# Music vs. Words

## Exploring the Problematic State of Semantic Meaning in Music

**Berk Sirman**

Magisteruppsats 2009
Institutionen för musikvetenskap
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Musical language does not carry obvious semantic meaning. The question of whether music has semantic meaning, or how it does, has been an age old question in musicology. This paper is a case study of musical analyses from Lawrence Kramer and Constantin Floros, and it discusses how they interpret semantic meaning into the Beethoven and Mahler pieces they analyze. Their analyses are then discussed against Nicholas Cook's model of musical meaning, and the formalist approach of Leonard B. Meyer. Even though these offer some insight to the difficulties faced in Kramer's and Floros' methods, some major problems with associating semantic meaning into music remain.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

The starting point of this essay is a fact, which everybody is familiar with: The language of music is different from regular language. The most distinctive difference for our purpose is that music is not a referential language. This makes the concept of meaning in music a problematic one. Sure, music can carry many sorts of meaning, even obvious semantic meaning in some cases when it is accompanying a text. However, how can music reach out to semantic meaning without the help of libretto, an explicit program (like in tone poems), or lyrics? Or how does a piece of program music acquire its semantic meaning and how does this coexist with structural meaning?

This is a very big subject that well exceeds the scope of this essay. Therefore, I will conduct a case study of two recent analyses that attribute semantic meaning to music. These are Lawrence Kramer's analysis of Beethoven's op. 111, and Constantin Floros' analysis of Mahler's Fourth Symphony. This way I hope to be able to discuss such a vast subject in adequate detail and sophistication, and still be able to comply with the space and time constraints of a masters essay.

## *Aim of Essay*

The aim of this essay is to analytically approach semantic meaning in music, and bring out some major difficulties and their possible solutions related to attributing it.

## *Previous Works*

There are quite a large number of works on the subject in general, but the delimitation of the subject on this essay also limits the relevant literature. Lawrence Kramer's book *Music as Cultural Practice,* Constantin Floros' *Gustav Mahler The Symphonies* will provide the analyses for the case studies. Leonard B. Meyer's *Emotion and Meaning in Music* and *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* are of direct relevance to this study as they explore structural meaning. Nicholas Cook's article "Theorizing Music" and Sten Dahlstedt's *Musikesthetik* are of great importance as reference in the theoretical part of this essay. Michael Dummett's *Frege and Other Philosophers* provides important philosophical background on meaning. Even though there are numerous books and articles published that are about meaning in music, there is a lack of material that takes individual analyses and critically discuss them against the theoretical background. That is what I will be attempting in the essay.

## *Method*

This is a paper in musical aesthetics about semantic meaning. The study of analyses that attribute this to music will cover two cases showing the two ways by which structural to semantic meaning may occur: The first is by interpreting semantic meaning into the structure of the musical piece. The second is by linking certain elements in music to extra-musical events, usually by way of a puzzle-solving, such as linking these elements to important events in the composer's life, the social/political environment of the time etc. The former method is Lawrence Kramer's, as seen in his analysis of Beethoven's op.111 piano sonata, and the latter is how Constantin Floros analyzes Gustav Mahler's symphonies. The two will be examined in chapters two and three respectively. After these case studies, I will discuss the topic further by referring to Nicholas Cook and Leonard Meyer as well as providing some philosophical background on meaning in general.

## ***Types of Musical Meaning***

There are various types of meaning one may refer when discussing the meaning of a piece of music. A competent study on musical meaning should include a discussion of these types of meaning before discussing any of them.

The list of meanings I will use here appear in Sten Dahlstedt's *Musikesthetik*. This book is an overview of aesthetics from antiquity to 20th century, and in the appendix there is a discussion of meaning in aesthetics where the below uses of meaning are discussed. This list of uses is very useful for my purpose for the following reasons. First of all, it covers the ones that will be discussed in this study. Moreover, it mentions other uses of meaning, which provide a negative definition for the focus of this study.

The meanings that are most important for this paper are structural and semantic. The full list is as follows.

### Causal Meaning

This type of meaning examines the relation between a phenomenon and its necessary or sufficient conditions when explaining or predicting that phenomenon. That a book is underlined means it has been read. Similarly, Maxwell Boltzmann's third thermodynamic law can be a part of the meaning of Xenakis' *Pithoprakta. (Dahlstedt 1990:124)*

### Final Meaning

Final meaning deals with the goal or the aim of a phenomenon, and in terms of the mechanics of the relation, it is pretty similar to causal meaning. Only this time the explanation of a phenomenon comes after it, instead of being before it like in causal meaning. This mirrors the difference between Aristotle's teleology vs. the modern tradition of explanation based on causes.

### Structural Meaning

Structural meaning deals with the relation between the parts in a structure, or between a part and the whole in a structure. According to Dahlstedt, we can talk about the different elements in a painting that balance each other, as an example of the former, or a subdominant chord in a tonal piece of music as an example of the latter. (ibid: 128)

Structural meaning can also be a form of explanation like causal and final meaning. This time the function of the phenomenon, which follows its structural meaning, offers the explanation. We can explain an element in a painting by how it interacts with the other elements, or a chord in a piece of music as the subdominant chord, referring to the tonal center of the piece, or tonality as a system.

### Intensional Meaning

The idea of intensional meaning is a result of phenomenology and the developments in philosophy that followed it. The study of intensional meaning explores the relation between the object and mind that understands, perceives, or knows it. For there to be intensional meaning, there has to be an explanation of how the mechanics of understanding objects works, and how it is coherent between different people.

### Value Ascribing use of Meaning

"Meaning" in everyday language can imply value. Used in this sense, a meaningless piece of music would be one that is worthless. Meaning, in general, has a positive connotation.

### Semantic Meaning

Semantic meaning of a word is what that word refers. Accordingly, the meaning of "table" is what my computer sits on as I am writing this essay. Gottlob Frege distinguished between sense and nominatum in his famous article ("Uber Sinn und Bedeutung") in late 19th century. Accordingly, sense meant the properties of the object we spoke about to distinguish it from other objects and to make us intelligible.

Nominatum was what that word referred. For example, the phrases “morning star” and “evening star” have different senses, but refer to the same object, Venus, which is their semantic meaning. Referential, or semantic, meaning has utmost importance, and the subject of this essay, because it is what is commonly thought of as “the meaning” of words but lacks a clear homologue in music. The motivation to give account of semantic meaning of music is great, as this will refer the musical phenomena to the outside world and give account of how music is intelligible. In music that is accompanied with text, or that come with an explicit program, this task is easier. The composer has already given us directions on where we are supposed to look for it. However, this does not explain the mechanics of semantic meaning in music.

## *Semantic Meaning and New Musicology*

Semantic meaning is also relevant to New Musicology that has been very influential since the 1980’s. New Musicologists in general reject the claim that music can only be understood in structural terms. Much of New Musicology liberally attributes semantic meaning to music, and this creates some of the controversy around it. Lawrence Kramer, whom I will discuss in the next chapter, is one of the leading names in New Musicology. By discussing semantic meaning in music, I also hope to be able to discuss and give insight to a part of this hot subject.

# Chapter 2 – Kramer and Beethoven’s op. 111

## *Lawrence Kramer and Structural Tropes*

Lawrence Kramer in his book *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900,* aims to prove that musical works have semantic or “discursive” meanings, as opposed to the formalist view that they do not. An overview of Kramer’s methodology will be proper before investigating his analysis of Beethoven’s op. 111 piano sonata.

