

ADORNO, HEIDEGGER AND THE MEANING OF MUSIC

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ABSTRACT T. W. Adorno's philosophy of music aims to show that music is a source of important insights into the nature of modern society. This position leads, though, to a series of methodological difficulties, some of which can be alleviated by using resources from Heidegger's hermeneutics. The essay takes the key notion of 'judgementless synthesis' from Adorno's unfinished book on Beethoven and connects it to Heidegger's account of pre-propositional understanding and to Kant's notion of schematism. This connection is shown to have consequences for how we conceive of both the meaning of music and meaning in more general terms, especially with regard to analytical philosophy. The essay argues that, despite its many important insights, Adorno's account of the meaning of music in modernity depends too much on his analogy between Hegel's claim to achieve the final philosophy and Beethoven's establishment of new forms of integration for musical material.

KEYWORDS Adorno • Heidegger • hermeneutics • language • musical meaning • politics • schematism • semantics • society

I

In an outline for a never-written work on the history of German music from 1908 to 1933, T. W. 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 Schönberg, because the suppression had already 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)' (Adorno, 1984b: 628). Adorno 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 apparently as derivative area of culture as that of music. (Adorno, 1984b: 628)

In many approaches to the philosophy of music or to musicology such statements are, fairly understandably, liable to be treated with more than a hint of scepticism. Is it seriously possible to legitimate an approach to music which thinks it is more likely, as Adorno suggests in a related context, that one will arrive at 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, say, by looking at the broad history of musical styles (Adorno, 1984b: 615) or, indeed, at the social and economic conditions of musical production and reproduction? On what grounds might one move from such analysis to discoveries about society, without failing in either musical terms or sociological terms? Now, I do not have any easy answers to these questions, but neither do I think that all Adorno’s aims should simply be renounced, despite the fact that some of them are patently unfulfillable. Are we seriously happy to think that the *Eroica* is, as Peter Kivy claims, a ‘beautiful noise, signifying nothing’ (Kivy, 1993: 19), in order to avoid making statements which, given that in one sense the *Eroica* does not strictly refer to anything, cannot claim to be about what the *Eroica* refers to, let alone about its ‘truth’? If the *Eroica* indeed means more than Kivy suggests – and even his suggestion that it means nothing depends on the emergence of the notions of aesthetic autonomy and of ‘absolute music’ in the 18th century – how are we to approach its meaning without our approach just being dictated by the assumptions we make before engaging with the music itself?

We are evidently confronted here with problems of a hermeneutic circle that affects any attempt to explore the meaning of a largely non-semantic form of articulation with semantic means. However, as we shall see, this circularity may not be quite as destructive as it first appears. It should already be very obvious that what is at issue leads to a whole series of revealing philosophical questions about the nature of ‘meaning’ – in the sense of that which human beings can understand – in relation to music. Before getting to these philosophical questions, let us, though, briefly take an extreme example of Adorno’s attempts to see the meaning of music in sociopolitical terms which makes the dangers of such approaches all too clear. In 1963, a Frankfurt student newspaper reprinted an unfortunate 1934 review by Adorno of works for male choir with texts by Baldur von Schirach.¹ The review at times uses the Nazi jargon of the day, but it does also try to give an analysis of the music, suggesting, with only slightly disguised critical intent, that the successful pieces ‘are not concerned with patriotic mood and

vague enthusiasm, but with the question of the possibility of new folk-music' (Adorno, 1984b: 331). In response to the republication of the review, Adorno, while freely admitting he had made a serious error of judgement, rightly asserts that the rest of his life's work contradicts this misguided attempt at a tactical accommodation with a régime which he at the time, like many others, thought had no chance of lasting. He then insists that 'Whoever has an overview of the continuity of my work could not compare me with Heidegger, whose philosophy is fascistic in its innermost cells' (1984b: 638). When asked in 1939 to speak about 'What is Music?', Adorno had already maintained that

If the question wanted to be understood as an ontological one and was directed at the 'being' of music as such, then I believe it would move at a level of abstraction which would offer the occasion for 'radical' questions in the dubious Heideggerian sense. (Adorno, 1984b: 614)

The radical questions about music in which Adorno is interested are, then, supposed to be wholly different from the kind of 'radical' questions asked by Heidegger. But are they really?

From the examples cited above it is patent that a lot must be going on under the surface for Adorno even to begin to contemplate such links between music and society. Despite his refusal to engage in an 'ontological' approach, Adorno has to entertain some at least heuristic notions concerning what it is about music that allows it to be interpreted as an indication of fundamental social issues. At the same time, some of Adorno's suspicions of 'ontological' accounts of music are plainly valid in relation to approaches to music which try to convert a phenomenon that can only be understood as a historical manifestation of human imagination – something which is therefore irredeemably 'intentional' – into something akin to a part of nature that would be accessible to scientific investigation. As Adorno argues, 'compositional material' is as different from what is described in a physicalist or psychological account of acoustic phenomena 'as language is from the store of its sounds' (Adorno, 1958: 35). Carl Dahlhaus makes the essential point:

Instead of beginning with the rules of the musical craft and – for the sake of their theoretical legitimation – looking for illusory causes of historically based norms in a fictive nature of music, theory of music would have to ask about the categories via which a collection of acoustic data could be constituted as music at all. (Dahlhaus, 1988: 98)

The real question, then, is the *status* of the categories via which something is apprehended as music.

Looking at music in terms of its meaning is already much less problematic in these terms: in order to regard something as music at all one must assume that there is something to be understood in ways that there is not for non-music. The ways in which we come to apprehend something 'as' something are, of course, as Heidegger shows, the bread and butter of the hermeneutic enterprise. Given the shifting historical boundaries of the musical

and the non-musical, musical understanding cannot be reduced to a series of methodological rules of the kind that might apply to the scientific classification of sounds, not least because a major factor in the development of music is *disagreement* over whether something is music or not. (Something analogous applies, at least in the modern period, to literature and other forms of art.) Despite Adorno's strictures about 'ontology', Heidegger explicitly linked his reflections on the issue of 'seeing as' to a vital aspect of the philosophical tradition to which Adorno also regards himself as being an heir and which Adorno uses to interpret the meaning of music. It is here that there will be some significant mileage in bringing the two approaches together.

