

Introduction

‘Attending to the Way Things Are’: Frankfurtian Reflections on Truth and Musicology

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In his recent examination of *The Discourse of Musicology* Giles Hooper poses the question ‘What should one say about music?’ and it is clear that the use of the word *should* here covers a moral dimension.¹ Unlike, say, physicians and engineers, whose activities are assessed in terms of outcomes such as health of patients and robustness of physical constructions, what musicologists do must primarily be considered in terms of the words they produce. Given that this is the case, and that speech acts (understood to cover inscriptions – the normal mode of scholarly discourse – as well as utterances) may be examined for whether they are true or false, appropriately informative or deceptive, perspicuous or vague, questions of truth, honesty, and intellectual integrity, can become important issues for musicologists.

In the course of the twentieth century, the ‘hard sciences’ demonstrated dramatic success in the discovery of truths and in applications, both benign and otherwise, in medicine, information management, space exploration, and warfare. As a result, such sciences seemed to provide a model for any field of enquiry with pretensions to intellectual respectability. This is the background to Joseph Kerman’s assessment of the state of musicology in the early 1980s.² According to Kerman, musicology then was ‘perceived as dealing essentially with the factual, the documentary, the verifiable, the analysable, the positivistic’.³ Two terms in that statement, *verifiable* and *positivistic*, invoke a philosophy of science, positivism, which had arisen in the early part of the century in Germany among the so-called Vienna Circle, a view that is now largely seen as discredited. This philosophy amounted

¹ Giles Hooper, *The Discourse of Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.1.

² Joseph Kerman, *Musicology* (London: Fontana Press, 1985).

³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

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to a Procrustean distortion of science to accommodate a philosophically misconceived conception of the way scientists actually operated.⁴

Postmodernism, in reaction to the weight accorded by some, to factual verifiability, substituted an emphasis on ‘indeterminacy and interpretive “play”’.⁵ Such a substitution raises significant issues for any discipline. In this regard, Felipe Fernández-Armesto writes of his fears that the post-modern challenge would subvert historians’ traditional aspirations to the truth and he attributes to librarians in recent decades a worry that in the future they would be consigning history books to the fiction shelves.⁶ Musicologists would seem to be vulnerable to a similar risk. The worry is that, convinced of the impossibility of attaining truth, they would, *faute de mieux*, resort to fictional narrative as the only appropriate musicological mode of discourse.

And, perhaps, a preference for the relaxed attitude of the fiction writer over the conscientious stance of the scholar is understandable. The allure of fiction is not confined just to readers; Amos Oz tells us how he was envied by his scholar father for the freedom that he enjoyed:

He always envied me my novelist’s freedom to write as I wish, unconfined by all kinds of preliminary search and research, unburdened by the obligation to acquaint myself with all existing data in the field, unharnessed from the yoke of comparing sources, providing evidence, checking quotations and installing footnotes: free as a bird.⁷

Frankfurt on Truth

The scholar, unlike the novelist, must stay rooted in reality. A significant common theme of Harry G. Frankfurt’s two recent essays *On*

⁴ See entries under ‘logical positivism’ and ‘the verifiability criterion of meaning’ p. 514, and ‘Vienna Circle’ p. 956, in Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵ Hooper, *The Discourse of Musicology*, p. 35.

⁶ Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, ‘Epilogue: What is History Now?’, in *What Is History Now?*, ed. by David Cannadine (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 149.

⁷ Amos Oz, *The Story Begins: Essays on Literature* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & company, 1999), p.1.

Truth and On Bullshit is the importance (and against all kinds of postmodernists, relativists, and sceptics, the possibility) of ‘attending to the way things are’.⁸ Frankfurt contends that objective truth is a coherent concept, and that it is an important element in both practical and theoretical thinking. He further contends that currently fashionable theories of relativism and postmodernism are inimical to humane living and are, in any event, self-refuting.⁹ Noting that publicists and politicians typically display a relaxed attitude towards truth, Frankfurt is disturbed that such an attitude is now apparent among those, including academics, who might ‘reasonably have been counted on to know better’.¹⁰ Such persons:

emphatically dismiss a presumption that is not only utterly fundamental to responsible inquiry and thought, but that would seem to be – on the face of it – entirely innocuous: the presumption that “what the facts are” is a useful notion, or that it is, at the very least, a notion with intelligible meaning.¹¹

In this essay I propose to examine several examples of musicology under the Frankfurian rubric of ‘attending to the way things are’. How do musicologists attend to the way things are, and what could the notion of so attending, understood as an obligation, mean for the practice of musicology?

