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Historical Formalism in Music: Toward a Philosophical Theory of Musical Form

Andrea Baldini

Abstract

In this paper I begin to fashion a theory of musical form that I call historical formalism. Historical formalism posits that our perception of the formal properties of a musical work is informed by considerations not only of artistic categories but also of the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural circumstances within which that work was composed.

Key Words

artistic perception, categories of art, contextualism, formalism, Kivy, Levinson, musical form, Walton

1. Introduction: Form and the philosophy of art

Form occupies a primary role in philosophical discussions about art as, for instance, in Clive Bell's claim that "the essential quality in a work of [visual] art is significant form,"^[1] and Susanne Langer's theory of art as expressive form.^[2] In philosophical discussions of music, form proves to be crucial. Formalists regard it as one of the most important artistic aspects of a musical work and some of the most influential theorists endorse formalist positions about musical meaning.^[3] Thus in *On the Musically Beautiful*, Eduard Hanslick, godfather of the formalists in music, declares, "The content of music is tonally moving forms."^[4]

In this paper I discuss form as one of the most important artistic aspects of a musical work. I argue, using a sample of the pertinent philosophical literature, that even those knowledgeable discussants who grant musical form its central role often fail to furnish a fully convincing account of it. The subject of musical form is a notoriously difficult topic and my present goal is not to provide an exhaustive account of it. My aim, rather, is to offer some preliminary thoughts toward a theory of musical form that may contribute positively and pertinently to a philosophical analysis of music.

I call the theory of musical form that I begin to develop in this paper *historical formalism*. Historical formalism posits that our perception of a musical work's formal properties depends both on considerations of artistic categories *and* on knowledge of the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural circumstances within which that work was composed. Historical formalism can be considered a version of contextualism. Because it makes room for a set of considerations that exceed the boundaries of the art-historical (musico-historical) context, historical formalism is more far-reaching than other forms of contextualism, particularly Kendall Walton's contextualist interpretation of artistic perception. My inclusion of a larger set of considerations as relevant to the apprehension of a musical work's form provides evidence in favor of the claim that within the specifics of perceiving its formal features, music is intrinsically interrelated with the cultural milieu in which it is

created.

I argue for historical formalism from the ground up. I start by considering a basic view that understands musical form as a pure perceptual object. In Sections 2 and 3 I argue that such a view is incomplete. I maintain that considerations of the musico-historical categories to which a work belongs have an impact on one's perception of that work's musical form. In Section 4, I expand the considerations that are relevant for perceiving correctly a work's musical form. I show that not only are considerations of music history and theory relevant, but also that historical (broadly construed), sociopolitical, and cultural considerations may be relevant. I thereby clarify the advantages of historical formalism over more restrictive versions of contextualism.

2. Aural-form and categorial-form

A commonsense view considers musical form as one aspect of a musical work whose characterization is unproblematic. In such a view, what we intend with musical form can be easily identified as those structural properties featured in a musical work that can be heard in a performance. According to such a characterization, the form of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* consists of all the melodic lines, chords, harmonies, rhythms, etc., that one can hear when attending a performance of that work. However, as soon as we think seriously about it, we quickly recognize that the commonsense view is incomplete, and that musical form is more complex than what it suggests.

As Arnold Whittall notes, "musical form" is an ambiguous term. On the one hand, it can refer to the structural properties that one can hear in the performance of a musical work. On the other hand, musical form can also refer to "a generic category (such as ternary, canon, sonata)."^[5] To capture what Whittall is suggesting, I introduce a distinction between *categorial-form* and *aural-form*. Though implicitly acknowledged in the theoretical debate (both philosophical and musicological) about music, this paper is the first attempt to develop such a distinction in a sustained way. I have a twofold aim in making this distinction: first, to solve a terminological incoherence that troubles scholarly works even by distinguished thinkers such as Peter Kivy;^[6] and second, to provide a conceptual tool whose usefulness is validated by the analysis of musical form developed in the discussion that follows.

