

Early Music Defended against Its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century

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Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Summer, 1983), pp. 297-322

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742175>

Accessed: 12-05-2017 20:53 UTC

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SUMMER, 1983



Vol. LXIX, No. 3

# THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY®

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## Early Music Defended against its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century

LAURENCE DREYFUS

Trying to develop a new theory, we must first  
take a *step back* from the evidence and recon-  
sider the problem of observation.

—Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method*

### A Theory of Early Music?

WITHIN the cultural phenomenon called “Early Music,” there has been little, if any, philosophical reflection on its own activity. There is, of course, a large and growing literature which charts the day-to-day course of historical performance. But the language here is pragmatic, designed to answer the question: How ought we to perform this? This concern may be entirely legitimate. But once we wish to explore the motivations underlying this question, to understand why late twentieth-century culture should place such a value on historically “correct” renditions of centuries-old music—in effect,

once we wish to articulate a theory of Early Music—there seems to be a conspiracy of silence.<sup>1</sup> When the question is raised at all, we are most often informed that Early Music resulted from the progress of modern musicology. But this merely displaces the problem onto musicology. More commonly the question is answered with a logic that sounds oddly theological: “Thou shalt perform the music in accordance with the composer’s intentions, for this is (H)is will.” Authentic renditions, it appears, are ethically superior to inauthentic ones. Many people apparently find this argument persuasive. Yet as a justification for historical performance, much less a theory of genesis and structure, it is evasive and empty. Small wonder that the critics of Early Music remain unconvinced and continue to view it as a hoax or nuisance. But if Early Music is indeed something more than a passing antiquarian fad, then it requires a theory embracing both explanation and critique. A theory should no doubt answer the detractors. But, curiously, it must also rescue Early Music from its moralizing devotees.

But what is “Early Music?” Certainly not only the set of musical objects comprising the older repertoires of European music. For this definition would gloss all too neatly over the first question of a theoretical inquiry: namely, Why has a sector of “serious” music culture devoted itself to the recovery of forgotten repertoires, instruments, and practices? It is therefore more useful to define Early Music as a late twentieth-century ensemble of social practices instead of restricting it to the works which occasion the interest. To be blunt: Early Music signifies first of all people and only secondarily things.

A brief listing of the actors and their props is necessary. First there are the performers (professionals and amateurs of varying proficiency), together with the teachers and scholars, this last group primarily musicologists but also other humanists interested in dance, theater, iconography, and cultural history. Then there are those in the supporting professions such as luthiers and other instrument makers, music publishers, newspaper critics, concert managers and agents, record company executives, and sound engineers. And complementing these active participants are the consumers—the ever-growing audiences, who are most heavily concentrated in Western Europe and (increasingly) in North America, but who by now span the globe from

<sup>1</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 1980), for example, does not contain an article entitled “Early Music,” nor any coherent discussion of the twentieth-century revival of earlier repertoires, instruments, and practices.

Melbourne to Moscow. We must mention the visible tools of the trade—those exterior signs of Early Music—the “original instruments”: both antique and reconstructed viols, “baroqued” violins, plucked lutes, harpsichords and organs, winds of endless variety, and a vast array of percussion. Only then do we arrive at the music itself: a massive corpus extending from liturgical chant of the Middle Ages through Classical symphonies of the eighteenth century and (at the present writing) casting a covetous glance at the nineteenth century. Finally there are the keys that unlock the doors to historical reconstruction: the didactic treatises, the archival documents, and the iconographical and notational evidence which form the basis for the discipline “performance practice.”

If there is an idea which cements together this diverse collection of people and things, it is authenticity. Whether or not it is named, this highly charged concept underlies every conscious act of Early Music. One might wonder exactly what is meant by it. First, as a regulative ideal, authenticity expresses a supposed opposition to the self-aggrandizing individualism prevalent in Mainstream musical praxis. In the typical version of this widespread myth, the individual Mainstream artist harnesses the musical text to his own will, thereby glorifying self-expression at the expense of the composer’s intentions. A musician humbled by authenticity, on the other hand, acts willingly in the service of the composer, thereby committing himself to “truth,” or, at the very least, accuracy. But there’s the rub. For if we peer behind the uplifting language, we find that one attains authenticity by following the textbook rules for “scientific method.” Early Music, in other words, does not preach some empathetic leap into the past in an act of imaginative *Verstehen*. What it has in mind is a strictly empirical program to verify historical practices, which, when all is said and done, are magically transformed into the composer’s intentions. Authenticity in Early Music, then, is grounded in a philosophical position I shall call objectivism. By “objectivism” I mean above all the epistemological proposition that knowledge is assured by accurately describing things in the world without taking stock of the biased vantage point from which the (human) observer perceives the phenomena. Only by maintaining this strict separation of subject-object can Early Music restrict itself in practice to empirical accumulation and research while claiming authenticity in principle as a moral value.

## Adorno on Early Music

There is no better diagnosis of this objectivism than that of the Frankfurt-School critic, Theodor W. Adorno, in the few passages he devotes to “historical performance.”<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Adorno is no friend of Early Music. Having even gone so far as to castigate Stravinsky for his caustic return to a *pseudo*-Baroque idiom—branding it a regression in consciousness—this mandarin of modernism is unlikely to have anything kind to say about Early Music’s wholesale evacuation of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Adorno’s pronouncements pierce forcefully through the well-intentioned but pitiful apologetics that characterizes most discussions of Early Music. Although his conclusions, as we shall see, are quite wrongheaded, his orientation provides an excellent introduction to a more comprehensive theory.

Adorno’s most substantive criticism focuses on the illusive objectivity which underlies the notion of *Werktreue*—loyalty to the musical work. He points out that while no one would claim that the essence of a musical work is tantamount to the sum of historically demonstrable facts surrounding its performance, the “fans of old music” go right ahead claiming that authenticity is guaranteed by reconstructing the relevant instruments, texts, and practices. But in so doing Early Music has no room for crucial nonempirical considerations—such as emotional expression or the meaning of a work—without which, all would agree, music making is inconceivable. As Adorno puts it: “Objectivity is not left over once the subject is subtracted.”<sup>4</sup> More perniciously, he senses that this theoretical exclusion actually encourages the liquidation of subjectivity. That is, since the daily preoccupation of Early Music stresses the objective retrieval of historical prac-

<sup>2</sup> Adorno discusses the matter in three places: (1) in a 1951 article entitled “Bach gegen seine Liebhaber verteidigt” (“Bach Defended Against his Devotees”), later collected in a volume called *Prismen* (Berlin, 1955; Frankfurt, 1967), pp. 178–79, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber as *Prisms* (London, 1967; Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 145–46; (2) in the chapter on “Types of Musical Conduct” from the *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* (Frankfurt, 1973), *Gesammelte Schriften*, XIV, 187–90; trans. E. B. Ashton as *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York, 1976), pp. 9–11; (3) in an article from 1966 entitled “Der Missbrauchte Barock” (“The Abused Baroque”), collected in the volume *Ohne Leitbild* (Frankfurt, 1967), pp. 133–57, esp. pp. 149–55.

