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Music Cognition and Cultural Meaning

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the world of musicology has developed a rift. On one side, there are traditional (or "positivistic," as they are often labeled) musicologists who perceive music to be absolute. To some positivists, music has no meaning at all, while to others, music captures aspects of human experience, but ineffably. Either way, the proper study of music must by necessity avoid questions of content, focusing instead on form (derived from analysis), on the historical circumstances surrounding a given work, composer, or tradition, and on other purely objective aspects. On the other side are "new musicologists," who have embraced the premise that music is integrated into the rest of society. It is impacted by cultural values and has its own impact on those values in turn. Thus, it has meaning to those who write and listen to it. New musicologists are most interested in exploring these meanings; as a result, metaphor is deeply embedded into their work. These metaphors can take many forms, including imagery and narratives of varying complexity; the common element is that they are nonmusical ideas projected onto music in an attempt to understand how that music participates in culture. Given the inability of instrumental music to express any explicit meaning, these metaphors are by nature personal, and it is this subjectivity that the positivists find objectionable.

There has been a good deal of vitriol on both sides of this debate. The positivistic musicologists accuse the new musicologists of pretending that any interpretation, no matter how

wild or seemingly arbitrary, is valid. New musicologists in turn accuse their positivistic counterparts of ignoring the spirit of the music through dry analysis, and of pretending that music exists in a vacuum. This ongoing argument raises many questions about the nature and usefulness of metaphorical meanings in music, two of which will be considered here. First, why is there such a strong tendency for people to understand music through metaphor? Second, will an understanding of the forces behind this tendency ultimately validate the complex, culture-oriented metaphors so often central to new musicology?

Methodology

In this paper, I will address these questions through the work of Candace Brower's article, "A Cognitive Theory of Musical Meaning." Brower outlines the processes that lead to the understanding and emotional responses that people experience when listening to music. She argues that all human understanding is based in "embodied meaning," or metaphors reflective of physical experience (Brower, 324). These metaphors are what make it possible to synthesize abstract concepts. Brower uses this basis to give a detailed explanation of what bodily metaphors are used in the understanding of music and how they have influenced the development of music. This will explain on a cognitive level why people are so highly inclined to understand music through metaphors.

Brower's work will then be used to understand why contemporary audiences were so inclined to read metaphors into the music of Ludwig van Beethoven. This will be discussed through Robert Fink's article, "Beethoven Antihero: Sex, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Failure, or Listening to the *Ninth Symphony* as Postmodern Sublime." Here, Fink defends the work of Susan McClary regarding Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* on the grounds that the audiences and critics of the time often interpreted the work very similarly to McClary. This

evidence will refute the frequent criticism from positivists that metaphorical readings of music are historically inaccurate. It will be shown through Fink's work that while some metaphors may not suit every individual's taste, it is a common enough process that denouncing it would put one in the tenuous position of delegitimizing the composers of the music themselves, along with their audiences. Once this is established, Brower's work will provide context for the cognitive process of these metaphorical understandings.

However, it is not apparent that laying out the process of metaphorical understanding automatically justifies any given metaphor, especially when it comes to complex cultural readings common in new musicology. So, to what extent is Brower's work really able to validate the controversial metaphors of new musicologists? This issue will be explored by applying Brower's theory to Raymond Knapp's article, "Reading Gender in Late Beethoven." Here, Knapp is invoking classic new-musicological metaphors about the music of Beethoven, and it is not clear whether these complex gender metaphors are *prima facie* valid. Although Brower's work may not be able to legitimize this metaphor, applying her theory to Knapp's process will nevertheless shed some light on why he says what he does.

Historical Metaphors

First, it's important to see what kinds of metaphors were typically read into music at the time it was written and performed. This will be done using Robert Fink's article, "Beethoven Antihero: Sex, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Failure, or Listening to the *Ninth Symphony* as Postmodern Sublime." In this article, Fink is coming to the defense of Susan McClary's infamous metaphor about the first movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, in which she compares the recapitulation to "the throttling, murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release" (McClary, 8). Although McClary herself abandoned this explicit wording in a later

edition of the article, Fink argues that her sexual reading would have fit right in among the opinions of the original audience of the *Ninth*. He begins by debunking certain misconceptions about McClary's metaphor – namely, he clarifies that she was in no capacity attacking Beethoven's character or accusing him of rape. Rather, she was hearing the idea of the "sublime" in the first movement of the *Ninth*.

