Book Reviews

Lawrence Kramer. *Music as Cultural Practice: 1800-1900.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

Reviewed by James Buhler

Lawrence Kramer's ambitious book *Music as Cultural Practice: 1800-1900* offers a defense of "the much-disputed idea that music means something, or better yet, something we can talk about" (xi). Indeed, he hopes "to appropriate [the] strength of meaning on behalf of music—and most especially on behalf of textless instrumental music" (2). A literary critic and author of the influential *Music and Poetry,* Kramer has been instrumental in introducing methodologies derived from post-structuralism and New Historicism into the study of music. At their best, the hermeneutical analyses that Kramer offers in *Music as Cultural Practice* are virtuosic and highly seductive; and if his interpretations occasionally seem arbitrary or overly fantastic, we can nevertheless glimpse in his practice, perhaps above all in those most whimsical of passages, the image of what some future, not-yet-existing musical hermeneutics might be.

The allure of Kramer's method no doubt stems in large part from his ability to release associations between music and other aspects of culture that formalist methods have long suppressed while at the same time retaining a prominent place for those methods in his interpretive practice. Indeed, Kramer folds elements of harmonic, motivic, formal, and Schenkerian analysis into his interpretations, and this is one reason why it is appropriate for music theorists to devote attention to this book.

The manner in which Kramer employs music analysis to mediate between music and other aspects of culture is impressive and always instructive. Kramer treats the analysis, like the work from which it derives, as an object that is itself in need of interpretation. Although for Kramer analysis can reveal something crucial about a work, without interpretation that analysis remains as enigmatic as the work that the

analysis is supposed to elucidate. Analysis becomes a means by which Kramer, borrowing a term from J. L. Austin,[1] identifies the "illocutionary force" of music, "the pressure or power that a [musical] speech act exerts on a situation" (7). If the musical work is the sedimentation of illocutionary force within a specifically musical medium, then analysis can help us uncover those points in the work where that force puts the work under stress. Kramer explores the structural similarities between these musical tensions and those he finds in other "cultural practices," such as art, literature, and psychoanalysis.

In Chapter Two, for instance, Kramer reads the individual movements of each of Beethoven's two-movement piano sonatas as structural parallels of one another; he interprets these sonatas as instances of "expressive doubling," where one movement of the pair "represents the transposition of the other to a higher or deeper plane, a more brilliant or profound register" (30). Likewise, in Chapter Three Kramer tells us that Chopin's Prelude in A Minor is one of those works that "*sound* abnormal, and cannot be made to sound otherwise" (91); this prelude becomes an instance of an "impossible object," a work in which "subjective incoherence . . . becomes articulate" (92). Liszt's musical portraits of Faust and Gretchen in the *Faust Symphony*, the subject of Chapter Four, allow Kramer "to rethink the representation of gender in the nineteenth century" (103); here, in an interesting reversal of the usual procedure of interpreting program music, Kramer is less concerned with what Goethe's *Faust* can tell us about Liszt's music than with what Liszt's music can tell us about how the gender relations of Goethe's *Faust* were conceptualized in the mid-nineteenth century. In Chapter Five Kramer moves from gender to sexuality and suggests that the structural processes of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and Hugo Wolf's "Ganymede" "(re)articulate certain radical changes in the concept of sexuality that emerge in late-nineteenth-century culture" (135).

The problems in Kramer's interpretations do not simply disappear

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[1]J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

if we arrive at better analytical representations, and so it would be petty to quibble too much with the details of his analyses. For Kramer is far more interested in how it is that music, despite its lack of a linguistic content, nevertheless manages to resonate outside of its purely musical context and to attain a culturally mediated significance—in short, how it is that music comes to be a cultural practice. That is, the central question that Kramer's book poses is not How do we go about generating the best analytical representations possible?, but rather How do we deploy any kind of analysis in an interpretive (hermeneutic) argument? This is a *theoretical* question rather than an interpretive one, although it is not a question that *music theory* is accustomed to asking—or answering. It is a question, in fact, whose answer demands philosophical speculation on the nature of analytical representation and on the relation between music and language. From this perspective, some of Kramer's seemingly arbitrary interpretive decisions—that the two-movement Beethoven piano sonatas represent an attempt to work out alternative solutions to the same basic premise, or that "the musical parallelism between [sections of Hugo Wolf's 'Ganymede'] testifies to their libidinal parallelism" (174)—may be understood as the symptoms of underlying and, for the most part, unacknowledged theoretical problems within his text. Since it is in the first and last chapters of the book that Kramer raises theoretical issues at length, this review will be primarily concerned with the arguments of these two chapters.

