

Chapter 1

Introduction: A Material Girl in Bluebeard's Castle

In the grisly fairy tale of Bluebeard, the new bride, Judith, is given keys to all the chambers in her husband's castle with strict instructions that she is never to unlock the seventh door. Upon opening the first six doors, Judith discovers those aspects of Bluebeard that he wishes to claim—his wealth, strength, political dominion, love of beauty, and so on. Bluebeard offers a form of symbolic self-representation in these chambers: he reveals himself as the man he wants Judith to adore. But throughout her explorations—behind every door—she finds traces of something else, something hidden that sustains all she is actually shown, something that resonates with the old tales of horror she has heard. And in opening the final door she comes face to face with that unspoken, forbidden factor.

In some versions of the Bluebeard story, what Judith discovers behind the forbidden door are the mangled bodies of previous wives who likewise went too far in their quests for knowledge. Bruno Bettelheim assumes that she and Bluebeard's other hapless victims must have committed carnal transgressions of the magnitude of adultery in order to be deserving of such dreadful ends.¹ But it is also possible to interpret the story rather more literally: Judith and her sisters were simply not satisfied with the contradictory versions of reality given to them by a self-serving patriarch, and they aspired to discover the truth behind the façade.

The version of the story set by Bartók in his opera *Bluebeard's Castle* tends to support such a reading. Judith discovers not only Bluebeard's crimes but also his pain, his fears, his vulnerability. For this she is not excused but rather is exiled into darkness along with the other still-living wives, away from the light of his presence. The last speech is uttered by Bluebeard, whose tragedy this opera finally is. He is forever being betrayed

feminist criticism of music look like? What issues would it raise, and how would it ground its arguments theoretically?

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The roads taken by other feminist music critics have been similar to mine in some respects, very different in others. All of us are heavily indebted to the feminist theory and criticism that has taken shape in disciplines such as literary or film studies over the last twenty years. This work makes it possible for us to proceed without having to define *ex nihilo* such basic concepts as gender, sexuality, and femininity. We are able to benefit from the debates that have enlivened feminist scholarship and to arrive at our tasks with a sophisticated theoretical apparatus already at hand.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to transfer the key questions of other branches of feminist study directly to music, for music has its own constraints and capabilities that have to be identified and queried. As pioneering feminist critics of music, we have developed rather different agendas and procedures reflecting our intellectual training, our musical tastes, and the particular versions of feminist theory to which we have been exposed. At this moment, I cannot begin to give any kind of overview of the rich variety of approaches that appear to be emerging within the discipline. Therefore, I will only address my own work—the issues I have found most compelling and the circuitous methodological route that has permitted me at last to feel I can responsibly address some of the concerns of feminist criticism in music.

The questions I have pursued in my feminist work cluster into five groups. They are not always entirely separable; in fact, most of the essays in this collection engage with all five sets of questions in some way or other. Nevertheless, it seems useful to outline them at this point for the sake of setting out a provisional methodology.

1. *Musical constructions of gender and sexuality.* This is probably the most obvious aspect of feminist music criticism. In most dramatic music, there are both female and male characters, and usually (though not always) the musical utterances of characters are inflected on the basis of gender. Beginning with the rise of opera in the seventeenth century, composers worked painstakingly to develop a musical semiotics of gender: a set of conventions for constructing “masculinity” or “femininity” in music. The codes marking gender difference in music are informed by the prevalent attitudes of their time. But they also themselves participate in social formation, inasmuch as individuals learn how to be gendered beings through their interactions with

the vanguard of antifeminist backlash. Norton's specially reprinted collections from *The New Grove Dictionary of Music* (the principal disciplinary reference tool since its publication in 1980) are entitled “Masters of Italian Opera,” “Masters of the Second Viennese School,” and so forth, perhaps taking their cue from the successful “Masters of the Universe” series on Saturday morning television.⁴ There is also a prestigious new series of books and videos on the various periods of music history from Prentice-Hall called *Man and Music*, and still another new set of videos from Brown called *The Music of Man*.⁵ It is impossible to believe that anyone who has lived through the last fifteen years can have failed to observe that terms such as “master” or “man” have been so thoroughly problematized that they are no longer in general circulation in most academic communities. If musicology has lagged behind in admitting feminist criticism to its list of legitimate areas of inquiry, it is way ahead of the game in its efforts to expunge all evidence that feminism ever existed.

Yet all is not hopeless in the field. Two conferences occurred in spring 1988—one at Carleton University in Ottawa and the other at Dartmouth—in which feminist criticism was highlighted.⁶ Moreover, the program committee for the 1988 meeting of the American Musicological Society actively solicited and accepted several papers in feminist criticism, and the 1989 meeting offered the first discipline-sponsored workshop in feminist theory and music.⁷ The most important consequence of these conferences is that they have enabled those of us who have been trying to develop and perform feminist criticism in isolation to become aware of others who have been grappling with similar issues and methods. Feminist critics of music, encouraged by the knowledge that a community does in fact exist, are currently organizing at least two anthologies of feminist music criticism.⁸ Furthermore, several professional journals have begun to request feminist articles.

Most of the essays in this collection predate this recent surge of interest in feminist criticism, and they are virtually all marked by a sense of disciplinary solitude. They are often as concerned with questioning why there has been no feminist criticism in musicology as in exploring what one might do with such methods if one were allowed to pursue them. To that extent, these pieces bear the traces of a moment in the history of the discipline, and I have decided not to erase them. It is heartening, however, to know that it may no longer be necessary to concentrate quite so heavily on the issue of whether or not there ought to be a feminist criticism of music. That battle seems perhaps to have been won, at least in sympathetic quarters. Whether or not the mainstream of the discipline approves, feminist music criticism does exist. However, the more interesting questions remain: What would a

by women who do not take him at his word, who insist on knowing the truth: the truth of his human rather than transcendental status. And he cannot live with someone who thus understands his mortality and materiality. Thus he is fated always to live alone, yet safe with his delusions of control and magnanimity—at least so long as no one tampers with that seventh door.

As a woman in musicology, I find myself thinking about Judith quite often—especially now, as I begin asking new kinds of questions about music with the aid of feminist critical theory. Like Judith, I have been granted access by my mentors to an astonishing cultural legacy: musical repertoires from all of history and the entire globe, repertoires of extraordinary beauty, power, and formal sophistication. It might be argued that I ought to be grateful, since there has really only been one stipulation in the bargain—namely, that I never ask what any of it means, that I content myself with structural analysis and empirical research.

Unfortunately that is a stipulation I have never been able to accept. For, to put it simply, I began my career with the desire to understand music. I suppose this must also be true of most other music professionals. Yet what I desired to understand about music has always been quite different from what I have been able to find out in the authorized accounts transmitted in classrooms, textbooks, or musicological research. I was drawn to music because it is the most compelling cultural form I know. I wanted evidence that the overwhelming responses I experience with music are not just in my own head, but rather are shared.

I entered musicology because I believed that it would be dedicated (at least in part) to explaining how music manages to create such effects. I soon discovered, however, that musicology fastidiously declares issues of musical significance to be off-limits to those engaged in legitimate scholarship. It has seized disciplinary control over the study of music and has prohibited the asking of even the most fundamental questions concerning meaning. Something terribly important is being hidden away by the profession, and I have always wanted to know why.

Just as Bartók's Judith discovers telltale traces of blood on the treasures in the first six chambers (even though Bluebeard adamantly refuses to corroborate her observations), so I have always detected in music much more than I was given license to mention. To be sure, music's beauty is often overwhelming, its formal order magisterial. But the structures graphed by theorists and the beauty celebrated by aestheticians are often stained with such things as violence, misogyny, and racism. And perhaps more disturbing still to those who would present music as autonomous and invulnerable, it also frequently betrays fear—fear of women, fear of the body.

It is finally feminism that has allowed me to understand both why the discipline wishes these to be nonissues, and also why they need to be moved to the very center of inquiries about music. Thus I see feminist criticism as the key to the forbidden door: the door that has prevented me from really being able to understand even that to which I was granted free access. To that extent that I live in a world that is shaped profoundly by musical discourse, I find it necessary to begin exploring whatever lies behind the last door despite—but also because of—disciplinary prohibitions.