The difference between music that is sublime and music that is beautiful is integral to Fink's argument. In the mind of a nineteenth-century listener, sublime music attempted to express that which was beyond the limits of the human consciousness. Sublimity was powerful and overwhelming. Beauty, on the other hand, was gentler and not as invasive. To put it most simply, Fink paraphrases the words of Edmund Burke: "The beautiful is founded on pleasure, but the sublime is founded on pain" (Fink, 112). Nineteenth-century listeners did not shy away from the physical intensity of this pain; rather, they reveled in it, and readily applied metaphors of war, violence, and calamity to express it. However, some scholars have had a difficult time reconciling the reverence and respect they feel for Beethoven's music with the sheer nastiness of these metaphors. Therefore, they have turned to a different strategy, which amounts to focusing on technical description to downplay the intensity and discomfort the music expresses. That is, they have attempted to make the music beautiful rather than sublime. From this point on, Fink refers to this strategy as "beautifying," whereas the approach of focusing on and interpreting the intense and disturbing parts of the music is "sublimating" (113).

With regard to the *Ninth*, this split was evident fairly early on. In a novel of 1838, Robert Griepenkerl described it quite handily in a conversation between two people listening to the *Ninth*. Upon reaching the recapitulation of the first movement, one of them describes what is essentially a battle between gods: "They are tearing off the granite tops of mountain ranges and

throwing them at each other, they're scourging the boiling sea into the bridal bed of the earth," and so on. The other responds: "The theme, listen for the theme!" And therein lies the difference. The first listener is uninterested in theoretical analysis, preferring instead to immerse himself in the sheer, overwhelming power of the music. Significantly, he does this through metaphor. The second listener is holding on to theoretical analysis to shield himself from the intensity (114).

Fink gives a variety of other examples of the split. Some nineteenth-century critics described the recapitulation of the *Ninth* with all variety of metaphors, like natural disasters, evil spirits, and violence. To them, that passage is catastrophic. Others stuck to pure, neutral analysis in an attempt to fit the passage together logically.

Many of the sublimating descriptions of the recapitulation of the first movement had some suggested sexual implications beneath the surface. However, rather than stating it outright, the authors in question simply used images that were already understood as being sexual in nature. For instance, A.B. Marx heard in the recapitulation the moment in Goethe's *Faust* where the "Earth-Spirit" appears. This "Earth-Spirit" was understood commonly enough as a sexual metaphor, so much so that a famous playwright had no hesitation about using that same character to depict a barely veiled scene of homosexual rape (122). Another example is the composer Richard Wagner, who described the passage in terms of a fight between "naked and powerful" wrestlers. As Fink points out, if one of those presumably male wrestlers were reimagined as a woman, the scene would certainly look compromising (123). Thus, McClary's rape imagery was far from unique; it was attacked so cruelly only because it came at a time when musicology had dedicated itself exclusively to beautifying. It certainly didn't help McClary's popularity with the beautifiers that her analogy was an explicit criticism of their process. She claimed that analyzing the music solely to describe technical detail ignored and therefore undermined its sublimity and

intensity. Add to this the feminist roots of McClary's metaphor, and it's clear why McClary got so much criticism for something that male critics of the nineteenth century could and did say more or less freely.

After this, Fink goes on to argue that the first movement of the *Ninth* is purposefully set up to depict the failure of sonata form. He describes how Beethoven builds toward the recapitulation, and how at that critical moment he "destroys any sense of comprehensible cadential syntax," thus presenting to the audience a complete failure to reach the satisfying resolution they were waiting for (128). This creates a difficulty, then, with the analyses of musicologists like Heinrich Schenker and Pieter van den Toorn (both of whom criticized McClary's metaphor quite harshly). The issue is that their analyses strive to make the music into a technically correct, coherent whole, which is not the experience that most listeners have when confronted with the violent onslaught of sound that occurs in the recapitulation of the first movement. Thus, the formal analyses that attempt to reconcile the insanity and physical intensity of that passage with the structure of sonata form are attempting something that Beethoven has made impossible. It is clear, according to Fink, that this passage was intended to portray a radical failure of the confines of sonata form, allowing raw and unspeakable sublimity to force its way through (130).