⁸ Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), *On Truth* (London: Picnic, 2006). The quotation is from the earlier essay: ‘[...] a person’s normal habit of attending to the way things are may become attenuated or lost [by excessive indulgence in the habit of bullshitting]’. p. 60.

⁹ In any case, even those who profess to deny the validity or the objective reality of the true-false distinction continue to maintain without apparent embarrassment that this denial is a position that they do *truly* endorse. The statement that they reject the distinction between true and false is, they insist, an unqualifiedly *true* statement about their beliefs, *not a false one.* (italics in original) Frankfurt, *On Truth*, pp. 8-9. Similar considerations are proposed by Thomas Nagel in *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.6. For a philosophical defence of the idea of objective truth against various forms of ‘veriphobia’ (that is challenges to the idea of objective truth), see Alvin I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), Chapter One, pp. 3-40.

¹⁰ Frankfurt, *On Truth*, p.18.

¹¹ Frankfurt, *On Truth*, p.19.

Gibbs on Schubert

My first example raises the fundamental question of whether there is, objectively, a 'way things are' which could make sense of the notion of an obligation to focus on the way things are. A flirtation with postmodernism, and an apparent conflation of objective fact with invented fiction, can be seen in the treatment by Christopher Gibbs of Schubert reception in his essay "Poor Schubert": Images and Legends of the Composer'.¹² In discussing the reliability of the legends surrounding the life of the composer, Gibbs warns against discounting "the aesthetic truth' of certain fictions'.¹³ By way of explanation of this idea he states that anecdotes often arise from, and reflect the need to, create a legend in the first place.

While the contention that present concerns may lead to the creation of legends about the past may be true, the terminology used here is surely confusing. One might, in the context of a work of fiction, use the notion of 'aesthetic truth', for example, to claim that a character created by the author was a convincing figure that might well be encountered in real life. However, in the case of the portrayal of a historical character, this notion seems particularly inappropriate. The historian or biographer does not have the same latitude as the practitioner of creative fiction.¹⁴ While it is necessary to recognize the difficulties in reaching the truth, there is no reason to believe that it is in principle impossible to reach, at least, some part of the truth. The human proneness to error is a reason for us to be cautious in the search for truth; a reason for us to be ready to scrutinize, and if necessary revise, our beliefs, in the light of new evidence; but it is no reason for the abandonment of that search.¹⁵

¹² Christopher H. Gibbs, "Poor Schubert": Images and Legends of the Composer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. by Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 36 – 55. Hereafter referred to as Gibbs, "Poor Schubert".

¹³ Gibbs, "Poor Schubert", p.39

¹⁴ Frankfurt points out that "There are important limits [...] concerning the range of variation in interpreting the facts that serious historians [...] may be expected to display." Frankfurt, *On Truth*, p. 26.

¹⁵ At most, recognizing that our history has been shaped by many stories that we now regard as false must make us cautious, and always ready to call into question the very stories that we now hold as true, since the criterion of wisdom

Gibbs ends his discussion of Schubert on a thoroughly sceptical note. He suggests that the truth is elusive and that we are in thrall to images which may not reflect the reality of the composer's life. Significantly, he raises the possibility that scholarly discussion produces as many distorted images as supposedly less reliable sources of truth such as pictures, popular biographies, or operetta.¹⁶ If Gibbs is proposing a position of universal scepticism the degree of pessimism is unwarranted, as it would seem to call in question the very enterprise of objective music scholarship. Such scholarship can aim at the objective truth, while at the same time recognising the difficulty of attaining it.

Our attitude to the world of fiction has to be different to our attitude to the real world. No matter how interesting, engaging, or lifelike, fictional characters cannot engender moral demands to which we must pay heed: their interests cannot be advanced by any of our actions; their rights cannot be vindicated by any of our interventions; nor can we do anything to relieve any burdens that they may bear. Fictional events are similarly insulated from any of our moral concerns: nothing that happens in a fictional world can oblige us to act in a certain way or adopt a certain policy.¹⁷ However, the real world, which is the domain of the scholar, does make moral demands on us, and in order to satisfy these demands we must attend to the way things are in that world.¹⁸

of the community is based on constant wariness about the fallibility of our knowledge.' Umberto Eco, *On Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 2004), p. 299.

¹⁶ Gibbs, "Poor Schubert", p. 55.

¹⁷ This is not to deny that fictional works can help to make us more morally sensitive and aware. See Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1995), and Katherine Elgin, *Considered Judgment* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 179-96.

¹⁸ The way things 'are' should, obviously, be interpreted to include historical realities. The realities of the past can create moral obligations. For example, we may have duties to dead persons, including dead composers. See Peter Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Chapter V, 'Live performances and dead composers: On the ethics of musical interpretation', pp. 95-116. For the notion of posthumous harm See Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Chapter 1, 'Death', pp. 1-10, and Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Others: The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 80-86.

