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ARTICLES

Disparate Formalisms:
The Roles of Diversification and "Semiotic Availability" in the Fate of Formalist Criticism for Music and Literature

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> *The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art. ... The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public.*
> —William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley (Literary formalists)[1]

> *All I can do is put my own cards on the table: they are intentionalist cards. I am on the side of the intentionalists and believe, with Noël Carroll and others, that the meaning of works of art is directly attached to the intentions of their makers, certainly in the negative sense that what a maker did not, or could not, intend a work of art to mean, it cannot mean.*
> —Peter Kivy (Musical formalist)[2]

> *[The meaning of a text] is, and can be, nothing other than the author's meaning.*
> —E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (Foe of formalism)[3]

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[1] William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Vincent Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 1232–246.

[2] Peter Kivy, "Foes of Formalism," in *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music.* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148.

[3] E.D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation* (Newhaven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 216.

1.1 Introduction

As a scholar who inhabits literary spaces at least as much as music-theoretical ones, this trio of quotes always kept me awake at night. In the polemically titled chapter "Foes of Formalism," Peter Kivy (1934–2017)—the most vocal scholar of musical formalism since Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904)—seeks to mount a "defense of formalism;"[4] however, in doing so, he not only goes directly against the traditional formalist credo of "intentional fallacy," but also aligns himself with E.D. Hirsch Jr. and Noël Carroll, two self-avowed foes of formalism.[5] In this article, I address a puzzling conundrum for scholars seeking to work interdisciplinarly between music theory and literary theory: as indicated by the above quotes, both fields' formalist schools are in stark opposition in regard to matters of intention and, consequently, semiotic interpretation. Although literary formalism and musical formalism tend to align in rudimentary ways—such as their mutual emphasis on close reading and keen interest in formal structure—the two schools hold entirely different hermeneutical ideologies. For instance, musical formalists such as Kivy and Hanslick take a staunch intentionalist perspective in matters of interpretation, aligning them with the likes of Hirsch.[6] This affinity between musical formalism and Hirsch's intentionalism is perplexing when one considers the fact that Hirsch himself was a famous adversary of formalism. For scholars of music that seek to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches through the use of literary theory, this discrepancy can be quite mystifying. In fact, these two disparate formalisms are so contradictory that scholars may potentially consider themselves to be part of the formalist school in one field but wholly anti-formalist in the other. Had the anti-formalist Hirsch moved in musicological circles in addition to literary ones, it is likely that he would have experienced this same crisis of identity. As evidenced by a latent ambivalence in his writings, Kivy seemed to also find himself caught between both worlds.

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[4] In the nearly two dozen books and countless articles that bear Kivy's name, musical formalism—including its origins, central tenets, problems, and legacy—is a commonly recurring topic. Simply put, one cannot discuss musical formalism without the conversation leading to a discussion of Kivy's work.

[5] James O. Young, review of *Art in Three Dimensions* by Noël Carroll, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, December 7, 2010.

[6] Hirsch states that "when critics deliberately banished the original author, they themselves usurped his place, and this led unerringly to some of our present-day theoretical confusions. Where before there had been but one author, there now arose a multiplicity of them, each carrying as much authority as the next. To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation." Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 5.

The underlying reason behind this interdisciplinary disparity can be attributed to the two fields' differing levels of "semiotic availability," that is, the level of connection—or lack thereof—between signifier and signified.[7] In a field such as literature studies, semiotic availability is generally high because human language is utilitarian in design and words have culturally agreed-upon meanings; however, musical languages are less guided by utility, and thus have relatively low semiotic availability, to the extent that many scholars argue against the very idea that absolute music can represent meaning at all.[8] This pivotal difference between literature studies and music studies accounts for a great deal when one considers the diametrically opposed stances of literary and musical formalism in regard to issues of interpretation. The lack of semiotic availability found in absolute music, in contrast to literature, enables musical formalism to make an argument against semiotic meaning. Such a conclusion may seem plausible in regard to absolute music; however, a literary theorist could not easily make the same argument when confronted with a piece of prose or poetry, where the linkage between signifier and signified is more explicitly codified. Even when artful tactics of defamiliarization are applied to language—creating the disproportion between signifier and signified that generally differentiates art from an instructional manual—the words on the page are still left with more semiotic clarity than a succession of chords.[9]

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[7] Although the disconnection between signifier and signified is certainly not a new concept—as they are a central point of contention for Ferdinand Saussure—I considered it necessary to provide a more succinct term for the phenomenon.

[8] Andrew Chung states that "the idea that linguistic meaning is fundamentally based on a denotational structure—in which the most central elements are the mappings between words, concepts, and things—is itself a sort of cultural belief system that has been so wildly successful in the West as to become seemingly universal. … A musical entity's meaning is not an inherent property of the music itself, nor is it reducible to the effects or consequences it generates, nor is it entirely a matter of the subjective proclivities of any unique listener." Andrew Chung, "What is Musical Meaning: Theorizing Music as Performative Utterance," *Music Theory Online* 25, no. 1 (March 2019).

[9] In a similar vein, Barthes suggests—following Benveniste—that language is the only semiotic system capable of interpreting other semiotic systems; yet, language fares very poorly when confronted with the task of interpreting music. See Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image-Music-Text* (Hill & Wang, 1977), 179. Furthermore, there are situations within English literature when language is unmoored from its typical semiotic availability; in such instances—"Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll, for example—the text is then approached in much the same way that narrative theorists approach absolute music, that is, through the use of topics and plot archetypes to imbue the text with meaning.

This comparison of literary formalism and musical formalism also raises an important question, namely why it is that literary formalism fell out of popularity by the 1980s while musical formalism is, even now, very much active within music-theoretical discourse. I present two arguments for this discrepancy, one that can be claimed definitively and one that would benefit from further statistical data. On the one hand, it is undeniable that music's lack of semiotic availability in contrast to literature means that works of music are more amenable to hermeneutic interpretations that equate form with content—the modus operandi of formalism. On the other hand, this fact only explains why a formalist lens is *generally* more applicable to music than literature; it does not fully account for why formalist criticism declined in favor within English literature studies and musicology but has remained so strong in the field of music theory. In order to address this question, I consider Terry Eagleton's argument that formalist criticism has historically maintained a conflicting relationship with the overall level of diversity in a field.[10] If there is credence to this idea, then it stands to reason that music theory's dependence upon formalist lenses is also conditioned by its particularly homogenous body of practitioners. As literary scholars like Eagleton and Vincent Leitch argue, the fall of the "formalist moment" within literary studies coincides with a marked diversification of the demographics in literature departments. Yet, for the still homogenous field of music theory, this formalist "moment" has been going strong for more than a century. The negative correlation between diversity and formalism is lent credence by the fact that musicology underwent a strikingly similar distancing from formalist criticism with the rise of New Musicology in the 1980s; the fact that musicology's estrangement from formalism occurred at the same time as that of literature studies is no coincidence and speaks to the similar processes of diversification that occurred in both fields.

In the sections that follow, I present a comparison between literary formalism and musical formalism in order to better answer several questions: first, how have these conflicting formalist schools been shaped by differing semiotic availability, and what ancillary disciplinary differences have contributed to their contradictory approaches to authorial intention?; second, what are the impacts of disciplinary demographics on formalistic discourse, and how do they correlate with available demographics reporting?; and, finally, given the examples of literature studies and musicology, what projections might be made about the future of formalism in music theory, which currently appears to be undergoing its own epistemological and methodological shift?

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[10] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 191.

To answer these three daunting questions, this article is comprised of three sections. First, I give a brief historical account of formalist thought in both music studies and literature studies, with a particular focus being placed on the figures associated with each. On one hand, this task establishes a means through which to compare and contrast the formalist perspectives of both fields; but additionally, a genealogical account of this nature is valuable in itself because formalist criticism often naturalizes itself in ways that foreclose upon our abilities to view it diachronically. This issue is especially evident in music theory, where formalist criticism—especially that of an organicist perspective—has long held a privileged position in academia, although significantly more ink has been spilled over literary formalism than its musical counterpart.[11] While an exhaustive account of either discipline is beyond the scope of this article, a discussion of both formalisms' divergent properties would be remiss without a discussion of their common Kantian roots, as well as arguments for why and how they ultimately diverge; in the current absence of quality interdisciplinary scholarship on literary and musical formalism, such a discussion would serve to address an important lacuna while also identifying the ideological baggage attached to both. Throughout this article, I return to the issue of semiotic availability as the primary locus through which these disparate formalisms take shape. Building on this diachronic view of formalism, I address the concurrent declines of formalism within literary studies and musicology. During this 1980s decline—and possibly as a consequence of it—formalistic thought within music theory actually intensified. This section centers around the various reactions and polemics that took place within both literature studies and musicology vis-à-vis the move away from formalism, including later attempts to resuscitate it. In order to further Eagleton's argument that demographic homogeneity is a sustaining elixir for formalistic thought, I utilize demographical information from Data USA, an aggregator of governmental statistics. Finally, I end the article by addressing current events in the music theory discipline, which is arguably undergoing a paradigm shift of its own, roughly two academic generations after that of literature studies and musicology.