Fink goes on to analyze the first movement. Although formal analysis has often been seen by new musicologists as a method of taming sublime music into submission, Fink sets out here to do the opposite: he shows how the form of the *Ninth's* first movement expresses the sublime through its intentional failure, after which he makes connections with the other three movements that expand this interpretation. First, Fink notes the lack of a clear, strong dominant in the first movement; Beethoven instead provides a sense of resolution through momentary

Lydian ascents from G♯ to A. This, combined with the warring between D major and D minor, sets up the recapitulation, where these elements of the piece come to a head (135). The failure of the recapitulation to provide the essential resolution makes the entire form unsalvageable, and Fink reads the remaining movements as an attempt to solve this problem. Particularly, this leads to a different view of the ending of the fourth movement, which is absolutely packed full of cadences in D major; Fink reads this ending as Beethoven beating his "formal impotence" into oblivion (147). Fink's analysis clearly contradicts those of the beautifiers, who all searched desperately for ways to make the *Ninth* fit within sonata form as part of their futile attempt to transform sublimity to beauty.

In summary, the beautifiers' value of beauty over sublimity is what led to their dislike of metaphor; the sublime, by nature, requires metaphorical interpretation to express, whereas the beautiful merely invites appreciation. This is made clear in Fink's examples of nineteenth-century listeners applying metaphor to get at the sublimity of Beethoven's *Ninth*. Additionally, the frequency of these metaphorical understandings among contemporary audiences shows that reading metaphor into music is something that has been happening for a long time, and has provided listeners the means to deepen their understanding of the music. It would be unwise (even arrogant) to write off those nineteenth-century listeners who encountered Beethoven's *Ninth* as it was first performed, and who participated in the same societal context they evoked in their descriptions. However, it would certainly prove useful to understand why they were – and why modern musicologists are – so inclined to understand music through metaphor.

The Cognitive Approach

In her article, "A Cognitive Theory of Musical Meaning," Candace Brower sets forth an explanation of why people can emotionally connect with music. Using the work of philosophers

Howard Margolis and Mark Johnson, Brower proposes that music is understood subconsciously through bodily metaphors. She begins by explaining that on a large scale, metaphor is the way that any abstract concept is understood. Essentially, the process of learning a new idea consists of comparing that idea to information and experience stored in memory, then noting the similarities and differences between the old and new ideas (Brower, 325). This allows the concept to be set into context. According to Mark Johnson, the basis for these patterns is in the understanding of physical experience, which he calls "embodied meaning." From a very young age, children begin to assemble patterns of such physical experiences which they use to interpret the world around them. (Hereafter, these patterns will be known as image schemas, in keeping with Brower's terminology.) Brower submits the example of balance. When learning to walk, children will learn how to balance their bodies. In doing so, they will create a subconscious image schema that depicts the way their bodies must move to avoid falling over. Later in life, children will encounter abstract ideas such as the balance of power between two authorities, or the ability to keep one's emotions in balance. They will then be able to use their image schema for physical balance to understand these abstract concepts (324).

Brower applies this theory to music. She proposes three types of patterns that are stored in memory and referenced when listening to a new piece. First, there are bodily image schemas. When listening to music, people compare what's happening in the music to their image schemas of physical experience; meaning rises from this comparison. Next come intra-opus patterns: listeners can create schemas that reflect their experience of a particular passage, and these schemas are compared with what happens later in the piece. Differences and similarities between later repetitions of a pattern within a piece also create meaning. Last are musical schemas. Over the course of listening to many pieces of music, listeners will create schemas that reflect their

understanding of musical convention. Each piece of music is then compared to the schemas for musical convention, and meaning is gleaned from the discovery of the ways in which a piece departs from the schemas (324).

It is inherent to Brower's theory that tonal conventions are based on embodied metaphor, just as they are understood through embodied metaphor. Since image schemas constitute the basic cognitive process used to comprehend music, it makes sense that music must then reflect those schemas. That is, when a composer is writing music, his or her subconscious image schemas inform how music is written to elicit a particular feeling. Brower proposes that this feedback loop between writing music based on internal schemas, and then listening to it through the lens of those same schemas, is a process that resulted in the development of conventional tonality (325).