The first chapter sketches what Kramer calls an "Outline of Musical Hermeneutics." Here Kramer develops techniques for "opening hermeneutic windows" on pieces. He identifies three types of windows. The first type, *textual inclusions*, consists of "texts set to music, titles, epigrams, programs, notes to the score, and sometimes even expression markings" (9). The second type of hermeneutic window, closely related to the first, Kramer refers to as *citational inclusions*, which consist of less-than-explicit allusions to other musical works or art works. Finally, Kramer calls the third type of window *structural tropes*. "The most powerful of hermeneutic windows," the structural trope is "a structural procedure, capable of various practical realizations, that also functions as a typical expressive act within a certain cultural/historical framework" (10). More latent than immanent

within the piece, the structural trope is located at those points that are (structurally) problematic in the piece—those places within the work where structural tensions, and the illocutionary force of music that sustains them, become manifest. The structural problem suggests affinities with similar problems in other cultural fields: "guided by the problem posed by the breaking point, we begin to play with analogies and recategorizations, seeking to throw light on one object by seeking out its multiple affiliations with others" (13). The point then is "to allow musical and non-musical materials to comment on, criticize, or reinterpret each other" (17). Kramer's idea here is that similar kinds of structural tropes occur in different cultural media, that these tropes can be analyzed and compared, and that these tropes articulate certain cultural practices through their appropriation of, transformation of, and resistance to underlying cultural structures.

Kramer is not always clear as to whether the structural trope is in the work (that is, is an immanent property of the work) or whether it is a product of Kramer's reading of the work (that is, is a latent property of the work). The structural trope begins as a product of interpretation, a supplement to the immanent properties of the work and so also properly exterior to those properties. But Kramer soon transforms supplement into complement, exterior into interior, as the latent qualities of the structural trope become something real, something immanent, something that was "in the air" (25). (Kramer makes this comment about the structural trope of "expressive doubling" that he finds in Beethoven's two-movement sonatas.)

Kramer suggests that this hermeneutic practice remains fundamentally unaltered by its object (music, literature, philosophy, painting, etc.)—that hermeneutic interpretation remains indifferent to the medium of what it interprets. "Under the hermeneutic attitude, there is and can be no fundamental difference between interpreting a written text and interpreting a work of music—or any other product or practice of culture" (6). He proceeds in a straightforward manner to suggest that the difficulty of interpreting music can be solved with the correct critical technology: "we should now know how to develop the techniques we need [to interpret music]; . . . we must learn, first, how to open hermeneutic windows . . . and, second, how to treat works of

music as fields of humanly significant action'' (6). The almost giddy optimism of this passage reduces the specific problem of musical interpretation to a ''lack'' of technique. It also posits a hidden assertion of technological progress: the impasse over interpretation can be overcome if only we develop the right tools. The seemingly explicit content of literature and art makes interpretation there seem a more straightforward endeavor than it actually is; but such a view of literature and art ignores the complex relationship between the figural and literal level of the work.[2] In reality, as Kramer is no doubt aware, the relationship between these levels is no easier to interpret in literature and art than is the relationship between musical technique and musical significance.[3] Music's lack of an explicit semantic dimension just makes the divide more explicit and, hence, renders the problems endemic to interpreting it more overt. The right tools do not in fact make interpretation any less problematic (although they may, perhaps, make it ultimately more satisfying), a point over which Kramer passes in silence.

''Interpretation,'' Kramer tells us, ''takes flight from breaking points, which usually means from points of under- and over-determination'' (12). Breaking points thus become ''sources of understanding'' (13); the search for points of rupture becomes a search for what is individual in an object, for what can be interpreted. As we have noted, Kramer conceptualizes the breaking point as a case of a musical ''illocutionary'' speech act. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's critique of Austin's speech-act theory,[4] Kramer emphasizes that the illocutionary force of a musical speech act is radically dependent on context and, further, that this radical contextuality makes it impossible

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[2]Hayden White, ''Commentary: Form, Reference, and Ideology in Musical Discourse,'' in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 292.