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[11] On the topic of formalist criticism's naturalization within music theory, consider the state of affairs in departments of the 80s and 90s, in which the task of music analysis became almost indistinguishable from specifically Schenkerian approaches. Similarly, Todd F. David and Kenneth Womack state that during literary formalism's heyday (1940s–1960s), there was a "programmatic institutionalization of its standards as the normal or natural practice of reading for several generations of students and teachers in secondary schools in America … even while many of its specific strategies or skills remain the basis for other more overtly ideological forms of reading." Todd F. David and Kenneth Womack, *Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), 14.

Musical and literary formalism—despite the differences that serve as the focus of this article—share common roots, namely the work of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). These origins are two-pronged: first, Kantian schematism introduces a process by which ostensibly dissimilar objects can be categorically united by their shared traits; second, Kant gives voice to the idea that Beauty exists independently of human intellect, turning the now-familiar aphorism about the "eye of the beholder" on its head. These two prongs emanate from Kant's First and Third Critiques, respectively, and they condition two conceits central to formalism of *every* flavor;[12] in other words, if one wanted to speak of meta-formalism—the essential form of formalism—one need look no further than Kant's concepts of "schematism" and "pure judgement of taste."[13] Whether one is reading Kivy, Beardsley and Wimsatt, Hanslick, Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935), or any other formalist, these two concerns take pride of place. A third commonality, "close reading," has its origins in biblical hermeneutics before then being adopted by British literary critics of the early twentieth century, namely I.A. Richards (1893–1979) and William Empson (1906–1984).[14] For the moment, however, it is prudent to take a closer look at Kant's impact on what would become formalist criticism, in order to lay out the common basis from which musical and literary formalism diverge.

2.1 Kant's Schematism as a Lens for the World and Art

In Book II, Chapter I of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, titled "The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding," the author defines the schema as "the formal and pure condition of sensibility to which the employment of the concept of understanding is restricted."[15] These schemata, he clarifies, can only ever be products of the imagination. Although Kant himself lacked the terms "signifier" and "signified," they prove useful here as a means through which to understand how Kant envisions the nature of schemata, which maps precisely onto a modern understanding of a signified. When one considers a concept, the imagination compiles the constellation of essential attributes associated with that concept; in Kant's example, consideration of the word "dog" calls forth the essential attributes

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[12] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed., trans. Norman Kemp Smith (1781: repr., New York, NY: Macmillan & Co., 1965), and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard (1790; repr., New York, NY: Hafner Press, 1951).

[13] Kant, "The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, 180–87.

[14] As Eagleton explains, modern literary criticism comes about during a time of increased secularization, in which the close study of literary texts serves as a substitute for the moralizing and pacifying practice of biblical hermeneutics. See Eagleton, 20–24.

[15] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 182.

associated with *dog-ness*. Due to Kant's latent logocentrism, he fails to realize the pivotal role played by language in generating these supposedly *a priori* essential attributes. As a culturally conditioned system, language is always bound to produce images and ideas fully at the mercy of the subject's particular prejudices and experiences. Even philosophers contemporary to Kant acknowledged this flaw, as evidenced by the (in)famous 1781 *Metacritique* by Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), which stated that "language is the center of reason's misunderstanding with itself."[16] One might say that Kant was overly optimistic regarding reason's ability to *accurately* categorize a concept into its proper schema—should one even exist.

Consequently, many rather damning indictments have been made against schematism. At its most innocuous, schematism is susceptible to its own internal contradictions—such as in the categorization of platypodes as mammals despite the fact that they fail to exhibit one of the defining characteristics of mammals (i.e. birthing live young). At its most insidious, however, schematism can be a covert force at the heart of many of the conflicts that beset modern humans: the rather unnatural concept of geographical boundaries fuels geopolitical conflict; colonialist modes of classification and taxonomy create virtually arbitrary categories of being, such as race, gender, and sexuality; and the forced binary of normativity versus alterity contains any number of oppressive consequences, usually at the behest of flawed utilitarian (i.e. one-size-fits-all) ethics.[17]

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[16] Johann Georg Hamann, *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*, in *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 154–67. See also Ted Kinnaman, "Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788)," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, https://iep.utm.edu/hamann/, accessed June 15, 2022. More recently, semioticians—including János Kelemen and Umberto Eco—have argued that Kant's understanding of semiotics, though not codified, is implicit in his writings. Specifically, Eco writes that "to talk of that which is means rendering what we know communicable. But to know it, and to communicate it, implies recourse to the generic, which is already an effect of semiosis, and depends on a segmentation of the content in which the Kantian system of categories, bound fast to a venerable philosophical tradition, is a cultural product that is already established, culturally rooted, and linguistically anchored. When the manifold of the intuition is ascribed to the unity of the concept, the *percipienda* are by that time perceived as culture has taught us to talk about them." Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus*, trans. Alastair McEwen (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Inc., 1999), 67.

[17] Examples of these flawed utilitarian solutions are abundant and indicative of existent power dynamics: seatbelts are still designed to provide better protection for biological males despite the fact that males represent the minority of licensed drivers; standardized testing is inherently geared toward white-middleclass epistemology, yet is often used to decide the funding received by schools; and "body mass index"—a notoriously inaccurate gauge of health—is used to gatekeep valuable services and affordable insurance.

In illustrating the deleterious impacts of schematism, I do not intend to dismiss schematism out of hand. While the examples I gave above were chosen specifically for their connections to ideology—and thus their extrinsicality to nature—I naturally concede that a certain level of schematization is essential for life; as Eco states in his evocatively titled book *Kant and the Platypus*, schematism is "why we don't normally mistake our wife for a hat," in reference to a famous case of visual agnosia that left a man unable to differentiate faces and objects—in other words, stripped of his ability to schematize visually. More importantly, in connecting Kantian schematism and its frequent ills to the formalist project, I do not necessarily intend a one-to-one relation between the potential harm done by schematism in the world and that done by a formalist analysis of a novel or symphony. For one, I believe that the stakes are (thankfully) much lower for the choice of method in analysis of art; and, furthermore, having a toolbox full of many diverse methods is the best way to provide the checks and balances necessary to avoid methodological hegemony. However, consideration of these potential ills is important for an understanding of formalism's fall from grace within literature and musicology departments of the 1980s, as well as the decline of formalist interest currently being experienced within music-theoretical discourse.

Finally, an understanding of musical and literary formalisms' opposing views on intentionality should take schematism into account, especially in regard to how readily an organicist perspective—based more on schematic logic than even schema theory itself—can be applied as a method of generating meaning, as well as the *type* of meaning it tends to generate. While literature's denotational system of language is easier to derive concrete meaning from—thus making recourse to authorial intention less necessary—the reverse-side of this coin is that organicism—a generator of primarily connotational meaning—becomes less applicable. In other words, the language of music is an abstract semiological system, making it more open to the *connotational* meanings concomitant with organicist analysis.[18]

2.2 Rejection of *A Posteriori* Affect in Favor of *A Priori* Form

Kant's Third Critique, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), establishes the second formalistic tenet shared between literature and music: the disqualification of affect as a determining factor for Beauty. Such an affect-based judgement, Kant argues, would merely be reflective [*reflektierend*] of the thing itself, and an imperfect reflection at that;[19] this conclusion is conditioned, in part, by the

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[18] It is important to note that I only mean to say that organicism is more applicable to music *than it is to literature*, which says nothing about the value of organicist methods in relation to other music-theoretical lenses.