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When feminist criticism emerged in literary studies and art history in the early 1970s, many women musicologists such as myself looked on from the sidelines with interest and considerable envy. But at the time, there were formidable obstacles preventing us from bringing those same questions to bear on music. Some of these obstacles were, of course, institutional: a discipline within which we were located was still male-dominated, and most of us were loath to jeopardize the tentative footholds we had been granted.

Nevertheless, a few of the more courageous women began to excavate the history of women composers and musicians. And even though the projects were initially regarded with scorn, they have uncovered an enormous amount of rich material: the long-forgotten music of such extraordinary figures as Hildegard von Bingen, Barbara Strozzi, Clara Schumann, Ethel Smyth, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and many others is being made widely available for the first time.² Likewise the history of women performers, teachers, patrons, and civic promoters of music has been brought to light as well as the history of the conditions that consistently have served to exclude or marginalize female participation in music.³ As a result of this research our understanding of music institutions and of specific people engaged in musical activities has been substantially altered.

Yet until very recently, there was virtually no public evidence (that is, official conferences or refereed journals) of feminist music criticism. I painfully aware that this volume—one of the first books of feminist criticism in the discipline of musicology—is being assembled at a time when cynical voices in many other fields are beginning to declare feminism to have passé. It almost seems that musicology managed miraculously to pass directly from pre- to postfeminism without ever having to change—or to examine—its ways.

Indeed, one of the few signs that the discipline has even noticed the challenges feminism has presented elsewhere is that musicology appears to

b) *Δασί υγροί Σποικισμοί*.....

c) *Ευρωπαϊκή ενδογένεση και Ευρωπαϊκή* u

cultural discourses such as music. Moreover, music does not just passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which various models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated.⁹

These codes change over time—the “meaning” of femininity was not the same in the eighteenth century as in the late nineteenth, and musical characterizations differ accordingly. To be sure, many aspects of the codes are strikingly resilient and have been transmitted in ways that are quite recognizable up to the present: for instance, musical representations of masculine bravura or feminine seductiveness in Indiana Jones movies resemble in many respects those in Cavalli’s seventeenth-century operas. But if some aspects of the codes prove stable, it is not because music is a “universal language,” but rather because certain social attitudes concerning gender have remained relatively constant throughout that stretch of history. Thus the musical semiotics of gender can tell us much about the actual music (why *these* particular pitches and rhythms as opposed to others). And studying music from this vantage point can also provide insights into social history itself, insofar as repertoires testify eloquently to the various models of gender organization (whether hegemonic or resistant) available at any given moment.

Music is also very often concerned with the arousing and channeling of desire, with mapping patterns through the medium of sound that resemble those of sexuality. While the topic of sexuality is rarely broached in musicology, it has received considerable attention in recent literary and film theory. As a result of this investigation, much of what had been assumed as biological and immutable in human sexual experience has been radically reinterpreted as socially constructed. Stephen Heath sums up the revisionist position well when he writes:

There is no such thing as sexuality; what we have experienced and are experiencing is the fabrication of a “sexuality,” the construction of something called “sexuality” through a set of representations—images, discourses, ways of picturing and describing—that propose to confirm, that make up this sexuality to which we are then referred and held in our lives, a whole sexual fix precisely.¹⁰

As reasonably clear instances of “fabrications of sexuality” in music, we might consider the prelude to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, or Madonna and Prince’s recent duet, “This Is Not a Love Song.” Even though such pieces may seem extraordinarily erotic—as though they have managed to bypass cultural mediation to resonate di-

rectly with one’s own most private experiences—they are in fact constructions. Indeed, the three tunes just mentioned present very different notions of what qualifies as “the erotic” (most listeners would tend to identify one or two of them as representations of desire and to reject the others as inoffensible or as rubbish). Because such pieces influence and even constitute the ways listeners experience and define some of their own most intimate feelings, they participate actively in the social organization of sexuality. Thus, one of the principal tasks of feminist music criticism would be to examine the semiotics of desire, arousal, and sexual pleasure that circulate in the public sphere through music.

2. *Gendered aspects of traditional music theory.* The images of gender or sexuality addressed above are usually rhetorically generated; that is, they are produced by more or less deliberate choices by composers, along with other dramatic and affective strategies of particular pieces. This is not to say every element of every construction of, say, “femininity” must be intentional, for these codes often are taken to be “natural”—when composing music for a female character, a composer may automatically choose traits such as softness or passivity, without really examining the pros and cons for such choices. But still, the fact that gender or arousal is at stake is not so obviously clear.

My next two groups of issues are less obvious but are far more crucial to the enterprise of feminist criticism, especially given that musical institutions like to claim that music for the most part is not concerned with musical issues such as gender or sexuality. Most of the essays in this collection seek to identify and analyze the ways in which music is shaped by constructions of gender and sexuality—not only in the context of opera or program music, but also in some of the most fundamental of musical conceptual procedures.

For instance, music theorists and analysts quite frequently betray an implicit reliance on metaphors of gender (“masculinity” vs. “femininity” vs. sexuality in their formulations. The most venerable of these—because of its roots in traditional poetics—involves the classification of cadences or endings according to gender. The 1970 edition of the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, for instance, includes the following entry:

Masculine, feminine cadence. A cadence or ending is called “masculine” if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and “feminine” if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. The masculine ending must be considered the more important one, while the feminine is preferred in more romantic styles.

This standard definition makes it clear that the designations "masculine" and "feminine" are far from arbitrary. The two are differentiated on the basis of relative strength, with the binary opposition masculine/feminine mapped onto strong/weak. Moreover, this particular definition betrays other important mappings: if the masculine version is ("must be considered") normal, then the implication is that the feminine is abnormal. This is so self-evident that the author, Willi Apel, does not think it worthy of explicit mention. Instead, he engages yet another binary: if the feminine is preferred in "more romantic styles," then the masculine must be (and, of course, *is*) identified with the more objective, more rational of musical discourses. In two brief sentences focused ostensibly upon a technical feature of musical rhythm, Apel has managed to engage some of the most prominent of Western beliefs concerning sexual difference. The "feminine" is weak, abnormal, and subjective; the "masculine" strong, normal, and objective. And this whole metaphysical apparatus is brought to bear and reinscribed in the conventional terminology used to distinguish mere cadence-types.

It might be argued that no one takes the gender implications of that music-theoretical distinction literally anymore, that these are but the reified traces of dead metaphors. But how, then, is one to explain theorist Edward T. Cone's strangely moralistic discussion of the performance "problem" of feminine cadences in Chopin?

Even in the case of movements that seem to remain *incorrigibly feminine*, some differentiation can still be made. In the case of Chopin's Polonaise in A major, for example, a clever emphasis on one of the concealed cross-rhythms at the cadence can make the last chord sound, *if not precisely masculine*, at least like a strong tonic postponed by a suspension of the entire dominant.¹² (my emphasis)

Cone is concerned here with "butching up" a polonaise, a genre that is distinguished from other dances by what Apel labels as "feminine" endings. Now, Chopin's polonaise is a remarkably vigorous, even aggressive composition, and I would argue that it is precisely the emphatic stress on the second ("weak") beat that gives the polonaise its arrogant swagger, its quality of always being poised to plunge into the next phrase. But given that this technicality is conventionally classified as "feminine," Cone feels the need to rescue the piece from its "incorrigibly feminine" endings. He can do so only by violating Chopin's score and in effect weakening the rhythmic integrity of the composition. But at least then the cadences won't sound "feminine" (even if the resulting performance concludes with what sounds

like a failure of nerve, a normalization that "corrects" the groove's idiosyncrasy).

Cone's nervousness over the "feminine" cast of this ending suggests that more must be at stake than mere "weakness." Apel defines "feminine endings" as those in which the final sonority is postponed beyond the downbeat. But we could also describe such events in terms of *excess*—a feminine ending then becomes one that refuses the hegemonic control of the barline. Such a description alters the assumed power relationship between the two types, but it begins to account for the anxiety that marks Cone's discussion of these "incorrigible" moments. For his proposed solution attempts to manipulate the music so that it *sounds* as though its "feminine" components are complying with the law of the downbeat. If gendered terminology can lead astray Edward Cone, who is unquestionably one of the finest theorists and analysts in the field, then it certainly needs to be interrogated seriously.

