

**The Concert Hall as a Medium of Musical Culture:
The Technical Mediation of Listening in the
19th Century**

by

Darryl Mark Cressman

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Approval

Name: Darryl Mark Cressman
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (Communication)
Title of Thesis: *The Concert Hall as a Medium of Musical Culture:
The Technical Mediation of Listening in the 19th Century*

Examining Committee:

Chair: Martin Laba, Associate Professor

Andrew Feenberg
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Gary McCarron
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Shane Gunster
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Barry Truax
Internal Examiner
Professor
School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

Hans-Joachim Braun
External Examiner
Professor of Modern Social, Economic and Technical History
Helmut-Schmidt University, Hamburg

Date Defended: September 19, 2012

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Abstract

Taking the relationship between musical culture, media history, and the philosophy of technology as its starting point, this dissertation situates the concert hall as a musical technology designed to mediate attentive listening. Recognizing that the technical mediation of listening to music is rarely considered by media historians prior to the invention of recorded music, this dissertation draws together elements of the cultural history of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western musical culture, musical aesthetics, social history, architectural acoustics, and the history of musical venues to explore how listening to music was technically mediated in the nineteenth century. Using Amsterdam's Concertgebouw (opened in 1888) as a case study, I trace the process by which abstract ideas of romantic music aesthetics shaped the design and meaning of Amsterdam's concert hall. This requires examining how the ideal of attentive listening was articulated in early nineteenth-century Dutch music criticism. Next, I examine how the Amsterdam bourgeoisie acted upon these ideas and how their patronage led to the funding and organization of the Concertgebouw. Finally, I examine how the design of the Concertgebouw embodied the ideal of attentive listening and the conventions of bourgeois patronage that had inspired its construction.

Keywords: musical culture; media history; philosophy of technology; sound studies; concert halls; Amsterdam

For Deanne

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1. Introduction

Most people of artistic tastes share the widespread distrust and dislike of machinery and argue that anything pretending to be art cannot come out of a machine...the moment man ceased to make music with his voice alone the art became machine-ridden. Orpheus's lyre was a machine, a symphony orchestra is a regular factory for making artificial sounds, and a piano is the most appalling contrivance of levers and wires this side of the steam engine.

-Jacques Barzun

1.1. Building Musical Culture

On April 11, 1888, Amsterdam's new concert hall opened its doors to an expectant public. Prior to the opening of the Concertgebouw (literally translated as Concert Building), classical music culture in Amsterdam was unexceptional. In the nineteenth century, Amsterdam was home to a few orchestras and a number of adequate venues, but no one would mistake it for a European musical capital. Up until the opening of the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam's musical culture seemed out of touch with changes that had occurred elsewhere. For example, the majority of orchestral concerts were organized by musical societies whose membership was rigidly exclusive. Not unlike eighteenth-century aristocratic musical culture, the opportunity to attend an orchestral concert in Amsterdam throughout most of the nineteenth century was only open to a select elite.

The Concertgebouw changed this. Unlike other venues in Amsterdam that were either too small for orchestral performances or halls whose cavernous interiors led to horrible acoustics, the Concertgebouw was specifically designed for the performance of orchestral music. Also, the Concertgebouw was not an exclusive social club. It was a public company funded by the sale of a limited number of shares, each share entitling the holder to two tickets to every performance. All remaining tickets were sold to anyone

who could afford one; in theory this meant anyone could attend, but in reality the cost of a ticket restricted the audience to the wealthiest Amsterdammers.

The Concertgebouw is what twentieth-century architectural historians call a shoebox concert hall. Stylistically, these buildings are the direct descendants of palace ballrooms, which were usually square or rectangular and had a stage designed for orchestras.¹ However, the experience engendered by the shoebox concert hall is significantly different than that found in palace ballrooms. Aristocratic musical culture was convivial; in concert halls, there is an aura, or a feeling, that envelops listeners and is certainly not conducive to socializing. Shoebox concert halls are designed to impart an appreciation of secular music that is inspired by the Christian church. As musicologist Carl Dahlhaus writes, “In an architectonic system that allowed museums to be Egyptianesque, theatres Greek, and churches gothic...concert-house architecture expressed a “religion of art” in which Christian images shaded into intimations of antiquity.”² Concert halls are temples of a secular religion. Constructed for the worship of music, once inside, one can’t help but feel reverence for the sacred art of music.

In a city that generally avoided grandiose monuments, the presence of the Concertgebouw, a large neo-classical building dedicated to classical music, seemed at odds with Amsterdam’s reputation as an unmusical city.³ Although many Amsterdammers were proud of their orchestras, this pride was more stubborn than

¹ Michael Barron, for example, identifies Vienna’s Redoutensaal (a ballroom in the Hapsburg royal palace built in 1752 where Beethoven’s Eighth Symphony premiered in 1814) as the direct predecessor of Vienna’s famous shoebox concert hall, the Grosser Musikvereinssaal (opened in 1870). Michael Barron, *Auditorium Acoustic and Architectural Design*, 2nd ed. (London: Spon Press, 2010), 80. For more on the architectural and social history of shoebox concert halls, see: Tim Blanning, *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians, and Their Art* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008), Chapter Three; John Forsyth, *Buildings for Music: The Architect, the Musician, and the Listener from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), Chapter Six; Mitchell Schwarzer, “The Social Genesis of the Public Theatre in Germany,” in *Karl Friedrich Schinkel: The Drama of Architecture*, ed. John Zukowsky (Tubingen/Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2004), 54-68.

² Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 44.

³ “For some reason, monumental buildings do not work in Amsterdam...the monumentality of Amsterdam exists only in the heads of its inhabitants, not on the streets.” Geert Mak, *Amsterdam: A Brief Life of the City*, trans. Philipp Blom (London: Vintage Books, 1999), 4.

warranted. In 1879, Johannes Brahms directed his Third Symphony in Amsterdam and complained that the musicians he was charged with directing were good people, but bad musicians, and as he left the city he swore he would return to Amsterdam only to eat and drink well.⁴ Although some in Amsterdam musical circles knew of Brahms's dissatisfaction, these shortcomings could no longer be hidden after Hans von Bülow and the Meininger Hofkapelle (the court orchestra of George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen) performed three concerts in Amsterdam in 1885. These performances, Truus de Leur writes, "astonished the Dutch and opened their eyes to the painful and irreversible fact that Dutch musical life lagged far behind what was happening in other countries."⁵

If Amsterdam's musicians were mediocre, it could be argued that they were only responding to their audience. Henriette de Boer notes that in the years leading up to the opening of the Concertgebouw, Amsterdammers attended concerts "to meet and chat over a drink and a bite to eat, with the orchestra essentially providing background music. The repertoire was chosen accordingly, and the motivation of the musicians was consequently poor."⁶ Compared to other European cities, Amsterdam was not musically sophisticated. Lydia Lansink writes that nineteenth-century Amsterdammers were not very demanding and predominantly attended concerts for the "gezelligheid"—a uniquely Dutch word that refers to a pleasurable time being social with other people.⁷ In this regard, talking, eating, drinking, and smoking with an orchestra playing in the background would be the ingredients for a "gezelligheid" for many nineteenth-century Amsterdammers.

⁴ Paul Brill, "Beethoven Zonder Bier," in Paul Brill (ed.), *Opmaat van een nieuw eeuw: Hoofdstukken uit het Nederlandse fin de siècle* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1995), 115; Johan H. Giskes, "Opbouw (1881-1888)," in H.J. van Royen (ed.), *Historie en kroniek van het Concertgebouw en het Concertgebouworkest 1888-1988 Deel I* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1989), 14; Lydia Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch gezien," *Preludium*, 36 no.8 (1978): 35.

⁵ Truus de Leur, "Amsterdam—A Courageous Community: Mahler's Fifth Symphony and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra," in Donald Mitchell (ed.), *New Sounds, New Century: Mahler's Fifth Symphony and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra* (Bossum: THOTH Publishers, 1997), 76.

⁶ Henrietta Posthuma de Boer, *Concertgebouw & Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra*, trans. Lynne Richards (Amsterdam: Ludion, 2003), 36.

⁷ Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch gezien," 35.

The Concertgebouw was proposed as the solution to the problems that beset Amsterdam's classical music culture. A new concert hall, it was hoped, would propel Amsterdam to the forefront of Europe's musical capitals. In an urban planning decision that was similar to the layout of Vienna's Ringstrasse, the patrons of the Concertgebouw decided to erect their concert hall in close proximity to that other great Amsterdam monument to art, the Rijksmuseum. The construction of these two buildings seemed symbolic of a new era. Both buildings were on the outskirts of Amsterdam, signaling an urban expansion that would be equal to the one that led to the construction of Amsterdam's exclusive canal belt during the seventeenth century. Amsterdam was never home to a royal court, nor was it administered by the church, thus its aristocracy were firmly rooted in the city's tradition of trade and commerce. It seems fitting, then, that during Amsterdam's golden age, it was an elite class of bankers, stockbrokers, and merchants who established themselves as Amsterdam's aristocracy. They demonstrated their distinction by sequestering themselves away from the rest of the city. From their luxurious canal homes, Amsterdam's patrician aristocracy firmly established themselves as the city's cultural patrons and tastemakers. Amsterdam's urban expansion in the nineteenth century, and the construction of massive new monuments to painting and music, indicated that a profound cultural shift was occurring.

European musical culture underwent an economic, aesthetic, and social transformation in the nineteenth century. This transformation corresponded with the decline of the aristocracy and the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie as cultural patrons.⁸ In the aftermath of the French and Industrial revolutions, the balance of European cultural power shifted and the bourgeoisie began to assume the rights and privileges formerly held by the aristocracy. The political economist Jacques Attali writes that the concert hall appeared in the nineteenth century as an expression of bourgeois social and cultural power: "(music) refused to stay tied to a camp whose power was dwindling. It ceased to

⁸ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985); Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Derek B. Scott, "Music and Social Class," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 544-568.

be written solely for the pleasure of the idle and became an element in a new code of power, that of the solvent consumer.”⁹ Or, as he put it more bluntly, “Music became involved with money. The concert hall performance replaced the popular festival and the private concert at court.”¹⁰

“The spirit of the bourgeoisie,” Carl Dahlhaus writes, “found its musical manifestation in the public concert.”¹¹ Unlike aristocratic musical culture, where performances were restricted to courtiers and other noble invitees, the public concert was open to anyone who could afford a ticket. The public concert can be defined by its organizational structure: an overture, a solo, an intermission, and then a symphony. But, as Dahlhaus writes in his study of nineteenth-century musical culture, this is not what makes the public concert the representative institution of bourgeois musical culture: “Public concerts...are also the object of descriptions and reviews in the central public medium of the bourgeoisie, the press. It was here that the emancipated bourgeoisie confirmed in its own eyes its status as the “taste-bearing stratum” in music.”¹²

Aesthetically, the musical sensibilities of the bourgeoisie were informed by musical romanticism. As David Gramit writes, patronage and aesthetics are intertwined, and as the bourgeois became the patrons of musical culture, the meanings attributed to music became bourgeois as well:

⁹ Attali, *Noise*, 50.

¹⁰ Attali, *Noise*, 47.

¹¹ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 49.

¹² Dahlhaus, “Nineteenth-Century Music,” 49. For more on the public concert, see: Joan Peyser (ed.), *The Orchestra: A Collection of 23 Essays on Its Origins and Transformations* (Milwaukee, Hal Leonard Corp., 2006); Henry Raynor, “The Rise of the Public Concert,” in *A Social History of Music: From the Middle Ages to Beethoven* (New York: Schoken Books, 1972), 314-331; William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848*, (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2004); William Weber, *The Great Transformation in Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Percy M. Young, *The Concert Tradition: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 38-42.

...in a social context in which the significance of musical performance was no longer reliably established by aristocratic patronage, the inherent value of art could replace the patronage of the highest classes as a guarantor of value...the prestige of music itself...had effectively replaced the prestige of the patrons it had once signaled.¹³

What differentiated the concert halls of the bourgeoisie from the churches and palaces of the aristocracy was that churches and palaces were musical venues by circumstance, they were designed to reflect the glory of either god or the patron, not music. The concert hall was designed for the worship of music.

The expansion of Amsterdam in the nineteenth century and the construction of the Concertgebouw and Rijksmuseum was a firm indication that the bourgeoisie were Amsterdam's leading cultural patrons. By the late nineteenth century, the patrician elite who had dominated Amsterdam's musical life found themselves presiding over an increasingly anachronistic culture. Music and musicians were no longer reserved for the wealthiest members of society. The bourgeoisie democratized musical culture by making it a commodity, a process that culminated in the building of the Concertgebouw. But, the cultural initiatives of the Amsterdam bourgeoisie were not purely economic in nature. Their intent was to inaugurate a cultural Golden Age for their city; musically, this ambitious goal would be achieved by transforming Amsterdam into a European musical capital that could rival Vienna and Leipzig.

The letter that appeared in the Amsterdam newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* on November 9, 1888 did not help this cause. This letter concerned the first Sunday matinee concert held in the Concertgebouw. It described the concert as a "séance," and although the orchestra was excellent, the audience "wasn't cheerful...there was a certain contagious unsociability and stiffness which led to boredom."¹⁴ The writer looks back to Sunday matinees at the long-departed Parkzaal (Park Hall), what he calls one of the

¹³ David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770-1848* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 145.

¹⁴ "...maar het publiek was niet opgewekt; er heerschte in de zaal eene zekere ongezelligheid en stijfheid die aanstekelijk werketen en verveling deden ontstaan..." *Algemeen Handelsblad* (November 9, 1888).

most loved events in Amsterdam, and offers suggestions that would enliven the Concertgebouw matinees: remove the ban on smoking, provide waiters with noise-less shoes so they can take food and drink orders during the performance, don't allow the orchestra director to bother guests with angry looks when they cross the room during a performance or have a loud conversation, and let the first half of the program consist of classical music and the second consist of light and cheerful music.¹⁵ The writer argues that the point of these matinees is to provide a pleasant and sociable Sunday afternoon, music is not necessary to accomplish this and so music "shouldn't be considered a main thing, nor be treated like it, so visitors won't be forced to listen to it with full attention."¹⁶ The letter was signed *Een Muziek liefhebber Tevens Aandeelhouder*—a music lover and a shareholder.

A response was printed in the same newspaper on November 22, 1888. The *Muziek liefhebber Tevens Aandeelhouder*, this letter points out, "desires that people should be able to walk, smoke, talk...in short, he wants to tolerate everything but good, respectable concerts."¹⁷ This writer discovered that on one occasion, Sunday November 11, 1888, "the hall was quiet, the music was excellent, and no one talked." However, the following Sunday, "it was noisy, people entered the room talking loudly...people's shoes creaked, they moved their seats...and successfully spoiled the performance for music

¹⁵ "In te trekken het verbod van te rooken. Geen enkele dame zal daarom minder komen, terwijl de rook in de hooge zaal niemand kan hinderen...Toe te staan aan de bedienden, na ze eerst van een niet-gernisch makend schoeisel te hebben voorzien, van ook gedurende de muziek-uitvoeringen te circuleeren, bestellingen van ververschingen aan te nemen en die uit te voeren; De bezoekers niet te laten lastig vallen, ook niet door den verentwaardigden blik van den orkestdirecteur, wanneer ze gedurende de muziekuivoeringen de zaal doorgaan of op gewenen toon een gesprek voeren en dit vooral niet gedurende het 2de deel van het programma; Het eerste deel van het programma te laten bestaan uit klassieke muziek en het tweede deel uit niet klassieke muziek. In dit tweede deel moet minsten een nummer van eenigezins licht en opwekkend gehalte voorkomen." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, (November 9, 1888).

¹⁶ "De muziek, die daartoe noodig is, dient in elk opzicht uitstekend te zijn, maar moet toch niet als hoofdzaak beschouwd, noch aldus behandeld werden, zoodat men dan ook de bezoekers niet moet dwingen van er met alle aandacht naar te luisteren." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, (November 9, 1888).

¹⁷ "Hij verlangt, dat men er ongegeneerd te werk mogegaan, wandelen, rooken, praten...kortom hij wil er van alles tolereeren behalve goede, degelijke concerten." *Algemeen Handelsblad* (November 22, 1888)

lovers.”¹⁸ The author feels that this change in behaviour is the result of the board of the Concertgebouw giving in to the demands of people whose opinions were similar to the *Muziek liefhebber Teven Aandeelhouder*.¹⁹ To this, the letter poses the following questions: Shouldn't the Concertgebouw, which was expensive enough, be used for anything better than socializing? Can a well-bred audience let the Concertgebouw be downgraded to the level of noisy promenade concerts, like the ones that used to be performed in the Parkzaal and other venues? And finally, can those who are so amused by noise not find a more suitable place than a concert hall?²⁰ The problem is clear—the board of the Concertgebouw cannot serve two masters; they must choose what kind of musical culture this building was to become associated with: respectable concerts, “which suit the monumental building and the high membership fee,” or the type of concert preferred by *Een Muziek liefhebber Teven Aandeelhouder*. If the latter is the case, then the board should “lower the entrance fee, alienate itself from art lovers and turn the Concertgebouw into a bar.”²¹ In a nod to the inclusive nature of the Concertgebouw as a venue for public concerts, the letter was signed simply *Een Muziek liefhebber*—a music lover.

¹⁸ “Den 11 was het stil in de zaal, de muziek was uitstekend en het publiek zweeg. Den 18 daarentegen was het er rumoerig, onder de mooiste passages kwam men luid sprekende binnen, kraakte met de laarzen, schoof met stoelen of voetbankjes en slaagde er dan ook vrij wel in het genot voor de muziekliefhebbers te bederven.” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, (November 22, 1888).

¹⁹ In fact, the Board of the Concertgebouw discussed the letter by *Een Muziek liefhebber and Aandeelhouder* on November 16, 1888. The only record of this in the minutes of the Board is a note that they voted unanimously to keep the ban on smoking. Johan H. Giskes, “De Periode Willem Kes (1888-1895),” in H.J. van Royen (ed.), *Historie en kroniek van het Concertgebouw en het Concertgebouworkest 1888-1988 Deel I* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1989), 44.

²⁰ “Moet het Concertgebouw, dat geld genoeg gekost heeft, niet voor iets beters gebruikt worden dan voor societeit? Kan een welopgevoed publiek lijdelijk aan zien dat een Concert zaal, waarop Amsterdam trotech zou kunnen zijn, verlaagd worde tot het niveau van de rumoerige promenade concerten, die vroeger in het Park en Paleis voor Volksvlijt gegeven werden? Kunnen zij, die zich zoo gaarne met rumoer amuseeren niet eene meer geschikte plaats daartoe uitkiezen dan juist een Concert zaal?” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, (November 22, 1888).

²¹ “Het moet of aan zijne concerten het cachet van degelijkheid geven dat in overeenstemming is met den monumentalen bouw der zaal en met het hooge bedrag der contributie; of het meet de contributie belangrijk verlagen, de kunstliefhebbers van zich vervreemden en van het Concertgebouw een uitspanningsoord maken.” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, (November 22, 1888).

The conflict between these two music lovers is a conflict over the meaning of instrumental music. *Een Muziek liefhebber Teven Aandeelhouder* believes that a concert should be a social event, a place to eat and drink and socialize with the orchestra providing musical accompaniment. *Een Muziek liefhebber* understands concerts to be events for listening; instrumental music is art and to properly appreciate what this art form has to offer, one needs to listen attentively.

It may seem obvious to anyone who attends a classical music concert that attentive listening is one of the most guarded rituals of this event. But this is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of Western musical culture. Historian William Weber writes that in the eighteenth century, “some people listened and some socialized, but no one objected to their being together in one audience;” while in the nineteenth century, “audiences were expected to remain seated and silent for the duration of the musical performance.”²² Prior to the late eighteenth century, scored secular instrumental music performed by an orchestra—what we would call classical music—was rarely considered anything more than mere entertainment. It was pleasant, but not in the same category as mimetic art, like poetry, literature, sculpture, or painting. Because instrumental music was considered merely pleasant, arriving late, socializing, and leaving early were common occurrences at orchestral concerts up to the early nineteenth century, and in some instances, such as Amsterdam, this behaviour was defended as late as 1888.

Given the privileged status that has been afforded to classical music over the past century, it is surprising to discover that many eighteenth-century aesthetic theorists and philosophers found instrumental music to be not only inferior to vocal music, but

²² William Weber, “Wagner, Wagnerism, and Musical Idealism,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* eds. David Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 31.

incapable of expressing anything other than a pleasant melody.²³ In the nineteenth century, this attitude was no longer fashionable. Under the influence of romanticism, aesthetic theorists, philosophers, and music critics propagated ideas about the nature of art and the meaning of music that upended aesthetic traditions. Painting or poetry was bound by what it could represent; it was always “of” something in the world. Instrumental music could transcend the everyday and convey experiences and interpretations that other art forms could not. Romantic theorists latched on to instrumental music’s non-representational nature, and by the mid-nineteenth century it was considered by many to be the ideal art. Music, as the romantic theorist Walter Pater put it, is the art towards which all other art aspires. Instead of pleasurable entertainment, instrumental music was considered profound and sublime because it could express the inexpressible—it was a language above language.

Under the influence of musical romanticism, listening to music became an act of aesthetic devotion. If, as romantics argued, instrumental music was capable of expressing the unimaginable, if it was capable of touching the soul like no other art form, then the path to sonic transcendence could only be achieved through silent and attentive listening. Beginning in the 1990s, attentive listening garnered attention from writers working in different disciplines (history, sociology, philosophy, musicology).²⁴ Because attentive listening seems simultaneously unnatural (it is unique to Western classical

²³ For more on the aesthetic transformation of instrumental music, see: Andrew Bowie, “Music and the Rise of Aesthetics,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Friedrich Blume, *Classic and Romantic Music: A Comprehensive Survey* trans. M.D. Herter Norton (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music* trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007); Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770-1848*; John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

²⁴ Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995); Matthew Riley, *Musical Listening in the German Enlightenment: Attention, Wonder, Astonishment* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2004); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1974); William Weber, “Did people listen in the 18th century?” *Early Music*, 25 no.4 (November 1997): 678-691.

music) and unquestioned amongst audiences for Western classical music, these writers asked why audiences began to listen attentively and how attentive listening was maintained. These studies of attentive listening are fascinating. They reveal a relationship between aesthetics, class, behaviour, and musical culture that for too long was ignored in favour of the common-sense explanation that audiences listen attentively because the beauty of the music inspires attentive listening.