Before this can be fully understood, though, the schemas themselves must be thoroughly explained. There are several basic image schemas defined by Brower that will be referenced from now on. First, the "container" schema, which is the idea that we experience any given space as having an "inside" and an "outside," with a boundary dividing the two spaces (327). There are many readily accessible examples of this: a room is a container within a building, which itself is perceived as a container, etc. Another that Brower mentions is the human body itself. We intuitively understand that we are contained within our bodies, and our skin is the boundary between ourselves and the outside world. Our organs are then considered containers nested within the larger unit of the body. This schema can be modified by "entailments," which is what Brower calls more complex meanings that emerge naturally from the basic schema. These entailments include: the location of an object as inside or outside of the boundary; the boundary as obstructing motion between inside and outside; the container itself being in motion; containers

nested within each other; the flexibility of the walls of the container; and the expansion or contraction of a flexible container (327).

Next comes the "cycle" schema, which is how we organize the passage of time (328). Cycles of time are so thoroughly built into human society that they require no explanation. It is important to note, however, that within the cycles of time are periods of higher and lower activity or tension – for example, nighttime is less active than daytime. A smaller-scale example is the cycle of breathing: breathing in builds tension and breathing out brings relaxation. As a result of this, cycles can also be understood linearly as waves with alternating points of high and low energy (330).

Third is the "center-verticality-balance" schema, which depicts our understanding of how gravity acts on the body. Here, the ground is understood as a stable base upon which the body rises vertically. The body is experienced as most stable when it is extending directly upward, with all its weight spread evenly around the center, such that no effort is required to remain upright. Thus, tension is perceived upon an attempt to go upward against the force of gravity, or when something knocks the body off-balance from the vertical axis. Going downward and returning to upright stability will elicit a sense of relaxation (330).

Lastly, there is the "source-path-goal" schema. Unsurprisingly, this explains our experience of motion beginning at a source, following a path under the exertion of a force that elicits the motion, then arriving at a goal. Like the "container" schema, the "source-path-goal" schema comes with a list of entailments that extrapolate on the basic concept to create options for more nuanced meanings. They are as follows: motion must be carried out by an agent; goals are fixed; lower-level goals are taken into the process of a higher-level goal; motion may or may not succeed at reaching the goal; motion does not have to follow the expected path; outside

forces may impact motion; an obstacle along the path can be overcome by repeating an action, increasing the energy behind the action, or finding a different path; an approach toward the goal builds tension, while arrival releases tension (331). These four basic schemas can be easily combined to create more complex image schemas. For example, a container can move along a path, and multiple paths can be strung together in a cycle. Of course, these schemas are flexible and very broadly applicable – otherwise their usefulness would be limited.

Brower goes on to explain different aspects of music in terms of these schemas. First, she discusses melody. Melodies in conventional tonality are based on scales, which have many opportunities for the application of image schemas. Scales can be analyzed with the "source-path-goal" schema as being a pathway beginning at the tonic and following a predetermined path up or down through the octave. The repetition of the scale through the next octave brings the "cycle" schema into play. Additionally, the "verticality" schema creates an understanding of the tonic as being the "ground," which combines with the "balance" schema to show the way that pitches which feel unstable are pulled, almost as if by gravity, to stable pitches that provide resolution (333-334). Although the analysis would depend on the melody in question, any melody could easily be analyzed in terms of the image schemas listed above.

Next, Brower discusses harmony. There's very little difference in the process of applying image schemas to melody versus harmony. Harmonic progressions now align with the "source-path-goal" schema. Brower proposes that the tonic is understood as the gravitational center, and this combines with the cyclical nature of harmonic progressions to create the sense of centripetal force around the tonic (341). Larger-scale events like modulation between keys can be understood much the same way; for example, the "cycle," "source-path-goal," and "container" schemas can all work together to create the circle of fifths. The current key space exists as a