<sup>3</sup> *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Tübingen, 1949; Frankfurt, 1975), *Gesammelte Schriften*, XII, 188, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster as *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York, 1973), p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno, *Prismen*, p. 176; *Prisms*, p. 144.

tices, it fosters the attitude that subjectivity in interpretation (whether in performance or in criticism) is irrelevant or, at best, unknowable.

While proudly proclaiming its historical credentials, Early Music manages to overlook some glaring inconsistencies. For example, the concern to reproduce “the Baroque sound” uncritically absolutizes a nineteenth-century concept of orchestration that did not yet exist in the early eighteenth century. In other words, the reconstruction of the original instruments verifiably used by a medieval, Renaissance, or Baroque composer is taken as essential to the meaning of the music before the idea of essential instrumentation becomes historically operable. On a deeper level, Early Music has imposed the notion of authenticity on composers for whom the term is meaningless; in other words, for those who have not yet imagined the metaphysics of Goethe’s *Fassung letzter Hand*, through which the intentioned text becomes discrete from its reproduction.<sup>5</sup> In one sense, then, the historicists are bad historians; they fail to take stock, as do all objectivists, of their own historicity.

Adorno also points out that objectivism tends to relegate questions of aesthetic value and critique to a secondary, if not meaningless, status under the guise of furthering rigorous scholarship. The bedrock of this position is of course the prevailing doctrine of historical relativism, according to which no artistic epoch is regarded as superior to any other. This assertion is in itself not too problematic. But in a neat sleight of hand, the objectivist extends his relativism a step further, so that each work of art mysteriously becomes the equal of its contemporary. We may best observe this tendency in modern musicology, which has produced an enormous apologetic literature designed to rescue the “minor masters.” Often prompted by a search to discover the origins of a genre (e.g. “Jacques Buus wrote the first and longest monothematic *ricercar*”) or the antecedents of a style (e.g. “Sammartini’s symphonies contain the kernel of the mature Classical style”), this *Kleinmeister*-compulsion figures as a leveling device by which all works are reduced to a manifestation of the lowest common denominator. One can easily see how congenial this doctrine (or methodological consequence) is to Early Music, which treats all German Baroque composers by one norm of German “Baroque” performance practice. As Adorno so impudently puts it: “They say Bach, but

<sup>5</sup> See Georg von Dadelsen, “Die ‘Fassung letzter Hand’ in der Musik,” *Acta musicologica*, XXXIII (1961), 1–14.

mean Telemann.”<sup>6</sup> For what we have here is nothing less than a grand *nivellement* of value so that one interprets Bach, for example, only in terms of the most common features of period style.

Adorno tries to cast the objectivist sensibility in a psycho-social mold by seeing it as a form of contemporary *ressentiment*, an angry, puritanical resistance to the reign of emotion prevalent in the reception of the Mainstream Classical repertory. By fusing together Nietzsche and Freud, albeit in a somewhat obscure manner, Adorno has distilled a powerful insight. For although on the surface the Early-Music enthusiast appears as highbrow as the traditional “Classical music” buff, his aesthetic intent is of a wholly different order. One might, for example, say that the Mainstream listener is attracted to music, usually of a late-Romantic hue, because of the low cost of affective output: he feels drained yet fulfilled by identifying with the emotional ebb and flow of the piece. The Early-Music fan, on the other hand, not only curbs his pleasurable response to the music, but brags about his command of authentic historical facts—the justification for the instruments and editions used, for example. Indeed, he is proud *not* to be emoting over Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* and considers his sobriety a mark of superiority. But this somewhat peculiar stance may in fact stem, according to Adorno, from a desire to liquidate Romantic subjectivity, which appears as a form of promiscuity. The irony here is that the puritan has implanted the civilized ban on the uninhibited expression of feelings (the mimetic taboo) directly into the art form whose purpose it was, in the first place, to sublimate it.<sup>7</sup> Music, a cultural outlet for socially imprisoned subjectivity, is then transformed into a place of containment, a prison for feelings. If Adorno is right, then objectivism is not some value-free consumer choice, but, above all, a rationalization for a defensive posture.

The tables are now turned. For, as Adorno sees it, the Early-Music fans are the ones who, in their objectivist zeal, have distorted the great music of the past. As for Bach, “They have made him into a composer for organ festivals in well-preserved Baroque towns, into ideology.”<sup>8</sup> It must be made clear, however, that Adorno is not proposing as a superior alternative the standard neo-Romantic practice of the

<sup>6</sup> Adorno, *Prismen*, p. 177; *Prisms*, p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> On the mimetic taboo in culture generally, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt, 1969), pp. 149–50; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York, 1972), pp. 141–42.

<sup>8</sup> Adorno, *Prismen*, p. 163; *Prisms*, 136.

Mainstream—the Great Conductor leading the swarming chorus and orchestra in enervating renditions of the Passions. Rather he is questioning whether anything was gained by exchanging one distortion for another. (Later we shall see that much was gained.) However, Adorno's solution, if it can be called that, is not really an answer at all but a retreat into the inner sanctum of the Frankfurt Institute. For from within this theoretical sanctuary it is easy to condemn every contemporary attempt to perform Bach as ideologically tainted. Adorno prefers instead to see Schoenberg and Webern as the true interpreters of Bach, for having channeled their engagement with the past into “contemporary” orchestrations of his keyboard works, they remain “loyal to his heritage by breaking faith with it.”<sup>9</sup> They then are Bach's true devotees. This displacement from reception onto production (that is, from performance onto composition) is a neat trick, but it will delude no one. And yet, Adorno may have no other choice. For if Early Music is grounded in a neurotic need to repress feelings, how can it be anything more than a dredging operation for historical residue?

Before recoiling from Adorno (either in shock or in amusement), one ought to localize the source of his discomfort. For Adorno did not know Early Music as it blossomed in the late 1960s and 1970s but confronted the more barbaric gropings of the 1950s and a bit beyond. (He died in 1969.) This was the period of the “sewing-machine” style, sometimes called the “Vivaldi revival,” when German chamber orchestras enthusiastically took up “terraced dynamics,” when historically minded conductors urged players to stop “phrasing,” and when repeat signs in the music occasioned a blaze of premeditated embellishments. “Motoric rhythms,” it seemed, revealed a new species of musical gratification—the freedom from feeling. “Let the music speak for itself” was the battle cry. In practice: substitute brittle harpsichords for grandiloquent Steinways, pure Baroque organs for lush Romantic ones, cherubic choirboys for wobbly *prime donne*, intimate ensembles for overblown orchestras, the *Urtext* for doctored editions, then one is true to Bach (or whomever) and his intentions. The musical results of this early purism were so sterile that we can hardly criticize Adorno for having missed the seeds of a critical new development. Instead, he focused insightfully on the grimaced faces of the sanctimonious participants.