Kramer summarizes the formalist view by Hanslick’s words that “sounding forms in motion are the one and the only content of music” (Kramer 1990: 3). He also mentions Kant’s aesthetics according to which music speaks by means of pure sensations and not concepts. Therefore, music, unlike poetry, does not leave anything over for reflection. Kramer disagrees: Music is in fact referential but cannot make truth claims the way ordinary language does. Contrary to what Kant seems to think, this does not make music inferior to poetry. Kramer does not share Kant’s idea of sensation being inferior to reflection. Kant thinks that pure reflection is bearer of culture and the closest music can come to pure reflection is “Gedankenspiel”[1]. Kant thinks this is purely mechanical as it is too intimate to the sensation of music, and it lacks detachment necessary for reflection.

Kramer suggests that music must be made to yield understanding by a hermeneutic window through which it will appear as a set of humanly significant actions. (ibid: 7) Given that in this way music will then be referential, and that it cannot make truth claims, and propositions, Kramer turns to another function of everyday language, which drew much attention in mid 20th century: Speech-acts.

Speech-act theory, championed by J. L. Austin, studies the performative part of language, as utterances themselves are often actions. The sentence “I promise that I will pay back what I owe him.” is the very act of promising and therefore consists of much more than the proposition, and the truth-value, it contains.

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[1] German for thought-play, or as Kramer translates it, neighboring thought-play

According to speech-act theory, there is a distinction between the constative part of language, or the locutionary effects, and the performative part, which acts out the illocutionary. Giving an irrelevant reply to a question, for example, may mean you want to change the subject, which you in fact do by giving the irrelevant reply.

The relationship between the locutionary and the illocutionary is an unruly one though, and it can lead to different interpretations in different contexts. This means that the sentences can "misfire" in certain contexts if they mean different things than the originally intended. Kramer argues that this does not shadow his theory, referring to Derrida that every act of communication presupposes the possibility that they will be reinterpreted in new contexts. Rather than a failure of communication, Kramer argues that this possibility is the very norm of communication.

Kramer then adapts speech act theory to music. He writes:

> "..(A)lthough locutionary effects are confined to the sphere of language, illocutionary for need not be. Any act of expression or representation can exert illocutionary force provided, first, that the act is iterable and, second, that in being produced the act seeks to affect a flow of events, a developing situation. In their illocutionary dimension, therefore, speech-acts exemplify a larger category of expressive acts through which he illocutinary forces pass into general circulation. Musical processes clearly count as expressive acts according to the terms just given. If we can learn to recognize them as such, to concretize the illocutionary forces of music as we concretize its harmonic, rhythmic, linear, and formal strategies. We can then go on to interpret musical meaning." (ibid: 9)

Going back to the hermeneutic window that will yield understanding, we have a few options. Text in music is an obvious one, citational inclusions, such as titles, are others. These two still have locutionary elements though and do not utilize Kramer's theory to the full extent.

The third window is what Kramer calls "structural tropes", which only have illocutionary elements. Structural tropes are "structural procedure(s) (that are) capable of various practical realizations, that also function as expressive acts within a certain cultural/historical framework. " (ibid: 10) They can evolve from style, presentation, rhetoric or anything else that entails communication. These procedures may cover the whole work, or they may only be visible at one instance. There is no strict formula for finding structural tropes, which make them so hard to discover.

Structural tropes form the language of interpretation. They, like speech-acts, are usually found where object of interpretation appears problematic, like in instances where an expected element is missing, or similarly, where there is something redundant. (ibid: 12) This is similar to speech acts that usually occur by a deliberate deviation from the regularity of direct conversation.

Kramer's reading of Austin's speech-act theory and how he applies it to musical meaning is interesting, but not free from problems. Eyolf Østrem points out in his article "Musicological Mountaineering, A Critical Encounter with Larry Kramer" that Kramer reduces Austin's three categories (locutionary meaning, illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect) into two (locutionary and illocutionary effect) without justification.[2] Kramer also drops the "meaning" from Austin's locutionary meaning so that the model better fits his argument. This modification is supposed to help rationalize Kramer's use of illocutionary force in music as a medium of meaning that lacks "locutinonary effect". However, this argument does not hold even with Kramer's modification. Kramer had previously stated that there was no criterion to separate constatives from performatives therefore the two were the two dimensions, rather than types, of the same utterance. If they are not two types but dimensions of the same utterance, where is the locutionary dimension of musical utterance? (Østrem 2000: 2-3)

Østrem also criticizes Kramer's use of Derrida's iterability, which, he argues, is a logical fallacy. It is circular because both Austin's and Derrida's arguments are based on an existing language while Kramer uses them to argue that we can look for (or read) the meaning in music as if it was language. Moreover, iterability is actually a limitation of Austin's theory, as it makes it less possible for us to know what we in fact do with our words. Kramer uses iterability as it only leads to new possibilities without mentioning this setback. (ibid: 3)

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[2] I am grateful to Eyolf Østrem for letting me refer to his unpublished paper, which was presented at the American Musicological Society conference on November 4th, 2000 in Toronto, Canada.

Therefore, it seems like Kramer borrows freely from speech-act theory to support a way of having discursive meaning in music. He needs speech-act theory, especially Austin's model, to argue for semantic meaning without truth claims. Kramer attempts to achieve by the playing between locutionary and illocutionary effect in a way that contradicts these terms' origins. This, as evident from Østrem's objections, turns out to be problematic. We should nevertheless continue examining Kramer's model as it will be better understood by how he applies it to Beethoven's piano sonata op.111.

## ***Beethoven's Op. 111 and Expressive Doubling***

Kramer's analysis of Beethoven's piano sonata op. 111 is based on the structural trope of "expressive doubling", which he defines as "a form of repetition in which alternative versions of the same pattern define a cardinal difference in perspective." (Kramer 1990: 22) Kramer discusses various examples of expressive doubling in literature, painting and music. He mentions, among others, William Blake's poems *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793). These form a contrast between different modes of seeing the world through matching numbers. Examples are those poems that describe how an angel sees with an eye of orthodox reason and those that describe how the poet himself sees with eyes guided by rebellious energy. Kramer also mentions J.M.V. Turner's paintings *Shade and Darkness – The Evening of the Deluge and Light and Color (Goethe's Theory)* (1893) The former one exhibits dark masses swallowing the light as well as Goethe's minus colors while the latter exhibits the light pouring forth and Goethe's plus colors. (ibid: 22-23)

After discussing various examples of expressive doubling, Kramer applies the concept in his analysis of Beethoven's piano sonata. Op. 111 has only two movements and this property defines its character. However, according to Kramer, there is a deeper reason for this peculiarity. It is the expressive doubling that happens between the movements. There are also other structural tropes within the movements that are significant for the whole work.

Kramer adapts Charles Rosen’s analysis regarding the use of diminished seventh chords in this sonata, and how the three uses of diminished sevenths distinguished by their resolutions is a structural tool. This, according to Kramer, even overshadows the sonata form in the first movement.(ibid: 55) The first type of diminished seventh chord (dim7-1) resolves to the dominant chord (V), second type (dim7-2) to the tonic (i or I) and the third (dim7-3) to the subdominant (iv or IV). They appear first in the introduction and set the order mentioned above. The dim7-1 chord resolves to the G (V) in measure 3, the dim7-2 chord resolves to the C chord (I) in measure 5, and the dim7-3 chord resolves to the F-minor chord in measure 11 after a delay of several measures. (Rosen 1972: 442) The F-minor chord that is the resolution is accentuated by dynamics (*f*) but is followed immediately by the dominant chord that eventually leads to the main theme.