closed container over a section of the circle of fifths, and key changes are then understood as the shifting of that container along the circle (343). This idea can be tied into the historical understanding of the feeling behind sharp and flat keys; that is, sharp keys have often been understood as sounding more hard, bright, and tense, whereas flat keys have been heard as more relaxed or soft. This applies even in enharmonic keys; as Brower points out, Beethoven himself claimed to hear this difference between the keys C♯ and D♭ (344). This can be explained in that flat keys are perceived as shifting downward, and sharp keys upward; since upward movement creates tension and downward movement creates relaxation, the key signatures are assigned meaning accordingly. Although the circle of fifths obviously ties all the key signatures together into a circle, it is still perceived that counterclockwise motion is "downward" and clockwise motion is "upward" – or backward and forward, respectively. The circle of fifths can be expanded by adding thirds along the outside, so that between each note of the circle of fifths, a third will be added to create a major triad; Brower refers to this as "triadic space," and it depicts the relationship between I, IV, and V chords by showing IV to the left and V to the right of any given tonic chord (346). This can further be expanded into "major-minor" space, with another layer of thirds added to show parallel minor keys (347). These representations help us to visualize the embodied metaphors of cycles and containers that allow for our understanding of what chord progressions sound like within a given key.

Lastly, Brower discusses phrase structure in terms of embodied metaphor. This is perhaps the simplest of the musical aspects that she's chosen to depict through image schemas. The generic phrase structure in tonal convention has two goals: first, the climax, and second, the resolution at the cadence. This is depicted through the "source-path-goal" schema; the pattern then repeats, adding in the component of the "cycle" schema (350). Brower speaks a little bit

about rhythm here; rhythm allows for the most literal mapping of an image schema onto music, because rhythmic impulse is experienced just like bodily functions such as the beating of the heart, footsteps, etc. (351).

Brower now proceeds to apply these concepts to the idea of music as narrative. That is to say, she uses image schemas to understand conventions of form in music. The overarching idea is that musical form generally follows the same progression as a narrative: the beginning is stable, tension rises toward a climax, and then a resolution is achieved at the end. There are many image schemas that can be assembled to take part in this process. Brower introduces ten schemas, which can be compounded or combined in various ways: 1) motion within a container; 2) expansion of a container; 3) motion of a container; 4) motion between two containers; 5) departure from and return a to a pathway; 6) creating an alternative pathway; 7) overcoming an obstacle; 8) reaching the boundary of a container; 9) escape from a container; 10) gaining entry to a container (353). These schemas are acquired by listeners after hearing many works of music adhering to the same convention of tonality and form. Often, meaning results from the divergence of an established pattern – either within the piece or within convention as a whole – so it is necessary for the listener to have preconceived notion of what will happen next in the music. The schemas can illustrate both the conventional expectation and the departure from expectation. When they are applied to an entire piece of music, it is natural that they form a kind of narrative understanding of how the work progresses.

To show this process, Brower applies her image schemas to Schubert's song "Du bist die Ruh." She analyses the text of the song (a love poem wherein the narrator is asking his lover to drive the longing and pain from his soul) and then discusses how the music reflects and expands upon this narrative. First, she divides the music into seven phrases, which are in turn grouped

into three sections. The first phrase is the piano introduction, and it stands alone. The next four

phrases align with the first four stanzas of the song and are grouped together. This leaves the last

two stanzas as another group (357). Although most of the phrases are conventionally structured,

Brower notes that phrases one and six break from the convention in several ways. First, the

melodic peak: phrase one has its melodic peak quite near the beginning, whereas phrase six

peaks at the very end. Although the other phrases in the piece are broken down into the typical

groupings of two or four measures, phrases one and six both extend for seven measures, which is

a clear departure from the convention of phrase structure (362). The listener will certainly

conflate these two phrases, as they differ from the expectation in a comparable manner. Of

course, phrase one will influence the way that phrase six is heard. Phrase one, for example,

creates the "container" of an octave (363). This upper limit persists throughout the piece until

phrase six, which breaks out of this container and expands beyond the octave set out in phrase

one for the first time in the piece (367). As for the other phrases of the piece, each has its own

function to serve in the overall narrative. The second phrase solidifies the sensation of the octave

as a container by reaching up to the top note and resting there after a suspension. The third

phrase repeats this to further reinforce the overall mood, the sense of the suspension, and the

limit of the octave (365). Then, the fourth phrase departs from expectation by beginning

similarly to the first phrase but modulating to the dominant; this modulation serves as a force to

send the melody upward, whereas previously it had descended. The fifth phrase modulates back

down again, which allows the melody to descend as anticipated. These two phrases can be

understood as the creation of an obstacle (that being the A♮, which was raised from an A♭ in the

modulation to the dominant), then progression past the obstacle after a second attempt (366-367).