<sup>9</sup> Adorno, *Prismen*, p. 179.



But, Adorno aside, the question remains whether the situation in Early Music today differs so fundamentally from that of the 1950s. The latter-day Early-Music enthusiast will likely object: "Wait just a moment! We've come a long way since the 1950s." In this he is surely right. Of course one would not want to commit a genetic fallacy, mistaking the origin of a phenomenon for its subsequent form. On the other hand, one must grant that the objectivist program of authenticity and its related relativism remain wholly intact. It is merely the sum of facts about instruments, practices, and circumstances which has swelled: the method *appears* more impressive, even sophisticated. But if we honestly evaluate the artistic quality of most Early-Music performances, then there are ample instances of wretched renditions ground out by stony-faced champions of authenticity to grant to Adorno's diagnosis a good measure of truth.

What Adorno cannot account for—and this is a crucial point—are Early Music's manifest successes. His theory is, for example, unable to deal with a performer such as Gustav Leonhardt. For here is someone who has read the treatises, consulted the proper sources, is technically without par, yet arrives at thought-provoking radical interpretations. Perhaps, one could say with no small irony, Adorno has suspended his own dialectic. For I hope to show that it was this same deception in the realm of ideas—the objectivist program of authenticity—which fostered, paradoxically, one of the more critical developments in twentieth-century music. But one does not discover the real advances of Early Music, as most would have it, in the outward signs of historicity—the "original" instruments, verifiable performing forces, or text-critical editions—but in the revised operations in the minds of the players. This means that the most crucial interpretive sectors of performance—articulation, phrasing, tempo, rhythm, and tone production—do not remain metaphysical universals beyond the grasp of history but emerge as weapons that force Mainstream culture to confront its own historicity. At its most successful, Early Music does not return to the past at all but reconstructs the musical object in the here and now, enabling a new and hitherto silenced subject to speak. To survey and connect these seemingly discrete moments within Early Music is, as I see it, the aim of an adequate theory.

### The Birth of Early Music and the Repression of the Present

The arrival of Early Music coincided with the most profound crisis in European musical culture in which the middle-class public

soundly repudiated an avant-garde that dared to forsake traditional tonality. One might say that both Early Music and early modernism occupy nearly analogous positions with regard to the Mainstream. Whereas the avant-garde strode forward in advancing the cause of historical time, Early Music took an equidistant leap in the opposite direction. But while the avant-garde could not fail to recognize the grave consequences of its actions, Early Music was blissfully ignorant of its historical status. For to maintain equilibrium in a mythical kingdom of the past, replete with courtly values and (palpably) harmonious relations, Early Music paid a price: it forcibly repressed every sign of the present.

This is not to say that Early Music was pointedly antimodernist. Its day-to-day activity, with few exceptions, made sure to brush away the problems of tortured humanity, like all forms of antiquarianism, into the recesses of the unconscious. What it promised was a sense of stability, an illusion of serenity, a “haven in the heartless world.” Neither was Early Music in any sense a Neo-Classic movement. It was not remotely interested in converting living composers to the joys of pre-Romantic idioms. Nor was it even concerned to integrate itself into Mainstream institutions: from the first it saw itself as something apart from the real world. Indeed, Early Music drew a wondrous curtain on reality and celebrated its devotion to the past by resurrecting the relics of that beckoning age—the “antique” instruments themselves. To the same extent, then, that “modern music” circa 1890-1914 exposed the raw nerve of social disharmony in the form of the neurotic utterance, Early Music redressed the imbalance by repressing the nightmarish present and mounting a grand restoration of the glorious past. Whereas the Mainstream had said “no” to modernism, Early Music forgot it was traumatized.

This kind of amnesia surfaces in the work of Arnold Dolmetsch, perhaps the most famous pioneer in Early Music. For despite his enormous pretensions to historical accuracy and empirical method,<sup>10</sup> one sometimes gets the impression that he not only wished to revive the past, but actually to improve on it. Take, for example, his reconstruction of the harpsichord in a now-forgotten account from the 1930s by his pupil Robert Donington.<sup>11</sup> We learn, perhaps to our

<sup>10</sup> Dolmetsch's major work was his *Interpretation of the Music of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1915).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Donington, *The Work and Ideas of Arnold Dolmetsch* (Haslemere, 1932), p. 8.

surprise, that Dolmetsch was not entirely happy with his reconstructive labors. Even after scrupulously rebuilding a historical copy, it seems that

the old harpsichord has certain limitations [and produces] a jangle, slight in the treble but audible in the bass. [Moreover, the] use of the damper-raising pedal (corresponding to the sustaining pedal of the piano) is rendered impracticable, precluding a number of effects of great musical value.

The solution:

[Dolmetsch's] new instruments, which remedy these historical oversights, have proved both purer and more sustained than any previous harpsichord.<sup>12</sup>

One could easily make light of Dolmetsch's "fidelity" to history, but I find much more interesting Donington's view that the Dolmetsch "improvements" are good common sense. Progress marches on, and it is irrelevant that two hundred years have meanwhile intervened. Not only, then, is the repudiation of the world as is forgotten but also the grand retreat itself.

### Early Music as Defamiliarization

How ironic, then, that Early Music, cowering from harsh reality, ought to turn around and administer the same shock which, at its inception, it sought to stifle. For there is no escaping a relatively recent trend in which critics treat Early Music as if it were a rebellious and rampaging modernism. Of course this metamorphosis from traumatized refugee to agent provocateur was a gradual process. But beginning in the 1970s it became clear that Early Music was not a harmless bit of antiquarianism but a sweeping movement able to rock the foundations of Mainstream musical culture. For what had been thought of as durable and traditional masterpieces, especially of Baroque music, became alienated, indeed "defamiliarized" in a disturbing departure from expected norms. I refer here to the *priëm ostranenie* ("device of making strange") made famous by the Russian Formalists. For in a similar way to the processes of literary production, the operations performed by Early Music "tear the object out of its habitual context . . . and force a heightened awareness."<sup>13</sup> One perceives this most vividly in Early Music's ability to inflect long melodic

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism* (The Hague, 1955; New Haven, 1981), pp. 176–77. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 50–54.

lines with a series of mercurial gestures, to defuse grandiose cadences into grammatical ending points, to endow dance rhythms with unexpected lilts and graces, and to deploy a wide variety of tonal colors in new ways. The Mainstream listener, who believes his preferred masterpieces forever safe from tampering, is now compelled to sit impotently by as an unwitting iconoclast knocks down his favorite Classical knick-knacks, reminding him precisely of that fractured frame of mind, which, with Great Music, he hoped to forget.