[3]Kramer does suggest, for instance, that ''interpretation is an art modelled on the experience of [instrumental] music'' (16).

[4]Jacques Derrida, ''Signature Event Context,'' trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Hehlman, *Glyph* 1 (1977): 172-97.

"to limit the instability of illocution" (8). Indeed, since speech acts "presuppose the possibility of their repetition in new contexts"—what Derrida calls their iterability—they also "necessarily presuppose the possibility of difference, and hence also the possibility of their being redirected, reinterpreted" precisely because of this possibility of repetition, this iterability (8). The very structure of the sign is divided, as Derrida teaches, between iterability and difference. "One can speak the words of the same *but in another voice*, a voice that emerges from within language to spread itself throughout the whole system, fissuring it in every direction" (178). Iterability entails the heterogeneity of language. There can never be just one meaning for a word, phrase, structure or even style; for that word, phrase, structure or style can be uttered again and in the act of repetition can become different to the extent that the context has changed.[5] The always-changing context thus dislocates meaning and prevents meaning from ever being wholly identical with itself. Hence, "the prospect of what Austin thinks of as a 'misfire,' as 'infelicitous' deviation from the norm, is actually the norm itself" (8). Misfire is the very condition of possibility of successful, completed communication, and, so, potential misfires are always already latent in any attempt to complete a speech act. Kramer generalizes this notion of speech-act theory to music by locating illocutionary force wherever a musical speech act, what Kramer identifies as an "act of expression or representation," is iterable and where "in being produced the act seeks to affect a flow of events, a developing situation" (9).

"Other-voiced texts," Kramer writes, "are those that accentuate the always-latent prospect of a misfire, that openly invite a reinterpretation, a revoicing, of prominent expressive acts" (180). In particular, this other-voicedness draws on the Derridean concept of "force," which both supplements and opposes structure. Force, Kramer tells us, "is temporal and dynamic in character and associated

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[5]The fundamental instability of context generalizes to wider domains, in particular to that of interpretive practice. As we shall see, Kramer never considers the full ramifications of this instability for his own interpretive practice, which likewise presupposes some (relatively stable) context.

with value, beauty, feeling; it is graspable principally as it disrupts structure and compels change'' (176). The supplemental logic that governs the opposition between force and structure entails that the lesser term of the pair (force) is the condition of possibility of the greater term (structure). Without force, structure would not be what it is; it would, in fact, be impossible. At the same time, however, this supplementary force also undoes that structure by eroding the stability of the opposition that had made structure possible in the first place. Force, as Kramer notes, produces a ''strategic dislocation'' of structure, an effect that resists the structure within which it is embedded and that divests that structure of its authority. By emphasizing how force ''invigorates'' rather than resists structure, however, Kramer places an affirmative spin on Derrida that is not present in the original: ''Though deconstruction is in part a practice of vigilance against the repressive effects of structure, its larger purpose is to bring forth an affirmative energy by which both force and structure can invigorate each other'' (177). What is missing in Kramer's affirmation of Derrida is the sense in which a supplement such as force not only appropriates what it supplements but also always already breaches that appropriation. Only one who is insensitive to images of death in Derrida's text, to Derrida's uncovering of the grim struggle of language against itself, could read his exposition of the supplement as exclusively affirmative in tone.[6] Derrida writes, for instance, that ''the supplement is dangerous in that it threatens us with death.''[7]

Other-voiced texts produce what Kramer elsewhere refers to as *narratographic* effects.[8] And it is in terms of musical narratology,

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[6]*Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 144.

[7]Ibid., 155. Indeed, theory, for Kramer, is dangerous in that, if taken too literally, it threatens us with the death of interpretation, of meaning, and ultimately even of ourselves.

