

Chapter 2 : Music as sign-system—a survey of scholarship

The best way to predict the future is to invent it.

(Sinister CIA-type character, *The X-Files*)

For surely we want to make a new start which is no longer ideological, essentialist, racist or secretly nationalistic. In other words, a new beginning which is inherently neither consciously nor unconsciously making differences and evaluations.

(Tarasti 1997:180)

2.1 Introduction: Semiotics and linguistic theory

Semiotics tells us things we already know in a language we will never understand.

(Whannel, in Hodge 2003)

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework, drawing on semiotics and its related potential linguistic and cultural underpinnings, for the explanation of the dynamics and functioning of Soundpainting as a system for the collaborative creation of music in performance. An overview of contemporary critical theory provides the reader with a survey of some of the main currents of this thinking as a background to the application of semiotics to notated music. The author contends that semiotics, while very much a part of contemporary linguistic theory, has certain limitations as far as the analysis of improvised music is concerned, especially when such analysis is harnessed to a focus on musical works as formal objects.

The work of Saussure and Peirce is discussed as the origin of many of the most important contemporary theories about language and culture to emerge during the course of the twentieth century. Following from an examination of Saussure and Peirce, the author considers the applications of structuralist thinking as evidenced by early Barthes and goes on to examine poststructuralism as a shift in Barthes's thinking from work to text. The purpose of this examination is to provide a theoretical foundation for analyzing improvisation with reference to Barthes's new understanding of textuality, as relevant to contemporary creative practice.

Following Small (1998) and Bowen (2001), the distinction is drawn between music "as text" and music "as event," and the necessity for the study of the performance elements of improvised music in general, and Soundpainting in particular, is highlighted. Considering Soundpainting as a specific case of music as "event," the author next discusses the kind of methods best suited for the analysis of a Soundpainting performance, with a view to suggesting some possible models for analyzing the process of improvisation in general.

The Greek word *sêmeion*, meaning sign, forms the root of both semiology and semiotics, these terms being understood as the science of the sign. Both terms are used more or less interchangeably, with Continental philosophers tending to employ the term "semiology" and their American counterparts generally favouring "semiotics."⁴¹ Underlying these terms are two different structural conceptions of language and how linguistic signs operate, these differences being understood as a dyadic/oppositional (in Saussure) or triadic (in Peirce) conception of the nature of the sign. Since its beginnings in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, semiotics (not without its share of controversy) has gained ground in many areas of research and in the fields of zoosemiotics and medicine has moved into the natural and health sciences.

⁴¹ Monelle (1992:26) has a detailed discussion of the history of these terms and suggests using them as follows: "Semiotics" and "semiologist" preferred to "semiology" and "semiotician."

As David Clarke states (1996:5):

Semiotics itself—the study of signs, of how things come to be meaningful—is a discipline that has strong connections with linguistics. Although its historical roots can be traced back to Aristotle, its entry into the eventual mainstream of contemporary ideas can be traced back to the early part of the 20th century, one of its two principal originators being the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1915).

With regard to Soundpainting, the author has emphasized the fact that it operates first and foremost as a system of gestures for creating music. On this basis, as already suggested, it shares certain similarities with similar systems like orchestral conducting, both of which may be characterized as "systems of signs," whose primary purpose, like other sign-systems, is the communication of ideas.

In discussing the work and influence of these two great intellectual masters, the author aims to reveal some of the richness as well as the limitations of certain semiotic strategies. Bouissac (2003), quoting from Jakobson's *Essais de linguistique générale*, highlights a potential danger of such strategies as follows:

Those attempts made to construct a linguistic model without any connection to a speaker or a listener and which therefore hypostatize a code detached from actual communication, risk reducing language to a scholastic fiction.

Jakobson highlights a difficulty in the separation of language from the context in which communication is taking place. It seems reasonable to propose that Jakobson is suggesting that the act of communicating may (and often does) include non-verbal elements, which may influence the content and context of the message. By way of an example, people talking on mobile phones still have an inclination to using the same types of kinesic hand gestures that are used in the presence of a real listener during a face-to-face conversation.

These gestures may be used for rhetorical purposes, so as to persuade the

unseen listener, or to reinforce a point being made, or as part of the complex set of what Wittgenstein⁴² has referred to as language-games. The danger here seems to be the privileging of codes over the context in which they are being used, to the exclusion of essential non-verbal elements such as hand gestures and facial expressions, which "add value" to the communication process.

To some extent this may be seen as one of the flaws in some semiotic analyses of music. Some of these formalist analyses work by focusing attention on the symbolic language (i.e. notation) as opposed to the contexts in which they operate, which contexts in turn seem to be bound up in various discursive and ideological frameworks, making the apparent scientific objectivity of these analyses somewhat spurious.

2.1.1 Saussure's concept of language as a sign-system

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems.

(Saussure 1998:77)

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is regarded (with C. S. Peirce) as one of the two pioneers of twentieth-century linguistic theory. His *Course in General Linguistics* (1910-11) begins by defining language ("the most important of all these systems") as a sign-system for the purpose of human communication. *Lingue* ("language"), in Saussure's terms, refers to the social system of language, "the shared system which we (unconsciously) draw upon as speakers" (Selden 1989:52), while *parole* ("word") represents the individual utterance in the form of speech or writing.⁴³ The linguistic sign is made up of

⁴² The author will discuss some elements of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language as applicable to Soundpainting in section 2.1.6.

⁴³ "Saussure made what is now a famous distinction between language and speech.

"signifier" (a phonetic sound) and a "signified" (the concept to which it refers). The phonetic sound and its concept, for Saussure, exist in a close relationship, something akin to the two sides of a piece of paper.

Saussure postulated the existence of this general science of signs, or Semiology, of which linguistics forms only one part. Semiology therefore aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not *languages*, at least *systems of signification*.⁴⁴

(Hodge 2003, emphases in original)

Hodge here alerts the reader to the fact that Saussure's use of the term "sign" includes not only signs in the obvious visual sense of traffic signs, for instance, but also musical sounds as such. Moreover, and importantly, semiology is also concerned with the relations between signs in whatever signification can, and indeed does, take place; this idea of the sign as bound up in its context will become vital to the author's discussion of sociosemiotics (as discussed in section 4.1.3). Saussure further establishes two important principles: firstly, that the connection between signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept) is arbitrary, and secondly, that the signifier is linear and capable of analysis as part of a synchronic or diachronic study of language.⁴⁵

The first principle accounts for the different names in various languages that point to the signified "dog." Dogs are assigned different signifiers depending

Language refers to the system of rules and conventions which is independent of, and pre-exists, individual users; **Speech** refers to its use in particular instances. Applying the notion to semiotic systems in general rather than simply to language, the distinction is one between *code* and *message*, *structure* and *event* or *system* and *usage* (in specific texts or contexts). According to the Saussurean distinction, in a semiotic system such as cinema, any specific film is the *speech* of that underlying system of cinema *language*." (Hodge 2003, emphases in original)

⁴⁴ Whether musical systems, as such, can be construed as languages is still a topic of debate, to which the author returns in section 4.1.

⁴⁵ An important consequence of Saussure's thinking is that if a potential signifier does not bring about or trigger a signified or concept, then it does not operate as a sign.

on the language (system) in use, for example, "chien" in French or "ntja" in isiZulu. Signs are defined, moreover, as much by what they are not as what they are, that is to say, a dog is not a cat or a rabbit. The arbitrary nature of signs, however, does not imply that the speaker is at liberty to choose any signifier at will, because "the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community" (Saussure 1998:79).⁴⁶

The arbitrariness of the sign opens up a continuum of interpretive possibilities, ranging from the individual and idiosyncratic to the communal or collective. The potential conflicts implicit in such a range of possible interpretations are dramatized in tensions between the individual and the community, or, in Saussurean terms, between *parole* and *langue*.

Saussure's second principle is represented graphically as the intersection of a vertical (synchronic) "axis of simultaneities" (AB), standing for "the relations of coexisting things from which the intervention of time is excluded," with a horizontal (diachronic) "axis of successions" (CD), "on which only one thing can be considered at a time but upon which are located all the things on the first axis and all their changes" (Saussure 1998:81). Thus CD represents a particular moment or time-slice against the background AB of the historical evolution of a linguistic system. Saussure goes on to compare the functioning of language with a game of chess, where the state of the chessboard at any given moment represents a synchronic state governed by the diachronic rules of the game (1998:82):

First, a state of the set of chessmen corresponds closely to a state of language. The respective value of the pieces depends on their position

⁴⁶ Saussure's assertion has clear implications for theorizing about matters artistic in the twentieth century. Modernist movements like dadaism, futurism, and surrealism may be said to have interrogated the individual's "right of access to the signifier," in terms of the new art languages that were being developed. In the context of free improvisation and Soundpainting, evidence is found of a move toward the "democratization" of the signifier.

on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms.

In the second place, the system is always momentary; it varies from one position to the next. It is also true that values depend above all else on an unchangeable convention, the set of rules that exists before a game begins and persists after each move. Rules that are agreed upon once and for all exist in language too; they are the constant principles of semiology.

Extending Saussure's analogy to music, a similar situation obtains in the difference between a chord (a simultaneous vertical occurrence of more than one note) and a sustained arpeggio of the same chord (which the listener perceives as discrete elements forming a chord over time.) This kind of low-level structural analysis of musical events is seen in the work of Heinrich Schenker.

To summarize, the essential points sustaining Saussure's theory of the sign as applied to language are as follows:

- Language is one of many sign-systems used by human beings for communication purposes.
- *Langue* denotes language as a signifying system with a set of rules, with *parole* as the individual (and thereby idiosyncratic) utterances that provide instances of the system.
- A sign for Saussure consists of two components: the signifier (sound-image) and the signified (concept to which the signifier refers).
- Language can be studied "synchronically" at a particular historical moment and "diachronically" as it develops through time.
- Saussure also distinguishes between paradigms (signs that can be substituted for one another) and syntagms (those that form sequences of signs by association).

As stated by Williams (2001:23): "Taken all together, these claims convey language as a web in which meanings and functions are generated by networked relations." This was to prove a powerful new way of understanding language (as being much more fluid and arbitrary than had hitherto been imagined) and paved the way for the significant movements in critical theory that followed.

2.1.2 Peirce's typology of signs

The American philosopher,⁴⁷ mathematician, logician, and polymath⁴⁸ Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) proposed a general theory of signs, in which the trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol has a prominent place. However, in general, Peirce's conception of semiotics is a more complex one than that of Saussure, as it rests on the philosophical foundation of the categories of "firstness," "secondness," and "thirdness," which underpin Peirce's entire theory.

