ESSAYS AND DIALOGUES

MUSIC GROOVES

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suggestive in concluding this attempted sequel to Meyer's work. Although any crystallization of his thought into a few neat slogans does Brown a grave injustice, he argues generally for release from repression, resurrection of the body, and a return to the perverse, polymorphous playfulness (and immediate gratifications) of childhood. The latter qualities of childhood alliterated so playfully by Brown (and Freud before him) strike me as a peculiarly appropriate set of criteria for establishing value, if not greatness, in jazz. Just how one goes about measuring perversity or playfulness I am not at all certain. But where process and spontaneity are the ends in view, I think we must make the effort to analyze and evaluate in these terms, for, as Brown notes in speaking of art, "Its childishness is to the professional critic a stumbling block, but to the artist its glory" (Brown 1959:58).

Finally, I must ask myself the same nasty question that I have directed to Meyer: Will a theory based almost exclusively on one musical idiom, in this case jazz rather than classical music, have any validity when applied to the musics of other cultures? I am convinced, of course, that ultimately the answer will be an emphatic Yes. My conviction rests on two assumptions: first, that the vast majority of cultures around the world have musical styles that are performance-oriented, dance-derived, and at least partially improvised; and second, that a processual methodology will be developed in the coming years so that this rudimentary theory can be tested, elaborated, and refined accordingly.

2 COMMUNICATION, MUSIC, AND SPEECH ABOUT MUSIC

STEVEN FELD

Music has a fundamentally social life. It is made to be engaged—practically and intellectually, individually and communally—as symbolic entity. By "engaged" I mean socially interpreted as meaningfully structured, produced, performed, and displayed by historically situated actors. How this happens, what it means, how one can know about it—these issues focus on the nature of the music communication process, and to rethink them I turn back to the question posed often by Charles Seeger: What does music communicate? To answer that he also needed to ask, What does speech about music communicate? Through diagrams and dense prose, Seeger (1977:16–44) argued that to address the issue of what music communicates one must specify what it cannot communicate. Logical preoccupation with differences between the speech and music modes of communication led to his notion that speech is the communication of "world view as the intellection of reality" while music is communication of "world view as the feeling of reality."

In this essay I want to argue both for another approach to these questions and for another set of answers. Specifically, I am concerned less with the logical and philosophical distinction between the speech and music modes and more with the general question of communication, that is to say, with the process of meaningful interpretation explicitly conceived as social activity.

Seeger devoted great efforts to pointing out the potential distortions of music in verbal discourse about music. He felt that the "operational idiosyncrasies" (1977:7) of speech biased the study of music, and he endeavored to promote metalanguage and definitional postulates that were ontologically precise. He was concerned that speech about music overemphasized musical space while underemphasizing musical time, that speech about music ultimately valued event over process, product over tradition, and

static over dynamic understanding. He continually reminded audiences of the shortcomings of linguocentrism in music scholarship. Rather than merely repeat his cautions, I want to address some of the consequences of studying how people routinely talk about music. But first I want to extend Seeger's query about what music communicates to talk about how this communication process takes place, how we participate in it, and how our participation invents, validates, circulates, and accumulates musical meanings.

A Communications Approach

Seeger concerned himself with rigorous definitional postulates, a precise and logical series of terms and denotata. As an overarching concept for music and speech he invoked the term *normenon* for any "class of manmade products that serves primarily a function of communication"; he further defined communication as "transmission of energy in a form" (1977:10, 19). We can refine this notion of communication by moving it from physicalistic exposition to more firmly social ground. Being fundamentally relational, communication is process, and our concern with it should be a concern with the operation of social determination in process. The focus is always on a relationship, not on a thing or entity; in the case of human expressive modalities, it is on the relationship between the origin and action of sensations, the character of interpretations and consequences. Communication in this sense is no longer ontologically reified as a transmission or force; it can only exist relationally, in between, at unions and intersections. To the extent that we take this notion as the grounding for an epistemic approach, we must claim that the origins and conditions of communication are multidimensional. Communication then is not located in the content communicated or the information transferred. At the same time it is not just the form of the content nor the stream of its conveyance. It is interactive, residing in dialectic relations between form and content, stream and information, code and message, culture and behavior, production and reception, construction and interpretation. Communication is neither the idea nor the action but the process of intersection whereby objects and events are, through the work of social actors, rendered meaningful or not.