Shelemay and the Case of the Beta Israel

Such demands were clearly apparent to Kay Kaufman Shelemay once she began to reflect on her research project. During the 1970s Shelemay studied the liturgical chant of the Beta Israel or Falasha, an ethnic group from north-western Ethiopia.¹⁹ From the late nineteenth century, due to outside influence, this group began to see themselves not merely as a religious minority in the country of their birth, but as co-religionists with the Jews, and the perception of their own identity changed accordingly. Following a campaign to ensure their acknowledgment as Jews, the rabbinic authorities in Israel gave the group full recognition, with consequential rights of entry to, and citizenship of, that state. However, the research carried out by Shelemay cast doubt on any connection between the liturgical music of the group and a supposed ancient Jewish origin, and showed, to the contrary, that the church music of the group bore marked similarities to extant Christian Ethiopian music.

These findings could have harmed the interests of the subject group, whose sense of identity had been shaped around a presumed Jewish lineage and whose material interests were served by a right of entry to Israel as a means of escape from their own war-torn homeland. This posed an ethical dilemma for the researcher: whether to publish her findings, thus serving the interests of scholarship, and indeed her own interest as a musicologist who had invested significant time and energy in the project; or to keep confidential the outcome of her research in the interests of the subject group who had extended her their cooperation.

After considering her options, she decided to restrict her findings to scholarly publications, and to steer clear of publicity that might compromise the position of members of the ethnic group at the centre of her study.²⁰ One may query the efficacy of these actions. The world of academic writing is not somehow hermetically sealed off from the world of politics, and there is no guarantee that something written in a scholarly journal will not be given a wider circulation.

¹⁹ Kay Kaufman Shelemay, 'The Impact and Ethics of Musical Scholarship', in *Rethinking Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 531-44.

²⁰ Shelemay, 'The Impact and Ethics of Musical Scholarship', p. 542.

Whatever reservations might be had about the way that Shelemay dealt with her problem, that problem was at least partially defined by a concern for, and a specific understanding of the nature of, truth. The most plausible explanation of her attitude to her research is that she takes seriously the notion of truth as something that should constrain what she may appropriately do and say. We can infer from her report that for her truth is 'out there', something to be discovered, something that obtains irrespective of her view or her interests, or the shared opinion of any community or collective to which she might belong. For those who think like Shelemay, truth is 'of the world, rather than 'for' the individual inquirer or community. Consequently she feels obliged to attend to the way things are in a real world which exists independently of her research or of the views or thoughts of others.

Eric Werner on Mendelssohn

The issue of how musicologists do not have the freedom of the writer of creative fiction, and how they must be constrained by the relevant historical evidence, is poignantly raised in Jeffrey Sposato's examination of Eric Werner's writings on Mendelssohn.²¹ Werner (1901–1988), a German musicologist who fled to America in 1938 to escape the Nazi regime, portrayed the composer as someone who had, despite superficial assimilation into German society, retained a conception of himself as essentially Jewish.

Sposato believes that the common post-war depiction of Mendelssohn – shared by Werner and others - as 'a man with a passion for his [Jewish] heritage [which] was strengthened by the severe episodes of oppression that he faced throughout his life' is little more than 'creative writing'.²² He links this to the shadow of the Nuremberg laws which provided an unambiguous and inescapable categorization for Jews. Such laws did not recognize assimilation. Compensating for the denigration of Mendelssohn, who was effectively expunged from music history by Nazi musicologists, and converting the Nazi 'badge of

²¹ Jeffrey S. Sposato, 'Creative Writing: The [Self-] Identification of Mendelssohn as Jew', *The Musical Quarterly*, 82/1, (1998), 190-209. I am grateful to Dr Lorraine Byrne Bodley for bringing Werner's treatment of Mendelssohn to my attention.

²² Sposato, 'Creative Writing', p. 204.

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shame' to a badge of honour, the composer was now seen as essentially Jewish.²³

Sposato demonstrates that Werner was, to say the least, wayward in the manner in which he argued his case. To portray the composer as a victim in a hostile anti-Semitic environment Werner cites actual instances of insulting behaviour but exaggerates the degree of virulence involved.²⁴ He also imputes anti-Semitic motivation to the decision not to make Mendelssohn Director of the Berlin Singakademie, where this decision could quite plausibly be explained by other factors, such as the composer's youth and lack of experience compared to the appointee.²⁵