Taking this research one step further, in this work I examine the materiality of attentive listening. Social theorists of technology have long argued that ideas, on their own, are not very effective. For ideas to spread and persist over time and space, they need to be materialized in objects. In this work, I examine the concert hall as an object that does just this—materialize attentive listening and enable it to persist over time and space. Concert halls are not neutral conduits for the performance and reception of music. These buildings are loaded with meanings that draw upon the history of Western musical culture. Beginning in the nineteenth century, shoebox concert halls were constructed in European cities to disseminate the idea that classical music, and in particular the symphony, is aesthetically superior to all other art forms. Functionally, this idea was translated into designs that encouraged listeners to listening attentively, even devoutly, to music that had previously been considered a pleasant diversion to social obligations. Using the Concertgebouw and Amsterdam's musical culture as a case study, the following work explores the materiality of attentive listening by examining the concert hall as a medium of classical music culture.

1.2. The Technical Mediation of Listening and Nineteenth-Century Musical Culture

To take listening as a starting point for the study of musical culture is problematic because it draws attention away from the facts of music and focuses on the experience of music. This is especially problematic in studies of classical music where, traditionally, great composers and musical works have cast an imposing shadow over the listener. The subjective experience of listening has no place in a musical culture dominated by the concrete facts of notation and biography.

Recovering the listener can be accomplished by focusing on the technical mediation of listening. There is always a form of technical mediation that comes between composition, performance, and reception. This mediation shapes listening because it is intended to shape reception; the symphony may not be intended for the listener, as Walter Benjamin famously wrote, but the technology that mediates the symphony is.²⁵ In this way, studying listening as a technically mediated phenomenon can reveal the historical and cultural contingencies of musical culture from the perspective of the listener.

This approach to musical culture was partly motivated by the media theory of Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innis, and Friedrich Kittler. These writers put media at the centre of Western history, arguing that the history of Western culture is a history of how different media bias the organization and dissemination of knowledge. From hieroglyphics to the Greek alphabet to medieval manuscripts to the printing press, the history of Western culture is a history of how different media shape our understanding and experience of the world. Applying these insights to musical culture opens up an approach that is quite different from those found in cultural studies, philosophy, or musicology. If, as media theorists argue, the history of Western culture is the history of media, then the history of Western musical culture is the history of music's mediation. Instead of a history of composers, genres, and styles, the history of Western musical culture is a history of notation, printed scores, recordings, and venues.

Robert Albrecht, one of the few media theorists who has studied musical culture, describes this media-centric approach as one oriented towards studying how media “shift patterns of perception, expressions of feelings, and habits of interaction that extend well beyond the superficial content of music.”²⁶ Approaching musical culture in this way, I became interested in how different media influence the listening experience. It seemed obvious that listening to music, like visual perception, was historically and culturally

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 69.

²⁶ Robert Albrecht, *Mediating the Muse: A Communications Approach to Music, Media, and Cultural Change* (Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press, 2004), 49.

contingent. Investigating how different media were intertwined with different modes and expectations of listening revealed many fascinating studies that explored the relationship between listening, musical meaning, and media.²⁷ However, I quickly realized that most of these studies focused on different configurations of recorded music. However fascinating these studies were, I was struck by their technical exclusivity—the history of the technical mediation of listening was a history of how recorded music (or related media, like radio) mediated listening.

One of the consequences of this historical perspective is that nineteenth-century musical culture appears as an era in which aesthetics trumps materiality and the greatness of works and composers takes precedence over the technical mediation of these works. We are led to believe that this was an era of unmediated musical experiences where everyone was a listener and performer, before a nefarious music industry monopolized musical performance and turned the masses into docile listeners and complacent consumers. This is the myth of authenticity, a nostalgic lament for a musical culture that is shaped by dissatisfaction with the present, not historical fact. This view of history is part of a larger trend in which media historians simply fail to account for forms of technical mediation that are not recordings. Thus, by virtue of being free of recorded music, nineteenth-century musical culture is free of all forms of technical mediation.

²⁷ Examples of studies that resonated with my interests in listening and the technical mediation of music include: Theodor Adorno, “The Curves of the Needle,” “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” “Opera and the Long-Playing Record,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 55 (1990): 49-66; Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); James M. Curtis, “Towards a Sociotechnological Interpretation of Popular Music in the Electronic Age,” *Technology and Culture*, 25 no.1 (1984): 91-102; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1999); Dick Hebdige, *Cut’n’ Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music* (London: Methuen & Co., 1987); Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young & Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); John Mowitt, “The Sound of Music in the Era of its Electronic Reproducibility,” in Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (eds.) *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

With an inclination towards blending musical culture and media history, I began to research how listening could be considered technically mediated prior to recordings. There were many books and articles about musical instruments and quite a lot of literature about notation and printed scores, but these media did not appeal to me. Instruments, notation, and scores are media designed for the performance of music, not listening to music. Listening is unlike any other moment of the musical experience. Composing music, performing music, promoting music, selling music, distributing music, buying music—none of these activities necessarily requires the ear. Because we come to music as listeners first, I wanted to prioritize listening and the role of the listener within a sociotechnical study of musical culture.

The concert hall is the ideal object through which to explore listening, media, and nineteenth-century musical culture. Concert halls—as opposed to opera houses, churches, taverns, pleasure gardens, or theatres—are designed to mediate attentive listening, a mode of listening that is historically and culturally contingent. Attentive listening, and the musical culture it is a part of, was the result of social, aesthetic, and philosophical transformations of musical culture that became firmly established amongst musicians, critics, and audiences during the nineteenth century.

Approaching media and musical culture in this way, I had to invert conventional methods for studying media and listening to music. Instead of using technology to explain listening, I began to consider how a cultural idea of listening could explain the technical mediation of listening. This approach was influenced by the philosophy of technology and constructivist technology studies, both of which encourage researchers to examine the social contexts that precede and shape technology. Following philosopher of technology Andrew Feenberg, who writes: “one learns a great deal about a vision from attempts to realize it,”²⁸ I hope the following work can reveal a great deal about listening to music by focusing on one particular attempt to realize its mediation.

²⁸ Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 144.

1.3. The Making of Classical Music Culture in Amsterdam

Still in use today, the Concertgebouw is considered by architectural acousticians, musicians, and listeners to be one of the three best concert halls in the world alongside Vienna's Grosser Musikvererinsaal (opened in 1870) and Boston's Symphony Hall (opened in 1900).²⁹ Its orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, has been similarly lauded. It received the title of best orchestra in the world in a poll of American, European, and Asian classical music critics conducted by the British magazine *Gramophone* in 2008. In short, the Concertgebouw—the building, the orchestra, and the audience—is one of the iconic institutions of classical music. Yet, in 1888, the year the Concertgebouw opened, Amsterdam was considered, at best, a second-rate musical city: the orchestras were unspectacular, there was no great compositional talent to speak of, and audiences attended concerts to socialize, not listen.

The Concertgebouw was the material validation of a concentrated effort to create a classical music culture in Amsterdam. Unlike other cities like Leipzig, Vienna, or Paris classical music in Amsterdam did not emerge from a rich history of court-based musical culture or ecclesiastical tradition. The Concertgebouw was the beginning of a tradition of classical music culture in Amsterdam.

Concerning the history of Dutch musical culture, musicologist Emile Wennekes writes: "The place of the Netherlands in the musical history of the last four centuries was that of a loyal, indeed quite conservative trend follower. Developments abroad were followed at a modest distance but with warm interest, and skillfully assimilated."³⁰ In the nineteenth-century, Amsterdammers who were concerned with their city's musical status looked to German cities as models for their own city. These Amsterdammers were quite familiar with German musical culture, and, as cultural historian Donna Mehos writes, the

²⁹ Leo Beranek, *Concert Halls and Opera Houses: Music, Acoustics, and Architecture* 2nd Edition (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2004), 425; see also Fritz Winckel, "Space, Music, and Architecture," *Cultures*, 1 no.3 (1974): 180.

³⁰ Emile Wennekes, "Music and Musical Life," in *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective Volume 5, Accounting for the Past: 1650-2000*, ed. Douwe Fokkema and Frans Grijzenhout, trans. Paul Vincent (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 257.

“culture-conscious Dutch bourgeoisie” often regarded “major foreign cultural institutions as models, competitors, and signs of Dutch backwardness.”³¹ German musicians held prominent positions in all of the major cities in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century and German music was favoured amongst the orchestras in the country.³² Of course, in the nineteenth century, Germany’s musical culture was the envy of the Western world and so it is not surprising that in a small country that borders Germany, German music and German musicians were quite influential.

Yet, what is compelling about Amsterdam’s imitation of German musical culture is the characteristics they chose to pickpocket from their Eastern neighbours. Unable to develop compositional talent to equal German composers, the Dutch imported German ideas about music derived from the aesthetic theory of musical romanticism. Drawing upon the writings of theorists like E.T.A. Hoffmann and German music journals like the Leipzig based *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Dutch critics and writers were inspired to start their own music journals. These journals introduced new ideas about music through criticism and essays that were intended for an engaged listener, not a trained musician. Audiences were educated as to how to behave and how to listen, orchestras were critiqued for encouraging virtuoso performances and commended for fidelity to the score, and in time, the horizon of expectations that Dutch audiences brought to concerts were equal to German audiences. Making these ideas permanent required a concentrated initiative by the city’s bourgeoisie. Inspired by what they read in music journals and trips they had taken to German concert halls, this class of Amsterdammers ensured that *their* musical culture would persist by building a durable symbol of musical romanticism.

Musical romanticism did not occur naturally in the Netherlands. It was a German import. In the realm of ideas, this sometimes implies a depreciation of the original culture. This was not the case in Amsterdam. The assimilation of musical romanticism

³¹ Donna C. Mehos, *Science & Culture for Members Only: The Amsterdam Zoo Artis in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 120.

³² Eduard Reesor, *Een eeuw Nederlandse Muziek 1815-1915* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1986).

was an assimilation of certain elements of musical romanticism, namely attentive listening and the creation of a professional orchestra. The Concertgebouw was built to materially ensure that attentive listening and other tenets of musical romanticism would endure and Amsterdam would not return to a second-rate musical city.

1.4. The Concert Hall as a Medium of Musical Culture: An Overview of the Following Work

This project is more than a history of musical culture and the concert hall. It concerns media history and how the history of musical culture and listening is accounted for within the framework of media history. In Chapter Two, I examine the relationship between media history and musical culture and argue that the history of musical media has been constructed as a history of recorded music. Situating the concert hall as a technology that mediates a particular listening experience challenges the assumption that the mediation of listening to music began with the invention of recorded music.

In Chapter Three, I develop a methodology premised on the idea that the history of musical media should be a history of listening. Engaging in larger debates concerning the relationship between the social and the technical, I argue that within musical culture, listening (the social) influences its technical mediation, not the other way around. Drawing upon Andrew Feenberg's philosophy of technology, I outline a framework using the concept of the technical code to reveal how modes of music listening precede and shape the technical mediation of listening.

Chapter Four is the hinge between the conceptual and methodological issues discussed in Chapters Two and Three and the case study of the Concertgebouw. Chapter Four begins with a discussion of listening and what it means to take listening as the starting point for a study of musical culture. In particular, I focus on the split between visual epistemologies and aural forms of knowledge. The intellectual and political building blocks of modernity, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, were visual movements, unthinkable without the advent of print. This visual bias has influenced how we think about the composition, performance, and reception of music by celebrating the value of the former two activities and relegating listening as a passive engagement with

music. Following this, I examine the relationship between attentive listening and musical romanticism, tracing how listening was transformed by German romantic writers like Hoffmann and Wackenroder who argued that secular instrumental music requires a disposition worthy of this art.

Chapter Five is the first of three chapters dedicated to the case study of the Concertgebouw. In this chapter, I examine how the ideals of musical romanticism circulated in the Netherlands by using examples drawn from nineteenth-century Dutch music criticism. Music criticism, in the sense that we know it today, emerged in the early nineteenth century. This was the point at which a style of criticism was developed that was written for listeners, not professional musicians. Guided by musical romanticism, critics took it upon themselves to develop the taste of their readers by providing compelling philosophical and aesthetic arguments concerning the meaning of music.

Chapter Six traces musical romanticism to the Amsterdam bourgeoisie. Members of this class acted as intermediaries between aesthetic ideas concerning music and the concrete realization of these ideas. Beginning with a newspaper article that defined the problems that had beset Amsterdam's musical deficiencies as a material problem that could be solved by constructing a new concert hall, this chapter examines how a group of individuals were able to act upon this idea. By deciding to build a concert hall, a symbol of the public concert and musical romanticism, the Amsterdam bourgeoisie were attempting to solve Amsterdam's musical deficiencies through technology.

In Chapter Seven, I describe the processes through which the design of the Concertgebouw was selected. Beginning with a discussion of the science and history of acoustic architecture, this chapter examines how attentive listening was translated into the design of the Concertgebouw. With neither a predictive theory of acoustics nor a rich musical history to draw upon, I tell the history of the design of the Concertgebouw as a history of how a technical code of attentive listening implicitly shaped the design and function of the Concertgebouw.

I conclude by returning to questions raised in Chapter Two concerning the nature of media history and musical culture. Taking the technical mediation of attentive

listening as a starting point, I outline a history of media and Western musical culture from 1800 to the mp3. Overcoming the technical divides that have defined the history of media and musical culture, this concluding chapter outlines a history of media designed for listening to music that is a history of a conflict between attentive and inattentive listening.

2. The Technical Shaping of Musical History

Successive technological revolutions have immeasurably widened the psychological gap between generations. With some reason, perhaps, the man of the age of electricity and of the airplane feels himself removed from his ancestors. With less wisdom, he has been disposed to conclude that they have ceased to influence him.

-Marc Bloch

2.1. Introduction

The composer John Cage writes that Willem De Kooning was once asked which painters from the past had influenced him. He answered, "The past does not influence me; I influence it."³³ Questions of audacity aside, one wonders if such a claim is limited to painting, or could other artists say the same thing? Perhaps we could subject De Kooning's claim to music. After all, the history of Western musical culture is a history of momentous breaks with the past. Styles (polyphony, the symphony, atonalism, be-bop, rock, punk, rap) and musicians (Bach, Beethoven, Schoenberg, Parker, Hendrix) define the eras that make up Western musical culture by breaking with prevailing conventions and opening up horizons within which new potentials can be realized.

However, this is a recursive process. There is always historical continuity: a musical style emerges that changes everything until this style inevitably becomes that which needs to be changed. New styles and musicians are always a reaction against those that came before them. The past always influences the present. It is the horizon within which new ideas emerge and change can occur. If we were to measure the

³³ John Cage, "History of Experimental Music in the United States," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 67.

historical worth of any particular musician or style against De Kooning's claim, one would find that musicians and musical styles are strongly influenced by history, not the other way around.

Musicians and musical styles, though, are not the entirety of musical culture. If we consider music to be not just social, but *sociotechnical*, one finds that De Kooning's claim has more accuracy. The history of musical culture is written so that technical innovations are described as having had an effect on the history of Western musical culture that exceeds the contribution of any musician or musical style. Max Weber, for example, writes "The specific conditions of musical development in the occident involves, first of all, the invention of modern notation."³⁴ Following Weber, it was media, not any particular style or musician that inaugurated Western musical culture.

Modern notation can be traced back to the ninth century when musically inclined monks developed systems to record the melismas performed by choirs. In the eleventh century, Italian monk Guido d'Arezzo improved the symbolic representation of music by introducing a 4-line staff and a set of syllables that denoted pitch.³⁵ For 400 years, notation was used to describe the sound of music; it was a storage medium. In the fourteenth century, it became a compositional tool; "It now became prescriptive," Paul Théberge writes, "a set of more-or-less clearly defined instructions written by one individual to be executed by another."³⁶ After the split between composition and performance, other significant changes occurred. Fifty years after Gutenberg, music became a commodity when Ottaviano dei Petrucci of Venice became the first seller of

³⁴ Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, trans. D. Martindale (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), 83; see also Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 15; Max Weber, "Value-Judgments in Social Science" in *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. Tom Runciman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 95.

³⁵ Michael Chanan, *Music Practica: The Social Practice of Western Music from Gregorian Chant to Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1994), 55; Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 132.

³⁶ Paul Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 178. See also Kurt Blaukopf, *Musical Life in a Changing Society: Aspects of Music Sociology* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1992), 160; Chanan, *Musica Practica*, 59.

printed sheet music. The anonymity of composition declined as authorship secured payment and the burgeoning industry of music publishing exploited the marketability of “star” composers. As Jacques Attali writes, “The artist was born, at the same time as his work went on sale.”³⁷ The separation of composition from performance, the emergence of the music industry, the idea of musical genius and celebrity—all of these aspects of Western musical culture can be told through the history of notation.

We could also compose a history of Western musical culture as a history of musical instruments. Paul Griffiths begins his history of Western musical culture by pointing to 45,000 year old flutes made of hollowed bones found in caves in modern-day Southern Germany and Slovenia. This is the point, Griffiths argues, at which music begins:

No sooner were we here than, in all probability, we were making music. We must have done so on other instruments, which have disintegrated or gone unrecognized, perhaps including reed flutes, log drums, ringing stones and shakers made from seedpots.³⁸

Although notation and instruments have played an indelible part in shaping the history of Western musical culture, the significance of recorded music overshadows both today. Recordings have supplanted notation and printed scores as the definitive version of music, while instruments have largely been replaced in the home by stereo equipment and computers. The significance of recordings has been so great that it is common

³⁷ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 47. For more on the printing and commodification of music in the sixteenth century, see: Robert Albrecht, *Mediating the Muse: A Communications Approach to Music, Media, and Cultural Change* (Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press, 2004), 109; Chanan, *Music Practica*, 112; Reebe Garofalo, “From Music Publishing to mp3: Music and Industry in the 20th Century,” *American Music*, 17 no.3 (1999): 320.

³⁸ Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Western Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

sense to say that everything changed after Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner.³⁹ Hearing music, prior to recordings, was synonymous with seeing it. Music could not be owned, collected, manipulated, or listened to at will. Yet, over the course of a century, we find ourselves in a musical culture where almost all of the music we listen to is recorded music. We take it for granted that when we talk about music, what we are usually talking about is the recording of that music.

The changes that have resulted from recorded music inspired many writers to equate the significance of recordings with other momentous events within media history. Theodor Adorno writes that recordings are to music what writing is to speech.⁴⁰ For Don Ihde, recordings enable a music listening public in the same way that the printing press led to a reading public.⁴¹ Marshall McLuhan goes so far as to compare different configurations of recorded music (78, LP, tape) with “all the phases of the written, the printed, and the mechanized word.”⁴² The impact of recorded music on musical culture can also be gauged by the sheer number of books and articles that take recordings as

³⁹ Edison invented sound recording in 1877 and his name is synonymous with the early phonograph that played cylinders. Berliner is largely credited as the first person to exploit this technology for musical purposes through the popularity of his gramophone and his use of discs, not cylinders, as the preferred configuration of recorded sound, see: Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph 1877-1977*, 2nd revised edition (New York: Collier Books, 1977); Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Oliver Read and Lewis Welch, *From Tin-Foil to Stereo: Evolution of the Phonograph* (Indianapolis: Howard W. Sams & Co., 1959).

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” trans. Thomas Levin, *October*, 55 (Winter 1990): 59.

⁴¹ Don Ihde, “Bach to Rock: Amplification,” in *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd Edition (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 227-234.

⁴² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964), 277. For more on the recording as text, see: Arved Ashby, *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Amanda Bayley, *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Colin Symes, *Setting the Record Straight: A Material History of Classical Music* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

their starting point.⁴³ Never before have studies of musical culture been so explicitly intertwined with questions of technical mediation. There are, as noted, numerous studies of instruments and other media throughout the many histories of Western musical culture. With few exceptions, though, it is only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that musical culture has become so clearly identified as sociotechnical.

These examples tell us what we already know—recorded music is an indelible part of twentieth and twenty-first century musical culture. Recordings mark the beginning of a new musical culture that is significantly different than the eras that preceded it. But studies of recorded music do more than this. Sociotechnical studies of

⁴³ For studies of musical culture that take recordings as a starting point, see: Ashby, *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction*; Bayley, *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*; Hans-Joachim Braun, *Music and Technology in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995); Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink, *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Corbett, "Free, Single and Disengaged: Listening, Pleasure and the Popular Music Object," in *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, 2nd Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Aden Evens, *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Jon Frederickson, "Technology and Music: Performance in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 20 no.2 (1989): 193-220; Simon Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," in *Popular Music and Communication*, edited by James Lull (Newbury Park CA: Sage), 53-78; Garofalo, "From Music Publishing to mp3"; Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph 1877-1977*; Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines*; Geoffrey P. Hull, *The Recording Industry*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2004); Don Ihde, "Technologies-Musics-Embodiments," *Janus Head*, 10 no.1 (2007): 7-24; Steve Jones, "Music that Moves: Popular Music, Distribution and Network Technologies," *Cultural Studies*, 16 no.2 (2002): 213-232; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Kembrew MacLeod, "mp3s are Killing Home Taping: The Rise of Internet Distribution and its Challenge to the Major Label Music Monopoly," *Popular Music and Society*, 28 no.4 (2005): 521-531; Millard, *America on Record*; Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever: An Aural History of Recorded Music* (New York: Faber & Faber Inc., 2009); Keith Negus, *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (New York: E. Arnold, 1992); Read and Welch, *From Tin Foil to Stereo*; Eric Rothenbuhler and John Durham Peters, "Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory," *The Musical Quarterly*, 81, no.2 (1997): 242-264; David Suisman and Susan Strasser, *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Symes, *Setting the Record Straight*; Timothy Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

twentieth- and twenty-first century musical culture construct a history of media and musical culture that extends further back than the invention of recorded music. The history of twentieth-century musical culture is written so that a technical divide separates it from nineteenth-century musical culture, a divide that becomes greater with each new configuration of recorded music introduced (78, LP, cassette, CD, mp3). As new configurations are introduced, the nineteenth century recedes from view with increasing speed; history begins to be written so that recordings not only mark the beginning of a new musical culture, they also mark the beginning of music's technical mediation. Media historians have created a version of nineteenth-century musical culture that, by virtue of being free of recorded music, is free from all forms of technical mediation. Returning to De Kooning's declaration concerning his unprecedented originality, the history of musical culture tells us that no one person or style can claim to be both free from history and a determining force on it, but it does tell us that technology can.