The term communication rightly evokes process and activity, but I would also like to emphasize two other aspects, those of meaning and interpretation. We cannot speak of meaning without speaking of interpretation, whether public or conscious. Communication is not, in other

words, a "thing" from which people "take" meanings; it is rather, an ongoing engagement in a process of interpreting symbolic forms which makes it possible to imagine meaningful activity as subjectively experienced by other social actors. Communication is a socially interactive and intersubjective process of reality construction through message production and interpretation. By "socially interactive" I mean that, whether events are face-to-face or mediated in some way, we apprehend the symbols and situations before and around us through various schemes of typification and, unless evidence to the contrary is in hand, we assume that these schemes are not whimsical or idiosyncratic but social (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Whether or not we think we know what things, events, or sounds are about, we assume, not infrequently, that they display the subjective intentions of others. We understand that these intentions may or may not be explicit and refined in the minds of the others; they may be equally vague and ambiguous to both actor and receiver, equally transparent and obvious to both, or at different levels of clarity with relation to each. To the extent that we apprehend scenes as meaningfully organized, we assume that others share our sense of reality, as well as our more specifically situated and finite sensibilities. At the same time we recognize that we might not all have the same idea, the same "take" on what is going on and what it means. We guess about what others are up to, what is on their minds. We guess about what they intend or whether they mean to intend, or mean to feign disinterest in intention (Worth and Gross 1974).

In responding to objects and events that are either familiar or exotic, both those to which we are frequently exposed and anonymous abstractions, we take some things for granted, as transparent, requiring no action or verification beyond their physical presence or existence. Other things invite engagement and choice; we make choices that extend typifications and, in so doing, engage an object or event to take it in knowingly. In all cases the importance of a communications perspective is in its focus on (*a*) the primacy of the social, interactive, intersubjective realm of these processes; (*b*) the fact that engagement in the processes shapes, defines, maintains, and brings forth tacit or explicit subjective realities for participants in the scene; (*c*) the way in which meaning fundamentally implicates interpretation; (*d*) the complex relation of production codes and producer's intentions to interpreted messages; and, because this nonisomorphic complexity cannot be reduced to purely logical or normative terms, (*e*) the need for socially situated investigation.

Communication or Semiosis?

Other recent models of musical and sociomusical analysis, following semiotic theories (Molino 1975; Nattiez 1975; Boilès 1982; Tagg 1982), have also invoked or evoked the concept of "communication." To help focus my concerns, let me briefly distinguish their approaches from mine, at the same time emphasizing that many of these ideas are indeed complementary to mine and perhaps reflect larger, shared goals.

The best known and perhaps most substantial proposals for rethinking the process of musical signification are raised (not entirely explicitly) by the tripartite model of musical semiology associated with Jean Molino (1975) and Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1975).[1] Recognizing the nonisomorphism of code and message, of artistic "intent" and produced "effect," of interpretations by producer and consumer or sender and receiver, Molino and Nattiez propose a model of musical signification which considers the vantage points of code production (*poiétique*) and message perception (*esthésique*) and posits a *niveau neutre*, an autonomous level of material

1. Jean-Jacques Nattiez's important book, *Fondements d'une sémiologie de la musique* (1975), the basis for so much discussion of the nature of a musical semiology, including that found here, has been largely reworked and greatly refined for the English version, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music* (Nattiez 1990). Nattiez has extensively read and reflected upon social theory and the anthropological analysis of music, and he takes great pains in the new version to clarify what he considers to be misunderstandings about his project and musical analysis generally by critics who have found his book to be an important springboard. He devotes a section of the new book to semiology and communication (1990:16–28), largely to discuss how they involve distinct issues and how Jakobson's and Eco's theoretical invocations of communication within semiology overlap his but are logically separate from the issues he and Molino wish to raise about the tripartition. He carefully responds to many of Lidov's criticisms in this section as well. The revised book displays an impressive erudition and sophistication, although Nattiez holds onto some ideas about the tripartition with a tenacity that is difficult to understand in light of the obvious enlargement of his sense of musical meaning. Indeed it is hard to read the new book without the sense that Nattiez both embraces his interlocutors' critiques of the autonomy of the musical object, and wants to convince us that he never meant musical objects to be quite so autonomous to begin with.

Nattiez's book is essential reading in the ongoing debate about the discourse of music, for he clearly has a broad and comprehensive vision of musical analysis, even if it is not entirely clear how he would integrate a truly cultural and hermeneutic dimension into his program. In rereading the present essay, originally written in 1983, a fundamental point still stands: virtually all of musical semiology privileges scores, sign logics, and a highly formalist notion of essentialized musical meanings. The communicational notions developed here are meant to raise critical questions as to whether this kind of semiological stance really helps one grasp the meaning-making processes that listeners use to engage with their musical experiences. The extent to which I see these notions as both oppositional and complementary to semiological projects remains much the same as when the piece was written, although I am happy to acknowledge that much recent semiological work has demonstrated a substantially greater desire to account for more of the problematics of human historical and social complexity.

structure where music is "text." Nattiez's book is largely an attempt to justify the autonomy and empirical validity of this "neutral level," holding the other two levels back for future exploration. Some commentators have found this cause for strong criticism. David Lidov, for example, argues that, in function and in practice, the *niveau neutre* can only constitute a retreat from musical meaning, as well as from communication: "If all descriptions of music have their origin in the facts of production and perception, how is a neutral description possible except as a vacuous hypothesis?" (1977:19).