However, the clearest example of bias is Werner's translation, from the German, of a letter written in London by the composer in July 1833 commenting on the Jewish Civil Disabilities Bill which had just passed the House of Commons (as in the case of the Catholic Relief Act passed four years previously, this was an ameliorative measure, benefiting the Jewish community in England by removing restrictions, including prohibitions on voting and on entry to public office). Sposato shows how this translation omits parts of the text of the original and interpolates elements not found in Mendelssohn's letter.²⁶ The omissions and interpolations are quite clearly intended 'to show the composer as emotionally involved in the event because of his self-identification as a Jew. A strict translation and analysis of the letter shows that Mendelssohn viewed the passing of the bill with cool detachment; there was 'no expression of Jewish pride, but rather amusement at the irony that five days after the Prussian government should issue an edict restricting the rights of Jews, the English Government should emancipate them'.²⁷

There is something clearly wrong with the manner in which Werner dealt with the historical reality to which he should have been attending. Either carelessly or (which is more likely) deliberately, he misrepresented the facts of the matter. Werner's treatment of the

²³ Sposato, 'Creative Writing', p. 192.

²⁴ Sposato, 'Creative Writing', pp. 193-94.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-93.

²⁶ Sposato, 'Creative Writing', pp. 194-204.

²⁷ Sposato, 'Creative Writing', p. 200.

Mendelssohn question certainly represents a complete abandonment of proper standards of scholarship.²⁸

It is relevant here to mention what philosopher Susan Haack has written about scholarly inquiry. Haack takes it as a tautology that inquiry aims at the truth.²⁹ She contrasts ‘genuine inquiry’, carried out by those with intellectual integrity, with ‘pseudo inquiry’ which is motivated, not by a desire to arrive at the truth whatever that is, but to make a persuasive case for some proposition which is determined in advance of any careful scrutiny of evidence.³⁰

By distorting the evidence Werner neglects attending to the way things are. However, there are other ways in which scholars do not pay appropriate attention to reality. By taking a narrow disciplinary view, salient facts, which arguably should not be ignored, may be left out of consideration.

As pointed out by Stephen Toulmin, historically, the development of disciplines necessitated a deliberate narrowing of the field of enquiry of their practitioners. The ensuing intellectual division of labour, which obliged those in a specific discipline ‘to focus *exclusively* on the things they knew best and did best’, resulted in a blinkered view.³¹ As part of this historical process, abstract concepts, appropriate to each field of inquiry, were developed. While these concepts facilitated the achievement of certainty in specific disciplines, their use involved, in effect, a cultivated and deliberate shutting off from

²⁸ In an editorial comment on the Sposato article, Leon Botstein accepts that what Werner did was ‘criminal’ (214). However he also warns against assuming an attitude of moral superiority (215). In the context where scholarship had been recruited to the service of Nazi ideology, and anti-Semitism had been given a pseudo-scientific gloss (214), he points out that Werner and other émigré intellectuals ‘never experienced anything approximating “normalcy”’ (218). Leon Botstein, ‘Mendelssohn and the Jews’, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 1, (Spring, 1998), 210-219.

²⁹ Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998) p.189.

³⁰ Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, p. 189. See also Frankfurt: ‘[...] higher levels of civilization must depend [...] on a conscientious respect for the importance of honesty and clarity in reporting the facts, and on a stubborn concern for accuracy in determining what the facts are.’ *On Truth*, p.16. For Frankfurt, a lack of deference or respect for the truth is facilitated by current views such as postmodernism and relativism. *On Truth*, pp. 17-20.

³¹ Stephen Toulmin, *Return to Reason*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001) p. 41.

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view, aspects of reality deemed to be outside the proper area of concern.³² The adoption of a narrow perspective also excluded questions of ethics.³³ Taken to extremes, this tendency could relieve the scholar of any obligation of attending to the realities outside his own ivory tower. In this connection Northrop Frye sums up a widely held view of academics in the following way:

the disinterested pursuit of knowledge acquires, for its very virtues, the reputation of being unrelated to social realities. The intellectual, it is thought, lives in an over-simplified Euclidean world; his attitude to society is at best aloof, at worst irresponsible; his loyalties and enmities, when they exist, have the naïve ferocity of abstraction, a systematic preference of logical extremes to practical means.³⁴

A desire to escape the restraints of a specific scholarly discipline, as such constraints are conceived at any particular time, need not be the same as a desire to retire to the world of fiction, and neither need it represent an unprincipled abandonment of all responsibilities. Indeed the opposite may be the case: dissatisfaction with the perceived limits of a discipline such as musicology may be an assumption of responsibility.