2.2. History, Technology, and Listening to Music

It is a bold claim that the history of musical culture is determined by technology, so before going any further is it necessary to clarify this point. Christopher Small argues that the meaning of music cannot be reduced to a thing or an idea. Rather, music is an activity, it is something that people do and can only be explained through the relationships that people have with music. Small suggests the verb musicking to replace the noun music to account for all the possible relationships one can have with music: "To take part, in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing, or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing."⁴⁴ From this, I would like to suggest that there are three types of relationships with music that technology can mediate: performance, composition, and listening. Of these, recordings mediate listening.

⁴⁴ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

I am aware of the growing literature on the re-configuration of recorded music into performative or compositional media. Thinking about recordings in this way is interesting, but the assumption that DJs are performers on par with other musicians seems a bit artificial. In this regard, I follow Peter Szendy who writes:

For if the DJs are essentially doing nothing different from what I do in my listening room, that is because they are simply listeners appearing in concert...it was a musician who recently said, speaking of them, that their art "implies less a knowledge of how to play than of a knowledge of how to listen."⁴⁵

The mediation of composition and performance is quite different from the mediation of listening. An instrument requires a certain type of skilled intentionality to mediate music effectively. Ihde's description of playing a flute emphasizes this difference. "The flute player must learn an embodiment skill which engages, in this case, the disciplined hand and breath motions which are mediated through the flute to produce music...an actional intentionality which is directed, mediated through a material instrument—a technology."⁴⁶ Similarly, notation requires a special kind of musical literacy to be useful. Against the experience mediated by recordings, Evan Eisenberg points out that notation is a specialized language, "a set of instructions, useful to those who can carry them out."⁴⁷ Compare that description with any one of our many experiences with recorded music. One does not need any special training or skilled intentionality to hear music, one just needs to know how to press play. To paraphrase Roland Barthes, the difference between recorded music and other technical mediations like instruments or scores is that these media are intended to mediate performance. Recordings are intended to mediate listening.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 71.

⁴⁶ Ihde, "Technologies-Musics-Embodiments," 10-11.

⁴⁷ Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel*, 11; see also Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 258.

⁴⁸ "There are two musics (or so I've always thought): one you listen to, one you play." Roland Barthes, "Musica Practica," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985), 261.

But, recordings and related media like radio are not the only media designed to mediate music listening, and it is here that the conceptual problems lay. While the mediation of performance and composition have well documented histories that precede recorded music, the mediation of listening does not. And so it is this aspect of musical culture, listening to music, which has become free of technical mediation prior to recordings.

We can trace this view of history to critics of recorded music who, shortly after its widespread popularity, began to argue that musical culture was becoming increasingly listless. American composer John Philip Sousa, writing in 1906, argued that recorded music would lead to “a marked deterioration in American music and musical taste, an interruption in the musical development of the country, and a host of other injuries to music in its artistic manifestations, by virtue—or rather by vice—of the multiplication of the various music-reproducing machines.”⁴⁹ The argument that Sousa makes has been repeated, in various guises, over the past 100 years. One variation of this theme is that recordings remove music from the context of live performance, resulting in an impoverished musical experience. These interpretations lament the loss of “aura” or “authenticity” that recordings eliminate from the listening experience. Thus, two types of listening experiences are created: one that is mediated by recordings and one that is unencumbered by technology.

Philosopher of technology Albert Borgmann articulates the difference between these two types of listening as the difference between music as a focal practice and music as a device paradigm. The device paradigm, Borgmann writes, is the notion that modern technologies: “dissolve the coherent and engaging character of the pre-technological world of things. In a device, the relatedness of the world is replaced by a machinery, but the machinery is concealed, and the commodities, which are made available by a device, are enjoyed without the encumbrance of or the engagement with a

⁴⁹ John Philip Sousa, “The Menace of Mechanical Music,” *Appleton’s Magazine*, 8 (1906): 278.

context.”⁵⁰ As an example of this, Borgmann contrasts listening to recordings (device paradigm) with listening to friends performing music (focal practice):

A group of friends who gather with their instruments to delight me on my birthday provide music...A stereo set, however, secures music not just on a festive day but at any time...To this apparent richness and variety of technologically produced music there corresponds an extreme concealment or abstractness in the mode of its production. Records as unlabeled physical items do not bespeak, except to the most practiced of eyes, what kind of music they contain...I have little understanding of how the music came to be recorded on the disk and by what means it is retrieved from it. I have a vague conception at best of the musicians who originally performed the music; I may not even know how many there were, and in some cases I will not be able to distinguish or identify their instruments from the reproduction of their playing.⁵¹

For Borgmann, the antidote to music’s iteration as a device paradigm is re-conceptualizing music as a focal practice, which would require, “a focal concern for musicianship [that] will curtail the consumption of music and secure a more influential position for the authentic devotion to music.”⁵²

Borgmann’s philosophical theory of technology applied to music encourages the idea that prior to recordings, musical culture was authentic and pure because there were no intermediaries between performer and listener. Following Borgmann’s history, in the era of recordings, music is not something that is listened to, it is something that is consumed. Prior to recordings, music was not a thing, and listening, because it was not listening to things bought, was closer to Borgmann’s desire for an “authentic devotion to music.”

Simon Frith writes that anti-technology critiques directed towards recorded music create an idealized past that exists only to be mourned; a narrative wherein recordings mark “a shift from active musical production to passive pop consumption, the decline of

⁵⁰ Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 47.

⁵¹ Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 3-4.

⁵² Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 225.

folk or community or subcultural traditions, and a general musical deskilling.”⁵³ Although critiques like these do not always refer to a pre-technological past, they idealize the past by hinting that the musical culture that existed prior to recorded music was more authentic by virtue of its immediacy. The listening experience, in these narratives, is constructed around listening to live music—taken to its extreme (like in Borgmann’s example), one gets the idea that prior to recordings, listening only occurred in small groups where everyone knew one another and every person was potentially a performer and a listener.

This approach to listening and media is premised on the universality of a normative theory of communication where face-to-face communication is the ideal against which all other forms of communication are judged. Applied to musical culture, listening to a live performance becomes the ideal against which all other forms of listening are critiqued. The further removed the listener is from live performance, the less authentic it is and the greater the need is to return to a more authentic experience.

Jonathan Sterne critiques this facile idealism, writing that applying the communicative logic of face-to-face communication to listening can lead to the erroneous idealization of musical culture prior to recordings, which, in turn, makes it easy to dismiss recorded music from theories of musical culture:

If interpersonal interaction is the presumptively primary or “authentic” mode of communication, then sound reproduction is doomed to denigration as inauthentic, disorienting, and possibly even dangerous by virtue of its “decontextualizing” sound from its “proper” interpersonal context.⁵⁴

Timothy Taylor draws upon the normative ideal of the authenticity of live performance in presenting a historical dichotomy between the era of recorded music and the era that preceded it. Unique to Taylor, though, is the understanding that prior to

⁵³ Frith, “The Industrialization of Popular Music,” 54.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 21. See also Simon Frith, “Art versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music,” *Media, Culture, and Society*, 8 (1986): 263-279.

recorded music, listening to music was not an activity pursued as an end in itself, that without recordings, there would be no one who only listened to music:

The turntable is a technology that made it possible to have music anytime, and that threatened to turn producers of music into consumers of music, that threatened, in this shift from production to consumption, to remove music and musicking from their roots as social activities. And by and large it did. People who might have once made their own music learned to buy it instead.⁵⁵

Taylor's premise that recorded music turned potential performers into passive listeners is the necessary corollary of Borgmann's idea that recordings hinder "an authentic devotion to music" by encouraging consumerism. However, this romantic nostalgia masquerading as history does not hold up very well if we subject it to examples from musical history. As I will discuss throughout this work, the concert-going public of the nineteenth century did not necessarily perform or produce music. They were, first and foremost, listeners and consumers of music.⁵⁶ Similarly, the aristocratic audiences of eighteenth-century opera were made up of listeners whose musical ability was largely on par with Taylor's record buyers. The idea that recorded music turned would-be performers into mere listeners is a kind of idyllic history, symptomatic of living in a highly technical and hyper-consumer society.

Complementing Taylor's misguided musical nostalgia are writers who assume that the technical mediation of listening began with recorded music. Marc Leman suggests this when he writes that access to music (I assume that access includes listening) became technically mediated with the invention of recordings):

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Strange Sounds*, 204.

⁵⁶ As an aside in an essay on nineteenth-century conductors, Rufus Hallmark points out *only* listening to music did not begin with recorded music: "...bourgeois concertgoers were little trained in music, and except for the acquisition of a modest ability on the piano or flute by young ladies, they were not amateur performers. For musical entertainment they heard others perform rather than making music themselves." Rufus Hallmark, "The Star Conductor and Musical Virtuosity," in *The Orchestra: A Collection of 23 Essays on Its Origins and Transformations*, ed. Joan Peyser (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2006), 548.

During the twentieth century, there was a dramatic change in the way people had access to music. Originally, music was accessible only in an environment where it was played. There needed to be a direct transfer of sound energy from musician to listener. However, since the late nineteenth century, music recording technology has made it possible to encode the sound energy on a material substrate. As a result, access to music has become mediated by technologies.⁵⁷

Leman's claim that there needed to be a direct transfer of sound energy from musicians to listeners ignores the fact that this direct transfer was technically mediated. The music itself was not an object (a recording), but this does not mean that the connection between the performer and the listener was unmediated. The places where music is performed, what Leman calls the environments where it is played, are neither invisible nor neutral conduits for performance and listening. Churches, pleasure gardens, pubs, opera houses, and concert halls mediate the relationship between the performer and the listener and in doing so influence the performance and reception of music. Leman defines mediation through media he is most familiar with. Looking backwards from contemporary musical culture and unable to find CDs, LPs, or mp3s, he deduces that listening to music was not technically mediated.

Apart from questions of listening, the assumption that the technical mediation of music is only a twentieth-century phenomenon has become an unquestioned aspect of popular music studies. Simon Frith, for example, writes:

The history of twentieth-century popular music is impossible to write without reference to the changing forces of production, electronics, the use of recording, amplification and synthesizers, just as consumer choices cannot be separated from the possession of transistor radios, stereo hi-fis, ghetto blasters and Walkmen.⁵⁸

Of course, Frith is correct in his analysis of twentieth-century musical culture. But what does this say about nineteenth-century musical culture? Is it not also impossible to

⁵⁷ Marc Leman, *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 1.

⁵⁸ Simon Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music," in *Music & Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 135.

write its history without reference to technology? The technologies that Frith mentions are unique to the twentieth century, and his argument points to recorded music, and the technologies that emerged alongside it, to qualify musical culture as being technically mediated. It would be impossible to understand nineteenth-century musical culture through these technologies and the functions they enable, but this does not mean that musical culture was not technically mediated prior to Edison and Berliner. The ability to record music, or the profits that can be derived from selling records, or the portability of music, or the manipulability of music, or the potentials for disseminating music—any of these, when taken as a starting point, leaves no option for considering musical culture as sociotechnical prior to recorded music.⁵⁹

It would be unnecessarily controversial to say that recorded music did not drastically transform listening to music. There is a significant difference between listening to music in 1881 and listening to music in 1921 and this difference is largely due to recorded music. The historical fallacy that derives from this dramatic transformation of musical culture is the belief that listening to music was not technically mediated prior to recordings. Yet, the history of media and listening to music continues to be written in such a way so that it appears that no one was only a listener in the nineteenth century and/or the act of listening was entirely unmediated. Only after the invention of recordings does musical culture have a non-technical past, an assumption that is more convenient than accurate. This view of history that is certainly useful for

⁵⁹ There is a parallel between technical mediations of music and the proliferation of musical genres in the twenty-first century. As Nikil Saval aptly points out, one of the consequences of the prolific need to categorize the new has been the destruction of historical complexity: ...The rise of generic distinctions has lately reached a climax of absurdity, such that we can name off the top of our heads: house, witch house, dub, dubstep, hardstep, dancehall, dancefloor, punk, post-punk, noise, “Noise,” new wave, nu wave, emo, post-emo, hip-hop, hardcore hip-hop, nerdcore hip-hop, Christian hip-hop, crunk, crunkcore, metal, doom metal, black metal, death metal, Christian death metal, and, of course, shoegazing, amongst others (Meanwhile a thousand years of European art music is filed under “classical”). (Nikil Saval, “Wall of Sound: The Icky Shuffle,” *n+1*, 11 [Spring 2011]: 10-11.) Like genres of music, we can name dozens, if not hundreds, of technologies that mediate music unique to the twentieth and twenty-first century. Yet, we have very few descriptive categories for the technologies that mediated music between 1000 (the invention of notation) and 1900 (when recorded music became a mass medium).

emphasizing the transformative effects that recorded music has had on musical culture, but we should not let a compelling narrative determine historical perspective.

Using terms and concepts developed by media historian Harold Innis, we can argue that the history of the technical mediation of listening is biased by the functions enabled by recorded music. Recordings are space-biased media, they are “light and easily transported.”⁶⁰ The concert hall, like recorded music, is a medium of musical culture designed for listening. The difference is that the concert hall is a time-biased medium, one whose material form makes it “better suited to the dissemination of knowledge over time than over space.”⁶¹ Confronted by a time-biased musical medium, media historians and cultural theorists have a difficult time conceptualizing the mediation of listening. The tools and concepts used to study the cultural significance of musical media are designed for the study of space-biased media like recordings and so time-biased media, like concert halls or opera houses, simply do not register as media designed for listening. Understanding the technical mediation of listening exclusively through the functions and characteristics of recorded music has led to the generalization of these characteristics to explain the technical mediation of all music listening. This means that these concepts, which derive from the functions of recorded music, define what the technical mediation of listening is.

⁶⁰ Harold Innis, “The Bias of Communication,” in *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 33. See also Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972)

⁶¹ Innis, “The Bias of Communication,” 33. For a similar take on the question of media and historical continuity, see Hartmut Winkler, “Discourses, Schemata, Technology, Monuments: Outline for a Theory of Cultural Continuity,” trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, *Configurations*, 10 (2002): 91-109.

2.3. The Impossibility of a Non-Mediated Listening Experience and the Reasons Why this Idea Persists

Philosophical, sociological, and historical theories of technology all persuasively argue that any social activity free of technical mediation is virtually impossible. As sociologists of technology John Law and Wiebe Bijker write:

All relations should be seen as both social and technical...purely social relations are found only in the imaginations of sociologists, among baboons, or possibly, on nude beaches; and purely technical relations are found only in the wilder reaches of science fiction.⁶²

This being the case, how did it come to be that listening to music is not considered technically mediated prior to the invention of recorded music? Why, in other words, do media shape the history of musical culture?

Historians of technology struggle against the idea that history is a technologically driven phenomenon and have sought to explain why this approach dominates our historical imagination.⁶³ These historians suggest that technology defines history by creating the categories through which we know history. This is a subtle form of technological determinism, one that Sally Wyatt cleverly points out “has been common sense for so long that it has hardly needed a label.”⁶⁴ As Rosalind Williams writes, the persistence of this type of technological determinism is part of a shared notion of progress and modernity that is difficult to identify, let alone avoid:

The modern age has defined history in terms of socioeconomic factors rather than in terms of, say, political or diplomatic or religious events.

⁶² John Law and Wiebe Bijker, “Postscript: Technology, Stability, and Social Theory,” in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe Bijker and John Law (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 290.

⁶³ Thomas J. Misa, “How Machines Make History, and How Historians (and Others) Help Them to Do So,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 13 no.3/4 (Summer/Autumn 1988): 308-331; Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx, *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Sally Wyatt, “Technological Determinism is Dead; Long Live Technological Determinism,” in *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, ed. Edward Hackett, Olga Amsterdamska, Michael Lynch, and Judy Wajcman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 168.

This way of defining history is itself a result of priorities that are technology based, if not technology-determined. Technology decisively entered the study of history in the Enlightenment and the early 19th century. In response to the great technological event of the epoch—the overwhelming and unprecedented increase in productivity—the concept of technological progress was gradually extrapolated to history as a whole, and history became redefined as the record of socioeconomic progress. In other words: For those of us living in the modern age, history is almost by definition a technology-driven process.⁶⁵

Media theorists provide another explanation of the phenomenon of media determining media history. As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz write, “The media of the present influence how we think about the media of the past.”⁶⁶ Applied to media and musical culture, Winthrop-Young and Wutz’s comment is a reminder that the characteristics by which we know configurations of recorded music—portability, price, storage—influence how we think about the musical media that preceded recordings.

From the perspective of the history of technology and media theory, the categories we use to define the technical mediation of listening derive from the functions enabled by recorded music. We fail to recognize the technical mediation of listening prior to recorded music because we have neither the categories nor the frameworks to do so. Although it is convenient to use the term “technological revolution” to describe the impact of recordings on musical culture, the deterministic implications of this term are simply untenable.⁶⁷ By using the term revolution to describe the impact of recorded music, recordings are too often taken to be the starting point for music’s technical mediation and the characteristics of recordings taken as the categories through which we understand music’s technical mediation. Thus, questions concerning the technical mediation of music, and more importantly, the technical mediation of listening, are

⁶⁵ Rosalind Williams, “The Political and Feminist Dimensions of Technological Determinism,” in *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*, ed. Merrit Roe Smith and Leo Marx (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 221.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), xii.

⁶⁷ George Basalla, *The Evolution of Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chapter Two.

framed exclusively through recorded music. Relying on before-and-after narratives that emphasize the differences that result from recordings, twentieth-century musical culture must necessarily be sociotechnical while nineteenth century musical culture, because there are no recordings, is constructed as being free of technical mediations.

The divide between nineteenth and twentieth century musical culture is not an insurmountable technical divide. It is conceptual. It is a conceptual divide maintained by categories that, although developed for the study of recorded music, now frame how we understand technology and the mediation of listening. Commenting on the divide that separates modern and pre-modern scientific cultures, Bruno Latour writes, “All such dichotomous distinctions can be convincing only as long as they are enforced by a strong asymmetrical bias that treats the two sides of the divide or border very differently.”⁶⁸ In other words, epochal distinctions are maintained by conceptual distinctions—writers treat twentieth-century musical culture differently than they treat nineteenth-century musical culture. Following this, if studies of twentieth-century musical culture are sociotechnical in nature, studies of nineteenth century musical culture can be characterized by aesthetic autonomy.

Aesthetic autonomy can be explained through the example of the scientist who, when asked which message humans could communicate in the quest for alien intelligent life, answered: “We could send them Bach, but that would be bragging.”⁶⁹ By saying Bach, the scientist in question confirms the idea of Bach’s music as a pinnacle achievement of Western culture. But, why Bach? Why not Thelonious Monk or The Rolling Stones? The answer can be traced back to the split between the popular music of the twentieth century and the classical music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This distinction is characterized by an epistemological bias where, Simon Frith writes, “Serious music matters because it transcends social forces; popular music

⁶⁸ Bruno Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” in *Representation in Scientific Practice*, ed. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 20. See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁶⁹ Small, *Musicking*, 3.

is aesthetically worthless because it is determined by them.”⁷⁰ Twentieth-century popular music is the product of the music industry and is bought and sold like any other commodity. This makes these artists and their work aesthetically suspect. Bach’s music, on the other hand, is free from such crass concerns. It is eternal, transcendent, and timeless music that makes sense within any cultural context. This, as Leppert and McClary write, is aesthetic autonomy, “the notion that music shapes itself in accordance with self-contained, abstract principles that are unrelated to the outside social world.”⁷¹

Largely associated with the canon of Western classical music—bookended by J.S. Bach (1685-1750) and Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)—the influence of aesthetic autonomy has both limited and inspired cultural studies of classical music. On one hand, adherence to the ideology of aesthetic autonomy imposes what historian William Weber calls a strict internalist approach upon classical music: “The conviction that works

⁷⁰ Frith, “Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music,” 133. For a comprehensive critique of popular music from the perspective of classical music, see Theodor Adorno, “On Popular Music,” in *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 437-469.

⁷¹ Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, “Introduction,” in *Music and Society; The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Leppert & McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), xii. Although aesthetic autonomy is synonymous with classical music, in some cases, it has extended beyond the canon of Western classical music and can now be found in studies of 20th century popular music. What Theodore Gracyk (1993) calls “romanticizing of rock” has become common among rock critics who invoke a concept of authenticity to differentiate the crassly commercial from the transcendent. Rooting rock music’s authenticity in pre-WW II folk and blues music, particular rock musicians are mythologized through an interpretation of their aesthetic worth within a trajectory of music that, beginning in the Mississippi Delta, appears independent of the material conditions that are evident in most commercial music. Theodore A. Gracyk, “Romanticizing Rock Music,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 27 no.2 (Summer 1993): 43-58; Michael Coyle and Jon Doyle, “Modeling Authenticity, Authenticating Commercial Models” in *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation and Aesthetics*, ed. Dettmer & Richey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 17-35. Other examples of aesthetic autonomy in twentieth-century popular music include studies of jazz musicians like John Coltrane, who is celebrated in terms typically reserved for Bach or Mozart, and Bob Marley, whose image (and music) has been transformed by the music industry to invoke the transcendent and timeless themes of peace and unity, Michelle A. Stephens (1998) “Babylon’s ‘Natural Mystic’: The North American Music Industry, The Legend of Bob Marley, and the Incorporation of Transnationalism,” *Cultural Studies* 12(2), pp. 139-167. Of course, the boomer idols of 1960s popular music, The Beatles and Bob Dylan, have also been subjected to musicological influenced studies aimed at adding the names Dylan and Lennon & McCartney to the pantheon of great composers.

must be evaluated through analysis of their inner structures exclusive to extramusical factors.”⁷² As Michael Chanan writes, for disciples of aesthetic autonomy, instrumental music is attended to with quasi-religious reverence, its believers adhering to a “spiritual view” whereby “music comes from a source of which we’re ignorant and which is unaffected by material conditions.”⁷³ Within this perspective, classical music becomes reified, understood to be distinct from the social contexts from which it emerged and within which it is performed and listened to. Typically the purview of musicology and music theory and guarded with complex terminology that limits serious music scholarship to those privileged enough to fully understand its transcendence, aesthetic autonomy effectively blocks any study of music that identifies it as a cultural, historical, or material phenomenon.