I define *categorial-form* as the musical form that refers to the particular musical genres (sonata, rondò, etc.) that may be determined by factors such as architectonic structure, harmonic language, typical rhythms, the instrumentation, as well as historical and geographical origins. The categorial-form, rondò, for instance, is characterized by a particular architectonic structure, divided into a series of sections. The first section is regularly repeated between subsidiary *couplets* (episodes) and appears again at the end of the composition. Schematically, the rondò's structure can be represented by ABAC ... A, where A is the first section and B, C, etc., are the couplets. The categorial-form dodecaphonic music is characterized instead by the use of a particular method of composition whereby a predetermined set of twelve nonidentical notes constitutes the basic material from which

the composition is generated.

Aural-form refers to the ordered set of structural properties that can be heard in a performance. It is intrinsically related to features of sounds, such as their frequency, loudness, or duration. These features are objects of aural perception—that is, objects that we perceive primarily, though perhaps not exclusively, by means of sense organs receptive to properties of sounds. I define structural properties as those properties pertinent to our perception and critical assessment of an aural-form.

Structural properties can be differentiated into four different types. A first type contains those audible properties of sounds that depend on their physical constitution, such as pitch (e.g., “being an E-flat”) and relations of pitch (e.g., “being a major third”), duration (e.g., “being a quarter note”), dynamics (e.g., “being a *pianissimo*”), and timbre (e.g., “being mellow”). Call these *tone properties*.

A second type includes structural properties that depend on the particular arrangement of tone properties. Call these *syntactical properties*. Properties of harmonic, polyphonic, melodic phrases and thematic organization, such as “being a dominant-tonic cadence” and “being a theme in G major,” are syntactical properties.

A third type of structural property includes musically *expressive properties*. The exact characterization of this type may well be controversial. Many, however, would accept Budd’s account that a section of an aural-form “can be agitated, restless, triumphant, or calm since it can possess the character of the bodily movements which are involved in the moods and emotions that are given these names.”^[7] In other words, expressive properties are intrinsic to an aural-form and capable of conveying certain aspects of human expressive behavior, in particular those associated with the voice, which they translate into musical sounds.

A fourth type includes what may be called *broad-span properties*, which depend on overall relations of similarity, identity, contrast, etc., among syntactical properties drawn from different sections of a work’s aural-form. A repetition of the first theme is a broad-span property of a particular section of an aural-form. Such a property depends on the perceived similarity between a section characterized by the syntactical property “being a theme” and a previous section possessing the syntactical property “being the first theme.”

I believe that the perception of the structural properties of aural-form often depends upon considerations of categorial-form. For instance, the unexpected absence of the repetition of the exposition may very well have an impact on the expressive properties of an instance of sonata form. Consider, for example, Beethoven’s *String Quartet in F Major, Opus 59, No. 1*. The first movement of the *Quartet* is in eighteenth-century sonata form. The categorial-form eighteenth-century sonata form is characterized by three sections: first, an exposition that contains the first subject in tonic key and a second subject in the dominant (and sometimes further subjects, often repeated); a development follows, in which the material of the exposition is elaborated in a kind of free

fantasia; and finally a recapitulation occurs in which the exposition is repeated, often with modification, and the second subject is transposed into the tonic.

After the exposition, however, Beethoven skips the repetition. This feature, skipping the repetition, is a broad-span property. It is surely original, given the date of its composition (1806), but it is not merely that broad-span property that interests us. It is rather the fact that, in what immediately follows the exposition, Beethoven mimics a repetition of the exposition down to the smallest detail of phrasing and dynamics. Then, suddenly, at measure 107, he introduces a G-flat that clearly affirms the identity of the section: we are listening to the development. The effectiveness of this passage results from Beethoven's conscious manipulation of the expectations of those who hear the music and are tricked by this false start. The expressive quality of the passage, its surprising nature, depends on the perceivable ambiguity of the first five measures of the development.