The category of "firstness," in Peirce's view, suggests immediacy (as in a quality, colour, or timbre), while "secondness" contains a more metaphorical component (often linked to categories like space, time, and causality) and "thirdness" indicates an element of convention. Cumming (2000:72-104) discusses the application of these central elements of Peirce's thought to musicking from the viewpoint of a WEAM performer. Although Bouissac (2003) has dismissed the distinction between Saussure's dichotomy and Peirce's trichotomy as "sterile and pointless," in so doing, he minimizes the importance of this crucial conceptual difference between the two theories of the sign.

For Samuels, the *signifiant* (signifier) and *signifié* (signified), as theorized by Saussure, find their counterparts in Peirce's terms, "representamen" and "object," respectively. However, Peirce introduces a third idea missing from Saussure's view of language in the form of the concept of the "interpretant,"

⁴⁷ As Buchler states (1955:ix): "Peirce was both natural scientist and close student of the history of philosophy—a rare combination. But the significance of this is dwarfed by the further fact that that he could critically utilize his historical study toward the achievement of imaginative depth, and his experimental science toward the development of a powerful logic. The striking originality of his thought thus grows from a broad and solid foundation, and it is the product not only of his native intellectual genius but of his moral conviction that philosophy must build as well as repair."

⁴⁸ Defined as "a person of wide-ranging knowledge or learning." (Oxford American Dictionary)

which is defined as "the component of the sign which serves to unite the two halves of the Saussurean opposition." According to Samuels (1999:3), Peirce was famously alert to a logical consequence of this third component:

Peirce's recognition that an interpretant may come to function as a representamen in a new sign, requiring an interpretant in its own right. The concept of the 'interpretant' is crucial in this model, for it names the element in the process of creating meaning which is omitted by Saussure. Peirce insists that meaning is created by the receiver of the message, rather than being self-evident; we 'make sense' of a text.

The consequences of this view for Peirce were the establishment of a potentially infinite chain of signifiers, giving rise to his notion of "unclosed semiosis." The similarities between this notion and the semiotic concept of *slippage* seem evident, in that both interrogate assumptions with regard to the finality of meaning in a given text.

Cumming (2000:48), while emphasizing the pragmatic nature of Peirce's philosophy, similarly lays stress on the contingent nature of the structures of meaning that are generated in human behaviour:

In the pragmatic philosophy developed by Peirce, meanings are relational structures that emerge in active behavior, as an individual responds to some aspect of the environment. Neither pure relational patterns nor purely sensuous data are possible, as both are mixed at every level and evident in functional differences of behavior.

In their discussion of the main trends in musical semiotics as summarized in Monelle (1992), Van Baest and Van Driel (1995:3) state the case as follows:

Within this range of approaches, a Peirce-based form of musical semiotics can be found as well. Although Monelle uses different elements of Peirce's semiotics, his main interest goes out to the relation between a sign and its object with its well known trichotomy *icon-index-symbol*. Because Monelle's study can be considered as a kind of state of the art, it can be concluded that only a small part of Peirce's philosophy has found its way into the field of musical semiotics: it seems that only the trichotomy icon-index-symbol has found its place here.

2.1.2.1 Icon

Tagg (1999:4) defines the Peircean icon as follows: "Icons are signs bearing physical resemblance to what they represent." He goes on to divide icons into two types, the first type (as in photographs or painting in the orthodox, "representational" sense) bearing a direct (or "striking") resemblance to what it represents, whereas, in the second type of icon, the resemblance (as in maps and certain types of diagram) is indirect or structural.

Tagg concludes his discussion by including the symbolic language of musical notation in the category of Peircean icons: "The representation of rising and falling pitch, of legato slurs and staccato dots in musical notation can also be qualified as iconic."⁴⁹ Cumming (2000:86) defines the icon (in the context of its ground of signification⁵⁰) as bearing "a putative likeness to some object (either 'naturally' or by convention)," but for her the problem turns around the definition of "likeness," for which Eco finds no less than five possibilities. She concludes by stating (2000:87): "If this multiplicity is problematic in a general discussion of the icon, it is even more intractable when the signifying thing is an element in a piece of instrumental music."

2.1.2.2 Index

The relationship of the index to what it represents is somewhat less direct. The index contains the added philosophical concepts of space, time, and/or causality, as when dark clouds suggest the possibility of rain. Tagg (1999:4)

⁴⁹ The author finds this definition of Tagg's somewhat problematic, as discussed in the following section. Peirce's definition of the legisign in the sense of a "conventional representation" (Cumming 2000:83) seems more appropriate in this context, suggesting as it does the necessary element of agreement. If Tagg's definition is correct, then symbolic languages in general (such as those of mathematics or physics) could also be qualified as iconic, which would exclude the strongly conventional element which operates within them.

⁵⁰ In other words, in the connection between the Sign (Representamen) and its Object.

stresses the importance of the Peircean indexical sign for music semiotics, in saying: “Indeed, all musical sign types can be viewed as indexical in this Peircean sense. Verbal language’s metonymies and synecdoches are indexical and therefore useful concepts in music semiotics.”

There seems to be a concealed problem in Tagg’s logic here on two counts: firstly, he begins by classifying certain elements of musical notation as iconic and, as a result of this procedure, views all musical sign types (in which are surely included such notational elements as legato and staccato) as indexical. Then he compares “all musical sign types” with figures of speech (*metonymy* and *synecdoche*) on the basis of their common indexical nature and brings those procedures into the semiotic analysis of music as “useful concepts.” It seems to this writer that while using procedures derived from language may well be a valid analytical strategy, Tagg’s use of the word “therefore” assumes a similarity between music and language that is by no means proven at this juncture in this notoriously difficult debate.

While Tagg's definition of index is in general agreement with other writers such as Cumming and Monelle, a problem reveals itself when Tagg employs linguistic concepts to describe musical notation on the basis of their common indexical character. Without the benefit of musical notation, Tagg would perforce have to be a great deal more circumspect in this regard and decide which elements of *the sound of a musical performance* might exhibit similarities to language. It seems to the author that the way to do this is to use Cumming's idea of timbral iconicity⁵¹ in a fairly restricted manner so as to avoid the potential pitfalls of a direct comparison between music and language.

2.1.2.3 Symbol

The symbol for Peirce is the third category of sign, in which the relationship of

⁵¹ Section 3.4.1 contains a more extensive discussion of this topic.

signifier to signified is arbitrary or conventional. In this category are found the words of ordinary language, such as "jazz," "scenario," "blue," "Lincoln Center," "doctoral thesis," and so on. As Wishart suggests (1996:259), there is no necessary connection between such linguistic signs and the properties to which they refer:

For a language utterance to convey its meaning, the linguistic signs need not reflect in any way the properties of the object to which they refer. There is nothing in common between the word 'red' and the property of redness.

From this exposition what are the implications of this science of the sign for music analysis? Broadly speaking, the semiotic breakthrough in both Saussure and Peirce may be characterized as their attempt "to analyse language as a sign system that constructs meaning, rather than simply reflecting it," as defined by Williams (2001:22). When applied to music, semiotic approaches in the later part of the twentieth century tend to range widely in their subject matter as well as in their degree of scientific rigour.

Dunsby and Whittall stress the potential relativity of semiology as an analytical method in stating (1988:231):

In discussing Schenker or Schoenberg, pitch-class-set analysis or post-tonal voice-leading, there is an inescapable stage at which we have taken on the responsibility of considering their claims to be true, to be valid, or to be more convincing than any alternative. Semiotics offers something beyond this, a programme for assessing relativities.

2.1.3 Structuralism (revealing deep codes)

Alistair Williams (2001:22) defines structuralism as follows:

Structuralism might be described as a particular historical branch of semiotics, mainly associated with a French intellectual movement. Beyond this definition, structuralism marks a wider movement of thought in the humanities and social sciences, characterized by the application of scientific rigour to areas that were accustomed to less stringent methodology.

As part of this quest for scientific rigour in the human sciences, the structuralist agenda also sought to purge any suspicion of subjectivity from the matter under investigation. Claude Lévi-Strauss, widely considered as the founder of structural anthropology, shows little interest in the human element in searching for the universal structures underlying some instances of myth when he describes the subject (as quoted in Williams 2001:22) as: “That unbearably spoilt child, who has occupied the philosophical scene for too long now, and prevented serious research through demanding exclusive attention.”

Lévi-Strauss applies structuralist methods to anthropology in his discussion of some indigenous myths of the Americas (*Introduction to a Science of Mythology*). His discussion of the myth of the Sun and the Moon (Williams, q.v.) depends on the assumption of underlying binary oppositions,⁵² which articulate and support the common worldwide thematic structures of myth. In examining the *langue* (that is, the system) within which the individual cases (as *parole*) serve as examples, Lévi-Strauss’s structural anthropology takes on a deliberately anti-human and ahistorical stance to get at the “universal truth” existing below the surface.

Attempting to remove the subject from the investigation as a deliberate strategy, however, it might be suggested, is a flawed move, not only from a humanistic, but also a scientific, standpoint. Here the author has in mind Werner Heisenberg’s famous precept of the uncertainty principle in quantum physics. The uncertainty principle basically implies that the observer has an influence on the experiment as a side effect of the very act of observation, and therefore it is impossible in science to get at the results uncontaminated by the scientific process itself.

It is important to note that Heisenberg’s principle was derived from his

⁵² Similarly, for Samuels (1995:3): “Saussure’s basic armoury of concepts proceeds in binary oppositions.” Samuels (*ibid.*) finds such oppositions underpinning such Saussurean concepts as synchronic and diachronic analysis, *langue* and *parole*, and the distinction between paradigms and syntagms.

observations of subatomic particles under laboratory conditions, but it does seem to suggest that the completely objective observer does not exist even in the most rigorously controlled conditions. The famous "thought experiment" of Schrödinger's unfortunate cat (which exists until the point of actual physical observation in a strange limbo between life and death) is another example of quantum physics acknowledging its own limitations.⁵³

Through his application of structuralist methods, Lévi-Strauss arrives at the concept of binary oppositions as a deep structure underlying various myths. For instance, Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between the raw and the cooked, *langue* and *parole*, synchronic and diachronic, the sun and the moon, nature and culture, and various other binaries⁵⁴ to account for the way in which myths from different areas of the world intersect thematically: in other words, to explain why myths seem to have common thematic concerns wherever in the world they originate from.

Lévi-Strauss expresses the problem succinctly when he raises this question (1998:102): "If the content of a myth is contingent, how are we going to explain the fact that myths throughout the world are so similar?" He describes this situation (that is, an individual myth narrative as *parole* as opposed to a universal structure as *langue*) in terms of a "basic antinomy" and a "contradiction," which is resolved by appeal to a third level, one where myth exists as absolute truth.