Lidov's question is harsher than though related to my own, namely, Do semiotic approaches really analyze communicational processes or transacted social meanings? To answer, I think it necessary to distinguish communicational analysis from logical, philosophical, or other normative analyses that seek to establish typologies of signs and sign functions. For the semiotics of music, much activity seems to stress the taxonomy and form of sign types. Meaning is subjugated to logical relations, hence Nattiez's "intrinsic signification" and "symbolic signification" take over where Meyer's (1956) "absolutist/expressionist" and "referential/expressionist" left off. While these notions tease our concern for a real semantics and pragmatics, the issues of use and interpretation are never addressed socially and directly. I cannot escape the sense that the dominant concern still is with "cracking the code," with formalization, rather than with the code as a *fait social total.*

The analyses of Boilès (1982) and Tagg (1982) are more satisfying in some respects, but can also be differentiated from mine. Boilès follows the Peircian semiotic trichotomy and sets up a calculus of interpretive possibilities based on a relationship of interpreter, interpretant, sign-object, designatum, and thing-object. The benefit of such a calculus as a convenient way to map logical relations is clear. The problem is also clear: the image of listening experience projected by such a model is extremely simple. One can quickly and intuitively falsify it. Listening experience involves things that happen in time; such things change often and rapidly. To construct a model of this experience and a sense of its relation to how signs signify and how musical symbols mean, one must confront the dynamics of changeability and the interactions of form and content, of specific and general experience, and of background expectations and generalized interpretive routines. Once again it seems that form dominates content, taxonomy dominates real worlds of users and use, and logical types dominate ambiguities, heterogeneity, lived meanings, and the multifunctionalism and reception of signs.

Tagg (1982) eschews some of this formalism to situate his object socially within real worlds of audiences whose interpretive investments are clear. But I still find his notion of communication bound to the idea that a certain "something" exists within a music that can project itself outward onto its audience ("receivers"), which is affected by it. This effects-reinforcement approach to musical affect tends to focus on structural features of music and reified minimal units ("musemes") rather than on engagement or the variety of ways sounds are consumed. Tagg presents an ideological critique of the macroeffects of the musical messages he analyzes (1982:62–63) but admits that he has not integrated this level with his "textual analysis." This strikes me as the crux of the problem; one cannot stay at a syntactic level of analysis and then project its results to micro- or macrosemantics as if these were determined by a musical text. Musical meaning cannot be reduced to the textual level of structural association, comparisons of musemes in one piece with phrases, motifs, or patterns from others. While such associations may be part of the microstructure of listening experience, they do not necessarily fix any or much of a piece's meaning.

While these proposals are of great utility because of their clarity, formal explicitness, and concern with general theory, Clifford Geertz's critique of the semiotics of art seems to apply in degrees to their real or potential problems:

> For an approach to aesthetics which can be called semiotics—that is, one concerned with how signs signify—what this means is that it cannot be a formal science like logic or mathematics but must be a social one like history or anthropology. Harmony and prosody are hardly to be dispensed with, any more than composition and syntax; but exposing the structure of a work of art and accounting for its impact are not the same thing . . . . If we are to have a semiotics of art (or for that matter, of any sign system not axiomatically self-contained), we are going to have to engage in a kind of natural history of signs and symbols, an ethnography of the vehicles of meaning. Such signs and symbols, such vehicles of meaning, play a role in the life of a society, or some part of society, and it is that which in fact gives them their life. Here too, meaning is use, or more carefully, arises from use. (1983:118)

In the perspective that follows I will try to illuminate a model compatible with some of the formal concerns illustrated in the work of these semioticians. My focus however is not on logical or neutral analyses but

on what I see as the more specifically communicational processes of musical meaning and interpretation. In order to demonstrate the complementarity of these perspectives, I will approach the process of musical communication with an emphasis on the listening process rather than the score, composer, or code per se. By doing so I wish to subvert the usual assumption that a producer's intention is closer to some abstract rule determining significance in music than the ordinary feelings that arise from routine engagement on the part of the listener.

Dialectics of the Music Communication Process

Let us begin with the assumption that the presence of sounds in our social field will invite conventional patterns of attending, disattending, foregrounding, or backgrounding. The invitation proceeds dialectically through the structure of sound and its placement in historical and physical space and time. If I walk out of my office and cross the street I must attend to car horns in a particular way. I may or may not attend to them if their sounds come in through a closed or open window or emanate from a record or tape recording. I will attend to them in another way if there is no sound source to be heard but only a spectral chart or sonogram labeled "car horn" that I must use.

