

## **Metaphor and Analysis in Hoffmann's Beethoven Criticism**

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The Early Romantic aesthetics of the German Jena circle, formulated around 1800, involved a new conception of art, emancipated from the classical doctrines of mimesis. Among the many profound consequences of the Romantic philosophy of art was a re-evaluation of the status of music. In the eighteenth century, instrumental music had been considered mainly as entertainment, inferior to the other arts because it lacked concepts, and therefore failed to be mimetic. But around 1800, the writers Wackenroder and Tieck vividly portrayed it as the highest, most independent form of art, thus inspiring the semi-religious worship of music that was to be characteristic of the nineteenth century. Music was praised as a medium of transcendence into higher realms of spirit, revealing truths which were ineffable in words.

The writer, composer and conductor E.T.A. Hoffmann, who explored the aesthetics of Jena Romanticism both in his stories and in his musical criticism, played a central role in this fundamental re-evaluation of music. The prime example is his famous review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony from 1810. The extensive introduction to the review is one of the main texts in the aesthetics of Romanticism, and it had an immense impact both on the idolization of Beethoven as a genius and on the reappraisal of instrumental music as a privileged, transcendent art form. Because of its meticulous attention to musical detail, Hoffmann's Beethoven review also influenced the course of musical analysis.

However, his purpose as a critic was not to evaluate to what degree a work complies with a normative standard, but rather to examine how it fulfils its own, unique conditions. In the review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony he was particularly occupied with the *unity* of the symphony. But as Ståle Wikshåland has demonstrated<sup>1</sup>, the idea of organic unity in Hoffmann's review should not be confused with the quest for structural unity in the musical analysis of the twentieth century. I will return to Wikshålands argument in a moment. For the present I will limit myself to emphasize that the idea of unity is complex and ambiguous in

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<sup>1</sup> Wikshåland, Ståle: "Beethovenvariasjoner" in *EST XI: Gåter*, Oslo 1995, pp. 145-189.

Hoffmann's review, depending as much on aesthetic metaphors as on analyses of musical structure.

In this article I will examine how Hoffmann mixes metaphorical and analytical language in his attempt to articulate his experience of unity in Beethoven's fifth symphony. In my argument, I will lean on recent theories by Thomas Grey and Marion A. Guck on metaphor and fictionality in language about music.

### **Organic unity and infinite yearning**

In the aesthetic introduction to the review Hoffmann confronts the accusation that both Shakespeare and Beethoven had been met with, namely that they were both the originators of chaotic and incoherent works. He replies by using metaphors of growth that bring to mind Goethe's ideas of the organic unity in Gothic architecture:<sup>2</sup>

Just like our aesthetic overseers have often complained about a total lack of real unity and coherence in Shakespeare, when only profounder contemplation shows the splendid tree, buds and leaves, blossom and fruit are springing from the same seed, so only the most penetrating study of the inner structure of Beethoven's music can reveal its high level of rational awareness, which is inseparable from true genius and nourished by continuing study of the art.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, Hoffmann's subsequent examination of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony appears to be an attempt at carrying out this "most penetrating study of the inner structure of Beethoven's music." Being an accomplished composer and conductor, Hoffmann was definitely qualified for the task of evaluating Beethoven's musical craftsmanship, and he applied a great variety of musicological terms in his review. But contrary to many music critics of the late eighteenth century, Hoffmann's aim was not primarily to criticize the composer's mistakes; instead he was willing to extend the boundaries of music theory to embrace the unique and original in new works of music.

The aesthetics of Early Romanticism is always present in Hoffmann's analytical survey of the symphony, especially through continual allusions to the ideas in the introduction. In these essayistic first paragraphs Hoffmann claims that Beethoven's instrumental music gives the listener a feeling of "infinite yearning". All sorts of conflicting emotions are united in this yearning, which is evoked by the overwhelming and immeasurable character of the music. This experience is painful and threatening, but it is also a state of

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<sup>2</sup> Goethe: "On German Architecture" in Gearey (ed.): *Goethe: Essays on Art and Literature*, Princeton 1994, pp. 3-10.