Williams (2001:27) maintains that this is evidence of the "arrogance" of structuralism in believing that "it could somehow transcend its own

⁵³ Gribbin (1991) has an entertaining account of this (and other) such paradoxical outcomes of quantum physics.

⁵⁴ "Since ours is a culture that compartmentalizes virtually everything, I feel it is important never to lose sight of our own built-in assumptions. When considering play, we need to free ourselves from the artificial and entirely arbitrary distinction between 'serious business' and 'play.' In the context of my work, this distinction is a relatively recent one, and is certainly not a part of our biological makeup—for, as I will state, play *is* serious business, provided that you know how to look at it" (Hall 1992:224, emphasis in original).

methodology and access fundamental principles,” and goes on to say (2001:28): “The problem is that a methodology willing to bracket certain experiences in favour of underlying principles starts to look like an ideology that will only countenance particular types of organization.” This bracketing is, however, not a side-effect but an inevitable consequence of the structuralist agenda operating here: Lévi-Strauss is trying to get rid of “the unbearably spoiled child” (the subject) so as to arrive at a rational and disinterested position enabling him to grasp the fundamental principles, the underlying structures of myth. What Lévi-Strauss’s formalist procedure illustrates here, in short, is an undue privileging of *langue* over *parole*, which leads some critics to protest that this approach dehistoricizes music by isolating it from its social context.

In the context of Soundpainting, and indeed much spontaneously created music, it is apparent that this method of analysis is problematic for the following reasons:

- The fundamental attitude of much of this music is the negation of "structure as imposed from outside"
- The structural analysis of music is steeped in the ideology of the musical system under discussion as well as that of the analyst, and suggests a spurious recourse to objectivity
- Music of this kind is created on the spot and consequently is not fixed through the symbolic language in the form of a score.

One of the procedural problems raised by the application of structuralist methods to musical analysis is highlighted by Sawyer, who suggests (2003:16):

There has always been a small minority of musicologists who study music in cultures that have no notational system, and these musicologists always had difficulty applying analytic methods originally developed to study notated European music. The paper-oriented focus of musicology largely forced these ethnomusicologists to transcribe the performances into (European) musical notation before they could examine them.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Sawyer concludes by noting (2003:16): "This has the unintended effect of removing many of the uniquely performative elements of world music traditions—emergence and improvisation, the contingency from moment and moment, the interactional synchrony among performers—elements that cannot be fully understood

Similarly, in defining the characteristic structures that form the field of interest for sociological studies of human activity, Sawyer views structures as obstacles to the creative drive, by suggesting (2001):

Our drive to be creative is often opposed by fixed structures—our job, our neighborhood, our social class or education level, the conventions of how things have always been done. Sociologists and anthropologists known as *structuralists* study these fixed structures. By focusing on the structure of our lives, we end up neglecting the creativity and freedom that we are all capable of. Structure is static and stable; improvisations are free-flowing and open-ended.

So saying, Sawyer distinguishes between the stability of structure and the contingent nature of improvisation, be it in the form of unscripted everyday conversation or the free play of musical ideas in improvised jazz. The structuralist approach, Sawyer claims, excludes the improvised elements that are a part of everyday life by emphasizing the role of language over speech. The author returns to these problems in chapter 3, in which notions of music as work and music as event (and the ideological implications of such a distinction) are examined.

2.1.3.1 Roland Barthes and structuralism

Barthes's early application of structuralist thinking is most evident in a famous analysis of soap powder. While a "mythology of the detergent" may be regarded as somewhat frivolous by comparison with Lévi-Strauss's more sober analysis of myth, it nonetheless bears out Barthes's willingness to extend the rigour of the structuralist method to such apparently trivial areas of everyday life as fashion, food, and detergents.

For Barthes (1957:37-8): "What matters is the art of having disguised the abrasive function of the detergent under the delicious image of a substance at once deep and airy which can govern the molecular order of the material

without a consideration of group creativity."

without damaging it.”

Barthes reveals a preoccupation with antinomies (“abrasive function” as opposed to “delicious image”) already seen in the work of Lévi-Strauss, but here the antinomies conspire to create a “euphoria” disguising the negative actions of Omo and Persil, as in their abrasiveness and ultimately their contribution to water pollution in the less ecologically-conscious 1950s.

Barthes concludes this discussion by describing this euphoria in terms which uncannily foreshadow the current debate around the issue of globalization (1957:38): “A euphoria, incidentally, which must not make us forget that there is one plane on which *Omo* and *Persil* are one and the same: the plane of the Anglo-Dutch trust *Unilever*.” What Barthes lays bare in this exposure of the everyday and the trivial may not be so frivolous after all; the “deep structure” behind the “delicious image” is that of one of the many faceless corporations of the cold war era.⁵⁶

As Selden (1989:78) puts it:

Bourgeois ideology, Barthes’ *bête noire*, promotes the sinful view that reading is natural and language transparent; it insists on regarding the signifier as the sober partner of the signified, thus in authoritarian manner repressing all discourse into a meaning. Avant-garde writers allow the unconscious of language to rise to the surface: they allow the signifiers to generate meaning at will and to undermine the censorship of the signified and its repressive insistence on one meaning.

Barthes's structuralist methodology exposes the ideological foundations of this view of the neutrality of language and thereby calls into question a univocal (and therefore unambiguous) theory of meaning. In the service of his abhorred bourgeois ideology, the "meaning" of a given text is construed as

⁵⁶ Facelessness is consistently dramatized in the imagery of the CIA in *The X-Files*, as well as in the film *A Beautiful Mind*, in which the Nobel prize-winning scientist John Nash (who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia) is "forced" to participate in an imaginary cold war "operation," in accordance with the instructions of a similarly anonymous CIA operative.

somehow residing in the text itself, legitimated in literature, for instance, by the author's presence as an authentic voice.⁵⁷

Barthes's structuralist analysis theorizes the hidden operations of a dubious authority in the objects of popular culture (beefsteak, washing powder, and photographic images), which exemplify, as he claims, (1957:11): "The decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there." Starting from the premise that myth (and especially contemporary "myth" as prevalent, for instance, in the advertising and fashion industries) is a language, Barthes is able to reveal how the operations of bourgeois ideology depend on the "sober partnership" of signifier and signified, a partnership which brooks no ambiguity and reduces all possibility of divergent (or even conflicting) rhetorical positions within a given set of discourses to a "meaning," in Selden's terms.

2.1.3.2 The structure of serialism

The deep code underlying much twentieth-century WEAM composition is, of course, the serial method. As pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg and his pupils Alban Berg and Anton Webern, serialism has an explicit ideology, which seeks to liberate composition from the hegemony of tonality, wherein the dominant-tonic chordal relationship acts as both master and underlying organizational principle. As Young claims (2002:72-3):

In Schoenberg's serialist compositions, and those of his Second Viennese School associates Alban Berg and Anton Webern, music unhooked itself from the emotionalism and intuitive structures that had brought it to its opulent and overripe state in late Romanticism. Schoenberg hastened the move to atonality—meaning the lack of any defined key—as speedily as his contemporaries Picasso and Braque accelerated the destruction of Renaissance perspective on the canvas.

⁵⁷ One of the primary issues taken up in poststructuralism (and deconstruction as a later offshoot) is the systematic interrogation of the wider implications of the notion of authorial "presence" as a servant of ideology.

While one may question Young's explicit linkage of serialist atonality to Cubism's re-evaluation of previous concepts of perspective as belonging to two different areas of artistic endeavour, the uniting factor is a common engagement with the agenda of modernism. However, there is a key difference between the structuralist agenda (as promoted by Lévi-Strauss and his associates) and that of the serialist movement. While structuralist anthropology sought to discover a universal set of principles underlying myths, the serialist composers created an alternative set of compositional rules as a point of departure. In other words, serialism operates as an *a priori* method of organizing sound, while structuralism looks at phenomena as indicating some underlying organization.

Young (2002:72-3) describes Schoenberg's approach to composition as follows:

Schoenberg converted music into pure data: groups of 12 notes were used as amelodic cells⁵⁸ throughout any given composition. Capable of being inverted, intermixed or run into palindromes, their relationship to each other was as abstracted, isolated notes, not linked to a previously chosen dominant key. Fixed keys give a sense of progress in a composition by pegging music to a tonic resolution. Schoenberg tried to inscribe a new, secret, inaudible system as the *modus operandi* in his music, but at some point he lost his nerve in the shadow of several years of classical tradition: "One uses the series and then composes as before," he once wrote.

Although this procedure might be seen as a move towards a kind of "musical democracy," in which no single note is "privileged" over another, as had been the case with the tonal system that preceded serialism, this is a mistaken conclusion. What is evident in serialism is the adoption of a rigorous and

⁵⁸ The intention in determining the order of notes within a cell was to avoid any hidden tonal suggestions. In practice, Alban Berg's music often does contain quasi-tonal implications, which are used for specific expressionistic purposes. As Jarman states (1979:226-227): "Highly artificial techniques, rigorous formal symmetries, number symbolism, ciphers, cryptograms, and various other conceits are so peculiarly Bergian and are so constant and important a feature of Berg's mature music as to suggest that such procedures not only acted as a stimulant to his creative imagination but had a further, and perhaps a deeper and more personal, significance for him."

highly formalized system of composition as a move towards the creation of a new musical language, one which broke with the sentimentality of late Romantic music, thereby extolling the virtues of abstraction and complexity in search of a less decadent and indulgently expressive means of expression. In this light, serialism may be seen as a closed linguistic system; once the composer has decided on the order of the notes within the series, the implications of the system are that the composition virtually "writes itself," because the strict formal requirements of the serial procedure only allow for a limited range of transformational possibilities.

Initially, serial composition was limited to operations relating to pitch. The next logical step was the adoption of multi-serialism (also known as integral serialism) in which other parameters like duration and dynamics also were serialized. This approach to composition was adopted by the next generation of serial composers, such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and especially Pierre Boulez. Peyser's discussion of structuralism compares the analytical procedures of Lévi-Strauss and Piaget with Boulez's approach to composition (1999:245-246):

Claude Lévi-Strauss has built a creed on the way a myth changes as it moves from one culture to another; he deemphasizes the meaning of the content of the myth. Jean Piaget concentrates on the way a person conceptualizes the world; he never really deals with what the person wants to do with that world.

Lévi-Strauss, Piaget, and their colleagues imply that structures are ultimately logico-algebraic⁵⁹ in nature—whether they involve myths,

⁵⁹ Logic is variously defined as: "Reasoning conducted or assessed according to strict principles of validity, a particular system or codification of the principles of proof and inference, the systematic use of symbolic and mathematical techniques to determine the forms of valid deductive argument, the quality of being justifiable by reason," and as the "logic of) the course of action or line of reasoning suggested or made necessary by, as in the fragment: if the logic of capital is allowed to determine events."