Nor are masculine/feminine distinctions limited to cadences. The eighteenth-century theorist Georg Andreas Sorge explained the hierarchical distinction between major and minor triads in terms he regarded as both natural and God-given—the respective powers of male and female:

Just as in the universe there has always been created a creature more splendid and perfect than the others of God, we observe exactly this also in musical harmony. Thus we find after the major triad another, the minor triad, which is indeed not as complete as the first, but also lovely and pleasant to hear. The first can be likened to the male, the second to the female sex. And just as it was not good that the man (Adam) was alone, thus it was not good that we had no other harmony than the major triad; for how far would we come in a progression from one chord to the other? . . . And just as the womanly sex without the man would be quite bad, thus with music it would be in a bad way if we had no other harmony than that which the minor triad gives. We could not once make an authentic cadence.¹³

Because it might be objected that Sorge is a figure too far in the past to be relevant to anything today, I offer here a later mapping of major/minor onto masculine/feminine in Arnold Schoenberg's *Theory of Harmony*: "The dualism presented by major and minor has the power of a symbol suggesting high forms of order: it reminds us of male and female and delimits the spheres of expression according to attraction and repulsion. . . . The will of nature is supposedly fulfilled in them."¹⁴ This passage occurs in a context in which Schoenberg has just defined the major mode as "natural," minor as "unnatural," and his mapping of masculine/feminine onto modes follows

the same logic as Apel's, Cone's, or Sorge's. Yet even though he bears witness to this received wisdom, it is important to note that Schoenberg (unlike most others) also calls it into question and strives to resist it. For *Theory of Harmony* is in large measure an attempt at imagining a musical language that could eschew binarisms, whether they be major/minor, consonance/dissonance, or masculine/feminine. After the passage just quoted, he goes on to express his longing for a musical discourse that is, like the angels, "asexual"—a discourse no longer driven by the attraction and repulsion between major and minor. His success at locating the metaphysical categories (such as gender) that structure musical thought and his struggle to transcend them make his an exceptionally brave, if tortured, intellectual agenda.¹⁵

Sometimes sexual metaphors are used to structure musical concepts without reference to gender distinctions. For instance, the theoretical writings of Heinrich Schenker often draw explicitly on analogies to sexuality. Throughout *Harmony*, he describes musical logic—whether motivic or harmonic—as the product of "procreative urges":

Obviously, every tone is possessed of the same inherent urge to procreate infinite generations of overtones. Also this urge has its analogy in animal life; in fact, it appears to be in no way inferior to the procreative urge of a living being. This fact again reveals to us the biological aspect of music, as we have emphasized it already in our consideration of the procreative urge of the motif.¹⁶

One explanation for such a passage is that Schenker simply found this particular verbal trope of sexuality handy for describing the dynamic quality of pure, abstract tonal music. Yet the nineteenth-century repertory he is accounting for was itself generated in accordance with a crucial set of biological, "organic" metaphors.¹⁷ Schenker's tropes spring from and participate in the same cultural milieu that gave rise to the music he analyzes. They merely testify in words to the processes that likewise underwrite the musical imagery.¹⁸

3. *Gender and sexuality in musical narrative.* Not only do gender and sexuality inform our "abstract" theories, but music itself often relies heavily upon the metaphorical simulation of sexual activity for its effects. I will argue throughout this volume that tonality itself—with its process of instilling expectations and subsequently withholding promised fulfillment until climax—is the principal musical means during the period from 1600 to 1900 for arousing and channeling desire. Even without texts or programs, tonal compositions ranging from Bach organ fugues to Brahms symphonies whip

up torrents of libidinal energy that are variously thwarted or permitted to gush. The principal theorist to acknowledge and examine this aspect of tonality systematically is Schenker: the purpose of his quasi-mathematical diagrams (in addition to his explicitly sexualized tropes) is to chart simultaneously the principal background mechanisms through which tonal compositions arouse desire and the surface strategies that postpone gratification. Through rigorous theoretical language and graphing techniques, he plots out the mechanisms whereby certain simulations of sexual desire and release are constituted within the musical medium.

His mystical statements of intention to the contrary, Schenker's graphs can be read as demonstrating in fully material terms that the excitement achieved in these pieces is *constructed* (is not, in other words, the tracing of the German *Geist* or Schopenhauer's Will). And any medium—whether music or fiction—that regularly achieves such powerful effects needs to be studied carefully, not only technically (as in Schenker), but also ideologically. What are the assumptions that fuel these mechanisms so often called by the neutral name of "tension and release" (or by Schoenberg's explicitly sexualized "attraction and repulsion")? Whose models of subjectivity are they, given that they are not universal? To what ends are they employed in compositions? What is it, in other words, that the listener is being invited to desire and why?

Similarly, the various narrative paradigms that crystallized during the history of tonality contain many features that are in effect gendered. This is especially clear in the case of sonata-allegro procedure, for which there even used to be the custom of calling the opening theme "masculine" and the subsidiary theme "feminine." To be sure, this custom extends back only as far as the mid-nineteenth century. Theorist A. B. Marx seems to have been the first to use this terminology, in his *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1845):

The second theme, on the other hand, serves as contrast to the first, energetic statement, though dependent on and determined by it. It is of a more tender nature, flexibly rather than emphatically constructed—in a way, the feminine as opposed to the preceding masculine. In this sense each of the two themes is different, and only together do they form something of a higher, more perfect order.¹⁹

The convention of designating themes as masculine and feminine was still common in pedagogy and criticism of the 1960s, although musicology by and large has since repudiated it—especially its application to sonata movements that antedate Marx's formulation.

However, the fact that themes were not referred to in this fashion until the mid-nineteenth century does not mean that earlier pieces are free of gendered marking: the themes of many an eighteenth-century sonata movement draw upon the semiotics of "masculinity" and "femininity" as they were constructed on the operatic stage, and thus they are readily recognizable in their respective positions within the musical narratives. To identify them as such is not to commit an anachronism: the gender connotations of the opening "Mannheim rockets" or "hammerstrokes" and the sighing second themes in Stamitz symphonies are so obvious as to border on the cartoonish, even if neither he nor his contemporaries actually called the respective themes "masculine" and "feminine."

Nor is it merely a matter of deciding whether or not to label themes as "masculine" and "feminine" in what are otherwise neutral narrative processes. Drawing on the structuralist work of the Soviet narratologists Vladimir Propp and Jurij Lotman, Teresa de Lauretis has demonstrated with respect to traditional Western narrative that:

The hero must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female. . . . The hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.²⁰

Furthermore, as de Lauretis and other narratologists have demonstrated, regardless of the manifest content of particular stories, these two functions interact in accordance with a schema already established in advance—the masculine protagonist makes contact with but must eventually subjugate (domesticate or purge) the designated [feminine] Other in order for identity to be consolidated, for the sake of satisfactory narrative closure.²¹

This narrative schema is played out quite explicitly in opera.²² But it is no less crucial to the formal conventions of "absolute" music: indeed, large-scale instrumental music was not feasible before the development of tonality, which draws on the model of these powerful narrative paradigms. In its early manifestations in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the course of a movement traces the trajectory from a home base (tonic), to the conquest of two or three other keys, and a return to tonic for closure. Schoenberg, for one, was explicitly aware of the narrative demands of tonality:

For [our forebears] the comedy concluded with marriage, the tragedy with expiation or retribution, and the musical work "in the same key." Hence, for them the choice of scale brought the obligation to treat the first tone of that scale as the fundamental, and to present it as Alpha and Omega of all that took place in the work, as the patriarchal ruler over the domain defined by its might and its will: its coat of arms was displayed at the most conspicuous points, especially at the beginning and ending. And thus they had a possibility for closing that in effect resembled a necessity.²³

Thus, the Other may be merely an alien terrain through which the monologic subject of the piece passes (and secures cadentially) on its narrative adventure away from and back to tonic. However, the sonata procedure that comes to characterize instrumental music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries features a more polarized version of that basic narrative paradigm. In sonata, the principal key/theme clearly occupies the narrative position of masculine protagonist; and while the less dynamic second key/theme is *necessary* to the sonata or tonal plot (without this foil or obstacle, there is no story), it serves the narrative function of the feminine Other. Moreover, satisfactory resolution—the ending always generically guaranteed in advance by tonality and sonata procedure—demands the containment of whatever is semiotically or structurally marked as "feminine," whether a second theme or simply a non-tonic key area.

