1 Defining Subjectivity

'Defining Subjectivity'. The title invites hubris. How does one attempt to define such an all-pervasive yet hopelessly nebulous notion? Frustratingly polysemous in its application, subjectivity is one of the most popular and yet at the same time obscurest terms in the modern human sciences. Not without justification does one of the most valuable previous musicological accounts of the topic disclaim any direct approach to this question, insofar as subjectivity, in the author's view, escapes definition by its very nature.[1]

The difficulty arises in part as subjectivity appears not to be a single thing. Neither is it, at least by some accounts, reducible to a group of things. Slightly more securely, subjectivity might be argued to be a relation between things. But it is one where its apparent basis – the subject or self – is itself hotly disputed, even denied by some commentators. And then, even after coming to some provisional answer to all these concerns, how do we begin to relate this concept to music, which similarly appears to elude all verbal confinement?

Faced with this situation, one might be forgiven for dismissing the whole topic as yet another musicological example of conceptual diffuseness, humanistic hermeneutics at its idlest and most fuzzy. Yet for all these evident difficulties, still we encounter the term, perhaps even use it, rely on it implicitly or explicitly to underpin various assertions made about music and its effect on us. We may not be exactly sure what subjectivity is – at least when summoned to define it – but much of the reception of Western classical music in the last few centuries seems premised upon it. If only for heuristic purposes, some characterisation – however provisional – is necessary.

One time-honoured way of starting out might be to look to common understandings of the notion, what it has been taken to mean by earlier authors, how it has been used both generally and in a more specialised musical context, in order to refine a better working definition. And already

[1] Julian Johnson, 'The Subjects of Music: a Theoretical and Analytical Enquiry into the Construction of Subjectivity in the Musical Structuring of Time' (DPhil diss., University of Sussex, 1994), p. 25.

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even the simplest of starting points, the entry for the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reveals quite a diverse range of definitions.[2] Most generally, (1) subjectivity may refer to 'a conscious being' – animate life, consciousness. Thus 'a subjectivity' can function as a mildly more pretentious term in place of 'living being' (human or possibly animal), one possessing consciousness. (An earlier age might have spoken of 'soul'.) Taken further down these lines, the term shades into something akin to *self*-consciousness ('consciousness of one's perceived states'), crucially introducing an awareness of self to this animating consciousness.

More familiar is quite another meaning: (2) subjectivity as a uniquely personal and often idiosyncratic quality, 'the quality or condition of viewing things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind or individuality; the condition of being dominated by or absorbed in one's personal feelings, thoughts, concerns, etc.' Significantly for the concerns of the present study, this may be applied more exclusively to that type of 'art which depends on the expression of the personality or individuality of the artist'. As we saw, Schumann is often considered 'subjective' in this sense, in that listeners seem to hear him 'in' his music, to a greater degree than many other composers. But as we shall presently see, it need not be in this sense that musical subjectivity is often constituted. Two other definitions point to subjectivity as akin to subjectivism ('the philosophical theory according to which all our knowledge is merely subjective and relative, and which denies the possibility of objective knowledge') and a form of philosophical idealism (4: 'the character of existing in the mind only').

This is a good enough starting point, but there are several aspects which might be brought out more clearly. What is latent but underdeveloped in the above account, for instance, is the notion of subjectivity as a form of first-person experience, one irreducible to any other external or objective viewpoint (that fabled 'view from nowhere' in Thomas Nagel's formulation).[3] This aspect is brought into greater relief by Robert C. Solomon's entry for 'subjectivity' in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. For Solomon, subjectivity is something 'pertaining to the subject and his or her particular perspective, feelings, beliefs, desires'. Especially important is the idea of perspectivalism, the realm of experience

[2] 'Subjectivity', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2009).

[3] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). As Nagel argues in a celebrated earlier paper, 'every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view'. With regard to such experience, 'the idea of moving from [subjective] appearance to [objective] reality seems to make no sense' ('What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), 437, 444).

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'typically defined with reference to the first-person standpoint'. Often defined in opposition to objectivity (something only implicit in the third definition above), subjectivity may also pick up the pejorative connotation that it is based on unjustified personal prejudices and a limited standpoint (i.e. the contrary of universal; a negative inflection of the second OED definition).[4]

Also left unstated is the nature of the relationship between subjectivity and other seemingly related concepts, most obviously the subject, but potentially extending further to such disputed notions as the self, ego, transcendental 'I', and so on. More properly one might propose that subjectivity relates to the subject as an activity does to an actor; in some accounts, the activity might indeed constitute the subject. Thus defined, subjectivity may refer to a range of 'self-reflective activity', with the crucial emphasis on the subject's process of mediation between itself and the external world or 'other'.[5] But in some accounts (especially German Idealist philosophers such as Schelling and Hegel), the actual self is just such an activity, not an object, and thus becomes almost indistinguishable from subjectivity. At the broadest level, then, it appears that subjectivity may often be used – sometimes imprecisely – as an umbrella term for matters 'concerning the subject' and is thus general enough to include such notions as subject, self, persona, individual, agency, and self-consciousness.[6]

I should like to set out openly here that no single unitary definition of subjectivity is being proposed within this book. What we might outline from the foregoing discussion, however, is a range of possible uses – some slightly contradictory – that might be of use for considering music. These include subjectivity as referring to a conscious, living being; self-consciousness or similar reflexive awareness of self; a unique first-person

[4] Robert C. Solomon, 'Subjectivity', *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 857.

[5] Kim Atkins (ed.), *Self and Subjectivity* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2005), p. 1.

[6] As Atkins notes, the expression 'the self. . . is more appropriately understood as a colloquial umbrella term that encompasses a range of concepts that relate to self-reflective activity' (which she has earlier identified with subjectivity), such as 'consciousness', 'ego', 'soul', 'subject', 'person', or 'moral agent' (*ibid*., p. 1). Jerrold Seigel likewise argues that 'however clearly it may be possible to distinguish them', terms like 'self, subject, identity, person . . . are permeable and sometimes merge into each other'. They 'constitute a vocabulary of selfhood, a linguistic register from which we single out one or another depending on the context in which we employ the idea of the self, or the particular purpose we ask it to serve' (*The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 16). Despite my desire to define the topic more precisely, in this book I still follow, to a certain extent, Seigel's accommodating guidelines.

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standpoint (based more upon immediate feeling and sense of self); the means of the subject's mediation to external world or self-articulation, and a range of subjective concepts – the self, subject, and so on – with a tendency to emphasise the active, temporal dimensions of existence.

Defining Musical Subjectivity

Unsurprisingly given this leeway, subjectivity may be, and has been, applied to music in many diverse ways. One might, for instance, indicate a personal and idiosyncratic quality to the composer's style, or to the performer's rendering, or to our own flights of hermeneutic fancy as listeners (sometimes most apparent in a negative sense when we encounter an interpretation that jars with our own [OED's definition 2]).[7] Or we might be referring to the amorphous nature of music's existence (the sense that the musical work is largely a mental or intentional construct, lacking tangible objecthood [OED definition (4)]). But to offer an initial clarification of the general sense I am interested in here, *by musical subjectivity, I refer most particularly to a way of understanding music as being in some way like a (human) subject, whether as a virtual living being, an extension of our own consciousness, or something with which we closely identify*. While the music may not really *be* a subject, it is necessary for it to be heard 'as if', or as possessing unmistakable subjective qualities, not simply as our own projection (though ultimately, of course, it is just this).[8] In a further, less demanding sense, though, the subjectivity of music may also be understood as arising from the fact that as an artwork – as a creation of a human subject – it is one of the modes of articulation of such a subject, and as such constitutes 'subjectivity'. (This is a more immediately defensible position, yet in many ways open to much vaguer use insofar as virtually all music is thereby subjective, to the same degree.)

Musical subjectivity in this sense, or something like it, has been around for a long time; the close connexion between the soul (the classical 'proto-subject' as it were) and music was often noted in ancient times, while from

[7] See especially Lawrence Kramer, 'Subjectivity', *Interpreting Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), ch. 3, pp. 46–62.

[8] This formulation is an example of the literary-rhetorical concept of 'prosopopœia' ('a rhetorical figure by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or with personal characteristics' [OED]). Most recently Robert Hatten has proposed the term 'virtual' to describe the quality of the agency or subjectivity heard in music; see *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), pp. 1–2.