Logic is also defined in a more technological sense as: "a system or set of principles underlying the arrangements of elements in a computer or electronic device so as to perform a specified task."

Algebra is seen as "the part of mathematics in which letters and other general symbols are used to represent numbers and quantities in formulae and equations"

behavior, or interval relationships. Thus the structuralist is orientated towards mathematics and away from the interpretation of life. The most complex of such formulas underlie *Trope* (the second formant of his *Third Piano Sonata*) and every other composition of Boulez's post-1952 career. Still, Boulez derives no satisfaction when someone else discovers the mechanisms at work.

A logico-algebraic view of structure unites the endeavours of these theorists; for Lévi-Strauss (in the new science of structural anthropology), Piaget (working in educational psychology), and Boulez (using the tools of integral serialism), this is a world-view based on the transformation and manipulation of abstract symbolic languages, which may be seen as uniting these different structuralist approaches. In this view, structure is interpreted as inherent in the symbolic languages of logic, algebra and music, and, as Peyser notes (1999:245), this reveals a tendency towards abstraction and a consequent distancing from the human beings who use these languages.

2.1.3.3 Schenkerian analysis and after

One of the earliest cases of what might be termed a proto-structuralist approach to music analysis is found in the work of the German analyst Heinrich Schenker, who used graphic methods to reveal the underlying structures within tonal music.⁶⁰ In applying Schenker's methods, Forte and Gilbert's *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis*, as discussed in Williams (2001:25), looks for "an equivalent to the fundamental structure in post-tonal music":

The aim of pitch-class set analysis, therefore, is to produce a list of intersecting sets, in the hope that some will emerge as especially significant because they contain the largest number of intersections. With its firm belief that surface phenomena are governed by underlying patterns, set theory is resolutely structuralist, and has been widely criticized for performing clinical autopsies on living organisms.

(Oxford American Dictionary).

⁶⁰ Dunsby and Whittall (1988:23-61) provide an extended discussion of Schenker's pioneering work in this field.

Extending Schenker's work in graphic analysis of tonal music, the strategy of pitch-class set analysis is to determine the underlying rules of organization in post-tonal music; this methodology considers musical statements as **generative** processes subject to quasi-linguistic interpretation. Another type of formalist-semiotic musical analysis as discussed by Williams and Samuels is the method of paradigmatic analysis⁶¹ used by Ruwet and Nattiez. Williams focuses his attention on Nattiez's lengthy and detailed examination (1982) of Varèse's *Density 21.5*.

This analytical method depends on the application of the concept of segmentation⁶² to musical scores, once again to attempt to arrive at the underlying deep structure. Originating in the study of phonetics, this method assumes a similarity between language and music at the microscopic level as part of its strategy, which aims to arrive at an objective analysis of a given work. Herein lies the problem, because, although this method has been applied to early and non-Western musics, Williams is critical of Nattiez's "beleaguered belief" in the neutral level (that is, one uninfluenced by compositional technique or reception history).⁶³

The method represented by the neutral level is important: Nattiez is a relativist in the sense that he does not believe in any final, decidable meaning for the musical message. He rejects the idea that the last word can ever be had on the analysis of the work. But instead of accepting this as evidence for the endless deferral of meaning as represented by Derrida's term **différance**, and concentrating on the vested interests

⁶¹ Samuels defines paradigms and syntagms as follows (1995:3): "Paradigms are groups of signs which may theoretically substitute for one another, whereas syntagms are allowable ('grammatical') sequences of signs."

⁶² Segmentation is described as "the smallest distinct part of a spoken utterance, in particular the vowels and consonants as opposed to stress and intonation" (Oxford American Dictionary).

⁶³ This forms the crux of the debate between formalists and semioticians. The neutral level is discussed in Samuels (1995:8): "Nattiez's theory rests on the communicative chain composer → piece → listener. Analysis, he contends, must situate itself in relation to these three stages of musical production. This produces a threefold project, which he terms the 'tripartition,' and which was invented by the theorist Jean Molino. The three components are: 'poetic' analysis, of the relationship of the composer to the work; 'neutral level' analysis, of structures immanent to the work; and 'esthetic' analysis of the relations of the work to the listener."

present in any analytical presupposition, Nattiez constantly tries to reclaim the right to make normative judgements.

Samuels's discussion (1995:10) highlights an objection that Williams has also raised with regard to "vested interests." The problem is that one cannot (even temporarily) detach analytical methodologies of music from the discourses from which they originate. As Williams puts it (2001:28): "With its commitment to structural principles, analysis is nevertheless often unwilling to examine the formations of subjectivity that propel its own endeavours."

The immediate objection to this line of thinking might proceed along the lines of stating that this is surely true for all analytical methods, in other words, that all such methods are to some extent "contaminated" by the analyst's theoretical position. Williams criticizes the way in which the structuralist project has assumed that a "God's-eye-view" (encompassing the notions of rigour and objectivity) is possible. This leads to a situation where the variety of circumstances in which musicking takes place is circumscribed so as to privilege the underlying patterns or codes that the analyst is attempting to reveal. This tactic of "bracketing,"⁶⁴ for Williams, is a flawed one when it fails to acknowledge the implications of its own "formations of subjectivity." In a sense, the assumption of objectivity on the analyst's part cannot but suppress not only the analyst's own subjectivity but also that of the performers creating the music, whose contribution to the realization of the performance is regarded as incidental.

As Samuels (1995:10) concludes: "In fact, all analysis is esthetic: the immanent structures of the work, and the compositional strategies that created it, can only be reconstructed after the event, according to an analytical model; hence the 'dirtiness' of the neutral level." Accordingly, all analysis then depends on the relationship of the work to the listener, which confirms some of the objections raised by Williams and others to the

⁶⁴ The Oxford American Dictionary defines bracketing as "to put (a belief or matter) aside temporarily."

structuralist project, which, as has been demonstrated, seeks objectivity by extending a pseudo-scientific emphasis on rigour to all manner of social discourses (for Lévi-Strauss, myth; for Barthes, anything and everything in mass culture).

On this basis, Williams is critical of Lévi-Strauss because of the deliberately ahistorical standpoint of structural anthropology. The ahistoricism "built in" to the structuralist project for Williams (2001:28) leads to Lévi-Strauss's idea of fugue⁶⁵ as "a static form unaffected by varying historical contexts." Detaching fugue from its history is for Williams a tactical error which leads to an overly synchronic view of its manifestations, while a more dynamic conception of fugue might consider it as a texture rather than as a universal formal structure, which view accounts rather better for its historical development over time.

With regard to integral serialism, Boulez extended the principles of serialism by applying its methods not only to organizing the tone row, but also to such elements as duration, dynamics, and large-scale organization. Small highlights a methodological problem in this approach as follows (1998:165):

But even at the high noon of such rational control, by means of total serial organization, its high priest, Pierre Boulez [1964], found himself writing: 'Despairingly one tries to dominate one's material by an arduous, sustained, vigilant effort, and despairingly chance persists, and slips in through a hundred unstoppable loopholes.'

In the light of the above discussion on structuralism, Boulez's frustration with the difficulty of eliminating chance from the compositional process may well be seen as a consequence of his need to "dominate" the material. Boulez's frustrations are confirmed by Young's comments (2.1.3.2) about Schoenberg's

⁶⁵ Defined as: "A contrapuntal composition in which a short melody or phrase (the subject) is introduced by one part and successively taken up by others and developed by interweaving the parts" (Oxford American Dictionary). Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier*, Books 1 and 2 (also known as the '48'), is a well-known example.

"loss of nerve" with regard to serialism. These difficulties may be seen as symptomatic of a desire to control and channel the random, by suppressing the chaotic element within creativity, and begins to sound rather uncomfortably (for this author at least) like fascism.

In music of the twentieth century the need for control is also evident in some composers' attitudes towards performers. As described by Small (1998:5-6):

Composers, especially in the twentieth century, have often railed against the 'liberties' taken by performers who dare to interpose themselves, their personalities and their ideas between composer and listener. Igor Stravinsky was especially vehement in this regard, condemning 'interpretation' in terms that seem as much moral as purely aesthetic and demanding from the performer a rigidly objective approach called by him 'execution,' which he characterized as the 'strict putting into effect of an explicit will that contains nothing beyond what it specifically commands.' The eagerness with which many composers took up electronic composition from the 1950s onward was motivated at least in part by the prospect of dispensing altogether with the services of those troublesome fellows.

This statement is not meant to imply that Stravinsky was necessarily a structuralist, but in many ways his demands of performers to behave like obedient automata typifies the attitude of modernist composers to music and performers. The minimalist composer Steve Reich, while clearly not a modernist, displays a similar attitude (although he does not invoke Stravinsky's concepts of will and command) in stating (in Nyman 1999:154-5):

This music is not the expression of the momentary state of mind of the performers while playing. Rather the momentary state of mind of the performers while playing is largely determined by the ongoing composed slowly changing music. By voluntarily giving up the freedom to do whatever momentarily comes to mind we are, as a result, free of all that momentarily comes to mind.

2.1.3.4 New Criticism

Structuralist assumptions similarly animate the theoretical approach to literary texts known as New Criticism. Groden and Kreiswirth's definition (1997b) of New Criticism (as evident in the work of some Anglo-American writers and critics of literature) contains a number of points deemed by the author as

significant to this study for the following reasons:

It is seen as a method that insists on the self-contained and autonomous nature of the literary work, from the interpretation of which the writer's history, biography, and other factors are excluded,⁶⁶ to avoid what is perceived as the trap of the "intentional fallacy." Similarly, the proponents of New Criticism seek to avoid the "affective fallacy," wherein the subjective response of the reader to the work is taken into account.⁶⁷ It is possible to see in this exhibition of formalist tendencies a parallel process in early twentieth-century music, as in the case of Stravinsky, who, in addition to his agenda of "eliminating the performer from performance," as Small notes (2.1.3.3), likewise insisted on the autonomy of the musical work.⁶⁸

Despite the wide variety of theoretical viewpoints of many of its practitioners (including F. R. Leavis, William Empson, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, among others), there seems to be a common agenda operating with respect to the privileged situation of the musical as well as the literary text, as described by Groden and Kreiswirth (1997b):

By careful attention to language, the text is presumed to be a unique and privileged source of meaning and value, sharply distinguished from other texts or other uses of language (particularly scientific language). Accordingly, the meaning of the poem is not conveyed by any prose paraphrase and is valued as the source of an experience (for the reader) available in no other way.

It is not difficult to see parallel workings in some more traditional musicological analyses, which for Nicholas Cook (2001) and other critics, such as Kevin Korsyn (2003), have led contemporary musicology into an epistemological impasse. In the field of jazz studies, for example, John Gennari's evaluation of

⁶⁶ This, in Nattiez's tripartition project in music semiotics, would be termed the *poetic* element.