Defamiliarization, moreover, displaces the attention from the interpreter onto the composition. Consider, for example, the way one usually judges performances of, say, the Elgar Cello Concerto (Casals, Fournier, Rostropovitch, DuPré). Then contrast this with the usual manner of reviewing performances of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos (either a Mainstream or an Early-Music rendition). With the Elgar, we admire (or object to) various "interpretations" based on the performer's approach to sound, tempo, Romantic feeling, and taste. What is striking is that any particular judgment leaves the Elgar concerto untouched. Questions regarding its meaning or value rarely appear on the agenda. Not so with our Early Musicians tampering with the Brandenburg Concertos. The choice between performing styles here is anything but value free, for preferring one over the other amounts to a manifesto *pro* or *contra* authenticity. Are you in favor of respecting Bach's intentions, or are you a proponent of the *élan vital*? The aesthetic evaluation here is irrelevant: the point is that the "meaning" of J. S. Bach gets mentioned in the first place. All at once, it becomes most important to take sides: you either subscribe to authenticity *tout court*, seek compromises to appease the purists, or else put up with inauthentic renditions of famous Baroque music while making appropriate apologies for moral weaknesses in this area should you be taken to task.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Interesting in this regard is an article in *The New York Times*, March 21, 1982, entitled "The Reborn Bach Aria Group." "The Bach Aria Group plays on modern instruments. 'We all have gratitude and admiration for people like Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who have done so much work with authentic instruments and performances,' says Mr. [Samuel] Baron. But it does not mean that his is the only way. You don't have to reconstruct the Globe Theatre to present a meaningful Shakespeare performance. . . . My personal hero was Karl Richter, the German conductor, who did so much to clean up Bach performance practices. Yet I felt sad that at the end of his life he had to defend himself [because he was] behind the times in matters of authenticity. . . . [Even] without going to the old instruments, there's a lot of scrubbing up to do." In other words, the guilty modern player realizes he had better rid himself of outmoded practices. But note that Early Music is not really a respected colleague but an inimical adversary.

Through the logic of defamiliarization, Early Music turns around, forgets the moment of its genesis, and repeats (albeit in muted form) the provocation incited by its cultural adversary: it co-opts the defiant scream of the early avant-garde and itself becomes a threat to established musical values. Perhaps this disruption can be explained as a repetition compulsion. Freud describes the analysand's predicament in this way: "He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of . . . *remembering* it as something belonging to the past."<sup>15</sup> Why Early Music should need to forget its original *raison d'être* is not hard to imagine. After all, who today would freely admit the wish to live as a fixture in an antique shop, a perhaps valuable but dead museum piece? Who, moreover, would enjoy conceding that he has given up on any meaningful contemporary art, and (what is worse) that he secretly wishes to annihilate the specter of modernism? Thus there are perfectly plausible reasons why fantasies of this order are concealed beneath such comfortable webs as authenticity and the composer's intentions. We can also understand why defamiliarization in Early Music is not ordinarily accorded its due recognition: the disruption was unintentional.

### The Language of Resistance

To the extent that defamiliarization within Early Music mimicked the provocation first voiced by the avant-garde, it has also encouraged similar forms of resistance. On the surface, this resistance manifests itself in the sober calls for moderation: to revive historical performance is admirable to a point, but not if it becomes fanatic. Yet if we examine the metaphors used in these invocations to the golden mean, it appears that Early Music has committed an inexcusable violation of social mores, as if it has exhibited some horrible disease in polite society. The affront then demands some act of censure in order to expose it, a public rebuke which the critic rationalizes as social responsibility.

Consider first two newspaper reviews of works by Schoenberg performed during 1913–14:

Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony—self-torture of a flagellant who whips himself with a cat-o'-nine-tails while cursing himself! When a conglomeration of horns

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Leipzig, Vienna, Zurich, 1920); rev. ed. trans. James Strachey (London, 1961), p. 12.

pushes upwards through the strings, it sounds like the words, "You, monster!" A hideous modern sound of the scourge! Schoenberg's unappeasable nature is made clear: reckless self-mutilation and a reckless admission: "I am like that!" A sort of cat-music, whining, wailing, desperate. . . . Schoenberg is uncontrolled. . . . He bares his breast in a fury of penitence and shows his scars—and the spectacle is shocking. And yet, if people mention Brahms's chastity, one ought to speak of Schoenberg's shamelessness. [Ernst Decsey, (Berlin) *Signale*, Feb. 4, 1914]<sup>16</sup>

Or else:

I fear and dislike the music of Arnold Schoenberg. . . . It is the decomposition of the art, I thought, as I held myself in my seat. . . . What did I hear? At first, the sound of delicate china shivering into a thousand luminous fragments. In the welter of tonalities that bruised each other as they passed and repassed, in the preliminary group of enharmonies that almost make the nose bleed and the eyes water, the scalp to freeze, I could not get a central grip on myself. Schoenberg is the cruelest of all composers for he mingles with his music sharp daggers at white heat, with which he pares away tiny slices of his victim's flesh. Anon he twists the knife in the fresh wound and you receive another horrible thrill. . . . Every composer has his aura; the aura of Arnold Schoenberg is, for me, the aura of original depravity, of subtle ugliness, of basest egoism, of hatred and contempt, of cruelty, and of the mystic grandiose. . . . If such music making is ever to become accepted, then I long for Death the Releaser.<sup>17</sup>

There is, I regret to say, not much in Early-Music criticism that rivals the honesty and literary competence in these two texts.<sup>18</sup> But a superior competitor is found in Gérard Zwang, a French surgeon and self-proclaimed sexologist, who, in his book of 1977, *A Contre-Bruit*, launches an unprecedented attack on the infamy of Early Music.<sup>19</sup> Zwang complains that French National Radio has succumbed to a condition he calls "Nécrobaroque." In responding to the allures of the authenticity craze, he claims, the radio has propagated three evils: boys supplant women in church choirs, period instruments replace "modern" ones, and worst of all musicians tune to Baroque pitch (a

<sup>16</sup> Cited and translated by Nicholas Slonimsky in his *Lexicon of Musical Invective* (New York, 1952), pp. 156–57. I have modified the translation slightly.

<sup>17</sup> James Gibbons Huneker, *The New York Times*, Jan. 19, 1913. Quoted in Slonimsky, pp. 153–54. Neither Decsey nor Huneker were ordinary philistines: Decsey was a pupil of Bruckner and an important Austrian writer on music. Huneker popularized the works of Richard Strauss, and counted among his friends G. B. Shaw and Havelock Ellis.