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the nineteenth century on barely a Romantic thinker misses the chance to equate music with the flow of subjective consciousness. In the mid-twentieth century, the writings of a figure such as Theodor Adorno provide ample illustration for the association between the cultural work done by music and the notion of subjectivity. For modern musicological purposes, however, recent English-language discussion of subjectivity is significantly indebted to a tradition initiated by Edward T. Cone's 1974 study *The Composer's Voice*, which introduces the idea of the musical *persona* (with an accompanying array of assorted agents and protagonists). Cone proposes early on that 'the expressive power of every art depends on the communication of a certain kind of experience, and that each art in its own way projects the illusion of the existence of a personal subject through whose consciousness that experience is made known to the rest of us'.[9] This musical persona is very much like the fictional subject of a poem, the lyric 'I', or the 'I' that we encounter in a first-person novel; significantly, Cone's way into the discussion is through song, moving from the persona (or multiple personae) of the text to the virtual personae of the musical setting, and thence to consideration of instrumental music. For Cone,

> any instrumental composition, like the instrumental component of a song, can be interpreted as the symbolic utterance of a virtual persona. This utterance may be a symbolic play, in which a number of virtual agents assume leading roles. It may be a symbolic monologue in which a single agent addresses an audience. It may be a symbolic soliloquy, a private utterance that an audience overhears. Very likely it is a complex structure involving all these modes . . . . But in every case there is a musical persona that is the experiencing subject of the entire composition, in whose thought the play, or narrative, or reverie, takes place – whose inner life the music communicates by means of symbolic gesture.[10]

As is apparent in the preceding formulation, Cone desires ultimately to reduce a plurality of personae or lesser 'agents' to one overriding synthetic persona: 'in the last analysis all roles are aspects of one controlling persona, which is in turn the projection of one creative human consciousness – that of the composer'.[11] It is repeatedly qualified, however, that this 'composer's

[9] Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 3.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 94.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 114. This feature is particularly emphasised by Cone in later revisions of his theory applied to the multiple personae of songs: see 'Poet's Love or Composer's Love?', in Steven Paul Scher (ed.), *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 177–92. Cone's views on this point have been critically engaged with in several articles by Fred Everett Maus, Berthold Hoeckner (see especially 'Poet's Love and Composer's

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voice' is not actually identifiable with the real composer of the music; rather, it is an idealised projection (in a footnote early on in his account, Cone points to literary critic Wayne Booth's notion of the 'implied author' of a literary work).[12] The 'Schubert' that we hear in *Winterreise* or the C major Quintet does not really give us access to the voice or consciousness of the Franz Schubert who actually wrote these compositions and died in 1828.[13] Finally, towards the end of his book, Cone also raises another characteristic of one of the most curious aspects of what I call subjectivity: the aspect of personal identification with the music, even the overlapping of our own subjectivity with the composer's fictional one.

> When we listen to music . . . we must follow it as if it were our own thought. We are bound to it – to its tempo, to its progression, to its dynamics. We can recall the past or foresee the future only as they are reflected in our awareness of each moment of the perpetually flowing present. And if that awareness is sufficiently acute, and our attention sufficiently constant, we can succeed in feeling that we have *become* the music, or that the music has become ourselves.[14]
>
> To listen to music is to yield our inner voice to the composer's domination. Or better: it is to make the composer's voice our own.[15]

Though the word 'subject' appears on several occasions, Cone does not actually use the term 'subjectivity' in his book. Yet the theoretical concerns of his account clearly point to the same thing: a musical subject, persona, agent, or voice, given anthropomorphic qualities and heard as expressing human experiences and emotions. His account has provided a foundation for future discussion of voice, agency, and narrativity, especially in song and opera.[16] Moreover, the concerns of

Love', *Music Theory Online*, 7/5 (October 2001)), and most recently Seth Monahan's 'Action and Agency Revisited', *Journal of Music Theory*, 57 (2013), 321–71.

[12] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), esp. pp. 70–3, cited by Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, p. 2. Cf. *ibid*., p. 85: 'the persona's experiences are not the composer's experiences but an imaginative transformation of them; the reactions, emotions, and states of mind suggested by the music are those of the persona, not the composer'.

[13] Carl Dahlhaus has similarly distinguished between the biographical subject Beethoven (who composed, ate, drank, grew deaf, and squabbled with his sister-in-law) and the aesthetic subject 'Beethoven', whom successive generations have heard and empathised with in his music, and to this day may be heard alive and in rude health (*Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music*, trans. Mary Whittall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 31).

[14] Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, p. 156. [15] *Ibid*., p. 157.

[16] See, for instance, Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), and *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); the work of Anthony Newcomb, Fred Everett Maus, and Berthold

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Cone's work have become widespread in musicology of the last few decades.

Few of the numerous scholarly writings that draw upon ideas of subjectivity, persona and agency stop to interrogate what these terms mean, however, or how they might be supported.[17] The reason is due less to scholarly indolence than to the fact that many of us feel we instinctively know what these words mean, or at least how we are using them, and believe they serve an important and indispensable purpose, but find that attempting a better definition gets us caught in a conceptual thicket for no good purpose.[18] A handful of significant exceptions foreground the notion of subjectivity and provide clues to what it might mean. Of these, the most detailed subsequent study that explicitly addresses the idea of how subjectivity is constructed in music (as opposed to the cultural work done by musical subjectivity, the primary focus of several other accounts discussed presently) is given in the work of Naomi Cumming.[19]

In a 1997 article and her posthumously published 2000 monograph, Cumming approaches the question of musical subjectivity from a semiotic angle.[20] The terms 'subject' or 'persona' are introduced by her in recognition of the fact that 'a complex expressivity, emerging through the play of signs at many levels, [can] in many contexts be heard as a quasi-personal utterance by some virtual entity – not the composer or performer, but an

Hoeckner. A symposium dedicated to Cone's book was also edited by Maus, ' Edward T. Cone's *The Composer's Voice*: Elaborations and Departures', *College Music Symposium*, 29 (1989), 1–80, with contributions by Marion A. Guck, Charles Fisk, Fred Everett Maus, James Webster, Alicyn Warren, and a response by Edward T. Cone. More recent work on narrativity and voice since the start of the new millennium has departed further from Cone's concerns, but it still stands as a key musicological text in the field.

[17] This matter is highlighted in Seth Monahan's valuable recent discussion of the often-unconscious ascription of various types of agency to music in scholarly writing, 'Action and Agency Revisited'.

[18] I speak from personal experience. Much of the present chapter could be considered an expansion of the brief account of subjectivity I give in *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 26–31, which was kept deliberately concise, partly from necessities of space, but also to avoid opening up more troublesome issues which could never be satisfactorily addressed there.

[19] A further significant work in this context, Robert Hatten's *A Theory of Virtual Agency*, appeared after most of this present book had been completed. Hatten's discussion of how a sense of lower-level agency can be formed in music is valuable and will be returned to later; his broader account of musical subjectivity complements rather than supersedes the accounts of Cone and Cumming presented here.

[20] Naomi Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme dich"', *Music Analysis*, 16 (1997), 5–44; *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). The latter volume places particular emphasis on the subjectivity of the performer, especially in its opening chapters.

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"utterer" created by the musical passage in question'.[21] Evident here is how in Cumming's account the musical subject is an *emergent* quality, not a preformed thing or merely the sum of its constituent parts, created from multiple elements in the music that invite interpretation as a subjectivity:

a musical 'subject' can emerge in time as an integration of various 'subjectivities' in the work. Any attributions to music of qualities that would normally be applied to living beings, such as locality, gesture, or volition, indicate that subjective content has been heard. The sense of a 'subject' emerges from these things, but is not reducible to them.[22]

Also apparent is how for Cumming, the subjectivity really has to be understood as 'in' the music. Following Susanne Langer, the expressive content of the music is not simply our own projection but appears to inhere in the work, making its own demands for recognition, a persona that is in this sense 'other'.[23]

Musical personae are not the ephemeral masks behind which the composer's face can be discerned, but neither are they the distorted reflection of one engaged in listening. They inhere in the text of the work itself, as it is performed, inviting the listener's engagement in a manner that transforms his or her own subjectivity.[24]

Just like the self, the musically signified persona 'may be imagined as a "super-sign", an emergent entity negotiating the continuous integration of life representations (affects and memories) in time'.[25] This virtual subject is inseparable from the temporal course of the music, not something which stands behind it: it is something which 'demands to be encountered in order to be known, and which cannot be simply paraphrased or summarized'.[26] Here, Cumming comes close to suggesting that our acquaintance with music's persona is akin to a first-person experience. Cumming's account of musical subjectivity is one of the most detailed and rewarding available. While the plethora of overlapping but distinct conceptual terms – subjects, personae, agents – she calls upon barely reduce Cone's already extensive list, her explication of the ways in which music constructs a sense of subjectivity, its characteristic ways of signalling a 'sonic self', provides strong grounds for future development.[27]

21 Cumming, *The Sonic Self*, p. 241.
22 Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme dich"', 11–12.
23 Cumming, *The Sonic Self*, pp. 223–4.
24 Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme dich"', 17.
25 Cumming, *The Sonic Self*, p. 209.
26 *Ibid.*, pp. 223–4.
27 Maus already comments that a codification and evaluation of Cone's 'elaborate technical vocabulary' in *The Composer's Voice* would be helpful ('Introduction', ' Edward T. Cone's *The Composer's Voice*: Elaborations and Departures', *College Music Symposium*, 29 (1989), p. 7).

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Quite a different approach is taken by Julian Johnson, who has drawn on the idea of subjectivity productively throughout many publications. The piece that most directly addresses the meaning of the term is his 1994 doctoral dissertation, which, even if dating from an early stage of his output, provides the most convenient summary of the idea for our purposes.[28] For Johnson as we saw, 'subjectivity resists definition. This is because it is not a thing but a structure of relations between other things.' Moreover, he claims, discreetly absorbing the lessons of poststructuralist thought, it is something that 'has a history', being subject to historical and cultural change.[29] Subjectivity possesses a rich plurality of meanings across different discourses, meanings that are not equivalent to each other. And in case this were not challenging enough, 'philosophical theories of subjectivity tend to reveal the inadequacy of a theoretical articulation of the nature of the subject, not least because language is above all others the medium in which subjectivity is articulated to itself'.[30] Indeed, 'the subject has no existence except in the media through which it realizes and externalizes itself'.[31]

Subjectivity emerges as a far more slippery concept in his account, yet partly owing to this insistence on understanding it as a process, as a means of self-articulation whereby the subject realises itself, art may have a vital role to play by not just reflecting but in fact constructing subjectivity. Music, in particular for Johnson, 'challenges and redefines notions of subjectivity'.[32] This is due to its position as a product of human activity – as a real form of subjectivity, of the human subject seeking to articulate itself – and exemplified in the parallel drawn between music and the subject as a structuring of time.