⁶⁷ Reader-response theory (also known as reception theory), by contrast, is concerned with the reader's relationship to the text (Sim and van Loon 2004:84-5).

⁶⁸ The implications of the concept of the autonomous musical work are considered in section 3.2.

Gunther Schuller's *The Swing Era* (1989), while acknowledging its value as "the field's authoritative work," highlights some methodological problems in its somewhat formalist approach as follows:

Schuller seems to be advocating an approach on the lines of literary New Criticism, which would approach individual works of art as self-contained, self-defining objects to be elucidated as autonomous aesthetic works rather than understood as documents created in specific socio-historical contexts. If the tenets of the New Criticism have proved excessively confining for most literary critics, its narrow injunctions are of especially dubious value for critics of jazz, whose texts are in a constant state of revision, and whose historical significance to African-American social identity is simply too compelling to disregard.

Hedges (1997) reiterates this view of "The text as an *autotelic* artefact, something complete within itself, written for its own sake, unified in its form and not dependent on its relation to the author's life or intent, history, or anything else." In the field of music, McClary (2000) has seen in the operations of the tonic-dominant system of Western art music the workings of a *telos* and a consequent hegemony.

New Criticism may be seen as complementary to the formalist concerns of modernism and is viewed by Groden and Kreiswirth (1997b) as exhibiting in its later stages "some resemblances to Structuralism." New Criticism shares a central concern of structuralism with regard to its emphasis on oppositions and tensions, as highlighted by Arnason when he writes (2004, emphases in original): "The reader must discover *tensions* in the work. These will be the results of *thematic oppositions*, though they may also occur as *oppositions* in imagery: light versus dark, beautiful versus ugly, graceful versus clumsy."

These thematic oppositions are not dissimilar to the binary oppositions (as found in Saussure's conception of language and further elucidated by Lévi-Strauss in his discussion of myth). In its concerns with oppositions and its aim of eliminating readers' responses to the text, New Criticism may be seen as sharing common ground with structuralism.

Daniel Green (2003) exposes some of the assumptions of New Criticism, one

of his most telling points (for purposes of this study) being: "That it makes the Western tradition out to be more unified than it is by ignoring diversity and contradictory forces within it, and more monadic than it is by ignoring the exchange between non-western and western cultures." When musicology (of whatever persuasion⁶⁹) assumes an interpretation of the history of music as unified and continuous, it may be seen as exhibiting a state of credulity to what Lyotard (1984) has called "metanarratives."⁷⁰

Green continues his critique of New Criticism by pointing out its deliberate rejection of the idea "that artistic standards of value are variable and posterity is fickle." This argument militates against the modernist notion of art and science in service to humanity's unfettered progress toward the light of rationality, and the educational value of difficult "high" art. In this view, Adorno's exaltation of modernist music, especially serialism (and his dismissal of jazz and popular music as surplus to requirements of the struggle) also may be seen as subscribing to a Marxist metanarrative of progress. Suggesting that artistic standards are variable calls into question the ontological status and value of works of art and therefore threatens interpretations of music history that rest on unity, coherence, continuity, and progress.⁷¹

New Criticism's quest for objectivity, for Green, privileges form over the

⁶⁹ Jazz scholarship is sometimes no less prone to the adoption of what Harris (1998) describes as its "canon-model."

⁷⁰ For Appignanesi *et al.* (2004:103): "Metanarratives are the supposedly universal, absolute or ultimate truths that are used to legitimize various projects, political or scientific. Examples are: the emancipation of humanity through that of the workers (Marx); the creation of wealth (Adam Smith); the dominance of the unconscious mind (Freud), and so on. Lyotard prescribed this scepticism in 1979, ten years before the Berlin Wall came tumbling down—and almost overnight the world witnessed the total collapse of a Socialist Grand Narrative."

⁷¹ Green (2003) amplifies this point (as regards the fickleness of posterity) as follows: "Particular pieces of art are viewed as important because they do important cultural work, represent values that segments of the culture (say editors and English professors) believe are of vital import, or help us understand our history". In other words, the cultural value placed on pieces of art is as much a part of an ideological hegemony as is the "Grand Narrative" of tonality for McClary.

contingencies of circumstance, and in so doing, denies "that context is just as important as form to understanding a work of art." Green's concerns in this regard are significant for this study in sounding a warning bell to the bracketing being carried out by the New Critical endeavour, which, in aiming for a neutral reading of the text, perforce must ignore the contingent social circumstances in which such texts are produced.

Thus it seems almost unavoidable that the house of fiction with its many windows would encourage a diversity of perspectives beyond the purely New Critical and that academic criticism would thereby become increasingly fragmented, leaving aesthetic formalism at best as one thing among the myriad others one could do with literary texts, at worst as an evidently limited thing to do with them considering the grander ambitions that motivate the sorts of things being done by the more culturally engaged critics.⁷²

Leppert finds much in common between New Criticism and its musicological equivalent in stating (1998:292):

One notable result of this combination⁷³ is what now constitutes mainline music theory: nothing if not rigorous, profoundly similar to literary New Criticism, where the only questions asked—indeed, the only questions that can be asked, given the "methodology"—involve the notes in relation to the notes. And whereas literary New Criticism has been on life-support in English Departments for well over a decade, slowly fading with faculty retirements, the analogue in musicology and music theory is anything but threatened. It continues to overshadow and marginalize all other research.

⁷² Green concludes by observing: "That both fiction and drama have a more recent past as 'popular' entertainment rather than high art only made this fragmentation more pronounced, as it is only a small step from the consideration of a novel or a play in its own generic or historical context to the analysis of other popular forms—movies, television, pop songs—using similar methods and from these to the implicit judgment that these forms can provide us with 'knowledge' at least as valuable as that to be found through reading what have come to be called works of literature."

⁷³ Leppert (*ibid.*) is referring to "a deadly combination of 19th-century hard-line aesthetics and 20th-century humanistic pseudoscience borrowed from the social sciences, which in turn borrowed, in lamentably nonscientific fashion, from the 'hard sciences'."

2.1.4 Poststructuralism and the play of the text

Rivkin and Ryan describe the underlying rationale behind the move from structuralism to poststructuralism as follows (1998:334):

Structuralists saw signs as windows to a trans-empirical world of crystalline order, of identities of form that maintained themselves over time and outside history, of codes of meaning that seemed exempt from the differences entailed by the contingencies of living examples; Poststructuralism claims all such orders are strategies of power and social control, ways of ignoring reality rather than understanding it. It was time, they argued, to burn down the signs and with the signs, all the orders of meaning and or reality that signs help maintain.

Poststructuralism's interrogation of the structuralist project harks back to Barthes's earlier reading (1957) of the mythology of detergents. Barthes found evidence therein of the hidden conspiratorial operations of mass media and the ideology of the marketplace. Guy Debord (2005, 2006) describes this conspiracy as part of what he terms "the spectacle."⁷⁴

What Rivkin and Ryan are suggesting is that the move into poststructuralism was already implicit in structuralism itself, but what emerges in poststructuralism is a new concept of the text. The term "text" is somewhat deceptive, because it does not necessarily suggest the generally accepted definition of something printed, existing somewhere as a tangible object in black and white, like a newspaper photograph or a musical score. As Hodge (2003, emphasizes in original) defines it:

A Text⁷⁵ is an assemblage of signs (such as words, images, sounds

⁷⁴ For Debord (2006, §24): "By means of the spectacle the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise. The spectacle is the self-portrait of power in the age of power's totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence. The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relationships conceals their true character as relationships between human beings and between classes; a second Nature thus seems to impose inescapable laws upon our environment."

⁷⁵ Both Hodge and Barthes himself seem to favour capitalizing the term, so as to distinguish it from its more conventional usage.

and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication. Text usually refers to a message, which has been recorded in some way (e.g., writing, audio- and video-recording) so that it is *physically independent of its sender or receiver*.

What is important to note from this definition is Hodge's emphasis on the physical independence of the Text; this implies that poststructuralism does not support the musicological idea of "the work" as existing independently from the composer in some kind of extra-historical space. Williams (2001:30) characterizes the poststructuralist text as follows: "For poststructuralism, a text is not an object with clearly defined boundaries that fix meaning, but an ensemble of discourses." The notion of discourse for Foucault and others, such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, is intimately bound up with issues of legitimation and control, so that academic and scientific discourses, where the emphasis is placed on objectivity and neutrality, call for careful reading to expose these underpinnings.

For Barthes (1997:273):

In fact, *reading* in the sense of *consuming* is not *playing* with the text. Here 'playing' must be understood in all its *polysemy*.⁷⁶ The text itself *plays* (like a door on its hinges, like a device in which there is some 'play'); and the reader himself plays twice over; playing the Text as one plays a game, he searches for a practice that will re-produce the Text; but, to keep that practice from being reduced to a passive, inner mimesis (the Text being precisely what resists such a reduction), he also *plays* the Text in the musical sense of the term.

Poststructuralism interrogates the notion of objective meaning in a text (by querying the right of the author to claim absolute authority over it) by suggesting that, once released into the market, texts are susceptible to misinterpretation equally well, and that there is not a single authorial (authoritative) voice to which the reader can turn to for guidance. The reader is equally responsible for constructing the meaning of the encounter.

⁷⁶ This concept has important ramifications for the deconstructive project, as discussed in section 2.1.5.

2.1.4.1 The death of the author

In terms of literary criticism, however, structuralism's basic goal was to apply the scientific methods of linguistics to the study of literary texts. This scientific analysis placed a primary emphasis on the language of a creative work as interpreted by the reader, while simultaneously reducing the importance of authorial intent as a subject of critical study. This attitude was expressed most famously in Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author," in which he states that the "image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, and his passions." The actual physical author was not presumed to be dead, but instead the institutional concept of authorship that had long dominated criticism at the expense of linguistic and semiotic analysis.

(Honeycutt 1994)

Perhaps Barthes's most radical conclusion from his interrogation of the structuralist method is this notion of "The death of the author." In this 1977 essay, Barthes suggests that the traditional idea of the author as the sole agent of legitimacy is the product of yet another mythology.⁷⁷ This view radically calls into question the reassuring notions of authorial intentionality and presence and allows the reader the freedom to draw whatever conclusions are available from the text from a unique, idiosyncratic vantage point. It might be argued that this viewpoint has some unsettling implications for a musicology which is motivated by the belief that musical works possess an existence of their own, whose existence depends on the composer's authority. As Selden (1989:79) concludes:

The death of the author is already inherent in structuralism, which treats individual utterances (*paroles*) as the products of impersonal systems (*langues*). What is new in Barthes is the idea that readers are free to open and close the text's signifying process without respect for the signified. They are free to take their pleasure of the text, to follow at will the defiles of the signifier as it slips and slides evading the grasp of the signified.