<sup>3</sup> Charlton (ed.): *Hoffmann's musical writings*, Cambridge 1989, pp.238-239.

ecstatic vision. Even though Hoffmann is not employing the term directly, Burke's and Kant's ideas of *the sublime* are easily recognizable:

[...]Beethoven's instrumental music unveils before us the realm of the mighty and the immeasurable. Here shining rays of light shoot through the darkness of night, and we become aware of giant shadows swaying back and forth, moving ever closer around us and destroying within us all feeling but the pain of infinite yearning, in which every desire, leaping up in sound of exultation, sinks back and disappears. Only in this pain, in which love, hope, and joy are consumed without being destroyed, which threatens to burst our hearts with a full-chorused cry of all the passions, do we live on as ecstatic visionaries.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows Hoffmann seems to be trying to *show* in musical analysis how the sublime character of Beethoven's instrumental music is displayed in the Fifth Symphony. Since Richard Wagner many critics have stressed Hoffmann's thoughts on the opening theme and how it acts as the core of the whole of the first movement, and, further, how the themes of the four movements are related to each other. Hoffmann's criticism has to a great extent been understood as an attempt at a demonstration of perfect structural unity in the masterwork of a genius, even by recent musicologists like Joseph Kerman and Ruth Solie. Consequently it has been overlooked that the unity Hoffmann is describing is impossible to measure or capture in words: it is the overwhelming, all-consuming experience of the sublime.

Like H.C. Andersen's fairy tale "The Nightingale" the reception of Hoffmann is a story about trying to stabilize and mechanize something "organically" meaningful. Scott Burnham suggests that the structural analysis of the music composed around the turn of the previous century can be understood as attempts at a technical "improvement" of Hoffmann's organicism: "[...] reductive analysis has found ways to make technically explicit aspects of musical coherence that were initially the object of intuition only."<sup>5</sup> The most influential theorist of structural music analysis was Heinrich Schenker, who coined the terms "Ursatz" and "Urlinie". The terms were explained as fundamental shapes of musical structure, which he claimed could be detected in all of the classical and romantic masterpieces. Schenker demonstrated musical unity by peeling away "superfluous" details from the surface of a musical work and reducing it to the unvarying shape of the "Ursatz", which he believed to be the essence of music. Other structural analysts, like Donald Tovey and Rudolph Réti, demonstrated musical unity through examination of melody, tonality and rhythm, identifying the cores that the musical surface was supposed to spring from.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.238.

<sup>5</sup> Burnham, Scott: Review of Charlton (ed.) 1989, in *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music*, Spring 1991, pp.286-296p. 295.

However, Ståle Wikshåland has argued in an essay about the romantic and the modern notion of the musical work that the Early Romantic idea of organic unity has little in common with the reductive structural analysis that it has been supposed to anticipate:

[...] The Romantic establishment of the work as an organism is in no way related to a theoretical principle of explanation which is construed to be proved empirically, as the unity in the multitude of elements and relations in the work. [...] The idea of the organicism is a *metaphor* for the work of art, a symbol of the infinity of the Idea. And that is not exactly the same as a theoretical axiom of formal synthesis, which is to be demonstrated uniformly and automatically, step by step in one work after the other, as is implied in structural musical analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Wikshåland's point is that the reductive demonstration of unity in modern structural analysis is a far cry from Hoffmann's idea, and he accuses Joseph Kerman of overlooking this difference when he identifies Romantic organicism as "the root of evil" in his attack on structural musical analysis.<sup>7</sup> Wikshåland instead contends that the idea of organic unity in Romantic music criticism must be regarded as a *metaphor*. I will elaborate on this view by presenting Thomas Grey's account of the use of metaphor in nineteenth-century music criticism, which I will connect to Hoffmann's Beethoven review.<sup>8</sup>

### Music and metaphor

"[...] Metaphorical discourse has always been recognized as an indispensable, if troublesome, component of musical criticism" Grey claims.<sup>9</sup> He begins his argument by citing Eduard Hanslick's famous treatise *On the Musically Beautiful* from 1854, where Hanslick asserts that the music critic faces an eternal dilemma: the lack of conceptual content in music. Grey explains Hanslick's position in the following way:

To gain verbal access to a composition, the critic is forced to choose between 'dry technical designations' or else 'poetic fictions,' in Hanslick's words. Despite his reputation as a formalist, Hanslick clearly does not advocate here a purely technical discourse – which he accuses of dryness – over a more poeticizing style of interpretation. His point is merely that 'poetic' discourse about music must be recognized for what it is, fiction rather than fact. 'What is simply description in the other arts,' he adds, 'is already metaphor in music.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wikshåland, Ståle: "Beethovenvariasjoner" in *EST XI: Gåter*. Oslo 1995, pp. 145-189: 157. (My translation). The Norwegian original reads: "[...] Romantikkens fastleggelse av verket som organisme [ligger overhodet ikke] i etablering av et teoretisk forklaringsprinsipp som skal kunne ettervises empirisk, som enhet i verkets mangfold av elementer og relasjoner. [...] Organisme-tenkningen blir stående som *metafor* for kunstverket, som symbol på idéens uendelighet. Og dét er ikke helt det samme som et teoretisk overbegrep for formens syntese, som differensløst og automatisk skal kunne la seg ettervises skritt for skritt i verk etter verk, slik som i strukturanalysens moderne verkoppfatning."

<sup>7</sup> Kerman, Joseph: "How we got into analysis, and how to get out" in *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1980, pp. 311-331.

<sup>8</sup> Grey, Thomas: "Metaphorical modes in nineteenth-century music criticism: image, narrative, and idea," in Scher, Steven Paul (ed.): *Music and text: critical inquiries*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 93-117.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Hanslick's main point seems to be that music is ineffable and that all discussion of it is bound to refer to something else than the music itself. Even though he believes that the critic has to choose between a technical and a poetical language, he suggests that both languages are metaphorical in relation to the music. However, for some reason Grey does not examine the consequences of Hanslick's view for the status of technical analysis. Instead, he points out that the choice between "dry technical designations" and "poetic fictions" seldom has been made singularly in music criticism. Grey believes that the two approaches complement each other and that the history of music criticism can be read as attempts at achieving a convincing balance between them. He disapproves of the modern tendency to regard the poetizing, metaphorical approach in nineteenth century music criticism as a sign of lacking musico-logical tools and analytical skill: "It could be argued [...] that the more ambitious, serious examples of nineteenth-century criticism are precisely those which exploit such metaphorical means, while 'objective' technical description is employed by reviewers whose principal aim is to make readers aware of the existence of new compositions [...]."<sup>11</sup>

Grey differentiates between two main metaphorical "modes" in nineteenth-century music criticism, the visual mode and the narrative mode: "The sense of a composition might be sought in the images it seemed to evoke, or else in the events of which it seemed to speak – 'events' which could themselves be construed either in strictly musical or in metaphorical terms."<sup>12</sup> The visual metaphors are in general images from nature, like sunlight, thunder and shadows, images whose familiar form and often codified emotive content makes the description of the music comprehensible to a wider audience. But Grey is more concerned with the *narrative* metaphorical mode, which he describes like this: "[It] ascribes to a composition the teleological character of an interrelated series of events leading to a certain goal, or perhaps a number of intermittent goals that together make up a more or less coherent story."<sup>13</sup> In Grey's opinion, the use of narrative metaphors is particularly fruitful because both narratives and music are inherently determined temporal processes. But he emphasizes that the nineteenth-century critics do not always make a clear distinction between visual and narrative modes: "The 'story' conveyed by an instrumental work might, for some critics, have more in common with the kind of story conveyed by a series of images [...]."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

Grey regards the critical notion of the *idea* of a musical work as a third metaphorical mode, incorporating both the visual and the narrative modes. He claims that this was first applied to Beethoven's music:

[Beethoven's] major works inspired already in his own day the critical topos of 'idea' – often specified as a 'fundamental' or unifying idea (*Grundidee*) – which corresponded to the essential expressive content of the individual work. [...] the broader category of 'idea' readily subsumed both visual and narrative modes of metaphor. Metaphorical interpretation of music, whether couched in terms of images or of actions, aimed to reveal the 'idea,' the true spiritual-intellectual essence of which the 'sounding forms' of a composition were understood as the immediate sensual manifestation.<sup>15</sup>

In this statement we clearly recognize Hoffmann's criticism as the central contribution in Beethoven's "own day". As we saw earlier, Hoffmann's review of the fifth symphony concentrates on the idea of "infinite yearning", an idea closely connected to the conceptions of the sublime and the infinite in the discourse of Kant and of Early Romanticism. And, in concordance with Grey's description above, Hoffmann's critical language employs both visual and narrative metaphors as he works towards revealing the idea of the work.