II

Adorno's unfinished book on Beethoven contains remarks that make establishing this link to the tradition to which Heidegger's hermeneutics also belongs fairly easy. However, before looking at these remarks, we need first to consider other remarks that Adorno makes, both about his aims in the Beethoven book – whose subtitle, *Philosophy of Music*, suggests, in a manner which I shall investigate more fully at the end, that Beethoven is the paradigm of 'music' – and about philosophical problems involved in understanding music. In the introductory material to the book, Adorno asserts that 'one of the basic motives of the book' is 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). This is supposed to be explained by his more general comments about the 'affirmative' – and therefore 'ideological' – nature of music. This 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' (1993: 25). Music as whole is, because of its inherently consoling aspect, 'more completely under the spell of illusion (*Schein*)', which means that it contributes to existing injustice by reconciling listeners to reality as it already is. (By this time, after all, the reality in question does include what leads to Nazism.) However, in terms of what Adorno calls its 'immanent movement', music's 'lack of objectivity and unambiguous reference' make it '*freer* than other art' (1993: 26), because it is less bound to reproducing determinate aspects of existing reality and is therefore able to perform a critical role in keeping alive an awareness of how things could be transformed. As such, 'It may be that the strict and pure concept of art can only be derived from music', because great literature and painting necessarily involve material which cannot be 'dissolved into the autonomy of the form' (1993: 26).

Now this latter remark might appear to locate Adorno in Kivy's camp: the dissolving of the material of the Eroica into the 'autonomy of the form' would seem to be what renders it free of the convention-bound meanings of

a 'reified' reality, of the kind Adorno thinks invade 'significant (*bedeutend*)' (Adorno, 1993: 26) literature via the representational aspect of verbal language.² Far from making autonomy the basis of music's *lack* of meaning, Adorno's approach to the philosophy of music is, though, defined by the fact that it is precisely the great autonomous works which are supposed to communicate the important truths, especially, as we saw, about society and history. In order to be able to make such connections between music and society Adorno initially relies on the idea of a reconciliation between compositional freedom and technical necessity in the great works, and, as we shall see, on the assumption that this reconciliation relates to a key aspect of modern philosophy. This connection between music and society, though, entails some very questionable presuppositions.

The concept of 'technique' in art is, for example, related to, but vitally different from, what is involved in technology in the more usual sense. Adorno thinks that the subject of 'instrumental reason' contributes to the delusions characteristic of 'bourgeois society which has been driven towards totality and is thoroughly organised' (Adorno, 1958: 28). Instrumental reason, like the commodity form, imposes forms of identity onto nature, of the kind whose effects, it can justifiably be claimed, are now apparent in the ecological crisis. The artist's products, on the other hand, offer a model of what an emancipated employment of historically developed 'technical' resources in other spheres might achieve. Because it requires freedom from instrumental ends for it to be aesthetic at all, aesthetic production does not necessarily involve the kind of repression Adorno regards as definitive of the 'universal context of delusion' of which modern technology is a part.³

However, Adorno's account of the utopian aspect supposedly inherent both in serious modern art's refusal to ignore the need for innovation and in its resistance to being used for instrumental ends relies on an indefensible equation of two different senses of '*techné*'. Furthermore, what counts as 'advanced' has a different sense in relation to problem-solving technology from the sense it has in relation to the choice of possibilities in musical composition. These objections seem to me pretty damning and they might seem to invalidate Adorno's whole approach. However, a passage from *Philosophy of New Music* on the idea that 'the confrontation of the composer with the material is the confrontation with society' does offer some hints as to how Adorno's conception may involve more than just dubious analogies:

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. (Adorno, 1958: 36)

Unfortunately, despite involving some persuasive ideas, some of this position, which is based on Hegel's notion of 'objective spirit', is also questionable.

Adorno is too reliant on his version of a Hegelian–Marxist–Weberian idea of the totalized nature of 'modern society' that results from the commodity structure's reduction of intrinsic value to exchange value. In the present-day world of transnational capitalism such a view clearly should not just be dismissed, but it leaves too little room for crucial discriminations to be made between the functioning of musical material in, for example, societies with different histories and different 'sedimented spirit'. What can in one context be the emancipatory adoption of previously ignored compositional means may in another context be a clichéd abdication of the autonomy of the artist. This would, for example, explain why Adorno is so bad at doing justice to composers like Sibelius who, for all their faults, cannot be adequately understood in terms of the aspects of central European musical modernism that Adorno uses to criticize them. Adorno's conception also completely fails to deal with the idea, later developed by Gadamer, that what makes art 'true' is not something that can be located in one particular historical perspective, but results rather from a continuing interaction of different historical horizons. This is why Adorno has to claim that when Beethoven's historical constellation – the constellation in which new kinds of social freedom and integration seemed possible⁴ – no longer pertains, the music is 'lost' to us because what it meant is no longer possible. The fact is, though, that the survival of Beethoven's music need not be a timeless survival, but depends rather on the way in which his music continues to reveal *different* things to different musicians and audiences. There is too little in Adorno's perspective to enable one to understand why this is the case, so obsessed is he with the undeniable fact of reactionary appropriations of bourgeois culture in his own historical location.