Similarly, I attend to the details of a performance in a certain way at a concert or club, in another way at home with a recording or score, if one exists for the sounds in question. These levels of experience can also be combined. Moreover, having attended to a sonic experience in any one of these ways, I am no longer able to attend to any of the other experiences in exactly the same manner as I did before. Experience is not only cumulative but interactively cumulative. We rarely confront sounds that are totally new, unusual, and without experiential anchors. Hence, each experience in listening necessarily connotes prior, contemporary, and future listenings. Engagement reproduces one's sense of meaningful pattern and experience.

Leonard Meyer's work (1956, 1973, 1989) takes on the issue of musical meaning and communication by arguing that our ongoing predictions of musical structures—in tension, drama, fluctuation, development, changes, constants, deflection, implication, suggestion, delay, and such—will be satisfied, frustrated, or surprised through the listening process in time. He argues that affective and emotional states in the listener are responses to these musical stimuli. Based on gestalt perceptual principles, Meyer finds inhibition or gratification of anticipated structures to be the basis of meaningful musical communication. Keil (chapter 1) argues

that Meyer's emphasis on syntactically recoverable dimensions of music leaves out an entire dimension of performance dynamics, which, particularly in improvised, spontaneous, or nonwritten musics, are deeply linked to expressive and emotive feelings and responses on the part of the listener. Shepherd (1977b, 1982) and Lidov (1977, 1980) have discussed Meyer's treatment of a score as musical signifier and other problems in his framework with communicational implications. For instance, Meyer's theory does not distinguish the meaning of one musical item from another, does not address the meaning of "pieces" or "musics" but only of *music,* and does not probe structural domains besides drama and tension. Furthermore, the framework does not account for varied meanings of the same piece to different listeners, or of the same piece to a single listener over time. One must, in other words, differentiate the syntactic features which might be said to arouse a listener, from the range and variety of musical feelings the listener may have in experiencing the piece.

Rather than posit only psychological constants as the deep sources enabling music to express emotions, we must also acknowledge social experience, background, skill, desire, and necessity as central and complementary constructs that shape perceptual sensations into conceptual realities. To do so is to recognize the social character of the musical communication process: the listener is implicated as a socially and historically situated being, not just as the bearer of organs that receive and respond to stimuli. For this reason, a description and a theory of the musical encounter must be sensitive to the biographies of the objects, events, and actors in question. The encounter is not simply one between a musical text and the gestalt processing of patterns of tension, anticipation, fulfillment, and resolution. Rather, it involves engaging and making sense of music through interpretive procedures deeply linked to, but not synonymous with, the structure of concatenated sound events (Schutz [1951] 1977).

Each listening is not just the juxtaposition of a musical object and a listener. It is a juxtaposition—in fact an entangling—of a dialectical object and a situated interlocutor. "Dialectical object" reflects the fact that a sound object or event can only be engaged through recognition of a simultaneous musical and extramusical reality: the experience is mental and material, individual and social, formal and expressive. In short, any musical object embodies and provokes interpretive tensions. One cannot encounter the object without making associations; the character of the associations is musical and extramusical. One cannot encounter the object without turning percepts to concepts; the character of those concepts

is musical and extramusical. The musical object is never isolated, any more than its listeners or producers are. Its position is doubly social; the object exists through a code, and through processes of coding and decoding. These processes are neither pure nor autonomous; neither is encountered at a strictly physiological level of experience, no matter how perceptual or physical the implication of the label one applies to them (Baudrillard 1981).

Enter the Listener: From Dialectics to Interpretive Moves

All musical sound structures are socially structured in two senses: they exist through social construction, and they acquire meaning through social interpretation. Both kinds of engagement are socially real regardless of the ultimate importance or value of the musical sound and regardless of how consciously it is formed, attended to, and understood. Interpretation of a sound object or event (that is, of a construction) is the process of intuiting a relationship between structures, settings, and kinds of potentially relevant or interpretable messages. When we first listen we begin to "lock in" and "shift" our attention, so that the sounds momentarily yet fluidly polarize toward structural or historical associations in our minds. The immediate recognition is that sounds are contextual and contextualizing, and continually so. We attend to changes, developments, repetitions—form in general—but we always attend to form in terms of familiarity or strangeness, features which are socially constituted through experiences of sounds as structures rooted in our listening histories.

When I hear piped-in music, I am first aware of it as generic piped-in background music, over and beyond whether it is a known or unknown tune or a known or unknown performer. But I recognize it neither from sound nor setting only. I must draw upon a range of typifications. If I am in the bank or an elevator I will be surprised if I hear piped-in Kaluli (Papua New Guinea) music, even if it is soft and perfectly obeys other structural features of Muzak. At the same time, I would be quite surprised if I hear what I structurally know to be appropriate background music played at a loud volume.