The claim that one's perception of an aural-form's structural properties depends on the categorial-forms to which that work belongs sounds plausible and has been largely endorsed by contextualists in artistic perception. Jerrold Levinson, however, argues against it. In his view, knowledge of a work's categorial-form (simply "form" in his idiom) does not significantly affect our perception of that work's aural-form (which Levinson calls "FORM").^[8] Levinson's view is controversial and has been critically discussed elsewhere.^[9] In the following section, I examine Levinson's view and, while rejecting its most extreme consequences, I accept some of its provocative conclusions, which illuminate how we perceive aural-forms.

In explaining the link between aural- and categorial-form, I intend to establish the plausibility that contextual knowledge can affect one's perception of a work's aural-form. I also want to provide evidence in favor of the claim that our perception of a musical work's formal properties can depend on considerations of categorial-forms.

3. Linking categorial-form and aural-form

Levinson argues, by developing an idea that originated with Edmund Gurney, that a piece of music is a temporal process.^[10] Thus, because of the limitations of our aural perception, musical pieces are never the object of a single act of perception—like the façade of a building. They are perceived as they unfold in time and the portions that can be aurally grasped (*quasi-heard*) as unity are of limited extent. Levinson identifies those portions as melodies.^[11]

Levinson's contentions about the nature of musical pieces and our perception of them have important consequences in terms of his theory of musical form. Levinson argues that, as far as perception is concerned, a musical form "is in effect exhausted by the constitution of the smallest independent units, that is, phrases and melodies, out of formless elements, and the specific manner in which each independent unit leads to the next."^[12] In his view a musical form has positive artistic value if it affords "an experience well worth having."^[13] Whenever evaluation is involved, the "essential form in

music"[14] still coincides with the linear development of melodies and harmonies.

We can summarize Levinson's view of musical form, using my terminology, as follows: the form of a musical work can be generally reduced to its aural-form, especially in terms of its tone, syntactical, and expressive properties. Although Levinson admits that broad-span properties are possibly perceivable, he argues that their perception is difficult to achieve and is often unnecessary for music appreciation and evaluation.[15] "The elevation of FORM [i.e., aural-form] over forms [categorial-forms]," Levinson writes, "is very much in the spirit of our present discussion." [16]

Categorial-forms, in fact, are not perceptual objects; they are merely historical categories and abstractions. For instance, we cannot perceive that the *Allegro* of Haydn's *Keyboard Sonata in G Major (no. 4)* is in *sonata form*. We can apprehend that aspect of the *Allegro* only conceptually by consciously organizing what one has perceived prior to her judgment about the *Allegro* being in sonata form. We know that the *Allegro* is in sonata form because we have heard the identifying syntactical properties serially at the appropriate places. There is nothing that we can actually hear, *per se*, that enables us to perceive a piece's aural-form to be in sonata form. Since categorial-forms are not perceivable features of a musical work, they cannot afford by themselves a worthwhile experience. For this reason Levinson believes that considerations of categorial-forms should not affect our critical judgment of a work's aural-form. Levinson does admit that such considerations can possibly enhance our perception of the impressiveness of individual bits of an aural-form, enhance our perception of its cogency, facilitate our perception of its melodies, contribute to our perception of its higher-order aesthetic properties, and provide intellectual musical satisfaction.[17]

How does Levinson handle cases like Beethoven's *Opus 59 No. 1*? His account explicitly addresses the complications of such cases. He recognizes the existence of properties such as this *Opus 59*'s "being surprising" at measure 107. Using my terminology, however, he holds that considerations of categorial-forms are unnecessary for perceiving those properties. He argues that a listener can perceive them simply by becoming familiar through listening to many actual examples of works belonging to the appropriate categorial-form(s).