The universalizing perspective which leads Adorno to the assertion that there is an 'advanced state of the musical material' requires precisely the final Hegelian overcoming of the subject/object split in the 'Concept' which is elsewhere often the justified target of his philosophical criticism. How are we supposed to *identify* this most 'advanced state' without already possessing a totalizing insight into the historical significance of music? Inferring from the fact that *in some contexts* certain kinds of conventional employment of musical material, like the diminished seventh chord, can indeed be said to become 'false' does not allow one to make the further claim that this falsehood reveals the total state of the 'technique' with which the composer must work. It merely establishes the need for a critical vigilance which takes seriously the social significance of aesthetic forms and practices. Too much of Adorno's position with regard to western music depends, as we shall see later, upon the viability of his interpretation of the link between Hegel's claim to achieve the final philosophy and Beethoven's establishment of new forms

of integration for musical material. The link is the source both of some significant insights and of Adorno's ultimately ethnocentric perspective.

Adorno's further, esoteric claim in the passage cited above – *viz.* that, precisely because it is most isolated from contamination by existing meanings in society, the 'advanced' work of art will, by freely making the same sort of demands on itself that technology forces upon those developing the means of production, articulate otherwise inaccessible truths – is never substantiated in this text; nor, for that matter, is it in *Aesthetic Theory*. The claim ultimately has to rely on a notion either of repression or of Sartrean bad faith on the part of members of modern societies who are supposedly reconciled to existing injustices: this is apparent in the remark that the technically advanced dissonances which 'horrify' the concert-going public in new music 'speak of their own state: only for this reason are they unbearable to them' (Adorno, 1958: 15). This judgement from above is simply not adequate to the hermeneutic complexity of the phenomenon in question. As Nicholas Cook (1992: 177–8) points out, the same dissonant music that elicits a negative response in the concert hall or on the radio can, for example, become acceptable to the same people if it is heard first as the accompaniment to a film. There is little doubt that a frequent link *can* be established in some contexts between a rejection of aesthetic modernism and political reaction, but this fact is not sufficient to establish the esoteric position that Adorno proposes.

However, despite all these problems, the idea of a tension between the 'consciousness of people' and the objectifications, be they musical, linguistic or visual, which can both constrain individuals and yet also enable them to articulate meaning, must be part of any serious attempt to understand the role of art in society. The sense that Schönberg exemplifies a crisis in modern music, which results from a disintegration of a shared 'language' of tonality, the seeds of which are sown in the deconstruction of forms in Romantic music from Schubert to Mahler, is undeniable, as is the fact that the development of this music is inextricably connected to the social and political crises of modern western history. Although his evidence and his interpretation of the significance of this disintegration may be flawed, Adorno's ways of trying to understand the crisis are still important. The question to be answered here is how the account of the relationship between 'material' that is pre-given in the social world and what the artist can spontaneously achieve with this material can be made to work as an approach to the understanding of music and society.

Adorno rightly argues that it is no good using examples of music to illustrate 'something already established' (Adorno, 1958: 30) about a society: that way the meaning of the music qua music would be irrelevant because the ascribed meaning would be merely a circular consequence of a prior interpretation of society. Instead, he maintains, the aim is 'social theory by dint of the explication of aesthetic right and wrong in the heart of the [musical] objects' (1958: 30). This is because 'All forms of music . . . are sedimented contents. In them survives what is otherwise forgotten and can no

longer speak in a direct manner' (1958: 44). Tempting as this might sound, it involves a further serious problem, namely a kind of 'aesthetic antinomy' of the kind Kant identified in his 'antinomy of taste', which demanded that the aesthetic object be both uniquely particular and yet universally significant. If the piece of music, which must be in some way unique if it is to be aesthetically significant (i.e. because it involves freedom and is not just the product of rules), is the only means of articulating what has been forgotten, any verbal attempt to say what this is must necessarily fail, but, of course, if only the music says it, we will never be able to recover it in a conceptual manner anyway. Adorno begins his remarks on 'Music and Concept' in the Beethoven book with a reflection on precisely this dilemma: 'That music can only say what is proper to music: that means that word and concept cannot express its content *immediately*, but only mediately, i.e. as philosophy' (Adorno, 1993: 31). But what does 'philosophy' mean here? It is at this point that the link to Heidegger's hermeneutics and to the Romantic philosophical tradition adumbrated above can be very revealing, in ways which also suggest how many existing philosophical conceptions of meaning, particularly within the analytical tradition, suffer from serious deficits.

III

How, then, does Adorno see the 'mediation' of music by philosophy? The Beethoven book, he claims, must 'decisively determine the relationship of music and conceptual logic' (Adorno, 1993: 31), and he embarks on an intriguing initial 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*. (Adorno, 1993: 32)

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno extends this last 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 could not say of any of them what it judges, none of them is a so-called proposition (*Aussage*)' (Adorno, 1973: 187).

As we saw above, Adorno claims that there is an important link between music and language, because no form of articulation can be seen either as

music or as language if all that is at issue are the phenomena in which it is instantiated. What makes music into music and language into language is therefore essentially connected, in a way that relates to what makes art into art. Crucially, whatever the conditions of music, language and art may be, they are prior to what we can subsequently analyse in 'apophantic' propositions:

the musician who understands his score, follows its most minute movements, and yet in a certain sense does not know what he is playing; 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. (Adorno, 1973: 189)

The 'logical' aspect of works of art is, Adorno maintains, most closely related to inference, by which he would seem to mean, for example, the way in which the resolution of dissonances in tonal music is like, to listeners used to the conventions of western music, the conclusion of an argument from premises. This claim becomes most readily comprehensible when Schumann, for example, does *not* resolve the dissonance at the end of the first song of *Dichterliebe*: we are left with the sense that an expected 'conclusion' is lacking, as it would be in a verbal inference. We cannot state what is lacking (i.e. it is not just the resolution of the dominant seventh chord – that would be to confuse the material with its contextual significance), because that would again obviate the point of this music's 'saying' it. This does not, of course, mean that what we say propositionally about the music is inherently 'false', but points rather to dimensions of meaning – which often have to do with the mood or feeling revealed by the specific piece of music – that are not reducible to how we talk about them by employing general terms.⁵