On the other hand, the hegemony of aesthetic autonomy has challenged writers to interpret classical music as historically and culturally contingent. De-mythologizing music’s aesthetic autonomy has influenced recent work in musicology and social history, evinced by a shift from internalist studies of the music to contextual studies of music and society. Directly confronting the ideology of autonomous art means examining the privilege that Western classical music has within our collective musical imaginations. A recurring theme found throughout these studies is that it is not only the inherent genius of a composer or the internal greatness of a piece of music that guarantees that it will be performed or listened to. Although compositional genius and aesthetic beauty helps, it is also the cultural context within which music, musicians, patrons, and audiences operate that ensures the success or failure of music. These contexts are as essential as the notes being played, such that without them, music as we know it would be impossible.

Despite these moves to contextualize nineteenth-century music, questions concerning the technical mediation of this music have not been explored in greater detail. Perhaps the tendency to unproblematically assume media as given within

⁷² William Weber, “Beyond Zeitgeist: Recent Work in Music History,” *The Journal of Music History*, 66 no.2 (1994): 327.

⁷³ Michael Chanan, “The Trajectory of Western Music or, as Mahler said, The Music is not the Notes,” *Media, Culture and Society*, 3 no.3 (1981): 222.

classical musical culture is part of the lasting influence that an autonomous theory of music has cast upon the study of nineteenth-century musical culture. Although aesthetic autonomy has been openly challenged, it persists when we do not address the question of technical mediation, and in particular, the technical mediation of listening. Classical music may be becoming increasingly contextualized with politics, economics, aesthetics, and history, but as far as questions concerning the technical mediation of listening, it is still autonomous. To paraphrase sociologist of technology John Law, who writes that technology does not appear to be productively integrated into large parts of the sociological imagination,⁷⁴ it is equally true that media has not been productively integrated into large parts of the musical imagination before 1900.

2.4. Conclusion

I began this chapter by arguing that the study of recorded music shapes how we think about the history of media and musical culture. Recorded music is used to mark a break with history; it is the beginning of a new, highly technical, era of musical culture. Attuned to the variations of musical media that followed Edison's cylinders, writers began to explore how recordings mediated the listening experience. Over time, the technical mediation of listening to music became exclusively associated with recorded music and nineteenth-century musical culture became a creation of twentieth century musical culture. With attention firmly fixed on the cultural significance of recorded music, history was rewritten. Prior to recordings, listening was either not pursued as an end in itself or it was idealized as a pure experience, unencumbered by technology.

Some may argue that given the pace of technical change within musical culture it is easy to forget history. Perhaps there is some merit to this argument. If the short history of recorded music is any indication, today's mp3s and iPods will soon be as archaic and irrelevant as cassettes and 45s. Yet, the history of media is never really

⁷⁴ John Law, "Introduction: Monsters, Machines and Sociotechnical Relations," in *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, ed. John Law (London: Routledge, 1991), 8.

forgotten. Media history adapts to emphasize the qualities and functions of new media. We project the “newness” of new media onto history by making straw men from old media so that our historical imagination becomes conditioned to exaggerate the differences between the new and the old. We fail to appreciate that media ranging from concert halls to Berliner’s gramophone to 8-tracks to mp3s all essentially do the same thing—mediate a listening experience. Instead, we look for differences. Sociotechnical continuity is pushed aside. The new must always be different, a scenario in which history becomes an unwitting ally. In studies of musical culture, this perspective culminates in a truncated history where nineteenth-century musical culture is rendered free of technical mediation. Perhaps we could blame Thomas Kuhn or Michel Foucault for the tendency to look for abrupt breaks with the past. Or perhaps it is the popularity of what historian Fernand Braudel calls “the history of the event” against the “longue durée.”⁷⁵ But the problem is much simpler than trends in intellectual history. To put it plainly, new media shape how the history of music’s mediation is told.

In the following chapter, I address these conceptual problems by proposing a method for studying the relationship between media and listening to music that emphasizes continuity over abrupt breaks with the past. To overcome the technical divide that characterizes the history of media and musical culture, we need to resist the tendency to take recorded music, or any other medium, as a starting point. The method I propose in the following chapter does this by taking listening, not media, as a starting point. The study of listening transcends any sort of technical divide or abrupt technical break with the past, and, as Don Randel suggests, it also opens up alternatives to the legitimacy and authority of aesthetic autonomy by moving beyond the composer and the musical work.

The focus of our energies must inevitably move in the direction of the listener: away from the process of composition and toward the process of hearing; away from the presumably autonomous text and outward to the network of texts that, acting through a reader or listener, gives

⁷⁵ Fernand Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*,” in *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25-55.

any one text its meaning. This shift will open the way to—indeed, will demand—kinds of musical criticism and analysis that have not yet made contributions as significant as we should expect: Marxist, psychoanalytic, and feminist, for example.⁷⁶

The following work is my contribution to Randel's demand. Instead of invoking the theoretical traditions he mentions, I would suggest that an emphasis on listening can open up nineteenth-century musical culture to perspectives from the social study of technology. The study of nineteenth-century musical culture has begun to address non-musical contexts. But these contextual studies have not yet addressed the technical mediation of listening. Using the cultural history of listening to music to explain the technical mediation of music encourages us to think about both nineteenth and twentieth-century musical culture in a way that has been insufficiently developed.

⁷⁶ Don Michael Randel, "The Canons in the Musicological Toolbox," in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

3. From Listening to Technology: The Technical Code of Attentive Listening

Tools and objects are outgrowths of fundamental attitudes to the world. These attitudes set the course followed by thought and action. Every problem, every picture, every invention, is founded on a specific attitude, without which it would never come into being.

- Siegfried Giedion

3.1. Introduction: Towards a Theory of Media and Musical Culture

Timothy Taylor begins his book *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology & Culture* with a striking claim: “The advent of digital technology in the early 1980s marks the beginning of what may be the most fundamental change in the history of Western music since the invention of music notation in the ninth century.”⁷⁷ Given his point of comparison, we probably won’t be able to verify Taylor’s claim for at least a century or two. But there is more to this claim than a bold prognostication. Taylor is also presupposing a particular relationship between the technical and the social, namely that the technical is the starting point for thinking about the social.

⁷⁷ Timothy Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 3.

This should not be read as an accusation of technological determinism. Taylor, like most contemporary writers on music and media, explicitly addresses technological determinism. In the case of musical culture, avoiding the pitfalls of technological determinism is usually accomplished by emphasizing the social contingency of musical media, usually by examining how technologies are redefined by users—cassettes empower users to make their own music mixes, mixers and LPs are used by DJs as musical instruments, the mp3 enables musicians and fans to create their own distribution networks, and so on.⁷⁸ An emphasis on user re-configuration may deflect charges of determinism, but it does not change the fact that most studies of musical media use technology as the starting point to explain musical culture.

This is hardly a shocking revelation. Configuring the relationship between the social and the technical in this way is as close to a methodological paradigm as you will find in studies of media and musical culture. It seems to make sense that a study of media and musical culture begin with media. But does it have to? As Lisa Gitelman reminds us, media history must not always be media-centric:

Is the history of media first and foremost the history of technological methods and devices? Or is the history of media better understood as the story of modern ideas of communication? Or is it about modes and habits of perception? Or about political choices and structures?⁷⁹

⁷⁸ For more on technological determinism from the perspective of media and musical culture, see Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁷⁹ Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 1.

Gitelman points to an interesting question for media historians: how should the relationship between the social and the technical be conceptualized? This is a difficult question because the relationship between the social and the technical is never a concrete fact. What we assume is a clear distinction is always just an analytical distinction. In practice, the social and the technical are intertwined; just as history is the re-enactment of the past in the historian's mind, theorizing the relationship between the social and the technical is always a matter of abstraction.⁸⁰ Theorizing the relationship between the social and the technical is an awkward balancing act, and every social theory of technology is a variation of this balancing act: Martin Heidegger's concept of enframing, Jacques Ellul's *la technique*, Albert Borgmann's device paradigm, Don Ihde's cultural techniques, Bruno Latour's actor-networks, Michel Foucault's disciplinary regimes, Herbert Marcuse's technological rationality—all of these are interpretations of the relationship between the social and the technical.

I bring this up because questions concerning the social and the technical are largely unaddressed in studies of musical media. Overwhelmingly, the study of musical media, and in particular the history of musical media, tends to be the study of one medium. Thus, the balance between the social and the technical is weighted in favour of the technical. One of the unintended consequences of this approach is that the history of musical media comes to be written so that every new medium inaugurates a new musical culture. The result is that the study of musical media is excruciatingly literal.

⁸⁰ "History is nothing but the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's mind." R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 228.

Media history is medium history, restricted to discrete technical objects like the radio, particular configurations of recorded music, the piano, and so on.

An alternative history, one that prioritizes media without making it a determining influence, can be written if the relationship between the social and the technical is re-conceptualized. Although conventional logic says we should begin with technology and read its impacts off of musical culture, a different history can be told if we begin with themes and ideas developed within musical culture and examine how these are realized in the function and meaning of musical media.

I raise these points because listening, more than any other dimension of musical culture, suffers when media are used to explain musical culture. When we start with media to explain musical culture, listening is no longer considered an activity with its own cultural history. Instead, it becomes the result of music's technical mediation, a mere consequence of technical function. An example of this can be found in studies of mobile listening. Beginning with the Sony walkman and progressing to the Apple iPod, the starting point for these studies is the idea that media precede and shape listening.⁸¹ Mobile technologies lead to mobile listening, an aural experience defined by, and dependent upon, a particular medium.

⁸¹ On the walkman, see Michael Bull, "The World According to Sound: Investigating the World of Walkman Users," *New Media & Society*, 3, no.2 (2001): 179-196; Paul du Gay, ed. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage, 1997). For studies on the iPod, see Michael Bull, "No Dead Air! The iPod and the Culture of Mobile Listening," *Leisure Studies*, 24, no.4 (2005): 343-355; Andrew Williams, *Portable Music and its Functions* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

The cultural history of listening is, of course, intertwined with media. It is difficult to think of an example of listening that is not mediated by some sort of material object. But this does not mean that *how* we listen and *why* we listen begin with these media. Musical media embody an idea of listening that is part of a larger musical culture. Cultural imperatives concerning how and why we listen precede and shape the technologies that mediate listening. The concert hall is not the starting point for attentive listening any more than iPods, walkmen, or transistor radios mark the beginning of mobile listening. Media do not simply emerge from the air and proceed to influence musical culture. The listening experience being mediated has to fit within an existing musical culture.

This interpretation of technology is similar to philosopher of technology Don Ihde's hermeneutics of technology. Ihde argues that technology is what it is only in within a particular cultural context. As he writes, this also means, "the "same" technology in another cultural context becomes quite a "different" technology."⁸² Following this insight, starting with the cultural contexts within which media are used would encourage a re-thinking of the relationship between listening and musical media. In this chapter, I propose a method to explain how musical culture shapes musical media by inverting conventional methodological assumptions. Instead of beginning with media to explain listening, I will examine how we can take an idea of listening to music as the starting point for discussing musical media.

⁸² Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 144.

This approach parallels Jonathan Sterne's historical study of the sound-reproduction media that emerged at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century (telephone, radio, phonograph).⁸³ Sterne's history is non-traditional—instead of focusing on inventors or media, he provides a history of the *possibility* of mechanized sound reproduction, asking: “Why did sound-reproduction technologies emerge when they did and not at some other time? What preceded them that made them possible, desirable, effective, and meaningful?”⁸⁴ This question directs Sterne towards “the social and cultural conditions that gave rise to sound reproduction,”⁸⁵ these conditions concern the very nature of sound and hearing.

Our theories of sound and hearing, Sterne explains, underwent a transformation in the nineteenth century. In the early part of the nineteenth century acoustic research was oriented towards the source of sound, not its reception.

Theories of sound took the voice and the mouth, or music and a particular instrument (such as the violin) as ideal-typical for the analysis, description, and modeling of sonic phenomena. The mouth and instruments were taken as *general* cases for understanding sound. Sound-reproduction technologies informed by this perspective attempted to synthesize sound by modeling human sonic activities like speech or musical performance.⁸⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century this changed, and the ear, not the mouth, became the model by which sound and hearing was understood. The sound reproduction

⁸³ Jonathan Sterne, “A Machine to Hear for Them: On the Very Possibility of Sound’s Reproduction,” *Cultural Studies*, 15 no.2 (2001): 259-294; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: The Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁸⁴ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 1-2.

⁸⁵ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 1-2.

⁸⁶ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 33; see also Sterne, “A Machine to Hear for Them,” 276.

technologies which Sterne studies result from this changing notion of what sound and hearing is. “Not only were the modern sound media *for* the ear, they were *of* the ear.”⁸⁷

But it was not just theories of sound and hearing that changed. The reasons why and how we listen were also changing. What Sterne calls an audile technique, or a technique of listening, can be traced historically to how listening was used in medicine and telegraphy. From these practices, listening became rationalized and turned into an instrumental skill: “Audile technique articulated listening and the ear to logic, analytic thought, industry, professionalism, capitalism, individualism, and mastery.”⁸⁸ The audile technique that Sterne describes was a necessary part of the social context within which the invention of the telephone, the phonograph, and the radio occurred.⁸⁹ As Sterne writes, “The cultural history of sound’s reproduction begins long before the invention of sound reproduction technologies.”⁹⁰ Sound reproduction media are not so much revolutionary as they are objects that disseminated an existing audile technique.

Conceptually, the approach I develop in this chapter is similar to Sterne’s. We both begin with, or look backwards to, theories of listening to explain aural media. Where we differ is the scope of our studies. Sterne’s aims are Foucauldian. As he explains it, his work should be thought of as a genealogy of a regime of listening

⁸⁷ Sterne, “A Machine to Hear for Them,” 264.

⁸⁸ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 95.

⁸⁹ Friedrich Kittler makes a similar point, noting that the phonograph, although technically possible centuries before Edison, “could not be invented until the soul fell prey to science.” Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 28.

⁹⁰ Sterne, “A Machine to Hear for Them,” 265. See also Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 154.

practices.⁹¹ The audile technique that Sterne describes crosses numerous practices because it is meant to describe a regime, not a single instance of listening. My aim is more limited. I am only interested in the relationship between listening, musical culture, and media. And it is here that a difference between the approach I am suggesting and Sterne's work can be articulated. One can't help but notice that the genealogy of listening practices that Sterne traces is rooted in science and engineering. His audile technique emerges first in medicine and technology, and while ways of listening to music can be explained by this audile technique, using it to explain all listening diminishes the unique experience of listening to music. Reducing the complex aesthetic history of music listening to one part of a larger audile technique, listening to music becomes the same as listening for information, like a telegraph operator or a doctor with a stethoscope.

In his summary of James H. Johnson's history of music listening in Paris, Sterne points out that his genealogy of audile technique can help explain why Parisian concert audiences became silent over the course of the nineteenth century.⁹² Certainly, one could apply Sterne's audile technique to this and other examples of nineteenth-century musical culture. It is possible to explain attentive music listening as part of a regime of listening that developed from telegraph listening or listening to the body. But there is something else going on in the listening practices that Johnson recounts. Listening to music is also an aesthetic disposition that developed out of musical culture. Not all

⁹¹ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 91.

⁹² Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 98.

listening can be explained through Sterne's audile technique, regardless of the similarities.

The changing perception of instrumental music and the changing structure of musical culture that occurred in Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries explains the listening habits found in Parisian concert halls more accurately than an audile technique designed for listening for information. To equate an instance of musical listening with the rationalization of listening practices in the nineteenth century is to be chronologically single-minded. I don't think the causality of Sterne's audile technique extends as far as he wants it to. Music is unique as a human endeavor, with its own history distinct from other aural activities. Despite the many ways that instrumental rationalization colonizes the life world, listening to music can never be wholly equated with the rationalized listening familiar from the stethoscopes and the telegraphs that make up Sterne's audile technique. The act of listening to music is an act of aesthetic reception, an aural disposition that is different from aural activities like listening to a patient through a stethoscope or listening to a telegraph machine. While these activities fit nicely into Sterne's audile technique, listening to music requires an aesthetic explanation rooted in musical culture. As an example of how to undertake a history of aural media, Sterne's work has few equals. As a history of musical media, though, Sterne is not sufficiently attuned to musical culture.

Returning to the relationship between the social and the technical and the case of the Concertgebouw, Andrew Feenberg's critical theory of technology, and in particular his concept of the technical code, is a particularly useful concept. For those familiar with Feenberg's critical theory of technology its applicability to the study of media, listening, and nineteenth-century musical culture may seem odd. Feenberg's is a political

philosophy of technology. It provides a theoretical basis for the democratization of technical design and can serve as the impetus for the radical transformation of technological modernity. The critical theory of technology is a realistic program for social change premised on the idea that those whose lives are affected by technology should have a say concerning how, and for what purpose, technology is developed: “Real change will come...when we recognize the nature of our subordinate position in the technical systems that enroll us, and begin to intervene in the design process in the defense of the conditions of a meaningful life and a livable environment.”⁹³ So what does this have to do with a concert hall?

I argue that Feenberg’s concept of the technical code is a particularly apt theory of the relationship between the social and the technical. This concept is useful for the study of musical media I am proposing because the concept of the technical code provides a framework that uses the social to explain the technical.

Although the approach I develop in this chapter is designed for understanding the Concertgebouw as a medium of nineteenth century musical culture, as I will discuss in the conclusion of this work, I hope that this approach can be a useful addition to the emerging field of sound studies. In particular, I hope that it encourages researchers to think about listening as a cultural phenomenon when considering the relationship between musical culture and musical media.

⁹³ Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xiv.

3.2. The Social Study of Technology: Impacts and Origins

Very generally, there are two ways that the relationship between the social and the technical can be conceptualized: the *impact* that technologies have on the social and the social *origins* of technology. All social theories of technology are variations of these two perspectives. The difference between impacts and origins can be thought of as a difference between the questions being asked of technology. Impact studies ask *how* technologies affect the social world. The study of origins asks *why* we have the technologies we do. These questions, and the trajectories they open up, greatly influence how we think about our relationship with technology.

For most people, most of the time, day-to-day experiences with technology warrant the study of impacts. We want to know how the internet impacts communication, how automobiles impact the environment, or how nuclear weapons impact foreign policy. Analyzing the social impacts of technology cuts across numerous disciplines. Prominent examples include Lynn White Jr.'s historical study of the impact of the stirrup on medieval European society, Martin Heidegger's philosophical treatise on the impact of modern technology on being, and Marshall McLuhan's literary inspired insights concerning the impact of print on visual perspective.⁹⁴

Given that technology impacts our lives in so many obvious and immediate ways, why should we consider thinking about the relationship between the social and the

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings* ed. David Ferrell Krell (New York: Harper Books, 1977), 307-343; Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Lynn White Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

technical any differently? The problem is that an unwavering focus on impacts leads to deterministic assumptions concerning the nature of this relationship. Although it is common-sense to claim that the printing press caused the reformation, or that the cotton gin caused the American civil war, or that the internet caused the decline of print media, all of these claims, for critics of technological determinism, fail as social theories of technology because, as Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx write, “in each case, a complex event is made to seem the inescapable yet strikingly plausible result of a technological innovation.”⁹⁵

Impact studies conceptualize technology as an isolated artifact whose sole purpose is to impact society. In this conceptualization, technology is guided by an internal logic that has no relation to the social world and takes place outside of social, economic, and cultural influences.⁹⁶ Deterministic assumptions about technology lead to assumptions about the nature of the social world that are untenable. The social, in many impact studies, is modeled quite efficiently; it is a seemingly undifferentiated mass of humans whose experiences with technology are identical. At times, one wonders if technology is more complex and interesting than humans!

The corollary of a passive social world and an autonomous technology is a Promethean historiography written, as historian Eugene Ferguson puts it, as if “the whole history of technological development had followed an ordered or rational path, as

⁹⁵ Leo Marx and Merritt Roe Smith, “Introduction,” in *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism*, ed. Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), xi.

⁹⁶ Sally Wyatt, “Technological Determinism is Dead; Long Live Technological Determinism,” in *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, ed. Edward Hackett, Olga Amsterdamska, Michael Lynch, and Judy Wajcman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 168.

though today's world was the precise goal towards which all decisions, made since the beginning of history, were consciously directed."⁹⁷ Thus, focusing on the impacts of technology can lead to a situation where our collective relationship with technology is one in which we are focused on adapting to technological change, not shaping technological change.⁹⁸

Alternatively, the study of origins points to the social contingency of technology. To study the origin of technology means asking why we have the technologies we do. This directs us to the social and cultural contexts within which technologies are designed and acquire meaning. At odds with a picture of an inevitable and unchanging technology, an emphasis on origins assumes that technology could have been otherwise. When the relationship between the social and the technical is historicized, it is the social, not an autonomous technical logic, which appears as the basis of technological innovation.