> Time is the constitutive dimension of the subject, and it is for this reason that music stands in a privileged relationship to the subject. Music provides not only a revelation of the subject but a site for the subject's creation. It possesses the potential for this function because the defining activity of music is also that of the subject – the structuring of time.[33]
>
> Subjectivity is a structure of relations in time which attempts to preserve a central unity in spite of the negativity of diversity, and which functions for consciousness as a central referent for diversity. Music, by creating abstract structures in time which relate directly to this pattern articulates models of subjectivity.

[28] Part of the thesis was published as 'The Status of the Subject in Mahler's Ninth Symphony', *19th-Century Music*, 18 (1994), 108–20.

[29] Johnson, 'The Subjects of Music', p. 25. Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva, in particular are elegantly assimilated in Johnson's thesis.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 30. [31] *Ibid*., p. 61. [32] *Ibid*., p. 30. [33] *Ibid*., p. 50.

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The variety of different structural organizations of musical time is testimony to the variety of 'models' of the subject.[34]

Indeed, Johnson makes the strong claim that 'the structures of music are those of the subject rather than being analogous to, or resembling those of some subject "in itself"'.[35] Given Johnson's insistence on subjectivity's resistance to objectification and his concentration with the wider cultural and aesthetic questions that mark its relation with music, we should not look to this source for help with this initial attempt to demarcate the terminological boundaries of the concept. But in emphasising the work music does on behalf of subjectivity, music *as* subjectivity, Johnson's thesis offers numerous promising ways of exploring this topic, several of which will be taken up later.

Lawrence Kramer is another contemporary scholar who has productively employed the concept of subjectivity in a variety of ways to argue for the constitutive role of music in modern culture. Music, for Kramer, 'has acted as a basic formative medium of modern subjectivity'.[36] Along comparable lines to Johnson, he points to 'music as a site of subjective mobility or negotiation', whereby to this day people 'still tune their sense of self to music'.[37] In arguing for this role, Kramer sees instrumental music as particularly significant:

Instrumental music suggests the post-Enlightenment conception of the subject as a mode of depth, an inner space filled with recesses, layers and unfathomed reaches. . . . One reason for these identifications is an alliance between the way the subject was conceived and the era's heightened emphasis on the capacity of music to bypass language. Subjective depth was (and is) generally identified with an unsymbolisable uniqueness that stands in excess over anything that the subject can say or that can be said about it.[38]

Especially important in Kramer's account is how music can blur the distinction between self and other, this art form possessing a power

[34] *Ibid*., p. 54. [35] *Ibid*., p. 61. [36] Kramer, *Interpreting Music*, p. 3.

[37] Kramer, 'The Mysteries of Animation: History, Analysis and Musical Subjectivity', *Music Analysis*, 20 (2001), 153. This article is probably the most detailed attempt by this author to address how music conveys a sense of subjectivity in the manner I am concerned with here, though other useful accounts may be found in *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song*, pp. 28–34, and, with greater emphasis on the subjectivity of musical interpretation, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 19–25, and 'Subjectivity Unbound: Music, Language, Culture', in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), pp. 395–406.

[38] Kramer, 'The Mysteries of Animation', 158.

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'to implant subjective states in the listener that are paradoxically both native and alien, impossible either to own or disown'.[39] Thus he can conclude that 'the primary action of music in [the modern] era is not to express subjectivity, no matter how expressive of feeling or "musical personality" some of it may be. Its primary action is to invite subjectivity.'[40]

One final important scholarly account of subjectivity from the last two decades is given by Michael P. Steinberg, who, as with the previous two accounts, focuses more on what subjectivity *does* than how we might demonstrate it in music. Steinberg is at pains to distinguish between subjectivity on one hand and the 'self' and 'subject' on the other. He sees the former more as a mode of negotiation, or relation, between self and society or culture, which can be carried out – indeed, is best articulated – in art, especially in music. Subjectivity is 'the subject in motion, the subject in experience and analysis of itself and the world'. Subjectivity does not denote a *property* of the subject but rather the *life* of the subject, 'conceived in such a way as potentially to produce an internal critique of the category of "the subject"', that is, itself.[41] 'The endless work of subjectivity involves the constant renegotiations of the boundaries between self and world', culture and language. It is also a historical category, emerging from post-Enlightenment claims on the subject in relation to the power structures of society. For Steinberg here, the figure of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is especially important in positing music at the core of the modern concern of subjectivity.[42]

Music does the work of subjectivity, is a mode of subjectivity with the power to organise and structure subjectivity (i.e. itself). To exemplify his claim, Steinberg calls upon what he styles 'two fictions of modern music', 'unwarranted ascriptions from a commonsense point of view' in that they 'ascribe capacities of consciousness and agency to music'. First, music can and does *speak* in the first person (his own, oblique response to Edward Cone's famous opening question in *The Composer's Voice*: 'if music is a language, then who is speaking?'), and second, music can *listen* to itself. The latter point relies on another 'fundamental fiction', that music 'has the capacity for memory, a sense of past and future, and a language for their articulation'. This implies nothing less than the idea that music must be understood (at least at times) as being self-conscious. And because music is

[39] *Ibid*., 159. [40] *Ibid*., 157.

[41] Steinberg, *Listening to Reason*, p. 5. Also see the related account in the same author's 'Schumann's Homelessness', in R. Larry Todd (ed.), *Schumann and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 47–8.

[42] Steinberg, *Listening to Reason*, p. 7.

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granted the ability to listen, it implies 'that the subjectivity inscribed in musical utterance is immediately a mode of intersubjectivity.' Departing from Cone, and coming closer to the later writers cited, Steinberg insists the subjectivity we hear in the music is not that of the composer or anyone outside the music but is rather 'of the music itself'. 'Musical subjectivity cannot therefore be absorbed into the subject-positions of the composer or the listener.'[43]

Steinberg's two fictions are extremely discerning formulations and touch on crucial elements of how music might be said to convey a sense of subjectivity. Sadly, for the immediate concerns of this chapter he does not attempt to justify them any further on an analytical, phenomenological, or historical level (they remain simply 'unwarranted ascriptions', heuristic conveniences). They do, however, suggest highly rewarding approaches to defining the qualities of music that make it appear subjective.

The Identity of the Musical Subject

In the preceding accounts, the subjectivity in music has been attributed to various possible subjects – the composer or an idealised compositional persona in Cone, the performer or music in Cumming, the listener in Kramer, the 'music itself' in Steinberg. It may help here, prior to proposing a more detailed summing up of the meanings that may plausibly be assigned to musical subjectivity, to offer our own analysis of possible subjects, a form of response to Cone's famous opening question already alluded to by Steinberg.[44] For if there is a subject present in music, who might it be that we hear?

(1) The Performer. Most straightforwardly, when listening to music we hear a subject who is the performer, or the 'persona' projected by the performer. He or she really is 'there' and producing the sounds.[45] And – in the human voice especially, but also by extension in

[43] *Ibid*., p. 9. See Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, p. 1.

[44] Comparable, though not identical, taxonomies relating to the specific question of agency can also been found in Anthony Newcomb, 'Action and Agency in Mahler's Ninth Symphony, Second Movement', in Jenefer Robinson (ed.), *Music and Meaning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 133–4, and Monahan, 'Action and Agency Revisited', 327–33.

[45] At least in live performance, recording technology obviously introduces more complexity, but does not really alter the fact that we hear the sounds of a performer who 'was there'. Electronic music certainly clouds this issue. However, it lies outside the boundaries of my concern in this book with the music of the Western classical tradition.

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instrumental performance – we undeniably do hear the sound – the audible trace – of another human subject. This is undeniably one sense of subjectivity in music. But this is not the subjectivity I am primarily interested in here. To illustrate this point, we normally hear the same subject 'in' the music – in a specific piece by Tchaikovsky or Brahms, or what have you – irrespective of who is performing. Maybe the performer adopts different sonic 'personas' when approaching Bach and when playing Kodály. And conversely, we might think that Casals and Fournier maintain some sense of their own sonic identity across different repertoires. But this is already departing from the straightforward sense that the subject we hear in music is the human performer and into hermeneutic territory, as is given away by the use of terms like 'persona'. Thus, there is certainly a direct sense in which the performer is one candidate for the identity of the subject in music (one about which Cumming has written with great insight), but also other important senses, as yet unclarified, in which he or she is not.[46]

(2) The Composer – another seemingly straightforward, though in fact highly problematic, candidate. If music communicates a persona or subject, there is an obvious reaction to attribute this to that of the composer. A work of music is the product of human activity and undeniably reflects to some extent the subject who created it. In the Romantic era especially, music was often seen as a form of self-expression, and thus the expressive states that appear to be communicated by music can easily – though questionably – be attributed to those of the creator.[47] This is particularly the case with someone like Schumann, whose music has long been bound up with details of his personality and private life. Of course, although this view has long been attractive and appears ineradicable in popular aesthetics and programme-note journalism, demonstrating such links is extremely problematic. It would be hard to deny that many works seem to reflect the emotional state of the composer at the time of their creation (I think of Mendelssohn's late F minor Quartet), but counterexamples are rife

[46] A recent contribution to this discussion of performer agency is Edward Klorman's *Mozart's Music of Friends: Social Interplay in the Chamber Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); see esp. ch. 4, 'Analyzing from within the music: toward a theory of multiple agency', pp. 111–55. On the interaction of different agencies see also Rebecca Thumpston, 'The Embodiment of Yearning: Towards a Tripartite Theory of Musical Agency', in Costantino Maeder and Mark Reybrouck (eds.), *Music, Analysis, Experience* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), pp. 331–48.