Interpretation always requires an active process, however unconscious, intuitive, or banal, of relating structure to ranges of potentially appropriate or relevant messages. In other words, the sound event draws my interpretive attention to the circumstances of meaning through the general features of being contextual and contextualizing. These features of the way we listen involve form-content and musical-extramusical dialectics. In the simplest sense what takes place in the experience of a piece of

music is the working of some features of momentary experience into the context of prior and plausible experiences to interpret what is going on.

Take the example of listening to the American national anthem, the "Star Spangled Banner," performed in the minor mode. The recording I have in mind is the opening section of the Carla Bley Band's "Spangled Banner Minor" (Bley 1978). What happens in the process of listening? First, one makes some attentional shifts and adjustments within the dialectic of musical and extramusical features. As one listens, one works through the dialectics in a series of "interpretive moves," developing choices and juxtaposing background knowledge. Interpretive moves involve the discovery of patterns as our experience is organized by juxtapositions, interactions, or choices in time when we engage symbolic objects or performances. Interpretive moves—regardless of complexity, variety, intensity, involvement—emerge dialectically from the human social encounter with a sound object or event (fig. 1).

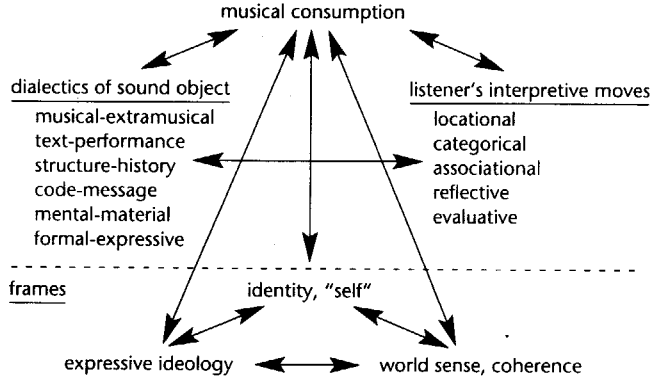

Figure 1. A musical encounter

Without establishing an order, sequence, or hierarchy of such moves, we can list some general categories. One kind of move is *locational*, placing the object that one is hearing within a subjective field of like and unlike items and events. In the case of "Spangled Banner Minor," such a move would vary significantly according to whether the listener was an American, a veteran, a prisoner, a dominated minority, a visitor, an immigrant. We would also expect an enormous range of responses within any one of these groups, no matter how much we assume members share common experiences.

One might also have certain more specific *categorical* interpretive moves, relating the piece to a class of things—anthems, and patriotic

songs—or an even more specific set—parodies of "important" texts. Or one might think of nonstandard treatments of anthems that are not parodies, for example, Ray Charles's soul-gospel version of "America the Beautiful." Moreover, one might make various *associational* moves, relating or analogizing this item to particular visual, musical, or verbal imagery. For instance, one may conjure the image of a flying American flag; a Jasper Johns painting of the American flag; a photograph of Larry Flint in a wheelchair naked save for an American flag serving as a diaper; a burning American flag outside the U.S. embassy in Teheran; hippies and yippies of the 1960s dressed in American flags; the passing of a folded flag to the survivors of a deceased military officer at a funeral ceremony; a flag at half-mast. One may hear the particular recording while at the same time also imagining or even hearing the "correct" rendition of the same tune. Similarly, one might imagine or hear the words that go with the melody. Such moves, singly or in combination, may begin immediately or after a period of exposure or may fade in and out during an extended listening experience.

Additionally, one might make a variety of *reflective* moves, relating the item to social conditions, political attitudes (patriotism, nationalism), or personal experiences that include similar or dissimilar sounds, mediated or live. One could reflect on something as specific as a live performance of the same piece by the same band, on recordings of the national anthem by Jimi Hendrix, Grover Washington, or Aretha Franklin, or on versions performed at mass events. More generally one might reflect upon standardization and the range of aesthetic license different performers might take or have taken with this piece in different historical or performance contexts.

Perhaps one also makes some *evaluative* interpretive moves, instantly finding this funny, clever, distasteful, inappropriate, hip, immoral, or foolish. Students occasionally question the seriousness of my choice of "Spangled Banner Minor" or take offense at my making an academic exercise out of something they may consider abhorrent and unpatriotic. Others accept my forcing them to listen to it in class but feel real animosity toward the performers for making it. Others find it outrageously funny and wonder why it took so long for someone to come up with such an obvious parody.