Methodologically, tracing the origins of technology means turning away from what Bruno Latour calls "ready-made technology" and instead looking at "technology in

⁹⁷ Eugene Ferguson, "Toward a Discipline of the History of Technology," *Technology and Culture*, 15 no.1 (1974): 19. Interestingly, this is the perspective of both triumphant and dystopian theories of technological modernity. Feenberg calls these competing, yet similar views "instrumental" and "substantive." The former works from the position that technology is inherently neutral; the latter view is familiar from the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Ellul who interpret modern technology as an inescapable form of domination. The similarity between these two can be found in their shared belief that we cannot change the path of technological progress, that "*technology is destiny*." Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

⁹⁸ Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, "Introductory Essay: The Social Shaping of Technology," in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, ed. Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999), 5.

the making.”⁹⁹ This is what constructivist theorists of technology call opening the black box of technology.¹⁰⁰ The concept of a black box was originally used in information science to make the inner complexity of technology opaque in order to reduce it to a set of inputs and outputs. Taken up by the sociology of science, the concept was used to refer to the unquestioned acceptance of the scientific method as objective truth. Reflecting the Mertonian tradition in the sociology of scientific knowledge, sociologists undertook investigations of the social relations and processes of science but left the cognitive basis of science unexamined.¹⁰¹ Thus, the scientific method was black boxed in the sociology of science until Thomas Kuhn identified the historical contingencies of scientific paradigms, leading to a turn from the sociology of science to the sociology of scientific knowledge. The consequence of this move was to suggest that there is nothing epistemologically special about scientific knowledge. Adopting this perspective for the social study of technology, opening the black box of technology reveals the social contexts that precede innovation, problematizing any assumptions of technical inevitability or infallibility.

⁹⁹ Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁰ See Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, “Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them Do So,” in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*, ed. K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 277-303; Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker, “The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and Technology Might Benefit Each Other.” *Social Studies of Science*, 14 no.3. (1984): 399-441.

¹⁰¹ See Michael Mulkay, “Knowledge and Utility: Implications for the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Social Studies of Science*, 9 no.1 (February 1979): 63-80; Richard D. Whitley, “Black Boxism and the Sociology of Science: A Discussion of the Major Developments in the Field,” in *The Sociological Review Monograph: The Sociology of Science*, ed. Eric Ashby, no. 18 (1972): 61-93.

There is a strong, albeit marginal, tradition among philosophers, historians, and sociologists to study technology in this way. Writing in the first half of the twentieth century, this is the approach that Lewis Mumford called “cultural preparation” and what Siegfried Giedion called “anonymous history.”¹⁰² Mumford and Giedion have a unique perspective on technology. Both were born in the late nineteenth century (Giedion in 1888 and Mumford in 1895) and were witness to significant technological transformations of Western culture. Like other philosophers and social theorists who lived through the first half of the twentieth century, to make sense of these cultural and social upheavals, they sought the origin of the technologies that had transformed the world they were born into.

Against popular histories that pointed to Watt’s steam engine or some other machine to date the beginning of technological modernity, Mumford and Gidieon saw their age as one whose history cannot be reduced to a history of technical disciplines. Against these conventional histories, Mumford identified a lineage that was routinely overlooked in celebration of “the new.” For Mumford, the origins of mechanization date back to changing concepts of time and space that paralleled the emergence of the clock in the thirteenth century. The clock materialized and disseminated a sense of order and regularity that had been part of monastic life. This change in the culture of time and space was the necessary pre-condition for the processes of industrialization and

¹⁰² Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization takes Command: A Contribution to an Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948); Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963).

mechanization that would follow in the centuries to come. The basis of Mumford's insights is the idea that the history of technology is cultural, not mechanical.

Before the new industrial processes could take hold on a great scale, a reorientation of wishes, habits, ideas, goals was necessary...one must explore in detail the preliminary period of ideological and social preparation. Not merely must one explain the existence of new mechanical instruments: one must explain the culture that was ready to use them and profit by them so extensively.¹⁰³

Similarly, Giedion traces the origins of mechanization to the representation of motion in the visual arts and ideas of comfort, bathing, and food preparation. Giedion's history of technology is a cultural history of these anonymous practices, a significant alternative to technical and scientific histories of mechanization.

Mumford and Giedion were not the first social theorists of technology to examine the social pre-conditions of technology. Decades earlier, their insights were foreshadowed by Karl Marx. Marx is rarely considered a social theorist of technology. In fact, according to many writers, Marx's social theory of technology can be dismissed as another variation of technological determinism. Mumford writes that Marx "erroneously assumed that technical forces (the system of production) evolved automatically and determined the character of all other institutions."¹⁰⁴ Langdon Winner turns to quotes from *The Critique of Political Economy* ("...the mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life") and *The German Ideology* ("...the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society, hence the 'history of humanity' must

¹⁰³ Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, i.

always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange”) to make his point that Marx had formulated “what amounts to the first coherent theory of autonomous technology.”¹⁰⁵ Like Mumford, Winner understands Marx’s use of the term “the forces of production” to mean “all of physical technology,” which means that “again and again in his writing Marx states that the forces of production play a determining role in human history...Marx has isolated *the* primary independent variable active in all of history.”¹⁰⁶ From the perspective of historiography, Robert Heilbroner associates Marx with technological determinism by describing the famous hand-mill quote from *The Poverty of Philosophy* (“The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist”) as a Marxian paradigm which means that “the steam-mill follows the hand-mill not by chance but because it is the next “stage” in a technical conquest of nature that follows one and only one grand avenue of advance.”¹⁰⁷

Given that Marx wrote thousands of pages, using a few scattered aphorisms to implicate him as a technological determinist seems a bit hasty. Indeed, the notion that the forces of production are equivalent only to technology unfairly limits Marx’s intent. Donald MacKenzie points out that in many places, Marx can be read as arguing that the forces of production also include human labour power which, if properly recognized, would lead to a different take on Marx’s social theory of technology. “The inclusion of labour power as a force of production thus admits conscious human agency as a

¹⁰⁵ Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology: Technics out of Control as a Theme in Political Thought* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1977), 39.

¹⁰⁶ Winner, *Autonomous Technology*, 78-79.

¹⁰⁷ Robert L. Heilbroner, “Do Machines Make History,” in *Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism* ed. M.R. Smith and Leo Marx (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 55.

determinant of history; it is people, as much or more than the machine, that make history.”¹⁰⁸ Georg Lukács makes the same point. He writes in a review of Nikolai Bukharin’s book *Historical Materialism*, “technique is a *part*, a moment, naturally of great importance, of the social productive forces, but it is neither simply identical with them, nor the final or absolute moment of the changes in these forces.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, with few exceptions, the interpretation of Marx as a technological determinist went unchallenged for most of the twentieth century. This view began to change in the 1970s when writers discovered that instead of creating a Marxist social theory of technology from quotes scattered across different books and articles, there was a Marxist social theory of technology in plain view. Marx’s most sustained examination of machinery takes up large chunks of Parts III & IV of *Capital* and is complemented by sections from the *Grundrisse*.¹¹⁰ These works contradict determinist interpretations of Marx by revealing a Marx who believed that “social relations molded technology, rather than vice-versa.”¹¹¹ As Lukács put it in his critique of Bukharin,

The *social* preconditions of modern mechanized techniques thus arose first; they were the product of a hundred-year social revolution. The technique is the consummation of modern capitalism, not its initial

¹⁰⁸ Donald MacKenzie, “Marx and the Machine,” in *Knowing Machines: Essays on Technical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 26.

¹⁰⁹ Georg Lukács, “Technology and Social Relations,” in *Marxism and Human Liberation: Essay on History, Culture and Revolution* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973), 53.

¹¹⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), 173-473; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* trans. Martin Nicolaus (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1973), 670-711.

¹¹¹ MacKenzie, “Marx and the Machine,” 23; see also Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 20; Andrew Feenberg, *The Critical Theory of Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 23-65; Frederic Fleron, Jr., *Technology and Communist Culture: The Socio-Cultural Impact of Technology Under Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1977).

cause. It only appeared after the establishment of its social prerequisites.¹¹²

For Marx, the machinery that characterized nineteenth-century Britain (and with increasing speed, the rest of the Western world [*De te Fabula Narratur*]) was the culmination of social processes that had been gaining momentum for centuries. Industrialization made these social processes materially durable in nineteenth-century industrial machinery.

This brings us back to listening and musical media. The purpose of this work is to explore how a cultural idea of listening can be used to explain the origins of a musical medium; in particular, how attentive listening preceded and shaped the function and meaning of the concert hall. To take attentive listening as the starting point for the study of musical media means drawing upon a theory of the social and the technical where the social stands behind and shapes technology. The next step is figuring out the details of this relationship. What do we mean when we say “the social”? Do we mean the details of everyday life? Do we mean our own unique subject position? Or do we mean the grand narratives of modernist social theories? What do we mean when we say “technical”? Are we talking about an essentialized technology, Technology with a capital “T”? Not an object, or objects, but an idea that accounts for the entirety of all technology? Or, does the technical refer to individual technologies, each unique in their own right? In what follows, I use the concept of the technical code to answer these questions. Following this, I outline a framework for tracing how the technical code of attentive listening was materialized in Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw.

¹¹² Lukács, “Technology and Social Relations,” 56.

3.3. Andrew Feenberg's Critical Theory of Technology

We can get an idea of how Feenberg conceptualizes the relationship between the social and the technical in the following quote:

Technologies are selected by the dominant interests from among many possible configurations. Guiding the selection process are social codes established by the cultural and political struggles that define the horizon under which the technology will fall. Once introduced, technology offers a material validation of that cultural horizon...The legitimating effectiveness of technology depends on unconsciousness of the cultural-political horizon under which it was designed. A critical theory of technology can uncover that horizon, demystify the illusion of technical necessity, and expose the relativity of the prevailing technical choices.¹¹³

From this, we can identify the levels at which Feenberg theorizes the social and the technical. Feenberg uses the term horizon in reference to the social to mean “culturally general assumptions that form the unquestioned background to every aspect of life.”¹¹⁴ The social, in this configuration, is familiar from theories of modernity, what sociologists call macro-theories, or what postmodern critics call grand narratives. This is the social theory of Marx, Weber, Freud, and the Frankfurt School, theories that look at how trends and processes are generalized over Western culture as a whole.

The technical is identified at the micro-level. Identifying the technical at the level of design follows from constructivist technology studies. Conceptualizing technology at this level establishes a balance between the concrete empirical facts of technology and

¹¹³ Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, 86.

the expansive horizon of modernist social theory. This relationship between the social and the technical is articulated by the technical code.

I have proposed the term “technical code” to describe those features of technologies that reflect the hegemonic values and beliefs that prevail in the design process. Such codes are usually invisible because, like culture itself, they appear self-evident. For example, tools and workplaces are designed for adult hands and heights not because workers are necessarily adult, but because our society expelled children from the work process at a certain point in history with design consequences we now take for granted.¹¹⁵

Feenberg’s brief example at the end of this quote illustrates how the relationship between the social and the technical occurs in practice. Technical design is flexible, it can respond to a range of social imperatives. The design of tools and workplaces, in Feenberg’s example, is the material validation of a particular attitude to child labour and what the role of children should be in society. These social imperatives are designed into machines and tools so that industrial machinery embodies a technical code concerning the morality and economic incentives of child labour. “A technical code is the realization of an interest or ideology in a technically coherent solution to a problem.”¹¹⁶

The sociotechnical balance articulated by the technical code can be thought of as a balance between the insights of philosopher Herbert Marcuse and constructivist technology studies. As Feenberg writes, “I have introduced the concept of the “technical code” to explain Marcuse’s concept of technological rationality in a more concrete

¹¹⁵ Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 4.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Feenberg, “Critical Theory of Technology: An Overview,” in *Between Reason and Experience: Essays in Technology and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 68.

sociological context.”¹¹⁷ Technological rationality is Marcuse’s term to describe the rationality of modern industrial capitalist society. Similar to concepts like instrumental rationalization and Heidegger’s concept of enframing, technological rationalization refers to the convergence of technical and social imperatives across modern society. Key to Marcuse’s concept of technological rationality is a theme that is developed in other social critiques of science and technology, namely that technology is premised on the domination of nature.¹¹⁸ As the logic of technology comes to envelop more and more dimensions of the social world, a logic of domination, of control over things and people, comes to characterize the rationality that governs modern society. Industrial capitalism, in this sense, is the natural extension of the domination of nature.

As the imperatives of capitalism become materialized in technology its social origins are forgotten and so we use the social impacts of modern technology to define abstract ideals like progress, happiness, and efficiency without realizing that our ideals have converged with the ideals of industrial capitalism. By virtue of its ability to “deliver the goods,” modern technology creates the rationale by which social and cultural ideals are judged. Technology, which was once a means to an end, has become an end in itself.

Technological rationality is a powerful ideological tool in its leveling of differences between what were formerly antagonistic opposites. Dialectical thinking is replaced by

¹¹⁷ Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 104. See also Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, 162.

¹¹⁸ See William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: G. Braziller, 1972).

one-dimensional thinking as the potential for resistance to modern industrial society diminishes. As Marcuse explains it,

In the medium of technology, culture, politics, and the economy merge into an omnipresent system which swallows up or repulses all alternatives. The productivity and growth potential of this system stabilize the society and contain technical progress within the framework of domination. Technological rationality has become political rationality.¹¹⁹

Technological rationality shares many similarities with the concept of the technical code. For both, the social imperatives that guide technical design and innovation are the technical equivalents of Kuhn's scientific paradigms; facts, not values.

The concept of technological rationality expresses the condensation of social and technical functions...it explains how rules and procedures that achieve a certain kind of universality may also represent private interests through the assumptions that form their horizons. These interests are overlooked because that are not expressed through orders or commands, but are technically embodied, for example, in apparently neutral management rules for technical designs.¹²⁰

Where Feenberg's technical code and Marcuse's technological rationality differ is the totality, or one-dimensionality, of the social imperatives realized in technology. Marcuse speaks of technology as if it is an undifferentiated whole, as if technologies ranging from refrigerators to pacemakers to trains are all examples of the same technological rationality. Recent work in constructivist technology studies provides an alternative to this idea. Studying the design of different technologies reveals that

¹¹⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), xvi.

¹²⁰ Feenberg, *Transforming Technology*, 66.

technology is not reducible to a one-dimensional technological rationality. As Feenberg explains:

Applications are not designed in function of abstract technical principles alone but emerge from concrete technical disciplines applied in social contexts. Naturally, those disciplines incorporate technical principles, but they include much besides. As social institutions, they operate under the influence of “actors,” social groups with the power to define problems and select solutions. Designs that flow from these sources accord with the interests, ideology, and way of life of those groups.¹²¹

For Feenberg, what this means is that there is not one social imperative or one type of technological rationality that guides the design of technology, there are potentially many.

By conceptualizing the technical at the level of design, the case studies that make up constructivist technology studies are a powerful corrective to Marcuse’s thesis of one-dimensionality. “At the level of the concrete historical forms of technical culture, there is room for a variety of different “rationalities”...each embodies a historical project, a resolution of the technically underdetermined aspects of the design of devices and systems.”¹²² This is what Feenberg means when he writes that the technical code explains Marcuse’s concept of technological rationality in a more concrete sociological context. The technical code maintains Marcuse’s theory that social imperatives and ideologies invisibly bias what we consider to be neutral technologies. But by integrating the insights of constructivist technology studies, the technical code recognizes that these imperatives and ideologies differ across different technologies.

¹²¹ Feenberg, Heidegger and Marcuse, 103.

¹²² Feenberg, Questioning Technology, 162.

Constructivist technology studies, or technology studies as it is commonly referred to, accounts for the loosely woven collective of sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of technology who began combining trends from the history of technology and the radicalized sociology of scientific knowledge that emerged in the wake of Thomas Kuhn's work. Familiar from Science, Technology and Society (STS), the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the term technology studies refers to common themes found across these approaches.¹²³ Methodologically, technology studies is characterized by micro-level studies of innovation, what could be called ethnographies of innovation. Through this method, researchers are able to trace the complex associations of people, knowledge, and materials that shape the form and function of any technology. This is done symmetrically so that these descriptions explore the path of successful technologies and the path of designs that were not successful.¹²⁴ Following the idea of symmetry, it is discovered that the failure or success of any technology cannot be explained solely through technological reasons. When the distance from the cutting edge of innovation is reduced, technology appears socially contingent, not the inevitable result of objective technological rationality.

¹²³ For an overview of the approaches that constitute technology studies, see the essays collected in: Wiebe Bijker, Thomas Hughes, and Trevor Pinch, *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987); Wiebe Bijker and John Law, *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); MacKenzie and Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology*; Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

¹²⁴ The term symmetry is derived from the sociology of scientific knowledge where, as David Bloor explains it, it is used to describe the study of scientific knowledge in a way that "would be impartial with respect to truth and falsity, rationality and irrationality, success or failure...the same types of cause would explain, say, true and false beliefs." David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 6.

From technology studies, Feenberg is attracted to an idea that was anticipated by Marx and Marcuse—technology is underdetermined by purely technical principles. For a technology to work, for it to succeed, there needs to be fit between the object and the interests and goals of the various social groups who are involved in the design process. Although this idea is present in critical social theories of technology, it is given empirical diversity through technology studies. Feenberg summarizes the implications of technology studies for the cultural study of technology as follows:

1. Technical design is not determined by a general criterion such as efficiency, but by a social process which differentiates technical alternatives according to a variety of case-specific criteria.
2. That social process is not about fulfilling “natural” human needs, but concerns the cultural definition of needs and therefore the problems to which technology is addressed.
3. Competing definitions reflect conflicting visions of modern society realized in different technical choices.¹²⁵

Although influenced by technology studies, Feenberg can hardly be considered an adherent. Unsatisfied with the strict empiricism that characterizes technology studies, Feenberg argues that the avoidance of macro-concepts to describe the social meaning of technology is problematic to the point of being absurd and warns that we should be wary of isolating (and reifying) the micro-level details of technology. The ethnographic bent of technology studies has long been a point of contention for social theorists of technology. The problem is not the micro-level case study, but rather the conceptual orthodoxy that follows from the methodological orthodoxy. As philosopher of

¹²⁵ Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, 83-84.

technology Hans Radder bluntly puts it, constructivist technology studies, “shows a distrust or even outright rejection of theoretical analyses and philosophical assessments...they only report what they see.”¹²⁶

Under the illusion that empiricism is the only way to resolve the ambiguous and arbitrary relationship between the social and the technical, technology studies draws from observations of *how* technologies come into being to explain *why* technologies come into being. Concepts that have long been a part of social theory are ignored because they cannot be empirically verified. The intellectual traditions of the West, for many in technology studies, are no longer tenable because they cannot be observed. Unfortunately, if we give up these traditions, we are left with a social theory of technology consisting of hundreds of case studies that all say the same thing: technology is socially constructed.¹²⁷

The critique of localism is not a methodological critique. Even the most polemical attacks on technology studies emphasize the advantages of utilizing micro-level case studies. What is troubling is the inability of technology studies to move beyond the local and comment on patterns and trajectories that emerge over time and across a number of technologies. As Radder writes:

The significance of patterns...transcends by far any individual local situation in which they are embodied. Consequently, an adequate

¹²⁶ Hans Radder, “Normative Reflexions on Constructivist Approaches to Science and Technology,” *Social Studies of Science*, 22 no.1 (1992): 145.

¹²⁷ Langdon Winner, “Social Constructivism: Opening the Black Box and Finding it Empty,” *Science as Culture*, 3 no.16 (1993): 446. For more on the relationship between modernity theory and technology studies see, Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg, *Modernity and Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

view of the development of science and technology should take into account *both* these broader patterns *and* the specific ways in which they are embodied – that is, reproduced or transformed – in local contexts. In other words, in concrete cases one finds not only changes but also continuity. Constructivist views, in stressing locality and contingency, tend to miss the importance of these continuities.¹²⁸

The technical code balances the social and the technical in such a way that broader patterns can be identified at the micro-level of technical design. But the technical code is not simply a synthesis of different social theories of technology. It implies a process whereby the technical is shaped by the social. Social imperatives do not shape technology of their own volition, they require intermediaries, people and policies and institutions that come between these imperatives and the design of technologies. In the case of any technology, Feenberg writes that we can trace the technical code “from the highest level of worldviews down to the lowest level of technical design,”¹²⁹ and so to speak of a technical code is to speak of the processes by which it is transformed from idea into artifact; the technical code is not transmitted, it is translated.¹³⁰ The term translation comes from Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and by looking at it in more detail we can get a better idea of the value of the technical code for mapping the relationship between the social and the technical.

The concept of translation as it is used by ANT theorists was developed by the French philosopher Michel Serres to describe the ways that science, art, technology,

¹²⁸ Radder, “Normative Reflexions on Constructivist Approaches to Science and Technology,” 154.

¹²⁹ Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 156.

¹³⁰ This distinction between transmission and translation is taken from Bruno Latour, “The Powers of Association,” in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* Sociological Review Monograph 32, ed. John Law (1986): 264-280.

myth, information theory, literature, and history blend together in different objects and ideas. In one of the few English summaries of Serres's work, Steven Brown describes how Serres deliberately crosses what he considers to be arbitrary disciplinary boundaries. For Brown, translation "appears as the process of making connections, of forging a passage between two domains, or simply as establishing communication...an act of invention brought about through combination and mixing varied elements."¹³¹

Within ANT, translation is a concept that explains the connections between the heterogeneous social and technical elements that are combined in sociotechnical networks. If there are countless elements and ideas identifiable in any technology, translation describes the processes that connect and define them.¹³² Translation can be considered the general movement of technological development over time and space: how ideas and plans are turned into staffed research labs, how ideas and objects reciprocally interact, how social interests are materially disseminated over time and space, and how users are able to transform technology to better meet their goals.

Translation implies a process, not a thing. Not abiding by the distinctions that isolate seemingly dissimilar aspects of technological development, ANT is able to focus on the numerous moments of translation as they are enacted in the process of building

¹³¹Steven D. Brown, "Michel Serres: Science, Translation and the Logic of the Parasite," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19 no.3 (2002): 3, 6.