[47] This is the concern of Mark Evan Bonds's new study, *The Beethoven Syndrome: Hearing Music as Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

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(Beethoven's Second Symphony is a classic case). It might seem a banal point to make, but the present existence or non-existence of the actual composer also appears to have no impact on the continued existence of the musical subject. Thus, as was indicated before, the authorial persona in the music is at the very least a partially fictional 'implied author'. Thus, we come to:

(3) The Aesthetic Subject (a virtual persona or imaginary construction). This category may divide into two broad types (which may intermix or divide further): first, the easily accepted idea that (especially with texted or theatrically staged music) we hear music conveying the subject speaking through words or represented on stage. Just as we speak of the subject of a text written in the first person, so it seems easy to accept that in a song music conveys the feelings of the protagonist. Verbal or dramatic representation clarifies the existence of the musical subject (though, as we will see, the subject in language is, in fact, just as much a construction as the musical one). But, as an extension of this, we arrive second at the regulative fiction of the musical persona or aesthetic subject: that music, even without verbal designation or representation, is somehow akin to another consciousness or subject.

(4) The Listener. A fourth possible sense, which is briefly mentioned here but will become important later in this book, is that the subject in the music is actually the listener. In fact, in a straightforward sense, this is the only real consciousness that we directly encounter – our own.[48]

In the current account I am interested primarily in the third category above. This is the most problematic, troublesome, least obvious, most hermeneutic, and perhaps therefore the most fascinating. But all these definitions have some valuable implications, which will be drawn upon at later stages of this study.[49]

[48] An intriguing proposal extending this category has been proposed by John Butt in his notion of an 'implied listener'. See ' Do Musical Works Contain an Implied Listener? Towards a Theory of Musical Listening', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135 (2010), 5–18.

[49] There are some variants or possible admixtures of the above. If we hear or mentally rehearse a piece in our head, the performer is virtually obliterated (or becomes us). Another thought-experiment might be to consider the status of the subject when a composer is performing (and furthermore listening) to music he or she has composed. My proposal is that in some cases the composer/performer would sense that he or she had become the music, which was functioning as an extension of the self.

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Propaedeutic Definition of Musical Subjectivity

We might now be in a position to propose a slightly more refined working definition of subjectivity as applied to music, drawing on the work of the scholars cited earlier in the chapter but informed by the wider meanings of the term outlined before. By 'definition' I mean something closer to circumscribing a cluster of related conceptual areas, drawing circles ever more narrowly around what are still quite fuzzy and general notions. It was a point made earlier that subjectivity itself may be an emergent concept, an activity or process rather than an essence waiting to be revealed. In a sense, this entire book could be thought of as a gradual process of defining, explicating, or articulating subjectivity; one that moves from the largely descriptive in the present chapter, which seeks to provide a heuristic framework for the ensuing discussion of Schumann's music, to propose a more normative understanding of the concept by the end of the book.

Subjectivity in music refers to a range of features:

- Most basic is the experience of music as in some sense alive, as a living, animate being. As we saw at the start, this is an elementary definition of subjectivity more generally. This interpretation, while metaphorical, is relatively uncontentious. Music has almost invariably been heard as possessing movement, while the association with metaphors of organic life has been customary since the late eighteenth century. One might often associate this apparent capacity for self-movement with 'agency'.
- This living quality may often appear to be, possess, or be akin to, a *consciousness* – the capacity for perception, thinking, and understanding. Again, this is a basic condition of most philosophical understandings of the soul, self, or subject.[50] How this quality is applicable to music (a point addressed later) is rather less straightforward, but answers might be found in homologies between consciousness and music rooted in their sense of unity amid temporal flux and apparently immaterial nature.
- Furthermore, following Steinberg, this sense of consciousness should have the potential for being heard at times as *self*-consciousness. It is not simply the case that music may appear animate and possess agency, but it is as if the music is aware of itself, can relate to itself and act reflexively. Once more, the criterion of self-awareness is fundamental to philosophical understandings of the self or subject. But how this condition relates to music is yet trickier. Again, we might propose looking to music's temporal nature, particularly as constituted through

[50] In *De Anima*, for instance, Aristotle identifies local movement and thinking, understanding, and perceiving as properties of that which possesses soul (*On the Soul*, III/3, 427a).

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its apparent ability to reflect on its own course through stylised processes of memory and anticipation.

- More abstractly, there is often a sense of gaining somehow a *first-person perspective* on this self-consciousness – a sense of personal identification with the music where normal boundaries between self and other seem annulled. The apparent immediacy of music's presence and emotional expression permits us to empathise or relate to it as if it is part, or an extension of ourselves. (To put this in linguistic terms, such music may speak as an 'I', but our identification may become such that that it is felt as almost our own 'I'.) How this is done, and why this should be the case, is one of the most fascinating questions to explore.
- Most generally, as with the broader non-musical explanation given earlier, subjectivity may be a useful umbrella term to gather a number of 'subjective' concepts such as *agency*, *persona*, *voice*, *aesthetic presence*, *subject*, or *living quality*. How these terms might be differentiated still requires clarification.

Yet there are several other, more abstract ways in which music may be said to relate to subjectivity, on quite a different level from the previous examples, which call for acknowledgement here.

- At the broadest level and rather undermining the foregoing attempt at definition, one may (as with Johnson, or indeed Adorno before him) see subjectivity as less something 'in' music, a fictional construct or way of 'hearing as', than what music is, in a real sense, doing. Music *is* subjectivity. This is both valuable and yet for certain purposes excessively general (as all music is thereby subjective, albeit in different ways, which may be productively interrogated).
- Finally, our own relation to music may be constitutive of subjectivity (an extension of the third point above), but in a sense in which it is more accurate to speak not of the *music's* hypothetical subjectivity so much as of *our* subjectivity. Music, as Kramer implies, solicits or invites our own subjectivity as listeners (or indeed performers).

The summary just given outlines some ways in which music may plausibly relate to the idea of subjectivity, understood in a broader, non-musical context. Yet for all the familiarity of the idea in recent musicological writing and musical reception, the idea that there should even be a subject in music at all, in sounds, is far from self-evident. *Why* should music suggest a subject? How does this occur, what justification may we find to support this? What does the subject sound like? A number of such questions arise which require some circling back over ground already traversed, albeit in more detail now. The following section attempts some responses to these problems.

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The Sound of Subjectivity: A Preliminary Phenomenology of the Musical Subject

'Accounts of musical subjectivity', writes Lawrence Kramer, 'have often been bedevilled by a nagging sense of futility. The subjective content of music feels unimpeachably real, but the moment one tries to specify it, it risks seeming paper-thin by comparison to the solidity of form, technique and structure, the stuff of analytical understanding.'[51] Kramer is touching on a fundamental concern here. For all the attraction of hearing some form of subjectivity in music, it is not immediately obvious in a more concrete, analytical sense where this subjectivity might be located.[52] Taking our bearings from a question posed by Steinberg ('what does it mean to recognize a first-person voice in music?'), we could equally ask here: *how does music sound when it is speaking in the first person?*[53] Are there any characteristic 'signs' of subjectivity? How else do we read subjectivity into musical sounds?

I would propose there exist a cluster of characteristic markers of musical subjectivity, some more specific and analytically locatable, in particular works or passages, others looser and more diffuse, affinities between our experience of sounds and subjects applicable to a broad range of music.[54] More specifically, one might point to the concepts of *voice* or *vocality* on the one hand, and to the sense of musical *agency*, created especially from a sense of tonally directed motion, on the other. More generally, we may speak of a sense of bodily *presence* felt through music and an apparent affinity with certain attributes of consciousness. Music's expressivity – its status as a preeminent language of the emotions – also readily lends itself to the projection of an underlying subject in whom such affects might be located. Not to be ignored either is the role of language – titles, programmes, tropes in reception history – and other 'extramusical' factors in denoting or suggesting the existence of a musical subject.

51 Kramer, 'The Mysteries of Animation', 174.

52 Eero Tarasti similarly worries about this question: 'Where are the musical subjects? Are they in the music, the musical enunciate itself? If so, where exactly?' (*A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 108).

53 Steinberg, 'Schumann's Homelessness', p. 47.

54 The discussion from here on partly builds on the work of authors cited in the previous sections, especially that of Naomi Cumming, though it will be apparent that my interest in semiotics is less pronounced than hers.

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Voice, Vocality, and Lyricism

'Voice', proposed Aristotle long ago, 'is a kind of sound characteristic of what has soul in it; nothing without soul utters voice'.[55] Many centuries later Jean-Jacques Rousseau would observe similarly how 'as soon as vocal signs strike your ear, they proclaim a being similar to yourself; they are, so to speak, the organs of the soul'.[56] The most obvious way in which we hear subjectivity in sound is when another subject gives voice to itself: in a direct sense the sound *is* that of a subject.

Naturally this notion of voice may occur through speech as well as through song, but what is crucial here is not the semantic import of any words but rather the very sound of the voice, its sensuous immediacy and musical quality.[57] As a consequence, the sound of the singing voice is perhaps the primary locus for hearing subjectivity in music. It is hence no surprise that Edward Cone starts out his account of the musical persona with the genre of song, for song not only contains a verbal, grammatical component that helps denote the existence of a subject but further presents the listener with the actual sound of a human subject. The subjectivity here may, of course, be identified directly with that of the performer, but the vocal quality may often be understood in a more metaphorical sense of persona or aesthetic subject.