⁷⁷ Herein lies the crux of the debate around the composer or conductor as author of the text or the event.

2.1.4.2 Readerly and writerly texts

Barthes in *S/Z* (1974) distinguishes between two types of text ('readerly' and 'writerly') on the basis of the extent to which the reader is allowed to negotiate meaning. In the case of a readerly text, there is little room for manoeuvre on the reader's part, as the boundaries of the text are relatively fixed. For Sim and van Loon (2001:74):

By implication, readerly texts are authoritarian.⁷⁸ In the rebellious climate of the 1960s, when the concept of the 'death of the author' was developed, this was a grave charge to make. Critical theory since that date has had a distinctly anti-authoritarian, and often counter-cultural, edge to it.

Barthes characterizes as writerly those texts in which there is evidence of experimentalism at work, and finds an early precursor of this tendency in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67). Landow's definition of hypertext (1992) extends Barthes's distinction into the realm of modern-day computer technology:

Hypertext⁷⁹ blurs the boundaries between reader and writer and therefore instantiates another quality of Barthes's ideal text. From the vantage point of the current changes in information technology, Barthes' distinction between readerly and writerly texts appears to be essentially a distinction between text based on print technology and electronic hypertext, for hypertext fulfils: "The goal of literary work (of literature as work) [which] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Sim and van Loon (2001:74) also suggest that most 19th century realist novels are likewise "readerly." An important motivating principle of this genre is the dramatization of moral principles as part of its educational agenda.

⁷⁹ The Oxford American Dictionary defines hypertext as: "A software system that links topics on the screen to related information and graphics, which are typically accessed by a point-and-click method," while the Encarta World English Dictionary suggests: "A system of storing images, text, and other computer files that allows direct links to related texts, images, sound, and other data."

⁸⁰ Barthes continues (1974:4): "Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its consumer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness—he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to

Landow (1992) goes on to describe the organizational structure of hypertext as follows:

Both an author's tool and a reader's medium, a hypertext document system allows authors or groups of authors to link information together, create paths through a corpus of related material, annotate existing texts, and create notes that point readers to either bibliographic data or the body of the referenced text. Readers can browse through linked, cross-referenced, annotated texts in an orderly but nonsequential manner.

The reader's journey through this new medium does not have to follow the same kind of linear path as that of a classic text, in which the author directs the flow of the narrative. As Foucault (1998b:423) states: "The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network."⁸¹

As Landow argues, the implications of Barthean poststructuralism suggest a new type of collaborative process at play in the interaction between author and reader (1992):

Barthes' concept of the 'writerly text' signals the return of the subject,⁸² if only as a shadowy participant in the web of language, which the author traverses *in absentia*. This concept also sounds a death knell for the notion of objective 'meaning' within a given text, because if there is no author (as bearer of legitimating authority), then the construction of

accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the readerly. We call any readerly text a classic text."

⁸¹ For Heaton and Groves, comparing Wittgenstein's "rhizomatic" approach to philosophy with its more traditional manifestations (2005:128): "Most traditional philosophy is like a tree. It seeks the roots from which its object is constructed. It wants to find the founding principles of things, and so account for the different and irregular in terms of the same or regular, to bring the unruly and under one rule. A rhizome (bulbs and tubers), on the other hand, is more like a network, a multiplicity, which has diverse forms ramifying in all directions."

⁸² The return of the subject forms a central idea in the author's later discussion of identity formation in jazz improvisation, as discussed in chapter 3.

'meaning' as a stable narrative element becomes the reader's responsibility, and hence open to idiosyncratic 'readings.'

Eco's notion of the open work (1977:132-39) similarly exhibits poststructuralist and anti-formalist tendencies in suggesting that the subject has a part to play in the interpretation of the Text. In contradistinction to the New Criticism's insistence on the possibility of an objective stance vis-à-vis the literary work, Eco (summarized in Kessler and Puhl 2004:2-3) insists on the *openness* of the work in question:

Eco, quoting Henri Pousseur, defines the 'open' work as one that 'produces in the interpreter acts of conscious freedom, putting him at the center of a net of inexhaustible relations among which he inserts his own form.' Eco's study, which examines Joyce, Alexander Calder, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pousseur, and other contemporary and near-contemporary artists, opposes this concept to the traditional closed work, which allows the reader or viewer far less choice in interpretation. The categories are ideal—no work can be completely open or closed—but they function well in making distinctions between different kinds of art.

For Groden and Kreiswirth (1997a), Eco's idea of the open work has political consequences, in that this concept suggests a new way for the reader to engage with the world:

What is more important, adopting the proper attitude toward an open work has political and social ramifications: the open work denies conventional views of the world, replacing them with a sense of its discontinuity, disorder, and dissonance. Eco considers the alienation attendant on this realization as beneficial, since from this feeling of crisis, one may derive a new way of seeing, feeling, and understanding a social order in which traditional relationships have been shattered.

2.1.4.3 Undercoding and overcoding

Brackett (2000:8), drawing on the work of Middleton (1990:173) and Eco (1976:129-39), defines undercoding and overcoding as follows:

In an undercoded piece, "aspects of a piece are received within a general sense of 'understanding.' Pieces in this category may create their own individual codes." Examples of undercoded pieces would be avant-garde art music, and "free" jazz. On the other hand, in an overcoded piece, "every detail is covered by an explicit network of codes and subcodes. A piece in this category may be so tightly bound to socialized conventions

as to be 'about' its code." Examples of overcoded pieces would be muzak and advertising jingles.

Brackett's classification of avant-garde music and free jazz as "undercoded" is significant in that undercoding allows for the presence of the individual to re-invent (if not break) the general rules of engagement that have heretofore operated. Whether as composer or performer, this slippage within Brackett's *general sense of understanding* allows the individual breathing space or room to manoeuvre within the network itself, and thereby establish a tenuously documentable presence.

In similar fashion, Hall (1992:229) distinguishes different messages on the basis of their context, which he defines as "the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event." Hall continues by defining two types of communication or message as follows:

A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already known to the recipient, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message or music. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite: the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. People who have grown up together can and do communicate more economically (HC) than lawyers drafting a contract, a mathematician programming a computer, politicians formulating legislation, or administrators writing regulations (all LC).

With respect to Soundpainting, Hall's distinction is a useful one. One might suggest, with regard to the degree of context involved, that the gestures in Soundpainting operate on two fundamental levels. For the performers, these gestures are HC, in the sense that they have learned their "meaning" (and how to respond to them) in the course of the workshops. For the audience, however, such gestures may initially make no sense until they are able to decipher them as the performance progresses, and the gestures and the musical events so generated begin to seem familiar.⁸³

⁸³ The author is concerned in this instance with the way the gestures operate, not the content or style of the music itself.

Hofstadter (1999:162-164) imagines a scenario in which a piece such as Cage's *Imaginary Landscape no.4* is sent to outer space as a communication from humankind to the rest of the galaxy.⁸⁴ As Hofstadter suggests (1999:164):

It would be extraordinarily unlikely—if not downright impossible—for an alien civilization to understand the nature of the artifact. They would probably be very puzzled by the contradiction between the frame message ("I am a message; decode me"), and the chaos of the inner structure. There are few "chunks" to seize onto in this Cage piece, few patterns which could guide a decipherer. On the other hand, there seems to be, in a Bach piece, much to seize onto—patterns, patterns of patterns, and so on. We have no way of knowing whether such patterns are universally appealing. We do not know enough about the nature of intelligence, emotions, or music to say whether the inner logic of a piece by Bach is so universally compelling that its meaning could span galaxies.

By comparing these two pieces (one whose compositional procedures are random, and one which exhibits a strong sense of structure), Hofstadter so differentiates between the musical outcomes of such procedures. He is careful to avoid suggesting that the patterns evident in Bach's music are universal, or that the meaning of the piece is a product of what he terms its "inner logic," thereby leaving questions about "the nature of intelligence, emotions, or music" unanswered. Hofstadter's discussion seems relevant to this discussion in the sense that he maintains an open attitude toward music's communicative capability, so raising doubts about its ontological status (and meaning) that are in keeping with the poststructuralists' skepticism towards any form of final legitimating authority.

For Sawyer, one of the great strengths of the poststructuralist project lies in its focus on contingency and improvisation (2001, emphasis in original):

⁸⁴ Hofstadter (1999:163) characterizes this piece as "A classic of *aleatoric*, or *chance*, music—music whose structure is chosen by various random processes, rather than by an attempt to convey a personal emotion. In this case, twenty-four performers attach themselves to the twenty-four knobs on twelve radios. For the duration of the piece they twiddle their knobs in aleatoric ways so that each radio randomly gets louder and softer, switching stations all the while. The total sound produced is the music." Emphases in original.

Of course, everyday discourse is much more improvised than scripted theater. Our daily conversations are not exact imitations of any script, and our daily lives do not exactly follow the structure of anybody's social theory. Researchers who explore these issues are often called *post-structuralists*, since they are concerned with those aspects of social life that can't be explained by fixed structures: individual creativity, variation across performances, and change over time.

The ramifications of poststructuralism (readerly and writerly texts, the death of the author, and undercoding and overcoding) are vital for this study of an improvised form of musicking known as Soundpainting. As suggested by Sawyer (2001), poststructuralists examine the relationship between fixed structures and the way in which people improvise with, and sometimes against, them:

Post-structuralists focus on the balance between structure and improvisation. Improvisation was a central concept for two influential French social theorists; Pierre Bourdieu focused on 'regulated improvisation' (which he also called *habitus*), and Michel de Certeau's central concepts were improvisation, strategy, and contingency.

2.1.5 On deconstruction

Barthes, discussing Saussure's concept of the dichotomic relation between spoken and written language, observes the way in which Saussure departed from the historical/evolutionary methods previously employed in linguistics (1964):

The (dichotomic) concept of language/speech is central in Saussure and was certainly a great novelty in relation to earlier linguistics which sought to find the causes of historical changes in the evolution of pronunciation, spontaneous associations and the working of analogy, and was therefore a linguistics of the individual act. In working out this famous dichotomy, Saussure started from the multiform and heterogeneous 'nature of language, which appears at first sight as an unclassifiable reality' the unity of which cannot be brought to light, since it partakes at the same time of the physical, the physiological, the mental, the individual and the social.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Barthes concludes (*ibid.*): "Now this disorder disappears if, from this

Saussure's structural linguistics broke with the past in this important regard, but in highlighting the distinction between written and spoken forms of language maintained the concept of binary oppositions. Structuralism, by foregrounding the antinomial or oppositional nature of this relationship,⁸⁶ was merely perpetuating one of the central axioms of logic, wherein the terms A and -A cannot exist co-terminously. Logic, by definition, depends on the non-identity of these terms, whereby A is (according to the rules of the game) the opposite of not-A. Structuralism's dependence on this dichotomic relationship formed the starting point for the deconstruction project.

