ (Herder 1966: 7). Admittedly Herder then suggests the limitations of this kind of articulation, and we have seen how he regards music in the aesthetic sense as losing the affective immediacy of the earlier forms of expression, but he does sustain a role for phenomena one can term ‘musical’ as part of our being in the world.

Heidegger concentrates particularly on Herder’s account of ‘reflection’ (‘Besonnenheit’), which he fits into his version of the story of metaphysics, as the transformation of philosophy into natural science. The account is insightful, and yet overly schematic. He argues that Herder’s use of the term derives from Leibniz’s notion of reflection, which involves ‘apperceptive’ awareness – reflective awareness of having one’s thoughts and perceptions – and is the constitutive element of ‘egoity’. This might seem odd, because Herder is clearly critical of rationalism, but the point is convincingly made that he cannot be interpreted as rejecting Enlightenment rationalism. The further step in Heidegger’s argument is more debatable, namely that, even though Herder is not a Leibnizian, his argument remains within the same ‘western metaphysics’ (Heidegger 1999: 44) as Leibniz. This is because of the way Herder presents the relationship between ‘sensation’ (‘Empfindung’) and ‘reason’. For Herder language is the external, and reason is the internal, feature of humankind which differentiates us from animals (Herder 1966: 43). Herder’s link between ‘Ton’, ‘sound’ or ‘note’, and sensation relies, though, Heidegger claims, not on ‘reason’, but ‘on a deeper basis . . . the attunedness (‘Ge-stimmtheit’) of being and its truth’ (Heidegger 1999: 44). The idea is that the subject’s capacity to link a sound to a visual or other perception is not grounded in the subject’s capacity for reason, but in the fact that being is intelligible at all in these different perceptual forms. Heidegger’s conception here has some similarities to what Wittgenstein intended with the notion of ‘logical form’.

The word for mood, ‘Stimmung’, retains the sense of musical ‘mode’ and ‘attunement’ which has been lost in English. In his earlier work Heidegger regarded moods as essential to the understanding of Dasein.
In moods ‘*Dasein* is brought before its being as here/there (da)’ (Hei-
degger 1979: 134). Moods are not something we choose, they are what
we *find* ourselves in, and they determine much of how we are. By suggest-
ing that there is an inherent connectedness of inner and outer which
is beyond the exercise of our will, he seeks to get away from the notion
of the subject as an intending ‘inside’ which relates to an objective
‘outside’. (I shall look further at how these ideas might be considered
with regard to music in chapter 8.) As Heidegger moves away during
the 1930s from the centrality of *Dasein* towards his heightened concern
with language, his suspicion of any philosophical concentration on the
idea of the subject as foundation or source of the world’s intelligibility
grows. However, a further crucial element of his earlier work does, sig-
ificantly, sound very like Herder’s ‘reflection’. Heidegger talks of the
‘as-structure of understanding’, the prior ‘existential-hermeneutic “as”’,
in contrast to the secondary ‘apophantic “as” of the proposition’ (ibid.:
158). The point of the as-structure is precisely, as in Herder’s reflection,
that it allows things to be manifest in differing ways in relation to our
needs and purposes.

What now troubles Heidegger can be construed in the form of the
question: ‘What do we see language as?’ He thinks any philosophi-
cal approach to this question involves an objectification of the kind
which dominates modernity via the natural sciences: ‘The unfolding
of man as subjectum [is] precondition of real philosophy of language’
(Heidegger 1999: 51). Such philosophical approaches are, then, part
of metaphysics1. His claim introduces precisely the issue which has
repeatedly concerned us. ‘Philosophical’ approaches to language take
‘“Language” as a whole (“*Die* Sprache’) as something pre-given, known’
(ibid.: 52). Language is therefore an object, rather than something
whose very status is in question, not least because it has to question
itself. He is concerned, then, not with *Dasein* as the locus of the as-
structure, but with the ‘origin and the secret of the “as”’ (ibid.: 55).
The ‘as’ is ‘the hardly graspable abyss [‘Abgrund’, which has, in the
wake of Schelling, the dual sense of ‘ground from which’, and ‘abyss’]
of the word’ (ibid.). Instead of explaining language in the manner
of ‘philosophy of language’, language is to be ‘founded again’ in the
word (ibid.: 57), and this leads towards poetry, rather than to philoso-
phy. Using words to explain the origin of words involves the problems
that we have already encountered, so a different path is sought. This
path is not fully developed in the Herder text, but the key elements are
already present.
Heidegger considers a poem by Stefan George, claiming that ‘The poem has no “content”’ (ibid.: 70); it cannot be paraphrased without losing what makes it significant. Referring to George’s line ‘No thing shall be where the word is lacking’ he claims that it is ‘when the word is lacking’ that ‘being disavows (‘versagt’) itself. But in this disavowal it reveals itself in its refusal – as silence’ (ibid.: 72). Is silence, then, to be thought of as mere privation of sound, or rather ‘as the basis of “sound” (‘Laut’)? or even the a-bys ['Ab-grund', where the hyphen again suggests the sense of ‘ground from which’]’ (ibid.: 109)? We sense the basis of language’s intelligibility at those moments when the words for what we really want to say do not arrive, leaving a space which is pregnant with ‘meaning’ but which cannot be filled. What makes being manifest and intelligible therefore cannot be explained, and so leads to silence. Silence is the space into which meaningful articulation can emerge and it cannot be explained in terms of its opposite, because it is not just the lack of sound. It is linked in some important way to listening, rather than just hearing whatever sound there is, because this can just be a way of objectively registering something. Silence in these terms is not something that one judges to be present or that one brings about, but rather something that we can become aware of or open to.

All this would seem to relate closely to music, in which silence can be as significant as the notes. Think of the pause in Beethoven’s Egmont Overture, which has to do with death, but does not ‘describe’ death, and instead enacts a transition which cannot be part of the sayable, consisting of nothing but the relationship between the sounds that precede it and those that follow it. Silence is, moreover, what makes possible the relationship between different elements of music. Music also does not explain anything – though it can make things comprehensible in new ways: heroism and forbearance may not be the same once one has listened to the middle Beethoven – and it generally does not function in terms of the picking out of characteristics. In an apt phrase Roger Scruton talks of ‘a peculiar “reference without predication” that touches the heart but numbs the tongue’ in our listening to music (Scruton 1997: 132). This would seem to come close to Heidegger’s aim of using poetry to explore language in a manner which does not reduce it to what can be explained. However, Heidegger makes no such link. What, then, of his response to Herder who, as we have seen, regards music as germane to these issues?

In one sense, all Heidegger does is to fit Herder into the model he is developing at this time. When Herder talks of hearing as the
mediator between seeing and feeling, for example, ‘he has an inkling . . . of the in-between and the in-the-middle-of of the clearing (‘Lichtung’)’ (Heidegger 1999: 113) – thus of the ‘space’ within which intelligibility comes into being – but he fails to grasp its significance. Heidegger notes, again without any reference to music, that, for Herder, hearing ‘exhilarates and makes vibrate/swing (‘beschwingt und bringt ins Schwingen’)’ (ibid.: 122). He then links hearing to Kant’s idea of the transcendental subject as the ‘unity of a manifold’ across time. The need for unity in multiplicity is the source of the need for the ‘formation of characteristics (‘Merkmale’), as a means of holding on to what otherwise passes away: ‘Hearing gives one sound/tone/note (‘Ton’) after the other. The single sound/tone/note is profiled, has a certain duration, and wants to be sustained. A certain togetherness comes about in which the sounds/tones/notes assert themselves. In their succession they also stand in a certain unity’ (ibid.: 199). The echo of Descartes’ remark that ‘when we hear the end we recall at this instant what there was at the beginning and in the rest of the song’ and the reference to ‘Ton’ seem to suggest that this must have to do with music. Indeed, read in isolation, it seems to be about music. However, Heidegger moves the argument in a direction which is actually at odds with a link to music, focusing instead on the semantic dimension of reflection. Characteristics result from reflection, the central aspect of Herder’s view of reason, so that ‘The characteristic is the inner word itself’ (ibid.: 174) which is arrived at by linking sound and perception: ‘in hearing [‘Gehör’, i.e. the sense] lies the necessity of the formation of characteristics’ (ibid.: 199). The impression that Heidegger is moving towards music as the source of an alternative to the idea of language as something essentially classificatory dissolves, and the possibility of seeing identity and coherence in terms other than those of metaphysics dissolves with it.

Heidegger wants to get away from the idea that the empirical sense of hearing is the ground of reason which orders the manifold of the senses. He instead thinks in terms of a grounding silence which opens up the space for things to be present, rather than demanding that they be classified as entities. Such an approach would mean that reason and language cannot be connected in the manner which he regards as constitutive of metaphysics. Reason, as what, for Herder, makes the chaos of sense impressions clear, is therefore dependent on the ‘clearing’. Heidegger points out that the word for ‘bleat’, ‘blöken’, is not an onomatopoeia, which would be ‘Mäh’, so that ‘what is really said is not what is sounded, echoed’ (ibid.: 137). The sense perception is not what
makes something intelligible, but rather the perception’s becoming a signifier, which moves it away from the immediacy of the perception into the web of language. Herder actually says something similar, but regards it as part of the loss of immediacy. In backing up his assertions concerning Herder’s failure, Heidegger claims that Herder has a ‘very broad conception of language’, because animal ‘sounding in sensations’ counts as language (ibid.: 160), although Herder also says that human beings are the only ‘linguistic creatures’.

An essential issue emerges, Heidegger argues, when the move is made from how a word relates to something, like the sheep, which makes a sound, to how the sound of a word is able to relate at all to something which does not make a sound. Note how the same question can be asked in relation to music: how do perceptible external sounds relate to ‘internal’, non-sounding emotions? The question is then ‘how inner and outer word, meaning and sound (‘Laut’), whose way of being is so different, can be connected’ (ibid.: 201). This is a version of the question of being, of how it is that things are intelligible at all. Herder’s failure to explain the connection leads, Heidegger maintains, to the situation in subsequent theories of language, like that of Jacob Grimm, where ‘the sound-constitution (‘Lautgefüge’) of language comes to the forefront of observation while meaningfulness in words moves into the background as somehow already understood’ (ibid.: 209). Heidegger’s point is that characteristics are already intelligible as such in relation to whatever sense they are apprehended by, before they become ‘sounding’ characteristics. The formation of characteristics is the general answer in metaphysics to what reason is, and this is precisely what links the study of language to the rest of the sciences, to metaphysics

Heidegger makes a distinction between two conceptions of the ‘origin’ of language. The first is concerned with the ‘derivation of one entity from another’, the second with ‘the essential basis which carries an entity’ (ibid.: 208). The conceptions correspond to metaphysics, and to his version of metaphysics. In order to avoid the former, he insists that the essence and origin of language are not to be investigated ‘in the sense of another theory’ (ibid.: 215), but rather in some other way which is not specified, because the lecture course ends at this point. The idea, to be considered in chapter 8, will be that poetry reveals this essence precisely because it does not primarily designate entities. Although Herder’s idea of the mediating role of hearing suggests that he appreciates the issue involved in the second conception,
namely of how the same intelligibility applies to the different senses, Heidegger claims that Herder then puts the emphasis on the historical emergence of language, which leads to the first conception. This conception involves the objectifying model of explaining language within language, and so never gets to the more fundamental question of what a word is that cannot be answered in terms of its being what constitutes a characteristic. The reason for this is that a version of the same circle occurs here as we have encountered elsewhere. What is the characteristic that constitutes a word as what constitutes a characteristic? Part of the answer presumably lies in its iterability, but why does repetition generate significance at all? The same issue appears in music: notes are only notes when they are in some sense repetitions, but that still does not make clear what makes them into music, which has to be some wider horizon of intelligibility.

The specific direction Herder takes indeed does not, as Heidegger shows, answer the question of the relationship between language and reason, if reason is restricted to being understood as that which forms characteristics. Moreover, when Herder argues in relation to the human species’ place in nature that ‘humankind must either go under or rule over everything... take clear possession of everything or die! Be nothing or be monarch of creation through understanding! Destroy or create language for yourself!’ (Herder 1966: 88) it is easy to regard him as part of the ‘subjectification of being’ that is essential to metaphysics, for Heidegger.

However, Herder is anything but a consistent thinker, and his inconsistencies mean that he is not so easily made into what Heidegger wants him to be. Even if Herder does not succeed in offering a fully articulated alternative, his rejection of the argument for the divine origin of language does lead to a new kind of focus on language as human practice. This focus gives scope for exploring interrelations between differing forms of articulation, from pragmatic use of language to pick out objects, to expressive forms, which can either be music, or can be poetry ‘without content’, much in the sense Heidegger intends. Herder admittedly tells questionable stories about the loss of sensuous immediacy as languages develop and as music becomes its own form of articulation. However, the idea that forms of articulation can involve a loss which leads to other forms developing can be a plausible way of considering the issue of why music becomes philosophically and socially so important in Europe soon after Herder writes the Essay. Furthermore, is Heidegger himself not thinking in a similar direction to Herder’s
idea of language losing something in the move to modernity, when he talks of the ‘language of metaphysics’ as the ground of the objectification brought about by modern science and technology, and adverts to other kinds of language as offering a way of questioning the supposed ‘language of metaphysics’?

Why, though, does Heidegger repress the issue of music, and what effect does this have on his own project? In Heidegger’s work on Nietzsche of around the same period a possible reason for his neglect of the issue of music in relation to Herder’s text is apparent. Discussing Nietzsche’s view of Wagner, Heidegger claims that the fact that it is music in Wagner that takes on the status of the highest art, rather than the words of the drama, ‘already has its basis in the increasingly aesthetic attitude to art as a whole; it is the conception and evaluation of art from out of the naked state of feeling, and the increasing barbarisation of the state of feeling itself into the naked seething and surging of feeling which has been left to itself’ (Heidegger 1961: 105).

In Wagner the ‘dominance of art as music is . . . the dominance of the pure state of feeling’ (ibid.: 102–3). Heidegger extends his concern to develop an approach that does not rely on the ‘unfolding of man as subjectum’ to the idea that any ‘subjective’ state is part of the domination of being, which therefore goes from technology to music. What makes this so puzzling is that we have also seen that feeling can have cognitive, world-disclosing functions, of the sort which Heidegger attributes to works of art. If emotions are construed as kinds of judgement and as bound up with the symbolic resources of a culture, music is essential to the ways in which individuals articulate their being in the world. Furthermore, Heidegger’s insistence on listening – being open to being, rather than determining it – is part of what comes to be so important in the new role of music in modernity. Music’s lack of semantic determinacy, which Hegel construes as its essential limitation, can in these terms be regarded as a challenge to the dominant philosophical concern with explanation. Explanation can involve a failure to ‘listen’ to what escapes the frameworks upon which explanations rely.

Heidegger’s philosophical case depends on the idea that the ground of intelligibility is what is addressed by exploring the meaning of being. The question is how we are able to understand what Heidegger seeks to show by his adverts to poetry and to the idea that only the essential philosophers speak the ‘words of being’, in the dual sense of words which are about being and of words which come from being itself. We
cannot understand these kinds of utterance in the way that we under-
stand a philosophical or other explanation, so there has to be some
kind of appeal to Schnädelbach’s idea of what has to ‘show itself and
be experienced’. However, the problem with poetry is that it cannot
escape the fact that it is made up of the words that also get used for the
discourse of instrumental reason. This is one reason why Heidegger’s
notion of the ‘language of metaphysics’ is so problematic: given that he
cannot, despite his employment of neologisms, completely stop using
German himself, it can never be clear whether he really avoids this lan-
guage – or, indeed, whether there is such a language. Apart from the
relatively limited emergence of neologisms in a language, it can only
be the re-ordering of words in new configurations that brings about a
substantial renewal of that language. Such re-ordering, as we shall see
Schleiermacher and Wittgenstein contending, arguably brings poetry
close to the irreducibility of the order of the elements of a particular
piece or performance to any other in music. Exactly what this link of
music and poetry means will be explored in the following chapters:
it does not, for example, mean just the beauty of sound patterns in
‘euphonic’ verse, and has more to do with rhythm and the juxtapositions
of elements.

Music would even seem to have an advantage in relation to Heideg-
erg’s concentration on articulation which is not tied to instrumental-
ity, because it can evoke more than can be grasped in terms of the
feelings or intentions of composer, performer, or listener. ‘Musical
ideas’ can have a rightness which is analogous to certain kinds of verbal
truth/rightness. The normative (and technical) demands involved in
the practice of music can therefore hardly be said to have to do with
‘the pure state of feeling’. It is unclear just what this idea means any-
way, given the connection of feeling to being in a world constituted in
terms of symbols generated in part, as Herder argues, by our embodied
contact with reality. It is not, to counter an obvious objection here, that
Heidegger thinks that the forms of world-disclosure which he regards
as allowing understanding of being in a non-objectifying manner must
be inherently verbal. In the Origin of the Work of Art he considers archi-
tecture and painting, as well as literature, as world-constituting forms.
In that text he emphasises how art constitutes the intelligibility of a
domain of existence in a manner which philosophy as metaphysics,
cannot. There seems to be no reason why the same should not apply
to music, especially in the case of figures like Beethoven and Wagner,
who play a world-constituting role in nineteenth-century culture, but
in that essay too music plays no significant role, despite the fact that it is closer to language than other forms of art. In a thinker as thorough as Heidegger could be, this is pretty baffling.

It is important to remember here that, at the time at which Herder is writing his texts, the great period of German music which leads from Haydn to Schoenberg is getting underway. Haydn begins to compose ‘wordless’ Symphonies and String Quartets which become one of the major reasons why the perception of music changes so much by the end of the century. Rüdiger Safranski tells the story of Heidegger in 1944 hearing Schubert’s last piano sonata in B-flat and claiming: ‘We cannot do that in philosophy’ (Safranski 1998: 371). Assuming the story is reliable – there are other indications that Heidegger actually thought music very significant – he would seem to be locating music as part of metaphysics. The reasons for his repression of music seem, then, to have to do with his suspicion of the ‘subjective’ nature of emotions. My argument in the coming chapters will therefore seek to integrate emotions into the defensible aspects of Heidegger’s conception. A measure of the historical changes to be considered in the coming chapters is the fact that Herder would not think music like Schubert’s sonata has such importance. For him the autonomous ‘art of notes’ derives from a mediated version of expression whose power is actually most present in its more immediate forms.

What emerges here are precisely the kinds of phenomena intended by my idea of music’s resistance to philosophy. Herder’s empiricist philosophical assumptions mean that he is unable to grasp the significance of the autonomous music which partly emerges because of the influence on Romanticism of other aspects of his own thought. Heidegger, while seeming open to the ways in which music’s intelligibility is part of what he is seeking, fails to come to terms with the world-disclosive dimension of emotion in music. Now consider the following analogous example of the relationship between philosophical reflection and music. Dahlhaus talks of the ‘paradox that around 1800 there was neither a classical music aesthetic to correspond to the classical music of Haydn and Mozart, nor a romantic music to correspond to the romantic music-aesthetic of Wackenroder and Tieck. Reflection and compositional practice were widely divergent’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 86). He shows that, as Tieck founds the aesthetics of ‘absolute music’ by separating music from ‘the rhetorical and the characteristic’, Beethoven, the composer who was to produce the real music which gave decisive support to the idea of absolute music, thought of his works
precisely in terms of their rhetorical impact and as involving the ‘characteristic’ (ibid.: 99). The relationship between music and philosophical reflection can here be seen as going both ways, such that music already articulates what conceptual thought as yet fails to articulate, and vice versa. This is not, though, as Dahlhaus tends to imply, just an issue of praxis preceding theory in the one case, and the converse in the other.

The issue goes deeper because the thought and the music of the early-modern period relate in more complex ways. If the intelligibility of language and of music are inextricably related to each other, propositionally articulated accounts of music may themselves, as some Romantic texts do, involve ‘musical’ elements. Furthermore, music need not be understood just in terms of what is described by theories of music, because it can itself help to constitute new kinds of thinking. The emergence of the notion of a ‘musical idea’ from Kant’s notion of the ‘esthetic idea’ in Romantic thought (see Neubauer 1986) indicates how the notion of thought as inherently propositional and representational fails to come to terms with some of the kinds of intelligibility involved in the practices of music. What does an improvising musician do, for example, but have ideas which can be heard and felt as right or wrong, good or bad, etc., which can be normatively evaluated in the way that much verbal language is? There is no reason to see these ideas as somehow actually verbal, even though there may be verbal elements in the ways they come about and though they may be subsequently characterised in verbal terms.

Lest this all seem rather too eccentric for many philosophers, what is at issue are really just the ways in which non-representational conceptions of language, which do not assume that there are radical breaks between differing forms of articulation and understanding, can reveal the interplay between differing symbolic and expressive resources in ways that representational accounts cannot. Obviously ‘music’ as an art-form depends, as Herder argues, on the reflective capacity which needs language to be able to single out certain practices as belonging together as ‘music’. At the same time, it is not so easy, as Herder also suggests, to give an account of what separates that which eventually becomes language and that which eventually becomes music if one sees all forms of human expression and articulation as in some way

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9 The ‘characteristic’ has to do with the expression of individuality in the form of unorthodox works, rather than ‘typical’ works.
constituting – rather than just representing – what they render intelligible. Forms of articulation which are not understood as linguistic if language is conceived of solely in representational terms can come to be considered as linguistic if they disclose otherwise inaccessible aspects of the world. It is this idea which plays a role in the new conceptions of music and language in Romanticism.
What Kant said about music, and what he could have said

In Kant’s transcendental philosophy the realm of objectivity is constituted by necessary forms of thought which organise data received from the world into judgements. In some still disputed sense this means that the thinking subject is the source of the world’s intelligibility. J. G. Hamann’s objection to Kant was that all forms of thought depend on natural languages acquired from the external world. His objection shifts the issue of the world’s intelligibility towards the kind of questions we considered in the last chapter, not least towards the question of the origin of language. Language, rather than the mind, is seen as the constitutive factor in ‘world-making’, but it is not clear how it is that language itself comes to exist in the first place, unless, as Hamann does, one argues for a divine origin. The problem of the origin of language is, as we have seen, one of the sources of music being regarded as the transition between the non-semantic and the semantic. How, then, does music relate both to Kant’s idea of necessary forms of thought and to the linguistic critique of Kant? Responses to this question offer ways of understanding the particular role of music in German Romantic philosophy, as well as having resonances for contemporary philosophy.

The major factor here is the ‘in-between’ nature of both language and music that was touched on by Herder in his remarks on hearing as the mediator between feeling and vision. Because of its connection to feeling, music relates to the inner nature of the subject; it also, though, exists as a socially produced object with perceptible, physical properties. In turn, the physical object, qua intentional object possessing meaning, affects the inner nature of the subject. The two sides must be connected if any sense is to be made of music at all. This connection also affects the
broader question of how the ‘external’ phenomenon of verbal language can articulate both the subject’s apprehension of an objective world and its inner feelings. One advantage of such a dialectical relationship between the internal and the external is that it obviates the need to give an essentialist account of what music is, because music cannot be music at all outside of changing contexts which modify what it is. The same can be said of language.

Kant was regarded by many as having failed to complete his philosophical project because he gave no account of how and why objectivity-generating forms of thought developed in the first place. Herder tried, as we saw, to address the transition to forms of articulation which are rooted in our existence as part of nature, but which cannot be explained in purely naturalistic terms. Rorty’s argument is that this transition can be circumvented by dropping representationalism, for which language is supposed to be essentially different from the forms of coping with reality which preceded it. For Rorty discursive thought is one way of using articulations to achieve certain kinds of goals, and other kinds of articulation can be used to achieve other goals. The capacity to use metalanguage, which he sees as defining the specifically linguistic, is highly significant in this, but it need not be regarded as the foundation of everything else. The important thing is rather how we evaluate these goals and means of articulation in relation to human flourishing. This view offers ways of thinking about music as a social practice relating to the idea of metaphysics.

Music relates to discursive thought via its proximity to verbal language, but is not usable for many of the tasks for which we use verbal language. The borderline between music and natural sounds or human language is an issue in both modern and pre-modern societies, but it is with modernity that this borderline really becomes crucial. If we reject transhistorical answers to the question of what belongs to music and what does not, we are still left with the question as to why certain forms of production of organised sound, which cannot be wholly assimilated either to natural sound or to verbal language, become so important in all human cultures. This question is particularly vital in relation to Romanticism, because these forms are regarded by some Romantic thinkers as either more significant than philosophy, or even as being themselves a kind of philosophy. However hyperbolic such ideas may be, they point to one important way in which music gives rise to questions about the limits of philosophy.
Underlying these issues is the question of what it is to hear something as music. The blackbird that used to sing a minor key jazz riff outside our house was not making music, but the sounds it made could be heard as music. At this level an inferential approach to what the sound could be heard as – it was specifically pitched, rather than consisting of arbitrary frequencies, melodic, rather than unconnected pitches, syncopated, etc. – is sufficient to justify the judgement that it was musical. The appeal of the blackbird’s phrase arose because it established a continuity between natural and cultural realms, of the kind I am referring to as belonging to metaphysics. Biological explanations of such phenomena account for the melodic inventiveness and the capacity for imitation of blackbirds in terms of evolutionary advantage. However, they do not exhaust the meaning of these phenomena because they cannot account for how a world of significances can be built up by linking natural phenomena to human practices and experiences. This linkage is not simply a subjective projection onto a meaningless objective substrate, because the world in which the phenomenon occurred is, as we shall see, itself already in some sense musically constituted. The kind of meaning involved in metaphysics relates to the fact that we can re-contextualise an element of the world in order to generate new significance. This ability depends upon being able to establish an identity between a phenomenon that is felt to be meaningful and its transformed manifestation. Interpretation of this ability is vital to the issue of music and philosophy.

The origin of something is, of course, not an explanation of what that thing has become. However, it is worth considering the relationships between music, language, and philosophy in terms of the non-conceptual origins of the capacity for identification which makes both conceptual thinking and music possible. Concepts can initially be described in terms of Rorty’s – reductive – idea of them as the ‘regular use of a mark or noise’. Such use has to be appropriate to the purpose in question, which again suggests a link between conceptual and other kinds of articulation. Even at this minimal level the issue arises of how such regularity of use moves from the instinctual to the reflective level that Rorty characterises in terms of the use of metalanguage. How does the awareness of regularity based on

1 It may also be that the bird is doing more than just protecting its territory and is singing for the pleasure of singing: the two are not mutually exclusive.
identification, which is a necessary part of what generates significance, relate to music?

The central factor here is rhythm. John Dewey says in *Art as Experience* that in the course of human development ‘Man no longer conformed his activities of necessity to the rhythmic changes of nature’s cycles, but used those which necessity forced upon him to celebrate his relations to nature as if she had conferred upon him the freedom of her realm’ (Dewey 1980: 148). The genesis of freedom out of the awareness of necessity is the key idea here. One of the first people to see why was Schelling, who connects rhythm directly to philosophy in his 1802–3 *Philosophy of Art*. In Schelling’s terms rhythm need not be only acoustically manifested, and can be part of any kind of meaningful articulation. Music’s essence is rhythm, the ‘imprinting of unity into multiplicity’ (Schelling 1856–61: 1/5, 492), so even harmony can be conceived of as ‘rhythmically’ based. The idea of the unification of a multiplicity of elements is familiar in the aesthetics of classicism from the end of the seventeenth century onwards (see, e.g., Baeumler 1967), but Schelling points in a different direction. He talks of rhythm as ‘the transformation of a succession which is in itself meaningless into a significant one’ (ibid.: 493), and it is the idea of the initially meaningless nature of the succession of phenomena that is decisive. Why does the linking of different phenomena give rise to significance at all? The key factors here are (1) the differentiated moments, and (2) that in relation to which they are both different and unified, which must itself remain the same between the different moments. This combination of identity and difference involves both the idea that rhythm is itself meaningful, because of the ways in which it can be related to other aspects of the world, and the capacity to be aware of identity in multiplicity, that is, to apprehend rhythm as rhythm and be able consciously to produce and modify it. The latter, reflective awareness takes rhythm beyond what is present in phenomena like repeated animal cries that may be perceived as rhythmic, but which need involve no more than mere instinctual repetition. In this sense awareness of rhythm is proto-conceptual – and this will mean that it relates to what Kant calls schematism. The key question will be whether schematism is required for rhythm, or whether rhythm is required for schematism, or whether this is a false alternative.

Questions concerning the relationship between identity and difference which appear in Schelling’s description of rhythm are fundamental to Kant’s account of cognition, and thence to a whole
series of issues that arise from that account in subsequent philosophy. The connection to Kant is crucial because at the time when the idea of a ‘ready-made’ world which is represented in a pre-existing ‘logos’ is dissolving, a concern with attempting to account for the world’s intelligibility develops in relation to a re-thinking of the nature of music. This shift occurs, moreover, at much the same time as music moves away from more static polyphonic forms, which can be understood in terms of the idea of the universe as a logos-imbued, stable totality, towards the harmonically and rhythmically more dynamic and expressive forms of the great classical music from Haydn to Mahler and beyond. The development of both music and philosophy at this time can be interpreted via the idea that if verbal language loses the privilege accorded to it by the divine origin, or by the assumptions of Enlightenment rationalism, it can no longer just be assumed to have a grounding role in the world’s intelligibility. Language becomes open to the new awareness of its contingency that is apparent in Herder’s account of it as generated by the contacts of a culture with its environment, and this awareness also relates to the suspicion that feelings are not reducible to what can be articulated in verbal language.

Some thinkers in German Idealism and Romanticism now become prepared to accept, in a manner not previously contemplated, that the alternative to the development of the intelligibility expressed in natural languages is a chaotic, undifferentiated state. Already by the 1790s this state becomes associated with the ‘Dionysian’ and with music. Music both communicates the nature of that state, and, by communicating it, brings it into the domain of ordered thinking. Language can then be seen as either a necessary means for preventing dissolution into inarticulacy or as an arbitrary projection of forms of identity onto something which has no inherent form at all. Music is also thought of as relating to these alternatives. These ideas might seem far from what concerns Kant, but I want to consider now how what Kant says about music in

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2 Bach is hard to fit into this framework. His failure to do so could, though, be seen as a justification of my reversing the priorities between philosophy and music, because his music transcends the philosophical story one can tell about musical development in his era.

3 Even if the capacity for language were genetically hard-wired into us, this would not explain how it is that language developed in the first place, or explain all the expressive and other dimensions of language which depend on the particular histories of cultures and individuals.
the *Critique of Judgement* relates to some of what he says about cognition in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (on this see also Bowie 2003a: ch. 1). The lack of a transition between these two issues in Kant opens up the space for some interesting ideas about music and the limits of philosophy.

Kant does not actually say a great deal about music, not least because he did not think it was very important, but his remarks have been influential, notably in debates about musical formalism. Moreover, ‘the musical’ plays a larger role in Kant’s conception than the explicit appearance of the topic of music would suggest. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant looks at music when assessing the aesthetic value of the different arts. His discussion of all the arts involves vocabulary which is either derived from music, such as ‘harmony’, or is used in relation to music, such as ‘play’. The basis of an art’s aesthetic value lies in its stimulation of the harmonious play of the faculties of the mind in a manner which, in contrast to the relationship of the faculties in cognition, does not rely on binding rules. This play is seen as extending the cognitive faculty while not constraining it by making it function in terms of identifying concepts. The genesis of freedom out of necessity which Dewey saw in rhythm can suggest the direction of the argument.

The decisive factor in art is the expression of ‘aesthetic ideas’, an aesthetic idea being ‘that representation of the imagination which gives much to think about, but without any determinate thought, i.e. concept being able to be adequate to it, which consequently no language can completely attain and make comprehensible’ (Kant 1968b: B 193, A 190). Aesthetic ideas, Dahlhaus maintains, ‘mediate from the mere play of feelings (‘Empfindungen’) to the play of the cognitive capacities’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 53). They connect the receptive and the spontaneous aspects of the subject by making aspects of the intelligible world, like moral concepts, available in a sensuous form, such as images that stand for moral attributes. Aesthetic ideas can consequently be thought of as a kind of metaphor which cannot be cashed out into a literal concept. Unlike an empirical concept applied in a true judgement, which is instantiated in the match between concept and object, the aesthetic idea is never present as such. It is instead what leads to the ongoing generation of new thoughts concerning something unrepresentable. Aesthetic ideas therefore ‘strive towards something beyond the boundary of experience’ (Kant 1968b: B 194, A 191). The idea of the intelligible realm points to what is beyond the cognitive rules
applied to particular aspects of nature by the understanding. This idea leads to a sense of how the universe forms a coherently constituted totality that ultimately includes the moral law, even though we cannot know this to be the case. The aesthetic idea is, then, seen as enlivening our ability to think, as pointing to an organic coherence in things which is not cognitively accessible, as relating to the *sensus communis* which is both the condition of possibility of consensual judgements of taste and of a moral order based on shared principles, and as offering an image of a coherent whole of the kind which philosophy cannot claim to describe without regressing into dogmatism (see Dahlhaus 1988: 54).

Kant famously asserts that music ‘is admittedly more enjoyment than culture’ because it ‘speaks purely through feelings (’*Empfindungen*’) without concepts’ (Kant 1968b: B 218, A 216). It therefore lacks the connection to the moral and intelligible realms which literature possesses by virtue of its use of words to enliven the conceptual capacity. Language conveys ‘determinate thoughts’ in a way that music does not. Kant follows the still dominant doctrine of the time, for which music represents affects. Musical notes relate to affects in the same way as ‘every expression in language has a tone which is appropriate to the sense of the expression’, such that ‘this tone more or less designates an affect of the speaker’ (ibid.: B 220, A 217). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, though, Kant thinks that music does convey aesthetic ideas. In music the ‘form of the composition of . . . feelings (harmony and melody) . . . serves by means of a proportioned attunement of the same . . . to express the aesthetic idea of a coherent whole of an unnameable multiplicity of thoughts’ (ibid.). This form has mathematics as its necessary, but not sufficient, condition – musical proportions are mathematically expressible, but their effects on feelings are not.

Music may give the most pleasure of all the arts, because it ‘just plays with feelings’ (ibid.: B 221, A 218), but it lacks cognitive content. As Dahlhaus points out, this supposed lack of content derives for Kant from his attachment to the doctrine of affects, but ‘other contents to which music should relate as “themes” in order to arouse aesthetic ideas and so to appear as unity are thinkable than affects’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 54). Because Kant regards music as just disappearing once it has appeared in time, he does not see how apprehending any musical ‘coherent whole’ depends precisely on the capacity to apprehend identity in difference which is the basis of his epistemology. This capacity is common to the many ways in which we make a world from connections
which ‘negate the negation’ which is unidirectional sequential time – that is, time where each moment ‘destroys’ what precedes it – by recalling past events and anticipating future events. Only by hearing the repetition of a beat as part of a rhythmic whole of some kind, which requires this kind of negation of sequential time, can music be heard as music at all. Diminishing music’s importance because of its temporal nature is characteristic of many philosophical positions. It is the early German Romantics who first begin to see the relationship between philosophy and temporality in new ways, which are influenced by music and which in turn influence music (see Hoecker 2002). One consequence of the Romantics’ new evaluation of temporality via music will be that it puts in question an exclusive concern with timeless philosophical truths.

Elsewhere in his work Kant offers ways of thinking about these issues that illuminate the issue of music, but does not himself make the connection to music. In the first Critique the capacity of the understanding to produce cognitions depends on its negating, by schematism, the time that separates two intuitions. More obviously, elsewhere in the third Critique, Kant explicitly uses vocabulary derived from music to explain how it is that different individuals can communicate cognitions to each other. He talks of a ‘common sense’, of the kind ‘required for the universal communicability of a feeling’, as ‘the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition’ (Kant 1968b: B 66). This communicability relies on the ‘tuning/attunement’ (‘Stimmung’) of the cognitive powers, which is differently ‘proportioned’, depending on the object in question, and which ‘can only be determined by feeling (not by concepts)’ (ibid.). The echoes here of his remarks on the musical idea of a coherent whole are unmistakable, but his strictures on music mean that the two passages do not result in an account of the philosophical status of the musical. The radical – Romantic – version of what I want to consider here will be that Kant’s remarks in this and some other locations can be construed as making the ‘musical’ into the ground of cognition. The most obvious historical example of the kind of attunement of feeling that would make sense of Kant’s remarks is that occasioned by the organisation of pitched sounds in a musical system. Such sounds are non-conceptual, but they rely for their intelligibility on

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4 One of the few people to explore the links of Kant to music in this respect is Gilles Deleuze in lectures on Kant to be found at www.webdeleuze.com. My thanks to Christine Battersby for pointing this out to me.
the same kind of operations as those involved in conceptual thought, as well as relying on a shared feeling in different subjects. How, then, is this link between the musical and the cognitive to be established?

In a phrase which we shall consider in more detail in chapter 9, Adorno characterises music as ‘the logic of judgementless synthesis’ (Adorno 1993: 32). Music is judgementless because its synthesis of elements does not require ‘predication, subordination, subsumption’ (ibid.) in the way that cognitive judgements do. Patterns of identity and difference constitute music’s ‘logic’, but these do not result in classifying assertions. The question is how, in the light of the reversal we have adopted from Schlegel, this intelligibility is talked about in philosophy. One of Kant’s greatest difficulties in his account of the understanding’s generation of classifying assertions lies in explaining how pure concepts of the understanding can be applied to empirical intuitions, given that they are of a different order from each other. How do the two harmonise so that we can think it appropriate to apply structuring notions deriving from the identifying activity of thought to the contingent effects of nature on our perceptual apparatus? His much criticised answer is that the ‘schema’ bridges the two sources of cognition. There would seem therefore to be a connection between the schema and the aesthetic idea: both connect the sensuous and the intelligible, and both involve non-conceptual intelligibility.

David Bell maintains with regard to schematism’s role in Kant’s conception of judgement ‘that our thought conform to the rules, principles, concepts and criteria constitutive of objectivity, but that it also be grounded in a spontaneous, blind subjective awareness of intrinsic but inarticulable meaning – these are not conflicting requirements’ (Bell 1987: 241). The interesting question, as Heidegger realises, is how objectivity, the realm of metaphysics, relates to non-conceptual meaning, which is part of metaphysics2: is it dependent on it? If it is, the scientistic vision of a law-bound explanation of cognition dissolves, because it cannot account for how it is that what we know is intelligible in the first place. Schematism is intended by Kant to account for the fact that we do not encounter an empiricist world of unconceptualised sense-data that are then built into coherent ideas, but rather encounter a world which is pre-conceptually intelligible. Charles Taylor describes what is at issue here as follows: ‘We are able to form conceptual beliefs guided by our surroundings, because we live in a pre-conceptual engagement with these that involves understanding’ (Smith 2002: 114). This ability indicates that ‘There is
something more in nature between full spontaneity and mere mecha-

nism’ (ibid.: 111). It should not be difficult, on the basis of the non-

conceptualised meaningfulness of the world we inhabit, to connect the
cognitive aspect of judgement to the ways in which music is understood
as possessing meaning because it affects both one’s relationship to life
and the conduct and understanding of life. Rhythm need not involve
full spontaneous conceptual awareness, relates to natural processes,
and yet is not merely mechanical. How, then, does rhythm relate to
cognition?

Kant’s account of the schemata for the pure concepts of the under-
standing might seem to be able to be connected to music only with great
difficulty, given that the realm of application of the schemata is physics.
However, some of the schemata are actually also necessary – but not
sufficient – to be able to hear music as music. If we then consider the
question of how it is that there are schemata at all, we will be led into
some of the most interesting Romantic ideas about music and philoso-
phy. The important question here is one which Kant thought he did not
need to answer because it belonged to psychology, rather than to epis-
temology, namely how do the forms of thought of the transcendental
subject come into existence?

Kant’s account of the schemata includes the following
characterisations: the schema of cause ‘consists in the succession
of the manifold to the extent to which it is subordinated to a rule’, of
reciprocity is ‘the simultaneity of the determinations of one substance
with those of the other according to a general rule’, of reality is
‘existence of a thing at a certain time’, of necessity is ‘the existence
of an object at all times’ (Kant 1968a: B 184, A 145). Schemata
are ‘therefore nothing but determinations of time a priori according
to rules’ (ibid.). All these descriptions can be related to music and
rhythm. Although ‘the succession of the manifold etc.’ refers to the
fact that everything real (which for Kant is everything that is given in
perception) is followed of necessity by something else, the same idea
can apply to the linking of beats that form patterns whose rules we
can establish. Reciprocity is meant to refer to Newton’s laws, but at a
more metaphorical level, its schema could be applied to harmony, in
which one pitch interacts with related simultaneous pitches according
to rules. The schemata of reality and necessity both involve ways in
which objects are intelligible in relation to time, and many musical
phenomena depend on differentiations between things that pertain
at one time and those that pertain at all times. Most obviously, the
description ‘determinations of time’ a priori according to rules’ could itself be a description of rhythm. Rhythm is not a natural phenomenon that we apprehend empirically, because even the linking of moments of a rhythmic pattern in nature depends upon the a priori capacity for synthesis. Do we, then, need the category of unity to apprehend rhythm, which raises the problem of just how the transcendental subject relates to the empirical subject, or is the concrete experience of rhythm that is made possible by schematism actually part of what enables such abstract forms as the category of unity to develop at all? It can be argued that we live in a world which is rhythmically structured and that the ways in which we then use rhythm as part of thinking derive from the immediate experience of rhythm as part of what it is to be in a world. The contemporary pragmatist idea that it is impossible to establish a clear demarcation between scheme and content in cognition suggests that we have to see these factors as always already connected to each other as part of being in a world. If this is the case, the philosophical version of the issue proposed by Kant can be questioned in terms of the role of the musical in world-making.

The questions just suggested are clearly quite metaphorical if taken within the context of the first Critique. However, if one asks why these pre-conceptual forms of apprehension develop at all, the issue starts to look like more than just a rather speculative analogy. What one is looking at are Taylor’s forms of ‘preconceptual engagement’ with the world. Dewey maintains that ‘What is not so generally perceived is that every uniformity and regularity of change in nature is a rhythm. The terms “natural law” and “natural rhythm” are synonymous’ (Dewey 1980: 149). In Kant’s transcendental account we begin with what is actual – knowledge in the sciences, and look for what makes it possible – necessary forms of thought. This takes place in terms of operations of the mind. The Idealist and Romantic thinkers who respond to Kant seek, in the manner suggested by Taylor, to locate the mind in a world from which is not topically separate by concentrating on the ways in which we actively engage with the world. Why should the mind involve what Kant tries to theorise in terms of the schema? As we saw, the schema shares with the aesthetic idea the role of connecting the sensuous and the intelligible, and both involve pre-conceptual ways in which the world coheres.

Aesthetic ideas depend on the power of judgement, which links the imagination and the understanding, and schematism is required for
judgements to generate cognitions. Judgements of taste, in contrast, depend on a ‘feeling which judges the object according to the purposefulness of the idea (whereby an object is given) for the encouragement of the cognitive capacity in its free play’ (Kant 1968b: B 146, A 144). Aesthetic judgement is grounded in the difference between the object of a judgement generating a pleasant feeling and it generating an unpleasant one, and is therefore grounded in the subject’s nature as a feeling being. This suggests a link between feeling and cognition, based on the pleasure of the harmonisation of differing aspects of the inner and outer world common both to the experience of beauty and to cognition. Even though, Kant claims, we no longer feel any ‘noticeable pleasure’ in the forms of order that we come to know in nature, ‘in its time there must have been some, and only because the most common experience would not be possible without it did it gradually mix with simple cognition and was no longer particularly noticed any more’ (ibid.: B 40, A 38). Kant here wants to combine metaphysics, and metaphysics2 in order to restore the kind of position we saw in the rationalist representationalist view in the last chapter, where there was no separation between the two. However, he steps back from making the connection substantial because that would extend the legislation of the subject beyond what he thinks can be justified. The passage just cited is one of the few where Kant addresses the idea that cognition has a history, and that this history is linked to ‘feeling’. If it is accepted, then, that pre-conceptual feeling is a fundamental factor in the genesis of human forms of articulation, there are reasons for suggesting that music, in a sense linked to Schelling’s remarks on rhythm cited above, is inseparable from other forms of intelligibility. It is in German Idealist and Romantic philosophy that the ramifications of this idea are developed.

Feeling, music, and the origin of philosophy

Until recently early Romantic philosophy was generally assumed to be part of the reaction to Kant inaugurated by Fichte’s version of idealism.5 One way of understanding why there is in fact a significant division between the Romantics and Fichte has been suggested by Manfred Frank (Frank 1997, 2002; see also Bowie 1997, 2003a), precisely in

5 Walter Benjamin already rejected this view in 1919 (see Bowie 1997: ch. 8). For the definitive refutation of the view, see Frank 1997.
relation to the notion of ‘feeling’. The key issue here is the understanding of the spontaneity which Kant regards as essential both to judgement and to moral self-determination. In order to get beyond Kant’s split between the thing in itself and the subject’s knowledge of the world of appearances, the Fichte of the early versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* argues that the absolute, as what encompasses both the subjective and the objective, must be essentially subjective, so that spontaneity is the essence of what he terms an ‘absolute I’. He makes this claim because the fact that there is an *objective* world requires something prior to the objective world if the world is to be manifest as objective at all, rather than remaining just inert, wholly unarticulated being, i.e. being ‘*en soi*’ in the most radical sense. The world of nature which we experience as the objective world is therefore the result of the infinite (and therefore indeterminate) expanding activity of the I ‘inhibiting’ *itself*, and this self-inhibition is what, for Fichte, allows one to avoid the idea of the thing in itself, as something fundamentally other to the I. The world is not an inert, completed entity because the absolute I cannot be reduced to the finite things as which it objectifies itself at any particular time. It is therefore ‘infinite’, in the sense that it is always driven beyond any finite determination. In this conception feeling, as Fichte maintains, ‘is always something negative, feeling of a limitation’ (Frank 2002: 35), which means, Frank argues, that it is ‘immediately clear that no feeling could exist of an absolute activity’ (ibid.). Feeling, as we saw in Nussbaum, necessarily involves passivity, a dependence on something not in the control of the will, which means it must in some sense be relative to what it depends on.

Frank contrasts Fichte’s view of feeling with that of Novalis in his *Fichte-Studies* (1795–6): ‘In contrast to Fichte Novalis takes the first and original apprehension of the self not as the self-transparency of an action, but as a not-wishing and not-doing, precisely as a feeling’ (ibid.: 36). The experience of the I is therefore from the beginning the feeling of itself as something finite, limited by an other, not as something transparent to itself via its ‘infinite activity’. For Fichte, being is ‘*seeing that does not penetrate itself*’ (ibid.: 37), and feeling is transcended by philosophical insight into its limited status relative to the absolute activity of the I. For Novalis, in contrast, there is a crucial link between

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6 Whether this is how Fichte is to be interpreted is still disputed, but he was understood in this way by his contemporaries. His notion of the ‘check’ (‘*Anstoss*’), which drives the I’s activity back into itself, is thought of as within the absolute I, not as an external thing in itself.
feeling and the convictions (1) that, because being always precedes our particular form of existence, it cannot be reduced to what we know of it, and (2) that the being of the I is not wholly transparent to the I itself. These convictions are vital to the revaluation of music in Romantic philosophy. Given the limits of philosophy’s ability to grasp the fundamental nature of our being, the feeling which is our most fundamental way of being demands other forms of expression.

Feeling is linked to the realisation that our being is finite, and not wholly autonomous. It consequently plays a key role in the constitution of time, which is, of course, essential to the experience of music. The experience of time, in which the present is suspended between the loss of what is past and the absence of what is to come, involves a feeling of lack, which can be articulated in many forms. However, philosophical thinking traditionally relies on the move from finite apprehensions of being to the attempt to comprehend finitude in an overall account of the nature of things. The feeling of lack depends, after all, on the link between past, present, and future, and this involves the idea of the totality of time. But how does this move beyond finitude emerge in the first place? The tension between feeling as limitation and the sense that thought transcends limitation by its awareness of being limited gives rise to some of the most important Romantic ideas. As Novalis puts it: ‘We feel ourselves as a part and precisely for that reason are the whole’ (Novalis 1978: 44). Friedrich Schlegel suggests that ‘while we perhaps often feel ourselves completely limited and finite, at the same time we are repeatedly convinced of our infinite egoity (‘Ichheit’)’ (Schlegel 1964a: 334). This conviction results from our awareness both of the infinite nature of the universe and of thinking’s capacity to transcend the particular by locating it in a notional, but never finally articulable, totality, such as that of time. A ‘thought or concept’ cannot, though, Schlegel insists, be absolute ‘as these are too limited, can never be the highest, and always have feelings as their basis’ (ibid.: 391). Feeling involves both limitation and its opposite, because the awareness of limitation as limitation cannot itself just be derived from limitation, even though it requires limitation to emerge.

These ideas are closely connected to the Romantic understanding of music. In a note of 1827 Schlegel says: ‘Music is most of all longing’ (Schlegel 1969: 551). Rather than having a vague, merely affective status, longing plays a central epistemological and ontological role in Romantic philosophy. It has to do with the idea that the motivation
of philosophical thinking is the desire to attain something which can never be present, but which yet demands to be attained. This desire is suggested by the structure of feeling’s combination of limitation and its opposite. If we now look at the relationship between longing, music, and rhythm in the context of some aspects of early Romantic philosophy the connections to the issues raised so far in this chapter will become apparent.

The best place to begin to approach these issues is, perhaps rather surprisingly, via Schlegel’s writing on Greek and Roman literature from the second half of the 1790s. The underlying issue is the tension we encountered above, between the feeling of finitude and the sense of the infinite, which Schlegel explores in a variety of forms. His core assumption is that philosophy should not be concerned with what is fixed and completed, but rather with the fact that the world continually changes and develops. Fichte’s conception of the I appeals to him precisely because it makes activity, rather than objectivity, the key to the philosophical picture of the world. At the same time, he is suspicious of there being any single foundation for philosophy because it is likely to restrict the possibilities of articulating the world in new ways. Furthermore, he sees the need of thought to strive beyond finitude as developing from an initial state of limitation, of the kind designated by feeling.

The following account of the nature of Hellenic culture, which is in some respects close to the questionable ideas of Herder, underlines Schlegel’s insistence on diversity of articulation as a major aim of philosophy:

A truly human state does not consist of ideas or of endeavours alone, but of the mixture of both. It overflows completely through all available orifices, in all possible directions. It expresses itself in intentional and natural signs, in speech, voice and gesture simultaneously. In the natural formation of the arts, before the understanding mistakes its rights and confuses the borders of nature by violent interference, destroying its beautiful organisation, poetry, music and mime (which is also rhythmic) are always inseparable sisters.

(Schlegel 1988: 1, 109–10)

When Schlegel explores the role of rhythm in the genesis of cultural forms the links to what we have considered so far become evident, and the argument becomes less based on the questionable ideas of his predecessors. In a review in Die Horen of a text on poetic metre by his brother,
August Wilhelm, he comments on the claim that ‘what one honoured with the name song and dance before the discovery of an ordering measure of time was not essentially different from the leaps of joy and cries of animals’ (ibid.: 142). The crucial difference of the human from the animal is that ‘no animal limits the freedom of its passionate expressions by rhythm’. In this sense ‘freedom’ is merely indeterminate, uninhibited activity which presses for expression, rather than being the positive grounding metaphysical principle as which Fichte regards it. Without rhythm ‘man would have eternally have had to remain in the wild state’; rhythmic expression ‘soothes the feeling’ which gives rise to the wild state (ibid.). August Wilhelm refers in this context to the myth of Orpheus, who tames wild nature with music. In another text, in which he considers the role of Greek Orphic cults in the genesis of philosophy, Friedrich develops the underlying idea in a remarkable and influential direction. 

Schlegel sees philosophy as beginning with the development of thought’s awareness of its capacity to transcend particularity. However, he does not regard this in the kind of heroic terms encountered in Fichte. Freedom as expanding activity can be just as much a threat and a potential torment as it is the basis of new possibilities. Schlegel surmises that the people of the Orphic period’s first ‘inkling of infinity . . . fills the suddenly awoken mind not with joyous astonishment, but with wild horror. Via a necessary illusion the mind transfers the product of its freedom onto an alien power whose impulse [‘Anstoss’ – which is the word Fichte employs for the ‘check’ which drives back the infinite power of the absolute I into itself] awoke it’ (Schlegel 1988: 2, 5). The wild and often violent nature of the orgiastic religion associated with this awakening of what will lead to philosophy is a result of the fact that ‘the highest passion likes to injure itself in order . . . to relieve itself of excess power’ (ibid.). Schlegel adopts from Fichte the model of thought as involving a freedom which can expand towards infinity, which has to become limited for determinate thought to result at all. Fichte sees this in terms of the absolute I; Schlegel, in contrast, offers an historical account of the struggle this might involve for finite human individuals whose essential being is based on feeling. The experience of the expansive

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7 I shall not deal with the distinction between rhythm and metre here, as the latter can be considered to be an elaboration of the former, deriving from the initial identity required for a rhythm to be a pattern at all.
8 Both August Wilhelm and Friedrich draw on classical Greek writings about rhythm, but Friedrich takes them in new directions because of his awareness of Kant.
power of freedom is therefore as much a problem as it is the ground of new possibilities.

Schlegel sees the initial state of human awareness as involving mere unarticulated feelings, of the kind which also occur in animals. Because of the particular nature of the human experience of feeling as limitation described above, it expands into a sense of infinity which takes the form of ecstatic states that have to be controlled by developing cultural forms. Schlegel’s approach leads to an account of the origins of philosophy which is in some respects historically and anthropologically more plausible than an account which talks about the emergence of philosophical abstraction in Thales’ ontology of water. He suggests, in a manner which will be echoed by Nietzsche, that those who produced the culture of this period, from dance, to poetry and philosophy, were full of the living idea of an incomprehensible infinity. If this idea is the beginning and end of all philosophy; and if the first inkling of it expresses itself in Bacchic dances and songs, in inspirational customs and festivals, in allegorical images and poems; then orgies and mysteries were the first beginnings of Hellenic philosophy; and it was not a happy idea to begin philosophy’s history with Thales, and to make it suddenly appear as if out of nothing.

The development of a culture which can channel the sense of the infinite into meaningful forms therefore involves an overcoming of the initial horror generated by the feeling of limitlessness inherent in the link between freedom and philosophical thinking.

The essential ingredient in this overcoming is, precisely, rhythm. Progress beyond the ‘helpless state’ in which people are just open to the endless, ecstatic generation of feelings by the unlimited nature of what underlies thought involves the ‘drive to hold fast a feeling (‘Empfindung’) for oneself and to repeat it’ (ibid. : 13). This drive already makes possible the beginning of the ‘poetic capacity of humankind’: ‘for only by sensuous limitation and sensuous distribution of the material of communication, by rhythm, which in the case of the wild man therefore does not belong to excess but to need, can feeling . . . be expanded into a lasting and more universal effectiveness’ (ibid.). He sums up the decisive point as follows: ‘rhythm in this childhood of

9 There is no explanation of why this sense of infinity develops at all, because that would place it in a causal nexus, when the point is precisely that it is not caused by something else.
the human race is the only means of fixing thoughts and dissemi-
nating them’ (ibid.: 16). Dewey suggests the scope of this idea when he maintains that ‘a common interest in rhythm is still the tie which holds science and art in kinship’ (Dewey 1980: 150). At one level the argument would seem to be about the genesis of thoughts in general, but the specific aspect which gives rise to philosophy is that rhythm involves both the ‘incomprehensible infinity’ which can merely result in an endless chaos of feelings, and that which is able to fix a world which has stable elements. It is the combination of expansive energy and forms of limitation which makes rhythm essential to what becomes philosophy, and to the more general change in the perception of the relationship between music and philosophy in Schlegel’s time.

What sort of claim is involved in this account of the origin of philosophy and Orphism in ancient Greece? Is it merely a piece of speculative anthropology? In some senses it clearly is, but the point in relation to the issues we considered in Kant’s idea of schematism should be clear. It is the intelligibility of the repetitions which rhythmically structure feeling that enables determinate, communicable thoughts to develop. In this respect it makes sense to say that the musical can be construed as at least a source of cognition. Rhythm entails what Bell termed ‘a spontaneous, blind subjective awareness of intrinsic but inarticula-
ble meaning’. It can also be seen as linked to mathematics, and this is the probable source of Schlegel’s claim that ‘One has tried for so long to apply mathematics to music and painting; now try it the other way round’ (Schlegel 1988: 5, 41) that I used to initiate the idea of inverting the music/philosophy relationship.

Music as ‘philosophical language’

Part of Kant’s enterprise was to explain what made the synthetic a pri-
or propositions of mathematics possible. If mathematics is based on the ability to differentiate and identify, the question of how this ability itself came about also demands an answer. In Kant’s terms the answer has to do with the categories, which are assumed to be functions of the spontaneity of the transcendental subject. The categories rely on the

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10 Schlegel makes it very clear, incidentally, that music in the developed aesthetic sense, which culminates in the rise of the idea of absolute music and in the Viennese classical tradition, takes a great deal longer to emerge than what he means in the passages cited.
schemata, and schemata are common to the intelligibility both of musical structures and of forms of cognition. Kant himself suggests that cognition was originally linked to pleasure in the apprehension of forms of order, and Schlegel proposes a historical story of why this might be the case, thus making possible an account of the genesis of transcendental conditions, of the kind Schelling attempts in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and Hegel attempts in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Schlegel proposes his story on the basis of the idea that humankind’s more developed forms of awareness, which lead to philosophy, are based on an unpleasant state, in which thought’s potential for boundlessness leads to a terror which can be tempered by rhythmic order. The pleasure of rhythmic order derives from the way in which anticipation is regularly fulfilled, rather than just manifesting itself as a chaotic lack of fulfillment generated by thought’s endless expansive activity. Kant’s remarks on the connection of the genesis of knowledge to pleasure would seem to entail a similar underlying conception, but he does not anchor what he says in a concrete story in the manner Schlegel does. The interest of Schlegel’s claims derives not least from the combination of somatic and cognitive pleasure associated with rhythm. Rhythm seems to cross the sensuous/intelligible divide: it is instantiated in empirical phenomena, but it also involves synthesis on the part of the subject, as well as being connected to the subject’s capacity for desire.

Clearly, much of this is pretty contentious. However, even if the specific story Schlegel tells does not convince – it is backed up with detailed evidence from classical texts that he interprets in a sophisticated manner – the idea that the generation of abstract forms of thought like mathematics is connected to prior concrete activities is widely accepted. Links between rhythm and mathematics are often made as part of the initial teaching of mathematics to children, because of the way in which pleasure is generated by rhythmic articulations being used to convey abstractions. This pleasure in rhythmic repetition makes it easier to assimilate what is to be learned. Recent empirical research seems to show that teaching music to children enhances the spatial-temporal reasoning required for handling complex mathematical concepts.11 The problem is that any such story about philosophy and abstract thought encounters the difficulty we examined in chapter 2. How does one use

11 See www.mindinstitute.net/MIND3/mozart/mozart.php for details. One does not have to buy into the more contentious claims of such research to accept that music can enhance children’s cognitive abilities.
what one is seeking the origin of to describe its own origin, without it fail-
ing to communicate what is essential about what preceded itself? I shall
return to this issue again later. For the moment Schlegel’s story can at
least be seen as an intriguing way of responding to the fact that rhythm
is a fundamental human way of being in the world, and of arguing that
more abstract forms of coping with reality derive from such concrete
ways of being. In this sense, Schlegel sees things rather as Rorty does,
there being no moment when thought emerges as something wholly
other to what precedes it. Concern with understanding what precedes
rational thought will be more and more associated with music from this
time onwards.

Although Schlegel is a less fragmentary thinker than he is sometimes
presented as being, he does not offer fully worked-out positions on
these (or on many other) matters. This lack of completeness is actually
congruent with the way he sees philosophy anyway: his aim is often
not a final, fixed system, but rather an ever richer series of coherent
connections between elements of the world, of the kind which music
can also provide in its own particular ways. Let us, therefore, pursue
one further series of connections that he makes between music and
philosophy.\footnote{Schlegel can at times be found inverting many of the priorities between music, the other
arts, and philosophy that he is seen as establishing here. It is also clear that he would
not have heard most of the music with which I associate his thinking, but this does not
mean that what he says cannot illuminate this music, and vice versa.}

In notes from 1805 Schlegel suggests that ‘Philosophy is founded
on \textit{music}, is therefore not completely independent’ (Schlegel 1971:
50). We have already seen some reasons for such a claim in the links
between schematism and rhythm. Another, related, way of understand-
ing the claim can be seen via his remark that ‘Music is most of all
longing.’ The constellation of music, philosophy and longing recurs
throughout his work. Schlegel claims, for example, that ‘What [music]
alone can express is longing for the infinite and infinite melancholy
(‘\textit{Betrübnis}’)’ (Schlegel 1988: 6, 12). In certain respects music and phi-
losophy seem therefore to be identical, and this is underlined by the
following description: philosophy’s ‘essence consists precisely in the
hovering change, in eternal seeking and not being able to find; our
thirst for knowledge is always given something, but much more always
seems to be left’ (Schlegel 1988: 3, 79).

In Romantic philosophy truth often appears as a regulative idea
which may even be just a necessary illusion generated by the combi-
nation of our feeling of finitude with the sense of infinity inherent in

thinking. Music’s relationship to feeling, its temporal nature, and its capacity to be meaningful without us being able determinately to state what it means, are therefore closely connected to a philosophy of ‘eternal seeking’. Such a search need not, though, be dominated by a sense of futility. The ambivalent experience that one can both understand music in affective and other terms, and not be able to say in words exactly what it is that one understands, can be as much a source of pleasure as frustration, because there is always more to say and do in relation to music. This situation is congruent with Schlegel’s wise remark that ‘In truth you would be distressed if the whole world, as you demand, were for once seriously to become completely comprehensible’ (Schlegel 1988: 2, 240). Would having a philosophical answer to what music (or the world) means necessarily make life more interesting than seeking ever new ways to understand what music may convey in differing contexts?

The following passage on longing seems equally apt with regard both to philosophical thinking and to the experience of certain kinds of music: ‘Even in humankind longing is in its original form . . . a spiritual expansion and extension to all sides in all directions, an indeterminate, infinite drive which is not directed at a determinate object, but has an infinite goal, and indeterminable spiritual development and formation, and infinite plenitude of spiritual completeness and completion’ (Schlegel 1964a: 430). One of the most notable aspects of Romantic thought about music was implicit in Dahlhaus’ remark that ‘Reflection and compositional practice were widely divergent’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 86) at the end of the eighteenth century. The passage just cited seems more akin to Romantic music, from Schubert and Schumann, via Wagner, to Mahler, than to the music that is contemporaneous with Schlegel’s text. Analogously, when Schlegel claims ‘One has tried the way of harmony and of melody; now rhythm is left to form music completely anew; the way of a rhythm where melody and harmony only formed and amplified the rhythm’ (Schlegel 1988: 5, 86), he anticipates what Beethoven was just beginning to do in music at the same time, which culminates in the Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, and, later, in passages such as the manic rhythmic repetition in the scherzo of the String Quartet Opus 135.\(^\text{13}\)

At the same time, the emergence of a philosophy in which transience is constitutive, and the absolute cannot be positively attained is itself made more likely by the Romantics’ experience of music’s temporality,

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\(^{13}\) Maynard Solomon (2003) claims that Beethoven employs Greek poetic metres for the rhythms of the Seventh Symphony.
its relationship to feelings, and its resistance to philosophical explanation. This resistance itself has to do with the decline of the paradigm of representation that leads at this time to the idea of ‘absolute music’, which is regarded by some as the highest form of art (see Dahlhaus 1978; Chua 1999). It is the manner in which the differing forms of articulation affect each other which is central to the Romantic conception, and which is ignored in most approaches in the philosophy of music. Schlegel himself, for example, often plays with the priority between music and philosophy. This is apparent in the following passage, which contradicts the idea that Romantic thinking about music regards it as the expression of emotions, and also prefigures the musical technique of developing variation that will soon emerge in Beethoven:

those who have a sense for the wonderful affinities of all arts and sciences will at least not look at the matter from the flat viewpoint of so-called naturalness, according to which music is only supposed to be the language of feeling, they will in fact not find it per se impossible that there is a certain tendency of all pure instrumental music towards philosophy. Must pure instrumental music not create a text for itself? and is the theme in it not as developed, confirmed, varied and contrasted as the object of meditation in a sequence of philosophical ideas?

(Schlegel 1988: 2, 155)

The somewhat cryptic remark about music creating a text is in one sense performative. The deliberate paradox of taking the form of music most distant from verbal texts as being what creates a text for itself forces one to think about what it is that is meaningful about such music, which can be seen as deriving precisely from its lack of verbal cues. The succeeding remark, which again seems close to Beethoven’s compositional procedures, both establishes the notion of specifically musical ideas against affect theories, and gives substance to the notion by making it clear that musical ideas can be as demanding as philosophical ones. Anyone who has looked at Beethoven’s composition sketches will know what this means. One either finds this kind of writing merely frustrating, or very illuminating, because it can liberate one from received ways of thinking. Its very resistance to interpretation brings it, of course, close to music.

Central to Schlegel’s thinking is the notion of wit, the ‘combinatory spirit’, via which new ideas are arrived at by unexpected juxtapositions of disparate ideas. Wit is also seen as essentially connected to music: ‘All wit is musical, namely grammatical, mythological in the spirit of
music’ (Schlegel 1963: 265). Schlegel’s perhaps most hyperbolic statement about music is the following, that pre-empts Walter Pater’s remark that ‘All art aspires to the condition of music’: ‘beauty (harmony) is the essence of music, the highest of all arts. It is the most general [art]. Every art has musical principles and when it is completed it itself becomes music. This is even true of philosophy and thus also, of course, of literature (Poesie), perhaps also of life. Love is music – it is something higher than art’ (Schlegel 1980: 151). Elsewhere he asks: ‘Are architecture and metre perhaps only applied music –? or are all arts that?’ (Schlegel 1963: 244). These remarks are in one sense merely provocative, and they function again rather in the manner of music itself because they resist attempts to cash them out into a series of literal claims.\(^14\) However, the idea of ‘love’ as music does fit in with the utopian dimension of Schlegel’s thought that seeks to make the world which, as being ‘en soi’, is ‘endless’, but inarticulate ‘unity’, into the ‘infinite plenitude’ of being ‘pour soi’, by both articulating things in ever new ways and seeking to make those ways harmonise with each other. Why, though, should music be regarded as underlying so many aspects of culture in this manner? The answer has to do with its relationship to ‘feeling’.

In his probably most explicit treatment of the issue of music and feeling, from the lectures on philosophy of 1804–5, Schlegel maintains:

Now if feeling is the root of all consciousness, then the direction of language [towards cognition] has the essential deficit that it does not grasp and comprehend feeling deeply enough, only touches its surface . . . However large the riches language offers us for our purpose, however much it can be developed and perfected as a means of representation and communication, this essential imperfection must be overcome in another manner, and communication and representation must be added to; and this happens through music which is, though, here to be regarded less as a representational art than as philosophical language, and really lies higher than mere art. Every effort to find a general philosophical language had to remain unsuccessful because one did not touch on the fundamental mistake of philosophical experiments with language. – Feeling and wishing often go far beyond thinking; music as inspiration, as the language of feeling, which excites consciousness in its well-spring, is the only universal language.

(Schlegel 1964b: 57)

\(^{14}\) There are links to Platonic and Pythagorean ideas here, but in the context of Schlegel’s other ideas, this is a secondary factor.
He connects this view of music and feeling to his notion of ‘Poesie’ ['literature', which has the Greek sense of ‘poiesis’, creative production], the form of verbal language, which, like music, cannot be represented or adequately translated into something else: ‘The higher language as well should be music; here literature is the link which connects music and language’ (ibid.: 58). We have seen why feeling can be seen as the ‘root of all consciousness’ in the contrast of the Romantics with Fichte, and in Schlegel’s account of the genesis of philosophy. The further important step here is the idea of music as ‘philosophical language’. The rationalist idea of a ‘general philosophical language’, in which language is regarded as a means of representation and communication, had been the subject of Hamann’s influential critique in the 1770s and 1780s. He criticised it on the grounds that many dimensions of what is conveyed by a particular natural language are based on the history of the sensuous and affective contact with the world of the people whose language it is, and can only be adequately understood if we remain open to the affective and sensuous dimensions of communication.

Schnädelbach’s comment, cited in chapter 1, that ‘negative metaphysics’ offers a ‘reminder that discourse does not have complete control of the true and the good: that there is something here which cannot be anticipated by a method, but which must show itself and be experienced’ (Schnädelbach 1987: 171–2) applies in this context to the limits of a general philosophical account, both of particular natural languages, and of music. On the one hand, Schlegel is just making the questionable claim that music is a ‘universal language’ – the ability to understand music from cultures with which one is unfamiliar can in fact require the learning of new ways of understanding, so the music is not immediately and universally accessible. On the other hand, the ubiquity of music in all cultures, and the ways in which unfamiliar kinds of music can cross cultural boundaries do seem to involve shared forms of intelligibility and ways of relating to the world of the kind that we saw in the links between rhythm and schematism. Such links are further evident in the widespread concern with the musicality of verse which connects language and music in the manner suggested by Herder. The essential aspect shared by music and philosophy as conceived by Schlegel is suggested by ‘longing’, namely simultaneous ‘eternal seeking and not being able to find’. Philosophy has, therefore, to come to terms with its own temporality and lack of ultimate fulfilment.
Music is often seen as both conveying the feeling which engenders such philosophy, and yet enabling us to accept this situation and temporarily to transcend it.

A conception like this makes apparent the reasons for questioning the dominance of metaphysics, in modernity. Because what modern science seeks has no foreseeable end, what we can learn via the information which it provides is never enough to give us a sustained feeling of meaningful coherence. The Romantics’ version of metaphysics does not, though, offer a positive way beyond the sense of inherent lack that results when knowledge-acquisition is related to the desire and the need to make the world cohere. Indeed, in certain respects it actually underlines the fragmentary nature of our place within things, and it is vital for my argument that metaphysics should not be regarded as seeking to conceal the contradictory nature of modern experience in the name of an illusory harmony. The point is that the Romantics explore one of the main ways in which cultures seek to come to terms with a modernity that lets us know more and more while often feeling less at home in the world which that knowledge engenders. There is a further confirmation of the fertility of the Romantic approach. The kind of music which evokes what the Romantics begin to explore, the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Wagner, Brahms, Bruckner, and Mahler – music which confronts, rather than evades, some of the most challenging affective and other issues in modernity – develops after the ideas of the Romantics have already begun to fall into obscurity.

However, lurking in this discussion is the question of whether music, as a merely symbolic medium, or a form of ‘aesthetic appearance’, is not being asked to carry too heavy a burden in relation to the real advances in scientific knowledge and ethics which are more obviously essential to the ‘philosophical discourse of modernity’. In one sense this clearly is the case, but there are dimensions of modern philosophy which involve an important deficit with regard to music that can be revealed in relation to Romantic ideas of the kind explored above. The key issue here is that, although the Romantics seek to create systematic coherence in their thinking, they do so on the basis of the feeling that ultimate coherence will elude them. Novalis talks in this respect of philosophy as ‘systemlessness brought into a system’ (Novalis 1978: 200). This paradoxical characterisation of philosophy leads to the question of what can give meaning to the resulting sense of inherent incompleteness, and
that question underlies a major division in modern philosophy. The division can be illustrated by some of the different ways that music is dealt with in the most famous example of a philosophy which still seeks overall systematic answers to the questions posed by modernity, namely the philosophy of Hegel.
Music and the limits of inferentialism

Hegel is often interpreted as embodying the idea that philosophy’s task is to bring together the conflicting elements of modernity into a new conceptual system. He can thus be seen as representing the kind of claim for the status of modern philosophy that I am using music to interrogate. His core idea is that initially indeterminate aspects of the world progressively become determinate via the creation of links between differing forms of interaction between subject and world, self and other. This process begins with the most primitive forms of ‘desire’ that impel the subject towards the other, and ascends to philosophical reflection on the nature of truth and knowledge. The aim is for philosophy to achieve the highest level of determinacy, which comes about by more and more thorough conceptual differentiation. Hegel sees this in terms of the development of ‘Geist’, by which he means thinking as socially mediated interaction with the world, away from the particularity of the sensuous world towards the non-sensuous universals which constitute the truth of that world. The aim of this chapter is to begin to develop a contrast, that can be highlighted by the issue of music, between Hegel’s vision of philosophy and a Romantic vision of the kind looked at in the last chapter, which will be further considered in the following chapters.¹ This contrast will make apparent a paradigmatic tension that recurs in thinking about music’s relationship to philosophy in modernity, notably, as we shall see in more detail in chapter 6 and chapter 9, in the work of Adorno.

There are, however, considerable difficulties (1) in interpreting what is meant by Hegel’s account of the development of Geist from sensuous

¹ I have also dealt with Hegel’s relationship to music in Bowie 2003a, chapters 5 and 7.
immediacy to full conceptual determinacy, (2) in establishing how this account can be understood in relation to key features of modernity, and (3) in understanding exactly how Hegel is relevant to philosophy now. I want, therefore, first to use Robert Brandom’s account of Hegel’s idealism to clarify certain issues in Hegel, suggesting that music gives rise to some instructive difficulties for Brandom’s project. This will enable us in the following chapters to contrast the implications of a Hegelian position with key Romantic ideas in Novalis, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, and to make more sense of the Wagner–Nietzsche relationship. The latter thinkers do not regard philosophy’s role as consisting primarily in the establishing of ever-increasing conceptual determinacy (though they do not oppose such an aim), and they establish a different way of thinking about music and philosophy, which is echoed in later thinkers, like Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Adorno.

Brandom’s project is directed against a strand of modern philosophy which is also opposed by Heidegger and Adorno. His argument begins with the change in the conception of intentionality in modern philosophy, from Descartes’ epistemological concentration on certainty, which is based on the idea of mind’s representation of material contents in the world, to Kant’s concentration on necessity, which is based on normative assessments grounded in the idea of conformity to rules. The crucial consequence of this change is to see truth as inseparable from normative commitments in the practice of social interchange, rather than thinking of it in terms of adequate representation. Brandom develops a theory of ‘material inference’, which begins with what people concretely do in making claims and justifying the commitments these claims entail, rather than, as theories of logical inference do, relying on logical rules which are supposedly what ground claims and render them valid. Many of the inferences we make all the time are not formally valid – Brandom gives the example of ‘It is raining, therefore the streets will be wet’ – and depend on a range of other practices and kinds of knowledge for their intelligibility, such as whether the streets of this town are actually open to the skies, whether they have a special coating which prevents them getting wet, or whatever. The reason for this choice of approach is already fundamental to the hermeneutic tradition from Schleiermacher onwards: the assumption of a priority of logical rules generates a regress of rules for rules which gives no account of how

2 The discussion here has been revised in the light of comments by Jay Bernstein and others. My thanks to them. See Bernstein’s comments on Brandom in Bernstein 2001.
rules come to be understood and applied at all (see Bowie 1997: ch. 1).
Our practices of justification must therefore be based on ‘a notion of primitive correctnesses of performance implicit in practice that precede and are presupposed by their explicit formulation in rules and principles’ (Brandom 1994: 21 – note already how this remark can apply to music). Logical rules only express and make explicit what we always already do as social actors in the world (see Bernstein 2001). Brandom explicitly links his project to Hegel, suggesting that it ‘eats its own tail . . . presenting an explanation of what it is to say something that is powerful enough to explain what it itself is saying’ (Brandom 1994: xx).

The link to our concerns is evident both in the notion of correctnesses of performance and in the fact that the Hegelian claim contrasts with the early Wittgenstein’s contention that one cannot explain ‘logical form’ as being what a proposition ‘must have in common with reality in order to represent it’, a contention which he linked to music. In Wittgenstein’s case the idea of the impossibility of explicating logical form has to do with the representationalist assumptions of the Tractatus, which he will largely abandon in favour of a more pragmatic view, some of which Brandom himself adopts. The idea that language is unable to give an exhaustive account of its own content was also suggested by Heidegger’s remarks in chapter 2, which pointed in the direction of music in a similar manner to Wittgenstein, while not relying on representationalist premises.

The aspects of what Brandom proposes which regard language primarily as human practice are in line with much of what I have been arguing. Moreover, key aspects of the kind of Hegelian thinking on which he draws will offer considerable illumination of the understanding of music. However, Brandom’s adoption of Hegel also leads in directions which give rise to questions concerning the scope of philosophical explanation. The main issue in the present context begins to become apparent in the fact that music can be used to illustrate what Brandom sees as the key operation in Hegel’s thought.

Hegel himself sees music in the Aesthetics as exemplifying this operation, when he says of the tonic triad that it expresses the ‘concept of harmony in its simplest form, indeed [it expresses] the very nature of the concept. For we have a totality of different notes before us which shows this difference just as much as undisturbed unity’ (Hegel 1965: 2, 296). Brandom sums up the operation which Hegel terms ‘determinate negation’ as follows: ‘One understands items (for instance propositions or properties) as determinate just insofar as one understands
them as standing to one another in relations of material incompatibility’ (Brandom 2002: 179). As Hegel’s remark suggests, this idea is easily applicable to music. In music the notes of a scale or chord are ‘materially incompatible’ with each other because each gains its identity by excluding the other notes in the scale or chord. The note is also unified with these notes via the specific relations in which it stands to them; in turn, the identity of the scale itself becomes determinate by its not being other scales. This Spinozist structure permeates Hegel’s philosophy at every level. Brandom shows how one can understand Hegel’s account of immediacy and mediation as a way of responding to contemporary epistemological questions concerning the relationship between the material and the form of cognition. However, in the Aesthetics, Hegel uses a version of this same account to establish a contentious evaluation of the kind of ‘immediacy’ we considered in examining the question of feeling and music. This evaluation has consequences which go beyond the scope of what Brandom considers, and relates to questions for his project that we shall consider in this section.

Brandom claims that ‘the only form the world we talk and think of can take is that of a world of facts about particular objects and their properties and relations’ (Brandom 1994: xxiii) which are expressed in claims. He relegates any other sense of intentionality to the realm of animal consciousness or to the merely psychological. This move seems to me too restrictive with regard to the kinds of understanding involved in music. An account of the way in which we conceptualise the material of music would begin for Brandom’s Hegel with the non-inferential grasping of a note, taken as an example of a property, as ‘immediately contentful. It just is the thing it is, brutely there . . . the things presented in sensation are taken as being what they are apart from any relations among them’ (ibid.: 204). The next stage occurs with the awareness that the property of being a note ‘is determinate only insofar as it strongly differs from other properties’ (ibid.). The note becomes more determinate, indeed becomes a note at all, rather than a mere noise, by being related to other things which are different from it. We could start, for example, by saying that the auditory sensation in question is not a colour, then that it is not an arbitrary environmental noise, then that it is not such and such a note because it is lower, and so on. How, though, are these relationships to be made intelligible, given the following problem?

At the level of mediation one can just endlessly detail the difference between the frequency numbers of pitches without that making them into what we understand as music. Brandom says that ‘the relations are
individuated by their relata, and the relata by the relations they stand in. But relations between what, exactly? The intelligibility of the relations themselves is threatened’ (ibid.: 187). If we assign a number to every possible pitch in a total system we would have a system in which the relata are all individuated. (This in fact leads to a – determinable – infinity of notional different pitches.) However, we wanted to understand what is encountered as a sound in the world as a note in music, not as a number in an infinite, but determinate system. The note is both an audible sensation and something which requires a system of relations which extends beyond the determination of its frequency into a series of human practices for it to be a musical note. For the note to play a role in music, we therefore require further levels of contextual understanding, which can include affective understanding, and this is where things get more difficult. The difficulty is that the constitution of intelligibility can go in both directions: if, as we saw in the preceding chapters, the very understanding of real language-use relies in some respects on structures of intelligibility associated with music, a philosophical account like Brandom’s, which is founded on the making and justifying of claims, may leave inadequate space for dimensions of expression and communication that cannot be construed in those terms. The issue here is not the fact that even musical understanding cannot do without language use, but rather whether language use is sufficient to articulate all that we understand via music. Wittgenstein exemplifies the sort of alternative forms of articulation I mean when he talks of gesture as a response to music (see chapter 8). These questions must clearly affect the perception of the scope and nature of the philosophical enterprise.

Brandom argues that ‘We must reconceive the things we are talking about . . . in such a way that the immediacies that became first available are construed as signs, expressing a reality articulated by the relations that we first understood at the second stage’ (ibid.: 205). A lot turns here on just how the notion of a sign is conceived: is a note only a sign to the extent to which it is conceptualised in the manner of ‘this noise is E, the third step in the key of C’? What, though, of the way in which a note gains a significance in a unique musical context, like the dissonant trumpet note in the dischord that precedes the coda of the third movement of Bruckner’s Ninth? What reality does such a ‘note as sign’ express? It is not just the reality of its relations to the other notes as shown in a musical analysis (whose terms may be contested and undecidable anyway). The musical context in this example is not just
immanent to Bruckner’s work and needs to include, for example, the historical situation of a religious, late-Romantic composer in a secularising age, as well as issues to do with listeners, their affective lives, musical expectations, and so on. Even though this kind of contextualisation is precisely what an inferentialist approach relies on, not all of these factors fit easily into Brandom’s model. The question is whether the relationship between immediacy and mediation in music is just a matter of the conceptualisation of the notes. The basic move for Brandom is from ‘mere immediacy’, to ‘mere mediation’, to ‘mediated immediacy’: ‘The underlying only theoretically (that is inferentially, i.e. by mediation) accessible reality is expressed by the observationally (non-inferentially, i.e. immediately) accessible appearance, which serves as a sign of it’ (ibid.: 206). The truth about the note and its place in music would, then, be determined by how we articulate its significance in concepts and thus, in Brandom’s account, in terms of discursive commitments and entitlements to claims.

In order to avoid a ‘myth of the given’, the immediacy of a sensation must indeed be regarded as intelligible because of an underlying relational structure of which it is a sign. In the case of music the structure might be, for example, the Western diatonic harmonic system. We encountered this issue in Herder’s mistaken concentration on the single note. Music is, though, not simply a piece of an objectively characterisable world, because it involves communicative intentions, of a kind related to those present in language, by the very fact of its being music rather than noise. Hegel is, of course, aware of this: music is a manifestation of Geist, but he regards it as inferior to discursive thinking. However, music as a practice is not reducible to the ways in which it can be talked about, and what is not thus reducible is not the immediacy with which the process characterised by Brandom begins. If music were simply to consist in such immediacy, we could in the last analysis do without the experience of the music and rely on a true description or explanation of it, in the way that we see no need directly to re-investigate the content of much of what we say about the world by repeating the immediate experience of it. Orchestral conductors would, for example, be justified in objecting to the overly verbal notion of how we can communicate about music implicit in Brandom’s account of immediacy and mediation.

In the aesthetic experience of music mediation of Brandom’s kind reaches a limit that involves a different kind of ‘immediacy’, an immediacy suggested by the idea that metaphysics has to do with what
Schnädelbach says has to ‘show itself and be experienced’. This is not immediacy in the strict sense, because, while perhaps having an immediate affective impact, what shows itself requires a whole series of contexts and abilities for it to communicate what it does. Adorno says that

Hegel’s insight is certainly fruitful for music, that all immediacy is admittedly mediated, dependent on its opposite, but that the concept of something immediate, as something which has become, has emerged, does not just disappear in the mediation. However, this immediacy which is relativised into a moment would not be the note, but the unique figure which can be grasped distinctly as something to some degree plastic, which is different from contrast and progress.

(Adorno 1997: 16, 520)

An example of such a ‘unique figure’ which cannot be just understood in terms of its relations occurs when the slow movement of Beethoven’s 1st Rasumovsky String Quartet is transformed by a suddenly interpolated new section in D-flat. Adorno interprets the passage as an ‘allegory of hope’ (Adorno 1993: 250) because it emerges at a point in a deeply sad movement where there is no formal necessity for it to be there at all and is one of the greatest moments in all of Beethoven. The transformation depends on a unique kind of appropriateness or rightness which is felt as part of a practice that cannot be fully grasped by a command of linguistic meanings, or even of the tools of musicology. Awareness of inferentially articulated contexts is still essential to the possibility of the understanding in question here – even to hear the change of mood and significance one must be able to contrast the passage with what precedes it and what follows it – as is a command of language, but Brandom’s and Hegel’s concentration on the conceptual cannot do full justice to phenomena of this nature.

Both at the level of production and at the level of reception musical understanding involves a kind of material inference which cannot be articulated in terms of ‘an explanation of what it is to say something that is powerful enough to explain what it itself is saying’. The translation of ‘knowing how’ into ‘knowing that’ which underpins Brandom’s enterprise reaches a limit here. In tonally based jazz improvisation the choice of notes can be seen as involving inferences from the chords which allow correctness of performance, but deliberate ‘playing outside’ the chords can equally be successful. To carry out and understand this sort of playing involves a version of material inference that relies on something which may never fully be articulable in a theory of jazz harmony. If one
looks at transcriptions of jazz solos, norms of harmony are, of course, regularly transgressed. As Thelonius Monk said: ‘Wrong’s right’, but that does not imply mere licence: any note can be made ‘legitimate’ if the context is right, and sometimes the rightness comes about because, in order to avoid a convention, one deliberately plays a ‘wrong’ note.

Such phenomena might seem, though, to take us much too far from what really concerns Brandom. His main aim in the essay on Hegel is to get away from the idea that Hegel thinks ‘our concept using activity’ is necessary ‘to produce, as opposed to make intelligible, the conceptually structured world’ (ibid.: 208). However, the implication that the world itself is conceptually structured indicates how his approach may find music hard to digest. In the light of the ideas about rhythm that we considered in the last chapter, it can make sense to talk of music making intelligible a rhythmically structured world. The inferentialist structure based on ‘material exclusion’ is instantiated on both the somatic and the intellectual levels in the constitution of rhythm, which comes about by beats not being other beats and being linked with each other in significant ways which are not fully explained just by the differential constitution of the rhythm. As we saw, rhythm can even be seen as in certain respects prior to, and as informing, conceptual thinking, because it involves structures of identity and difference in ways which do not need to be conceptualised, such that knowing how becomes knowing that. One might also say that music makes an affectively structured world intelligible: affects may not be adequately articulated by what we say about them, and may be better articulated in music as a ‘language of gestures’.

Brandom’s conception ‘gives pride of place to practices of giving and asking for reasons’ (Brandom 2000: 11), and he regards this as the prior activity, without which other kinds of practice would not be intelligible. However, the role given to ‘the game of giving and asking for reasons’ (ibid.: 14) does not leave space for the ways in which this game can in turn depend upon other sorts of intelligibility, of the kind suggested by rhythm, which resist complete conversion from knowing how into knowing that. As we shall see in the next chapter, Hegel does make a link between rhythm and self-consciousness, but he does not interpret the consequences of the link in the manner that some of the Romantics do. What is at issue in the Romantic stance offers ways of understanding why some major figures in modern philosophy and art come to mistrust how language sometimes functions in modernity. If such suspicion is voiced in discursive claims it necessarily involves the performative contradiction of using language to reveal language’s
inadequacy, but if the statement of the suspicion just adverts to forms of articulation which show something that verbal language cannot, this objection need not hold. Cavell’s comment that in aesthetic judgement the giving of reasons will often end in the situation where ‘if you do not see something, without explanation, then there is nothing further to discuss’ (Cavell 1976: 93) points to the kind of phenomena I mean.