This is particularly the case when this category is extended to the notion of vocality, those qualities of sonic production and gestures characteristic of the singing voice. Though Aristotle continues his explanation by stating that it is 'only by a metaphor that we speak of the voice of the flute or the lyre', this metaphor is still one that runs extremely deep. Vocal elements in instrumental music readily connote the presence of a subjective voice: not only does the sound originate in the activity of a human subject, but its gestures call to mind the characteristic signs of the human singing voice. Nowhere is this more apparent than with those instruments capable of a sustained *cantabile* line such as the violin, cello, or clarinet, but even in a percussive instrument such as the piano the presence of lyrical elements

[55] Aristotle, *On the Soul*, II/8, 420b.

[56] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages, in which Melody and Musical Imitation Are Treated*, ch. xvi, trans. John T. Scott in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), vol. vii, p. 326.

[57] Moreover, at least in a historical sense, from the mid-eighteenth century and throughout much of the nineteenth, music was often given a historical primacy over spoken language, whereby the articulation of language was either considered as a falling from the immediacy and fullness of music, or song and speech were understood as originating from a common undivided unity (as the example of Rousseau's *Essay* demonstrates).

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can establish a putative sense of a subjective voice in the music. Thus, any vocal gesture, even if not produced by the human voice, may allude to the presence of some (fictional) subjectivity; the emergence of a lyrical voice in an instrumental texture might strongly suggest the emergence of a musical subject. Furthermore, once established as a believable metaphor, the notion of a virtual subjective voice may be extended (often through verbal signalling) to types of production which would be inconceivable from a normal human body. From this, we may not only be led to more unusual notions of flowers and birds speaking of an entire landscape calling forth a voice but also to more uncanny senses of disembodiment and absence, of production from inanimate or lifeless objects.[58]

Agency: Tonally Directed Motion, Interaction of Melody, Harmony, and Rhythm

A second factor in the audible manifestation of subjectivity lies in what might be called music's sense of agency – its apparent ability to act towards a defined end – and how this gives rise to a dynamic, living quality. We remember from Cumming that 'any attributions to music of qualities that would normally be applied to living beings, such as locality, gesture, or volition, indicate that subjective content has been heard'.[59] Western music from the common practice era possesses a remarkable capacity to create such an illusion of animation and volition through the power of tonal harmony to instil a sense of logical causation between events and directed motion (the feeling that one harmony follows as a necessary consequence of the preceding, that large-scale cadential articulations are set up as inevitable goals that the music strives towards); the ability of certain types of thematic working to imitate a process of evolving organic life; the control of rhythm, metre, hypermetre, and phrase rhythm to articulate the music's temporal progression into intelligible units whereby its future course may be partially predicted; and not least the art form's indispensible metaphor of movement. It is not that the music appears to be moved by an external source but rather that it appears to be moving itself, to be capable of self-animation. 'In hearing the movement in music', claims Roger Scruton, 'we are hearing life – life conscious of itself'.[60]

[58] This idea of music as an art of 'possibly animate things' has recently been taken up by Holly Watkins in *Musical Vitalities: Ventures in a Biotic Aesthetics of Music* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018).

[59] Cumming, 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme dich"', 11–12.

[60] Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 353.

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Clearly hearing life in music is a metaphor, an illusion we may (or may not) choose to believe, but it is nevertheless a concept that arose at a point in history particularly relevant for this present study. The years around 1800 witnessed a rise in the idea of art as free creation exhibiting the purposive characteristics of nature and a capacity for organic growth, and a particular predilection for understanding music through metaphors of organic life.[61] From E. T. A. Hoffmann's arboreal explanations of Beethoven to Schopenhauer's identification of music with the striving of the will, the ideology of organicism infiltrates musical aesthetics and reception throughout the next century. Such views reach their apogee (or logical nadir) in formulations such as Heinrich Schenker's notion of *Tonwille*, 'the biological factor in the life of tones', a sense of dynamic will rooted in tonal motion whereby the notes do not merely conform in their succession to the grammatical rules set by external custom but instead follow one another as if from an inner necessity. Implausible though it might sound, Schenker stresses how 'we should get used to the idea that tones have lives of their own, more independent of the artist's pen in their vitality than one would dare to believe'.[62]

Much tonal music, especially in the Classical-Romantic idiom, possesses this quality of apparent agency. Robert Hatten, building on the work of Steve Larson, has recently argued that in cases where musical gestures move against seemingly 'natural' forces or tendencies (e.g. a sense of 'gravity', 'friction', or tonal 'magnetism') a sense of virtual agency may be readily discerned.[63] To this extent, of course, it is hard to differentiate between the sense of subjectivity present in different works or composers: the notion emerges as a rather general one. However, we might view this basic sense of a living quality as a lowest common denominator for the constitution of musical subjectivity: agency, sentience, but not necessarily intelligent, self-conscious life. Once a quality like vocality is added to this base level we move up from a sense of brute animation to something closer

[61] The literature on musical organicism is considerable; for an overview see Ian Bent (ed.), *Music Analysis in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), vol. I, pp. 11–17.

[62] Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, ed. Oswald Jonas, trans. Elizabeth Mann Borges (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. xxv.

[63] Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency*, pp. 15–64, drawing on Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). See also Monahan, 'Action and Agency Revisited', and Michael Klein, *Music and the Crises of the Modern Subject* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 'Intermezzo: On Agency', pp. 122–6.

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to self-consciousness. The highest form of self-consciousness is music that appears to be recognising itself, hearing itself.

The account just given is premised upon music creating the illusion of coherence and causality, where later events may be seen as outcomes of earlier ones, thus giving a sense of purposeful directedness and agency. Some music, however, questions such coherence. As Kramer points out, when this sense of logical continuity and natural self-animation breaks down, the sense of a subject may disintegrate and the music quickly appears artificial, its gestures false.[64] Perhaps this is the same for human as for musical subjects. What is especially fascinating about Schumann's music is to what lengths it problematises such coherence while still managing to suggest a sense of subjectivity.

Bodily Presence and Affinity with Consciousness

'Birds whistle, man alone sings,' observes Rousseau, 'and one cannot hear either a song or an instrumental piece without immediately saying to oneself: another sensitive being is present.'[65] Not only does the sound of a voice indicate subjectivity, but in a more fundamental, visceral sense it points to the physical presence of the subject. More generally, our experience of music may often involve a quality of what could be called 'subjective presence', an almost tangible sense of contact with another being or consciousness, as if we are in the presence of another subject. Scott Burnham has written insightfully in this context of music's 'almost coercive immediacy, its apparent ability to generate and sustain a feeling of presence', an attribute he finds especially prominent in the music of Beethoven.[66]

Significant though this idea may be, it is hard to define precisely how this quality of presence is conveyed. Some suggestions might, however, be proffered. First, despite its erstwhile intangible quality, sound is vibrating matter, utterly material in its physical basis. Music is not merely an abstract, amorphous entity but substantially corporeal, and we sense it through our bodies, not just our ears and minds. Moreover, unlike, say, visual elements, one cannot shut one's ears to sound: music intrudes, whether we like it or not, into our very being. To experience music is to immerse oneself in the corporeal presence of sound. Performing, listening

[64] Kramer, 'The Mysteries of Animation', 164–8.
[65] Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, p. 326.
[66] Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 13, 164–5.

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to, or even imagining music can be as much a question of bodily feeling as of auditory cognition, and may invite our own sympathetic physical response.[67] Second, in attending to music, an art in a medium which vanishes even as it appears, we are necessarily attending with greater concern than usual to the experienced present – one made more conscious through the necessity of memory in music's constitution. And as Cone noted, if that awareness is sufficiently acute, 'we can succeed in feeling that we have *become* the music, or that the music has become ourselves'.[68]

But why should this manifest itself in some cases as subjectivity? To respond to this question, we might consider the idea ventured earlier that subjectivity may entail a privileged sense of first-person perspective. Since music, as sound, affects us in a more direct and unmediated manner than the subjects constructed by language or even visual imagery, as an embodied, immersive experience, we may feel this presence as 'really present', as part of our own physical being.[69] This need not be confined to moments of distinct lyrical expression but may be sensed in complete textures, in an accompanimental wash of sound, or when rhythmic cycles in the music seem to parallel the rhythms of the body (consider the effect of the reiterated accompanimental figure in the slow movement of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, like the gentle throb of a heartbeat). Moreover, music's sense of simply 'being there', existing without any determinate concept or object may offer a strong parallel to a feeling of pure self-consciousness or self-presence.[70] It has often been sensed that

[67] See especially Eric Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[68] Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, p. 156. Or in T. S. Eliot's famous words, quoted earlier, music may at times be 'heard so deeply' that 'you are the music, while the music lasts' ('The Dry Salvages', V, from *Four Quartets*).

[69] It is worth underscoring this bodily dimension of musical subjectivity, given the recent musicological appeal to 'the body' and the wider 'material turn' of previous decades, especially as accounts of subjectivity from Schumann's time often emphasise seemingly immaterial notions of interiority over worldly corporeality. Here the model of a 'multidimensional self', set out by Jerrold Seigel, offers a useful corrective. For Seigel, accounts of the self or subject may draw upon three different aspects or dimensions, which he entitles the bodily or material, the relational, and the reflective (*The Idea of the Self*, p. 5). Accounts of subjectivity that address all three are usually richer than those that concentrate on or reduce to one of them, although few theories entirely ignore any of the three.

[70] Marshall Brown, for instance, has argued that the Kantian revolution in consciousness is mirrored in the music of Mozart and his successors ('Mozart and After: The Revolution in Musical Consciousness', *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1981), 689–706). On the proposition that Kant made the musical into the ground of cognition see Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 86. I discuss these points at greater length in *The Melody of Time: Music and Temporality in the Romantic Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 115–23.