The point that really interests me here is that philosophical concern with what is not encompassed by apophantic truth, which Adorno sees as central to music, is also central to Heidegger's examination of the question of 'being'. One of Heidegger's major insights, which also brings him close to the later Wittgenstein, who connected much the same idea to music, is that what we understand when we understand is the world we inhabit, rather than just propositions about states of affairs, which are in fact only part of what we employ to bring that understanding about. Wittgenstein says, for example, that 'Understanding a sentence in language is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one thinks' (Wittgenstein, 1971: 227), and links poetry to music via the idea of there being 'something which only these words in these positions express' (1971: 227). Implicit in the view shared by Heidegger and Wittgenstein is the reason why, as Hilary Putnam suggests, analytical philosophers have been so signally unable to *state* in what the understanding of the meaning of 'Snow is white' consists, even though we understand what it means in most contexts.⁶ In Heidegger's terms, the 'Proposition is not the locus of truth, rather truth is the locus of the proposition' (Heidegger, 1976:

135) – by ‘truth’ he means here, as elsewhere, the fact of the world’s being disclosed as intelligible at all. As such, apophantic propositions about what is the case are ‘derivative’: without prior understanding of a world that concerns us there would be no way of understanding how words, as Heidegger acutely puts it, ‘accrue’ to meanings, or, for that matter, of understanding how children acquire language. As such, ‘meanings’ need not be conceived of as inherently verbal, which is precisely what opens the path to seeing music as having meaning. Heidegger himself, despite occasional hints in its direction – such as later references to the ‘singing’ of true *‘Dichtung’* – says nothing directly about the significance of music. However, a pupil, the musicologist Heinrich Bessler, did.

Bessler’s essential insight is contained in his wonderful dictum, in an essay of 1925, that ‘Music originally becomes accessible to us as a *manner/melody of human being (Weise menschlichen Daseins)*’ (Bessler, 1978: 45). The play on the sense of the word ‘*Weise*’ suggests that our ways of being in the world can be ‘melodic’: how else would melody ever come to seem significant to us in the first place, if it had no connection to our ways of being? Roger Scruton talks, in much the same vein, of music as ‘the universal idiom which, being “free from concepts”, can be understood by anyone who is open to the influence of the surrounding world’ (Scruton, 1997: 467). ‘Melody’ is, of course, also present in patterns of speech, of the kind that Children often pick up, precisely for their ‘musical’ aspect, without necessarily grasping their sense. The point is that we do not just live in a world of ‘representations’ and ‘propositional attitudes’, in which we function in terms of beliefs, doubts, etc., and of the relation of these attitudes to our actions, i.e. the world as too often seen in analytical philosophy. We actually live in a world whose meaningfulness lies not only in what we can articulate in propositions, but, for example, also in moods, memories and presentiments which may not reach the level of verbal articulation but which involve structures of coherence and sources of pleasure in making connections without which life becomes intolerable. These structures are evidently linked to non-verbal forms of articulation, and thus to the meanings music has for us.

In this perspective more of our linguistic activity than often thought is, therefore, as Charles Taylor has also argued, based on the need to articulate our being in the world (see Taylor (1985) Chapters 9 and 10) than on representing objects and states of affairs. Taylor claims, in line with Heidegger, that the ‘expressive’ dimension of language is actually prior to its ‘designative’ aspect, because the ‘expressive’ activity of using language to communicate cannot be convincingly explained as being generated just by the need to exchange information.⁷ Without already living in a ‘disclosed’ world that we first of all try to share with others by articulating ways of being in it, not least as a means of reassuring others of our social intentions, we cannot come to the point where the idea of exchanging information dominates the way in which language is conceptualized. ‘Nice day today’ cannot be understood as

telling someone something about the weather – as though saying it arose out of the need to communicate a piece of information that would otherwise be hidden to one’s interlocutor – and when it is said ironically on an awful day it is only the expressive *tone* of the utterance, or an accompanying gesture, rather than what the utterance supposedly ‘represents’, that allows us to understand it at all. Taylor argues that theoretical understanding of language in disclosive terms, as part of human being in the world, only becomes an explicit possibility with the beginning of modernity. The vital fact in the present context is that it is at the moment in 18th-century Europe when the notion of the divine origin of a language of names comes into question that the link between language and music becomes a central philosophical issue. This is evident in the rise of the idea of ‘absolute music’, in the elevation of music by many thinkers to being the highest rather than the lowest of the arts, and in the emergence of questions about what language really is, of the kind explored by Rousseau, Herder, Hamann, Humboldt, the early Romantics and Schleiermacher, all of whom connect language to music.⁸

The main question here is, therefore, how the borderline between language and music is to be understood in the light of these historical changes. The logical forms of ‘positing, identity, similarity, contradiction, whole, part’ which Adorno sees as constitutive of music as ‘judgementless synthesis’ are evident in a claim like Bessler’s that ‘musical rhythm’, itself dependent upon identity, similarity, etc., ‘would generally relate to the manner in which we “are there at all” and “move”, to a certain “temporal” basic character of our existence’ (Bessler, 1978: 67). Lest these claims still seem rather vague, we need to trace their philosophical pedigree somewhat more precisely.

IV

For Bessler, as for Heidegger, the forms of logic are dependent upon the prior nature of our ‘being in the world’, because the forms of differentiation which are the basis of logic are seen as dependent on temporal disclosure. What, then, is the ‘certain “temporal” basic character of our existence’, and why does it play the role it does in Heidegger? The question is obviously essential to understanding the meaning of music, given that Heidegger wants to argue that time is the ‘meaning of being’, and that music is the most immediately ‘temporal’ art. Heidegger relies for important parts of his account of ‘being’ on a rethinking of the ‘schematism chapter’ of Kant’s first Critique, characterizing the schema as ‘the making-sensuous of concepts’ (Heidegger, 1973: 93). The pure geometrical concept of a triangle and the image of a triangle we can see in the world are topically different, so we need a bridge between them. Kant sees the schema as a ‘rule of the synthesis of the imagination’, that can connect a pure geometrical notion in the understanding and an empirical one in ‘sensibility’. The schema, then, overcomes the divide between the ‘sensuous’ and the ‘intelligible’, the receptive