In Making it Explicit Brandom talks of ‘a picture of thought and of the world that thought is about as equally, and in the favoured cases identically, conceptually articulated’ (Brandom 1994: 622). While detailing worries about what he terms Brandom’s ‘conceptual realism’ (Brandom generally rejects other forms of realism), Habermas talks of ‘a remarkably objectivistic understanding of discursive behaviour in Brandom’s conception’ (Habermas 1999: 170). The Hegelian element in this which Habermas finds dubious is the following: ‘The place of the “exertion of the concept”, which would otherwise be a question of a constructively proceeding communicative community, is taken by the “movement of the concept”, which takes place via discourses which are mediated by experience, but over the heads of the participants in discourse’ (ibid.: 172). Instead of the contingency of the world being intersubjectively negotiated in terms of a multiplicity of communicative and expressive practices, via which we come to understandings with each other whose priority depends on the context and needs and aims of those engaging in those practices, ‘All communicative practices – including those, like expressive, aesthetic, ethical, moral, or juridical discourses that do not relate to the establishing of facts – are supposed to be analysed on the basis of assertions’ (ibid.: 179). The expressive dimensions of communication therefore may not have justice done to them in Brandom’s Hegelianism. This is because of the assumption that the order of the world is inherently conceptual, which is based on the idea of concepts as ‘inferential roles of expressions’ (Brandom 1994: 622) that express facts. The core difficulty becomes apparent in relation to the following distinction.

Brandom distinguishes between ‘texts, which we can interpret (in scorekeeping terms) or translate as expressing claims, on the one hand, and things, which we can describe or explain by using claims, but do not take to be expressing claims, on the other’ (Brandom 1997: 203).

3 Habermas reminds us that this brings Brandom close to the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus, although Brandom replaces Wittgenstein’s ‘transcendental linguistic idealism’ with an ‘objective linguistic idealism’, in which ‘the objectivity of the world is not testified to by contingencies which we experience through effects on our senses and in practical activity, but by the discursive resistance of stubborn objections’ (Habermas 1999: 169).
and he cites Davidson as distinguishing between ‘what one copes with by interpreting it and what one copes with only by manipulating it’ (ibid.). This distinction is too rigid, even if it is not one to which Brandom attaches any ontological significance – his view is that both the human sciences (texts) and the natural sciences (things) are capable of objectivity because of their shared relation to practices of justification. How, then, does this distinction between interpretation and description or explanation apply to music, which one both interprets and manipulates? In a discussion of ‘rationality as interpretability’ Brandom claims that ‘what makes something have or express the content it does is what makes it interpretable in one way rather than another. And that is a matter of its connections to other things, the role it plays in the overall behavioural economy of the one being interpreted’ (Brandom 2002: 5). This claim actually offers a route to understanding musical meaning and musical practice in the sense suggested by David Cooper, for whom meaning is attributable to anything which connects to something ‘something outside or larger than itself’. However, Brandom does not consider the content of non-verbal forms, content being for him what is inferentially articulated in claims. Noises with intentional content which are not verbal and cannot simply be converted into facts about which claims can justifiably be made can play no serious role in Brandom. If we are restricted to a view of communicative action which seems to have no explicit place for dimensions like tone and rhythm, how are we to grasp much that is essential to real communication? These dimensions can give such action its specific performative force in real social contexts, and this can be part of its semantic content (see the discussion of Cavell in the Conclusion).

I will consider the following remark by Wittgenstein in more detail in chapter 8, but its relevance to Brandom’s claims, even down to the concern with inference, should be apparent:

Understanding a sentence in language is much more related to understanding a theme in music than one thinks . . . Why should the strength and tempo move in just this line? One wants to say: ‘Because I know what that all means.’ But what does it mean? I couldn’t say. In ‘explanation’ I could compare it with something else that has the same rhythm (I mean the same line). (One says: ‘Can’t you see, that is as if an inference were being made’ or ‘That is, so to speak, a parenthesis’ etc. How does one ground such comparisons? – There are different kinds of groundings.)

(Wittgenstein 1984: 440)
Music itself cannot be construed as making claims in the sense Brandom intends, but it just as clearly can be interpreted, because it possesses meaning, albeit in a manner which cannot be fully explained by discursive claims. Such meaning can be illuminated by discursive, metaphorical, and gestural responses, but these responses cannot replace the experience of the music itself, both from the point of view of the performer and of the listener. This is precisely where explanations can reach a limit in the sense to which Cavell and Wittgenstein advert.

Wittgenstein puts ‘explanation’ in inverted commas because what he means is the establishing of different contexts in which we may grasp something of how the music might be understood, without making any literal claims. This understanding is apparent in music’s capacity even to take on forms which have a structure that can be understood as related to a claim – ‘that is as if an inference were being made’. A simple example of this is the juxtaposition of two phrases that relate as ‘question and answer’, of the kind one encounters in many forms of music. Similarly, the passage from the Rasumovsky Quartet cited above might be heard as a kind of parenthesis which may change our very sense of what a parenthesis can be. Brandom can object here that one must first understand inference and parenthesis in terms of material inference, before they can apply to music. However, this is a two-way process: one must – as Brandom insists – first understand such forms of intelligibility as part of the world, but this understanding can resist the translation from knowing how to knowing that. The experience of expecting something as a consequence of something else, which is part of what it is to be in a world at all, involves a pattern of inference which need not become theoretically explicit and which is also a constitutive part of the experience and practice of music. Musical innovation often relies on contradicting the expected consequences from previous events in a piece, and this can then set up another kind of inferential pattern which influences subsequent music.

It might be objected that the whole point of Brandom’s project of ‘making it explicit’ is to convert the pre-theoretical immediate into the theoretically mediated, but the question is whether this may not exclude something quite fundamental. The grounding of the sort of understanding Wittgenstein discusses would not be of the same kind as an explanation, and seems to relate rather to what Kant suggested by the notion of the aesthetic idea, which ‘gives much to think about, but without any determinate thought, i.e. concept being able to be adequate to it, which consequently no language can completely attain and make
comprehensible’ (Kant 1968b: B 193, A 190). Freedom from determination is what counts in this kind of understanding; indeed, it is precisely the failure of a certain kind of conceptual determination which gives it its significance. The link between freedom from determination and other ideas of freedom will be crucial in some of the philosophical approaches to music which do not follow a Hegelian line.

In chapter 3 I linked the idea of schematism both to aesthetic ideas and to Taylor’s notion of ‘preconceptual engagement’ with the world. The kind of forms this engagement can take are also suggested by the remarks from Wittgenstein. Some aspects of such pre-conceptual engagement can be a form of immediacy that we assume animals possess in varying degrees. However, the ways in which this engagement is manifest in music involve a level of reflexivity that is both non-conceptual, and yet highly differentiated. This level of reflexivity can transform a form of engagement as basic, for example, as ‘anticipation’ into a complex articulation that can in turn affect how we experience anticipation. Wagner inspired a whole genre of dramatic music in this respect: think of the part of the second act of Tristan which precedes the lovers’ meeting, and of the way in which the musical gestures of this scene are echoed in subsequent film and other music.4 If this is an appropriate way to think about music, it indicates one way in which we can question Brandom’s use of the division between texts and things to support his fact-based conception. Cavell has contended that knowing things is not the only way to relate to them – one can paint them, evoke them through music, etc. – and this perspective is neglected in Brandom’s conception.5

4 The phenomenology of anticipation is very often related to the functioning of tonality. Susan McClary (2000) regards tonality of the kind that develops in the eighteenth century as inherently ideological, relating it to the idea of the ‘centred self’ and of the disciplining of the self in the name of deferring gratification, which she associates with the ‘Age of Reason’ (see Bowie 2003a for a critique of the philosophy behind such a position). However, the ways in which tonality relates to fundamental ways of being in the world by creating structures of anticipation and fulfilment, tension and relaxation seem to me not just ideological. Nor is tonality just a form which instils discipline, not least because it can, as Tristan makes very clear, be related to eroticism. One major reason that many of the conventions of tonality become so important in modern music is that they make sense of how it is to be in an affectively structured world, rather than just creating a deceptive form of order. There is nothing natural about tonality, but the position which sees it as inherently ideological is itself also making a contestable ideological claim.

5 Brandom does suggest that one might ‘eschew reductive explanations in semantics entirely’ and one could ‘remain contented with describing the relations among a family of mutually presupposing concepts – a family that includes representation, inference, claiming, referring, and so on’ (Brandom 1994: 66q), but this still fails to expand the frame of communicative practice in the way I suggest.
Adorno says of the musicality present in poetic usage: ‘Musical is the transformation of language into a sequencing whose elements connect themselves differently from in the judgement’ (Adorno 1997: 11, 471). Such transformation can take us somewhere that paraphrase involving judgements cannot reach: ‘Works of art point, as it were, judgementlessly to their content without it becoming discursive. The spontaneous reaction of the recipients is mimesis towards the immediacy of this gesture’ (Adorno 1997: 7, 363). Adorno goes on to say that this moment must be subjected to critique and to the concept, but it is clear that without this prior spontaneous moment there is no art at all: ‘But art, mimesis which has been driven to consciousness of itself, is still bound to the stimulus, to the immediacy of experience; otherwise it would be indistinguishable from science’ (ibid.: 385). He comments in the ‘Fragment on Music and Language’ that ‘interpreting language means: understanding language; interpreting music means: making music’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 253), suggesting another way in which making something explicit cannot be construed solely in terms of claims. He also argues, though, that in music ‘the sequence of sounds (‘Laute’) is related to logic: there is right and wrong’ (ibid.: 251). This claim about the normative nature of music offers a further way of questioning the overly cognitive nature of Brandom’s conception. Right and wrong in music can just be a technical matter which takes place in terms of commitments and entitlements. If you claim to be playing a particular piece to an audience, there is much that one is objectively committed to, though exactly what is essentially contested. However, right and wrong can also have to do with interpretative decisions about how something is to be played, of a kind which are closely related to linguistic usage but which may only be conveyed by gesture.

A pragmatist orientation like Brandom’s surely requires attention to the musical dimension of language-use that is not captured in terms of the propositional content on which Brandom focuses as the basis of all other kinds of intelligibility. Connecting the wider pragmatic dimensions of language to music, Lawrence Kramer suggests that while ‘locutionary effects are confined to the sphere of language, illocutionary force need not be’ (Kramer 1990: 9). A more convincing pragmatist approach to this issue than that of Brandom was already suggested by

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6 ‘Mimesis’ in Adorno does not refer to imitation as a form of representation, but rather to a sympathetic response towards an object, of the kind which can, for example, be part of playing a piece of music. (See chapter 9.)

7 Think of Nelson Goodman’s almost universally disputed claim that unless all the notes of the score are realised, the piece has not been played.
Schleiermacher in 1809–10: ‘language as a totality of tones is a musical system. The musical element also has an effect in every utterance, and as this effectiveness has a different basis from that of the significant, they can come into conflict with each other’ (Schleiermacher 1998: 238).

The tension between these dimensions, the possibility that they can mutually reinforce – or mutually weaken – each other, points to questions for philosophical approaches to language which are still too rarely regarded as philosophically significant. Kramer puts the consequence of this very aptly: ‘music, as a cultural activity, must be acknowledged to help produce the discourses and representations of which it is also the product’ (Kramer 1990: 17). Despite his adherence to the primacy of ‘norm-laden practices’ over ‘matters of fact’ (Brandom 2002: 326), this two-way relationship seems hard to accommodate in Brandom’s terms, and will be equally difficult to make sense of in some of the terms of Hegel’s account of music.

That interpretation is not limited to texts, even in a pretty wide sense of the word ‘text’, is apparent at a variety of levels. A listener may interpret music by, for example, hearing it as evocative of something, or they may understand it as establishing ways of being in the world which give a coherence to their world that it otherwise lacks. This may link some piece or performance to other music, rather than to propositionally statable ideas about the world. Maynard Solomon suggests that listeners may feel what is in fact a kind of inferential ‘impulse to invent programmes and literary prototypes for musical compositions – somehow to diminish the anxiety, terror, and loneliness that may be aroused by the musical evocation of an unrecognizable time and place’ (Solomon 2003: 15). It is the way in which Beethoven ‘turns from validating the expected to inventing places where no one has ever gone before’ (ibid.) that indicates a dimension missing from Brandom’s Hegelian rationalism. The question is how philosophy should deal with something that we understand but which both cannot be cashed out into the ways in which we try to bring it into the discursive fold and can move the boundaries of that fold. Locating music as part of a world of facts as true claims would precisely fail to capture the specific kind of understanding it sometimes demands.

Such issues concerning the scope of interpretation constitute an important example of the kind of ‘entanglement’ of music and philosophy outlined in chapter 1. Let us summarise some of the core issues before considering some of Hegel’s texts on music. When Brandom talks of linguistic utterances in terms of interpretable noises, he uses the
Spinozist/Hegelian structure which is also the basis of Saussurean linguistics. To move from the semiotic level of material incompatibility of signs to the semantic level, though, one needs a pragmatic theory of the kind Brandom proposes, such that signifiers can allow us to make utterances about what we understand in the world that can be accepted or rejected by others. It is not clear, however, that this approach to language as inferentially articulated communicative action founded on claims can capture the musical dimensions of language, or that it exhausts the ways in which music itself can be meaningful. There are cases where one can justifiably maintain, on the basis of discursively established norms, that the tone or rhythm of a verbal piece of communicative action is appropriate or inappropriate, but certain kinds of rightness or inappropriateness, of the kind that we can concentrate on in poetry, do not reduce to such claims. They can only be experienced in the act of hearing what ‘these words in these positions’ (Wittgenstein) do that no other combination of words can. The notion of ‘these words in these positions’ is inseparable from the idea that music relies on ‘these notes in these positions’. In both cases a translation or paraphrase can illuminate but cannot replace the encounter with the particular piece of articulation.

In inferentialist terms musical notes relate to a tonal system in a manner analogous to the way signifiers relate to a linguistic system. However, what we can say is happening in music at a conceptualisable level – ‘this passage is in the relative minor’, etc. – does not explain the ways in which the music may be understood at an affective level, or may be played in a world-disclosing manner, even though the conceptual description is obviously connected to such understanding. The crucial fact is that it is the relationships between notes that count: transposing a piece does not, for example, change essential things about the form of the piece. Adorno argues that in music ‘The task of interpretation is of course not faithfulness to the text an sich, but the presentation of “the work”, i.e. of the music for which the text stands in’ (Adorno 2001: 89). The ‘music’ in this sense becomes a kind of regulative idea in terms of which ‘interpretation measures itself by the level of its failure’ (ibid.: 120) (on this see chapter 9). Merleau-Ponty claims that during the performance of a piece of music, ‘the sounds are not just “signs” of the sonata, but it is there via them, it descends into them’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 213). The pragmatic use of linguistic noises can, as Brandom argues, be interpreted in terms of mapping the behaviour or action of another onto my behaviour or action, so that
noises inferentially become signs. However, it is at this level that what Habermas terms Brandom’s ‘remarkably objectivistic understanding of discursive behaviour’ becomes apparent in relation to music. Forms of articulation like music, or dance, which show something intelligible that resists translation into discursivity, seem for Brandom necessarily to have to be translated in the last analysis into something which must be cashed out in discursive claims, on pain of being regarded as mere immediacy.

The attempt to respond to music in the form of discursive claims is evidently a vital aspect of the social practice of music: I am not concerned to question Brandom and Hegel at this level. However, we also need a philosophical approach to the ways in which musical content cannot be finally rendered in the form of claims. A verbal account of music can only ever make one hear and understand the music better (or worse) by extending the contexts to which it can be related; it cannot replace it by revealing what it refers to or ‘represents’. This is admittedly the case for all objects in the world, because they are also never reducible to the ways in which we talk about them. The difference is, though, that music would not be music if it were just the noises of which it consists, noises which, like any other object in the world, also transcend all the ways we talk about them. It is the possession of intentional content of the kind that makes a noise a linguistic sign or a note that distinguishes both music and language. This means that they have to be understood in terms of their world-disclosive nature, which is not the case for objects in general, and this depends on how the elements of music and language are related to other linguistic and musical elements, and to contexts in the world.

Music does not, then, seem to be straightforwardly either a ‘text’ or a ‘thing’ in the sense of these terms proposed by Brandom. How the functioning of signs in visual art relates to music in this respect is too big a topic to deal with here, though there are important parallels between what makes something into music and aspects of visual art connected to questions of rhythm. As Schnädelbach suggests, visual forms also have a linguistic aspect: ‘contemplation of pictures or listening to music always includes a seeing and hearing as . . . ’ (Schnädelbach 2002: 94). However, music’s peculiar proximity to language and its largely non-representational nature make it in some respects a special case, and much turns on whether its non-representationalism is regarded as a decisive lack, or as the source of its unique possibilities, or whether one seeks a mediation between these two extremes. Adorno characterises
this proximity in his suggestion that ‘Music aims at an intentionless
language’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 252), precisely in the sense that it does
not seek to articulate meanings that can be construed as claims. The
crucial word, though, is ‘aims’. Adorno also makes it clear that music
can never be fully separated from intentional language: ‘Music without
all meaning/intending (‘meinen’), the merely phenomenal context of
the sounds, would acoustically resemble the kaleidoscope. As absolute
meaning, on the other hand, it would cease to be music and would
mistakenly become language’ (ibid.). Hegel, as we shall see, thinks that
the move to the word from the note is a fundamental philosophical
advance, and it is this move that seems to me to need more differenti-
ation than Hegel allows.

The empirical manifestations of a verbal language can, as we saw, be
regarded as signs whose intelligibility is constituted by the underlying,
only theoretically accessible, reality of the langue which makes possi-
bile the articulation of contentful thoughts. Music can be thought of in
analogous terms because it exists in the form of empirical data and yet
is only really understood when these are appropriately contextualised.
What, though, is the underlying reality of which notes constitute the
signs? This cannot generally be what is theoretically accessible, if that is
expressed by facts as true claims which are endorsed within a commu-
nity. The crude answer must be that music has to do precisely with what
cannot be expressed in the form of facts, hence, for example, the idea
of music making a rhythmically or an affectively structured world intel-
ligible. The extreme version of such a position is that of Schopenhauer
(see chapter 7), who regards music as the most direct, intuitive form
of access to an underlying reality which is essentially resistant to discur-
sive articulation. The consequences of this particular view are, though,
precisely what I wish to avoid, because it imputes the same significance
to all music. Instead of offering a positive metaphysical determination
of music, I would prefer to show how it does not fit easily into many
of the dominant philosophical approaches to modernity. This involves,
for example, finding ways of revealing how rhythm and feeling can be
world-disclosive. Despite his rejection of representationalism, his con-
centration on language as social action, and his awareness of Gadamer,
Brandom does not take adequate account of the dimensions of lan-
guage and communication not catered for by the Frege-influenced tra-
dition that still plays a major role in his thought. His adherence to this
tradition leads precisely to a world of facts and claims, rather than of
contingencies to which we respond with a variety of kinds of articulation
and expression, of the kind, for example, that Adorno characterises in terms of ‘mimesis’.

The ubiquity of music in human culture has, then, to do with contingencies which seem to resist reduction to the kind of assertion-based model proposed by Brandom. David Cooper suggests of such models that they ‘lose their *prima facie* plausibility when attention is paid to the meaning belonging to activities less commonly subjected to rational appraisal than the making of assertions. (To ask about the meaning of a painting would not, typically, involve asking about the artist’s entitlement to express what he did.)’ (Cooper 2003: 5). The same, as Cooper implies, can be said of music. Brandom sees his project as making explicit the implicit, as ‘turning something we can initially only do into something we can say: codifying some sort of knowing *how* into the form of a knowing *that*’ (Brandom 2000: 8). Music does not fit comfortably into this model. Brandom gives the example of a parrot who can ‘produce an utterance perceptually indistinguishable from an assertion of “The swatch is red”. Our nonetheless not taking it to have asserted that sentence . . . is our taking it that, unaware as it is of the inferential involvements of the claim that it would be expressing . . . it has not thereby succeeded in committing itself to anything’ (Brandom 2000: 191). Something analogous applies to the blackbird that sang the jazz phrase I mentioned in chapter 3; it is not making music, but what exactly is it that the blackbird has not committed itself to? What sort of inferential involvements are there in the practice of music? Music involves similar kinds of commitment to verbal assertion, but the relationship between the bird and a musician is different from that between the bird and the maker of assertions. Because the bird can do more than just imitate music that is already there, a musician such as Messiaen can learn from the bird by appreciating a new way to phrase something or by hearing a new rhythm, in a way which the language-user generally could not from the speaking parrot. We can consequently arrive at new kinds of intelligibility which may enrich our existing practices and which can create new, specifically musical commitments.

Cooper thinks that Brandom’s concern with the notion of appropriateness is important, but appropriateness does not always depend on, and cannot always be conveyed by assertions and their attendant commitments. Music’s value can actually lie in its resistance to clear interpretation in a world where the demand for explicit clarity may itself become ideological. There are indefinitely many kinds of response to the world, from painting to dance, and so on, which can be appropriate
in the right context without their being conveyed in terms of discursive entitlements and commitments. In some contexts and for some purposes we assess such responses in the terms Brandom brilliantly characterises, but this is at a secondary level. If we consider someone’s characterisation of what they think is conveyed by the passage from the Rasmovskoy Quartet discussed above, we will be in the discursive game Brandom describes. However, this game is parasitic on the fact that the music matters because of the way it connects to, articulates, and evokes aspects of life which would not be accessible without the music itself and its immediate effects on its listeners. The wider significance of this issue for modern philosophy becomes apparent in Hegel’s response to music.

Hegel and the content of music

Brandom’s inferentialism has played a role in the recent rehabilitation of Hegel’s philosophy. It comes closer to the emphatically rationalist side of Hegel that is underplayed, for example, in Pinkard’s more communitarian readings. Hegel’s own remarks on music show that the ideas which Brandom adopts for his account of immediacy and mediation are indeed directly connected to his understanding of music: ‘notes are in themselves a totality of differences, which can divide themselves and combine themselves into the most multiple kinds of direct consonances, essential oppositions, contradictions and mediations’ (Hegel 1965: 2, 273). However, there is a crucial difference between Hegel and Brandom. Brandom’s project is part of a widening of the scope of analytical philosophy in the light of the decline of empiricism, and it is explicitly only a beginning. The nature of what he undertakes is, though, still dictated in some respects by the agenda of the analytical style of philosophy which resulted from the failure of Hegelian ambitions for philosophy to respond to the full spectrum of the demands made by modernity. The very idea that a philosopher from the tradition to which Brandom belongs would pay the kind of sustained attention to aesthetics which Hegel did in later life might well now seem odd to us. However, if context is as important to philosophy as inferentialism

8 Discussion of Hegel on music has recently been affected by the publication of reliable transcripts of his Lectures on the Philosophy of Art (Hegel 2003), which I use extensively here because they are not subject to the textual problems associated with the Hotho edition of the Aesthetics (Hegel 1965).
suggests, there may well be contexts which are philosophically illuminating that a concern with the established problems in the analytical tradition may obscure.

Hegel’s accounts of music in many respects transcend the limitations brought about by their historical context and by Hegel’s contingent adherence to classicism in music. However, the accounts also involve some instructive tensions that relate to their being contemporaneous with what many people think is probably the greatest music ever written, that of Beethoven (music which Hegel does not mention, at least by name – see chapter 5). On the one hand, there is the waning of Hegel’s influence in the period following his death, which is linked to announcements of the ‘end of philosophy’ by the Young Hegelians that have been a significant aspect of philosophy ever since (see chapter 6 below). On the other hand, Beethoven and others help to bring about a change in the very ways in which sound is understood as relating to the world. Music gains an – admittedly precarious – freedom from extraneous social and other demands, allowing it to develop according to a logic which is, to some extent at least, autonomous, but which also enables it to respond more fully than previous music to social, historical, and psychological transformations. Think of the expansion of the formal and expressive range of the symphony that is inaugurated with the Eroica and reaches a shocking intensity with the nihilistic aspect of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony, or of the development of musical expressionism out of the work of Mahler, Wagner, and others, by Berg and Schoenberg. Western music’s ability to respond to the extremes of the experience of the modern world in ways which feed into the rest of culture is one of the most striking aspects of modernity. One way to gauge these responses is in relation to the initial rejection of works or ways of playing which then come to be seen as definitive of a new way of doing things and as disclosing new dimensions of the dislocations that characterise modernity. It tends only to be philosophers like Marx and Nietzsche, who think in terms of the end of philosophy, that have a similar wider effect on modern culture.

Modernity is also characterised by interactions between the musical and the philosophical – some of which, though, are a result of a loss of faith in philosophy’s ability positively to achieve metaphysical aims. Music itself is, of course, not spared the crises which occur at some point in all spheres of modern cultural life. The idea of the demise of philosophy as what could restore or replace the meanings hollowed out by
secularisation and the rise of modern science can also be seen as related to the crisis of musical forms signalled by the advent of atonality and by the growing distance from the wider public of music which explores radical new possibilities. However, even the music which reflects these crises at the same time involves the ‘redemptive’ fact that it can be experienced aesthetically, as an expression of human freedom.

The musical and philosophical stories can be explored via the links between Beethoven’s music and Hegel’s philosophy (on this in more detail, see Adorno 1993; Bowie 2003; and chapters 6 and 9 below). The – inferentialist – idea in this context is that both Beethoven’s music and Hegel’s philosophy rely on contradictions and tensions which are integrated into a dynamic whole that gives the parts their meaning. In the same way as Hegel begins with indeterminate moments of thought, like the notion of ‘being’, which gain their full determinacy at the end of the system, Beethoven sometimes uses thematic material which has little intrinsic musical interest, but which gains its identity and significance by being integrated into new contexts, like the simple rhythm and the major third which begin the Fifth Symphony, or the open fifths and broken minor chord of the opening of the Ninth. Adorno (1993), however, is critical of the totalising tonal resolutions at the conclusion of some of Beethoven’s heroic works, like the Fifth Symphony. He relates these resolutions to what he sees as Hegel’s complicity with dominant tendencies in modernity, such as the obscuring of the particularity of things by the commodity form. The link of this criticism of Beethoven to Hegel follows from Hegel’s claims to have completed a philosophical system that integrates everything into modern forms of rationality. For Adorno art’s forms of ‘appearance’ which harmonise particulars into an integrated whole can, like Hegel’s philosophy, suggest rationality where there is none.

The vital issue here is the status of such analogies between social and cultural forms in modernity. Adorno’s criticism of Beethoven makes a ‘philosophical’ point about Beethoven’s music. He consequently runs the risk of doing what he elsewhere often seeks to oppose, namely reducing particular music to a questionable form of philosophical generality. What he tends to neglect is that one can hear Beethoven’s tonal apotheoses in many ways, depending on the contexts of performance. Hearing them in terms of a philosophical interpretation of dominant tendencies in modern history is only one possibility. One could also, for example, hear them in terms of an individual’s personal struggle and their triumph over adversity, where the ideological aspect Adorno
points to has no real purchase. At the same time, abstinence, in the name of musical formalism, from any connections and analogies to history and philosophy is open to Adorno’s objection that considering music in terms of ‘the merely phenomenal context of the sounds’ ignores music’s intentional content, which relates it to historical and social issues. The problem raised by Adorno is how to sustain a philosophical interrogation of music which establishes a critical historical perspective, whilst taking account of music’s role as a part of modernity which can be used to interrogate philosophy.

Consideration of Hegel’s account of music can show some of the difficulties and possibilities here. The key issue is the connection between music, language, and feeling in relation to the aims of modern philosophy. Hegel’s account in the *Aesthetics* forms part of what has generally been seen as a philosophical analysis of the arts in the terms of his system. The editor of the new lecture transcription interprets Hegel, in contrast, as suggesting a phenomenological approach to the understanding of each of the particular arts, rather than as attempting to fit them into the system (Hegel 2003: 33). Whichever way one interprets his overall aims with regard to art and philosophy, Hegel’s accounts of the particular forms of art have to be interpreted in the light of his claim that ‘art is not the highest manner of expressing the truth’ (ibid.: 5). The reasons why have to do with his historical reflections on art in modern society in comparison to science, law and politics. These reflections are connected to a philosophical point concerning the relationship between immediacy and truth. Hegel puts it like this: ‘art is also limited according to its content, has a sensuous material, and for this reason only a certain stage of truth is capable of being the content of art’ (ibid.). The factors which most determine the shape of the modern world are indeed those, like the natural sciences, which rely on abstraction from sensuous particularity to generate universal predictive laws, and those which give priority to general legal and other principles over specific cases. These essential attributes of modernity mean for Hegel that ‘the science of art’, as opposed to art itself, ‘has become more of a need than in earlier times’ (ibid.: 6). The implication that art may therefore be coming to an end will later be supported by the growing uncertainty about the very existence of art brought about by Duchamp and the avant-garde. In modernity conceptual reflection becomes more and more an explicit part of aesthetic practice, and the problematic relationship of art to the culture industry makes the idea of art as a medium which conveys truth harder to defend. Despite
Wagner’s attempts to create one, there will be no modern equivalent of Greek tragedy’s grounding of a community. Hegel can also be interpreted, as we shall see, as being prescient with regard to serious music’s development away from being accessible to the general public.

However, a differentiation needs to be made here, between the historical ascendancy of the sciences and of modern forms of legal and political organisation, and Hegel’s claims for philosophy in relation to this ascendancy. Distinguishing the two will eventually return us to the issue of metaphysics, and metaphysics, and to some of the questions we considered above. The main point has to do with how Hegel’s claims about the limitations of art relate to his claims for philosophy, given that, in the light of the success of the sciences, philosophy itself can be seen to be at least as threatened by modernity as art. Hegel’s aim is for philosophy to reveal the structures which make possible the increasing conceptual determination of the world. This determination involves a hierarchy of attitudes to the world, in which each stage is overcome by a more mediated articulation that incorporates the unmediated elements which preceded it. Brandom reads this basic pattern in the manner we have seen, but it has consequences in Hegel which Brandom does not consider.

Hegel’s interpretation of feeling and temporality in music depends on the ability of philosophy to transcend forms of immediacy, like the temporalised sounds which constitute music. The main issue here will be nothing less than the relationship of philosophy to nihilism. In a world where religious forms of totality, which supposedly overcome contingency, transience, and decay, can no longer be defended, the status of the transient empirical world becomes a central metaphysical issue, and music forms one important response to this situation. Hegel’s strategy is to push awareness of the transience of the life-world to its extreme, in order to show how it is to be overcome in philosophy. The truth is not what passes away, but what philosophy establishes, which does not pass away, even though it is manifested in what does. This view of truth can be read in a variety of ways. In the deflationary reading that is shared by Hegelians like Brandom and Pippin it is a version of the overcoming of the ‘myth of the given’, of the idea that there are immediate experiences that can ground true belief. Truth resides rather in the ways in which intersubjectively negotiated claims lead to the concrete universals which legislate the modern world. On the level of the now widespread rejection of sense-data based empiricism, there is much to be said for this view. However, what is read in these terms
as an epistemological argument has other historical dimensions, and these point to more problematic aspects of modernity that put the role of philosophy in Hegel’s sense into question.

The *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art* and the *Aesthetics* analyse forms of art in terms both of their objective material manifestation, as buildings, sculptures, sounds, etc., and of the development of the conceptual grasp of the subject which relates to that manifestation. The result is a dialectic of the external and the internal involving a hierarchy of relationships between inert, objective matter, such as stone, and the ways in which this matter is transcended by being animated by thought. The dialectic culminates at the point where the objective matter that art requires becomes the one remaining restriction on thought that only pure thinking – philosophy rather than art – can overcome. Hegel gives an example of this dialectic when he discusses how talking about a bereavement can objectify someone’s emotional pain: ‘by making it objective the inner comes out and stands opposite the person externally’ (Hegel 2003: 28). The same is the case with writing a poem about one’s passion, which makes it less ‘dangerous’. The ‘final purpose of art’ is ‘to reveal the truth, to present what moves in the human breast, but concretely, in the form of images’ (ibid.: 30). This dependence on sensuous images means that art has to give way to philosophy. The history of art is of a changing relationship between form and content, subjective and objective. In ‘symbolic art’, the two are not fully unified, so the constitution of the object involves a ‘striving’: ‘the image contains in itself more than that whose meaning it is to present’ (ibid.: 119). The external object therefore dominates the internal idea: symbols are ambiguous, because the same empirical object can mean any number of different things. ‘Classical art’, exemplified by Greek sculpture, realises the union of internal and external by presenting the human form as an object, but as one in which the particular body represented gains a universal human significance as the ‘mirror of the spirit’ (ibid.: 157). A Greek sculpture is an objective manifestation of the truth of the subject. This truth emerges via the artist’s grasping the objective natural form of the human body and imbuing natural material with this form, in order to make something which has a more general significance for the community. Moreover, this form excludes ‘pain and death, because in it the spiritual and the natural are united’ (ibid.: 181), and so does not confront the temporality that will be essential to ‘romantic art’.

The development of romantic from classical art is summed up in the following: ‘The meaning of Greek [classical] art is that subjective spirit
is the main thing, but its reality still appears as immediate existence [e.g. in the objective form of the sculpture]. Now [in romantic art] it is a question of presenting a subjectivity which dominates the [objective] form (‘Gestalt’) (ibid.: 177). There is now a difference between ‘form and meaning’ (ibid.: 176), but of a different kind from that present in symbolic art, where spirit did not have full control of the natural material. Romantic art has no essential relationship to the material world; instead, it ‘has a musical foundation, a hovering and sounding above a world which can only take up a reflection of this being in itself of the soul’, because ‘inwardness has an opposition within it against external existence’ (ibid.: 182). The move away from sensuous particularity is seen as constitutive of the essential power of mind. This power consists in mind’s awareness of the finitude of all empirical things, which is manifested in romantic art: ‘The traces of temporality, of the impoverishment of nature, the externality of existence can for this reason be taken up more for their own sake’ (ibid.: 185) in such art. The novel, which forms itself from the transient material of a historical period, depends on meanings established by the writer, rather than on the meanings of a pre-existing unified community, of the kind that Hegel sees as the basis of Greek art. There is, then, a falling apart of the subject’s inner sense of its existence and the power of its thinking, and the external world, which no longer appears as inherently meaningful.

In his account of the relationship between the arts Hegel locates music in terms of the falling apart of the subjective and the objective that is characteristic of modernity. The falling apart is exemplified in proto-Weberian manner by the processes of abstraction in science and law that destroy traditional ideas of immanent meaningfulness. Music is therefore connected to the development of specific forms of thinking which arise from the individualisation of the subject in modernity, and to the loss of a community founded on shared religious beliefs. Because its material, ‘although sensuous, progresses to even deeper subjectivity’ (ibid.: 42) than the spatial material of painting, music comes higher in the hierarchy of the arts than painting. The basis of music’s status as a new form of subjective expression is ‘feeling’, ‘Empfindung’, which is essentially internal. The question for us is whether feeling is to be regarded as a form of immediacy, of the kind that the critique of the myth of the given convincingly rejects as a foundation for epistemology, or whether it is to be understood in the sort of terms we considered in Nussbaum’s claim in chapter 1 that feelings are kinds of judgement. Feelings, as we saw, cannot be wholly inward because they involve
intentional relations to the objective world, and are themselves in part dependent upon forms of articulation, including music, acquired from that world. The issue for Hegel lies in the extent to which feelings can be regarded as determinate.

Hegel analyses the musical note in terms of the idea of the animation of objective material. Whereas the space in painting is still an ‘indifferent separation’, music ‘idealises it into the One of the point, but a concrete one’ (ibid.: 42–3). This is because the point, i.e. the note, ‘exists as the beginning ideality of spatiality in movement, the trembling of the material within itself’ (ibid.: 43). The process of animation is moved into the dimension of time, where the vibration of the body producing the note corresponds to ‘this negative sensuousness which, as it is, is not, and in its not-being already produces its being again’; ‘the restless self-negation’ of the vibration is the ‘emergence’ of what is negated (ibid.). The movement of the vibrating body involves a pattern of presence and absence (hence ‘self-negation’) which have to be grasped as a unity if the phenomenon is to exist as such at all. The note can only be a note because each vibration is negated by the next, but each vibration must, like the moments of time, be connected to the preceding ones. The note is a sensuous, temporalised instantiation of ‘material incompatibility’: each oscillation excludes the others, but thereby becomes intelligible as part of a structured whole. This intelligibility is constituted, though, at the level of feeling: ‘This material of abstract inwardness is the immediate medium of equally indeterminate feeling which has not yet been able to progress to solid being-determined in itself. Music only expresses sounding and fading away (‘Klingen und Verklingen’) and forms the middle-point of subjective art, the point of transition of abstract sensuousness to abstract mindedness’ (ibid.). The idea of music as a transition between the natural and the cultural, or the non-semantic and the semantic, that we encountered in chapter 2, is echoed here.

The link of this conception to the issue of nihilism starts to emerge when Hegel argues that the transition from nature to culture begins with the ‘liberation of the sensuous element in the note’ (ibid.), but culminates when the sensuous is ‘completely spiritualised, and the note is no longer the sounding of feeling itself, but is degraded to a mere sign which is contentless for itself’ (ibid.). The note is therefore just a form of immediacy, and music is limited by the nature of its material. At the stage beyond music the sign is not one of ‘indeterminate feeling, but of an idea (‘Vorstellung’) which has become concrete in itself’
(ibid.). Note how Brandom’s interpretation of the move from immediacy and mediation to mediated immediacy echoes Hegel’s account. The note which was ‘previously abstract [in Hegel’s sense of ‘immediate’, ‘unconnected’, where the ‘concrete’ is what has ‘grown-together’ in a web of determinations], determination-less sounding becomes a word—a sound/note (‘Ton’), whose sense/meaning (‘Sinn’) is to express ideas, thoughts’ (ibid.). The specific material of the word is now indifferent, because what counts is its ability to serve as the means for Geist to express thoughts, which it does via its inferential relations to other words. The animation and rendering intelligible of inert matter in art is therefore repeated in the genesis of meaning. Meaning does not rely on specific sensuous material, because mind can employ any material that can take on a form as a sign, from noises to electric charges, and so on.

The upshot for our concerns of this conception is best considered via Hegel’s analysis of music later in the text. However, certain obvious questions already suggest themselves, not least about the level at which the conception is to be understood. Is it, for example, an anthropological conception intended to account for the origin of language, or an account of the conditions of possibility of meaning, of the kind that Brandom elaborates, or a historical observation about music in modernity, which evidently does not have the determining effects on the social world that the language-based sciences do, etc.? If it is the latter, why is it that at much the same time other philosophers, like Novalis, Schleiermacher, and Schopenhauer, and musicians, like Beethoven and Schubert, probably invest more heavily in music than anyone had done in the previous history of Western culture? One reason for this investment has to do precisely with a perceived failure of language to communicate fundamental aspects of modern existence. In this sense the idea of the ‘degradation’ of the note suggests that an element of repression may be involved in the genesis of the signifier. The main issue in this context becomes apparent with regard to the temporality of the note and its link to feeling.

In the section on music in the Lectures, Hegel characterises the auditory element of music as ‘appearance which drifts away, abstract subjectivity which remains subjective in its expression, nothing external remains at rest, but rather immediately disappears as something external’ (ibid.: 262). Whereas the meaning of the word—whose material also disappears—is sustained against fading away by the idealisation inherent in thought, the musical note is seen as attached to the transient contingency of feelings. In other arts, such as sculpture and painting, the
fulfilment that results ‘is of its nature external, spatial and thus always distinguished from the inwardness of the I’ (ibid.: 263), because there is a determinate external object which occasions the inner response. In music this distinction is lost, so ‘the notes progress in my deepest inwardness’ (ibid.). The ‘power of notes’ comes about because what matters is the internal response: the subject is stirred by the movement of the notes in a manner which supposedly precludes an objective response. However, this is already implausible, because the feelings experienced in relation to music rely on awareness of connections between the notes, and, in a differentiated response, on a great deal many other idealisations. Then, however, comes Hegel’s crucial contention: ‘People can be all the more enthused (‘hingerissen’) the less they have determinacy of content, the less ideas and thoughts they have’ (ibid.). In contrast to Schlegel’s view of the significance of Orpheus, Hegel claims: ‘Orpheus, they say, tamed mankind, gave it laws through music. Our laws are not given musically. Music alone, which is without content for itself, does not affect us’ (ibid.: 265). Whereas music with a text gives satisfaction, the more music becomes independent, ‘the more it belongs to the understanding and is a mere piece of artifice, which is only for the expert and is untrue to the purpose of art’ (ibid.: 270).

Two factors are in play here, which relate to Hegel’s view of music as ‘art of the deepest feeling’, and ‘of the strictest understanding’ (ibid.: 262). The first is a justifiable suspicion of a giving way to powerful feelings that are not structured by thought (i.e. the sort of feelings which will be involved in what Schlegel, Schelling, and Nietzsche see as the ‘Dionysian’); the second is the idea that wordless music can only appeal to those who have a technical understanding of it. The first factor makes music inferior to philosophy because its ‘content’ is ‘more indeterminate and vague’ (Hegel 1965: 2, 299) than that of discursive thought; the second makes it inferior because the content cannot become objective to a community in the way that what is communicated by language can. Even though music must involve material inference if it is to be understood as music, it is therefore excluded from the level of the inferential game in which knowing how becomes knowing that. Hegel’s apparently contingent historical judgement on wordless music therefore has a specifically philosophical import. He insists that ‘music stops at the expression of feeling, it makes this its purpose’ (Hegel 2003: 266), and it can only transcend this limitation via the text it accompanies. Like Kivy and others, he assumes that the meaning of music with a text is just the meaning of the text which the music
accompanies, plus whatever feelings constitute its necessarily indeterminate ‘content’.

The knock-down objection to this would seem to be that at the points where they have the same text Bach’s B minor Mass, Haydn’s ‘Nelson’ Mass, and Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis therefore have the same meaning. That is not necessarily what Hegel intends, but if it is not, the difference must lie in the feelings: ‘As feeling accompanies the content of mind, then music as its expression is what accompanies’ – there is no sense that it can affect – ‘signs of ideas, words’ (ibid.: 270). Content is therefore conceptual, whereas feeling is not. However, Hegel then goes on to claim that the significance of independent (textless) music is available only to the expert, others gaining satisfaction via the content of the words that music accompanies. The knock-down argument which really is valid here is that plenty of non-specialist listeners (like the present writer) do not experience any difference of kind between, say, the sung fugues in Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, and the fugues in the late purely instrumental works, such as the non-choral movements of the Ninth Symphony or the Grosse Fuge. Beethoven’s incorporation of and transcendence of existing traditions of polyphony creates a musical excess that is combined with a new kind of order, and is more important than the semantics of the text of the Missa.

What music conveys also depends upon an immediate sense of its meaningfulness as part of a world which inherently involves musical significance, rather than existing independently of such significance. Hegel offers no real way of grasping the effects of the music on the understanding of the text of the Missa because the music supposedly merely accompanies signs of ideas in the way feelings can accompany thoughts. One further questionable result of Hegel’s approach is that it does not deal with how music can function as metaphor. Some passages of Bruckner’s symphonies, for example, may evoke mountain vistas in a manner whose phenomenology is neither merely visual nor merely affective. This kind of evocation presumably still comes for Hegel in the realm of what is ‘indeterminate and vague’. However, such a judgement entails a very contentious evaluation of what matters to people and of how and why they link the auditory, the visual and the affective. Moreover, the judgement of vagueness must also apply to verbal metaphors, which can only be metaphors to the extent to which they cannot be fully literalised.

What is decisive here is the idea, which underpins the Aesthetics and the Lectures, that philosophy is the arbiter of the relative status
of the differing forms of articulation in modernity. Here the question of nihilism again comes into play, because of the way in which philosophy is supposed to transcend immediacy. Hegel repeatedly insists that music’s inherent transience makes it an inferior stage of the appearance of *Geist*. The pattern of mediation is, as we have seen, one in which transient material is overcome by its incorporation into *Geist*’s inferential structures. The paradigm of this is the move from note to word, and the accompanying idealisation of the representation designated by the word, as opposed to the immediate, transient inner feeling related to the note. Brandom’s comment on the process of conceptualisation, that ‘the immediacies that became first available are construed as *signs*’, exactly parallels Hegel’s account of the move from music to language. The question is whether the mediation may not involve some kind of exclusion or repression of certain kinds of meaning.

The most complete version of the move from immediacy to mediation is required by Hegel to establish ‘absolute knowledge’, which Brandom saw in terms of ‘explanation of what it is to say something that is powerful enough to explain what it itself is saying’. Absolute knowledge transcends all the particular relations between things which philosophy reveals to be inherent in contentful thought, in order to articulate the overall structure of how thought and being relate. The question is how to interpret philosophy’s claim to attain a position which transcends all forms of immediacy. Hegel is aiming at more than just a critique of empiricism, as the disqualification of the supposedly lower forms of *Geist* in the name of the final elimination of sensuousness makes clear. In one sense, of course, he just means that music cannot do what verbal language can, lacking the meta-linguistic capacity that allows alternative descriptions of specific things. However, the assessment of the relative importance of these means of articulation is undertaken in the name of philosophy’s ability to overcome the immediacy of the forms which precede it.

What, though, does this overcoming concretely mean in relation to the socio-historical world, and philosophy’s role in it? If one really were able to reach absolute knowledge, what would be achieved by having done so? In one sense philosophy could therefore come to an end: having resolved the question of how mind and world relate, it could be

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9 Brandom refers to Hegel’s ‘objective idealism’, but Hegel advocates ‘absolute idealism’. The former involves the idea that philosophy seeks to analyse the contingent, socially located historical interactions of mind and world, and the latter is summed up by Habermas as the claim to encompass the ‘context of all contexts’.
left to the specific sciences to get on with the job of revealing the nature of things.10 This can become a version of what Max Weber describes in terms of the ‘disenchantment’ of the modern world. For Weber, the truths which dominate the modern world eliminate the meanings of the life-world. The vital factor in this interpretation is what we saw in Heidegger, namely the fact that philosophy itself also becomes more and more irrelevant in the face of the natural sciences.

What, then, of the contemporary defences of Hegel, which regard him as a positive resource for a philosophical approach to modernity? A key result of the Hegelian conception in Brandom’s terms derives, as we saw, from his rejection of Cartesian representationalist intentionality in favour of Kantian inferentialist intentionality. This allows him to explain progressing scientific rationality in a manner which places ‘mediated’ normative practices of justification prior to the ‘unmediated’ factual realm, in order to escape the dilemma of producing the normative from the factual. The primacy of the normative means that the approach can also be applied, as Pippin suggests, to the ethical sphere, with regard to things which become impossible to justify, like slavery and the oppression of women. In both theoretical and practical spheres it is possible to discern a wider pattern of rational development which can be immanently legitimated on the basis of critical appraisal of social practices of justification. The idea of a developing rationality offers a version of metaphysics that counters the nihilistic reading of Hegel’s account of the development of philosophy via the elimination of immediacy. It is, however, not clear how this approach regards the aesthetic, and here the relationship of contemporary interpretations of Hegel to the reading that links him to nihilism is important.

The historical point is the conjunction of the change in the importance of music with the emergence of Hegel’s vision of modernity. The entanglement of Hegel’s philosophical claim, that truth depends on the elimination of what makes music mere transience, with the claims of the music that is produced in Hegel’s period gives us indications of how to assess the relationship between music and philosophy. In concrete social terms music at certain times does things which philosophy is unable to do. Looked at strictly in Hegel’s terms this would just mean that music allows people ‘to be more enthused the less they have determinacy of content’. However, he does also appreciate the

10 In this sense Hegel can be related to the *Tractatus*: we can throw away the ladder of philosophy once this point is reached.
importance of modern music’s becoming an independent expression of human freedom. The fact is that the two positions never quite seem to square. In the light of the questionable side of the subsequent reception of phenomena like Wagner, Hegel’s rationalist approach contains an important warning which we shall consider again later in the book. At the same time, the suspicions of philosophy that are contemporaneous with Wagner (and which, in the case of Feuerbach, influenced Wagner’s conceptions) point to ways in which philosophy as a social practice fails to address deep concerns about the direction and nature of modernity.

My question is whether such works as Beethoven’s *Eroica*, or his late quartets, and Wagner’s *Ring*, or *Tristan* may not offer understandings of modernity, which, while relying on discursive language to be approached in these terms at all, still articulate something which philosophy cannot. This claim requires such music both to have a cognitive dimension and yet to communicate something that is only possible because of its specificity as music. In contrast to the Hegelian philosophical image of a progressing rationality, which many come to regard as hard to square with the often catastrophic course of the world in which that progress occurs, music’s development embodies contradictions in modern experience which relate to the nature of freedom in modernity. Modernity involves both the overcoming of traditional orders and the fear of groundlessness that haunts the new ‘merely human’ orders. Significant modern music confronts the most difficult issues in society concerning, for example, ineluctable change, the disintegration of traditional forms of order and the precariousness of new forms of order, the nature of time, the fragility of the self. It does so in ways which may temporarily transcend these problems, even while using them as its content, by articulating dimensions of the problems which can never be reduced to what we say about them. At the same time, music will be faced with the growing sense that its new orders are becoming more and more arbitrary. For the moment, though, what interests me is the fact that it is in one respect precisely because of its indeterminacy that music does something which philosophy cannot.

These claims relate to two crucial tensions in modern philosophy. Hegel can be seen as seeking to reveal the philosophical essence of modernity, in order rationally to reconcile people to the brutal changes it involves. Such a philosophy of immanence runs the risk of failing to appreciate the importance of responses to the contingencies of modernity which do not fit a rationalist model. This failure is echoed in Hegel’s
underestimation of music at a time when music itself, as Kramer puts it, ‘help[s] produce the discourses and representations of which it is also the product’. It is this two-way process that is largely excluded by a Hegelian conception. The first tension is, then, between philosophy as that which seeks to explain aspects of modernity, and philosophy as that which seeks to advert to new forms of world-disclosure which offer new semantic potential. The related, second tension is between philosophy for which, as Pinkard argues, the absolute idea is ‘the normative self-correcting structure of a rational form of modern “social space”, and forms the “pure normative structure” of the patterns of reciprocal recognition that make up modern mind, Geist’ (Ameriks 2000b: 177), and philosophy which suspects that limitation to immanent social appraisal is not adequate to experiences of meaning which cannot be mediated in such normative structures. In this latter view, forms of world-disclosure, like music, are best considered in the terms suggested by Adorno, when he says that their ‘interpretation measures itself by the level of its failure’ (Adorno 2001: 120), something which is known to any committed performer, but is also part of the experience of listening to great music (see chapter 9). Understanding thus becomes a regulative idea whose boundaries could not be drawn by philosophy in the manner suggested by Pinkard, because it is only in the active process of engagement with music that one can experience the open-ended challenge which it poses. This engagement can lead to debate in ‘rational . . . “social space”’, but there is always a sense that even reciprocal recognition of the results of the argument cannot be the last word. It is in the philosophy of the early Romantics that the beginnings of such ideas are found. The Romantics’ attention to music gives them, as we saw, a new understanding of philosophy, not as a systematic answer to metaphysical questions, but as a search for ways of coming to terms with the modern experience of finitude. I want now to consider some more early Romantic and later Romantic approaches to philosophy and music, in order to bring out both the possibilities and dangers of this sort of questioning of philosophy.
The task of philosophy

In early German Romantic philosophy communication and understanding are often regarded more as ways of acting and being in the world than as forms of representation of a pre-given reality. Music becomes particularly significant because it involves norm-based interpretation, on the part both of players and of listeners, and yet resists wholesale incorporation into representational and theoretical discourse. The question is what this means for philosophy. The interrogation of the nature of philosophy occasioned by the changes in thinking about language in Romanticism need not imply that, because modern philosophy fails to achieve some of the tasks it sets itself, it is therefore at an end, in the way the later Heidegger claims by his equation of philosophy and metaphysics. Such an implication would contradict the pragmatist side of Romanticism, which assesses discourses and practices in terms of their contribution to human flourishing, and so abstains from final judgements on the status of particular cultural practices. There is, however, no doubt that a significant strand of modern philosophy, from the Romantics, to Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Adorno, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer, can be interpreted as questioning the assumptions of science-oriented philosophy in terms of the issues that we have been exploring via music.

Ernst Tugendhat has criticised this strand of philosophy as follows: ‘it is characteristic for the entire tradition of philosophical Romanticism from Schelling and Hegel to Heidegger and Gadamer that, in ever new ways, an ontologically inflated conception of art became a substitute for the question of the justification of norms, and it was in every instance an obfuscation of the concept of truth’ (Tugendhat 1992: 430). From what
we saw in the last chapter, contemporary interpreters of Hegel would contest his inclusion in this list, but is what I am proposing an ‘ontologically inflated’ conception of music which obfuscates the concept of truth? An immediate rhetorical riposte to Tugendhat is suggested by Nietzsche: ‘Assuming truth is a woman – what? is not the suspicion well-founded that all philosophers, to the extent to which they were dogmatists, didn’t understand women very well?’ (Nietzsche 2000: 2, 565), because they have not been able to provide an agreed account of truth. Tugendhat himself admits that philosophy has failed to arrive at definitions of truth and meaning, which raises the question of the status of philosophy itself in the light of that failure.

Tugendhat demands that philosophy retain truth as the regulative idea that orients the attempt to legitimate norms. It might then be argued that philosophy can be connected to other aspects of human endeavour that involve an inherent sense of incompleteness that is generated by a notional goal of completeness. Novalis contends that ‘The highest works of art are completely recalcitrant (‘ungefällig’) – They are ideals, which only could and should please us approximando – aesthetic imperatives. In the same way the moral law should approximando become the formula of inclination (will). (Ideal will – infinite will. There is, in terms of its character, no way of conceiving of the attainment of the unattainable . . .).’ (Novalis 1978: 652–3). Truth, morality, and art can thus all be seen as involving regulative ideas: they make normative and other demands whose significance lies in the very fact that, even though they may be unfulfillable, they cannot be ignored. In music this conception is evident, for example, in the conviction among performers that something that is worth playing could always be played better. Novalis claims that philosophy ‘teaches the relativity of all grounds and all qualities – the infinite multiplicity and unity of the construction of a thing etc.’ (ibid.: 616). Linking Novalis’ view of philosophy’s aim to art – which can often precisely be seen as involving ‘infinite multiplicity and unity’ – offers ways of pursuing the question of what music may ‘tell’ us about philosophy.

Is the prior aim of philosophy the justification of norms, or the generation and apprehension of meaning? Is the latter reducible to the former, as Brandom tends to suggest? Is it a philosophical decision as to which of these activities is most essential, and how is that decision to be legitimated, if there is no general agreement about the foundations or nature of philosophy? Such questions recur in modernity for a variety of reasons, not least to do with the success of the methods of
the natural sciences. Modern philosophy’s role may consequently be better thought of in terms of its interpretation of the place of science in the rest of culture. This interpretation does not just have to do with the norms governing cognitive practices. It can appeal to other practices, like music, which let aspects of the world show themselves in ways which are immune to causal or law-based explanation. As we have seen, some norms in music cannot be justified in philosophical or scientific terms, because they may only be communicable through gesture, and may only be understood via a kind of ‘material inference’ relating to feeling.

Music and community

Questions about the aims of philosophy are a feature of modernity from Feuerbach to contemporary pragmatism. In the Romantic period they are also connected to admittedly hyperbolic, but instructive, assessments of the unique significance of music. Wackenroder and Tieck, Friedrich Schlegel’s friends and the authors of Fantasies on Art of 1799, echo some of Schlegel’s remarks when they claim that ‘Without music the earth is like a desolate, as yet incomplete house that lacks its inhabitants. For this reason the earliest Greek and Biblical history, indeed the history of every nation, begins with music’ (Wackenroder and Tieck 1973: 102). In chapter 1 I quoted Novalis’ claims that philosophy is ‘really homesickness, the drive to be at home everywhere’ (Novalis 1978: 675), and that music allows the mind to be ‘for short moments in its earthly home’ (ibid.: 517). Even if such ideas appear to be ‘merely romantic’, reflection on why they were proposed at all can change the perspective on whether philosophy should be primarily or exclusively the locus of the discursive legitimation of norms.

Tugendhat’s and Brandom’s understanding of philosophy’s role connects them to a crucial tension in modern philosophy. As Kierkegaard and Sartre both argued, one problem in perspectives like Hegel’s is that socially negotiated norms may offer individuals no resources for the sort of existential meaning that can lead someone to commit their life to music because it reduces or obviates their sense of ‘homelessness’. Modern philosophy involves a conflict between public and private dimensions of ‘meaning’, not least in the form of an uncertainty as to where the line between the two is to be drawn. The idea of ‘being at home’ can depend on the availability of normatively governed cultural and other resources, but these resources may not, on their own, be
sufficient. The early Nietzsche and Wagner think that music might give the individual, private existential need a collective articulation of a kind which the sciences and other aspects of modern culture cannot. Importantly, Hegel, as we shall now see, neither excludes this individual, private level, nor does he preclude the possibility of it being universalised in a new way in modernity.

The philosophical point of Hegel’s view of music is the idea that music’s true content is part of the transition to the rational determinacy of thought which is engaged with the external world. However, Dahlhaus reveals some interesting ambivalences in Hegel’s relationship to music when he reflects on the absence of discussion in Hegel of Beethoven, whose work he must have known. Hegel advanced the case of Rossini, thus reinforcing a cultural trend which troubled Beethoven in later life.¹ Dahlhaus thinks Hegel is probably reacting to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s famous review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, the hearing of which, Hoffmann asserts, leads one to leave behind ‘all feelings that can be determined by concepts in order to devote oneself to the unsayable’ (Hoffmann 1988: 23):

Hegel regarded absolute music which tears itself away from a content of feeling that is determinable by concepts, and for that reason lays claim as pure form or structure to metaphysical dignity as language that is beyond and above the level of words, as leading on the wrong path, on which the ‘universally human interest in art’ had to decline . . . Hegel probably completely understood what was happening in the history of music and manifested itself in Beethoven’s symphonies, but he resisted it.

(Dahlhaus 1988: 239)

He does so because of his awareness of the gap which Beethoven’s radical new music begins to open up between the composer and the wider public, the sort of gap which was to become unbridgeable in some areas of music in the twentieth century. The significance of that gap for music’s relationship to philosophy cannot be overestimated.

One way to approach this issue is in terms of the relationship of metaphysics₁ and metaphysics₂ to our self-descriptions in modernity. Objectifying self-descriptions which develop in the nineteenth century, particularly in the light of Darwin, and which lead to the

¹ Criticism of this trend has less to do with Rossini as an undoubtedly masterly composer than with the manner of his reception, which might be seen as an instance of the rise of the culture industry.
self-descriptions characteristic of contemporary genetics and artificial intelligence, have to co-exist with the search for forms of self-understanding and self-expression, such as music, which can integrate the subject into a disenchanted world. Hegel emphasises the need to come to terms with the former, disenchanted kind of self-description, but some of his remarks on how music relates to the individual subject point to another side of his thinking.

Hegel observes that music requires the division of time because ‘time stands in the closest relationship with the simple self which hears and should hear its inner-self in the notes’ (Hegel 1965: 2, 283). Time, though, can just be ‘empty progression’ (ibid.: 284), and the self must contradict this mere accumulation of successive moments because its essential nature is ‘return to self’ (ibid.: 283). By returning to itself it ‘interrupts the determination-less sequence of temporal points, makes incisions in the abstract continuity’, so that the I ‘remembers itself and finds itself again’ (ibid.: 284) in the experience of music. The temporal order of music is not given in nature, and the satisfaction it gives belongs ‘neither to time nor to the notes as such, but is something that only belongs to the I’ (ibid.: 285). This satisfaction enables the I to establish a sense of its own meaning, its ‘feeling of self’ (ibid.: 283), via the engagement with objective sounds. Hegel is concerned, then, with Kant’s ‘transcendental unity of apperception’, the ‘I think that must be able to accompany all my representations’, and thus also with the issues discussed in chapter 3 in relation to rhythm. Like Schlegel, he connects the way the self finds itself to rhythm, thus to what we saw in terms of schematism and of Taylor’s idea of ‘preconceptual engagement’ with the world. How, though, does what he asserts relate to his claims about philosophy’s ability to integrate the spheres of modernity? Dahlhaus offers an interesting speculation here which is, he acknowledges, not philologically verifiable. The idea is that Hegel may have come to see how his approach to music involves a more complex tension between metaphysics1 and metaphysics2 than is apparent in the ideas we looked at in the last chapter. The ‘feeling of self’ can be just arbitrarily inward and subjective, but it is also linked to important social considerations, as the fact that it emerges via engagement with music as part of the objective social world indicates.

Dahlhaus begins his speculation with a striking contradiction in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s texts on music, texts which, given Hoffmann’s place in the cultural life of Berlin, Hegel very likely knew. Writing about Beethoven’s Opus 70 piano trios in 1813, Hoffmann suggests, in the
manner of his review of the Fifth Symphony, that ‘in the midst of this unlocked realm of spirits the delighted soul listens to the unknown language and understands all the most secret intimations by which it is seized’ (Hoffmann 1988: 121). In the essay ‘Old and New Church Music’ of 1814, however, Hoffmann presents the conception of music as the conceptless means of access to a metaphysical realm, not in terms of wordless instrumental music that is free of the obligation to relate to what words may say, but instead in terms of the church music tradition deriving from Palestrina, which relies on the setting of liturgical texts. How is the metaphysical significance attributed to Beethoven’s music to be squared with the idea of the ‘religious substance’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 247) realised in the tradition from Palestrina to Bach, which Hoffmann regards as lost to the modern era?

Dahlhaus uses this question in relation to the assertion, attributed to Hegel on the occasion of Mendelssohn’s performance of the rediscovered Bach St Matthew Passion that he attended in 1829, that ‘that’s not proper (‘rechte’) music; we’ve now got further than that, although nowhere near the real thing’ (ibid.: 245). In the light of what Hegel says about such Protestant oratorios in the Aesthetics, this assertion, which is not confirmed by any direct sources, is surprising. There he claims that the oratorios’ combination of text and music transcends the subjective feeling of the individual and has to do with the ‘substantial content of all feeling or with the universal feeling of the congregation as a whole’ (Hegel 1965: 2, 318). In old church music, such as a Crucifixus, the listener should not ‘look at’ (‘anschauen’) the events, but should ‘live through in his innermost self the most inward part of this death and of these divine pains’ (ibid.: 304), so transcending mere subjective inwardness and approaching the ‘thing itself (‘die Sache selbst’)’ as part of a congregation. Dahlhaus suggests that if one relates Hoffmann’s problem to Hegel’s attributed remark on the Matthew Passion it could mean that at the end of his life Hegel ‘weighed up the possibility that the religious substance of music was not exclusively contained in older church music, whose main Protestant work obviously disappointed him as a musical experience, but might be able to be restored in terms of the premises of Beethoven’s instrumental music whose metaphysical interpretation by Hoffmann had earlier been suspect to Hegel’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 248).

Whether Hegel really made his remark about the Matthew Passion or pondered this possibility is perhaps less important than the paradigmatic significance of the underlying issue. From the beginning of his
work Hegel is concerned with finding ways to replace the ‘substance’ of religion, as the power which binds a community together, with what can be achieved through human reason. One reaction to this issue at the time is the elevation, envisaged by Hoffmann, of music and other art to being the locus for what had previously been religious feelings. However, in this period, art itself becomes subject to the same processes as lead to the problem to which music is seen as a solution. Dahlhaus talks of the ‘dialectic of emancipation and alienation, autonomy and loss of substance’ (ibid.: 238) that occurs in modern music, beginning with Beethoven. Such a dialectic also occurs in modern societies. Individual freedom leads on the one hand to the erosion of intersubjective bonds and shared practices, and on the other hand to the removal of repressive traditional constraints. The two processes can occur in relation to the same practices. One consequence of this dialectic in modern Western societies has been a need for new collective experiences which restore a sense of community, of the kind suggested by Hegel’s notion of ‘the universal feeling of the congregation as a whole’, which relates to the subject’s ‘finding itself again’ in music. For music this has important consequences that change the nature of opera and symphony concerts and the music played in them, and, later, change events like rock concerts, which offer various kinds of collective escape from isolation. There have also, of course, been much more sinister forms of the use of music to generate collective experience. Hitler’s attempted appropriation of Wagner as a means of collective seduction is the most notorious, but the manipulation characteristic of many areas of the popular music industry relies on the same kind of needs.

Another way of interpreting the loss of substance in art is consequently in terms of the refusal to be reconciled with dominant aesthetic expectations, of the kind which Adorno will see as essential to an art that defies being compromised by its relationship to the culture industry or to political repression. Adorno inverts Hegel’s worry about the loss of the ‘universally human interest in art’, in the name of the hope that he thinks is contained in authentic works of art’s resistance to society. He therefore approves a move away from the distortion of collective interest in art by what he regards as the false universality of the culture industry, in the name of precisely what concerned Hegel about Beethoven’s potential alienation of his wider audience. This stance leads to the dilemma that art’s collective social effects may become minimised by the attempt to express what the dominant attitudes of a society do not acknowledge. Art can thus be seen as suspended between fulfilling
a function that compensates for deficits in social life, at the risk of reconciling people to unjust circumstances (and worse), and fulfilling a critical function, at the risk of being a merely symbolic protest against social conditions which does not significantly influence most people’s thinking and action. Hegel’s possible ambivalence concerning how the substance of a modern community might be constituted with regard to music is therefore an indication of a structural tension facing modern music. However, music sustains itself through the crises associated with the idea of loss of substance in ways which cannot be understood solely in terms of an opposition between compensation and critique. Adorno fails to see how the relationship between compensation and critique has different significances in differing historical and cultural circumstances (see Bowie 2004a and chapter 9 below). It is therefore important to find resources which allow for these differences to be part of the understanding of music and modern philosophy. Elements of such resources can be found in aspects of Romantic philosophy, some of which we already considered in chapter 3.

Romanticism and musical consciousness

The unifying theme in Romantic philosophy is probably the attempt to grasp new kinds of connection between human consciousness and nature. Such connections can, if the aim is to anchor them in a re-theologising of nature, be ‘dogmatic’ in Kant’s sense, but they need not be. Despite the considerable diversity in what early German Romantic philosophers – I shall look at Novalis, Schelling, and Schleiermacher – say about music, they tend to share a sense that music has to do with ways in which we are part of the world that are not accessible to conceptual articulation, but which can also affect conceptual thinking. They do so because they regard music, not as something ‘natural’, but as something inextricably linked to self-consciousness.

Novalis’ comments on music are scattered throughout his work, and are neither very numerous nor very consistent. We saw in chapter 3 how his disagreement with Fichte led him to a new conception of philosophy’s relationship to temporality. By rejecting the idea of a system grounded in the spontaneity of the I, he is led to see philosophy’s task as coming to terms with the transience and lack of self-transparency of the I. This means that art can be as much a resource for philosophical understanding as discursive argument, and that music is essential to philosophy. Novalis consequently regards language in ‘poetic’, expressive
terms, rather than primarily as a means of representation. As he puts it in a famous passage from *Monologue*:

> whoever has a fine feeling for [language’s] application, for its rhythm, for its musical spirit, who hears in himself the gentle effect of its inner nature and moves his tongue or hand accordingly, will be a prophet; on the other hand, whoever knows this well enough but does not have the ears and the feeling for language will write truths like these but will be made fun of by language and will be mocked by people, like Cassandra by the Trojans. If I believe that I have thereby indicated the essence and role (‘Amt’) of literature [‘Poesie’, in the wider sense of creative art derived from ‘poiesis’] in the clearest possible fashion then I yet know that no one can understand it and that I have said something completely stupid, because I wanted to say it, and in this way no literature can come into being.

(Novalis 1978: 438)

Language is linked to music because it is not completely in the power of the subject and yet offers resources to the subject which transcend the subject’s intentions. This leads Novalis elsewhere to the following prescient view of the non-representational future of modern art: ‘Poems, just pleasant sounding and full of beautiful words, but also without any meaning or context . . . like fragments of the most diverse things. True poetry can at the most have an allegorical meaning as a whole and an indirect effect, like music etc.’ (ibid.: 769). By trying to speak the truth about the truth one fails to achieve what is possible when one relies on the musical and literary possibilities of language. These open up new dimensions of the world in ways which cannot be reduced to an explanation that would circumscribe the truth.

A related notion of the limits of the sayable occurred in Wittgenstein’s ideas about music and ‘logical form’. Wittgenstein maintained that ‘The proposition can represent the whole of reality, but it cannot represent what it must have in common with reality in order to represent it’, and so sought ‘a means of expression with which I can talk about language’. The idea in Novalis is that, just as the self is not transparent to itself and so has to embark on a constant attempt at self-articulation by means of ‘external’ language, language involves kinds of intelligibility which are not reducible to what can be explained within language itself. ² We encounter language as part of the contingent, external world,

² Reference here to ‘the self’ is just intended to indicate that propositional self-knowledge – from objective facts about my name, height and so on, to subjective facts about my feelings – cannot capture aspects of self-conscious existence that may be articulated in music and gesture.
like the rest of objective nature, but, also like objective nature, language is part of us in ways that resist objectification. Such objectification is always secondary to a prior intelligibility without which objectification makes no sense. This dual status precludes both a wholly naturalistic account of language, and one which sees language as completely in the power of the subject. It is language’s resistance to being regarded as belonging either to the subject- or to the object-pole that opens up its connection to music for the Romantics.

As we saw in chapter 3, rhythm is a necessary part of what enables us to experience and act in an intelligible world. Novalis talks of rhythm’s linking of natural and human phenomena: ‘Seasons (‘Jahreszeiten’), times of the day (‘Tageszeiten’), lives, destinies are all, strangely enough, thoroughly rhythmical – metrical – follow a beat (‘tactmäßig’). . . . Everything we do with a certain skill – we do rhythmically without noticing it – Rhythm is found everywhere – insinuates itself everywhere’ (Novalis 1978: 401). The sense that rhythm is part of both the natural and the human world is crucial in this context. The link between identity, coherence, and pleasure which we explored in relation to Kant and Schlegel, and which Hegel saw in the ‘return to self’, recurs here in a manner that prefigures Heidegger’s and Merleau-Ponty’s ideas about the precedence of our immediately meaningful active contacts with the world before the ways in which they can be conceptualised.

In his Fragments from the Unpublished Works of a Young Physicist (published 1810), much of which was written at the same time as Novalis’ texts, Novalis’ friend, the physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter, offers perhaps the most hyperbolic version of such ideas about music. Even if his main point cannot be defended, Ritter does show how the intelligibility of languages is not something that languages themselves can explain:

The essence and work(ing) (‘Wirken’) of humankind is language. Music is language as well, universal language; the first language of humankind. Existing languages are individualisations of music; not individualised music, rather they relate to music as the individual organs relate to the organic whole . . . Music disintegrated into languages. For this reason every language can still use music as its accompaniment . . . song is double language, universal [i.e. music] and particular [i.e. verbal language] at the same time. Here the particular word is raised to universal comprehensibility.

(Ritter 1984: 272)

The aspects common to music and verbal language implicit in Ritter’s comments are the units of articulation (note and word), rhythm, and
affect. Ritter relies on a mythical idea of ‘music’ as the origin and ground of all languages (if we think in terms of Schlegel’s and Schelling’s ideas about rhythm the idea is less problematic), but the idea that music is more universally accessible than verbal languages points to something more plausible. Natural languages are inter-translatable and can potentially be learned by any language-user. The ability to learn them also depends on acoustic and rhythmic forms of repetition. Phenomena like gaining command of a foreign language, when the shapes of new sentences which one has never spoken before form of their own accord as one speaks, or when one’s musical improvisations involve melodic and rhythmic shapes that one has never played before, seem to derive from this kind of ‘comprehensibility’, which itself derives from ways of coping with the world that transcend particular languages.

Novalis claims that ‘All method is rhythm. If one has grasped the rhythm of the world, one has grasped the world . . . Fichte did nothing but discover the rhythm of philosophy and express it verbal-acoustically’ (Novalis 1978: 544). The ‘rhythm’ Fichte discovers is the relationship between the I and the not-I. In this the infinite expansion of the I is inhibited and takes on the finite forms of the not-I; at the same time each resulting limitation is transcended by the activity that takes the I beyond it. The idea is echoed in Hegel’s conception of the ‘return to self’ in music. Fichte says, for example, that ‘I and activity which returns into itself are completely identical concepts’ (Fichte 1971, 1, 462). Rhythm only becomes rhythm via a ‘return to self’, as well as by the transcending movement to the next moment of articulation within a larger pattern. Novalis even associates the ubiquity of rhythm with the ‘rhythm of individual health’ (Novalis 1978: 544), as a way of trying to extend the analogies he seeks throughout his work between subjective phenomena, such as associations of ideas, and objective processes, such as chemical syntheses, or the irritation of muscles. Much of this is, to say the least, speculative. However, the continuities between forms of intelligibility that Novalis and Ritter propose do offer ways of beginning to understand the power which music has to connect us to the world in many differing ways.

One of the worries about Romantic philosophy’s attachment to music is, however, that it can be seen as entailing the celebration of indeterminacy. This is why both Hegel and the later Nietzsche are so suspicious of it (see Bowie 2003a). Novalis maintains, for example, that ‘Every universal indeterminate proposition has something musical. It arouses philosophical fantasies – without expressing any determinate philosophical
train of ideas, any individual philosophical idea’ (Novalis 1978: 554). Elsewhere he claims that a lack of determinate drives is the source of happiness: ‘Moods – indeterminate sentiments – not determinate sentiments and feelings make one happy . . . Of the most complete consciousness one can say that it is conscious of everything and nothing. It is song – mere modulation of moods – like song is of vowels – or notes’ (ibid.: 401) – whereas consonants are the forms of determinacy and specificity of thought. He also talks of the ‘universal n language of music. The mind is excited in a free, indeterminate manner – that does it so much good – that seems so familiar to it, so patriotic – it is for these short moments in its earthly home’ (ibid.: 517). Investment in indeterminacy as a manifestation of freedom is evidently two-edged. The apotheosis of indeterminacy is a form of mystical (un)consciousness, but this is hardly compatible with Novalis’ concern for aspects of the world to become ever more interrelated: for him freedom is precisely the freedom to connect and articulate. Dahlhaus argues that music should make us think carefully before we regard indeterminacy as being mere lack of differentiation: ‘Indeterminacy through lack of an object and determinacy in the sense of differentiation do not exclude each other at all; and one might even maintain that musical expression gains in connotations what it loses in denotations’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 333).

Novalis’ questioning of determinacy as the aim of philosophy may relate to F. H. Jacobi’s influential claim in the Pantheism Controversy of the 1780s that cognitive determination leads to ‘nihilism’, because each particular determination just leads to further determinations, without there being a basis which grounds the relationships between the determinations as relationships between meaningful items (see Bowie 1997: ch. 1). Novalis therefore seeks a higher unity in the endless, never fully determinate, possibilities of linking together aspects of the world in new ways. The relationships in music, which are not intelligible in terms of the merely relational, determinate aspect of mathematics, or of concepts, become a pleasure-giving symbol of a unity created from ever greater differentiation. The danger is that music might then seem to be saying the same thing over and over, as an indeterminate symbol of the unattainable absolute.

Such a philosophical construal of music would, however, miss the point that it is the experience of specific music which cannot be reduced to what we say about it that is important here. As we have seen, during the period when Novalis is writing, autonomous music combines elements into new forms which, although they are not semantically determinate,
connect to philosophical, social, and historical issues, as well as establishing new kinds of relationship to verbal texts. Beethoven’s symphonic language, with its integration of ever greater diversity, can ‘excite in a free, indeterminate manner’. It allows enjoyment of the ways in which tension results in resolution via complex and intriguing routes that both evoke and extend the narratives in which much of our affective and other life consists. Novalis’ remarks are, of course, too fragmentary for one to do more than construct a position from the relationships they have to other aspects of his thought, but one can further develop the ideas in relation to Schleiermacher. In order to see exactly how, we need first briefly to look again at Schelling’s account of music, rhythm, and self-consciousness.

Schelling: rhythm and self-consciousness

In the 1802–3 *Philosophy of Art*, written just after he had been in contact with Novalis in Jena, Schelling claims that art works communicate in sensuous form what philosophy communicates in abstract form. The book’s underlying idea is that ‘The secret of all life is the synthesis of the absolute with limitation’ (Schelling 1856–61: 1/5, 393). Each particular thing is limited by its particularity, but that limitation is therefore itself universal; the essential fact about ‘life’ is that particularity is constantly overcome by each particular entering into new syntheses with other particulars. He applies this idea to language, which is a ‘work of art’, because it is manifest in ‘real’ matter, but possesses ‘ideal’ meaning via the relationships between its elements. The connection to the ideas we have been considering emerges when he says that ‘even language is nothing but a continued schematisation’ (ibid.: 408), because the general sign enables the particular intuition to be linked to other cases of that intuition. Without schematisation there would be an indeterminate infinity of particulars. Schelling maintained, as we saw, that rhythm was ‘the transformation of a succession which is in itself meaningless into a significant one’ (ibid.: 493) for the same reason: the particulars gain an identity via their relations to a whole.

Schelling contends that ‘no discovery seems more directly inspired in mankind by nature’ (ibid.: 492) than rhythm. However, he does not regard rhythm as a natural phenomenon. Instead, he sees it both as generated by human activity, which has natural roots, and as linked to self-consciousness: ‘In everything which is in itself pure identity of activity man seeks . . . driven by nature, to establish multiplicity and
variety through rhythm. We cannot tolerate uniformity for very long in
everything that is in itself without meaning, for example in counting,
we make periods’ (ibid.: 493). Manual workers do something similar,
counting rhythmically in an unconscious manner to make their repeti-
tive work more tolerable. Schelling terms rhythm ‘the music in music’
(ibid.: 494), because the structure of identity in difference in schemat-
sim’s relationship to language is repeated both in melody’s horizontal
unification of pitches into intelligible forms and in the vertical unifi-
cation in harmony of different pitches, from the overtones in a single
note to the notes in a chord. Schelling’s other speculative attempts to
integrate his conception of music into his conception of nature as a
continuum between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ are now of mainly histori-
cal interest. However, his remarks on rhythm can still be philosophically
productive.

When Schelling talks of sound, ‘Klang’, as occurring via ‘a movement
communicated to a body whereby it is shifted out of indifference with
itself’ (ibid.: 508), so that it vibrates and animates its surroundings, he
suggests a metaphor for a crucial way of thinking in German Idealism
and Romanticism. It is in this context that his remark that ‘music is
nothing but the archetypal (‘urbildlich’) rhythm of nature and of the
universe itself’ (ibid.: 369) can make sense. Like the vibrating body, the
material universe can also be regarded as an ‘indifferent’ oneness which
is moved out of this indifference when it becomes the differentiated,
changing universe. Why the universe becomes anything determinate
at all is both a question of how the One becomes many things that
relate to each other, and of how this move from One to many becomes
intelligible via the differentiation and synthesis constitutive of thought.

Central to this process is time, which comes into being when the One
divides, but which is also what unifies the elements which are divided.
Schelling claims in the Naturphilosophie that ‘time is itself nothing but
the totality appearing in opposition to the particular life of things’ (Schelling
1856–61: 1/6, 220). Without time there would be no music, because
music’s form is ‘succession’ (ibid.: 1/5, 491), in which the particular
moment only is a particular moment because of its being in a connected
sequence of particular moments. He then argues, echoing Kant, that
‘the principle of time in the subject is self-consciousness, which is pre-
cisely the institution (‘Einbildung’) of the unity of consciousness into

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3 Hegel was aware of Schelling’s account of music when producing the Aesthetics. Both draw
on Johann Georg Sulzer’s Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste of 1792.
multiplicity . . . From this the close relationship of hearing in general, and of music and speech in particular, to self-consciousness can be understood’ (ibid.). Music requires the material form of vibration that combines the temporally different moments into one sound. The sound is apprehended as a unity by hearing, and, as such, is connected to the being of the I, which combines different moments in itself and thus renders the world – including music’s succession of sounds – intelligible. The idea is close to Hegel’s conception of the ‘return to self’ that takes place in music, but we now encounter an important divergence, which still has resonances today.

The aim of Hegel’s version of Idealism is to show how the self constitutes itself via its relationships to the objective world and to other subjects. The lack of self-transparency which is essential to Novalis and Schleiermacher is to be overcome by philosophy’s articulation of the subject’s relationships to the world. For Hegel music comes lower in the hierarchy of articulations than some other forms of art because of its transience and relationship to feeling. Schelling puts music low in the systematic hierarchy of the arts for similar reasons: like Hegel, he adheres to aspects of a Platonist conception of philosophy’s relationship to time. However, music becomes more significant in the terms Schelling proposes if it is also considered in the light of Romantic philosophy, for which the ineluctability of transience is constitutive of all particular existence, as opposed to being what is to be overcome by philosophy. The principal question here is the understanding of the subject in relation to music. Does music do more than offer ‘indeterminate feeling which has not yet been able to progress to solid being-determined in itself’ (Hegel 2003: 43)? Even Hegel says things which might cast some doubt on this view, but on what basis might an alternative view be convincingly advanced?

Music and self-consciousness: Schleiermacher

Hegel was famously rude about Schleiermacher’s conception of religion as founded on the ‘feeling of absolute dependence’. The lack of determinacy of this feeling meant, Hegel claimed, that a dog would be the best Christian. I am not concerned here with the religious dimension of Schleiermacher’s work. Much of what he says about feeling and self-consciousness is said in secular contexts, and he often makes it clear how important it is not to involve religion where it does not belong. What is most significant is that Schleiermacher connects ideas
to do with self-consciousness, which are important for his very particular conception of religion, to music. Schleiermacher says some of the most insightful things about music to be found in modern philosophy (see Scholtz 1997 for a detailed historical and philosophical account), but he has often been regarded as merely offering some rather confused remarks (see, e.g., Moos 1922: 172, who gives lots of space to other theorists whose ideas are now merely of historical interest). This perception of Schleiermacher is part of a general failure to grasp the significance of his philosophical project, which is now proving to be remarkably prescient with regard to contemporary philosophy (see my introduction to Schleiermacher 1998, and Bowie 1997, 2003a, 2005).

Schleiermacher’s conception of religion is based on the idea that we are connected to a world which is intelligible to us in more ways than can be expressed verbally. In his remarkably influential early rhapsodic text, *On Religion* (1799), Schleiermacher asserts:

> the universe is uninterruptedly active and reveals itself to us at every moment. Every form which it produces, every being to which it gives a separate life in accordance with the fullness of life, every occurrence which it pours out of its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the universe on us; and in this way, to accept everything individual as a part of the whole, everything limited as a presentation of the infinite, is religion.  

(Schleiermacher n.d.: 57)

The individual’s ability to respond to the universe in cognition and action, which Fichte’s Idealism made the very ground of being’s intelligibility, depends upon the prior ‘activity’ of the universe itself. Schleiermacher is influenced by Schelling’s Spinoza-influenced idea of nature as a ‘productivity’ which comes to ‘intuit’ itself both in its transient, differentiated ‘products’ – specific natural objects and organisms – and in our thinking about those products as objects of knowledge.

The kind of connection to the world with which Schleiermacher begins is immediate, and this is the reason for Hegel’s objection to it. Hegel is justified in opposing immediacy as the basis of cognition: what we can claim to know depends on inferential relations between assertions which can be publicly validated, there being no direct sensuous guarantors of epistemic reliability. However, the Romantic concern with immediacy, which makes Tugendhat so suspicious of the conception of truth as linked to art, has to do with responses to our affective and other relationships to the world which are not reducible to a theoretical attempt to determine the nature of those responses. Wittgenstein
says of music: ‘If a theme, a phrase, suddenly means something to you, you don’t have to be able to explain it. Just this gesture has been made accessible to you’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 27). Schleiermacher’s conception of music has a lot to do with the idea of a gesture being made accessible to someone in this way.

Hamann’s peculiar version of ‘empiricism’ may have helped to set in train a key idea which Schleiermacher develops in his theology and in his Aesthetics. In his work from the 1760s onwards Hamann claims against rationalist conceptions that our essential belief in the reality of things is not inferential: ‘belief happens as little in terms of reasons as tasting and smelling’ (Hamann 1949–57: 2, 74). Despite his admiration for Locke, what he has in mind is not a sense-data empiricism, but rather the idea that the world is always already revealed to us as intelligible, in the manner we have seen in relation to rhythm, before it can be theoretically grasped. Hamann sometimes sees this in erotic terms: our most significant relationships are those which make us feel engaged with a world which can motivate and inspire us, cognitive relationships being secondary to this engagement. Hegel’s objection to such a conception is cogent in its own terms: the increasing rational determination of the world must transcend the inherent particularity of immediate experiences and desires. There are, though, as we saw, hints that Hegel regarded the possibility that religious ‘substance’, of the kind Hamann sees in delight at the world’s ever-renewed forms of intelligibility, might also be located in music. In Schleiermacher the idea of immediacy is explored in relation to a conception of self-consciousness which does not, despite frequent claims to the contrary, lack the social dimension present in Hegel’s account of self-recognition in otherness. Schleiermacher’s detailed attention to the role of language and other forms of intersubjective articulation already suggests why this must be the case. The real significance of his approach lies in his focus on the dimension of feeling, as a private, individual, and as a public, collective, cultural phenomenon.

The difference between the Christian Faith, Schleiermacher’s account of Protestant doctrine, and most of the theology which precedes it is apparent in its startling claim that ‘the absolute feeling of dependence’, in which our self-consciousness, as a ‘general element of life . . . represents the finitude of all being in general’, is what ‘replaces for the doctrine of faith all so-called proofs of the existence of God’ (Schleiermacher 1960: 175). Schleiermacher radically separates philosophy, which seeks proofs, and religion, which demands faith based on ‘feeling’.
What he means by the absolute feeling of dependence is notoriously contentious. The core notion of ‘dependence’ in its absolute form is the basis of religious ‘piety’. Dependence derives from the realisation, both that we are not the ground and origin of our own activity, and that the objective world is inherently transient, and so cannot offer a firm foundation of cognitive or other certainty. Self-consciousness is always located between dependence and freedom, never absolutely being either: ‘our self-consciousness as consciousness of our being in the world or of our being together with the world is a succession of separate feelings of freedom and feelings of dependence’ (ibid.: 26). Self-consciousness therefore combines moments in which our relationships to things in the world and to ourselves are, in differing measures, always partially receptive and partially spontaneous. Think, for instance, of how the understanding of Wittgenstein’s musical theme or phrase is both particular to the individual in question and yet is occasioned by something in the external world.

The fact that we can move between degrees of receptivity and spontaneity must be grounded in something which is both beyond the difference between them and which must accompany all such moves. Otherwise it is unclear how experience is intelligible at all, rather than disintegrating into unrelated moments of receptivity and spontaneity. This ground of connection Schleiermacher terms ‘immediate self-consciousness’, or ‘feeling’, in order to differentiate it from the mediated states of relative activity and passivity in which empirical consciousness consists. Novalis argued that ‘feeling cannot feel itself’, because it is not inferential: immediate self-consciousness is therefore not transparent to itself. It is, though, the source of the realisation, both of our essential connectedness to being, and of the transcendence of being in general and of our own being in particular, over what we can know: ‘The transcendent basis must now indeed be the same basis of the being which affects us as of the being which is our own activity’ (Schleiermacher 1942: 275). We ‘carry the identity of thought and being in ourselves; we ourselves are being and thinking, thinking being and existing thinking’ (ibid.: 270). This means that there cannot be an external, cognitive perspective on the relationship between the two. The ‘identity’ in question refers to the inseparability of thought and being, not, as is sometimes claimed,

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4 Heidegger read Schleiermacher when he studied theology, so it seems possible that he derived the idea of ‘being in the world’ from Schleiermacher.

5 He sometimes does not use the terms synonymously, but for our purposes we need not make a distinction between them.
to an identity of thoughts with the objects of our thinking. Schleiermacher makes this idea the source of his claim that faith, not proof, is the root of religion. Because we can never know what the ultimate source of our ability to ask questions about our own activity is – such knowledge would rely precisely on an objectification of the ground of subjectivity – we are always inherently ‘dependent’. In consequence, ‘apart from in the sense that activity can only be originally attributed to God the relationship of absolute dependence cannot be expressed at all’ (Schleiermacher 1960: 188), least of all in the terms of a philosophical argument. For those of us who cannot see the necessity of moving from the idea that our activity is dependent on something which we do not ourselves originate and which we cannot know in the way that we can know things in the world, to faith in God, this claim might, though, seem superfluous.