As one listens and applies various interpretive moves—locational, categorical, associational, reflective, evaluative—certain issues arise. One must decide if this is an intentionally incorrect version of something usually experienced in a slightly different form. One might question the

seriousness of the performers or their ability to play "correctly" or "in tune," and therefore doubt the deliberateness of the piece. Or one might decide that the articulation is skillful, carefully crafted, and intentionally different—a parody. Then there is the problem of the seriousness of the parody. Is it just a cute joke, mild fun or the like, or is some deeper political message or critique implied? We might consider why the joke has been made using a song that, while not sacred, has more rigidly fixed semantic parameters than most other tunes familiar to the majority of Americans and associated by others with America. It would be a different "kind" of joke if the same technique were applied to "Mary Had a Little Lamb" or "Amazing Grace."

It is therefore not surprising that parodies—whatever their initial text or reference—involve more fixed and preset musical semantic parameters than do other pieces; parodies involve conscious and intentional manipulations that require certain analytic prowess in the process of conceptualization and production. One must grasp the importance and tacit generality of the major mode to Western patriotic songs, anthems, and the like in order to alter just that while preserving almost every other typical code feature—brass instruments, stately pace, clear articulation—of a serious performance in the genre.

Through all this activity—however much takes place at the moment of listening and however much through subsequent reconstruction—the work, essentially social, is brought into the situation that I am calling musical engagement. In a sense then, interpretive moves act roughly like a series of social processing conventions, locating, categorizing, associating, reflecting on, and evaluating the work through various aspects of experience. Such conventions do not fix a singular meaning; instead they focus some boundaries of fluid shifts in our attentional patterns as we foreground and background experience and knowledge in relation to the ongoing perception of a sound object or event. Meaning then is momentarily changeable and emergent, in flux as our interpretive moves are unraveled and crystallized.

I do not mean to suggest that there is a specific order, hierarchy, or conscious articulation to these interpretive moves as they pertain either to specific pieces, genres, styles, cultural repertoires, or listeners. I also would not suggest that all varieties of interpretive moves are significant in equal proportion all the time. Further, there is no isomorphism between the density and involvement of interpretive moves and the importance, greatness, aesthetic value, or enduring quality of a piece as socially

placed and understood. I am also aware that my example is particularly loaded. Many pieces or musics do not involve the range and variety of interpretive activity I have described for "Spangled Banner Minor." But what is always similar is the instantaneous, momentary dialectical impression, which is unraveled and developed, or fixed and held, through listening time. These caveats suggest that various social, cultural, and historic processes and constraints operate to provide these skeletal interpretive moves with nerves, muscle, veins, blood, and clothes—that is, with many layers of internal and external variability. An ethnography of musical communication which concentrates on musical meaning and interpretation should be concerned with explicating some of these lived epistemologies, these intertwinings of form and substance, these practices full of potential or realized coherence and contradiction.

To summarize: interpretive moves involve certain dimensions of communicative action. Recognition of certain features of code, genre, stylization, and performance instantly identify boundaries of the musical object that exist in a tension of ideational and material structure, musical and extramusical features. Codes articulate through acoustic patterns, and surely the recognition of acoustic pattern is central to communication; all sounds are structured, performed, and heard through organized patterns of anticipation. But notice how what is communicated is potentially much more than any of this, much more than a "parody of the national anthem" or "the national anthem rendered in a minor key." A range of social and personal backgrounds, some shared, some complementary, of stratified knowledge and experience, and of attitudes (about anthems, songs in general, parodies in particular, politics in all cases) enters into the social construction of meaningful listening through interpretive moves, establishing a sense of what the sound object or event is and what one feels, grasps, or knows about it. At the same time some very specific decisions (about seriousness, nonseriousness, intent, performer's attitude and meaning) can also be made by drawing on interpretive moves and other kinds of social knowledge. Some of these might relate to factors far outside the specific hearing, like knowledge of the performers and their body of work. Others might relate to factors closer to the specific hearing—the conditions surrounding a recorded presentation or other sound objects heard immediately before and after the one in question. In short, each hearing, like human social interaction generally has, as Erving Goffman (1983) insisted, a biography and a history, and these may be more or less important to the particular hearing in question at a specific time.

From Interpretive Moves to Boundaries and Frames

I have argued that the core of the music communication process involves two components. One is dialectic or tension that emerges as one recognizes and engages a sound object or event in time, the other the interpretive moves one employs to situate, entangle, and untangle this engagement and recognition process. These components are dynamically linked, and the linkage typically produces a boundary—what Gregory Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974) called a "frame"—namely, a conceptual sensing of organizational premises and a foregrounding of the operational dynamics of a situation. This boundary or frame represents the notion that potentially very general and very specific messages emerge simultaneously in the consciousness of the interpreting listener. The boundary or frame is both a closed and open door to this process; it can lock in or compact a summary of all interacting interpretive constructs, or it can let them scatter and draw more attention to its own position among those elements. If interpretive moves provide the possibility both of digging deeply into referential and expressive dimensions of music hearing and of more limited, superficial engagement, the notion of a boundary or frame is meant to suggest the instantaneous possibility of abstracting the dynamism of the sound object's dialectics and the listener's interpretive moves to a general level, which can then be directed back toward specifics or fixed where it is. The question then is this: What sorts of constructs or tendencies are set up by this boundary-making and framing process? I think there might be three general types of these contextualizing frames.