Levinson justifies his view by introducing a distinction between *intellectual* hearing-as and *perceptual* hearing-as. Intellectually hearing an aural-form as a particular categorial-form "involves entertaining certain concepts in thought and relating them to current perceptions, or consciously organizing what one is perceiving under certain articulate categories." [18] In other words when, for instance, intellectually hearing-as-a-sonata a work's aural-form, we classify explicitly what we just heard in terms of some propositional knowledge, which include notions such as exposition, repetition, first theme, etc.

Perceptually hearing an aural-form as a particular categorial-form (for instance, a sonata) "involves not conscious thought or categorization but a disposition to register and respond to

the musical progression one is presented in a certain way.”[19] To “perceptually hear-as-a-sonata” a work’s aural-form means to have “internalized a certain norm [not a categorial-form] from pieces of a given kind, and implicitly [to sense] convergence with and divergence from that norm as presented by a particular composition.”[20] By having internalized such a “norm,” a listener responds, for instance, with a “reaction of surprise when a recapitulation structurally due ... fails to turn up.”[21]

A listener can internalize a sonata “norm” just by comparing several examples of sonatas. Knowledge of categorial-forms or even a “prior abstract grasp of sonata structure” is not required.[22] In this sense, Levinson underlines that perceptual hearing-as has nothing to do with propositional knowledge. It is rather a form of *knowing-how*: the knowledge of “norms” (such as the sonata “norm”) need not be even in principle articulable linguistically and, consequently, is not known propositionally, like the knowledge of categorial-forms, but behaviorally or experientially.[23]

For Levinson, intellectual hearing-as is not necessary for perceiving structural properties such as *Opus 59*’s “being surprising” at measure 107. A listener can in fact identify sections (e.g., the exposition), label different themes (e.g., the first theme in the tonic) of *Opus. 59*, while still failing to perceive that expressive property at measure 107. Levinson grants that the propositional knowledge involved in intellectual hearing-as may facilitate or hasten the perception of “being surprising” or similar properties.[24] However, in order to perceive it, we only need perceptual hearing-as. Since perceptual hearing-as does not require propositional knowledge of categorial-forms, Levinson can still confine the role of such knowledge to those “enhancing” ones as listed previously. That is, he can still deny that knowledge of categorial-forms determines in part, at least sometimes, our perception of an aural-form’s structural properties.

I believe that Levinson’s concatenationism is pointing in the right direction. First, it correctly emphasizes that perceiving the aural-form of a particular musical work as a sonata involves a “behavioral” response to sounds rather than a mere capacity of describing what one has just heard. Second, it makes room for the possibility that a listener can develop the ability to respond “behaviorally” to a sonata in the absence of formal training. A capacity to react to particular developments in a sonata can certainly be acquired spontaneously through attentive listening. I believe that these two points are the aims of Levinson’s project which, in this sense appears to be partially successful.

I find Levinson’s view too extreme when he suggests that *perceptual* hearing-as does not depend on propositional knowledge of categorial-forms, but on non-propositional knowledge of “norms.” In the light of recent research in epistemology, Levinson’s distinction between categorial-forms and “norms” seems difficult to vindicate. In the remainder of this section, I maintain that there is no disjunction in principle between knowledge of categorial-forms and knowledge of “norms”: in a qualified sense, they both amount to the same propositional knowledge. I therefore suggest that (i)

perceptual hearing-as necessarily depends on propositional knowledge and that (ii) such knowledge must be propositional knowledge of categorial-forms.

Levinson's claim that knowledge of "norms" is non-propositional and is distinguished from knowledge of categorial-forms relies primarily on the premise that propositional knowledge, and hence knowledge of categorial-forms, is knowledge that can be easily articulated, that is, if someone knows that *p*, she must have the capacity to express *p* in words. However, as Jason Stanley argues, "Whether this premise is true or false depends upon which words count."[\[25\]](#)

If knowing that *p* requires being able to describe *p* accurately and systematically, the premise is false or at least controversial and would require sustained defense. In our case, knowing that eighteenth-century sonatas usually present a repetition of the exposition does not imply knowing how to express that belief accurately and systematically.