However, the decisive factor is how Schleiermacher’s core idea is associated with something close to the conception of ‘feeling’ that we encountered in the contrast between Novalis and Fichte in chapter 3. The Romantic absolute is only accessible via the realisation of our intrinsic relativity: ‘if we are conscious of ourselves without further ado in our finitude as absolutely dependent, then the same applies to everything finite, and in this way we take up the whole world into the unity of our self-consciousness’ (ibid.: 53). It is not that we therefore know about the totality of everything finite – we can only know finite particulars in inferential terms – but we have a sense of the totality because of our feeling that, although everything particular, including ourselves, is finite and transient, the totality is not. Schleiermacher’s concern is, then, with the ways in which we live in a world that is intelligible to us, both as what we can know in scientific and practical terms, and as what transcends knowledge but is essential to the possibility of that knowledge. The latter kind of intelligibility is regarded in terms of our individual ‘being in the world’ that is grounded in feeling. Because this being cannot itself be objectified – each attempt to objectify it requires a connection to other such attempts, which themselves cannot be part of the objectification – we need means of coming to terms with our being as subjects which are not reducible to what can be asserted about those means. It is in this connection that music becomes important.

6 Schleiermacher thinks the latter is a regulative idea, given the indefinite number of ways in which we can speak of what there is.
The notion of immediate self-consciousness is the basis of Schleiermacher’s attempt to address issues concerning the limits of the sayable and the role of other expressive means that humankind employs to respond to those limits. Manfred Frank has argued that Schleiermacher belongs to a tradition in which ‘feeling, as the epistemic organ for a non-objective familiarity with oneself, is also the epistemic organ for the comprehension of being in its radical pre-conceptuality, including, of course, one’s own being’ (Frank 2002: 10). Immediate self-consciousness plays a central role in Schleiermacher’s *Aesthetics*, particularly in relation to music. The significance of what Schleiermacher explores can be suggested by Samuel Wheeler’s remarks concerning the role of metaphor in the relationship between the cognitive and the non-cognitive in learning: ‘Worthwhile “learning” is not just the ingestion of propositions but rather a whole complex of states that cannot be divided into the cognitive and “other” . . . This inseparable mix of the “cognitive” with the “other” is characteristic of learning generally, not just of the kind of learning we derive from poetry’ (Wheeler 2000: 110). One example of what Wheeler is referring to is the use of rhythm in learning which we considered in chapter 3; another would be learning ‘how a piece goes’ that is, for example, demonstrated by the gestures of an orchestral conductor, or by its being played in a pedagogically effective manner by another person.

Schleiermacher’s *Aesthetics* begins with the interplay between spontaneity and receptivity in the production and reception of art. Art always involves degrees of each. When listening ‘passively’ to a piece of music, for example, hearing it as music also involves the freedom actively to make connections and associations in response to what one hears. Schleiermacher’s underlying assumption is that living being is always active or ‘productive’. Such productivity can, though, just consist in natural processes: much of our unreflective thinking is just a ‘production’ of representations in which our will plays no role (the same would be true of dreams). Only when this productivity is channelled by reflective thinking can it become art: ‘what makes art into art is nothing but the eminent direction towards free productivity in that form of activity which otherwise emerged as bound productivity, be it as spontaneity or receptivity’ (Schleiermacher 1842: 301). Mime, for example, employs the movements of people reacting unreflectively to what affects them in life (these reactions are part of ‘feeling’ on the individual level), but it makes those movements into intersubjectively accessible gestures which are no longer just reactions. Dance
is distinguished from mere bodily behaviour by the measurement of movement present in rhythm. The material of rhythm is present in human nature in the form of heartbeats and breathing, but these must be ordered by choices in the artistic employment of rhythm that lead to accent and metre. Such employment happens without the instrumental use of the activity for a specific social goal: art ‘only begins with the moment . . . which is no longer just the unconscious and will-less result of the inner movement, but in which free spontaneity must first intervene’ (ibid.: 369).

The interpretation of the account of music in the *Aesthetics* depends on how one interprets immediate self-consciousness. The notion’s philosophical importance lies in its role in understanding non-conceptual ways of being in the world. Clearly this involves the contradiction of seeking to mediate something which is, precisely, immediate. However, Schleiermacher’s point is that the immediate nature of affective ways of being, for example, can be conveyed by mediated, but non-conceptual, means in art. Fundamental to Schleiermacher’s conception is the ontological uniqueness of all individuals, whose ‘life consists in the variation (‘*Wechsel*’) of the moments of immediate self-consciousness’ (ibid.: 124). This individual life is communicated externally ‘in a bound manner in the pathematic movements which are the artless precursor of certain arts’ (ibid.). ‘Pathematic movements’ are things like bodily movements in reaction to effects of the world on the subject, which can become the material of articulated rhythms and gestures in dance or music if they are brought into the realm of intentional actions. The moments of such self-consciousness consist in contacts between the subject and its world – what he terms ‘the being-posed of humankind in the world as a whole’ (ibid.: 127) – and they are made external by ‘the significant movements of the voice and the system of the limbs’ (ibid.: 126).

Music is an ‘accompanying art’ because our ability to understand even textless instrumental music is connected to other ways in which we understand, such as our understanding of verbal language. However, even though the states of ‘moved self-consciousness’ expressible by music can be expressed in other ways – for example by gestures in a dance or words in a poem – they ‘cannot do without this expression because it is put in a necessary connection with this state by nature’ (ibid.: 367). Schleiermacher is referring to the continuities (and differences) between differing forms of human expression as responses to a world. The historical development of wordless instrumental music is
music and romanticism

connected to other human activity by a ‘great mass of productions which come between’ (ibid.: 371) immediate movements of self-consciousness and their expression, and the eventual emergence of the art of ‘independent music’.

It is easy to misunderstand Schleiermacher’s position. He is not proposing the kind of theory in which musical composition becomes the direct expression of ‘moved states of mind’ of the composer, so ignoring the fact that the composer must begin with forms which they first encounter in the objective world. Schleiermacher is instead quite explicit that such a moved state ‘would have to be long exhausted in its expression before [the composer] had even completed it internally, let alone produced it externally’ (ibid.: 379) with objective musical means. Although he is evidently very concerned with the musical aspect of verbal language, he is more discriminating than Hegel concerning the relationship of music and verbal text. It might seem that adding music to a text would ‘express the thought even more strongly’ (ibid.: 380), but this is not the case because ‘if the thought is expressed in words then one could underlay the same musical sentence/movement (‘Satz’) with completely different verbal sentences; indeed each could have as much justification as the others’ (ibid.). The primary relationship between music and language is therefore not semantic.

The real connection of music is to poetry, rather than to prose: ‘only poetry postulates music, and music only presupposes the poetic element of speech’ (ibid.). Like lyric poetry, music ‘is never connected with the communication and presentation of something known, but rather of an inner moved state’ (ibid.: 381). Wittgenstein will talk of ‘The way music speaks. Do not forget that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 27). Furthermore, any direct connection of music with natural forms of expression is contradicted by the fact that developed musical forms do not simply correspond to what immediate natural expressions convey. Schleiermacher makes the wonderfully suggestive assertion that ‘Song is the indifference of speech, crying, and laughing. Each of these can approach song, but none of them becomes song without ceasing to be what it is’ (Schleiermacher 1931: 324). He even insists that most of the sounds in nature are just ‘noise’ (Schleiermacher 1842: 382), whereas music has developed endless differentiated forms of expression. In consequence, ‘we can hardly grasp the reduction’ of the effects of music to ‘a single inner state, but on the other hand, the inner effect of music in all its greatness
is undoubted, but cannot be resolved into thoughts. This is the mystery which undeniably lies in music’ (ibid.: 383).

Schleiermacher’s ensuing contentions about music might appear at odds with many widely held conceptions in contemporary philosophy because they would seem to take us back to all the problems of seeing music in terms of subject–object relationships. The questions that lead him to this position are, though, not based on the separation of subjectivity from the world. This is very obvious when he asks: ‘How has this direction towards free production in sound (‘Ton’) been able to expand itself to such an infinity above what is given in nature?’ (ibid.: 392), and contrasts the development of musical instruments as extensions of the human voice with poetry’s lack of extensive development of the material of language. Literary language, with a few exceptions, uses the same words as are used in everyday intercourse. Even the musical effects of poetic language are nowhere near as important as the continual extension of the possibilities of sound in music. The vital issue is the connection between the ‘mobility of self-consciousness’ and ‘musical productivity’ (ibid.: 393), which always already involves the material in the objective world via which the mobility of self-consciousness becomes communicable. Why otherwise would he lay so much emphasis on the development of the objective means of expression in the history of musical instruments?

The source of music’s importance is the same as for dance, ‘namely the physiological basis of rhythm in the movements of life themselves. The connection of artistic productivity with the movements of self-consciousness which is so directly linked to the activity in the movements of life is, accordingly, unmistakably the main factor in musical production’ (ibid.: 393). Schleiermacher wants a conception in which what is expressed in language, and what is expressed in mime, dance, and music are related, but not reducible to each other: ‘just as the infinity of combination of articulated sounds belongs to human thought being able to appear in language, so the manifold of measured (‘gemessen’) sounds represents the whole manifold of movements of self-consciousness, to the extent that they are not ideas, but real states of life’ (ibid.: 394). He also inserts a crucial qualification: ‘the direction towards the infinite multiplicity of combinations of measured notes is

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7 In Aesthetic Theory Adorno says: ‘The apparently purest forms, traditional musical ones, date back, right into all idiomatic details, to contents like the dance’ (Adorno 1997: 7, 15).
nothing but the external representation of the infinity of relationships in self-consciousness, but not at all such that there would be a determinate correspondence between particulars in one and in the other’ (ibid.: 394). Just as understanding language depends on historical and psychological contexts for the relationship of particulars in language to particulars in the world to be intelligible, different cultures involve differing relationships between the ways in which consciousness moves and the forms which are used to articulate such movement. This means that music can be understood as achieving degrees of completion: ‘the more completely . . . the mobility of the whole of human life appears in the whole multiplicity and sequence of notes, the more the idea of music is achieved’ (ibid.: 395). Whether this remark points to what can really count as a universal phenomenon can be questioned, but it does illuminate the development of Western music in his period towards the attempt to encompass human being in the world ever more completely. Think of the difference between the symphonies of the Mannheim School and what becomes of the symphony by the time of Mahler.

Schleiermacher’s position is no doubt questionable in certain respects, but what makes it important is suggested by the following:

If we once more consider how one so easily one-sidedly presupposes that the very direction of the individual towards communication is a verbal one (‘eine logische’), and yet must admit that all musical representation only really has a minimum of verbal content, then a powerful refutation of this assertion lies in this fact, and it follows that there must be a massive intensity in this direction of the human mind to be able to represent itself purely in its mobility, apart from everything verbal (‘abgesehen von allem Logischen’).

(ibid.: 399–400)

Schleiermacher sees this ‘direction of the mind’ as an anthropological given, albeit one which differs in degree with regard to its effects on particular cultures, but it also has to do with the modern development in which music takes on a new status because of changes in the understanding of language (and vice versa).

How, then, can one make more precise sense of the notion of the ‘movements of self-consciousness’ in relation to music? Schleiermacher wishes to distinguish between what can be articulated as propositional knowledge, and what must be articulated or shown in some other manner. The former fixes what would otherwise pass away or remain indeterminate, the latter has to do precisely with the fact that individual human
lives consist of constant transitions between determinate thoughts and other states, which may not be conceptually determinate, but which have affective and other significances. He gives the example of poetry: ‘Language consists of the combination of elements which have become fixed, so it cannot really present what changes in itself, but the poet forces it to do so in an indirect manner . . . Here, then, it is not at all a question of the logical content of language, towards which language is originally directed’ (ibid.: 641). However, the musical aspect of language, whose ‘possibility is already originally part of language’ (ibid.: 643), is ‘capable of infinite transformation and of hovering multiplicity because it consists solely of transitions’ (ibid.: 642).

Why is it so important for there to be such a means of conveying mobility? The answer has to do with the understanding of self-consciousness and its relationship to the world. As we have seen, Schleiermacher does not see this relationship in Cartesian terms: ‘If we consider man in his specific relationship to the world, then it is just being (‘Sein’) and he is consciousness (‘Bewusstsein’). But to the extent to which he is a part of the world he is conscious being (‘bewusstes Sein’) (so that admittedly the name consciousness is not really appropriate; one can only oppose the unconscious (‘das Unbewusste’) [i.e. not the world] to it)’ (Schleiermacher 1931: 26). This connection is necessary to generate intersubjective knowledge in ‘identical activities’, but it is also inherently individual. The tension here leads to a version of the relationship between metaphysics\(^1\) and metaphysics\(^2\).

One of the pivotal factors in Schleiermacher’s whole conception is that metaphysics\(^1\) and metaphysics\(^2\) cannot be wholly opposed: both science and art are primarily forms of human activity. They both depend on language, which ‘stands in complete indifference between art and science’ (ibid.: 17). Once ‘feeling’ has become determinate it externalises itself through gesture, and ‘these signs relate to feeling just as language relates to thinking’ (ibid.: 29), so that ‘note and movement’ play the role of language for feeling. Feeling is important because it ‘relates to the specific existence of individuality’ (ibid.: 34). At the same time, even though individuality ‘is reflected in feeling’, ‘it is only comprehensible to others via identity’ (ibid.: 35). The semantic aspect of verbal language (which is verbal language’s form of ‘identity’) must therefore have a counterpart in non-verbal forms like music. In the same way as words schematise things which are strictly different in order to make them the possible objects of judgements of identity, the individual element of feeling would be mere arbitrary particularity if the
forms in which it is manifested did not function in some respects like language and convey intersubjective content. This does not mean that the same feeling is necessarily understood by all recipients of a piece of music, but neither is it the case in language that the same assertion necessarily conveys the same content to different people. Knowledge is the product of reason, and art is the product of fantasy, but it is ‘Not as if these are completely different powers; they are just the different functions of the same capacity for discrimination, and they are only relatively different’ (ibid.: 48).

One consequence of this approach is that it indicates how the cognitive connects to other ways of being in the world, and so suggests why music can make a contribution to our comprehension of the nature and limits of purely cognitive activity. In his Ethics Schleiermacher claims of judgement: ‘Feeling and the principle of combination [i.e. judgement] are One. For self-consciousness comes between each moment, because otherwise the acts would be indistinguishable’ (ibid.: 71), and in an added note he asserts ‘If one goes a step further then all action as combination is grounded in feeling’ (ibid.: 73). The determinate elements of judgement have to be separate if they are subsequently to be joined in a judgement – Hölderlin surmised for this reason that the German word ‘Urteil’ means ‘original separation’ (see Bowie 2003a: ch. 3) – otherwise they merge into an undifferentiated identity. The different – mediated – elements to be united also rely, though, on that which is the same, which connects them, namely immediate self-consciousness.

This may seem to be just a logical point – identity and difference cannot be made intelligible without each other – which offers no obvious way of giving any content to the notion of immediate self-consciousness. It is clear that the basis of judgement in our ability to connect – an ability which, as we have seen, is linked to the question of rhythm – cannot itself be characterised in the same terms as what it enables us to judge. Rorty therefore objects to notions like this on the grounds that they involve ‘the pointless, because tautologous, claim that something we define as being beyond our knowledge is, alas, beyond our knowledge’ (Rorty 1999a: 58). However, this is precisely why Schleiermacher argues that we articulate what is at issue here in other ways, which are not reducible to the ways in which they can be known, but which are also not merely indeterminate.

Schleiermacher maintains that it is not the immediacy of particular moments of individual feeling that is essential for music, but rather ‘mood (‘Stimmung’), which arises from the cross-section of moments of...
being-affected’ (Schleiermacher 1931: 52). Mood – the German word is connected to musical modes and to the idea of ‘attunement’ – is therefore a kind of synthesis which does not rely on what is being connected being articulable in words. However, mood does require a sense of how separate moments of feeling can coalesce into what can be articulated in non-verbal form. This process involves both receptive openness to the effects of the world and the kind of active synthesis required for judgement. The synthesis here takes the form of differentiated articulations, such as music, that have more than individual significance, even if their source is individual being in the world. This might seem to be a conception which is really only appropriate to an individualistic, ‘Romantic’ conception of the subject’s ‘self-expression’ in music. However, Schleiermacher makes it clear that the degree to which ‘feeling’ is individualised in music has to do with the historically available forms of communication and expression in a culture, and these vary in their ability to be adequate to individual existence. The point of the conception is precisely to get away from fixed divisions between the subjective and the objective: ‘Production is always something individual’, because there will always be differences, even in artistic activities which involve the following of strict rules, but ‘The individual is... in truth never separate from the universal’ (ibid.: 75), because the forms which the individual employs are socially transmitted and are part of an intersubjective world.

Schleiermacher’s conception is echoed in Martha Nussbaum’s that music has to do with ‘our urgent need for and attachment to things outside ourselves that we do not control, in a tremendous variety of forms’ (Nussbaum 2001: 272). The notion of immediate self-consciousness seeks to convey how we are open to a world which necessarily affects us at every moment but which does so in ways that are not all best responded to in cognitive terms. This openness is never merely receptive. Musical production requires a reflective distance from the immediacy of being affected, and this enables a degree of freedom in response to effects of the world which may otherwise elude articulation. Unlike many philosophers who seek to give an account of music, Schleiermacher is able both to suggest how music achieves things which verbal language cannot, and to characterise music’s relationship to language in a manner which avoids a radical split between the two.

Schleiermacher’s approach is important for philosophical understanding of language because it points to dimensions required for the functioning of language which are often ignored in the wake of the
linguistic turn. Echoing Schleiermacher, Dieter Henrich has claimed that ‘language can only be understood as a medium, but not as the instrument of agreement. Subjects cannot agree on the use of language, because the agreement would itself already presuppose its use. From this it follows that taking up communication presupposes a real common ground between subjects who mutually relate to each other’ as self-conscious beings (Henrich 1999: 71). This real common ground cannot, then, be reduced to the use of a common verbal language. It may, for example, be understood in terms of what we share as feeling beings that can be conveyed by music. In this sense the common ground would be precisely what the term metaphysics is intended to point to.  

However, the idea of such a common ground being manifested in music can be threatened by the idea that music may actually lead to radical divisions between subjects, who therefore need language to overcome the dangers revealed by music. The contrast between Schleiermacher’s desire to reveal an essential unity underlying individual differences and Nietzsche’s questioning of such a unity highlights a tension in music’s relationship to the understanding of modernity. This tension is particularly apparent in perhaps the most startling musical phenomenon in modernity, namely the work of Richard Wagner. Before considering Wagner in chapter 7, I shall in the next chapter consider how music relates to a series of philosophical developments in the nineteenth century that help to illuminate Wagner’s significance.

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8 This argument can, though, end in a negative version of metaphysics if nothing is shared by those who are supposedly relating to each other. Giorgio Agamben cites, against Karl-Otto Apel’s attempt to ground ethics in the necessary presuppositions of verbal communication, the case of those in the extermination camps who can no longer be addressed in language, having been brutally excluded from being human altogether (Agamben 2002: 64–6). The limits of philosophy’s dependence on language can in this sense have to do both with the human and with the inhuman.
Music, philosophy, and politics

Evaluations of the nature and significance of music were anything but uncontroversial before the end of the eighteenth century: Plato’s comments in the *Republic*, and the battles over music during the Reformation make that clear. However, reflection on the significance of music takes on a different quality during the course of the nineteenth century and beyond. Music becomes more overtly linked to philosophical, ideological, and political controversies that influence modern social and historical developments. This chapter will explore some of the conceptual issues which arise in this context, as a prelude to a re-examination in chapter 7 of the paradigmatic example of this intensification of concern about the nature of music, the ‘case’ of Wagner. My extended treatment of Wagner is justified by the fact that issues associated with him have remained a part of disagreements about art, philosophy, and politics ever since. These disagreements are also important for a reason relating to a central theme of the book. Wagner’s ‘positions’ on the issues involved cannot be reduced to what he says about them, but must also be assessed in terms of what he does in his music.¹ Dahlhaus suggests that it was not Wagner’s theoretical writings on cultural and philosophical issues that were most influential, but rather ‘the effect of the music itself, from which consequences for cultural politics emerged. One can, exaggerating only a little, actually talk of the emergence of the “Kulturkritik” of the end of the century from the spirit of music – Wagnerian music’ (Dahlhaus 1974: 13). Wagner’s theoretical writings

¹ Magee (2001) seems to me to offer a plausible account of the personal issues (but see also Deathridge and Dahlhaus 1984).
are just one interpretation of the real content of his works, and by no means always the best one.

This claim already suggests a further factor relating to our main themes. Performances of Wagner’s musical works continue to transform what the works reveal and how they are interpreted. His works have, for example, come to be seen as playing a disreputable role in the history of anti-Semitism. The suspicions of anti-Semitism are, though, not confined to the portrayal of characters, but extend to aspects of the music itself, as the literature on Wagner suggests. I shall return to this issue in the next chapter. However, the same works articulate features of the experience of modernity, from the sense of the individual’s being overtaken by social and historical forces which they cannot control, to the complexities of desire and of human identity, in ways that only the greatest art does. A similar ambivalence pertains with regard to Nietzsche’s writings, which can be seen both to contribute to reactionary politics, and yet to offer emancipatory resources for the interrogation of theological and metaphysical orthodoxies. The difference lies in how Wagner’s musical works transform, in ways which verbal texts alone cannot, what he assimilates from the philosophical, political, and other culture of his day. How, then, does this transformation take the works beyond the undoubtedly problematic ideas upon which Wagner relies, and what does this mean with respect to the works’ relationship to philosophy? The response to these questions in this and the next chapter will be a rather demanding one, but the issues are anything but simple.

The Wagner–Nietzsche relationship provides a further illustration of the entanglement of music and philosophy. Bryan Magee claims that ‘There is no other such example in the whole of our culture of a creative artist who is not himself a philosopher having a philosophical influence of this magnitude on someone who was indeed a great philosopher’ (Magee 2001: 81), and he agrees that the influence arose more from Wagner’s music than from his texts. The relationship is, however, highly complex. Nietzsche’s philosophical development involves a move away from the influence of both Schopenhauer and Wagner, which leads to a change in his assessments of music. Wagner’s theoretical and musical development in his work in the 1850s is, in contrast, deeply affected by Schopenhauer, whose work takes the place

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2 As Adorno argues, however, this aspect can readily be made to recede by staging the works in a manner which is critical of any suspicion of anti-Semitism.
formerly occupied by Feuerbach and other thinkers on the political Left. Some of Feuerbach’s ideas are later adopted, despite his different political standpoint, by the later Nietzsche, because of Feuerbach’s concern to promote concentration on sensuous human existence over philosophical abstractions. Wagner’s change of philosophical orientation also leads to a shift in his views on the relationship between music and language. It is, on the other hand, Wagner’s music in the 1850s which helps to establish Schopenhauer’s reputation as a philosopher, a reputation which until that time was anything but firmly established. At the same time, Wagner’s enthusiasm for Schopenhauer emerges not least because of his re-assessment of what his own music was ‘saying’. Were one to see the changes in the views of Nietzsche and Wagner solely in philosophical terms, they would both have to be regarded as merely inconsistent thinkers. This judgement would, however, miss most of what is important about their self-contradictions. Furthermore, if the significance of Wagner’s later work were wholly dictated by its relationship to Schopenhauer, it would be subject to the objections we shall encounter when considering Schopenhauer later in the chapter.

The main reason for the complexity of the story here is that the developments with regard to music relate to the wider crisis concerning the status of philosophy which follows the decline of Hegelianism from the 1840s onwards. Although this crisis may seem to be a local issue within German intellectual life, the questions associated with that decline have much broader implications. The decline has, for example, to do with the success of the empirically based natural sciences, which leads many people to argue that philosophical attempts at giving an overall description of nature and our relationship to it get in the way of verifiable science. Such assessments help to open up the space for versions of metaphysics. As the sciences become more effective because of their increasing specialisation and differentiation, the need for what can ‘hold together a world in thought’ (Dieter Henrich) is transferred to other forms of understanding and expression. At the same time, such forms themselves come under attack because they cannot be assessed in the terms applicable to the sciences. Such attacks can be justified, when, for example, the decline of systematic metaphysics is answered by an appeal to mythology as the means of making a world cohere: nineteenth-century and subsequent nationalisms are a key example of this. Wagner illustrates the underlying problem via his combination of musical innovation with the occasional employment of nationalist
mythology (for example in the conclusion of *Die Meistersinger*). The decline of Hegelianism also has to do with a related sense, shared by the early Wagner, that philosophy and theology contribute to perpetuating indefensible social conditions. Both are regarded as failing to engage with the demands of sensuous human existence and so as failing to appreciate the effects of abstract ideas on the real social world. This criticism is often linked to the notion that metaphysical systems involve an inversion, in which the source of metaphysical ideas in concrete social practices and in the interaction of human beings with material reality is not recognised. Ideas are therefore mistakenly thought of as prior to what gives rise to them in real terms.

In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) Ludwig Feuerbach argues that the power of Christ as an example of virtue is misunderstood if it is seen as deriving from an abstract quantity, called ‘virtue’, that is exemplified by Christ. Similarly, ‘the power of religious music is not the power of religion, but the power of music’ (Feuerbach 1956: 1, 229). Feuerbach uses music to counter the idea that religious ideas possess an autonomous ability to influence people. Music’s power must be understood in other ways: ‘Music is the language of feeling – the note is the sounding feeling (‘das laute Gefühl’), the feeling that communicates itself’ (ibid.: 38). If, as Schleiermacher claimed, feeling is the organ of religion, then ‘Feeling is the most noble, the most excellent, i.e. the divine in man. How could you hear the divine through feeling if feeling were not itself of a divine nature?’ (ibid.: 47). A concrete human practice like music therefore takes on a vital role in the affective constitution of human beings, and this role is independent of how the practice may be conceptualised in metaphysical terms.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) Marx observes that ‘only via the objectively unfolded wealth of human being [‘Wesen’, literally ‘essence’] is the wealth of subjective human sensuousness, is a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form, in short, are senses that are capable of human enjoyment, which confirm themselves as human essential powers, partly developed, partly created’ (Marx 1968: 541). At much the same time as Feuerbach and the other ‘Young Hegelians’ question metaphysics, in the name of the need to correct the inversion of the relationship between ideas and human social reality, the status of music

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3 However, it is important to keep in mind the differences of the kind of cultural nationalism with regard to music present in *Die Meistersinger* from later forms of cultural and political nationalism.
itself also changes. Music need no longer be regarded, in the manner of Hegel, as something which is transcended by philosophy, but at the same time it need not be interpreted in terms of the sort of metaphysical ideas encountered in E. T. A. Hoffmann. If attention to feeling is as essential to a thriving human existence as Feuerbach thinks, the understanding of feeling’s relationship to music can change the significance of music, and vice versa. At the same time, however, misgivings that will be expressed with regard to music’s relationship to feelings make apparent a source of some of the concerns to be examined below.

One of the paradoxes of the period during which Wagner’s work emerges is that an anti-metaphysical approach to music, of the kind just sketched, can be linked to a Romantic view of it as an autonomous form of articulation which ‘says’ what verbal language cannot. The latter view is, as it is in Hoffmann – and in Schopenhauer – often advanced in the name of a thoroughly metaphysical conception, in which music is to replace discursive metaphysics as the form of access to the supersensuous world. My aim here is not to resolve this paradox, but to see how the two conceptions inform both thinking about music, and the production of music, in this period. An underlying issue will be the relationship to language of the critiques of metaphysics. When the idea that words can convey substantial metaphysical ideas comes under suspicion – Marx’s notion of language as ‘practical consciousness’ sums up the suspicion – music takes on the conflicting roles in relation to the understanding of philosophy just outlined.

Wagner’s relationship to Feuerbach and Schopenhauer can be understood in terms (1) of music as part of what undermines a philosophically conceived logos in favour of the primacy of human practices grounded in our sensuous nature as feeling beings, and (2) of music as in some sense replacing words as the source of the deepest metaphysical insights. The first of these approaches can lead in a pragmatic direction, where the value of a practice depends upon its relationship to human well-being; the second can lead in the direction of regarding music as the source of a new kind of metaphysics. Wagner’s move from Feuerbach to Schopenhauer is a reflection of the difference between the two conceptions, but it does not explain all that is at issue here. Dahlhaus suggests that the more emphatic connection of music to metaphysics at this time comes about because ‘one no longer believed in a significance of metaphysics . . . for affecting “true reality”’ (Dahlhaus 1974: 11), the reality in question being dominated by the technological and social changes involved in industrialisation and urbanisation. As I shall
show towards the end of the chapter, one way of exploring these issues is to contrast Schopenhauer’s conception of music with remarks about music in Kierkegaard’s *Either–Or* of 1843. What will be important here is how the perceived dangers of music in modernity emerge from these differing philosophical approaches. The idea of the dangers of music is hardly new, as the treatment of music in Plato’s *Republic*, or some of the suspicions of music in certain forms of Christianity or Islam, make clear. The question is therefore how the new versions of this idea relate to perceptions of the role of philosophy in modernity.

These issues emerge in a context where processes of secularisation progressively undermine the idea of music as reflecting a metaphysical world-order. This is a radically new development: even the Enlightenment doctrine of music as a representation of affects still largely relied on the assumption of a metaphysical order of things. The undermining of music’s metaphysical status now comes to be connected to the questioning of the foundations of morality which results from the decline of ‘dogmatic’ religious authority and from the Enlightenment idea of human autonomy. The idea of autonomy is, of course, beset with controversy: Rousseau’s and Kant’s claim that self-determination means avoiding being slave to one’s passions comes into conflict with the idea that self-determination may be most ‘authentic’ when one is prepared to explore what freedom from traditional constraints makes possible, whatever the consequences (see, e.g., Trilling 1972). Ideas about music and the most significant music itself both take on and create new meanings in relation to conflicting conceptions of freedom. Music’s ambivalent relationship to metaphysics consequently becomes very apparent.

The major changes in music in modernity, from Beethoven to Schoenberg, and beyond, which challenge established musical forms and musical rules, coincide with the reflections on the nature and limits of human autonomy that go from Kant to Nietzsche and beyond. The problem for philosophy is that the attempt to ‘determine’ the nature of human freedom comes to seem paradoxical. If freedom keeps open new possibilities for the exploration of the world and of ourselves, a philosophical description of freedom cannot encompass what can only ever, as it were, ‘happen’ in the future. Arguments in favour of moral self-determination, which would make possible an account of acceptable human conduct, may therefore clash with what can be seen as giving value to secular human life, namely the possibility of continuous new exploration, articulation, and expression that is not determined by
existing normative constraints. How, then, is freedom in this latter sense to be understood at all, given that it entails a constitutive indeterminacy? One way is via art, where the demand for the radically new becomes the crux of the modernism which begins around the 1840s in Europe. It is noticeable, of course, that Beethoven in particular had already carried out in practice some of what becomes an explicit theoretical demand in the subsequent period, and that what he did was perceived by the likes of Goethe as being intimidating. The worry which Dahlhaus attributes to Hegel – that Beethoven will lose touch with a wider audience – can therefore be related to the constellations now to be explored, in which awareness of the dangers of modern freedom is connected to music.

Will, freedom, and music

In order to show how conceptions of freedom connect to music we need first to examine some implications of what Kant and Schelling say about evil, in texts which affected the later thinkers whom we shall be investigating. The reason for considering this topic has to do with the concern with the inaccessibility of freedom to conceptual determination. The fact that music is largely non-referential and non-representational, which constitutes its chief deficiency for some thinkers, becomes for others what is most essential about it. In the last chapter I cited Dahlhaus’ remarks, that ‘Indeterminacy through lack of an object and determinacy in the sense of differentiation do not exclude each other at all’, and that ‘musical expression gains in connotations what it loses in denotations’. This contrast can be mapped onto the tension between the objectifying, ‘denoting’ aims of natural science, and the aesthetic, ‘connoting’ desire to keep open new affective and other possibilities of relating to the world. This tension suggests how music can become a focus for fundamental differences concerning the aims of modern culture, and these differences will relate closely to the issues now to be examined. The underlying theme in the following is, then, how understandings of freedom in an increasingly secular culture affect music and are affected by music.

In *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793), Kant considers difficulties that emerge from the notion of spontaneous, free ‘will’ in his

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4 This might seem to underestimate Beethoven’s classicism, but the alternative danger is the failure to grasp his modernist concern with radical innovation, which is not just evident in the late works.
moral philosophy. The will in Kant is not subject to a causality external to itself, and so, unlike the appearing world of nature, does not exist in time. Kant’s attention to the question of evil relates to his separation of temporal appearances from the timeless intelligible realm of things in themselves and of human freedom. The separation aims to establish the ‘fact’ of freedom in the face of the awareness that nature is wholly bound by causal laws. In these terms evil cannot be part of nature, in the form, for example, of perverse, ‘animal’ instincts. It must instead be essentially connected to human will, as a spontaneity which exists outside the chain of natural causes:

Therefore if we say: man is by nature good, or, he is by nature evil, then this just means that he contains a primary ground (which is inaccessible to us) for the acceptance of good maxims, or the acceptance of evil maxims (maxims which are contrary to the law); and he does so universally as a man, thus such that he thereby at the same time expresses the character of his species by that acceptance.

(Kant 1977: 667)

Were the ground of evil to be found in socialisation, which can be regarded as essentially causal, and so is necessarily temporal, then it would not be based on freedom, and could have no substantial moral import. The startling consequence is that the ground of good and evil is given at birth as part of what it is to be human. Freedom is now inherently connected to the possibility of evil in a way that we cannot explain, because what is to be explained lies outside the realm of appearances connected by laws.

The ground of action is therefore either merely arbitrary, such that the performing of good or evil actions is ultimately incomprehensible, or the ground is constitutive of our very being and we are responsible for our evil deeds. In the light of Kant’s remark about the inaccessibility of the nature of will, this conception might appear to be merely obscure, and to underplay or ignore the social and other factors that cause people to perform evil deeds. Accounts of evil have tended to be the preserve of the political Right, for whom they function as an excuse not to look at the social factors which lead to bad behaviour. However, Schelling’s account of the connection between freedom and evil in his account of will in his 1809 essay, *Philosophical Investigations on the Essence of Human Freedom*, and the subsequent unpublished texts called *The Ages of the World*, written in the early 1810s, suggest how Kant’s
ideas might make, albeit very contentious, sense. These texts reject the idea of evil being explained, as it is in Rationalist positions like that of Spinoza, as a lack or deficiency that can be overcome by proper philosophical insight into the nature of the world, and by concomitant social changes. Such an explanation would, Schelling thinks, take away the reality of freedom, by subjecting it to determination by something else. This determining factor would then become the ground of the explanation – and can itself in turn lead to a regress of explanations of explanations.

The idea of freedom therefore becomes two-edged. For Schelling we are connected to being by the fact that our existence is ultimately groundless in the same way as he thinks that being as a whole is groundless, because God did not have a reason to create the universe, creation being His free act. We are therefore also not determined in advance by our essence, though we have no choice about the fact of our existing at all, and have a potential, that is not reducible to causal explanation, for which we are at the same time responsible. This idea develops from Schelling’s attempt to establish a concept of nature which goes beyond Kant’s conception of it as the realm of law-bound appearances. Even if one does not accept the theological version of Schelling’s argument, the idea in contemporary cosmology that the universe is the result of a ‘singularity’, which itself precedes a universe of causal laws, suggests the groundlessness at the origin of things at issue here. The disturbing, but logical, upshot of Schelling’s argument is that:

nobody has chosen their character; and yet this does not stop anybody attributing the action which follows from this character to themself as a free action . . . Common ethical judgement therefore recognises in every person – and to that extent in everything – a region in which there is no ground/reason (‘Grund’) at all, but rather absolute freedom. . . . The unground (‘Ungrund’) of eternity lies this close in every person, and they are horrified by it if it is brought to their consciousness.

(Schelling 1946: 1, 93)

The question is how to respond to this awareness of a groundless contingency which is inseparable from responsibility for one’s actions.

5 The Freedom essay was one of the last substantial texts that Schelling actually published. I am not so much concerned here with Schelling’s direct historical influence, but with the structure of his key ideas, which focuses some major concerns of the era.

6 See Bernstein (2002) and Neiman (2002) who show how theodicy was the core issue in the apprehension of the idea of evil as something that ultimately ‘made sense’.
The idea of this groundless contingency relates to an influential way in which music comes to be understood during this phase of modernity. The contingency is both felt as a danger and yet is also the source of new potential for expressive meaning in a world which is more and more known to be determined by natural laws. I will suggest in the next chapter that Wagner’s best work can help give us access to what is at issue here. Wagner does so, not on the basis of his texts, which can in some respects be construed as echoing questionable philosophical conceptions, but on the basis of the interaction between the texts, the drama, and the music, an interaction which can never be resolved into the conceptual ways in which we may describe it.

In the Freedom essay and in the Ages of the World (see Bowie 1993: ch. 5) Schelling aims to come to terms with the fact that there is an articulated, comprehensible world, rather than a mere physical chaos that never reaches the point of being manifest as a world of truth and falsity, of good and evil actions. Any understanding of the emergence of an intelligible world cannot be couched in causal terms, because causal explanation leads to endless chains of causes. These can never account for why such chains should result in an intelligible, rather than an opaque, ‘world’ – an opaque world is, of course, arguably not a world at all. His objective is to get away from an ‘idealistic’ view of the world – in which rational order is assumed always already to be integral to the world and which therefore neglects what he sees as the dynamic nature of living existence – towards a conception in which the always fragile order of the world emerges from conflicting forces. The source of these conflicts is itself to be understood as ‘freedom’ in a particular ontological sense. The existence of the manifest world is not of the same order as a fact within that world which requires an explanation based on the principle of sufficient reason. It should already be clear, therefore, that the notion of ‘freedom’ here cannot be defined, because the aim of the notion is precisely to point to the possibilities of a world which is not predetermined from the beginning. Freedom has to do both with self-determination, and with feeling and intentionality. These relate in turn to the ways in which the world is manifest to us that cannot be understood in purely causal terms, and it is these ways which can be linked to a new understanding of music.

There is consequently a close relationship in Schelling between human freedom, as the active ability to do good or evil, and the fact of manifest being. Both involve a fundamental contingency which resists explanation, but which is also the condition of possibility of change.
and development, and neither has its future development inscribed within it. What makes the fact of there being an intelligible world a source of value is, then, precisely that its ground can never be fully comprehended: if it could be, the point of life, with its conflicting forces and — admittedly precarious — potential for development, would dissolve into a world of the ‘ever-same’. This view challenges many conceptions of the task of philosophy as being to establish a timeless metaphysical picture of reality, and this is important with regard to the changes in production and reception of the temporal art of music. The threat of ‘nihilism’, suggested by Jacobi in the 1780s (see Bowie 1997: ch. 1), that results from thinking of the world solely in causal terms and so ending in an endless regress, is countered by the idea of a world in which freedom opens new possibilities that philosophy cannot encompass. Even God is therefore ‘something more real than a simple moral world-order, and has completely different and more lively motivating forces in Him than the meagre subtlety of abstract idealists attributes to Him’ (Schelling 1856–61:i/7, 452). Schelling’s heretical ideas, that God freely subjects Himself to a process of becoming and that He has a ground in nature that is not fully Himself, are pretty disturbing for the time, but can they really be connected to music?

In the Ages of the World both intelligible being and thought result from continual conflict, and from unstable moments of balance, between a contractive force which would, if left to itself, render being a self-enclosed opaque One, and an expansive force which, if it were not opposed by something else, would just dissipate itself at infinite speed. Thought can also be ‘congealed’ if it tries to render determinacy complete, but thought without determinacy to anchor it is a mere — ‘mad’ — chaos of opposed drives. Language is subject to a related dialectic, being at once what can render that world fixed and immobile, and what can open up a living, articulated world. Schelling claims that the link in Greek mythology between Dionysus and music reflects both the fundamentally conflictual nature of being, and the precarious relationship between thought and what grounds it: ‘for in what should understand itself, except in the overcoming, command and regulation of

7 Jacobi’s idea influenced Nietzsche’s claim in The Birth of Tragedy that the modern sciences’ following of the principle of sufficient reason leads to what will revive a tragic world view, namely chains of causality leading to an ‘abyss’ rather than to a final explanation of being. Nietzsche connects this idea to music.

8 Schelling sees these forces as ultimately ‘identical’: for the detailed argument see Bowie 1993, chapter 5.
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madness? (Schelling, 1856–61: i/8, 338). Dionysus’ wagon, which is pulled by wild animals, is accompanied by music: ‘For, because sound and tone only seem to arise in . . . that battle between [expansive] spirituality and [contractive] physicality, only music can be an image of that primal nature and its movement, for also its whole essence consists in circulation, as it, beginning from a tonic [‘Grundton’], always finally returns to the beginning, however many variations it may go through’ (Schelling 1946: 40). We saw in chapter 5 how Schelling’s idea of the vibration which produces the note by an alternation between presence and absence of the sounding body could be seen as an image of the move from the One to the manifest Many that gives rise to such difficulties for traditional metaphysics. Music now expresses the idea of a ‘Dionysian’ state of being before the emergence of a comprehensible, ordered world. For it to do so it must be regarded as devoid of semantic content, its significance deriving from a moving away from and returning to an opaque state which is prior to any kind of conceptual determinacy.9

However, the battle between expansion and contraction, which in ‘primal nature’ just leads to random replacement of the one by the other, carries on in the world that emerges from the opacity of primal nature. Music combines order with the capacity to evoke resistance to order, and is able to generate pleasure via the evocation of painful feelings. The tensions in this combination can be understood as a way of articulating the divided nature of existence, without what is articulated becoming fixed and so contradicting the contingency of freedom. Schelling talks elsewhere of the idea, expressed in the ‘oldest Greek tragedy’, that ‘it is the mourning/tragedy (‘Trauer’) of everything finite that in itself it is the same as the infinite, but not to be the infinite, but rather not to be it. It is only to be in potentia’ (Schelling 1969: 90). The remark is about the very nature of temporal existence, but music’s intrinsic temporality and relationship to feelings suggest how it can be linked to music. The finite, transient elements of music point beyond their transience because their combination makes them more than what they are individually, but this requires them to be ‘destroyed’ for the music to be realised. Even as music may transform one’s affective relationship to an aspect of existence, so suggesting its relationship to freedom, it can remind one that what has been transformed

9 The conception develops the idea of music as a transition to the semantic that we considered in chapter 2.
is still temporal, as the Romantic idea of longing suggested. Adorno talks, echoing ideas that develop around this time, which he associates with Schubert’s question as to whether any music is really cheerful, of ‘the unattainability of joy . . . which is the case since Beethoven for all great music’ (Adorno 1997: 13, 101). Music’s relationship to what were previously ‘ontotheological’ issues means that, instead of being a reflection of a mathematically or theologically based metaphysical order, it becomes an expression of the affective and other significances that modernity attaches to temporality.

Although Schelling himself makes little of these ideas in relation to music, his wider conception can help to interpret the notion, which becomes so important in this period, that music gives access to what is inaccessible to conceptual thinking. This notion can take a variety of forms, not least in relation to links between music and ‘the unconscious’. It is, of course, difficult to find a coherent way of talking about the unconscious. However, one way in which it can make sense is via Schelling’s idea that madness is inseparable from the very possibility of creative thinking, at the same time as always threatening to overwhelm it. His conception might be regarded as relying on questionable anthropomorphic metaphors of music’s effect on the mind, but that would make things too simple. If what is at issue is inherently resistant to literal explanation because it is not conceptual – in the sense of ‘inferentially determinable’ – such objections only hold water if one denies world-disclosing possibilities to metaphors, and to music. The question is therefore whether music is able to convey what a discursive metaphysical argument cannot, which cannot be answered in terms of assent to or disagreement with a philosophical argument. The answer depends rather on what is evoked or disclosed by the particular articulation in varying historical, social and intellectual contexts. What is disclosed in this way cannot be reduced to what is said about such evocation or disclosure.

In the Freedom essay Schelling says that even after the emergence of an ordered world

the rule-less (‘das Regellose’) still lies in the ground, as if at some time it could break through again, and nowhere does it seem as if order and form were what is original, but rather as if something originally without rules were brought to order. This is the ungraspable basis of reality in things, the remainder that never comes out, that which can never, even with the greatest exertion, be dissolved into understanding, but remains
eternally in the ground. Understanding is really born from what is devoid of understanding.

(Schelling 1856–61: i/7, 360)

His point is not to undermine reason, but rather to come to terms with what reason can never finally grasp, upon which it must depend for its ability to engage with the contingency of the world. The ‘rule-less’ is both a threat and what enables new responses to things which are not ‘congealed’ and inflexible. Unsurprisingly, then, Schelling adverts throughout these texts, in a manner which points to the world of Wagner’s Tristan, to the essential insecurity of human existence:

man learns that his peaceful dwelling place is built on the hearth of a primeval fire, he notices that even in the primal being something had to be posited as past before the present time became possible, that this past remains hidden in the ground, and that the same principle carries and holds us in its ineffectiveness which would consume and destroy us in its effectiveness.

(Schelling 1946: i, 13)

In some respects this is indeed just very bold, but not merely irrational, metaphysical speculation, of a kind which is these days very hard to defend. However, it seems to me that Schelling is justified in being concerned with the ways in which the extremes of human life cannot be understood solely in causal terms.

Such ideas do have, albeit rather indirect, echoes in later thinkers, like Hilary Putnam, who oppose reductive versions of physicalism (see Bowie 1993: chs. 4 and 5). If the ground of motivation were merely concatenations of causes, the reality of the world of human action and judgement, the intentional world in which we act, suffer, make music, and so on, would be dissolved into epiphenomenality. The implicit question is, to put it in its contemporary form, how to respond to attempts to reduce the ‘thick’ ethical and aesthetic vocabulary and other forms of expression of the life-world, which articulate the diversity of human motivations, to what is now seen by some as being merely the vocabulary of ‘folk psychology’. In the terms I have been employing: if music is not to be regarded as something to be explained in terms of metaphysics, how can it function as part of metaphysics?

This aspect of Schelling is what Slavoj Žižek connects to Lacan’s account of the ‘Real’. See Žižek 1996.
If human freedom to do good or evil (evil being construed as knowing what is right and willing what is wrong) is still a topic which can validly be discussed, and causal explanation in terms of ‘instinct’ or socialisation – or even the ‘unconscious’ – is not adequate to the issue, because it empties the moral terms of their content, then exploring what Schelling terms the ‘rule-less’ can offer interesting perspectives. The problem lies in specifying the nature of such exploration, because it cannot rely solely on explanatory resources. For Schelling the exploration is associated with madness, and yet also with the possibility of new creative potential. Such potential can in turn become pathological if it is not channelled into forms which are not just forms of conceptual ordering. This might sound merely ‘Romantic’, in the bad sense associated with notions like ‘original genius’, as that which functions outside all established rules. However, that would neglect those dimensions of human existence which take one beyond what can be thought about discursively into the realm where some other kind of response is required. Many kinds of musical and other art therapy rely precisely on non-verbal means of articulating and expressing traumas which otherwise render the person who is subjected to them speechless. These means can then enable speech, but they seem to be a prior condition of the return of the sort of speech that enables life to continue.

The interest during the Romantic period and since in the dangers and insights associated with the power exercised by music can, then, be illuminated by Schelling’s reflections, whether his overall philosophical position is ultimately defensible or not. The key point is that he does not give complete precedence either to the natural or to the intentional realm, these being inextricably connected to each other without being reducible to each other: the material and mental are ‘identical’, as the predicates of being (see Frank 1991). This idea can be connected to music via consideration of rhythm. Although dependent on occurrences in the physical realm, rhythm cannot be rhythm unless it

11 One does not need here to think in terms of good and evil as metaphysical ‘forces’. The use of moral vocabulary in the coordination and evaluation of social life allows one to think in terms of evil in this sense.

12 These factors may in most cases be the dominant ones, but there are cases where explanation in such terms cannot get at what is most important about the role of the ethical and the aesthetic in human life.

13 E. T. A. Hoffmann’s figure of the musician Kreisler and the real historical figure of Schumann, who adopted Hoffmann’s figure as the motivation for one of his greatest compositions, Kreisleriana, regard music as both essential to their precarious mental health and a potential threat to it.
is also an intentional phenomenon. It cannot, moreover, be properly grasped without taking into account both its somatic and its affective significance for those engaged with it. Schlegel and the Schelling of the *Philosophy of Art* characterised rhythm in terms of its ordering of the feeling of chaos or meaninglessness that emerges with thought’s ability to transcend immersion in immediate particularity. However, this means of establishing order can also take people into an ecstatic state, akin to madness, which is part of what Schelling means by the ‘rule-less’. The kind of identity involved in rhythm’s being both a means of escaping order and of establishing it is precisely what interests Schelling and is vital to an adequate understanding of music. It follows from his conception that the subject’s need to come to terms with the contradictions in its existence can be provided for by music’s capacity both to evoke and to structure powerful feelings. Music can therefore be the source both of disruption of feelings and of a possible response to that disruption. The greatest modern music can evoke feelings whose extreme nature takes them close to madness, but at the same time it uses what can give rise to those feelings to create new kinds of order which may in some cases protect the subject from falling into dangerous psychological states. The fascination of Wagner lies in his ambivalent status in this respect: does his music threaten psychological stability, or help sustain it in a deeper way by articulating what is often repressed?

Music’s ambivalent status in modernity, where it is regarded both as a resource and as a danger, has to do with the dualities suggested by Schelling’s attempts to understand how freedom is part of a nature which is also thoroughly determined by natural laws. Martin Geck says of Beethoven that, for him, ‘art is on the one hand a chance to “experience” life without becoming hardened, on the other it fixes attitudes which are an obstacle to the direct enjoyment of life. It is not only Beethoven who experiences art in this dialectic – it is the bourgeois problematic of art’ (Geck 2000: 8). The development of modern music involves moves between extremes of order and the disruption of order. However, what is regarded as belonging to the extremes can change:

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14 In a letter to Carl Fuchs in 1888 Nietzsche comments that ‘Our [modern] rhythm is a means of expression of affect: ancient rhythm, time-rhythm, has, in contrast, the task of dominating affect and eliminating it to a certain degree . . . In the ancient understanding rhythm is morally and aesthetically the reins which are put on passion. In short: our kind of rhythm belongs to pathology, the ancient to “ethos”’ (Nietzsche 2000: 3, 1314).

15 In the Conclusion I cite Daniel Barenboim’s comment that music, which ‘is so clearly able to teach you so many things’, is also able to ‘serve as a means of escape from precisely those things’ (Barenboim and Said 2004: 122).
the boundaries between merely mechanical order and mere incoherence depend on the shifting historical and social contexts of musical practices.

This last point is crucial, because one difficulty with the way Schelling talks about freedom is that he can be seen as making an ontological claim which renders all the differing historical manifestations of what he means by freedom essentially identical, as manifestations of the same groundless will. It is for this reason that such conceptions can be regarded as encouraging a mythologisation of the nature of human existence, and this issue will be crucial in assessing Wagner. Schelling’s conception need not, though, be thought of in these terms, precisely because there is no way of describing the ‘rule-less’. This is what leads to the idea that human existence is based on an ‘unground’ which opens up a world that offers possibilities which can be both creative and threatening. The differing ways in which music relates to the cultural articulation of human existence, from reflecting a religious sense of order, to evoking madness while not itself being mad, need not, therefore, be regarded as manifestations of a determinate ontological foundation. Music can, then, relate both to conceptual ways of structuring the world and to what cannot be articulated in conceptual form. It is the interaction of these possibilities which alters music’s significance in changing historical circumstances.

Music, will, and tragedy: the return of Dionysus

Schelling’s ideas derive in part from the mystical ideas of Meister Eckhart and of Jakob Böhme, which arguably inform some of the worst ‘irrationalist’ and mythologising aspects of the history of modern German philosophy. In the light of such a heritage is it appropriate to talk in terms of the ground/unground of ‘freedom’ at all? This way of talking about the fundamental contingency in human existence should indeed make one wary. Ostensible prescience about the terrible possibilities created by modernity’s revelation of the potential of radical freedom may indeed be achieved at the price of ontologising the idea of ‘freedom’, and so implying that economics, sociology, psychology, etc. lack the resources to deal with ‘deeper’ questions rooted in the fundamental nature of being. This danger is a real one, which vitiates certain parts of the German philosophical tradition, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century (see Bowie 2003b), and is the frequent target of Adorno, especially in his assessment of Wagner. However, even as
one explains important aspects of historical changes in the production and understanding of music via these disciplines, the question remains as to whether there are dimensions of music which are not susceptible to this kind of explanation. The idea that the demand for philosophical transparency is the sole valid demand in relation to human culture can too easily lead to a failure to engage with some of culture’s most revealing manifestations.

Traumatic experiences and extreme affective states of the kind associated with aspects of modernist art, for example, involve causes of the kind investigated by the social sciences, from rapid urbanisation, to the disintegration of social bonds, to modern warfare, exile, and so on. However, the manner in which trauma increasingly becomes a part of the most advanced modern music, from *Tristan*, to Mahler (e.g. in the first movement of the Tenth Symphony), to Berg’s *Three Pieces for Orchestra* and *Wozzeck*, to the work of Shostakovich and others, is not just explicable in terms of these disciplines. Indeed, it is arguably the case that music sometimes articulates in advance things which, initially, lead to silence. Think of Walter Benjamin’s argument, in his essay ‘The Storyteller’, that the capacity for telling meaningful stories about experience is profoundly damaged by events like the First World War. There are elements of Mahler’s and Berg’s music which seem to articulate the experience characteristic of that war even before the events take place. These elements, which often gave rise to initial puzzlement and rejection, became more comprehensible in the light of the real events, and so establish a repertoire of new symbolic forms.

Schelling’s idea of ‘that which can never, even with the greatest exertion, be dissolved into understanding’ can, then, be speculatively interpreted as pointing to why music incorporates aspects of modernity which may resist other means of articulation. The music which develops from Beethoven’s integrated formal dynamism to Schœnberg’s expressionism is indeed unthinkable without the transformations summed up in Marx’s dictum that ‘All that is solid melts into air’ in capitalist modernity. However, this music reveals dimensions of that experience which take on a different aspect because of the music itself. Why otherwise does the music bring about such strong responses on the part, in particular, of its first listeners? Adorno’s comment that dissonances in the music of the Second Vienna School disturb listeners because they ‘speak of their own state: only for this reason are they unbearable to them’ (Adorno 1997: 12, 18) may not be adequate to the differing ways in which people can react to such dissonances, but it does contain
a grain of truth, as new music’s reception by the Nazis suggests. The very fact that music evokes disturbing aspects of life in a way which does not seek just to redeem them is a modern phenomenon, unthinkable in pre-modern societies, where music is still fully integrated into the other practices of that society (see Hewett 2003).

It is, of course, precisely the most demanding modernist works, like Tristan, Stravinsky’s Sacre du printemps and Schoenberg’s Erwartung, which are most reliant on the technical and intellectual development of Western music, that tend initially to be heard as though they come closest to a ‘rule-less’ barbarism. Adorno claims in relation to modern art’s connection to myth that ‘The unstoppable movement of mind towards what is removed from it speaks in art for what was lost from the oldest times’ (Adorno 1997: 7, 181). The combination of myth and technical mastery in Wagner’s work can be understood as an illustration of Adorno’s idea that the most advanced music is connected to what he terms ‘primal history’ (’Urgeschichte’). For Adorno increases in technical mastery and the emergence of new forms of barbarism in modern societies are substantially related. On the level of the production of military weaponry, for example, this may be unexceptional. How, though, does the connection apply to music?

Adorno is concerned to explore what can be salvaged in a secular form for modernity from theology. He therefore wants to show how music responds to what may otherwise be unreflectively and uncritically expressed in ‘mythical’ ways. The term ‘myth’, in Adorno’s particular sense, designates cultural forms which express the supposed impossibility of transformation of the human and natural world. The belief underlying myth is in an essential reality that was expressed by the primal forms of human thinking, subsequent forms being mere masks that disguise the purportedly ‘ever-same’. The twist in Adorno’s argument is that he contends that some of the most modern aspects of human culture also produce ‘myth’. In a commodity-based society of mass-production, ‘The new, sought for its own sake, so to speak produced in the laboratory, hardened into a schema, becomes in its sudden appearance the compulsive return of the old, not unlike traumatic neuroses’ (Adorno 1997: 4, 270). Adorno thinks that the most significant new music, in contrast, absorbs, symbolically articulates and transforms, damaging aspects of modern societies, but does not regress into myth. In this connection he often uses the psychoanalytical idea that music is a defense against paranoia, understood as a form of pathological narcissism, because it can take the subject beyond itself into an affective
world that is objectively manifested via the music, rather than being located inside the subject.

Indicating a further important way in which music is thought of as relating to freedom, Adorno contends that ‘Since music existed it was the – always at the same time powerless – objection to myth and invariant (‘immergleiches’) fate, to death itself’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 387). There is an aspect of music which may transcend what it evokes, even when this involves what can also make life a torment, from the physical and psychological threats of first nature, to the threat of ‘second nature’. The latter can take the form, for example, of the destructive features of modern technology, or the disorientation occasioned by the rapid upheavals of modernity: ‘As music begins it already commits itself to going on, to becoming something new. What can be called music’s transcendence: that it has begun at each moment and is an other than it is: that it points beyond itself, is not a metaphysical commandment that has been dictated to it, but lies in its own condition, against which it can do nothing’ (ibid.). Adorno’s animus against the music produced by the culture industry will be generated by his conviction that it betrays this potential for ultimately ‘powerless’ transcendence by merely repeating what is already the case in the commodity market. His verdict on Wagner will be instructively ambivalent in this respect. He is torn between his awareness of Wagner’s capacity for innovative musical transcendence that makes possible ‘new music’, and what he sees as Wagner’s simultaneous tendency to regress into myth.

One way of interpreting this idea of music’s combination of transcendence and finitude becomes apparent in the association of music with a modern return of tragedy. Schelling had hinted at this in the *Philosophy of Art* (1856–61: 1/5, 736), and the idea will become explicit both in Wagner and in Nietzsche. A major issue here is the contested interpretation of the relationship of tragedy to myth, which is echoed in Adorno’s concern with music’s being an ‘objection’ to myth as the expression of the ‘ever-same’. Tragedy is concerned with the worst things in human life, and yet is anything but a manifestation of the worst in human culture. Music may also have to do with the worst things, and depends on how it transcends them. Why and how, though, do cultural expressions which respond in a non-mythical way to the worst things become so important? Whereas myth can be seen as a form of submission to disaster, because it tells stories about why things must be the way they are, Greek tragedy has a more reflexive relationship to calamity. This is most evident in the ‘dual causality’ in many Greek tragedies, whereby
characters are presented as both responsible for their actions and yet as at the mercy of influences that they do not control, which makes interpretation of Greek tragedy as a model of the human condition so complex. Schelling says, for example, that the tragic person – he is referring to Oedipus – is ‘necessarily guilty of a crime’ (Schelling 1856–61: i/5, 695).

The debate about tragedy among philosophers until the beginning of modernity tended to focus on Aristotle’s concept of catharsis. The ‘cleansing’ of feelings supposedly brought about by tragedy is understood as the explanation of why a culture would present images of the worst things to itself on a public stage. It is easy to relate this idea to music’s expression of painful or extreme emotions, and early opera was sometimes regarded in such terms. However, when the relationship of tragedy to Dionysus comes to the fore during the process of secularisation that begins around the middle of the eighteenth century, the interpretation of tragedy in terms of catharsis is seen as inadequate, and this both influences approaches to music and is in turn influenced by music.

The reason why the idea of Dionysus becomes significant once again can be approached via Merleau-Ponty’s remark that ‘Because perception gives us faith in a world, in a system of rigorously connected and continuous natural facts, we believed that this system could incorporate everything into itself, including the perception which initiated us into it’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 46–7). In the structure suggested by Merleau-Ponty a system based on inferential relations between facts must leave outside itself what makes possible the establishing of such a system in the first place. This structure can be related to Kant’s and Schelling’s separation of the causal world from the ground of human freedom, which will form the basis of the early Nietzsche’s adoption of Schopenhauer for his account of music and tragedy. Something akin to such a structure offers one way of understanding Greek tragedy and its perceived relationship to music in the nineteenth century.

Greek tragedy explores how systems of order are undermined by a reality which is resistant to such ordering, hence the link between the ideas about ‘freedom’ we have examined and the new understandings of tragedy. Human identities, for example, which are based on inferential relationships, of the kind in which being a daughter excludes being a sister of the same person, are undermined when it turns out that it is in reality possible to inhabit identities which are supposed to be mutually exclusive within a particular symbolic order. Something similar occurs
in relation to the theme of the exclusion by the humanly constituted
city of what is other to it, that is often couched in terms of wild ‘nature’
outside the city. What is ‘outside’ often proves in some way to be inside.
In Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, Dionysus himself is the destructive god who
comes from outside the city, but he is in some sense always already inside
it. The necessity essential to the idea of tragedy lies in the fact that,
whatever form of order human beings seek to establish or maintain,
it will inevitably come up in the end against a reality that transcends
and destroys it. Importantly, there is no dualism here: the forms of
order could not exist without the reality from which they emerge, but
that reality always transcends them. Why, then, does this idea come to
be linked to music? The analogies of the structure here to what we
observed in relation to the question of evil and freedom should make
the answer easier to grasp: in both cases a causally explicable world is
seen also to involve a dimension which is not explicable in causal terms,
and which is sometimes linked to madness.

Dionysus is essential to tragedy because he is associated with the idea
that creation and destruction are inevitably linked. While ‘reality’ can be
regarded as that which can be conceptually fixed, it can also be regarded
as that which never ceases to change, destroying previous ways of fixing it
in concepts and occasioning trauma in those who undergo the changes.
That concern with the idea of Dionysus should re-emerge during the
French Revolution – the Sans-culottes, for example, adopted Dionysian
insignia (and used music that can be characterised as Dionysian) – and
in the subsequent period, when ‘All that is solid melts into air’, seems
not to be wholly fortuitous. Tragedy is connected to times of great social
upheaval: Shakespeare may precede the English Revolution, but the
social conflicts he is concerned with relate to that Revolution. With
the exception of Georg Büchner (whose *Woyzeck* was, of course, turned
with little alteration into the libretto of Berg’s *Wozzeck*), the nineteenth
century does not give rise to great tragedies, although Wagner can be
regarded as an exception precisely because of his addition of music.
This may seem unfair to Ibsen and others, but they arguably do not
attain the universality necessary for tragedy. The association of music
with tragedy comes about because of the particular ways in which the
destruction of forms of order is interpreted in the modern period, there
being no universal consensus on the evaluation of this destruction.

The issue of time is crucial here, because of the erosion of traditional
forms of temporal order associated with modernity. In chapter 3 we
encountered the Romantic questioning of the idea that the task of
philosophy was to seek a timeless account of the nature of things. Time can be related to the Dionysian, being both inherently divided against itself, each moment gaining its identity inferentially, by not being what precedes and follows it, and yet unified, because the totality of time consists of all of these differences. The question is how meaningful connections are made between moments – someone unable to make such connections is threatened with madness, just as one who structures time too rigidly can be regarded as being in a pathological condition – and how such particular connections relate to the idea of the whole.

Music exemplifies the question of time, as we saw when considering the relationship of rhythm to self-consciousness. When traditional metaphysical conceptions of a timeless true world are eroded, musical forms are therefore also affected. In particular, the relationship between music and text changes. Two aspects of temporality come into play here. On the one hand, the disintegration of dogmatic metaphysical conceptions opens new horizons of temporality, which are influenced by the new potential liberated by modernity. The sheer speed and diversity of change alters the way in which time is experienced, and this creates new musical possibilities. Modern jazz, for example, is unthinkable without the impact of the temporality of urban life: Parker, Coltrane and others improvise more complex configurations of notes at higher speed and more coherently than in most of the previous history of music. On the other hand, the redemptive aspect of metaphysical conceptions, which either gave value to particular moments by seeing them as part of a divinely authorised whole, or which directed attention to that which is beyond the transient empirical world, is lost. Music consequently can come to be regarded as where such redemptive experiences of time are preserved, either by its ability to connect moments together into an intelligible larger whole, or by its evoking in a temporal medium what is supposedly beyond time.

One symptom of the tension between these aspects of temporality is apparent in the development of the symphony. From Beethoven to Mahler and beyond, the symphony integrates new ideas about humankind’s relationship to the world and increasingly disparate musical material, taking up possibilities which emerge from the challenging of existing forms, at the price of making the integration ever more difficult. (Something similar happens in the novel and the other arts, as Hegel’s conception of ‘Romantic art’ suggests.) At the same time, during the nineteenth and into the earlier part of the twentieth century, the conclusions of some major symphonies become ever more oriented
towards a redemptive culmination that is meant to bind together the increasingly diverse patterns of expectation and fulfilment, and changes of mood and feeling, which form their material. This sort of control of a symbolic totality seems, however, then to founder on the fact that the culmination is contradicted by a real world whose ‘endings’ become more and more disastrous. The analogy to the Dionysian conception of the destruction of human order outlined above should be apparent. The disparity between the anything but triumphant conclusions of Mahler’s Sixth and Ninth Symphonies, and the conclusions of some of his other symphonies, like the Seventh and Eighth, illustrates the basic point. The consequence is that the Sixth and Ninth take on an iconic status in relation to the disasters of the twentieth century for thinkers like Adorno, who reject triumphant tonal apotheoses from this period as ideology which feigns reconciliation where there is none. As we shall see in later chapters, it is in this sense that certain kinds of music can come to be seen as ‘critical’ of reality.

The First World War is a watershed in this context, because it brings home what is seen as the inherently tragic aspect of Western music suggested by its links to Dionysus. Much depends here, of course, on how the tragic is understood. The interpretations of Schopenhauer and of the early Nietzsche, who hold in certain respects to a traditional metaphysical view of a timeless world that is accessible through art, contrast vividly with those of the later Nietzsche. The latter says, in the notes of the 1880s, opposing Dionysus to ‘the Crucified’ as the manifestation of ‘a curse on life’ (i.e. Christianity), that ‘Dionysus who is cut into pieces is a promise (‘Verheissung’) of life: it will eternally be born again and come home from destruction’ (Nietzsche 2000: 3, 774).16 The question is, he maintains, whether the meaning of suffering should be regarded in a ‘Christian’ or in a ‘tragic’ manner, the former seeking an answer beyond life, the latter seeing meaning in this life, there being no other. In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche talks of the ‘Positive belief that only the particular is reprehensible, that within the whole everything redeems and asserts itself . . . But such a belief is the highest of all possible beliefs: I baptised it with the name Dionysos’ (ibid.: 2, 1025). In the later Nietzsche the destruction of the transient particularity in which human lives consist can be ‘redeemed’ by affirmation of the inevitable

16 References to Nietzsche are to the Schlechta edition because this is now available on a very reasonably priced and easily searchable cd-rom (Digitale Bibliothek 31 Berlin: Directmedia 2000).
fact that the whole will always produce anew from what is destroyed. Obviously this is not supposed to be redemption in a theological sense. The idea is instead that, because there is no other life, one has to affirm this one in all its destructiveness and transience. Not to do so would be the ultimate waste of what possibilities life offers, and would mean living life by trying to repress what it really is. Nietzsche thinks that the view of art as a form of necessary deception that ‘justifies existence’ advanced by Schopenhauer and his earlier self essentially does this. His new approach introduces a different sense of temporality, in which the transience of music ceases to be a deficit.

The complicating factor here is that the later Nietzsche’s characterization of Dionysus is, in some respects, analogous to Hegel’s conception of the absolute, in which all particulars are ‘negative’ and only the whole is positive, so that insight into the necessity of negation is the highest philosophical insight. Hegel’s immanentist philosophy, which rejects any fundamental dualism between the empirical and the intelligible has, as we already saw in Brandom, been interpreted in an ‘anti-metaphysical’ manner which brings it closer to Nietzsche’s refusal of a dualism of the temporal and the eternal. The ambivalence in Hegel interpretations is inherent in the ambivalence of the significance of tragedy and music apparent in the differences between the later Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. The essential problem is how the destruction of the parts via the way they relate to the whole is understood with regard to metaphysics and music in modernity.

Hegel famously used the idea of the ‘Dionysian’ in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, where he talks of ‘the True’, in a manner which could be applied to a Beethoven symphony, as the ‘Bacchic frenzy in which no member is not drunk; and, because each, as it separates itself, just as immediately dissolves itself, the frenzy is equally transparent and simple tranquillity’ (Hegel 1970: 47). Without the dissolution of each finite particular into the totality there could be no advance in truth, but there would also be no truth but for all the particulars that manifest the truth, even as they dissolve: ‘appearance is the emergence and disappearance which itself does not emerge and disappear’ (ibid.). For Hegel, though, unlike for Nietzsche, this conception of the primacy of the whole over the parts is the source of a rationally articulated, teleologically constituted philosophical system, even as he also describes the True in terms which are associated with music and Dionysian states. Nietzsche rejects such teleological conceptions on the grounds that they will detract from the contingent possibilities of present life, in the name of a promise for
the future that will not be fulfilled. Transience is therefore not seen as negation, but as what offers the positive possibility of new revelation, without any final ‘Aufhebung’. Let us, then, briefly consider some of the ways in which teleological structures relate to music in order to evaluate differences between a Hegelian and a Nietzschean stance with regard to music and metaphysics. The ideas in question will underlie many subsequent attempts to understand music’s relationship to the modern world.

In one sense all tonal music is ‘teleological’, relying on harmonic resolutions both for its formal constitution, and for its aesthetic and emotional effects. However, the degree to which some of the most influential music from the end of the eighteenth century until the advent of atonality becomes oriented towards the final resolution into a tonic key increases, particularly in the light of Beethoven’s dynamic new employment of tonality. How does the symbolic teleology of this kind of music relate to teleology in the sense encountered in Hegel? As we saw in chapter 4, Hegel’s conception is echoed in Beethoven’s manner of integrating musical particulars into a totality (and vice versa). A revealing example here, which parallels Hegel’s remarks in the Phenomenology (1807), is Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony (1812), because it combines rigorous structural integration with a strong sense of the Dionysian. The integration of musical material via the accumulating power of Greek rhythms (see Solomon 2003) leads to a work which (particularly in the last movement) at the same time evokes the Dionysian, in a manner influenced by the music of the French Revolution. The Seventh Symphony extends the expressive range of music in ways which create new possibilities that are taken up by subsequent composers, like Wagner, and also evoke the disturbing collective energy that fuels both the best—and the worst—aspects of the French Revolution. How is this sort of combination to be evaluated?

Nietzsche wants affirmation without teleology, and by the time of his later work is often critical of Beethoven (and of the Revolution). In the unpublished notes of the 1880s, for example, he says: ‘just say the word “Dionysos” before the best recent names and things,

17 Adorno sees tonality as characteristic of the bourgeois era: in the ‘classic-liberal model of the economy . . . the totality asserts itself behind the scenes via and over the heads of individual spontaneities’ (Adorno 1997: 17, 284) as the tonic key does in relation to the musical particulars.

18 Solomon thinks that the symphony may involve a ‘pull to ecstatic conformity’ (Solomon 2003: 134), which echoes Adorno’s suspicion of Beethoven’s affirmative music.
before Goethe, or Beethoven, or Shakespeare, or Raphael: and sud-
denly we feel our best things and moments judged [in the sense that
they do not live up to what Dionysus signified for Greek culture]
(Nietzsche 2000: 3, 463). His assertion is part of a questionable verdict
on music in modernity which will be considered in the next chapter.
The objection to the verdict is that his predictions that Beethoven’s
music, let alone that of Wagner, would soon cease to be culturally
significant are simply mistaken. The reasons why can be briefly sug-
gested by the following. In Twilight of the Idols Nietzsche claims that
modern music is ‘the remainder of a much more complete expression-
world of affect, a mere residue of Dionysian histrionics. In order to
make music possible as a particular art, a number of senses, above all
the muscle-sense, were rendered immobile’ (ibid.: 2, 997). We are here
returned to an idea which we encountered in Herder, namely that the
development of modernity depends on the loss of immediacy. Instead
of the Greeks’ supposedly immediate somatic reactions to the affec-
tive stimuli of life, reflective, rationalised articulation now dominates,
and music becomes an autonomous art. An obvious problem for this
argument is apparent in a complexly ‘mediated’ work like Wagner’s
Tristan. Tristan is both an astounding ‘complete expression-world of
affect’ and relies on the most extended deferral of tonal resolution
and a final tonal culmination, without involving the kind of structural
integration present in Beethoven’s employment of sonata and other
forms. There is no obvious reason to regard Tristan as inferior to Greek
Dionysian art, unless one adduces a series of cultural and philosoph-
ical evaluations that may fail in important ways to do justice to the
music.

What is at stake, then, in such evaluation of music? In the case of
Nietzsche the question is hard to answer. At the beginning of the sec-
tion of Ecce Homo on The Case of Wagner, for example, Nietzsche makes
another link between Dionysus and music: ‘From what do I suffer if I suf-
ferr from the fate of music? From the fact that music has been deprived
of its world-transfiguring, yea-saying character, that it is décadence—music
and no longer the flute of Dionysos’ (ibid.: 2, 1146). The affirmative
aspect of music consists here in the involvement of the whole somatic
and affective being of the person, but this conception relies on the ques-
tionable version of immediacy we have just encountered. Elsewhere in
Ecce Homo, looking back on The Birth of Tragedy, he admits, while criti-
cising it, that ‘A great hope speaks from this book. In the last analysis
there is no reason for me to take back the hope for a Dionysian future
of music’ (ibid.: 2, 1112), and he claims that ‘when I described Dionysian music I described what I had heard’ (ibid.), rather than Wagner’s actual music. This is just retrospective self-justification, but the contrast that emerges from Nietzsche’s conflicting positions lies at the core of modern questions concerning music and metaphysics.

So what could be meant by ‘Dionysian music’? The answer has to do with Nietzsche’s response to the demise of redemptive metaphysics. His problem lies in the indeterminate nature of what he proposes as an alternative in music, which depends on his discursive ideas about the fate of philosophy. Despite his desire to undermine the pretensions of philosophy, Nietzsche will in certain respects be less interesting than the Romantic thinkers who had the idea of using music to question philosophy. The questions here have to do with the relationship between metaphysics_1 and metaphysics_2. The Kantian revolution depended on the idea of philosophy as critique, which helped to undermine the idea of philosophy as substantive metaphysical explanation of the meaning of existence. Metaphysics had variously sought to function as: an account of an inherent order of things, a moral compass, consolation for the troubles of a transient existence, and the promise of redemption from that transience. These were often expressed in precisely the kind of teleological terms that gave rise to the contrast between Hegel and Nietzsche. As Dahlhaus suggested, metaphysics then comes up against the concrete reality of modernity. Disputes over music in this period and since often arise because it is regarded as potentially taking over some or all of these functions.

The situation is changed further by the connection between music and ‘freedom’. This connection creates a tension between the idea that music can compensate for what is destroyed by the decline of substantial metaphysics (hence the link to teleology), and the idea that such an attribution of an extra-musical role to music detracts from the new autonomy of ‘absolute music’ (a term which seems to have been coined by Wagner). These issues finally bring us to Schopenhauer, who is often seen as the most significant philosopher to examine the question of philosophy and music, but who, I want to argue, in fact merely tries to make a questionable version of metaphysics_1 into metaphysics_2. He is therefore not the radical representative of an inversion of the music/philosophy relationship as which he is often presented.  

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19 I have also discussed Schopenhauer and music in Bowie 2003a. For a concise, if rather a-historical, exposition and critique of Schopenhauer on music, see Budd 1992, ch. 5.
Schopenhauer places tragedy immediately below music, which is the highest form in the hierarchy of the arts, that he considers to be ‘objectifications of the Will’. The ‘Will’, in his particular sense, takes the place of Kant’s ‘thing in itself’. It is, though, not inaccessible in the way the thing in itself is, being instead manifest in pain and desire, etc., as ‘an endless striving’ (ibid.: 1, 218). The Will is, however, never finally objectifiable, because that would contradict its essential nature. In the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche will equate the Will with Dionysus. Like Schelling’s universe of expansive and contractive forces, Schopenhauer’s universe is constituted by opposition within the totality of the Will between aspects which strive to be absolute, but are doomed not to succeed because they can never fully realise themselves by wholly overcoming the Other. The objectifications of the Will are an ascending series of ‘Platonic Ideas’, i.e. of timeless forms which manifest the essence of transient empirical phenomena, from the basic forms of matter, to thinking organisms. Art manifests the essence of an object, which is accessible only to disinterested aesthetic contemplation. This separates the subject’s aesthetic responses from those driven by its intrinsic sense of lack which derives from its also being itself a manifestation of the Will. Consequently, unlike the natural sciences, which aim at an ever-receding goal in their pursuit of chains of explanation generated

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20 I will for the sake of clarity capitalise ‘Will’ when referring to Schopenhauer’s specific doctrine.
by the principle of sufficient reason, art has always already reached its goal because it provides satisfaction in itself, rather than demanding ever-renewed effort. The hierarchy of aesthetic objectifications begins with architecture, as the lowest form, which is most tied to materiality, and eventually reaches music, which symbolically manifests the essential nature of reality. Schopenhauer connects the very notion of such a hierarchy to music, claiming that ‘animal and plant are the descending fifth and third of man, and the inorganic real is the lower octave’ (ibid.: 1, 205). The underlying reality of the Will is what leads to the competing manifestations of the empirical world. Instances of a particular objectification will inevitably be destroyed, but the objectification will later be manifest in new instances, as that aspect of the Will strives to assert itself again.

Schopenhauer’s hierarchy of the arts actually shares much with Hegel’s conception of degrees of animation of material objects by Geist. A common orientation towards Platonic metaphysics and aspects of Schelling largely explains why this is the case, despite their considerable differences in other respects. The basis of their differences lies precisely in Schopenhauer’s rejection of teleology. Hegel conceives of the absolute as the result of the progressive self-negation of everything finite, so that there is no dualism of the empirical world and the intelligible truth about the empirical world. This truth is realised in time, even though it is timeless, timelessness only being intelligible via its opposite. Schopenhauer, in contrast, separates the metaphysical truth of the world from the transient empirical world. He argues that his conception of Ideas is the correct explanation of what Kant intended with the idea of the ‘thing in itself’, which lies outside the temporal realm of cause and effect. The difference between the Idea and the thing in itself is that ‘the Idea is only the immediate and therefore adequate objectivity of the thing in itself, which itself, though, is the Will, the Will insofar as it is not yet objectified, not yet representation’ (ibid.: 1, 227). Music therefore relates more directly to the Will, because, unlike the Idea, it does not represent anything.

Music’s proximity to tragedy can be understood via Schopenhauer’s description of the ‘aim of this highest poetic achievement’, namely ‘the presentation of the terrible side of life’, in which

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21 This idea is first advanced by Schelling in his 1800 System of Transcendental Idealism.
the nameless pain, the misery of humankind, the triumph of evil, the mocking domination of coincidence and the hopeless fall of the just and the innocent are presented to us: for in this lies a significant indication about the nature of the world and of existence. It is the conflict of the Will with itself that here, at the highest stage of its objectification, most completely unfolded, emerges in a terrible manner.

(ibid.: 1, 318)

Tragedy is closest to music, but still lacks what makes music philosophically decisive: ‘Music is not at all, like the other arts, the image (’Abbild’) of the Ideas, but the image of the Will itself, whose objectifications are the Ideas: that is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts: for these speak only of the shadow, music of the essence itself’ (ibid.: 1, 324).

A particular consequence which Schopenhauer draws from tragedy is crucial to the interpretation of tragedy in relation to music. Because the Will is the metaphysical ground of everything in the world of representation, not least of the conflicting individuals in a tragedy themselves, the conflicts in tragedy are simply conflicts between differing parts of the same whole. The tragic characters therefore attain their highest insight when they give up their transient, Will-driven motivations and realise that these, like themselves as individuated parts of the causal world, are mere appearances of a reality which dissolves all conceptual differences, and which can ultimately only be understood via affective differences. This new insight into the real essence of things ‘brings about resignation, the renunciation, not just of life but of the whole will to life itself’ (ibid.: 319), so that ‘at the moment of tragic catastrophe the conviction becomes clearer than ever to us that life is a burdensome dream from which we have to awaken’ (ibid.: 4, 511). The aesthetic pleasure occasioned by the presentation of these things in the tragic catastrophe therefore lies in their being a means for bringing the spectators to turn away from the ‘will to life’.

Although tragedy points beyond the illusions of the world of representation, it is still tied to representation. In music, on the other hand,

All possible strivings, excitations and expressions of the Will, all those occurrences in the interior of people which reason throws into the broad, negative category of feeling can be expressed by the infinitely many possible melodies, but always in the universality of mere form, without matter, always only according to the in itself, not according to appearance, [it is] as it were, the innermost soul of the appearance, without the body.

(ibid.: 1, 329)
Music is therefore ‘immediately an image of the Will itself and so is the metaphysical to everything physical in the world, the thing in itself to every appearance’ (ibid.). It must be an image of the Will because the whole point of these contentions is to arrive at a philosophical attitude in which the torment to which our dependence on the Will gives rise can be avoided. Were the feelings occasioned by music to be real feelings, we would still be subject to the dissatisfaction inherent in the Will’s self-manifestation. The argument is, though, implausible. How do we know to connect the pleasurable experience of music’s presentation of the tormented striving of the Will with an intuitive sense of the Will, if the former is completely devoid of any recognisable affective ‘content’? The ultimate consequence of these ideas is Schopenhauer’s investment in the Buddhist idea of self-negation as the true means of transcending Will-bound existence, music allowing only a temporary respite from this existence. However, this investment raises further difficulties.

Schopenhauer’s contentions about the Will’s independence of the principle of sufficient reason derive from the tradition of Kant and Schelling considered at the beginning of the chapter. The crux of the relationship between Schopenhauer and his predecessors lies in how freedom is conceived. As we saw, philosophical attempts to understand freedom can be regarded as inherently paradoxical, because they involve the performative contradiction of claiming to define what is constitutively resistant to being defined. For Kant and Hegel freedom must be thought of in terms of self-determination according to intersubjective norms. However, what Schelling talked about in terms of the ‘rule-less’ does seem to play a role in the capacity to transcend or reject existing norms, at the risk of the dangers – as well as opportunities and achievements – associated with some of the disturbing aspects of modernity.

The history of the most significant modern music involves a tension between intersubjectively generated norms which determine the boundaries of musical practice, and the growing realisation that few, if any, of those norms are necessarily binding for all music. What the music which pushes the boundaries signifies depends on the contexts in which it occurs, and this is part of what vitiates Schopenhauer’s approach. He famously maintains that the ‘composer reveals the innermost essence of the world and expresses the deepest wisdom in a language which his reason does not understand’ (ibid.: 1, 327). Our intuitive, affective awareness of the fundamental nature of things cannot be expressed conceptually, and so must be articulated in music (which already involves
the problem of how we can understand the form without any of the content). At the same time, Schopenhauer’s arguments about human freedom actually contradict this claim because they rely on a discursive metaphysical argument which makes music irrelevant to his philosophical case. He admits that what he says about music ‘assumes and establishes a relationship of music as a representation (‘Vorstellung’) to that which essentially never can be a representation’ (ibid.: 1, 323), namely the Will. How, then, is his position to be interpreted, given that it relies on something essentially non-empirical?

Robert Wicks contends that the argument about the Will should ‘not be understood as a traditional metaphysical theory which purports to describe the unconditional truth. It should rather be understood as an expression of the human perspective on the world, which, as an embodied individual, we typically cannot avoid.’

One has to wonder, though, what the relationship between the awareness of the limitation of our perspective and the idea of an absolute conception could be for Schopenhauer. How can we even conceive of the latter, if all we have is the former? To do so would seem to require a regulative idea of unconditional truth, but Schopenhauer does not talk in such terms. He appeals instead to the intuition of the Will itself, which must have absolute status: even ‘relative’ appearances are themselves produced by the Will, which is their absolute ground. He claims, for example, in his reflections on morality and freedom that the Will is ‘free, it is all-powerful’ (ibid.: 2, 438). His admission that he cannot prove his contentions makes his appeal to the intuitive awareness offered by music all the more central to his arguments. However, if we consider what he says about freedom in relation to music, the aporias in his position become apparent.

Schelling’s reflections on the will and freedom were – as indeed are Schopenhauer’s – concerned to come to new terms with the opposition between freedom and necessity that is brought about by Kant’s division between things in themselves and causally determined appearances. Schelling’s position is interesting because it can be interpreted as sustaining an essential contingency in the idea of human freedom, which is connected to the contingency of being itself. This means that Schelling’s position does not necessarily constitute just another version of Heidegger’s idea of modern metaphysics as the ‘subjectification of being’ by the subject. Instead, his ideas can be seen as resonating

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with the ways in which music in modernity responds to a world where traditional certainties of all kinds, including about the nature of self-conscious existence, are brought into question. Schelling argued that we do not choose our character, but that this does not exclude our taking responsibility for our deeds. This situation includes the possibility of acting against our character, and this is part of the reality of a freedom which cannot ever be fully grasped. The source of such an action, which can be either good or evil, need have no ground of explanation. That is the ‘abyss’ that we can all become aware of when faced with the possibility of doing something ‘out of character’ in the most radical sense. My suggestion was that this idea can be connected with the notion of music as an expression of ‘that which can never, even with the greatest exertion, be dissolved into understanding’. However much we explain music in terms of its historical, social and other determinations, that does not account for the very fact of music’s ability to disclose new ways of being. Such a conception allows one to sustain a notion of music’s autonomy, without disconnecting music from the world that it can disclose.

It might seem obvious that Schopenhauer also argues for such an inversion, but this is not the case, because his theory of freedom and the Will takes no account of the contingency that is central to Schelling’s conception. The ‘immediacy of knowledge of one’s own will’ (Schopenhauer 1977: 2, 615) is, he contends, the source of the concept of freedom. The Will itself is indeed groundless, not being located in the spatio-temporal causal realm; the will of human individuals is, in contrast, not groundless, because they are themselves just appearances of the Will, which is their ground. Character is therefore actually Will-determined fate, and, in retrospect, we can, Schopenhauer maintains, see all our actions, which we thought of as free when we performed them, as determined by our timeless, Will-derived, intelligible essence. If a person ‘lived for ever, they would, by dint of the unchangeability of their character, always for ever act in the same way’ (ibid.: 4, 595). Heidegger’s idea of modern metaphysics as the objectification of the freedom of the subject is clearly applicable here. For Schopenhauer only death gives real freedom, by delivering one from individuation altogether.

Schopenhauer’s argument leads to a vicious circle. Whatever one does must, in retrospect, be interpreted in terms of the a priori metaphysical claim that the individual’s will is subject to their timeless intelligible character. No empirical evidence can refute this claim, so it
depends on the metaphysics that backs it up. What, though, could validate that metaphysics, especially given that its main contentions depend precisely on what is supposed to be intuitively – and therefore not discursively – available in music? Schopenhauer maintains that ‘assuming that one could succeed in giving a completely correct, complete, and detailed explanation of music, thus a comprehensive repetition in concepts of what it expresses, this would immediately also be an adequate repetition and explanation of the world in concepts, or would be equivalent to this, and so would be the true philosophy’ (ibid.: 1, 332–3). However, as he himself admits, one cannot do this. I suggested earlier that critiques of metaphysics in modernity often relate to the idea that language can no longer convey substantial metaphysical content. Schopenhauer seems to realise this, but then simultaneously assumes that this content can be said to be what is conveyed by music.

The need to find a better way of dealing with this issue will be apparent in the work of Wittgenstein and Adorno, and is implicit in aspects of Heidegger.

The appeal of Schopenhauer’s position would seem to lie in its elevation of music to real philosophical dignity. In many respects, however, he does precisely the opposite, subordinating music to the limiting effects of a highly contentious metaphysical vision. As Budd (1992) argues, most of Schopenhauer’s case depends upon the idea of tension and resolution in a diatonic melody, which he equates with the nature of the Will. This already excludes many kinds of music which do not function in terms of such tension, but Schopenhauer also excludes many dimensions of diatonic music because he denies that music can express the world of appearance. Music does not, he argues, express a particular joy or sadness, but rather the essence of these emotions. In that case, though, the specificity of the music is ignored in favour of the philosophical claim for music’s metaphysical status: is the joy expressed in Beethoven’s Ninth essentially the same as that in the conclusion of Die Meistersinger, or in South African township music? The essence of the joy is supposed to be located in the music, but why can the music not make us feel real joy? Indeed, as I suggested in chapter 1, the already questionable general objection to the idea of sad music making one sad certainly does not apply to the joyous emotions which can be occasioned by music.