The sixth phrase, as previously mentioned, expands beyond the octave container for the first

time; this underscores its function as the climax of the piece. The following tonicization of the

♭VI chord implies a sensation of peacefulness since the added flats introduce a sense of relaxing

into the pull of gravity (369). This allows for a feeling of joy and success upon pulling back

upward again to the tonic (E♭). This process reinforces the sense of achievement that came from

breaking beyond the octave container. Then, phrase seven resolves everything by following once

more the descending melody that was set out in phrases one and five, thus bringing the piece to a

happy and restful conclusion (370). The whole narrative expands upon the outline that the poem

provides. When the poem references pain, the music reflects this with harmonic obstacles. When

the poem speaks of longing, the music expresses it through suspensions. When the poem's

narrator acquires the object of his love, and his heart is thus filled, the music breaks beyond its

container of longing and into the light of happiness. The body image schemas that Brower uses

to analyze this piece make it very easy to see how certain aspects of the music – such as the

harmonic progressions, the use of suspension, or the trajectory of the melody – are used to create

a sense of overall narrative structure.

  Brower's theory validates this use of narrative by grounding it in the cognitive process

that allows for an understanding of the music to develop. To sum it up: image schemas are used

in two ways to build a connection with music. First, they allow for us to feel music physically by

comparing it to bodily experiences. Second, they provide us with a framework through which we

can develop a more complex comprehension of the music. Without the internal understanding of

image schemas, music would not acquire any emotional meaning to the listener; having a

subconscious structural understanding makes it possible to experience the emotional response

that makes music pleasurable. Presenting a metaphorical reading of music, such as Brower's

narrative explanation of Schubert's song, is merely verbalizing the internal process that makes

music enjoyable to listen to. Thus, in bringing the image schemas to light, Brower makes it possible to explicitly analyze music in terms of metaphor while retaining a basis in factual analysis.

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Now that Brower's work has been thoroughly explained, it is time to assess its implications for the nineteenth-century metaphors that Fink discussed. Brower's work explains quite neatly why audiences (both then and now) have so frequently understood music through metaphor. If it really is the case that any emotional connection with music arises from an unconscious application of metaphor, then it follows naturally that verbalizing these metaphors is a reasonable approach to deepening one's connection to a piece of music. It is simply expanding on the basic structure from which the initial understanding was built. Now, the process of reading metaphor into music is vindicated not just by its long history, but also by its status as a natural cognitive process. It is additionally important that Brower's work does not simply reflect the understanding of music; this is the cognitive process that allows for any kind of understanding to develop. Metaphorical comparisons are, according to Brower, an essential part of learning; they are required to process abstract concepts of any kind (including, for example, cultural values). The necessity of these metaphors, along with their flexibility in being combined or built on, gives support to the idea of larger-scale metaphors between music and culture.

Even so, the question remains: can Brower's work validate specific cultural metaphors offered by new musicologists? One example is McClary's metaphor about rape, which can now be defended from a different angle, one that Fink gets at himself: he states that the music is a physical experience of violence, just as rape is a physical experience of violence, and this is why McClary thought of it. The all-too-common question, "why sex?" can be answered easily from

the perspective of a woman. Women are socialized from a young age to fear rape; we are taught that it is the type of violence we are most likely to suffer, and that we must take measures day and night to protect ourselves from it. Even for women who have never been raped, the idea of it is close to mind as a constant danger. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that a woman who perceives violence in a piece of music would connect that with rape. Brower's work supports this comparison because it implies the possibility of larger-scale metaphors being mapped onto one another, just the same as her schemas are mapped onto small musical details. McClary's imagery of rape and violence provides a very easy target for comparison on the basis of bodily metaphor; the connecting factor is the ingrained physical experience (whether from a past event, or merely constructed from years of conditioning).

However, not all new musicological arguments are grounded in such a strong, easily identified physical image. So, if the question before was whether Brower's theories could validate the application to music of specific cultural metaphors, now it becomes: to what extent can Brower's work be used to support comparisons that are more abstract in nature?