[19] See Kant, "Elucidation by Means of Examples," §14, in *Critique of Judgment,* 59–62.

distrust of empirical (*a posteriori*) senses that was in vogue after Descartes.[20] In contrast to affect, *form* is logical and determinative [*bestimmend*], being based on certain *a priori* structures supposedly already in the mind; therefore, only form, not affect, can be the criteria for Beauty. When observing a sunset, for instance, one may feel that the display of colors and continuum of fading light is beautiful, however these are merely *subjective* judgements to Kant. Rather, those things thought to be beautiful are deemed as such because they reflect certain logical forms that are *objectively* good, such as proportion, line, or balance. In other words, though humans are often not consciously aware of these logical forms, they are the impetus for our perceptions of Beauty.

Within literary circles, this belief that emotion is an unreliable gauge of artistic value is most well known as the "affective fallacy," a term coined by Beardsley and Wimsatt in 1949, three years after their discussion of "intentional fallacy."[21] Though the origins of this belief are rarely discussed by the formalist figures most associated with it—namely, Beardsley and Wimsatt, and Hanslick—it is in Kant's Third Critique that affective fallacy is first given voice. The century-long transmission from Kant's 1790 text to Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful* (1891) occurs through Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), an important influence for Hanslick. In Herbart's 1831 *Kurze Enzyklopädie der Philosophie aus praktischen Gesichtspunkten entworfen*, he complains that "right up to the present day, even knowledgeable musicians perpetuate the principle that music expresses feelings as though the feelings that are perchance aroused … were the basis of the general rules of simple or double counterpoint, which underlie [music's] true nature."[22] Whether it be the rules of counterpoint, or the sense of proportion and balance found in the human form, these logical forms betray the presence of what Kant refers to as "purposiveness of form" [*Zweckmäßigkeit der Form*].[23] This belief in purposiveness of form contributes to the conceit of many analyses that every facet of a work—even the potentially serendipitous ones—is the product of compositional control.

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[20] For more on Descartes and rejection of empirical thought, see Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1945), 563–64.

[21] William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," in *Theory and Criticism* (2010), 1246–261.

[22] Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Kurze Enzyklopädie der Philosophie aus praktischen Gesichtspunkten entworfen*, ed. G. Hartenstein (1831; repr., Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1850), 112.

[23] Rachel Zuckert, "The Purposiveness of Form: A Reading of Kant's Aesthetic Formalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, no. 4 (2006): 599–622.

Through the idea of "purposiveness of form" one can see not only the beginnings of formalism, but also the roots of unity and organicism as criteria for value in art. As Lee Rothfarb writes, Kant "invokes purposiveness to characterize aesthetic objects whose parts are harmoniously combined in such a way that they create unity from multiplicity;"[24] or, as Kant states in his Third Critique, "what is formal in the presentation of a thing [is] the harmony of its manifold to [form] a unity."[25] In other words, the presence of unity suggests a certain organization that implies purposive design, an idea that Kant first touched on in the penultimate section of his First Critique, "Architectonic of Pure Reason."[26] In the theoretical lens of Schenker, one can see reflections of Kant's ideas concerning unity and organicism: Kant advocates for an organicist lens based upon hierarchy and architectonic structure when he states that

> 'pure' in a simple mode of sensation means that its uniformity is troubled and interrupted by no foreign sensation, and it belongs merely to the form. ... Even what we call 'ornaments' [*parerga*], i.e. those things which do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements, but only externally as complements, and which augment the satisfaction of taste, do so only by their form; as, for example, [the frames of pictures or] the draperies of statues or the colonnades of palaces.[27]

Nevertheless, although Kant's ideas present a starting point for formalism and appear to prefigure much organicist music theory, true correlates with musical formalism are severely limited by Kant's negative stance toward music. As Rothfarb argues, Kant regards music as merely a "beautiful play of sensation," leading to the conclusion that "surely musical formalism requires a more suitable originator than a philosopher who likens the effects of music to the undesired, spreading fragrance of a perfumed handkerchief waved about at social gatherings and to the 'feeling of health produced by intestinal agitation.'"[28] Furthermore, because Kant's conception of "pure beauty" is more amenable to *natural* beauty than human artifice, Kant's formalism required extensive alteration and retheorization in order to be applicable to music.[29]

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[24] Lee Rothfarb, "Nineteenth-Century Fortunes of Musical Formalism," *Journal of Music Theory* 55, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 167–220.

[25] See Kant, "The Judgement of Taste is Quite Independent of the Concept of Perfection," §15, in *Critique of Judgment,* 62–65.

[26] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 653–65.

[27] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 60–62.

[28] Rothfarb, "Fortunes of Musical Formalism," 174–75.

[29] One may wonder how Kant reckons an aesthetic philosophy based on natural beauty with his idea of purposiveness of form; however, it is important to remember that parts of Kant's philosophy hinge upon a non-

Following Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in 1790, the first major application of formalism to literary criticism was not until 1864, with the essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" by Matthew Arnold (1822–1888).[30] In this work, Arnold famously asserts that the critic should strive to "see the object as in itself it really is [*sic*]" and also argues in favor of criticism as a "disinterested endeavour;"[31] both maxims are distinctly Kantian and became central tenets of formalism. However, Kant's formalistic ideas had already been applied to music sixty years before Arnold brought it to literary criticism. For instance, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw Herbart's argument against the validity of affect as a critical tool, as well as Forkel's praise of the organic unity and teleological purpose in Bach's music.[32] The reason that music criticism was so quick to adopt Kant's ideas likely comes down to music's reduced semiotic availability, as well as its reliance on repetition. In other words, musical works are more open to discussions of form because what music loses in semiotic availability, it gains in formal clarity.

3.1 Disparate Formalisms Shaped by Their Artistic Medium

A juxtaposition of literary and musical form is performed by Kivy on at least one occasion, in a chapter provocatively titled "Foes of Formalism."[33] However, it is done as a way to argue against musical narrativity:

> Consider, now, what a typical narrative form, say the stage play, would be like if *it* were constructed with internal and external repeats of the kind about which I have just been speaking. Suppose *Hamlet* were constructed that way. Then, instead of saying 'To be, or not to be…' once, and then getting on with his life, Hamlet would repeat, every few minutes, 'To be, or not to be…'. Not only that, but each act of *Hamlet*—it has five!—would be performed twice, the first act being repeated before the second act could be presented, and so on. The absurdity of this procedure hardly needs further comment.[34]

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secular view of the world, so the logical forms like balance and proportion can still be said to betray a purposiveness of form, being the product of a divine creator.

[30] According to literary scholar Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold is the "founding father of modern [literary] criticism in the English-speaking world," so such a beginning for literary formalism is indeed an auspicious one.

[31] Matthew Arnold, *Theory and Criticism* (2001), 691.

[32] Joseph Kerman, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," *Critical Inquiry* 7/2 (Winter 1980), 315.

[33] Kivy, "Foes of Formalism," in *Philosophy of Music*, 135–59.

[34] Kivy, "Foes of Formalism," 154.

Even if one does not accept Kivy's conclusion—which is akin to comparing apples and oranges in order to conclude that one or the other is a vegetable—this argument is indicative of music's more explicit connection to issues of form.[35]

Meanwhile, any attempt to analyze a work of *literature* with a purely formal lens may look something like Eagleton's description of a structural interpretation of a text:

> Suppose we are analyzing a story in which a boy leaves home after quarrelling with his father, sets out on a walk through the forest … and falls down a deep pit. The father comes out in search of his son, peers down the pit, but is unable to see him because of the darkness. At that moment the sun … illuminates the pit's depths with its rays and allows the father to rescue his child. After a joyous reconciliation, they return home together. … The first unit of signification, 'boy quarrels with father,' might be written as 'low rebels against high.' The boy's walk through the forest is a movement along a horizontal   axis, in contrast to the vertical axis 'low/high,' and could be indexed as 'middle.' The fall into the pit … signifies 'low' again, and the zenith of the sun 'high.' By shining into the pit, the sun has in a sense stooped 'low,' thus inverting the narrative's first signifying unit, where 'low' struck against 'high.' The reconciliation between father and son restores an equilibrium between 'low' and 'high,' and the walk back home together, signifying 'middle,' marks this achievement of a suitably intermediate state.[36]

It turns out that this example is not quite given in good faith—as Eagleton later calls it a "calculated affront to common sense"—but it is illustrative of why reduced semiotic availability seemingly increases the applicability of formal arguments.[37] The problem with the previous analysis, according to Eagleton, is that it "refuses the 'obvious' meaning of the story and seeks instead to *isolate certain 'deep' structures within it, which are not apparent on the surface*. … If the particular contents of the text are replaceable, there is a sense in

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[35] Also noteworthy is the level of attention that Schenker gives to repetition at the beginning of *Harmony*. As it seemed to Schenker that music was unique in its lack of natural form to imitate—whereas painting had the natural world and dance had human form—he saw repetition as the solution. He stated that "the motif, and the motif alone, creates the possibility of associating ideas, the only one of which music is capable." Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, trans. Oswald Jonas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 4.