¹³²See Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: The Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay." in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* Sociological Review Monograph 32, ed. John Law (1986): 192-234; Michel Callon, "Society in the Making: The Study of Technology as a Tool For Sociological Analysis," in Bijker, W., Hughes, T., & Pinch, T. (eds.) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987): 83-107; John Law, "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, and Heterogeneity," *Systems Practice*, 5 no.4 (1992): 379-393.

the sociotechnical. But translation is paradoxical. At once it appears as a unique concept to frame the processes that contribute to, and result from, the relationship between the social and the technical. But its potential is hindered by the very nature of the term's complexity and seemingly infinite applicability.

Recognizing the processes of translation that occur as a technical code moves from abstract social theories to technical design, it is possible to describe not only how translation occurs, but also what is being translated. Bruno Latour's concept of delegation, for example, uses translation to describe the relationship between the social and the technical.¹³³ Latour describes how technology is used to delegate, or translate, a major effort into a minor effort. We delegate to technologies the work of humans. In turn, technologies delegate behaviour back onto the social. For Latour, we act as we do not by some idealistic notion of free choice, but because our actions are bound by technologies that delegate how and what we can do within a sociotechnical network. The technical code provides a macro social theory to explain and contextualize the micro-level details being delegated through the embodied norms of technical devices. In Feenberg's case study of the Minitel, we can read in more detail how a technical code was translated from idea to artifact.

¹³³Bruno Latour, "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer," *Social Problems*, 35 no.3 (1988): 298-310; Bruno Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts," in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change* ed. Wiebe Bijker and John Law (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 225-259.

The Minitel was a computer-like terminal that connected millions of French citizens to a videotex network called Teletel in the 1980s.¹³⁴ This machine, and the network it was part of, was intended to propel France into the information age. This was spelled out in the Nora-Minc report (1978), a policy document that outlined how France should aggressively pursue modernization through computerization. For Simon Nora and Alain Minc, it was imperative that France control this initiative—the French must undertake the modernization of France! Allowing other states or firms to control the direction and pace of modernization would be disastrous for France’s sovereignty. Published in English as *The Computerization of Society*, the Nora-Minc report expresses the urgency of the situation in unambiguous terms: “If France does not respond effectively to the serious new challenges she faces, her internal tensions will deprive her of the ability to control her fate. The increasing computerization of society is a key issue in this crisis and could either worsen it or help solve it.”¹³⁵ The Nora-Minc Report defined what post-industrial society was to be in France and the role that computers would play in this scenario.

This was neither a neutral nor a universal interpretation of post-industrial society; it was a vision that was biased towards unidirectional information delivery. Feenberg describes this familiar vision of technology and society as one that “legitimated the technocratic ambitions of states and corporations. The rationalistic assumptions about

¹³⁴ “Videotex is an on-line library that stores “pages” of information in the memory of a host computer accessible to users equipped with a terminal and a modem.” Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 145.

¹³⁵ Simon Nora and Alain Minc, *The Computerization of Society: A Report to the President of France* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 1.

human nature and society that underlie this fantasy have been familiar for a century or more as a kind of positivist utopia.”¹³⁶ The assumptions that guided the computerization of French society were the social imperatives of engineers and managers, what Feenberg calls, “social engineering based on systems analysis, rational choice theory, risk-benefit analysis.”¹³⁷ These imperatives, or meanings, were projected onto the design and function of the computer, which came to be interpreted in line with this highly rationalized version of the computer age.

At the microlevel these assumptions are at work in the traditional computer interface, with its neat hierarchies of menus consisting of one-word descriptors of “options.” A logical space consisting of such alternatives correlates with an individual “user” engaged in a personal strategy of optimization. Projected onto society as a whole in the form of a public information service, this approach implies a world in which “freedom” is the more or less informed choice among preselected options defined by a universal instance such as a technocratic authority. That instance claims to be a neutral medium, and its power is legitimated precisely by its transparency: the data is accurate and logically classified. But it does not cease to be a power for that matter.¹³⁸

The task of realizing this vision was placed in the hands of French civil servants. Engineers and other bureaucrats working for France Telecom set out to design, build, and implement a system of computerization. They were able to realize one of the social imperatives of the Nora-Minc report by creating an infrastructure of national unity by distributing the Minitel free of charge to anyone who requested one.¹³⁹ This was not all.

¹³⁶ Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 157.

¹³⁷ Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 157.

¹³⁸ Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 157.

¹³⁹ Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 148.

The vision of post-industrial society found in the Nora-Minc report was materialized in France Telecom's design of the Minitel.

Designed as a "cute" telephonic device the Minitel is a kind of Trojan horse for rationalistic technical codes...The Minitel testifies to the designer's original skepticism with regard to communication applications of the system: the function keys are defined for screen-oriented interrogation of data banks, and the keypad, with its unsculptured chiclet keys, is so clumsy it defies attempts at touch typing.¹⁴⁰

Of course, it didn't have to be this way. There is not just one possible technical code of post-industrial society. This was shown to be true when users who were unsatisfied with the information-intensive functions of the Minitel transformed it into a communication device. These users hacked the system and transformed the technology to accommodate personal communication. Soon, this transformation was embodied in new programs that exploited the communicative functions of the Minitel. In the end, it was the social imperatives of users that defined what the Minitel was and what it was to be used for.

The Minitel case is an example of how two different technical codes, each representative of two different cultural horizons, can be traced through the history of the design of one object. Identifying these technical codes means tracing the process by which they were translated from ideas to social groups to the technology itself. Following Feenberg, the case of the Minitel is an example of how, "one can trace an ideology "all the way down" in the sense that discursive expressions of social visions can

¹⁴⁰ Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, 163.

be found reflected in details of technical design and vice-versa.”¹⁴¹ In this case, the vision of post-industrial society presented in the Nora-Minc report constitutes the level of *ideas*; the second level includes the *policies* of the French Telecom utility that led to the creation of the Minitel system; the third level is the *design* features such as the keyboard and screen layout. Alternatively, we can trace a vision of post-industrial society premised on an idea of communication and interaction to the policies of entrepreneurs who exploited these communicative functions in new software and service applications down to the design initiatives of hackers that enabled communication to occur freely on the system.

It is not enough to identify a social imperative or an ideology as a technical code. What is required is the identification of the process by which a technical code is translated across different levels. On their own, social imperatives and ideologies do very little. They need to be taken up by social groups who mediate the translation of ideas into artifacts. Drawing upon the technical code to explain the relationship between the social and the technical means tracing the process by which a technical code goes from idea to the initiatives and policies of social groups to design.

3.4. Conclusion: The Technical Code of Listening

When we take musical media as the starting point to explain musical culture, media history becomes medium history and the impacts of a technical medium on

¹⁴¹ Feenberg, “Encountering Technology.” (Lecture, Netherlands Graduate Research School of Science, Technology, and Modern Culture, Soeterbreek, Ravenstein, NL, 2008). Available at: <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/encountering.pdf>, 9.

culture, the impact of recorded music on musical culture for example, come to determine the bounds of media history. If we invert the relationship between music and media we can avoid this situation. By situating the culture of listening to music as a social imperative that shapes the objects that mediate listening it becomes possible to write a history of musical media that is not bound by a particular medium. When listening precedes media, a sense of historical continuity can be cultivated to off-set the view that the history of media and musical culture is a history of abrupt technical breaks that began with Edison.

Of the numerous social theories of technology that prioritize the social to explain the technical, the technical code is distinct through a conceptualization of what the social is and what the technical is. Where other social theories of technology offer compelling accounts of either the social or the technical but fail to adequately account for both, the technical code takes both into consideration, articulating the social at the level of cultural horizon and the technical at the level of design. From this, it becomes possible to trace the process by which a technical code is translated from idea to artifact.

The following chapter explores the cultural phenomenon of attentive listening by tracing its history to the development of musical romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Musical romanticism is the cultural horizon within which attentive listening and the concert hall make sense. Much like the visions of post-industrial society that shaped the design and meaning of the Minitel, musical romanticism is a wide-ranging social theory that is concerned with the very definition of what music means.

4. The History of Attentive Listening: Musical Romanticism and the Sacralization of Instrumental Music

The century of revolutions was also the century of museums.

- Carl Dahlhaus

4.1. Introduction

If you asked the patrons of a symphony concert why they were listening in attentive silence, it is likely that most would answer that the beauty of the music demands attention. These listeners are reiterating an idea of classical music that has shaped Western musical culture for the past 200 years—classical music is aesthetically superior to other types of music. All music that aspires to be art aspires to be treated the way that classical music is treated. Whereas the live performance of pop or rock or jazz can unproblematically be considered entertainment and attended to in a state of distraction, it is widely accepted that a symphony performed by an orchestra in a concert hall is art of the highest caliber and deserves a type of attention reserved for serious culture.

The presumed artistic merits of classical music are not the only reason why audiences listen attentively. There is an elegant congruence between attentive listening, classical music culture, and the design of a concert hall. This congruence is no accident. As R. Murray Schafer writes, in the case of the concert hall, musical culture and architecture are blended seamlessly together so that it is difficult to abstract one from the other.

Silence is observed at concerts where it (instrumental music) is performed. Each piece is affectionately placed in a container of silence to make detailed investigation possible. Thus, the concert hall makes

concentrated listening possible, just as the art gallery encouraged focused and selective viewing. It was a unique period in the history of listening and it produced the most intellectual music ever created.¹⁴²

In this chapter, I explore the cultural history of classical music through the ideal of attentive listening. To do this, I situate attentive listening as an aspect of musical romanticism. Musical romanticism is an aesthetic and cultural understanding of musical culture that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and provided the theoretical justification for the aesthetic superiority of instrumental music. As I point out in this chapter, attentive listening not only derives from musical romanticism, but by listening attentively, audiences confirm and reinforce the idea of classical music's superiority. However, before exploring the history of attentive listening and musical romanticism, I will step back a little and consider the place of listening within studies of musical culture.

4.2. In Search of the Listener

Beginning with Guido d'Arezzo's refinement of notation in the early eleventh century, Western music can be thought about in one of three ways: as something that is composed, as something that is performed, or as something that is listened to. These parts, however, are far from equal. The canons that define Western musical cultures—from classical to jazz to rock—consist of composers, their works, and the musicians who perform them; the listener is assumed, but of no real importance. As Peter Szendy writes, "I look desperately, in the forensic history of music, for any place where there is a question of me, the listener. I know in advance this quest is doomed to failure."¹⁴³ Szendy's fatalism is a bit over-indulgent; nevertheless, his lament is a symptom of the difficulty that comes from trying to conceptualize the listener in studies of musical culture. The problem is that listening is unfairly dismissed as a passive engagement

¹⁴² R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 117

¹⁴³ Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of our Ears*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 4.

with music while composition and performance are lauded as active engagements with music.

That the viewer makes the painting, as Marcel Duchamp claimed, has gone from iconoclastic slogan to an important part of art history. Film and television theorists convincingly argue that mass audiences are not passive, but engaged in the interpretation of polysemic texts. In literary theory, the reader is an active participant in the literary experience.¹⁴⁴ So why is the listener so rarely considered an active part of musical culture? It could be, as novelist E.M. Forster put it, that “listening to music is such a muddle that one scarcely knows how to describe it.”¹⁴⁵ If only it was a problem of words!

From a disciplinary standpoint, listening falls between the paths laid out by conventional approaches to musical culture. As Charles Hamm points out, musicologists tend to privilege composition while social scientists, cultural theorists, and media scholars focus on performance and other means of dissemination.¹⁴⁶ The imprecise standing that listening has within academia is not limited to studies of musical culture. It is an interesting fact of intellectual history, as Barthes & Havas remind us, that “*listening* does not figure in the encyclopedias of the past, it belongs to no acknowledged discipline.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ For a theory of the viewer in art history, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); for a theory of the active viewer, see David Morley, “Active Audience Theory: Pendulums and Pitfalls,” *Journal of Communication*, 43 no.4 (Autumn 1993): 13-19; for a review of theories of the reader in literary theory, see Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

¹⁴⁵ E.M. Forster, “On Not Listening to Music,” in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York: Harcourt & Bruce, 1951), 133.

¹⁴⁶ Charles Hamm, “Privileging the Moment of Reception: Music and Radio in South Africa,” in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁴⁷ Roland Barthes and Roland Havas, “Listening,” in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 260.

It is not only a problem of disciplinary exclusion that pushes listening to the periphery of musical culture. To take listening as the focus for any type of study is a reminder that our knowledge of the world is visual, not aural:

We feel happier when *it* is visible; then it's oriented in a way we understand. For, in our workaday world, space is conceived in terms of that which separates visible objects. "Empty space" suggests a field in which there is nothing *to see*. We refer to a gasoline drum filled with pungent fumes or to a tundra swept by howling winds as "empty" because nothing is visible in either case... In our society, to be real, a thing must be visible, and preferably constant. We trust the eye, not the ear.¹⁴⁸

Vision is the metaphor most commonly used to describe the relationship between knowledge, thought, and action.¹⁴⁹ If we know something, we have *insight*; if we plan something, we exercise *foresight*; our way of knowing the world is our *worldview*; we *look* for answers that *appear* to us; we *see* things through.¹⁵⁰ One consequence of using terms and concepts that derive from vision is the instinct to use visual references and metaphors to define activities that are aural. This is especially pronounced in studies of musical culture. There is a dissonance between how the performance and composition of music is conceptualized and how listening to music is conceptualized. The former are intentional or active engagements with music while the latter is qualified pejoratively as "mere" or "passive" listening. A few examples can illustrate this. Philosopher Don Ihde writes that the transformation of recorded music (records) into performative technologies (instruments) exemplifies how a technology which "produced a music for 'passive'

¹⁴⁸ Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, "Acoustic Space," in *Explorations in Communication*, ed. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 65.

¹⁴⁹ See Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: The Phenomenology of Sound*, 2nd ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁵⁰ See also Martin Jay who intentionally uses twenty-one visual metaphors in his introductory paragraph to point out the ubiquity of these colloquialisms in language; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 1. Barry Truax points to the abundance of visual metaphors in everyday speech and writing to argue that the dominance of visual metaphors and clichés is evidence of our pre-conditioned ignorance of the aural environment. Barry Truax, *The World Soundscape Project's Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* (Vancouver: A.R.C. Publications, 1978), v.

listening, is changed into a transformed music.”¹⁵¹ Similarly, Timothy Taylor’s analysis of the turntable used earlier also relies upon this contrast between agency/performance and passivity/listening. In Taylor’s history, the turntable turned potential producers of music “into consumers of music” and it was not until DJs transformed the meaning of the turntable from passive listening into active performance that “agency struck back.”¹⁵²

It is interesting to note that while contemporary writers like Ihde and Taylor marginalize listening as passive, listening to recorded music was considered socially beneficial by even the most ardent critics of modern technological society. Herbert Marcuse writes, “as far as they go...long playing records are truly a blessing.”¹⁵³ Equally generous in his analysis of recorded music is Marcuse’s contemporary Theodor Adorno, who, against the temporal limitations of 78s, saw within the LP the possibility to “capture the extended musical durations without interrupting them and thereby threatening the coherency of their meaning.”¹⁵⁴ Edward Bellamy’s utopian account of the year 2000 in his 1888 novel *Looking Backward* presents a similar view of the joys of ‘merely’ listening. Bellamy’s protagonist is asked if he would like to listen to music. He settles in to hear his hostess sing and perform at the piano, only to be surprised when he finds out that music is neither performed nor listened to in this way. Instead, a schedule of performances occurs each day, performed live by musicians throughout the city, and broadcast into the home via the telephone. Bellamy’s protagonist is astounded:

If we could have devised an arrangement for providing everybody with music in their homes, perfect in quality, unlimited in quantity, suited to every mood, and beginning and ceasing at will, we should have considered the limit of human felicity already attained, and ceased to strive for further improvements.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Don Ihde, “Technologies-Musics-Embodiments,” *Janus Head* 10, no.1 (2007): 21.

¹⁵² Timothy Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 204.

¹⁵³ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 65.

¹⁵⁴ Theodor Adorno, “The Curves of the Needle,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin *October* 55 (1990): 63.

¹⁵⁵ Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (New York: New American Library, 1960), 87.

Bellamy's phone concerts were meant to alleviate the burden of performing music in the home, what many contemporary writers would valorize as an active engagement with music. One would think that if Bellamy wrote from the perspective of the twenty-first century perhaps he would be less enthusiastic about such a passive undertaking as merely listening to music!

For writers like Ihde and Taylor, the performance and composition of music is superior to listening, which is not considered to be an active engagement with music. To overcome the passivity of listening, one needs to transform technologies that mediate listening into performative media. It's as if there is a normative imperative to transform all media into performative media; that given the numerous opportunities that media provide to "actively" engage with music, to passively listen seems disingenuous to the spirit of music.

What appears to be a clear distinction between active and passive engagements with music is, upon closer examination, more complex. To equate agency with performance/composition and passivity with listening is to invoke an interpretation of engagement that is analogous with vision. Sight's nobility, as philosopher Hans Jonas argues, is realized in its difference from the other senses. What is unique to vision is the freedom for selective attention and detached perception. Hearing, in contrast to sight, is entirely dependent on something outside of human control; sound comes to the ear, the eye goes to the object:

...for the sensation of hearing to come about the percipient is entirely dependent on something happening outside his control. All he can contribute to the situation is a state of attentive readiness for sounds to occur. He cannot let his ears wander, as his eyes do, over a field of possible percepts, already present as a material for his attention, and focus them on the object chosen, but he has simply to wait for a sound to strike them: he has no choice in the matter...the sense of hearing...is related to event and not to existence, to becoming and not to being. Thus hearing, bound to succession and unable to present a

simultaneous co-ordinated manifold of objects, falls short of sight in respect of the freedom which it confers upon its possessor.¹⁵⁶

Composition and performance are similar to the type of agency and intent that correspond with vision. Just as the eye selectively chooses what to engage with, the composer and performer make conscious choices concerning the creation of music. Listening is difficult to reconcile with this analogy, and so almost by default the listener becomes passive.¹⁵⁷

Recovering the listener begins by recognizing the intentionality of listening by making a distinction between hearing and listening. As Barthes and Havas write, “*Hearing* is a physiological phenomenon; *listening* is a psychological act.”¹⁵⁸ The difference between these two dispositions is simple and extraordinarily important. Barry Truax writes that “hearing can be regarded as a somewhat passive ability that seems to work with or without conscious effort,”¹⁵⁹ while listening, as Jonathan Sterne writes, “is a directed, learned activity: it is a definite cultural practice. Listening requires hearing but is not simply reducible to hearing.”¹⁶⁰ We always hear (we cannot shut our ears like we do our eyes), but we choose to listen. I hear the low level hum of the city while I write this, but I am oblivious to it, it means nothing to me. If I choose to, though, I can listen to these sounds, distinguishing between different vehicles or interpreting how the intensity of traffic noise changes at different times of day.

¹⁵⁶ Hans Jonas, “The Nobility of Sight,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14, no.2 (June 1954): 509.

¹⁵⁷ Against Jonas, Donald Lowe (1982) suggests that the nobility of hearing surpasses vision because it is “most pervasive and penetrating...sound comes to one, surrounds one for the time being with an acoustic space, full of timbre and nuances. It is more proximate and suggestive than sight. Sight is always the perception of a surface, from a particular angle. But sound is that perception able to penetrate beneath the surface. For example, sound can test the solidity of matter; and speech is a communication connecting one person with another. Therefore, the quality of sound is fundamentally more vital and moving than that of sight.” Donald Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6.

¹⁵⁸ Barthes & Havas, “Listening,” 245.

¹⁵⁹ Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 2nd ed. (Norwood NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp., 2001), 18.

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

Distinguishing listening from hearing returns to the much-maligned listener a sense of importance by situating the moment of aural reception as the moment at which sound acquires meaning. In other words, if no one hears it, sound still exists—it just doesn't have any meaning. We listen like we read, Barthes & Havas argue, with focused intent, recognizing meanings that make sense within a definite cultural context. These authors pursue this analogy with reading by suggesting that the basic characteristics of listening—intention, interpretation, and meaning—are incompatible with the science of hearing:

Listening is henceforth linked (in a thousand varied, indirect forms) to a hermeneutics: to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the "underside" of meaning (what is experienced, postulated, intentionalized as hidden).¹⁶¹

In the nineteenth century, hermeneutics came to the fore as an alternative (or resistance) to the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences. The idea that the social world can, and should be, subjected to the kinds of structures and laws that govern our understanding of the natural world has been the dream of social scientists since Descartes. This was the approach that Hermann van Helmholtz took in his pioneering research on the scientific study of sound and hearing. Sterne writes that Helmholtz's investigations into auditory perception in the nineteenth century were the first to theorize hearing as "an amalgamation of the acoustic properties of sound, the shape and mechanics of the ear, *and* the determinate function of the nerves."¹⁶² Prior to this, hearing was largely oriented toward sound, not the processes by which we hear sounds. Helmholtz saw his work as the basis for connecting the aesthetics of music with the science of hearing, a quest that is continued today by musical psychologists and cognitive scientists who seek to discover cognitive laws of musical listening. But, the quest for certainty comes at a price. The rich lifeworld of culture, history, and experience

¹⁶¹ Barthes & Havas, "Listening," 249.

¹⁶² Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 63.

that informs listening remains unaccounted for in the pursuit of the certainty of the scientific method.

As I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, the cultural study of music seems well equipped to detail what we do with music, but it lacks the concepts and terms to articulate the listening experience. Listening is either overlooked in favour of composers, musicians, and works; or, it is assumed to be passive, an oppressive disposition forced upon us by the culture industry. But recovering the listener is not simply a matter of equating listening with performance. To put listening on par with composition or performance means trying to equate an aural engagement with engagements that correspond with visually oriented ways of knowing and acting in the world. What compounds the problem is that the facts of music (notation, biography, history) are relatively useless when trying to articulate listening. There is a degree of certainty when discussing musical culture through the facts of composers, performers, and works—alternatively, the only listening experience we can ever be certain of is our own.

One of the more famous descriptions of listening that reflects its interpretive nature is found in E.M. Forster's novel, *Howards End*.