A New Musicology Metaphor

This question will be explored using the work of Raymond Knapp. In his article, "Reading Gender in Late Beethoven," Knapp discusses gender metaphors for Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and his song cycle, *An die fern Geliebte.* The metaphors that Knapp proposes – particularly the idea of the musical subjunctive – are not as readily comparable to a physical experience as McClary's rape analogy. Knapp begins with a general defense of reading gender into music. He states, similarly to Fink, that it "enriches understanding and experience of the music and heightens our sense of its historical context and personal significance to the composer" (Knapp, 45). Brower can certainly support this general idea, given her view that

underlying metaphor is an essential part of synthesizing a new abstract concept. Knapp substantiates his point by analyzing two Beethoven works in terms of their possible gendered meaning in the attempt to discover more about Beethoven's approach to composition and his conception of his own life. Although these two works are superficially unrelated, Knapp proposes that a gendered analysis will also show a connection between them.

To begin with, Knapp talks about Beethoven's *Ninth*. He, too, brings up an older interpretation, in this case that of Wagner. Wagner proposed a gendered reading of the finale of the *Ninth* which involved the idea that "Music is a woman," with the Poet playing the male counterpart. Over the course of the last movement, Music seduces the Poet, and then the Poet asserts his masculine dominance (46). Knapp takes issue with this argument on the premise that it ignores commonly understood inscriptions of masculinity and femininity in music.

In support of his own gendered reading, Knapp begins with the way that Beethoven has set the text. First, Beethoven separates the last quatrain of each stanza from the first three stanzas of the poem. Some of this text does come back later, and Knapp reads the reunion of the text as a marriage ceremony, in such specificity as to label the two parties of the marriage approaching the altar, receiving a blessing, and departing to a wedding march (47).

Knapp then goes on to discuss what people or ideas are metaphorically wed. He explains that the simple binary between masculine and feminine does not suffice here. It's true that certain elements of the music lend themselves to description as masculine or feminine, which, in one case, Beethoven emphasizes by highlighting words in the text with feminine endings (48). Nevertheless, Knapp is not interested in merely pointing out what parts of the music have a masculine or feminine cast; he would prefer to use this understanding to create a more meaningful interpretation. Thus, he proposes instead a religious reading. The masculine elements

of the music are an authoritative God; the feminine elements, which are less certain and even slide into what Knapp calls the "musical subjunctive" (to be explained below), are the mortals hoping to convene with God (49).

Knapp transfers the discussion at this point to Beethoven's song cycle *An die fern Geliebte*. Since the latter is explicitly about a man singing to his faraway female lover, a gendered interpretation appears to be more readily available. However, Knapp proposes that a simple gendered reading is interrupted by two things: first, the idea of the "musical subjunctive," and second, the clear attempt on Beethoven's part to turn the song cycle into a "closed circle" to give the impression that singing the songs will bring about the desired reunion between the two lovers (50-51).

Knapp now goes on to describe his idea of the musical subjunctive in more depth. He argues that it makes perfect sense for such a concept to develop in the nineteenth century; people needed a method for expressing their personal opinions about the political happenings of the time (52). The subjunctive mode was ideal because it provided the opportunity to paint a fanciful new reality in which everything was resolved exactly as it should have been, and then allow that mask to slip just enough that the disappointment and bitterness at the actual events could be subtly expressed. Knapp proposes that music was a particularly good vehicle for this process because of – not despite – its purported ability to express that which is beyond words and its inability to recreate the specificity of language (52). That is to say, music is subjunctive itself; it is the realm of the nonliteral and ineffable expressions of the human experience. What better way could there be to express the subjunctive, which is in itself a mere fantasy?

The difficulty here is that to express the subjunctive, music must also be able to depict the reality which the subjunctive is being compared to. In his song cycle, Beethoven does this by

key relationships. The tonic (E♭) is reality. The subdominant (A♭) provides access to the subjunctive, especially when it appears in the middle of the song cycle as framed by the keys G and C. This makes the key of A♭ appear as a ♭VI, the instability of which links it to the idea of the subjunctive (53). Since the subjunctive is inherently uncertain, and uncertainty was a trait likely to be labeled feminine, Beethoven conflated the subjunctive with a more feminine style of music. Thus, references to the subdominant are generally more feminine throughout the song cycle. In the last song, Beethoven creates a union between masculine and feminine by interchanging the dominant (masculine) and the subdominant (feminine), following which the music is tied up in a neat bow with a very typical, conventional cadence. This serves to confirm the reunion between the lovers, as well as joining metaphorically fantasy and reality (58).