In his paper *Musicology and/as Social Concern: Imagining the Relevant Musicologist*³⁵ Ralph P. Locke reports on various fears raised on the electronic discussion list of the American Musicological Society about the social relevance of the discipline. Amongst these qualms is a worry about how musicology might 'help to draw attention to or even in some way alleviate one or another of the many seemingly intractable

³² Toulmin, *Return to Reason*, p. 147.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁴ Northrop Frye, 'The Knowledge of Good and Evil', in *The Morality of Scholarship*, ed. by Max Black (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 9. See also Ogden Nash's verse, *The Purist*, which nicely lampoons a type of disengaged objectivity: I give you now Professor 'Twist,/ A conscientious scientist./ Trustees exclaimed, "He never bungles!"/ And sent him off to distant jungles./ Camped on a tropic riverside,/ One day he missed his loving bride./ She had, the guide informed him later./ Been eaten by an alligator./ Professor Twist could not but smile./ "You mean," he said, "a crocodile". Ogden Nash, *Candy is Dandy: The Best of Ogden Nash* (Guildford: Methuen, 1983), p. 145.

³⁵ Ralph P. Locke, 'Musicology and/as Social Concern: Imagining the Relevant Musicologist', *Rethinking Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 499.

national and world problems'. Such unease is surely misconceived: the activities of musicologists, as such, would seem to offer little in the way of remedies for the relevant evils. However, that is not to say that it is always appropriate for a musicologist to take a narrow disciplinary view.

Feld on Schizophonic mimesis

When music, regarded purely as sound structured in a specific way, is perceived as a disembodied reality, the ramifications, in the wider human context, of musical composition, performance, analysis, and scholarship may remain unacknowledged. Such disciplinary inattention may be a productive stance, but it may also be inappropriate, and a denial of responsibility. In his paper *Pygmy Pop. A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis* Steven Feld does not hesitate to engage with moral considerations.³⁶ Feld's examination of particular commercial practices should be seen in the context of the structural economic differences which exist in today's globalized world, with intellectual property laws shaped by the most powerful actors on the world stage, and with some multi-national companies almost on a par with, or more powerful than, some sovereign states.³⁷

Feld has coined the term *schizophonic mimesis* to describe the practice whereby, by means of sound recording, music is torn from its cultural context and put to uses not envisaged by its creators.³⁸ In this regard he instances the use of the music of the Ba-Benzélé pygmy tribe of the Central African Republic, which has found its way, via Herbie Hancock's *Watermelon Man*, into the *Sanctuary* track of the Madonna CD *Bedtime Stories*.³⁹

Feld refers to a 1970 interview in which Chicago-born Hancock, replying to a question on whether he had ever been to Africa, responds, 'Naw. Africa is where I am. Africa is here'.⁴⁰ By so responding, Hancock

³⁶ Steven Feld, 'Pygmy POP. A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 28 (1996), 1-35. Hereafter referred to as Feld, 'Pygmy POP'.

³⁷ Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 48-51. The World Trade Organization TRIPS Agreement of 1994 on intellectual property rights has been described as 'the most effective vehicle of Western imperialism in history'. Marci A Hamilton, 'The TRIPS Agreement: Imperialistic, Outdated, and Overprotective', p. 243.

³⁸ Feld, 'Pygmy POP', p. 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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seems to be assuming a generic 'African' identity, distinct from the specific national identity he gained by virtue of his birth, and also distinct from the specific ethnic identity of the tribe whose music he had appropriated. Such thinking seems to provide a basis for the appropriation of the music in question by reference to the reciprocal give-and-take relationships characteristic of families (for Hancock the use of the music was a 'brothers kind of thing').⁴¹ However, as pointed out by Feld, such rhetoric, made more acceptable by viewing the schizophrenic practices as 'purely musical forms of encounter', masks the asymmetric power and economic differences which characterize the relationships between the Western music industry and Western musicians, the takers, on the one hand; and the peoples whose music is appropriated, those taken-from (not givers) on the other.⁴²

Feld suggests that the ethnomusicologists who first researched the music for academic purposes must take some responsibility for the use and abuse which their initiatives have facilitated:

Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists could once claim innocence about the activities of recording and marketing what was variously called tribal, ethnic, folk, or traditional music. Now there is little doubt that this whole body of work, since the time of the invention of the phonograph, has been central to complex representations and commodity flows that are neither ideologically neutral, unfailingly positive, or particularly equitable.⁴³

The *hindewhu* music which was used by Hancock and Madonna is characterised by alternation between multi-pitched vocal sounds and single pitched sounds produced by the vocalist on a papaya stem whistle.⁴⁴ Feld deplores the 'caricature' of the original music contained in 'pygmy pop' such as the Madonna track, and the richness and sophistication of the music which is referenced:

⁴¹ Feld, 'Pygmy POP', p. 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The documentary records emphasize a vast repertory of musical forms and performance styles, including complex and original polyphonic and polyrhythmic practices. Yet what of this diverse musical invention forms the basis for its global pop representation? In the most popular instances it is a singly untexted vocalization or falsetto yodel, often hunting cries rather than songs or musical pieces. This is the sonic cartoon of the diminutive person, the simple, intuitively vocal and essentially non-linguistic child.⁴⁵

Although some of the commercial organizations which had profited from the use of the music indicated a concern for the peoples whose music was being used, and expressed an intention to assign funds for the benefit of the peoples in question, Feld's inquiries seemed to suggest that this was merely lip service, and that the implicit promise was not, in fact, honoured.⁴⁶

Differences between the developed and underdeveloped economies cast a shadow even on the world of academia. And scholarship can be commandeered for ideological purposes in the maintenance of such differences. In a paper written some forty years ago, Conor Cruise O'Brien remarked on how the agenda of some Western scholars seemed to be subordinated to the requirements of global capitalism and how at least some works of scholarship manifested a 'consistently selective myopia' which rendered invisible how Western capitalist domination worked against the interests of populations in Asia and Africa.⁴⁷ It is not at all clear that the situation has changed radically over the four decades since O'Brien produced his analysis. In this context it is interesting to see that Feld has not ignored the relevant issues and has adverted to global economic and power disparities, and has drawn out the relevance of this for the practice of musicology.

Taruskin and Fink on *The Death of Klinghoffer*

Global realities also form the backdrop to a controversy which is the subject of my next example. At times of perceived national crisis, a

⁴⁵ Feld, 'Pygmy POP', pp. 26-27.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁷ Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Politics and the Morality of Scholarship', in *The Morality of Scholarship*, ed. by Max Black (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 59-74 (p. 72).

collective 'groupthink' may emerge which pervades even the realm of scholarship. At such times the values of disinterested inquiry, objectivity, and a sole concern for truth may be seen by some, including some members of the scholarly community, as luxuries which cannot be afforded until the emergency is resolved. And of course, in the case of a crisis such as the 'War on Terror', a resolution may be assumed not to be achievable in the foreseeable future.

Questions of attention and inattention arise in the conflicting responses of two musicologists, Richard Taruskin and Robert Fink, to the opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* by John Adams (libretto by Alice Goodman).⁴⁸ The former emphasizes the necessity, as he saw it, to 'focus resolutely on the [terrorist] acts'⁴⁹ which constitute the historical context of the work, while the latter suggests that Taruskin was, in relation to the work, suffering from 'critical deafness'.⁵⁰

In an article published on 9 December 2001 in *The New York Times*,⁵¹ Taruskin commented favourably on the cancellation, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, of a performance of excerpts from *Klinghoffer*. The opera, which was based on the 1985 hijacking of the cruise ship *Achille Lauro* by Palestinian terrorists and the subsequent assassination of one of the passengers, the Jewish wheelchair-bound Leon Klinghoffer, had attracted considerable negative publicity on account of what was seen by some as its bias in favour of the Palestinian hijackers. Using as a hypothetical analogy the inappropriateness of 'shov[ing] Wagner in the faces of Holocaust survivors in Israel',⁵²

⁴⁸ Richard Taruskin, 'Music's Dangers and the Case for Control', *The New York Times*, 9 December, 2001, <<http://nytimes.com>> [Accessed 26 July, 2008], Robert Fink, 'Klinghoffer in Brooklyn Heights', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 17/2 (2005), 173-213.

⁴⁹ This quotation from Taruskin's article is provided in Fink, 'Klinghoffer in Brooklyn Heights', p. 176, although it is not included in the article on the web.

⁵⁰ Fink, *Klinghoffer in Brooklyn Heights*, p. 181.

⁵¹ Taruskin, 'Music's Dangers and the Case for Control'.

⁵² Almost certainly Taruskin is here referring to the performance in Jerusalem, under conductor Daniel Barenboim, of the Prelude from *Tristan und Isolde* on 7 July 2001. This performance, which broke the convention banning live performances of Wagner's music in the state of Israel, caused a storm of outrage. Barenboim makes a distinction between Wagner's anti-Semitism ('monstrous and despicable'), and Wagner's music (Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002). pp. 79-110 and pp. 175-184). In any event, Taruskin's analogy is less than apposite: Wagner was a rabid anti-Semite, and

Taruskin contends that it is gratuitous to offend ‘people stunned by previously unimaginable horrors’ with works like the Adams opera.⁵³

The ‘previously unimaginable horrors’ referred to are clearly the events of 11 September 2001, when Al Qaeda terrorists caused the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, with loss of life running into thousands. Taruskin refers to that event explicitly twice, and suggests that the opera manifests ‘reprehensible contempt for the real-life victims’ of the atrocity. He does not call for a ban on the work, but suggests that musicians, such as members of the Boston Symphony, act responsibly by refusing to perform it.⁵⁴