and the spontaneous aspects of the subject. J.G. Hamann, who thought the first language was music, already points out in 1784 that language, as sensuous sign and non-sensuous meaning, would seem to involve the same bridging of the two realms, and in 1800 Schelling sees the schema as the basis of the whole of language because it enables the establishment of conventions. The schema, which Schleiermacher later terms a 'shiftable image', also overcomes the disparity between an empirical concept and any example of the concept: the same concept of 'dog' has to apply to the Great Dane and the Chihuahua if we are to see them both as dogs. Although schematism is clearly germane to the ability to use both pure and empirical concepts, which is Kant's main contention in the first Critique, the faculty actually establishes forms of *any* kind that could be recognized. This recognition can take place even without concepts, as Kant will suggest in the *Critique of Judgement* by the notion of 'aesthetic ideas' that do not involve a determinate conceptual thought.

Most fundamentally – and this is what draws Heidegger to the notion – Kant's schema is the ground of identity in temporal difference that allows the object world to become intelligible at all. Kant terms schemata in this respect 'nothing but *determinations of time* a priori according to rules' (Kant, 1968: B 184, A 145). We need these determinations in order to be able to apprehend things in terms of the categories of, for example, causality, which relies on temporal succession; reality, which relies on presence at a specific time; necessity, which relies on presence at all times, etc. The fact is, of course, that these same schemata of time are part of what is essential for hearing music as music.

Kant famously grounds *both* logic and time in the 'synthetic unity of apperception' of the I, which binds together all the different moments of the presence of things to myself that would otherwise disintegrate into meaningless multiplicity. Heidegger suggests, though, that if 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). Heidegger's point is that without the prior temporal opening up of the world the activity of synthesis, in which identity is made from difference, could not occur at all. As such, the synthesizing spontaneity of the I, which Kant is forced implausibly to exclude from time altogether in order to prevent it being part of the world of causality, is secondary to the happening of time itself, in which the world is disclosed as an object of our concern:

It is not that an I think is first given as the purest a priori and then a time and this time as the mediating station for a coming-out to a world, but the being of the subject itself qua Dasein is being-in-the-world, and this being-in-the-world of Dasein is only possible because the basic structure of its being is time itself, in this case in the modus of presenting (*des Gegenwärtigens*). (Heidegger, 1976: 406)

Kant's schema can be seen as playing something like the role of Heidegger's 'as-structure' of understanding, which is inherent in being-in-the-world, is 'pre-predicative' and makes predication possible, though it does not necessitate it. Apprehending things 'as' what they are is a basic way we are in the world, and this way need not be essentially conceptual: 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' (Heidegger, 1976: 146). Although Heidegger shows no awareness here of the dual sense of '*Weise*' as 'manner' and 'melody', it is not very hard to make a connection between unconceptualized but meaningful ways of being, such as certain kinds of movement or moods, and Adorno's 'judgementless synthesis'. This, as we saw, involved 'identity, similarity, contradiction, whole, part', and music is the 'logic' that renders it intelligible. What is at issue is precisely the pre-predicative, non-subsumptive apprehension of intelligible ways of being in the world that Bertrand Russell might also be seen as pointing to in his idea of 'knowledge by acquaintance'. Scruton talks in this connection of 'a peculiar "reference without predication" that touches the heart but numbs the tongue' (Scruton, 1997: 132) in our hearing of music, and Wolfram Högrefe suggests, linking the idea to music, that 'In feelings . . . everything is already wordlessly full of meaning'. Högrefe sees this in terms of a 'pre-linguistic existential semantics' (Högrefe, 1996: 10) that is present in '*Stimmung*', 'mood' or 'attunement' to the world. Without the pre-propositional capacity to apprehend and establish identities there would be no sense in which repetition or rhythm (which Schelling termed the 'music in music') would come to be significant at all. Indeed, the very ability to arrive at conventions – be they linguistic, musical, or both, as in 'tone of voice' – that can sustain socially established meanings would become incomprehensible. The idea that music can have more immediately universal significance than natural languages would in this view relate to the sense that there is a level of being in the world which precedes any insertion into a specific 'symbolic order'.⁹

Adorno, of course, is suspicious of Kant's schematism, and even more so of Heidegger's revision of it. He sees schematism as echoing the reduction of difference to identity characteristic of the commodity structure and of the aesthetic conventions of the culture industry. His suspicion, though, results from a tendency to conflate different senses of identity. The identity involved in identifying something *as* something is not just the same as that involved in identifying things *with* each other. The former can involve identifying something as unique and irreplaceable, when, for example, we identify thematic material in a Mahler sonata recapitulation – I am thinking particularly of the Sixth Symphony's first movement – as related to previous material, even though the context, the significance and the manner of appearance of the material are very different. The latter can, most obviously in the commodity structure but also in certain kinds of musical analysis, have

potentially disturbing implications, when intrinsic value or significance is obscured in the name of exchange value or of mere classification of musical material without proper regard for its value within what Adorno terms its constellation.¹⁰ Taking this proviso into account, certain aspects of Adorno's view of music can be illuminated by a key consequence of what we have looked at in terms of schematism. This will eventually take us back to the questions with which we began.