Knapp argues that the way Beethoven approaches encoded gender meanings in these two pieces is similar. Both show a union between masculine and feminine that can be expanded on in a more complex analogy: in one, it is also a metaphorical union between man and God, and in the other, a union between fantasy and reality. Knapp argues that Beethoven is likely working out his personal woes within these works (63). Beethoven had a longstanding lack of success in his romantic relationships, and his religious inclinations stood on shaky ground, too. So, to make up for the discomfort of these failures, Beethoven acted out success in the musical subjunctive, to express his desire for the fantasy world in which he was happily married and secure in his faith.

Brower's theory is not as easy to apply to Knapp's interpretation of Beethoven as it was to McClary's. After all, the entire point of the subjunctive mode is that it is not at all physical; it is an imagining of what could be, or what might have been. Brower certainly supports the general idea of pattern matching between abstract concepts, but it's difficult to know what

physical schemas might go into the understanding of a concept so abstract and vague as *that which might have been.* Therefore, although Brower's work certainly supports the process of using metaphor to deepen the understanding of music, it's unclear whether her theory would provide a detailed validation of this metaphor.

That being said, there is another possibility to explore: on the basis that Knapp's metaphor is an opinion, and never attempted to be factual, it may need no further support than Brower's elucidation of the process. Knapp – and McClary, for that matter – never set out to prove the meaning of Beethoven's music. Instead, they seek to describe their personal opinions about it, in the hopes that others would find those opinions an enriching addition to their conception of the music. Brower's work leads to the conclusion that this process is a natural part of learning and understanding; although she does not state it outright, it is implicit within the theory that the process of developing image schemas will be highly individualized as a result of its basis in personal experience. Not everyone will come to the same conclusions about a certain piece of music. If the process in arriving at a metaphor is valid, and the metaphor itself is known to be an opinion, is there really a need to prove the accuracy of that metaphor? With this perspective, Knapp's metaphor could be considered fully valid, even given the fact that other scholars may disagree with it.

Conclusion

In summation, there are a few points to be made about Brower's paper. First, it effectively explains why there is a tendency to conflate music with extramusical metaphors. Brower's work clearly shows that understanding new concepts through metaphors based on previous experience is fundamental to the process of learning. She shows also exactly how music is understood through bodily metaphor and indicates that this physical understanding is the

reason that emotional connection with music is possible. Thus, it's clear that understanding music through metaphor is a natural and logical approach; this is why it has happened so frequently throughout history.

Second, there are some new musicological metaphors that Brower's work can be applied to without much trouble. Those are notably the ones that involve physical metaphor. Since Brower's work is grounded in the body, it is much easier to use her work as defense for musical analogies that involve a physical aspect, such as McClary's rape imagery. Brower's cognitive theory demonstrates the full extent to which listening to music is a physical experience. It is arguably very similar, if not the exact same thing, for Brower to say that the sixth phrase of Schubert's song depicts the physical feeling of breaking through a barrier as it is for McClary to say that the recapitulation of the first movement of Beethoven's *Ninth* depicts the physical experience of rape. The only issue with McClary is that her chosen metaphor was so controversial and grotesque that critics of her work were eager to get Beethoven as far away from it as possible.

However, Brower's success in supporting the details of McClary's work is clearly not universal to every single new-musicological metaphor, as the work of Knapp shows. Knapp's metaphors are not nearly as easy to ground in physical experience as McClary's. Rape is physical; the subjunctive mode is anything but. This means that Brower's ideas may not be applicable to Knapp's own to the same extent as they are to McClary's. However, it is worth considering the possibility that such a theory as Knapp's may not need to be proven, merely understood as a valid process.

Brower's work may not provide wholesale support for every new-musicological metaphor, but she has certainly provided a strong cognitive explanation for why the process of

developing such metaphors exists. It's very much in the favor of new musicology to have this kind of support, especially given that it can be applied in such a detailed manner, since this refutes the claims of some critics that new musicologists create metaphors with no grounding in the music itself. Rather, these metaphors are shown to be a valid and important part of the process of understanding music, regardless of whether they occur subconsciously or in the hands of a scholar. However, Brower's work has yet to be applied to its fullest extent in the world of new musicology, and a deeper exploration of her theory may be able to determine what it can say about more abstract metaphors like Knapp's.

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