In his entry on sonata form in *The New Grove Dictionary*, James Webster is careful to mention the terminology of "masculine" and "feminine" themes only when he gets to the repertoires and theories contemporary with A. B. Marx. Yet in his opening structuralist account of the sonata paradigm, he writes the following:

The second group in the exposition presents important material and closes with a sense of finality, but it is not in the tonic. This dichotomy creates a "large-scale dissonance" that must be resolved. The "sonata principle" requires that the most important ideas and the strongest cadential passages from the second group reappear in the recapitulation, but now transposed to the tonic. The subtle tension of stating important material in another key is thus "grounded," and the movement can end.²⁴

As abstractly worded as this statement may be, it reveals that the sonata and likewise tonality are manifestations of the same cultural paradigms as the mythic narratives schematically laid bare by Propp, Lotman, and de Lauretis. They depend upon the logic that assumes as natural the tonic protagon-

nist's necessary subjugation ("resolution," "grounding") of whatever "large-scale dissonance" occupies the second narrative position.

Of course, the Other need not always be interpreted strictly as female—it can be anything that stands as an obstacle or threat to identity and that must, consequently, be purged or brought under submission for the sake of narrative closure. Robert Walser has suggested that the terms of tonality and sonata might be dealt with productively through methods expounded by cultural theorist Fredric Jameson in his analysis of *Jaws*. Jameson argues that the reason the film had such a powerful impact on the public imagination is that its narrative tensions could be interpreted in terms of a wide range of social tensions. In other words, the shark is not necessarily just a shark, but is available as a stand-in for any force (untamable nature, commodity culture, or even—in keeping with classical narratology and the shark's grotesque resonance with traditional iconography—the vagina dentata) that threatens the individual spectator. The danger posed by that "Other" is raised to an excruciating level and then resolved, granting at least momentarily the experience of utopia.²⁵

Likewise, the paradigms of tonality and sonata have proved effective and resilient in part because their tensions may be read in a variety of ways. I do not want to reduce two centuries of music to an inflexible formula. Yet the heavily gendered legacy of these paradigms cannot be ignored either. In literature, even if the second narrative slot is not occupied by a woman character, whoever or whatever fills the fatal slot is understood on some fundamental cultural level as a "feminine" Other: to conquer an enemy is to "emasculate" him as he is purged or domesticated. Similarly, chromaticism, which enriches tonal music but which must finally be resolved to the triad for the sake of closure, takes on the cultural cast of "femininity."²⁶ The "feminine" never gets the last word within this context: in the world of traditional narrative, there are no feminine endings.

These are features of composition and reception that are taken for granted as aspects of autonomous musical practice, as simply "the way music goes." They are usually not considered actively by composers, are not "intended." They simply are the elements that structure his or her musical (and social) world. Yet they are perhaps the most powerful aspects of musical discourse, for they operate below the level of deliberate signification and are thus usually reproduced and transmitted without conscious intervention. They are the habits of cultural thought that guarantee the effectiveness of the music—that allow it to "make sense"—while they remain largely invisible and apparently immutable. Most of the essays that follow concentrate heavily on these conventions, for it is through these deeply engrained habits

that gender and sexuality are most effectively—and most problematically—organized in music.

4. *Music as a gendered discourse.* Throughout its history in the West, music has been an activity fought over bitterly in terms of gender identity. The charge that musicians or devotees of music are "effeminate" goes back as far as recorded documentation about music, and music's association with the body (in dance or for sensuous pleasure) and with subjectivity has led to its being relegated in many historical periods to what was understood as a "feminine" realm. Male musicians have retaliated in a number of ways: by defining music as the most ideal (that is, the least physical) of the arts; by insisting emphatically on its "rational" dimension; by laying claim to such presumably masculine virtues as objectivity, universality, and transcendence; by prohibiting actual female participation altogether.²⁷

If the whole enterprise of musical activity is always already fraught with gender-related anxieties, then feminist critique provides a most fruitful way of approaching some of the anomalies that characterize musical institutions. Some of this work is already available. For instance, Linda Austern and Richard Leppert have demonstrated that one reason the English have produced so little music is that they—more than their German or French neighbors—have long associated music strongly with effeminacy.²⁸ The English effectively prevented themselves as a society from participating in musical culture, except as connoisseurs and consumers, and Anglo-Americans have followed suit. As Maynard Solomon writes of Charles Ives:

[Ives] is both drawn to music and repelled by it. "As a boy [I was] partially ashamed of music," he recalled—"an entirely wrong attitude but it was strong—most boys in American country towns, I think felt the same. . . . And there may be something in it. Hasn't music always been too much an emasculated art?" To ward off such feelings, Ives would eradicate the traces of the "soft-bodied" and the "decadent" in his own work, perhaps employing the techniques of modernism to conceal the atmospheric, lyrical, yielding strata which often underlie his first ideas.²⁹

Likewise, the polemics that proliferate around moments of stylistic change are frequently expressed in terms of sexual identity. Early Romanticism, for instance, was in part an appropriation of what the Enlightenment had defined as subjective, "feminine" imagination, and the battles over the relative status of structure and ornamental excess, between rationality and irrationality in early nineteenth-century music were understood as battles

over the proper constitution of the bourgeois male. Similarly, the turn from late Romantic hysteria and popular music to the refuge of rigorous Modernism is a gesture partly informed by the desire to remasculinize the discourse.³⁰

Even the strange absence of criticism in the discipline may well be related to gender-related anxieties. A particularly poignant manifestation of such anxiety in action is Schumann's celebrated essay on Schubert's Symphony in C Major. The essay carefully establishes a dichotomy between the masculine example of Beethoven and the more sensitive, romantic Schubert; and throughout the essay, Schumann shields himself from Schubert's influence by calling upon Beethoven's "virile power" at moments when he is about to be overwhelmed by Schubert's charm. At the end, after he has succumbed to a rhapsodic account of what it is like to listen to the Schubert symphony, he seeks to recover his masculine authority by abruptly informing the reader: "I once found on Beethoven's grave a steel pen, which ever since I have reverently preserved. I never use it save on festive occasions like this one; may inspiration have flowed from it."³¹

Despite the deeply conflicted nature of Schumann's essay, he does risk revealing himself in print as a man given to strong emotional impulses, perhaps even as one who is as attracted to the seductive grace of Schubert as to the virility of Beethoven. Most music analysts today do not have the nerve to follow Schumann's example—and thus, for instance, the recent outcropping of daunting structuralist graphs used to distance and objectify the passionate music of nineteenth-century opera. For if to admit that music moves one affectively means that one may not be a proper masculine subject, then one's study of music will systematically avoid addressing such issues.³²

The consequences of such anxieties are enormous—for individual musicians, for the history of music as it unfolds, and for the questions and methods admitted in the course of its academic study by theorists and musicologists. Even though these are extremely difficult and delicate issues, they have to be addressed seriously if music criticism of any sort is to proceed beyond surface details.

5. *Discursive strategies of women musicians.* There have been many obstacles preventing women from participating fully (or, at some moments in history, from participating *at all*) in musical production. Most of these have been institutional: women have been denied the necessary training and professional connections, and they have been assumed to be incapable of sustained creative activity. The music that has been composed by women (despite all odds) has often been received in terms of the essentialist stereotypes ascribed to women by masculine culture: it is repeatedly condemned as

pretty yet trivial or—in the event that it does not conform to standards of feminine propriety—as aggressive and unbefitting a woman.³³

Within the last two generations, it has finally become possible for relatively large numbers of women to enter seriously into training as composers. Composers such as Joan Tower, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Thea Musgrave, Pauline Oliveros, Libby Larsen, and many others have successfully challenged the pernicious and absurd stereotypes that have plagued women for centuries. They prove that women can and do compose first-rate music, and they are fully capable of deploying the entire range of the semiotic code they have inherited—not merely the sweet and passive, but the forceful aspects as well. Many superb women composers insist on making their gender identities a nonissue, precisely because there still remain so many essentialist assumptions about what music by women "ought" to sound like.³⁴ That they are determined to demonstrate that they too can write MUSIC (as opposed to "women's music") is understandable. Moreover, it is an important political position and strategy, given the history of women's marginalization in this domain.