<sup>18</sup> Only in the early days when, for example, a diary entry of two Victorian ladies records attending a Dolmetsch concert in 1892. They describe "toothache calling unto toothache . . . physical torture . . . nothing divine in it." Cited in Margaret Campbell, *Dolmetsch: The Man and his Music* (Seattle, 1975), p. 69. Considering Dolmetsch's infamous dilettantism, this may simply be accurate reportage.

<sup>19</sup> Gérard Zwang, *A Contre-bruit* (Paris, 1977).

semitone below contemporary). Here is a sample of Zwang's tirade against Early Music:

A grandiose project that only ends in . . . putting back into circulation musical vehicles which ought never to have left the garage. . . . That is, old nails, bagpipes, jew's harps, screeching fiddles, out-of tune cigar-boxes . . . which only proliferate like malignant tumors in the poor body of Music instead of gracing attics and flea markets. . . . All this worthless antiquarianism is vitiated by a defect rendering it null and void: they play a half-step below pitch. And this, no (real) musician can bear. . . . Lucky are those music lovers with relative pitch. For the others, it is impossible to listen without discomfort, nausea, without clenching one's teeth.

### His solution:

I say it in all tranquillity. Gustav Leonhardt and consort, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and sons, Frans Bruggen and assistant fifers, Kuijken & Co. are the polluters of the musical environment. They create anti-art, anti-music. . . . And it is with the greatest joy that [I] would see all those guilty of musical outrages thrown into prison. Imprisonment must be coupled with the destruction, by fire, of those old buggies which they have the effrontery to call musical instruments.<sup>20</sup>

More than sixty years separate Zwang from Decsey and Huneker, yet the strident tone and the array of metaphors are strikingly similar. Pathology is most frequent among the images, with torture, murder, sin, and criminality following close behind. Zwang's own specialties include references to war, terrorism, and pollution, all of which enrich an already fertile field. Now it is clear why Schoenberg's critics respond to him the way they do. With Zwang, however, the "symptoms"—low pitch, instrumental and vocal sonorities per se—are simply too trivial to account for his uncontrolled anger. Instead, it appears that Zwang is victimized by a process of musical defamiliarization which has robbed him of prized possessions.<sup>21</sup> It is less the Baroque violin that upsets Zwang's sensibilities than the Baroque violinist's tinkering with musical fundamentals.<sup>22</sup> For Early Music

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 15, 16.

<sup>21</sup> His complaints center consistently on repertory which he already knew; he abuses, moreover, not the typically mediocre Early-Music dilettante but the leading players of the advance guard.

<sup>22</sup> An example would be Early Music's use of vibrato which it sees as an additive ingredient similar to an ornament. Since vibrato in Mainstream practice is omnipresent, it is tautological, or to use Roman Jakobson's term, "unmarked" with respect to expression: since it always refers to individual warmth, it is almost meaningless. In Early Music, on the other hand, vibrato takes on a "marked" value which enlarges the field of expression: *senza vibrato* no longer has to mean *senza espressione* as in even advanced contemporary music. Early Music therefore criticizes the notion of expressivity as one metaphysical unit either present or absent, viewing it instead as a range of emotions experienced by the musical subject.

enables a powerful and sometimes disturbing insight into a historical subject not yet regimented by the dictates of the culture industry, a subject located beyond the epistemological horizon of conventional “expressivity.” In addition, it serves to undermine the mythic qualities of harmony and restitution which neo-Romantic culture had imputed to Baroque music. This, then, is perhaps why Schoenberg’s Chamber Symphony of 1906 and Leonhardt’s Bach in 1977 wreak similar havoc.

### Musicology *contra* Early Music

It is the musicological community, however, which offers the most substantive resistance to Early Music. This may seem paradoxical. After all, the scholars were the ones who had nurtured Early Music by discovering the musical repertoires comprising it, by editing them so rigorously, and by publishing the treatises. But above all the musicologists championed the historicist view that music was conditioned by its time. From here it was but a short step to the necessary conclusion: Baroque music requires Baroque performance practice. Indeed, it was largely through musicological lobbying (or so the story goes) that Bach-Stokowski was deleted from symphony programs in the first place. But beginning in the 1960s, it became clear that the Early-Music progeny were coming into conflict with the implicit goals of postwar musicology: accumulating, venerating, and (sometimes) embalming the European cultural heritage.<sup>23</sup>

The most significant form of musicological critique thrives on reprimanding Early Music for its inadequate scholarship: that the specific practices which Early-Music adherents have read about in treatises and seen confirmed in the musical notation are based on a faulty logic. The most visible proponent of this view is undoubtedly Frederick Neumann, who has claimed since the 1960s that several important conventions of Early Music are historical misinterpretations.<sup>24</sup> According to him Early Music has fallen prey to a “childhood disease” (again, pathology!) which

<sup>23</sup> All these activities are understandable responses to the demotion of high culture by contemporary society. The question is whether apologetics, however appropriate, is methodologically justifiable. Being limited to the positive, this orientation is often unable to deal with truth. On this point see Adorno, *Philosophie*, p. 33; *Philosophy*, p. 26. But for a brilliant antidote to Adorno’s negativity, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, Bd. 1: *Versuche im Feld der ästhetischen Erfahrung* (Munich, 1977), trans. Michael Shaw, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis, 1982), pp. 13–21.

<sup>24</sup> For a list of Neumann’s publications, see his biography in *The New Grove*.



is caused by a somewhat naïve trust in the infallibility of historical treatises, the symptoms of [which] are manifested in a faulty interpretation of these documents.<sup>25</sup>

Neumann's strategy is to show how the evidence of the treatises does not warrant the conventional practices of Early Music. For instance, he claims that the overdotting of French overtures, a prominent trademark of Early Music, is a myth invented by Dolmetsch. Not only do the witnesses who allude to it (such as J. J. Quantz) arrive too late to confirm a Baroque practice, but even notational evidence which points to overdotting argues for the contrary—that composers had to prescribe it because a convention never existed. Although it is not often made explicit, Neumann's dismissal of Early Music's prized conventions gives the clear impression that "modern" players are perfectly justified in retaining the received wisdom of the Mainstream—"Play as written!"—since so-called historical performance is a hoax.