[8]Kramer, ''Musical Narratology: A Theoretical Outline,'' *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991): 144-48. In *Music as Cultural Practice*, Kramer refers to these effects as ''narrative'' rather than ''narratographic.'' Here, we adopt the the terminology of the

discussed in Chapter Six, that *Music as Cultural Practice* makes important theoretical contributions. Kramer clearly perceives such narratographic effects as unusual occurrences in music. For Kramer, these effects "constitute a critical or disruptive process rather than a normative one" (189). Indeed, Kramer is skeptical of reading music as fundamentally narrative in quality. As he states in his article "Musical Narratology," "the very premise of musical narratology is the recognition that music cannot tell stories."[9] Instead, he suggests that instrumental music, especially, "leans more towards lyric than towards narrative in its organization of successions" (185). While narrative "[combines] storytelling with the continuous representation of an epistemological gap," Kramer writes, "the lyric treats as continuities the epistemological differences on which narrative depends" (189). Following Mikhail Bakhtin, Kramer conceptualizes the lyric as a "monological form," by which he means that the lyric is characterized by "a single subject-position in which the authorial, narrational, and focussing activities are merged" (188). Certainly, a lyrical text is a subjective presentation of a series of events, and so not the events themselves; but the lyrical text emphasizes the immediacy of the presentation, the subjective experience of those events. The lyrical subject can produce such immediacy, however, only by remaining oblivious to the very act of textual production that makes the lyric possible in the first place—that is, by excluding from figural representation the self as an agent of textual production.

Since music, according to Kramer, is construed within Western culture as being primarily a lyrical form, his critique of the lyrical subject also applies to music's lyrical subject. In particular, instrumental music endows continuity, or rather the figural representation of continuity, with a value it withholds from disruption. But this illusion of continuity is as difficult to sustain in music as in the lyric. Like the lyric, music generally differs from narrative in that "the subject who supposedly produces the music is not represented directly

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"Musical Narratology" article since it is more precise.

[9]Ibid., 154.

[in the music]'' (187). This lack of an immanent musical narrator, of a narrator inscribed into the very fabric of the musical discourse, is what allows music to exhibit the symbolic and temporal continuity characteristic of lyric, indeed perhaps to exhibit it even more consistently than the literary lyric.

The continuity of music (unlike that of sound) is neither ontological nor irrevocable: it is always open to discursive challenge and so to cultural negotiation. Like the lyric, musical continuity can be disrupted in a way that calls into question the possibility of that continuity. By accentuating the gap between musical continuity as a thing produced and the continuous unfolding of sound (the way one sound follows immediately upon another in temporal sequence) as an ontological principle of the medium's temporality, disruption allows music to approach momentarily the condition of narrative.

Disruption, it might be said, structures an opposition between continuity and its opposite, discontinuity. Like the disruptions characteristic of narrative, musical disruption blocks the free flow of time. Such blockages rebound back at the subject, however, drawing attention to the subject's loss of discursive control rather than to the subject's mastery of it. In narrative, for instance, we are paradoxically more aware of the presence of the narrator when the seamless unfolding of plot is somehow broken, suspended, or in some way problematized – in short, when we become aware that story and plot are not identical – than in those (more common) instances when the plot proceeds smoothly without interruption (186). In the latter case, the presence of the narrator remains largely transparent, or ''maximally covert'' in the terminology of narratology.[10] Kramer suggests that the situation is similar for music (and indeed for any art form that is primarily lyrical): ''The music narrates in order to fail at narration, to reach the point of narrative rupture at which the subject breaks through, both dislocated and dislocating'' (202). The price of producing this other voice, this musical voice capable of producing the effect of narrating, is a thematization of subjective control presented by means of the narrating

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[10]See, for instance, the entry on ''narrator'' in Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

subject's loss of discursive mastery. For Kramer "the sudden eruptions of subjectivity" that project this loss of discursive control "manifest themselves as impediments to narrative"; they become "signs of an inability to proceed meaningfully in time" (203).

Other topics of *Music as Cultural Practice* could have used the same kind of theoretical attention that Kramer devotes to musical narratology. For all the discussion of structural tropes, for instance, Kramer never broaches the central theoretical question of how structural tropes are related to one another. Only in his article "Dangerous Liaisons" does Kramer even begin to sketch a theory of what the significance of similarity between various structural tropes might be—although even here there is less than of an account than one might like.[11] In this article, Kramer speaks of "deep structures" rather than "structural tropes," but what Kramer has to say about deep structures, or rather about the relationship between the deep structure of a musical work and that of a literary work, would seem to be equally valid for relating the structural tropes of literature and music.