Schopenhauer’s arguments on these issues need not detain us for long: they are for the most part untenable. It is much more important to understand why they became such an influential cultural force,
affecting artists, writers, and thinkers of many kinds, but particularly musicians, from Wagner, to Mahler, to Schoenberg, and beyond. This might seem to support Schopenhauer’s philosophical case, but it actually supports the position I have sought to advance. Schopenhauer’s cultural impact may best be construed in terms of the music which he influenced, most notably Tristan and the later-composed parts of the Ring, or parts of Mahler’s symphonies. A flawed, monolithic, philosophical approach to music, which reduces music to the one significance of being an image of the movements of the Will, helps to give rise to the most diverse kinds of musical expression, which cannot be articulations of the monolithic philosophical claim. The underlying issue here is again music’s relationship to freedom. Schopenhauer’s desire to salvage a timeless metaphysics from the vortex of modern temporality leads him to repress the aspect of freedom I have sought to derive from Schelling. Real freedom for Schopenhauer lies in the escape from transient individuated being, hence his attachment to the idea of Nirvana.23

Paradoxically, the important cultural effect of Schopenhauer seems to have more to do with his role in the undermining of metaphysics, on account of his refusal to envisage any theological redemption from the destructive and painful nature of existence, and his concomitant attention to the importance of art. His reminders of the universality of suffering lead him to an interesting ethics of universal compassion for all sensuous beings. The weakness of this ethics lies once more in his reliance on the idea of a timeless intelligible nature supposedly shared by all individuated, self-conscious manifestations of the Will.

The best artists who respond to negative philosophical visions like Schopenhauer’s do not just find symbolic ways of ‘saying the same thing’. Life does not just consist of grim, relentless destruction – though plenty of it does – and human responses to the horrors of life in tragedy and music are not just a repeated reminder that ‘life’s a bitch’. Why bother to go to all that trouble, especially if the appeal of Nirvana may itself be mere self-deception? Schelling once again offers a contrast to Schopenhauer, thus indicating a more appropriate way of considering how music and philosophy might interact in this respect. It is not that Schelling paints a rosy picture of human existence. Indeed, he talks of ‘a sadness which adheres to all life’ and of a ‘veil of melancholy which

23 I do not wish here to diminish Schopenhauer’s achievement in making Eastern philosophy an issue for the West, but I do wish to question the conclusions he draws from it.
is spread over the whole of nature, the deep, indestructible melancholy
of all life’ (Schelling 1856–61: 1/7, 495) that derives from the constant
battle required for the establishing of particular, but transient, individ-
ual existence, rather than lifeless sameness. However, without freedom’s
attempts to overcome the resistance occasioned by this melancholy, we
would live in a dead world: there can be no joy without its opposite.

The greatest modern music often results from the composer or
performer taking on the most demanding tasks, and it nearly always
involves some element of the ‘melancholy of all life’, not least because
music cannot offer any ultimate consolation, of the kind which some
people expect from religion. This failure to fulfil a substantial meta-
physical role is one reason why music is connected to tragedy at this
time. Metaphysics, seems to me, then, to be part of the great Viennese
classical tradition, which embodies the tension between a striving for
transcendence of finitude, and the realisation that modernity cannot
attain such transcendence. Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Wagner, and
Mahler all create musical worlds which can be heard in terms of what
is suggested by Schopenhauer, but they can be heard as doing far more
than this. Schopenhauer does not appreciate the complex ambivalences
present in great modern music because he needs music to get him out
of the difficulties of giving a philosophical version of metaphysics, by sup-
posedly offering direct, non-conceptual access to the ground of being.
He does not understand that modern music’s relationship to modern
philosophy is often negative and critical. It cannot perform the role
of shoring up a dying metaphysics, and so is most significant when it
points to the limits of philosophy and connects us with the world in new
ways, rather than divorcing us from it. Because Schopenhauer gives pri-
ority to traditional metaphysical goals he ends up with the performative
contradiction of attempting to say in words what only music is supposed
to be able to say. This difficulty is, despite his inadequate responses to
it, obviously an important one, which helps to raise the question of
the limits of philosophy in influential ways. I want now to consider a
few points from Kierkegaard’s approach to music in Either–Or which
take up issues to do with language, music, and philosophy that we have
encountered in Schopenhauer.

Music, language, and the ethical: Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard’s best writing might itself be said at times to come close to
‘music’. His texts cannot readily be made into a series of philosophical
arguments, and reading them is not always best thought of in terms of establishing ‘what they are really saying’. Kierkegaard’s playing with authorial roles means that positions which seem unambiguous at one moment cease to be the next, and the insights revealed derive as much from the shifting nature of the texts’ construction as from their apparent substantive claims. Indeed, these claims can be rather disappointing, and frequently quite reactionary. Kierkegaard can therefore be said to address by his manner of writing some of the issues which have emerged from my heuristic inversion of the music/philosophy relationship. However, his most influential discussion of music, in *Either–Or*, does anything but seek to give music a dominant role in relation to language. It is impossible here to go into the detail of the polyphonic connections of his discussion of music to the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in *Either–Or*, or to discuss the detail of Kierkegaard’s authorship. The account of music in *Either–Or* should therefore be taken here as a model that responds to some of the issues which we have been considering in this chapter.

The question highlighted by the approach to music in *Either–Or* is why music might come to be regarded with suspicion in this particular historical context. Kierkegaard is part of the wider movement against Hegelianism – he was very interested in Schelling for this reason – that takes place in the 1840s. The basis of his opposition to Hegelianism is sometimes regarded as the irreducibility of the individual’s ethical life to ‘mediation’. When faced with an ethical dilemma, awareness of how that dilemma can be understood historically and socially does not touch the final reality of the individual subject’s free decision, by which they constitute their very identity. More importantly, the decision through which an individual can adopt the Christian faith is wholly separate from the mediation of what Hegel termed ‘*Sittlichkeit*’, the ethical substance of a community into which an individual is born. This conception of the existential nature of freedom, which was influenced by the arguments of Schelling, relates to the opposition between the aesthetic and the ethical which structures some of the most important parts of *Either–Or*. The question of mediation is seen, however, in a different way in relation to music’s immediacy.

*Either–Or* famously focuses on Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, as ‘a work of which one can say that the idea of it is an absolutely musical one, thus that the music is not added to it as an accompaniment’ (Kierkegaard 1885: 67). It is for this reason that music is problematic in relation to philosophical and religious concerns. The idea of *Don Giovanni* is
'the most abstract one can think of, namely that of *sensuous geniality*’ (ibid.: 59). This is explained by the text’s treatment of the relationship between the sensuous and the spiritual, which underpins the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical. The argument has a historical element that is based on a Hegelian dialectical approach. With Christianity the sensuous becomes a ‘principle, a power’ (ibid.: 64), precisely because it is supposed to be excluded by Christianity. Before that, in Greek culture, the sensuous is immediately integrated into the realm of the soul: ‘Now if I think of the sensuous-erotic as a principle, as a force, a realm (determined by spirit to the extent precisely that it denies and excludes it), I think of it as concentrated in one individual: and straight away the idea of *sensuous-erotic geniality* occurs to me’ (ibid.: 67). The immediate expression of this idea, which the author contrasts with its mediated expression in language, where ‘it is subordinated to ethical determinations’ (ibid.), is music. Music is ‘the medium of that of which Christianity only speaks in order to negate it . . . In other words music is the *demonic*’ (ibid.). The demonic is the power of the sensuous which emerges when the sensuous takes on an independent existence, rather than being integrated into a form of life. It emerges, therefore, when, as Don Giovanni does, an individual lives their life in terms of the sensuous as a principle, and so can instantiate the principle. The significance of this way of life depends, of course, on its being lived against the ethical demands of Christianity.

These contentions rely on a short-circuit between what the author insists is the essence of music – he does admittedly grant that it can have other significances – and the figure who represents a version of the idea that freedom is dangerous. Don Giovanni does in fact reflect one aspect of what we considered in Schelling’s account of freedom. His repeated ‘No!’ to the demand for penitence at the end of the opera is the sort of thing meant by Schelling when he talks of ‘evil’, namely self-assertion in the knowledge that one is wrong. However, the question is how this element of the drama relates to the music of the opera, with its sometimes disturbing mix of moods and styles, and its striking combination of dramatic intensity, lyricism, and comic elements. *Either–Or* gives a fascinating, but restricted, account of the opera, which suggests once again how philosophy can diminish music in terms of its own agenda.

The interpretation of Don Giovanni’s link to music is based on the idea of the ethical in relation to the aesthetic. This relationship is one of the stages in terms of which Kierkegaard evaluates human existence,
from the aesthetic, to the ethical, to the religious ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’. The last stage is exemplified by the account in *Fear and Trembling* of Abraham’s preparedness, against ethical norms, to sacrifice his son because he has heard God’s command to do so, even though there can be no guarantee that he is not simply mad. It is worth reflecting here that Wagner’s *Ring* also depends, via the incest of Siegmund and Sieglinde, on either a suspension or a transcendence of the ethical, but this time associated with the attempt to establish a new, freer social order. Kierkegaard’s religious stage involves a higher kind of immediacy, based on faith, which results from the transcendence both of the immediacy of the aesthetic, and of the mediation involved in the ethical. What is meant by the aesthetic and the ethical becomes clearer when it is suggested that Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* is weakened because ‘Ethically determined love, or conjugal love is posited as the goal of the development. This is where the main failing of the piece lies; for whatever else, speaking morally or in bourgeois terms, such love means, it is not musical, rather it is absolutely unmusical’ (ibid.: 85–6). The incest between Siegmund and Sieglinde which results in Siegfried in the *Ring* could in this sense be seen as confirming Kierkegaard’s view of the musical. If one wanted to mediate ‘sensuous geniality’ so that (and here the thought is straightforwardly Hegelian) it is ‘reflected in another’, the result would be that it ‘falls under the dominion of language and from then on is subordinated to ethical determinations’ (ibid.: 67), becoming a normative matter for a community. The ethical and language are therefore in certain respects co-extensive; the musical is separate from the ethical and consequently, in this respect at least, divorced from language. There is also, though, a fundamental connection between music and language.

The issue of language is presented in terms of the relationship between the sensuous and the spiritual: ‘language appears as the complete medium when everything sensuous is negated in it’ (ibid.: 70). The argument should be familiar from Hegel’s account of the idealisation involved in language’s separation of meaning from its contingent sensuous embodiment that we considered in chapter 4. The author also maintains, however, that ‘This is also the case for music. What should really and principally be heard constantly frees itself from the sensuous’ (ibid.). However, even though it may appear that the difficulties of giving an aesthetic account of music in language make language a ‘poorer medium’ than music, this is not the case. ‘Music constantly expresses the immediate in its immediacy’ (ibid.: 72–3), but
developed language has reflection as its basis, this is why it cannot say the immediate. Reflection kills the immediate, that is why it is impossible to say the immediate in language. But this apparent poverty of language is precisely its wealth. The immediate is what cannot be determined; that is why language cannot incorporate it. That it is what cannot be determined does not constitute its completeness, but rather a lack which is inherent in it.  

(ibid.: 73)

The position is close to that of Hegel (and Brandom), and this proximity is underlined when the author admits that ‘I have never had real sympathy for the more sublime music which thinks it does not need words. Such music generally appears with the pretension of being more sublime than the word, although it stands below the word’ (ibid.: 72). The main point, which makes Don Giovanni central to the argument, is that music’s ‘absolute object . . . falls outside of spirit’ (ibid.), being precisely the ‘sensuous geniality’ which only emerges as an independent principle with Christianity.

The author rejects the traditional idea in some forms of Christianity that music is ‘the work of the devil’, but, as we saw, he does suggest that it is ‘demonic’. 24 The text’s contentions rely on the account of what music is excluded from. He admits that his enterprise is paradoxical, insofar as ‘I wanted to prove by thought that sensuous geniality is the essential object and content of music, but this can really only be proven by music itself, and I personally only arrived at this insight in this manner [i.e. by the experience of music]’ (ibid.: 78). Like Schopenhauer, he is in the situation of mediating what can only be immediate, that is, attempting to say in words what only music is supposed to be able to say, although his aims are clearly different. This difference becomes apparent by the way in which he seeks to establish the autonomy of music: ‘What I . . . want is in part to illuminate the idea [of sensuous geniality] and its relation to language from as many sides as possible, and so limit ever more the territory in which music has its home, so to speak, to force it to unfold its splendour to me without me being able to say any more while it makes itself heard, than: listen!’ (ibid.: 88). By doing this he can defuse what he sees as the danger of music, which results from its lack of mediation.

24 Goethe sees this difference as between a Christian conception of evil, and a Greek conception of ‘Daemon’, which has to do with inspiration, but in the form of a compulsion.
His reason for doing this is that the aesthetic an inferior stage of human existence to the ethical, as the example of love suggests:25

While the love of the soul has a certain persistence in time, sensuous love is nothing but a disappearing in time. But the medium that expresses this is music. Indeed it is ideally suited to such expression, because it does not just express the particular, but rather the universal, which is for everyone, not as something abstract, but as something concrete, in complete immediacy.

(ibid.: 98)

This is a version of the model in which the temporality of music, which manifests the immediacy of the aesthetic, is contrasted with what resists transience. This contrast is underlined by the description of Don Giovanni: ‘He pursues, indeed he rushes past in front of us, as he, without justifying himself, suddenly disappears after suddenly appearing, just like music, which, as soon as it has stopped sounding, is no more, and is only present again when it is heard again’ (ibid.: 102–3). A good deal turns on the implications of these remarks.

Language cannot function without idealisation, which enables different occasions of the use of a word to convey the same thing across time, and this would seem to be the basis of the contention about music here. However, the move from this evaluation either to a metaphysical conception of the timeless, as in Schopenhauer’s ‘Ideas’, or to the ethical or the religious, as Kierkegaard describes them in Either–Or, is by no means a necessary one. To hear music as music at all, let alone to hear it at the level required to do justice to a work like Don Giovanni, also involves idealisations of this kind, as well as the ability to transcend immediacy in other ways. Adorno’s judgement on Either–Or’s essential claim about music, in his Kierkegaard. Construction of the Aesthetic (1933), may be somewhat unfair, but it does point to the key issue: ‘all qualitative differences on which art depends shrivel in relation to the unity of the “idea” of the empty general concept of “sensuous geniality”, and a masterpiece is left canonically alone as a closed and final totality’ (Adorno 1997: 2, 35–6). While Schopenhauer tries to use music to salvage the substance of metaphysics, Kierkegaard wishes to use philosophy and religion to domesticate the power of music. In both cases music is circumscribed in terms of something else: as a temporary respite from the

25 The relationship of the author A to these contentions suggests the difficulty of interpreting Kierkegaard’s texts. A is supposed to exemplify the aesthetic, but he also argues for its inferiority to the ethical.
effects of the Will of which it is the image, and as the manifestation of the ‘power of nature’ in Don Giovanni. Words cannot express this power, ‘only music can give us an impression, a feeling of it; for reflection and thought it is unsayable. What sort of a power it really is nobody can say’ (Kierkegaard 1885: 102). Adorno suggests that Kierkegaard in fact ‘hears out of Don Giovanni the demonic side of the simple power of nature as it only became musically free in Wagner’ (Adorno 1997: 2, 36).

The differing kinds of investment which philosophers make in the interpretation of music’s unsayability can sometimes be more informative than the actual claims that they advance about music. For Wackenroder and Tieck, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and some other Romantic thinkers unsayability points to a transcendent realm which compensates for the prose of modern life. But why does music come to function as compensation, and what is the status of this transcendent realm? For Kierkegaard such Romantic notions belong to the lesser realm of the aesthetic, which entails a view of art as a danger to authentic human existence: ‘every aesthetic view of life is despair, and everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair, whether they know it or not. But if one knows it . . . then a higher form of existence is demanded which cannot be rejected’ (Kierkegaard 1885: 484). This higher form moves through the reflective stage of the ethical to the religious. The latter may be equally ‘unsayable’ because it is also beyond mediation, depending on a leap of faith by the individual. However, religion offers what the aesthetic supposedly does not, namely the chance of an absolute answer to the meaning of life, albeit one which has no guarantee of realisation. The idea of dangerous freedom we encountered in Schelling is transferred into the wager of faith. Schopenhauer is closer to Hoffmann and the idea of the need for compensation, but music is only a temporary respite from a form of life whose only real redemption is Nirvana.

What lies behind such conflicting positions is the search for what can give human existence value in the face of the changes in temporality characteristic of modernity and of the issues concerning freedom that we have been examining. There is no necessity, for the moment, to adjudicate on the contending philosophical claims which I have highlighted via Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard in the light of the idea of freedom developed from Schelling. The important thing for now is the radical divergence in the assessments of music on the part of thinkers in the era in which the idea of the ‘end of philosophy’ first emerges. Music
comes to be regarded both as a temporary means of secular redemption, and as a threat to real religious redemption. At the same time music is understood in both cases in relation to the need for transcendence of sensuous existence. This conflict in approaches to the idea of transcendence will play a major role in Wagner’s musical work, as well as in Nietzsche’s philosophical – or post-philosophical – desire to ‘transvalue all values’.
PRO AND CONTRA WAGNER

The Wagner problem

In *Search for a Method* Sartre says of Paul Valéry that he is ‘a petit-bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit-bourgeois intellectual is Valéry’ (Sartre 1968: 56). The case of Richard Wagner gives us the analogous ‘Wagner was a resentful, vicious anti-Semite, but not every resentful, vicious anti-Semite was Wagner.’ In the light of the Holocaust it is, however, not enough to leave it at that. Anti-Semites in nineteenth-century Germany – who included a significant proportion of the German population, including Karl Marx – should not be equated with real Nazi perpetrators or fellow-travellers, but neither should they be seen as wholly blameless. At the same time, even though context cannot excuse everything, one should take account of the differing performative effects of texts and artworks in differing historical situations.

What does make Wagner a real problem in relation to the questions posed by the present book is his main contribution to the ideology of the Holocaust, the reprehensible essay, ‘Judaism in Music’ (1850), which he insisted on re-publishing and explicitly defending against criticisms in 1869, thereby compounding the damage. The effects of the essay’s odious contentions persist into the Nazi period, when Jewish music is banned because it was supposed to involve a ‘Jewish’ musical essence of the kind Wagner invokes in the essay.

Were it not for Wagner’s anti-Semitism in this essay and other writings, such as the essay ‘Modern’, there would be little reason to regard the intense controversy generated by his work as meaning that it should be rejected as morally indefensible, even where it is anything but morally attractive. *Das Rheingold*, for instance, is remarkable for having not one character who is in any way admirable. However, the following example
suggests how difficult this area can be. Adorno and others argue that figures like the pedantic – and eventually humiliated – Beckmesser, in *Die Meistersinger*, and both Alberich, who renounces love for money and power, and his brother, the malicious dwarf Mime, in the *Ring*, are Jewish caricatures. Indeed, if looked at in the light of the pernicious characterisations of Jews in the Judaism essay, this claim is quite easy to defend. However, the spiteful portrayal of these figures in the *Ring* does not actually warrant an unambiguous link to anti-Semitism, not least, as Magee (2002) and Said (1991) point out, because someone who was as obsessed with being explicit as Wagner would very probably have made such a link clear. Alberich’s son, Hagen, although malevolent, has no traits associated with anti-Semitic caricature, and Beckmesser is a Christian. Wagner had no hesitation about propagating his explicit anti-Semitic essay, so why was he not explicit in the musical works? The issue of his anti-Semitism is clearly not going to be made to go away by advertizing to such ambiguities, but they do suggest that Wagner’s racist assertions cannot be the sole criterion for an assessment of his work.

Much of the debate about Wagner depends on how his intentions are interpreted. Condemning someone for their moral failings generally has to relate to what they intended to do, so any such judgement on Wagner must establish this in an appropriate manner. In some cases this is not a problem: although it is wrong simply to project subsequent history back onto Wagner’s text, condemnation of the Judaism essay is unproblematic. Its potential performative effects are obvious, and Wagner clearly meant it to have some such effects, although it is uncertain just what his kind of ‘cultural anti-Semitism’ really intended. At its worst the essay goes so far as to seem to invoke the destruction of the Jews, but there is little evidence in the rest of Wagner’s life that he would really have countenanced anything of the kind, despite his fondness for apocalyptic visions. At the same time, one has to remember that very many Germans at the time of the Holocaust would also not have sanctioned what happened, but did nothing to prevent it. Wagner’s essay and his other anti-Semitic attacks are in many respects just a piece of paranoia and reveal more about the glaring psychological problems of its author than anything else. His questionable personal traits, which include the ability to sustain contradictory stances in relation to questions like anti-Semitism, might, though, also be said to be one of the sources of some of his most remarkable artistic achievements, and this idea will be given some credence by examination of the relationship of his philosophical self-contradictions to his music dramas.
It is more problematic in the case of works of art than of theoretical essays to link an interpretation of a work to the author’s intentions. How, for example, does the question of moral intentions apply to music? Could Wagner have intended to promote anti-Semitic or other ideas with his music, if the libretti do not overtly do so? Some of the music of Beckmesser, Alberich (and Hagen) is notably more technically advanced and ‘difficult’ than much of the rest of the work in which it appears, and this suggests that the music conveys a negative judgement on the character concerned (Said 1991: 41–2). This issue becomes more complex, though, when one considers Dahlhaus’ demonstration of how the supposed ‘music of the future’, represented by Walther’s Prize Song in Die Meistersinger, is actually quite traditional, compared with Beckmesser’s music in the pantomime of Act Three. Is dissonance, etc., therefore merely to be understood as standing for evil, and other forms of ‘negativity’? The question of the ethical intentions in music is, however, even more tricky because Wagner himself was convinced for a long time of the political power of music. How do the more dissonant aspects of his music, which helped make possible many subsequent new musical forms of expression, relate to his social and political vision?

For a large part of his career Wagner saw himself as promoting a new social vision for humanity by his musical work, a vision which appeals to those critical of the effects of unfettered capitalism on human well-being. Like too many others at the time and since, he tended, though, to attach this view to the idea that ‘the Jews’ were at the root of money’s dominance of the modern world. Adorno suggests that

The most elevated, specialised, inevitably isolated intensification of musical productive force obviously leads away from the overall spiritual awareness of the epoch; the greatest modern composers tend to become stubbornly fixed in their own naiveté. It is not least here that one may seek one of the explanations for Wagner’s anti-Semitism: through it he thought he would be able to see through the social mechanism [i.e. the dehumanising nature of capitalism] that was impenetrable to him.

(Adorno 1997: 18, 215)

Although the Ring might at times be understood in terms of the myth of Jewish monetary domination, to stage it in a manner that makes that connection requires a lot of tendentious interpretation. George Bernard Shaw’s idea that the Ring and Marx’s Capital are actually telling something like the same story about the end of feudalism and the
The impact of capitalism suggests why: critiques of capitalism and antisemitism are not inherently connected. In a further example of the way Wagner’s social vision can be understood, Edward Said maintains of *Die Meistersinger* that ‘Few operas in my opinion have done so relentlessly detailed a job of literally enacting the way in which music, if it is looked at not simply as a private esoteric possession, but as a social activity, is interwoven with, and is important to social reality’ (Said 1991: 61). Wagner’s libretto’s openness to interpretation, and the effects of the music on the action and on the words – and vice versa – make it clear that judgements relating to intentions require a very vigilant approach.

Even ‘authentic’, ‘period’, or ‘historically informed’ performance practice does not rely just on what a composer said about their intentions, but rather on a whole series of other contexts and practices of the time of composition. Charles Rosen’s canny remark that ‘authentic’ performance practice confuses what the composer got with what they wanted indicates the problem. Concentration on intention as the basis for interpreting works of art can also involve employing a questionable subject–object model. The work becomes an object with properties whose correct interpretation depends on their connection to what the creator-subject supposedly intended. Strictly applied, this would mean that all interpretations of Wagner that did not somehow instantiate a correspondence between the subjective and objective sides would be illegitimate. This is, of course, already wholly implausible in relation to the performance history of the works. Moreover, works composed over long periods involve so many intentions – the *Ring* spans Wagner’s move from Feuerbach to Schopenhauer, the text pertaining to the former, much of the music to the latter – that such a correspondence is impossible to establish.

The subject–object model is anyway, as we have seen, inherently flawed. In the case of music one is inevitably forced to extend the scope of ‘intention’ to include the kind of shared, but often unthematised, background knowledge that informs a musician’s practice at a particular time. One has therefore already moved beyond a model of intention that makes the ‘inner’ ethical status of the individual’s practice the main focus: the practices in question exist both on the ‘object’ and on the ‘subject’ side of the relationship. Furthermore, the idea that the nature of performance should be dictated solely by historical knowledge is contradicted, as Gadamer has shown, by the fact that interpretations, including musical performances, involve a complex mediation
between the present and the past. Indeed, they can often involve a notional future, as Ernst Bloch suggests of Wagner’s works’ transcendence, in the direction of a utopian future, of his immediate contexts and assumptions.

In certain respects, then, it does not matter what went on in Wagner the individual. His moral person would not be the endlessly discussed topic it is but for his music’s revolutionary impact on the culture of his era and since. This impact involves not only its use for Nazi propaganda, but also its revolutionary effects on the very idea of what music can be and do, and its enduring value to its listeners. The question is therefore whether Wagner’s musical work is so vitiated by the ‘internal’ elements which contribute to an anti-Semitic world-view that its positive achievements are eclipsed. Those in Israel and elsewhere who find themselves unable to separate Wagner from the Holocaust have every right to reject his work, but theirs cannot be the last word for everyone. Daniel Barenboim’s gesture at the concert in Israel in 2001, when he played the Tristan prelude as an encore, of discussing it with the audience and acknowledging that some people would wish to leave, seems to me to enact the attitude which is appropriate in this most sensitive of contexts.

The very difficulty of getting to a point where one can begin to investigate Wagner’s relationship to our concerns is an index of the intensity associated with judgements about music in this phase of modernity. Wagner’s theoretical and polemical texts are not the main focus here, though they can be where he is at his most obnoxious. The real issue is the impact of his music dramas. This impact makes Nietzsche’s discursive engagements with Wagner into a paradigmatic case for the relationship between philosophy and music in modernity. An evaluation of Wagner’s work in the terms of the present book cannot cover most of the issues involved, not least because my amateur musicological competence does not suffice for an appropriate investigation of the music. It is also impossible for reasons of space to expound the basic detail of the works’ plots, characterisation, etc.: this has anyway been done elsewhere on numerous occasions (see, e.g., Newman 1991). Those not

1 The musicologist Hans Keller remarked that ‘We have period instruments, but we do not have period ears.’
2 Magee (2002) points out that, apart from Hitler, most of the leading Nazis actually had no time for Wagner.
familiar with Wagner’s work should consult such introductions (and do some listening). I want here, then, just to use one aspect of my overall argument as a way into questions whose significance extends beyond the immediate case of Wagner. The entanglement of music and philosophy is crucial both to Wagner’s own perception of what he was doing and to his influence on modern culture. Along with some of Wagner’s own theoretical work, I shall, therefore, also use aspects of the philosophically and musicologically influential approaches to Wagner of Adorno and Dahlhaus, to see what they can reveal about the musical works and their relationship to philosophy.

Analysing the meaning of tensions between understandings of artworks may generate more insights than seeking to overcome such tensions. It is not always the ‘definitive’ interpretation – either in discursive terms or in performance – which makes music significant, though there are occasions when a revelatory performance or groundbreaking critical analysis can transform the reception of a piece. It is rather the shifting perspectives which emerge from differing engagements with music that bring about its significance, and this has to do with questions of freedom of the kind discussed in the last chapter. The lack of critical consensus on the assessment of performances is therefore not a reason for espousing a relativist perspective. Performance is not about the establishing of objective facts, but consists in participation in a practice whose norms are always revisable, but not arbitrary, and in which new norms may help to disclose what established norms did not.

The goal of musical practice may consequently, as we have seen, be conceived of in terms of a regulative idea of ‘getting it right’, and this points to a difference between music and certain conceptions of philosophy. In philosophy the problem of using the notion of a regulative idea is that one seems to be seeking something for which there can be no criteria, unless one just dogmatically presupposes them. Such a presupposition renders the point of the philosophical search unclear, because in some sense one must already know what one is searching for. The basic problem is that on the one hand truth has to be presupposed in order to be recognisable at all – how would we even ask questions about it if we were not already familiar with it? – and yet it also seems to have to be a goal that cannot just be presupposed and which has to be sought. I shall deal with this issue in more detail in chapter 9. For the moment the important issue is the notion of ‘getting it right’ as a regulative idea. The idea of a rightness for which we have no ultimate criteria beyond a feeling of imperfection based on competing norms
seems less problematic in art than it does in philosophy. This feeling of imperfection underlies the early Romantic conception of art as the means of understanding the absolute, which is often linked to music. As Friedrich Schlegel puts it: ‘The smallest dissonance is . . . a confirmation of eternity’ (Schlegel 1963: 18, 213). The awareness of dissonance points to harmony, even if harmony can never be said to be achieved. What counts as dissonance is, however, as the history of music teaches, not something independent of history.

The alternative to what I am suggesting here, as we saw, presupposes the truth of a theoretical or philosophical perspective and applies it to music. However, this is precisely what I have been questioning all along. Such perspectives cannot be excluded or ignored: they are in one sense unavoidable. They must, though, also take into account the fact that they themselves can be put into question by the music to which they are applied, otherwise the self-confirming circularity I pointed to in chapter 1 is inevitable. Wagner provides a potent example of the ways in which an undoubtedly problematic, but also wholly exceptional, musical oeuvre can both be questioned by, and can itself question, philosophical attempts – including those of its own creator – to interpret it.

Wagner: music, text, and philosophy

Wagner’s work is remarkably disruptive of systematic attempts to characterise it. The extended exploration of conceptual contexts in chapter 6 should, though, help us to understand some of the reasons for this. The ways in which the relationships between the musical and the extra-musical change in the period in question have very much to do with changes in the perceived status of philosophy. If Wagner’s work does indeed affect philosophy, a purely philosophical characterisation of this relationship will be one-sided, and so need complementing by an understanding – which does not itself just rely on philosophical ideas – of how the music affects philosophy. Music can affect ideas if its relationship to language is regarded, not as a problem to be explained by philosophy, but as transforming how the world can be disclosed and responded to.

Modern philosophical exploration of human freedom is, as we have seen, linked to a sense of groundlessness which both opens up new

4 See Goehr 1998 for an instructive attempt to come to terms with Wagner in relation to the musical and the extra-musical.
possibilities, and leads to an awareness of the perennial threat of incoherence and madness. The dangers in this conception become apparent when philosophy invokes a conceptually inaccessible ontological foundation, like the Will, which is resistant to discursive analysis. Such invocation can, rather than leading to new possibilities, lead in the direction of mythology, as the expression of the idea that the reality which underlies our thinking and practices is essentially unchanging. The expression of such a reality in mythology is then used as a counter to the sense that modernity has undermined any possibility of a fixed ontological order. Music’s ambiguous relationship to these issues was suggested by Schopenhauer’s elevation of music to being the key to metaphysics, and by Kierkegaard’s conception of music as the expression of the sensuous which is connected to the ‘demonic’. In both cases music’s non-conceptuality is the basis of the assessment, but the theories arrive at significantly opposed results.

Wagner was not familiar with all the texts discussed in the last chapter, but he read plenty of philosophy, and he would have registered the effects of many texts he did not read, or would have heard about them from other people. Adorno’s remark in *Philosophy of New Music* that ‘Wagner, whose music points in more than a merely literary sense to the German philosophy of the earlier part of the nineteenth century, has in mind a dialectic between the archaic – the “Will” – and the individuated’ (Adorno 1997: 12, 153) makes this clear. Wagner’s change of philosophical orientation from Feuerbach to Schopenhauer also makes evident his relationship to the tensions between the conceptions of freedom which result from these thinkers’ divergent approaches to metaphysics. The crucial issue is how his combination of music and text relates to these tensions.

Adorno’s own complex relationship to Wagner’s musical works results not least from his own location between Feuerbachian and Schopenhauerian perspectives. He is concerned both with the emancipation of somatic existence from forms of repression, and with music’s relationship to philosophy in a world seen in historically – though generally not metaphysically – pessimistic terms. His approaches to Wagner are structured by the issue of freedom. For Adorno, as we saw, Wagner develops new means of musical expression, which make possible ‘new music’, and yet he also reverts to mythology in his failed attempt to comprehend the driving forces in modernity, thus revoking the emancipatory potential of other aspects of his work. Adorno, however, takes too little account of the fact that Wagner’s ambivalent status depends
on his discursive writings, his libretti, and his music, each of which leads towards very different assessments if it is given priority over the others. Wagner’s work, and Adorno’s evaluation of it, can consequently best be approached via the question of music’s relationship to language. The friction between what Wagner regards himself as doing, and what he can be construed as doing, are the crucial issue here.

Wagner’s own theoretical writings often function, as Dahlhaus shows, more as means to aid the composition of his musical works than as accurate descriptions of those works. His writings consequently already offer a counter to representationalist philosophical approaches, because their performative status cannot be understood in terms of their descriptive claims. Dahlhaus cites the case of the 1851 *Message to my Friends* which describes *The Flying Dutchman* in terms of the large-scale use of leitmotif. This use of leitmotif actually applies to the as yet uncomposed *Ring* cycle, but generally not to the *Dutchman* itself. If we regard both language and music as forms of communicative action which can take on differing performative statuses in differing contexts there is no intrinsic problem with the divergence between theoretical text and musical work in Wagner. The real difficulty lies in how the various forms of articulation both relate to and affect different historical contexts.

This issue is obsessively pursued by Wagner himself, particularly in *Opera and Drama* (1851), which tells a story of how forms of articulation both enable and hinder human self-expression at different times in history. The story culminates, of course, in Wagner’s own new – but at that time by no means fully realised – synthesis of text, music, and stage action. *Opera and Drama* confronts some of the issues examined in the preceding chapters concerning the decline of theology and the effects of this decline on the status of language, and sees art as taking over the core of what had been religion. Given the prolixity of Wagner’s texts and their frequent lack of consistency, it is best to focus here on a specific topic to which he returns at various times throughout his career, namely that of music and language in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. This topic becomes the matrix of some of the frictions between Wagner’s musical and theoretical conceptions.

In the early (thoroughly entertaining) fictional story, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven* (1840–1), Wagner introduces the question of the Ninth via a vision of the future of music. At this time he has just finished the by no means radically innovative grand opera *Rienzi*, but is beginning, with the composition of *The Flying Dutchman*, to become a real innovator.
In the story Beethoven, whom the narrator succeeds in meeting in Vienna after overcoming considerable obstacles, is used to ventriloquise Wagner’s own conception of a new kind of vocal and orchestral music. ‘Beethoven’ maintains, in a manner that already suggests why Schopenhauer will later become so important for Wagner (who reads him in 1854: see Dahlhaus 1990: 148 ff.), that ‘The primal organs of creation and of nature represent themselves in the instruments; what they express can never be clearly determined and fixed, for they reproduce the primal feelings themselves as they emerged from the chaos of the first creation.’ In contrast, the ‘genius of the human voice . . . represents the human heart and its closed, individual feeling. Its character is therefore limited, but determinate and clear’ (Wagner 1907: 1, 110). The relationship between instrumental and vocal is often the key to reflection on the relationship between philosophy and music at this time.

The need ‘Beethoven’ feels to reconcile these two sides is reminiscent of Schelling’s Ages of the World: instruments play the role of the inchoate expansive force, the voice that of the contractive force which makes determinacy possible. Schelling saw language both as the condition of possibility of determinacy and as entailing the danger of reducing the abundance of the real to a limited number of signifiers. His view is echoed in Wagner’s concern both with the excess of feeling over its determinate expressions, and with the means for reconciling feeling and determinacy. This concern will lead him to conflicting construals of the relationship between music and language. The combination of instruments and voice means, ‘Beethoven’ says, echoing E. T. A. Hoffmann, that ‘the human heart will, by taking up those primal feelings into itself, be infinitely strengthened and expanded, capable of feeling clearly in itself the former indeterminate presentiment of the highest transformed into divine consciousness’ (ibid.: 111). The problem is, he continues, that no text is able to bear the weight of this task, and he adverts to his use of Schiller’s ‘Hymn to Joy’ in the Ninth, which cannot say ‘what in this case no verse in the world can say’ (ibid.). Music and text are here not given any intrinsic priority over each other: the crucial factor is how they can interact to create something which is more than either on its own.

Faced with Wagner’s speculative assertions it is easy to forget that he was essential to the historical impact of Beethoven’s symphony, not least because of his profound awareness of the technical and other problems involved in its performance (see, for example, the essay of 1873
On the Performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony).5 In programme notes aimed at convincing a sceptical public for a successful performance he conducted in 1846, Wagner uses quotations from Goethe’s Faust to characterise the relationship of each movement to affective aspects of life, as a means of rendering the music less alien. Despite his inconsistencies, Wagner always wants his audiences clearly to understand his and others’ works of art. The difficult questions have to do with whether this understanding is located at the affective or the conceptual level, and how the levels relate. He says of the Ninth’s last movement that it ‘leaves behind the character of pure instrumental music that announces itself in infinite and indecisive expression which is sustained in the first three movements; the progress of the musical composition (‘Dichtung’) presses for a decision, a decision which can only be expressed in human language’ (ibid.: 2, 61). The recitative in the double basses which precedes the appearance of the voice, and which employs musical rhetoric of a kind normally reserved for the human voice, already ‘almost leaves behind the limits of absolute music’ (ibid.). The attempt of the instruments alone ‘to express a certain, determinate, joyful happiness that cannot be marred’ is, however, not enough to overcome the ‘uncontrolled element’ (ibid.) in the reappearance of the dissonant ‘fanfare of terror’, which opened the movement and which immediately precedes the entry of the voice. The voice then controls and determines the expression of joy which was only a ‘tormented striving’ (ibid.: 62) when expressed by the instruments.

This text is written in the period during which Wagner is attached to Feuerbach and to the idea expressed in the title of the essay The Artwork of the Future (1849), which echoes that of Feuerbach’s Foundations of the Philosophy of the Future (1843). His philosophical aim is an integration of aspects of human life which he thinks are being torn apart by modernity. Like Schiller he regards aesthetic activity as the location of what is best about human existence, and this activity must be part of the public sphere as a whole, as Greek tragedy was for Athens. He consequently seeks to promote precisely what Hegel thought was no longer possible, namely a society in which art is the leading form of that society’s self-awareness. Instead of accepting Hegel’s idea that modernity progresses by the ‘reflection’ and ‘division’ inherent in the analytical procedures of the sciences and in capital exchange, he seeks to overcome these

5 Adorno rightly takes texts like this one and the text on conducting seriously as major contributions to a theory of musical reproduction (see Adorno 2001).
effects of modernity in the name of ‘the people’, who will be the ‘artist of the future’ (ibid.: 169), rather than of the individual poet or composer, whose status is a result of the division of labour. The progressive side to his ideas depends on an awareness, not unlike that of Marx and the Young Hegelians, of the social injustices produced by unfettered capitalism, but his politically undifferentiated concern with ‘the people’ as the basis of a new society not determined by money will be one reason why his vision so easily becomes politically and morally indefensible.

How, then, does this vision relate to ideas about music and language? Here we again encounter the issue of Beethoven. Wagner takes up the Romantic idea of music as the expression of ‘infinite longing’, and claims that it requires an object if it is to move from being just a feeling into the determinacy of the ethical domain. In his Fifth Symphony Beethoven ‘was able to intensify the expression of his music almost to the point of moral decision’ (ibid.: 3, 93), by the resolution from striving C-minor to triumphant C-major, but the music cannot express the decision itself. Only in the Ninth does the word lead to the situation where ‘the last symphony of Beethoven is the redemption of music from its most proper element into the art that is common to all’ (ibid.: 96). This is ‘drama’, in Wagner’s particular sense (see Dahlhaus 1990), which is ‘only conceivable via the common drive of all arts towards immediate communication to a common public’ (Wagner 1907: 3, 150). Wagner sees the possibility of major social transformation in the form of live events with a collective audience. The exact nature of such events is the problem, as subsequent history will demonstrate.

The concept of the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ need not concern us in detail here. It relates to Feuerbach’s Schiller-influenced perception of the need to integrate the sensuous and intellectual aspects of humankind, which Wagner thinks drama can achieve by combining understanding and feeling. The specifics of Wagner’s ideas about music and drama are considerably more interesting. Later in the Artwork essay he says that ‘The orchestra is, so to speak, the soil of infinite, universal feeling, out of which the individual feeling of the individual actor can grow to the greatest plenitude’ (ibid.: 157). The philosophical issue throughout the texts of this period is a version of the questions we examined in Hegel concerning the relationship between the conceptual, that is communicated by language, and the pre- or extra-conceptual, that is communicated by music. Wagner’s change in his thinking after 1851 will rest on a revaluation, related to his changing political commitments, of music’s relationship to conceptual determinacy. The difficult issue is
how to interpret the fact that his greatest musical works accompany his disillusionment with radical politics and the move from Feuerbachian commitment to Schopenhauerian resignation.

In *Opera and Drama* the contradictions between conceptual determinacy and what music alone can communicate are exemplified by the choice Wagner sees in the operas of Weber and Rossini, of either ‘absolute melody which is completely self-sufficient’, or ‘thoroughly true dramatic expression’. He insists that ‘one of these had to be sacrificed, – the melody or the drama’ (ibid.: 293). Beethoven is the composer who seeks ‘what is artistically necessary’, namely ‘the expression of a completely distinct, clearly comprehensible individual content’ (ibid.: 277), precisely where it is not possible, in ‘absolute [i.e. wordless] music’, music not having found a way of articulating such content. The very extent to which Beethoven reveals the expressive possibilities of music is, however, also what makes him reveal limitations which open up the space for Wagner’s own new dramatic combination of the verbal and the musical. This judgement can, as Wagner himself will later suggest, easily be inverted, even while attending to the same musical phenomena, by changing the priority between words and music.

Wagner subsequently returns to the Ninth Symphony’s combination of melody and text, which he now regards, having outlined Romantic-influenced ideas about language’s origins in melody, in terms of the trite metaphor of ‘the female’, as the melodic, which is married to ‘the male’, in the form of the poet who uses language: ‘The poet is initiated into the deep, infinite secrets of female nature by the redeeming kiss of that melody . . . The bottomless sea of harmony, out of which that joy-inducing appearance emerged towards him, is no longer an object of shyness, of fear, of horror’ (ibid.: 4, 146). Later Wagner discusses the ‘capacity for language’ of the orchestra, which develops in Beethoven’s symphonies to the point where ‘it feels itself compelled even to say precisely what according to its nature it cannot say’ (ibid.: 173). The orchestra’s capacity for language consists in ‘announcing the unsayable’, which is inaccessible to ‘the organ of the understanding, verbal-language’ (ibid.). What the orchestra announces is not, though, unsayable in a mystical sense, because instrumental music is the ‘organ of feeling’ (ibid.: 174), and feeling cannot be conveyed by the ‘organ of the understanding’. 6 He elucidates this claim by adverting

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6 Too often, as I suggested in relation to Richard Taruskin, discussion of the unsayable is regarded as somehow about a theologically tinged idea of the ‘ineffable’. There is no necessary reason for this if we assume certain things may, for example, only be communicable by gesture.
to ‘gesture’ as ‘an other unsayable’ (ibid.): both the orchestral and the gestural aspects of music drama convey aspects of ‘feeling’. The argument is close to Schleiermacher’s remarks about ‘feeling’ and our non-cognitive relationships to the world.

It is easy to make fun of some of Wagner’s flights of rhetoric. However, what he is trying to work out are ways of integrating forms of articulation that allow him to say and do something different from what has been said and done before. This is because he thinks that previous kinds of music and drama, with the exception of the Greeks and Shakespeare, failed to have the impact on society that he is seeking. There is, moreover, little doubt that he succeeds in some respects, even though his theoretical texts do not adequately characterise what he does, and the nature of his success is still controversial.

In the same section of Opera and Drama Wagner makes observations about the combination of ‘linguistic’ means in music drama that point to a feature of his work which will affect many subsequent aspects of music, the other arts, and philosophy. What makes his observations interesting is their concern with the temporality of the differing kinds of ‘language’ in musical drama. He asks how drama is to present the ways in which people reveal themselves in the world, and contends that this usually involves a ‘mixture of voluntary, reflected activity of the will, and unconscious, necessary feeling’ (ibid.: 180), in which the transitions from one to the other are crucial. Whereas gesture, understood as ‘the whole external manifestation of human appearance to the eye’, is ‘the most present’ (ibid.: 181), because its meaning is the feeling it manifests, it fails to convey the significance of the feeling to the understanding, because the understanding requires words. Wagner’s idea is that ‘In verse-melody [i.e. his new combination of music and text] not only does verbal-language combine with tonal-language, but what is expressed by these two organs is also combined, namely what is not present with what is present, the thought with the feeling’ (ibid.). His concern is, then, with the temporal dimension of how the different forms of articulation engage the audience, and this has consequences for how philosophy thinks about ‘meaning’.

Wagner argues in an empiricist manner that the ‘thought’ is based on the memory of the past sensuous impression of an object, as ‘the image which recurs to memory’ (ibid.: 182). This is, though, not a plausible explanation of what interests him. The identity of different cases of the perception of something required to form a thought of it cannot, as Kant showed, just depend on the sense impressions themselves. However, there is another point in Wagner’s contentions. This
is that the melody associated with the impression helps to imbue the thought of something past with an affective significance, so that music can itself become a signifier in a way that words cannot, even though this possibility does also depend on words. Wagner puts it as follows:

Music cannot think; but it can realise thoughts, i.e. manifest their affective content as what is no longer remembered but is made present: but it can only do this if its own manifestation is determined by the poetic intention, and this in turn is not revealed merely as what is thought, but is first clearly presented by the organ of understanding, verbal-language.

(ibid.: 184–5)

The combination of means therefore changes how thoughts are conveyed to the subject. Music conveys its own kind of thought, because what is signified by the melody is not just an object which is referred to, but also an affective relationship to whatever is at issue in the object, which depends on the object’s relations to other aspects of the world in which it occurs. Once this kind of signification is established the melody can also, for example, convey a presentiment of something to come, as well as serve as a reminder of the feeling connected to something past.

What has been said so far might admittedly not appear sufficient to characterise what is so different in Wagner from other composers. This kind of ‘affective temporality’ is, though, of decisive importance for Wagner’s compositional technique and for understanding how he establishes new ways of using musical motifs. In the passage from A Message to my Friends mentioned above Wagner talks proleptically of the idea of a ‘web of themes which spread not just over one scene (as previously in the single operatic aria) but over the whole drama’ (ibid.: 322). The idea of such an interconnected web is important for more than just the development of opera, because the expressive power of what Wagner develops affects other modern cultural forms, such as novel, poetry and film, as well as philosophy.

It should by now be well established that Wagner’s famous assertion in Opera and Drama that ‘the mistake in the artistic genre of opera was that it made a means of expression (music) into the end, but made the end of expression (drama) into the means’ (ibid.: 3, 231) does not, as Dahlhaus (1990) definitively shows, mean that the text is therefore the end, and the music the means. The point is rather that ‘drama’ should involve a complex interaction of the kinds of significance generated by both text and music. However, if we consider Wagner’s later accounts of Beethoven as an example of his later ideas about language and music, the contrast
between his earlier and later theoretical positions poses some revealing questions about philosophy’s relationship to music.

In a narrow logical sense, anything follows from a contradiction, but can we still make sense of Wagner’s change of view? The change goes along with his move from Feuerbach to Schopenhauer, a move which poses questions about how the holding of philosophical positions relates to musical production. It is important to remember here, as Dahlhaus points out, that ‘Beethoven’s symphonies did not come into existence as absolute music’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 373). Beethoven himself thought of his music in terms of the ‘representation of character’ and as a ‘speaking art’ (ibid.: 99). Indeed, ideas about music’s relationship to discursive language in the period from the end of the eighteenth century to Wagner are anything but stable or agreed,\(^7\) ranging from the idea of ‘absolute’ – wordless – music in Hoffmann’s sense, to ideas of interaction between the verbal and the musical of the kind we have observed in Wagner. Liszt’s ideas concerning ‘programme music’ that accompanied the composition of his ‘symphonic poems’ are important here. As Wagner’s text On Liszt’s Symphonic Poems of 1857 indicates, Liszt’s ideas and their enactment in Liszt’s music became part of his shift of conception. Dahlhaus cites the following remark by Liszt (which is best realised in Liszt’s great B-minor piano sonata): ‘The unlimited changes which a motif can undergo via rhythm, modulation, temporal duration, accompaniment, instrumentation, transformation constitute the language by means of which we can make this motif express thoughts, and, as it were, dramatic action’ (Liszt cited in ibid.: 383). It is not the individual elements of musical language themselves – which in Bach’s period, for example, had involved a series of predetermined topoi – that now enable signification, but rather the relations in which the elements can stand to each other. We encountered a version of this stress on relations rather than elements in Hegel and Brandom.

Liszt himself regards words as the carriers of pre-existing ideas, and so thinks that musical motifs can do something similar to words. He does not take account of the fact that the relational determinacy of the words is a condition of possibility of the determinacy of ideas. This fact matters less, though, than the idea of relationality as the basis of both verbal and musical significance, and so of the development of new kinds of connection between music and words. One way to highlight what is at issue here is to take the issue of music and irony, which

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\(^7\) This is obviously also the case after Wagner, but the degree of importance attached to the issue will not be as great.
becomes more central to music in the wake of Wagner. In the third movement of his Ninth Symphony, for instance, Mahler’s turning of an expressive thematic phrase (based on a musical ‘turn’) into a parody of itself, by speeding it up, distorting it, and moving it to the high-pitched E-flat clarinet, is both ironic in the manner of verbal irony and conveys a ‘musical irony’ which cannot be reduced to a verbal statement. The phrase then forms part of the main musical material of the symphony’s last movement. This movement is often heard as a ‘farewell to life’, which sets up a further series of relationships of the phrase to its previous manifestations. These constitute a musical narrative based on the interplay of past and present moods and contexts. In inferential terms the intelligibility of these aspects of the symphony relies on the ironic version of the phrase not being the serious version, and on the degrees of difference between the ironic and the serious cases of the employment of the pattern of notes in question. Music here functions meta-linguistically, the phrase offering alternative ways of constructing its meaning as it occurs in different contexts. The affective content conveyed cannot, as we saw in chapter 4, be reduced to its inferential constitution: if it does not have some immediate affective impact, it cannot become part of a musical inferential context. Once the symphony has been heard as a whole the pattern can then be understood as conveying all three temporal dimensions via these thematic relations. Something similar already applies to the later Beethoven in particular. The last movement of the Opus 135 String Quartet plays with serious and ironically transformed versions of a phrase headed ‘Muss es sein?’ (‘Must it be?’) in the score, but in a way which can still make sense to a listener who does not know that the words are in the score. Wagner’s later account of Beethoven is more able to make sense of phenomena like this than his earlier view.

The best illustration of the change in Wagner’s conception is a passage in the 1870 commemorative essay on Beethoven, where he discusses Beethoven’s third Leonora overture:

Who will hear this thrilling piece of music without being filled with the conviction that the music also incorporates the most complete drama into itself? What is the dramatic action of the text of the opera ‘Leonore’ but an almost objectionable enfeeblement of the drama experienced in the overture, rather like a boring interpretative commentary by Gervinus on a scene of Shakespeare?

(Wagner 1907: 9, 105)
Schleiermacher remarked that it might seem that adding music to a text would ‘express the thought even more strongly’ (Schleiermacher 1842: 380), but that this is not so, because ‘if the thought is expressed in words then one could underlay the same musical sentence/movement (‘Satz’) with completely different verbal sentences; indeed each could have as much justification as the others’ (ibid.). Wagner similarly insists that ‘a piece of music loses nothing of its character even if it is underlain by very different texts’ (Wagner 1907: 9, 103). The relationship between text and music is now such that ‘A unification of music and poetry must . . . always result in . . . a diminution of the importance of the latter’ (ibid.).

The introduction to the Beethoven essay offers a version of Schopenhauer’s account of music, in which ‘we understand without any mediation by concepts what the shout for help, the cry of complaint, or the shout of joy says’ because it results from the ‘affect of the Will’ (ibid.: 71) of the utterer, and this influences our Will-based ‘immediate consciousness of our self’ (ibid.: 70). The musician ‘does not express his view of the world, but the world itself, in which pain and joy, well-being and suffering interchange’ (ibid.: 100). The emergence of the voice in the Ninth Symphony is now significant, not for ‘the meaning of the word’, but for ‘the character of this human voice itself’ (ibid.: 101). The thoughts of the poem are not our prior concern, but rather ‘the familiar sound of choral song’ (ibid.). When we hear a musical version of the mass, like Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, we do not concentrate on the words, which are just ‘familiar symbolic formulations of belief’ (ibid.: 103), but on what is conveyed by the music in question. In his earlier conception the drama had been the totality within which the music and the text were comprised. Drama is now, in the manner of Socrates’ ‘mousikê’ (on this see Goehr 1998), comprised within music as ‘a comprehensive idea of the world’ (Wagner 1907: 9, 105), so that ‘drama which presents the idea can in truth only be completely clear via those motifs of music which move, form, and change’ (ibid.: 106). It is therefore hardly surprising when Wagner says in On the Name Music-Drama of 1872 that ‘I would have liked to call my dramas acts of music which have become visible’ (ibid.: 306), and sees his works as involving similar principles to symphonic compositions in their ‘web of basic themes’ (ibid.: 10, 185).

The crude version of what Wagner is saying is that music, as it does for Schopenhauer, embodies a version of metaphysics: it conveys, without concepts, the essential truth about the riven nature of existence. The consequence might then seem to be to regard the works in relation to
which he adopts Schopenhauerian ideas, i.e. *Tristan*, *Meistersinger*, the *Ring*, and *Parsifal*, as expressions of those philosophical ideas. But what are we to make of his change of conception? The easy answer is that he was a philosophical amateur whose real concern was ‘drama’, which philosophy could be used to enhance. This is, as far as it goes, true. However, it does not explain why ‘drama’ should be so important in the first place. There are, though, more interesting ways of regarding the question, which suggest why Wagnerian ‘drama’ might matter so much at this time, and since.

Wagner’s texts just cited are contemporaneous with Nietzsche’s first writings on Wagner, which claim that ‘the fate of culture as a whole depends on that of Wagnerian music’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 477), as ‘a work through which music takes control of its metaphysical truth’ (ibid.: 476). This elevation of the significance of music even outstrips anything we have encountered in Romantic thought. It establishes a tradition to which Adorno also belongs, for which music can embody criticisms of the cultural effects of modern philosophy and science. Wagner’s initial theoretical conception stressed a word-based determinacy of music, in the name of an art which would enable cultural and political transformation of social existence by integrating the affective, cognitive and other dimensions of human existence. His later conception is informed, in contrast, by a pessimism concerning the possibilities of social and other transformation, and, like Schopenhauer, attributes metaphysical dignity to music because it gives access to a way of contemplating an otherwise irredeemable existence. The question is whether this philosophical position, as it did in Schopenhauer, diminishes what the music achieves, thus whether metaphysics obscures the possibilities for metaphysics. I am not concerned here with whether Wagner’s earlier theoretical position is more, or less, convincing than his later one. Instead my interest is in the ways that inconsistencies between the philosophical claims and the musical works themselves offer a more productive way of understanding the importance of Wagner. Which brings us once more to Adorno.

Wagner and Adorno

Adorno’s main work on Wagner, the polemical *Essay on Wagner*, written in 1937–8, is not his definitive ‘philosophical interpretation’ of Wagner. He explains on the occasion of its publication in Germany in 1952 that ‘The “Essay on Wagner” belongs to the works produced by the Institute
for Social Research which set themselves the task of not remaining in fruitless indignation in relation to National Socialism, but of standing up to it by comprehending it’ (Adorno 1997: 13, 504). When the immediate dangers of Western European nationalism recede after the War, Adorno gives more emphasis to those aspects of Wagner’s works that had been relatively neglected in the Essay. We have seen one reason for Wagner’s relationship to National Socialism in the ‘Judaism’ essay, but the essay was only significant because its author was a major cultural influence for other reasons. The connections between the power of Wagner’s music, and his political and moral failings are therefore the decisive issue, and Adorno’s responses to Wagner need to be seen in this light.

It is because Wagner’s music dramas reveal so much about the best and worst of modernity that they give rise to such extremes of praise and opprobrium, from claims that his vision is profoundly religious (Scruton 2003 on Tristan), to the idea that it is a major factor in the development of the very substance of Nazism (Köhler 2000). Given such disparities, what criteria enable an adequate judgement to be made on Wagner’s significance? One thing seems clear: there is no point in killing the messenger. It is too easy to project onto Wagner negative feelings and judgements about aspects of modernity which his work reveals, but in many cases cannot be said to encourage or promote. His work is often unsettling, yet at the same time compelling, and one must respond adequately to both aspects, which are inseparable anyway. Nietzsche gets it right in The Case of Wagner when he says: ‘Modernity speaks its most intimate language through Wagner: it does not hide what is good about itself nor what is evil, it has unlearned all shame at itself. And conversely: one has almost made an assessment of the value of modernity if one is clear in oneself about good and evil in Wagner’ (Nietzsche 2000: 2, 904).

Adorno’s later text, The Actuality of Wagner (1965), which in certain respects contradicts his earlier assessment, specifies one root of Wagner’s capacity to disturb and compel, namely his ambivalent relationship to myth. As we have seen, Adorno regards myth as the expression of the idea of a world of the ‘ever-same’, which blocks ways of transforming an unjust reality:

One can object in any number of ways to Wagnerian mythology, unmask it as sham mythology, accuse it of a Romanticism of false beards and bullseye window panes. Yet the Ring in particular sustains against all moderate,
unperturbed, realist and classicist art its decisive truth in that mythical moment: that in it violence breaks through as the same law as it was in prehistory. In this thoroughly modern work prehistory is still modernity itself. That smashes the façade of the bourgeois surface, and through the cracks so much shines through of what only today developed fully and became recognisable that this alone would suffice as proof of Wagner’s actuality. No doubt his impulse (‘*Gestus*’), what his music advocates – and Wagner’s music, not just the texts, advocates incessantly – is an impulse on behalf of mythology. He becomes, one might say, an advocate of violence, in the way that the main work glorifies the man of violence, Siegfried. But as the violence in his work, in its terrible and entangled nature, becomes apparent in a pure manner, without anything to hide it, it is yet, despite its mythologising tendency, whether one likes it or not, an indictment of myth.

(Adorno 1997: 16, 549–50)

The work is an indictment of myth because it conveys a truth which transcends the mythical aspect of the work. This truth has to do with the nature of the music because the texts alone cannot be said to ‘indict’ myth. It is the combination of advanced musical techniques with a less sophisticated verbal narrative that relies on myth which reveals the brutal reality of modernity. The degree of technological sophistication employed in the modern era in the name of crude nationalist narratives makes Adorno’s point clear. The disparity between the accomplishment of music and libretto also has to do with the idea that Wagner arguably succeeds in creating nineteenth-century tragedies in a way that authors who do not employ music do not. The universal dimension and the sense of tragic necessity generally lacking in most nineteenth-century authors can be seen as being transferred into the music, whose interaction with the text conveys what text alone cannot. Whatever one thinks in moral or ideological terms of the passions and human relationships in *Tristan*, the sense of tragic necessity conveyed by the music is undeniable.

In the *Essay on Wagner* Adorno had claimed that Wagner’s music fails to indict myth, because myth penetrates into the very substance of the work’s characters: ‘the “directive” function of the music of the tetralogy is not just a principle of style, but is necessary for the sake of the dramatic figures themselves. As representatives of the idea [i.e. rather than as individualised characters], they are too empty really to have “expression” at their disposal’ (Adorno 1997 13: 119). Wagner ‘technologically administers’ the characters of his dramas, and this means
that the music ‘renounces that deepest critique which inhabited it since
the invention of the operatic form and throughout the whole epoch
of bourgeois ascent: the critique of myth. As identification with myth
[music] is in the last analysis false identification’ (ibid.: 119). The con-
tradiction with the later text echoes the contradictions that we have
observed in Wagner’s theoretical writings. Once again the strictly log-
ical response would be that Adorno says nothing determinate about
myth and music in Wagner, because he asserts p and not-p. However, if
we see the appropriate way to respond to music as engaging with it in
shifting normative contexts, Adorno’s self-contradictions become more
informative.

Adorno’s earlier assessment is based on his analysis of Wagner’s musi-
cal technique in terms of the contrast between ‘developing variation’
and ‘leitmotif’. Adorno inflates this contrast into an ideological image
of the nineteenth century that echoes the move from Feuerbach to
Schopenhauer: ‘The abandonment by the one who uses leitmotif of
real thematic-motivic work, the triumph of the compulsion to repe-
tition over the productive imagination of developing variation, says
something about the resignation of a collective consciousness which
sees nothing more ahead of itself’ (Adorno 1997: 14, 245). In devel-
oping variation, which Adorno associates particularly with Beethoven,
musical material becomes significant by being incorporated into the
dynamic totality of the symphonic or sonata movement: think of the
development and variation of the opening material of the Fifth Sym-
phony. The individual musical element is not something self-contained
that is merely repeated, but is instead transformed by its contexts and
by the changes it undergoes. We saw how this conception related to
Hegel’s view of philosophy and dialectic in the preceding chapters.
Leitmotif, in contrast, repeats musical motifs as a means of signalling a
fixed content, be it a character or a theme of the drama, from Siegfried’s
horn-call, to the motif of the twilight of the gods. These are like gestures:
‘Gestures can be repeated and intensified, but cannot really “develop”’
(Adorno 1997: 13, 34). Wagner’s music consequently comes closer to
verbal language, because the motif functions as a signifier, and so loses
its freedom to express something new: ‘music and word mean the same
thing’ (ibid.: 119).

The underlying claim is that when artistic means develop according
to their own internal demands and avoid schematic repetition they
generate the greatest insights and are aesthetically most successful: ‘in
general symphonic form, the principle Schoenberg termed “developing
variation”, is the completely anti-mythological principle’ (ibid.). This debatable idea will be the basis of Adorno’s positive evaluation of ‘new music’, which abandons reliance on many already existing forms and procedures, and so is forced to develop an autonomous musical logic which can avoid the – ‘mythical’ – repetition characteristic of the culture industry (see chapter 9).

The kind of ‘consolation’ music provided in opera – Adorno cites the link of the earliest operas to Orpheus, who is able to open the gates of Hades with his music and the theme of hope in Fidelio that informs the very nature of the music – is missing when Wagnerian music and language echo each other: ‘Music says once again what the words say anyway . . . but that affects the integrity of the music itself’ (ibid.: 98). This criticism is underpinned by Adorno’s view of how the history of European music’s increasingly close relationship to language, ‘to which music owes so much of its liberation’, also involves a ‘negative moment’, when music ‘merely imitates the curve of the linguistic intention’ (ibid.: 98). These ideas relating to Wagner will be crucial to Adorno’s thinking about modern music as a whole: ‘By functioning in an explicatory manner music has all the forces sucked out of it via which it, as a language distant from meaning, as pure sound, contrasts with the human language of signs and only becomes completely human by this contrast’ (ibid.: 99). The point is specified in relation to Wagner as follows: ‘Wagner’s music takes up as a whole a changed relationship to language. It does not respond to it, it does not, like Schubert, wander into the wood and cave of the word. Rather [music] makes language, as the interpreter of its little allegorical images, of the leitmotifs, penetrate through its grid in an alien, thing-like manner’ (ibid.: 56). Why, though, should language be regarded as ‘alien’ and ‘thing-like’ in relation to music when it is linked to the leitmotif? The answer for Adorno is that language in modernity is affected by the processes with which he claims Wagner comes to merely mythical terms.

Adorno adopts certain of his ideas about language from Walter Benjamin (see Bowie 1997: chs. 8 and 9). The connection to Wagner can be explained quite simply: leitmotifs function as allegories, and these are an index of a decisive fact about language in modernity. Benjamin’s discussion of the changes in the nature of language that take place in early modernity, in The Origins of the German Play of Mourning (1928), contains the following, concerning the proliferation of allegory in the baroque period in Germany and in the Shakespearean era in Britain: ‘Every person, every thing, every relationship can
arbitrarily mean something else. This possibility passes a devastating but just judgement on the profane world: it is characterised as a world in which details are not strictly that important’ (Benjamin 1980: 1/1, 350). Adorno adopts the idea for his assessment of Wagner:

He is an allegorist, not least in the fact that everything can mean everything. Figures and symbols play into each other, until Sachs becomes Mark and the Grail becomes the Nibelung treasure, the Nibelungs the Wibelungs. Only from the extreme of a kind of flight from thought, of a renunciation of everything unambiguous, of a negation of everything individually formed, and not at all just in music, is the idea of music drama unlocked.

(Adorno 1997: 13, 96)

Allegory points for Adorno and Benjamin to the loss of a world of immanent meanings. For the Benjamin of the 1920s this loss has predominantly theological connotations. However, in the 1930s, he also comes to see the historical development of the commodity world in the same terms, and this brings him closer to Adorno. The value of things becomes based on arbitrary relations between them and other things, and this affects people’s very mode of perception of the objective world, with consequences that are apparent in fascism. Adorno’s approach is less theological, but still relies on the contrast between the idea of a language that is essentially connected to things, and one which is merely arbitrary, which is affected by or which echoes the commodity structure. In the early 1930s Adorno says, for instance, that ‘Without an integrated/closed (‘geschlossene’) society there is no objective, thus no truly comprehensible language’ (ibid.: 1, 367). His related claim about Wagner is that he lacks a ‘form-apriori of inner organisation’ and so employs ‘a principle of addition of disparate procedures with no gaps’. This is ‘still an external principle, but appears as if it were collectively binding’ (ibid.: 13, 97).

For Adorno, Wagner tries to present a totality in art which would articulate the truth of the real social totality, but produces something which is actually a symptom of the nature of that totality. This is the source of Wagner’s relationship to mythology, which mystifies the real roots of the alienation occasioned by money portrayed in the Ring. The Ring is, like the modern world it seeks to present, merely assembled from arbitrary relationships, rather than developed on the basis of a substantial principle of the kind present in developing variation: ‘The adding together of the totality of the music drama from all forms
of reaction of the sense organs presupposes not just the absence of a binding style, but even more the disintegration of metaphysics. In the total work of art metaphysics does not just want to express itself but also to be manufactured’ (ibid.: 102). Wagner therefore seeks to establish a version of metaphysics. So does Adorno’s critique invalidate the claims I have made about music as a form of metaphysics? His appraisal of the music depends on the contrast between Wagner’s technique, which he sees in terms of ‘the absence of real motivic construction in favour of an, as it were, associative process’ (ibid.: 29), and the technique of developing variation. In both music and language the contrast between a world which has a ground that enables coherent meaningful articulation, and one where meaning consists in mere arbitrary relations between discrete particulars, is the basis of the evaluation. In Wagner, ‘Music is asked to do nothing less than take back the historical tendency of language, which is towards signification, in favour of expression’ (ibid.: 95). There is, however, something very questionable about this argument.

The music which allows us to understand what other means of articulation do not is supposed by Adorno to be a ‘language distant from meaning’, ‘pure sound’. Its value derives from its lack of what he terms ‘intention’, which has the sense of ‘being directed towards’ objects, thus of ‘reference’. Other passages from Adorno’s work confirm that this is how he conceives of music. Music ‘is’ (Adorno 2001: 221) – or ‘aims to be’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 252) – an ‘intentionless language’. Significantly, he also says of Hölderlin that his poetic language is ‘intentionless’ (ibid.: 11, 479), thus making a link between the very idea of art and the idea of resistance to discursive meaning. In his essay on Valéry he says that ‘The longing for the meaning to disappear in the verse has its home in music, which only knows intentions as ones which pass away’ (ibid.: 169). In contrast, ‘The intentional moment is specific to Wagnerian expression: the motif mediates a congealed meaning as a sign’ (ibid.: 13, 42). It should be apparent that these ideas do not square with the criticism of Wagner as allegorist.

Adorno loads the dice by seeing allegory as Benjamin does, such that ‘everything can mean everything’. The idea depends on the notion of a previous state of language where this is supposedly not the case, and this relies on a theological conception of a stable relationship between word and world. However, once one accepts the Saussurean (and early-Romantic) idea of the arbitrariness of the signifier, which gains its sense by its relations to other signifiers, not by anything intrinsic to
it, one side of Adorno’s position becomes questionable. Quite simply, language often does function ‘allegorically’ in his sense: one can get a word to mean anything if one puts it in the right context. However, this does not mean that everything is simply arbitrary. It just means that an account of verbal meaning has to take account of context and of the inherent underdetermination of the meaning of utterances in any interpretation that is occasioned by their indefinite number of possible relationships to their contexts. This now widely accepted hermeneutic assumption necessarily affects Adorno’s evaluation of Wagner and allegory.

Consider his own example of Hans Sachs. The widower ‘becomes Mark’ in Die Meistersinger when music from Tristan, in which King Mark laments Tristan’s betrayal of him over Isolde, is echoed when he renounces his hopes for happiness with Eva, realising that she belongs with the younger Walther. The effect of this moment depends on the differing contexts: feelings relating to troubles of the heart of an older man can have a different impact (and so, in some senses, be different feelings) when the music that evokes them is echoed in very different contexts. What can, because it results from a necessity which transcends the moral aims of the characters, be tragic in Tristan is, although still melancholic, partially redeemed in Meistersinger. There is no ‘unambiguous’ way of interpreting these moments, and the interpretation will also be changed by familiarity with the relationship between the two works. It is precisely this intertextual, musical ambiguity, which cannot be equated with indeterminacy, that makes Sachs’ renunciation so touching, and gives it a utopian ethical quality in relation to the tragic despair of Mark in Tristan.

The specifically philosophical focus of Adorno’s remarks tends to lead him to the idea of music as just the ‘intentionless’ Other of verbal language, which is seen as related to the cultural consequences of the commodity form. However, he wants it both ways. On the one hand, leitmotifs are too language-like and ‘intentional’; on the other, their meaning is merely arbitrary because of their allegorical quality. Verbal articulation would presumably be necessary for their meaning to be unambiguous, but that comes into conflict with the idea of music as an intentionless language of sounds which contrasts with the language of signs. Adorno could therefore be seen as prey to precisely what is at issue in intentionless music’s manner of signifying: he seeks to identify in language something whose real value lies in its resistance to being definitively identified. Wagner’s musical technique cannot be reduced
to a judgement of this nature, but its meanings are not therefore merely arbitrary.

Adorno’s critique is, though, not wholly unjustified. Wagner is indeed a symptom of questionable aspects of modern culture. His not yet fully developed use of leitmotif in the Dutchman and Lohengrin, or the earlier parts of the Ring, does involve a regression in comparison with the technique of developing variation. The motifs sometimes do simply repeat what is said or seen, and so have a function ‘similar to an advert’ (Adorno 1997: 13, 29). An inflexible use of leitmotif does relate to the development of kinds of cultural perception produced by and reflected in the schematic aspects of film (and advertising), ‘where the leitmotif just announces heroes and situations, so that the viewers can orient themselves more quickly’ (ibid.: 44). Adorno’s criticisms become problematic, though, when they take the form of philosophical judgements. What is at issue in Wagner is the interaction between music and text, which cannot be construed wholly in terms of either. Especially in his later work the musical technique cannot be regarded merely as a means of enabling swift orientation on the part of the listeners.

Adorno elsewhere offers a more apt construal of this interaction. This is apparent in the following passage, which is, perhaps surprisingly, from the earlier Wagner text:

In Beethoven and into high Romanticism the harmonic expressive values are fixed: dissonance stands for the negative and for suffering, consonance for the positive and fulfilment. That changes in Wagner in the direction of the subjective differentiation of harmonic feeling-values. The characteristic chord, for example, whose allegorical inscription brings the words ‘Lenzes Gebot, die süße Not’ ['Spring’s decree, the sweet craving'], and which represents the moment of erotic urge and thus the ultimate motivation in Meistersinger, speaks of suffering at lack of fulfilment as much as of the pleasure which lies in the tension, lies in what is unfulfilled itself: it is sweet and a craving at the same time . . . Composers and listeners learned only from him that suffering can be sweet, that pleasure and its opposite do not stand rigidly opposed to each other but are mediated by each other, and this experience alone made it possible for dissonance to spread over the whole language of music.

(ibid.: 13, 64)

How, though, does Wagner’s freeing of musical language from convention relate to Adorno’s criticisms of the leitmotif? Adorno’s point rests on his separation of harmonic from melodic techniques in Wagner, but
this separation is questionable: why can a motif not do something similar to a chord? In *Tristan*, the combination of pleasure and pain is often inscribed in both chord and motif, from the very opening of the work onwards, where the famous dissonant chord is linked to a yearning, lead-note based melodic pattern.

Adorno’s desire to give philosophical expression to the truth of musical techniques once again produces a rigidity that is not always adequate to the music. How, then, does Adorno’s philosophical difficulty relate to Wagner’s shift of theoretical perspective? In both Wagner and Adorno verbal assertion and musical articulation come to be at odds: the same music is construed in opposed ways in differing situations. This opposition relates to something we explored in chapter 2, namely the idea that in modernity it ceases to be clear what language is. In the present case the concern is with a concomitant uncertainty about how to characterise what differing forms of articulation do. This uncertainty relates to questions about the status of conceptual language itself in a – conceptual – characterisation of the relationship between itself and other forms of articulation. The instructive problem is that if one rejects the idea that theoretical accounts of Wagner should represent an essential truth about their object of investigation, and instead adopts the idea of renewed contextualisations that seek to disclose both work and world in new ways, one is likely to be accused of relativism. What is at stake in this charge?

The issue of relativism clearly goes far beyond the present discussion, but the following remarks by Albrecht Wellmer illuminate the question of conflicting theoretical responses on the part of the same thinkers with regard to musical works. Wellmer argues that the ‘battle for truth’ is concerned with ‘the appropriateness of our understanding of the world, of problems, of issues, and of ourselves, or the concepts and connections of concepts which are fundamental to these understandings: intentionality, understanding, meaning, truth, morality, knowledge, justice, justification etc.’ (in Wingert and Günther 2001: 25). Because these aspects can never be wholly isolated from each other ‘the concept of truth points of its own accord to a normative horizon which always already goes beyond that of an argumentative dispute about the truth of single utterances’ (ibid.: 52). The problem is how this normative horizon is constituted: there can be no norm for deciding on the appropriate norms, as this would either require a dogmatic founding norm, or lead to a regress of norms for norms. In relation to Wagner and the problem of contradictory verbal characterisations one is therefore involved in an
ongoing negotiation in which new norms may become relevant which render existing norms deficient. The process of negotiation is consequently analogous to what goes on in the history of musical composition and performance itself, where the norms cannot all be formulated verbally and where the relevant contexts can be essentially contested, as they were in Wagner’s time in the debate about ‘programme music’ between Hanslick’s ‘formalism’ and the ‘new German School’ of Liszt and Wagner.

A passage from Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* which refers to Nietzsche’s critique of Wagner suggests a model for these issues. Adorno distinguishes between works which are ‘true’, and those which are ‘true as expression of a consciousness which in itself is false’ (Adorno 1997: 7, 196), the latter summing up how he sees Wagner’s works. Nietzsche’s critique of Wagner’s false consciousness is ‘transcendent critique’, as opposed to his own ‘immanent critique’. Nietzsche fails to take account of ‘the historical moment that is immanent to aesthetic truth’ (ibid.), and adopts an idea of such truth based on assumptions about the ‘philosophy of culture’, thus on criteria not derived from the specificity of the works. Aesthetic truth depends for Adorno, in contrast, on a work’s relationship to its contexts and to the available artistic means: its innovations only being accessible in relation to its historical conditions. This assumption is inherent in Wellmer’s remarks, because they entail a horizon of norms which does not allow the taking up of a position outside actual engagement with the specific matter in hand. Adorno goes on: ‘The separation between what is true in itself and the merely adequate expression of false consciousness cannot be sustained, because until today the right consciousness does not exist . . . which would allow that separation to be made, as it were, from a bird’s eye perspective’ (ibid.). The difficulty lies in the idea of ‘right consciousness’: is it a regulative idea, or what would emerge if the world were not ruled by false consciousness? In the latter case, though, what could bring about such a world? Presumably it would have to be ‘right consciousness’ itself. However, Adorno’s historical materialist orientation would condemn this as Idealism: the whole point of his arguments about commodification is that the commodity world *produces* the forms of consciousness which also dominate it. Adorno is actually not necessarily prey here (though he clearly often is elsewhere) to the standard criticism of ‘Critical Theory’ (see, e.g., Geuss 1981), namely that it arrogates to itself a position from which everything but itself can be criticised. That still leaves, though, the problem of how ‘right consciousness’
is conceived, which leads us back to the music/philosophy relationship.

Adorno regards Wagner’s relationship to Schopenhauer as a key to his music. The music echoes the ‘ahistorical’ philosophy of Schopenhauer; ‘in which the blind Will only individuates itself in order to swallow up what is individuated into itself again’. This ‘unity of Wagner’s compositional procedure with the philosophy which has already become thematic in him both gives it its power and on the other hand marks the critical starting point: the untruth of that philosophy is the untruth of his music’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 191). The untruth is the one we identified in the last chapter, namely the philosophy’s ‘mythical’ character, that derives from a founding ontological principle which subjects the world to a cycle of endless repetition. The ‘adequate expression of false consciousness’ in Wagner thus relates to the historical situation – the capitalist world of commodification as the producer of reductive identity – which leads to metaphysics like Schopenhauer’s. In Wagner there is ‘the power of an imperialism and that feeling of catastrophe of a class that sees nothing before it but the endless disaster/fate (‘Verhängnis’) of expansion’ (ibid.: 14, 131). This is tendentious stuff, taking one dimension of Wagner as the meaning of the whole by making a very unmediated connection between music, philosophy, and history. Does the same apply, for example, to Bruckner’s symphonies, which also no longer develop in the manner of Beethoven’s, and which convey both a sense of repetition-based timelessness and an underlying tension which is at odds with this timelessness? At such points Adorno seems to lay claim to possession of ‘right consciousness’, even though his method turns on the avoidance of such claims by working immanently on the detail of musical problems. While it is possible to show immanent connections between the later Wagner’s music and Schopenhauer’s philosophy – the music of Tristan, which delays harmonic resolution over huge spans of time, does evoke Schopenhauer’s conception of endlessly denied satisfaction – the music’s successes and failures do not depend solely on what is revealed by these connections.

Consider now, in contrast, a comment by Adorno which offers a more fruitful perspective on ‘right consciousness’. He makes the comment in a passage which argues that it is mistaken to regard Wagner as inferior to Beethoven because Wagner’s music does not convey a positive idea of freedom: ‘The truth of the work of art is rather that its meaning (‘Sinn’) names, and thereby perhaps transcends, the historico-philosophical state of affairs, the contradictions of the situation, right into the depths
of the technical contradictions which have to be mastered in each case, rather than expressing immediately, of its own accord, the truth of philosophical consciousness’ (ibid.: 16, 192). The crucial factor here is music’s combination of ‘naming’ with transcendence of what is ‘named’ via the composer’s engagement with technical and other internal musical problems. Naming cannot be meant in the sense of ‘intentional’ language, and has to do with how the music is a response to social contradictions. Wagner can be understood in terms of the danger that results from the individual’s powerlessness in the face of modern history being thought of in ontological, rather than historical terms. However, his music’s combination of bombast and brutality with poignant expressiveness transcends the ‘historico-philosophical’ issue by evoking both the forces which destroy human individuality (along with what can make those forces appealing), and the very substance of that individuality. Adorno does not here claim access to ‘the truth of philosophical consciousness’ and the value of Wagner’s works lies in their being ‘true as expression of a consciousness which in itself is false’. This stance offers a more apt approach to Wagner than the direct link Schopenhauer, because it leaves open a way for the works not to be merely a repetition of the falsity which they ‘express’. Elsewhere Adorno claims that the ‘truth content’ of Wagner can be formulated as ‘a dark music, despite all its colour, which points to the ruin (‘Verhängnis’) of the world by representing the ruin’ (ibid.: 563), and not conjuring it away. Such truth content in great art ‘manifests itself in [the works’] fractures and contradictions no less than in their success’ (ibid.: 18, 214). How can it be shown that the work’s fractures and contradictions are what make it significant, without falling into the traps we have observed in Adorno?

Wagner and Dahlhaus

I have not sought to give an account of just what each of Wagner’s music dramas might be said to ‘be about’. Characterising the dramas too exclusively in terms of their librettos can occlude the ways in which the music changes how words and action are to be interpreted. The plots often turn on highly questionable issues like a woman’s need to sacrifice herself to redeem a man: the conclusion of the Ring, when Brünnhilde rides onto Siegfried’s funeral pyre, is, after all, a kind of suttee, and the figure of Kundry in Parsifal incorporates some of the worst mythical stereotypes that have dogged women through the centuries. The paradox of Wagner is that he manages to make such problematic material
so much more than the manifest content of the plot and characters would seem to allow. He succeeds in addressing fundamental questions in modernity, such as the relationship between desire and power, the fragility of the self in the face of collective historical forces, and the dangers and possibilities of secularised freedom. Much of his impact lies in the astonishing transitions of mood and atmosphere in his works. If one attends primarily to the text the works often seem to be mainly concerned with ‘mythical’ issues, such, in Tristan, as the motivation of the action through the love potion that binds Tristan and Isolde. Once the music is taken into account, as Dahlhaus (1971: 55) and others point out, the mythical element often recedes. The music reveals that Tristan and Isolde already love each other, so that the potion, which they think is a death potion, becomes the occasion for acknowledging what is already the case but too dangerous to say. The difficulty in how to respond to Wagner’s works is epitomised by Adorno’s summary of the Ring, as being about how ‘man emancipates himself from the blind context of nature [i.e. the realm of myth] from which he himself emerged, only in the last analysis to fall prey to it anyway’ (Adorno 1997: 13, 129). There is some truth in this summary, but exactly the same description could be used to summarise the main contentions of Horkheimer and Adorno’s 1947 Dialectic of Enlightenment.

Romantic thought regards works of art as being a mirror to their recipients. The danger of a mirror is that it is an invitation to narcissism, but it can also be a source of self-knowledge. Daniel Barenboim says of music:

For me there is only one clear definition of music, by Ferruccio Busoni, who said: ‘Music is sonorous air’. Everything else that is said about music refers to the different reactions that music evokes in people: it is felt to be poetic, or sensual, or spiritual, or emotional, or formally fascinating – the possibilities are countless. Since music is everything and nothing at the same time, it therefore can be easily abused, as it was by the Nazis.

(Barenboim 2001)

In the Introduction we encountered the circle in which the non- or extra-musical assumptions that precede a philosophical position’s application to music can just end up confirming those assumptions via the music, and so not allow for what the music conveys that is not countenanced by a particular position. The Wagner literature is full of Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian, Marxist, Schopenhauerian, and Nietzsche’s – conflicting – earlier and later interpretations, which offer
varying degrees of illumination of the works. Does one, though, have to adhere to the underlying theoretical commitments of an interpretation to find it enlightening, and, if not, how does one avoid mere syncretism?

Consider the following two claims. Adorno comments that Wagner’s work ‘is the first in which the superiority of the single work, and in the single work that of the concretely thoroughly shaped form, in opposition to every schema of whatever kind, asserts itself’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 548). Slavoj Žižek thinks that Michael Tanner is right to claim that ‘if one is to make sense of Tristan, one has to approach it not simply as a work of art but as an ontological statement about the last things, about the meaning of life’ (Žižek and Dolar 2002: 114–15). The easy – and false – way of responding to this clash is to regard such divergent views as confirming that all interpretations – particularly of music – are indeed just projections of the interpreter onto the Romantic mirror. Adorno, the Critical Theorist, thinks the capitalist world abolishes particularity and individuality; Žižek, the Lacanian critic of postmodernism, sees the postmodern attitude as based in the attempt to evade inescapable metaphysical questions about human existence. Wagner is therefore a means of conveying their pre-existing ideas. The mistake here derives from subject–object assumptions, in which there is the objective work, and subjective interpretations that are projected onto it. However, as Gadamer shows, there would be no way of understanding the work at all if its recipients were not in some measure already imbued with the kind of meanings it involves. I want now to consider a few examples of how Dahlhaus interprets Wagner, which contain useful lessons for the issue of music and philosophy. Dahlhaus suggests how to encompass both Adorno’s idea of Wagner’s ‘musical nominalism’, and his addressing of ‘the last things’.

Dahlhaus regards the content of music as inseparable from other aspects of cultural life, and his work is notable for its revelations about the historical entanglement of ideas and music. He also, though, analyses differences between musical and linguistic articulation in terms of their effects on how musical drama works. This Hegelian approach means that he does not always give enough weight to how music affects philosophical thought, rather than vice versa. However, this does not matter so much in his investigation of Wagner, because Dahlhaus explicitly seeks to understand them on the basis of the music, rather than just of the texts. The simple advice is, then, to read Dahlhaus on Wagner (in particular 1971, 1988, 1990; and Deathridge and Dahlhaus 1984)!
The point of his appearance here, however, is to show how the contradictions arising from the entanglement of philosophy and music in Wagner can be responded to without subjecting the work to a schematic interpretation of the kind present at times in Adorno.

In *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas* Dahlhaus offers a masterful few pages on *Twilight of the Gods*, whose investigation of the text/music relationship has paradigmatic significance. He agrees with Adorno that the persons in the play cannot be seen as developed characters, but are rather ‘scenes/bearers of affects’ (Dahlhaus 1971: 133). However, he does not attach the critical historico-philosophical weight Adorno does to this, regarding it instead in terms of how events and passions can take over people, rendering their individuality secondary. *Twilight of the Gods* is important because of the gap in time between the writing of the main part of the libretto of *Siegfried’s Death* (which would later become *Twilight of the Gods*) in 1848, when Wagner was a Feuerbachian, and the composition of the music, completed in 1874, when he has become a Schopenhauerian. This change becomes vital in the conclusion of the work, and we will see here how Adorno’s ‘fractures and contradictions’ do contribute to the truth of the work.

Dahlhaus gives an example of the limits of a purely discursive philosophical approach when he shows how, in *Twilight of the Gods*, ‘Wagner was by no means certain what his own work meant, and one is better off trusting the dramatist Wagner than the philosopher who was an ideologue of himself’ (ibid.: 137). At the end of the drama the gold, whose removal from nature to society set in train the destructive events of the *Ring*, in which Siegfried, the supposed inaugurator of a new era, falls prey to the machinations of the old world, is returned to the Rhine Maidens, thus annulling the curse placed on it. What does this mean in relation to the world of nineteenth-century capitalism, whose anti-human effects were the occasion of Wagner’s writing the original libretto? The Gods, whose end in the early version was part of a Feuerbachian vision of a new order based on human love and the overthrow of feudal power, are indeed finished as Valhalla crumbles. However, this is now also part of Wotan’s ‘will who has made his own the doom he could not elude’ (ibid.), which points in the direction of Schopenhauerian resignation in the face of the brutality of modern politics. Does this mean, Dahlhaus asks, that the demise of the old world is the birthplace of a new and better one, given that the Rhine Maidens only belong to a pre-social realm of nature? He cites differing texts which Wagner wrote for the conclusion, and shows that ‘Wagner replaced in 1856 the lines
[of 1852] which announce a “realm of freedom” that emerges from the demise of a world of “murky contracts” with lines in the spirit of Schopenhauer’ (ibid.: 138), in which Brünnhilde sees herself as closing “the open doors of eternal becoming” and as “redeemed from resurrection” (ibid.), and where the world of deceit and destruction comes to a definitive end. Love gives way to renunciation of the world of ‘representation’ of which it is a part. However, Wagner did not compose these endings.