It will generally be admitted that Beethoven's Fifth symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come – of course, not so as to disturb the others; or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood; or like Margaret, who can see only the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fräulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is "echt Deutsch"; or like Fräulein Mosebach's young man, who can remember nothing but Fräulein Mosebach...¹⁶³

Mark Evan Bonds notes that Forster's passage is a reminder that:
"Listeners...have their own methods and motivations...ranging from those who listened

¹⁶³ E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 25.

with rapt attention to those who used the occasion primarily to socialize, giving only passing attention (if any at all) to the music being played.”¹⁶⁴ That Forster is able to provide such a vivid description of the listening experience suggests that researchers should look towards anecdotal descriptions, music criticism, and literature when searching for an engaged and active listener whose listening experience is both compelling and accurate. The world of concrete facts—biography, notation, and sales figures—is better suited to an understanding of music modeled on vision and visual metaphors. The ear is more closely aligned with the lifeworld of experience and as such requires unconventional methods. In this way, listening to music is closer in kind to a literary genre than it is to traditional academic studies.

An example of this can be found in Thomas Pynchon’s novel *V* (1961). At a New York jazz club called the V-Note, Pynchon introduces McClintic Sphere, jazz musician and potential heir to Charlie Parker’s creative legacy. Sphere is playing alto sax to a crowd whose aural interpretations range from boredom to contemplation to understanding.

Collegians did not dig, and left after an average of 1½ sets. Personnel from other groups, either with a night off or taking a break from somewhere crosstown or uptown, listened hard, trying to dig. “I am still thinking,” they would say if you asked. People at the bar all looked as if they did dig in the sense of understand, approve of, empathize with...¹⁶⁵

The listeners that Pynchon describes (collegians, other musicians, bar patrons) are not composing or performing music—they are listening to music. Pynchon recreates an experience music fans recognize: listening, and trying to understand, music that may not be easily accessible. Some get it while others don’t, but there is no indication that this activity is passive. Free from the pretensions of populist cultural

¹⁶⁴ Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5-6; see also Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Pynchon, *V* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986).

studies, Pynchon has no reason to perform the conceptual gymnastics that would turn listening into performance or some other “active” engagement with music. In literature, listening is already assumed to be an active engagement with music, related to, but completely different from performance and composition.

The German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus elaborates on this point, arguing that literature about music is not simply about an existing art form. Rather, what is written about music is an essential aspect of musical culture: “Music, whether of the artistic or the popular variety, is constantly surrounded by linguistic turns of phrase that influence our musical awareness in conjunction with, and sometimes no less significantly than, the acoustic phenomenon itself.”¹⁶⁶ In the following section, I demonstrate how historians and musicologists have embraced the turn to literary and journalistic descriptions of listening so as to better examine the history of attentive listening. Recognizing that in literature and journalism listening is an active engagement with sound, historians of attentive listening have effectively re-integrated the listener into studies of musical culture by using the methods and concepts that extend beyond “visual” facts.

4.3. The History of Attentive Listening

In his introduction to a special issue of *The Musical Quarterly* dedicated to listening, Leon Botstein reminds the reader of the limitations that conventional methods for the study of musical culture have for a history of listening: “It may be clear intuitively that listening is an activity that is historically contingent. Yet, that observation has been curiously impotent in influencing the way we discuss music in history.”¹⁶⁷ This is not entirely true. As some of Botstein’s work prior to making this claim can attest to, the

¹⁶⁶ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 244.

¹⁶⁷ Leon Botstein, “Toward a History of Listening,” *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no.3-4 (1998): 427.

history of nineteenth-century musical culture is becoming increasingly intertwined with the history of attentive listening.¹⁶⁸

The history of attentive listening has interdisciplinary appeal; it has been the subject of historical, philosophical, and musicological study.¹⁶⁹ What makes the history of this behaviour so fascinating is its presumed timelessness. To attend to a symphony concert as we would a rock concert seems culturally dishonest, heresy to the widely accepted idea that classical music is musically superior to other types of music. These prejudices reveal themselves, historian William Weber points out, when we discover that audiences did not listen to J.S. Bach (1685-1750) and W.A. Mozart (1756-1791) with the quiet reverence found in today's concert halls.

Because so much is involved for us in the etiquette of classical-music life, any notion that people did not listen in times past carries powerful pejorative implications. We are horrified by the famous Parisian engraving, representing a scene in 1766, where people seem to chat while Mozart begins to play; we see them demeaning one of our loftiest cultural icons and abridging one of our most basic aesthetic principles. When that happens, we perceive the picture in global cultural and ethical terms, seeing it not only as a matter of social etiquette but also of the most fundamental artistic values. We then reject the listeners of Mozart's time as cultural barbarians.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ See Leon Botstein, "Time and Memory: Concert Life, Science, and Music in Brahms's Vienna," in *Brahms and His World*, ed. Walter Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3-23; Leon Botstein, "The Demise of Philosophical Listening: Haydn in the 19th Century," in *Haydn and His World*, ed. Elaine Sisman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 255-285.

¹⁶⁹ From history, see: Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience Volume IV* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); William Weber, "Did People Listen in the 18th Century," *Early Music*, 25 no.4 (November 1997): 678-691. For a philosophical take on attentive listening, see: Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kivy, *Music Alone*, 1990. For musicology, see: Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 2006; Leon Botstein, "Listening Through Reading: Musical Literacy and the Concert Audience," *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 16 no.2 (Autumn 1992): 129-145; Matthew Riley, *Musical Listening in the German Enlightenment: Attention, Wonder and Astonishment* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁷⁰ Weber, "Did People Listen in the 18th Century," 679.

Attentive listening governs the behaviour of classical music audiences to a degree that cannot be found in any other genre of Western music. But, like all ideologies, adherence to attentive listening masks the history of attentive listening. The silence that envelops our experience of a symphony is a relatively recent phenomenon. Only by the end of the nineteenth century did attentive listening become the norm at classical music performances.

What differentiates recent interdisciplinary histories of attentive listening from strictly musicological studies of listening is a concentrated effort to write this history from the perspective of the listener, not the work being listened to.¹⁷¹ This move, as one writer put it, signifies a “Copernican revolution in our approach to the history of music.”¹⁷² For most of the twentieth century, the history of attentive listening was nothing more than a collection of thinly disguised compositional histories. Seeking an implied listener in musical works, the history of listening was limited by an approach called inductive

¹⁷¹ The most important historian of attentive listening prior to the 1990s was the German musicologist Heinrich Bessler (1900-1969). In the 1920s, Bessler published two essays that caused a brief stir in Germany: *Grundfragen des musikalischen Hörens* (Fundamental Issues of Musical Listening [1925]) and *Grundfragen der Musikästhetik* (Fundamental Issues of Music Aesthetics [1927]). Bessler's essays attempted to break free of the classical-romantic tradition by critiquing the rituals and assumptions of the symphony concert. Seeking examples of musical activities that were neither shaped by, nor aspired towards, this institution of German music, Bessler argued that types of music other than instrumental, and modes of listening other than attentive, deserved serious musicological attention. The response to Bessler's work was not encouraging. Musicologist Rob Wegman writes that some of the more reactionary conservative musicologists in Germany, “hinted at possible Bolshevik sympathies behind the young scholar's critique of the modern concert, taking it to spell the death sentence for German symphonic art.” (Rob C. Wegman, “Das musikalische Hören in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Perspectives from Pre-War Germany,” *The Musical Quarterly* 82 no.3/4 (1998), 440). Bessler sought alternatives to classical-romantic German music in what he called *Gebrauchsmusik* (functional music), a music that is premised on the idea that performance is determined by social interaction, not the other way around. Inspired by his teacher, the philosopher Martin Heidegger, Bessler saw in jazz and other non-classical genres moments of what he called *Kollektivdasein*, what Wegman describes as “a state of being in which the boundaries of self/other and music/audience dissolve.” (Wegman, “Das musikalische Hören in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” 439.) By focusing on the totality of the musical event as a social event, Bessler argued that attentive listening was a contingent element of serious music, not the inevitable aesthetic disposition of serious music.

¹⁷² James Obelkevich, “In Search of the Listener,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 114 no.1 (1989): 108.

aesthetics, meaning that the work itself determines the mode of listening appropriate to it.¹⁷³ Nicholas Bacht explains how inductive aesthetics, or any variation thereof, leads to a predictable take on the history of music listening.

Such an assumption makes it easy to write the history of listening: as soon as the composer's intentions have been identified, the history of listening can be extrapolated from the history of musical styles.¹⁷⁴

The turn to the listener has encouraged a re-thinking of the composer/work orientation that has influenced studies of music listening and nineteenth-century musical culture. As Wegman points out, this may not be a Copernican revolution, but it does represent a genuine conceptual breakthrough within musicology.

The 1990s must count as (if nothing else) the decade in which musicology rediscovered music listening—as being more than a mere postlude to the compositional process, more than just a receptive disposition orchestrated by the composer along with the musical work itself. Listening, rather, is seen as itself a creative activity: as that dimension of a musical culture where the relevance of such concepts as “compositional process,” “reception,” “composer,” and “work” may well be determined in the first place.¹⁷⁵

More concretely, historian James H. Johnson explains how taking the listener's perspective poses a significant challenge to the conventions of autonomy that have traditionally influenced studies of nineteenth-century musical culture,

Musical meaning does not exist objectively in the work—or even in the composer's intentions. It resides in the particular moment of reception, one shaped by dominant aesthetic and social expectations

¹⁷³ For an example of this approach, see: Zofia Lissa, “On the Evolution of Musical Perception,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 24 no.2 (1964): 237-286. For inductive aesthetics in Bessler's work, see: Nicholas Bacht, “Introduction,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135 no.1 (2010): 1-3; Wegman, “Das musikalische Hören in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” 441.

¹⁷⁴ Bacht, “Introduction,” 2.

¹⁷⁵ Wegman, “Das musikalische Hören in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” 434.

that are themselves historically structured...there is no musical meaning without interpretation.¹⁷⁶

What enables researchers to take the listener's perspective, Wegman notes, is a methodology that locates the listener and listening through discursive networks.¹⁷⁷ As noted in the preceding section, listening to music should be considered a literary genre, its history is written, not performed. This is especially true in the case of the nineteenth century and attentive listening. The nineteenth century was an era of great music and an era in which people wrote a great deal about their musical experiences. Music criticism, newspaper articles, literature, concert programs, diaries, and even police reports have all been relied upon by writers to construct a history of attentive listening from descriptions provided by listeners.

What these documents reveal is that the history of attentive listening is a history of how musical romanticism was realized through musical culture. It is not music, but the conceptualization of romanticism through music that provides the context within which attentive listening became accepted as normal behaviour. In what follows, I draw upon a number of histories of attentive listening to explore this aesthetic and philosophical context, emphasizing how romanticism enabled musical culture to be defined through a framework that legitimated, and was legitimated by, attentive listening.

Concert halls are designed to mediate attentive listening. Understanding why this listening behaviour came about reveals the context, or to use a term introduced in the previous chapter, the cultural horizon, which inspired these buildings and shaped their meaning. In what follows, I explore in more detail the relationship between musical romanticism and attentive listening so as to better reveal the cultural horizon that shaped the function and meaning of the concert hall.

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Wegman, "Das musikalische Hören in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," 447.

4.4. Attentive Listening and Musical Romanticism as a Horizon of Expectation

James H. Johnson's book *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* is the most comprehensive history of attentive listening published to date. It is, as William Weber writes, responsible for "establishing listening as a problem we must address."¹⁷⁸ The book's charm is the simple question it begins with: Why, between 1750 and 1850, did Parisian audiences stop talking and start listening? To explore this question, Johnson contrasts two interpretations of a Beethoven symphony by nineteenth-century Parisian audiences. "Listeners of the early 1800s found Beethoven *musically* inapproachable." For these listeners, Beethoven's symphonies "had no meaning...they fell into none of the categories of aesthetic understanding that French listeners of the time possessed to make sense of the music."¹⁷⁹ Yet, by 1828, Beethoven's symphonies had conquered Paris as they had many other musical cities in Europe. This can be explained, Johnson argues, if we understand the act of listening as a historical phenomenon that occurs within a horizon of expectations.¹⁸⁰

Hans Robert Jauss introduced the concept "horizon of expectations" as part of a program to develop a history of literary reception. Jauss argued that readers come to a text with an interpretive framework, a horizon of expectations, within which the text makes sense and is considered meaningful.

The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception: the question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and of the taste of different readers or levels of readers can be asked meaningfully only when one has first clarified

¹⁷⁸ Weber, "Did People Listen in the 18th Century?," 680.

¹⁷⁹ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 276.

¹⁸⁰ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 3.

which transsubjective horizon of understanding conditions the influence of the text.¹⁸¹

Johnson exchanges listeners for readers and musical works for literary texts to explain how the changing nature of Beethoven's reception was evidence of a transformed horizon of expectation amongst Parisian listeners. A French critic who decried the performance of a Beethoven symphony in 1807 as "German barbarism" was writing within a horizon of expectations that he shared with his readers.¹⁸² In 1834, the same could be said for the critic who described the experience of listening to a Beethoven symphony as follows: "I am the toy of a thousand romantic dreams, I see stars of gold encircling my breast with a sparkling halo."¹⁸³ This enthusiasm was a common sentiment amongst Parisians who, unlike the listeners and critics of 20 years prior, listened to Beethoven's instrumental music within a horizon of expectations shaped by musical romanticism.

The horizon that defined Parisian musical expectations throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was informed by social and aesthetic norms that were no longer relevant by 1828. These were the norms of the aristocracy, a class whose musical experience was realized in elaborate operas and the ornate opera houses of pre-revolutionary Paris. As Johnson describes it, this was a musical culture that operated within a horizon of expectations that ensured that an audience of nobles was never upstaged by the music:

The opera was more social event than aesthetic encounter. In fact, eighteenth-century audiences considered music little more than an agreeable ornament to a magnificent spectacle, in which they themselves played the principal part. Like carrying a sword, which

¹⁸¹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 44. For other studies of music listening that use this concept see Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 6; Shai Burstyn, "In Quest of the Period Ear," *Early Music*, 25 no.4 (November 1997): 695.

¹⁸² Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 258.

¹⁸³ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 273.

only noblemen could do, attending the opera was a proud display of identity in the Old Regime.¹⁸⁴

Johnson regales the reader with anecdotes of eighteenth-century Parisian opera attendees who arrived late, chatted throughout, and left early. For these audiences, attentive listening was not an ideology, it was a social faux pas: “A young nobleman explained to his guest that listening to the music with forced attention was “bourgeois.” “There is nothing so damnable,” he went on, “as listening to a work like a street merchant or some provincial just off the boat.”¹⁸⁵ By the early nineteenth century, Napoleon’s ruling class of lawyers, bureaucrats, and merchants had replaced the nobility of the ancien regime in the seats of Parisian musical venues. With this social change, musical culture began exhibiting signs of romanticism: symphonies replaced operas, the prestige of the concert hall equaled the glamour of the opera house, and silent attentiveness replaced aristocratic conviviality.

It was not only a social change that transformed Parisian musical culture, an aesthetic change was also taking place. For eighteenth-century audiences, music “touched the senses but not the soul.”¹⁸⁶ Dazzled by a sort of musical mimesis, audiences found it easy to be distracted without losing out on the musical experience. Johnson argues that these aesthetic considerations reflected a horizon of expectations within which attentively listening to Beethoven’s instrumental music had no place.

An attentive, absorbed public was so foreign to the idea of opera that events which later audiences would condemn as distracting filled eighteenth-century performances without great complaint. By discouraging undivided attentiveness, in fact, the reigning social expectations may well have preoccupied audiences to such an extent that other ways of perceiving music—ways that required more focused and engaged listening—were effectively not possible.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 10.

¹⁸⁵ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 31.

¹⁸⁶ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 26.

¹⁸⁷ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 49-50.

For French audiences, romanticism involved a new way of listening (attentive) that corresponded with a new way to think about the function and meaning of instrumental music. The ideals of musical romanticism were institutionalized in the rituals of the public concert and the adoption of a recognized canon of composers and works. In this way, the changes that beset Parisian musical culture between 1750 and 1850 were similar to the changes that had transformed all of European musical culture during this time. By 1850, most European cities that considered themselves musical capitals were home to a concert hall, a symphony orchestra, and a public concert series that performed the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

In this sense, romanticism, as it constitutes a horizon of expectations, is a disposition, an attitude, or a set of beliefs; it is a way to think about the meaning of music. Musicologist Friedrich Blume notes that when used to describe music, the noun “romanticism” and the adjective “romantic” are ambivalent and require clarification.¹⁸⁸ Stylistically, romantic music can be considered distinct from the style of classical composers.¹⁸⁹ But, as Blume argues, even this stylistic distinction should not be taken too seriously, and the period between the mid-eighteenth century and the early twentieth century should be considered the classical-romantic period.

Classicism and Romanticism are just two aspects of the one and the same musical phenomenon and of one and the same historical period. In terms of chronology, the two labels signify one self-contained age of the history of music; in terms of style, they mark the two facets of this age, the two trends operating within the one fundamental idea of form and expression. There is neither a “Classical” nor a “Romantic” style in music. Both aspects and both trends are continually merging into one. And as there are no discernable styles, there can neither be a clearly definable borderline between Classicism and Romanticism nor a distinct chronology of when the one or the other begins and ends.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Friedrich Blume, *Classic and Romantic Music: A Comprehensive Survey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

¹⁸⁹ For studies of romantic music as a distinct style, see Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972); Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁹⁰ Blume, *Classic and Romantic Music*, viii.

To alleviate any confusion, and because the focus of this work is musical culture, not a specific style, for the purposes of this work the words romantic or romanticism will refer to Blume's definition of the noun romanticism, "a general artistic point of view, an intellectual attitude."¹⁹¹ In this regard, the conceptualization of romanticism through music is different than in other arts. Romanticism emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, first in poetry and literature, then painting and sculpture, and, by the early nineteenth century, music. In the fields of poetry and literature, romanticism was a rejection of classicism and the sober rationalism of eighteenth-century enlightenment ideals. Romanticism prized originality and individuality, emotion over reason and passionate inspiration over traditional rules. By the time it had begun to be conceptualized through music, romanticism was less an oppositional aesthetic as it was a spirit that informed all of musical culture.

Dahlhaus explains that within musical culture, classicism and romanticism are not opposed as they are in other arts; in fact, without romanticism, there would be no classicism:

Romanticism is ordinarily considered, and terminologically construed, as the opposite of classicism. This often hides the underlying significance of a fact without which music history of the last century and a half would be incomprehensible: the fact that it was in the nineteenth century that a concept of musical classicism emerged in the first place...In music, unlike literature, classicism was not challenged by romanticism; indeed, not until romanticism did classicism come into existence in the first place.¹⁹²

After 1800, philosopher Lydia Goehr writes, musicians and critics began to reconstruct musical history so that it appeared as if composers had always thought about their musical activity in modern (romantic) terms. "The canonization of dead composers and the formation of a musical repertoire of transcendent masterpieces was the result both sought and achieved."¹⁹³ Eighteenth-century composers were plucked

¹⁹¹ Blume, *Classic and Romantic Music*, 95.

¹⁹² Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 22.

¹⁹³ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 247.

from history and given a posthumous fame that could not have been imagined while they were alive. This was a canon of composers (Haydn, Mozart, and later, Beethoven) whose works were stylistically classical; yet, the aesthetic that enabled their canonization was wholly romantic. Classical compositions and composers became meaningful through romanticism.

Naturally, this is a very general overview of a complex term. Nevertheless, it provides a useful starting point for exploring the relationship between attentive listening and musical romanticism. Among those who have written about this relationship, no one has had as much influence as the German lawyer, critic, writer, composer, and conductor E.T.A Hoffmann (1776-1822). For the past two centuries, Hoffmann's musical writings have been the cornerstone of musical romanticism. For most writers, the essence of Hoffmann's musical aesthetics can be derived from his 1813 review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, *Beethoven's Instrumental Music*.¹⁹⁴ The influence of this short piece of writing cannot be underestimated. Richard Taruskin refers to it throughout his study of romanticism and musical culture, calling Hoffmann, "the most influential music critic of the early nineteenth century."¹⁹⁵ In his summary of Hoffmann's Beethoven review, R. Murray Schafer (1975) refers to him as, "an epoch-making critic, one of the greatest in the history of music."¹⁹⁶ Along these same lines, Mark Evan Bonds writes, "it is scarcely an exaggeration to call E.T.A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth the most influential piece of music criticism ever written."¹⁹⁷ As these comments indicate, Hoffmann's Beethoven review is much more than a simple concert review of the type contemporary readers have come to expect in newspapers or magazines. Hoffmann's review is the voice of an aesthetic transformation that had influenced musical thought in

¹⁹⁴Hoffmann's Beethoven review was originally published in the Leipzig musical journal *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1810. I refer throughout to the abridged form which was published in 1813, *Source Readings in Music History: From Classical Antiquity through the Romantic era*, ed. Oliver Strunk (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950), 775-782. Hoffmann's musical writings are collected in *E.T.A. Hoffmann & Music*, ed. R. Murray Schafer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

¹⁹⁵ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Volume Two: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 641.

¹⁹⁶ Schafer, *E.T.A. Hoffmann & Music*, 96.

¹⁹⁷ Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 6.

Germany and would soon spread across Western culture. An important aspect of this transformation was the switch from a social audience to one that listened attentively. Using Hoffmann's comments on listening as a guide, it is possible to better understand the relationship between attentive listening and the culture of musical romanticism.

4.4.1. The Sacralization of Absolute Music and Devout Listening

Of the many commentaries on Hoffmann's Beethoven review, only Mark Evan Bonds examines in detail Hoffmann's insights concerning the listener and attentive listening. Hoffmann's review is not kind to the listener. Listeners are referred to as "musical rabble" who are "oppressed by Beethoven's powerful genius."¹⁹⁸ This is made evident by listeners who demand that Beethoven bridle his imagination so that his ideas are accessible to the audience. These comments draw upon a musical aesthetic in which it is the composer's job to provide an interpretation of the music for the listener. Just as a caption alongside a photograph is intended to lead the viewer to a certain conclusion, composers were expected to tell listeners what the music meant through either lyrics or a program. Hoffmann argues that it is these listeners, not Beethoven, upon whom the interpretive demands should fall: "How does the matter stand if it is *your* feeble observation alone that the deep inner continuity of Beethoven's every composition eludes? If it is *your* fault alone that you do not understand the master's language as the initiated understand it, that the portals of the innermost sanctuary remain closed to you?"¹⁹⁹ In the concluding paragraph of his review, Hoffmann imparts to the reader a lesson in art appreciation:

...the correct and fitting performance of a work of Beethoven's asks nothing more than that one should understand him, that one should enter deeply in his being, that—conscious of one's own consecration—one should boldly dare to step into the circle of the magical phenomenon that his powerful spell has evoked. He who is not conscious of this consecration, who regards sacred music as a mere game, as a mere entertainment for an idle hour, as a momentary stimulus for dull ears, or as a means of self-ostentation—let him leave

¹⁹⁸ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 777.