V

One revealing way of considering what is at issue in schematism and its relationship to music is apparent in the question of metaphor. It might be argued that metaphor, which evidently relies on schematism, is in fact a form of 'judgementless synthesis': if I say 'You are a pig!' I do not tend to mean it as a truth-determinate literal judgement (though I suppose I could if you had the requisite real porcine attributes). Donald Davidson usefully claims that 'the endless character of what we call the paraphrase of a metaphor springs from the fact that it attempts to spell out what the metaphor makes us notice, and to this there is no clear end. I would say the same for any use of language' (Davidson, 1984: 263). If one does not assume that one can only notice states of affairs that can be represented in propositions it seems plausible to claim that music can make one notice aspects of moods, feelings, temporality, landscape, or, even, in some cases, states of affairs – for instance via the effects of film music on what one understands in a film – that may not be adequately expressed in propositions. Indeed, music may first enable certain ways of being to become accessible at all: the successes of music therapy indicate just how important this might be. Music can, therefore, be understood as being 'world-disclosive', in Heidegger's sense that it is a vital part of what renders the world intelligible. Confirmation of the world-disclosive nature of music is evident in the need we feel to have recourse to metaphor in order to try – and fail – to communicate what music actually says. Despite the failure it is clear that the best metaphors employed to talk about music do make us understand the music better, and that, conversely, great music can reveal aspects of verbal art which may otherwise remain concealed.

There is no space to do justice to this here, but the interplay between music and language just indicated may also be used to question the claim in analytical philosophy that a firm line can be drawn between metaphor and literal meaning, a line which means that it is invalid to talk of music having meaning in a strict sense.¹¹ The usual strategy here, which in some ways weakens Scruton's otherwise very perceptive account of musical meaning, is to maintain that the literal meaning of a word is established by identifying its truth-conditions or the rules for its correct use. What, though, is the literal meaning of the word 'music'? As I have shown elsewhere (Bowie, 1997b),

any attempt to specify definitive truth-conditions for a word or utterance leads to a regress, because the statements that give the conditions or rules must themselves then be analysed in terms of statements of their conditions or rules, and so on ad infinitum, which renders meaning incomprehensible. If one makes the hermeneutic assumption that what we understand is the living, changing historical world, and not just statements that are supposed to represent that world, the distinction between metaphor and literal meaning ceases to be absolute, and we also become able to understand how music can affect our understanding even of verbal language. As Rom Harré suggests in relation to Susanne Langer's idea that words have 'fixed connotations': 'the contextuality of the significance of the musical sign is not enough sharply to distinguish language from music' (Krausz, 1993: 209), because, in a Wittgensteinian or hermeneutic perspective, context, which precludes fixed connotation, is vital to the functioning of both words and music. If context is inseparable from meaning, music can even be said to 'refer' when it signals a conventionally accepted significance or practice, though this might be likely, as Adorno suggests, to make music liable to function as ideology.¹² Furthermore, the resistance to paraphrase or literalization of what we hold to be a living metaphor, in poetry, for example, is importantly related to our inability to specify a semantics of music. It is here that we can rejoin Adorno once again.

VI

In the essay 'On the Present Relationship between Philosophy and Music' of 1953, Adorno maintains, in a manner not too far from 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 notation in its history, a language sedimented from gestures' (Adorno, 1984a: 154). This can be elucidated by Scruton's remark that 'the formal organisation of music can be understood only by the person who relates it, through a metaphorical perception, to the world of life and gesture' (Scruton, 1997: 341–2). Gestures are inherently contextual and are often established by convention, which is evident in the use of music as a signifying practice for certain kinds of social function; at the same time, gestures can also be a form of communication which allows a unique directness and a 'rightness' which in some contexts words may not: one thinks again of the successes of music therapy.¹³ Adorno then claims that the attempt to establish the 'meaning' (*Sinn*) of music itself is . . . a deception' that results from music's similarity to language (Adorno, 1984a: 154), a similarity which he regards, for reasons to be considered in a moment, as increasing during the history of western music.

Following bad ideas adopted from the early Walter Benjamin (can we really assert that there ever was a time when signifier and signified were not arbitrarily linked?), Adorno then asserts:

Qua language music moves towards the pure name, the absolute unity of thing and sign, which is lost in its immediacy to all human knowledge. In utopian and at the same time hopeless exertions to achieve the name lies the relationship of music and philosophy, to which for this reason music stands incomparably more close than every other art. (Adorno, 1984a: 154)

This is questionable for a variety of reasons,¹⁴ but the defensible part of the argument is apparent in Adorno's insistence on the historicity of this pursuit of an ideal, which focuses on the way in which the material of music can become part of a particular society's ways of understanding its ideals. When music becomes subordinated to exchange value, rather than resisting subsumption into established conventions, it can, in this perspective, rightly be criticized for merely conforming to some ideological aspect of already existing reality, rather than trying to transcend it. Precisely because what music says 'offers much greater resistance to translation into other media than other art' (Adorno, 1984a: 157) it is, he asserts, able to carry a meaning that has claims to its own truth which other forms of articulation may lack by being too closely bound to already established forms of understanding. In the Mahler book he maintains that 'for the person who understands the language of music what music means becomes obscured: mere meaning would just be an image of that subjectivity [i.e. that of instrumental reason] whose claim to omnipotence is destroyed by music' (Adorno, 1976: 39). Although this seems at one level merely to repeat the questionable idea that predicative language – which has 'meaning' – is inherently a form of repressive identification, the very fact that music is understood to be significant at all is an indication of a complex history of subjectivity which is linked to the Romantic idea that what we can determinately say is not enough to articulate a proper understanding of our being. One obvious location of this sense of inadequacy lies in the experience of time. Adorno uses the example of differing forms of temporality in Palestrina, a fugue of the Well-Tempered Clavier, the first movement of [Beethoven's] Seventh,¹⁵ a prelude of Debussy, and 20 bars of Webern (Adorno, 1984a: 158) to suggest how the need for musical articulation may be generated. Clearly there are ways in which the differences in the articulation of temporality in these examples can illuminate approaches to the meaning of time in ways words cannot: from a theological sense of timeless order, to the dynamic totality of a Beethoven sonata movement, which Adorno links to Hegel's philosophy, and thence to the Weberian dynamic of rationalization in the modern world.