[36] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 82–83.

[37] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 83.

which one can say that *the 'content' of the narrative is its structure*" [emphases mine].[38] Yet, Eagleton's description of a purely formal approach to narrative is largely reminiscent of formalist analyses of musical works. In other words, the statement that "the content of the [work] *is* its structure" falls flat when applied to narrative but thrives in discussions of absolute music.[39] It is partly for this reason that literary formalism enjoyed a heyday of only about sixty years—from the Russian Formalist school of the 1910s to the decline of American New Criticism in the 1970s;[40] meanwhile, musical formalism has now been the dominant strain of thought in music criticism for nearly two centuries.

Musical formalism grows from the seed of Kant, through figures like Forkel, Herbart, Hanslick, Schenker, and eventually Kivy. A more precise trajectory can be traced in the section to come in this article, devoted to Kivy's brand of formalism. However, I shall ask: what of literary formalism? What occurred within that sixty-year period that caused it to be eclipsed by the likes of reception theory, reader-response theory, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and postcolonial theory? Briefly explicating this process will further prepare us for a discussion of Kivy's modern formalism in contrast to the traditional formalism within literary theory, as epitomized by the American New Critics.

3.2 The Adversarial Relationship between Formalism and Diversity

A variety of explanations have been given for the decline of American New Criticism and, consequently, literary formalism. According to Leitch, tactics of reading that emphasized the text over the societal factors that conditioned it came to be increasingly viewed as out of touch with the enormous social movements of the 1960s and 1970s: "The New Critical canon was too limited (male and white) to prove acceptable to feminists, African American critics, and other theorists."[41] Eagleton, however, is more detailed in his evaluation of ANC's fall, stating that it was the tenet of disinterestedness enforced by Kant and Arnold that fell out of favor:

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[38] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 83.

[39] A prime example is Hanslick's famous assertion in *The Beautiful in Music* that music is an art of tonally moving forms ("Der Inhalt der Musik sind tönend bewegte Formen"); see Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von Breitkopf & Härtel, 1922), 59.

[40] For more on the decline of American New Criticism, see Eagleton, "Afterward," in *Literary Theory,* 190–208.

[41] Vincent Leitch, *Theory and Criticism* (2001), 970.

Students had traditionally been expected, when encountering a literary text, to put their own particular histories temporarily on ice, and judge it from the vantage-point of some classless, genderless, non-ethnic, disinterested universal subject. This was an easy enough operation to pull off when those individual histories sprang from roughly the same kind of social world; but it was becoming much less apparent to those from ethnic or working-class backgrounds, or those from sexually dispossessed groups, that these supposedly universal values were in any real sense theirs.[42]

This explanation of literary formalism's decline points toward an additional explanation for music theory's continued use of formalistic lenses. While literary theory of the late twentieth century was becoming increasingly more divested from white-male power, the same cannot be said for music theory, which still struggles—or rather, does not struggle hard enough—to break free from a patriarchal, white-racial frame.[43] As previously mentioned, a full-fledged comparison of practitioner demographics between the fields of music theory, musicology, and English literature studies is currently limited by the available data. For instance, while the Society for Music Theory and the American Musicological Society have both conducted detailed surveys of their membership demographics, the Modern Language Association lacks such granular data. Furthermore, the demographic makeup of such scholarly societies is not necessarily representative of the fields at large, so such data is insufficient to support a contention that one field is more or less homogenous than another. Currently, the best source of one-to-one statistical comparison between the fields of music theory and English literature studies is through Data USA, an aggregator of governmental statistics. According to their 2020 statistics, those identifying as Black or Latine accounted for only 11.64% of degrees awarded in "music theory and composition," versus 23.45% for degrees under "general English language and literature."[44] Though the percentage of music degrees awarded to Black people and individuals from the Latin community sits just under half of those in English language and literature, the

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[42] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 191.

[43] On music theory's white racial frame, see Philip Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," *Music Theory Spectrum* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2021), 324–29 and Justin London, "A Bevy of Biases: How Music Theory's Methodological Problems Hinder Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 1 (March 2022). For more on patriarchy in music theory, see Ellie Hisama, "Getting to Count," *Music Theory Spectrum* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2021), 349–63.

[44] Data USA, "Music Theory & Composition," accessed April 9, 2023, https://datausa.io/profile/cip/music-theory-composition#demographics. See also Data USA "General English Language & Literature," accessed April 9, 2023, https://datausa.io/profile/cip/general-english-language-literature-230101#demographics.

deficiency is likely starker for degrees in music theory sans composition. Considering what Leitch and Eagleton have to say about the connection between formalism and homogeneity, it follows that these demographic differences play an important role in the two fields' differing dependence on formalist criticism.

There is an additional facet to this argument that makes its conclusion even more likely, and it relates to the primary difference between literary and musical formalism. As Eagleton states, it is the tenet of disinterestedness—the elimination of affect and socio-economic factors in analysis—that caused formalism to falter in a diversifying literary landscape. Close reading and formalistic estrangement, on the other hand, survived the fall of ANC because it could be used to "[denaturalize] certain traditional literary assumptions in ways congenial to the academic newcomers."[45] Consequently, Eagleton argues, "Anglo-American deconstruction is no more than a return of the old New Critical formalism."[46] However, in Kivy's representative brand of musical formalism, it is this very estrangement that gets eliminated as a viable approach to music. In other words, whereas estrangement was one of the few facets of literary formalism that made it agreeable to a more diverse field of practitioners, musical formalism does away with it. In the next section, I address in detail Kivy's brand of formalism, especially how it differs from literary formalism in regard to authorial intention and, consequently, issues of estrangement. As I will demonstrate, these existential differences are related to the two fields' differing levels of semiotic availability.

4.1 Kivy's Formalism, in Contrast to the other Formalists

In the previous section, I described some of the incongruities of musical and literary formalism, as well as the common Kantian roots of both; furthermore, I offered two basic rationales for these incongruities, namely the differing levels of both semiotic availability and relative diversity within the field. In this section, I dive deeper into Kivy's *oeuvre*, ultimately finding that Kivy's formalism is close to ANC in several aspects—such as a distrust of affect and a focus on technical description—but departs from literary formalism in fundamental ways. Furthermore, I show in this section how Kivy's ideas align with most other musicologists or music theorists that are generally labeled as formalistic, such as Herbart, Hanslick, and Schenker. This fact will further illustrate that Kivy's formalism is acceptable as a status quo for musical formalism in general. In other words, this section will return to the central conflicts offered by the

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[45] Eagleton, *Literary Theory,* 191. On the survival of close reading as a modern critical lens, see Leitch, *Theory and Criticism* (2001), 970–71.
[46] Eagleton, *Literary Theory,* 126.

trio of quotes that commenced the article, in which Kivy—a musical formalist—is inherently at odds with literary formalism.

In many of his works, Kivy clearly lays his cards out on the table; this tendency is laudable and contributes tremendous clarity to his ideas, as one is not left guessing as to his ideological motivations. The fact that Kivy does so also makes it far easier to ally him with musical formalism. For instance, in one of his early books, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* published in 1980, Kivy immediately betrays his formalistic sensibilities when he introduces what he sees as four kinds of musical description "in what I imagine is an ascending order of current respectability."[47] In order, these types are biographical, autobiographical, emotive description, and technical description. Already, Kivy's placement of "technical description" at the top of the list suggests a critical view that favors investigation of the artistic object itself, a formalist tenet regardless of field. In Kivy's view, biographical and autobiographical musical description is too far removed from the music; in his words, "we came for a description of music, and we were given a description of the composer instead."[48] Emotive description entails a similar issue, as an emotion is a distinctly human phenomenon that cannot be had by an object. When discussing Tovey's brand of emotive description, Kivy argues that "only sentient beings can have emotions. So [Tovey] must mean, when he says that a theme is broken with grief, that Beethoven was broken with grief when he wrote it, or Tovey was broken with grief when he heard it."[49] With this assertion, Kivy again allies himself with formalist criticism, namely the second most well-known idea of Beardsley and Wimsatt, the "affective fallacy."[50] As they argue, to commit the affective fallacy is to fall prey to a

> confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*) … It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome … is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear.[51]

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[47] Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3.