Kramer suggests in "Dangerous Liaisons" that the lack of obvious resemblances between two works of art need not rule out shared deep structures. He calls such hidden structural similarity "deep-structural convergence."[12] More generally these convergences function like analogies, although their lack of resemblance at an obvious level marks them as a special case of analogy. "Manifest analogies" can be evaluated somewhat more directly than those that exhibit only this deep-structural convergence. "When we find a manifest analogy," Kramer tells us, "we should assume that one work is trying to annex certain values associated with another work, or with a class of others. The analogy will become meaningful to the extent that we can interpret the values annexed, their impact on the work that annexes them, and the lack . . . that motivates the effort of

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[11]Kramer, "Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 13, no. 2 (1989): 159-67.

[12]Ibid., 161.

annexation.''[13] With the manifest analogy, then, Kramer assumes that one work of the pair is prior (both historically and philosophically) to the other and that the later one is in some sense a response to the first, or a ''reading'' of it. The second term of a manifest analogy then is to be interpreted, according to Kramer, as an intentional act of appropriation of the first.

This assumption of intentionality is not necessary for elucidating a deep-structural convergence, however. Works that share similar deep structures seem to be articulating common underlying social tensions or enforcing common experiences of time and common structures of the life-world. For this reason we can speak of such convergences as ''cultural practices.'' ''When we claim to find a deep-structural convergence,'' Kramer writes, ''we should assume that the convergent works indirectly affirm a common core of values.''[14] There is no implication here that one work is responding to or trying to appropriate another work. An objection against Kramer—that the comparison of, say, a Chopin prelude and English Romantic poetry makes little sense because the relationship between Chopin and this poetry seems so tenuous and arbitrary[15]—loses force as soon as one realizes that the structural trope or deep-structural convergence does not imply in any way that the works (or rather their producers) have knowledge of one another.[16] That is, similarity of deep structure need not suggest that one deep structure is a reading of the other. Rather this resemblance is a product of responding to a similar social structure or situation. It is latent rather than immanent in the respective texts, a kind of ''unconscious'' of the texts that is revealed only by bringing the various

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[13]Ibid., 162.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Kramer makes this comparison in the third chapter.

[16]A theory of deep-structural convergence must still confront the not-insignificant problem of spurious correlation of structure, unless we are to make the rather dubious claim that all structural similarity is necessarily significant.

texts into contact with one another.[17]

Kramer always seems to locate the meaning of a structural trope in music by mediating it through something outside music, typically a literary text, most often some kind of poetry. Hence one of the refrains of Kramer's approach is the search for a text, the transformation of all music into texted music: "the imperative to interpret asks us to recognize that all music is in some sense texted music, music allied to the cultural activity of text-production." That a text is necessary to establish the meaning of a structural convergence becomes clear in the very next sentence: "Where no text is given, our job is to find one, be it a solid 'Owen Wingrave' or a typical, composite text that we piece together ourselves."[18] Kramer assigns priority to the text, to verbal discourse. In a certain sense we can understand this move as a response to the indisputable fact that meaning must normally be couched in verbal terms in order to be communicated. Kramer tries to repair his epistemological ranking by once again invoking Derrida's logic of the supplement, where music functions as a supplement to some text (or series of texts), which it is the responsibility of the interpreter to reconstruct. By invoking this logic, Kramer seems to take back the priority he assigns to the literary text. Unfortunately, his interpretive technique belies this move. Kramer constantly embarks from and returns to the supposed greater security of the text. In particular, the literary text is granted considerably more interpretive autonomy than is music. Music's slippery voice is silenced, emptied, and then filled with a literary content that seems more secure. Behind this move perhaps lies the fear that music does not—or cannot—mean something after all.

Kramer remains skeptical of too much theorizing, insisting that

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[17]In his article "Musical Narratology," Kramer criticizes Anthony Newcomb for using narrative "to install a latent order amid manifest disorder" (146). But Kramer does not extend this critique to his own position, which likewise depends on the reading of latent contents from musical works. The question that remains unanswered by Kramer, and indeed that can only be satisfactorily answered in a theoretical mode that is granted more than just "provisional" authority, is: What separates the latency of Newcomb's narratives from that of Kramer's structural tropes?

[18]Kramer, "Dangerous Liaisons," 167.