Kramer notes that the main theme is derived from the diminished seventh chords mentioned above and their resolutions. These chords also appear, in the same order, at many important points in the sonata. In the conclusion, they are re-stated almost one after each other like they were in introduction. However, their resolutions are stated free of these chords. For example, the subdominant chord that follows the dim7-3 chord on measure 148 is freely followed by what would be resolutions of other diminished chords in measures 151 to 155. The order that was stated at the beginning of the movement is broken. According to Kramer, this hints that the first movement was not a complete circle. The diminished chords lead the sonata to the second movement as a necessary step, in order to complete what was stated in the beginning. Kramer writes that all the music in C-minor in the first movement can be interpreted as an interlude, and therefore the structure created by the diminished seventh chords apply to more than the first movement. (Kramer 1990: 56)

The second movement is a theme and variations. It forms contrasts with the first in many ways. In the beginning it is not harsh like its predecessor, the main theme is perfectly symmetrical in AABB form, tonality is C-major, and tempo is stable all along. Kramer says that, in this respect, it is a denial of the first movement, which is in C-minor and structured by diminished seventh chords as mentioned above. He also argues that, with the fourth variation, this denial turns into recognition and re-enactment of the first movement. (ibid: 57) The expressive qualities, like the ornamentation, elaboration of underlying harmony, which have steadily increased gradually since the first variation, reach a stage where the crystal clear periodic motion started by the theme reach stillness and the line between structure and ornamentation is blurred.

This is followed by a cadenza, marked by the triple trills, which is the climax of the movement. The clear harmony of the arietta has now turned into unresolved harmony of V7/bIII chord that suspends the flow of musical time (ibid: 59). Moreover, the structure and form has become almost non-existent. The ornamentation has completely taken over now, undoing the symmetry and stability that made the structure in the beginning. Kramer states that this gradual change brings an expressive doubling: The cadenza of second movement doubles the “surging temporality” of the first movement but “frees it of all rigidity, rupture, tragic implacability.” (ibid: 61)

Kramer has mentioned the three kinds of music specified by Boethius: *Musica mundana, Musica humana* and *Musica instrumentalis*. *Musica mundana* means an inaudible perfect harmony that governs the heavenly sphere. *Musica humana* is the perfect combination of body, spirit, reason and passion. *Musica instrumentalis* is what can realize *musica humana* in actual sound. (ibid: 56) According to Kramer, the arietta is an example of musica humana, substituting a figurative, inaudible singing voice for musical mundana. In the climax the inaudible musica mundana is stressed by the triple trills, which Kramer speculates, symbolize the concept of trinity. (ibid: 62) This is a clear example of interpreting referential meaning into music.

After the cadenza the arietta is renewed, though not the same way as it was before. The harmony has now more of a secondary role. The secondary climax (final trills) is more structural and rhythmic than the first one, and provides a structurally stable form to the doubling of the first movement.

Kramer notes that for the model of expressive doubling to hold, there must be an analogue to the diminished seventh chord structure in the second movement. In the beginning of the movement there is a lack of diminished seventh chords. In the third variation we see all three types of diminished seventh chords. The fourth variation is somewhat different from the previous ones. The binary parts of this variation are internally varied on the form of AA’-BB’, A and A’ being melodic parallels. The A part, like the third variation, has all three types of diminished seventh chords while B’ lacks dim7-3 and features a dim7-1 that does not resolve.

The *expressivo* part that follows the cadenza has the diminished seventh chords, but now in pairs from measure 126 through measure 130. The second diminished chord in each pair follows a pattern of breaking up and being completed by the following chord and this, according to Kramer, signifies the aggregate of diminished seventh chords dissolving as a whole and “bleeding into the ‘one song’ around it.” (ibid: 68) The order these pairs come in is the reverse of the original statement in the first movement. This means that the structural and emotional violence of the first movement is now being undone. Moreover, the expressive leads to a reprise of the arietta theme which doubles its original presentation in the beginning of the movement as well as doubling the first movement. The final trills, which follow the reprise, double the trills in the cadenza. The pattern of reprises affirms the romantic aesthetic ideal of the origin achieving its value when it is also the end; reaching meaning through becoming also a result. (ibid: 68)

Kramer argues that the pattern of reprises in op.111 proves that there can be a version of romantic utopianism, which challenges the romantic aesthetic ideology that was critized in 20th century for latent absolutism and even having totalitarian attitudes. He states that Beethoven’s sonata does not repress differences; in fact it is based on difference that is brought about by the heterogeneous chain of reprises. Moreover, it may even be said to extend the utopianism by the diminished seventh chords in the adagio movement: “(T)he desired ‘sentiments of inner peace’ may be merely cherished illusions, even escapist illusions” (ibid: 69-70).

Kramer’s analysis paraphrased above builds on examining some structures specific to the work in hand, and then associating non-structural meaning to these structures. Following the idea of structural tropes, Kramer makes the music yield to understanding as a series of humanly understandable actions. What are those actions in this sonata? Expressive doubling between, and within the movements.

There are two areas to criticize in such an analysis. The first one is whether the structural tropes Kramer stresses actually apply to music. Even though there are some things to criticize here, I will directly start the second area which is the more important one: How do these tropes entail meaning in op.111?

To do this we need to check whether the illocutionary force that Kramer suggests this sonata has necessarily holds given the structure of expressive doubling. What is the humanly understandable action in expressive doubling?

First of all expressive doubling is a speech-act of a kind. Exactly as Kramer says, it appears when the object of interpretation appears problematic. Usually piano sonatas have three movements but Beethoven's op.111 has only two. Moreover, within the movements there are elements that make the sonata challenging, like the dramatic cadenza in the second movement. What is the illocutionary force of this speech act?

Kramer suggests that the doubling brings a closure to the agility, and the "tragic implacability" of the first movement. The arietta theme, variations of ever growing ornamentations, cadenza, and the ending all take a part in that. The whole sonata is kind of a binary structure, where the first part is doubled by the latter, which also completes the whole.

However, Kramer is not satisfied by analyzing the structure, but chooses to describe the music with words like "tragic", "rupture" etc. and does not really justify the choice of such words. It is common to say that a piece of music is sad, joyful, energetic (even though the use of these terms are not completely justified either, but instead have become common idioms) but talking more specifically about the tragic implacability, or the surging temperament is taking it a step further. Because the use of these terms is not rationally justified, or unjustified for that matter, his observations remain subjective.

Building a plot on these descriptions, and basic observations about the unique structure of this piano sonata, make the music "yield to understanding" by illocutionary force. However, the link between the words and the music is not complete because words of choice for the analysis are arbitrary to start with. So is the plot built on them. What we have in the end is a structural analysis of the two movement form, and observations on the use of diminished chords (based on Rosen's analysis) plus Kramer's descriptions and impressions of this structure with a plot he appropriates over it. This does not assign music a semantic meaning, it actually does not tell about music one bit. It tells us more about Kramer. Every analysis tells us a little about the analyst but in this case it is very much of it.

Kramer's final remarks about the romantic aesthetics and utopianism involve the style and the ideology and they are not to be confused with the analysis of the individual work. Writing about the style is different from writing about the work. The fact that we can talk about the style and its relationship to ideology in a certain way does not mean we necessarily can do the same with the individual work. I will deal with this issue in detail in Chapter 4.