However, as I have stressed before, Hoffmann substantiates his interpretation of the idea of the Fifth Symphony with a high level of attention to musical detail. How, then, does Hoffmann's analytical close reading relate to the grand idea that he claims is the essence of the work?

It is obvious how the many scattered poetic passages in the course of the review contributes to a concretization and continual restating of the topos of "infinite yearning" which in Hoffmann's interpretation is the main aesthetic idea of the work. For instance, he makes sure to mention the idea when he comments on the appearance of a new theme: "The first violins now take up a second theme, which is melodious but preserves the mood of anxious, restless yearning expressed by the movement as a whole."<sup>16</sup> Significantly, Hoffmann mentions "infinite yearning" just when the analytical discoveries appear to be threatening the credibility of the main idea. In describing the extremely short melodic phrases in the first movement, which he admits can appear incoherent and hard to follow, Hoffmann writes: "[...] on the contrary it is precisely this overall pattern, and the constant repetition of short phrases and single chords, which maintains the spirit in a state of ineffable yearning."<sup>17</sup> Hoffmann comments very briefly on the slow second movement, which he judges to be less original than the first movement, but he seems to be unable to leave the rather unenthusiastic

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Charlton (ed.) 1989, p.241.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

analysis of the second movement . He adds that the unusual tonal modulations express the overall character of the symphony and illustrates his point with a poetical metaphor which gives a deeper meaning to the surprisingly light mood of the movement: "It is as though the awful phantom that seized our hearts in the Allegro threatens at every moment to emerge from the storm-cloud into which it disappeared, so that the comforting figures around us flee from sight."<sup>18</sup> This last quote is also a good illustration with regards Thomas Grey's comment on how the metaphoric concept of the idea of a work incorporates both visual and narrative metaphors. "The storm-cloud" is a common visual metaphor from nature, with especially sombre connotations. And the plot of an "awful phantom" from the first movement which constantly threatens to chase away the "comforting figures" of the second movement is a typical example of a narrative metaphor which gives the separate parts of a musical work functional roles in an over-arching musical story.

But what about the many passages in the analysis where Hoffmann seems to treat the musical structures in a matter-of-fact fashion? Is Grey right in suggesting that the analytical and the metaphorical description of music are dichotomies and that the one can compensate for the weaknesses of the other? Or is the difference between the poetic and the analytic approach not so fundamental after all? As I mentioned earlier, there was one insight in the quote from Hanslick that Grey did not investigate further: that all discourse about music is bound to be metaphorical because music cannot be captured in language, neither in "poetic fictions" or "dry technical designations". Marion A. Guck's theory of "analytical fictions" can help us deepen this perspective, and contribute to our understanding of Hoffmann's Beethoven criticism.<sup>19</sup>

### **Musical analysis as fiction**

In her article "Analytical fictions" from 1994 Marion A. Guck founds her meta-analytical theory on the view that a sense of *involvement* is crucial in the perception of music. She elaborates on Kendall Walton's theory of the involvement of the perceiver in mimetic art, which she claims has considerable relevance for the non-mimetic art of music as well.<sup>20</sup> Walton asserts that as perceivers of a work of art, we imagine a world where we belong together with the work and where our dynamic involvement with the work can be likened to a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Guck, Marion A.: "Analytical Fictions" in *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Autumn 1994), pp. 217-230.

<sup>20</sup> Walton, Kendall: *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge 1990.

relationship with a person. Guck mentions Susanne Langer and Edward T. Cone among many music aestheticians who regard music as a symbol of human existence in a similar way.<sup>21</sup> However, in modern music theory and analysis of music themes like these have largely been avoided. The focus has rather been on examining the musical work as an isolated structure. But Guck claims that the aforementioned attack on the structural analysis of music, which Joseph Kerman fronted in the 1980s, is founded on a misinterpretation of the nature of this kind of analysis and that Kerman's criticism indirectly recognizes the ambition of analytical objectivity:

My claim is that 'objectivity' has not been achieved. In fact, I will argue that Kerman is mistaken in believing that analysts have isolated the work, because language conveying a personal involvement with musical works pervades, indeed shapes, even the most technically oriented musical prose, that of musical analyses. [...] musical analyses typically – necessarily – tell stories of the analyst's involvement with the work she or he analyzes, in the process engaging the questions of the musical work's environment so interesting to philosophers and others [...].<sup>22</sup>