[48] Kivy, *The Corded Shell*, 4. It is important to note here that, as a formalist, Kivy's first priority is close reading through a scientifically detached technical lens; however, while biographical data is never the first line of inquiry, Kivy's brand of formalism does dictate that it receives/d a last say in the interpretive process. So, although it sits at the bottom of this list, it is not to say that biography is unvaluable for Kivy by any means. Furthermore, this list is not necessarily indicative of Kivy's own perspective, nor that of musical formalism itself.

[49] Kivy, *The Corded Shell*, 6.

[50] Beardsley and Wimsatt, "The Affective Fallacy," 1246.

[51] Beardsley and Wimsatt, "The Affective Fallacy," 1246.

In regard to the affective fallacy, Kivy's formalism is of a softer, more flexible variety than is found in American New Criticism. The goal of *The Corded Shell* was to stage an intervention of sorts, to "make emotive description once again respectable in the eyes of the learned, so that it can stand alongside of technical description as a valid analytical tool."[52] As it turns out, Kivy's objections to emotive descriptions of the past are largely based on an issue of semantics: "The theory of musical expression I intend to outline here is an account of how it is that music can be *expressive of* the emotions; it is not a theory of how music can *express* them."[53] As Kivy goes on to argue throughout his book, one cannot objectively state that a piece of music communicates a particular emotion—especially not certain "delicate shades of emotive 'color'" like "brooding," "earnestness," or "seriousness."[54] However, he does concede that one can potentially use *objective* technical description to narrow down the list of potential *subjective* emotions expressed by a piece of music. In his words, "our judgements usually fall into predictable bounds. (No one, to my knowledge, has ever been tempted to characterize … Papageno's 'Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja,' in *Zauberflöte*, as 'somber,' 'brooding,' or 'melancholy.')" This perspective, which Kivy calls "enhanced formalism," is probably his most well-known contribution to music studies. In this way, Kivy seems to represent a tempered kind of formalism, a suspicion that is confirmed by Kivy's 1989 retrospective on *The Corded Shell*:

> Much to most people's surprise who have heard my views on pure instrumental music and are familiar with my views on musical expression from reading *The Corded Shell*, I am a formalist in the tradition of Eduard Hanslick. But a formalist with a difference. For formalism is generally taken to deny that music can, in any important sense, be expressive of the emotions; whereas it was the purpose of *The Corded Shell* to defend the notion that music can be expressive, and to try to explain how it can be. Certainly, in my view, Hanslick denied that music can be expressive; and such denial is generally thought part of the formalist's creed.[55]

It is for this reason that Kivy acknowledges a conflict between Hanslick's formalism and his own brand.

While Kivy's view of affect turns out to be a flexible one, he does not budge on the idea that authorial intention must be weighed against any potential interpretation in order to gauge its validity; the

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[52] Kivy, *The Corded Shell*, 9.
[53] Kivy, *The Corded Shell*, 14.
[54] Kivy, *The Corded Shell,* 14.
[55] Kivy, *Philosophy of Music*, 67.

quote given at the outset of this article is a prime example. As Nina Penner writes in her 2018 article, "Intentions in Theory and Practice," this impulse to defend interpretations through speculation about authorial intention is the norm in musicology and music theory.[56] However, in times when Kivy puts on the hat of a literary critic, this impulse suddenly seems out of place. For instance, in his 2006 book *The Performance of Reading*, he argues that "reading a novel at one go is not only unusual, and in some cases impossible, but contrary to authorial intention, and, *consequently, not the most artistically correct way of experiencing such works*" (emphasis mine).[57] Furthermore, meaning for Kivy—though not necessarily for the wider music community—must be straightforward and simple. When attempting to refute McClary's infamous reading of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, he states the following: "Show a picture of a man, a woman, a dog, a tree, to *anyone*, *anywhere*, and it will be immediately identified for what it is. Play Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and see how many listeners come up with patriarchal expectations and female entrapment. … That is what, I think, we take narrative meaning to be: understandable by a wide audience of ordinary speakers and readers."[58] However, how do these two arguments square against literary formalism? Consider the ideas of Jonathan Culler, one of the last remaining practitioners of literary formalism in the American New Critical sense. In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Culler states that "meaning is an inescapable notion because it is not something simple or simply determined" and that "meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless."[59] One simply cannot ask for a clearer expression of the vast canyon that exists between literary formalism—as expressed by Culler—and musical formalism as Kivy articulates it.

Shifting now the focus towards another formalist figure, what would Schenker have said about issues of intention and meaning? One wholly formalist element of his thought was a distaste for historicism in interpretation. As William Drabkin writes, Schenker decried the mixing of politics with music: "the immortality of great music was itself proof that political beliefs had little to do with musical values."[60]

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[56] Nina Penner, "Intentions and Theory in Practice," *Music and Letters* 99, no. 3 (October 2018).

[57] Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 5.

[58] Kivy, *Philosophy of Music*, 151.

[59] Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.

[60] William Drabkin, "Heinrich Schenker," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, edited by Thomas Christensen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 815. Drabkin also makes the important point that, while Schenker may have believed that politics should in no way enter into the analysis of music, this does not stop Schenker's theoretical system from being fully conditioned by his political beliefs in the supremacy of the

This enunciation is just another form of the formalist creed to view the artistic object in itself. Similar to Kivy, however, this does not mean that Schenker puts composer intention aside. A case in point: in §63 of *Harmony*, Schenker discusses the difference between musical understanding of the mature musician versus the immature musician, "or even the theoretician."[61] As he argues, "whatever was meant to be heard horizontally, the mature artist would hear horizontally. Whatever resulted from the vertical structure he perceived as such. To put it concisely: His perception, unperturbed by external appearances, conformed to the intention of the composer."[62] Here, Schenker enforces a distinct difference between external appearances—i.e. politics, socio-historical factors, etc.—and compositional intention; the latter must be obeyed while the former is misleading. In the case of Schenker and Kivy, or any other musical formalist discussed here, it is beyond the scope of this essay to entertain how it is possible for an analyst to consider authorial intention without considering the wider context of the period and culture in which the author lived. However, there does appear to be a basic contradiction in such a stance, at least in regard to Kivy's plentiful writings, where he simultaneously lauds composer intention while denying the possibility of historical authenticity.

Addressing the latter concept, in his 1995 book *Authenticities*, Kivy refutes Richard Taruskin's argument that composer intentions are all but inaccessible, stating that "the notion that we cannot know about composers' states of mind seems utterly false, not to say completely destructive of the whole musicological enterprise."[63] As he goes on, Kivy clarifies that Taruskin's edict seems to come from a place of skepticism—in other words, Taruskin is wary of speculation about composer intention because one cannot have philosophical certainty, in the Cartesian sense. However, "justified true belief"—in the sense defined by philosopher Edmund Gettier—is more than achievable, Kivy states.[64] Yet, in many of Kivy's writings—especially *Authenticities* and his essay from two years prior, "On the Concept of the 'Historically Authentic' Performance"—he argues against the possibility of historicism on the grounds that any attempt to understand a work of art historically will be inevitably conditioned by one's own modern perspective;[65] one cannot be sure, beyond a

German people and what he saw as a steady decline in European culture after the eighteenth century.

[61] Schenker, *Harmony*, 124.

[62] Schenker, *Harmony,* 124.

[63] Peter Kivy, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 16.

[64] Kivy, *Authenticities*, 17.

[65] Peter Kivy, "On the Concept of the 'Historically Authentic' Performance," in *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 117–33.

shadow of a doubt, that a performance is historically accurate. So much for justified true belief.