# Chapter 3 – Floros and Mahler's Fourth Symphony

## Floros and Mahler Symphonies

In the last chapter I discussed how Lawrence Kramer argues for a semantic meaning starting from the structural elements in absolute music, which he calls structural tropes. Constantin Floros also argues for semantic meaning in music that he reaches through musical elements, but his way of getting there is very different from that of Lawrence Kramer. This chapter will be about Floros' analyses of Mahler's symphonies.

Before I begin, I would like to address one major difference that readers will notice between the musical examples Kramer and Floros use. Beethoven's piano sonatas that Kramer discusses are mostly examples of absolute music, while Mahler's symphonies are usually not.[3] This sounds like a problem when discussing semantic meaning that is attributed by analysis, as program music already has such meaning given by the composer. However, Floros' arguments go way beyond the given program. They use the musical elements in symphonies, as opposed to simply the program, if there is any. Therefore, Floros' analyses are suitable examples in this study.

## Floros and Semantic Meaning in Mahler's Music

Many of Mahler's symphonies started out as typical examples of program music. A program consisting of titles given by the composer accompanied the music in the early performances. Some of his symphonies, like the Fourth which I will discuss shortly, even had extended songs as one of their movements. These movements were usually re-compositions of Mahler's earlier lieds.

In 1900, Mahler distanced himself from composing "illustrative" program music, as practised by himself and Richard Strauss. (Floros 1994: 16) He withdrew all the programs of his previous works, and asked them to be performed without the aid of any program in the future. Naturally, he did not withdraw the lyrics from the lieds. Nevertheless, withdrawing the programs did affect these symphonies. Does this turn these works in question into absolute music? Or in the case of symphonies featuring lieds, does this make them "nearer" to absolute music?

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[3] In this context, absolute music is simply any music that lacks lyrics, program and even a title that is given by the composer.

According to Floros, the answer is no. He states that Mahler points hermeneutical directions in his scores, sketches, and letters, conversations with acquaintances, which point to meanings of his works. These meanings make it impossible to classify Mahler's symphonies as absolute music, even if there is no program, or lyrics to the symphony in question. The symphonies must instead be "perceived as music that expresses things personal, biographical, literary and philosophical" (ibid: 16) Floros goes on by saying that even if Mahler's position on open programs to music changed later in his career, his faith in "inner" programs was beyond doubt. He asks whether Mahler's message to humanity through his works can be correctly understood without these programs.

Floros then clarifies his aim as to make "a research (relating) structural aspects to semantic formulations, research directed not only to compositional techniques, but also to style, expression and idiom.... considering every hermeneutic hint of Mahler and strive to decipher his symbolic language while seeking to comprehend what is new in his music". (ibid: 17) This, of course, builds on the idea that there is a meaning to Mahler's music that is outside of music, which the music refers. Earlier, Floros mentions Mahler's naive belief that he could "thrust" onto listeners the emotions expressed in his music. This, according to Floros (and many others) is impossible without the aid of a program, which Mahler shunned. Thus, we can say that Floros' aim is to seek the meaning Mahler intended, but never disclosed.

## ***Symphony 4***

Mahler's Fourth symphony in G-major was composed between 1899 and 1901, and premiered in 1901. Among Mahler's symphonies, the fourth is the shortest, also the one that is the most traditional. Yet the symphony boasts a symphonic song as its last movement. The song is based on *Das himmlische Leben* (The Heavenly Life), where the text comes from the German folk poems *Das Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn). These poems provided material to many songs by Mahler, as to many of his contemporaries. Mahler's song *Das Himmlische Leben,* composed in 1892, was originally planned to be included in his song collection now known as *Das Knaben Wunderhorn.* Floros states that *Das Himmlische Leben* contained the "fertile seed" which fulfilled its "design and development" in the symphony, a pattern of borrowing common in Mahler. (ibid: 110)

In addition to the last movement, the symphony has three instrumental movements that had programs earlier in composition process. These programs were removed after Mahler's withdrawal of programs of his music in 1900. Floros argues that the symphony is based on this philosophical program that Mahler shared with his friends but never disclosed publicly. He also claims that it is impossible to fully understand the fourth symphony without the knowledge of this program. (ibid: 113)

The subject of this program is life after death. Floros mentions Mahler's conversations where Mahler repeatedly speaks of how the symphony is about a higher world. Among other conversations, Mahler tells Natalie Bauer-Lechner (a very close friend) that the final movement is about a child, who belongs to the higher world. In the scherzo movement things get scary, but the following andante reassures us that it is not so bad after all. Moreover, Mahler directly mentions the smiling of St. Ursula as the subject in the third movement, which he even relates to his image of his own mother. These contrasting movements reflect the contrasting sides of death, and what follows it: scary, eerie but also eternally blissful. Mahler even refers to eternally blue skies that may at times seem gruesome, as what he attempts to describe. (ibid: 113-114)

In the next pages I will go over Floros' analysis of the fourth symphony, where he relates structural aspects of each movement to semantic meanings in the direction of what is explained above.

## First Movement

The title of this movement according to the original program is *Die Welt als ewige Jetztzeit* (The World as Eternal Now). The movement is highly systematic. Following a strict sonata-allegro form, the exposition has seven themes which are all taken up in the development and recapitulation. Moreover, some of the themes closely resemble Viennese classicism. Even the orchestra is much smaller than the other Mahler symphonies, approaching the simplicity of classical style.

However, there are deviations from the classical style as the liberal use of the supertonic chord, as in the second theme, the false recapitulation towards the end of exposition, and the radical return of the main theme in the transition to recapitulation.

Mahler's quotes often from the song "The Heavenly Life" in measures 113-115. He also hints at the paradise theme from symphony's finale in measures 125-144 in the development section of the first movement. Floros notes that this is not just a regular motivic link for internal structural unity as it will show.

The movement's climax occurs towards the end of development in measures 221-224 where dissonances of minor ninth and diminished fifth follow a serene passage in C-major. According to Floros, this climax voice-paints the falling from a great height. This is immediately followed by trumpets and horns playing fanfare-like music and then the return of the original theme. The succession of these passages is not explicable by music alone.

Floros here refers to Mahler's words to Bauer-Lechner that the first movement is a kind of military signal and his description of confusion of the crowds and the troops' attempt to re-establish the order. Floros makes the link that the C-major passage must correspond to the image of floods of light, the dissonance at the climax to panic shock and the trumpet fanfare to the military signal. (ibid: 120-122) He argues that this is the only way that the otherwise inexplicable development makes sense. In the light of these, the earlier paraphrases of the paradise theme are not simple motivic connections; they take part in the plot that is the semantic meaning of the first movement.

## The Second Movement

The second movement of the fourth symphony is in scherzo form, with a länder as the contrasting middle section. The scherzo part is also ternary in form, with a main section in C minor and the middle section in C major. The C-minor section has a prelude where the key is undefined and harmony is very unstable. A high-tuned (scordatura) violin states the main theme in the scherzo, which contributes to the screeching sound of the movement.

Floros states that the name *Todtentantz – Freund Hein spielt zum tanz auf* (Dance of Death – Friend Death is Striking Up the Dance) given to the movement is authentic as the title Todtentantz was present in the 23rd of October 1904 performance of the symphony in Amsterdam, which conducted by Mahler. He also argues that the scordatura violin was associated to coming of death by no less than Mahler himself during his conversations with Natalie Bauer-Lechner. (ibid: 122)

Therefore, according to Floros, the scherzo movement also refers to death, but from a different angle. It focuses on the scary side of it, the side where the eternal blue skies seem gruesome.

The referral to the death theme is even clearer in Mahler’s performance note *lustig* (merrily) in a few points of the movement. According to Floros, this note is very appropriate as in many cultures, death is Janus-faced. It is frightening and deceiving but also alluring.