In Guck's view, the technical analysis of music is bound to be a subjective aesthetic approach to the work, even when the analyst makes objectivity his prime concern. Her perspective is language criticism with a clear post-structuralist orientation. Guck wishes to "defamiliarize" the language of musical analysis, to reveal the aesthetics of involvement concealed within it, which she calls "[...] a background of beliefs for a music-structural foreground of attention."<sup>23</sup> Guck names the underlying stories of musical involvement "analytical fictions", but the term does not imply any devaluation. On the contrary, Guck not only considers fictions of involvement an unavoidable aspect of language about music, she also regards it central to the aims of analysis. She is not uncritical to the praxis of musical analysis, however, as she calls for a more conscious and unconcealed use of analytical fictions that would be more accessible to discussion.

Through examinations of the language of three very different music analysts, Guck demonstrates how vocabulary, grammar and syntax reveal various stories of the relationship between the work and the listener. While the musical work is acting as a subject in Edward T. Cone's analysis, attracting the listener to its internal drama, the work is an object in Allen Forte's analysis, dissected by a scientifically detached analyst. But Guck emphasizes that contrary to the fiction of literature, analytical fictions about music rarely are consistent, and

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<sup>21</sup> Langer, Susanne: *Feeling and Form*, New York 1953; Cone, Edward T.: *The Composer's Voice*, Berkeley 1974.

<sup>22</sup> Guck (1994), pp. 217-218.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

do not have to be. That music analysts sway between differing linguistic approaches during the course of the analysis is in Guck's view a relevant response to the dynamic and intangible nature of music perception, which cannot be fully captured in language: "Shifts of musical vocabulary recognize that for all our erudition, evident in analytical texts, the musical work lies not under our finger, but just out of our reach. Our language about music is rightly secondhand, after the fact – and catch-as-catch-can. As such, it reflects what the interaction with music is like."<sup>24</sup>

In Guck's view it is impossible to reach a final truth about a work of art and no analytic fiction is the right one for all listeners: "[...] it is clear that there is no one, right story. Different individuals engage pieces in different ways; they therefore find different language congenial to that engagement."<sup>25</sup> But the subjectivity promoted by Guck is never wholly spontaneous. In the conclusion of the article she asks us to be aware of the persuasive power analytical fictions can hold over readers, listeners and students, and to reflect on our choices: "Since stories of involvement are unavoidable, each of us needs to consider what story to tell."<sup>26</sup>

Which story of involvement, then, is Hoffmann telling in his analytical review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony? I will assert that he varies between at least two different analytical fictions through the review.

The first fiction is connected to Hoffmann's proclamation of Beethoven as a Romantic genius and to his interpretation of the sublime concept of "infinite yearning" as the unifying character of the symphony. Having presented this set of ideas in the aesthetic introduction, Hoffmann regularly returns to it in the course of the musical analysis. The language here is strikingly metaphorical. There is abundance of what Thomas Grey termed visual metaphors from the natural domain, like sunlight, darkness, clouds, flames, storms and swelling torrents. These visual metaphors are closely connected to emotional metaphors with a clear narrative function: Hoffmann's depicts how the breast and the heart of the listener are constantly attacked by fear and anxiety and is given only temporary comfort. This metaphorical mode is used in an analytical fiction narrative where the analyst is a listener, passively and vulnerably surrendered to the drama of the music.

But when Hoffmann focuses on technical aspects of the music in long bits of the review, he employs yet another analytical fiction. Here, the integrity of the analyst is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

protected from the overwhelming expression of the music, and he is able to identify and compare musical patterns. Abstract layers in the music, like tonality, melody, rhythm and form are named and contextualized. However, even if the listener is more analytically alert in this fiction, the musical work is still staged as the acting subject. In his comment on the review Ian Bent emphasizes the ground-breaking nature of the way Hoffmann dramatizes the listener's perception from one moment to the next. Bent calls attention to syntactical effects in the review, effects which can readily be connected to Guck's linguistic examination of analytical fictions: "At the beginning of the first movement Hoffmann withholds verbs so as to convey a sense of breathless disorientation ('In the second bar a fermata, then the idea repeated a tone lower, then another fermata; both times strings and clarinets only')." <sup>27</sup>