It is here, though, that the decisive questionable assumption in Adorno's linking of philosophy to music is located. In the Beethoven book Adorno asserts that 'In a similar sense to the one in which there is only Hegel's philosophy, there is only Beethoven in the history of Western music' (Adorno, 1993: 31), and he insists that this link should not be just an analogy, but rather the 'thing itself, *die Sache selbst*' (1993: 31). This kind of thinking about music and philosophy actually belongs to the tradition of early Romantic philosophy

which first tried to come to non-theological terms with 'the unsayable', and is by no means inherently implausible: the problem lies in the consequences Adorno draws from it. Friedrich Schlegel had already asked in 1800, writing about pure instrumental music that actually sounds as though it could have been Beethoven's: '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, vol. 2: 155). Adorno's idea is that in Hegel and Beethoven both philosophy and music are 'self-grounding' because the organization of their elements does not follow from anything external to those elements, so that 'the sonata is the [philosophical] system as music' (Adorno, 1993: 231). The first arguably fully autonomous music and the most complete attempt at a self-grounding system of philosophy do, of course, emerge at the same time in much the same cultural location – and, incidentally, do not in fact communicate with each other.

In the same way as Hegel begins his *Logic* with the indeterminate particular concept of 'being', Adorno argues, Beethoven often uses thematic material which has no value in itself for his most successful sonata movements. The contingent particular beginning in both only transcends its nullity by being taken up into contexts which make it determinate as part of a whole, though at the expense of its having to appear to contradict the other particulars during the process, so that 'Only the whole proves its identity, as particulars they are as opposed as the individual to the society that is opposed to it' (Adorno, 1993: 35). In this sense the musical 'subjects', thematic material whose 'history' occurs in the music, are – metaphorically – the same as the moments of '*Geist*' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, whose implicit 'immediate' truth at the beginning is made explicit at the end of the process of meditation. Beethoven's music, though, is also supposed to have, qua music, a critical aspect that is lacking in Hegel's philosophy. This is because, unlike the positive conclusion of Hegel's system, which establishes the true essence of all the preceding negatively related elements, the music's synthesis does not apophantically judge 'that's how it is' (cf. Adorno, 1993: 287). However, this advantage of music allows only a temporary respite from Adorno's rigour, and he even seems subsequently to revoke this concession: in Beethoven's employment of the sonata reprise – he is referring to the Ninth Symphony's first movement – which actually seems to say 'that's how it is', the music is 'in the same sense aesthetically questionable as the thesis of identity in Hegel' (1993: 39). The sonata reprise, in which the formally decisive end of the movement is merely a conventionally determined repetition of the material of the beginning, mirrors the fact in Hegel that the philosophical system can only claim to be complete by repressing the 'non-identical', the resistance of the real to definitive subsumption under concepts, by merely repeating at the end what was already there at the beginning.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Adorno often seems to think that this repression is essentially the same repression as that occasioned by the commodity structure and instrumental reason.

Now, this part of what is in many ways a thoroughly illuminating conception of relationships between key structures of intelligibility in modernity is basically objective spirit gone mad, and is about as 'ontological' as you can get: art, philosophy, the commodity system, science, all become part of the same process, a position that largely derives from Weber's rationalization thesis, and which bears many similarities to the later Heidegger's accounts of western metaphysics' 'subjectification of being'. Once this position is adopted it necessarily provides the framework for the rest of Adorno's assessment of the meaning of modern music, with the attendant problems that we have already considered. More specifically, it makes necessary the idea that 'The idealist "system" in Beethoven is tonality in the specific function it gains in him'; in Beethoven tonality is 'abstract identity' (Adorno, 1993: 40) and, after a more complex argument, it is 'identity as expression. The result: That's how it is' (1993: 41). The result of tonality is, therefore, a kind of apophantic judgement, so that music has effectively become the language of a merely self-confirming reality.

These ideas actually become rather more enlightening when Adorno suggests that the 'key to the late Beethoven probably lies in the fact that the idea of the totality as something which is already achieved in this music became unbearable to his critical genius' (Adorno, 1993: 36), because it relied too much on a pre-established convention. This suggestion could be used to bring the late Beethoven into interesting contact with the Romantic philosophy of Schlegel and Novalis, which, while sharing the same sense of a new dynamic in modern forms of articulation, refused to accept the kind of Idealist closure subsequently sought by Hegel. Novalis' assertion in 1796 that the 'Absolute which is given to us can only be known negatively, by our acting and finding that no action can reach what we are seeking' (Novalis, 1978: 181) seems apt, even to music, like the Eroica and Ninth Symphony first movements, which may appear triumphantly to proclaim the Absolute by the reconciliation of beginning and end, but are, precisely, in one sense, 'only music'.

Rather than realizing, as he sometimes does elsewhere, that there is more than one way to oppose ideological symbolic forms of reconciliation, at the same time as rejecting as ideological the positive idea of totality he sees in Hegel and Beethoven, Adorno accepts the idea of a negative totality that relies on a sort of inverted history of *Geist*, as the increasingly disastrous domination of merely subjective, instrumental reason. Only when music opposes this domination by refusing any kind of reconciliation can it be 'true' by being an adequate response to history. To the extent to which this conception from *Philosophy of New Music* just repeats the ideas of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* it should be abandoned. Is there, though, another way in which this conception might yet yield some usable results? The fact is that Adorno's position, with all its flaws, does still point to something that is a serious issue in modern music: why otherwise are musicians in modernity

rightly criticized for trying to 'turn the clock back' by merely repeating conventions from the past and failing to engage with contemporary society by new use of musical material? The answer, I believe, lies in the question of music's relationship to language, which is where the issue of the political meaning of music must be confronted.

The 'linguistic character' of music has two sides for Adorno, which in certain respects relate to the dialectic between the metaphorical and the literal. On the one hand, the natural material, like the material of the linguistic signifier, is, as suggested by the Hegel–Beethoven link, increasingly incorporated into 'a more or less fixed system' – 'convention' – which is both independent of the individual subject and at its disposal as a means of trying to express itself. On the other hand, 'the inheritance of the pre-rational, magical, mimetic' survives in music, in so far as it is related to language as 'expression'. The mimetic aspect is, though, increasingly 'subjectively mediated and reflected', as an 'imitation of what happens in the inside of people' (Adorno, 1984a: 161). This mediation extends the range of convention in modern western music into the articulation of the most individual aspects of the subject, thereby extending the range of music as language and eventually leading to a crisis of expression. Although it involves a serious problem, this seems to me the dialectic which might form the defensible core of Adorno's conception of musical meaning.