## The Third Movement

The third movement of the symphony is a double variation in a five part form consisting of the two themes, their variation, and a further variation of the first theme. The first theme is marked *Ruhevoll* (restful) and in G-major. The second theme in E-minor, and in terms of mood it is strongly contrasting the first theme. According to

Floros, the performance remark *klagend* (lament) in measure 62 describes the mood of the whole theme. Especially the chromatic descent in the second part of the second theme is a great symbol of lament. (ibid: 127)

Floros argues that this contrast between the two themes go back to the original program of the symphony that also included the song *Das Irdische Leben* (The Earthly Life) from *Das Knaben Wunderhorn* as a movement. Mahler eventually realized this plan, not by borrowing from that particular song, but by contrasting the misery of earthly life and the gaiety of heavenly life by the two contrasting themes in this double variation.(ibid: 128)

## The Fourth Movement

There last movement is an orchestral song, based on the song *Das himmlische Leben.* As this movement is obviously not absolute music, there is not much to write about Floros' semantic meaning analyses as in three previous movements. However, Floros states that the last movement reveals the theme "life after death" as the meaning of the whole symphony, even to a listener who is unaware of Mahler's earlier program, or correspondence.(ibid: 131)

## Discussion

There is no question that Floros' analysis of Mahler's Fourth symphony is an interesting one, and that it adds to our knowledge of the work. However, his claim that the meaning of the symphony cannot really be understood without this analysis is problematic on several grounds.

First of all it ties the meaning of the symphony with the discovery of Mahler's initial program of the symphony, and his correspondence with colleagues and close ones. Would this symphony be misunderstood (or not understood at all) if Mahler's notes were lost and never discovered, or if Mahler never talked about it with anyone? Also, can we say that a person who just listens to the symphony as it is published (without program) will not understand it? Floros himself comments on Mahler's naive belief that the music alone could thrust some emotions onto listeners, and says that this is not possible without the aid of the program. (ibid: 17) Consistency with this statement requires that the attributed semantic meaning depends on the discovered program (which is a contingency), and the authors interpretation in putting the pieces together.

This leads us to the second objection. Floros' arguments regarding the meaning of several movements also seem quite speculative. Linking the development of the first movement to military signal, panic and the great flood, and linking the third movement to earthly vs. heavenly life is not proven solidly. They are instead the author's subjective interpretations. Therefore, the "meaning" of the symphony does not stand on its own, based on authentic material from Mahler's life. It is dependent on Floros as well. This renders the claim of this analysis being the key to the symphony's meaning doubtful.

# Chapter 4 – Meyer and Cook

So far I have discussed two analyses, where the authors interpreted semantic meaning in music. In this chapter I will further discuss these analyses with reference to two other authors, Leonard Meyer and Nicholas Cook. This does not mean that I reject Kramer's and Floros' arguments in favour of Meyer's and Cook's. Instead, the latter approaches provide a good medium to discuss the former ones, even though they do not clash head to head.

Kramer's analysis of Beethoven's op.111 will be compared to Meyer's studies on style and musical meaning as published in his books *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, and *Style and Music, Theory, History and Ideology.* Constantin Floros' Mahler analyses will be discussed with reference to Nicholas Cook's article "Theorizing Musical Meaning".

## *Kramer's op.111 vs. Meyer's style study*

Leonard Meyer, in his book *Emotion and Meaning in Music,* states that meaning in music, as in anything else, requires that the meaningful object is connected with, indicates, or refers to, something beyond itself. The distinction here is the nature of the meaning relative to the object. If the stimulus, as Meyer calls it, means something which is different in kind than the stimulus, then this is called designative meaning. (For example: the word "table" vs. the actual table) If the stimulus and its meaning are of the same kind, then it is embodied meaning. (Meyer 1961: 34-35) Semantic meaning is therefore designative meaning. Ordinary language designates physical objects, among other things, and this makes it a designative language.[4] Music, on the other hand, does not always have designative meaning, which is the starting point of this paper. Instead, it has embodied meaning.

Meyer states that embodied meaning is a product of expectation. Individual notes and sounds, as physical substances, do not mean anything because they do not point to anything beyond themselves. However, a piece of music can have meaning in time. If we expect phenomenon Y (like the tonic chord), upon hearing phenomenon X (like the dominant chord), this implies that X means Y. This is the basic way that embodied meaning in music occurs.

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[4] Or a "referential" language, as it was stated at the beginning of this paper.

Expectation in music depends on past experience, which makes it a learned skill, and a matter of culture. We can speak about past experience in three parts. It is firstly the musical experience that results from the preceding musical event (like the dominant chord that resolves to the tonic). Therefore we cannot have expectation based on the first sound we hear in a piece. It is also our acquaintance with the style of music in question. Similarly, a piece in a completely foreign style will not mean anything at first. Finally, it is the laws of mental behaviour that govern the organization of stimuli. (ibid: 36)

The meaning is acquired in different stages, assuming the above criteria are fulfilled. First, there will be hypothetical meaning that arises during the act of expectation, before we hear the actual result in music. Evident meaning happens upon hearing the result, therefore knowing how the moment of suspension during expectation resolved. Finally there is determinate meaning that we reach in a later stage, namely when all the experience of the music is timeless in our memory. This is when we look back on our listening experience.

Meyer takes style as the bearer of embodied meaning in music. In his later study *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology*, he defines style as “a replication of patterning, whether in human behaviour or in the artefacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints” (Meyer 1989:3) These constraints can be laws of human perception or acoustics, rules of music at the time, instrument’s capabilities among other things. In order to become style, the choices made within these constraints must “succeed” by being included in the pool of the patterns that are replicated. When they are, they also become expectable stimuli in musical experience. Therefore, style is a collection of these successful moves that have become the object of expectation, and therefore the bearers of embodied meaning.

In the beginning of this paper structural meaning was defined as dealing between the parts and the whole, and the function of the parts with regards to the whole. Structural meaning is a kind of embodied meaning, in Meyer's terminology, as the parts and the whole are of the same kind. This is also related to the topic of style, as it is the style that determines our expectations with regards to structure and its parts. Acquaintance with the style makes it possible for us to know the function of parts as regards to the whole in a given piece, as well as what constitutes which part.

At this point let me summarize the meanings attributed to Beethoven's op.111 in Kramer's book. Kramer has stated that the two movement structure of op.111 meant expressive doubling, which was to say that the second movement completed the first one through reinterpretation and revaluation. (Kramer 1990: 24) The initial contrasting mood of the second movement, and the later return of temporality, doubles the first movement. The special use of diminished chords also means a doubling between the movements. The second movement starts without diminished chords, but soon adopts them in the same style as the first. However, towards the end of the movement it uses them in pairs and in reverse order, undoing the organization of the first movement.

All these, according to Kramer, mean that the sonata achieves the romantic aesthetic ideal of the origin, reaching its value when it's also the end. It also means an alternative romantic utopianism that does not repress differences. Beethoven's sonata is based on heterogeneity, which does not become unified, or homogeneous, at the end.

Therefore, Kramer in his analysis of Beethoven's op.111 sonata starts from structural meaning when he discusses the two movement structure, how the movements, and parts within the movement relate to each other, and the use of diminished seventh chord as a structural tool. All these can be explained as embodied meanings as Meyer's model above if we look at it from the point of the listener who is acquainted with the style. Beethoven's sonata is full of contrasts, surprises and other stimuli that means a whole deal and generates emotions.