Dahlhaus then convincingly demonstrates that the ‘really authentic conclusion is obviously the one from 1852’ (ibid.: 139). Wagner claims in 1856 that the 1852 conclusion is politically “tendentious”, imposing something extraneous on the drama, but by 1873 he regards Brünnhilde’s Schopenhauer paraphrase as tendentious too. In both cases he thinks musical judgement makes it clear that an explicit textual determination of the conclusion is superfluous. However, Dahlhaus then points out that ‘the instrumental theme with which Twilight of the Gods closes is not a musical metaphor of renunciation and denial of the Will, but an expression of the “blissful love” which is praised in the 1852 conclusion’ (ibid.). Vaughan Williams notoriously regarded this theme as being more worthy of the Bierkeller, showing that he failed to hear it in an adequately contextualised manner. The theme’s naïve simplicity makes sense if considered in relation to the preceding complex web of dramatic deceit and musical allusion of Twilight of the Gods. The theme first appears in The Valkyrie, and manifestly has nothing to do with denial of the Will, and a lot to do with sensuous and emotional bliss.

Finally, Dahlhaus argues that, although the hopelessness of the direction of the world expressed by the Schopenhauerian conclusion may, given the squalid demise of Siegfried, be part of the significance of Twilight of the Gods, this does not explain the conclusion of the tetralogy as a whole: ‘In the context which stretches from the closing act of The Valkyrie, via that of Siegfried, to the prelude and end of Twilight of the Gods, Brünnhilde’s love for Siegfried appears as opposed to Wotan’s renunciation and resignation, and as an anticipation of future reconciliation’ (ibid.). He quotes Wagner saying in 1848 that “The “intention” of the Gods “would be achieved if they destroyed themselves in this creation of humankind, namely if they had to give up their immediate influence in the freedom of human consciousness”; and that is what the music says’ (ibid.). It says it by evoking possibilities of emotional fulfilment which the preceding dramatic action had progressively undermined by its
traumatic tangle of intrigue and deceit. This verbal judgement does not mean that the last part of the work simply ‘says’ what the judgement says, because the work *enacts* it via contexts detailed above, and by the emotional effects produced by the connection of those contexts in the music. To this extent the effect relies on the symphonic element of the music: something similar applies in Bruckner’s – Wagner-influenced – symphonies, which continually recontextualise musical motifs and other material, bringing them together in a conclusion whose power also derives from the accumulation of contexts.

The *Ring*’s concluding music might therefore be said to constitute a refutation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of music. Rather than pointing, as the action might seem to, to the need to renounce hope of satisfaction in the world of representation, it connects us to ever-present possibilities of affective renewal, not least by the pleasure it can convey as *this* music at *this* point in this complex musical context. Music here plays the role I have been referring to in terms of metaphysics.

Dahlhaus makes a further important point with regard to Schopenhauer in his discussion of the contradictory figure of Kundry in *Parsifal*, who is both seductress and penitent, and who poses the problem of how music can present these opposed roles: ‘Music is, according to Schopenhauer, who thereby expressed the *communis opinio* of centuries, an art of the representation of unbroken, unmixed feelings’ (ibid.: 151). Wagner is obsessed by the idea of a clarity in which text and music elucidate each other, but with the composition of the scenes with Kundry in his last major work:

he realised that the technique of leitmotif is a means of opening up for music a realm which otherwise remains closed to it. Leitmotifs are, as soon as they are clearly enough expounded, musical metaphors, which, by making transitions into each other, being linked together or referring to each other, make possible the expression of dividedness or ambiguity which is otherwise closed to music.

(ibid.)

He cites the example of the motif of Kundry’s longing, which is the musical inversion of the motif of the suffering of Christ and Amfortas, and so is ‘the expression of a desire for redemption which entangles itself in its opposite’ (ibid.: 152). Verbal statements of conflicting desires have to be articulated at separate times to be intelligible at all, but they can be simultaneous in music. Musical articulation makes possible an affective significance which conflicting linguistic expressions cannot convey.
This possibility was implicit in the discussion above of the temporality of musical leitmotifs, which can take music beyond immediacy to its own specific kind of mediation.

Dahlhaus’ interpretations combine the awareness of the historical situatedness of music that Adorno demands, with immanent demonstrations of how Wagner transcends his contexts and opens up new musical and dramatic possibilities. He thereby reveals limits in many philosophical approaches to music and to language. Wagner’s ‘art of ambiguity’ (ibid.: 153) makes it clear that there is no single answer to the question of the relationship between musical and verbal meaning. However, that is not a recipe for mere indeterminacy, as a further example can suggest. In a discussion of the composition of the music and text of King Mark’s lament in Tristan, Dahlhaus shows how Wagner’s reflections on words and notes are inseparable. The lament expresses Mark’s feeling that if Tristan cannot be trusted nothing can, which leads to sense of groundlessness. Wagner rhetorically elaborates the first verbal text he writes by inversion and parallelism, and this leads in the music to a rhythmic-melodic intensification based on the rhetorical repetition of ‘da Tristan . . .’ (‘if Tristan . . .’). Rhetoric and music support each other in a manner that allows Wagner to avoid traditional schematic melodic patterning, because he ‘had recognised in rhetoric, in the technique of parallelisms, inversions, and antitheses, an originally musical moment. Rhetoric is musical in the music drama and the music is rhetorical’ (Dahlhaus 1990: 124). In such moments it becomes clear that, while Wagner’s conceptual contradictions, and his political move to the Right, may be philosophically and ethically questionable, they are not what determines the truth of his greatest works. These function instead according to a logic that cannot be captured in philosophical or political terms. What, then, is Nietzsche’s contribution to evaluating the case of ‘Wagner’?

Nietzsche and Wagner: bad faith?

A recurrent tone in the later Nietzsche’s published criticisms of Wagner is epitomised by his account of Wagner’s move away from Feuerbach, which culminates in Parsifal:

Remember how enthusiastically at that time Wagner walked in the footsteps of the philosopher Feuerbach. Feuerbach’s phrase ‘healthy sensuousness’ sounded in the thirties and forties to Wagner, as it did for many
Germans – they called themselves the young Germans – like the word of redemption. Has he changed his mind after all about this? Given that it seems that he at least wanted to change others’ minds about it? . . . Has the hatred of life come to dominate him like it did Flaubert? . . . Because Parsifal is a work of spite, of vindictiveness, of secret poisoning of the preconditions of life, a bad work. – The sermon of chastity remains a provocation to perversion: I despise everyone who does not feel Parsifal to be an assault on morality.

(Nietzsche 2000: 2, 1053)

The first part of this passage appears in both On the Genealogy of Morality and Nietzsche contra Wagner. It is noticeable, however, that Nietzsche doesn’t mention the music of Parsifal at all. His critical view of some aspects of Parsifal’s presentation of sensuous existence as mere fatal temptation to sin does seem pretty defensible, and the fate of Kundry is disturbing, to say the least – though Žižek (2002) suggests elements of a defense. However, the effects of the conflict in Parsifal between diatonic and chromatic music, as well as of the technique of motivic ambiguity, once again mean that the piece as a whole cannot be reduced to the action and the words, as though these were simply advocating Schopenhauerian renunciation of the world.

If Nietzsche is seeking what in the modern secular world can make one love life, works of art like Parsifal can arguably do a pretty good job, whatever Wagner thought he was trying to do. One doesn’t need to buy into an ideology which may be part of what an opera conveys to profit from the opera. This seems almost too obvious to state, but Nietzsche’s indignation at Wagner’s later works sometimes blinds him to more than just this particular commonplace. When Nietzsche does talk elsewhere about the music of Parsifal he amusingly says that ‘what you hear is Rome – Rome’s faith without words’ (Nietzsche 2000: 2, 726), contrasting Parsifal unfavourably with the character of Siegfried, whom he, depressingly, presents as a kind of superman. His judgement derives, though, from his antagonism to Christianity and his aim of ‘transvaluing values’, rather than from a specific characterisation of the music, which is by no means just religious in character. In the same section he claims that ‘geniuses of [Wagner’s] kind seldom have the right to understand themselves’ (ibid.: 724), which gets nearer the mark because it allows Wagner’s work to transcend his intentions.

However, even when considering only what the later Nietzsche says about Wagner, we are once again faced with a series of blatant
self-contradictions. He notoriously admitted in a letter to Carl Fuchs in 1888 that his stated preference for Bizet over Wagner in *Nietzsche contra Wagner* is only meant as an ‘ironic antithesis’ (ibid.: 3, 1347) so that he could avoid what, had the comparison been with Beethoven, would have been tasteless, and that it was not to be taken seriously. In the same letter he says that *Tristan* is ‘of a fascination which is without compare not only in music, but in all the arts’ (ibid.), and he repeats this praise in *Ecce Homo*. Even *Parsifal*, or the prelude at least, is judged wholly differently in a letter to Peter Gast in 1887: ‘Apart, besides, from all inappropriate questions (what such music can be good for, or should be good for), but asked purely aesthetically: has Wagner ever done anything better? . . . There are things like that only in *Dante*, nowhere else’ (ibid.: 3, 1249).

He praises the piece for being ‘a synthesis of states which will be seen as incompatible by many people’, and as involving ‘sympathy with what is seen and judged in the music’, claiming that it ‘does Wagner the highest honour’ (ibid.). Such sympathy (which is something he regularly attacks elsewhere as part of his assault on Christianity) must presumably be good for more than ‘purely aesthetic’ purposes.

What is to be done with these contradictions? There are numerous psychological accounts of what is going on (e.g. Magee 2002): the vehemence of Nietzsche’s attacks on something he so obviously also loved provides plenty of material for these. However, such approaches do not explain how personal factors should result in a conflict which has paradigmatic significance well beyond what may have occasioned it. Nietzsche’s project from the time when he rejects Schopenhauer in the later 1870s onwards is an attack on philosophy as metaphysics, in the sense of a grounding of Truth in a timeless sphere beyond the everyday world. This attack is accompanied by his turn away from Wagner, and his reasons for his critiques of Wagner are, significantly, often the same as those for which he seeks to overcome philosophy. Nietzsche might seem to be an obvious resource in the use of music to interrogate philosophy. He opposes the idea of truth as correspondence and he attacks the representationalist epistemology that dominates so much philosophical thinking about music. However, his rejection of Wagner means that what would appear to be an obvious example of a musical alternative to philosophy, which he himself terms, referring to *Tristan*, ‘the opus metaphysicum of all art’ (Nietzsche 2000: 1, 408) becomes just part of a wider problem. Does the perceived wider problem with metaphysics really invade Wagner’s music to the extent to which Nietzsche claims it does?
Nietzsche himself offers ways of coming to terms with his contradictions, and these will prove to be the basis of his best responses to music. Moreover, these ways also depend on his opposition to representationism. The worst version of this opposition, however, is his metaphysical claim that truth and power are essentially equivalent, which relies on the idea that, for ‘the real philosophers’, ‘Their “cognition” is creation, their creation is a legislation, their will to truth is – Will to power’ (ibid.: 2, 677). Truth is here based in much too cavalier a manner on the ‘lordly right to give names’ (ibid.: 773), as the means of controlling and manipulating the world. Nietzsche is, though, sometimes more careful with regard to the idea of truth as what is created by greater quanta of power gaining ascendancy over lesser quanta. He asks, for example, ‘By what does truth prove itself? With the feeling of increased power – with usefulness – with indispensability – in short with advantages (namely presuppositions of how the truth should be constituted to be acknowledged by us). But that is a prejudice: a sign that it is not a case of truth at all’ (ibid.: 3, 813). Without such a separation of truth from its ground any claim to explain truth in terms of something else will be self-refuting. If power is the basis of truth it is also the basis of the claim that power is the basis of truth, and we have no grounds for accepting or making the claim. Claims made for strategic reasons can be true, but they are not true because of the strategic reasons for making them.

The important aspect of Nietzsche’s view lies rather in its attention to the performative aspects of communicative action. In the defensible version of what he says, utterances matter because of how they bring things to light and affect the ways that people relate to their world, and this connects language to music. His responses to phenomena like Wagner therefore need not be understood in representational terms, as ‘sentences held true’ of Wagner. They can be strategic counters to one-sided assessments which threaten to rigidify how such phenomena are responded to, or they can be ways of affecting how one hears the music. There is a dominant later Nietzschean assessment of Wagner – namely that he is a dramatist, rather than a musician, who loads music with baggage that it is better off without, in a manner which adds to the illusions created by metaphysics – but this is probably the least interesting of his responses to Wagner. Much more interesting is how Nietzsche’s own texts on Wagner set up contrasts and echoes between the positions advanced which are more productive than any particular position itself. Nietzsche becomes in this respect something like a
philosophical Gustav Mahler, who constantly challenges us to judge how seriously each element is to be taken. Let us, then, take a few examples of Nietzsche’s contradictory approaches to music, Wagner, and philosophy to see how this might be the case.8

Martha Nussbaum (in Janaway 1999) has pointed out that, even though The Birth of Tragedy of 1872 relies on the Schopenhauerian schema of Will and representation being echoed in the contrast between Dionysus and Apollo, Nietzsche already begins to depart from Schopenhauer in this text. He does so because art is seen not as what enables resigned, Will-free contemplation of an irredeemable existence, but as the manifestation of a creativity that can make life worth living, even if existence has no inherent meaning. Nietzsche’s modification has the advantage of making sense of music’s capacity to give pleasure and make us engage with the world, rather than just withdraw from it, even though music evokes transience, longing, pain, and so on. However, his view of language and music returns us to some familiar problems. He talks of the emergence of opera, where ‘the music is regarded as servant, the word of the text as master’ and where the ‘music is completely alienated from its true dignity of being the Dionysian mirror of the world, so that it is only left to it, as slave of appearance, to imitate the essence of the form of appearance’ (Nietzsche 2000: 1, 108–9).

As the ‘Dionysian mirror’ music gives access to the ground of appearances, as ‘the real idea of the world’ (ibid.: 119); the text, which refers to the world of transient, particular appearances, therefore does not have metaphysical significance. Tristan, above all, conveys a metaphysical message about the ground of being, a message which is, though, essentially that of Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the Will. In Richard Wagner in Bayreuth Nietzsche gives a further reason, which echoes Wagner’s theoretical texts, for this privileging of music over the word. He talks of the ‘pain of convention, that is agreement in words and actions without agreement of feeling’ (ibid.: 388). The music of the ‘German masters’ allows ‘true feeling, the enemy of all convention, of all artificial alienation and incomprehensibility between people’ (ibid.) to be manifest in sound. Music is ‘nature transformed into love’ (ibid.). The idea comes squarely into what Nietzsche will later condemn as ‘Romanticism’, which tries to conjure away the agonistic nature of human existence into an illusory harmony.

8 I have given a more detailed account of the various stages of Nietzsche’s writing about music in Bowie 2003a.
In another passage Nietzsche gets close to something interesting, but then just slips into a metaphysical determination of music of the kind that is doomed to failure. Wagner ‘has given a language to everything in nature which did not until now wish to speak: he does not believe that there has to be anything that is speechless. He also plunges into dawn, wood, fog, ravine, mountain heights, nocturnal shudders, moonlight, and sees in them a secret desire: they too wish to sound’ (ibid.: 418). Where the (Schopenhauerian) philosopher sees the Will in a theoretical manner in all aspects of nature, the musician sees that the Will wants ‘a sounding existence’ (ibid.) that speaks to feelings. The idea here of the extension of modern music’s ‘linguistic’ capacity into the disclosure of what was previously the domain of nature poetry and Romantic painting is an illuminating one, suggesting one root of modern music’s new cultural power. However, the more general metaphysical point about the Will actually takes away from this idea.

Nietzsche goes on to claim that ‘Wagner’s music as a whole is an image of the world as it was understood by the great Ephesian philosophers, as a harmony which creates conflict out of itself, as the unity of justice and enmity’ (ibid.: 420). Like Adorno’s characterisation of the Ring, quoted above, which could equally be applied to Dialectic of Enlightenment, this just summarises Nietzsche’s own philosophical concerns at the time. Wagner was admittedly for a time interested in Hegelian thinking, which also ‘creates conflict out of itself’ and relies on unity in contradiction, and versions of this idea can, as the link between Beethoven and Hegel revealed, be used to shed light on the understanding of music in the nineteenth century. However, Nietzsche at this stage offers versions of the entanglement of philosophy and music in which, as in Schopenhauer, philosophy tends to be given priority. Even though music is thought of as evoking in affective terms what philosophy says in concepts, so countering the perceived rigidity of convention-based language, the direction of the position is towards a version of metaphysics. Things become more complex in the later work because Nietzsche’s own anti-representationalist stance demands that he should no longer have recourse to a metaphysical position that seeks to provide a legitimation for his views of the significance of music.

A key issue here is how the contrast between formalist and non-formalist approaches to music affects the understanding of the language/music relationship. Formalism can serve as a counter to metaphysical determinations of music by denying that music has extra-musical content, but that denial is itself based on
representationalist premises about the functioning of language, which
deny ‘extra-musical’ meaning to music precisely because it is non-
representational. These premises can themselves be seen as metaphys-
ical because they seek to circumscribe truth and meaning in an expla-
nation of the relationship of word or statement to world, leaving no
place for how the musical can both play a role in verbal language itself
and articulate its own kinds of significance. Nietzsche comes to propose
ideas which vary between something akin to formalism and something
very far indeed from it, and the contradiction is once again what is most
informative. As he moves into his quasi ‘positivist’ phase, in Human All
Too Human (1878) and Dawn (1881), he rejects the account of music
and language suggested by his earlier remarks on music as the affective
counter to convention: ‘Music is not in and for itself so meaningful for
our inner life, so deeply stirring that it might pass as the immediate lan-
guage of feeling; rather its primordial connection with poetry [‘Poesie’
in the general sense of creative writing] has put so much symbolism
into the rhythmic movement in the strength and weakness of the note
that we now think it speaks directly to the inner self and comes from
the inner self’ (ibid.: 573). The awareness that so much of human life
depends on historical origins that philosophy has forgotten, which char-
acterises Nietzsche’s work on morality, occurs here in relation to music’s
relationship to language. However, this change from his earlier position
underplays the two-way relationship between music and language that
I illustrated by Schlegel’s account of rhythm and conceptual thinking.
Although Nietzsche avoids the wholesale separation of language and
music associated with formalism, he often deals with phenomena that
are best regarded as dialectically related by merely reversing his previ-
ous evaluation, in this case from a superiority of music to language to
a dependence of music on language.

Given the role of evaluation in Nietzsche’s thinking, this tendency
towards reversal is vital in assessing his responses to the issue of music
he rejects the idea that the rhythmic and musical aspect of language
serves as evidence against a utilitarian view of morality and culture,
claiming that rhythm is rather a means of compulsion, and that ‘long
before there was philosophy one granted to music the power of dis-
charging affects, of cleansing the soul, of pacifying the ferocia animi –
precisely via the rhythmic in music’ (ibid.: 2, 94). Rhythm is not some
kind of ‘spiritual’ addition to what is otherwise merely useful, but is itself
useful as a means of control. It can therefore be employed as a tool of
ideology: one can ‘feel a thought as more true if it has a metrical form’ (ibid.: 95), a view which gives support to his claims that equate truth and power. In contrast to his earlier conception, in which music made possible an ‘agreement of feeling’, feeling in music is now more likely to be a form of deception. This kind of evaluation turns him against ‘Romanticism in music’ (which includes Wagner) after 1876, because it ‘deprives the mind of its rigour and joviality and makes every kind of unclear longing, of spongy covetousness proliferate’ (ibid.: 1, 740). However, musical rhythm is not inherently suspicious: he more than once contrasts the ‘dancing’ of earlier music that is based on regular rhythmic patterns with the ‘swimming’ of Wagner’s ‘endless melody’ (e.g. ibid.: 789) which uses great variation of patterns, regarding the former as preferable.\(^9\) On what basis, though, is this evaluation made?

A distinction should be made here between the idea that certain kinds of music are a sign of a cultural deficiency, and the idea that they have a causal role in bringing about that deficiency. Nietzsche too often fails to make this distinction, regarding Wagner’s expression of cultural problems in modernity as being equivalent to his contributing to such problems. Wagner’s music might be both a symbolic manifestation of problems and a contributor to them, but one must then differentiate which aspects of his work are to be understood as signs, and which as causes. The question is whether Nietzsche just projects his philosophical or anti-philosophical concerns onto Wagner’s music, and so fails to do justice to the diversity of its cultural impact.

In Section 10 of The Case of Wagner Nietzsche sums up a central strand of his contentions: ‘In fact he repeated one sentence throughout his life: that his music should not just mean music. But more! But infinitely more! . . . “Not only music” – no musician talks like that’ (ibid.: 2, 924). In the same vein, he says a bit later: ‘It is not music with which Wagner conquered the young men for himself, it is the “Idea” . . . exactly the same as what Hegel seduced and tempted them with in his time!’ (ibid.: 925). The complaint is that Wagner wants to use music as metaphysics, which Nietzsche sees as both damaging to music and as damaging to those who are tempted by such music. This temptation can be explained by his remark in Human All Too Human that ‘the highest effects of art easily produce a resonance of the long-silent, indeed broken, metaphysical string’ (ibid.: 1, 548), where he refers to the moment in the

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\(^9\) Nietzsche’s own extended musical compositions, such as the ‘Manfred Meditation’ of 1872, are notable for their lack of rhythmic and formal coherence, as well as for their melodic inventiveness.
last movement of Beethoven’s Ninth in which the idea of immortality is evoked in relation to the starry sky. The point for Nietzsche is not to give in to a nostalgic temptation, in which art offers the illusion of a ‘true world’, of the kind previously offered by religion and philosophy, in opposition to what is in fact the only world. The anti-metaphysical form of art entailed by this criticism appears at various times as the ‘Dionysian’ art we encountered in chapter 6. However, with the exception of Greek tragedy, which Nietzsche interprets as an affirmation of existence in all its forms, just what art this now could be remains remarkably unclear, assuming we don’t think it’s Bizet. It is not, though, that music is excluded from such art. Nietzsche’s remark that ‘In the last analysis there is no reason for me to take back the hope for a Dionysian future of music’ (ibid.: 2, 1112) means that music is not inherently incapable of Dionysian affirmation, and this is underlined in his claim that ‘when I described Dionysian music I described what I had heard’ (ibid.).

When it comes to the content of this music we are, however, left with a vague promise, and little else. There are a few passages in which he describes his vision for a new music. In Beyond Good and Evil he talks of a ‘redemption of the music of the North’, associating this with a vision of ‘Southern’ music which is ‘deeper, more powerful, perhaps more evil and more mysterious’ (ibid.: 723). Strangely, these terms from the description of the music in question fit some of Wagner’s music rather well, if one forgets the ‘Northern’ sagas that the music accompanies. The contrast between North and South derives from Nietzsche’s (by this time justified) critical association of Wagner with the idiocy of contemporary German nationalism, as well as from his assessment of Wagner’s assimilation of music and metaphysics. It is Wagner’s investment in Schopenhauer that becomes the ground of Nietzsche’s wider suspicion of certain kinds of music. However, although they are good knockabout stuff, the arguments he offers are largely just rhetorical and ad hominem. Nietzsche says, for example, in relation to Wagner’s change from Opera and Drama to his post-1870 position:

With this exceptional increase in the value of music which seemed to grow out of Schopenhauerian philosophy, suddenly the musician himself also increased enormously in value: he became from now on an oracle, a priest, indeed more than a priest, a sort of mouthpiece of the ‘in itself’ of things, a telephone of the beyond – hereafter he did not only talk music, this ventriloquist of God – he spoke metaphysics.

(ibid.: 845)
Once again what he says is not based on a consideration of the music itself, but rather on a particular way in which the music can be evaluated in terms of a philosophical stance adopted by its composer. But is this adequate to the works in question?

Taking Tristan as Wagner’s most obviously Schopenhauerian work, the issue is whether what it conveys concerning the unconscious, the bounds of the self, the inevitability of loss, etc., is conveyed even to listeners who have no time for Schopenhauer’s metaphysical account of how these things are part of existence. If Tristan does speak to these listeners, the value of the musician with regard to these aspects of human existence lies precisely in the excess of their music’s significance over its notional philosophical source. In other words, metaphysics₂ is not reducible to metaphysics₁. Nietzsche is prone to let philosophy set the agenda for musical meaning. He criticises the music for contributing to a philosophical stance he opposes, but himself relies on the assimilation of music to philosophy to make his critical point, thus ignoring the possibility that the music might resist such assimilation.

The inconsistency becomes evident when Nietzsche amusingly criticises Wagner for having ‘immensely extended the linguistic capacity of music’— he is the Victor Hugo of music as language. Always assuming that one first accepts that music may be permitted not to be music, but language, but a tool, but ancilla dramaturgica’ (ibid.: 920). This criticism points in the direction of formalism, as did the remark concerning Wagner’s desire to produce ‘more than music’. However, for the case against Wagner to have any purchase Nietzsche has himself to rely on the idea of music seeking to have a metaphysical content beyond formalism, otherwise the supposed cultural effects that he is opposing become inexplicable. If ‘everything which has ever grown on the soil of impoverished life, the whole forgery of transcendence and of the beyond has its most sublime advocate in Wagner’s art’ (ibid.: 930), the kind of music which Nietzsche wishes to advocate must either be regarded in wholly formalist terms in order to escape what vitiates Wagner’s music – which means its cultural effectiveness can be questioned – or it becomes indeterminate, as we saw in relation to the idea of Dionysian music. It is no coincidence that Nietzsche’s advocacy of ‘transvalued values’ seems to suffer a similar fate. Either the values are all too familiar, as often just rather provocative inversions of the Christian values of sympathy, compassion, etc., or they are empty promises for the future. These have in the interim come to sound more than a little problematic, in contrast to some of the still compelling democratic values derived from the
Christian tradition and the Enlightenment that Nietzsche is concerned to attack.

The problems here are underlined by Nietzsche’s repeated judgement that the German music represented by Wagner is merely a passing historical phenomenon which will become obsolete because it emerged in a particular – decadent – cultural climate. The fact that he is simply wrong about this must have some impact on his later interpretation of Wagner as both a sign and a cause of cultural decline. Furthermore, this impact can extend to the extreme aspects of his critique of Christian morality. In seeking to undermine the idea that there can be a metaphysical foundation for art or morality he loses sight of their significance in everyday life, which depends, not on their explicit philosophical foundations, but rather on their ineliminable normative role in social practices. Wagner might indeed constitute a danger in certain cultural contexts – after Nazism one has to be very careful about this – but this does not mean that he is mainly a sign of something to be rejected because of his entanglement with ‘metaphysics’. The point is, of course, that Nietzsche does also continue to recognise that Wagner cannot be evaluated solely in terms of the idea that the rejection of metaphysics must involve a major cultural upheaval. What significance does this aspect of Nietzsche’s responses to Wagner have for philosophy, particularly when it is contrasted with the responses we have just examined?

Consider the following passage on Wagner: ‘Nobody is his equal in the colours of late autumn, the indescribably moving happiness of one last, very last, very, very brief enjoyment, he knows the sound for those secret-uncanny midnights of the soul, where cause and effect seem to have fallen apart and at any moment something can arise “from out of nothing”’ (ibid.: 1043). Later the passage continues: ‘and many things were first added to art by him that until now were inexpressible and even seemed unworthy of art, and were in fact only chased away, not grasped by words – many very small and microscopic aspects of the soul: indeed he is the master of the very small. But he doesn’t want to be that!’ (ibid.). Whatever one thinks of Nietzsche’s ensuing judgement on Wagner’s failure to recognise that his real talent does not lie in presenting the big picture, such passages do address the specificity of Wagner’s art and can illuminate one’s responses to the works. They

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10 Adorno’s valorisation of the Second Vienna School is equally mistaken, for similar reasons, as we shall see in chapter 9.
therefore take one beyond the need simply to accept or reject Niet-
zsche’s polemical conclusion. The contrast here between Nietzsche’s
philosophically based and his aesthetic judgements leads to an issue
which will loom large in the coming chapters.

We have already touched on the idea that music could be understood
as being ‘critical’ of reality, an idea which is largely inconceivable prior
to modernity. For Nietzsche this can mean a variety of things. On the
one hand, Wagner’s music can be seen as critical because it feigns tran-
scendence, rendering one dissatisfied with one’s existence. However,
it does so on the basis of an alternative which is mere illusion: instead
of opening one’s eyes to the new possibilities of a post-metaphysical
perspective, it takes one back into a past that needs to be overcome.
On the other hand, a non-Wagnerian, Dionysian music is supposed
to take one forward into a future disabused of the illusions of meta-
physics, so criticising ways of thinking and acting which are still imbued
with the contrast between this world and the ‘true world’. Concretely
this would mean that such music reinforces the anti-teleological, anti-
redemptive view of existence that Nietzsche opposes to the Platonic
and Christian metaphysics he associates with Wagner. Neither of these
views of music as critical of reality is wholly convincing, even in Niet-
zsche’s own terms, as the passages on Wagner as miniaturist already
suggest.

The reason for this is a straightforward aesthetic one. In On the
Genealogy of Morality Nietzsche opposes Schopenhauer’s idea of the
‘Will-calming’ effect of beauty with Stendhal’s idea that “the beautiful
promises happiness”, so that ‘for him the stimulation of the will (“of inter-
est”) by beauty seems to be the issue’ (ibid.: 847). Indeed, he contends,
even Schopenhauer’s view fails to live up to the Kantian idea of beauty
as devoid of ‘interest’, because beauty helps to take him away from the
‘torture’ of the world of representation. Wagner can, though, be seen
as achieving pretty much what is implied by Nietzsche’s interpretation
of Stendhal’s claims about beauty. An example of this would be the dis-
turbing music in Act Three of Tristan (which Adorno terms ‘the wound
as expressive content’ (Adorno 1997: 13, 173)). The ‘stimulation’ of
this music must convey some sort of promise that is, given the unsettling
nature of the music, not merely ‘Will-calming’. The intensification can
therefore be seen as being ‘critical’ of ways of being which do not offer
more than a mundane acceptance of the given. This kind of ‘criticism’
is part of what I mean by metaphysics. Only if such music is regarded
predominantly in terms of a certain conception of philosophy can such
secularised transcendence be turned into a version of Schopenhauerian metaphysics, rather than being an enrichment of the here and now that Dewey talks about when he talks of art as ‘experience’. It is therefore not surprising that Nietzsche’s most plausible versions of his criticisms of metaphysics and music emerge where he refuses to adopt the dogmatic perspective apparent in his criticisms of Wagner, and instead enacts an evaluation through the ‘musical’ tensions and interactions between differing parts of his texts.

This pragmatist point might appear to invalidate the idea that Wagner’s work does indeed have to do with cultural crises in modernity associated with the decline of metaphysics. There is little doubt that the perceived intensification of the significance of music in modernity does have to do with this decline. However, Nietzsche does not always argue at the level of the best accounts of this issue that we have explored via Romantic philosophy. His strong anti-Wagner stance leads him instead to the idea that music is just another version of what is offered by traditional religion and philosophy, as the ‘resonance . . . of the metaphysical string’. One can, though, take the same phenomena and interpret them differently. Part of the significance of Wagner lies in his liberation of music from received forms and in his extension of its expressive possibilities. The actual reception of his music has, though, often been dominated by its appropriation by ‘official culture’, most notoriously when Bayreuth becomes a place for the Nazis to seek cultural respectability. Making such appropriation the primary criterion for assessing his work is, however, to fall prey to one of the most mistaken ideas in progressive cultural politics. Concentration on the ways in which works of art have been received in a dominant culture too frequently becomes an excuse not to keep alive their cultural and political potential. The history of the public reception of Wagner does not pass an adequate verdict on his music: thinking that it does surrenders the possible future of the work to the past. Keeping alive the potential in Wagner is evidently not easy, but the failure to do so conspires with what progressive cultural politics should seek to oppose, namely the appropriation of the greatest culture by those in power.

The crucial factor here is the need to engage with the specificity of the works’ challenge to existing culture, rather than be blinded by their ideological accompaniments and institutionalised reception. That is why, despite all, Adorno’s concern with art and truth is so important. His claim that ‘The condition of all truth is the need to give a voice to suffering’ (Adorno 1997: 6, 29) captures one of the reasons why
music in modernity continually tries to expand its expressive range. Like Wagner’s work, much of the most significant modern music, from different forms of musical modernism to jazz, confronts any sense that existing cultural forms are self-legitimating. These challenges to the cultural status quo are admittedly themselves eventually assimilated into ‘official culture’. This does not mean, though, that they cannot still function as a motor for new critical responses to modernity, as Wagner’s enduring effect on music suggests. The point of such critical challenges often lies in their refusal to exclude even the most difficult aspects of life from music. Think of how Berg’s *Wozzeck* gives a unique voice to its oppressed proletarian hero, or of the way that the avant-garde in jazz became a location for opposition to racism.

Nietzsche seems at times not to want music to deal with the deepest issues, because he thinks this will make it into a substitute for religion. This attitude is echoed by the Left-wing view (that is repeated in aspects of new musicology) which sees works like Wagner’s as having no role to play in new cultural forms and practices because they belong to ‘bourgeois culture’. Modern music need not, though, be understood as an illusory answer to metaphysical questions, or as merely part of a reactionary cultural superstructure. The interesting question in all this is why it is that *music* is employed as a new means for responding to things which may previously have been the domain of religion and metaphysics, *not* why music is essentially another version of the same thing. The answer has to do with music’s non-representational nature and its relationship to emotions, which enable it to challenge current forms of expression and articulation, but it is vital here to make some careful differentiations.

Consider the following example. Music can indeed play the sort of ideological role Nietzsche accuses Wagner’s music of playing, but even this need not be inherently problematic. Why should music *in some circumstances* not also be a form of post-metaphysical consolation? The ‘consolation’ offered by music to the concentration camp commandant admittedly makes it starkly evident that musical consolation can be a form of deceit. Are we, though, supposed to live without the consolations music may provide, staring brute reality in the face all the time, in the manner advocated by the most hectoring and obsessive passages in Nietzsche? These passages are written by a desperate man writing in a performative manner as a response to his own desperation. Why can’t the experience of musical consolation itself be real, in the sense that, as the earlier Nietzsche saw it, it can offer reasons for living on? If
one denies this possibility, might not the unattainable standard against which musical consolation is being measured actually point in the direction of what sounds suspiciously like a metaphysical conception of the true world?

Music’s capacity for consolation offers a large spectrum of possibilities, from individual existential consolation, to ideologically charged collective misuse of music for the purposes of consolation: think of the Nazis’ use of Bruckner adagios at staged funerals. A blanket rejection of music as consolation would, though, just take away from the already often meagre resources for hope in a secular world, with little evidence that this would lead to Nietzsche’s brave new world after the transvaluation of values. Wagner’s work has so far both survived Nietzsche’s attacks and its deeply problematic historical reception, and continues to offer possibilities for the future, and this seems to me the central issue with respect to his music’s relationship to philosophy. The dangers and possibilities inherent in the modern awareness of freedom which we considered in chapter 6 are, as Nietzsche was sometimes well aware, exemplified in Wagner perhaps as strikingly as in any figure in modernity.

The present discussion of Wagner has revealed a tension between seeing music (1) as a cultural practice in which people engage, which has a whole series of functions, from consolation to protest, and (2) as an objectifiable sign or symptom of wider historical, cultural and philosophical issues. The two sides of this tension evidently cannot be strictly separated in concrete cases, but the idea of the two sides does help to situate differing philosophical responses to music. A related tension is present in the differences between expressive and representationalist conceptions of language in the twentieth century, where the former regards language as a multi-faceted form of human action, and the latter regards it as an object of analysis. By bringing music into consideration of this tension the next chapter will try to reveal new perspectives on the twentieth-century philosophy of language.
Explicit and implicit music

The fact that it took until the work of Karl-Otto Apel in the 1970s (Apel 1973, 1976) for the affinities between Wittgenstein and Heidegger to be widely appreciated is a symptom of the divisions between ‘analytical’ and ‘European’ approaches in twentieth-century Western philosophy. These divisions appear in Kivy’s claim, cited in the Introduction, that ‘Music, of all the arts, is the most philosophically unexplored and most philosophically misunderstood where it has been explored at all’ (Kivy 1997: 139). This is obviously not the case for the European tradition, and therefore could be valid only for the analytical tradition. But then consider the following. Wittgenstein must be regarded as part of the analytical tradition. However, even in his early writings, which helped to establish the terms of analytical philosophy, he used music as a means of asking questions about philosophy. On the other hand, Heidegger, for many the epitome of a ‘European’ philosopher, wrote virtually nothing about music, although he did think that it was important. Despite Heidegger’s lack of attention to music, we have already seen that music plays a role in his work. I want in this chapter to explore this role a bit further, but I mainly want to argue at greater length that, along with the explicit role which music plays in Wittgenstein’s thinking, it plays an important implicit role which has rarely figured in the main interpretations of his philosophy. My claim will be that the entanglement of music and philosophy is not primarily a philosophical problem for Wittgenstein, but is instead a resource for exploring the nature of language and the world. The relationship of both Heidegger and Wittgenstein to music will also reveal links between them which have not been evident in many existing readings.
Analytical approaches to Wittgenstein hardly ever discuss music as an issue in his philosophy. The indices of many of the standard works on Wittgenstein rarely even specify music as a topic of discussion (see, e.g., Sluga and Stern 1997), and even if these works do discuss passages from Wittgenstein involving ‘music’, ‘melody’, etc., when music is mentioned it is just seen as providing analogies for his supposed real philosophical concerns. This is a result of the assumptions I questioned in earlier chapters, which require that music be dealt with by the ‘philosophy of music’, a branch of analytical philosophy, which, like analytical aesthetics, is of little importance to that philosophy’s central concerns. The consequence is that for analytical philosophy there is little or no sense in which music might be said to convey anything about philosophy.

The early Wittgenstein did not accept such a view, and the later Wittgenstein did not do so either. One of the reasons is that he questions the substantialisation of concepts like ‘language’ or ‘philosophy’ which implies that their boundaries can be clearly drawn, as opposed to their being words whose differing uses can be related in terms of ‘family resemblance’. The same applies to ‘music’, so the music/language/philosophy relationship cannot be considered as something fixed, least of all by a specifically ‘philosophical’ approach, of the kind, for example, that asks in general terms ‘Is music a language?’ Before exploring in more detail how Wittgenstein responds to music, it is worth briefly demonstrating how odd the neglect of music by Wittgenstein’s commentators actually is.

The remarks cited below appear in different kinds of text, from diaries, to more obviously philosophical texts, and they all suggest how central music is for Wittgenstein. However, it is worth stressing that I am not claiming that ‘Music’ is some kind of major philosophical solution to key dilemmas in Wittgenstein. Such a claim would repeat from the opposite direction the problems I am concerned to circumvent, because it would regard music as a positive answer to philosophical problems, rather than as something which questions the very nature of

1 Alber (2000) is one of the few philosophers to address the issue directly. A more extensive treatment is the outstanding Ph.D. dissertation ‘Wittgenstein’s Music: Logic, Meaning, and the Fate of Aesthetic Autonomy’ by Paulo de Castro (University of London 2007), who has been of great help to me in this chapter. I have also profited from talking to (and playing jazz with) William Day and reading the manuscript of his ‘The Aesthetic Dimension of Wittgenstein’s Later Writings’.

2 This might sound a little dismissive, but reference to specific works of ‘analytical aesthetics’ in the most significant mainstream work in analytical philosophy is exceedingly rare.
philosophy. Here, then, are just four examples – there are very many more – which should inform any discussion of this topic. M. O’C. Drury reports that, while working on the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein said to him that ‘It is impossible for me to say in my book one word about all that music has meant in my life. How then can I hope to be understood?’ (in Rhees 1984: 160). This may be only a reported remark (there are similar reports from others: see, e.g., Bouveresse 1973: 13), but consider the following from Wittgenstein’s diary in 1930:

> I often think that the highest thing I would like to achieve would be to compose a melody. Or I wonder that, given my desire for it, one has never occurred to me. But then I must say that it is impossible that one will ever occur to me, because I am lacking something essential or the most essential thing for it. For this reason it hovers before me as such a high ideal because it is as though I could summarise my life and could present it crystallised. Even if it were only a little, shabby crystal, it would still be one.

(Wittgenstein 1999a: 21)

In *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein says in 1931: ‘There are problems that I can never get close to, which are not in my line or in my world. Problems of the Western world of thought that Beethoven (and perhaps in part Goethe) got close to, but which no philosopher has ever confronted (Nietzsche perhaps went past them). And perhaps they are lost for Western philosophy . . .’ (Wittgenstein 1980: 9). He also asserts in the same collection, coincidentally echoing Friedrich Schlegel, that ‘People today think that scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians etc. to give them pleasure. That the latter have something to teach them never occurs to them’ (ibid.: 36). Examples from his more well-known philosophical texts will be examined in the rest of the chapter.

These remarks make it hard to regard music as just a topic which sometimes appears in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, as an example, say, of a more general philosophical issue. Unlike his imagined melody, Wittgenstein does not think that philosophy could be what might ‘crystallise’ a life. Indeed, much of his work consists in the effort therapeutically to ‘cure’ us of philosophical problems. If Wittgenstein’s failure to convey what music has meant to him means that we are unlikely to understand him, music cannot be peripheral to his thinking, not least because a major part of that thinking is concerned precisely with
what can and cannot meaningfully be said. In the passage involving Beethoven the very fact that Wittgenstein adumbrates the possibility that music may address things which philosophy fails to address means that music must be significant in characterising the scope of his project. The easy way out here is to argue that the later Wittgenstein regarded differing forms of articulation as good for different purposes – which is undoubtedly the case – but this does not explain why music so often occurs in conjunction with central, explicitly philosophical, issues in his work. What music and poetry may have to teach has not been of much, if any, concern to many commentators on Wittgenstein, who consider science and philosophy, but not music, as means of ‘instruction’. How, then, can one develop an approach that reveals how music might ‘teach’ us, without just turning music into something to be explained by philosophy? It is here that connections between Wittgenstein and Heidegger will become significant.

Logical form and ontological difference

The remarks about music from the period of the composition of the Tractatus offered a way for me to introduce the notion of metaphysics. One of the recurring themes in discussion of Wittgenstein is the relationship of the Tractatus to his later work. Much of the discussion relates to his move from a position with apparent traditional metaphysical implications to one which is expressly suspicious of metaphysical claims. The Tractatus restricts the scope of meaningful use of language and engages with very specific points of logic and meaning in the manner of the analytical philosophy that derives from it. However, unlike some of that philosophy, the Tractatus also addresses broad metaphysical and ontological concerns with very explicit cultural implications. The question which troubles many commentators is the extent to which Wittgenstein is responding positively or negatively to these concerns. This question can initially be addressed by looking at his use of the word ‘nonsense’ (‘Unsinn’).

In its own terms, the Tractatus itself comes, as we saw, into the category of nonsense. The text consists neither of empirical nor of logical propositions, which it claims are the only forms of language that have meaning, and this suggests a link to music, which is also ‘nonsense’ in this respect. Wittgenstein indicates such a link in the notes preceding the writing of the text, as well as in certain passages of the Tractatus itself, which discuss ‘logical form’. In the recent collection of essays, The New
Wittgenstein, the question of whether Wittgenstein changed his philosophical stance as radically as is often assumed between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* is seen as germane to understanding his work. A focus of the discussion in the volume is precisely the interpretation of nonsense in the *Tractatus*. Music is, however, not addressed by any of those involved in the discussion, even though it plays a role in the text. I want to suggest that taking music into account offers a way of understanding the relationship between the earlier and the later work which may avoid some of the dilemmas that the philosophers in *The New Wittgenstein* fail adequately to confront.

An initial difficulty here is whether the interpretation of nonsense is (1) supposed to establish Wittgenstein’s own view, in order to show continuity or discontinuity between the early and the late work, or whether (2) it is an exploration of a core issue in modern philosophy, which appears in Wittgenstein’s texts, but which needs to be investigated in a manner not limited to the interpretation of one philosopher. Cora Diamond’s exploration of the issue of nonsense, for example, shifts, in the same paragraph, between claims such as ‘Wittgenstein . . . does not intend us to grasp what can be seen from the point of view of philosophical investigation’, to assertions like ‘The *Tractatus* . . . tells us, in part through its framing propositions . . .’ (Crary and Read 2000: 160). Similarly, claims about Wittgenstein’s ‘aims’ go along with the perceived need to ‘read the *Tractatus* right’ (ibid.: 161). If doing the latter corresponds to establishing what the former are, there is no problem, but this could only be the case if there were no serious hermeneutic problems involved in the interpretation of philosophical texts. Especially in the case of Wittgenstein, this seems highly implausible. My criticism might seem rather peripheral to the issue of music and philosophy, but the combination of these interpretative problems with the authors’ failure even to mention music is indicative of a stance in relation to language and meaning that music can be used to question.

We need first to identify the core of the claims of the ‘new Wittgensteinians’, as this relates directly to issues that Wittgenstein links to music. Their unifying premise is precisely that the ‘therapeutic’ aims of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy should be understood as being continuous with his aims in the *Tractatus*. The reasons have to do with whether it is possible, or actually makes any sense, to think that philosophy can seek or arrive at an ‘external standpoint on language’ (ibid.: 4), i.e. at an account of how language relates to reality. The idea is that the *Tractatus* ‘presents us with metaphysical sentences which lead us to participate
in an imaginative activity of articulating the structure of the illusion of an external standpoint on language – an imaginative activity through which we can come to recognize that illusion as an illusion’ (ibid.: 13). What appear to be assertions about how language represents or ‘pictures’ reality will therefore turn out to be nonsense, in what they term an ‘austere’ sense, that is no different from them saying, in Diamond’s phrase, ‘piggly wiggle tiggle’.

The New Orleans clarinet player, Johnny Dodds, made a record with the title ‘Piggly Wiggly’ in 1929, where the rhythm and melodic constitution of the record’s theme are the source of the title. This link of music and language suggests the need for a conception of ‘meaning’ that makes it possible to understand why Dodds’ record might be called what it is. The capacity of language and music to share such rhythmic and melodic structures will be vital to Wittgenstein. Diamond’s argument, though, is that because of its notion of meaning – which presumably excludes anything of the kind just mentioned – the Tractatus becomes an assault on traditional metaphysical claims, such as the book’s own opening assertion that ‘The world is everything that is the case.’ The reader is led to the point at the end of the book where the transcendental conditions of intelligibility of the world which they thought they were supposed to be grasping disappear like a mirage – hence the famous concluding image in the Tractatus of the ‘ladder’ formed by its propositions that should be thrown away if one is ‘to see the world right’.

In this view the book becomes, as P. M. S. Hacker argues, a kind of Hegelian dialectic: each particular moment of it is revealed as negative by the succeeding moments. There is, though, no culmination in the form of ‘absolute knowledge’, in which the negative moments become part of a self-describing whole. As we saw, Hegel’s Logic can, if its systematic claims to grasp the nature of being are found unconvincing, be seen as in some respects analogous to Beethoven’s music (see also Bowie 2003b). Something similar might in certain respects therefore be said of the Tractatus if the austere reading is accepted. That is, however, not how the Tractatus is actually regarded in this reading. At the end of the Tractatus we are, then, seen as having had the experience of a structure of negations that add up to something which cannot be said to refer to the world. The conception is somewhat analogous to what we observed in Schlegel’s and Novalis’ conception of the absolute, where art became the means of understanding the absolute’s resistance to philosophical articulation (see Frank and Soldati 1989).
Art, though, plays no role in the new reading of the *Tractatus*, and this is puzzling, given the *Tractatus*’ references to aesthetics. James Conant sums up his idea of the result of reading the *Tractatus* as follows: ‘I grasp that there has been no “it” in my grasp all along’ (Crary and Read 2000: 196) because this ‘it’ cannot be thought, and so is nonsense. The idea is that the ‘illusion that the *Tractatus* seeks to explode, above all, is that we can run up against the limits of language’ (ibid.: 197). We can’t do this because it entails the metaphysical assumption that there is anything intelligible to be thought about what lies beyond such limits. This idea has no sense, insofar as it demands that language, the condition of thoughts, itself occupy a position beyond or external to language. This can seem a plausible reading, but it tells too restrictive a story.

The dissenting voice in *The New Wittgenstein*, Hacker, offers important contextual, biographical, and historical evidence against the austere reading. Part of the problem here is, though, again whether the issue is establishing what Wittgenstein meant, or assessing the validity of the approach per se. The question that concerns us becomes apparent in one of Hacker’s pieces of evidence. This is a letter by Wittgenstein to Russell in 1919, in which he says that his main concern in the *Tractatus* ‘is the theory of what can be expressed (‘gesagt’) by prop[osition]s – (and, which comes to the same, what can be thought) and what can not be expressed by prop[osition]s, but can only be shown (‘gezeigt’); which I believe is the cardinal problem of philosophy’ (ibid.: 373). Interpreting this contrast between the sayable and the showable brings out some instructive philosophical differences. Conant contrasts the ‘substantial’ conception of nonsense, in which ‘the task of elucidation’ – which Wittgenstein sees as a key task of the *Tractatus* – ‘is to “show” something which cannot be said’, with his own austere conception, in which the task ‘is to show that we are prone to an illusion of meaning something when we mean nothing’ (ibid.: 177). He therefore thinks that the core sense of showing does not involve gesturing towards something unsayable, but is evident instead when the ‘apparently constative use of language (one which offers an appearance of representing a state of affairs) is revealed as illusory’ (ibid.: 179). Once we have realised this we are supposedly free of a certain approach to philosophical foundations, and this links the austere reading to Wittgenstein’s later work.

3 The reading is therefore in some ways analogous to the kind of anti-metaphysical reading of Hegel we encountered in Brandom.
What is surprising about the austere reading is that, on the one hand, it constitutes a rejection of metaphysics, but, on the other, does so via a sternly philosophical approach which is attached to a remarkably narrow conception of meaning, based on constative sentences that represent states of affairs. The reason for this narrowness (which echoes one aspect of the *Tractatus*, while ignoring those relating to music) is the desire to counter the possibility of an ‘external’, metaphysical view of language, and this desire requires certain kinds of locution to be radically nonsensical. However, the price of this narrowness is very high. Hacker cites a comment by Wittgenstein to Engelmann in 1917: ‘The poem by Uhland is really magnificent. And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – contained in what has been uttered’ (ibid.: 372). It is already clear from this that, whatever is meant by nonsense in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein takes the idea of unsayability seriously, and he continues to do so well beyond the period of the *Tractatus*. In 1931, for example, he says: ‘The unsayable (‘das Unausprechbare’) (what appears mysterious to me and which I cannot say) perhaps gives the background against which what I could say gains its meaning’ (Wittgenstein 1980: 16).

The nature of the text of the *Tractatus* and the disputes about its meaning suggest that there are contradictory impulses in the early Wittgenstein. One impulse is to seek pure solutions to philosophical problems, so that we could give an account of the logical structure of reality, which would mean that the problems of philosophy are solved by his text, as indeed he claims they are. The other impulse leads to the realisation that, even if one were to succeed in obtaining such answers, much that is vital to human life would be left unaddressed, hence his assertion that solving the problems does not add up to having done anything substantial. If the impulse that leads to the unsayable really just results in saying things equivalent to ‘piggly wiggle tiggle’, this raises questions about the other forms in which this impulse appears in Wittgenstein’s work, as his response to the Uhland poem, and his concern with how little philosophy can really say, suggest. From what perspective is it possible to separate the sense in which poetry or music shows things from the ‘austere’ demonstration that certain kinds of philosophical assertion that are supposed to show what they cannot say are nonsense, given that Wittgenstein undeniably associates the two kinds of showing?

Take the following example. In Wittgenstein’s 1932–5 Lectures, in remarks on aesthetics, he discusses the idea of bringing a thing ‘nearer
to an ideal’, where there need be nothing in common between the kinds of ideal in differing practices, from cooking, to music, and beyond. He maintains that ‘When one describes changes made in a musical arrangement as being directed to bringing the arrangement of parts nearer to an ideal, the ideal is not before us like a straight line which is set before us when we try to draw it’ (Wittgenstein 1982: 37). In the terms of the *Tractatus* the concept of ‘the ideal’ is therefore nonsense, because it does not refer to something which could be true or false and which is empirically available. The question is whether being nonsensical in this sense means that something can play no meaningful role in how we understand the world. Novalis asserts that the ‘ideal’ can never be achieved because ‘it would destroy itself. To have the effect of an ideal it must not stand in the sphere of common reality’ (Novalis 1978: 170). The fact is that the words ‘the ideal’ can be essential to certain kinds of musical practice, and can only be regarded as a meaningless sequence of noises if one employs a very restrictive conception of meaning. Anyone who is involved in music is likely to find this use of ‘the ideal’ apposite, and it is invidious to claim, as the austere conception would have it, that they are not ‘thinking anything’.

The austere reading’s rejection of any account which would describe how language relates to the world ‘from outside’ does pose interesting questions about what has generally been assumed to be the representationalist stance of the *Tractatus*. At the same time the position seems, via its conception of what constitutes having a ‘thought’, to regard something akin to representationalism as a criterion of meaning, given that everything that does not fulfil this criterion is nonsense in the austere sense, rather than a use of language of a different kind that has to be understood in an appropriate way. In *Art as Experience* Dewey contrasts ‘expression’ and ‘statement’: ‘Science states meanings; art expresses them’ (Dewey 1980: 84). He cites the example of Van Gogh describing his attempt to picture ‘utter desolation’ in a letter to his brother, where the words ‘taken by themselves are not the expression; they only hint at it. The expressiveness, the esthetic meaning, is the picture itself’ (ibid.). Does the austere position wish to claim that the meaning of the picture is nonsense, and what is the gain from such a restriction of meaning to propositionally articulable ‘thoughts’? Dewey elsewhere suggests of the material of art that ‘it is used to express a meaning which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence: the meaning not of what it physically is, but of what it expresses’ (ibid.: 201). The same must be true of language itself, which, as airwaves, marks on paper, etc., is able to express the world of which it also forms an ‘ontic’ part in
Heidegger’s sense (see below), because it is in this respect an entity like any other.

How can we talk about language’s ability to express the world, if we are therefore always already employing what we seek to explain? As we have seen, this problem is one of the sources of the importance of music for thinking about language in modernity. Music’s difference from mere noise offers an ‘unsayable’ experience of meaning which connects to what it is to ‘inhabit’ a language. In the austere view the circularity of using language to explain language means that an external viewpoint on language is a mirage. However, this assumption need not entail that exploration of how language may show what it cannot state will actually be just an account of ‘meaning nothing’. It suggests, rather, that the (Frege-influenced) conception of thought and meaning involved in the austere conception is useful only to analytical philosophers with a representationalist agenda.

Let us now look more closely at some aspects of the *Tractatus* and the 1914–16 *Notebooks*. The difference between sense and nonsense in the *Tractatus* can be put in terms of the difference between propositions about contingent states of affairs in the world that can be true or false because they are based on empirical evidence and are logically coherent, and propositions about the world as a whole or about the forms that make the world intelligible which in some way ‘express’ what cannot be propositionally articulated. The latter cannot involve contingency and are not bivalent because they are the condition of possibility of speaking intelligibly about the world at all. This division involves a version of what Heidegger calls ‘ontological difference’, the difference between ‘ontic’ statements about ‘entities’, particular things in particular contexts, and ontological statements about ‘being’, the fact that things are intelligible at all. The latter have to do with such issues as the immediate sense that something is music, because it is not, as we shall see Wittgenstein saying in a moment, ‘just a jumble of notes’. This base-line intelligibility is the condition of possibility of assertions about them as entities.4

In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein talks in terms which appear to locate him firmly in the metaphysical tradition, but the existential implications of remarks like the following also suggest something different: ‘The big problem around which everything turns that I write is: Is there, a priori, an order in the world, and if so, in what does it consist?’ (Wittgenstein

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4 Even someone who denies that a particular collection of notes is music relies on a prior understanding that some collections of notes are not just a jumble.
In a less obviously metaphysical vein, he says, coming closer to Heidegger: ‘The artistic miracle is that there is a world. That there is what there is’ (ibid.: 181), which has to do with what he intends with the idea of ‘the mystical’ (6.44 ibid.: 84; on this see Bouweresse 1973). Elsewhere he talks of his task as being to ‘explain the essence of the proposition’, and, in the same context, of ‘explaining (‘angeben’) the essence of all being’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 129): the two are in some sense inseparable. Heidegger’s lectures from the middle to the late 1920s similarly spend a great deal of time on the nature of the proposition as a way of approaching the question of being. Some of Wittgenstein’s questions seem to demand metaphysical answers, but the kind of answers which he gives to them at this time are the source of the differences we have outlined concerning how to interpret nonsense. He frequently brings up music in relation to these issues, and it is in this context that the remarks cited in chapter 1 occur.

Wittgenstein’s concern is with music as something which is intelligible in ways that cannot be verbally articulated. This concern is related to his remarks regarding what cannot be said about the intelligibility of propositions, which depends on their ‘logical form’: ‘The proposition is not a jumble of words. – (As the musical theme is not a jumble of notes)’ (3.141 ibid.: 18). When he says that ‘What can be shown, cannot be said’ (4.1212 ibid.: 34), there are therefore grounds for thinking of both music and language in relation to whatever is intended by the notion of showing. Dewey’s example of Van Gogh’s painting suggests an obvious way of grasping the difference between showing and saying ‘desolation’, and examples of desolation from music, like parts of the third act of Tristan, or parts of Shostakovich’s symphonies and quartets, can be regarded in similar terms. A verbal account cannot replace the experience of the music itself, although a verbal account still affects how we hear music, and the music can, in turn, affect how we understand the verbal account.

Both logic as ‘a condition of the world’ (ibid.: 172) – ‘world’ in the sense of that which involves an intelligible order – and music have to do with what is ‘unsayable’, but both also are construed as showing what makes meaning possible. Wittgenstein implicitly links the two when he claims that ‘ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic’ (ibid.), and that ‘Ethics and aesthetics are the same’ (6.421 ibid.: 83, 172), because they have to do with why the world is intelligible at all. The ‘meaning of the world must lie outside of it’ (6.41 ibid.: 82), because everything within the world is contingent and is expressed in
propositions which can be true or false. If there is to be ‘a priori’ an ‘order in the world’ this cannot be contingent, which is why ethics and aesthetics lie outside the contingent world, as conditions of its intelligibility. The idea that the ‘artistic miracle is that there is a world’ becomes easier to interpret in this respect, especially if one thinks in terms of its analogy to Heidegger’s ontological difference. Wittgenstein is at this stage still thinking of an essentially metaphysical answer to the fact of the world’s intelligibility, which leads him to the idea of ‘the totality of elementary propositions’ (§.5561 ibid.: 66), the provision of which ‘describes the world completely’ (§.26 ibid.: 39). Famously, though, he never actually offers us any such propositions, and this failure – the austere reading would not see this in terms of failure, because of the meaninglessness of the very idea of such propositions – is part of what leads him to his later way of philosophising. However one looks at it, the later philosophy cannot be interpreted as a search for a metaphysical order of the world.

It is hard to give a precise account of what Wittgenstein means in this context, because much of what he says refers to technical issues between himself, and Russell and Frege. If the strictly logical issues were the real core of the Tractatus it would be difficult to explain the work’s impact in so many areas. It is noticeable, though, that much of the discussion of the Tractatus in the secondary literature does not delve into the detail of the logical issues. This is not least because the very status of logic is part of what is at issue, and this cannot be established in terms of logic itself. One way of approaching the text which does not require specific attention to the detailed logical investigations is via the remarks from the Notebooks on music as ‘a means of expression with which I can talk about language’. The point of such a remark relates to the idea, as Bouveresse puts it, that ‘The first and most important of the things which language cannot say is the “fact” of language, the fact that something can be said, i.e. the capacity of certain facts to “represent” other facts’ (Bouveresse 1973: 57). The discussion both in the Tractatus and in the Notebooks relates to this capacity to ‘represent’, and music appears directly and indirectly in both discussions. The link to Heidegger can help make things clearer here.

A key source of Heidegger’s approach to the ‘question of being’ is Husserl’s notion of ‘categorial intuition’, from his sixth Logical Investigation. Husserl’s point is that our perception would not be the way it is without a whole series of meanings which structure what we perceive. These meanings are not themselves perceivable objects, and so
cannot be expressed in empirical propositions: they are the forms of relationship in which things can stand to other things. Husserl says, for example, that ‘I can see the colour, not the being-coloured’ (Husserl 1992: 4, 666). The colour is inferentially related to the colours it is not and statements about the colour can be true or false, whereas being coloured in the sense intended here is a condition of possibility of there being colour talk in the first place.\(^5\) Similarly, ‘I can paint \(A\) and paint \(B\), can also paint both in the same pictorial space; but I cannot paint the \textit{both, }\(A\) and \(B\)’ (ibid.: 688). ‘Sensuous intuition’ sees the white paper, and \(A\) and \(B\); ‘categorial intuition’ is the ‘seeing’, or understanding of the paper \textit{as} white, the grasping of the relationship or ‘state of affairs’ ‘both \(A\) and \(B\)’. What is expressed by words like ‘one’, ‘the’, ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if’ and ‘then’, ‘thus’, ‘all’ and ‘none’ cannot be perceived, but without these words we could not understand the world that we do perceive. The same applies to ‘being’: ‘Being is nothing \textit{in} the object, not a part of it’, it is not a predicate that may or may not be ascribed to the object: it is ‘\textit{absolutely not something which can be perceived}’ (ibid.: 666). What Husserl adverts to is, then, in the sense of the \textit{Tractatus}, ‘unsayable’, because it is the condition of possibility of what we do say being intelligible via its articulation in relationships whose forms have to do with ‘logic’.

The status of these conditions is crucial, and it will be here that the role of music becomes central in Wittgenstein’s approach. Are the conditions the \textit{logical} conditions of all meaningful thought, as Husserl seems to think? Or are they, as Heidegger comes to argue, a prior practical horizon of intelligibility that may change in differing circumstances, which allows us to grasp things \textit{as} things. Such a horizon can be conceived of in terms of pre-conceptual engagement with the world which is the basis of how things matter at all. This engagement can be exemplified by rhythm, as a pre-conceptual form of ordering that links us to nature, and we saw how this idea is connected to Kant’s transcendental philosophy via the concept of schematism. Rhythm in the sense at issue here cannot be perceived. What is perceived are sonic or other events, which are understood \textit{as} rhythmic (where the understanding may predominantly take the form of a feeling) if they form certain kinds of relationship with each other or change people’s relationship to their world, e.g. by making it possible to dance. Wittgenstein will move from a position closer to Husserl (and Kant) in the \textit{Tractatus}, to one closer

\(^5\) The assumption is that there is nothing in the perceptible world which is not coloured.
to Heidegger in the later work, but the move is not just from a more logic-based to a more pragmatic conception. Music can suggest a way of linking these positions which does not require one to make the excessive restrictions on the notion of meaning characteristic of the austere reading.

In the *Tractatus* the idea of language’s relationship to the world is regarded in terms of a ‘representing internal relationship’, like that between ‘The gramophone record, the musical thought, the musical notation, the sound waves’, all of which can convey the same music because they share a ‘logical construction’ (4.014 Wittgenstein 1984: 27). The important thing is the scope of what Wittgenstein discusses in terms of ‘logic’, which has to do with ‘representation’. The remarks on the gramophone record, etc., can be connected with the ideas that the ‘image’ is a ‘model of reality’ (2.12 ibid.: 15), and that the ‘form of the representation (‘Abbildung’) is the possibility that things relate to each other like the elements of the image’ (2.151 ibid.). In the *Notebooks* he gives the examples of hieroglyphic writing and of a drawn image of two men fencing, to suggest that ‘real pictures of states of affairs can be right or not be right’ (ibid.: 95). He uses the word ‘stimmen’, which has the musical sense of ‘being in tune’. ‘Logic’ has to do with the form common to image and reality, and he is concerned with how it can be discussed in philosophy. The image ‘cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it (‘es weist sie auf’’) (2.172 ibid.: 16), and what it shows is ‘logical form’ (2.18 ibid.). Representing the form of representation would threaten a regress of ‘representing the representation of the form of representation’, etc., so there must be something ‘immediate’ about ‘showing’. This implies a link between nonsense and the immediacy we experience in understanding an image – or music. There seems to be little space in the austere reading of the *Tractatus* for such a link.

Wittgenstein’s use of the term ‘image’ is unusual, as the remark that ‘The proposition is an image of reality’ (4.02 ibid.: 26) suggests. It is therefore important that when he also uses music as an example to indicate the role of logical form he still employs the word ‘language’. In his elucidation of the remark on the conveying of music by record, score, sound waves, etc., he talks of a ‘universal rule’ for ‘translation of the language of notes into the language of the gramophone record’ (4.0141 ibid.: 27). The differing ways in which a score and a record encode the physical components of music, from frequencies to durations, can be given a scientific explanation. The fact that what is encoded is then manifested as frequencies and durations by sound waves is also explicable,
as it is in written and mechanically recorded verbal language: the use of computers in the manipulation of music and language makes this obvious. It might therefore sound as though ‘logical form’ were just a way of talking about what we now think of in relation to digitisation. Two things are, however, not explicable in this manner. (1) Why are there such correspondences between differing means of encoding sound that make possible the realisation of the same music? (2) Why is the result of this something which we understand as music or language, which is not just a physical phenomenon to be explained in empirical propositions?

We already encountered Merleau-Ponty’s arguments on this topic in chapter 1, and the point is fundamental to a variety of phenomenological positions, as Husserl’s remarks on conditions of intelligibility also showed. As Dewey argued, art ‘is used to express a meaning which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence: the meaning not of what it physically is, but of what it expresses’. Wittgenstein’s use of ‘language’ to refer to music means that when he says ‘The proposition [which is, remember, an ‘image’ of reality, of the kind also present in the score, etc.] can represent the whole of reality, but it cannot represent what it must have in common with reality in order to represent it – logical form’ (4.12 ibid.: 33), the scope of the remark can be seen to be wider than sometimes assumed. This affects the interpretation of the question of ‘showing’ and of nonsense, and in fact suggests the kind of continuity between the work of this period and the later work sought in the austere reading. The employment of the phrase ‘the language of notes’ will be the key here.

The upshot of Wittgenstein’s investigation of ‘logic’ is that logical statements are in fact all tautologies. They do not mean anything, because they do not state anything determinate about the world: ‘But all propositions of logic say the same. Namely nothing’ (5.43 ibid.: 54). At the same time, without them the world could not be articulated at all because it would lack structures that render it intelligible and make possible what we can say. Unlike an empirical proposition ‘The tautology has no truth conditions, for it is unconditionally true’ (4.461 ibid.: 43); like the contradiction it is therefore ‘meaningless’/’nonsensical’ (‘sinnlos’). Tautologies are, however, not what he calls ‘unsinnig’ (4.4611 ibid.). This raises a revealing question of translation. The meaninglessness of tautology is explained by the fact that meaningful propositions are not unconditionally true, being bivalent: ‘The grass is green’ depends on its truth conditions in the empirical world, i.e. on whether the particular grass in question is green or not.
'Unsinnig' relates to ‘Unsinn’, ‘non-/un-sense’, so the translation might be that they are ‘not nonsensical’, perhaps because they pertain to what does have sense/meaning as its condition. The word can also have the stronger connotation of something that is simply ‘absurd’, which would add an existential dimension to the question of logic: without logic we would be confronted with an existential absurdity. Wittgenstein says that tautology and contradiction ‘belong to the symbolism... like “0” belongs to the symbolism of arithmetic’ (ibid.), namely as something without which positive quantities could not be expressed, but which is itself nothing.

In 1915, after a remark in which he states that ‘Language is articulated’, which in the Tractatus follows the remark about musical themes not being jumbles of notes, Wittgenstein asserts that ‘Musical themes are in a certain sense propositions (‘Sätze’). The knowledge of the essence of logic will for this reason lead to the knowledge of the essence of music’ (ibid.: 130). A bit later he adds: ‘Melody is a kind of tautology, it is complete in itself; it satisfies itself’ (ibid.). Soon after this, reversing the perspective from which knowledge of the essence of logic would explain music, he ponders whether there ‘is something which cannot be expressed by a proposition (and which is also not an object)? That could then not be expressed by language’ (ibid.: 143–4). This idea leads him to ask ‘But is language the only language?’ (ibid.: 144), and thence to the speculative assumption concerning music as a ‘means of expression with which I can talk about language’ (ibid.). Crucially, the remark is accompanied by the observation that ‘it is characteristic of science that no musical themes occur in it’ (ibid.). This observation is part of the repeated insistence, which also occurs in Heidegger, that science does not answer philosophical problems. The reason for this in Wittgenstein is that science consists of empirical propositions, and philosophy’s concern is with how such propositions are intelligible at all. The question is, then, how music relates to philosophy.

The remarks just cited admittedly do not find their way into the Tractatus, so they may just mark a working-out of Wittgenstein’s thinking which leads him elsewhere. Even regarded as such, the very fact that he ponders the issues in this way indicates something central to his thinking, and the recurrence of related issues in the later philosophy suggests that more is at stake than merely a discarded idea. Given the disappearance in the later philosophy of the notion of logical form, the idea that logic will ‘lead to the knowledge of the essence of music’ can no longer be sustained, and this is what interests me. Let us consider the remarks
a bit more closely. The link between musical themes and propositions is seen in terms of the possible ‘knowledge of the essence’ of logic and music. This is a traditional metaphysical aim, and the remarks occur in proximity to his asking ‘Is there, a priori, an order in the world, and, if so, in what does it consist?’ (ibid.: 145). Wittgenstein’s work at this time does seem to be focused on the meaning of life, as remarks like ‘God is the way everything is’ (ibid.: 173) make clear. This is especially apparent when considered in relation to the claim that scientific explanation only tells us how things contingently are, not how it is that they are ordered at all. What is in question is our capacity to understand the order of things by understanding the ‘essence of logic’. The aim seems a strictly rationalist one, but the very fact that music is introduced into the investigation as a response to the question of how to ‘talk about language’, without itself being located within language, points to the ambivalence.

Schopenhauer’s idea of music as the most direct expression of the Will, which is not accessible as representation, is relevant to Wittgenstein’s ideas here. In the *Tractatus* representations are expressed in meaningful propositions, so the domain of nonsense is in some way related to what Schopenhauer designates by the Will. However, pointing out the parallel with Schopenhauer does not account for all the implications of the remarks on music. Wittgenstein’s remarks about the will in the *Notebooks* link the goodness and badness of ‘my will’ to ‘the meaning of the world’ (ibid.: 167), but reference to the will is omitted in the equivalent part of the *Tractatus*. This indicates an ambivalence about positive metaphysical claims, which is confirmed when Wittgenstein says something that can be translated either as ‘One cannot speak of the will as the bearer of the ethical’ (which might mean that it could be shown), or as ‘You can’t say that the will is the bearer of the ethical’ (which would mean that it is not justifiable to do so) (6.423 ibid.: 83). Wittgenstein is, then, located between metaphysics¹ and metaphysics², because the only meaningful claims have to be those of the natural sciences, but this leaves a ‘meaning’ deficit of another kind.

Perhaps the most instructive remark in this context is the one in which melody is ‘a kind of tautology’, ‘is complete in itself’, and ‘satisfies itself’. A melody does not say anything about the empirical world; it is, though, articulated in a manner that relates to propositions which do picture the empirical world, but whose relationship to that world cannot be explained by further propositions. The necessary truth of the tautology is the basis of understanding contingent truths, so there is a link
between the unconditionality of the tautology and the self-sufficiency of a melody which has no need to refer beyond itself. Wittgenstein will frequently explore this kind of relationship between music and verbal assertion in his subsequent work. The aesthetic sense of something which is self-justifying, like a tautology, is echoed when he says that ‘the happy life justifies of its own accord that it is the only right life’ (ibid.: 173), and so requires no external legitimation. The same sense of that which is self-justifying occurs when he maintains of logic that ‘People have always suspected that there must be a realm of questions whose answers are – a priori – symmetrical, and unified into a closed regular structure (‘Gebilde’)’ (5.4541 ibid.: 55). This idea of logic points to the hope for a metaphysical account of the world’s intelligibility, which Wittgenstein will later give up. However, the connection to melody points to what is unsayable but still shows a coherence which cannot be said to be meaningless in the way in which logic might be said to be. The two aspects here make the austere reading questionable in key respects.

Logic must ‘take care of itself’ (5.473 ibid.: 57): nothing we say can affect it, because our ability to say anything at all depends on it, so it is transcendental in Kant’s sense. Music need not, though, be regarded in such terms, even though Wittgenstein at this time has an investment in it as something which is equally self-contained. In this respect he does come close to Schopenhauer, and to the problems I tried to show in Schopenhauer’s position, in which all music comes to have the same significance. So what does all this tell us about how to read the *Tractatus* and about its significance for modern philosophy? Nothing I have said gives a decisive indication of the extent to which the austere reading is defensible, but it can affect the way the issues are framed, because so much depends on how one conceives of meaning and interpretation in the first place. The conception of ‘showing’ is inseparable from the way the issue of nonsense is presented in the *Tractatus* and in the other texts of the period. Consequently it is only on the basis of a very circumscribed ‘rational reconstruction’ of the *Tractatus* that Conant’s argument that the task of elucidation ‘is to show that we are prone to an illusion of meaning something when we mean nothing’ can be regarded as the whole story. If what is conveyed by musical forms of expression matters, the notion of ‘meaning’ which Conant employs is not adequate to the

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6 Something similar is involved, as we shall see in the next chapter, in Adorno’s idea of music as ‘intentionless’, and as a form of ‘judgementless synthesis’.
sense, even in early Wittgenstein, that music tells us something about our relationship to the world. While Wittgenstein will cease to frame the question of music in the manner of the *Notebooks*, he still gives music a central role in relation to meaning. We now need to consider aspects of how his thought subsequently develops.

Playing the language-piano

The transition to Wittgenstein’s later positions can be suggested by his assertion in the *Philosophical Investigations* that ‘Understanding a sentence in language is much more related to understanding a theme in music than one thinks’ (ibid.: 226) (on this see Ridley 2004). In the terms of the *Tractatus* this would be the case because the sentence and the musical theme have ‘logical form’ in common, as that which allows one fact to ‘represent’ another fact. Hans Sluga sums up the move to the later philosophy when he talks of Wittgenstein’s ‘rejection of the idea that our sentences are meant to mirror the logical structure of the world’ and of his ceasing to hold that ‘language serves a single function, that of depicting reality’ (Sluga and Stern 1997: 331). The philosophical motivation for Wittgenstein’s change of conception is apparent in the ‘Big Typescript’: ‘If there were a “solution” of the logical (philosophical) problems then we would only have to remind ourselves that once they were not solved (and then too people had to be able to live and think)’ (Wittgenstein 1993: 180). This comment points to a growing sense that what counts is how people actually do live and think, and that the search for the logical structure of the world may tell us very little about how language works in everyday life. Rather than go into Wittgenstein’s move in detail, I want to trace aspects of it which connect to music, in order to adumbrate a different way of looking at the relationship between the earlier and the later work.

The theme which underlies the changes in Wittgenstein’s views is summed up by his assertion in 1930 that ‘One cannot describe the essence of language in language’ (Wittgenstein 1999a: 3, 30). The contrast to his earlier position lies in the scope of the term ‘language’. ‘Language’ becomes any articulation that can be understood, and such understanding depends upon the place of what is to be understood in its contexts. This is an inferentialist view, of the sort we encountered in Brandom. There is, however, space in Wittgenstein’s version of the view to cater for the objections I made to Brandom concerning non-discursive forms of articulation. One consequence of Wittgenstein’s
new approach is that ‘A language I do not understand is not a language’ (ibid.: 106), because there would be no sense in which it makes the kind of connections on which meaning depends.

Music plays an extensive role in the exploratory texts of the early 1930s that lead to *Philosophical Investigations*. The straightforward reason for this would appear to be that music provides a series of analogies which allow Wittgenstein to expand his notion of language. However, if we can no longer be happy with the notion of specifying the limits of language, because in modernity it is no longer clear what ‘language’ is, we cannot assume that we can clearly delineate what ‘music’ is either. The point, as Wittgenstein comes to realise, is that we use all sorts of means with which to communicate, and the elements of these means rely on their relationships to other elements within particular practices. He talks, for example, of a colour sample as ‘only part of a language’ (ibid.: 54) – i.e. it is significant only in relation to other colour samples – and says that ‘(Words are not essential to language)’ (ibid.: 4, 186). Elsewhere he insists ‘Don’t forget here as well that verbal language is only *one* of very many languages and that there are transitions from it into the others. Consider the map in terms of what in it corresponds to the expression of verbal language’ (ibid.: 194). No form of language is self-contained, because some elements of each notional ‘language’ can play a role in more than one other language, and the borders between these languages need not be fixed.\(^7\)

In the subsequent remarks he considers these transitions in terms of music: ‘I must, if I speak to myself, already play on a given/existing language-piano’; ‘If I use a word in language then it is either because I wish to play [*anschlagen*, the word for striking a key on the piano] it as an already familiar note, or that I want to establish that I will use the word in future in such a way’ (ibid.: 170). A vital role is played here by gesture, which will be inseparable from ‘music’: ‘The child as well *learns* one language by means of another one. It learns verbal language via the language of gestures. But adults must presuppose or wait for the understanding of the latter. Nobody thinks of teaching the child the language of gestures’ (ibid.: 3, 249). An ability to perceive sense in gestures is therefore constitutive of what it is to be a being that can understand. Otherwise we would be faced with the regress

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\(^7\) This is why the attempts of Lyotard and others to use Wittgenstein to argue for radical incommensurabilities between language-games are doomed to failure. In which language-game does one locate assertions about the incommensurability between other language-games? (See the Conclusion.)
that Schleiermacher regarded as the essential problem in accounting for primary language acquisition: rules for understanding the gestures required to learn verbal language cannot be taught except by using other gestures, and these must precisely be understood without all being taught. Wittgenstein insists, however, that you cannot ‘replace the most common sentence by gestures’ (ibid.: 4, 213), because, as Herder suggested, verbal language’s way of picking out something as something cannot be achieved by gestures. This does not mean, though, that the two are mutually exclusive: they just play different roles in the practices in which ‘language’ consists. Language does not have definable boundaries, but is rather a term employed with regard to phenomena which gain meaning via their relationships to their contexts. The important question for us is the role that music plays in Wittgenstein’s revision of his notion of language as that which depends on logical form.

In chapter 5 we encountered Wittgenstein’s assertion from *Zettel* that ‘If a theme, a phrase, suddenly means something to you, you don’t have to be able to explain it. Just *this* gesture has been made accessible to you’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 27). The ‘making accessible’ in question is not the same as learning how to use a piece of verbal language via an explanation, but it is not wholly different from it either: not all verbal language forms part of the game of explaining, or of referring to objects. Asked in *Philosophical Investigations* what a pain sensation is, one of the interlocutors replies: ‘It is not a something, but it is not a nothing either . . . The paradox only disappears if we break radically with the idea that language always only functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: conveying thoughts – whether these are thoughts about houses, pains, good and evil, or whatever’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 376–7). The central term in Wittgenstein’s discussions of these issues is ‘understanding’. His assertion that ‘Understanding a musical phrase may also be called understanding a *language*’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 29) needs to be considered in conjunction with his remark that ‘Understanding a sentence means understanding a language’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 344). There is no purpose served here by attempting to establish the limits of the concept of ‘language’ in explicit theoretical terms, i.e. in seeking to objectify language. The term language can be employed for an indeterminate number of cases of what Schelling, referring to rhythm, described as ‘a succession which is in itself meaningless’ being

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8 I shall not deal here with ‘interpretation’, which Wittgenstein reserves for situations where the relevant rules of language are not fully evident.
transformed ‘into a significant one’ (Schelling 1/5, 493), and the same applies to the concept of ‘music’.

One implication of such ideas is that the notion of music as a philosophical mystery which philosophers over the centuries have striven in vain to comprehend can look as though it might be based in some respects on a misapprehension. It is not that music cannot have a whole spectrum of deep significances, but the expectation associated with a philosophical answer to the ‘unanswered question’ is that it will take the form of an explanation, so that music would be accounted for in representational terms. However, for Wittgenstein, neither language nor music need be thought of as primarily having the function of explaining or representing. His idea of the ‘making accessible’ of a gesture can be understood in terms of the musical theme or phrase becoming part of one’s world. This is not just a world of significant objects, but also of movements, impulses, feelings, etc., and it is in this integration into a world that its meaning consists. Such meaning connects to all sorts of other meanings, and this diversity of connections is arguably what generates the idea of music’s mysterious nature. Music’s connections to the world it helps to constitute by, for example, establishing a familiar mood or evoking a new kind of mood, framing a public event, articulating a different sense of the tempo of things, giving significance to a relationship between formal elements, or enabling the release of a blocked emotion, depends on the contexts in which it is encountered. These cannot be exhaustively incorporated into an explanatory characterisation of any particular music. This perspective leads Wittgenstein to maintain that ‘it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything’ (Wittgenstein 1969: 18), and that he seeks only to describe, rather than to establish a method of explanation like that in the sciences. His approach can be read as part of what constitutes his essential conservatism, but it can equally be read as a concern to regard things like music as resources, rather than as philosophical problems.

In the austere reading of the early work ‘meaning something’ is construed just in terms of ‘having thoughts’, which means that the Tractatus does not express any contentful thoughts. This raises the question of how we are to employ the notion of a thought, especially in the light of the notion, already present in Schlegel, of a ‘musical idea’. In a discussion of understanding someone’s performing a bodily movement, such

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9 See Cooper 2003, who develops Wittgensteinian ideas in this direction.
10 Music can, of course, be both a resource for philosophy and a problem for philosophy, but it has been too often seen solely as the latter.
as pointing, Wittgenstein writes: ‘Could one also reply: “I meant something by this movement, which I can only express by this movement”? (Music, musical thought)’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 6). The issue here is a kind of meaning which demands a particular gesture, and so cannot be articulated by an expression which can be replaced by another expression. In *Philosophical Investigations* he claims that

> We speak of the understanding of a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another sentence that says the same thing; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by another sentence. (As little as one musical theme by another.)

> In the one case it is the thought of the sentence that is common to different sentences; in the other something that only these words in these positions express. (Understanding a poem.)

(Wittgenstein 1984: 440–1)

His concern is to escape the picture in which a thought is something that accompanies the sentence that expresses it, which leads to the question of what the thought could be independently of the sentence by which it is expressed. However, this does not mean that the thought simply is the sentence. When he says ‘We might say: in all cases what one means by “thought” is what is alive in the sentence. That without which it is dead, a mere sequence of sounds or written shapes’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 25), such assertions do not constitute a general answer to what a thought is, but are rather a way of indicating the multiplicity of uses of the term. The idea is close to his remark about music not being a ‘jumble of notes’, but he then points out that we would not apply the same idea to what makes something money, rather than ‘mere printed slips of paper’ (ibid.). Instead, therefore, of logical form being the universal underlying ground of intelligibility, intelligibility is now grounded in the contexts and practices that give things their meanings. Different kinds of norm are appropriate for different kinds of object, from norms which relate to what gives life to a sequence of noises, to norms which are rules for identifying something as money, to norms relating to combinations of ‘only these words in these positions’.

Such a conception might sound like a recipe for ‘anything goes’, but this is not the case. The real value of Wittgenstein’s approach often lies in the detail of his explorations, and nowhere more so than in the case of music. The vital factors are his refusal to subordinate music to what we may say about it, and his attention to how the musical is essential to the linguistic. The words of a poem are, as Schleiermacher
suggested, generally the same, public, words as everybody uses, so it is the unique form of combination which is decisive, and this has to do with the ‘musical’. Although music may greatly extend the range of sounds that can be combined, as Schleiermacher claims of the history of musical instruments, the idea of a ‘musical vocabulary’, that consists of material which can be used in habitual ways but which can be configured in unique ways, indicates another way in which any fixed language/music boundary can be questioned. How is it, though, that poetry has a specific kind of value that lies in its unique combination of words? Wittgenstein repeatedly connects this value to the idea of the musical theme which cannot be replaced by another. Why is this so important?

An important test for assessing differing philosophical construals of language is to ascertain whether the basis of language is regarded as established usage, from which ‘poetic’ usage is a deviation, or whether what is significant in poetic usage constitutes the ground of standard usage. There is a temptation to think, as Herder does, in terms of language having initially involved a uniqueness of expression and of combination which subsequently becomes ordered into more and more schematised forms, even though this idea is in tension with his holistic idea of language, which presupposes a shared public world. Such ordering can be seen as repressing certain aspects of language’s capacity to reveal the particularity of the world or to express the subject’s specific feeling, at the same time as enabling the world to be manipulated and feelings to be articulated more precisely. This contrast between repressive and enabling functions of language connects issues of language, poetry, and music to the idea of cultural criticism. Wittgenstein’s roots in turn-of-the-century Vienna locate him in a context where ‘Sprachskепsis’, scepticism about language’s connection to the world, became a major theme. The context was also the one in which some of the major developments in Western music from Mahler to Schoenberg took place. A characteristic theme in thinking about modernist poetry is that language is becoming debased, and that a poetry which refuses to use language in the manner of the dominant society is the

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11 Manfred Frank has analysed this issue in terms of ‘style’ as the individual combination of linguistic elements. Why such combination should be significant in the first place is, though, not explained by style as the expression of the individuality of the subject: why should others be interested in this individuality?

12 When babies move from a pre-verbal, but highly expressive state to a verbal state they arguably lose something even as they gain the new possibilities of verbal language.
appropriate response to this situation. Interpretations of this idea vary considerably, though the historical connection to Schoenberg’s move away from tonality as a shared social norm suggests once again that language and music cannot be decisively separated.

In his later work Wittgenstein does not, however, think of poetry as a critique of the state of language. Instead of following the idea that language has become somehow worn-out or debased, he looks at the everyday working of communication without which questions about language being debased could not be posed at all. He begins by considering how we interpret behaviour that may or may not be linguistic. This can be seen either as an exceptional situation, or as what we do much of the time in some degree, as Quine’s and Davidson’s discussions of ‘radical translation’ and ‘radical interpretation’ suggest. In reflections on the relationship of thinking to speaking that connect to the famous discussion of the builders and their use of language in *Philosophical Investigations*, he says:

> Were we to see creatures at work whose rhythm of work, play of expression etc. was like our own, but for their not speaking, perhaps in that case we should say that they thought, considered, made decisions. For there would be a great deal there corresponding to the action of ordinary humans. And there is no deciding how close the correspondence must be to give us the right to use the concept ‘thinking’ in their case too.

(ibid.: 19)

This reflection is then extended to music in the sequence of remarks which includes the observation about the becoming accessible of a gesture: ‘Soulful expression in music – this cannot be recognised by rules. Why can’t we imagine that it might be, by other beings?’ (ibid.: 27). We do not apply a criterion to know when an emotion is conveyed to us by music because any identification of the emotion is secondary to the fact of having that emotion. Verbal articulation of the emotion may bring out what was previously inchoate, but it cannot replace the music which evokes or occasions the emotion. Wittgenstein then imagines a ‘man who, never having had any acquaintance with music, comes to us and hears someone playing a reflective piece by Chopin and is convinced that this is a language and people merely want to keep the secret from him’ (ibid.: 28). He links such a person’s desire to know the secret to ‘all the innumerable gestures made with the voice’ (ibid.), emphasising the fact that meaning cannot be construed merely in terms of propositional content. Like the gestures employed to teach
a child a language, the gestures of the voice that link to musical gestures cannot themselves be rendered rule-bound, even though rules will play a role in the practices concerned. Note how an issue central to aesthetics – the fact that mere rule-following cannot generate significant art – is here seen as vital for an adequate approach to both music and language.

This connection of gesture, voice and music leads to the question: ‘how can it be explained what “expressive playing” is?’ The answer is that one needs ‘a culture’, and that within that culture people can be taught the ‘use of the phrase “expressive playing”’ (Wittgenstein 1981: 28). This might seem like mere behaviourism. However, the point is that the learning of the phrase is not dependent on one thing, as if one were referring to a discrete object and teaching the use of a noise in relation to it, but rather on a whole series of phenomena, practices, and affective responses, which involve reflective, active participation in a world. Perhaps the most important remark in this sequence is the following:

> Doesn’t the theme point to anything outside itself? Yes, it does! But that means: – it makes an impression on me which is connected with things in its surroundings – e.g. with our language and its intonations; and hence with the whole field of our language games.