Judging by Kivy's aforementioned essay, it seems that the crux of the argument in favor of intentionality but against historicism relates to what he and other musical formalists see as a fundamental difference between the mind of the composer and the historical period in which they lived. As he puts it,

> any historical reconstruction … is non-normative, value free. But the concept of compositional intention is not. … For, I take it, we have a right to assume that the composer intends, among other things, the best possible performance of his or her work. Indeed, that is what, presumably, all of the specific intentions add up to. If, therefore, we construe the historically authentic performance to be identical with the performance intended by the composer … we need not include any "bad" performance practice. We need not play Berlioz' music out of tune, if that was the practice of his times, for we can reasonably assume that he did not intend it to be played that way. [66]

Furthermore, he argues that composers were not necessarily acquiescent in the creation of performance practices, so composer intention and historically authentic performance "may frequently be at cross purposes."[67] These cross purposes, one could argue, are a recurring theme for musical formalism as was practiced by Herbart, Hanslick, Schenker, and Kivy.

Such cross purposes, as described by Kivy, are evident in musical formalism's infatuation with the "genius," that figure who stands apart from their historical and social surroundings, thus transcending them in a way that justifies our simultaneous concern for composer intentions and lack of interest in socio-historical context. To be sure, literary formalism was surely not without its own problems—namely, the same socio-historical myopias, which led it to be usurped by newer theoretical schools near the end of the twentieth century. Furthermore, literary formalism in the early twentieth century suffered from a marked elitism that maintained that those who made careful study of great literary works were morally superior.[68] In the cases of

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[66] Kivy, " 'Historically Authentic' Performance," 119–20.
[67] Kivy, " 'Historically Authentic' Performance," 120.
[68] As described by Eagleton, this facet of early formalism relates to the fact that serious literary analysis came into vogue after secularization as a *de facto* replacement for religious study; but, as he wryly quips, "when the Allied troops moved into the concentration camps some years after the founding of *Scrutiny,* to arrest commandants who had whiled away their leisure hours

both musical formalism and literary formalism, these declines of favor led inexorably toward episodes of defensive apologetics from practitioners. In the case of literary formalism, this episode came in the form of a 1999 edited book of articles, *Ideology and Form in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, as well as the 2000 issue of *Modern Language Quarterly*, both of which were dedicated to a discussion of formalism's place within the field and its various accolades and benefits. Though the various articles in these two publications are generally thoughtful and high in quality, parallels can still be easily made with analogous attempts within music theory to stem the tide of criticisms made against formalistic techniques.

5.1 Conclusions

The wholly different fortunes of formalist critique in music studies and literature studies suggests, as I have been arguing throughout this article, that there exists something inherent in each field to push them toward one extreme or the other. As Kivy himself concedes when discussing affect, "music is far more troublesome than … literature. It is really the same old story of content (in literature) versus the absence of it (in music);"[69] though he only alludes to the issue, the statement explicitly acknowledges the pivotal nature of semiotic availability in deciding existential factors for both formalisms. Consequently, it certainly seems to be the case that music's apparent lack of semiotic availability—or "absence of content," as musical formalists put it—creates the potential for the formalist approach associated with literature studies to falter. In the chapter "Foes of Formalism" that I have continually returned to, Kivy speculates as to why this view is hard to swallow for many, stating that

> absolute music is humanly constructed sound; and the only other such major sound construction is speech, which exists, obviously, for the sole purpose of conveying the speaker's meaning to others [high semiotic availability]. Music, then, as the formalist sees it, looks to the non-formalist as meaningless babble.[70]

It is for this reason, states Kivy, that non-formalists have often turned to narrative theory in order to impose meaning. Obviously, this is something that a literary formalist rarely needed to resort to, except in rare cases in which the grammar, structure, or syntax of a text

with a volume of Goethe, it appeared that someone had some explaining to do." Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 30.

[69] Kivy, *Sound Sentiment*, 236.

[70] Kivy, *Philosophy of Music*, 137.

eschews ordinary semiotic availability.[71] The lack of semiotic availability afforded by absolute music positions it as particularly conducive to a formalist perspective. Furthermore, whereas a novel or a poem has such an abundance of concrete content that one may be able to speculate about all sorts of meanings, musical formalists depend somewhat upon biographical context. When one considers the fact that formalism's eschewal of socio-historical factors damages its appeal for heterogeneous, diverse bodies of practitioners, it comes as no surprise that formalism is still alive and well in music theory circles, while it fell out of fashion in already-diversified literary theory spaces of the late twentieth century.

In the last several years, the field of music theory has undergone uncharacteristic levels of self-reflection and growth, albeit reluctantly and at a glacial pace. Importantly, these recent initiatives were presaged by growing concerns regarding issues of methodological and demographic homogeneity, the same considerations that led literary formalism to be decentered in favor of poststructuralist modes of inquiry like deconstruction, reader-response theory, and postcolonial theory. This fact does not necessarily constitute writing on the wall for a similar collapse of formalistic methodologies in music theory; considering the issue of semiotic availability, a collapse commensurate with literary formalism's is unlikely to happen within music theory. However, if this writing means anything at all, it appears likely that a broadening of methodological horizons—perhaps even centering lenses currently considered to be eminently musicological, ethnomusicological, or simply extramusical—is within music theory's immediate future. For a field that is known to struggle with stasis and insularity, such a future seems bright indeed.

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[71] Some examples include Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," James Joyce's mature works, portions of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, or the like.

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BOOK REVIEWS

How does the production, use, and presence of our voices play a central role in our self-identification, positionality, and daily life? To answer this question, Matthew Rahaim's work within the Hindustani vocal ecumene provides a rich array of possibilities. As studies of Hindustani vocal traditions expand in scope, Rahaim contributes an authoritative and engaging perspective in *Ways of Voice: Vocal Striving and Moral Contestation in North India and Beyond*. Drawing together discourses from vocal studies, sound studies, South Asian music and performance studies, globalization and identity studies, and emerging scholarship on vocal-ethical phenomenology and aspiration, Ways of Voice highlights many thought-provoking webs of influence. This book, though a dense read, stands as a treasure trove of musical analysis of the voice, a nuanced contribution to philosophical considerations of network theories, and a roadmap for the expansive implications of the voice in the context of neoliberal India. A review of Ways of Voice is timely, as this work represents a crucial contribution to the emergent field of vocal studies through the lens of South Asian regional music ethnography. This work is a must-read for any scholar, performer, or listener interested in how voices influence our understandings of ourselves and our surroundings.

Rahaim's *Ways of Voice* emerges as a natural companion to the author's *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012). *Ways of Voice* builds on the author's career-long exploration of how embodied performance, auditory experiences, and gestures play into human musical modes of being. In this book, Rahaim focuses on the embodied practices of vocality and turns to ontology—in this case, exploring the ways vocal development informs our ways of being. Rahaim relies closely on personal experience while maintaining a rich depth and scope of explorations of the human voice and related ethical contestations. His first-hand experiences shine through; it is apparent that Rahaim's twenty-year-plus training in the classical rāg music of the Gwalior lineage and his collaborations with North Indian musicians inform the core of his analysis. In this book, Rahaim dives into various branches of the Hindustani vocal ecumene to explore varied and interdisciplinary themes through duniyās, or worlds of various North Indian vocal styles. This book is structured broadly around four themes relating to the voice: vocal dispositions, vocal relationality, vocal formation and contestation, and vocal striving.

In his introduction, Rahaim uses the term "raga music" to refer to musical styles within and beyond the Hindustani vocal ecumene (9). He coins and mobilizes the term "Hindustani vocal ecumene" to describe the overlapping spaces of Hindustani vocal musics that reach through and beyond styles considered classical. The term Hindustani vocal ecumene, which simultaneously categorizes and challenges the boundaries of North Indian vocal performance, provides an effective model for future works in the increasingly-transnational, overlapping, and hybrid worlds of North Indian and Pakistani vocal performance (13). Rahaim proposes a metaphorically provocative sociological frame that "offers a view beyond—and between—fixed boundaries of conventional genre and identity" (11). He explores this frame through the phenomenon of vocal striving, where vocal "[aspirants] work to change their own voice, to work towards a voice that is not yet their own" (20). Rahaim speaks to the far-reaching impact of vocal contestations and vocality's role in formation of identity and ethics, conceptions of nationhood, and musical practice. These themes have demonstrated continued relevance in contemporary scholarship on South Asian music and vocality.