However, this is not enough for Kramer. Through his “hermeneutical window” he jumps to other meanings regarding romantic aesthetic ideal, repressing differences, and even trinity. This is designative, or semantic, meaning. I have already stated my criticisms against this in the end of chapter two.

Kramer also confuses individual piece and style in their relationship to ideology. Once we are talking about the style, it is a shorter step to ideology, as ideology is among the constraints that determine the style. But op.111 is not a style, it is an individual work. It is a much longer step from the particularity of an unusual piece to escapism, romantic aesthetic ideals, and what was considered later in 20th century as its totalitarian attitudes. Kramer jumps from the individual piece, to the ideology without much justification, which makes the analysis more subjective. Meyer’s studies on meaning through expectation, and style in music seem to be in the middle ground that Kramer leaps.

All this of course does not mean that Kramer is all wrong and Meyer is all correct. In fact, the two authors are not even targeting each other and we do not have to choose one over the other. However, Meyer’s discussion of meaning in music gives us a better perspective on the problems that follow Kramer’s analysis.

## *Floros' Mahler Analysis and Nicholas Cook*

Nicholas Cook in his article "Theorizing Musical Meaning" discusses various approaches to explaining musical meaning. Traditionally there have been two competing theories about where musical meaning lies. One regards meaning as pure social construction, thus outside of musical realm, and the other claims that musical meaning is completely inherent in music. Cook argues for a position that is in between these two extremes, and strives to avoid the serious problems that both face.

The former position has been held by most new musicologists as well as Adorno who influenced them. According to Adorno, music "presents its social problems through its own material and according to its own formal laws – problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique." (Cook 2001: 172) Therefore, these social problems that contain the meaning of music can be reached through musical analysis.

Cook states a few problems with this approach. First of all, Adorno and his followers link music to social meaning, but they are meticulous only about the former. Social meaning is not problem-free, in other words, it is not a pivot that will automatically explain music once we link them together. Also, linking music to social meaning requires major abstraction as they are not of the same nature, similar to what Meyer stated earlier. It is very hard, if not impossible, to point to how, and where, music and social meaning link as proposed by Adorno. Analyses of this sort depend on a homology, where the music as it is analysed, and the social structure resemble each other. However, since the homology and the resulting meaning are not constrained by the music, they can easily become arbitrary. Therefore, such analyses are doomed to be subjective and create more controversy than they do an objective discourse.
(ibid: 171-174)

It does not look better at the other end of the spectrum. Cook states that Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch Schönen* has been taken to mean that music cannot support expressive meaning, and music should be understood only in structural terms. Even though Cook states that this interpretation is not totally fair, it has set the orthodoxy that rules to this day.

The problem with this approach is that it cannot really explain musical meaning, because explaining it with words would put it in a form that it denies musical meaning to start with. On the other hand, proponents of this position agree that music has meaning that is being imputed, as they discuss whether the "experiencing subject" that receives this meaning is the composer, or the listener and so forth. The musical meaning though remains in a mysterious state, similar to Adorno's model. (ibid 174:176)

Cook then investigates a model where the musical meaning is socially constructed but not arbitrary. It has to be socially constructed because the attempts to explain musical meaning as inherent in music have not been successful. However, the meaning has to be regulated by the inherent properties in music so that it is not arbitrary.

Borrowing from Daniel Miller's argument Cook states that music, like physical objects, has indefinite, but not infinite, attributes among which we select when we analyze or think about it.[5] This is why a particular piece of music can acquire different meanings by different societies. They simply make different selections of its attributes and interpret them in their own way. This plurality though is not infinite, because it is limited by the attributes of the music, which are finite. Therefore, the meaning that is acquired is not arbitrary. (ibid: 178)

There is then the potential in music to have certain meanings emerge under special circumstances. When these meanings emerge though, the music does not stand separable from them. Instead, the music is received as it is one with the acquired meaning. This may be why new musicologists like Susan McClary write about Beethoven symphonies, among others, as if they have self-evident social or literal meaning in them waiting to be read.

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[5] Adapting Miller's argument is not problem-free as physical objects are authographic and music is allographic. However, Cook states that he means music as indefinitely extended series of traces of performances, recordings, scores etc. that all empirically constrain meaning through their attributes. Therefore, Miller's argument is adaptable. p.179

Cook lists certain criteria that have to be met for such meanings to emerge. He uses a TV commercial as an example before tackling musical analyses. The commercial shows a Citroen ZX car in the accompaniment of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* overture. In this commercial there are two media that are combined to deliver the meaning: the film space and the music space. The criteria regarding the meaning and the media are as follows. There should be enabling similarity between the attributes in different media, and a blended space where these may be combined. In this case the attributed of the film space are rapid motion, agility and tight editing. The attributes of music space are tempo, strong downbeats and rhythmic precision. These two blend in as agility, precision, style and prestige in blended space, which is the meaning of the commercial: The Citroen ZX is to be chosen over the competitors' offerings because it is agile, precise, prestigious and stylish. Note that Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* overture has indefinitely more attributes than its tempo, downbeats etc. that could be picked in different settings, but the combination with the film media points to the ones listed above. (ibid: 180)

The case is not much different in analyses of Beethoven's Ninth symphony. A similar model can be built on the symphony but a medium that is analogue to the film space above is not given. This does not mean though that it does not exist.

Cook compares two interpretations of the first movement of Beethoven Ninth symphony. The image of sky on fire that Donald Francis Tovey and his contemporaries described when they discussed Beethoven's Ninth is quite different from McClary's interpretation of murderous rage. Cook makes two models corresponding to Tovey's and McClary's analyses, and the attributes of Beethoven's music that they selected in music space to enable similarity to their text space is quite different. Tovey discusses the timbre/inversion/mode, fortissimo, basses and timpani and sustained texture of ninth symphony to match his description of remoteness, inhumanity and terror of the sky on fire image. Cook points out that the images of world wars in Tovey's time may contribute to this. McClary, on the other hand, focuses on Beethoven's arrhythmic accents, thematic absence and avoidance of cadence to discuss the repression and menace of murderous rage. (ibid: 182-184)

It sounds like the text space that corresponds to the film space in the car commercial is never empty, and at times the attributes of music are selected according to the text by which social meanings emerge. In other words music is never alone at its reception, and once musical space clicks with a film or text space an interpretation results. This goes on until another interpretation comes along that links musical space with another.

The danger lies in what Cook calls the disguise of double-articulation. Every time a meaning is attributed to music, some attributes of music are selected and incorporated in interpretation, which is a process of two steps. The main criticism against new musicology is that, as stated earlier, it presents these meanings as if they were waiting to be read, as if the author discovered the meaning, which is a single step.(ibid: 186)

At this point we can turn to Floros' analysis of Mahler's Fourth symphony and investigate if his analysis fits this model. Floros claims that the meaning of the symphony emerges when investigated by the help of the abandoned program, Mahler's correspondence with his colleagues and close ones, and of course his biography. Even though the Fourth Symphony was eventually released without a program, the instrumental movements are linked to the final song movement in a special way, and this leads to the image of "life after death" that the symphony paints as a whole. Floros uses Mahler's correspondence, the abandoned program as the text space, in Cook's words, to select the attributes of Mahler's music so that the image of life after death applies to the entire symphony.

A good example is Floros' analysis of the first movement. Towards the end of the development section Floros notes the climax, where the extreme dissonance is followed by a serene C-major passage. The trumpet part follows this, which leads to the recapitulation. Floros then refers to Mahler's words to Bauer-Lechner that the first movement is a kind of military signal, and his description of the confused crowds and the troops' attempt to re-establish the order. There is enabling similarity here between the C-major passage and image of floods of light, dissonant passage to panic shock, and the trumpet passage to military signal. This emerges in the blended space as life after death, as the rest of the symphony.