If the metaphorical parts of the review tell the story of a vulnerable listener, surrendering to the sublime immensity of the music, then the technical parts suggest the story of a highly competent student of a musical work, closely examining a printed musical score. As a matter of fact, Hoffmann usually reviewed scores rather than concerts, and it is unlikely that he had heard a performance of the Fifth Symphony by the time he wrote the review. Anyway, it would be futile to try to discern which formulations spring from a listening experience and which stem from a painstaking study of the score. This divide is transcended in and through Hoffmann's dramatization of the listener's perception as a temporal phenomenon.

The Swedish literature critic Horace Engdahl has pointed at how the simple, mesmerizing tone and the elaborated fugue are central motives in Hoffmann's musical aesthetics, symbolizing the contrasting ideals of immediate intoxication and formal reflection. <sup>28</sup> Hoffmann acts out passionate arguments for the aesthetics of both sides through the fictional characters in his stories and Engdahl's conclusion is that Hoffmann never sides finally with either intoxication or reflection, nor does he strive for a harmonizing synthesis. In the spirit of Early Romanticism, he prefers to let the paradox stay open: "What Hoffmann offers [...] is no positioning against Eros and the tone, or a utopian synthesis of the intoxicating imagination and the principle of writing, but rather their paradoxical and restless coexistence." <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bent, Ian (ed.): *Musical Analysis in the Nineteenth Century. Vol II – Hermeneutic approaches*, Cambridge 1994, p. 141-142.

<sup>28</sup> Engdahl, Horace: "Tonen och fugan" in *Stilen och lyckan*, Bonniers förlag 1992, pp. 127-140.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 140. (My translation). The Swedish original reads: "Vad Hoffmann erbjuder [...] är inget ställningstagande mot Eros och tonen, heller inget utopisk syntes av fantasiruset och skriftprincipen utan deras paradoxala och oroliga samexistens."

### Hoffmann's paradoxical path

With Hoffmann's complex review placed in the Early Romantic mirror-world of paradoxes, irony and infinitude, which was such an important point of departure for him, I also choose to conclude in the spirit of paradox. According to Ian Bent, Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is "[...] arguably the most celebrated document in the history of music criticism"<sup>30</sup> and the referential literature commenting on this text is overwhelming. To try to grasp it all would certainly be a sublime experience! My contribution has fulfilled its purpose if it has suggested the fruitfulness of the paradoxical coexistence of metaphorical and analytical language in Hoffmann's Beethoven criticism. In the present situation, Hoffmann paradoxical example shows a path ahead, when the impossibility of a purely objective language about music is an insight musicology cannot ignore, just as the private subjectivity of taste dominates the public discourse about music. The subjective and the objective cannot exist as isolated categories in music perception, but, like Hoffmann implies, we can still gain valuable understanding by letting them play roles in a hermeneutic circle. We experience a musical work when it speaks to us through its unique form, a form we can approach by trying to identify and contextualize what we hear. On the other hand, musical meaning only exists in and through the subjective aesthetic sensibility of the listener.

In my opinion, it music criticism should also take heed by Marion Guck's idea that all language about music, including the analytical, can be conceived as a story of involvement. As we have seen, Guck's theory allows for inconsistency in the analytical language as a consequence of the intangible nature of music perception. For example, Hoffmann never decides whether to depict the crucial idea of the unity of the work as a compositional structure which can be analyzed, or as a sublime experience which language cannot capture. In the opening words of his review it is almost as if Hoffmann warns the reader about his own intoxication with the work he is about to evaluate: "The reviewer [...] is utterly permeated by the subject of the present review, and may nobody take it amiss if he exceeds the limits of conventional appraisals and strives to put in to words all the profound sensations that this composition has given rise to in him."<sup>31</sup>

Is this not a hopelessly Romantic and dated position today? Personally, I do not think so. Not if you love music, without being able to explain why in a fully understandable way. Let us be inspired by Hoffmann to call criticism into play as music plays and to appreciate the

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<sup>30</sup> Bent (ed.) (1994), p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> Charlton (ed.) (1989), p.236.

paradoxes that spring from the attempt at describing the overwhelming and enigmatic experience of music.

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