One of the most captivating elements of this work, highlighted in the second chapter, is Rahaim's ability to capture several multi-faceted strands of theory, discourse, and sentiment, weaving them together into a coherent reflection on how individuals' vocal dispositions are implicated in ethical negotiations. Regarding such ethical contestations and building upon his previous work on embodiment, Rahaim explores areas of relationality, listening, inwardness, and gender subject positions. While acknowledging the lived social and political complexities post-independence Indian musicians face, Rahaim prioritizes and situates the aesthetic attitudes and sites of his work firmly within the bounds of ethnomusicology, through reference to Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment: Birds Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), and sound studies, through reference to Roland Barthes's *The Grain of the Voice*: *Interviews 1962-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985). This focused discipline-orientation is particularly helpful, given the expansive range of themes and methodologies included in the book and summarized below. The author deconstructs the concept of the natural voice as a seemingly essential quality, which he problematizes considering the voice's "acquired, disciplined, [and] malleable dispositions" (46). Through cultivating various vocal dispositions after years of practice, Rahaim outlines two primary categorizations of these vocal dispositions in chapter two: kinetic and sonorous. Kinetic dispositions encompass the pitches of vocal motion, articulation of syllables, styling of melodic motion, and ethical valuations attached to certain vocal qualities and methods of movement. Sonorous dispositions imply indexical meanings connected to a certain physical "texture that remains steady through vocal twists and turns" (70-71). Here, Rahaim highlights the active comportment of the vocal apparatus, which is necessary to produce distinctive forms of

resonance such as the musician's ability to control sur, or the tone / melody / tune and range (71). He elucidates that these sonorous dispositions are only possible through rigorous training, time spent in dedicated practice, and socio-cultural conditioning. Through the categorization of kinetic and sonorous dispositions, Rahaim clarifies how musicians within the Hindustani vocal ecumene explore the physical production and aspirational purpose of their vocal striving.

Throughout the third chapter, Rahaim addresses the elements of relationality connected to vocal practices, grounding his observations in deep listening. He explores the implications of a mahfil musical gathering on listener positionality, highlighting the importance of ethical awareness. The author explains how an ethical awareness emerges through personal and musical responsiveness and social/antisocial positioning inward toward the self and outward toward the Divine (104). Through the exploration of both relational and irrelational listening practices, Rahaim illustrates how musicians employ agency in construing their relationships to others, to their own selves, and to their spiritual and professional ambitions. Developments in sound technology and the standardization of the mic-stage concert setup have also influenced these musicians' interaction with others, themselves, and their ambitions. He champions the complexity of vocal music's dynamism as a means of being-together with other individuals, groups, societies, or transcendent imagined histories (235). Vocal sonorities, while nearly universal in scope, are nonetheless malleable and fluid phenomena that provide insight into conceptions of the self, social belonging, and constructed narratives.

Rahaim's account of his own vocal development is remarkably clear and honest and serves as an encouraging and informational model for those interested in exploring current developments in Indian music pedagogy and transmission. Building on themes of natural vocal dispositions, Rahaim further reflects on vocal formation and contestation in chapter four. These narratives are couched in the discourses of lineage and transmission (as seen in the gharana gayaki), heroization of individual musicians, and the complex transformations of gendered and national narratives within filmi vocal styles pertaining to music written and performed for Indian cinema. Rahaim supplements his observations of vocal striving in chapter five by outlining his own experience. For instance, he shares his detailed foray into the rīyāz-tālīm instruction complex of formal instruction and personal training and describes how these practices can be particularly useful for anyone currently participating in Indian music lessons or teaching.

The author's deep and long-standing engagement with traditions across the Hindustani vocal ecumene is evident throughout his work. He uses language like an artist to paint such a clear picture of rīyāz—personal musical practice—and tālīm—face-to-face instruction with the guru—that even a reader uninitiated into Indian musical practice can imagine themselves sitting alongside Rahaim as he comes to various embodied and theoretical realizations. In my experience, the verbal metaphors Rahaim uses to frame concepts are characteristic of the metaphorical language used by many Indian gurus in a lesson setting.

Ways of Voice contains many clear visual illustrations of vocal pitch graphs, spectrograms, and photographs of embodied motions that contribute to the clarity of Rahaim's argument throughout. Particularly refreshing are the illustrations and transcriptions relevant to Rahaim's personal rīyāz. The use of solfège, or sargam—syllables that illustrate distinct pitches—is effective in conveying musical clarity and detail. A reader unfamiliar with Indian music may gain relatively less audible understanding from these sargam syllables. However, the audio and visual materials on the Ways of Voice online companion site facilitate further understanding of Rahaim's visual and textual examples in each chapter.

Rahaim is successful in engaging with the subtlety between physical and metaphorical vocal mechanics and the individual and societal reflections on modernity. The author handles language surrounding singers' expected or anticipated behavior and vocal embodiments with a rhetorical care that avoids assumptions. When applicable, Rahaim acknowledges the privileged social and economic position of his interlocutors without villainizing their circumstances. Methodologically, the author accomplishes this through reliance on regional terminology, which is often helpful though tends to distract from overarching arguments.

Despite the impressively comprehensive scope of *Ways of Voice*, detail is at times featured at the expense of a focus on the central argument. Specifically, the degree of Rahaim's emphasis on a breadth of musical styles tends to obfuscate emergence of the primary argument which hinges on the voice's tangible and metaphorical significance. Additionally, given developing scholarship regarding online communities, Rahaim's work might be supplemented by greater engagement with the significance of online communities, virtual pedagogy and performance practices, and music production industries.

Ways of Voice holds potential for vocal pedagogical training and praxis of vocal music in the Hindustani ecumene and beyond. Although pedagogical instruction is not an explicit goal outlined in this book, it is an indispensable resource with several training suggestions and personal practice techniques, particularly as evidenced in Rahaim's evocative visual and verbal illustrations of his own musical revelations through often-laborious training. As a scholar-performer, I look forward to bringing Rahaim's suggestions into my own vocal practice and performance, particularly those directed toward challenging natural assumptions about physiological vocal phonation. Music teachers who give individual lessons, group lessons, and/or instruction in classroom settings may also benefit from Rahaim's candid observations of "schooling as ethical striving" (216). Readers may find that, as Rahaim discovers in his exploration of vocal striving in North India, the formation of the self is ever-malleable and dynamic.

Rachel Schuck
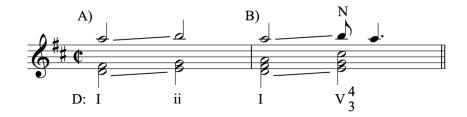
Of the many pedagogical issues that plague undergraduate music theory courses, I find that the most pernicious is a misunderstanding of the relationship between musical works and the theoretical models that reflect them. This confusion is particularly detrimental because students come to theory classes with hopes of discovering more about the music they love, but all-too-often leave in disappointment. Students often form the false notion that their theory professors intend them to consider these theoretical models as *prescriptive* rules, rather than as *descriptive* archetypes that offer vital information about common compositional tendencies. In his excellent 2019 book, *Bending the Rules of Music Theory: Lessons from Great Composers*, Timothy Cutler immediately foregrounds the fact that "'rules' are best understood as aesthetic guidelines [that] were intended to be treated with flexibility. Great composers knew these guidelines intimately, but they were also willing to bend and transcend them in order to serve their artistic visions" (viii). He continues, arguing that "just as our understanding of a composer's rule-bending is informed by our awareness of the rules themselves, the relationship is reciprocal—examining deviations from the norm ultimately enriches our comprehension of and appreciation for music theory's fundamental tenets" (viii). Thus, Cutler effectively illustrates the potential flexibility surrounding music-theoretical rules through his explication of unorthodox compositional moments throughout so-called "common-practice" tonality. At the same time, the author emphasizes the importance of knowing these rules, offering concrete compositional reasonings behind the breaking of them.

By enriching students' understandings of the relationship between theoretical models and the compositions that go against them, Cutler's book can significantly alter their approaches to music theory. I have witnessed this benefit firsthand, having assigned the preface and first chapter to multiple second-semester theory courses; upon questioning my students, many stated outright that it changed how they understood theory for the better. On the other hand, since books on music theory pedagogy inevitably invoke certain hard questions about representation, culture, and bias, the modern pedagogical text typically has an obligation to dispel certain presuppositions about categorization and valuation. In one sense, Cutler's book accomplishes this task, identifying ostensibly "incorrect" compositional traits and offering well-reasoned justifications for their existence; yet, at the same time, the book does not do enough to subvert the most deeply entrenched assumptions about art and culture, especially relating to the formation of canon, and the

representativeness of what we still call "common-practice" music. After I extoll the plentiful merits of the book, I will take a critical view of some of the unstated assumptions of the book.