Floros' analysis takes its strength from empirical research of Mahler, therefore the text space does not seem to be as removed from the music as in, say, McClary's Beethoven analysis. However, the double articulation is still somewhat disguised, as the material is presented as self evidently meaningful without the author's active selection of musical attributes. This is partly due to the authority of the text space, which in this case originates from no less than the composer himself. Still, there are problems with this as stated at the end of last chapter. Now I can re-state them using Cook's terminology.

First of all, this does not change the fact that different meanings could emerge under different circumstances. Floros implies that the real meaning of the symphony can only be unveiled by looking into Mahler's life, but the source material for Floros' text space are a result of contingencies. Mahler could have well never talked about the initial programme with his colleagues, or the correspondence could have been lost. Would this mean that we would have never understood the Fourth Symphony? Secondly, as stated above, Floros seems to understate his role in making the links on which the meaning emerges and tries to cover that fact with the authentic material from Mahler that he presents. This does not change the fact that the meaning Floros interprets in this symphony is not the ultimate one that he claims.

# Chapter 5 – The Way Out?

## *Recapitulation (General Argument)*

In this essay I have discussed the two ways of attributing semantic meaning to music with examples from recent musicology. I have also discussed various problems related to these examples. It is evident that much can go wrong when attributing semantic meaning to music, be it in the style of Kramer or Floros. But the question remains: Is it possible to argue for semantic meaning in music?

The answer has to be yes, because music does in fact at times remind us of extra musical concepts, invoke emotions and so forth. Moreover, when we listen to songs, or program music, we associate the music with extra-musical meaning. In this case, this is done through the non-musical material supplied by the composer (lyrics, program, title etc). However, once the music and the semantic meaning are "married" by this material, then it is very hard to think of them apart. It is hard to argue that we associate a song with what the lyrics said upon hearing the introduction, or even if we hear the music alone without the lyrics, just because we had heard the song earlier with the lyrics. Instead, now the music itself is associated with semantic meaning of the lyrics, almost independent from the lyrics. This is one of the reasons why we do not always enjoy familiar songs with alternative lyrics.

Arguing that music only has intra-musical meaning will not be very feasible given this fact. Another reason is that, and I admit that I am not stating this from a pure philosophical point of view, music would not be as important as it is today if it did not refer to the extra musical. Therefore, a practical query should start with the question of how music refers rather than if it does. The question whether it ultimately does will have to be left without a philosophically sound reply for now, but this should not hinder us from moving on.

The semantic meaning can either be interpreted through the structure, like Kramer did, or through linking properties of passages in music, be it the tone, character, phrasing, harmony or instrumentation to extra-musical phenomenon. This is the way exemplified by Floros' Mahler analyses. I will argue that the latter is a safer way of doing it, since it leaves a way to single out the properties of music that it refers to events or emotions.

In chapter four I have referred to Cook's criticism to musical meaning analysis as it was practiced by Kramer, McClary and others, and I stated that this criticism also applied to Floros. The main point of the criticism was that the attributed meaning was arbitrary due to the high level of abstraction involved. Another criticism was that the authors disguised the double-articulation in their analyses. Through the TV commercial example, and comparing the competing analyses of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Cook demonstrated how the mechanics of attributing semantic meaning to music could possibly work. I argued that Floros' Mahler analysis could also be explained this way, despite the fact that he also disguised double articulation, which I recovered.

Kramer's Beethoven analysis has other problems, which I will argue are more serious. First of all, Kramer's analyses suffer from all the problems Floros' have. Kramer's analysis is also arbitrary due to high level of abstraction, and it disguises double articulation. However, it is also built on a very questionable model of interpreting meaning through structural tropes. This builds on Kramer freely borrowing from Austin's speech-act theory, which is not faithful to the original theory as Østrem's criticism shows. This is a flaw with Kramer's model Floros' model does not suffer.

Kramer's model requires an even higher level of abstraction than Floros' because it makes music "yield to understanding" via the structural tropes. This abstraction is undesired, as it increases the risk of arbitrariness. Moreover in this case, it is not even justified, because Kramer's adaptation of speech-act theory is faulty.

If we return to Floros' model, the problem of arbitrary meaning remains. Cook's model that is influenced from Miller, tries to avoid this problem by limiting the possible meanings that can be attributed to an object through the indefinite but not infinite number of attributes of the object. Accordingly, the meaning attributed to a piece of music may vary between different cultures and times due to the different attributes that are selected at different times and places. However, the meanings will not be arbitrary because they have to be linked to a property that can actually be said of the object.

This model is not bullet proof either. Cook states that what can be said of a piece of music is indefinite but not infinite. This means that there are things that can and cannot be said of it; otherwise it would have infinite number of properties. Cook however does not specify the criteria to judge what can and cannot be said.[6]

There has to be criteria that determine the properties that can be said of a piece of music. If we just say that it is common sense, then Cook's model becomes circular, as we could say the same about what music means, too. It is very hard, if not impossible, to determine what counts and what not when it comes to properties of music. This may lead to infinite number of properties, which means there is no restraint put on musical meaning by them. This suggests arbitrary musical meaning.

However, this does not mean that Cook's model fails. Despite its shortcomings, it gives us an idea of how musical meaning can work. Most importantly, it gives better insight about what went wrong in Kramer's and Floros' analyses. This is a very good start.

Explaining semantic music in meaning is very important partly because it is very central to the debates of recent and older musicology. A better insight to it will mean a better insight to controversies around New Musicology. The older controversy between the formalists and expressionists also revolve around this subject. Moreover, the subject of meaning is important in general, as it sheds value to anything it is associated with. Our primary idea of language is verbal, and as its distinctive feature is being referential. The possible semantic meaning in music will be what evaluates it as a language.

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[6] It was Lars Berglund who pointed this out to me during a masters seminar in Uppsala University.

## *Argument from Intensionality*

None of the analyses I discussed in this paper took into account some fundamental philosophical arguments about meaning, which would definitely broaden the scope of discussion. One important concept that is relevant in discussing meaning is intensionality.[7]

Intensionality, or directedness-of-the-mind, is a term first discussed in modern phiosophy by Franz Brentano. Brentano argued that what distinguishes mental from physical phenomena was its intensionality. (Dummett 1991: 263) Every time we think of something, we approve of something, we imagine something, we deal with the "inexistence"[8] of the object of our thought that our mind is directed to. We do not just imagine, we imagine *something*, think of *something*, happy about *something* and so on. The problematic side of intensionality is stressed by the question of how we can have mental activities that are about things, which do not actually exist, like thinking about the president of Sweden. There is no president of Sweden in the real world but we can have the thought of one. Where is this thought, if our mind is directed to it while we are discussing it, and when it lacks a reference in the physical world? According to a school of thought, our thoughts are not physical phenomena but not really mental phenomena either. They make up what is known as "the third realm" that is like a middle ground between the (subjective) mind and the (objective) external world. Question of intensionality deals with this third realm.

Gottlob Frege, who is regarded as the father of analytical philosophy and modern logic, argued in favor of this third realm. His argument was simple: That thoughts can be grasped by different people in the same way means that they are independent from our minds. Therefore, they are not mental phenomena. (ibid: 249) They are obviously not physical phenomena either so they must belong to a third realm.