This is why, in a sense, Neumann stresses that the lesson his work teaches outweighs the importance of his findings. As he puts it:

When we play the overtures, sarabandes, chaconnes, etc. of Lully, Rameau, Handel and Bach, it is a mistake to deprive them of their majestic dignity in favor of the frantic style of jerks and jolts. [He is referring here to overdotting in French overtures.] In any case, for many listeners a prolonged series of such jerks and jolts can be rather irritating. Others might find such a style stimulating, perhaps because it reflects the nervous tensions of our age; they have the privilege of their taste, but must cease the claim of historical authenticity.<sup>26</sup>

From the range of metaphors, one would think that Early Music is some revolutionary force trying to topple the *ancien régime*. Not only does Early Music dethrone the monarchs ("depriving them of their majestic dignity"); it compels them to do a sort of rock-and-roll (the twofold "jerks and jolts"). The key figure here is surely Bach, whom Neumann has taken special pains to protect from the suggestion that his overtures ought to be dotted, that inequality ought to apply in his music, or that his trills ought regularly to begin from the upper neighbor. Even the title of Neumann's recent monograph is revealing: *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music with Special Emphasis on J. S. Bach* (Princeton, 1978). No doubt Bach is the centerpiece of much twentieth-century work in performance practice,

<sup>25</sup> Neumann, "The dotted note and the so-called French style," *Early Music*, V (1977), 311, trans. Raymond Harris and Edmund Shay. The article first appeared in French in the *Revue de musicologie*, LI (1965).

<sup>26</sup> Neumann, "The dotted note," p. 323.

but the “special emphasis” alludes to his almost iconlike status: Bach is viewed as a monument, which, if defaced, must contend with the wrath of the worshippers. This is why the tone of Neumann’s critique is so formidable.

But tone is not substance, and that is why this reading of Neumann’s motivations in no way endangers his argument. Therefore, to disarm Neumann means to examine his methodological premises. But by this I do not only mean cataloging errors in his logic.<sup>27</sup> For Neumann’s strength lies in his claim that Early Music lacks the empirical support to prove *its* argument. But the blame lies less with insufficient evidence than with Early Music’s reliance on the empiricist methodology in the first place. Specifically, Early Music has been forced by its own fetish for the historically accurate “fact” to succumb to the debatable view that empiricism saves all, that only the most cautious inferences may be drawn from the “evidence,” and that only that which is demonstrable by verifiable data (the neo-positivist twist) is admissible.

But if we look at the real development of Early Music, we do not find passive bodies of facts inducing careful inferences. Instead there have been musicians coming up with ever-changing theories to explain what they were reading in the treatises, finding in the notation, and learning about the instruments. Not only is the empiricist methodology unhelpful in the study of performance practice: it was never a model for the progress of Early Music.<sup>28</sup> Instead, historical performance must be recognized as an evolving and necessarily incomplete paradigm rather than as a set of documented index cards set atop inferences culled from freshman logic texts. Viewed this way, Neumann no longer poses such a threat, since he can merely knock down straw men, and offer instead the much touted “freedom” of Mainstream conventions. What he contributes, on the other hand, are useful anomalies that oblige Early Music to refine its hypotheses, rejecting a powerful theory only when it can be replaced with something better.

<sup>27</sup> David Fuller has done a witty job of this in an article entitled “Dotting, the ‘French Style’ and Frederick Neumann’s Counter-Reformation,” *Early Music*, V (1977), 517–43. The religious metaphor is particularly apt, for what better way to describe Early Music than as a Reformation—the return to the true religion, the idols removed from church, and even the theses nailed to the door. The Jesuitical Neumann plies sophistical arguments designed to confound the faithful and reinstate the supremacy of Mother Church.

<sup>28</sup> See, in this regard, Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London, 1975) and *Science in a Free Society* (London, 1978), and also Allan R. Keiler, “The Empiricist Illusion: Narmour’s *Beyond Schenkerism*,” in *Perspectives of New Music*, XVII (1978), 161–95.

## Early Music and the Aesthetic of Novelty

The repertoires of medieval and Renaissance music, unlike Baroque and Classical music, had of course never participated in the phase of defamiliarization, for they had never been familiar in the first place. Instead, one might consider how they gave a new lease on life to the traditional aesthetic category of novelty. According to this historical impulse, the *objet d'art*, like the commodity, is required perpetually to regenerate itself in a new guise. Built into this important motor in the history of art are, at first, a sense of "progress" in the area of taste and, later, a form of planned obsolescence. But it was of course early twentieth-century modernism which wreaked such havoc with the aesthetic of novelty, confronting it with its own undesirable consequences—innovative artworks which conflicted directly with an opposed aesthetic of gratification. Thus, although the stylistic development of the avant-garde was conceived as eminently rational (the Schoenbergs and Co. continually insisted on their direct links with the past)<sup>29</sup> the European middle classes took the path of least resistance and dedicated themselves to a predictable standard repertoire.

If we locate the revival of medieval and Renaissance music in this historical condition (which, tellingly, has changed little over the course of this century), then it becomes clear that this sector of Early Music kills two birds with one stone. First, it promises progress by producing an ever-"new" source of musical rarities for the future. And second, it promises to be diverting and pleasurable. Thus, if you are concerned that the Philharmonic has programmed Brahms's Second Symphony for the third time this season, you can attend an Early-Music concert, where many repertoires are still under heavy excavation and prospects for a regular supply of historical ore remain excellent.

Along with this reconciliation of novelty and gratification go all the latter-day accoutrements of the commodity: the exaggeration and deception of advertising; the promise of the good life; the hint of piquancy; the demotion of aesthetic quality; and the precipitous drop in artistic *niveau*. These themes can be readily observed in a newspaper blurb announcing a subscription series to the Waverly Consort ("America's foremost early music ensemble") in which I have italicized items of interest. Note how peculiar this language would sound

<sup>29</sup> Or, as Charles Wuorinen put it in 1975: "Credo in unam musicam." Liner notes to String Trio et al., Nonesuch H-71319.

in a notice for a Mainstream chamber-music series. The Waverly series, entitled “Italia Mia,” features:

Four *brand new* and *exciting* programs—*saluting* five centuries of great Italian music and the seven *colorful* and historic cities in which it flourished . . . at the *courts of the Medici*, Sforzas and Gonzagas . . . under Brunelleschi’s *fantastic* dome for Santa Maria del Fiore or Michelangelo’s *glorious* ceiling for the Sistine Chapel . . . in the *mosaic vastness* of San Marco, the *gilded palazzi* along the *Grand Canal* and the *jewel-box* theatre of La Fenice. 10 *Brilliantly Gifted* Solo Singers and Players, 50 Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque *instruments*, including viola da gamba—vielle—nun’s fiddle—rebec—lute—vihuela—theorbo—*sackbut*—gemshorn—cornetto—oud—shawm—*rauschpfeife*—citole—dulcian—psaltery . . . For the past eight seasons the Waverly Consort’s Alice Tully Hall series has been *sold out* by subscription *six months in advance*, with *hundreds* turned away at the box office. To share the *treasurable experience* of the 1982–83 season, *subscribe NOW* and *avoid disappointment*.<sup>30</sup>

### Early Music and the Flight from Envy

The failure to confront the cultural products of one’s own time is a feature which Early Music shares, by and large, with the Mainstream. Where they differ most pointedly is in their response to the problem of social envy. Whereas the Mainstream is forced by the competitive nature of society to deal, for better or for worse, with notions of value—both the principal actors and the musical objects are publicly recognized as salable commodities—Early Music likes to pretend that the problem does not exist. Denying envy, however, is hardly an antidote. On the contrary, the denial is costly. For what often appears as a pleasant diversion from present-day tensions, a utopian romp through the courts of Europe, may in fact introduce, by way of music, conditions which are far more coercive than those that Early Music sought to escape in the first place. Having first celebrated its liberation, Early Music turns around and proffers a more secure set of chains. By considering the repression of envy, it becomes possible to explain why Early Music so often seems to take on the trappings of a severe monastic order, a disguise which otherwise eludes analysis.