As theorized by Derrida (1930-2004) and De Man (1919-1983), deconstruction is a branch of continental philosophy, which starts by interrogating the nature of the binary oppositions at the root of structuralism. Derrida's neologism *différance* is used both to expose the hidden strategies that animate Western philosophical thought and to highlight deconstruction's philosophical insight as to how words both differ from and defer to each other. In his punning use of the term, Derrida suggests that words are both different from each other, which seems not only true but necessarily so, but further in his double sense of the term 'defer' that they acknowledge authority and make way for what Peirce terms unclosed semiosis. As Armstrong (2004:1-2) observes:

Deconstruction departs from an attack on the idea that the relationship between the two aspects of the sign, the 'signifier' (a recognisable trace or mark) and its 'signified' (a concept), can be anything more substantial than a socially instituted, habitually reinforced, and (as the process of language change demonstrates) unstable association. Ideologies rely on certain signifiers to denote unique, stable, unquestionable, and precise

heterogeneous whole, is extracted a purely social object, the systematised set of conventions necessary to communication, indifferent to the material of the signals which compose it, and which is a language (*langue*); as opposed to which speech (*parole*) covers the purely individual part of language (phonation, application of the rules and contingent combinations of signs)."

⁸⁶ Binary oppositions are exemplified by such ordinary language terms as *langue/parole*, nature/nurture, raw/cooked, good/bad, black/white, masculine/feminine, left/right, up/down, and so on.

signified concepts. Derrida is not known for bluntness, but his philosophy is certainly a refutation that a signifier could ever have a single, objective, self-interpreting meaning.

From a position of extreme scepticism towards the tyranny of Saussurean *langue*, deconstruction argues that there is a deeply ingrained tendency in Western philosophy towards privileging a particular signifier over another as part of a strategic attempt to stabilize "meaning," and thereby disguise the effects of linguistic slippage that Derrida exposes. The process of reasoning behind Derrida's controversial viewpoint is described in Rivkin and Ryan (1998:339-340) as follows:

What justifies the distinction between inside and outside, intelligible and physical, speech and writing? Doesn't there have to be a prior act of expulsion, setting in opposition, and differentiation in order for the supposed ground and absolute foundation of truth in the voice of the mind thinking the presence of truth to itself to come into being?

McClary (1987:60) views deconstruction as a "political act," which exposes the ideological assumptions behind the music of the Enlightenment:

What I am suggesting here is deconstruction as a political act. It is not coincidental that most deconstructive enterprises have centered on texts of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, for, as we have seen, these are the texts (and the musical repertoires) that most powerfully articulated the social values of the emergent bourgeoisie under the guise of universal rationality, objectivity, truth. Indeed, so powerful and successful were these articulations—with their hidden ideological underpinnings—that they still shape the ways in which we understand the world and our place in it as individuals.

What she exposes here are bourgeois dependencies on such ideas as the rational and the objective as "natural laws," which even today shape human thinking about the world. This can also be seen as a type of blind faith in progress and a reliance on science to provide the answers to the abiding philosophical questions of humankind.

The problem with the binaries, for Derrida, seems to be that they are opposite but not equal: that is to say, one binary is often privileged over the other. One of the most pervasive binaries in Western philosophy is known as Cartesian dualism. As proposed by Descartes and criticized by numerous philosophers

(Small 1998:51):

One of Bateson's fundamental intuitions is a denial of what is called Cartesian dualism, the idea that the world is made up of two different and even incompatible kinds of substance: matter, which is divisible, has mass, dimensions, and a location in space; and mind, which is indivisible, has no mass or dimensions and is located everywhere and nowhere. This mode of thought is very old in Western thinking and in fact, in the concept of an immortal soul that is distinct from the body and survives its death, is part of our society's religious orthodoxy.

Implicit in the way in which Derrida looks at language is the distinction (from linguistics) between the constative (the intended meaning of a statement) and the performative (the effect of that statement). The performative suggests that the unpredictable variety of the contexts in which language may be used makes its outcome also indeterminable. In *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, Kramer (2002) argues that meaning may be obtained from music through the analysis of its performative strategies as compared with other art forms, defining these strategies as "hermeneutic windows."

Deconstruction, by interrogating the disguised operation of a central axiom of conventional philosophy, foregrounds the contingent nature, as well as the complexity, of what Ake terms "issues of meaning and identity" (2002:81):

Issues of meaning and identity always involve more than simple binary opposites of black/white or masculine/feminine. They consist, instead, of extremely complex and fluid relationships among cultural values, understandings, and practices.

By highlighting deconstruction's interrogation of the privileging of these binary opposites, Ake suggests its exposure of strategies that are taken for granted. For McClary (2000), deconstruction lays bare the conventions and hegemonies of tonality, the operations of which Heble views as negative and restricting (2000:33):

The laws of tonality—conducive to an emotive approach to music—like the laws of language, prevent the artist from exploring a broader range of potential musical options and opportunities. Deviations from the rigid rules of tonality were originally seen as grammatical errors and solecisms.

What Heble highlights here is the potential tension between the needs of the individual musician (in terms of self-expression, telling a story, and so on) and the demands of the community, who, to a large extent, put these laws in place. This community has the power to determine the extent to which the laws of such languages hold sway and therefore acts as a braking factor in limiting the unbridled expression of the individual, who thus treads an uneasy path of compromise between expression and acceptability. The case of Ornette Coleman, as a key figure in this struggle, dramatizes this tension in the free jazz era of the late 1950s and early 1960s. As Certeau (1988:138) states:

In the vast sea of a progressively disseminated language, a world without closure or anchorage (it becomes doubtful, eventually improbable, that a Unique subject will appropriate it and make it speak), every particular discourse attests to the absence of the position which the cosmos formerly assigned to the individual, and thus to the necessity of carving out a position by one's own way of treating a particular area of language. In other words, it is because he loses his position that the individual comes into being as a *subject*.

For Monson, the poststructuralist usage of the word "discourse" has vivid ramifications for ethnomusicology (1996:206):

A considerable confusion regarding the idea of discourse has emerged in the debate about postmodernism and music in recent years. Perhaps the most useful aspect of Foucauldian notions of discourse and Derridean ideas about writing has been their implications for rethinking the concept of culture—for moving from a totalizing, coherent homogeneous idea to one that takes heterogeneity and the crosscutting of cultural identities with the contradictions (discourses) of race, gender, and economic stratification. Perhaps the most damaging, from the point of view of ethnomusicology, is the poststructural deprecation of the "speaking subject," vernacular knowledge, and the phenomenal world in relation to its philosophical project.

For Monson, the poststructuralist position has the clear advantage of necessitating a re-evaluation of a commonly held view of culture as "a totalizing, coherent homogeneous idea," a view similarly challenged by Korsyn (section 1.5.2) with regard to "society." However, Monson views the deconstructionist problematization of the "speaking subject" in less positive

terms. From her position as a jazz critic and performer and in view of jazz's emphasis on the contribution of the individual performer to its discourses, this is a somewhat inevitable conclusion.

2.1.6 Wittgenstein on language

The theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein, widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, have recently begun to be applied to thinking about music. In suggesting that academic discourse about music is a kind of Wittgensteinian language-game, Kevin Korsyn seeks a way out of the impasses that up to now have fostered division in musical scholarship (2003:187):

Whether or not music is considered a language, there can be no doubt that musical research is not only transmitted through language, but is also embodied in the sort of socially situated forms of life that Wittgenstein called language-games. By asking how these games work, and how they are connected to a variety of cultural practices, we can foster communication among them while avoiding certain impasses that we have seen in the field.

Although an exhaustive survey of Wittgenstein's thought is beyond the scope of this study, there are three concepts of his regarding language which are of significance: meaning as use, language-games, and grammar.

2.1.6.1 Meaning as use

Shawver comments on the importance of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as follows (n.d.):

Generally considered one of the most important philosophical works of the twentieth century, *Philosophical Investigations* is unique in its approach to philosophy. Most philosophical texts read as histories of philosophy, summaries of philosophizing which has already occurred, a completed report on thought. Wittgenstein's book treats philosophy as a lab science, instructing the reader to undergo various thought experiments and do the actual work of philosophy. Rather than relying on the thinking of others, it insists that the readers do their own thinking.

Wittgenstein was concerned with a new approach to philosophy, concerned with how to "use" philosophy; he was not particularly interested in metaphysical controversies, which he viewed as situated in problems of language. In Wittgenstein's view, when these linguistic problems are cleared up, their attendant philosophical problems disappear. In this light, Wittgenstein displayed a pragmatic turn in suggesting that meaning is a function of how language is used in practical situations (PI §340):

One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to *look at* its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a *stupid* prejudice.

To the author, this is an exceedingly valuable insight for the purposes of this study, because it acts as a counterpoise to the assumptions that lead some musicologists to treat music as an object rather than as an activity. This allows for a somewhat different focus wherein the frame of reference is the way in which musicians use signs, as opposed to the content of the signs themselves. Such a viewpoint can include all categories of musical sign, be they elements of the symbolic language of musical notation or the more elusive and fleeting aural signs of improvised music. Simply put, the focus then shifts from what these musical signs mean to the manner in which they are used.

Garver (1996:150) characterizes this key move in Wittgenstein's thinking as one in which is emphasized the importance of context over analysis:

Studying uses of language makes *context* prominent, whereas the study of forms lends itself naturally to *analysis*. There are no such things as the 'structural components' of a use of language or of a language-game, whereas morphological or syntactic analysis proceeds in terms of precisely such components. Contextual settings and possibilities of discourse continuation define or differentiate uses of language in ways that are not analytic at all—certainly not in the familiar sense in which analysis requires the identification of elements and their arrangement.

Biletzki and Matar (2005) view Wittgenstein's emphasis on the use of language as a challenge to the more traditional approach where meaning is regarded as representation:

"For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (PI §43). This basic statement is what underlies the change of perspective most typical of the later phase of Wittgenstein's thought: a change from a conception of meaning as representation to a view which looks to use as the hinge of the investigation.

This change of perspective, the author suggests, is by no means unique to Wittgenstein, as critical theory in general during the course of the twentieth century mounted waves of attacks on this traditional concept of meaning as representation. Heble (2000:72) sees evidence of this tendency in the music of the Art Ensemble of Chicago:

Rather than following standard chord progressions and traditional solo structures, large portions of the ensemble's repertoire are devoted to impromptu explorations of a semiotic freedom. These freely improvised passages bespeak a reliance on a kind of formalist aesthetic: jazz as a system of signs with no necessary relationship to anything outside itself. Notes are played not so much for their worth as semantic signifiers, but rather for their sound value.