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there is something peculiarly akin between music and the nature of our subjective consciousness or self. The connexion between music and consciousness is a long-standing one, yet one that has repeatedly proved intractable to define with adequate clarity (as much because the latter is at least as slippery and resistant to definition as subjectivity). We may, however, point to a shared sense of flux and capacity for temporal continuity, an enduring identity across time unattached to any definite physical object – similarities that have led some philosophers to claim that there is an 'ontological affinity between consciousness and sound'.[71]

Expressivity

One of the most powerful of all ways in which music evokes the presence of a human subject is through its expressivity. For much of Western history, music has been known as 'the language of the emotions', for its remarkable capacity to convey human feelings or sentiments. As set out earlier, the identity of the subject who is the source of these feelings is not necessarily clear, but one of the most persuasive responses is to understand the emotional qualities of music (and indeed art more widely) as the expression of an 'imagined utterer'.[72]

Much of the foregoing discussion has been implicitly defensive, trying to provide some grounds for the far-from-commonsense view that there is somehow a subject present in music. Yet viewed from another perspective the regulative fiction of the subject, rather than being a hermeneutic liability, is a protection or buttress against conceptual disintegration, shoring up a host of otherwise unmoored beliefs and values. Does not subjectivity function in some ways as a necessary construct – that by virtue of which we may speak of music's expressiveness, our capacity for feeling empathy or sympathy with it, without calling upon the discredited notion that we are actually feeling the same emotions that the composer felt? If music, for instance, is heard as sad (I emphasise 'the music as sad', not simply that we are sad when listening), and emotions are qualities predicable of human consciousnesses, then positing a (fictional) subject simply clarifies the

[71] Laird Addis, *Of Mind and Music* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 69. The possible link between the two has received a substantial literature; for a range of accounts see the chapters in David Clarke and Eric Clarke (eds.), *Music and Consciousness: Philosophical, Psychological, and Cultural Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Ruth Herbert, David Clarke, and Eric Clarke (eds.), *Music and Consciousness 2: Worlds, Practices, Modalities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[72] To use the expression of Bruce Vermazen, 'Expression as Expression', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 67 (1986), 196–223.

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fictional but powerful expressive quality perceived.[73] The musical subject here is being used rather like the idea of 'subject' in classical philosophy – as a ground or basis for predicates. It is a construct – imaginary, but useful.

Thus, it is no surprise that the recent 'affective turn' in the humanities and work on music and emotion has sought to advance the persona theory set out by Cone and subsequent writers. Philosophers like Jerrold Levinson, Aaron Ridley, and Jenefer Robinson have productively drawn on the notion of a fictional subject or persona in order to explain the sense that what is heard as emotion in music is not the feelings of the composer or merely a case of resemblance or isomorphism between musical processes and the phenomenology of emotion but may sometimes be best understood as arising from a hypothetical protagonist 'in' (or 'behind') the music.[74] For Robinson, importantly, not all music need be understood as the expression of an imagined persona, but this metaphor is particularly suited to Romantic music.[75]

This point has been recently developed by Michael Spitzer in his large-scale history of music and emotion, which connects the modern idea of the musical persona to nineteenth-century ideas on expression. 'In the nineteenth century,' Spitzer claims, 'musical emotion was individuated in human subjects and bodies'.[76] One of the best examples he finds is Schumann's use of the alter egos Florestan and Eusebius. 'For the Romantics, emotion is character. Whereas . . . the modern notion that a fictional agent owns a stable personality was simply foreign to early eighteenth-century psychology, . . . the Romantics saw emotion (or passion) as both an emanation of character, and a means of stabilizing character.' Moreover, 'Personifying an inner emotion also meant rendering character visible within the surface physiognomy of the music.'[77]

[73] A similar point is made by Hatten in *A Theory of Virtual* Agency; see ch. 6, 'Virtual Subjectivity and Aesthetically Warranted Emotions', pp. 178–201.

[74] Jerrold Levinson, 'Hope in the *Hebrides*', in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 336–75; Aaron Ridley, '*Persona* Sometimes *Grata*: On the Appreciation of Expressive Music', in Kathleen Stock (ed.), *Philosophers on Music: Experience, Meaning, and Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 130–46; Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. ch. 11. One of the leading critics of such an approach is Stephen Davies; see 'Contra the Hypothetical Persona in Music', in *Themes in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 152–68.

[75] Robinson, *Deeper than Reason*, p. 321; 307–15; Ridley likewise proposes some music rewards the projection of a virtual persona more than others.

[76] Michael Spitzer, *A History of Emotion in Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 314.

[77] *Ibid*., p. 311.

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If an emotion could be discharged in a flash in a character piece – a musical analogue of Romantic irony's favored genre, the fragment – then changes in musical style meant that, for the first time in history, an emotional script could also be unfolded across a large-scale work. To individuate an emotion is to treat it as the *motion* of a persona in a temporal narrative; in music, this meant a compositional 'subject' moving across the virtual tonal landscape of the work[.]

This is why, out of all the historical styles in his survey, Spitzer considers Romantic music to be best suited to the theory of the musical persona.[78] Significantly, he also notes the value of our contemporary term 'subjectivity', which for him 'amalgamates character and emotion into a single efficacious force'.[79]

Linguistic Association

The preceding discussion is still frustrating in its generality – this, despite the stated attempt at providing a phenomenology of musical subjectivity, an analytical inventory of what specific musical features denote a subject. There *may* be apparent similarities between the sense of self, consciousness, or subjectivity in music, but we rarely have the means to pin this down in anything like a precise sense. Much of this, of course, is due to the difference in denotative ability between music and language. Music's feeling of subjective presence is as potent as it is vague. Could one, for instance, differentiate between first-person singular and first-person plural in music? How does music sound when it is speaking as a 'we' (or, with particular relevance for Schumann, how is this in turn distinguishable from music speaking as multiple selves)? These are problems that will be returned to later in this book, though I should note now that no precise answer will be forthcoming, the task being unavoidably hermeneutic.

It is ironic that this ostensibly most 'subjective' art seems distinctly hazy on such issues. But is this really a problem? For much music does come to us with verbal clues as to its subjective content. We see ample evidence for this in the tactic adopted by Edward T. Cone, whose path into the subject is through song, not just the fact of its vocality, but through the fact that it is a genre of music possessing a text which designates a subject as speaking or singing. Having grounded the apparent validity of his discussion by these means, Cone proceeds to consider the use of persona in instrumental music possessing an explicit or implicit verbal programme, specifically the programmatic symphonies of Berlioz. In both cases, the verbal application of

[78] *Ibid*., p. 315. [79] *Ibid*., p. 311.

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subjective properties to the work is facilitated by the music already having such labels attached. Similarly, when Schumann designates one character piece 'Chiarina' and another 'Estrella', and we know from biographical information that these names refer to women he knew at this time, our sense of who the subject might be, its identity, is greatly facilitated. (Of course, 'Chiarina' is no more the real historical Clara than 'Eusebius' is Schumann himself in dreamy mode; the identity is once again of a fictional, implied aesthetic subject.) This is not to deny that words are in some cases extrinsic, 'extramusical' (an admittedly problematic category). But so much of our understanding of music is extramusical in this sense. Distinguishing too zealously on this point runs the risk of creating a false dichotomy. At least there is no need to insist on musical purity all the time. Language possesses greater determinacy in denoting subjects than music, and this can be used productively when coming into conjunction with music. And when no such verbal pointers are present, one should not insist on greater precision than is appropriate in this art.

Still, there are some things music appears to do better than words. One such example is its sense of immediacy, as noted before, its apparent ability to work on pre-cognitive, emotive levels of consciousness.[80] And music's indeterminacy need not always be viewed as a problem.

Productive Indeterminacy

The comparative indeterminacy of music's positing of a subject is, in fact, one if its strengths. One of the reasons why music is so potent as a model of human subjectivity derives from the multiple ways in which a sense of subjectivity may be suggested without being delimited. Picking up on this point, Fred Everett Maus has argued that 'musical textures usually invite several discrepant individuations of agents without resolving the issue, and [this] play of different individuations is an important part of musical experience'.[81] As he elsewhere proposes, 'in musical thought, agents and actions sometimes collapse into one another':

> This indeterminacy between sounds as agents and as actions is possible because a musical texture does not provide any recognizable objects, apart from the sounds,

[80] See, for instance, the argument made by Eric Clarke in 'Lost and Found in Music: Music, Consciousness and Subjectivity', *Musicae Scientiae*, 18 (2014), 354–68, drawing on the work of cognitive psychologist Antonio Damasio, specifically *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Heinemann, 1999).

[81] Fred Everett Maus, 'Agency in Instrumental Music and Song', *College Music Symposium*, 29 (1989), 37.

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that can be agents. If the sound is regarded as action, the listener may also, seeking a perceptible protagonist, attribute those actions to the sounds as agents. In music, Yeats's enigma – how to tell the dancer from the dance – arises continuously and vividly.[82]

Developing such themes, Charles Nussbaum argues similarly that the 'nonconceptual nature' of musical representations 'tends to dissolve epistemic and metaphysical barriers between subject and subject and between subject and object, a result that encourages simulation of virtual musical objects and further enhances emotional involvement'.[83]

Music may be heard as an action or type of agency, as speaking to us through another persona, as immediately expressive of feelings and emotions that are felt as ours, as pure presence, as another consciousness, or even as an extension of or surrogate for one's self. Such a view implicitly qualifies Cone's thesis that all music possesses a univocal subject, speaks in a single unitary voice. Often there is not a single, realistic subject formed by the music, but disparate elements of that which may constitute a subject (like – employing a fruitful homology – modern ideas of the complexity of the human subject). The very indeterminacy of the subject permits the fluid movement between otherwise contradictory perspectives, allowing us to construct an apparently impossible object which is both ourselves and 'other'.[84] Music may suggest a sense of subjectivity sufficient to invite our own subjective response, to allow us to fill its vacant space with subjective attributes, to empathise with it, without circumscribing it. Thus, as Alastair Williams puts it,

Music is an invitation to subjectivity: it participates in the construction of subjectivity by allowing us to inhabit it with our bodies and to experience something beyond the confines of ourselves. Thus when we interact with music we are asked to occupy a subject position, or, put more precisely, we are interpellated by a subject position to which we can respond by means of identification, dialogue, or rejection.[85]

[82] Fred Everett Maus, 'Music as Drama', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 10 (1988), 70.