However, I am no longer sure what MUSIC is. Given that my first three sets of questions are concerned with laying bare the kinds of gender/power relationships already inscribed in many of the presumably value-free procedures of Western music, it becomes difficult to stash that information and simply analyze MUSIC, even if it is produced by women. For even though women have managed to enter into composition as professionals, they still face the problem of how to participate without unwittingly reproducing the ideologies that inform various levels of those discourses.

Thus I am especially drawn to women artists who, like myself, are involved with examining the premises of inherited conventions, with calling them into question, with attempting to reassemble them in ways that make a difference inside the discourse itself, with envisioning narrative structures with feminine endings. The work of these women broadens the range of possible musics, as it comments both on the assumptions of more traditional procedures and on the problematic position of a woman artist attempting to create new meanings within old media.

How does one go about grounding arguments of the sort these questions would require? The intellectual obstacles that have impeded the development of feminist music criticism are rooted in the assumptions that have long informed and sustained academic musicology in general. It is important to remember that there really is very little resembling criticism of *any*

sort in musicology.³⁵ For many complex reasons, music has been and continues to be almost entirely exempted from criticism as it is practiced within other humanities disciplines: even those scholars who produce work resembling that of the old-fashioned New Criticism of literary studies still count as radicals in musicology. In other words, feminist criticism has not necessarily been singled out for exclusion—to a very large extent, its absence is merely symptomatic of the way the discipline as a whole is organized. Consequently, it is not a matter of simply adding feminist issues to a well-established tradition of critical inquiry: before we can address the questions concerning gender and sexuality discussed above, it is necessary to construct an entire theory of musical signification.

It is an intimidating task to try to unlock a medium that has been so securely sequestered for so long. There does exist, of course, a sophisticated discipline of music theory, but this discipline by and large restricts the questions it acknowledges to matters of formal process as they appear in musical scores. To be sure, the contributions of music theory are indispensable to feminist or any other kind of criticism. Far from setting the score aside and concentrating on extramusical issues, my work is always concerned with explaining how it is that certain images or responses are invoked by particular musical details. But as long as we approach questions of signification *exclusively* from a formalist point of view, we will continue to conclude that it is impossible to get from chords, pitch-class sets, or structures to any other kind of human or social meaning. Indeed, the more deeply entrenched we become in strictly formal explanations, the further away we are from admitting even the *possibility* of other sorts of readings, gendered or otherwise.³⁶

Yet music need not be—and has not always been—defined exclusively in terms of its atomic bits. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for instance, music was typically discussed in terms of affect and rhetoric. Monteverdi wrote letters in which he openly recounted his invention of various kinds of musical signs: ways of representing madness, military ferocity, and so forth. Bach's contemporaries Mattheson and Heinechen wrote lexicons cataloguing affective devices, and composition teachers of the time instructed students on how to produce passionate responses in listeners through rhetorical manipulation. And even though the musicians of the nineteenth century sought to give the illusion that they wrote by inspiration and with disdain for social codes, the documents produced by composers and critics testify to a belief in the emotional power of music, even if they wished that power to be regarded as unmediated and transcendent.

Likewise today most people who have not been trained as academic musicians (who have not had these responses shamed out of them) believe that

music signifies—that it can sound happy, sad, sexy, funky, silly, “American,” religious, or whatever. Oblivious to the skepticism of music theorists, they listen to music in order to dance, weep, relax, or get romantic. Composers of music for movies and advertisements consistently stake their commercial success on the public's pragmatic knowledge of musical signification—the skill with which John Williams, for instance, manipulates the semiotic codes of the late nineteenth-century symphony in *E. T.* or *Star Wars* is breathtaking. As Galileo is reported to have uttered after he was forced to recant his theories before the Inquisition, “And yet it moves.” It doesn't really matter that academic disciplines have tried to insist that music is only music, that it cannot mean anything else. In the social world, music achieves these effects all the time.

Like any social discourse, music is meaningful precisely insofar as at least some people believe that it is and act in accordance with that belief. Meaning is not inherent in music, but neither is it in language: both are activities that are kept afloat only because communities of people invest in them, agree collectively that their signs serve as valid currency. Music is always dependent on the conferring of social meaning—as ethnomusicologists have long recognized, the study of signification in music cannot be undertaken in isolation from the human contexts that create, transmit, and respond to it.

However, this is not to suggest that music is nothing but an epiphenomenon that can be explained by way of social determinism. Music and other discourses do not simply reflect a social reality that exists immutably on the outside; rather, social reality itself is constituted within such discursive practices. It is in accordance with the terms provided by language, film, advertising, ritual, or music that individuals are socialized: take on gendered identities, learn ranges of proper behaviors, structure their perceptions and even their experiences. But it is also within the arena of these discourses that alternative models of organizing the social world are submitted and negotiated. This is where the ongoing work of social formation occurs.

Most members of a given social group succeed in internalizing the norms of their chosen music and are quite sophisticated in their abilities to respond appropriately. They know how to detect even minor stylistic infractions and to respond variously with delight or indignation, depending on how they identify themselves with respect to the style at hand. Yet very few people are able to explain verbally to themselves *how* music affects them.

I am interested first and foremost in accounting for the ways music creates such effects. On the informal level, my work has always been strongly influenced by my own perceptions: the perceptions of a member of this society who has been immersed in musical “high culture” for forty-four years and professionally engaged with it for over thirty. I always begin by trusting

that my own reactions to music are legitimate. By "legitimate," I do not mean to suggest that my readings are identical with everyone else's or are always in line with some standard version of what a piece is taken to mean. Indeed, the essays that follow diverge quite consistently from received wisdom.

But neither would I accept the charge that my readings are "subjective" in the sense that they reflect only my own quirks. Rather, I take my reactions to be in large part socially constituted—the products of lifelong contact with music and other cultural media. Thus I regard them as invaluable firsthand evidence of how music can influence listeners affectively, how it can even participate in social formation.³⁷ If most other music professionals are reticent about confessing music's effects on them, I can at least draw upon my own experiences. Miraculously, thirty years in the profession have not succeeded in destroying my faith in that fundamental storehouse of knowledge.

But if I pay close attention to my own reactions (instead of shoving them to the side for the sake of an objectivity that will always prevent in advance the examination of music's impact), I am also very much concerned with the reactions of others. Since I want to be able to argue that music is socially grounded, I have conducted extensive field research (or, if you prefer, "reality testing") over the past twenty years. That is, I play pieces of music for and invite responses from many other kinds of people: inner-city high school students, professional string quartets, groups of senior citizens, musicology graduate students, literary critics, New Music America audiences. What I have learned is that nonprofessionals are extremely adept at comprehending and even explaining affect and rhetoric in music, while professionals tend to divide into two camps: those who think they are above such nonsense and who supply formal explanations for everything they hear, and those who have not surrendered their conviction that music signifies but who have kept this carefully hidden, rather as though they were adults who still believe in the Tooth Fairy.

But mere gut reactions (my own or those of others) are only the beginning—although without these, it would be impossible to discuss significance at all. My primary concerns are first with justifying those reactions through musical analysis, social history, critical theory, and much else. But once the validity of such reactions is established, I am further concerned with interrogating them: it is important to ascertain that Bizet does, in fact, make our pulses race at the end of *Carmen*, sweeping us ineluctably forward to Carmen's murder, and also to account for how he accomplishes this musically. But then it also becomes necessary to explain why—in Bizet's day and in ours—such a musico-narrative device has been regarded as so com-

elling and even pleasurable. And the question then arises of whose interest is being served by the public deployment of such devices.