Let us consider the status of envy within other sectors of serious music.<sup>31</sup> For the contemporary “advanced” composer, for example,

<sup>30</sup> *The New York Times*, May 16, 1982.

<sup>31</sup> The standard work on the sociology of envy is Helmut Schoeck, *Der Neid* (Freiburg, 1966), trans. Michael Glenny and Betsy Ross as *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York, 1969). Freud treats the question of social envy briefly in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (London, 1959). Melanie Klein’s *Envy and Gratitude* attempts to augment psychoanalytic thinking on this point.

the encounter with envy is simply unavoidable. Today's composer realizes from the start that mass adoration is not in the cards. He has therefore compensated for his envious desires vis-à-vis successful "entertainers" before the first drop of ink falls on the page. This may take the form of a snobbish elitism ("Who cares if you listen?"),<sup>32</sup> a vengeful vigil awaiting the vindication of posterity, or a retreat into the hermetic cocoon of New-Music circles, where the injured give one another comfort. Within Mainstream Classical music, too, envy and its related guilt are obvious. Performers across the social spectrum must struggle with auditions, juries, competitions—not to mention managers, contractors, and critics. In response, the "artist" feels compelled to achieve at the expense of his colleagues, to admire (i.e. envy) his superiors, and feel a measure of guilt about those whom he has vanquished. Although most musicians would not put it in these terms, envy, a pervasive feature of all social life, cannot fail to be a daily fact of life in Mainstream musical culture.

It was probably capitalist development of the late Middle Ages which first brought envy into special prominence in the West. First it legitimized the covetous wish for the desired object through the ideology of the marketplace, making accumulation ("enlightened self-interest") tantamount to social progress. It later masked the guilt (caused by the fantastic enactment of the envious desire as much as from the discomfort of being envied) with the idea of formal equality. The social contract that resulted requires that envy be omnipresent at the same time that its identity remain covert. Perhaps this is why, in American English for example, the historical sense of "envy" has either been neutralized (as in: "I envy you your trip to Europe") or confused with jealousy (which requires a third party). With either meaning, the ugly wish to see the downfall of someone perceived as superior is obscured, either by suppressing the original definition or by masking it under the sign of an acceptable Romantic triangle.<sup>33</sup>

Within the sphere of artistic production, our culture also tends to

<sup>32</sup> The title of an article by Milton Babbitt, *High Fidelity*, VIII (1959), 38. The original title, "The Composer as Specialist," was deleted by the magazine and the now infamous title substituted without the author's permission (private communication from Milton Babbitt). Although it has little to do with the substance of Babbitt's article, the catchier phrase has achieved a kind of notoriety and can serve as an exaggerated emblem standing for the tragic isolation of the contemporary composer.

<sup>33</sup> Rescuing the distressed damsel from a brutish suitor is a preferable fantasy to disposing of a secretly envied enemy whose very existence is galling.

underestimate the creative power of envy. For just as envy underwrites the accumulation of capital, it also sponsors that particular form of artistic progress prevalent in the West since the Renaissance: learn the master's craft, admire (envy) him, and then outdo him (read: do him in). The generally destructive and inhibiting effect of the "evil eye of envy" is thereby transformed into a productive act, whose identifying sign is the presence of something "new."<sup>34</sup>

If the musical Mainstream represents, as it were, an idealized version of postindustrial society, with its transactions designed to coordinate and rechannel the harmful effects of envy, then Early Music must be characterized as a special psychological haven where envy is not supposed to exist. It is as if Early Music signals a return to a presumed state of innocence before envy became institutionalized as the motor of social progress. A Brechtian table comparing the dominant social code of Early Music with that of the Mainstream highlights these differences in a revealing way:

## Early Music

1. The conductor is banished.
2. All members of the ensemble are equal.
3. Ensemble members play a number of instruments, sometimes sing, and commonly exchange roles.
4. Symptomatic grouping: the consort—like-minded members of a harmonious family.
5. Virtuosity is not a set goal and is implicitly discouraged.
6. Technical level of professionals is commonly mediocre.
7. The audience (often amateurs) may play the same repertory at home.
8. The audience identifies with the performers.

## Musical Mainstream

1. The conductor is the symbol of authority, stature, and social difference.
2. The orchestra is organized in a hierarchy.
3. The "division of labor" is strictly defined, with one player per part.
4. Symptomatic grouping: the concerto—opposing forces struggling for control; later, the one against the many.
5. Virtuosity defines the professional.
6. Technical standards are high and competitive.
7. The audience marvels at the technical demands of the repertory.
8. The audience idealizes the performers.

<sup>34</sup> Beethoven's relationship to Haydn, for example, particularly as depicted in Maynard Solomon's *Beethoven* (New York, 1977), typifies the process I am referring to.

## Early Music

9. Programs are packed with homogeneous works and are often dull.

10. Critics report on the instruments, the composers, pieces and that "a good time was had by all."

## Musical Mainstream

9. Programs contain contrasting items and are designed around a climax.

10. Critics comment on the performer and his interpretation.

As this schematic comparison makes clear, Early Music attempts to hold envious desires in check by negating every sign of social difference. It is as if, with the absence of the tyrannical father-master (who epitomizes difference), the children can live together in peace and fellowship. Some form of this process, in which social envy is transformed into group solidarity, occurs no doubt in all social formations. Early Music simply displays a superior talent in this regard, but with an important difference: the repression of envy leaves in its wake an enforced routine and a uniform mediocrity. The colorless and suffocating atmosphere encountered so often in Early-Music performances is therefore not merely the result of inferior technique but the price paid for avoiding the reality of envy.<sup>35</sup>

## Early Music and "the Rules"

Consciously, this "aetiology of the Early-Music complex" depends on a peculiar understanding of performance practice, that it is in fact a set of rules which guarantees correct musical behavior. But these rules—to the extent that theories about historical performance can be discussed as a coherent set—are subject to a precarious dialectic: they define Early Music at the same time that they endanger its viability as critique.