[83] Charles Nussbaum, *Musical Representation: Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2007), p. 257.

[84] As Eric Clarke proposes, 'music affords peculiarly direct insight into a limitless variety of subjective experiences of motion and embodiment – real and virtual' (*Ways of Listening*, p. 90). Similarly, for Watkins, 'Music creates a multitude of virtual worlds, or virtual configurations of space and time, that listeners can vicariously experience as alternative forms of embodiment, affect, spirit, thought, or some combination thereof. . . . Music both diversifies the self and extends it toward other selves in motion, whether real or imaginary, human or not.' *Musical Vitalities*, p. 4.

[85] Alastair Williams, 'Swaying with Schumann: Subjectivity and Tradition in Wolfgang Rihm's "Fremde Szenen" I–III and Related Scores', *Music & Letters*, 87 (2006), 396.

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Some music – even from the nineteenth century, even from Schumann – may not appear to solicit the listener's response in terms of another subject. But this sense is powerful enough in others.

The Arbitrary Subject: Music and Language

A final point, towards which the previous discussion has been moving, is the extent to which the fictional status of the problematic and problematised musical subject differs from that of language. Repeatedly we felt compelled to defend the notion that speaking of subjectivity in music was meaningful. Implicitly, we seemed to labour against the notion that subjectivity in music is somehow artificial, fictional, at root a mere fantasy, whereas if only we could draw on language everything would be fine. The use of verbal texts in songs or programmatic music was even introduced to support the plausibility of positing a subject in music. On the face of it, this would be a defensible position. But this is all overlooking one obvious point. For the subject of language is just as much a fiction as music's. The use of the first-person singular pronoun, even its sound, when I speak it, when I say 'I', is just as arbitrary, just as constructed. (It is still meaningful, at least if this sentence is understood by another reader. So is the subject in music.) We might read *War and Peace* or *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Middlemarch* or *À la recherche du temps perdu*. But there is no real human subject present in any of these books, no more than there is in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony or Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. Asking where the subject is in music is in this sense no less problematic than that in a novel, or for that matter in a visual image (a portrait, on film). Yes, music seems less clear than language in its capacity to designate who is speaking. But in both cases the 'who' is entirely fictional. All are constructs, conventions we choose to hear, metaphors by which we live, so much so that their constructed nature sometimes escapes us.

Looking at it, the subject of language, albeit more precisely denotative, is just as arbitrary. What we think of as the subject is largely a grammatical construct. And in both language and music, the fact that a sound or an inscription designates, connotes, or is sometimes interpreted as suggesting a subject is a priori arbitrary but a posteriori not.[86] (Perhaps, even, hearing a subject in musical sounds is on occasions mildly less arbitrary, such as

[86] See Clark, *Ways of Listening*, p. 40, drawing on Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 51.

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with the case of vocality, as it is here functioning as an indexical referent, not symbolic.)

Arguments against the reality of the subject, or those that construe it as simply a construction of language or society, are familiar from poststructuralist thought. The grammatical construct who is allegedly thinking and writing, and whose words you (that equally grammatical construct?) are reading now, does not want (with any sense of his illusory agency) to enter this debate here. But it is worth remembering that, no matter how far we wish to go down the poststructuralist path, if the subject is constructed through language and other cultural forms of meaning, music is equally implicated in such constructions of subjectivity. And, while this is a topic that must be left for exploration elsewhere, it may be worth considering whether in some senses music might actually hold out the tantalising possibility of escaping from certain linguistic aporias associated with the subject, or at least doing something different from words. This is not to suggest that we could be modern subjects and have the same self-understanding without language; nor, too, would I venture too much on whether this musical self-understanding is not already partially inculcated, bound up with the linguistic means we use to describe it (as exemplified by this book). But this musical subjectivity is importantly different from verbal subjectivity and cannot therefore be entirely reduced to it. Both music and language provide possible ways of constructing a sense of self.

The Emergence of Subjectivity: The Musical Subject in History

Though hearing a subject in music may seem on the face of it as 'subjective' in the bad sense – that is, an arbitrary interpretation – as we have seen it is, in fact, a cultural belief, in other words, intersubjective, the product of society. As Cumming usefully underlines, 'what is "heard in" the sounds . . . has been heard according to a learned code of recognition'.[87] Thus it does not make sense to claim impressions of subjectivity are merely subjective; rather, they are intersubjective, socially constructed (like language, like other types of meaning). If the subject in music is socially constructed, this necessarily means the idea arose in a specific historical and geographical culture. To this extent, asking why there is a subject in an apparently ahistorical, a priori manner is deceptive; not only is it difficult to answer, but it asks a wrong question. It is much easier to show that music was

[87] Cumming, *The Sonic Self*, p. 17.

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understood in a number of ways that afforded, supported, even demanded, the notion of subjectivity just traced. Tracing the 'archaeology' or 'genealogy' of music's relation to the idea of subjectivity is actually far simpler than defining subjectivity per se.

The Historical Rise of Subjectivity

While one might think from some discourse that the subject is a timeless entity, subjectivity as a concept has a history. It is indeed noteworthy that the earliest instances for the use of the term recorded in the OED all date from the first part of the nineteenth century (most come from Coleridge, who was deeply steeped in contemporary German Romantic and Idealist thought). There is, in fact, general consensus among scholars that subjectivity, and the related notions of the subject and self upon which the idea draws, are in certain essential respects modern concepts. Though some present-day analytic philosophers of mind are adamant that 'the sense of the self arises almost irresistibly from fundamental features of human experience and is no sense a product of "Western" culture, still less a recent product of it, as some have foolishly supposed', others are more circumspect.[88] Of course, in certain epistemological respects the structures of the mind and self-awareness surely have been relatively constant across the last few millennia of human history, but the importance accorded to the subject or self – even its labelling as such – has undoubtedly changed within this time period.[89] As Robert Pippin observes, it is 'only relatively recently in Western history that we began to think of human beings as something like individual, pretty much self-contained and self-determining centres of a causal agency', a event that is normally located in the period after 1600.[90]

In antiquity it was customary to speak of the 'soul', but not of being 'a self'.[91] Personal identity was not such a concern; for the Homeric heroes, anger, wrath, courage were visitations from the gods, not intrinsic aspects

[88] Galen Strawson (ed.), *The Self?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. vi.

[89] Charles Taylor notes how making 'self' into a noun, speaking of 'the' self or 'a' self, reflects something important which is peculiar to our modern sense of agency (the Greeks, he observes, had their reflexive 'gnothi seauton' – the celebrated Delphic 'know thyself!' – but not really the sense of 'ho autos', 'the self'). Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 113.

[90] Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 7. For a slightly divergent view see Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, p. 25.

[91] See John Barresi and Raymond Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); for a briefer introduction, see also the same authors' 'History as Prologue: Western Theories of the Self', in

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belonging to their personal selves, just as for Plato love and artistic inspiration were divine beneficence. For Charles Taylor, in his important study of the self and modern identity, a crucial move inwards is initiated by Augustine, who distinguishes between the outer and inner man (the *interiore homine*), the space where I am present to myself. Augustine's turn to the self was thus a turn to a radical reflexivity.[92] But, it is above all from the seventeenth century onwards that the modern understanding of the subject is born. With René Descartes's *cogito*, the self is made into the ground for human knowledge, an unassailable centre for the philosophic enterprise upon which the rest of the world must hold. And with this epistemological turn in philosophy and the breakdown of the older 'ontic logos' we witness a decisive shift to the modern sense of subject, whereby we place within the subject 'what was previously seen as existing, as it were, between knower/agent and world, linking them and making them inseparable'.[93] The early modern 'self' replaces the ancient 'soul'.

In an era of ever-growing social emancipation and enfranchisement from an earlier condition of absolute rule this was the subject rooted in personal identity and self-possession, one that, in the words of Thomas Reid, formed 'the foundation of all rights and obligations, and of all accountableness'.[94] The result was that 'notion central to the self-understanding and legitimation of the bourgeois form of life: the free, rational, independent, reflective, self-determining subject'.[95] Rather than being defined by anything outside itself, conforming to an external end, a subject of another, the modern 'bourgeois subject' is subject purely to itself. The subject is not a pre-given thing: 'a human subject is, rather, a meaning-*making* subject ... a self-conscious subject'.[96] In fact, given that it can only be known to itself, from a first-person perspective, it demands self-exploration: we must explore what we are in order to establish our own identity – it is given in no other way. 'The domain is *within*, that is, *it is only open to a mode of exploration which involves the first-person stance*.'[97]

However, with such exploration it gradually became clear that this sense of self was a curious, even fragile thing, one which upon analysis was ever in

Shaun Gallagher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 33–55.

92 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 129. 93 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

94 Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1850), p. 112.

95 Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, p. 5. 96 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

97 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 389, emphasis mine.