> If I say for example: Here it’s as if a conclusion were being drawn, here as if something were being confirmed, this is like an answer to what was said before, – then my understanding presupposes a familiarity with inferences, with confirmation, with answers.

(ibid.: 29)

The latter remark might seem to imply that logical and verbal understanding is prior to musical understanding, in the manner in which Kant’s categories are the conditions of the understanding of empirical phenomena. However, this would run counter to the image of language being developed. Wittgenstein therefore later says:

> How curious: we should like to explain our understanding of a gesture by means of a translation into words, and the understanding of words by translating them into a gesture. (Thus we are tossed to and fro when we try to find out where understanding properly resides.)

> And we really shall be explaining words by gesture and gesture by words.

(ibid.: 40)
In *Culture and Value* he suggests that the ‘simplest explanation’ of a musical phrase ‘is sometimes a gesture; another might be a dance step, or words which describe a dance’ (Wittgenstein 1980: 69), so indicating that understanding cannot be construed simply in terms of ‘grasping the sense’ of propositions. In the *Investigations* he maintains that ‘Speaking thoughtlessly and not thoughtlessly is to be compared with playing a piece of music thoughtlessly and not thoughtlessly’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 341, 388), which again underlines the sense in which thought need not be propositionally articulated. Verbal language plays a necessary role in articulating a world, but it is not a sufficient condition of all the kinds of intelligibility at issue here.

An important further aspect of Wittgenstein’s exploration is apparent in a remark which begins ‘This musical phrase is a gesture for me. It insinuates itself into my life. I make it my own’ (Wittgenstein 1980: 73). If gestures were thoroughly predictable, they would presumably lose their expressive quality: ‘Expression consists for us in unpredictability’ (ibid.). However, even in the case of already familiar music, the gestures ‘always remain gestures for me, although I know what will come. Indeed, I can even be surprised over and over again. (In a certain sense.)’ (ibid.). This is a remark about a key aspect of aesthetic experience, but it is also an important indication of just how central music is to the image of language that Wittgenstein seeks to develop. In music the expressive quality which language and physical gesture can lose by repetition is retained, and the reasons for this have wider consequences for our theme.

One of the issues in Heidegger that we shall examine in a moment is his insistence on language’s ‘world-disclosive’, ‘ontological’ nature, in opposition to the idea of language being primarily ontic and representational. Heidegger’s position on this issue changes significantly between his earlier and later conception. The former is in many respects pragmatic: language is part of our manipulation of the world for differing purposes. In the latter, poetry, as we saw, is regarded as the key to an appropriate understanding of language, to the extent that philosophy itself, as ‘Western metaphysics’, is seen as contributing to a misrecognition of the truth of language. Heidegger, then, connects these issues to a broader conception of the role of philosophical issues in modern culture. Although Wittgenstein does make remarks, particularly in *Culture and Value*, indicating the wider cultural and historical significance of music for conceptions of philosophy, these do not play an explicit role in his investigation. The reasons for this seem to be mainly
contingent, relating to his particular background and temperament. His approaches can, though, be connected to the positions developed by Adorno and his successors.

This connection depends on understanding how the communicative resources of a culture affect its social and political nature. Wittgenstein often has recourse to music as a means of emphasising the role of ‘feeling’ – in a broad sense, which involves sensitivity for tone, etc. – in proper understanding. The point is not to say that speaking thoughtlessly is the same as playing thoughtlessly, but rather to illuminate each via its family resemblance to the other. This illumination cannot take the form of a theoretical explanation because understanding of the propositionally constituted activity of speaking is added to by the non-propositional activity of playing, and vice versa, without the former being regarded as the ground of the latter. Both depend on how we always already respond to the world: without these responses neither words nor notes would mean anything.

It is this conception which can have broader cultural and political implications. The earlier Heidegger claims that words ‘accrue’ to meanings. This claim does not, however, require understanding to take place without forms of articulation. Instead it presupposes that for forms of articulation to convey something there must be prior involvement in a world where responses and actions are holistically connected to a horizon of saliencies which always transcends our ability to describe it in propositions. From this perspective much of the analytical philosophy of music is based on mistaken premises because it seeks to isolate phenomena whose significance cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts. Wittgenstein makes it evident that theories which fail to take account of the diversity of the means whereby we understand and practise music will be unable to substantiate their claims. Moreover, even if he does not explicitly make a great deal of it, the holism of understanding he describes leads to a rejection of the idea of music as an object that somehow relates to a feeling subject. This dimension of his explorations will link him most clearly to the more plausible

13 Albrecht Wellmer (2004) makes the point that the so-called ‘private language argument’ – which Wittgenstein presents in a manner that seems almost designed to obscure any unambiguous ‘real argument’ (see e.g. Eldridge 1997) – does not entail contesting the privacy of feelings. It is concerned rather with how what is privately often diffuse or unarticulated comes to be publicly communicable. There is in this view no reason to exclude music from the attempt to articulate what may indeed be unique feelings.
of Adorno’s ideas about music. Before we come to Adorno we need, though, to look once again at Heidegger.

Music as a ‘manner/melody of human existence’

A recurrent theme in our investigation has been the circularity involved in using language to explain language. The circularity appeared in Wittgenstein’s idea of music as a ‘means of expression with which I can talk about language’. Such a means would circumvent the circularity of using language to explain language, so requiring a position which would have to be both inside and outside language. Wittgenstein’s idea still depends, though, on a conviction that, although the logical structure of reality may transcend what we can say about it, this structure is what must orient philosophy. Music would therefore – *per impossibile* – play the role of replacing traditional metaphysics. This approach to music was also seen as related to Heidegger’s contentions about being as the ground of intelligibility of the ontic disciplines, and logical form can be connected to Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology in *Being and Time*. In both cases music has to do with the pre-conceptual intelligibility without which verbal and conceptual forms would be impossible.

There is an important interpretative issue here. If one reads Heidegger as maintaining that the ‘Existentialien’, the ways of being in the world that are the ground of the meanings of what we say, are not subject to historical transformation, and so are rather like an ontological version of Kant’s categories, both he and the early Wittgenstein can be regarded as being engaged in a traditional ‘philosophical/metaphysical’ project. However, the persistence of Wittgenstein’s concern with music suggests a different perspective. Wittgenstein moves away from a perspective with metaphysical pretensions by widening the scope of what language is understood to be, a move already prepared by his early attention to music as the ‘language of notes’. A reading of Heidegger which regards the *Existentialien* as a means of characterising historically changing ways of being, can then be interpreted as coming closer to the later Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘forms of life’. These are equally subject to history, and are inseparable from the working of language. This approach leads to an informative perspective on a major question in Heidegger, namely why he moves away in the mid 1930s from the perspective of the earlier work, towards his later concern with something which would no longer be ‘philosophy’. Heidegger’s move has to do with a radical reassessment
of his conception of language, which is why it can be connected to music.

Heidegger’s ‘turn’ is often seen as being from a position in which the analysis of Dasein is the key to the understanding of being, to one in which language becomes that key, thus from a perspective connected to the transcendental tradition based on the spontaneity of the subject, to one which seeks to overcome that tradition in the name of a new kind of ‘thinking’. This move can also be understood in relation to differing perspectives on language. In chapter 2 I suggested that there is a repression of music in Heidegger which is connected to his questioning in the 1930s of metaphysics and its relationship to subjectivity. Much depends, therefore, on how the relationship of the subject to music and to language is conceived. I will here just look at some key aspects of how Heidegger’s earlier perspective can be related to music, and then at a few elements of On the Way to Language (1959), much of which developed out of the ideas that we considered in Heidegger’s examination of Herder.

One point of orientation for the Heidegger of before the ‘turn’ is Kant’s notion of schematism. The aim of the notion for Kant, as we saw, is to connect the receptive and the spontaneous aspects of the subject, which have, respectively, to do with the material and with the form of cognition. As Heidegger puts it, schematism is ‘the making-sensuous of concepts’ (Heidegger 1973: 93). Schematism is important for him because it points to the overcoming of the philosophical model based on the separation of subject and object, which he will seek to achieve via his notion of ‘being in the world’. An object of what Kant terms ‘pure intuition’ is pure because the cognitive rules pertaining to it are not affected by anything sensuous, so that a triangle, for example, can be described with absolute accuracy. However, it is then hard to comprehend how synthetic a priori notions are applicable to a sensuous image of a triangle or a triangular material object, which are not ‘pure’. How can concepts, which are inherently general, apply to a world which is given to us in the form of sensuous particulars? Attempts to answer this question constitute one aspect of what Heidegger regards as ‘metaphysics’. What Kant intends with the schema therefore also applies to empirical concepts, and thence, as Schelling argued, to the very possibility of a word being able to designate different things as the same in

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14 Heidegger’s repression of music is also an example of a widespread, questionable reluctance of philosophers to talk about music when they have no specialist knowledge of it.
some respect. Heidegger’s radicalisation of these ideas depends upon his demonstration that time, the form of intuition which Kant characterises in terms of schemata that are ‘nothing but determinations of time a priori according to rules’ (Kant 1968: b 184, a 145), is inseparable from the ‘meaning of being’. Music’s link to temporality would seem to make it an obvious topic in relation to Heidegger’s desire to overcome traditional, atemporal metaphysics, especially in view of Hegel’s metaphysical subordination of music to language because of music’s failure to transcend time. Moreover, the links between rhythm and schematism, suggested in Schlegel’s account of the genesis of philosophy, where schematism was part both of thinking about nature and of the experience of nature itself, also appear to relate closely to what Heidegger is aiming at. However, he again does not talk about music in relation to the question of being. Despite this, what he says is important for discussion of music and philosophy.

In the Marburg lectures of 1925–6, called Logic. The Question of Truth, Heidegger argues that something essential about the subject is missed in Kant’s transcendental account, because of the role of time in the constitution of Dasein. If, for Kant, the I is the “correlate of all our representations”, it ‘is . . . almost literally the definition of time, which, according to Kant, stands absolutely and persists and is the correlate of any appearances at all’ (Heidegger 1976: 406). However, for Heidegger, synthesis, in which identity is made from difference, could not occur without the prior temporal opening up of being into a world of differences, which makes it possible for being to be intelligible via the ‘as-structure’. In consequence, the synthesising spontaneity of the I required to articulate the world in concepts, which Kant implausibly excludes from time altogether in order to prevent it being part of the phenomenal world of causality, is secondary to the happening of time itself, in which the world is disclosed as an object of our concern. Any Cartesian split between I and world is therefore overcome by the dependence of Dasein on time. How, then, is the relationship of Dasein as being-in-the-world to time concretely conceived? Here the path to music becomes apparent. Heidegger talks of Dasein’s speaking, walking and understanding, such that ‘My being in the world is nothing but this already understanding moving myself in these ways (‘Weisen’) of being’ (ibid.: 146). These forms of moving in the world, which go along with the idea that Dasein is always already ‘mooded/attuned’ (‘gestimm’), all relate to what we associate with the function or significance of ‘the musical’. Heidegger makes nothing of this, but a pupil, the
musicologist Heinrich Besseler, did.\textsuperscript{15} Besseler shows how the pragmatic aspect of Heidegger’s earlier work can be explicitly connected to music.

At this point a by now familiar question arises. Is music just to be regarded as an illustration of some aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy, or does it lead in directions which his explicit philosophy fails to countenance? Besseler suggests a way of considering this issue for the earlier philosophy which can help to circumvent some of the more difficult questions in the interpretation of that philosophy. Furthermore, some of Besseler’s ideas about music can be interestingly linked to Heidegger’s later idea of the history of being as manifested in the work of the key philosophers, from Plato, via Descartes, to Nietzsche. Here the question is how an equivalent list of either composers or kinds of music would relate to the idea of the history of being: would it merely depend upon the framework given by the key philosophers? Before getting to these issues we need, though, to get to grips with some instructive difficulties.

Cristina Lafont (1994) indicates one way of seeing the controversial aspect of Heidegger’s work when she rejects a pragmatist interpretation of the early work, of the kind espoused by Charles Taylor, Hubert Dreyfus, and others. She claims that Heidegger privileges the ‘world-disclosing’ function of language over its ‘designative’ function throughout his career. The crux of this claim, which she backs up with a great deal of detailed textual evidence, is summed up in her remark that, even in \textit{Being and Time}, ‘The “world-disclosure” – the unfoldedness – which language “contains in itself” regulates and distributes the possibilities within which the other sources of disclosure (such, e.g., as moods) can move’ (ibid.: 74). Language therefore becomes a fixed horizon that constitutes the possibilities of how the world is to be understood. Even though Heidegger’s conception of the nature of language changes between the earlier and later work, the idea that language pre-determines the horizon of intelligibility is, she argues, retained in a manner which has counterintuitive consequences with regard to the changing ways in which understanding occurs.

\textsuperscript{15} Besseler does not play much of a role in English-language musicology, because so little of his work has been translated. He also worked in the GDR until his death, which may prejudice some people against him. His work is, though, devoid of the dialectical-materialist dogmatism characteristic of the worst intellectual work in the GDR, and he played a major part in initiating the still ongoing re-examination of “early music”, as well as in a variety of other areas of music, from Bach to Romanticism and beyond.
In *Being and Time* the problem which results from this view of language is that both the account of *Dasein* and the account of language get into difficulty. The difficulty becomes apparent in Heidegger’s failure to clarify the precise status of language. As we have seen, language can be regarded in ‘ontic’ terms: it exists in the form of things in the world and can be the object of the science of linguistics. For the things of which language consists to mean anything they must, though, also have ‘ontological’ status. Lafont points out that the combination of existing ontically and yet having an ontological status that generates significance is precisely what is supposed to distinguish *Dasein* from all other entities, as the entity that ‘is concerned in its being with this being’ (Heidegger 1979: 12). Consequently, if *Dasein* needs language to understand the world, and language is part of the world, *Dasein* cannot have the ontological status required for it to be the foundation of the understanding of being. Moreover, it is therefore not clear either how language can be encountered as an entity in the world and yet in some sense be a condition of possibility of the world being intelligible to *Dasein*. The subject–object split consequently just reappears. The central issue for our investigation is the scope of the notion of ‘language’ and how this relates to pre-conceptual aspects of subjectivity and to the kind of non-verbal forms of articulation that we encountered in the later Wittgenstein.

It may well be that one should grant Lafont’s case with regard to the interpretation of Heidegger’s own aims in the earlier work. This would mean that he is really still engaged in the sort of foundational project that his teacher Husserl failed to accomplish, in which, instead of attempting, as Husserl does, to ground meaning in the constitutive mental acts of the subject, the meaning of being is sought in ‘the basic forms of a possible articulation (’Gliederung’) of the meaning of all that can be understood’ (ibid.: 166). It is, though, evident that the influence of *Being and Time* on subsequent philosophy and other areas of modern culture does not derive wholly from its attempt at this kind of phenomenological ontology, and this is where Besseler is important.

Like others in the 1920s, Besseler understood Heidegger as offering a new way of thinking in a crisis-ridden era when many assumptions about the function of art in modern societies no longer seemed defensible. The fact that his first essays which use Heidegger for thinking about music were already written in the mid 1920s suggests the urgency felt at the time. These essays are, though, occasioned as much by musical developments as they are by his understanding of Heidegger. The
crisis in concert and other musical life brought about by the war and by the economic crises of the Weimar Republic were not external to composers’ and performers’ reflections on what they were doing, or, indeed, to what they did. It is therefore no coincidence that many of the developments which change the nature of modern music take place in Germany at this time. The most immediate way to show how Besseler relates to Heidegger can be suggested by the link of Heidegger’s remark above, concerning the fact that ‘My being in the world is nothing but this already understanding moving myself in these ways (‘Weisen’) of being’, to Besseler’s remarks on the kinds of relationship people have to music in differing contexts.

Besseler’s central idea is that ‘The musical originally becomes accessible to us as a manner/melody [‘Weise’, which combines the older sense of ‘melody’ with the idea of ‘way’ or ‘manner’] of human existence (‘des menschlichen Daseins’)’ (Besseler 1978: 45). Music is not, therefore, primarily an object. That conception, he thinks, applies to only one specific form of musical practice, namely concert music from the nineteenth century onwards, although even in that case the history of how such music was listened to prevents it merely being apprehended as an object. Besseler is initially concerned with what he terms ‘Gebrauchsmusik’, ‘music for use/using’, and he gives serious consideration to dance music and to other popular forms, such as jazz and those involving participation on the part of non-specialist musicians. Here he reflects the attempts on the part of Hanns Eisler, Paul Hindemith, and others to involve all kinds of people in music as part of broader attempts at social and political transformation.

The relationship to the music being danced to of a dancer or of an active spectator at a dance in a community exemplifies what Besseler is aiming at: ‘the music is in no way central for him. He only half listens to it. His real activity consists in making his body swing to the rhythm he hears and in inwardly following the melody, which he generally knows. He does not listen but behaves in an active-outpouring manner, without taking the music expressly as objectively present (‘objektiv vorhanden’). It is not there in an objective form (‘gegenständlich’) for him’ (ibid.: 33). The best responses of the dancer do not rely on anything he could know, but rather on how he behaves in response to the music. Besseler

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16 The fact that the analytical philosophy of music until recently largely only considered music in terms of works, performers, and listeners suggests what is at stake in Besseler’s approach. See Goehr 1994, Ridley 2004 for criticisms of the exclusive orientation to the work on the part of much of the ‘philosophy of music’.
employs Heidegger’s distinction between ‘Zuhandenheit’ and ‘Vorhandenheit’ – between the being of things which we use in our world without needing to reflect on what we are doing, and the objectification which occurs when something no longer functions as we expect and we seek to explain its failure in order to make it work again.\textsuperscript{17} He does so, however, in a manner which does not require all the philosophical baggage which Heidegger attaches to the distinction.

For Heidegger the very possibility of modern science and of all that he associates with it rests on the distinction being fundamental, as part of his account of ontological difference. What is \textit{zuhanden} relates to what he means by the ontological, without which things would not be intelligible at all, and what is \textit{vorhanden} to the ontic. We saw the difficulty this gives rise to in relation to language and \textit{Dasein} above. It is not, however, that all conceptions of ontological difference are indefensible: versions of the notion play a crucial role in certain areas of modern thought, for example, in opposing scientistic conceptions, that regard scientific descriptions as foundational for all other descriptions or as the only candidates for truth. The problem is the status attached to distinctions like that between \textit{zuhanden} and \textit{vorhanden}, given that we move from one to the other of these notional relationships to objects all the time. A rigidification of the distinction in relation to natural science therefore merely brings about a reduction of the historical complexity of scientific research to a questionable philosophical story. There is, though, a crucial difference between using a philosophical distinction to try to circumscribe science, and using it to show, in the manner we saw Wittgenstein doing, that science does not encompass a great deal that is fundamental to our existence.

Besseler’s historically specific, more pragmatically oriented point is precisely that music can be related to in both \textit{zuhanden} and \textit{vorhanden} ways at differing times and in differing contexts, and can also be related to in both ways at once in some circumstances. The essays ‘Basic Questions of Musical Listening’ (1926) and ‘Basic Questions of Music Aesthetics’ (1927), from which the remarks cited above are taken, have a polemical socio-political intent, which is linked to Besseler’s ideas of \textit{Gebrauchsmusik} and of music as a form of everyday social ‘involvement’ (‘\textit{Umgang}’). However, the interest of his argument lies as much in his account of the transitions between kinds of musical hearing

\textsuperscript{17} None of the standard English translations of these terms, such as ‘ready to hand’ and ‘present at hand’, really covers all their connotations.
and performance as it does in his questioning of what he sees as the ‘aesthetic’ approach to music.  

For Besseler the aesthetic approach depends on the idea of the autonomy of the musical work and on its concomitant objectification by the kind of concert listening which develops in the nineteenth century. His interpretation of this situation is in some respects rather too reliant on Heidegger’s distinction between \( \text{zuhanden} \) and \( \text{vorhanden} \). However, he is seeking to get at important issues, that will be vital in considering Adorno’s philosophical contentions about the social and political role of music. The core of Besseler’s argument is that ethical claims, based on the idea of music’s purifying function, that are made on behalf of the ‘classical form of access’ (ibid.: 51) to concert music, are founded in the listener’s ‘devotion/dedication/self-surrender’ (‘\( \text{Hingabe} \)’), which ‘leads’ the listener without their being actively involved. As such ‘one cannot talk of there being a community-forming power of the symphonic work of art’ (ibid.: 52). In the context of the Weimar Republic this might sound rather questionable. What he means, though, is the development of workers’ choirs and instrumental groups, and other new forms of progressive musical practice, which lead Kurt Weill, in the \textit{Dreigroschenoper}, to create a new kind of opera that is accessible to a broader audience. Besseler’s decisive claim is that, far from existing in an objective way, such that ‘music’ would occur when a gramophone plays ‘in a room empty of people’, ‘Music \textit{is} only if and to the extent that it is achieved/carried out (‘\( \text{vollzogen} \)’) as a ‘manner/melody of human existence’ (ibid.: 57). Note that Heidegger regards \textit{Dasein} as that which ‘achieves/carries out’ (‘\( \text{vollzieht} \)’) its existence by relating to its being.

Besseler’s emphasis on the need for music to be engaged in and actively brought about is what is most significant for the entanglement of music and philosophy. His essay on music aesthetics concludes with reflections on the idea of musical understanding, where he claims that one of the ‘most important tasks of musicology’ is the overcoming of the ‘traditional opposition between hermeneutics and formal analysis’, so

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18 There need be nothing problematic about such criticism of the ‘aesthetic’ approach, but it may, in a different context, cease to have the force it had in Besseler’s context. The contemporary crisis with regard to live concerts of ‘classical music’ has very different roots from those addressed by Besseler. A progressive position might now seek, for example, to involve the passive consumers of much industrially produced ‘popular music’ in the much more diverse musical possibilities of the major classical traditions, where the kind of attentive listening not generally demanded by a lot of popular music is crucial.
that each would ‘fuse with’ the other (ibid.: 77). Making music ‘as such does not have the tendency to understand itself with its own means’ (ibid.), whereas conceptual understanding of music involves ‘an alien new approach that is added from the outside’ (ibid.: 78). The tension between making music, and objectifying conceptual understanding is not something to be overcome by an overarching theory, or by a simple privileging of one over the other. Instead the tension constitutes the field within which the relationships between ‘tradition, the historical, music theory, and music education’ (ibid.) are played out.

Heidegger’s influence on people like Besseler has to do with their perception that his work gets in touch with aspects of human existence which other contemporary philosophy was regarded as having failed to bring to light or as having repressed. This perception was accentuated by the War and the ensuing social, political, and economic disintegration. How, though, is one to connect the historical situation and the philosophical response? The former has a specific immediacy and contingency, and the latter, if it is to count as ‘philosophical’ at all, must seek to go beyond historical contingency, because it is precisely the source of the need for a new orientation. The main problem here becomes apparent when Besseler questions the modes of performance and reception of the nineteenth-century classical music tradition. He regards these as relying on the idea of transcendent values communicated by music. His conception echoes the questioning of Platonism in Heidegger’s temporalisation of the question of being, which seeks to get away from the idea of truth as the timeless ‘presence’ of an independently existing objective world.

Besseler’s anti-Platonism, which regards music’s positive social role as involving an active, participatory response to human existence, leads to an informative version of one of the issues we have been pursuing. He argues that Heidegger’s idea of mood is better characterised by the term ‘attunedness’ (‘Gestimmtheit’) (ibid.: 62), which makes the musical connotation more explicit. Attunedness is not to be equated with affect. We are always already attuned, whereas affects are, as Nussbaum’s account of them as a kind of judgement indicates, largely intentional in character, and interrupt our underlying attunedness, by directing attention to specific objects of love, hate, etc. In this sense received ‘Romantic’ ideas, which regard the meaning of music as relating predominantly to the emotions of the I, are a special case, not the historical norm. Besseler is interested in musical practices, like dances, marches, collective singing, etc., which are external to the I, yet inextricably related to its
daily existence, and which are both constituted by and help constitute the nature of attunement.\textsuperscript{19} The subject’s attunedness will therefore also depend upon the kinds of articulation that occur in such musical practices within a culture.\textsuperscript{20} Australian aboriginal culture, for example, views the natural world as a network of ‘songlines’, so that differing songs relate to specific features of the landscape and constitute a musical way of being in the world.\textsuperscript{21} The tension between making music, which, as Besseler’s account of attunedness makes clear, cannot be conceived of in terms of a separation of subject and object, and analysis of music, which objectifies the music in conceptual terms, is the key here. This tension has important consequences for the perceived role of philosophy in Heidegger.

Heidegger’s philosophical enterprise would seem to depend on what Besseler advocates in his name, namely a conception in which meaning is not the object of a theory, but has rather to be ‘carried out’ – ‘vollzogen’ – and can therefore be in tension with the means by which we objectify it in theories. Heidegger admittedly insists that understanding in the sense of practical, \textit{zuhanden}, involvement with the world, which is required for other forms of verbal and theoretical understanding, must precede explanation. However, this gives rise to the problem of characterising the relationship between the ontic and the ontological with regard to language and \textit{Dasein} that we encountered above. A phenomenological ontology is supposed to give an account both of the fact that and of how the world is intelligible. If this answer itself requires something which has to be ‘vollzogen’, and involves what Besseler considers in terms of music, a theoretical account which delineates the \textit{Existentialien} must be inherently lacking. Wellmer suggests of this issue in Heidegger that ‘Understanding of being would rather be understood in the sense of a \textit{way of being} than in the sense of a philosophically articulated understanding of the being-in-the-world of \textit{Dasein}’ (Wellmer \textbf{2004}: 322). This resistance to a purely theoretical approach has consequences for the understanding of language and philosophy. But there are also dangers here.

\textsuperscript{19} Even concert listening, of which he is so critical, is less ‘passive’ than he suggests, as Schleiermacher’s remarks about the relationship between receptivity and spontaneity in music indicate.

\textsuperscript{20} Affects are not irrelevant to the significance of music in this conception. They are located, though, in collective contexts and practices.

\textsuperscript{21} My thanks to Cesar Benalcazar at the University of Melbourne who told me about this.
If involvement in a practice is supposed to involve a kind of legitimation which is inaccessible to objective description, the critical reflexive moment that is essential not just to philosophy, but to all forms of cultural practice, risks being neglected. It is also the case that any practice – including the use of a simple sentence, or, for that matter, of any thing in the world – will transcend the ways in which it can be theoretically characterised. However, such objections miss the key point, which is indicated by Besseler’s insistence on the tension between making music, and analysis of music. Interpretation of our meaning-articulating practices and participation in those practices are inextricably connected, but not reducible to each other. As Adorno says: ‘interpreting language means: understanding language; interpreting music means: making music’ (Adorno 1997: 16, 253). This dual sense of interpretation – where the terms are not opposed, but not identical in meaning either – are implied by the later Wittgenstein’s remarks on gesture as a means of interpreting a musical phrase, which highlighted the importance of avoiding the idea that ‘language always only functions in one way, always serves the same purpose’. How, then, does Heidegger’s later work, in which he moves away from the very idea of doing philosophy, relate to the questions just considered?

On the way to music?

Heidegger’s ‘turn’ can be interpreted in terms of the issue of objectification that we encountered in the tension between music-making and music analysis. This interpretation maps easily onto aspects of On the Way to Language. The reason is quite simple: by this time Heidegger has moved away from his concern with Dasein’s projects and from the delineation of the Existentialien as the route to the understanding of being. He now develops the position in which language is the ‘house of being’, in the sense of the ‘space’ in which being’s truth can be articulated, which therefore allows things to be. Once again the problem arises of how to assert the truth about language within language, thus making language into the object of language, without falling prey to the circle in which initial assumptions about what language is simply dictate the conclusions. Consider an obvious alternative. What, on the one hand, would make the assertion that language is the ‘house of being’ true? Must the metaphor be cashed out into a prior literal statement, and in that case, why does Heidegger not talk in literal terms in the first place? On the other hand, if language, as it is in many areas of
linguistics or analytical philosophy, is regarded instead primarily as a means of carrying information, doesn’t that mean that the results of any investigation are just determined by this initial assumption, so that something essential about language may be obscured by investigating it in this way? The latter investigation would belong to metaphysics, whereas Heidegger’s assertions about the ‘house of being’, which are not primarily concerned with language as information, would belong to metaphysics.

The difference in question relates to the difference between analytical and hermeneutic approaches to language (see Wellmer 2004). As we have seen, Heidegger comes to equate metaphysics with modern natural science, which is the culmination of the objectification of the world that begins with the emergence of Western philosophy. With respect to language, Being and Time can, as Lafont argues, be regarded as still seeking a version of metaphysics, which tries to transcend the world-disclosure of particular languages in the direction of a philosophical account of ‘the basic forms of a possible articulation (“Gliederung”) of the meaning of all that can be understood’. In contrast, Besseler’s more pragmatic approach, via music, to ways of being in the world does not need to demarcate ‘basic forms’ in this manner, and is open to differing ‘ways/melodies of human existence’ across history in differing cultures. Lafont’s further claim is that Heidegger’s later work also relies on a prioritisation of language as a semantic condition of possibility of meaning over its pragmatic use in engaging with other language-users and the world. All such engagements therefore take place within a horizon of disclosedness which is ‘given’ by language, rather than produced by interaction with the world and other speakers. The idea of such a horizon makes the idea of metaphysics in relation to the later Heidegger problematic.

Heidegger insists, Lafont maintains, on a ‘strict separation between the [ontic] “uncoveredness of entities” and the [ontological] “disclosedness of their being”, or between inner-worldly experience and world-disclosing context of meaning’ (Lafont 1994: 255). The latter therefore determines the former, and must be immune to correction by it. In Lafont concludes that Heidegger therefore levels the distinction between ‘referential’ and ‘attributive’ use of language, between speaking of the ‘object as such’ and the ‘object in the how of its manner of being given’ (Lafont 1994: 321). Such a difference is present in our everyday linguistic practice, but it is not clear how much follows from this. There may be no clear ‘x’ in relation to which we may disagree about correct attributions. These would seem to require the ‘as structure’ for what is at issue to emerge as anything distinct.
this sense the world of which we can speak ‘happens’ in a way which constitutes how we can engage with it and speak of it, rather than this being a two-way process in which our actions can also change both how the world can be understood and how language is appropriately used. Aspects of Heidegger’s approach to language in *On the Way to Language* can make the relevance of these issues to our concerns apparent.

Despite all the later Heidegger’s posturing and preciosity, and the moral and political difficulties involved in approaching his work – he, after all, unlike Wagner, really was a Nazi – he does address many important concerns. *On the Way to Language* already indicates by its title why this is the case. We are not to think of language as the object of the book, in the way that it would be for a work in linguistics or the philosophy of language. Language is not ‘present’, in the way the object of investigation is for such subjects, because what is at issue is precisely how the language of the investigation itself relates to what language is: ‘A speaking about/above (über) language almost unavoidably makes it into an object’ (Heidegger 1959: 147). Heidegger’s text can be frustrating to those who regard the whole philosophical enterprise as based on the advancing of clear arguments. Its oblique manner and extensive use of neologisms, which mean that it defies straightforward summary (and is not readily translatable), can, however, be seen as a response to a problem discussed above.

Any theoretical account of the meaning of being has, as we saw, to seek to objectify that which cannot be objectified and which may only be accessible in terms of a praxis that has to be ‘vollzogen’. Heidegger talks of ‘having an experience with language’ (ibid.: 159), in the sense of ‘undergoing’ it, rather than seeking ‘knowledge about language’ (ibid.: 161). Much of the book is concerned with poetry, thus with ‘these words in these positions’, rather than with language where what is said can be conveyed by other words in other positions. Heidegger concentrates, as part of his idea of ‘letting things be’, on the idea of ‘hearing from language’ (ibid.: 149), rather than attempting to impose a philosophical explanation on language. The concern with hearing and the avoidance of objectification are easily related to music, as Wittgenstein’s suggestions about poetry, music, and gesture make clear, so what does Heidegger contribute to our topic?

at all. This objection to her rigid distinction between reference and attribution (i.e. one where the logical distinction is supposed to be the basis of what we do in engaging with the world) does not affect Lafont’s objections to a rigid conception of language as an a priori, incorrigible horizon of intelligibility.
If one is looking at it for its relationship to philosophical conceptions of language, rather than for its world-disclosing readings of poems by Georg Trakl and Stefan George, or for its attempt to enact what it has to say about language, *On the Way to Language* does not in fact add a great deal to the ideas we considered in chapter 2. What matters is how Heidegger spells out a story about the nature of modernity as the basis of this enactment. The story seems to point to music, but once again does not engage with it. Heidegger’s version of the story undoubtedly has a reactionary side to it, but it is important for us because it is closely analogous to Adorno’s story of modernity, in which music is central.

Consider one of the handful of passages in *On the Way to Language* where Heidegger does talk about ‘the musical’ in language. In a discussion of the sensuous aspect of language and its relationship to meaning, he says: ‘One points . . . to the melody and the rhythm in language and thereby to the relationship between song and language. If only there were not the danger of also thinking of melody and rhythm from the perspective of physiology and physics, thus in the broadest sense in a technological-calculating manner’ (ibid.: 205). This is pretty odd. Is the first thing that one thinks about when considering melody and rhythm in language really the question of how science describes them? What lies behind Heidegger’s peculiar response is his concern to avoid an account which could be construed as being part of Western metaphysics, as that which makes the world into what can be technologically manipulated. Attempts to circumscribe language are consequently manifestations of metaphysics as an ever more totalising objectification of being. The objectification of the sensuous element of language, of the kind that takes place in acoustics and phonetics, for instance, involves the hierarchy of sensuous and supersensuous that constitutes metaphysics.

However, his stance would seem to imply that hearing music as music, rather than objectifying it in terms of physics, or even regarding it in terms of the history of music, or music-analysis, is precisely the kind of thing which does not objectify meaningful articulation. Music is both ‘sensuous’ and ‘intellectual’, and a separation of the two is likely to result in a failure to appreciate it as music. Heidegger is reluctant even to use the word ‘language’ for what he is talking about because this would have connotations of the kind he associates with the ‘language of metaphysics’. This reluctance would seem to lead us into similar territory to that explored in the later Wittgenstein’s remarks on music, but, significantly, Heidegger does not consider the issue that way.
In chapter 2 I cited Heidegger’s criticism of Wagner, which is one of the few places in which he actually discusses a musician. The criticism was based on the Hegel- and Nietzsche-derived idea that the music in Wagner’s music dramas led to the ‘dominance of the pure state of feeling’. Heidegger associates feeling with subjective taste, and thus with aesthetics as a part of modern philosophy’s subjectification of being, in which the art work becomes ‘an object of [merely subjective] feeling and ideas (‘des Vorstellens’)’ (ibid.: 139). His response to Wagner is based both on a reaction against modernism in art and on the story of modernity as subjectification. It should, however, be clear from Besseler’s conception of the role of subjective feeling in music that the basis of Heidegger’s judgement is a specific historical phenomenon, not something inherent in music per se. Moreover, the exclusion of feeling from world-disclosure is itself, as we have seen, implausible. The main source of Heidegger’s story of modernity is the idea that conceptualisation is objectification, which is what makes him unwilling to use the word language as a classifying concept. He has no doubt, though, that the relationship between word and thing is central to his concerns, and therefore has to seek a way of conceiving of the word which does not involve ‘a relationship between the thing on the one and the word on the other side’ (ibid.: 170).

Heidegger’s exploration is carried out via his reading of George’s poem ‘Das Wort’ (‘The Word’), which we encountered in his text on Herder. The initial idea is that ‘The word itself is the relationship that in each case so holds the thing within itself that it “is” a thing’ (ibid.). The essential experience with language in the poem does not, however, simply consist in a theoretical insight into the fact that words disclose the world by allowing things to be. The experience is contained rather in the line ‘No thing shall be where the word is lacking.’ Heidegger reformulates what he thinks is experienced in the poem as ‘An “is” gives itself up [‘ergibt sich’] where the word breaks [‘zerbricht’, which has to do with the word’s return to the silence whence it emerged]’ (ibid.: 216). When the word for what concerns us is lacking ‘language itself has from afar and fleetingly touched us with its essence’ (ibid.: 161), revealing the nature of being. A space of meaningfulness which demands articulation is opened, but not filled. If it were filled with a determinate concept that would be a case of the objectification characteristic of metaphysics,

23 This construal of aesthetics is adopted by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, and is highly selective (see Bowie 2003b).
and, of course, there would be no need to have the poem to convey what cannot be stated. The poem that conveys the essence of language ‘has succeeded in becoming the singing song (‘singende Lied’) of language’ (ibid.: 173). It would seem, therefore, that we experience language’s essence when it becomes ‘music’. The poem’s unique combination of elements cannot be reduced to an explanation of the meaning of the elements, and so has to be ‘vollzogen’, in Heidegger’s sense of ‘heard’ or ‘listened to’, rather than actively constituted by the subject. Otherwise the subject would just impose its already existing frameworks on those elements.

There is not necessarily a great distance here between Heidegger and Wittgenstein, given their shared concern with poetry as language which is not reducible to objectifying analysis. The vital difference between them lies in Heidegger’s particular story of modernity. What, then, is Heidegger’s investment in his very emphatic conception of metaphysics and modernity, and how does this relate to his skirting of music? Heidegger regards the major conceptions of being in Western metaphysics, from Plato’s thinking of being as ‘idea’, to Aristotle’s ‘energeia’, to Kant’s idea of being as the ‘position’ of things relative to perception, to Hegel’s ‘absolute concept’, to Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ (Heidegger 1988: 9), as ‘words of being’ in the subjective genitive. They are the truth of how being is ‘sent’ (the verb he uses is ‘schicken’, which he links to ‘Schicksal’, ‘fate’), because this sending happens in a manner which is not the result of the actions of a subject. In concrete terms this history of being results in modern Western technological civilisation, which comes about because truth is reduced to what can be proved. It therefore cannot be apt to argue for an alternative conception, because this would also depend on the discourse of proof. Instead Heidegger is left with the need to enact an alternative by circumventing the objectification characteristic of metaphysics: even ‘natural language’, he claims, is ‘historical-metaphysical’. Echoing the early Wittgenstein, albeit from a very different perspective, he therefore ponders a ‘language of thought’ (in the sense of a language that would say what philosophy cannot) that would ‘make visible the limitedness of the language of metaphysics’. However, ‘One cannot talk about this. What decides on this is whether such a saying [‘Sage’, which is the term he substitutes for ‘language’ in many of the later texts] succeeds or not’ (ibid.: 55). It is in certain poets, like Hölderlin, that this ‘saying’ occurs. What occurs cannot be at the level of the paraphrasable meanings of the poem, i.e. at the semantic level, because that
is again an objectification which moves away from ‘these words in these positions’, so it must be at the level of what I have referred to as the ‘musical’.

It is not clear that this is what Heidegger intended, but the problem with his later work is that it gestures towards something which inherently resists being specified, and yet makes nothing of the idea of the musical as a possible aspect of what it is that he is gesturing towards. He therefore necessarily puts himself into a paradoxical position with regard to language, on the one hand using it to try to reveal something otherwise hidden, on the other denying that a discursive philosophical text can articulate what he is seeking. He uses words while regarding them somewhat in the manner of the thinkers and writers associated with ‘Sprachskepsis’, like Rilke, who also saw poetry as a way of seeking a new relationship between words and things. Heidegger does not aim at a ‘critique’ of modern technological civilisation – that would entail adopting the kind of metaphysical perspective that he wishes to circumvent. He does, though, use a version of the history of philosophy to reach a generalised verdict on the nature of modernity (for some of the details see Bowie 1997: ch. 7). The stages of the history of being from Plato to Nietzsche exhibit the essence of the story he thinks has led to the contemporary situation, namely the story of ‘subjectification’ and technological dominance.

But why should Heidegger’s story based on his construal of the history of philosophy be the decisive one, when there are other stories which seek to understand the nature of modernity that also involve many of the factors which he sees as decisive? The emphasis placed on language in his story is understandable, but attaching this emphasis to an overall assessment of history requires a more differentiated approach. The very idea that – however much it may be affected by the processes of modernity – everyday language should become the ‘language of metaphysics’ forces Heidegger into a series of reductions, not least because the notion of a language that is circumscribable as the ‘language of metaphysics’ itself sounds suspiciously metaphysical. From what perspective does one judge what falls within it and what does not? \(^{24}\) Would not such a perspective itself just involve another kind of domination by philosophy, because of the totalisation it entails, even though the aim is to find a way of avoiding objectification?

\(^{24}\) Heidegger is aware of this issue, but this does not stop him using the term ‘language of metaphysics’.
If one looks, for example, at Besseler’s accounts of the history of Western music, which are based on the interplay between verbal language and music, a different story emerges of how to understand the subject’s relationship to language and music. Can this relationship be encompassed within the later Heidegger’s story? Heidegger repeatedly questions the primacy of visuality in epistemology, regarding it as linked to objectification in modern philosophy, in the name of the ‘listening’ we encountered above. However, he says very little about the actual history of listening. Besseler, on the other hand, outlines an essential contrast between the musical listening of the modern period and what preceded it, and this contrast has instructive echoes in the later Heidegger. Gregorian chant and sixteenth-century song depend on ‘prose melody’, which ‘always brings something new’, and this gives rise to ‘a peaceful, more passive hearing: the acceptance of the music in its objectivity’ (Besseler 1978: 99). The listeners engage in what he terms ‘vernehmen’: this now just means to ‘hear’, but it originally meant to ‘take possession of’, and is linked to ‘Vernunft’, ‘reason’. Jacobi makes much of this etymology in his critique of Fichte, whose early philosophy he sees, in an anticipation of Heidegger, as the modern becoming narcissistic of subjective reason: ‘Pure reason is a listening which only listens to itself’ (Jacobi 1799: 14 – see Bowie 1997: ch. 1). Besseler’s idea, in contrast, is that ‘reason’ is linked to hearing in terms of the grasping of an existing order of things which the text conveys: text and music form an inseparable unity, and the subject receptively takes in this order, rather than constituting it.

He contrasts this kind of listening with the ‘active-synthetic listening of the modern period’ (Besseler 1978: 99), outlining the concept of such listening in relation to Descartes’ account of hearing a melody in the Compendium Musicae, and also to Kant. The classical music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, which consists of linked, but contrasting elements, depends upon the listener, who has to synthesise the elements into a whole. However, this kind of listening then gives way in turn to the Romantic ‘mystical immersion in the work’ in Carl Maria von Weber and in Wagner (ibid.: 153), which echoes the ‘passive hearing’ of the sixteenth century: in both the subject does not impose an order on the music, but rather surrenders itself to the music. Passive hearing of this kind relates, as Besseler says, to the early Heidegger’s idea of ‘mood’, where there is no subject–object division, whereas active-synthetic hearing involves the intentional directedness of particular subjective feeling towards an object. The former requires a ‘preparedness to let oneself
These ideas are also echoed in Heidegger’s later contrast of the objectification characteristic of metaphysics with his own idea of ‘listening’. Besseler’s historical typology is rather too schematic, but it does suggest a dialectic between the subject and the musical material which has to be investigated both in the detail of the music itself and in terms of the historical constitution of subjectivity. The later Heidegger’s monolithic story of subjectification as the essence of the history of being depends on a specific – and contentious – version of the history of philosophy. There are, in contrast, the beginnings of a very different history in Besseler. This is because a vital aspect of Heidegger’s story, namely the listening which ‘lets things be’, is just one aspect of a history which is neither subjective nor objective, because it involves a dialectic between objective practices and subjective responses. There is in Besseler’s dialectic, however, no Hegelian sense of spirit realising itself, which would, in Heidegger’s terms, just make it part of the history of metaphysics. Besseler’s history is instead based on changing social practices and their relationship to those who participate in them. The development of the subjective form of listening is, for example, dependent on the development of dance, which is part of what first gives a role to wordless instrumental music. Besseler’s use of the early Heidegger suggests, then, how an account of being in the world should be extended in the direction of what can be understood via music, and this account need not fall prey to the later Heidegger’s objections to his own earlier work.

The question that remains is whether what Besseler is concerned with is in fact merely another phenomenon whose true significance lies in the technological objectifications that are the manifestation of Western metaphysics. Heidegger’s conception can actually tell us a lot about the ways in which music becomes subjected to technology. However, the philosophical story he tells cannot do justice to all the implications of this process, as Besseler’s story makes clear. The ways in which Heidegger talks about language and poetry, as we have seen, often point in the direction of music. His failure to do anything with this connection offers another example of how the entanglement of music and philosophy should make us question even the most canonical philosophical stories. Is the story of Western music from Monteverdi to jazz and the avant-garde of the twentieth century nothing more than another manifestation of modernity as subjectification? The persistent tension in the story
of that music between new possibilities for subjective expression, and the ways in which the forms of that expression can rigidify into objectified conventions simply does not fit Heidegger’s framework. Despite Wittgenstein’s limited historical perspective and his often rather naïve view of social issues, by taking the entanglement of music and philosophy seriously he offers a more plausible interrogation of the focus of modern philosophy than does Heidegger. It is, however, Adorno who has generally been seen as proposing the most challenging account of the modern relationships between music and philosophy. In the next chapter I shall therefore consider to what extent this judgement can be legitimated.
ADORNO: MUSICAL PHILOSOPHY OR PHILOSOPHICAL MUSIC?

Dialectics of music

Adorno probably wrote more involving the relationship between music and philosophy than any other leading modern thinker. One strategy in considering him might therefore just be to outline and analyse his ‘philosophy of music’. A version of this – extensive – task has, however, already been undertaken by Max Paddison in his Adorno’s Aesthetics of Music (1993), which should be the starting point for anyone engaging with this topic (see also Witkin 1998). My aim here is just to pursue aspects of the philosophy-music relationship in Adorno which affect the themes that we have investigated so far. Many familiar themes in his work on music will therefore either not be dealt with at all, or will be dealt with in a fairly cursory manner. The advantage of this approach is that certain issues get a more extensive treatment than they have so far received.

Adorno is a very uneven thinker. Some of his texts, such as Dialectic of Enlightenment (DoE) (1947), written jointly with Max Horkheimer near the end of the Second World War, and his Philosophy of New Music (1949), have become more well known than they really deserve to. Ironically, this is not least because, despite the considerable demands these texts make on the reader, they also advance sometimes quite schematic positions. These can appeal to precisely the kind of undifferentiated thinking which the texts themselves regard as a symptom of a culture determined by the commodity structure’s erosion of critical awareness. One of the problems in interpreting Adorno lies, therefore, in reconciling this schematic side of his thinking with his more discriminating approaches to specific phenomena.
**DoE** famously tells the story of how ‘humankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism’ (3: 11), a barbarism which results from the workings of reason itself. Given the period of the book’s production, it is hardly surprising that it is deeply pessimistic, to the point where the pessimism is not just about the present but is projected far back into the past. The development of humankind is based from the very beginning on the repressive effects of its need to overcome the threat of external nature, thus on ‘instrumental reason’, which the authors associate with the ‘subjection of everything natural to the arrogant subject’ (ibid.: 16). The problem is that this reduces phenomena as diverse as primitive tool use and the application of highly developed scientific concepts to the same common denominator. This essentially relies on a version of Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’, in which reductive identification wins out over the apprehension of the particular and irreducibly individual, in the name of self-preservation. Versions of the extreme argument about subjection occur in Adorno’s contentions about music, and this will be where he is at his weakest, offering another example of how music can reveal limitations in philosophical thinking.²

However, Adorno’s interrogations of rationalisation in relation to music are not always reductive, and his philosophical contentions sometimes gain from his detailed attention to music. In the notes for a never completed work, recently published as *Towards a Theory of Musical

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1 References to Adorno that are from the *Gesammelte Schriften* will just give the volume number, followed by the page number. The *Gesammelte Schriften* are now available on a very reasonably priced cd-rom at www.digitale-bibliothek.de, the cd is number 97.

2 Adorno’s less critical admirers often cite the implausible dictum from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that ‘Only exaggeration is true’ (3: 140), as an explanation of his exaggerations. His more convincing account of exaggeration is contained in the following, from *Minima Moralia*:

While thought relates to facts and moves in the criticism of them, it moves no less in the sustaining of the difference between thought and fact. It says what is precisely because what is is never completely the way it is said. An element of exaggeration is essential to thought, an element of shooting beyond things, of untying itself from the weight of facticity, by dint of which it carries out the determination of being at the same time strictly and freely, rather than merely reproducing it.

(4: 143-4)

If everything transcends what we say of it, because of its enduring potential for being redescribed, all positive claims to say ‘what is’ will involve this kind of exaggeration (see also 8: 319). The further implication, that thought should do more than reproduce the real suggests an important link of music, as what discloses, rather than represents, reality, to cognition understood in non-representational terms.
Reproduction, Adorno reflects, for example, on Wagner’s thoughts about how to perform Beethoven’s Ninth that we looked at in chapter 7. He approves of Wagner’s sophisticated instrumental retouching of the score, which aims to retain the wildness of a particular passage in performance while conveying a musical thought that would remain hidden if Beethoven’s instrumentation were strictly followed. Wagner’s solution is seen by Adorno as an example of a key theme in DoE, namely the connection between ‘technique/technology’ (‘Technik’), which is apparent in Wagner’s change of instrumentation, and ‘archaism’, which is apparent in the wildness that Wagner seeks to preserve. Adorno then remarks that ‘Dialectic of enlightenment is much more complex than we have so far conceived it’ (Adorno 2001: 60). This part of the work on musical reproduction is from much the same period as DoE, and it offers a different way of understanding the notion of such a dialectic. Adorno’s work on musical reproduction often presents his wider concerns more effectively than some of his well-known texts, so I shall use it to lead into the more general discussion.

One source of Adorno’s approach is Max Weber’s groundbreaking, incomplete text of 1921 on The Rational and Sociological Foundations of Music. In it Weber tries to understand both the development of modern Western ‘classical’ music based on the tempered scale and the concomitant developments in the notation of music. He asks why the tempered tonal system, and modern polyphonic and harmonically based music emerge in Europe, when other equally intensive musical cultures, like those of ancient Greece or Japan, did not lead in this direction. The instructive parallel here is with the question why the roughly contemporaneous beginnings of the scientific revolution take place in Europe, when Chinese science in the seventeenth century, for example, was in many ways more advanced. Heidegger’s answer to why there is a scientific revolution in Europe was that modern European thinking makes the whole world into a objectified ‘picture’, and that this process is the correlate of the rise of the idea of the subject as the metaphysical ground of knowledge manifested in Descartes’ cogito. From the Greek person who ‘listens’ to being, the order of which always transcends the subject, the move is made to the modern individual who both dominates the world as ‘picture’ in science and technology, and becomes concerned with their own subjective being. This concern goes as far as trying wholly to objectify it in ‘cybernetics’ – i.e. in what we now think of

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3 This question recurs in Weber’s work and is a key to his conception of rationalisation.
as ‘artificial intelligence’. Descartes, of course, plays a role in bringing music into the new rationalised philosophy. However, music once again suggests an ambiguity in Heidegger’s story.

Weber’s account depends upon the apparently paradoxical relationship between the new, mathematically based tempering of the scale into equal semitones in the seventeenth century, and the resulting new freedom for the subject in music. He shows how, throughout the history of music, attempts are made to ‘rationalise’ the relationships between notes within different octaves, which are asymmetrical if based on the relationships between natural overtones. The result of modern tempering is the ability to modulate from any key to any other key. This leads to a considerable extension of expressive freedom, at the price, on instruments with fixed tuning, like piano or organ, of losing melodic differentiations between notes such as F-sharp and G-flat, which are the same in tempered tuning, but different in ‘just’ (Pythagorean) tuning. Weber’s image of rationalisation is summed up by his contention that ‘Only the tempering of the scale brought complete freedom to [modern harmonically based music]’ (Weber 1921). These reflections relate to a decisive theme in Adorno’s conception of music and philosophy.

Adorno maintains that ‘What drives spirit (‘Geist’) in music forwards, the principle of rationality which was rightly recognised as central by Max Weber, is nothing but the unfolding of extra-artistic, social rationality. The latter “appears” in the former’ (14: 409). His reasons for this claim are apparent in the contention that ‘music transforms itself by control over the natural material into a more or less fixed system whose particular moments have a significance in relation to the subject which is independent [of the subject] and at the same time open to it’ (18: 160–1). The apparent paradox, in which an objective mathematical order is the condition of possibility of a new subjective freedom, becomes in Adorno a constitutive contradiction, the interpretation of which forms the basis of his understanding of music in modernity. The rationality which is the source of the dialectic of enlightenment is, as we saw, based on the subject’s domination of the other, and the development of modern music consists in the extension of the subject’s control of ‘musical material’. Presumably, though, this control need not take place solely in the name of the domination of nature which Adorno regards as leading both to repressive social effects and to the degradation of human and non-human nature. The ‘openness’ of the ‘system’ of music to the subject requires acknowledgement both of the constraints
entailed by any system and what the system enables, which is precisely what is exemplified by Weber’s account of the freedom made possible by the tempering of the scale.

The dynamic nature of his construal of the relationship between constraints in music and what they enable makes Adorno’s work on musical reproduction particularly illuminating. Because his main focus is the Western classical, notated, musical tradition he might seem likely to present the issue simply in terms of a dialectic between the fixity of the notated score and the flexibility of the attempt to realise the score in performance. This would fit a model – that can be linked to philosophical versions of the relationship between necessity and freedom – in which a musical object is confronted with the freedom of the performer-subject. However, Adorno’s avoidance of fixed concepts, which can lead to questionable results, here leads to important insights concerning both music and philosophy.

Consider his remarks on coloratura, which he terms the ‘ballet of the voice’. It is essential to the success of coloratura, and to musical virtuosity in general, that ‘the most difficult must sound “easy”, without effort’; there has to be more to it than the overcoming of a technical obstacle, more than just ‘control of nature’ (Adorno 2001: 172). He continues:

Here a chink is opened up in metaphysics – as well as opening up the salvation (‘Rettung’) of the virtuoso element. For it is not just control of nature as command of the material and of the mechanism of playing, but rather, because that command can, by virtue of its completeness, [itself] be played with, it loses its violence, its seriousness, and becomes imagination and is thereby reconciled: control of nature appears ‘natural’, becomes aware of itself as nature.

( ibid.: 173 )

Compare this with the following remark from his lectures on Problems of Moral Philosophy: ‘We are really no longer ourselves a piece of nature at the moment when we notice, when we recognise, that we are a piece of nature’ (Adorno 1996: 154). In both these passages freedom has to do with the realisation that in certain cases our subjective command of something initially appears as an overcoming of nature, but can be the opposite. Freedom in this sense is nature itself in us – Adorno, echoing aspects of Schelling, does not accept Kant’s idea of nature as just the causal realm – but in a form which transcends self-preservation. Most importantly, what may seem abstract in the philosophical formulation
is manifested in a historically specific musical phenomenon which has to be experienced in its specificity if what Adorno means is to be conveyed. This contrast and interaction between what can be experienced in music and what philosophy can say indicates a characteristic tension in Adorno’s approaches to music and philosophy.

At times Adorno uses the notion of a ‘reconciliation’ between mind and nature in such an emphatic manner that what he points to only makes sense in quasi-theological or strong Idealist terms, both of which rely – despite Adorno’s claims to the contrary – on there having been some point at which mind and nature were not ‘unreconciled’. The idea of re-conciliation depends on something about which there cannot be any justifiable arguments, namely the idea of the state prior to the separation of mind and nature. In the passage about coloratura, on the other hand, Adorno salvages the idea of reconciliation in a way which does not promise more than any theory could ever convey. This glimpse of a way of being both beyond mere technical domination and beyond a failure to live up to human creative possibilities – possibilities which necessarily involve technical command – suggests a model for the best of Adorno’s ideas about music and philosophy.

Contrast this model, however, with the following, from the essay ‘Appreciated Music’, on ‘The ideal of music’, where the philosophical vocabulary leads to problems:

This ideal is one based on cognition, but not cognition about art, rather cognition which art itself is, as a counterpart to scientific cognition: cognition from within. Artworks are the only things in themselves; they stand in for reconciliation with lost things in themselves, with nature. Comprehension [‘Mitvollzug’ in the sense both of listening which actively grasps the nature of the music, and of adequate performance] of music is the successful self-externalisation of the subject in something which thereby becomes its own: anticipation of a state in which alienation would be abolished.

(15: 187)

Here Adorno, sketching a version of metaphysics, takes the step – probably influenced by the Lukács of The Theory of the Novel and History and Class Consciousness – of assimilating the idea of the loss of ‘things in themselves’ to a theory of ‘alienation’. The suggestion is admittedly that this state of alienation, which is produced by the incursion of the commodity form into all areas of society, is not a perennial fact of human existence, but the conception is still questionable.
The notion of alienation recurs in Adorno’s work, and it often has problematic consequences. He opposes any conception in which ‘the hope that what in reality missed its opportunity should come to unity and peace in art’, so art is an ‘anticipation’ of the abolition of alienation, not an immediate counter to it. This opposition forms the basis of his repeated claim that ‘Music, which intends reconciliation, is most allergic to the illusion of reconciliation’ (16: 143–4). The extreme – and not strictly necessary – consequence of his suspicion of false reconciliation is that music should not transcend ‘alienation’, but should be ‘pure, uncompromising presentation of the absolute contradiction itself’ (ibid.). This idea forms the basis of his insistence that music should critically ‘oppose’ the nature of contemporary reality, rather than functioning as a consolation, and of his advocacy of the technically advanced, dissonant music of the Second Vienna School. There are, of course, plenty of contexts in which music can justifiably function as a consolation. Adorno can therefore only be talking of music that functions at the level of philosophy, as a form of critique of existing historical reality, and this will involve important difficulties (on this see Geuss 1998). Equally problematic is the fact that the account of what music is supposed to resist is suspiciously vague.

It is easy to appear complacent if one criticises Adorno in relation to such matters. Modernity unquestionably has involved ‘the worst’, in the form of industrialised genocide, and other technologically produced mass suffering. Technology which could feed the world, increase peaceful communication, diminish suffering, etc., often helps to do precisely the opposite. However, it is problematic to make this into a verdict on modernity as a whole, as though all forms of technology are the root of the problem, rather than that root being the social forms within which technology is employed. Adorno clearly thinks the latter is actually the case, but he too often conflates a whole series of differing factors into the crude version of a dialectic of enlightenment. In *Negative Dialectics*, referring to Marx’s Feuerbach thesis about philosophy having interpreted the world and now needing to change it, he talks, for example, of philosophy as ‘remaining alive’ because ‘the moment of its realisation’ was missed (6: 15). The moment in question appears to be a revolution in a Marxian sense. Critical philosophy is consequently based on the need to keep alive the idea of what should have been realised – i.e. a humane society – in circumstances where it is no longer possible to bring it about, revolution itself having been shown to produce new kinds of inhumanity. Once such a model is adopted,
history – including the history of music – has to be seen in the light of this fundamental failure, as though one knew for certain that the course of things would have been radically better were x to have happened. How the Holocaust could have been avoided and how a repetition of it could be prevented are vital questions for philosophy, as Adorno maintains in *Negative Dialectics*. Can one, though, be sure that the ‘realisation of philosophy’ would have been a guarantee that such an event would be impossible? So much is invested in the notion of ‘philosophy’ here that it is hard to know what it means.

Adorno’s reflections on philosophy and modernity should not, however, just be dismissed out of hand. The processes of rationalisation characteristic of the emergence of the commodity structure as the dominant global form of exchange do indeed have universal effects. These make it justifiable in some contexts to see these processes as linked both to the nature of modern philosophical thinking and to some of the most inhumane and terrifying aspects of modernity, in which people become mere objects to be dominated. The combination of Hegel, Marx, and Weber involved in Adorno’s approach to rationalisation does capture something important about the nature of modernity. At the same time, any specific example of rationalisation is likely to complicate the issue, as we already saw with regard to Weber’s music sociology, and this is also the case with Adorno’s own approach to musical reproduction.

**Settling the score**

Adorno himself often stresses the importance of using ‘micrological’ analysis as a means of understanding historical phenomena, rather than assuming that the phenomena are best grasped by locating them within a historical totality.¹ Let us therefore look at the issue of notation as a form of rationalisation in the notes on musical reproduction, contrasting what is said there with a passage from *DoE*. In the latter the authors give a generalised anthropological account of the move from nomadic society to a more fixed social order. This move is seen in terms of the establishing of domination based on forms of identity, including the following:

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¹ His ambivalent stance with regard to the relationship between a micrological view and the idea of modernity as a concrete totality derives from his fascination with both Walter Benjamin’s and Hegel’s approaches to modernity (see e.g. 10.1: 247–8).
The recurring, eternally identical processes of nature are hammered into the subordinates as the rhythm of work, according to the beat of the cosh and the stick, whether by alien tribes or by their own cliques, and this beat echoes in every barbaric drum and every monotonous rhythm. Symbols take on the expression of the fetish. The repetition of nature which they signify always reveals itself eventually as the permanence of the social compulsion which they represent.

Although there are echoes of the links between rhythm and language which we encountered in the Romantics, the links are seen here essentially in terms of repression based on the will to power. In the work on musical reproduction, on the other hand, the account of much the same phenomena is more differentiated. Furthermore, by examining the emergence of musical notation and how it relates to other themes in the work on reproduction, the ambivalence of the notion of rationalisation in modernity becomes evident, making sense of part of Adorno’s claim that ‘extra-artistic, social rationality’ appears in music.

The philosophical importance of notation derives from its relationship to memory. For Kant memory was linked to schematism, which connects sensuous receptivity and the spontaneity of thought. The ‘input’ of intuitions from the world without any structuring by thought would involve a chaotic multiplicity in which nothing is really identical with anything else, so that nothing could be remembered. Schematism makes judgement possible, rendering material that is empirically never identical the same by enabling it to be classified in categories and concepts, and therefore to be retained as something intelligible. The retention can, however, be seen as demanding the sacrifice of qualitative aspects of the particular experience. For this reason Adorno relies in many contexts on the assumption that ‘Thinking is identifying’ (6: 17), because it may neglect what cannot be said to be identical.

The point of the Romantic version of schematism we looked at was that it depended on rhythm, on a pre-conceptual intelligibility which cannot simply be located in the subject, because it belongs to what it is to exist in a world. The account of schematism in the chapter on the ‘Culture Industry’ of DoE also does not present schematism as simply part of the cognitive capacity of the subject, but its extension of the notion is characteristically hyperbolic: ‘The achievement which Kantian schematism still expected from subjects, namely the initial connection of the sensuous manifold to fundamental concepts, is taken off the subject by
industry. It carries out schematism as the first service to the customer’
(3: 145). Two things are important here. The first is the attempt to
give what Kant sees as the activity of the subject an objective historical
basis in the world of commodities (the authors cite examples of clichés
in mass-produced culture, from film to music, to illustrate their point).
The second is the one-sidedness of the interpretation, which echoes the
passage cited above on rhythm as a form of social compulsion, and sugg-
ests the problem of relying on an overall philosophical principle with
regard to specific historical phenomena. Schlegel’s account of rhythm
and identification can be related to the theme of the increasing control
of nature by identification in DoE, but, importantly, he did not think
of rhythm as a form of repression, because it was also a resource which
enabled coherent thought and gave pleasure. This positive evaluation
is hard to reject out of hand: think, for example, of how important
rhythm is to the well-being of infants. Schlegel’s dialectical conception
of rhythm can make sense of Adorno’s sometimes questionable reflec-
tions on the origins of notation.

Adorno’s initial claim about writing music down, rather than play-
ing it from memory (or improvising it in an established tradition), itself
already involves a more dialectical approach. It is, he argues, when mem-
ory becomes a problem that the need develops for forms of reminder
which objectify what is to be remembered. The difficulties involved
in the historical story here are admitted by Adorno: he is speculating
about something for which the evidence is sketchy at best, and, more-
over, about a state which is assumed to precede one kind of split between
subject and object. DoE engages at times in such speculation and it tends
to lack anthropological and historical support. The emergence of musi-
cal notation, on the other hand, necessarily involves attention to a kind
of practical musical awareness that precedes this specific form of objec-
tification. The idea of such awareness can, of course, legitimately be
extended beyond the case of musical notation to writing, for example,
and to how thought is affected by it. This awareness is, furthermore,
part of very many people’s experience.

Adorno sees aids to memory as resulting from the ‘universal mediation
of experience which cuts through the original relationship of subject
and object’ (Adorno 2001: 70). The idea of such an ‘original rela-
tionship’ might sound questionable. However, he specifies it by the
example of children, who have no problem in remembering language,
but do have a problem with its ‘objectification’, i.e. with learning to
write. This allows him to infer the necessity of a situation where there
is no subject–object separation, even if recalling this state may become impossible once it is lost. Adorno analogises the case of children to ‘primitive tribes’ and their music: ‘whenever music was made traditionally, without being bound to fixed writing, memory reveals itself as strong: the rhythmic models which are retained by primitive peoples are so complex that no civilised person, except perhaps the trained musician, could achieve the same thing (there is still something of this in jazz)’ (ibid.). Rather than presupposing a prior state of unity before ‘alienation’, Adorno is, then, concerned here with a well-established phenomenon whose erosion is a key to understanding what follows it. He regards the recurrent changes in primitive music that the lack of fixed notation makes unavoidable as ‘a function of memory, not of its failure’ (ibid.). The past of such music is alive, and not fixed, so there is no reason why the music cannot be sustained as itself, even when it is modified. When notation seeks to preserve music as something identical across time, it becomes ‘reified as something forgotten’, such that ‘one could easily enough call notation the enemy of remembering, of memory itself’ (ibid.). Memory of the kind familiar, for example, from Australian aboriginal culture, which does not draw a rigid line between ‘now and previously’, is therefore submitted to musical notation as ‘a piece of discipline’ (ibid.).

This might sound like a characteristic critique of modern rationality, of the kind shared by DoE, Foucault, and other Nietzsche-influenced thinkers. The difference is that Adorno makes it clear that what this form of repression of memory is is also what makes possible modern Western music culture. The dialectical character of memory, which is central to this culture, is based on the idea that ‘the making disposable/available (‘das Verfügbarmachen’) of what has been makes it at the same time irretrievable’, so that ‘the desperate utopia of all musical reproduction’ is, ‘by having it at one’s disposal, to bring back what cannot be brought back’ (ibid.: 71). The echo of the myth of Orpheus here is also associated with Proust’s exploration of how, because voluntary memory

5 Adorno’s critical evaluation of civilisation makes it clear that he does not contrast the ‘primitive’ with the civilised to the simple detriment of the former. For his negative assessments of earlier cultures he uses the term ‘barbaric’, which he also applies to much of modernity. Positive evaluations of aspects of jazz recur in the work on musical reproduction.

6 Zoe Hepden has pointed out to me that one can read aspects of DoE in the same manner, because repression makes culture possible at the same time as imbuing it with an inevitable sense of loss. I think, though, that the dominant tendency of the main parts of DoE is still in the direction I have described above.
already objectifies the past, it cannot reach what it seeks: all ‘making of
music is a Recherche du temps perdu’ (ibid.). Underlying this concep-
tion is a plausible example of what Adorno terms ‘non-identity’.

The notation of music is ‘musical domination of nature, and in it
musical subjectivity emerges as separation from the unconscious commu-
nity’ (ibid.). The ‘unconsciousness’ of the community is its immersion
in the complex rhythmic and other practices described above, which are
remembered by dint of participating in them, not by their being object-
tified. When music becomes objectified it creates space for the subject’s
awareness of its difference from the object, hence the loss of collectively
anchored, practice-based memory. This space is the ‘precondition of
aesthetic freedom’, because subjects can now develop the object in
their own manner and communicate what they develop within society.
On the other hand it also involves what is opposed to that freedom:
‘notation always at the same time regulates, inhibits, suppresses what
it notates and develops’ (ibid.: 71–2). The non-identity consists in the
fact that, in the writing down of music, the difference of what is written
from what is performed is ‘constitutively established at the same time’
(ibid.: 72). It is not, therefore, that the best performance would be the
one which realises what is ‘objectively there’ in the score (a computer
can sometimes do this more accurately than a performer), because that
would simply privilege the objective over the subjective side. Nor is it
that the subject would express itself most completely in the best per-
formance, because that would not do justice to the historical meanings
sedimented in the notated work, which transcend individual subjective
intentions, even as they require them for the music to live.

Adorno’s account of notation leads to ways of considering the inter-
pretation and performance of music which some of this other more
dogmatic work, like Philosophy of New Music, has tended to obscure.7
However, we need first to look at how Adorno’s specific attention
to music corrects the one-sidedness of DoE. Indeed, the structures

7 Adorno was one of the first critics of the idea of ‘authentic/period’ performance (see,
e.g., 10: 138–51). The value of the ideas outlined here is that they also allow a non-
dogmatic appraisal of how attention to historical factors can move from the mistaken
attempt to recreate the sound as it was produced in a particular period, which neglects
the subjective side of how listening is constituted, to a new relationship between the
two. An example of this is a notionally ‘period’ performance, like Thomas Zehetmair’s
remarkable recording of the Beethoven Violin Concerto (Philips 4621232), which uses
some period playing techniques (faster tempi, reduced vibrato, attention to the rhetoric
of melodic phrasing), but does so in a manner that results in a startlingly new realisation
of the work.
involved here go to the heart of Adorno’s thinking, which is often most successful when it ‘listens’ to what music can convey, rather than judging music ‘from above’ in terms of a version of the philosophical story of *DoE*. Perhaps the most illuminating element in Adorno’s approach is the idea that comprehension of the problem of performance must rely on the notion of necessary failure. Versions of this notion recur in Adorno’s thinking, and they enable one to get more grip on his elusive concept of non-identity.

The truth of performance

The issue of notation and performance offers a way of showing something which, when stated as a philosophical idea, does not sound very plausible. Adorno talks, for example, of the philosophical idea of ‘non-identity’ in terms of the ‘impossibility of grasping, without there being a surplus, what is not of the subject [i.e. some aspect of the world] in subjective concepts’ (5: 152). It is easy to object here that one does not need to think in terms of the identity of a concept with its object. Concepts can be tools for achieving a purpose, so that the idea of necessary failure becomes redundant in contexts where the idea of truth as correspondence of concept and object has no relevance to what one does. Only if one adopts, in the manner of *DoE*, the idea of the total predominance of ‘instrumental reason’, as the subjugation of the object by the subject, can the idea of a concept as a tool be regarded as inherently problematic. However, by linking thought and language to the question of music as performance and as text, the hyperbolic demands Adorno makes on concepts in the name of non-identity can still add up to something challenging which has consequences for the scope of philosophical reflection about truth.

A recurrent dilemma concerning truth in modern philosophy arises from the idea that every specific claim to truth relies on our ability to offer justifications. Truth must, though, transcend all particular justifications, because they can never come to an end, or can, in Putnam’s phrase, ‘be lost’. The Romantics therefore conceived of truth as a regulative idea: truth might never be reached, but without the idea the search for it seemed to lack a goal. Crucially, this conception was associated with the work of art’s transcendence of our interpretations as

8 Adorno consistently failed to understand how close much of what he thought about philosophy was to pragmatism (see Bowie 2000, 2004b).
much as it was with strictly epistemological concerns. The problem with the philosophical versions of the conception of truth as regulative idea, which play a role in some of the work of Apel, Putnam, Habermas, and others, is that they cannot show that the idea plays a real part in the practice of inquiry or of everyday communication. Unless we already knew in some way what it was that we were seeking, we would have no way of knowing if we had reached that for which the regulative idea stood, so the idea that under ideal conditions, rather than the messy ones we actually deal with, truth would be guaranteed is of no use. Rorty suggests regarding such ideas as a ‘focus imaginarius’ because they serve as a motivation for producing justifications, rather than having any substantive content. The substantive idea of truth as a regulative idea starts, then, as Albrecht Wellmer contends (Egginton and Sandbothe 2004: 99, and Wellmer 2004), to sound indefensibly metaphysical.

Adorno’s echo of the Romantics in his remark that musical ‘interpretation measures itself by the level of its failure’ (Adorno 2001: 120) can be informative here. The implication I want to explore, as another way of understanding music as a form of metaphysics, is that musical practice offers a way of responding to the idea of the transcendence of truth that does not entail a metaphysical version of the idea that truth substantially pre-exists the search for it. What is at issue here can be suggested by Hilary Putnam’s arguments about the entanglement of fact and value. Putnam rejects the idea that value issues can be assessed from a perspective outside involvement in them, of the kind to which reductive ‘naturalism’ makes claim. He talks of ‘moral perception’, by which he means ‘the ability to see that someone is, for example, “suffering unnecessarily”, as opposed to “learning to take it”’. There is ‘no science that can teach one to make these distinctions. They require a skill that, in Iris Murdoch’s words, is “endlessly perfectible”, and that . . . is also interwoven with our (also endlessly perfectible) mastery of moral vocabulary itself’ (Putnam 2004: 128). Putnam insists that epistemic values and ethical values are not the same, but that they may play equally important roles in our lives. The comments just cited can clearly be applied to music, where the ability to distinguish between what is ‘deeply expressive’ and merely ‘meretricious’ involves a further mastery, a mastery which is not just of the vocabulary for verbal expression about music, but of music itself.9

9 The same can apply to the other arts.
Adorno does at times fall prey to the divisions between talking about objects and talking about moral issues which Putnam is criticising, even though his aims relate closely to Putnam’s. Habermas criticises Adorno for his adherence to the epistemological paradigm of the subject confronted with the object. The ‘paradigm of communication’, based on the ‘telos of agreement’ in truth-oriented inquiry, is, he contends, a better ‘post-metaphysical’ alternative to the ‘subject philosophy’ to which Adorno adheres by his view of reason as the subject’s instrumental control of the object. Adorno fails to consider reason’s intersubjective, communicative aspect and so is prone to the consequences of a fact/value dichotomy even as he actually seeks to oppose it. However – and this is what connects to Adorno’s account of musical interpretation – agreement, which is also involved in aesthetic judgement and artistic practice, still does not, as Habermas acknowledges, account for truth, because even a universal consensus can be false. Now this is evidently a debate which could take us much too far from our central concerns. I just want to take one reaction to it and show how that reaction relates to aspects of Adorno’s views on music and truth in interpretation. These views suggest ways beyond the narrow approach to truth that dominates much contemporary philosophical discussion.

It is important here that the scope of the notion of interpretation should include most kinds of music. Interpretation can be of a score, but it can equally be of a piece which is being improvised on. We can, for instance, comparatively assess Coleman Hawkins’ and John Coltrane’s interpretations of ‘Body and Soul’, even though what they actually play is not remotely identical. Adorno’s reflections on memory and identity in music, as well as on the significance of improvisation, suggest how both playing a score and improvising are forms of interpretation. Even in a traditional musical culture the playing of music is regarded in normative terms, when it is agreed, for example, that a kind of music or a piece is played well or badly. Failure to communicate ‘soul’ in playing a piece is a failure of interpretation, because expression can be a decisive way in which understanding of the practice being engaged in is conveyed. It seems appropriate to say, therefore, that the music is not being played in a true manner.\footnote{This might seem to go against the everyday use of ‘true’, but saying that what someone plays is not true can be a very effective way of criticising music.} The extremes here are the kind of highly detailed score produced by Mahler, which seeks to fix as many parameters of performance as possible, which Adorno associates with
other rationalised aspects of modernity, and the very loose framework in some free jazz or other improvised music.\footnote{I exclude here the score which is then ‘played’ by a computer because the constitutive tension with which Adorno is concerned is not strictly relevant in this case.} Despite the differences in the sense of ‘interpretation’, there is a continuity between these extremes, insofar as they can be seen in terms of the activity ‘measuring itself by the level of its failure’, a failure which means that something important is not achieved. This is, then, a normative issue, but the norms in question cannot be said to pre-exist the specific music to which they pertain – that would entail the kind of metaphysical assumption which Wellmer criticises with regard to truth as a regulative idea. A crucial aspect of the history of art consists precisely in the continual transformation of norms by aesthetic practice. This transformation is what leads to the idea that judgements in aesthetics are merely subjective, and hence merely relative to historically contingent norms. However, while Adorno would not deny the historical element in aesthetics, he rejects what he terms ‘aesthetic relativism’ (see Bowie\footnote{2004a}).

The obvious problem with musical interpretation is that agreement about how to do it right is often local, and transient. There must, though, for the issue of interpretation to be controversial, be some underlying agreement on the aim of getting it right, even between those with opposed views of what this concretely consists in. This situation is echoed by Putnam’s claim with regard to ethics that ‘There is no recognition transcendent truth here; we need no better ground for treating “value judgements” as capable of truth and falsity than the fact that we can and do treat them as capable of warranted assertibility and warranted deniability’ (Putnam\footnote{2004: 110}). It is the relationship between the norms informing necessary background agreements, without which truth is incomprehensible, and the norms invoked in contingent disagreements about specific cases that matters here. One way in which a disagreement might be dealt with, as we saw, is for each participant to play the music to the other as they think it should go, making their differences at least in part non-verbally apparent. This playing might also be accompanied by gestures – and verbal remarks – that underline or clarify the differences. Especially in the modern period concern with the right interpretation of music becomes part of a wider interrogation of the rationality of norms and of what is gained and lost by the insistence on such rationality. The idea of a right interpretation seems, then, both to be inescapable, and yet also at odds with the actual
practice of music. Now compare this situation with Wellmer’s criticism of the Habermas–Apel idea of truth as a regulative idea based on the aim of ‘final ultimate consensus’.

Wellmer shows that the idea of truth-oriented inquiry depends on an asymmetrical relationship between two ways of thinking of truth. I want to relate these to the idea of right interpretation and the inherent failure completely to realise it in practice. In the first person, my conviction of the truth of something is inseparable from my sense that it is justified, so that there is ‘an internal connection between truth and justification’ (Egginton and Sandbothe 2004: 102). My understanding of what truth is depends on my understanding that what I hold to be true is justified. I may very well be wrong, but I cannot assume that I am always wrong without losing the meaning of what it is to be right. In judging music, both as listener and as performer, something similar applies: I must have some ability to distinguish between right and wrong for any critical awareness to be possible at all. My view of someone else’s conviction of the truth of something, on the other hand, presupposes that they hold the conviction for reasons (otherwise I would again not understand truth), but, unlike in my own case, it is always possible for me to think that those reasons fail to legitimize their conviction.

Wellmer contends that the absence of a pre-given or universally agreed set of what really are good reasons means that invoking good reasons entails ‘the adoption of an attitude with normative consequences’ (ibid.: 103), in which we are obliged to give and defend reasons with no foundational guarantees, not even the notional guarantee contained in the idea of a final consensus.12 What links these ideas to music has to do with how we conceive of the normative consequences. Our comprehension of the notion of truth comes, Wellmer argues, from its internal connection to justification, but that is also what makes truth congenitally controversial, so the tension between consensus and disagreement is constitutive: ‘just as every controversy about truth has its telos in an uncoerced consensus, so does every consensus carry in itself the seed of new disagreements’ (ibid.). Note how an analogous claim can apply to musical judgements in the form both of verbal judgements about and of practical judgements in performance. Wellmer’s characterisation can also be linked to Adorno’s view that there is a constitutive contradiction between a score and how it is performed: the score implies a telos of true performance, but actual performances reveal ongoing disagreements.

12 The position is, as Wellmer says, close to that of Brandom.
concerning the score. The position advanced by Wellmer makes Apel’s and Habermas’ idea of truth as a regulative idea invalid because ‘the expectation that truth and justification (or truth and consensus) will coincide, not here and now but rather under ideal conditions’ fails to take account of the aforementioned asymmetry, in which ‘Truth and justification coincide with reference to the making of judgements and the holding of beliefs, but not in reference to the ascription of judgements and beliefs to others’ (ibid.: 108). The notion of truth as ‘interperspectival and context-transcending’ (ibid.) is necessary to explain the meaning of the internal connection of truth and justification. I do not think things are just true for me, because I would then have no way of understanding truth, even though my sense of truth is inextricably linked to what I think is justified. However, invoking truth as an ever-receding goal or as that which would result under ideal intersubjective conditions makes it, Wellmer thinks, into a metaphysical fiction. Such a fiction can play no substantive role in cashing out the notion of truth, because it would be, as Derrida suggests, endlessly ‘deferred’, rather than playing the role in communication which the understanding of truth manifestly does.

For Wellmer there is consequently nothing but the contingent game of giving reasons, of trying to fulfil normative demands without the back-up of a metaphysical final answer. This seems plausible, and it can also be linked to what actually happens in the history of musical performance. The fiction of the final answer is here, though, in one important sense at least, not completely empty, because, following Rorty, it can play a motivating role. The search for better conditions of inquiry which will maximise consensus and establish maximum justification is perennial in many domains. This kind of motivation, which is part of what makes many norms effective, is also an ineliminable aspect of music making. A key difference between the aesthetic and the scientific realm is, however, that, whereas in the sciences the search for truth can also be construed in pragmatic terms, as problem-solving, which does not require regulative ideas as part of the practice, ‘problem-solving’ in music – Adorno often talks of music in such terms – does not have an aim beyond success immanent to the practice. Music can therefore be said in some circumstances still to involve a regulative idea, of the kind suggested by Murdoch’s notion of that which is ‘endlessly perfectible’.

Think for a moment, then, about employing the notion of a regulative idea – in the sense of that which, as Adorno puts it below, is ‘in
principle unrealisable’ – in relation to different cultural domains. The belief that the history of philosophy can be construed as the search for an explanation of truth has often been understood in terms which seem to require a regulative idea. Because the search in question has yet to lead to a final consensus, the regulative idea supposedly becomes what makes philosophy cohere as a unified enterprise, even if its telos seems so far to have been absent. This is, though, precisely what leads Wellmer to argue that the conception of truth as a regulative idea is a metaphysical fiction. At the same time, however, the motivation provided by such a fiction leads to results which arguably constitute the history of Western philosophy, at least until the emergence of some aspects of Romantic philosophy and of pragmatism, which break with representational conceptions. The Romantic link of art to philosophy would in this case have to do with the possibility that the idea of philosophy as a unified enterprise constituted out of inherent or necessary failure is in fact parasitic on a notion of unification derived from the demands encountered in art.¹³ In the musical domain the fact that the importance of regulative ideas lies in the question of motivation leads to another case of the entanglement of music and philosophy.

Consider the following remark by Adorno on ‘true interpretation’, which he characterises as ‘an idea that is strictly prescribed, but one which is in principle unrealisable, for the sake of the fundamental antinomy of art-music’ (Adorno 2001: 74). Truth as idealised consensus and true musical interpretation are in these terms both ‘in principle unrealisable’, but this status has a normative significance in music that is not obviated by the problematic metaphysical consequences involved in a philosophical description of truth in such terms. Adorno’s ‘fundamental antinomy’ has to do with relationships, such as that between score and interpretation, between ‘analysis’ and ‘mimesis’, and a variety of other oppositions that we shall encounter in what follows. The antinomy is explained when he asserts, with regard to assessing how far a score should determine its interpretation, that ‘musical notation is, of course, expression of a musical idea, which it, so to speak, standardises, reifies, alters, and which . . . is to be awoken, restored. In a certain sense true interpretation revokes the notation’

¹³ The other alternative is the Hegelian idea that constant refutation of particular truths in the sciences is the ground of the ‘absolute idea’, which is the ultimate negation of the negation. As Adorno suggested, this can be linked to the dynamic of Beethoven’s tonal music (see chapter 4 above).
The notation that is ‘revoked’ is at the same time that without which the music could not exist, hence the antinomy. A similar conception can apply to written texts. The words of which they consist are, by the very fact of their being words, standardised, and the most effective interpretations may be those which take one beyond established meanings and associations to what the texts reveal by their individual combination of elements. This is what Wittgenstein meant when referring to ‘these words in these positions’.

For Adorno score and performance must remain in a tension with each other in a way that need not apply to many verbal texts, such as the instructions for the use of a mechanism. He goes on to insist, however, that ‘reification by the notation, a central moment of rationalisation, is not only external to the composition [i.e. to the locus of the ‘idea’]’ (ibid.). Significant performances often result precisely from the way in which the resistance occasioned by the reification intrinsic to the score is overcome. Interpretation in this sense should seek both to realise the musical idea and yet also to manifest the resistance which is encountered in engaging with the score. Adorno praises Furtwängler for how he conveys the sense of the impossibility of realising what he seeks in the great classical and Romantic works, because what he seeks is no longer fully available to the interpreter. Furtwängler’s interpretations thus possess a historical truth which is manifest in their admission of failure. The ‘core of the question of interpretation’ (ibid.: 183) is that there is no final way of succeeding in both being true to the demands involved in playing technically correct note-lengths, etc., and yet rendering the music the expression of a – historically mediated – subjective individuality which overcomes the objectified aspect of the music.

There are obvious differences between how we conceive of truth as what is conveyed in or by assertions, and the idea of true interpretation of music, but these differences should not be regarded as absolute. Adorno himself sums up the differences in his dictum in the ‘Fragment on Music and Language’ that ‘interpreting language means: understanding language; interpreting music means: making music’ (16: 253). However, he also says the following, which deconstructs the differences: ‘Whether a phrase is played in a meaningful manner can be precisely converted into technical correlates like accents, pauses for breath, etc.

14 In the case of a ‘musical idea’ Adorno does not just mean a theme which is the basis of a piece, but rather the significance generated by that theme’s relationships to its contexts. In this sense the ‘idea’ of the *Eroica*, for example, is not just its musical themes, but what the work means in history by being realised in performance.
But in order to carry out this conversion one must first understand the meaning of the phrase’ (Adorno 2001: 159). One way of accounting for the understanding of linguistic utterances is that it depends on knowing what it is for an utterance to be true, which has to do with the contexts of its appropriate use. This suggests a continuity with what Adorno demands for playing ‘in a meaningful manner’, which is also about relating a phrase to its harmonic, rhythmic, and other contexts in an appropriate way. This conception can be elucidated if we return to Brandom’s ideas that we looked at in chapter 4.

Brandom says of the thermometer which reliably measures temperature and of the parrot which can say that something is red – thereby, in Adorno’s terms, fulfilling ‘technical correlates’ – that they are not using the concepts of temperature and colour in question, and so ‘do not understand what they are “saying”’ (Brandom 1994a: 897), because ‘the belief condition on knowledge implicitly contains an understanding condition’ (ibid.). In Adorno’s example of playing a phrase something similar applies, but this cannot, for the reasons we saw in chapter 4, be thought of in solely conceptual terms. Crudely, beliefs require ‘knowing that’, musical understanding requires ‘knowing how’, which is not simply cognitive and propositional, but not merely behavioural either. The musical equivalent of using a concept is playing what may in one respect be able to be done by a machine, but playing it in a manner which makes the kind of non-mechanical connections that fulfilling inferential and other normative commitments achieves in language. In Style and Idea Schoenberg develops the notion, Adorno observes, that ‘great music consists in the fulfilling of “obligations” which the composer, as it were, enters into with the first note’ (11, 122–3), and Adorno also talks of such obligations in performance (Adorno 2001: 100). There are, moreover, as Wittgenstein suggested in his remark that ‘the feeling gives the words “meaning”’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 444), dimensions of the musical which affect the kind of normativity appropriate to full understanding in language.\footnote{Brandom, as we saw, sometimes restricts his conception too much to the inferential dimension: the affective dimension and the aesthetic dimension are not fully characterisable in these terms. If we are interested in understanding what real people say and write, these dimensions cannot be consigned to the realm of mere psychology, not least because that realm itself is informed by objective social factors inherent in language both at the semantic and the expressive levels.}

Considering this parallel between musical and linguistic interpretation in art can both highlight what happens in extra-artistic contexts,
and reveal differences from those contexts. An actor performing their part in a play requires technical abilities which can be taught, but also an understanding of the words in question in relation to the context of the play as a whole, which goes beyond the technical level. Such understanding is not just of the meaning of individual utterances, but of their rhythm, tone, contextual function, etc. This understanding can be construed in similar terms to those required in everyday language use, but the circumscribed verbal material of the play makes one kind of formal normative demands, whereas everyday usage might, for example, make normative demands in terms of local standards of tact, accuracy, etc. Both language and music can be thought of here in terms of the continuum in musical interpretation which moves from reproducing something to some extent fixed, such as occurs when playing a role in a Shakespeare play or playing a Beethoven sonata, to improvising in a dramatic or musical context, which brings one in certain respects closer to everyday practice.\[^{16}\] In both cases an understanding of ‘meaning’, which results from successful connections of the material of communication, is essential to interpretation, and truth has to do with fulfilling the normative demands of the particular form of articulation.