My eclectic tool kit of methods has been assembled over the years out of whatever has seemed handy in unlocking particular musical problems, for music continually (and unpredictably) draws upon everything available in the social domain. In the various essays I have written—feminist or otherwise—I have made use of whatever helped me to make sense of the composition at hand. Thus I have no sense of loyalty to any particular orthodox position. To be sure, my various theoretical acquisitions invite me to make connections that would not be available to those who refuse categorically to look beyond the literal details of the musical notation. But my focus is invariably on the music itself—or, to be more precise, on the music as it operates within human contexts.

4

By far the most difficult aspect of music to explain is its uncanny ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms. Yet this aspect is also what makes music so compelling. If music were not able thus to move us, the human race would not have bothered creating any of it for formalists to dissect, for musicologists to catalogue, or for sociologists to classify. In a recent song, the Doobie Brothers sing, "Music is a doctor, makes you feel like you want to." And Raymond Williams too has stressed the impact of music on the body, albeit in rather more academic terms:

We are only beginning to investigate this on any scientific basis, but it seems clear from what we already know that rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of experience, in such a way that the experience is re-created in the person receiving it, not merely as an "abstraction" or an emotion but as a physical effect on the organism—on the blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain. . . . it is more than a metaphor; it is a physical experience as real as any other.³⁸

Although Williams claims that what he is talking about is "more than a metaphor," the best way of grounding what he is addressing is philosopher Mark Johnson's recent epistemological work on metaphor. Johnson argues convincingly that metaphors are not mere figures of speech (which seems to be how Williams construes the word), but rather are the fundamental means through which we as embodied beings orient ourselves with respect to the world and thereby structure our discourses and our cognition. His work

constructs a theory of knowledge that avoids the splits between mind and body, between objectivity and subjectivity that have plagued Western thought since Plato:

The body has been ignored by Objectivism because it has been thought to introduce subjective elements alleged to be irrelevant to the objective nature of meaning. The body has been ignored because reason has been thought to be abstract and transcendent, that is, not tied to any of the bodily aspects of human understanding. The body has been ignored because it seems to have no role in our reasoning about abstract subject matters.

Contrary to Objectivism, I focus on the indispensability of embodied human understanding for meaning and rationality. "Understanding" is here regarded as populated with just those kinds of imaginative structures that emerge from our experience as bodily organisms functioning in interaction with an environment. Our understanding involves many preconceptual and nonpropositional structures of experience that can be metaphorically projected and propositionally elaborated to constitute our network of meanings.

My purpose is not only to argue that the body is "in" the mind (i.e., that these imaginative structures of understanding are crucial to meaning and reason) but also to explore *how* the body is in the mind—how it is possible, and necessary, after all, for abstract meaning, and for reason and imagination, to have a bodily basis.

*Any adequate account of meaning and rationality must give a central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world.*³⁹

I have quoted Johnson at length because I believe that it is only by adopting such an epistemological framework that we can begin accounting for how music does what it does. Certainly the acoustician's sound waves in and of themselves cannot be demonstrated to possess any of the powers Williams describes. Yet when those sound waves are assembled in such a way as to resemble physical gestures, we as listeners are able to read or make sense of them, largely by means of our lifelong experiences as embodied creatures.⁴⁰

Thus to say that one hears sexual longing in the *Tristan* prelude is not to introduce irrelevant "subjective" data into the discussion. Surely that is the point of the opera, and we are missing the point if we fail to understand that. The process by means of which Wagner's music accomplishes this is not at all mystical. In part, his music draws on his own (excessively documented) experiences in the sexual realm, and we as listeners perceive long-

ing in his music likewise because we are human beings with bodies who have experienced similar feelings firsthand. But this is not to suggest that music works on the basis of essences or that this communication between bedroom and ear happens without extensive symbolic mediation. Wagner's music relies heavily on the traditional semiotics of desire available in the musical styles he inherited, and listeners understand his music in part because they too have learned the codes (the minor sixths demanding resolution, the agony of the tritone, the expectation that a dominant-seventh chord will proceed to its tonic, and so on) upon which his metaphors depend.

Moreover, the musical conventions for representing such human experiences are far from timeless or ahistorical. Desire, for instance, was configured differently in seventeenth-century music, in part because Baroque social codes of signification and even norms of harmonic syntax were very different: some of the techniques exploited by Schütz in "Anima mea liquefacta est" resemble distantly those in *Tristan* and can be grasped by the modern listener without special tutoring; but many more of them depend upon the listener's familiarity with the relevant set of grammatical expectations. Musical imagery, in other words, is heavily mediated through the available syntax, sound forces, genres, and much else.

Nor are the bodily experiences engaged by musical metaphors stable or immutable.⁴¹ Indeed, music is a powerful social and political practice precisely because in drawing on metaphors of physicality, it can cause listeners to experience their bodies in new ways—again, seemingly without mediation. The explosion of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s brought a vocabulary of physical gestures to white middle-class kids that parents and authorities quite rightly perceived as subversive of hegemonic bourgeois values. Sheltered Northern adolescents picked up on the dance rhythms of the Southern honky-tonk and black R & B, and their notions of sexuality—their perceptions of their own most intimate dimensions of experience—split off irrevocably from those of their parents. Even if it is difficult to account definitively for how music precipitates such transformations, its political potency must be acknowledged. And any human discourse with this much influence not only warrants, but demands serious scrutiny.

As the Wagner and rock examples indicate, much is at stake in the sets of apparently "natural" metaphors that inform various musics. For music is not the universal language it has sometimes been cracked up to be: it changes over time, and it differs with respect to geographical locale. Even at any given moment and place, it is always constituted by several competing repertoires, distributed along lines of gender, age, ethnic identity, educational background, or economic class. Because musical procedures are

heavily inflected over history and across social groups, they function extensively within the public domain and are thus available for critical investigation.

Given its centrality in the manipulation of affect, social formation, and the constitution of identity, music is far too important a phenomenon *not* to talk about, even if the most important questions cannot be definitively settled by means of objective, positivistic methodologies. For music is always a political activity, and to inhibit criticism of its effects for any reason is likewise a political act.⁴²

5

The project of critical musicology (of which feminism would be an important branch) would be to examine the ways in which different musics articulate the priorities and values of various communities. Fortunately, we are not required to reinvent the wheel, for this is, of course, one of the principal activities of ethnomusicology. Because the musical images produced by people foreign to us are usually somewhat opaque, discouraging us from thinking that we can hear straight through to universal meanings, we tend to be aware that there are many levels of social mediation involved in the production of other musics.⁴³ Accordingly, ethnographers regularly analyze the musical institutions and procedures of non-Western or folk communities in terms of social organization. But much less work is available that asks ethnographic questions of Western art music. For it is one thing to recognize the social basis of the activities of remote societies, and it is quite another to begin examining the relativity of our own cherished habits of thought.⁴⁴

To do so demands two very different kinds of work: analytical and historical. On the one hand, the techniques and codes through which music produces meaning have to be reconstructed. Because the music theories available at present are designed to maintain the illusion that music is formally self-contained, very little exists in Anglo-American musicology to facilitate such a project. Having to trace over and over again the processes by which musical elements such as pitch or rhythm can be said to signify is extremely tedious, especially within a discipline that refuses even to acknowledge musical affect. Yet it is impossible to go on to finer points of interpretation so long as the question of whether music means anything at all arises to block any further inquiry.

The chapters in this book focus on substantive issues rather than on this basic methodological problem — although fundamental questions about musical signification are addressed continually throughout. But elsewhere I have published three essays devoted to demonstrating how formal musical

details may be connected to expression and even to social ideology. Two of them present step-by-step readings of pieces by Mozart and Bach.⁴⁵ The third examines a very particular device in nineteenth-century music: narrative interruptions by the key of the flatted submediant.⁴⁶ Admittedly, this last project looks arcane on paper. But the reactions of listeners to flat-six interruptions are almost unfailingly immediate and dramatic, even if they do not know technically how to explain their perceptions of discontinuity. All three of these essays account for musical signification in part through details of the score: by means of historical semiotics, generic expectations, deviations from syntactical or structural norms, and rhetorical devices such as continuity, disruption, intensification, and so forth.