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[7] Not to be confused with the more common word "intentionality" that is the noun form of "intentional", meaning "on purpose".

[8] A term to that takes notice of the problematic ontological state of object of thought. Not existence but not simply non-existence either.

Frege’s theory of meaning has also been extremely influential in 20th century philosophy. In his famous article “Sense and Nominatum” he discusses a three element model between sign, sense and reference (nominatum). When we are talking about a name, definite description, or even a sentence for instance, the sign is the word(s) and reference are what those words refer to in reality. Sense is what he calls the “manner and context of representation”. (Frege 2001 :200) Applied to the famous example the expressions “the morning star”, “the evening star”, and the proper name “Venus” have the same reference (they refer to the same heavenly body) but different senses. Senses of these expressions, however, are not mental phenomena as they can be objectively communicated between different people. Most people know what morning star and evening star are, what context we are taking the term when we utter them. Many also know that they are actually the same star. Among those, there are some who studied enough astronomy to know that they are not actually stars but refer to the planet Venus. However, people can still tell apart what we “mean” by morning star as opposed to evening star. Therefore, according to Frege, the expression “morning star” causes the thought of morning star, which is its sense that refers to the morning star, the heavenly body.

Frege's model is therefore a possible solution to the problem brought out by Brentano's popular definition of mental phenomena that their distinguishing feature is intensionality. We can think of and communicate meaningful sentences about things that do not exist when we distinguish their senses are distinguished from their references.

Frege's argument in favour of a third realm also explains perception. According to Frege, only physical objects and their sense perception in our minds, which may very well be different from one person to another, are not enough to explain how many people can look at a tree and perceive that it is a tree. An abstract realm that we can also objectively communicate ensures that we have a “sense” of tree and therefore can perceive it despite subjective inner world and possibly unequal sense-data. (Dummet 2001: 272)

Edmund Husserl, a contemporary of Frege, did not agree with some aspects of Frege's model. He generalized Frege's sense from linguistic to all mental acts and preferred the term “noema” to specify it.[9] Dagfinn Føllesdal in his article “Noema and Meaning in Husserl” argues that the noemata are intensional entities that are the generalizations of the notion of meaning. He also argues that the noema of an act is not the object of an act. (Føllesdal 1990:265) These two arguments are important for our study of the meaning.

Føllesdal refers to a passage from Husserl's “Ideen III” where Husserl states the noema is nothing but the generalization of the meaning. He also paraphrases a passage in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* where Husserl criticizes Frege's “unfortunate” terminology and proposes “Bedeutung” (meaning, or “reference” in Frege's terminology) for Frege's “Sinn” (sense) and “Gegenstand”[10] for Frege's “Bedeutung”. (ibid:268) According to Føllesdal, Husserl thought that the meaning was in what Frege thought of an expression's sense. This also means that expressions do not refer to their meaning, which happens to be Föllesdal's next argument. He then refers to Husserl's paragraph in *Ideen I,* where Husserl states that unlike a tree in nature, the “Sinn” of a tree cannot burn as it has no real properties. (ibid: 269) This means that noemata are abstract entities.

In the light of above, Husserl's phenomology explains perception and meaning. According to Føllesdal, noema in Husserl is all the “features of (a mental) act in virtue of which it has the object it has.” Upon any mental act, as perception, remembering and so forth, the noema are a group of determinations which make certain visual, auditory, tactile “data” appearances of an object. These determinations are limited by what Husserl calls “hyle” that prevent any “data” from being the appearance of any object. In the case of imagination, for instance, there are no “hyle”, the noemata can have unlimited features and objects. In the case of perception the visual appearance of a distinguishing feature may limit the determinations so that the noema has certain features and not others and, therefore, has less possible objects. This explains how, upon seeing a tree, the noema directed to it is restricted by the tree's distinguishing features (“hyle”) like shape, size, color, texture, smell and therefore the “meaning” is “tree” and not something else.(ibid: 267)

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[9] I am not claiming that Husserl's “noema” is the same as Frege's “sense”, but they may be considered analogous.

[10] Object, thing

To recapitulate, Brentano's introduction of intensionality to modern philosophy has been very influential but not without problems. The problem of intensionality of mental phenomenon that do not have real-life objects are solved by Frege by a meaning theory that distinguishes between sense and reference of an expression. Husserl, while being largely influenced by Frege, has some objections to the consequences of the sense-reference model. Husserl's argument from noemata, implies a meaning and perception theory that is relevant to this essay.

An important question is where the meaning of music lies. As previously mentioned, traditionally the formalist position is taken as the meaning lies inherently in music while others, as the new musicologists, claim it is a social construction. Even though these positions differ in how the meaning in music is formed, they are not really clear in the philosophical aspect of perception and meaning that I very briefly summarized above.

If we take meaning as reference as in Frege's philosophy we run into problems while discussing meaning in music. The reference is the music itself which is a body of sound, with or without text. The meaning in that body of sound may be embodied as Meyer would put it. Arguing for a designated meaning is problematic as the step between musical phenomenon to words is at best mysterious. Moreover, the new musicologists argue for social meaning in absolute music as it is waiting to be read within the music. That they generally emphasize certain elements in music while arguing for their attributions while downplaying their part in these attributions means that they probably consider meaning as reference.

Husserl's solution to the problems of intensionality offers an alternative way to think of meaning in music. If we take the noema as intensional entities that are the generalization of meaning and not as the object of mental acts we can reach another way of discussing how things are meaningful. Accordingly, the musical meaning is not in the musical piece as reference but related to the noema that is the features of the mental act in virtue of which it has its object (musical piece) that it does. Hyle also plays an important role in this as musical pieces have limiting properties that prevent any noema to have them as their objects. The context of perception and representation also affect these limiting properties and therefore the meaning attributed to the piece.

Accordingly, the meaning of the musical piece is not in the musical piece waiting to be read. Instead, the properties of the musical piece affect on our noemata that are directed to it. It is to these noemata that the musical meaning is related. Among the analyses previously discussed in this essay Cook's article comes close to this position, though not necessarily in a philosophical manner. Cook's position was between the extremes of the formalists and the new musicologists. According to this position, music had indefinite but not infinite properties among which we choose from to reach a socially constructed but non-arbitrary meaning. Taking meaning as noema rather than reference would also lead to a similar position where the references' properties act on meaning but not contain it. It would also allow different meanings to be attributed without resulting in brute assertions, subjectivism or relativism. This is not to say that Cook's ideas are necessarily linked to phenomenology. However it can be argued that examining the philosophical discourse on meaning, as the discussion of where meaning lies that arises from the problem of intensionality, can provide another angle of view to the discussion of meaning in music. Hopefully then we will be a step closer to overcome the dilemma between formalism and attributing meaning to music as new musicologists do.

We can also take a look back at Floros' analysis of Mahler's Fourth Symphony in the light of the above discussion. Floros had reached certain conclusions on what the symphony means based on the composer's correspondence, biography, and the earlier symphony program that was removed before the work's first performance. The analysis is an interesting one but to claim that the symphony's real meaning can only be reached through Floros' argument, as he claims, leads to problems as I have argued. It can however be argued that the meaning of the symphony is in what Husserl would call the noemata directed to it, which is in part determined by the context in which it is perceived, in this case all the correspondence and the secret program. The meaning is not in the symphony itself that is the reference of our mental activities regarding it. This way of evaluating meaning may prevent some problems discussed earlier. Floros' analysis in this case would be a reasonable way of deducing meaning from perceiving the symphony in a certain context and not a problematic way of trying to link musical phenomenon to the extra-musical.

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