The ultimate aim in the case of art, which need not apply when pragmatic success in communication can be the criterion, would be to make such connections in the most thoroughly integrated manner. However, this is precisely what is ‘in principle unrealisable’: by putting emphasis on one element, one can fail to do justice to another. The link between the linguistic and the musical senses of interpretation and truth can therefore be seen to result from holistic demands that are made on understanding. The appropriateness of employing the notion of a regulative idea relates, then, to Adorno’s idea that ‘interpretation measures itself by the level of its failure’. Rather than being thought of as a positive goal, the regulative idea becomes the result of the inherent failure involved in attempting to fulfil holistic demands. The question is how this failure applies to differing human activities and forms of articulation.

In contrast with the kind of holism at issue here, much of the literature on truth in the analytical tradition relates to the understanding of the truth of single utterances. What Adorno is concerned with in relation to music might therefore, as Nelson Goodman (1978) argues

\[^{16}\] Adorno argues that there are elements of each end of the continuum in any real instance of the notional extremes.
in relation to the idea of truth in art, be construed in analytical terms as ‘rightness’, rather than as truth. Indeed, Adorno often refers in such contexts to ‘Stimmigkeif’, which means ‘rightness’, and which has a connotation relating to ‘being in tune’. However, he also has no hesitation in also referring to truth in these contexts. Wellmer’s claim that the notion of truth ‘points of its own accord to a normative horizon which always already goes beyond that of an argumentative dispute about the truth of single utterances’ (Wingert and Günther 2001: 52) gives a way of seeing why.

For Wellmer the understanding of truth cannot be restricted to a deflationary semantic conception, because even ‘the concept of propositional truth cannot be understood if it is not understood in its internal relationship to a (normative) problematisation of ways of seeing, background understandings, etc.’ (Wellmer 2004: 172). The continual need to negotiate and to resolve differences in such understandings does not rely on a regulative idea in the metaphysically problematic sense, but is part of any practice constituted in normative terms. In comments on Donald Davidson’s holism, which involves the ‘principle of charity’, the assumption that in interpreting someone’s utterances one should assume that most of what they say is true, Wellmer suggests a direct bridge between the philosophical issue of truth in interpretation and the question of musical interpretation in Adorno. The principle of charity relates to the fact that interpretation for Davidson is necessarily hypothetical, but that ‘does not mean that the meaning of utterances or texts has some kind of being-in-itself beyond interpretation, so that it would only ever be grasped, as it were, hypothetically and temporarily or incompletely; instead this manner of its being grasped – interpretation – belongs to the manner of being of linguistic meaning. Its “esse” is “interpretari”’ (ibid.: 200). Wellmer’s anti-Platonic conception of interpretation, which is expressly informed by the later Wittgenstein, the Heidegger of Being and Time, and Gadamer (Wellmer is also a pupil of Adorno), echoes the Heidegger-influenced ideas of Besseler. For Besseler the manner of being of music in modernity was constituted by engagement in a practice, rather than being the representation of something already objectively existing. This concentration on practice is vital to my approach, but there is a further difficulty here.

Adorno is resolutely opposed to the idea of any kind of ‘being-in-itself’ that stands outside time, against which thought measures itself. Truth for Adorno always has what he calls a ‘temporal core’, because it can only be understood in relation to historically determinate
situations, even if it also necessarily involves a moment that transcends
the subjective aspect inherent in such historical determinacy (see e.g.
5: 283–4). Moreover, far from seeing works of art in Platonising terms,
he is concerned with the way in which the ‘process-character of works
of art is nothing but their temporal core’ (7: 264). Indeed, this con-
cern goes as far as the idea that works which seek to transcend time are
attempting to become like concepts that aim to fix their object defini-
tively, and so are doomed to fail more rapidly than works which ‘rush
towards their destruction (‘Untergang’)’ (ibid.: 265). Music is in this
sense the key to art, because it constitutively involves transience and
non-identity. So why does Adorno still talk of ‘true interpretation’ of
music as an unrealisable ‘idea’?

Truth, mimesis, and history

The answer has to do with how Adorno conceives of the demands of
musical interpretation, which require fulfilment but which can never
all be fulfilled together. Failures of realisation in music are an index
of music’s relationship to history. What Adorno wants is a critical per-
spective which can consider music and its performance to be true or
not, hence his opposition to relativism in aesthetics. The basis of this
is the following reflection: ‘Of course there are several layers of false
interpretation, one is the material layer of not-bringing-things-together
(from wrong notes, etc., to crude sound etc.), the other is that of untrue
interpretation, i.e. of missing what is composed’ (Adorno 2001: 119).
These two levels are, though, not separate: ‘everything to do with Geist
[‘alles Geistige’ in the sense of what has to do with the spontaneity of
interpretation] in music has something that represents it in sound; one
must differentiate the two in order to negate [‘aufheben’ in the Hegelian
sense of negate, preserve, and elevate] the difference’ (ibid.). He else-
where insists that ‘Every musical work [‘Arbeit’, which suggests activity,
rather than ‘Werk’, which suggests a completed object] presupposes
the possibility of the differentiation between right and wrong . . . the
apperception of all musical meaning consists in precisely this distinc-
tion’ (ibid.: 72). This possibility pertains both at the level where the
notes being wrong makes the piece ‘wrong’, and at the level of inter-
preting a piece truly.

A correct analytical grasp of the identity and function of the notes
played might seem to be the essential source of doing it right. How-
ever, this leads to a further decisive opposition: ‘true reproduction is
not simply the realisation of the analytical result’, because it must contain the spontaneous ‘idiomatic element’ (ibid.: 91). In consequence, true interpretation ‘is neither irrational-idiomatic . . . nor analytically pure, but [is] the restoration of the mimetic element through analysis’ (ibid.: 107). The key to Adorno’s approach to music and truth becomes apparent here, namely in the relationship between the ‘mimetic’ and the ‘analytical’, a relationship which has close affinities to that between the expressive and the semantic.

In DoE ‘mimesis’ is used to characterise ways of behaving that precede the repressions attached to socialisation: “Recognition in the concept”, the grasping of the different under the same, takes the place of somatic alignment [‘Angleichung’, which is apparent in ritual practices that imitate in gesture and symbol what a culture is afraid of] with nature’. The impulse to imitative behaviour has to be controlled for civilisation to be established, but it can never be eradicated. The mimetic is therefore associated with what is both an archaic threat, because it is pre-rational and not fully controllable, and yet crucial to a tolerable human existence, because it is part of being able to live in the world. The most obvious everyday case of ‘mimesis’ in the latter sense is the kind of mutual imitation of gestures and sounds that takes place between a pre-linguistic infant and its carers, which establishes bonds and gives the child its sense of a stable place in the world. This behaviour precedes language and is necessary for language-acquisition. In later life such behaviour can easily become a form of regression, but if other forms do not fulfil the need which gave rise to it, something essential will be repressed. Another way to approach what Adorno intends with the idea is to think of everyday use of language as follows, which connects to Putnam’s ideas about ‘moral perception’. Telling someone the truth can be done in a tone or via a formulation which is damaging to that person, even if they would have to concur on at least some aspect of the truth of what is said. The ‘same’ truth could be conveyed in an apt manner by the right tone of voice, or by a gesture that is right in the context, and such means echo what one does in communicating with an infant before they learn to speak.

What is at issue here are a whole series of background understandings – particularly of the affective nature suggested in Wittgenstein’s remark that ‘the feeling gives the words “meaning”’ – of the kind that Wellmer insists belong to an adequate understanding of truth. The affective element is here not a contingent addition. There are times when we cannot understand the truth of an affectively inflected utterance without
such background understanding of tone and its relationship to feeling, mood etc. In Adorno one can analogise the blunt statement to the analytical getting the notes technically right, and the apt communication of the truth to the appropriate combination of this with the mimetic element. From many perspectives in analytical philosophy this analogy will be seen as ignoring the fact that truth is a semantic concept, and cannot be affected by the non-semantic elements of communication, which belong in the realm of psychology or pragmatics. That, though, is likely to involve precisely the Platonism that Wellmer rejects in his claim that ‘the meaning of utterances or texts has some kind of being-in-itself beyond interpretation’. There may be purposes for which restricting the understanding of truth to a deflationary semantic conception can be appropriate, but that conception omits too much that is essential to how we understand truth. What is important, then, is that Wellmer’s hermeneutic approach permits a link, in a way that the deflationary concept of truth cannot, to what leads Adorno to sustain a regulative idea of true musical interpretation based on the relationship between analysis and mimesis.

The core question here is the association of the everyday functioning of truth, of the kind that we encountered in Brandom’s inferentialism, with what Adorno intends with regard to the demands of music. Following on from remarks about interpretation as an ‘idea’ which is ‘not even purely knowable, let alone realisable’, Adorno says: ‘Even if the true interpretation is unknown and unrealisable – false interpretation can always be concretely identified’ (Adorno 2001: 120–1). False interpretation makes the music ‘meaningless’ (ibid.) by failing to realise it in an adequate manner. One can, for example, show this by pointing out the elements that are dead in an interpretation because their connections to other elements are not made manifest. Much the same applies to criticism of a score, or an improvisation, which has notes that are merely ‘filling in’ musical space, rather than being justified by their adding to the piece’s meaning. Even if we don’t agree on when this occurs, without the sense that this is part of the normative aspect of music, one loses, as one does in relation to the understanding of truth if one tries to be sceptical about all one’s beliefs, any way of talking about understanding and interpreting music at all.

These last remarks on false interpretation might be seem to involve the metaphysical notion of a regulative idea that Wellmer rejects. So why are Adorno’s observations not open to that rejection? Discussion of truth always raises the problem of circularity: what makes the discussion
true, without presupposing the answer to what truth is? Does the correspondence theory of truth correspond to the fact that truth is correspondence to reality? As we saw, some understanding of truth has to be presupposed, otherwise our rejection both of utterances and of musical interpretations without finally knowing what the truth is becomes inexplicable. The crux of the matter is Adorno’s assertion that the idea is ‘not even purely knowable’: true interpretation of music is not just a matter of knowing how to do it. Truth in art is not a wholly cognitive issue: ‘For what mimetic behaviour addresses is the telos of cognition which cognition at the same time blocks with its own categories. Art completes cognition with what is excluded from it and thereby in turn detracts from the character of cognition, namely its unambiguous nature’ (7: 87). This claim involves another version of non-identity: the ‘telos of cognition’ would in these terms be the – impossible – unification of the general categories of thought with the particularity of any specific object of thought. Adorno’s idea is that cognition alone cannot be self-justifying. One can think of this in terms of Nietzsche’s question as to the value of truth, or in terms of Cavell’s reminder that our relations to things can entail demands which cognition cannot fulfil. Cavell talks of Heidegger and Wittgenstein ‘throwing into question . . . philosophy’s obeisance to epistemology’, in which certainty is ‘taken as its preferred relation to objects (as opposed, for example, to recognition, or intimacy, or mastery)’ (Cavell 2005: 245). Art’s importance lies, therefore, in its extending the idea of ‘truth’ beyond what can be known, in the sense of classified by a concept, towards other relationships to people and things. Music enacts the dilemma involved in the telos of cognition by requiring general forms, epitomised for Adorno by notation – which are analogous to concepts because they identify what they stand for – with the demand that true interpretation incorporate the particular mimetic moment without which those forms are not adequately realised. The parallel with what actually happens in moral life should be noted here: legitimate moral rules can be applied in a manner which constitutes a form of cruelty.

Adorno illustrates ‘the mimetic ability’ by ‘the musician who understands his score, follows its most minute movements, and yet in a certain sense does not know what he is playing’, and maintains that ‘it is the same for the actor, and for this reason the mimetic ability manifests itself most drastically in the praxis of artistic representation, as imitation of the curve of movement of what is represented’ (7: 189). Music has to combine the analytical and mimetic demands,
and that leads to the constitutive contradiction which informs the major developments in Western music. At the same time, this contradiction reveals the limitations of a notion of truth which remains exclusively at the cognitive level, and it is this that makes what may initially appear rather an abstruse topic important for contemporary philosophy.

Adorno rejects what he calls the ‘theory of truth as residue’ (‘Residualtheorie’), according to which ‘the objective is what remains after the crossing out of the so-called subjective factors’ (5: 256). He does not exclude the possibility that this theory ‘may be valid where the object is not itself a human one that is mediated through Geist’ (9.2: 138) (e.g. in the physical sciences). Significantly, his description of the ‘theory of truth as residue’ is echoed in Bernard Williams’ idea of the ‘absolute conception’, which assumes that the exclusion of subjective perspectives will generate pure objectivity, and that physics is therefore the source of such objectivity. In line with the direction intended by Adorno, Arthur Fine has argued that Williams’ conception is false in relation to many objects of inquiry, because it conflates ‘processes that are impersonal and nonperspectival’ with those that are ‘impartial and unbiased’ (Egginton and Sandbothe 2004: 121), when ‘impersonal does not imply unbiased, nor conversely’ (ibid.). The – Kantian – question Williams does not answer is how a conception can be absolute that seeks to exclude the ‘subjective’ ways in which the life-world out of which science emerges is constituted. Fine argues that the kind of judgement required for impartiality and lack of bias is essential to understanding ‘what it is like to be another’ (ibid.). In Adorno’s terms this understanding cannot be fully achieved in conceptual terms, concepts being too general to grasp all that belongs to the individuality of the other, and so it requires the mimetic. Such understanding connects to the appropriate understanding of how to perform music, where the need for ‘idiomatic’ expression and the need to get things technically right are both essential.

Ultimately Williams’ conception requires, as Heidegger suggests by his idea of modernity as what turns the world into a ‘picture’, a wholly objectified account of the subjective, otherwise the term ‘absolute’ is invalid. Adorno would regard such an account as another version of what vitiates the metaphysics of German Idealism. For Adorno the identity of subject and object required for any absolute conception absolutises thought’s ability to comprehend being. Such a conception would have to overcome precisely the constitutive tension between what can be
construed in objective terms and what cannot whose results make music significant in relation to philosophy.

All this is obviously very contentious if looked at in purely epistemological or semantic terms. Why stretch the notion of truth in such a manner, and isn’t the approach still dependent on its own being true, which must be stated verbally, so that one is forced back to the semantic? In the essay ‘Aspects’ from the *Three Studies on Hegel* Adorno gives a rationale for his position, in which the use of ‘mimetic’ suggests how music plays a role in his conception:

> Were there, to put it in Kantian terms, no similarity between subject and object, were both to stand . . . immediately opposed to each other, then there would not only be no truth, but no reason, no thought at all. Thought which had completely eradicated its mimetic impulse, the kind of enlightenment which does not carry out the self-reflection which constitutes the content of the Hegelian system and which names the relationship of thing and thought, would end in madness . . . The Hegelian speculative concept saves mimesis by thought’s reflection on itself: truth is not adequation but affinity.

(5: 285)

The adequacy of the ‘speculative concept’ to its object can never be finally achieved – except in the ‘absolute idea’, which Adorno regards as a mere metaphysical conjuring away of the non-identical – and should be thought of rather in terms of the continued engagement of thought with the object. In this engagement the object is related more and more coherently to its world via reflection on the practical and aesthetic, as well as cognitive, ways in which we encounter and interact with it.

Music’s relevance to this idea has to do with the notions of ‘similarity between subject and object’, and of truth as ‘affinity’. If ‘similarity’ is taken in an epistemological sense it would lead in the direction of adequation, but that is explicitly not what is intended. Like contemporary pragmatists, Adorno has no time for global scepticism, and so is not trying to connect subjective scheme and objective content. He is instead thinking in terms of a version of metaphysics. The key to the idea of affinity lies in its relationship to motivation. The lack of any mimetic impulse would end in madness, because there would be no sense in which engaging with the world had any point. Even self-preservation would be senseless, since individual existence would lack any reason for being sustained at all. It is because the world can engage us that a wholesale separation of subject and object makes no sense. The
idea of similarity can, of course, easily be mere subjective projection, a kind of pathetic fallacy, but Adorno’s claim is that it also points to ways of relating to things which do not just involve dominating them. The musical score illustrates what he means. As a physically describable object, the score has nothing directly to do with music, but the object is also what makes possible music as something which is neither merely subjective, nor wholly objective. There are echoes here of a non-metaphysical version of Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘logical form’, which was used to account for how differing forms of intelligibility – score, performance, gramophone record, etc. – are connected, but which cannot itself be analysed. Wittgenstein claimed that ‘What can be shown, cannot be said’ (4.1212, ibid.: 34), and showing can involve some of what Adorno means by mimesis. Imitation of the other, which is closer to showing than to saying, is one of the ways in which we act in relation to the world’s responding to us. Pursuing this parallel via Wittgenstein’s remark, with regard to the idea of showing, that ‘Musical themes are in a certain sense propositions (‘Sätze’)’, will take us to an important aspect of the philosophy/music relationship in Adorno.

Adorno talks of the ‘historical dual character of music as mime and language. As mimetic it is not purely readable, and is not purely imitable as language. For this reason it splits itself into the ideal of sound and into script, and needs ever-renewed exertion to reconcile the divergent elements’ (Adorno 2001: 238). This exertion cannot be described in conceptual terms because it has to do with the kinds of mimetic relations to the world which discursive forms cannot capture, and which have, using Besseler’s term, to be ‘vollzogen’, ‘achieved’/‘carried out’, in making music. However, Adorno always thinks of mimesis as in a dialectic with rationality: art is ‘mimesis which has been driven to consciousness of itself’ (7: 385). Art involves critical reflection, not mere regression to a previous, unreflective condition, and this is what makes it appropriate to call music a kind of language. Musical texts, even as they become ever more specific, still always involve a ‘zone of indeterminacy’, but this ‘is not just an inadequacy of the notation, but rather the consequence of a sign system for the intentionless’ (Adorno 2001: 239).

The notion of music as an intentionless – a non-referential, non-classifying – language makes the connection to Wittgenstein’s notion of showing clearer, as do Adorno’s remarks on the tension between the gestural aspect of music and what can be notated. Adorno discusses the notion of an intentionless language in terms of art in general, but music
in particular, as ‘judgementless synthesis’. Music is constituted by connections of signifying elements, which, unlike predicative judgements, are not intended to identify what they relate to: ‘What art as judgementless synthesis loses in determinacy in its particulars, it regains by doing greater justice to that which is otherwise cut off by judgement’ (11: 270). Truth in Adorno’s sense has, then, to do with doing justice to things and people, and this has to do with not identifying them conceptually. This does not, though, entail a relativist or sceptical position: he has no doubt, for example, that there are advances in the explanatory power of natural science. His concern is rather with the attempt to reveal what can be obscured by an exclusive concentration on scientific truths, and to explore how scientific method may be connected to certain kinds of repression in modern culture. The notion of judgementless synthesis highlights a series of insights and problems in Adorno’s conception, which are vital to the issue of music, philosophy, and modernity. In the next section I want first, though, to look at the some of the most problematic aspects of Adorno’s conception, before using the notion of judgementless synthesis to show how that conception might be revised in a more workable direction.

Music as socio-historical expression

The Adorno presented so far no doubt does not seem much like the notoriously austere political critic encountered in such essays as ‘On Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Hearing’ of 1938. In this hyperbolic piece Adorno uses Marx’s theory of the commodity as fetish to analyse the contemporary state of musical culture, where the ‘familiarity of the pop song replaces the value ascribed to it’, and where ‘evaluative behaviour has become a fiction for the person who finds themself surrounded by standardised market commodities’ (14: 15). As often in the case of Adorno’s most extreme claims, there is a grain of truth in this characterisation – it seems more apt now than when he wrote it – but the lack of empirical investigation into the social consequences of the decline of such evaluative behaviour means that it is unclear what the real import of the claim is. I have so far concentrated on other aspects of Adorno in order to separate issues which he sometimes conflates via his diagnosis of the sources of the cultural malaise suggested in such remarks. The core problem in Adorno in this area lies in how he deals with the relationships between the conceptual and the non-conceptual with regard to music.
Adorno wishes, by extending the scope of the notion of truth, to sustain the idea that music plays a role in kinds of awareness which are not verbal. These kinds of awareness can also affect what we say and how we say it, and so can play a role in developing moral perception, e.g. by enabling the articulation and expression of emotions. Such transitions between the non-verbal and the verbal relate to the two-way relationships between performance and score, as cases of the tension between the mimetic and the analytical or the semantic. The difficulty here becomes apparent in a remark by Adorno on philosophy’s relationship to the mimetic. He seeks to distinguish philosophy from science via the demand for philosophy to be ‘expressive’. The demand is to be fulfilled by applying what we have considered via the idea of ‘these words in these positions’ to philosophical writing. Indeed, Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* themselves offer an example (albeit one that Adorno seems not to have recognised) of what is meant. Wittgenstein’s text is not best understood as a series of arguments, and the ways in which it moves without coming to definitive answers are essential to an adequate understanding of it (see Eldridge 1997). Adorno maintains that ‘the moment of expression integral to philosophy, which is non-conceptual, mimetic, is only objectified by representation (‘*Darstellung*’) – by language’ (6: 30). Without language the expressive moment remains unarticulated. Language is, though, also inherently generalising, and this militates against expression, which has to be realised by the way in which linguistic elements are combined. Thought is, for Adorno, constantly confronted with this dilemma, which echoes the dilemmas of musical performance. The aspects of human life addressed by music are evidently entwined with the social, cultural, and political forms in which that life is lived, and many of these forms are necessarily discursive. What, then, of Adorno’s claim that music can offer an interpretative key to those forms which is not available to many discursive forms?

Consider the following example of this claim. In an outline of ca. 1949 for a never-written work on *The History of German Music from 1908 to 1933* Adorno remarks that, when the Nazis took over, they hardly needed to suppress ‘cultural-bolshevist’ music – i.e. ‘new music’, such as that of Berg or Schoenberg – because the suppression had already

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17 The philosophical idea that music is in general a stimulus to moral improvement is the sort of thing that I am arguing we should get away from. Music can indeed help to promote moral behaviour in certain contexts by, for example, enabling new channels of communication between people of differing cultural backgrounds, but it can also be morally dangerous, as suggested in chapters 6 and 7.
largely taken place within the realm of ‘so-called new music’ itself, so that ‘certain late forms of new music (Weill’s Bürgschaft) could be taken over almost unchanged by fascist composers (Wagner-Régeny)’ (see also Bowie 2004b).18 He continues:

In the historical analysis of this section [of the proposed book] the idea is to be developed via the model of music that the decisive changes, whose drastic expression is the seizure of power by fascism, take place in such a deep stratum of social life that the political surface does not decide at all, and that these experiences of the depths, as they are connected to the problem of unemployment and the elimination of the rising bourgeoisie (crisis of the opera), are strikingly expressed in an area of culture as apparently derivative as that of music.

(19: 628)

These changes would seem to belong firmly in the realm of the ‘intentional’, i.e. in the realm of what can be the object of predicative language. What enables an intentionless language to ‘express’ the changes, when ‘intentional’ description of the ‘political surface’ will obscure the essential issues? The centrality of the issue of intentional description and politics to his thinking about music becomes apparent when Adorno maintains in another context that one will arrive at greater historical insight by ‘a really technically strict interpretation of a single piece like the first movement of the Eroica that makes its discoveries transparent as discoveries about society’ than, for example, by looking at the broad history of musical styles (ibid.: 615).

The demand for ‘really technically strict interpretation’ would seem to belong to a musical formalism which rejects the idea that music has ‘content’. The notion that technical interpretation can be a more effective means of understanding society than locating music in its social and historical contexts therefore seems paradoxical. Implausible as it might seem, there is a serious justification for Adorno’s claim. The point is, as he argues, that it is no good using examples of music to illustrate what is already known about society. That way the meaning of the music qua music would be lost, because the ascribed meaning would be merely the consequence of a prior interpretation of society which does not involve the music. Instead, he maintains, his aim is ‘social theory by dint of the explication of aesthetic right and wrong in the heart of the [musical] objects’ (12: 33). The rationale for this position

18 One or two passages from the essay cited appear in a slightly different form in this chapter.
is a version of his ideas about the mimetic: ‘All forms of music . . . are sedimented contents. In them survives what is otherwise forgotten and can no longer speak in a direct manner . . . The forms of art draw the history of humankind more justly than documents’ (ibid.: 48). The last comment can be interpreted in terms of the idea of ‘doing greater justice to that which is otherwise cut off by judgement’. Documents will judge, in the sense of convey what can be said in identifying terms, and thus will fail to communicate the particular truth about human history that is communicated by art.

The truth in question often has to do with suffering, which may not be adequately responded to in judgements, and so needs to be expressed in other ways. Walter Benjamin’s remarks about the history of culture being the history of barbarism suggest one reason why. Adorno is seeking a kind of history which will not be that of the victors, and this means one must seek responses to the suffering of the vanquished that cannot be conveyed just by description. In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno claims that ‘The need to give a voice to suffering is the condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity which weighs on the subject; what it experiences as most subjective to it, its expression, is objectively mediated’ (6: 29). Giving a voice to suffering demands objectification, but this means that what is most personal and individual must be mediated by the general forms in which it is expressed. These forms can themselves have played a role in oppression, when, for example, language serves merely to label, rather than to discriminate in a just manner. This situation leads in turn to the need for ways of sustaining the oppressed individual, mimetic element, and thence to the questions of music, language, and truth that we have been pursuing. The dialectic here is the key to Adorno’s conception of the relationship between music and philosophy, but it appears in a variety of forms, some of which are illuminating, others of which are deeply problematic.

Consider the following two examples of music as expression. In the essay ‘On the Social Situation of Music’ of 1932 Adorno says that music will be ‘all the better’ the more it ‘expresses in the antinomies of its own language of forms the misery of the state of society, and demands change in the coded-language of suffering’ (18: 731). If music can demand social change it must possess a performative element, but, being ‘coded’, it cannot state what this change is, and so would seem to require something – which in Adorno is generally philosophy – to decode it. Music on its own can therefore only express the suffering which is otherwise forgotten by the manner in which the *formal*
difficulties involved in its production are confronted, rather than being circumvented. Adorno thinks that only ‘advanced’ music, which cannot just be consoling, because it rejects existing means of expression on the grounds that they have become like a fixed language, is able to express such negativity. These remarks, which might seem as if they were rooted in the terrible events commonly associated with Adorno’s cultural criticism, precede the Holocaust and its effects on Adorno’s conception of music’s cultural and political role. It is also notable that Adorno’s remarks about it being ‘barbaric’ to write poetry after Auschwitz are prefigured in an essay of 1929 on Hanns Eisler’s songs ‘Zeitungsaußsnitte’ (‘Newspaper cuttings’): ‘that no true lyric poetry is possible today, that our existence lies so cruelly in the dark, that is all the newspaper texts wish to mean’ (18: 525). The newspaper cuttings set to music by Eisler just reflect the staleness and confusion of society, so it is music’s ‘function’ to ‘grasp the latent contents’ of the cuttings ‘in their inappropriateness to words’ (ibid.). How is one to read such examples of ‘social theory by dint of the explication of aesthetic right and wrong’ in music?

From one perspective the second example in particular could be seen as being prescient. The idea of the failure of linguistic representation will later become a central post-Holocaust concern. This failure can be related to the idea of the destruction of meaningful ‘experience’ by the First World War described by Benjamin in his essay ‘The Storyteller’, where he points to the lack of literary texts about the war in its immediate aftermath. Both Karl Kraus and Benjamin also link this destruction to the debased language of newspapers. Although such language did indeed contribute to what made the Holocaust possible, one must be wary of such retrospective judgements. This is not least because Adorno’s assertions are informed by something like the idea of alienation I criticised earlier, which translates rather too easily from one area of human misery and cruelty in the twentieth century to another. The kind of musical modernism used to express the ‘latent contents’ that are ‘inappropriate to words’ can slip into being a rather indeterminate sign of a cultural climate, associated with ‘Weimar’ and ‘Expressionism’, that can easily lose its signifying force. Can even a precise technical analysis on the musical level really avoid this consequence? While musical analysis can and should investigate the particular response in a piece to wider musical problems of its period, how exactly do

19 My thanks to Leonard Olschner for pointing this passage out to me.
those problems and the responses to them express extra-musical issues?

Is Adorno’s attempt to interpret music as a form of social theory to be carried out by seeing musical ‘right and wrong’ really viable as an index of historical truth? He himself insists that this interpretation has to be achieved while taking music’s ‘intentionless’ status seriously. The task might seem hopeless, and in its most emphatic version I think it probably is: in order to achieve the determinacy required for music to be a readable historical code, its intentionless aspect has to be subordinated to a philosophical reading of its significance that relies too much on the extra-musical, intentional domain. Such readings are likely to fail to take account of the multiplicity of meanings that music’s intentionless status makes possible, in the name of what is supposedly the essential ‘truth’ of the music, a truth which has to be stated in a verbal text.

In 1962, in Introduction to the Sociology of Music, Adorno does offer a rationale for his approach, but it is very questionable. He invokes the principle of ‘comprehending and analysing subjective responses towards music in relation to the thing itself (‘zur Sache selbst’) and its determinable content, rather than ignoring the quality of the object, treating it as a mere stimulus of projections and limiting oneself to the identification, measuring and ordering of subjective reactions or of sedimented responses to music’ (14: 176–7). Adorno himself shows why this principle is questionable in a remark in 1968 on the same theme: ‘It is an open question, which can indeed only be answered empirically, whether, to what extent, in what dimensions the social implications revealed in musical content analysis are also grasped by the listeners’ (Dahms 1994: 252–3). In the first passage there is an unambiguous distinction between objective musical content of the kind available to the right kind of musical analysis, and subjective projection of feelings onto music by its listeners. The difference between the two implies that the truth is contained in the objective content of the music, which has to do with the way it communicates what is repressed by other forms of articulation. For this truth to be a means of understanding society it must, though, be connected to the ways in which people in society do in fact respond. In the second passage the need to connect the two sides leads to the sense that their connections may be much more complex and diverse than the first passage suggests. The first passage’s reference to the ‘thing itself’ arises from a legitimate fear of subjectivism, but if there is no connection between subjective responses and the objective
material, many of Adorno’s insights in the work on musical reproduction and elsewhere into how the subjective is formed by the objective, and vice versa, become impossible to defend.

The problem here is Adorno’s tendency to regard a certain version of the determination of the subjective by the objective as being the essential truth about modernity. In this view subjective self-determination becomes wholly subordinated to the culture industry and to the ‘context of delusion’ resulting from the domination of consciousness by the commodity form and by related forms of modern rationalisation. To this extent there would, as Adorno sometimes claims, be no point in presenting the delusions and projections of the actual listeners, because these can be read off the commodified forms of culture which perpetuate the listeners’ delusions. The truth therefore has to be sought in the art which seeks to oppose delusion, hence Adorno’s extreme idea of music as counter to social reality, as ‘pure, uncompromising presentation of the absolute contradiction itself’. For Adorno, then, the technically advanced dissonances in ‘new music’, which result from a composition’s appropriateness to the history to which it is a response, ‘horrify’ the concert-going public and ‘speak of their own state: only for this reason are they unbearable to them’ (12: 18). Once again there is a grain of truth in such a position, which manifests itself, for example, in the horrific consequences of the conformism of the ‘authoritarian personality’, who is indeed very often an enemy of musical modernism. However, this way of thinking can too easily obscure how resistance to domination comes about, as though only the esoteric domain of advanced music is free from delusion.\textsuperscript{20} As I have suggested elsewhere, in the light of remarks by Nicholas Cook on the use of Ligeti (whom Adorno greatly admired) in Kubrick’s \textit{2001}, Adorno also overlooks ways in which such music may become acceptable to many audiences (see Bowie \textit{2004a}).

The relationship between what one can term ‘philosophical music’, and ‘musical philosophy’, can crystallise the dilemma faced by Adorno. ‘Musical philosophy’ involves the demand for expression in philosophy, and I shall suggest in the \textit{next section} how his most successful work can be regarded in such terms. ‘Philosophical music’ can be explained via Adorno’s more problematic approaches to history and society. The key

\textsuperscript{20} The fact that Mussolini was happy for Berg’s \textit{Wozzeck} to be performed suggests how problematic this is. There is no simple correspondence between advanced modernism and any political position.
term here is the ‘state of the material’ in music. This refers to the formal and technical dilemmas in the music of their time to which composers have to respond if they are to fulfil the demand that music should convey truth, rather than offer mere culinary enjoyment. The plausible aspect of this idea is exemplified when contemporary musicians try to compose by employing a musical vocabulary from the past. The resulting music may be technically competent and musically satisfying, but it will fail to challenge its audiences in the way that the original music did. There can, though, be situations when a revival of something from the past may, in a particular context, be highly significant, whether it be Mendelssohn’s revival of Bach, or the return, at a time when free jazz itself tended to settle into a routine, to chord- and scale-based improvisation which incorporates some of the possibilities opened up by free jazz. The problem with Adorno’s extreme position in these matters is that he pays too little attention to the differing contexts of musical activity. He does so largely because of the Hegel-influenced way in which he relates music to philosophy and because of his too exclusive concentration on modern European music.

Take the following well-known passage from *Philosophy of New Music*, on the idea that ‘the confrontation of the composer with the material is the confrontation with society’:

The demands which go from the material to the subject derive . . . from the fact that the ‘material’ is itself sedimented spirit, something social, which has been preformed by the consciousness of people. As former subjectivity which has forgotten itself this objective spirit of the material has its own laws of motion. What seems to be merely the autonomous movement of the material, which is of the same origin as the social process and is always once more infiltrated with its traces, still takes place in the same sense as the real society when both know nothing of each other and mutually oppose each other.

(12: 39-40)

If one did not know that this was a passage about music it would be easy to think that Adorno was talking about verbal language. This is also in one sense ‘preformed by the consciousness of people’, as well as forming that consciousness, and involves demands – think of Brandom’s inferential commitments – that confront the subject with ‘objective spirit’. The remarks could, moreover, apply to philosophy itself, where the idea of the ‘confrontation of the philosopher with the material’ of philosophy, in the form of the texts, problems, and arguments
which concern an era, is also a confrontation with society. Liberally interpreted, this can be a valid way of seeing how philosophers respond to their socio-historical location, insofar as their responses can differ in different locations, even as they seek universally valid responses.

However, the passage cited comes from Adorno’s analysis of Schoenberg, in which he argues that the use of tonality and all the means of ‘traditional music’ are made into ‘powerless clichés’ by the ‘most advanced state of technical procedure’ (ibid.: 40) in Schoenberg’s atonal music. The parallel with philosophy might be extended to this view of the ‘most advanced state’ of the material as well, but this leads us to the main problem. Against his often-stated suspicion of the idea of philosophical progress – ‘The assumption that there is progress from Hegel to the logical positivists, who dismiss the former as unclear or meaningless, is just comical’ (10.2: 636) – Adorno’s reliance on the idea of progress in music is in some respects echoed precisely in philosophers like the logical positivists, who think of themselves as in a discipline with specialised techniques which can be said to be more or less advanced.

Stephen Toulmin has suggested the problem here: ‘Philosophy and social science are sharing the experience of music. Little now remains of the twelve-tone music of Berg and Webern . . . As in music, so in philosophy and the human sciences, the price of intellectualism has been too great, and we are now having to work our way back to broader modes of self-expression’ (Toulmin 2003: 13). Adorno can hardly be said to adhere to the analytical perception of philosophy as a technical discipline, so why is he often attached to the idea of unilinear technique and progress in music which culminates in one specific kind of music being regarded as the most advanced? He does not, admittedly, advance a crude progressivist view, but his emphasis on technique tends to obscure other considerations: ‘All progress in cultural domains is progress in the command of the material, of technique. The truth-content of Geist is not indifferent to this. A quartet by Mozart is not just better made than a symphony of the Mannheim School, but also ranks, as better made, more right, higher in the emphatic sense.’ 21 At the same time, however, ‘progress in the command of material in art is not at all immediately identical with the progress of art itself’ (10.2: 634), because, as we saw in the work on musical reproduction, once

21 This particular aesthetic judgement may be true, but such a judgement would not always apply to Mozart and Bach.
there is technical command of an aspect of art, it loses something by that very fact. Here technique plays the role of the analytical, and it is only via a mimetic sense of what technique can obscure that Adorno avoids progressivism.

When questioning Adorno’s stance one needs to distinguish between the kind of anti-modernism in music which simply seeks to turn the clock back, rejecting the experiments begun by Schoenberg and others, and what Toulmin’s remark implies. Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern were indeed radical and important innovators who produced some of the most important music of their century, but they were not continuing the classical tradition in the way that Beethoven continued it from Mozart, or Mozart continued it from Bach. They constitute rather a more local trend in early twentieth-century modernism, which parallels Frege’s and Russell’s desire for a logically purified language. Although the idea of such a language now appears strange, it did influence the tradition of analytical philosophy which still dominates philosophy in many parts of the world. Atonal and serial techniques are similarly now part of the vocabulary of concert music, and have played a limited role in jazz and other kinds of music, but they have not led to the kind of wholesale change of direction in music and in the patterns of listening that Schoenberg expected. Adorno approvingly cites Berg’s implausible remark that ‘the time of Anton Webern would only come in a hundred years; then his music will be played in the way poems by Novalis and Hölderlin are read today’ (17: 204). As Toulmin argues, the revival of Bruckner and Mahler from the 1970s onwards is perhaps a more significant expression of how music can articulate the affective relationship to modernity experienced by members of technologically developed societies. Adorno is himself, as we shall see, often more plausible when writing about Mahler.

In Adorno’s most rigorous terms the relatively marginal status of the Second Vienna School in relation to contemporary music would have to be interpreted as a manifestation of the standardising effects of the commodification of culture. He talks of people in modernity ‘collectively carrying out a senseless ritual, following the coercive rhythm of repetition’ which leads them to be ‘affectively impoverished: with the destruction of the ego, narcissism or its collective derivates are intensified’ (8: 83). Such ideas inform the notorious essays on jazz, and his account of the regression of hearing. There are some reasons for using the ideas as a resource for understanding aspects of social conformism of all kinds, and elements (but by no means all) of the increasingly commodified
rock music industry can involve what Adorno is talking about. However, more general fears about the social consequences of the commercial music industry’s effects on people’s ability to discriminate need to be carefully handled. Even the fact that Schoenberg et al. did not change the course of music in the way that they intended should be interpreted in a number of different ways. A reading in terms of Adorno’s most stringent conception of the relative failure of this music would, then, only succeed if the philosophical story that he relies on were really convincing. The odd thing is, however, that Adorno’s approach to philosophy is often different from his most stringent approaches to music.

Schoenberg seems to play the role of ‘philosophical music’ in Adorno’s conception, being interpreted within a framework, derived from Hegel, Marx, and Weber, which leaves too little space for the freedom that the modern period has seen as inherent in the very idea of interpreting ‘intentionless’, autonomous music. The proximate explanation of this role for Schoenberg is that music which moves away from tonality lends itself very easily to being incorporated into Adorno’s philosophical story. Thomas Mann’s novel, *Doktor Faustus*, adopts from Adorno the idea of a crisis of musical form being linked to historical crisis, notably in the composer Leverkühn’s assertion that ‘Even a silly order is better than none at all.’ For Adorno, Hegel’s conception of objective spirit and Weber’s ideas about rationalisation pose the problem of post-theological order in terms of how modernity generates new and potentially dangerous universal forms to which the subject that has been freed from traditional orders is subordinated. His manner of connecting this idea to music is apparent in the following, concerning Beethoven:

> What has been called the obligato style, which is already adumbrated in a rudimentary form in the seventeenth century, contains teleologically within itself the demand, following the analogy to philosophy, for completely integrated, systematic composition. Its ideal is music as a deductive unity; what lacks connection to and is indifferent to this unity determines itself first of all as a break and as a mistake. That is the aesthetic aspect of the basic thesis of Weber’s music sociology, the thesis of progressing rationality. Objectively Beethoven adhered to this idea, whether he knew it or not. He creates the total unity of obligato style by dynamisation. The individual elements are no longer joined in a discrete sequence, but are transformed into a rational unity by a process which is without any gaps and is occasioned by the elements themselves.
In a further example of how music and philosophy become interchangeable in Adorno, the last sentence applies equally to Beethoven’s music and to Hegel’s system.

A fundamental problem with Adorno’s investment in ‘philosophical music’ becomes apparent when he maintains that ‘the insatiable and destructive principle of expansion of exchange society reflects itself in Hegelian metaphysics’ (5: 274). When this claim is looked at in conjunction with the relationship between Hegel and Beethoven it becomes evident that Adorno relies on a connection between (1) systematic metaphysics based on the principle of determination as negation, (2) the commodity as an exchange value constituted by its relations to other exchange values, rather than by anything intrinsic to it, (3) social rationalisation as the enforced integration of individuals into structures which negate their individuality, and (4) autonomous musical works whose elements are integrated in an increasingly complete manner. The idea of the integral musical work evidently applies to Beethoven, but it does so even more to Schoenberg’s twelve-tone composition. Significantly, however, Adorno has an ambivalent relationship to the latter. He later criticises his own interpretation of Schoenberg in Philosophy of New Music: ‘The decisive thing, the interpretation of the compositions of Schoenberg, was always inadequate. In consequence it appeared that music was supposed to be completely dissolved into cognition’ (18: 165).

When Adorno explicitly addresses the analogies between philosophy and music, the tendentiousness of his presentation of Schoenberg as ‘philosophical music’ becomes apparent: ‘Philosophy is neither a science, nor the poetry of thought to which positivism wanted, with a stupid oxymoron, to degrade it, but rather something which is as mediated with, as it stands out from, what is different to it. Its suspended nature is, though, nothing but the expression of what is inexpressible in itself. In this it is truly related to music’ (6: 115). The contrast to the idea of the ‘suspended nature’ of both music and philosophy is Adorno’s claim that music ‘fulfils its social function more precisely when it represents social problems, which it contains in itself right into the innermost cells of its technique, according to its own formal laws’ (18: 731). This claim is directed against composers who try to create political effects via music, in favour of composers who pursue the compositional problems of their era in the most thoroughgoing way, thereby supposedly getting closer to the truth about the extra-musical world than composers who begin with the concerns of the extra-musical world and seek to address
them directly in music. What, though, makes this claim more than a version of the objection to using art as a form of political propaganda, rather than regarding it as an expression of freedom? The answer is that Adorno is trying to attend both to the constraints inherent in music as a situated historical practice, and to the sense that music should have to do with freedom.

One version of the Adorno’s response to the problem of combining freedom with the awareness of historical constraint is what one can term the ‘avant-garde thesis’. The truth of avant-garde music ‘seems rather to be contained in the fact that it denies the meaning of organised society, of which it wishes to know nothing, by organised emptiness of meaning, rather than being capable of producing meaning of its own accord’ (12: 28). In the face of the appalling history which informs this remark, the idea that composers might resort to a deliberate refusal to console or to make sense in established musical terms is understandable. The difficulty is that this stance must eventually fall prey to the inherent problem of the aesthetic avant-garde. Radical music eventually becomes assimilated into the domain of the culturally normal. This is largely what happens (not least via the influence of Adorno himself) in the case of the Second Viennese School – to the point where composers, like Hans Werner Henze, end up revolting against it as the musical norm among serious composers in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. The alternative is that music must continually find new ways of ‘denying the meaning of organised society’, and this can become a mere empty refusal of communication. Adorno says in the same passage that music can ‘in the present circumstances’ only be ‘determinate negation’, i.e. it can only be a response to existing forms of music, which seeks to avoid what is untrue in them. This applies, though, to any serious music in the modern period. It is therefore the utopian idea that in radically changed social circumstances music could cease to be determinate negation which is specific to Adorno’s conception, and which gives rise to the idea of the present denial of meaning.

Adorno’s interpretation of Schoenberg as determinate negation depends on the idea that his music’s integration of musical material, which does not rely on established forms, is a ‘cryptogram’: ‘Authentic music, and, indeed, all authentic art is just as much the cryptogram of the unreconciled opposition between the fate of the single person and their human vocation, as it is the representation of the however questionable connection of antagonistic single interests in a whole, and finally of the hope for real reconciliation’ (14: 251). What these
aspects have in common are – albeit very different – kinds of relationship between individual elements and a totality, and Adorno’s views of musical technique as a source of social theory often rely on analogies between such relationships. In Schoenberg’s music the liberation of melody from harmony becomes a utopian image of social relations in which individuals would not be under the pressure of conformity to traditional or repressive forms of order.  

However, this kind of analogy can be very easily taken in another direction. The liberation could, as Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* suggests, be interpreted as manifesting the arbitrariness of ‘merely human’, modern forms of order. Such freedom leads to what is incomprehensible to many people, both in the social and political domains, and in the domain of new music. Whilst the incomprehension may be connected to political and social reaction, it can also be benign: this is again an empirical issue, not something to be decided by a philosophical theory. Adorno’s interpretation would therefore only be compelling if one accepted his esoteric idea that new music is the expression of different kinds of relationship between part and totality in modernity, from the alienation of individuals from the systems of capital, to the hope for reconciliation of individual and totality in a just society. For this interpretation to work he has to rely on the idea that analysis of the internal workings of the music produces insights into historical reality that are otherwise inaccessible. Consequently he necessarily – and explicitly – privileges musical production over reception, and tends to lose contact with how music actually affects those who hear it.

Music therefore becomes above all a historical document, whose truth is located in its relationship to its contexts. Adorno claims, for example, that Beethoven’s ‘language, his content, tonality as a whole, i.e. the system of bourgeois music, is irrevocably lost for us’ (Adorno 1993: 25). However, this judgement sums up what is wrong with a restrictive historicisation of musical interpretation. It is as though listeners at other times could not find other ways of understanding and appreciating what Beethoven’s music communicates in their own era. Adorno himself defends this idea elsewhere. The justifiable aspect of

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22 Whether such music is actually listened to in non-harmonic terms is open to dispute. Most listeners not schooled in the techniques of atonal and twelve-tone music (and even some that are) will make sense of it by the degrees of perceived dissonance in the piece, and by hearing melody based on their sense of tonality. In operas such as Berg’s *Wozzeck* it seems obvious that much of the dramatic intensification has to do with degrees of dissonance and with the extent to which melody is heard diatonically.
his judgement lies in the fact that the hopes of the revolutionary era in which Beethoven lived, which gain unparalleled expression in his music, are no longer ours. We in developed Western democracies cannot recreate circumstances in which this music is a concrete utopian expression of, and a motivating force for a better collective future. It is, though, also implausible to maintain that we lose all connection to its communication of hope, as the playing of Beethoven when the Berlin Wall came down suggests. Beethoven’s survival as part of modern culture is not least a result of the ways in which his music sustains a non-delusory sense of hope. Adorno’s reference to tonal music ‘as a whole’ points, however, to another problematic feature of his analysis.

The claim about tonality is explained by his more general comments about the ‘affirmative’ – and therefore ‘ideological’ – nature of music. Music’s ideological character is present in the very fact ‘that it begins, that it is music at all – its language is magic in itself, and the transition into its isolated sphere has an a priori transfiguring aspect’ which is the result of music’s setting up a ‘second reality *sui generis*’ (ibid.: 25). Because of its inherently consoling aspect music as a whole is ‘more completely under the spell of illusion (*Schein*)’ (ibid.), which means that it contributes to injustice by reconciling listeners to the status quo. Tonality is perhaps the clearest example of Adorno’s analysis of musical techniques as the means of access to social issues. For such analysis to work the frame of reference employed has to depend on the contentious philosophical conception which we have already encountered. The following version of a recurrent criticism of Beethoven in Adorno makes this clear:

Not for nothing are some of Beethoven’s most compromised conceptions based on the moment of the [sonata] recapitulation as the return of the same. They justify what once was as the result of the process. It is thoroughly illuminating that Hegelian philosophy, whose categories can, without doing violence to it, be applied in detail to a music where every influence from the history of ideas is excluded, has the recapitulation in the same way as Beethoven does... However, that the affirmative gesture of the recapitulation in some of the greatest symphonic movements of Beethoven takes on the violence of the repressively imposing, authoritarian ‘That’s the way it is’ and goes beyond what is happening musically in a gestural decorative manner is Beethoven’s coerced tribute to the ideological nature of music, under whose spell even the most elevated music falls that aims at freedom in a state of persistent unfreedom.

(14: 412–13)
Behind this criticism lies the problematic history of art, aesthetics and philosophy in modern Germany. Adorno talks elsewhere of the ‘guilt of the German mind which mixes up its particular achievements in art and philosophy with the realisation [of mind] in society and so is under the control of those who obstruct real humanity’ (ibid. 14: 369).

Tonality gives the sonata its force because it produces the appearance of resolution by repeating what happened in the past, in the form of the repetition of the exposition in the recapitulation. This repetition is ‘ideological’: its affirmation of what has already happened fails to acknowledge the ‘persistent unfreedom’ involved in historical reality. Much as Marx criticises Hegel for the claim that the ‘real is the rational’, Adorno criticises Beethoven for producing affirmative music in an unjust society. As this criticism is the basis for much of Adorno’s approach to music and modernity, we need to look at it a bit more carefully.

The decisive issue is Adorno’s application of his interrogation of issues concerning the notion of identity to music. If the world is unfree, unjust, etc., and if we have the means to obviate this situation, anything at all which contributes to things remaining the same is complicit with injustice. Great music is complicit because ‘it asserts itself in its objective appearance as the absolute, now, here, immediately, as a guarantee of transcendence’ (ibid.). Stated as baldly as this, the claim seems pretty vacuous. However, Adorno’s idea of non-identity makes it clear that such generalisations are inherently inadequate, and can only be justified by immersion in the specifics of what is in question. If one asks, for example, why modern Western ‘classical’ music continually changes – to the point of losing much of its audience – in ways that music in a traditional society does not, the idea that what happens in music is linked to other tendencies in modernity makes more sense.

The following parallel between philosophy and music can suggest a related way of understanding the legitimate aspect of Adorno’s questioning of identity and its relationship to music. In the later Wittgenstein the idea that philosophy progresses by argument refuting argument, in the manner of scientific explanations being replaced by better explanations, largely gives way to the idea that philosophical problems wear themselves out because they cease to matter, or can be made to dissolve by realising that the ways in which they are talked about are deficient in some way. Such a view makes it easier to accept that philosophy and music are connected in the ways that Adorno suggests, as his idea that
they both have a ‘temporal core’ indicates. There are times in music when use of a previously innovative technique ceases to be appropriate because it is worn out. Adorno gives the example of Beethoven’s new way of using the diminished seventh chord becoming a cliche in salon music. It is, moreover, not just in more ‘serious’ music that this happens. In these cases repetition is a problem, because it merely perpetuates something that demands renewal. There is no need to make a general philosophical point here: the real history of all kinds of modern art demonstrates what is at issue. Modern art is unthinkable without constant challenges to whatever norms happen to dominate at a particular time. The problem is how to connect this critical assessment of identity and repetition to manifestations of the negative effects of identification and repetition in other domains.

It might seem that Kivy’s assertion that nobody ‘will be tempted to attribute any meaning’ to the Eroica would be confirmed by the difficulties here, but this is not the case. Unless one accepts Kivy’s increasingly discredited analytical approach to meaning, there is no reason to doubt that the journey from Beethoven’s tonal affirmations to Schoenberg’s renunciation of tonality relates to the journey from Hegel’s attempt to reveal a developmental rationality in the turbulent developments of modernity to the Nietzsche-inspired sense in Weber and others that such rationality may be a victory of often arbitrary universal structures – the commodity form and bureaucracy – over the particulars that they subsume into themselves. Adorno’s claim that ‘Mahler’s music caught up in an original manner with Nietzsche’s insight that the system and its unbroken unity, the illusion/appearance of reconciliation was not honest’ (13: 213) can only be denied at the price of ignoring Mahler’s relationship to the composers whose tendency to reconcile he feels compelled to ironise.

However, the question here is again how to get from the ‘intentionless’ form of music to the intentional forms of philosophy and sociology, without just making the latter the source of the interpretation of the former. One of Adorno’s answers was that the former is a ‘cryptogram’ of the latter, but that raises the question of what the coded aspect of music actually ‘tells’ us by being coded. Part of the more convincing answer is, as we saw, that even a form of expression which comes to be regarded

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23 This assessment of the nature of rationalisation does not entail a demand to return to what preceded these structures, merely the demand to be aware of the repressions that they can cause. Adorno does not always remember this.
as an expression of freedom involves constraints which are the basis of right and wrong in composition and performance. In the course of modernity many of these constraints come to be seen as non-binding, when norms which were constitutive of the very nature of music are abandoned. These norms relate to questions of form and repetition, but the reasons for their loss of authority cannot be wholly explained in technical terms of the kind that lead to the analogies with philosophy. Adorno’s attempt to deal with this issue via the idea of the ‘state of the material’ seems to me to rely too much on the narrative of the move from tonality to atonality as an analogy to the breakdown of systems in modern philosophy. This narrative does illuminate some aspects of the specific music to which it is applied, but is simply inadequate as a model for too many kinds of music and for the differing significances of music in different contexts. Adorno’s ethnocentrism, evident in his too-exclusive concentration on Western European ‘classical’ music, and his failure to deal with the complexities of the reception of music, mean that the strong link between music and philosophy cannot be made in this manner.

Musical philosophy: judgementless synthesis, convention, and expression

Some of Adorno’s historical arguments about modern music suffer from his conviction that it is in fact possible to establish what ‘advanced state of the material’ is. How, though, are we supposed to identify the state without already possessing total insight into the development of music? The fact that in some contexts certain kinds of conventional employment of musical material can indeed be said to become ‘false’ does not allow one to infer that this falsehood reveals the total state of the ‘technique’ with which the composer must work. This would only be the case if one made Schoenberg’s atonal music the criterion, because of the supposedly wholly deluded nature of the world of the culture industry, which has to be opposed by a radically new kind of cultural order. Even making allowances for the appalling historical events which affect Adorno’s conception, and which lead to the idea of the refusal of musical meaning, the extreme nature of his claims looks these days more like a failure to differentiate between different contexts. However, Adorno does also offer more effective resources for understanding ways in which music reveals limitations in philosophy’s interpretations of modernity.
This role for music can be explored via the idea of ‘judgementless synthesis’, which will also enable us to look further at how Adorno connects music and language. The following passage makes clear that a less rigid view of the idea of musical material can allow music to reveal history in its own way:

Music is similar to language as a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sound. They say something, often something human. They say it all the more emphatically the more elevated the music is. The sequence of sounds is related to logic: there is right and wrong. But what is said cannot be separated from the music. It does not form a system of signs.

(16: 251)

Adorno’s insistence on strong evaluation, which will not accept that lesser kinds of music that have not assimilated technical and expressive possibilities developed in serious music, can be a real source of truth, seems here to be more defensible. In the Beethoven book, Adorno extends the conception of music and logic when he claims that he must ‘decisively determine the relationship of music and conceptual logic’ (Adorno 1994: 31), and embarks on an intriguing attempt to do so:

The ‘play’ of music is play with logical forms as such, of positing, identity, similarity, contradiction, whole, part, and the concretion of music is essentially the power with which these forms articulate themselves in the material, in the notes . . . The threshold between music and logic does not therefore lie with the logical elements, but rather with their specific logical synthesis, the judgement. Music does not know judgement, but rather a synthesis of a different kind, a synthesis which constitutes itself purely from the constellation [i.e. the particular configuration of musical material], not from the predication, subordination, subsumption of its elements. The synthesis also stands in relation to truth, but to a completely different truth from apophantic truth . . . The reflections would have to terminate in a definition like Music is the logic of judgementless synthesis.

( ibid.: 32)

In Aesthetic Theory Adorno extends this idea to art in general: ‘In the work of art judgement as well is transformed. Art works are analogous to judgement as synthesis; but the synthesis in them is judgementless, one

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24 This insistence does not, however, have to entail all the consequences he draws from it in relation to Schoenberg and new music.
could not say of any of them what it judges, none of them is a so-called proposition (‘Aussage’) (7: 187).  

Adorno’s notion of judgement as identification makes it a form of repression of non-identity, because it fails to allow for the irreducible particularity of things. The problem with this position has been pointed out by Herbert Schnädelbach (1987) and Anke Thyen (1989). Identifying something with something else can involve a failure to take account of its specificity; identifying something as something could, in contrast, be intended to reveal its unique nature (see Bowie 1997: ch. 9). The latter kind of identification might well depend on ‘these words in these positions’, when, for example, something is characterised or evoked in a poem. In a poem the manner in which the words are synthesised would not primarily have to do with subsumption, etc., and this brings its sort of judgement closer to music. Any suspicion of the identifying aspect of language must take account of these distinctions. Given what verbal language and music share, how, then, can the specific cultural contribution of music be understood, without limiting the account of this understanding to the idea of music’s avoidance of intentional language?

One way of interpreting the notion of judgementless synthesis is to consider other forms of symbolic synthesis which do not subsume particulars under a universal. Music and language can be related via metaphor, which appears as a form of identification or judgement but does not have to function as such. The logical forms of ‘positing, identity, similarity, contradiction, whole, part’, which appear, for example, in the statement of a musical theme, the recapitulation of the theme, the use of a contrasting theme, the coherence of a piece, and the elements which make up the piece, also play a role in metaphor (in the wider sense, that can include metonymy and synecdoche). The positing of something’s identity with something else is not intended as a judgement of identity, but rather, as Davidson suggests, as a way of making us notice things. This is often based on some kind of similarity relating to the feeling evoked by the things connected – remember Nussbaum’s claims about feelings as kinds of judgement. Metaphors can also have their effect because of the apparent contradiction between the two things connected; related forms, like synecdoche, function in terms of whole/part relationships. Davidson’s idea suggests that the

25 The difference is once more that music is closer to language than visual art, for the reasons we saw in Wittgenstein.
world-disclosive aspect of language is at least as important as what can be grasped in terms of the difference between the literal and the metaphorical. The connection to music here is clear, insofar as music can make us notice aspects of inner and outer life, and has no literal meaning.

Metaphor is based on the capacity to pick out characteristics; music’s non-intentionality has to do with its very limited capacity to do this. Once again the difference is not absolute, because the ‘as structure’ involved in picking out characteristics is also involved in making things noticeable, and both metaphor and music make this possible. Music accompanying a film might therefore be said to ‘pick out’ the mood of a scene, or pick out the nature of a character, e.g. in the manner of a Wagnerian leitmotif. It can also change how we regard the events that we see on screen by making us see them as sinister when they would otherwise appear benign. The referential dimension of music is, though, clearly restricted, not least because it lacks the apparatus of singular terms, predicates, etc., which language employs to pick out concrete objects and characteristics. If, however, as Charles Taylor contends, we must also see language as expressive, then performative, gestural, rhythmic and other dimensions of language are indeed shared with music. Most importantly, effective metaphors employed to talk about music enable us to understand and play music better, and music can reveal aspects of verbal texts which might otherwise not come to light.

It may therefore be best, as Schleiermacher suggested, to see the music/language difference in terms of degree, rather than of kind. Similarly, Davidson’s contention that communication is a condition of language, not vice versa, should allow for musical communication playing a role in what we think of as meaning. In our context it is crucial to examine the ways in which the difference between music and language appears in changing historical contexts, rather than to seek an analytical way of dividing language and music. Adorno’s remarks on musical logic should not, therefore, be understood as proposing a philosophical account of judgementless synthesis. The ‘logic’ of judgementless synthesis is manifested in historical changes in music that involve a truth, of the kind we considered in relation to mimesis and suffering, which is not ‘apophantic’, and so is not reducible to what philosophy can say about it. Why, then, should forms which have analogies in logic, but which do not function in the way they do in referential language, take on new cultural significances in modernity?

This question returns us to an issue encountered in earlier chapters. Are the musical forms derived from the logical forms, or is it the other
way round? For Adorno to be able to advance his claims, he must presuppose the existence of logical forms. However, this does not explain why these also occur in music, and function differently from the way they function in apophantic language. The Romantic position I have been developing does not start from the primacy of logical forms, but rather from the involvements with the world which give rise to them. Schlegel suggested that rhythm was a form of being in the world that was a condition of possibility of repetition and identity, from which philosophy’s ability to abstract from particularity was derived. Similarly, the early Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘logical form’ could not be analysed into its logical components, because it was the basis on which logical components generated intelligibility. These ideas connected with Taylor’s Heidegger- and Merleau-Ponty-related account of our pre-conceptual engagement with the world.

The more plausible aspects of Adorno suggest how the advance of conceptual ways of grasping the world gives rise to a compensatory revaluation and rearticulation of more immediate contacts with the world. These are then expressed in – mediated – harmonic, rhythmic, and other ways, which are connected both to emotions and to conceptual advances. Hence, for example, the ways in which Beethoven’s music can be understood in relation to the revolutionary era. Martin Geck has termed this ‘music as philosophy’ (Geck 2000: 97): Beethoven produces work that ‘does not represent sounding philosophy, but is it’ (ibid.: 88). His symphonies ‘do not just show what music can do in an advanced state of material, but also what it should demand of the material in order to be understood as spirit of the spirit of the time’ (ibid.: 97). The tension between the mimetic impulse and the forms in which it is articulated becomes the motor of musical development, which connects to philosophical and other conceptual developments, but which cannot be reduced to them.

Adorno’s most powerful response to these issues relates to the contrast between ‘convention’ and ‘expression’, which echoes that between analysis and mimesis. In ‘On the Present Relationship between Philosophy and Music’ of 1953 Adorno maintains, in a manner not so far from either Wittgenstein or Besseler, that ‘In music it is not a question of meaning but of gestures. To the extent to which it is language it is, like

26 The use of ‘advanced state of the material’ here is more appropriate than it usually is in Adorno, because of Beethoven’s desire to make music part of social, moral and cultural advance.
notation in its history, a language sedimented from gestures’ (18: 154). Gestures are inherently contextual and can be based on convention (they can also be mimetic). The conventional employment of gesture is evident in the use of music as a signifying practice for social functions. Mere repetition of a gesture can consequently involve identity of the kind which is the target of Adorno’s criticisms of the commodity world. Convention in cultural forms can therefore be an obstacle to critical awareness, and it can mar even everyday communication, when one’s responses become automatic and no longer address the particularity of one’s interlocutor.

The dialectic here which connects the level of the individual subject to the level of general symbolic forms is, then, between the expressiveness of gestures and their reliance on convention. Adorno’s assertion that it is not a question of meaning in music therefore relates only to the non-intentional aspect of music. If gestures rely on understanding to be gestures at all, rather than being mere behaviour, they must, as a form of social intercourse which may be performatively more effective than words, possess meaning. Musical gestures can renew the force of emotions, enable new emotions to emerge, evoke the mood of a particular situation, evoke a landscape, a time, etc. It is because of this power that music can enter the realm of ideological conflict in which Adorno locates it. There is again no need for a philosophical argument to back up such an assertion. The history of music in modernity, both within the immediate sphere of musical production and in music’s relationship to politics, most obviously in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, testifies to the many ways in which music is perceived as adhering to a social order or as opposing it. Musical conventions therefore become the location of ideological and philosophical conflict by connecting to other cultural forms of expression.

When Adorno tries to incorporate the idea that music conspires with an unjust social order into the philosophical story deriving from DaE he is open to the criticisms detailed above. When he uses a more flexible framework, which takes more account of music’s openness to diverse interpretations, the results are much more interesting. The following passage makes sense, for example, of why a crisis develops in the European tradition of modern music via a shift away from the productive

27 Cf. Wittgenstein’s remark that musical gestures ‘always remain gestures for me, although I know what will come. Indeed, I can even be surprised over and over again. (In a certain sense.)’ (Wittgenstein 1980: 73).
relationship between convention and expression that was epitomised by Beethoven’s use of tonality:

The process of the linguistification of music also entails its transformation into convention and expression. To the extent that the dialectic of the process of enlightenment essentially consists in the incompatibility of these two moments, the whole of Western music is confronted with its contradiction by this dual character. The more it, as language, takes into its power and intensifies expression, as the imitation of something gestural and pre-rational, the more it at the same time also, as its rational overcoming, works at the dissolution of expression.

(18: 161)

Without convention music qua expression cannot be a means of creating symbolic social cohesion that establishes a comprehensible musical vocabulary, of the kind produced by Wagner’s extension of music in the direction of referential language. Expression without convention can cease to have any social significance beyond being a refusal to accept anything dictated by convention. As soon as expression ceases to constitute such a refusal, however, it must begin to become convention if it is to be significant at all. Expressivity, like uniqueness, is inconceivable without its counterpart, but convention can cancel out what makes expression possible by rendering mechanically repeatable what was formerly expressive. We encountered this situation in the work on notation. At this level of abstraction the dialectic of expression and convention might seem too general, sounding rather like a version of the Apollo (convention)/Dionysus (expression) dialectic. However, when the dialectic is observed in specific phenomena it leads, for example, to a version of the story of rationalisation in Western music that avoids some of the problems we have observed in Adorno.

Adorno’s remarks on convention and expression can be understood in relation to more than just music. Meaning depends on iterability, but mere repetition raises the question of how the repeated signifying element can function in very different contexts, and why it may become worn out. A passage on the convention of sonata form from one of Adorno’s lectures on Mahler shows how the dialectic of convention and expression leads to real insight – think of how the same remark might be applied to a poetic form, like a sonnet:

But Mahler asked himself the question how the sonata, whose outline his technically not at all rebellious attitude respected, could be organised from the inside, structurally, so that it was not violently stamped on
the life of the details, but rather so that the life of the sonata becomes one with that of the details. That is a squaring of the circle comparable to the ever-renewed and deeply related effort of philosophy to join rationalism and empiricism. All art of the highest rank has something paradoxical of this kind, the Bachian subjective animation of the objective language of forms, Beethoven’s tour de force of creating the forms once again from out of pure subjectivity, hardly to a lesser degree than Mahler. That explains at the same time why the marks of failure very apparent in Mahler, as they are in Bruckner, are not to be attributed to an insufficiency of artistic ability, but rather to the insolvability of the nevertheless objectively posed problem.

(18: 606)

Here the idea that problems of musical form relate to the processes of rationalisation in modernity does not suffer from the rigidity we encountered in the remarks on Schoenberg.

There is a growing difficulty for musicians and other artists in modernity to find means which are individually expressive that have not been rendered conventional by their employment by others and by their propagation via forms of technical reproduction. The difficulty leads from the apparently subjective problem of the individual composer to an objectively existing state of affairs, of a kind which relates to the issue of truth and necessary failure. This state of affairs need not, however, be reduced to the arguments about the culture industry and the commodity form. It simply is the case that the more cultural forms are used and disseminated, the more the possibilities for innovation become problematic. Music’s connection to the squaring of the circle between rationalism and empiricism depends on the following historical situation. The problem of reconciling structures which can be generalised to cover all objects with the particularity of how the world is given to us is posed in new ways at the same moment as the emergence of bourgeois society poses the problem of the reconciliation of general and individual will, objective and subjective judgement. Music focuses this problem precisely because it addresses aspects of human life which scientific concepts cannot fully articulate, but which still involve the normative dimension of right and wrong. Adorno’s individual assessments of music may often be highly contentious – he is, for instance, needlessly dismissive of composers who do not fit his more rigid modernist criteria, like Elgar, and of composers whose success he regards as unwarranted, 28 At times such dissemination can also be very productive.
like Sibelius. However, his search for ways of interrogating structures of intelligibility in music which generate historical insights not available in more traditionally conceived disciplines does, when successful, offer models for articulating dimensions of experience rarely countenanced by large parts of modern philosophy.

Music, philosophy, and hope

The idea that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the intellectual, social and political forms which sought to overcome the contradictions between universal and particular were exhausted might sound like a typically vague piece of philosophical speculation. However, when connected to Adorno’s claim that ‘the language of forms of Western music in Mahler’s epoch’ has become merely ‘convention’ (13: 165), i.e. a form of false universality, the general idea can be addressed via the particular response of Mahler’s music to both musical and extra-musical history. Mahler combines irony, based on playing with musical conventions, with a striving for transcendence. This combination can either lead, as it does in the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies, to break down or resignation, or to a tonal apotheosis whose brashly affirmative nature is somehow at odds with the ambivalence which precedes it, for example in the Seventh Symphony.

This alternative captures something important about a secularised modernity – which one can associate with metaphysics, – that has yet to find ways of responding to the needs aroused by the decline of theology – which relate to metaphysics. Music’s role in such matters is suggested by Adorno’s hyperbolic assertion that ‘Mahler provokes rage from those who are in agreement with the world because he gives reminders of what they have to banish from themselves’ (ibid.: 153). This claim can be backed up more convincingly than his claims about Schoenberg by historical evidence about the rejection of Mahler’s music, which was only widely overcome by the 1970s. Mahler’s music combines a sense of the loss of a world where hope for a metaphysical resolution of the contradictions of modernity was still possible with the

29 In the case of Schoenberg the frequent rejection has to do with the degree of dissonance and the consequent difficulty for non-specialists of hearing atonal music as intelligible. The rejection of Mahler does have to do with his technical advances, but it was also based on incomprehension of the apparent banality of some of the music. Adorno himself contributed to the re-emergence of Mahler by, among other things, persuading Georg Solti to conduct his work.
impossibility of forgetting what is felt to be lost. 30 What provokes the rage is therefore often decried as sentimentality and bombast, but this misunderstanding of Mahler is itself a symptom of a repression of the situation that he articulates. The misunderstanding on the part of Mahler’s critics is akin to a refusal to accept the need for mourning if one is to move beyond what one has lost. Rather than proposing a naïve Nietzschean triumphalism at the liberation from metaphysical constraints, Adorno sees that this liberation – which he in no way wishes to revoke – is fraught with dangers that modern culture must counter by finding ways of responding to what is lost.

How, then, is Mahler’s unique tone to be interpreted in relation to the issue of music and philosophy? At times Adorno’s Mahler texts do slip into mere repetition of the use of the ideas of DoE in Philosophy of New Music. Mahler is, however, not just treated as ‘philosophical music’. Adorno associated the idea of ‘organised emptiness of meaning’ with new music, where any utopian sense in that music tends to become a kind of negative theology. This approach gives way in the work on Mahler to a focus on what Adorno terms Mahler’s combination of feeling for meaning in ‘what has been abandoned by meaning’ (apparent, for example, in his use of sentimental popular melody in the first movement of the Ninth), with feeling for what has been abandoned by meaning in established meaning (apparent in his ambivalent relationship to musical expressions of triumph which suggest that things can turn out all right) (ibid.: 181). The idea that true music should be critical of acceptance of the status quo is essential to Adorno’s interpretation of new music. However, in Mahler, the idea of the ‘experience of music’ as being that ‘something communicates itself to us as very specific but as something from which, despite this, the concept withdraws’ (Adorno 2002: 274) leads Adorno to a more plausible response to the power of the music. This response is more convincing than his view that social reality is so distorted that anything which is aesthetically successful must constitute a criticism of it.

Adorno often subjects a too vaguely characterised ‘positivism’ to exaggerated criticism because of its supposed confirmation of ‘the given’ that results from seeking foundations for what is regarded as

30 If one follows Kivy’s assertions about the Eroica’s lack of meaning, it becomes impossible to understand Mahler at all. Without a sense of what Mahler is reacting against and what he affirms, his music provokes the kind of rejection Adorno describes. This need to hear Mahler contextually is part of what Adorno means by the ‘linguistification’ of music in modernity, in which awareness of convention becomes central to what happens in music.
already being the case. This extreme position relies on the totalising argument about the delusions arising from instrumental reason and the commodity form in *DoE*, and this leads to the counter-position that becomes a sort of negative theology. The work on Mahler, however, offers a more fruitful way of suggesting why philosophy might see its task as getting beyond the given. Part of the point of Adorno’s use of the idea of non-identity is to reorient the goals of philosophical thinking away from foundationalism. This aim is echoed by Rorty’s claim that any attempt to fix an ontological foundation for philosophy by, for example, seeking to establish metaphysics on the basis of physics as the potential ‘theory of everything’, fails to offer political guidance or anything that might enable individual ‘redemption’ by giving life a new orientation. As we saw, Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology also can be seen as trying to delineate ‘the basic forms of a possible articulation (‘*Gliederung*’) of the meaning of all that can be understood’ (Heidegger 1979: 166). Adorno thinks that such positions have shown themselves to be inadequate to the experience of modernity. Any attempt at grounding such positions in the ‘real nature of things’ lacks the dimension which results from seeing how that nature itself changes as the historical relationships of humankind to nature change. There is therefore always the possibility that the apparently necessary order is actually just a historical product, and so is transformable. Resources that might aid such transformation are vital, but they always run the risk of being either delusory or dangerous. False transcendence is precisely what can be associated with the most nightmarish political visions in modernity.

Adorno backs up his view by analysis of the historical failure of foundational philosophies, and links this to his concern with music and philosophy. He talks, connecting music to modern philosophy’s failure to establish an agreed ontological order that he associates with Husserl and Heidegger, of ‘the aesthetic impossibility of a reestablishment of an

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31 This particular aim can reasonably be termed ‘ontological’ in the sense intended by Adorno, even if Heidegger’s aims can also be construed as an attack on ‘ontotheology’, the idea of a ready-made world.

32 This position does not reject particular scientific claims, but rather serves as a reminder that what nature is thought to be depends on what questions are asked of it. Heidegger can be read as saying something similar, but see Lafont’s objections in the last chapter.

33 This is why Rorty argues that art is a matter of private transcendence, as opposed to the public role of science in problem-solving. Adorno is aware of the danger of the aestheticisation of politics, but thinks art is a key to public issues. See the Conclusion of Bowie 2003b.
order of art just from the will to such an order, without this order being substantially present to us any more in the thing itself and in the world in which we live’ (Adorno 2002: 236). In this respect ‘the insolubility of the nevertheless objectively posed problem’, which means that Mahler cannot succeed in sustaining the sonata so that ‘the life of the sonata becomes one with that of the details’, leads to a more convincing response to modernity than philosophical attempts to restore an ontological order. Failure in art in this sense is different from failure in philosophy, because art is able to embody unresolved contradictions in a way which ‘says’ more than do contradictions in discursive texts.

Adorno’s term for what lies behind much of his interpretation of Mahler is the ‘ontological need’ for an order of things that would make sense of the disorienting experience of modernity. He thinks that the state of the modern world demands that we renounce the need in this form because it can only produce more illusions, particularly the illusion that ‘what cannot be fulfilled is able to be fulfilled’ (6: 99). The alternative therefore involves ways of sustaining hope – a word that occurs with very great frequency in his work – without hope becoming mere delusion in the face of the distortions which stand in the way of a just social order. Hope is precisely dependent on the possibility of transcending the given, and the question is therefore how it can be expressed. In his essay on Goethe’s Iphigenie Adorno claims that ‘In the art of the period [hope] is located in the great music, in Beethoven’s Leonora aria and in moments of many adagio movements, like that of the first Rasumovsky Quartet, eloquent beyond all words’ (11: 513). But can this hope in the music transcend its immediate circumstances in the heroic period of the bourgeois era, the period of Hegel’s system, with all the associations that this has for Adorno? The eloquence of these pieces has not diminished, even though they no longer express the concrete socio-political hopes which gave rise to them. There is, however, also an element of hope in the fact that such music is still

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34 His interpretation of Heidegger in particular is questionable. However, the criticism of ontology in the sense intended here would be shared by contemporary pragmatism’s questioning of much that still forms the basis of analytical philosophy. The idea that an agreed ontological order has not been found in modernity is hard to dispute, given the contemporary tensions between scientistic forms of naturalism based on some kind of fact/value dichotomy, and philosophies which follow the post-Kantian traditions (see Putnam 2004).

35 Compare Rorty’s insistence on the idea of ‘Philosophy and Social Hope’ against the dominant concerns of much Anglo-American philosophy.

36 This is the movement referred to in chapter 4.
aesthetically alive, as it clearly is for Adorno too. This hope indicates
an ambivalence in Adorno’s view that I will consider at the end of the
chapter. What, though, of hope in Mahler’s world, the world of the
pending world wars and of the demolition of optimistic bourgeois world
views?

The situation of hope in the era of the decline of bourgeois heroism
is suggested when, in Minima Moralia, Adorno criticises the evocation
of sunrise in Strauss’ Alpine Symphony because ‘no sunrise, even one
in the high mountains is pompous, triumphal, commanding, rather
they all happen weakly and hesitantly, like the hope that it might one
day be all right, and what is emotionally overpowering lies precisely in
the unprepossessing nature of the most powerful light’ (4: 126). Any
heroic sense of hope has given way to something akin to the idea of
hope beyond hope. This is a consequence of his interpreting the worst
events as what unmasks the underlying nature of even the less traumatic
phases of modern history.37 He suggests a further way of understand-
ing how truth does not exclusively have to do with knowledge when he
claims that ‘In the end hope, as it wrests itself from reality by negating
it, is the only form in which truth appears. Without hope the idea of
truth would hardly be able even to be thought, and it is the cardinal
untruth to present existence which has been recognised as bad as the
truth, just because it has been recognised’ (4: 110). Mahler’s music
expresses hope by salvaging elements of culture which have become
conventional. At the same time it reveals the limits of hope in moder-
nity, even as it conveys the continuing affective power of hope for the
individual: ‘Mahler was the first musically to draw the musical conclu-
sion from a state of consciousness which has command of nothing but
the abundance – that it just about manages to gather together – of its
individual impulses and experiences and the hope that something will
emerge from them which they are not yet, without them being faked’
(13: 211). A direct connection between objective historical spirit and
music, of the kind suggested in the link between Beethoven and Hegel,
is now impossible. There is now just the residual hope that the indi-
vidual may, despite all, convert their experience into something more
universally communicable. The individual who succeeded in doing this
would then be articulating a more general truth through their very
individuality.

37 Adorno’s stance is often questionable, but the recurrence of a return to barbarism in
developed countries is a perennial phenomenon, given certain kinds of social, political,
and economic breakdown.
The key to the issue of music and philosophy here is indicated in the following passage: ‘Mahler’s music anxiously preserves in itself the soothing, healing quality which tradition ascribed to music since time immemorial as the power to banish demons, and which yet pales into a chimera in the face of the extent of the disenchantment of the world’ (13: 178). The point of Adorno’s view of disenchantment can be shown as follows. For those directions in modern philosophy which are associated primarily with the natural sciences disenchantment simply reveals the false nature of the beliefs that precede it. One of the major problems of modernity is, though, as my reference to metaphysics\(^2\) is intended to suggest, that the significance of these false beliefs cannot be conjured out of the world merely by demonstrating their undoubted falsity. Hence the association of the need to mourn with such a demonstration. Fascism and the rise of the contemporary religious right and Islamism in the Western world have, for example, at least in part to do with the failure to fill gaps left by disenchantment.\(^{38}\) The pivotal role of Mahler in interpreting Adorno’s positions on music and philosophy lies in Mahler’s ability to evoke hope even as he undermines it and mourns its loss, thus in the truthfulness of his presentation of the fate of attempts to make a better world in modernity.

It is no coincidence that Mahler occasions some of Adorno’s best writing on music. In it Adorno exemplifies what I mean by ‘musical philosophy’: the text is illuminated by the music and at the same time illuminates the music. Rather than subordinating music to a pre-established philosophical aim, the writing tries to do justice to it, including with regard to its significance for philosophy. Adorno does not claim to give a definitive representation of the music’s meaning, but responds to it in a manner that allows it to unfold its potential. Take, for example, Adorno’s response to *Das Lied von der Erde*, where he considers how the ‘earth’ is understood in the piece:

The first song says that it stands firm for a long time – not eternally – and the one who says farewell even calls it the dear earth, as it is disappearing. For the work [i.e. *Das Lied*] it [the earth] is not the universe, but what fifty years later someone flying at a great height may have caught up with, a star. For the gaze of the music which is leaving the earth it curves into a surveyable sphere, in the way it has in the meanwhile already been photographed from space: not the centre of creation, but something tiny and ephemeral . . . But the earth which has moved far away from

\(^{38}\) Ernst Bloch always insisted on the need to see the effects of disenchantment in this way.
itself lacks the hope which the stars once promised. It is submerged in empty galaxies. On it beauty lies as a reflection of past hope which fills the dying eye until it freezes under the flakes of now unlimited space. The moment of rapture at such beauty dares to stand up to the spell of disenchanted nature. That metaphysics is no longer possible becomes the last metaphysics.

What might be paraphrased as just another account of modern disenchattment resists such reduction when read as a response to the unique tone of Mahler’s song cycle. It reminds us of the admittedly limited possibilities for metaphysics in the light of a sober appraisal of now dead sources of meaning that were based either on theology or on the centrality of humankind in the cosmos. The music’s combination of resistance to disenchantment and admission of the hopelessness of traditional metaphysics cannot be conveyed discursively, as that would miss its affective dimension, without which the hope it embodies has no power. The fact that only the music can convey this combination is what sustains it as the ‘last metaphysics’. Adorno’s rejection of the familiar interpretation of the last song of the cycle as a pantheistic celebration of the eternal life of nature may be contentious, but his rejection should not be assessed just as a cognitive claim. It is better interpreted as an attempt to disclose the mimetic character of the music’s move towards silence in a manner which is adequate both to its aesthetic quality and to its historical situation.

If one reflects on how ‘the earth’ can be thought about in modernity, the competing demands of scientific and ‘life-world’ conceptions make it clear that there is always a need for ways in which we can, in Dieter Henrich’s phrase, ‘hold a world together in thought’. We cannot do so by regarding the earth as the interconnection of all its natural laws, because that leads to mere disintegration into endless particularity. Rather we can see it as a context of meanings of the kind which we encounter when touched by its beauty, savagery, or indifference. At the same time these meanings are marked by our intensified awareness of the ultimate transience of all that the earth can ever be. Adorno’s insistence on the ‘temporal core’ both of truth and of works of art gives music a special significance, precisely because it is built on a transience which yet seems to generate meaning. Mahler’s Lied embodies the modern situation, giving a bitter-sweet pleasure to the sense of mourning associated with the awareness of our ephemeral character.
This pleasure, which is a complex aesthetic pleasure, raises a vital question for Adorno’s philosophical understanding of music.

On the one hand, the Adorno who sees the modern world as dominated by totalising economic and cultural processes tends to talk in terms of an equally totalising counter to this world, in the form of the realisation of freedom, or of a ‘human’ world. On the other hand, the Adorno who predominates in much of the Mahler book seems to suggest that even a realisation of such an ideal will not be able to overcome the sense of irredeemable transience which is a condition of modernity. Indeed transience in a world which was indeed humane and constituted in terms of freedom might be even more painful, as one would have more to lose. In that case there would be a need for the hope that better resources for coping with transience would develop as part of liberation.

The ambivalence with regard to the work of art suggested by this thought is particularly important in relation to Adorno’s qualification of art as ‘Schein’, ‘appearance’/‘illusion’, which he links to the idea of art as ‘play’. He thinks of ‘Schein’ in relation to Hegel’s idea that art is the ‘sensuous appearing of the idea’, which contrasts for Hegel with philosophy’s supposed overcoming of the sensuous. In an essay, ‘Little Heresy’, on understanding music, in which he reflects on the relationship between hearing the parts and hearing the whole, Adorno points to the dilemma of ‘Schein’: ‘The light of the beauty of details, once perceived, obliterates the illusion (‘Schein’) with which Bildung covers music and which is all too complicit with music’s dubious aspect: the aspect which says that music is already the happy whole which humanity has until today denied itself’ (17: 302). In one obvious sense music is just appearance, and it is necessarily linked to the idea of play (although if one thinks of Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘language game’ the sense that music lacks ‘reality’ because it is play is already diminished). The happiness that music can convey with regard to the concrete historical world is merely a promise, and may not be fulfilled. Adorno’s point, though, is more emphatic, because he links music’s being appearance with its ideological creation of the illusion of a ‘happy whole’, which he sees as getting in the way of realising that whole.

Take an extreme example: the target of Adorno’s conception is the sort of aestheticism which leads audiences in the Nazi period to enjoy

39 The meaning of ‘Schein’ depends very much on the context of its use. I shall here sometimes use ‘appearance’ and sometimes ‘illusion’, but will also retain the German term when both senses play a role in understanding the term.
the great musical classics while the victims died in unspeakable agony a few miles away. However, in other circumstances (or, indeed, for other people in the same circumstances), the same music might be a means of sustaining hope when reality otherwise extinguishes it. Only if one regards music as essentially ‘philosophical music’ could such sustaining of hope be seen as merely ideological. Is music which has helped many people live through terrible times, or has brought people together after conflicts, simply a replacement for something else? Music can also fill a large part of someone’s life – as, of course, it did Adorno’s. The man who wrote the following clearly did not always adhere to his own most stringent views:

music is, as it were, the acoustic objectification of facial expression, which perhaps only separated itself from it in the course of history. If ‘a shadow passes over a face’, an eye opens, lips half-open, then that is closest to the origin of music as well as to expressionless natural beauty, the path of clouds across the sky, the appearance of the first star, the sun’s breaking through clouds. Music as it were in the middle between the spectacle of the sky and of the face. That is the basis of the affinity of music to nature poetry.

(Adorno 2001: 237)

In the face of the radical transience characteristic of modern temporality, great musical experiences which take us beyond the dominant relationships to time might be said to be ‘illusion’, in so far as they do not ultimately transform that temporality. However, do such experiences not also offer their own kind of fulfilment, often, as Mahler’s music does, by temporarily transforming what is in reality irredeemable? This is another possible interpretation of Adorno’s remark on Mahler and the ‘last metaphysics’, which hints at the ambivalence in his notion of ‘Schein’.

This ambivalence has a more general significance for the entanglement of philosophy and music. Adorno claims that ‘The fact that no [work of art] is a symbol [in the sense of that which manifests the infinite in the finite] testifies to the fact that the absolute does not reveal itself in any work; otherwise art would not be either appearance or play, but rather something real’ (7: 147–8). Only if art were to overcome the difference between universal and particular, mind and material reality, would it cease to be ‘Schein’. Being ‘real’ is therefore intended in the emphatic sense that Adorno associates with Hegel’s claim to attain the absolute in philosophy. In Adorno’s terms this metaphysical goal, like
the regulative idea of truth, cannot be attained: ‘Identity of essence and appearance is as little achievable for art as for cognition of the real’ (ibid.: 167). However, he has to rely on the idea of this goal of the absolute when he maintains that music’s transience is what constitutes it as mere appearance. He then argues, though, that ‘Geist’ (‘mind’/‘spirit’, in the sense of that which makes things intelligible) is ‘non-being’, i.e. lacks material existence, and that the ‘non-being in [works of art], for the sake of which they exist, attains a however broken existence by dint of aesthetic realisation’ (ibid.: 167). Geist’s need for material manifestation in the configuration of the elements of the work of art makes the work more than what it is as a material object, so that its appearance is ‘methexis’ [Plato’s word for the participation of material things in the forms] in truth’ (ibid.: 166).

The dialectical twists in this strand of Adorno’s thought are evidently very hard to unravel. The main point is that the ‘broken existence’ realised by Geist’s appearance in art means that ‘Schein’ cannot, if the metaphysical goal of ‘reality’ is inherently unattainable, simply be the replacement for something ‘real’. The consequence of Adorno’s stance is echoed in Wellmer’s objection to truth considered as a regulative idea: in both cases the inaccessibility of the metaphysical goal forces one back to what actually happens in language and in music. The implication here would be that there may be nothing beyond the transcendence of the given by the ‘broken existence’ of meaning in art. This transcendence is, though, not the kind associated with traditional conceptions of metaphysics. The centrality of music in Adorno’s relationship to philosophy, and his ambivalence with regard to the philosophical idea of music as ‘Schein’ result from this tension between art and the transcendence of the given.