But these three essays also locate generic norms and strategies of deviation within historical and cultural contexts. Genres and conventions crystallize because they are embraced as natural by a certain community: they define the limits of what counts as proper musical behavior. Music theory has often been a more or less legislative branch of music that seeks to rationalize and prescribe the preferences of a particular dominant group. Yet crystallization or legislation also makes those norms available for violation, making music itself a terrain on which transgressions and opposition can be registered directly: as Jacques Attali has argued, music is a battleground on which divergent concepts of order and noise are fought out.⁴⁷

For instance, Monteverdi's violations of Renaissance rules of dissonance treatment succeeded in polarizing authorities and advocates of the new practices, and the resulting polemics reveal quite clearly that much more was at stake than an occasional unprepared discord. When Bob Dylan first walked onto the stage with an electric guitar, he was thought to have betrayed the folk community with which he had been identified and thrown into confusion the social categories of the 1960s. In our own day, Tipper Gore's PMRC has brought the censorship of rock both to Capitol Hill and to the recording industry because of the kinds of sexual images she claims the music transmits to her children.

In other words, music and its procedures operate as part of the political arena — not simply as one of its more trivial reflections. So long as music reaffirms what everyone expects, it can manage to seem apolitical, to serve as a mere frill. But as soon as it transgresses some deep-seated taboo, it can bring boiling to the surface certain antagonisms or alliances that otherwise might not have been so passionately articulated. The incidents involving the character Radio Raheem in Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* illustrate this point with extraordinary clarity: Raheem is a loner whose identity is wrapped up in his boombox, on which he incessantly plays Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" at carsplitting volume. When he refuses to turn it off in

the pizza shop, the white owner (who displays only photos of Italian-American celebrities on his walls, despite the objections of his all-black clientele) smashes the boombox, triggering the violence that escalates eventually to the looting of the shop, defacement of his cultural icons, Raheem's murder, and a race riot. Struggles over musical propriety are themselves political struggles over whose music, whose images of pleasure or beauty, whose rules of order shall prevail.

Consequently, it is difficult to understand why in certain repertoires some images and constructions dominate, why others are prohibited, unless one has a strong sense of social history. The kind of history musicology has typically adopted is that of chronology. There are no power struggles in such histories, to say nothing of sensitive issues such as gender or sexuality. It is in part because history is presented as orderly, settled, and unproblematic that it has appeared to be largely irrelevant to the ways music itself is organized.

Therefore, the other principal task facing a music critic who wants to find the traces of history in musical texts is to discover alternative modes of historiography. Fortunately, a considerable amount of work has already been done toward this end, first through the Frankfurt School critics — exemplified especially in the aesthetic theories and finely nuanced analyses of Theodor Adorno — and more recently through Michel Foucault's "archaeologies of knowledge."

Adorno is the only major cultural theorist of the century whose primary medium was music, as opposed to literature, film, or painting.⁴⁸ Thus much of what he accomplished does not require the kind of disciplinary translation that virtually all other critical theorists do. His work, while parochially grounded in the German canon of great composers from Bach to Schoenberg, provides the means for understanding how compositions of the tonal repertoire are informed by the fundamental social tensions of their time. His conceptual framework opens up that sacrosanct canon to questions of great social and political urgency.

Writing between the world wars, from the historical vantage point of the horrific collapse of German high culture, Adorno dismisses with contempt those who would regard this music as a set of icons and insists upon treating it as a medium within which the bourgeois contradictions between individual free will and social pressures to conform were played out in increasingly pessimistic ways. The illusion of total order and control cherished by traditional musicologists is stripped away by his readings, which focus unremittably on historical human dilemmas rather than on transcendent truth. In his hands, the presumably nonrepresentational instrumental music of the canon becomes the most sensitive social barometer in all of culture. It is

thereby made available to social criticism and analysis. Without my study of Adorno, I could not have undertaken any of the projects presented in this volume, for I would have had no way of getting beyond formalism. Yet there are many areas of human experience that Adorno overlooks or denigrates as regressive, such as pleasure or the body.

These are precisely the areas Foucault opens up to critical and historical investigation: in book after book, he has demonstrated that such apparent universals as knowledge, sexuality, the body, the self, and madness all have histories bound up with institutional power.⁴⁹ Moreover, he theorizes how these have been — and are — variously defined, organized, and constituted by means of cultural discourses such as literature or music. Social critics have typically been scornful of the pleasurable aspects of the arts, favoring those works that could be shown to have the proper political stance; to dwell on the actual details of the artifice was to be seduced by it into false consciousness, to be drawn away from the central issues of the class struggle. However, far from finding pleasure to be trivial, Foucault locates the efficacy of cultural discourses in their ability to arouse and manipulate. Pleasure thereby becomes political rather than private — it becomes one of the principal means by which hegemonic culture maintains its power.

While they offer extraordinary insight into the political machinations of culture, Foucault's formulations often are somewhat pessimistic, for they rarely admit of the possibility of agency, resistance, or alternative models of pleasure.⁵⁰ Here the models of political criticism developed by Antonio Gramsci or Mikhail Bakhtin can serve as empowering correctives, in that they recognize and focus on cultural contestation, counternarratives, and carnivalesque celebrations of the marginalized.⁵¹ They conceive of culture as the terrain in which competing versions of social reality fight it out, and thus they permit the study of the ideological dimensions of art while avoiding the determinism that too often renders such analyses reductive.

Inspired in part by Foucault, Gramsci, and others, the practices of history and literary criticism have changed profoundly during the last decade. Historians are increasingly making use of anthropological questions as they interrogate who WE are: why we organize gender and sexuality as we do, how we came to assume certain notions of subjectivity, and how various discourses operate to structure, reproduce, or transform social reality. Consequently, the study of the arts has become a far more central, more urgent enterprise than it was in its Great Books phase. From various angles, writers such as Fernand Braudel, Stephen Greenblatt, Joan Kelly, and Nancy Armstrong have begun to set forth a very different picture of European/American history — a history no longer just of a privileged people, but of an extended community with beliefs and customs as peculiar as those of any

overconcerned with textual analysis). Yet, once again, it has always been music itself that has compelled me into these dark alleys, that has kept me searching for explanations beyond the scope of the autonomous analytical techniques musicology and music theory offered me. For if the principal obstacle to dealing with music critically has been its claim to nonrepresentationality, then critical and cultural theories make it possible to challenge not only the more superficial aspects of music (the setting of song texts, the delineation of characters in operas, the references to explicit literary sources in program music) but, more important, its very core: its syntactical procedures and structural conventions. Thus it is at this level that much of my critique is aimed—at the narrative impulses underlying sonata-allegro form and even tonality itself.

6

This is a collection of essays written between 1987 and 1989. Together they set out the beginnings of a feminist criticism of music. Although the essays address a wide range of periods and repertoires (from the beginnings of opera in the seventeenth century to Madonna's most recent music videos), they are not packaged together here arbitrarily.

As I have considered the ways music might be opened to feminist critique, I have found it useful to develop a practice of scanning across many historical periods. For to focus exclusively on a single repertoire is to risk taking its formulations as natural: its constraints and conventions become limits that cease to be noticeable. It is only, I believe, by continually comparing and contrasting radically different musical discourses that the most significant aspects of each begin to fall into relief. There are, consequently, extensive cross-references among repertoires in the essays—Monteverdi's spectacles are intersected with those of heavy metal, Laurie Anderson's narratives with those of the nineteenth-century symphony. However, to thus violate period and genre boundaries does not mean losing sight of the specificity of sociohistorical contexts. On the contrary, such scanning facilitates the reading of repertoires against the grain—it is the best way to lay bare the unquestioned assumptions that guarantee each repertoire, to identify the most important historical questions.

The first three essays are concerned with examining compositions in the standard canon from a feminist point of view. The first of these, "Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi's Dramatic Music," concerns the emergence of a semiotics of gender in early seventeenth-century opera. Drawing on Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and his work on the rise of modern institutions of control in the seventeenth century, Gramscian models of cultural

so-called primitive society, a community that structures and reproduces itself by means of cultural discourses.⁵²

The essays that follow owe much in terms of method and information to these new directions in historiography. For if we reject the idea that European music is autonomous, then much about the changing world in which it was enmeshed must be reconstructed. Unfortunately for those who want their investigations to be methodologically tidy, the history of that "outside" world is not stable. We are at present in the midst of extensive revisions of the histories of Europe and the United States. Much of what one would like to know about (e.g., attitudes toward sexuality and gender throughout the centuries) is only now being pieced together.