The following passage makes great sense, for example, of why a crisis developed in the European tradition of modern music, as a result of a shift away from the relationship between convention and expression that was epitomized 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. (Adorno, 1984a: 161).

Without convention there can be no way in which music qua expression can be meaningful as an aspect of social integration: expression without convention becomes merely radically individual in a way which ceases to have any social significance beyond the refusal to accept anything dictated by convention. As soon as expression ceases to be this, however, it begins to become convention, as it *must* if it is to be significant at all: pure expressivity, like pure uniqueness, is properly inconceivable without its counterpart. This dialectic must be interpreted via specific historically located music, otherwise we end up back with Adorno's worst totalizations, and fail to see how the moving relationships between these two notional poles have differing significance at

different times in different places. Free jazz can, for example, move from being a vital attack on limiting harmonic and other conventions to being an empty repetition of what becomes a conventional refusal to employ tonality and song structure.

The problem in Adorno's version of this idea lies in his tendency simply to identify apophantic language with convention, and then to attach the identification to the Hegelian–Weberian story about rationalization as the repression of the 'non-identical'. This leads to a tension in his idea of art's link to truth which highlights a series of difficulties inherent in the approach with which we began. These difficulties are not just particular to Adorno and they can only be briefly metaphorically illustrated, but not analysed, by a final example. If one interprets the conclusion of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony in terms of its historical constellation, as the apotheosis of 'tonality', it can be understood as a last attempt to restore unity to musical material whose growing divergence and disintegration will soon lead to 'new music'. The resources Bruckner has to employ to achieve this unity are riddled with contradictions, so that past and future jar even as their confrontation gives rise to something unique. In this way the dangers of a theologically inspired ideological overcoming of real contradictions in modernity can be heard in the power of music which often simply forces together material of divergent kinds. Bruckner's overwhelming coda does not occur at a point of logical musical culmination, and the final major key descending phrase combines affirmative culmination with a desperate sense of relief: this would, for example, be one way of understanding why Furtwängler played it so fast.

In terms of musical production the piece arguably does have a historically specific ideological sense, which thereby contributes to the problematic nature of subsequent tonal apotheoses. However, in terms of its reception, which Adorno too often subordinates to the idea of the immanent logic of the work, the meaning of the work is dependent on complex interactions between listeners, performers, institutions and history which, as long as the work is 'alive', demand a more open-ended approach to musical meaning. This would allow more space for individual engagement with the work as, for example, an articulation of a kind of temporalized, secular transcendence that little else in the modern world can provide, and which may at present only be accessible via 'judgementless synthesis'. Such an approach, which is sometimes evident in aspects of Adorno's Mahler book and in other work on specific composers, would require a more consistent engagement with ideas from a hermeneutic tradition which Adorno, for understandable reasons, was in some ways unable to understand.

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Notes

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1. The same review has been reprinted since, only, as far as I know, by papers on the left, such as the *Tageszeitung*.
2. The point with regard to literary and other non-musical forms is that without the friction of the aspects of reality that they ultimately wish to oppose, the works would merely contribute to existing deceptions. The novels of Flaubert most obviously suggest what is meant: they are to a large extent constructed of the debased everyday language of Flaubert's time, which they try to transform by the constellations in which it is placed.
3. I shall not attempt to deal here with the proximity of this idea to the later Heidegger's view of modern technology.
4. The idea of this constellation is, as we shall see, the main source of the connection of Beethoven to the philosophy of German Idealism.
5. We escape the generality inherent in a finite vocabulary by recombining words in new ways in poetry: such recombination often relies on the 'musical', non-semantic possibilities of language, such as rhythmic repetition or repetition of sounds. I shall return to this idea in relation to metaphor below.
6. Would, by the way, anyone but a philosopher talking about the tradition of analytical semantics ever actually say 'Snow is white'?
7. Given the worries about the notion of 'expression' (just what is being pushed out of what?) I think it is perhaps better to employ the term 'disclosive', for reasons that will become apparent in the rest of the argument.
8. Downing A. Thomas traces the important earlier stages of this shift in the period of the French Enlightenment in Thomas (1995). See also Bowie (1993a).
9. Whether one can really talk of a 'symbolic order' in any strict sense seems doubtful to me: see Bowie (1997a: ch. 5).
10. On the issue of identity and Adorno see Thyen (1989) and Bowie (1997a: ch. 9).
11. Davidson, for example, insists in his analytical vein that the only *meaning* a metaphor has is its literal meaning.
12. This does not, by the way, mean that we do not rely on contextual heuristic

distinctions between ways in which articulations are intended, it just means that we do not possess metaphysical certainty about what is literal and what is metaphorical of the kind promised, but hardly delivered, by formal semantics.

13. Adorno suggests in the Mahler book that the externality of music, as an objectification of subjectivity: 'It is rather the case that an orchestra plays in musical consciousness than that that consciousness projects itself into an orchestra' (Adorno, 1976: 39), may be an aid in the defence against paranoia generated by pathological narcissism.
14. For a critique of the idea of the 'name' in Benjamin, see Bowie (1997a: ch. 8).
15. Given that Beethoven 'is' music, Adorno does not feel the need to specify which 'Seventh'.
16. This was already Schelling's objection to Hegel: see Bowie (1993b: ch. 6) and Schelling (1994).

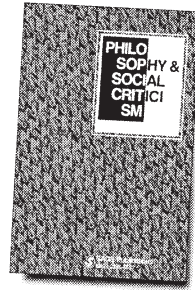
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