There is a friction in Adorno’s thinking between the ‘Schein’ which participates in truth that is exemplified in Mahler’s music as a response to modernity, and the idea that, were a humane state of the world to become possible, a fulfilment could result which went beyond ‘Schein’. The latter idea also informs Adorno’s conception of new music. Given his view of the catastrophic nature of the dominant factors in modernity, new music is obliged to deny ‘the meaning of organised society’, and announce itself as mere ‘Schein’ by being empty of meaning, rather than be at all complicit in the given. This conception is, as we have seen, unsustainable. It results from taking an extreme philosophical interpretation of a particular historical constellation as the only key to the truth of music. In my terms the friction involved in the idea of
`Schein` described above cannot be overcome by establishing a philosophical standpoint which resolves the contradiction. Adorno’s problems in mediating between music, philosophy and history help, then, to lay bare real contradictions which are carried out in modern music.

In the last chapter I suggested that, despite the limited amount of direct reflection on music and society in his work, Wittgenstein was still able to illuminate the entanglement of music and philosophy. Adorno’s much more ambitious aims with regard to music, philosophy, and society mean that he is open to many more kinds of criticism. However, even when criticising his diagnoses, we are by that very fact led to confront vital issues. If we take Adorno’s more radical approaches seriously, the prevailing forces in modernity will be seen as showing their true face in Auschwitz and Hiroshima. The continuing rapacious effects of capital, which decimate the environment, exhaust natural resources, and lead to cultural impoverishment, without heed for the longer term future, are then to be regarded as related to such events. The human world may, therefore, be heading for an abyss created by the dominance of instrumental attitudes to both human and non-human nature.

Such concerns can be seen as at best peripheral to, and at worst grossly irrelevant to music. The easy option here is therefore to argue that music is precisely not a form of instrumental reason, and so constitutes a respite from the ills of modernity, although this argument itself makes it clear that these ills affect how music is perceived. Adorno refuses to see music as respite, though his concern with music and hope does have to do with the exploration of ways beyond modern disenchantment. It is, moreover, clear that, although most music probably plays the role of mere distraction, the most significant modern music does not. While insisting on the relative autonomy of music, Adorno’s most productive conceptions show that the tasks facing composers and performers are indeed entangled with social issues. Even if one rejects Adorno’s interpretation of the musical path from Bach to the present, a rejection of the idea that music still has to do with inescapable issues like secularisation, the burden of freedom, divisions in the self, technological command, affective life, changes in language, the experience of time, cultural identity, the way moods can constitute how we see reality, and a myriad of issues relating to his critical diagnoses of the problems of modernity, is not a serious option. The fact that philosophical understanding of music is often parasitic on extra-musical philosophical assumptions and so fails to see what it can learn from music, does vitiate some of Adorno’s emphatic interpretations of music via the ideas...
of DoE. However, his best engagements with the entanglement of music and philosophy reveal how each can become a form of criticism, or an illumination, of the other.

I began the chapter by claiming that Adorno can be regarded as a ‘post-metaphysical’ thinker. In the course of the chapter it should have become clear that this status is itself ambivalent. Modern philosophy’s response to the idea that traditional conceptions of metaphysics are no longer tenable tends to split into directions which either seek to reduce truth to verifiable scientific claims, or seek new ways of responding to the needs formerly met by metaphysics and theology. Both directions lead towards a heightened concern with language, the former mainly in order to explain its ability to represent the world, the latter in order to explore its expressive, world-disclosive nature. From Adorno’s perspective the former can be seen as failing to take account of the non-identical, of those aspects of things which are not reducible to what can be stated in assertions. What he criticises need not, though, just be construed in the terms of his more contentious philosophical diagnoses. When he talks of philosophy’s ‘suspended nature’ he is attempting to steer clear of a philosophical method which will rigidly demarcate what can be objectively established about language from what is therefore merely contingent or subjective. Music can here become a metaphor for the need for philosophy to be on guard against forms of articulation that obstruct access to what can give human lives meaning. The task is therefore to explore forms which, while not being reducible to the terms of the dominant kinds of rationality, might also be able to broaden the scope of rationality. Adorno shares with Wittgenstein the sense that attempting to solve philosophical problems by giving theoretical answers might often be an inadequate way of approaching what those problems tell us about our understanding of our lives. Instead of music being a philosophical mystery, it becomes a new resource for a critical self-understanding of modernity. Adorno may often not convince in his specific judgements, but the directions suggested by his best work are far from exhausted.
CONCLUSION

Cheesecake, or metaphysics?

After Adorno’s sombre analyses of the place of music in modernity, in which pleasure is often subordinated to truth, there might seem to be something refreshing about the bluff hedonism of Steven Pinker’s claims that music is ‘auditory cheesecake’ (Pinker 1997: 534) and that ‘the direct effect of music is sheer, pointless pleasure’ (www.lse.ac.uk/collections/evolutionist/pinker.htm). The difference between Pinker and Adorno is a somewhat drastic illustration of how the split between metaphysics_1 and metaphysics_2 can manifest itself in modernity. In a riposte to the comical reductionism of evolutionary psychology’s treatment of cultural issues, Louis Menand suggests against Pinker that:

Music appreciation, for instance, seems to be wired in at about the level of ‘Hot Cross Buns.’ But people learn to enjoy Wagner. They even learn to sing Wagner. One suspects that enjoying Wagner, singing Wagner, anything to do with Wagner, is in gross excess of the requirements of natural selection. To say that music is the product of a gene for ‘art-making,’ naturally selected to impress potential mates – which is one of the things Pinker believes – is to say absolutely nothing about what makes any particular piece of music significant to human beings. No doubt Wagner wished to impress potential mates; who does not? It is a long way from there to ‘Parsifal’.

(www.newyorker.com/critics/books/?021125crbo_books. See also Simon Blackburn: www.phil.cam.ac.uk/~swb24/reviews/Pinker.htm.)

Pinker is not worth taking seriously in this context (and in quite a few others): he too often fails to separate how an aspect of culture may have originated from how it subsequently becomes significant. The two
cannot be assimilated to each other because the second makes no sense if one does not take intentionality into account. How would Pinker wish to account for the crises and revolutions of modern music in his terms? Are Mahler, Schoenberg, Coltrane, and others, who create music which sometimes cannot be regarded primarily in terms of pleasure, to realise that they have simply mistaken the essential nature of music? If music were not about the world there would be no reason for such music to exist. Even though music does not relate to the intentional realm in exactly the same way as novels or other texts do, it does absorb issues which are intentionally constituted. The real question is why pleasure in modern music should have become a problem, to the point where sounds that are ugly to many are regarded by some, like Adorno, as the most appropriate response to the horrors to which modernity has given rise.¹

Before one even gets to such historical issues, a philosophical point concerning intentionality is decisive in this context. Merleau-Ponty’s comment, cited in chapter 1, makes the point clear: ‘Because perception gives us faith in a world, in a system of rigorously connected and continuous natural facts, we believed that this system could incorporate everything into itself, including the perception which initiated us into it’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 46–7). Once perception is seen as inherently bound up with meaning, this belief has to give way to the realisation that resources for understanding the world are not exhausted by the causal explanations that we use to account for natural phenomena. This is obvious in the case of music: what music is cannot be said to remain the same across history, and coming to terms with this fact involves the ability to understand how cultural norms are transformed and assimilated in social contexts. There is, though, more to this objection than this – in some quarters – still too often ignored fact.

Pinker’s assumptions correspond to those of the kind of analytical philosophy which uses terms like ‘folk psychology’ to characterise what others think of as intentionality. The assumption is that whatever it is that the term intentionality designates will eventually be explained by a scientific theory, revealing it to be another natural fact like any other. This assumption might make sense if we had an agreed sense of just what it is that an explanation of intentionality would be explaining, but this is simply not the case, for the reason suggested in Merleau-Ponty’s remark: the explanation itself depends on what it is supposed

¹ Dada’s revolt against beauty in the visual arts poses similar questions. See Danto 2003.
to explain. The connection between the scientistic position and the way in which analytical aesthetics often approaches music is that both work in terms which have to be external to what they are examining. The construal of meaning in this tradition has therefore to rely on the explanatory aim which Merleau-Ponty denies is achievable. The structure of exclusion which he points out in relation to perception is also present with regard to meaning: if meaning makes explanation possible, it cannot then be reduced to what it itself makes possible. The consequences of this contention obviously depend on how meaning is conceived, and this is where many analytical accounts of language show themselves to be so inadequate to questions of music and language.

The preceding chapters have tried to connect music to the idea that meaning has to do with pre-conceptual engagements with things, with embodied ‘being in a world’, where one acts, feels, etc. Otherwise the ways in which material things can become signs at all are incomprehensible. Wittgenstein’s remarks on the context-dependence of learning the meaning of gestures exemplify what is at issue here, and his concern with gesture was one of the reasons why music was so important to him (and vice versa). Analytical accounts of meaning are, in contrast, modelled primarily on representational assumptions about language, of the kind which lead to Kivy’s idea that music should be thought of as possessing inherent affective ‘properties’, as though it were an object like any other. As we saw, this idea offers no way of comprehending how these properties could take on the ‘subjective’ aspect of affectivity in the first place. This aspect can only come about via the interaction between the notionally subjective and the notionally objective, which takes place in what Heidegger terms a world of ‘involvements’ (‘Bewandtnisse’).

One effect of the prevailing analytical assumptions is that philosophers who work on ‘aesthetics’ or the ‘philosophy of art/music’ often think, in the light of the inferior, ‘subjective’ status generally attributed to these disciplines by the analytical tradition, that they need to legitimate what they do by producing theories which have the same ‘objective’ rigour as is supposedly present in other branches of philosophy. They therefore want to establish that there is indeed a domain of

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2 This might seem to repeat the problem I pointed out in Pinker, namely that the genesis of an aspect of culture does not explain its subsequent meanings. However, I am not seeking to deny that once there is language these pre-conceptual engagements are also changed. Indeed, as we have seen, some thinking about music suggests that it may sometimes be understood as a means of restoring what we have lost by the move to the predominance of verbal language.
conclusion

specifically ‘aesthetic’ questions, concerning ‘expression’, the ‘work of art’, etc., which constitute their own branch of philosophy. This seems to me to be a mistake. Rorty warns against conflating the contrast, essential to the sciences, between the ‘veridical (the “objective” as the “intersubjective”)’ and the nonveridical (the “subjective” as the “merely apparent”), with ‘the quite different contrast between the communicable (what our concepts catch) and the incommunicable (what these may, or must, fail to catch)’ (Rorty 1982: 190). The latter is essential to aesthetics because much that matters in art is not conceptual and so is not best dealt with as though it can be grasped in objective terms. It should be clear from what I have said so far that I see no need to produce a self-justification of the kind sought in analytical aesthetics. This is not least because I don’t think that what is at issue can actually be justified in this way. Attempting to do so would depend on the representationalist assumption that there is something aesthetic ‘out there’ which is different from other kinds of objectively existing things out there. This idea depends on the veridical/non-veridical contrast, when what is at issue is really the nature of the changing relationships between the meaning manifest in art, some of which is non-conceptual, and other forms of meaning. I also don’t think that one should attempt to provide such a justification as the basis of ‘aesthetics’, because doing so would exclude the heuristic reversal of roles between the musical and the philosophical which is vital to understanding the significance of music in exploring the limits of modern philosophy.

Rather than what is intended by ‘the aesthetic’ being the object of a specific domain of philosophy, it should therefore be regarded as one way of addressing what is intended by metaphysics, namely those things which have to be ‘vollzogen’, which can only show themselves in a specific articulation or be understood by participating in a specific practice. Lawrence Kramer says of interpreting musical meaning that ‘the interpretation does not locate meaning as a recoverable substance within the work, musical or otherwise, but as an activity or disposition within the cultural field’ (Kramer 2002: 19). There is nothing mysterious or unclear about this sort of participation in cultural practices, as the later Wittgenstein suggests by his avoidance of prescribing limits to what can count as signifying material or signifying activity. It is only if one makes the representationalist assumption that answers to questions about musical meaning have to be couched in terms of a translation of the musical into a direct verbal equivalent that Wittgenstein’s approach
seems problematic, or that music has to be primarily construed as a philosophical mystery. Remember Martha Nussbaum’s remark that ‘Musical works are somehow able – and, after all, this “somehow” is no more and no less mysterious than the comparable symbolic ability of language – to embody the idea of our urgent need for and attachment to things outside ourselves that we do not control, in a tremendous variety of forms’ (Nussbaum 2001: 272). However, the ramifications of such challenges to dominant forms of philosophical legitimation are evidently not straightforward.

A further way of approaching what is at stake here is via the parallel which can be drawn between art and religion. One great strength of what emerged from the Enlightenment was, and is, the insistence on public verification of validity claims, based on evidence, consistency, relevance, etc. In chapter 4 I cited Cavell’s comment with regard to aesthetic judgement that ‘if you do not see something, without explanation, then there is nothing further to discuss’ (Cavell 1976: 93). Only on the basis of a prior intuitive sharing of the sense that there is something that matters in ‘aesthetic experience’ – both as reception and as production – can it become the object of discursive argument. If the core aspects of theology lie outside the realm of explanation and legitimation by evidence and argument, as the modern world has shown that they do, both religion and art are excluded from the publicly warrantable, evidence-based validity that is required of the sciences. The question is whether this is necessarily to be regarded as a problem. Rorty suggests the link that I want to make here when he cites Max Weber’s idea of those who are ‘religiously unmusical’: ‘One can be tone-deaf when it comes to religion just as one can be oblivious to the charms of music.’ He refers to this idea as a way of indicating some of the consequences of an anti-representationalist approach to contemporary philosophy. Both music and religion can simply seem pointless to some people, and ‘Philosophy resembles music in this respect’ (Rorty and Vattimo 2005: 30–1). What lies behind Rorty’s comments is his claim that ‘the desire for universal intersubjective agreement’ is ‘just one human need among

3 These days it is perhaps a good idea to stress here that these Enlightenment demands should not be seen as in conflict with what I am trying to get at. The issue is how we deal with what is not adequately covered by these demands, not the wholesale putting in question of those demands.

4 Awareness of the musical, of the kind inherent in the rhythm of communication, in tone, and the sense of the meaningfulness of expressions which are not verbal will be present even in those who can’t ‘get’ music as a form of art. To this extent, a complete lack of the musical may be pathological, even though everyday unmusicality clearly is not. The
Religion and science can both, if they promote the need for universal agreement above all other needs, be regarded as part of the ‘ontotheology’ to which Rorty wants to say farewell. The same cannot be said of art, even if some philosophical theories might suggest that it could. Communicative reason has, in Rorty’s view, to be preferred to the philosophical desire for universal agreement, and this connects it to aesthetics. While science involves the possibility of public validation in the terms we encountered in Brandom’s inferentialist ‘game of giving and asking for reasons’, religion does not. That need not, however, be a reason simply to dismiss religion, because it may be vital in giving meaning to individual lives, as Marx’s ‘heart of a heartless world and . . . soul of soulless conditions’. Rorty therefore thinks that religion should be ‘privatised’, and that it can opt out of the inferentialist game, so long as the actions of religionists do not bring them into the game of public justification. One is not likely to be justified in criticising the religion which consoles somebody for the loss of a loved one, but one is rightly going to criticise religion when it leads to the refusal to provide condoms for those at risk of AIDS.

Art has an in-between status with respect to evidence and justification. Aesthetic judgements must cite evidence, but this evidence is not, as Cavell makes clear, of the same order as scientific evidence. Both art and science admittedly depend on normative evaluation, but the way this functions differs in each. The initial moment of unexplainable engagement with art required for norm-based aesthetic judgement to begin at all has to do with the complex webs of meanings that we build up in our lives. The registering of scientific data for the purposes of explaining a specific phenomenon need not (though it can) depend on such an engagement, and scientific webs of meaning can be methodologically explicated in ways that aesthetic ones cannot.

Rorty addresses what I have termed metaphysics in an essay on why he thinks we should drop the realism/anti-realism dichotomy. He says of the opposition between representationalist realists and pragmatist anti-representationalists:

equivalent issue with regard to philosophy will depend on how philosophy is construed: not ‘getting’ epistemological scepticism of the kind that obsessed empiricism is hardly a problem, for example.

See Bowie 2003b, where I question some aspects of Rorty’s view.
Intellectuals cannot live without pathos... If you do not like the term ‘pathos’, the word ‘romance’ would do as well. Or one might use Thomas Nagel’s term: ‘the ambition of transcendence’. The important point is simply that both sides in contemporary philosophy are trying to gratify one of the urges previously satisfied by religion. History suggests that we cannot decide which form of pathos is preferable by deploying arguments. Neither the realist nor her antirepresentationalist opponent will ever have anything remotely like a knock-down argument, any more than Enlightenment secularism had such an argument against theists.

(Rorty 1999a)

The realist’s transcendence would be the culmination of metaphysics, although the transcendent world in itself independent of our descriptions is inherently inaccessible to description. For antirepresentationalists metaphysics can be regarded as the name for secularised forms of transcendence, which include such things as Rorty’s liberal hope, Adorno’s ‘non-identical’, and, in the terms of the present book, music.

Rorty’s claims about the limits of what can be achieved by argument are highly contentious, especially if one adheres to the ‘realist’ side of the debate. This is not least because of what they imply about the future aims of philosophy. However, Rorty does not necessarily need a rigorous argument for his claims: that would anyway be self-refuting, and, whatever the aims of the realists, there simply are no generally accepted arguments, even among realists, that achieve the degree of consensus achieved by successful scientific theories. This does not mean that there could not be such arguments, but history gives one a right to a provisional inference that the evidence is not encouraging. The situation is, then, that ‘Even if they admit that their opponents’ point admits of no refutation’ both realists and antirepresentationalist pragmatists ‘will remark, complacently and correctly, that it produces no conviction’ (ibid.). Were this not the case there would have to be decisive conclusions to philosophical debates that were based on knock-down arguments, but again history tends to contradict this.

Rorty talks in this respect about his hope for ‘aestheticisation’ of philosophy: ‘In the sort of culture which I hope our remote descendants may inhabit, the philosophical literature about realism and antirealism will have been aestheticized in the way that we moderns have aestheticized the medieval disputations about the ontological status of universals’ (ibid.). A person’s relationship to philosophy may be defined by the extent to which they concur with Rorty’s desire for a farewell to so many of its up to now prevailing concerns. However, one does not
need to buy into his position as a whole to be aware that his focus on how philosophy informs the rest of culture challenges many dominant assumptions. This challenge cannot be a question just of the truth of philosophical claims, because what is at issue are competing norms, such as those relating to when, whether, and how philosophy really matters. Here, propositional truth may not always be the primary concern, and the focus of attention depends precisely on appeals to intuitions about what matters most. These intuitions are unlikely to be surrendered merely on the basis of specific arguments, because they are connected to a whole web of connected convictions, feelings, investments, etc., which could not all be addressed at once by such arguments.6

What interests me in our context is, then, the ‘sense of how things hang together’ (ibid.) which can be immune to what is achieved by the volunteering of specific philosophical and other arguments. Music’s role in this context can be approached by considering another aspect of how Rorty characterises the difference between the realist and the pragmatist. He claims, in relation to the basic idea of metaphysical realism, that no ‘pragmatist [is] likely to be convinced that the notion of something real but indescribable in human language or unknowable by human minds can be made coherent. A concept, after all, is just the use of a word’ (Rorty 1999). If the word is effective we will continue to use it, and, if not, we will be forced into a local change of vocabulary. This need not involve wholesale changes of ontological commitment, but there may be times when large-scale changes of vocabulary become necessary. Although this rejection of metaphysical realism explains why some of us don’t think it a good idea to pursue the realist intuition – as Rorty puts it elsewhere, we have norms for things like ‘snow’, but not for ‘reality’ – the limitation of the notion of the real to what is describable in human language and knowable by human minds excludes important dimensions of our concerns. As I have suggested, our relationship to the world does not just consist in what we are able to describe and to know. It is with respect to his failure to do very much with this fact that Rorty still sometimes seems tied to the focus of the analytical tradition which he otherwise wishes to move beyond.7

6 Cf. Wellmer’s remarks on expanding the scope of how we think about truth discussed in chapter 9.

7 Rorty does, however, say the following: ‘a culture which has substituted literature for both religion and philosophy finds redemption neither in a non-cognitive relation to a non-human person nor in a cognitive relation to propositions, but in non-cognitive relations to other human beings, relations mediated by human artifacts such as books and buildings, paintings and songs. These artifacts provide glimpses of alternative ways of being human’ (Rorty 2000).
Aesthetics, language, and music

If Rorty is serious about the aestheticisation of philosophy he might, then, pay rather more attention to the resources offered by the aesthetic tradition. The reason he doesn’t is that he wants, following Gadamer, to get away from the ‘standard Kantian cognitive-moral-aesthetic distinction’, which reduces all issues not amenable to universal agreement to being ‘merely a matter of taste’ (Rorty and Vattimo 2005: 31). Avoiding this reduction seems to me a desirable aim (cf. Bowie 1997, 2003b). However, things are not as simple as Rorty tries to make them. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant himself calls the cognitive-moral-aesthetic division into question, suggesting that shared feeling, of the kind required in claims about beauty, as opposed to claims about the merely private ‘agreeable’, is also required for agreement in cognition (see Bowie 2003b: ch. 1). Dieter Henrich makes Kant’s idea plausible in his Schleiermacher-influenced assertion, cited in chapter 5, that ‘language can only be understood as a medium, but not as the instrument of agreement. Subjects cannot agree on the use of language, because the agreement would itself already presuppose its use. From this it follows that taking up communication presupposes a real common ground between subjects who mutually relate to each other’ (Henrich 1999: 71). This common ground cannot be conceived of in conceptual terms, because that would precisely require language, which the common ground is supposed to make possible in the first place.

Such common ground can be apparent in the practice of music. Relationships between beings endowed with what Schleiermacher termed ‘immediate self-consciousness’ can be constituted in gestures, as well as in other modes of articulation and expression, such as music or dancing. These may be more important than what is articulated verbally, as their role in all human cultures makes clear. Moreover, what is at stake in Kant’s attention to aesthetics is not necessarily part of the attempt, as Rorty sees it, to separate ‘hard and soft’ areas of culture. Even in its Kantian form aesthetics is also to do with what *connects* ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ areas, by pursuing (even as it admits that it can never be achieved in reality) the goal of making subjective judgements capable of commanding universal assent. Rorty’s remarks about concepts and the use of words can, therefore, be interpreted in a direction which he does not countenance because of his conviction that looking beyond the linguistic will entail an appeal to epistemological foundations, and so lead us back into ontotheology.

8 The very fact that the likes of the Taliban seek to ban these things underlines the point.
My idea here is that Rorty should, as Wittgenstein does, extend the scope of what is intelligible in the direction of articulations which may not describe or convey knowledge, but which also need not primarily be thought of as involving something ‘ineffable’ towards which knowledge is striving. This idea can be made persuasive by looking again at one of the main historical manifestations of music. As we have seen, music in modernity has important effects on what language is taken to be. Questioning of the idea of verbal language as representation of a ready-made world leads to a new sense that the uses to which words can be put do not adequately cover all that we need to express, and that music is significant in extending what can be expressed.

A further way of approaching these changes is via Cavell’s very particular (and sometimes exaggerated) take on scepticism as a founding aspect of modernity, which relates to the questioning of language as representation.\(^9\) Essential to Cavell’s position is his claim that ‘the human creature’s basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing’ (Cavell 1979: 241). When, paradigmatically with Descartes, philosophy becomes more and more concerned with using knowledge to ground human beings’ basis in the world,\(^10\) the philosophical problem of humankind’s relation to the world becomes acute, and this is accompanied by the emergence of a new kind of fundamental mistrust of language. The sort of thing which Cavell means is indicated in Walter Benjamin’s remark that in baroque allegory ‘Every person, every thing, every relationship can arbitrarily mean something else. This possibility passes a devastating but just judgement on the profane world’ (Benjamin 1980: 1/1, 350). Benjamin connects this occurrence with the emergence of opera, which is ‘product of the decay’ of what he refers to as ‘Trauerspiel’ (which includes German baroque drama and Shakespeare) (ibid.: 1/1, 385). He regards the move to opera as a sign of decay because he adheres to the theological idea of a ‘language of names’, which would be the perfect representational language (see Bowie 1997: ch. 8).

Music has precisely to do with connections to the world which often cannot be characterised in terms of what we know or in representational

\(^9\) Rorty (1982) is probably right to suggest that Cavell tries too hard to connect the uninteresting empiricist concern with epistemological scepticism about the external world in the analytical tradition to the really important issues about human communication associated with scepticism in Kant, Sartre and others.

\(^10\) Hamann, Jacobi, and Schelling, whose ideas have been important for the approach I have tried to develop, all question the primacy of epistemology that is the consequence of Cartesianism. See Bowie 1993, 1997; and Schelling 1994.
terms, and these connections will be regarded differently, depending on how linguistic representation is evaluated. What is most significant in our context is that the historical changes in the significance and nature of music in early modernity parallel the shift in perceptions of language associated with the sceptical problematic as it is envisioned by Cavell. However, although music is always part of Cavell’s explorations, it does not in the main play an explicit central role in his image of modernity. In Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow (Cavell 2005), where aesthetic issues are regarded as essential to what has been neglected by the science-oriented concerns of analytical philosophy, he addresses some of the topics we have dealt with, but still links them more indirectly than directly to music. It is therefore worth attempting to spell out some implications of his ideas via what has been established in the preceding chapters.

The echoes of the idea of metaphysics in Cavell should be evident from the following, referring to the notion of the ‘end of philosophy’ in Wittgenstein: ‘It would follow that philosophy is only over on the assumption that philosophy is exhausted by metaphysics and that metaphysics is exhausted by the attempt to solve problems generated by the skeptical process. But if metaphysics is to tell us how things are, then philosophical procedures otherwise motivated – let’s say by wonder – may count as metaphysics’ (ibid.: 211). In my terms this means, then, that music can count as ‘metaphysics’. Beethoven, for example, challenges the previous orders of things by establishing new kinds of expressive relationship to the world. These can change ‘how things are’ by, for instance, dynamising temporality and linking it to emotion in ways which affect one’s sense of how time can be structured and experienced, or by showing how expressive material can be integrated into a rationally structured temporal whole. How Cavell’s idea might be further connected to music is best shown via his account of limitations in J. L. Austin’s theory of performative utterance. First, though, Cavell’s questioning needs briefly to be situated in the wider context in which it occurs. It is not that he just offers an addition to Austin’s theory, rather he shows how what that theory lacks points to an essential lack in the tradition to which Austin belongs.

Cavell’s claim that ‘the ability to praise guards against the threat of skepticism – as in religion the acceptance of God may be attested less in the reciting of creeds than in the singing of psalms’ (ibid.: 3) suggests how his approach connects with our themes. Praise has a particular performative status (rather like that of ‘encourage’, discussed below);
it has to be enacted, performed, ‘given’, for it to be what it is, hence its frequent connection to music in both religious and secular contexts. Cavell presents Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in particular as a paradigm of the ‘threat of scepticism’.*11 Central to this status is Lear’s ‘preoccupation with the choice and the value of words, with the inability to be either satisfied with what is said or reconciled to what cannot be said’ (ibid.: 53). Cavell cites Emerson’s view that Shakespearean language liberates us from the effects of scepticism, such as solipsistic mistrust of the other, by demonstrating ‘for the first time . . . “the possibility of the translation of things into song”’. Emerson elsewhere speaks of this possibility in terms of “transferring the inmost truth of things into music or verse” (ibid.: 51). Cavell talks of the idea of language as ‘a matter . . . of learning how to let objects become impressive to us, matter to us (something to sing about, or speak about)’ (ibid.), without language becoming predominantly or exclusively a means for mastering objects. The idea of language as mastery generates doubts about that mastery: Descartes’ combination of the wish to be ‘lord and master of nature’ is inseparable from fears about scepticism and all that ensues from it in modern philosophy. However, music is not presented as fundamental to what Cavell develops from this idea of language as what lets things matter. We encountered a similar, but more extreme, elision of music in Heidegger’s later view of language, to which Cavell also refers in this context.

Cavell is seeking to get away from ‘an idea of language . . . as a matter of registering what empiricists variously picture as ideas derived from impressions that “enter” the mind’ (ibid.), i.e. the idea of language as representation. This idea, he thinks, constitutively excludes the sense of language as ‘expressive’: in our terms, it fails to incorporate the world-disclosive, world-constituting dimensions of language, which entangle it with music. Cavell does take account of music when he undertakes his extension of Austin’s theory of ‘speech as action’, by linking what he has to say to opera, whose emergence is contemporaneous with ‘the great tragedies of Shakespeare’. He describes opera as ‘music’s exploration of its affinities with expressive or passionate utterance’ (ibid.: 15), as though these were primarily attributes of language that music needed the voice to explore. One can, though, also see this the other

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11 Even if one finds Cavell’s overall interpretation of *Lear* unconvincing, there is no doubt that the concern with language and scepticism which he finds in it is essential to the early stages of modernity.
way round: music, both vocal and instrumental, was understood as an expression of affect even before opera existed. Moreover, in modernity, the affinities of language as expression to music become, as we have seen, a powerful philosophical and aesthetic theme. Novalis talks, for example, of ‘Poems, just pleasant sounding and full of beautiful words, but also without any meaning or context . . . like fragments of the most diverse things. True poetry can at the most have an allegorical meaning as a whole and an indirect effect, like music etc.’ (Novalis 1978: 769). Despite Cavell’s touch of logocentrism – why can each notional side not have priority in differing situations, as the debates over the priority of music and text in the history of opera itself suggest that they do? – what he addresses is germane to our concerns.

Cavell’s interest is in the ‘relation of passion to speech’ as what is neglected in Austin’s theory of performative utterance. Passion is both something that one undergoes, and something which drives one’s stance towards others and the world. The link to music is clear: music can be engaged with both in a predominantly receptive manner, and in a productive manner. Cavell’s concern with the exclusion of the topic of passion and speech from the ‘tradition of analytical philosophy’ (Cavell 2005: 156) relates to the questions that we have seen music posing for philosophy. According to Cavell, Austin’s ‘aim in his study of performatives is at once to lift the non-descriptive or non-assertional or non-constative gestures of speech to renewed philosophical interest and respectability, and to bring, or prepare the ground on which to bring, the philosophical concern with truth down to size’ (ibid.: 159). He remarks that this aim finds little echo these days in the dominant analytical traditions, and is taken up rather by literary theorists and continental philosophers. The phrase ‘non-descriptive or non-assertional or non-constative gestures’ closely echoes both elements of the later Wittgenstein, and Adorno’s characterisations of music as ‘judgementless synthesis’, as a ‘language sedimented from gestures’, and as ‘intentionless’. Once gesture in the sense intended here is admitted as essential to language, the gestures which music alone can enact take on the kind of philosophical importance that Cavell largely restricts to poetic utterance.

The initial problem which Cavell finds in Austin can be summed up in the idea that verbal performance, doing by saying, is not adequately understood just in terms of the obvious illocutionary verbs like ‘name’, ‘assent to’, ‘promise’, etc. Austin would, as Cavell admits, no doubt agree with this. However, the consequences of a crucial logical point that
he makes concerning performatives drive home what he really thinks is missing in Austin. The logical point emerges in the specification of the difference in Austin between illocutionary and perlocutionary verbs.

Use of the first person pronoun is necessary for the working of illocution: if there are to be performative intentions and effects, rather than merely causal ones, there has to be a subject that intends to have effects in relation to an interlocutor. Cavell illustrates the point by the verb ‘encourage’ – significantly, the related perlocutionary verbs he cites are, unlike ‘encourage’, all widely used to characterise effects of music:

‘Encourage’ may seem to satisfy the illocutionary formula ‘To say “X” is to X’, hence not to be a perlocutionary verb. But it does not satisfy something else Austin calls an illocutionary formula: ‘If “X” is illocutionary, then “I X you that...” is English’ (a test that does not always work). I can’t encourage you that, though I can encourage you to; perhaps that is illocutionary enough. Then perhaps ‘encourage’ for some reason is in a halfway region. Yet terms in the semantic range of encourage, such as hearten, inspire, rouse, embolden, have no tincture of the illocutionary about them: we cannot say ‘I hearten you’ to hearten you, or ‘I embolden you’ to embolden you.

(ibid.: 178)

Any claim about the perlocutionary effect of my utterances therefore ‘has to come primarily from you, not me... In perlocutionary acts, the “you” comes essentially into the picture’ (ibid.: 179–80). The conventions which sustain many illocutions are consequently not applicable to perlocution, because ‘the perlocutionary act is not, as it were, built into the perlocutionary verb’ (ibid.: 172). If it were ‘I would be exercising some hypnotic or other ray-like power over you, you would have lost your freedom in responding to my speech’ (ibid.). I could achieve whatever effect my utterance had built into it, in the way I can succeed in being married to you if I say the right words in the right circumstances.\(^\text{12}\)

The sense of perverse domination that is evident in an assertion like ‘I inspire you’ illustrates the point, and makes the ethical aspect of

\(^\text{12}\) As Peter Dews shows, Austin himself makes many of the same points as Derrida concerning the contingency of the actual functioning of the conventions governing illocutionary utterances (see Dews 1995). Lawrence Kramer (1990) has illuminating things to say about music and illocution, but he does not make the decisive point about perlocution that I develop from Cavell.
the issue of perlocution apparent. Unlike illocutionary effects, perlocutionary effects cannot, then, be construed in terms of ‘an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect’ (ibid.: 180). At the same time – and this is the crux – it is essential to human communication that I can still ‘rationally expect’ to have perlocutionary effects on you, such as inspiring you, or irritating you, because otherwise ‘I would lack the capacity to make myself intelligible to you. And what you would lack is not some information I might impart to you’ (ibid.). Making oneself intelligible, then, involves a fundamental contingency, but it also involves rational expectation. Both the contingency and the rational expectation are based on the knowledge that language does things to people. In this sense the refusal to give priority to the representational aspects of language can itself be regarded as having an ethical significance.

It is not hard to relate some of this to music, which cannot achieve its effects simply by convention, and which would in many circumstances not be music at all if one could not expect that it will have effects on those who hear it. Music admittedly cannot be described as ‘perlocutionary’ in a literal sense, because it is not achieving effects through the speaking or writing of words. However, Cavell’s remarks on the role of gesture in speech make the translation from language to music unproblematic in this context. The vital factor here is the *combination* in both language and music of a potential for having effects which can be anything from dangerous to life-enhancing, with the possibility that the same expression that gives rise to such effects could also amount to nothing, because it elicits no response. I shall consider in a moment what follows from the fact that some perlocutionary verbs can and some cannot be applied to music. The significance of music here derives not least from the fact that many ‘perlocutionary’ effects, in the sense of what results from human expressions which engage and affect their recipients in emotional and ethical ways – or indeed proto-cognitive ways, as when one senses, by the way they play music, the particular emotional state of someone who is reserved – cannot be achieved by words at all. These considerations about what language and music can do which is not primarily descriptive or cognitive can put in question one aspect of Rorty’s conviction that ‘the notion of something real but

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13 Fears about demonic musical virtuosity in the nineteenth century can be interpreted in the light of the nature of perlocution.

14 In the case of those that can be applied it is important that there is no necessary identity between what the word conveys and what the music may actually do.
indescribable in human language or unknowable by human minds’ cannot be made coherent. Rather than this something being the world ‘in itself’ – in this respect Schopenhauer can be said to have thought that music fulfils the metaphysical realist demand – what cannot be conveyed by human language has to do with ways of being in the world which may be obscured by the attempt to use concepts to characterise them. We need now to make it clearer why the discussion of Austin should lead in the direction of music at all.

Cavell hints at a link between music and his discussion of Austin. This link connects to his recent reflections on aesthetics which develop his remarks, cited in previous chapters, about the lack of an explicable ground in aesthetic discussion. His reflections are formulated in a way which relates directly to his concern with passionate utterance as ‘an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire’, which he contrasts with performative utterance as ‘an offer of participation in the order of law’. The former involves ‘the rights of desire’; the latter brings with it ‘the responsibilities of implication’ (ibid.: 185), so taking one into the realm of Brandom’s inferential commitments. Cavell regards an ‘aesthetic claim’ ‘as a kind of compulsion to share a pleasure, hence as tinged with an anxiety that the claim stands to be rebuked’, and argues that ‘It is a condition of, or threat to, that relation to things called aesthetic, that something I know and cannot make intelligible stands to be lost to me’ (ibid.: 9). There is therefore a correlation between the uncertainty attached to an aesthetic claim addressed to another and the contingency of perlocution as ‘improvisation in the disorders of desire’: in both cases convention is disempowered, and the idea of expression which is not based on knowledge of anticipated effects becomes central. The same risks are inherent in musical performance – musical improvisation, for example, may not best be achieved just in terms of the existing rules and it arrives at new kinds of order at the risk of being unintelligible. Cavell’s assertion that ‘my idea of passionate utterance turns out to be a concern with performance after all’ (ibid.: 187) suggests how this connection to music can be made.

The most important implication of the idea of passionate utterance lies for Cavell in the centrality of expression for the philosophy of language. He cites Crispin Wright’s doubts that ‘expression could ground or sustain a theory of language’ because ‘human beings have so few natural expressions’ (ibid.: 186). In contrast, Cavell argues that ‘when creatures of a certain species fall into the possession of language and become humans . . . they have become (always already) victims of
expression – readable in every sound and gesture – their every word and act apt to betray their meaning’ (ibid.). This readability, which can be both a burden and a gift, and which is conveyed in many different ways, is central to my concerns. That expression of this kind is part of music is evident when Cavell says, echoing the Romantic tradition, that he is ‘prepared to persist . . . in regarding cries of pain, or prolonged silences, or sobs, as “preverbal” calls for help, or as traces of rage’ (ibid.: 187). All these expressions have important correlates in music as a ‘language of gestures’: think of the importance of the timing of silences in so many kinds of music. Cavell’s extension of the notion of language beyond what the analytical tradition countenances is based on the fact that ‘my view of the role of ordinary language in relation to the imperative of expression, is that it is less in need of weeding than of encouragement’ (ibid.: 188). The phrase ‘imperative of expression’ offers a good way of characterising what lies behind the change in the status and nature of music in modernity, which, as we just saw, has to do with the phenomena that Cavell examines in relation to scepticism. Music is both imbued with an intrinsic contingency, which points to sceptical worries, and yet offers, as the idea of praise suggests, a way beyond a sceptical relationship to the world. It does so, moreover, by its very lack of the conceptual determinacy demanded by someone seeking a philosophical way out of epistemological scepticism. This point will be important again below, when I discuss Daniel Barenboim’s remarks on the cultural role of music.

The division between illocution and perlocution here makes possible some distinctions between uses of differing forms of articulation and expression which are largely absent from analytical approaches to these issues. These distinctions need not be regarded as conceptually fixed, not least because musical intentions, challenges, etc., are not best interpreted as just proceeding from one individual to another individual, being rather part of the symbolic vocabulary that is caught up in the dynamic of cultural practices at a particular time. Whereas one can quite usefully try to list verbs which can be illocutionary or perlocutionary, and the use of the verbs is likely to remain stable for considerable periods, music’s effects and functions are often essentially contestable, as the history of the ways in which music has been understood suggests. Remember Mattheson’s representationalist talk of how

15 The fact that he even has to persist tells one something important about the failings of the approach advocated by Wright.
an ‘Adagio indicates distress, a Lamento lamentation, a Lento relief, an Andante hope, an Affetuoso love, an Allegro comfort, a Presto eagerness, etc.’ (Strunk 1998: 699).

Music is not straightforwardly illocutionary, but it can, as Adorno claimed, become determined by convention in such a way that it functions in proto-illocutionary manner, as ceremonial music or the clichéd music of the culture industry does. The very fact that something can be felt to be questionable about proto-illocutionary uses of music indicates how Cavell’s concern with ‘encouraging’ rather than ‘weeding’ expression in verbal language gains another dimension when music comes into the picture. Music can be perlocutionary, and often in a fruitful manner – what else could make music therapy successful, for example? – but it cannot just be translated into the terms of perlocution as they apply to verbal language. Whereas music both with and without words can, and can be meant to, inspire, cheer up, make melancholy, or even offend, it cannot, and cannot be meant to, embarrass or shame in any direct sense, though the circumstances of its production may do so. Music may only, like Rilke’s caged panther, shame us by conveying a sense that ‘You must change your life.’ This lack of direct, specifiable effect – which should not be equated with insignificance – has to do precisely with music’s ‘intentionless’ nature. For Adorno this meant that music may be critical of social reality because it does not employ the reified terms of intentional language. His version of this idea is flawed, but the tension between the musical and the verbal can still be instructively connected to cultural politics. Music can encourage and inspire, but its relationship to encouraging or inspiring someone to do something specific is not the same, for example, as that of a political speech.16

Similar specifiable effects to that of a speech can, however, result from music, albeit at a rudimentary and very context-dependent level, as the example of martial music shows.17 As a part of a whole mode of existence martial music is capable of intensifying the motivation of members of an army and of weakening the motivation of their opponents. It is because music can function in a manner which comes close to convention-based illocution that the example of Mahler’s ironic use of

16 Note also how music, as we saw Dahlhaus argue in chapter 1, may just evoke some of what is designated by such verbs, without the listener necessarily undergoing an actual perlocutionary effect.
17 More encouraging examples would include the sort of music which binds together an oppressed community, such as South African township music or some kinds of jazz.
military musical tropes is illuminating for the topic of music, modernity, and performativity.\(^{18}\) The fact that the perlocutionary effect of martial music becomes more and more questionable in a technologically driven modernity means that Mahler makes his military music self-reflexive, and so, as Adorno argues, brings it closer to speech. This ‘becoming linguistic’ of music is part of the dialectic between convention and expression (see Adorno 1997: 18, 149–76) that we looked at in chapter 9. The opening movement of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony, for example, which begins with a minor key march, can initially be understood in terms of a performative environment – militarised Europe which will soon descend into two world wars – in which the march plays a role as part of many forms of life that will directly and indirectly contribute to disaster. The symphonic movement’s questioning of established attitudes to the march need not, though, be seen in representational terms, as ‘foreseeing’ the war-torn world to which it becomes a prelude. Its significance is better located in how it engages its listeners in a critical relationship to a conventionalised, performative musical form.

Rather than this critical relationship being conveyed by words, it results from the specific perlocutionary potential of the music itself. The vital point is that the music evokes the dangers and seductions which it at the same time questions. As such, it is both removed from the sphere of direct perlocution and yet can, by the way in which it may engage the listener, give an access to that sphere which intentional language cannot. We can engage with this sphere in an uncritical, ‘culinary’ manner, by simply enjoying – or, for that matter, not enjoying – the threatening, obsessive feel of the music. Or we may engage with it in a critical manner, by reflecting in historical or psychological terms on the meaning of what the music evokes in us. We can also respond in a variety of other ways. Which of these responses actually occurs will depend on factors such as one’s education in music, etc., but the contingency that Cavell suggests is inherent in the ‘imperative of expression’, which connects the aesthetic and the performative, will also play a role, as will the rational expectation that one can argue about what the music expresses and how it expresses it. The interaction between subjective and objective that is so important here was apparent in Dahlhaus’ comment, cited in chapter 1, that ‘The expressive character [of music] inheres, looked at phenomenologically, in the object, but exclusively in

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\(^{18}\) The different ways in which ironised march music signifies in Shostakovich make it clear to what extent context is inseparable from adequate musical understanding.
the actual relationship to a subject’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 331). That ‘actual relationship’ involves contingency of the kind that we have been considering. However, the relationship is not merely arbitrary: it requires the musical ‘object’. This has, in turn, to be related to its potential perlocutionary effects on the subjects experiencing it, without which it would not be significant in the first place. In any specific case these effects relate to a wider series of cultural contexts, and therefore will sometimes not occur, but – which is too often forgotten – this is the case for any articulation, verbal, pictorial, or acoustic. Once we get away from representationalist assumptions it makes no sense to think that the dependency of a piece of cultural expression on a dynamic web of background assumptions, feelings, attitudes, etc., is a deficiency.

If the contingency of communication resulting from our being ‘readable in every sound and gesture’ – and therefore also liable to be misread – is ignored, our grasp of the conditions that make human understanding possible is, as Cavell argues, essentially lacking. What is at issue here is not the difficulty that we encounter in conveying the ‘semantic content’ of our utterances and in understanding the content of our interlocutor’s utterances. Putting it in those terms – which is, of course, valid for some purposes – abstracts from the concrete reality of communication, where the conveying of semantic content is only one aspect of what occurs, and is necessarily entangled with the other conscious and unconscious investments of the interlocutors in what they express. Concern with these other aspects of communication is the point of Cavell’s development of what Austin neglects. From a purely semantic perspective, this might just seem like a psychologisation of meaning, which would miss the point of semantics. However, if one conceives of meaning holistically, all our ways of being in the world affect what we mean and what we understand. For some purposes, such as in the natural sciences, the aim may be to circumscribe what can be meant, so that the investment in what is said is kept within certain parameters. But this limitation cannot form the model for communication in general, where we seek to move people in all sorts of ways nearly all the time, directly in speech, and sometimes, but only sometimes, less directly in writing. The question is how exactly music relates to Cavell’s conception. Is music just an echo of what takes place in passionate utterance, or is it rather itself a source of possibilities for such utterance?

It should be clear that there must be a constant interplay between the gestural, the passionate, and the rhythmic, and this connects verbal
language and music. This interplay is constituted in different ways in
different historical circumstances. If one construes music solely on the
basis of understanding its relationship to passionate verbal utterance,
this can involve an abstraction that obscures vital dimensions of mean-
ing. It is therefore important that the relationship between music and
verbal utterance should go both ways. The question is how Cavell’s ideas
about the ‘expressive’ relate both to verbal language and to meaning in
the broader, hermeneutic sense, that includes what music can convey
and evoke. Wellmer says that ‘languages, properly understood, are only
what they are as moments of a practical life-context’ (Wellmer 2004:
461): expressivity is ineliminably part of such contexts, so the musical
must be an essential part of our approaches to understanding language,
not just a contingent addition.

At the same time, not all kinds of music can be characterised primar-
ily in terms of their being ‘expressive’, unless the term is so widely
applied that it loses any discriminatory power. This might seem to
weaken the case I have been making. However, for approaches to music
in modernity expressivity does tend to be the norm in relation to which
other aspects of music are assessed. Even when Stravinsky and others
revert to neo-classical forms, in opposition to the idea of Romantic
expression, they depend on what they are opposing: for the difference
that makes neo-classicism significant to emerge it must be related to
what it is not.19 The importance of expression in this context becomes
apparent if one considers that musical neo-classicism has analogues in
other cultural forms. These include the moves against using expressive
metaphor in some modernist writing (in the later Kafka, for instance),
or some modernist painting’s moves away from expression towards geo-
metrical abstraction, but also (underlining the ambivalence of the idea
of neo-classicism) regressive architecture which simply repeats classical
forms from the past. The linguistic purism in early analytical philosophy
that we briefly considered in chapter 9 – whose effects are still present
in the analytical tradition – can also be construed in relation to the idea
of a move against expression. Within jazz, there have been approaches
where expressiveness directed against the norms of what jazz musicians
characteristically term ‘legitimate’ music has been the dominant aim,

19 Something analogous applies to Kivy’s wish to deny that the Eroica means anything: it is
only in relation to the history of interpretations of musical meaning that it makes sense
to deny that the Eroica has any. When this denial is seen historically it emerges as part
of the crisis of meaning inaugurated by logical positivism’s failed attempt to explain
meaning.
and others, such as some of the West Coast jazz of the fifties and sixties where a greater proximity to ‘legitimate’ playing becomes the goal. These phenomena all involve what should and should not be ‘said’, and how it should be said, and so connect to related issues in verbal language. A perspective on language and philosophy which is adequate to the major issues in modernity must, then, be in a position to take account of the diversity of human expressions which articulate what matters to people. Cavell’s reflections on passionate utterance point to the conclusion that the analytical tradition’s frequent neglect of the topics being examined here has to do with its relegation to insignificance or indeterminacy of anything that cannot be grasped in terms of what can be verbally articulated. In my view it is precisely the things which resist verbal articulation that ought to constitute an important focus of a philosophy which tries to engage with all dimensions of modern culture.

Music as philosophical expression

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche fantasises an interpretation of the last days of Socrates in support of one of his book’s main arguments:

Often, as he tells his friends when he is in prison, the same dream-figure repeatedly came to him, who always says the same thing: ‘Socrates, make music!’ Until his last days he calms himself with the view that his philosophy is the highest art of the Muses, and can’t believe that a divinity would remind him of that ‘common, popular music’. Finally, in order completely to appease his conscience in prison, he also agrees to make the music which he respected so little.

(Nietzsche 2000: 1, 82)

Nietzsche interprets the words of the dream-figure as ‘the only sign of the limits of logical nature being questionable’. He continues: ‘perhaps – this is how he [Socrates] must have asked himself – what I do not find comprehensible does not also immediately lack comprehensibility. Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom from which the logician is banned. Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative and supplement of science?’ (ibid.). Nietzsche’s version of the idea of the limits of logic, which are the limits of the world of appearances, is attached to elements of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics that we considered in chapters 6 and 7, and is in some respects open to the same kind of objections. One consequence of the entanglement of music and philosophy evident in Nietzsche’s use of Schopenhauer is suggested when Lawrence
Kramer maintains that ‘It is scarcely a secret that the extraordinary value ascribed to music, and to the arts in general, during the nineteenth century has lost much of its credibility’ (Kramer 1990: 20). If music’s value is to depend on a metaphysical position that seeks to give itself a dignity superior to the sciences, music is vulnerable to the philosophical failure of that position. This will be the case even though there are still good reasons for regarding music as a philosophical counter to scientism. Kramer consequently also reminds us that the loss of credibility of metaphysical claims for music is not a reason to conspire with the cultural and intellectual marginalisation of music and the other arts characteristic of some areas of contemporary society.

How, then, should one now regard the challenge that music makes to some of the dominant concerns of contemporary Western philosophy, without it having to be taken as a substantial solution to traditional problems of metaphysics? Part of the answer to this question is suggested by the title of Kramer’s book, *Music as Cultural Practice*, which connects to the ideas explored in the preceding chapters. If philosophy itself is regarded as a cultural practice, decisions about the competing significances of such practices cannot be made by philosophy alone, so the relationships and tensions between practices become crucial. As we have seen, however, the needs that metaphysics sought to fulfil cannot just be conjured away when philosophy shows itself incapable of fulfilling them. The image of music presented in the *Birth of Tragedy* must indeed now be regarded as hyperbolic. However, in a world where emphatic philosophical claims are equally problematic and the public role of the explicit practice of professional philosophy is anyway often marginal, music’s making its own kind of sense of the world for many people should play a part in questions about philosophy’s ability to do this. Resources for post-metaphysical meaning, as Nietzsche often points out, will be sought in whatever cultural practices can elicit commitment. The significances that music generates are important because some kinds of commitment may involve the risk of regression and irrationality, as the resurgence of theological fundamentalisms demonstrates. Many people find music a more compelling practice than philosophy for situating themselves in the world: as such, music can be seen as one of the resources available for confronting the

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20 The content of what people do in confronting ethical and other dilemmas is ‘philosophical’, but the question is the extent to which they need philosophy as a specialised discipline in its present form to deal with such issues.
consequences of the death of God. This might sound rather melodramatic, but I don’t think that it necessarily is.

If one regards the task of post-metaphysical thinking as primarily therapeutic, in the sense that it should enable people to emancipate themselves from ways of thinking and acting which hinder their capacity to make sense of the world and of their lives, music of many kinds can offer therapeutic resources. These range from the psychological, where some of music’s beneficial effects can be scientifically demonstrated, to the existential, where they cannot. In the latter case music may involve a change in the meaning of many interrelated aspects of someone’s life, and this can include leading them into the more distressing sides of engagement with music. Furthermore, music’s ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers make it one of the few forms of expression which can bring people together who may share little in other respects. Scott Burnham’s conjecture that ‘the secret of music’s power’ may lie in its being ‘the art form that most successfully models the human integration of mind and body’ (Burnham 1997: 328) points in the right direction because it sees what is generally regarded as a philosophical problem in terms of the practice of music. Instead of answering the ‘mind-body problem’ music may, for example, as praise does for scepticism, be able to address what gives rise to the putative problem so that we relate to it in a new way. There is, one should add, no reason in these terms to give up pondering whether issues involving music can be better dealt with by argument than by other practices. Burnham’s comment is in line with Merleau-Ponty’s concern to overcome the very philosophical model which frames things in terms of mind and body, as though the idea of a mind that is not always already embodied makes any sense. The point here is quite simply to question some increasingly untenable assumptions about the nature and consequences of supposed answers to philosophical problems, like the ‘mind-body problem’. I shall give a further example of what I mean at the end, when I consider the issue of self-consciousness in relation to music. First, though, we need to take account of some objections to my approach.

21 When I gave a paper relating to these ideas at Princeton Michael Jennings asked me whether I thought the famously harsh and dissonant (but often ecstatic) jazz of Albert Ayler, who committed suicide, made sense in terms of my idea of metaphysics. My answer was, yes, because such music is generated by the refusal of the world as it is, in the name of something else, and that may require the journey through torment. Making music is hardly an easy option at the best of times. What Ayler would have done without his music seems to me the real question.
A number of interpretations of the state of music in the contemporary world can be seen as making the very idea of challenging philosophy through music itself seem very questionable. There clearly is a crisis affecting the music that has so far been most likely to be afforded philosophical dignity, i.e. the Western ‘classical’ tradition, whose development has in many respects taken it away from the kind of cultural importance attributed to Beethoven and Wagner. At present it would hardly be controversial to claim, for example, that the best jazz from Louis Armstrong to Wayne Shorter is aesthetically more significant than much of what has been produced in the classical music of the same period.\(^{22}\) Dahlhaus makes it clear that the crisis of ‘art music’ is not just a result of the effects of the culture industry’s neglect of challenging art. He observes that, whereas the music aesthetics of the nineteenth century aimed to explicate the musical experience of the educated lay person, the music aesthetics of the twentieth century becomes an aesthetics for experts, and this reflects upon the legitimacy of the new techniques for composing music (see Dahlhaus and Zimmermann 1984). Much of the ‘advanced’ music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, like much of the innovative visual art (as Danto contends), can seem to depend upon philosophical or proto-philosophical explications, of the kind which I questioned when discussing Adorno and ‘philosophical music’. Is it not strange, then, in the light of what Adorno talked of in terms of music’s ‘becoming linguistic’, to try to emphasise music’s contemporary significance in the manner that I propose? If advanced music now needs philosophy to sustain its intelligibility, why claim that philosophy needs music for it to constitute a more adequate response to modernity? The answer has to do with how we understand the cultural roles of music today.

The conditions of contemporary musical production and reproduction mean that the most important and challenging music, be it ‘classical’, ‘jazz’, or from the end of the spectrum of ‘popular music’ not primarily determined by commercial considerations, often plays a minor role in the public sphere, in comparison with the music promoted by the culture industry.\(^{23}\) As Edward Said observes, one can these days expect

\(^{22}\) Rock music obviously has more social effects, but that is not the same thing as having great aesthetic significance.

\(^{23}\) This might sound dismissive with regard to what is sometimes very good popular music, but the conditions of production and distribution often have far more to do with what music is successful in this sphere than does musical quality or cultural value. BBC Radio 3’s recent offer of free downloads of new performances of all the Beethoven symphonies, which was taken up by large numbers of people, suggests a degree of hope that new technologies can also make things better.
educated people to have things to say about the other arts, but they will have little or nothing to say about serious music. The real cause of this situation is, though, not primarily music itself – there is more than enough of it of outstanding quality – but the way it is taught, produced and distributed. This has in turn to do with distorted cultural priorities of the kind which are reflected in certain aspects of the philosophical approaches that I have been criticising. These give far too little sense of why music matters, which should be the prior philosophical question with regard to music. Another complicating factor here is the sense that we may also have come to the end of a tradition of philosophical thinking about music and other art which was certain of its ability to make substantial connections of Western music to a wider story about history and philosophy. Who can now justifiably feel secure in venturing the kind of judgements that Adorno makes when in his most critical and schematic frame of mind? In an era of perceived incommensurability between philosophical traditions and of ‘decentred’, globalised artistic production, such judgements are very likely to underestimate the difficulty of establishing large-scale links between the theorisation of music and the movement of history.

These are important objections and they should not just be dismissed. If philosophy and music are to have a productive relationship in the face of such objections, one needs to make distinctions between the different levels involved in their contemporary entanglements. One way of doing so is to map out a notional continuum between, at one end, the kind of music which connects most readily to philosophy, of the sort that enabled Adorno to link Beethoven to Hegel and to construct the narrative of musical modernism which parallels the ideas of Dialectic of Enlightenment, and, at the other, the kinds of popular music that people play and listen to in their everyday environment. The latter can only be connected to the large-scale philosophical story which Adorno proposes if one accepts the extreme interpretation of how the ‘context of delusion’ is inherent in all modern culture except advanced musical modernism. The shortcomings of this extreme conception are, as we saw in chapter 9, all too clear.

We also saw, though, that there is still a degree of truth in the worry to which Adorno points by his critique of the culture industry. Very many people today have no meaningful contact with the best music – be it Mozart or Sonny Rollins – even though it is more readily available to more people than ever before in history. This situation is difficult to evaluate with regard to its concrete social, political and cultural consequences, but the ethical sense that peoples’ lives are likely to be
impoverished as a consequence of this lack of contact seems to me incontrovertible. The situation should therefore already be sufficient to justify the argument that music education and the dissemination of music are in need of transformation. The less problematic aspects of the ubiquity of music in everyday modern life do, on the other hand, have important echoes in Wittgenstein’s concern with how music relates to the other non-verbal ways in which we understand (and misunderstand) each other and the world. The obvious contradiction here is, therefore, between the sheer fact of the growing presence, made possible by technology, of all kinds of music in people’s lives, and the demand for critical interpretation and relentless innovation if music is to play a role in cultural self-reflection and so, directly or indirectly, affect or criticise society.

The temptation is to leave it at this contradiction, by opting for one of the extremes. It should be apparent, however, that no music can be said completely to belong at either extreme of this, in any case notional, continuum. The location in such a continuum of particular music will change as society changes, and as the reception and production of music changes. These are predominantly matters for specific inquiry, of the kind carried out in the best academic and journalistic work on music, which has increasingly made music that was previously marginalised by the academic study of music part of that study. What most interests me is the very existence of music as something which cannot be reduced to other forms of articulation and expression, but which also does not make sense without its relationships to those forms, including, of course, its relationships to philosophy.

The historical shifts in the relationship of music to its ‘other’, whether that other be philosophy, theology, language, history, literature, or whatever, should not, however, just be interpreted in terms of an explanatory theory. These shifts should also be understood as manifestation of the

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24 The difficulty of maintaining this in contemporary conditions is a result of the dominance of the ideology of the ‘free market’ (a notion which is laughable in the protectionist world of transnational corporations). In a free market people can supposedly choose what they like. However, it is clear that endless money is spent in that market manipulating people into not making informed choices. People who ‘do not like/choose’ classical and other important music have often never really heard any, or associate it with the class divisions that influence its role in the public sphere. One consequence of my objections to both the analytical philosophy of music and some other theorising about music is the idea that they can help to stop people making the kind of imaginative connection to serious music that can change their lives. If one mainly argues about whether music arouses emotions, or whether x is presenting bourgeois ideology in their music, one is not contributing to opening up great music to a wider audience.
ways in which sense is made in human societies. Such ways of making sense do not have to be discursive: one raison d’être of music in modernity can be regarded, as we have seen, as deriving precisely from its being non-verbal. Burnham says of the need to sustain a conception of music’s relative autonomy, rather than focus exclusively on its social construction, that

something without its own voice would at best be a mouthpiece for something else... The case for music’s autonomy is not simply the default result of its lack of definable moorings in the world of referential denotation; rather, any claim about music meaning something presupposes that it has its own voice. In short, precisely because music is musical it can speak to us of things that are not strictly musical. This is how we hear music speak: not by reducing it to some other set of circumstances but by allowing it the opacity of its own voice, and then engaging that voice in ways that reflect both its presence and our own, much as we allow others a voice when we converse with them.

(Burnham 1997: 326)

The fact that past ways of speaking through music still engage people, despite music’s radical changes of context and significance, therefore poses questions for musicological or philosophical approaches to music which try to objectify it. Both traditional music theory, of the kind which concentrates on objective analysis of musical works, and New Musicology, which sometimes tends to over-semanticise music, and so neglects the moment of potential transcendence that I have associated with the idea of metaphysics, can involve a questionable prioritisation of the theoretical/philosophical over the musical.

The alternative to this prioritisation is suggested when Nicholas Cook cites the splendid remark by Charles Seeger that ‘gaps found in our speech thinking about music may be suspected of being areas of music thinking’ (Cook 2001: 191). Cook points to places where music may be made less coherent as music by its relation to text or other media, such as film, so suggesting the interaction of music’s internal workings with the meanings and effects which arise via its connections to the world. An approach like this takes account of music’s relative autonomy that is inherent in its predominantly non-intentional nature, while acknowledging that this autonomy is always negotiated in relation to its other. The approach therefore has consequences both for music’s questioning of philosophy and for how theoretical and philosophical approaches to music relate to the practice of music.
It is worth looking here at a slightly different version of a question that I asked in the Introduction. What would follow if a much worked-on philosophical problem, such as that of ‘the meaning of music’, were to be ‘solved’ (which would also presuppose an answer to the further problem of the ‘meaning of meaning’)? Another way of looking at this question is apparent if one asks: how is one to react to assertions by philosophers working on what may even be a circumscribed, technical issue, that they don’t think they will ever arrive at the answer to the problem to which they are devoting themselves? (I have heard a philosopher of science assert this of the problem of induction, and the stance is common in the philosophy of music.) Is this attitude a testimony to the higher Platonic unity of the philosophical task, which transcends the immanent real-world insufficiencies of those engaged in it, or should we rather seek to reinterpret what such philosophical phenomena mean as a way of reframing the nature of the philosophical enterprise, by seeing it as in fact more akin to what takes place in music?

What I mean is apparent in Friedrich Schlegel’s assertion that ‘In truth you would be distressed if the whole world, as you demand, were for once seriously to become completely comprehensible’ (Schlegel 1988: 2, 240). Music has a similar status to ‘the world’ in Schlegel’s sense, because the aim with regard to music that matters cannot be to make it completely comprehensible in a discursive manner, even though we may wish or need to pursue as far as we can the attempt to comprehend it discursively. The philosophical worry in this case is once again that one is therefore heading in the direction of ineffability, mysticism, or mere mystification. There is, however, often a confusion here, analogous to the one suggested above by Rorty’s differentiation between the veridical and the non-veridical, and the communicable and the incommunicable. The confusion results from a failure to distinguish between the idea that if something cannot be resolved in conceptual terms, it leaves us in the realm of mere indeterminacy or mysticism, and the idea that many things that cannot be resolved in this way are the motors or, indeed, the very substance of some of the most important human practices. These do not involve final solutions but do involve a deep sense of the value of ‘getting it right’ that Daniel Barenboim has talked about in relation to the ‘meta-rational’, rather than the irrational, nature of music. How, then, does this view of the limits of conceptuality apply both to philosophy and to music?

The following example of the significance of trying to get it right suggests that questions which emerge in the practice of music can have
important philosophical implications. Barenboim’s and Edward Said’s project of an orchestra in which musicians from Israel and the other countries of the Middle East play music together gives rise to a series of questions about our themes. One such question is raised by Barenboim’s description of the encounter between a Syrian and an Israeli cellist, who are on opposite sides of the political divide. This encounter can be taken as an allegory of our concerns. The rehearsals of the orchestra are accompanied by discussions in which, unsurprisingly, it is very apparent that the profound political differences between the participants cannot be easily and immediately resolved. At the same time, when the two cellists seek to play a particular note in the right way ‘They were trying to do something together . . . about which they were both passionate’, and an important level of communication is established: ‘having achieved that one note, they already can’t look at each other in the same way, because they have shared a common experience’ (Barenboim and Said 2004: 10). Barenboim (and the musicians involved in the orchestra) are very clear that what they are doing may have no real impact on the political situation. ‘Romantic’ ideas about the harmony made possible by music (of the kind that are part of the advertising for the recordings of the orchestra) are therefore not the primary issue for those directly involved, though a faint hope that music might help is present in some of the comments of the musicians.

Barenboim also observes, however, that ‘I believe in cultural matters – with literature and, even better, with music, because it doesn’t have to do with explicit ideas – if we foster this kind of contact, it can only help people feel nearer to each other, and this is all’ (ibid.: 11, my emphasis). His refusal, by saying ‘this is all’, to make theoretical inferences from the proximity that is made possible via music-making is important. Were he to make such inferences he would be involved in the entailments of a discursive philosophical claim. This would again put conceptual determination above the need to engage in the practice required for communication to be realised. At the same time, implicit in his refusal is a philosophical insight concerning the nature of communication. For the musicians to achieve what they do, they have to share a history of complex abilities which are not reducible to what can be said about those abilities. Charles Taylor often contrasts propositionally expressible beliefs about the world, which can be actualised in the absence of the objects about which the belief is held, with the kind of ability which can only be exercised by engaging in a practice. The world conceived of in these latter terms is not something defined
by explicit ideas, and is in fact the horizon within which explicit ideas, which articulate things that already pre-conceptually engage people, become possible in the first place. In consequence, the practical world, where the possibility of the ethical is first generated, is the locus of forms of communication which are not subject to the exclusions generated by the identifications characteristic of verbal language.  

Barenboim’s remark on the importance of what does not ‘have to do with explicit ideas’ can be used to examine some related issues for those directions of recent theory in the humanities which have been concerned to emphasise the particularity and incommensurability of cultures. Such theory often does so in the name of overcoming the repression of the minority cultural ‘other’ by a dominant culture – female by male, black by white, gay by straight, etc. These approaches have often been theorised from an explicitly philosophical perspective, in the name of a questioning of ‘Western metaphysics’, which comes to stand for an underlying paradigm of modernity as the locus of the forcible reduction of difference to identity. (We encountered Adorno’s related, but different version of such an approach in the last chapter.) Clearly there are many situations, especially in a post-colonial world, where repressed and marginalised cultures must seek to assert their particular identity against the dominant other, and very significant political advances have resulted as a consequence of such self-assertion. However, the point of such assertion – which is in danger of being parasitic on the same notions of identity as it is used to oppose – must also be to enable others to understand and engage with what has been marginalised or oppressed. Otherwise it will reinforce a sense of irreducible difference from those outside the repressed culture. Without the possibility of such understanding the impasse symbolised by the initial stance of the two cellists, who can both cite repression of and threats to their culture as a reason for the refusal of communication, becomes total. Said talks of the way in which cultural differences these days tend to end either in homogenisation or in paranoia, and this seems to me to be reflected in some theoretical approaches to these matters. The question is, as Said insists, how to avoid the fatal alternative between wholesale absorption of the other and exclusion of the other as a threat, and music may, as Barenboim’s example suggests, help to avoid this alternative.

25 This approach seems to me compatible with some aspects of Levinas’ assumptions about the need for communication that is prior to ethical precepts to give those precepts any motivating force. See below.
Jean-François Lyotard’s *Le différend*, perhaps the most characteristic philosophical text in this area, has taken the philosophical core of cultural and other differences to be situations where participants in a dispute cannot even agree on the use of the vocabulary in which an argument might be enjoined. As a consequence, what Barenboim refers to as ‘explicit ideas’ must become an insuperable barrier between people who do not share what Lyotard terms a ‘regime of discourse’. The idea is that in the absence of a metalanguage which adjudicates on the validity of the very languages being employed in a dispute, one is faced with an aporia, and this leads, to use the term suggested by Said, in the direction of paranoia. The interesting question in relation to our example is what happens when the ‘regime of discourse’, or, avoiding the rigidity of Lyotard’s term, medium of communication, does not involve explicit ideas. If what Merleau-Ponty and Taylor point to is defensible, some of the theorising in this area would seem to rely on a construal of communication that neglects some of its essential substance.

To begin with, one should note that there are good grounds for arguing that Lyotard’s idea of incommensurability is indefensible anyway, because it depends on the notion that communication and understanding function predominantly in terms of rules. Construing communication in terms of rules alone not only generates a regress of rules for the application of rules, but also does not tell us how we ever even manage to choose the appropriate rule from those available in a particular situation. For the tradition of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty this ability has to derive from practical coping, not from adherence to rules. Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, even knowing that there is a *différend* requires more than can be thought of in terms of two wholly incommensurable regimes of discourse. In which regime is the ability to claim that there is a *différend* to be located (see Bowie 2003b: ch. 6)? Lyotard is led into a performative contradiction by the attempt to explain his central notion, because the explanation requires the metalanguage excluded by that very notion. At the same time, the issue of irreconcilable positions in argument that Lyotard makes into a questionable philosophical position does point to issues in which music plays an important role.

This role for music is apparent, for example, when Said says that he is interested in music precisely because it has to do with ‘what can’t

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26 Lyotard’s desire to avoid repressive assimilation of the other therefore leads to the paranoid alternative, because he thinks that incommensurable sets of rules lead inevitably to a *différend*. 
be resolved and what is irreconcilable . . . I think it’s useful, at times, to think of the aesthetic as an indictment of the political and that it’s a stark contrast, forcefully made, to inhumanity, to injustice. And I think that’s what people respond to in Beethoven’ (Barenboim and Said 2004: 168). The musical communication between the Syrian and the Israeli cellist should not in these terms be thought of as immediately politically relevant. It should rather be seen as showing a dimension of human existence which cannot be subsumed into the determinate ways of speaking required for political argument, a dimension where the very lack of verbalised ideas enables things to happen which such ideas can obstruct. Instead of irreconcilable differences being considered solely in philosophical and political terms, they may, then, be partially transcended, though not finally overcome, by something not locatable in those terms. This may seem rather vague, as does anything which has to do with what ‘cannot be said’, but if the substance of human communication also has to do with the issues we considered via Cavell, music, and perlocution, the importance of this other way of approaching communication should be beyond question.

Clearly, music’s resistance to conceptual determination and simultaneous perlocutionary potential do also involve the danger of misuse. This brings it into the domain of ‘the political’ in Said’s sense, and refusals and failures of musical understanding are inevitable, as are those of verbal understanding. However, focusing attention too exclusively on what can be problematic about music risks obscuring its capacity to embody contradiction, negativity, etc., in a form which shows ways beyond them. When this capacity is located in successful practical contexts, as it is in Barenboim and Said’s orchestra, its real-life potential becomes more apparent. The Romantic association of music with the ‘longing’ occasioned by the suspension of human existence between finitude and a sense of what is beyond finitude, that we considered in chapter 3, already suggested how modernity needed new ways of dealing with the irreconcilable. The essential tension that underlies many philosophical responses to music after the Romantics can, in the light of the present discussion, be seen to have to do with whether, as Nietzsche and Adorno sometimes claim, music offers a deceptive illusion

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27 Musical disagreements often echo tensions of the kind generated by identity politics, when people’s adherence to particular music becomes a kind of self-assertion against a perceived other. This sort of identification can betray the important possibilities that music offers, because music is being used like any other commodity that supposedly individualises its possessor.
of reconciliation, or whether it can offer a kind of reconciliation which
does not conjure away real problems. Barenboim offers a more positive
way of thinking about what leads Nietzsche and Adorno to a negative
conclusion, when he talks of music, which ‘is so clearly able to teach
you so many things’, being also able to ‘serve as a means of escape from
precisely those things’ (ibid.: 122). It is the power of this combination
from which the practice of philosophy can learn, if it is not to become
irrelevant to many issues which deeply affect people’s lives.

Take the following example, from the area we have been discussing,
of how structures in philosophy can exclude something essential. Many
major contemporary forms of conflict can, as suggested by the idea of
the differend, be seen in terms of the assertion of particularity and dif-
ference. If I see myself as identified by my not being what you, as Amer-
ican, Arab, European, Jew, etc., are, I constitute my identity by the same
operation as is the basis of inferentialism. In chapter 4 I questioned
Brandom’s strict distinction between texts which express claims, and
things which are described by claims, because it left too little scope for
communication that does not take the form of claims. In the present
case it is clear that claims alone, however well backed-up with justifi-
cations, will not produce a way beyond an impasse between opposed
groups of the kind characteristic of the situation in the Middle East.
If my identity is predicated on an inferentialist form of exclusion, thus
on a claim to which I think I am entitled, there would seem to be no
obvious way beyond it. Impasses that result precisely from trying to win
arguments are a factor in everyday life, especially, of course, in close
relationships. This suggests one way of understanding how philosophi-
cal approaches which rely predominantly on argument may suffer from
a vital deficit. Reliance on argument evidently makes sense for issues
that come in the causal domain, but in the world of communicative
reason it may not. Do we always resolve a dispute with somebody on
the basis of winning or losing the argument, rather than finding some
other way of responding to the dispute? It is hardly an exaggeration to
suggest that the very functioning of modern culture may be predicated
on the need for forms of interaction, such as music, which do not rely
on agreement on explicit ideas, and many kinds of philosophy would
do well to take more note of this.

The beginnings of a way beyond the establishing of identity by
exclusion may therefore have to do with what is apparent in Adorno’s
comment, cited in my discussion of Brandom, that ‘Works of art
point, as it were, judgementlessly to their content without it becoming
discursive. The spontaneous reaction of the recipients is mimesis towards the immediacy of this gesture’ (Adorno 1997: 7, 363). Music generally lacks explicit ideas of the kind conveyed by propositions, but, as we saw Dahlhaus argue in chapter 5, this does not mean that it is vague or unspecific. Successful participation in music, whether as listener, performer, critic, teacher, etc., is as demanding as participation in any discipline, because it requires specific intellectual and other skills and emotional literacy. Such skills, which Adorno relates to the mimetic, and which are illustrated by the two cellists, reveal the limits of an inferentialism that relies predominantly on identification by exclusion.

These ideas clearly do not immediately offer a great deal for practical politics, and I am not suggesting that the attempt to find ways beyond intersubjective differences through argument be abandoned. That would be absurd. What music does offer, though, is a way of grasping how what argument can achieve is embedded in aspects of human life which concentration on argument can obscure. Barenboim gives the example of how the temporality of music can inform our understanding of political failure when he talks of the ‘relationship between the content and the time it takes’ in both cultural and political spheres. He cites the failure of the Oslo peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians as being the result of the tempo of the process not going hand in hand with the content . . . there was something that was wrong and, therefore, it could not have its own tempo. But this is absolutely, for me, a parallel with playing music, where the content requires a given speed, and if you play it at the wrong speed – in other words much too slow or much too fast, and the whole thing falls apart.

(Barenboim and Said 2004: 59)

What he is referring to cannot be described in purely theoretical terms because the factors that are linked by temporality in the political situation and in music have to do with specific holistic connections which are rooted in complex lived experiences and so cannot be learned just by following theoretical descriptions.

It should be becoming clear by now that philosophical disagreements may also lead to impasses that are analogous to those in the politico-cultural realm. Philosophical argument about standard problems will, of course, be perennial, if these continue to be relevant to the ways in which we describe ourselves and the natural world. History makes that clear. However, if the problem in question directly engages our lives,
there are also grounds for considering other ways in which we may respond to it, which do not involve either taking a firm philosophical position – which must always await the next argument that may render it invalid – or regarding the problem as deep and intractable and likely to generate continuing philosophical debate. Let us therefore briefly take an example of a specific, live philosophical problem and to see what the introduction of music does to how we might regard it. We have encountered the issue of self-consciousness at several points in the book, and it can shed some light on the questions in the preceding discussion.  

The initial reason for linking music and self-consciousness is that both inherently resist objectification. What can be objectified in music, i.e. its objective physical existence as script or as sound, is not sufficient to make something music, and self-consciousness must involve some sense of that which is not an object, because it can itself be considered a condition of possibility of objectivity. Self-consciousness’s importance to the extra-philosophical world derives from the fact that accounts of self-consciousness have consequences concerning our other self-descriptions which affect the practical domain. If one buys into evolutionary psychology, for instance, and regards self-consciousness as an epiphenomenon that is reducible to being a means of self-preservation, the very fact that this position leads to something like a Hobbesian picture of the self has political ramifications. If self-consciousness is regarded, on the other hand, as the basis of self-determination, very different political implications emerge, such as the demand for education to encourage autonomy rather than blind obedience. A crucial factor here, given the non-objective status of self-consciousness, is that the theme of self-consciousness was not an issue during large parts of the history of philosophy, appearing briefly in Augustine, and only becoming central with Descartes. This non-thematisation of what comes to be an – or, indeed, at times, the – essential philosophical topic in modernity has a different significance from the non-thematisation of an object in the natural realm. While the latter may not have been relevant to people, may not have been accessible, or may have been mistakenly subsumed into some other entity, the former only seems to emerge as such at all in certain contexts. The need to locate the issue historically

28 For an extended version of these ideas, see my essay in Grundmann et al. 2004.
29 Future histories of the turn to the Right of the Reagan–Thatcher years and beyond will, I suspect, reveal that the rise of sociobiology in the public sphere is inseparable from the contemporaneous ideology of the market.
is, therefore, inescapable, but that brings its own problems, because the historical explanation has to be of something which does not appear in the objective world.

Let us take a paradigmatic example of opposed philosophical accounts of self-consciousness, in order to suggest how the topic is affected by music. The positions in question involve structures that underlie many subsequent differences of position in the philosophy of mind, so their significance goes beyond their initial historical manifestations. The Hegelian answer to how one can comprehend something which resists objectification but which can at the same time be considered to be a condition of possibility of objectivity is to regard subject and world as inseparable. The apparent ‘emptiness’ of the transcendental subject is ‘filled’ with the content of the world, so that the subject articulates the world with the means – including language, as what Hegel terms the ‘existence of Geist’ – which the world itself provides. Self-consciousness therefore cannot be understood in isolation from the intersubjective and objective world which subjects inhabit. Manfred Frank and Dieter Henrich have, however, developed an objection to this position that involves arguments from Fichte, the early Romantics, and Sartre. The idea here is that mediated self-knowledge, which comes about ‘reflexively’, by ‘self-recognition in the other’ of language and society, cannot account for self-consciousness, because it has to presuppose something that is prior to reflection. How can I recognise myself and my thoughts as mine, if I am not already familiar with myself in a form which does not require the other? Seeing myself as myself in the mirror, which I can, of course, fail to do in any real-life case, includes an awareness of myself that the mirror cannot provide. Ernst Mach famously failed to recognise himself as the ‘shabby pedagogue’ whom he saw in a tram mirror, although he knew that he himself was seeing a shabby pedagogue.

The Hegelian position makes possible considerable insights into the historical and social constitution of the self, and it is very hard to disagree that in many ways we become what we are by our relationships to the other. The Frank–Henrich position, on the other hand, opens up a dimension in which resistance to determination by the other is possible, because my immediate sense of self can come into conflict with the orders of the other, to which it cannot be reduced. In this respect, the argument that self-consciousness is not reducible to its social mediation also seems plausible. The nature of the connection of such self-consciousness to the world seems, however, to play little
role in this predominantly epistemological theory. This means that the theory can still threaten to revive the tired old sceptical problems about the existence of the ‘external world’ that obsess some analytical epistemologists.

In the light of these strengths and weaknesses it seems rational to incorporate the best of both approaches into our understanding of self-consciousness. But what do we do with the fact that the positions are structurally incompatible? If self-consciousness is a function of reflexion, it is always already imbued with the content of its historical world, and so poses the question as to how real individuality is possible. If, in contrast, self-consciousness has an existence that is in part independent of reflexivity, it is hard to say how this existence relates to the world at all. This can lead one to wonder whether the notion of pre-reflexivity does any real work beyond being a condition of possibility of self-identification. The debate on this issue has a long way to run, for both intra- and extra-philosophical reasons, because it affects our self-descriptions in fundamental ways. We are therefore left precisely with the question of how we, as situated subjects who have no choice but to come to terms with ourselves, relate to what seems an inescapable philosophical dilemma.

Rather than try to find a way beyond this dilemma based on the advancing of philosophical arguments, I want, then, to suggest how the issue of pre-reflexivity may be approached in relation to music. The initial way is via what is actually a serious problem for the pre-reflexive account, namely that the self’s pre-reflexive ‘familiarity’ with or awareness of itself has to be articulated as a relationship, as the words ‘with’ and ‘of’ make clear. The point of pre-reflexivity is, though, that it does not involve a relationship of one aspect to another, because this leads to the regress of being conscious of being conscious, etc., when the point is that self-consciousness has to be non-relational. The linguistic means for articulating self-consciousness therefore fail to articulate what the theory demands: they inherently divide what in some sense has to be one. An intersubjective, discursive explanation of pre-reflexive consciousness will consequently only make sense, as we saw Henrich claim above, if what is to be explained is always already understood in some other way.

For many conceptions of philosophical argument the failure of language to convey the basis of an answer to a philosophical problem has to be a reason for rejecting the answer. This demand for discursive articulation would seem to take us back to what constituted the basis
of the Hegelian position, but we would then be faced again with the problem that reflexivity does not encompass all that is at issue in self-consciousness. One is, therefore, confronted with a situation in which the theoretical form cannot represent the content in question. As we have seen, though, it is mistaken to think that reaching the limits of what is articulable in conceptual form means that one is left with mysticism or mere indeterminacy. Dahlhaus gives an example of the alternative to this view of conceptuality when he contends that Hanslick’s equation of music’s untranslatability into verbal language with its indeterminacy and lack of an object is mistaken, because ‘translations [of music into language] do not aim at objects or states of affairs which can be designated by words or sentences, but at the meaning and sense’ of music itself. The point is that there is no ‘relationship of representation between represented feeling and representing music’ (Dahlhaus 1988: 333), which means that other sorts of relationship between language and music, of the kind apparent in metaphor’s enabling of non-representational connections between things, or in gesture’s or dance’s evocation of things, have to be brought into play.

In the preceding chapters we have seen that if we stop thinking of language as essentially based on description and representation, we open up other intersubjectively intelligible possibilities for expressing what is unsayable in a theory. In Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein offers the following exchange about someone crying out in pain: “So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means the crying?” – On the contrary; the verbal expression of pain replaces the crying and does not describe it’ (Wittgenstein 1984: 357). This leads to his remark, cited in chapter 8, that a pain sensation ‘is not a something, but it is not a nothing either. . . . The paradox only disappears if we break radically with the idea that language always only functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: conveying thoughts – whether these are thoughts about houses, pains, good and evil, or whatever’ (ibid.: 376–7). If immediate self-consciousness is also ‘not a something’, but ‘not a nothing either’, the sense that the theoretical form of explanation cannot represent its content need no longer seem so problematic.

Our responses to things that are not a something and not a nothing either can take a whole variety of forms, but music seems particularly apt in relation to self-consciousness because of its inherent relationship to feeling. In discussing the idea of the ‘feeling (of) self’ (‘Selbstgefühl’),

30 Sartre bracketed the ‘of’ in ‘conscience (de) soi’ in order to try to get away from the duality that the term involves. As Novalis puts it: ‘Feeling cannot feel itself.’
Frank says of Heidegger’s related notion of ‘Befindlichkeit’, which has
to do with how one ‘finds oneself’, in the sense of ‘how one is’, that it
expresses itself in moods ‘like a [musical] tonic or a colouring which
unthematically suffuses the life of our mind’ (Frank 2002: 15). ‘Selbst-
gefühl’ is not an intentional object of consciousness, but it is undoubtedly
present as part of what consciousness is. Music’s ability to express this
non-intentional way of being of the subject should, in the terms I am
trying to establish, not be seen as a merely metaphorical circumvention
of the real issue. It is rather a demonstration of the limits of a theoretical
approach, reminding one of the other ways in which we can relate
to matters that can be inaccessible to discursivity. Only because there is
music can we have an articulated sense of what suffuses our minds in
this manner.

The heading of this section, ‘Music as philosophical expression’,
is another way of referring to what in the Introduction I termed the
‘philosophy of music’ in the subjective genitive, in which philosophy is
seen as emerging from music, instead of determining it as an object.
Music does not describe or give discursive answers to philosophical
problems because its relationship to philosophy is not representational.
It is to be regarded rather as a resource for responding to how certain
kinds of philosophical issue impinge on our lives. Precisely because a
musical response is generally not discursive and representational it may
capture or influence aspects of these issues which philosophy may not.
Music is no doubt irrelevant to many philosophical debates, but nothing
is good for everything, and, given the striking absence of music from
so much contemporary philosophical discussion, it is more interesting
to reflect on the implications of that absence than to contribute to its
continuation.

In the preceding chapters I have at times rhetorically emphasised
the limitations of ‘philosophy’, instead of just seeking to explore phil-
osophy’s limits. My aim has been to offer ways of responding to the
fact that what is at present practised in many areas under the name
of philosophy, particularly in the analytical tradition, has in many
respects diminished in public significance, to the point where many
non-philosophers (and plenty of philosophers as well) no longer see
the point of much that is being argued about. There must always be a
place for detailed philosophical argument, but it is worth pondering
how many arguments are generated at present by the representational
premises which I have been concerned to question via music. If we still
wish philosophy to be one of the resources for generating meaning and
for coming to terms with modern existence, it needs to address more
than the merely theoretical side of those to whom it speaks. Whatever doubts one may have about giving music a more emphatic role in this respect, it does at least demonstrably address real needs in many different kinds of society in a way that much professional philosophy often does not.

The example of self-consciousness and music can serve, then, as a model for a philosophical approach that engages with some of the concerns about philosophical argument and its role in cultural life which I have considered in this section. In order to understand the significance of the simultaneous development in the latter half of the eighteenth century of an intense concentration on self-consciousness, which, as Frank has shown (1991), anticipates many aspects of contemporary debate in the philosophy of mind, and the – in many ways culturally more significant – flowering of musical expression from Mozart to Wagner, we need an approach that can do justice to interrelations between domains of cultural life. Arriving at a true ‘theory of self-consciousness’ cannot be decisive in this respect, because the theory will not comprehend what we only have access to by actively engaging with the music of this era. This self-understanding may sometimes do more for us than a theory, though it does not preclude the kind of illumination which theories provide.

An example from another philosophical domain can elucidate what is intended here. Cavell has contrasted two kinds of moral philosophers, the ‘legislators’, and the ‘moral perfectionists’. The former think that the problems of moral philosophy would be resolved by establishing the right moral or political rules, and the latter, while acknowledging the need for the legislators, insist, as Putnam puts it in a discussion of Levinas, that ‘there is a need for something prior to principles or a constitution, without which the best principles and the best constitution would be worthless’ (Critchley and Bernasconi 2002: 36). This contrast between what can be achieved by propositionally expressed rules and what needs to be in existence before those rules can be felt to be compelling echoes some of the reasons why music comes to be philosophically significant in new ways in the modern period.

In the same discussion Putnam considers the Hebrew word ‘hine’ which ‘performs the speech-act of calling attention to, or presenting, not describing’ so that ‘hineni! (‘here am I!’) performs the speech-act of presenting myself, the speech-act of making myself available to another’. He links this to Levinas’ distinction between the ‘saying and the said’, such that ‘if by a “said” we mean the content of a proposition, then
when I say *hineni* there is no “said”” (ibid.: 38–9). What I am in such presentation is an openness to the other, not something that could be captured in what I could say about myself or what could be said about me. Simon Critchley talks of Levinasian ‘saying’ as ‘a verbal and possibly also non-verbal ethical performance . . . a performative *doing* that cannot be reduced to a propositional description’ (ibid.: 18). Music, as a ‘performative doing’, relates to the need for ways of being human which inherently resist what could be said about them propositionally. This does not mean that there is no musical equivalent of the ‘said’, which functions much as many automatised forms of language do, such that, in Adorno’s terms, convention takes over from expression. However, the desire for music to be more than this lies behind much of the significance of music for philosophy explored in the preceding chapters. At present the dominant forces in philosophy are still mainly focused on ‘the said’, to the point where even countenancing what may be missed by this focus is often regarded as philosophically disreputable. The history of music’s entanglement with philosophy suggests that this attitude may be seriously mistaken.
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