"recognizing structural tropes is an empirical, even a catch-as-catch-can, matter" (12). His attitude toward theory is, in fact, somewhat ascetic: he employs theory only when necessary to resist theory—to turn theory against itself and thereby undo the theoretical impulse of swallowing up what that theory purportedly explains. Hence "each particular theory [is accorded] only a provisional, implicit, occasional authority" (14). The danger of theory, Kramer suggests, is that it may be used to limit rather than to facilitate interpretation.

Kramer sketches theory as a kind of death. Theory is totalizing; it produces "the illusion that the wavering movement of meaning has been arrested at last" (16). For Kramer, theory is in fact the death of interpretation that is also a condition of possibility of interpretive life: "Deconstruction," Kramer writes in the last sentence of the book, "is a sign of life" (213). But this statement comes with a necessary caveat: the system, death, theory is what makes a deconstructive practice possible in the first place (213). The logic that governs this relationship between theory and deconstructive practice exactly reproduces that of the supplement described by Derrida; even the imagery of life and death, *eros* and *thanatos*, remains intact. Derrida writes, "the dangerous supplement . . . is properly *seductive*; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it toward its loss or fall and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal."[19] Later, Derrida adds that the supplement is "a *substitute* that *enfeebles, enslaves, effaces, separates,* and *falsifies*."[20]

This theme of substitution is one that operates in Kramer's text as well. Let us read how the (im)potency of theory is invoked and revoked, always to be trumped and regulated by interpretive practice:

> Though interpretive practices benefit enormously from hermeneutic theorizing, a hermeneutic theory is only as good as the interpretations that it underwrites. Freud . . . repeatedly insisted that psychoanalysis was unconvincing as

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[19]Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 151.

[20]Ibid., 215.

> a body of theory. Only by *doing* analysis, by engaging in the work of interpretation whether as analyst or analysand, could one be persuaded that Freudian claims are credible . . . . The same is true of musical hermeneutics . . . . I will, to be sure, theorize a little in what follows, both about music and about interpretation. The value of theory, though, must rest with the interpretive practices that it empowers. (2)[21]

Just as Kant, according to Kramer, legislates the range of musical meaning, so too Kramer legislates the range of theory, as though theory were merely a supplement to practice, something to be controlled and regulated so that it does not erode the integrity and freedom of interpretation. Kramer places boundaries on (theoretical) freedom in order to ensure the continuation of (interpretive) freedom. Kramer, no less than Kant, however, "responds . . . to the presence of danger" (4). Why else would Kramer express such deep concern about keeping the authority of theory "only provisional"? Furthermore, Kramer's legislation of theory turns authoritarian at the level of interpretation itself: "The text . . . does not give itself to understanding; it *must be made to yield* to understanding" (6, emphasis added). The interpretation enters the work, uninvited if need be, by opening a hermeneutic window "through which the discourse of our understanding can pass." Kramer, however, never specifies how one is to take such an authoritarian stand against the object while still allowing that object "its measure of resistance" (16).

Kramer envisions theory not as some kind of fixed entity but as an adaptable toolkit of techniques oriented toward elucidating the individual work of art. Interpretation, the pragmatic employment of

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[21]One wonders what Kramer would do with the well-known claim, which Freud advanced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that "the aim of all life is death." In the terms developed here, this claim transmutes into "the aim of all interpretation is theory." Interpretation can avoid and regulate theory no more than, and in the same way that, life can avoid and regulate death. That is, one can to a certain extent defer but never entirely escape death or theory.

these theories, is something that can be "learned only by example and performed only by applying tacit, unformalized knowledge to individual cases" (14). Kramer does not so much discount the importance of theory as place its power at the service of interpretation. In fact, the interpretive potential of a theory—or as Kramer puts it, "the interpretive practices it empowers"—regulates the theoretical activity: theories that prove useful for some interpretive task are legitimated by nothing more than that utility.