One variety of frames has to do with *expressive ideology.* Through framing, music can communicate highly patterned aesthetic orderings. To the extent that a given frame suggests one mode of interpretation over other possible treatments of form and content, boundary making or framing involves value. A range of meanings as interpreted amongst others draws attention to one organizational premise—the extent to which the form or content is a preferred one. A second variety has to do with *identity,* the means by which music communicates sameness or difference of character as it exists among music makers, makers and listeners, individuals and groups. It draws interpretive attention to the character, the signature, of the "self." Musical practices typically either emphasize context by high redundancy of code, or emphasize code through a combination of contextual neutralization and low redundancy. Given the possibilities for very redundant codes in music, it is often the case that

interpretive action moves elsewhere; redundancy and what it puts into focus can become a sort of identifying signature (see Jakobson 1960).

A third variety of contextualizing frame has to do with *coherence,* a term suggested in recent work by Judith and Alton Becker (1981). The coherence of a frame refers to the extent that it is indivisible from other ways of relating to the subjectively real world—a notion close, I think, to what Seeger had in mind by "world view as the feeling of reality." In this kind of frame, the musical mode may present the same orders of message that are presented, simultaneously or otherwise, in other modes. I am referring, then, to tropes and crossmodal abstractions, those figurative wellsprings that unify experience across natural, cultural, physical, and aesthetic fields of reference. Coherence systems involve organizing principles that are not unique to one social domain, symbolic system, or social practice, but are instead broadly epistemic and unifying, culturally axiomatic, implicated in social behaviors and praxis of all sorts.

Seeger often stressed that music is interesting because of the way generality allows for many levels or overlaps of conscious discovery in listening. Here is where our views are most compatible. The significant feature of musical communication is not that it is untranslatable and irreducible to the verbal mode but that its generality and multiplicity of possible messages and interpretations brings out a special kind of "feelingful" activity and engagement on the part of the listener, a form of pleasure that unites the material and mental dimensions of musical experience as fully embodied. It is in this sense that we might speak of music as a metaphoric process, a special way of experiencing, knowing, and feeling value, identity, and coherence. If our interpretations of musical sounds are general, floating frames and boundaries that exist simultaneously and instantaneously, it is because we momentarily apprehend value, identity, and coherence through the "thisness of a that or the thatness of a this" (Burke 1945), through the simultaneous recognition of relationship and difference. Because metaphors operate on meaning over form, they generalize in ways no taxonomy might, while specifying in ways descriptions rarely achieve. Instantaneous recognition of shared connotative and denotative features is the motion from interpretive moves to frames and boundaries.

Speech about Music

Recently, in a lecture series bearing Seeger's name, Klaus Wachsmann (1982) spoke to the problem of speech about music. He suggested that

talk about music is a fact of life, worth turning into an object of study in its own right rather than a continual cause of musicological lament or embarrassment. He argued, along with Hugo Zemp (1979) and me (Feld 1981a, 1990), that the ways people talk about music can be a significant datum of musical concepts, theory, and experience and can be studied systematically. He addressed some ways in which any discourse about music is a window opening to metaphoric processes and synesthesia and therefore a potential way to explore—through the verbal mode—certain complexities of the musical mode stressed by Seeger's notion of music as the communication of "world view as the feeling of reality."

Yet when Charles Seeger talked of the qualities of speech about music, he considered only one dimension of verbal language, the referential or lexically explicit semantic character of speech, the dimension where words stand as proxies for denoted objects. It is true that musicologists and analysts use a very technical and referentially explicit lexicon to talk about music. But this theoretical, technical language is often closely related to metaphor, whether, as in many metalanguages, to a limited kind of polysemy or to a broader kind of linguistic creativity. Let me put that aside for now and argue that, at the very least, the "talking about music" that most people do, most of the time, whatever their technical knowledge, involves both lexical and discourse metaphor. This is at once a recognition of the nontranslatability of musical and verbal modes and the simultaneous multiplicity and generality of what is communicated. Metaphors involve the instantaneous recognition that things are simultaneously alike and unlike. And when most people talk about music, like and unlike is what they talk about.