Cutler's preface begins by invoking the familiar joke that J.S. Bach killed a kitten every time someone wrote parallel fifths, noting the seriousness with which we tend to regard certain "hard" rules in music theory. "Why, then," asks Cutler, "does a close inspection of tonal works reveal that composers repeatedly violated the rules outlined in theory textbooks?" As an answer to that question, Cutler presents the central thesis of the book: What musicians and theorists think of as "rules" are merely a crystallization of countless compositional tendencies of Western art music (hereafter, abbreviated as WAM), the understanding of which allows us to better appreciate the myriad deviations that occur within WAM repertoire. In the preface as well as the first chapter—emphatically titled "'Rules'" with scare quotes—Cutler expands on this thesis through an exhaustive census of artists from various disciplines. From pages 2–8, Cutler includes roughly fifty-two direct quotations from composers (Debussy, Schoenberg, Coltrane, etc.), painters (Picasso, Monet, Zuccari, etc.), writers (T.S. Eliot, Shaw, Frost, etc.), actors (Orson Wells, Marylin Monroe, etc.), practicing musicians (Wilhelm Furtwängler, Murray Perahia, and even Slash from Guns and Roses) and many others; most of the quotes are proverbial or maxim-like in style, relating to creative ideologies surrounding the interplay of aesthetic rules and innovation. Although having nearly eight quotes per page for half a chapter begins to feel excessive, the approach is successful in that it shows the level of consensus that exists within communities of *creators*, rather than the dry, second-hand accounts students are used to.

After this informative introduction, the main portion of the book is broken up into broad categories based on topics germane to a typical music theory classroom, including dissonance management, voice leading, syntax, and embellishing tones. Positively no musical dictum escapes Cutler's keen gaze. For instance, chapters 4 and 5 focus on voice leading, particularly rules surrounding parallels. Cutler's Example 4.1, on page 53, serves as a good model of how many of the book's examples are framed, with the problematic parallel being excused via non-chord-tone activity, in which A) represents poor parallel fifths and B) represents good parallel fifths:

Additional rationales for excusing parallels involve Alberti bass, which Cutler persuasively shows to involve multiple voices, thus complicating ostensible perfect parallels. Moreover, many examples are given of parallels that can be excused on account of doubling, and for the sake of coloristic quality—for instance, the clanging of bells or imitation of medieval organum. The most interesting examples are those in which customary tendency-tone resolutions are avoided for text-painting reasons. For instance, on page 97, Cutler addresses an unresolved leading tone in the soprano of "Solveig's Song" from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, noting that the leading tone's lack of resolution to $\hat{1}$ highlights the fact that the principal characters' longing for one another is denied.

Throughout the book, Cutler reminds readers of his central argument, that what we call "rules" are in fact descriptive models based on common compositional practices. Additionally, the book is replete with wise statements about music—for instance, the fact that it is wrongheaded to evaluate all music based on a single overarching principle—that many of us would do well to explicitly state to our students, lest they form harmful notions about art. Finally, the clarity of Cutler's examples is much to his credit, and of particular interest are his uses of reductions to explicate the compositional rationale behind ostensibly radical chord progressions and seemingly uncategorizable nonharmonic tones.

After having discussed some of the particulars and strengths of this book, it is important also to address some of its shortcomings. While Cutler's arguments are convincing, his book should be read with current debates about representation and received knowledge in mind. Much has been written in the past several years regarding serious issues in music-theoretical practice that harm its relevance and academic standing, such as Philip Ewell's approach in his "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame" (*Music Theory Spectrum* 43, no. 2 [Fall 2021]: 324–29) and Justin London's study a year later ("A Bevy of Biases: How Music Theory's Methodological Problems Hinder Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion." *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 1 [March 2022]). As many critics have argued, the theoretical understandings presented in many textbooks are based entirely on a miniscule corpus of examples, mostly from J.S. Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Chopin, and Robert Schumann. This hyperfocus leads many theorists to form confirmation biases, leading to circular valuations in which a select pantheon of composers is positioned as

"genius" or "great" based on qualities derived directly from the very same group. Out of Cutler's 469 examples, 325 of them (roughly 70%) are by the eight composers mentioned above. It may be that these eight composers exactly epitomize the broad compositional tendencies of the thousands of diverse composers in the history of WAM; after all, these styles are supported in many instances by evidence from historical compositional treatises. However, it is far more likely that our very conception of the "rules" of music theory are codified by our overdependence on such an infinitesimally small sample of composers, which we herald as objectively great.

More concerningly, a careful perusal of the book will confirm that every single composer represented is a white male. In combination with frequent ascriptions of "greatness" or "genius"—immaterial valuations that modern academic works tend to avoid—this serious myopia weakens the utility of Cutler's otherwise fine text. To be sure, I have no doubt that the sixty-odd composers encompassed in the book were skilled at their craft; however, a book subtitled "lessons from great composers" that then proceeds to eschew every existent non-white-male composer should give readers serious pause.

Granted, one could potentially offer certain defenses of this deficiency: for example, the premise of Cutler's book—that the "rules" are bent even by the canonical heavyweights (over) studied in theory courses—may be argued to necessitate a certain level of tunnel vision with regard to repertoire; additionally, a simple and unthoughtful addition of diversity could easily turn into tokenism, thus using subaltern voices as tools with which to support the white racial frame. However, I offer a few counterpoints: if the choice of examples is guided by a desire to show that even the most skilled composers regularly violate the rules, then the lack of examples from non-white-male composers would reify a (patently false) notion that white-male composers were more skilled at their craft. I would even further argue that such subaltern voices would have been a prime source of "bent" music-theoretical rules. For instance, Fanny Mendelssohn's works are replete with interesting deviations from the compositional status quo, including some rare instances of *true* plagal cadences. Furthermore, an unthoughtful inclusion of non-white-male composers would be easily avoided in a project of this nature. After all, some of the most abundant and interesting adaptions of tradition hail from those artists that exist in the margins of said tradition. Aside from addressing the enormous part of the corpus left out of the book, this understanding would strengthen the book's relevance, both for theorists and their students: whereas many of the examples of rule breaking cited in the book are attributed to somewhat more mundane reasons—registral demands, avoidance of more egregious voice-leading errors, and general embellishments—the inclusion of marginal composers' augmentations of tradition would highlight compositional rationales more grounded in history and culture. In sum, *Bending the Rules of Music Theory* presents itself as a corrective for students' misconceptions

about music theory with regard to its orientation toward compositional practice, a task that it accomplishes admirably; however, in the vastly more consequential issue of who gets to count, in the sense posed in Ellie Hisama's "Getting to Count" (*Music Theory Spectrum* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2021): 349–363), the book reaffirms one of music theory's most self-destructive conceits, namely that the study of music theory is synonymous with the study of a highly insular collection of 5–10 white-male composers, most of which were born within 500 kilometers of each other.

Despite these critiques—which I direct more toward our field's historically insufficient approach to repertoire and reception history than I do to Cutler himself—*Bending the Rules of Music Theory* is one of the most interesting and enlightening technical-pedagogical works that I have encountered in recent years. Any theory instructor should read this book and find ways to sprinkle it into their theory instruction, thus putting the so-called "rules" into perspective for students who might otherwise form dogmatic notions about their sovereignty. Ideally, Cutler's book should eventually warrant a (well-deserved) second edition, allowing for the sampling of composers to be updated and improved.

Levi Walls

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Rachel is an active flutist, vocalist, educator, ethnomusicologist, and advocate for cross-disciplinary scholarship and collaboration. She has enjoyed bringing these disciplines together in the creation of interactive lectures, recitals, and workshops throughout the United States and internationally. Previous workshop topics have included: introducing music cultures in the classroom, preparation for international college auditions, Karnatak vocal techniques, Karnatak *venu* flute techniques, and exploring cross-cultural music pedagogy and philosophy. She has presented papers at the Society for Ethnomusicology's national and regional meetings, the Society for Scholarship in Christian Music, and the Music of Asian America Research Center's annual festival.