Here we see a musicologist prepared to widen his perspective to include more than just the music itself. However this is achieved in a somewhat selective manner. The easy invocation of the ‘War on Terror’ is questionable:⁵⁵ the currency of that particular shibboleth has had the effect of drawing attention away from problematic realities. By using it Taruskin evokes a stark Manichean dichotomy between two global forces: on the one hand there are ‘civilized states’, who pursue legitimate wars with unfortunate but unintended, and therefore – so the argument goes – morally permissible, ‘collateral damage’⁵⁶ involving citizens; on the other hand, there are terrorists whose actions in destroying life are abominable.

In a careful and detailed analysis of the opera, Robert Fink takes issue with Taruskin’s analysis. Rejecting the contention that the Jewish characters are demeaned, Fink suggests that this perception is based on a faulty interpretation of a scene, featuring the fictional Jewish family of the Rumors, which was included in the first performance of

the fact that his music was appropriated by the Nazis created painful associations for those who had survived the Nazi persecution. On the other hand there is no evidence of anti-Semitism on the part of Adams or Goodman – the librettist was of Jewish extraction – and Taruskin cannot use the analogy in support of his thesis of anti-Semitic bias, as that contention is the very point at issue. I am grateful to Dr Mark Fitzgerald for bringing this issue to my notice.

⁵³ Taruskin, ‘Music’s Dangers’.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ In a quotation from Taruskin’s article in Fink, ‘*Klinghoffer* in Brooklyn Heights’, p. 176, there is explicit reference to the need to defeat terrorism. The paragraph in which this reference is made is omitted from the edited web article.

⁵⁶ A convenient euphemism which tends to veil the grisly realities of modern warfare.

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the opera but subsequently deleted. According to Fink, the Rumors are ‘admirably, engagingly funny and self-aware, in their own *haimish* [Yiddish for ‘homey’ or ‘folksy’] way’.⁵⁷

Fink provides an alternative understanding of the contrast between the heroic (exemplified in the opera by the Palestinians) and the domestic (exemplified by the two Jewish families, the Rumors and the eponymous Klinghoffers). In effect Fink argues cogently that the distinction between the heroic and the domestic should not be identified with a distinction between the noble and the ignoble.⁵⁸ And this stance is entirely plausible. In her examination of the topic, Lucy Hughes-Hallett reminds us of the problematic nature of heroism. Among the heroes included in her survey are Alcibiades (‘an arrogant libertine and a turncoat several times over’), El Cid (‘a predatory warlord’), Wallenstein (‘a profiteer’), and Drake (‘a pirate and a terrorist’). Clearly heroism is not to be equated with virtue or moral worth.⁵⁹

Both critics deal with the music in the opera. Taruskin points out that ‘numinous’ tones (‘long, quiet drawn-out tones in the highest violin register’) accompany almost all of the utterances of the Palestinians; that this is a musical analogue to a halo in a painting; and that such musical representation is absent, apart from one instance after Klinghoffer’s death, in the case of music accompanying utterances of the victims.⁶⁰ Rink suggests that ‘Taruskin’s critical deafness’ has left him unaware of similar characteristics in several scenes in which the same kind of numinous music accompanies statements by Jews: the soft lamentation in the Chorus of Exiled Palestinians in the Prologue; the tender moment in Act II where Leon Klinghoffer attempts to distract his

⁵⁷ Fink, ‘*Klinghoffer* in Brooklyn Heights’, p. 186.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-07.

⁵⁹ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Heroes: Saviours, Traitors, and Supermen* (London: Fourth Estate, 2004), p. 3. For the relationship between notions of heroism, the cult of sacrificial death, and the rejection of Western values, see Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), Chapter 3, ‘Heroes and Merchants’, pp. 49-73. Buruma and Margalit point out the contrast between the cult of sacrificial death, and the recognition, ‘as witnessed by seventeenth-century Dutch painting and English novels [that] the unexceptional everyday life has dignity too and should be nurtured, not scorned.’ p. 71.