Even so, there is something suspiciously underdetermined about Kramer's criteria: in particular, the definition of the term "useful" is suspended in an ambiguous state. Undoubtedly such ambiguity is purposeful in that it allows and promotes interpretive mobility. But it also begs a question, one of an infinitely deferred context: To whom exactly are Kramer's interpretations to be considered useful? We would not argue with the claim that "good interpretations can never be manifestly true" (15). We might even go so far as to accept Kramer's assertion that "unlike a true account of something, an interpretation can never exclude rival, incompatible accounts" (15). Kramer himself does not take a position on how utility is to be evaluated except to say that interpretations "convince by their power to sustain a detailed scrutiny of a text that also reaches deep into the cultural context" (15). Of course, this criterion just defers the question of relevance and validity again to the cultural context, or rather to an assertion that detailed scrutiny of texts that reach deep into cultural contexts, whatever they may turn out to be, is a useful kind of interpretation to do. Kramer does not indicate why (or to whom) his kind of interpretation should be more "useful" than, say, a plain old Schenkerian reduction, which likewise reaches deep into the musical context of the work but has the distinct advantage of rigorously theorizing its admittedly narrow context.

Problems of utility are notoriously difficult to resolve because utility can be measured by so many different, and even somewhat incommensurate, standards. (It is unlikely, for instance, that what is "useful" to a Schenkerian would be identical to what is "useful" for

Kramer.[22]) This is not to cast doubt on Kramer's invocation of utility, however, so much as it is a call for examining and rigorously theorizing the posited context that such utility must always presuppose. One searches without success in Kramer's texts for some acknowledgement on his part that utility is less than self-certain, or even that utility is itself a category subject to the intricate mechanism of cultural negotiation and so is as fluid and unstable as musical meaning. A central task of theory is to resist interpretation, to push interpretation as a form of "practical consciousness" (14) to greater self-reflection. It is this function of theory especially that Kramer suppresses when he casts theory in a subordinate position with respect to interpretation. To the extent that theory lives a subaltern existence in *Music as Cultural Practice*, it remains a dangerous supplement that imperils his interpretive practice even while empowering it. The logic of the supplement suggests that theory always already shapes interpretation, no matter how often Kramer might intervene to keep theory subordinate to interpretative practice. If interpretation is "opportunistic, unruly, and contestatory" (14) when confronted with theoretical constraints, then the same can be said of theory when it is placed at the service of interpretation. Theory "cannot be [successfully] regimented, disciplined, or legislated" any more than interpretation can.

Ultimately Kramer's interpretive practice suffers from a lack of theory that might have resisted his interpretive practice. Despite the genuine insights Kramer offers into the works he interprets, his admirable resistance to theory frequently passes into complete negation and so also into an unthinking affirmation of his interpretive practice. Yet does this affirmation not suggest an interpretive practice that has itself become totalizing? Does it not testify to the existence of some unacknowledged, some *unresisted* theory that underwrites his

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[22]As Marion Guck recently pointed out, Allen Forte's analytical discourse does indeed construct a definite context for the music he analyzes. What those who object to his practice must dislike, then, "is not a lack of context, but, in fact, the particular context in which Forte places the music" ("Analytical Fictions," *Music Theory Spectrum* 16, no. 2 [1994]: 223n).

interpretive practice and indeed is necessary to give voice to those fragmentary, idiosyncratic, and heterogeneous elements of the artwork that Kramer himself so clearly wants to preserve? Resistance, it should be noted, cuts both ways. Theory without interpretation may be empty and lacking in empirical content, but interpretation without theory lacks sense and meaning, for it is theory that supplies (and problematizes) the context that makes interpretation possible. By making theory subordinate to interpretation, Kramer simply inverts a ranking that is perhaps more typical. Let us read what Kramer, in another context, has to say about such privileging and overturning: "Newcomb's reading [of Schumann's works] itself is a trope of overturning, a privileging of force against structure. And this is problematical, because his own analyses uncover forces of dislocation that can only be confronted by reading against or across the force/structure polarity" (190n). We can reapply this critique against Kramer's own ordering of interpretation and theory: elevating interpretation above theory is problematic because Kramer's own interpretive practice uncovers interpretive problems that can only be confronted by reading against or across the interpretation/theory polarity. In order to read across this polarity, however, it is also necessary to grant theory more than "provisional" authority.

Music as Cultural Practice presents tantalizing hints of a solution to the always vexing problem of how to link music and analysis to other aspects of culture. Yet if it ultimately does not deliver on its promise, this is due to the arbitrary restrictions Kramer places on theory vis-à-vis interpretation. A better hermeneutic practice will perhaps emerge when theory and interpretation are allowed instead to enter into a productive tension where the relationship is governed by something other than an invisible hand ("utility") that always already turns out to fulfill even the most fanciful whims of the interpreter.