Viewed from outside Early Music, the rules appear as a secret, powerful code, a concrete yet somehow inscrutable body of knowledge which assures correct interpretation. As such, they wield enormous

<sup>35</sup> The seemingly improved standards of Early Music during the last few years are probably due less to real technical progress than to an influx of conservatory-trained musicians joining the ranks in the hope of escaping the debilitating struggle for existence on the "outside." These refugees from the Mainstream believe they have eluded the cut-throat competition of the "real world." But their new-found freedom is largely illusory.

influence on Mainstream musicians, who would like nothing better than to get their hands on the code and know the awful truth.<sup>36</sup> In fact they really wish to halt the threatening advance of Early Music through a neat expropriation of its secrets. By acquiring the rules, it seems—particularly those that deal with marginally unimportant areas such as ornamentation—these Mainstreamers will be able to take a comfortable middle road, keep to their modern instruments, retain their views on phrasing and articulation, and forestall criticism by the growing number of Early-Music adherents. But try as they may, something is always amiss: the rules do not work well on modern instruments and often seem contradictory and counterintuitive. The Mainstream musician then becomes resentful: “Since music is a living art, I reserve the right to make my interpretations relevant to modern audiences.” Of course the appeal to relevance is somewhat disingenuous, considering that “contemporary” ideas are warmed-over practices of Vienna in the 1920s prettied up by the perfectionism of the recording industry. No matter. The rules of Early Music have such a prestige and jurisdiction that they must be circumvented by an uneasy compromise or rejected outright.

This special status which the Mainstream grants to the rules cannot but be a source of pride to Early Musicians who have sworn the oath of allegiance. No need now to take a daring interpretive leap; proper application of the rules guarantees accurate “period style.” The rules also ensure identity by difference: we have something you lack. Historically, of course, the recovery of the rules had been integral to the reconstitution of the musical object. But now, it seems, the rules have lost their experimental potential and become dogma, dispensed as an elixir transporting the rankest amateur into authentic, historical time.

Here again Early Music differs from the Mainstream. The modern violinist in the conservatory working up the Sibelius concerto believes he is expressing his innermost feelings through the music. The typical Early Musician, on the contrary, distrusts his intuitive impulses as a harmful residue of a Mainstream upbringing. Instead, he reads the proper treatises, invests in expensive facsimiles, consults source-critical editions, and worries that he is deviating from the proper style. The player soon comes to fear the rules as harsh proscriptions. Style

<sup>36</sup> This is partly to compensate for the guilt they feel at their irreverence toward the musical texts: they too are trained to view art as moral improvement.



no longer elucidates but only inhibits. This is why, within much of Early Music, experimentation is discouraged, and deviance from the norms is branded heresy.

### The Revolt of the Advance Guard

The hegemony of the rules in Early Music has meanwhile come to be repudiated by the leading musicians in the movement. This was bound to happen: if they spoke honestly, they would admit that they had never regarded performance practice as anything more than an initial stimulus to break with the Mainstream. But at least from the pronouncements of the 1960s, it certainly seemed as if these players had discovered a science of interpretation. They were the ones, after all, who had exploited the slogans of "authenticity," "original instruments," "first version," and "composer's intentions." Perhaps these gimmicks of advertising were once useful, but they have backfired now that they have become common property. On the other hand, the advance guard has now overcompensated in the opposite direction. (They were also tired of the accusation that they were unfeeling antiquarians.) Hence: "The more I read the treatises the less I know." And as often: "I play only from the heart."

These disclaimers, while appearing to contradict the underpinnings of Early Music, can be safely disregarded. For the proof of the pudding lies not with rationalizations *post festum* but with the status of the performances. And here, in my judgment, the advance guard has continued an admirable tradition: funneling the raw material informed by historical critique through the contemporary subject to express something new and complex. If the outward signs of revolt are symptomatic, they attest to a growing rift between professional and amateur. This distance may in fact prove useful in safeguarding the independence of the antiobjectivists. For those in the advance guard have programmatically avoided preordained formulas, which is why their insights resist duplication by students. At best, they have created an inimitable antistyle.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The constraints on the future development of the advance guard stem largely from the demands of the recording industry, which encourages technical flawlessness and homogeneous expression "in the age of mechanical reproduction." Once the performer is preoccupied with "sound for sound's sake" it becomes difficult to formulate novel approaches to interpretation. One wonders if the critical moment of Early Music has passed.

## Early Music as Hermeneutics

In circumscribing the scope of this investigation, I drew a distinction between Early Music as a social ensemble and the repertory it takes as its primary object. This was above all a tactical move, designed to put the spotlight on the actors instead of the play, as is usually done. But the distinction also proves useful in the way it highlights another pair of terms familiar to the humanistic disciplines—the interpreter faced with a text. Indeed, Early Music can be viewed as a classical hermeneutic activity, in that it attempts to ferret out meanings hidden beneath the surface. Seen in this way, we might consider Early Music with respect to what Paul Ricoeur has called the two poles of hermeneutics.<sup>38</sup> The first pole, originating in biblical exegesis, takes the restoration of meaning as its goal. As such, the interpretation figures largely as a revelation of the sacred and maintains an attitude of respect toward the symbol. The second pole, on the other hand, attempts a demystification of meaning, which underlies the symbol as a disguise. This hermeneutics is suspicious of the symbol but hopes, through its interpretation, to minimize the illusion. Although interpretive styles are often reduced to one form or the other, Ricoeur observes that the great modern interpreters of the second school—he names Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche—manage to mediate strategically between both poles. As a consequence, demystification and semantic restoration are not logically prior to each other, but are inextricably linked.

If Mainstream critics of Early Music have misjudged it, it is because they have yet to acknowledge the hermeneutic circle enveloping their opinions. Admittedly, Adorno suffered from no such naïveté. But he jumped too quickly, perhaps, into the second hermeneutic mode, thereby neutralizing his own dialectic. To its credit, Early Music is one of the few interpretive strategies to have braved both hermeneutic poles, albeit with varying degrees of success. Perhaps this is its most profound statement to the twentieth century: with only a religious respect for historical reconstruction—the objectivist stance—the revelation tends to unveil a mirrored image of the interpreter. But with only a perfunctory dismissal of historical

<sup>38</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, 1970), pp. 26–27. See also John Thompson's introduction to Ricoeur's *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans., ed. John Thompson (Cambridge, 1981), p. 6.

performance—Adorno's skepticism—the demystification remains incomplete. For Early Music cannot do without both modes of interpretation—restoration and critique—if it is to signify beyond a dead past and point to an idiom not yet invented.