If articulation includes indexical or demonstrative expressions, Stanley adds, then the premise that propositional knowledge is knowledge that can be easily articulated may very well be true.[\[26\]](#) I know that my keyboard is *this* shade of white and that the pages of that paper are *that* shade of white. Though surely having propositional knowledge of those shades of white, I can express it only in demonstrative-involving terms. But, Stephen Davies also observes that a listener who cannot articulate in this second sense her responses to an aural-form surely does not sense convergence with and divergence from "norms," as Levinson holds.[\[27\]](#)

In our example, a listener who is able to perceive *Opus 59's* surprise expressive property around measure 107 must be able to articulate verbally, when asked, something similar to the following description: "*Here* [mm. 103–106] is when the tune seems to repeat the beginning as in *those* other similar pieces I have listened to [18th-century sonatas], but *here* [mm. 107] is when I realized that it was not a repetition and *this* piece is somewhat different from *those* others." When we allow indexical and demonstrative terms, knowledge involved in perceptual hearing-as seems always articulable. Since, in this qualified sense, knowledge of "norms" is in principle articulable, Levinson is left with no evidence justifying his view that knowledge of "norms" is non-propositional; it cannot be distinguished from the propositional knowledge of categorial-forms.

I must emphasize that, according to historical formalism, claims containing indexical and demonstrative terms and expressing salient and recurring properties characterizing a specific set of aural-forms still constitute knowledge of categorial-forms. Such claims can be vague, unsystematically collected, and expressed in words not complying with the current musical jargon. However, their content is in some degree equivalent to that of musicological accounts of categorial-forms. It is in this qualified sense, which incorporates what is correct in Levinson's lesson, that historical formalism sees perceptual hearing-as as depending on propositional knowledge of categorial-forms.

4. Aural-form, history, politics, and culture

At this point, one might wonder whether our perception of a work's aural-form can depend only on considerations of categorial-form. In this section, I show that considerations other than those of categorial-form may very well be relevant for perceiving a work's aural-form. The historical, sociopolitical, and cultural context within which a work is composed can be relevant and should be considered. It is this aspect that distinguishes historical formalism from other versions of contextualism.

When discussing the nature of musical form, Peter Kivy directly addresses the issue of what kind of considerations might be relevant for perceiving what I call a work's aural-form. Though admitting that our perception of the structural properties of a work's aural-form can be informed by our knowledge, Kivy identifies this knowledge with musical knowledge in a strict sense—that is, knowledge of music theory and of music history. Considerations other than strictly musical ones, such as “functionalist considerations and considerations of social setting,” are, for Kivy, of no particular value when we perceive and critically assess an aural-form.^[28] In our practice of listening, an aural-form “is meant to perform but one function: to be [an object for] rapt attention,” and “all its other past social settings and function have been obliterated.”^[29]

Social setting and social function, Kivy argues, might impart to a musical work “artistic properties” that can be enjoyed and appreciated (e.g., how well a piece of dance music suits the movements of the dancers), but such properties are not structural properties of a work's aural-form.^[30] Social setting and function, in other words, do not affect a work in terms of our perception and judgment of its aural-form.^[31]

I argue, in contrast, that to appreciate the complexities of an aural-form to its fullest in an attitude of rapt aesthetic attention, it is sometimes necessary to inform our perception and critical judgment with considerations of social setting and functions, that is, with historical (broadly construed), cultural, and political considerations. Let me offer an example. Consider the aural-form of *Lied von der Belebenden Wirkung des Geldes*, composed by Hanns Eisler between 1934 and 1936.^[32] The various sections of this song draw on different musical worlds. The instrumental introduction is a *quasi-toccata* and prelude, played by a jazz instrumentation. The first and the third main verses are a slow waltz tending toward a *valse triste*. The refrain is a toccata-quick march. The bass moves in a rhythmically regular way. The harmonic progression follows closely the rules of tonal harmony and leaves nothing unresolved. The vocal line and the voicing of the accompaniment nicely imitate one another. All the elements are somehow questions that receive an answer. The song unfolds in a rather traditional way. There are, one should add, inconsistencies, peculiarities, and distortions in the formal arrangement of the musical flow.^[33]