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danger of becoming either little more than fictional, divided within itself, or else infinitely unknowable to itself (what Gilbert Ryle would memorably call the 'systematic elusiveness' of the concept of 'I').[98] John Locke famously sees the self and our sense of personal identity to reside in consciousness. 'Consciousness always accompanies thinking, and makes everyone to be what he calls "self" and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity . . . Whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions is the same person to whom they both belong.'[99] It follows that we are what we remember, our identity relies on narrative continuity, the stories we construct about ourselves. David Hume took the implications of this theory and drew them out to reach the more drastic conclusion that 'the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one'.[100] Not all were willing to subscribe to this level of scepticism. Immanuel Kant's philosophical revolution amounted to a subjectivising of our knowledge of the world (albeit as objective epistemological preconditions). For Kant, the self is not a fiction but part of the very structure of consciousness, a transcendental 'I' or ground of apperception. However, since it is that by virtue of which our empirical self is able to perceive at all, this transcendental self cannot in itself be perceived. And anyway, others asked, how could we stand back from our self to see this self? How can a subject be at once completely an object to itself? By what means can we illuminate that obscure inner space of apparently infinite depths?

Thus, around the beginning of the nineteenth century the subject occupied a central yet perilous position in philosophy. Either, taking a sceptical line, it was a fiction, a narrative told (by itself), or it was something that escaped itself at the moment of looking, a transcendental precondition that was forever unknowable. It is within this new notion of the subject, one that is self-conscious, reflexive, a 'meaning-making subject', but one that is apparently ever unknowable to itself, that art may play a particularly vital role. For if the subject is that which is accessible only to itself, it can be approached only by its own forms of articulation, in the narratives it tells, in the way it configures

[98] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* [1949] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 178.

[99] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II/27 'Of Identity and Diversity', § 9. 16.

[100] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), I/IV/6, 'Of Personal Identity', § 15, p. 259. In keeping with other thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Adam Smith, Hume has a broader, more pragmatic conception of selfhood than this one-dimensional reflective one, being inclined to see the self as based more fundamentally in bodily passion and practically constituted through social interactions.

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temporally distended events into meaningful articulations of time. And this is what art was understood as achieving.

Music as an Articulation of Subjectivity

'Something fundamental changes in the late eighteenth century', claims Taylor. 'The modern subject is no longer defined just by the power of disengaged rational control but by this new power of expressive self-articulation as well – the power which has been ascribed since the Romantic period to the creative imagination.'[101] Subjectivity, following one definition proposed earlier, is less what the subject *is* than how the subject articulates itself – what it *does*. If art constitutes a primary means by which the subject expresses and realises itself, then it is already inherently a form of subjectivity. This is a major reason for the enormous surge in interest in aesthetics around the start of the nineteenth century. For many philosophers, thinkers, and poets after Kant and Schiller, art is the manner in which the self can intuit itself, a reconciling of freedom and necessity, conscious and unconscious, an externalisation of human spirit, a means by which the subject can recognise itself.[102] Such views were supported by the idea of organicism as the dominant mode for understanding art and expressivist views of creativity.[103] And music, above all, was seen as the subjective art *par excellence*, owing to its apparent absence of material substance, its sense of supratemporal identity amidst temporal passing, and not least its long-established ability to act directly on human feelings at a period when the notion of *Gefühl* was seen as a more unmediated, precognitive means of expression that bypassed perceived problems in language.[104]

Thus, it is a truism of Idealist philosophy and Romantic thought that music is resounding subjectivity, 'the art of reflection or of self-consciousness' that 'takes as its subject-matter the subjective inner life itself'.[105] One of the clearest of all illustrations can be found in Hegel, for whom 'music is spirit, or the soul

[101] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 390, emphasis mine.

[102] Classic formulations may be found in Friedrich Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man* and F. W. J. Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

[103] See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 368–90.

[104] See especially Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*. A classic formulation of this priority of feeling over all reflection is given by Novalis, who famously asserts that 'The borders of feeling are the borders of philosophy' (Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), No. 15, p. 13).

[105] Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 162; G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. II, p. 909.

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which resounds directly on its own account and feels satisfaction in its perception of itself'. Music, in his belief, is brought into being by the 'complete withdrawal, of both the inner life and its expression, into subjectivity', taking 'the subjective as such for both form and content'.[106] One might look equally to Friedrich Schlegel, to Wackenroder, Novalis, Jean Paul, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and to a whole host of writers and thinkers down to the twentieth century, for other comparable formulations. As I have argued elsewhere, in the years after 1800 music becomes omnipresent as a metaphor for understanding the continuity and flow of experienced time, for explicating the nature of consciousness, and at the broadest level for reconciling the temporally separated events of our lives into a meaningful continuity. Indeed, a strong case can be made that music was seen as the closest thing to the self, to consciousness, to the 'absolute subjectivity' for which all other names were lacking.[107]

If, as Paul Ricoeur holds, the problematic of personal identity 'can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence', then music would appear to possess a privileged capacity to articulate this sense of selfhood.[108] At any rate, many writers and thinkers in the Romantic era believed this to be the case. It was noted before that the connexion between music and subjectivity often appeared tenuous when approached from an ahistorical perspective. But viewed historically, substantiating the link is quite unproblematic, for it is incontrovertible that music was commonly understood in the nineteenth century as a means by which the subject articulated itself, as a form of subjectivity.

In Search of a Subject

This chapter has offered a range of approaches to defining the question of musical subjectivity – what it *is*, what it *has* (i.e. its attributes), what it *does* – reflections that have repeatedly circled back, tracing different paths over this contested subject, in preparation for the main part of this book which follows. In summary fashion now, I would like to offer a handful of theses

[106] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, pp. 939, 889.

[107] Taylor, *The Melody of Time*, pp. 113–15; the allusion is to Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. James Churchill (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), §36.

[108] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 114.

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or tenets which we may take from the preceding ruminations and may serve as a guide, explanation, or perhaps apologia for the remainder of this study.

The Resistance-Resilience of Subjectivity. No matter how much the notion of the unified subject has been attacked, no matter how many rhetorical claims are made for the death of the subject, subjectivity, as numerous scholars have noted, has proved remarkably resilient as a concept. At the risk of repeating a truism that was already verging on the banal, subjectivity can be many different things for many different people. The resistance to definition of which Johnson speaks is to this extent a valuable property. This is said not as an attempt at obfuscating the question, but rather from a desire to avoid reducing the idea of subjectivity to a fixed category which may be used or equally dismissed as merely ideological, as if it were obvious what is meant by this word, and all the ways in which it has been used have a unitary meaning. Furthermore, rather than this resistance to definition being a problem for the term's application to music, we might choose to see this as liberating. Musical subjectivity, perhaps most of all, resists confinement to language.

Subjectivity is not necessarily an object, or a fixed, stable concept. The nature of musical subjectivity is slippery and can refer to many different, though at some level related qualities. It does not simply refer to a sense of persona, or even multiple personae, but may include a sense of animation and agency, expressivity, presence, personal identification, all of which can flow into each other so fluidly as to give rise to otherwise impossible subjects or subjective experiences. 'Subjectivity', I propose, is ultimately the most fitting term for covering the overall sense of our experience of music (in particular, Western music from the later eighteenth century onwards) as being like a living being, consciousness, self, or subject. Its inclusivity is also useful in implicating the 'work' done by music, its mediation between the composer and style, culture, audience, tradition, between ourselves and something else.

Subjectivity is an act – an aesthetic act. Music does the work of subjectivity. Subjectivity is not a preformed entity, but a process in which we, as subjects are involved. When we engage with music's apparent subjectivity, we are engaging with aspects of our own sense of what it is to be a human, meaning-making subject. The role of art and the aesthetic within the philosophical enterprise since Baumgarten, Kant, and Schiller is fundamentally such an attempt at connecting the subject to world, in other words, 'doing' subjectivity. This might not only be used 'to recover stable and reassuring ideas of selfhood' in a manner familiar from recent critiques

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of aesthetic ideology but it also holds the potential to be transformative or 'world-disclosive'.[109]

Subjectivity is always intersubjectivity; as a form of mediation it requires interpretation and an interpretant. Subjectivity is mediated through relations with others; effectively, then, it is always intersubjectivity. Whether in the relation of self to society, or listener to music, subjectivity is a process of mediation and (self) understanding. Subjectivity is not at all the same as solipsism: the subject is always a subject *for* someone, for someone else (even if to itself), always bound up with the dialectic of self and other. Taking up an important point from Hegel, subjectivity is how the subject appears, manifests itself, as an object to an other, a mode of understanding premised upon difference. Even when we hear 'ourselves' in music, this is something that is yet 'other'. Only through such alterity is there the possibility of attaining self-recognition, in other words, a fuller sense of subjectivity.

Subjectivity as Emergent. I am aware that many questions concerning this curious idea of subjectivity, ones which might by rights have been expected to have been answered in this preliminary definitional section, remain to be satisfactorily addressed. By good fortune, an apt pretext may be found for their absence here and deferral to a later stage. Since subjectivity arises from our forms of mediation, in fact depends on our ability to propose interpretations which may be accepted or rejected but which are always provisional and can be added to, we might agree with earlier scholars that subjectivity is something that is *emergent* – both not only in the everyday sense that it comes into being over time but also in the more specialised sense that its identity is not fully definable in advance or reducible to its constituent parts (and hence plausibly calls for a narrative account of the specific course taken in its formation). This book is in a manner a mediation on music's mediation (something which equally may be accepted or rejected), in another manner constituting a form of subjectivity. And this quality will manifest itself across this book, emerging piece by piece.

[109] Kevin Korsyn, *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 44; on music's subjectivity as, on the contrary, 'world-disclosive' see especially Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity*.

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