⁶⁰ Taruskin, ‘Music’s Dangers’.

wife from their terrible predicament; and Marilyn Klinghoffer's lament in the final moments of the work.⁶¹

In the previous examples the realities which claimed attention were historical and biographical facts about composers, and the possible undesirable effects of scholarly activity on informants who provided evidence for ethnomusicologists; these realities were not purely musical; they did not primarily concern, in Kerman's phrase, 'the music itself'.⁶² In the case of *The Death of Klinghoffer* both Taruskin and Fink do deal with 'the music itself'. Can the idea of attending to the way things apply to music ('objects of delight'), seen in isolation from the social realities in which it is embedded?⁶³ Frankfurt points out that evaluative judgments 'must depend on [...] statements about facts'.⁶⁴ The delight of the listener is subjective, but the objects which cause the delight, the musical works, are outside the mind of the perceiver, and these works have objective features which render them insusceptible to a radically unconstrained subjective interpretative

⁶¹ Fink, 'Klinghoffer in Brooklyn Heights', pp. 177-81. According to Fink (p. 181) 'a decade-long pattern of journalistic reception' had the effect of drawing Taruskin's attention away from the philo-Semitic aspects of the opera.

⁶² Kerman, *Musicology*, p. 18.

⁶³ Kerman had insisted, against the narrow positivism that he saw as dominant at the time, that 'Among the primary "facts" about pieces and repertoires of music (past and present) are their aesthetic qualities (past and present)'; he saw the primary focus of musicology as 'objects of delight'. Kerman, *Musicology*, pp. 18, 32 (Kerman took the phrase 'objects of delight' from Arthur Mendel).

⁶⁴ Frankfurt, *On Truth*, p. 29. The facts are physical facts. In philosophical terminology, aesthetics facts supervene on physical facts. Using the example of sculpture, Jaegwon Kim explains the concept of supervenience thus: Imagine a sculptor working on a statue [...] When the physical work is finished, his work is finished; there is no *further* work of 'attaching' desired aesthetic properties, say elegance and expressiveness, to the finished piece of stone. The aesthetic character of a sculpture is wholly fixed once the physical properties are fixed; that is, *aesthetic properties supervene on physical properties*. If a sculptor is unhappy with the aesthetic quality of his creation and wishes to improve it, he must get out his chisel and hammer and do more physical work on the stone; it is only by changing its physical character that its aesthetic character can be improved or otherwise altered. Jaegwon Kim, 'Supervenience, Emergence, Realization, Reduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, ed. by Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 558 (Italics in original).

Applying this to music, we can say that the aesthetic qualities of a piece of music supervene on its sonic qualities.

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licence. So the significance of truth, and of the way things are, pervades musicology.

Conclusion

Musicologists are engaged in inquiry; it is a tautology that inquiry aims at the truth.⁶⁵ It follows, as a matter of logic, that if she is to retain her scholarly status, the musicologist must be concerned with truth. Frankfurt makes explicit what a concern with truth would amount to in practice. It would mean:

finding satisfaction [...] in recognizing and in understanding significant truths that were previously unknown or obscure; being eager to protect, from distortion or discredit, our appreciation of those truths that we already possess; and, in general, being determined to encourage within society, insofar as we are able to do so, a vigorous and stable preference for true beliefs over ignorance, error, doubt, and misrepresentation.⁶⁶

The examples that I have described demonstrate, in the field of musicology, degrees of attention and inattention to the way things are, and how musicologists can care for truth. For Gibbs, attending to the reality of Schubert's life is a precarious venture at best, and the words he uses seem to suggest - although this may not be his intention - that a retreat from fact to fiction is permissible. By contrast, Shelemay is acutely aware of the way things are for the informants who contributed to her research, and how their situation might be affected by dissemination of her findings. The case of Eric Werner illustrates that sham and fake reasoning can infect scholarship, and how evidence for a thesis can be manipulated so that the relevant realities are ignored. Feld's essay is the product of a scholar who, not paying undue deference to the limits implied by disciplinary boundaries, cares to comment on the global realities of the music business, and who is also critical of other scholars in his field for their myopia. The clash between Taruskin and Fink demonstrates how ideology and group-think may lead to a narrowing of vision with consequent ignoring of salient moral realities.

⁶⁵ Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, p. 189.

⁶⁶ Frankfurt, *On Truth*, pp. 96-97.

The importance of truth for the musicologist can be placed in a wider context of the importance of truth for all individuals. Frankfurt points out that truth has a profound significance which goes much further than mere practical utility: each person's sense of his own individuality can emerge only in the context of a real world, and recalcitrant truths about that world, independent of the self.⁶⁷ These considerations provide an explanation for the claim made by Bernard Williams, in his last major work *Truth and Truthfulness*, that 'to the extent that we lose a sense of the value of truth, we shall certainly lose something and may well lose everything'.⁶⁸

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⁶⁷ '[...] our recognition and understanding of our own identity arises out of, and depends integrally on, our appreciation of a reality that is definitively independent of ourselves. In other words, it arises out of and depends on our recognition that there are facts and truths over which we cannot hope to exercise direct or immediate control.' Frankfurt, *On Truth*, p. 100.

⁶⁸ Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 7.

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