However, these last features of the *Lied's* aural-form, some critics argue, are the outcome of musical ineptness or—more harshly—of “stupidity.”^[34] This *Lied* and almost all of the songs Eisler wrote have been judged as “primitively immediate.” Adorno disdained Eisler, since “for the sake of

being understood [Eisler] has lowered his musical means to a new outdated level, rather than rising to the challenge of present-day music.”[35] Such judgments are motivated by critics' hearing and assessing the *Lied's* aural-form in relation to the categorial-form of twentieth-century avant-garde music.

Eisler studied from 1919 to 1923 under Schoenberg, who devoted considerable attention to his protégé.[36] Eisler became knowledgeable in traditional composition as well as in modern technique and he was the first of Schoenberg's pupils to compose using the dodecaphonic method. His piece, *Palmström, Opus 5*, definitely belongs to the categorial-form of twentieth-century avant-garde music. If the *Lied's* aural-form is evaluated as an example of that categorial-form, then the uses of rather traditional and consonant material, of regular rhythms, and of tonal harmony cannot but be perceived and critically assessed as primitively simple and banal properties of an uninteresting aural-form. But the question arises of why a Schoenberg pupil, who showed supreme control of the most complicated aspects of music composition, would begin, at that stage of his career, to compose music like the *Lied*?

The answers to such a question will not be found by looking at the self-contained musical domain. The explanation of why Eisler radically changed his musical style is to be found in his then-recent affiliation with the Communist Party and its revolutionary spirit. As a consequence of his political ideology, Eisler committed himself “to the creation of an alternative music culture on behalf of an excluded, ‘disenfranchised’ class of working people.”[37] Following his militant spirit, he explicitly developed a new type of music: “*angewandte Musik*” (applied music). Applied music can be defined, first, in negative terms. It is not bourgeois music, the music traditionally played in concert halls as a form of entertainment, in isolation from the struggles of the masses. Applied music serves a sociopolitical function to create a class consciousness and to instruct and teach the working masses.[38] Eisler wrote protest songs, politically didactic pieces, and working songs (along with *Auferstanden aus Ruinen*, the Democratic Germany's national anthem). His politicized conception of music motivated most of his musical and formal choices after 1926 and deeply affected his approach to musical materials and compositional procedures.

Consideration of the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural circumstances within which Eisler composed the *Lied's* aural-form, including the political function that he intended for his music to play, has important consequences for how one perceives its structural properties. In this light, the *Lied's* aural-form is heard not as primitively simple, but as economical and engaging. The use of tonal harmonic language is perceived, not as banal, but as enjoyable and welcoming toward the audience that Eisler wanted to reach. The inconsistencies, peculiarities, and distortions, together with the different musical worlds the aural-form draws on, are not perceived as unpleasant but as surprising, designed to shock the listeners by creating passages that sound stylistically unexpected.

I, like many, consider the value of aural-forms to be related to the aesthetic impact that their structural properties seem to have on us, and believe our critical judgment will need to be revised accordingly. Once we consider all the circumstances relevant to the writing of the *Lied* and how those circumstances affect our perception of its structural properties, its aural-form should be judged as original and understandable both for those with little experience in music and for the specialist. It should be assessed as an aural-form that "make[s] [the listener] think," reflecting the fractures and the contradictions of the society in which Eisler was living.^[39] *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to most of Eisler's post-1926 works.