It might be argued that it is foolhardy to jump in to try to account for music before the revised picture of the outside world has been solidified. But if music is one of the cultural terrains on which such issues get worked out, then our picture of the outside world will always be incomplete until music is figured in. Cultural critics have already discovered how absurd it is to write histories of the 1960s without paying close attention to the crucial roles played by music. I suspect that this is true of most other moments in Western history as well.

To the large extent that music can organize our perceptions of our own bodies and emotions, it can tell us things about history that are not accessible through any other medium. This is not to dismiss the importance of verbal documents: indeed, far more than flattened-out historical narratives, historical documents help us to locate music within the ideological struggles that leave their traces on its procedures. Consequently, my essays refer continually to a wide variety of documents and social histories. But for the study of music, music itself remains the best indicator, if we only permit ourselves to listen self-reflexively and to think.

The essays in this collection attempt to sketch out what several of these historical, analytical, and theoretical projects would look like. If the arguments sometimes seem circular—the analyses depend on particular constructions of the social world that are in part constituted by the music at hand—then this only points to the inseparability of music and the social world within which it operates. What usually motivates a project is that an odd musical detail catches my attention; but in order to explain that detail, I am required to undertake extensive historical excavation. And likewise, my historical studies make me aware of the significance of many musical details I might never have noticed otherwise.

My detour into critical and cultural theory has been interpreted by some as an abandonment of musicology. I have at times even been called a sociologist (though never by actual sociologists, who usually take me to be

hegemony and resistance, and Bakhtin's concept of carnival, I explore how power relationships connected with gender and class are inscribed in these pieces. This essay examines the artificial codes Monteverdi devises for distinguishing between male and female characters, but it also traces the crisis in gender representation that occurred almost immediately as a result of unforeseen contradictions in the cultural terms of gender propriety.

"Sexual Politics in Classical Music" deals with how music (even classical music) is involved in creating particular models of libidinal desire and also how the standard schemata of narrative organization that inform both opera and instrumental music are loaded with respect to gender and power. The compositions it examines in particular are Bizet's *Carmen* (which also requires that treatments of race and class be addressed) and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4, for which I introduce questions of gay criticism: does the fact that Tchaikovsky was homosexual have any bearing on his musical narratives?

"Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen" continues the study of gender representation and musical narrative conventions by exploring how madwomen from Monteverdi's lamenting nymph to Lucia and Salome are portrayed. It takes much of the work on the social history of madness by Foucault, Elaine Showalter, Klaus Doerner, and others and demonstrates how music participates in that history. However, the depiction of madness in music often is used to justify the flagrant transgression of musical convention (transgressions that become marks of status in the "antibourgeois" phase of bourgeois art). Thus this examination of musical deviation leads to a reexamination of the treatments of musical deviation by music theorists, especially Schoenberg. "Excess" concludes with a discussion of the work of Diamanda Galas, a contemporary performance artist/composer who takes onto herself the musical signs of the madwoman and uses them aggressively in political pieces designed to protest variously the treatment of AIDS patients and victims of the Greek junta. Galas's work makes it possible to compare the politics of representation versus self-representation. It also serves as a convenient bridge to the second set of essays.

The essays in the second group focus on recent music by women composers who deliberately problematize their sexual identities within their musical discourses: respectively so-called serious composition,⁵³ postmodern performance art, and popular music. I have concentrated here on new music for a couple of reasons. First, these essays were originally written in response to specific conference invitations, all of which happened to be concerned with examining contemporary issues. And second, the political climate of the 1980s has been more hospitable to participation and experimentation by women artists than any previous moment in music history. For the

first time, there exists something like a critical mass of women composers and musicians. Moreover, the theoretical work of feminists in literary and art criticism has cleared a space where women can *choose* to write music that foregrounds their sexual identities without falling prey to essentialist traps and that departs self-consciously from the assumptions of standard musical procedures.

I believe it may be possible to demonstrate that various women composers in history (Hildegard von Bingen, Barbara Strozzi, Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn) likewise wrote in ways that made a difference within the music itself. Now that the music of these women is becoming available, we are able to begin examining their strategies for the first time. But the essays included in this volume concern only women artists who we can be relatively sure are engaged in the kinds of deconstructive enterprises I discuss.

The first of these, "Getting Down Off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandervelde's *Genesis II*," deals with the artistic development of Minnesota composer Janika Vandervelde who began to recognize certain masculinist traits in many of the techniques she had been taught or had absorbed from her lifelong exposure to classical music. Her response was to problematize these procedures in a piece that counterpointed them explicitly against new ways of organizing time. The result was the piece *Genesis II*, which is discussed at length in the essay.

"This Is Not a Story My People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson" takes up many of these same issues, but in the context of postmodern performance art. Drawing upon the feminist work on cinema and narrative of Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doane, and others, this essay focuses on the problem of the female body in performance, on electronic mediation, and on the compositional procedures of two songs: "O Superman" (*United States*) and "Langue d'amour" (*Mister Heartbreak*).

The final essay, "Living to Tell: Madonna's Resurrection of the Fleshly," moves into the realm of popular music. Yet it continues several of the threads already developed in the previous two pieces, including the deconstruction of inherited conventions and the possibility of new modes of organizing musical time. Like the piece on Laurie Anderson, it also deals with issues surrounding the female body, although — needless to say — this question is far more urgent in Madonna's case. Roland Barthes has written of the text as that "uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*."⁵⁴ And Madonna's cheeky modes of self-representation habitually greet the anxieties so often ascribed to women's bodies by "mooning"; them: she flaunts as critique her own unmistakably feminine ending. Thus,

the essay also discusses Madonna's music videos, especially the ways in which their visual scenarios interact with her music.

Despite their obvious differences, these four contemporary women musicians—Galas, Vandervelde, Anderson, and Madonna—are similar in that they have inherited the sometimes oppressive conventions examined in the first group of essays. Each is concerned with carving out a niche for herself within the highly resistant medium of music; each is at least intuitively aware of the premises of the tradition; and each strives to rework those premises such that she can tell new and different stories.

In short, they accomplish within the music itself the kinds of deconstructions I present throughout this book in analytical prose. They too are Material Girls who find themselves in Bluebeard's castle, and they too refuse to abide by the house rules. They have entered resolutely into the forbidden chamber with its dark, hidden codes and have transformed it into a carnival—a playground of signifiers—for their own pleasure. And just as they dare to write compositions with feminine endings, so I conclude this collection with their voices.

Chapter 2

Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi's Dramatic Music

One of the great accomplishments of seventeenth-century culture was the development of a vocabulary by means of which dramatic characters and actions could be delineated in music. The techniques for emotional and rhetorical inflection we now take for granted are not, in fact, natural or universal: they were deliberately formulated during this period for purposes of music theater. Monteverdi's descriptions of how he invented the semiotics of madness for *La finta pazzia Licori* or of war for the *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* reveal how very self-consciously he designed methods for "representing" affective states.¹

The achievements of the *stile rappresentativo* made possible most of the musical forms with which we still live today: not only the dramatic genres of opera, oratorio, and cantata, but also instrumental music, which is dependent on the tonality and semiotic codes born on the seventeenth-century stage. Indeed, we are so immersed in these and other cultural forms of the early modern era that only recently have their original social purposes been examined critically. Studies such as José Antonio Maravall's *Culture of the Baroque*, Jacques Attali's *Noise*, and Lorenzo Bianconi's *Music in the Seventeenth Century* have begun to lay bare the post-Renaissance politics of "representation" and to demonstrate how opera and other public spectacles of the seventeenth century served as sites for struggles over power. For if audiences can be made to believe that what is presented on stage is literally the re-presentation of reality itself, then questions of what gets represented, how, and by whom become vital political concerns to rulers and the ruled alike.²

To be sure, the ideological struggles Maravall, Attali, and Bianconi have in mind are those of the public sphere: those of the Counter-Reformation,