This "formalist aesthetic" of which Heble speaks is not formalism in its traditional sense of music for music's sake, however. One of the key elements or motivating factors of this organization's approach is, after all, a highly politicized and polemical re-thinking of music's place in American society.

2.1.6.2 Language-games

In an important discussion of Wittgenstein's concept of the language-game in *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (1984:10) puts his point thus:

Wittgenstein, taking up the study of language again from scratch, focuses his attention on the effects of different modes of discourse; he calls the various types of utterances he identifies along the way (a few of which I have listed) *language-games*. What he means by this term is that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put—in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them.

If one is permitted to view musical performance in terms of “various types of utterance,” in Lyotard’s terms, it seems possible to classify musicking itself as a language-game, one whose connotative content is largely indeterminate. For example, Inuit throat-songs imply a complex set of cultural and historical connotations for the community which practises them, connotations largely lost on the average Westerner who might perhaps find them as amusing or odd as Tibetan music, but certainly foreign. This reinforces perhaps the sociocultural nature of the New Musicology’s attempt to consider music as a communal and socially directed activity.

The author is suggesting moreover that Wittgenstein’s categories of utterance for speech are typified in the symbolic language of music notation by such devices as dynamics, phrase marks, accents, and so on: in short, those devices that mimic the action of breathing and emphasis within human speech. Within music styles that do not encompass notation as a mediation device, phrasing may be conceived of quite differently but still as a form of conversation, in which individuality and uniqueness of parlance are highly valued. This metaphorical conception of music as speech is extensively discussed in Monson (1996:73-96).

Wittgenstein, in his definition of the language-game, places a strong emphasis on verbal language as an activity and lists a wide variety of examples of such activities (PI §23, emphases in original):

Here the term “language-*game*” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form. Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others:

- Giving orders, and obeying them—
- Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements—
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—
- Reporting an event—
- Speculating about the event—
- Forming and testing a hypothesis—
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams—
- Making up a story; and reading it—
- Play-acting—
- Singing catches—
- Guessing riddles—

Making a joke; telling it—
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic—
Translating from one language into another—
Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

Lyotard (1979) makes three important observations with regard to language-games, in which utterances are subject to a system of rules beyond the control of the individual players:

It is useful to make the following three observations about language-games. The first is that their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are the object of a contract, explicit, or not, between players (which is not to say that the players invent the rules). The second is that if there are no rules, there is no game, that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game, that a "move" or utterance that does not satisfy the rules does not belong to the game they define. The third remark is suggested by what has just been said: every utterance should be thought of as a "move" in a game.

For Bowman, in discussing Margolis's work, the language-game is a useful concept in catering for the unpredictable character of musical meaning (1998:239):

On Margolis's view, musical meanings are contingent, culturally relative, and culturally emergent in ways that make them unlikely candidates for study from the systematic purview of semiotic science. Pointing to Wittgenstein's conception of language-games as extensively improvisational, fluid, and unpredictable affairs, Margolis believes meanings are contingent and consensual phenomena. They are deeply embedded in the various and ever-evolving social practices that give rise to them. In short, the rigorous aspirations and rule-governed nature of semiotics is ill suited to the ambiguity, the multiplicity of potential meanings, the indefinite variability, and the diversity of musical phenomena and practices.

Wittgenstein's idea of the language-game, in allowing for a wide range of fluid, contingent, and negotiable meanings within musicking, is a powerful concept for the analysis of improvised music in general, and Soundpainting in particular, in that it emphasizes the contingency of musical meaning. As Bowman describes it, this concept is highly relevant to this study, in that it accommodates the diversity of musical practices within various systems of rules, which may or may not be "formalized" through musical notation.

2.1.6.3 Grammar

Wittgenstein adopts the term 'grammar' in his quest to describe the workings of this public, socially governed language, using it in a somewhat idiosyncratic manner. Grammar, usually taken to consist of the rules of correct syntactic and semantic usage, becomes, in Wittgenstein's hands, the wider—and more elusive—network of rules which determine what linguistic move is allowed as making sense, and what isn't.

(Biletzki and Matar 2005)

In the light of the above statement, Wittgenstein's adoption of the term "grammar" suggests the possibility of likewise conceiving of music as a "public, socially governed language." This raises in turn a question with regard to who exactly might be considered to be the custodians of this musical language: the author suggests that this role is taken up by the loose community of musicians, listeners, and marketers of jazz, whose viewpoint tends to be somewhat conservative.

The conservatism of this community is evident in conventional approaches to jazz pedagogy, which mostly takes a no-nonsense approach to the validity of linguistic moves within the language-game of tonal jazz. The individual who takes on the community therefore also takes on the rules of the game and in language, "the formidable adversary of connotation," in Lyotard's terms.

In an imaginary dialogue between a sceptic and a musician,⁸⁷ Naomi Cumming (2000:265) suggests that while the boundaries of a musical community may be difficult to define in a final or narrowly circumscribed way, it is nonetheless possible to describe such a community:

Sceptic: "If you do not define the boundaries of the community, how can you specify the criteria of judgment used by those within it?"

Musician: "Vagueness in defining the boundaries of a community of language users never prevented a language from functioning before, so

⁸⁷ For the sake of clarity, the author identifies whose position Cumming is representing here.

long as the language is connected with a shared '*form of life*,' as the late Wittgenstein puts it. A community of those who compose, perform, critique, theorize, and write histories of Western classical music in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries is closely defined for practical purposes."

Sceptic: "You make a circle around an arbitrary field of play."

Musician: "Yes. And by doing so I acknowledge a boundary, a limit to a 'world,' without denying that it may intersect with other worlds, which bring perspectives to what I have so enclosed."

Cumming's argument hinges on Wittgenstein's notion of the 'form of life,' which she defines as a variety of activities associated with her area of research, as in Western music composing, performing, and so on. Although Wittgenstein's term is the subject of a certain amount of controversy, Hacker's definition of Wittgenstein's term suggests that what he is referring to is the notion of culture *tout court*. On this basis, and although she is referring to WEAM, it does not seem unreasonable to theorize the existence of a similar community (or communities) within jazz, for whom aesthetic criteria of judgement are also at stake. As Hacker states (2005):

Wittgenstein employed it to indicate the roots of language and of agreement in application of linguistic rules, in consensual, regular forms of behaviour. This includes natural, species-specific action and response, as well as concept-laden, acculturated activities. Speaking a language is part of a form of life (a culture) and to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.

Is it therefore possible to view musical practices likewise as "forms of life?" It seems plausible to do this on the basis of musicking's grounding in "consensual and regular behaviour," in the sense that music tends (for the most part) to conform to a definite set of rules, which form its grammar. Although it is risky to generalize, as Wittgenstein warns, it seems clear enough that within the genre of tonal jazz, for instance, the acquisition of improvisational skills operates within the framework of a system of tension and resolution. This system of axioms operates within a framework of generally agreed-upon conventions as to what note-choices are deemed as "correct" or "incorrect."

To what extent these rules are defined as "linguistic" is the province of

musical semiotics, but, although Cumming is referring to a community of practitioners within WEAM, it does not seem unreasonable to theorize the existence of a similar community (or communities) within jazz, for whom aesthetic criteria with regard to jazz's common practice are also at issue. A renewed focus on the role of the community's role in patrolling the limits of the grammar of African American music forms the basis of recent studies by such writers as McClary (2000), Heble (2000), Fischlin and Heble (2004), and Lewis (2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

Returning to Wittgenstein, in keeping with his move away from syntactic analysis to usage, he maintains that the task of philosophy with respect to the determination of meaning is not to be completed through a process of detached observation, but by means of an active engagement with what is actually taking place. For Biletzki and Matar (2005), this is a move away from generalized speculation to the careful consideration of specific cases:

Rather, when investigating meaning, the philosopher must 'look and see' the variety of uses to which the word is put. So different is this new perspective that Wittgenstein repeats: 'Don't think but look!' (PI §66); and such looking is done *vis a vis* particular cases, not thoughtful generalizations. In giving the meaning of a word, any explanatory generalization should be replaced by a description of use.

What this line of thinking seems to require is a greater degree of caution with regard to abstract generalizations about music and a greater emphasis on the various contexts in which musicking takes place. In this sense, Soundpainting can be construed as a particular type of language-game, as can be the practices of WEAM and the various forms of musical life that employ improvisation.

The behavioural rituals and performance conventions of the "form of life" known as WEAM (with its entrances, exits, faithful adherence to the intentions of the score, as well as the very notion of the "work" as autonomous object)

support this conception.⁸⁸ The question then arises: Are there similar rules for the production and consumption of improvised music? Or even more simply put, does improvised music similarly exist as a language-game with a somewhat different grammar? As suggested in section 1.7.3, this certainly appears to hold true for tonal jazz, in which the logic of the **changes** dictates the improviser's choice of notes.

Conceiving of improvised musicking as a Wittgensteinian language-game (with its idiosyncratic grammar) opens the way to an analytical approach in which is acknowledged the contingent and fluid nature of such musical practices. Viewing musical meaning in this light is a means of avoiding the reifying tendencies of some traditional musicology, which thereby seeks to conceal, or at least suppress, the hegemonic implications of tonality and its discourses, as theorized by McClary, Heble, and others. According to these writers, musical meaning is conceived of as eminently negotiable and culturally "constructed," rather than inhering in "the music itself."

The pragmatic emphasis in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language allows the author to situate the negotiation of subjectivity in the context of musicking as activity, in other words, as process rather than product. The work concept of traditional musicology suggests that music exists as an absolute entity, beyond time and space, and thereby diminishes its nature as a part of the social fabric of humankind. Viewing musical styles as an assortment of language-games with various (and variable) rules of engagement acts as a counterweight to totalizing generalizations about the relative value of different genres.

As applicable to Soundpainting, the author suggests that these concepts of

⁸⁸ The author wishes to stress the understanding here that music, while it does not have the same direct connotativity (force of meaning) as spoken or written language, nonetheless may be seen as obeying a similar set of rules of operation to languages in general, which rules amount to music's *langue*.

Wittgenstein may be very useful tools for the analysis of spontaneously created music, in so far as they expose both the conventional and the contingent underpinnings of such processes. In the following chapter, the author will make an extended comparison between the work concept (and its part in WEAM musicology's strategy of canon formation) and the rather more flexible view of musicking as process. Such a view also attempts to take cognizance of musicking as an embodied activity, thereby acknowledging the contribution of performers to the spontaneous and collective process of creation.