If the interpretation of Eisler's *Lied* I have just proposed is valid, Kivy's account of musical form and similar versions of formalism seem not comprehensive enough to admit that sometimes historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors can affect our perception and critical judgment of a work's aural-form. Historical formalism, an historically, socio-politically, and culturally informed theory of musical form, is preferable for the correct assessment of Eisler's *Lied* and other, similar pieces of music, as well. Consider, for instance, Stravinsky's use of folkloric music material in his work, *The Rite of the Spring* (1913). There is something in the expressiveness in the bassoon's opening melody in *The Rite* that one will not understand while ignoring its folkloric origin.^[40]

Following Richard Taruskin's interpretation of the *Rite*, the passage sounds "ancient," that is, "evoking feelings of ancient times."^[41] Its expressive quality depends on the historical and geographical provenance of the tune from which Stravinsky explicitly drew.^[42] *The Rite's* opening melody is a quotation from a Lithuanian folk tune as reported in Anton Juskiwicz's musical anthology, *Litauische Volks-Weisen*.

When Stravinsky composed the work, Lithuania and Byelorussia were canonically associated with the "ancient" origin of Russian culture.^[43] The association between Lithuania and "ancient" Russia was justified by the survival of archaic pagan rites in Lithuanian contemporaneous folk customs. In their turn, the stronger survival of pagan rites was a consequence of the fact that "Christianity did not entirely supplant the 'old religion' until the fifteenth century, while Kievan Russia adopted Christianity in the late tenth century."^[44]

As with Eisler's *Lied*, it does not seem possible to fully appreciate the structural properties of *The Rite's* aural-form if we limit our considerations to those of musicological and musico-historical knowledge, as Kivy's theory suggests. But, I must add, most contextualist accounts of artistic perception, and in particular Walton's, do not make room for the larger kind of considerations that are also relevant in those cases.^[45]

Walton identified the role of the context as solely artistic categories. He argued that by considering the given category to which an artwork belongs, one can distinguish between an artwork's standard, variable, and contra-standard properties. The aesthetic impact of a work's property, according to Walton, depends on whether one views it as standard,

variable, or contra-standard. In this sense, according to Walton's contextualism, considerations that have an impact on one's perception of an aural-form's structural properties are limited to considerations of the relevant *art-historical* (musico-historical) context.[46]

In the cases discussed above, the impact that the structural properties of those two aural-forms have depends upon a larger set of considerations that include, in the case of Eisler's *Lied*, the composer's political affiliation and the intended sociopolitical function of his music. In Stravinsky's *The Rite of the Spring*, the aesthetic impact of the opening bassoon melody depends also upon considerations of its historical and cultural origin. Historical formalism can include those and other pertinent considerations.

To conclude this section, I propose that our account of musical form should be informed not only by considerations of the relevant art-historical context, but also enriched, whenever it seems fruitful, by a knowledge of the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural circumstances within which a work is composed. The need to consider, at least sometimes, such a broad set of circumstances testifies for the complexities of musical form, complexities that have generally been obscured by previous accounts.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of musical form demonstrates more complexities than can be superficially assumed. I have argued that a suitable understanding of such a fundamental aspect of musical works requires a more comprehensive theory of musical form that I call historical formalism. Historical formalism challenges previous theories of musical form since it holds that considerations other than those related solely to music theory, music history, and the art-historical context—that is, considerations of the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural circumstances within which a musical work is composed—might be relevant to our perception and critical assessment of a work's aural-form.

I am therefore persuaded that historical formalism, while acknowledging music's specific formal characteristics, gives us some insight on music's intrinsic relationship with the mundane vicissitudes of our world, an aspect of that art form that has often been obscured not only by conventional formalist theories of musical form, but also by contextualism.[47]

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Endnotes

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- [7] Malcolm Budd, *Music and Emotions: The Philosophical Theories* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 47.
- [8] Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 103.
- [9] Stephen Davies, "Musical Understandings," in *Musical Understandings and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 88–127; Peter Kivy, "Music in Memory and Music in the Moment," in *New Essays in Musical Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 183–217; Justin London, et al., "'Music in the Moment': A Discussion," *Music Perception*, 16, 4 (1999), 463–494.
- [10] Edmund Gurney, *The Power of Sound* (New York: Basic Books, 1996/1880).
- [11] Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, pp. 4–5.
- [12] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- [17] Jerrold Levinson, "Reply to Commentaries on *Music in the Moment*," *Music Perception*, 16, 4 (1999), 485–494; Levinson, "Concatenationism, Architectonicism, and the Appreciation of Music," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 60 (2006), 505–514.
- [18] Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, p. 72.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. ix–x, 72–73; Jerrold Levinson, “Musical Literacy,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 24, 1 (1990), 17–30; see pp. 27, 30n17.