Furthermore, when people talk to each other, to themselves, or to music analysts they often draw upon the stock of interpretive moves that I identified earlier. They *locate* and *categorize* musical experiences in relation to similar or dissimilar experiences. They *associate* musical experiences with experiences of other types. They *reflect* on how an experience relates to like or unlike imagery. And they *evaluate* the experience by relating it to their particular preferences. When people say, "It's different from . . . ," "It's a kind of . . . ," "It sort of reminds me of . . . ," and things of this sort, they are creating discourse frames with locational, categorical, and associational features. When they say, "Well, if I had to name it . . . ," "I mean on some level . . . ," "For me at least . . . ," "I really can't say but, do you know what I mean?" they are not necessarily tongue-tied, inarticulate, or unable to speak. They are caught in a

moment of interpretive time, trying to force awareness to words. They are telling us how much they assume that we understand *exactly* what they are experiencing. In fact, we do understand exactly what they are experiencing. We take it as socially typical that people talk this way about music, stringing together expressives, and we assume that this confirms what we are all supposed to know: that at some level, one just cannot say with words what music says without them. Finally, when someone says of a piece, "It's not as good as . . . " or "What I really like is . . . ," they are making an evaluative move that draws on simultaneous recognition of other texts, experiences, or performances.

These common structures of verbalization (all of which can be found concretely in the Music in Daily Life project interviews; see Crafts, Cavicchi, and Keil 1993) tell us something about the nature of interpretation and the possibilities for speech about music. One engages and places an item or event in meaningful social space through ongoing interpretive moves. These moves do not fix or freeze a single meaning; meaning is emergent and changeable in relation to various combinations of moves made by specifically situated speakers. Interview data confirms both the importance of lexical and discourse metaphors for verbally expressing something about musical experience and its prevalence in representing such abstractions as value, identity, and world sense. Talk locates emergent processes of making meanings, and it is as social engagement and accomplishment that talk must be studied.

Here is where I most obviously diverge from Seeger. By equating the referential domain of the speech mode with primary verbal communication, he left aside much of how people routinely talk and certainly how they routinely talk about music. It was this emphasis on the referential that led him to assert that speech about music communicated "world view as intellection of reality." On the contrary, I think speech about music represents an attempt to construct a metaphoric discourse to signify awareness of the more fundamental metaphoric discourse that music communicates in its own right. What is to be gained by attention to speech about music is information about the construction of interpretive moves as a kind of metaphoric engagement. Locational, categorical, associative, reflective, and evaluative discourse attempts to identify the boundaries that sound objects and events present in their structure and social organization. Interpretive moves in talk, then, are attempts to recreate, specify, momentarily fix, or give order to emergent recognitions of the events that take place so rapidly and intuitively when we experience musical sounds.

For clarity, let me emphasize that verbal representations of these sorts are in no way necessary or essential to musical communication. Musical communication is a primary modeling system, to use John Blacking's (1981b) phrase, with unique and irreducible symbolic properties. These must be experienced and approached in their own right and, as Seeger said, empirically and conceptually freed from any notion that they simply translate or copy the speech mode. At the same time, speech about music clearly constitutes a source of parallel or exploratory information about metaphoric process, discourse, interpretive moves, and conceptual ideas or theories about sound.

Conclusion

What does music communicate? The question as articulated by Seeger places an emphasis on music as a contained universe that evokes meanings from an inner form to an outer social realm. To rethink this question I have replaced it with several others: What are the shapes of music's communication processes? How are these processes activated? How do they implicate interpretation? In answering these questions I have tried to explicate the role of listening as symbolic engagement in order to redress the imbalance common in analytic perspectives that equate musical communication with the extent to which a listener receives a composer's or performer's intentions, or receives what a music analyst can uncover in the score.

By communication I have meant a socially interactive and subjective process of reality construction through message making and interpretation. Communication is a dialectical process. The dialectic between musical structure and extramusical history is central to the study of human musicality in evolutionary, cross-cultural, and symbolic perspective. A communications epistemology addresses this dialectic not by choosing sides but by focusing on its consequences. Those consequences concern boundary making, framing, and contextualizing as universal perceptual features of the dialectical process. Furthermore, framing involves simultaneous recognition of generality and specificity, form and reference, through some combination of locational, categorical, associational, reflective, and evaluative interpretive moves. I sense that investigating the substance of these processes leads to the conclusion that music's major messages are general and multileveled and concern expressive ideology and value, identity and character, and coherence of world sense.

I have argued that what makes this possible is the process of boundary framing, the contextualizing turn that proceeds from the recognition of

dialectically simultaneous musical and extramusical features experienced in engaging the sound object. I think that these constructs are, to varying degrees, accessible to intuitive and empirical investigation. At the same time, they may also be represented at the level of verbal interpretive moves that metaphorically locate, categorize, associate, reflect on, or evaluate music experience. A key to this is the differentiation of music, as instantaneously apprehensible metaphorical expression of one symbolic order, and speech about music, as metaphorical expression of another order that reflects secondary interpretive awareness, recognition, or engagement.