[24] Levinson, *Music in the Moment*, p. 125. Nicholas Cook underlines that propositional knowledge of categorial-forms can facilitate perceptual hearing-as “is hard to square with Levinson’s injunction, near the end of the book, that it is a ‘great mistake’ to attend reflectively to large-scale form ‘before a piece has cohered in a listener’s mind’” (“Music in the Moment by Jerrold Levinson,” *Music and Letters*, 80 (1999), 602–606, ref. on 603). I do not press this potential inconsistency of Levinson’s account because, as Andrew Kania (2012) emphasizes, Levinson’s project was conceived as a polemic against traditional views overestimating the role of categorial-forms. I grant that Levinson’s polemical aim might require some exaggerated claims. See Andrew Kania, “The Philosophy of Music,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta (Fall 2012 edition), accessed November 19, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/music/>.

[25] Jason Stanley, “Knowing (How),” *Noûs*, 45, 2 (2011), 207–238; ref. on p. 214.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Davies, “Musical Understandings,” p. 97.

[28] Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, p. 104.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[32] I am here concerned with the formal features of the work, not with its textual meaning. The reader can imagine the vocal line as played by a saxophone.

[33] Gerd Rienächer, “The Invigorating Effect of Music?” in *Hanns Eisler: Miscellany*, ed. David Blake (Luxembourg: Harwood, 1995), pp. 91–102.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[35] As quoted in Günter Mayer, “Eisler and Adorno” in Blake, *Hanns Eisler*, pp. 133–158; ref. on p. 136n8.

[36] Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler Political Musician* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 39.

[37] Blake, *Hann Eisler*, pp. xi–xii.

[38] Betz, *Hanns Eisler Political Musician*, pp. 31ff.; Mayer, “Eisler and Adorno,” pp. 152–154.

[39] Rienächer, "The Invigorating Effect of Music?," p. 95.

[40] Peter Hill, *Stravinsky: The Rite of the Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 35.

[41] See Richard Taruskin, "Russian Folk Melodies in the Rite of Spring," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 33, 4 (1980), 501–543; Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition: A Biography of the Works through Mavra* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), in particular pp. 891–923.

[42] See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 98.

[43] As in the case of Eisler's *Lied*, I am here concerned with the formal features of the work, not with its putative representational content.

[44] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition*, 900. See also Jonathan Shepard, "The Origins of Rus' (c.900–1015)," in *From Early Rus' to 1689*, ed. Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 97–98.

[45] Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art," *Philosophical Review*, 79, 3 (1970), 334–367. Surprisingly enough, Levinson argues for a version of ontological contextualism that would well accord with historical formalism's account of musical form. Levinson claims that a musical work's aesthetic properties depend on what he calls the "total musico-historical context" in which that work is composed. I must admit that I find it difficult to square Levinson's ontology of musical works with his theory of musical form. See Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 1 (1980), 5–28.

[46] For an instructive discussion of Walton's contextualism, see Brian Laetz, "Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art': A Critical Commentary," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50, 3 (2010), 287–306.

[47] A version of this paper was originally presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Society of Aesthetics in Philadelphia in 2012. I would like to thank the commentator, Phil Jenkins, and others present for their suggestions and critique. For thought-provoking discussions about these issues, I want to thank Philip Alperson, John Dyck, Susan Feagin, Jerrold Levinson, and Joseph Margolis.