¹⁹⁹ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 778.

Beethoven's music alone. Only to such a man, moreover, does the objection "most ungrateful" apply.²⁰⁰

For Bonds, Hoffmann's review is an articulation of a new way of listening that reflects a new musical aesthetic. Music is, "an object of contemplation, a potential catalyst of revelation accessible to those who actively engaged the work by listening with creative imagination."²⁰¹ Bonds continues, "listening to Beethoven's music, we become aware—dimly—of a higher form of reality not otherwise perceptible to us."²⁰² Against a musical aesthetic that assumes that it is the composer's job to lead the listener, the romantic aesthetic that Hoffmann is propagating places the onus on the listener. Thus, as Bonds rightfully points out, for Hoffmann, and for musical romanticism in general, the listener is at the centre of the musical experience.

Hoffmann's review appeared at a time when purely instrumental music had only just begun to be thought of as superior to other types of music. But Hoffmann goes further than simply claiming that instrumental music is superior to music with words. He famously proclaimed instrumental music to be "the most romantic of all the arts—one might almost say, the only genuinely romantic one—for its sole subject is the infinite."²⁰³ Predating the romantic maxim, attributed to both Arthur Schopenhauer and Walter Pater, that all art aspires to the condition of music, Hoffmann recognized instrumental music's non-representational nature as the perfect medium for expressing the essence of the sublime. He writes: "Music discloses to man an unknown realm, a world that has nothing in common with the external sensual world that surrounds him, a world in which he leaves behind him all definite feelings to surrender himself to an inexpressible longing."²⁰⁴ The other arts—literature, poetry, sculpture, and painting—represent the external world. They are reflective. Only instrumental music is reflexive, it is of itself, autonomous from the bounds of external reality that limit the expressive power of the mimetic arts. Words and images are "of" something, only instrumental music is "of"

²⁰⁰ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 780.

²⁰¹ Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 33.

²⁰² Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 35.

²⁰³ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 775.

²⁰⁴ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 775.

itself. Thus, for nineteenth-century romantics, instrumental music is a language above language, the only art capable of expressing the inexpressible.

The most comprehensive study of the aesthetics of instrumental music is Carl Dahlhaus's *The Idea of Absolute Music*. Demonstrating a textual rigor indicative of twentieth-century German musicology, Dahlhaus traces the emergence of the *idea* of absolute music through the writings of eighteenth and nineteenth century German philosophers and aesthetic theorists. Dahlhaus treats the history of absolute music not as a history of music, but as an intellectual history, recognizing absolute music's hegemonic status within musical culture in full view of its historical contingency.

...whoever treats the verbal component of the music at a concert or opera with casual disdain is making a music-esthetic decision. He may consider his decision to be based on his own taste, when in fact it is the expression of a general, dominant tendency that has spread ever further in the last 150 years without sufficient recognition of its importance to musical culture. Above and beyond the individual and his coincidental preferences, nothing less than a profound change in the very concept of music is taking place: no mere style change among forms and techniques, but a fundamental transformation of what music is, what it means, and how it is understood.²⁰⁵

The changes inaugurated by romanticism in regards to the status of absolute music—what it is, what it means, how it is understood—stood in stark contrast to ideas that had shaped music for millennia. Music, since the ancient Greeks, was guided by extra-musical imperatives. Its function and meaning was subservient to goals that were not musical, but religious, political, or educational. Even in the eighteenth century, as music slowly began to emancipate itself from the bounds of social and religious authority, it was still guided by a mimetic aesthetic.²⁰⁶ The eighteenth-century French

²⁰⁵ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1-2.

²⁰⁶ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 139-147.

writer Jean Le Rond d'Alembert expressed this widely held opinion when he wrote, "music which does not paint anything is just noise."²⁰⁷

Musical mimesis helps explain why music in the eighteenth century was considered merely a pleasant backdrop to more pressing social engagements. But this was not an example of fleeting aristocratic fashion, it was an aesthetic truth espoused by the leading writers of period. In 1751, d'Alembert's *Discours Préliminaire* to Diderot's *Encyclopédie* placed music behind painting, sculpture, and poetry as the lowest of the imitative arts.²⁰⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the quintessential French romantic writer of the eighteenth century, had a very dim view of instrumental music, quoting with approval Fontanelle's frustrated request, "Sonata, what do you want from me?" (Sonate, que me veux-tu?). As Bonds notes, Fontanelle's frequently quoted remark, "became a kind of shorthand dismissal of the art of instrumental music on the grounds of vagueness and imprecision."²⁰⁹ In Germany, the sentiment towards instrumental music was similar. In the 1770s, Johann Georg Sulzer's influential encyclopedia of the fine arts (*Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*) contained the following remarks on instrumental music: "To this category belong concertos, symphonies, sonatas, and solos, which generally present a lively and not unpleasant noise, or a civil and entertaining chatter, but not one that engages the heart."²¹⁰ Immanuel Kant wrote in *Critique of Judgment* (1790) that instrumental music, because it did not contain a text, appealed to the senses but not to reason: "Like wallpaper, instrumental music was an abstract art that gave pleasure through its form but lacked content and was therefore inferior to vocal music."²¹¹

Between Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) and Hoffmann's Beethoven review (1813), a significant intellectual and aesthetic transformation took place that upset what many took to be the natural order of the arts. Leonardo da Vinci called music the

²⁰⁷ Quoted in John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 107.

²⁰⁸ Gay, *The Naked Heart*, 15.

²⁰⁹ Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 7; see also Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Volume Two*, 642.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 4.

²¹¹ Quoted in Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 7; see also Gay, *The Naked Heart*, 23.

younger sister of painting, however, by the nineteenth century, the rules that guided aesthetic interpretation changed. It came to be understood that only instrumental music could express the inexpressible. Music became the ideal art form for romanticism at the same time that romanticism sacralized instrumental music, turning what was formerly a pleasurable form of frivolous entertainment into a secular religion.

In Hoffmann's time, the idea that secular instrumental music was to be listened to as if it were sacred music was relatively new. Thus, to the reader in 1813, the numerous religious allusions found in Hoffmann's Beethoven review must have appeared odd. Hoffmann writes that instrumental music, "guides us out of life into the realm of the infinite," and that Beethoven's symphony begins with "a climax that climbs on and on," and "leads the listener imperiously forward into the spirit world of the infinite!"²¹² Of note, Hoffmann points to the *listener* attaining religious-like transcendence via listening. As mentioned earlier, Hoffmann's musical romanticism placed the listener at the centre of the musical experience. From this, Dahlhaus points out an interesting aspect of musical romanticism: it is not the sacralization of instrumental music that led to devout listening; instead, the transference of devotion from Christian liturgy to secular instrumental music sacralized instrumental music.

The claim that it would be appropriate to hear a piece of absolute music with "devotion," rather than allowing oneself to be stimulated to conversation through the pleasant yet empty sounds...was in no way taken for granted in 1800; instead, it was rather alienating. However, the transportation of "devotion" from "holy" music to absolute music was not...mere enthusiasm, but represented nothing less than the discovery, fundamental to the musical culture of the nineteenth century, that great instrumental music, in order to be comprehended as "musical logic" and "language above language," required a certain attitude of esthetic contemplation...an attitude through which it constituted itself in one's awareness in the first place.²¹³

The significance of Dahlhaus's insight is its contrast to the eighteenth-century assumption that music determined listening, a sort of simplistic version of inductive

²¹² Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 776, 778.

²¹³ Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 80.

aesthetics. Following Hoffmann, and adhering to the tenets of romanticism, Dahlhaus not only places the listener at the centre of the musical experience, he argues that the entire aesthetic of musical romanticism is dependent upon attentive listening. We have certainly come a long way from a model of musical culture where listening is peripheral to composition and performance!

This idea that music is a secular religion and that listening is an act of devotion preceded Hoffmann by a few decades. It was first developed in the writings of the German idealist and forerunner of musical romanticism, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798). Writing anonymously in 1797 about the “art-loving Monk” Joseph Berlinger, Wackenroder’s fictional biography exudes the heroic individualism and sensitivity that is emblematic of a cultural romanticism that has influenced biographical narratives for two centuries.²¹⁴ Berlinger’s passion is music, and in his description of attending both religious and secular music performances, Wackenroder is one of the first to suggest that both of these types of music be listened to devoutly. First, we read how Joseph listens to music in the Church,

...he often listened humbly on his knees...full of expectation he awaited the first sound of the instruments; as this now broke forth from out of the muffled silence, long drawn and mighty as the sigh of a wind from heaven, and as the full force of the sound swept by above his head, it seemed to him as though his soul had all at once unfurled great wings—he felt himself raised up above the barren heath, the dark cloud-curtain shutting out the mortal was drawn, and he soared up into the radiant sky. Then he held his body still and motionless, fixing his gaze steadfastly on the floor. The present sank away before him; his soul was cleansed of all the pettiness of this world—veritable dust on the soul’s luster; the music set his nerves tingling with a gentle thrill, calling up changing images before him with its changes. Thus,

²¹⁴ An example of this is in Wackenroder’s description of Berlinger’s life as, “ a beautiful fantasy and a heavenly dream. His soul was like a delicate young tree whose seed a bird had dropped into a ruined wall, where, among the rough stones, it springs up like a maiden. He was always by himself, alone and quiet, feeding only on his inner fantasies; on this account, his father considered him too a little foolish and unbalanced...most of all he prized his inner life, keeping it secret and hidden from others. Thus one secretes a jewel casket, to which one gives no one the key.” W.H. Wackenroder, “The Remarkable Musical Life of the Musician Joseph Berlinger,” in *Source Readings in Music History: From Classical Antiquity through the Romantic Era* ed. Oliver Strunk (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950), 752.

listening to certain joyous and soul-stirring songs in praise of God...a thousand sensations latent within him were liberated and marvelously interwoven. Indeed, at certain passages in the music, finally, an isolated ray of light fell on his soul; at this, it seems to him as though he all at once grew wiser and was looking down, with clearer sight and a certain inspired and placid melancholy, on all the busy world below.²¹⁵

Next, Wackenroder has Joseph attend a symphony,

When Joseph was at a great concert he seated himself in a corner, without so much as glancing at the brilliant assembly of listeners, and listened with precisely the same reverence as if he had been in church—just as still and motionless, his eyes cast down to the floor in the same way. Not the slightest sound escaped him, and his keen attention left him in the end quite limp and exhausted. His soul, eternally in motion, was wholly a play of sounds; it was as though, liberated from his body, it fluttered about the more freely, or even as though his body too had become part of his soul—thus freely and easily was his entire being would round with the lovely harmonies, and the music’s foldings and windings left their impress on his responsive soul. At the lighthearted and delightful symphony for full orchestra of which he was particularly fond...the music called forth a wondrous blend of gladness and sadness in his heart, so that he was equally inclined to smile and weep—a mood we met so often on our way through life, for whose expression there is no fitter art than music...the art of which it may be said in general that the more dark and mysterious its language, the greater its power to affect us, the more general the uproar into which it throws all forces of our being.²¹⁶

The similarity between devoutly listening to religious music and attentively listening to a symphony was not lost on the romantics. Just as true salvation can only be experienced by the devout, only by listening attentively can the inexpressible beauty and the infinite longing (to use Hoffmann’s terms) of absolute music be experienced.

But there is more to attentive listening than a romantic metaphysics of instrumental music and a history of religious piety. Following the argument for attentive listening set out in Hoffmann’s Beethoven review, there are two more dimensions of

²¹⁵ Wackenroder, “The Remarkable Musical Life of the Musician Joseph Berlinger, 752-753.

²¹⁶ Wackenroder, “The Remarkable Musical Life of the Musician Joseph Berlinger, 753-754.

musical culture that were significantly influenced by romanticism and need to be explained to fully contextualize attentive listening.

4.4.2. *The Symphony as a Musical Work and the Deification of the Composer*

Although other forms of instrumental music (the string quartet, the sonata, the concerto) qualify as absolute music, the symphony is the prototype for both musical romanticism and the idea of absolute music.²¹⁷ In Hoffmann's Beethoven review, he identifies the greatest symphonic composers of the eighteenth century, Haydn and Mozart, as the "creators of our instrumental music...the first to show us the art in its full glory."²¹⁸ The full glory of instrumental music, one can confidently assume, is the symphony.

Hoffmann is not simply establishing a chronology of the symphony from Haydn through Mozart to Beethoven. His choice of a Beethoven symphony to demonstrate that instrumental music is the most romantic of all the arts is not arbitrary. The symphony, Bonds writes, is the musical style, above all others, composed specifically for listeners.

Why the symphony? It was a listener's repertory *par excellence*: more than any other form of instrumental music, it demanded an audience. Sonatas, trios, and quartets could be played in public as well, of course, but these and similar genres were just as often performed privately, without any listeners other than the musicians themselves. The old adage about the string quartet being a conversation among four rational individuals lasted for as long as it did in part because it captured the essence of the genre so well: one can listen in on a conversation, but the conversation is not conducted for the eavesdropper. With or without listeners, the string quartet and other similarly intimate genres could sustain themselves quite nicely. The symphony, on the other hand, was never performed without an audience, and certainly not for the pleasure of the musicians (as any orchestral musician will be quick to attest)...even before it emerged

²¹⁷ Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 10.

²¹⁸ Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," 776.

into the public concert house in the nineteenth century, the symphony demanded a listening audience.²¹⁹

The symphony, in the form we know it today, emerged from the *sinfonia*, which denoted the orchestral opening, or overture, of an opera. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the symphony, as a three or four movement orchestral composition, detached itself from opera and became a freestanding musical form. As suits the eighteenth century's view of instrumental music, the symphony was considered only marginally important compared to opera and other vocal music. As Taruskin points out, despite the grandeur and magnificence that nineteenth-century romantics associated with the symphony, it was "aristocratic party music," its origins "modest and artistically unpretentious in the extreme."²²⁰ The aesthetic re-consideration of instrumental music that occurred around 1800 led musicians, critics, and listeners to begin thinking about the symphony as an autonomous musical work.

In her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Lydia Goehr argues that after 1800, the work-concept began to regulate the production, dissemination, and reception of instrumental music. Goehr's book is not about a single work per se, but rather about what it means to speak about music in terms of works. Prior to thinking about music in terms of works, music was understood through extra-musical concerns, typically related to the functions of the church or the state. The emancipation of music from these extra-musical concerns encouraged a type of musical autonomy realized in the idea that music should only concern itself with the musical ideas.

Speaking about music in terms of works not only bestows upon the musical work a type of aesthetic autonomy, it also bestows upon the composer the assumption of creative genius. For Hoffmann, the emancipation of music was not an evolutionary process or a historical inevitability, it was the work of gifted composers: Haydn, Mozart, and above all, Beethoven. Through their symphonies, these composers, "raised music to its present high estate" by virtue of their profound and intimate "recognition of music's

²¹⁹ Bonds, *Music as Thought*, xx.

²²⁰ Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Volume Two*, 498.

specific nature.”²²¹ As Taruskin puts it, since Hoffmann, the romantic myth of the composer is one of a “lonely artist-hero whose suffering produces works of awe-inspiring greatness that give listeners otherwise unavailable access to an experience that transcends all worldly concerns.”²²² What Goehr calls the “Beethoven Paradigm” refers to the emancipation of the composer from extra-musical demands and the romantic re-configuration of the purpose of composition: “composers enjoyed describing themselves and each other as divinely inspired creators—even God-like—whose sole task was to objectify in music something unique and personal and to express something transcendent.”²²³ As Goehr’s term indicates, it was Beethoven, more than any composer, who personified the romantic cult of musical genius.

Of Beethoven’s many sufferings (a favourite romantic theme—the great artist must suffer) there is none greater than his deafness. As Taruskin argues, Beethoven’s deafness is the chief source of his mystique and cultural authority, enabling Beethoven to become the single most commanding influence over musical culture to this day.

The idea of a successful deaf composer is a virtually superhuman idea. It connotes superhuman suffering and superhuman victory, playing directly into the emerging quasi-religious romantic notion of the great artist as humanity’s redeemer. That scenario—of suffering and victory, both experienced at the limits of intensity—became the ineluctable context in which Beethoven’s music was received.²²⁴

Beethoven is the paradigmatic romantic hero-composer. Independent and strong-willed, he is a musician whose uncompromising commitment to the superiority of his purpose has become the subject of anecdotes and stories. He is not a human being, Knittel writes, “but rather a symbol of a larger aesthetic doctrine or concern.”²²⁵ What has become known as the Teplitz incident of 1812 is telling of Beethoven’s symbolism. Walking with Goethe through a park at Teplitz (a spa in Bohemia), these great men of

²²¹ Hoffmann, “Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,” 776.

²²² Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Volume Two*, 649.

²²³ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 208.

²²⁴ Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Volume Two*, 654.

²²⁵ K.M. Knittel, “The Construction of Beethoven,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 120.

German culture encountered the Austrian imperial family. Goethe moved aside and bowed, Beethoven refused to cede the path and pushed through, reportedly having told Goethe, “Keep hold my arm, they must make room for us, not we for them.”²²⁶ The incident at Teplitz verifies those qualities that enabled Beethoven to be so easily mythologized. By not giving way for the aristocracy, Beethoven is asserting his own nobility as a musical genius (Goethe, on the other hand, clings to the old order). This assertion is not mere pretension, Beethoven is certain of his superiority, and it is this certainty, this complete independence from expectation and convention, that elevates him from musical genius to romantic hero. That the validity of the Teplitz incident is suspect doesn’t seem to matter; its reproduction in biographies, stories, and film, indicates that what it is important is the way it portrays Beethoven.²²⁷

4.5. Conclusion: The Technical Mediation of Attentive Listening

Concert halls are often thought of as buildings that confer cultural prestige on cities throughout the world. They come to be known as architectural monuments or examples of an architect’s oeuvre. However, the cultural and material significance of concert halls extends beyond questions concerning either the building or the builder. Concert halls are the media of musical romanticism. They are purpose-built for the performance and reception of orchestral music; they are adorned with busts and plaques celebrating the great composers of instrumental music; and most importantly, their

²²⁶ Tim Blanning, *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 42.

²²⁷ The Teplitz incident comes to us from a letter written from Beethoven to Bettina Brentano von Arnim (1785-1859) that she eventually published. She also published her correspondence with Goethe. As Knittel writes, “Bettina’s Beethoven seems so real – so familiar – that it comes as a shock to find out that hardly a single word that she published can be trusted. Of the three letters (1810, 1811, 1812) that she claimed to have received from Beethoven, only the one of 1811 exists in Beethoven’s hand, suggesting that she was the author of the other two. The Teplitz incident, so *characteristic* of Beethoven, is thus almost certainly a fabrication. Even her exchange of letters with Goethe is unreliable: before publication, she significantly rewrote not only her side of the correspondence, but Goethe’s as well.” Knittel, “The Construction of Beethoven,” 119.

design, as Christopher Small puts it, “not only discourages communication among members of the audience but also tells them they are there to listen.”²²⁸ As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, there is an elegant congruence between musical romanticism, attentive listening, and the concert hall. As Goehr writes, concert halls are monuments “devoted to the performance of musical works,” where “audiences were asked to be literally and metaphorically silent, so that the truth or beauty of the work could be heard in itself.”²²⁹

Following John Neubauer, who writes that a unified manifestation of musical romanticism is nothing more than “a figment of the historian’s imagination,”²³⁰ in the following chapter, I move away from the monolithic version of romantic aesthetics presented in this chapter and examine how romanticism was realized in Amsterdam by exploring how the idea of attentive listening shaped this city’s musical culture during the nineteenth century.

²²⁸ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 27.

²²⁹ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 236.

²³⁰ Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language*, 194.

5. Listening and the Idea of Musical Romanticism in Amsterdam

What reason could there be for the fact that so few of our Dutch compatriots have a passion for music...one is almost obliged to assume that it is entirely alien to our national character.

-From *About the Practice of Music in the Netherlands*, 1828²³¹

5.1. Introduction

Invoking both Sigmund Freud and Norbert Elias, Peter Gay writes that in response to the performance of a symphony, undivided silent attention is a triumph of the secondary over the primary process, “a civilized response that overrides instinctual urges.”²³² From this perspective, the concert hall must seem odd to anyone unfamiliar with the rituals of classical music. To the uninitiated, these monuments to music are a material restraint against our natural instincts, a temporary prison where we exhibit a bizarre type of self-discipline. As described in the previous chapter, a radical transformation of how people thought about instrumental music was necessary for attentive listening to become the norm at symphony concerts. Romanticism provided

²³¹ “Over de beoefening der muziek in Nederland,” *Magazijn voor schilder- en toonkunst* 2 (1828):100, quoted in Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, eds. *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective Volume 2: 1800 Blueprints for a National Community* trans. Beverly Jackson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 492.

²³² Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: The Naked Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22.

the conceptual basis for this transformation, encouraging listeners to forget that attentive listening runs counter to fundamental human impulses.

In this chapter, I examine the emergence of musical romanticism in the Netherlands and the gradual acceptance of attentive listening by Dutch audiences. This is an important part of the context within which Amsterdammers could imagine constructing a purpose-built concert hall, making musical romanticism and attentive listening a permanent part of Amsterdam's musical culture. This chapter marks the first step towards tracing how the social (attentive listening) was translated from the heady realm of aesthetic theory down to the level of technical design (the Concertgebouw). I do this by demonstrating how particular tenets of musical romanticism circulated within nineteenth-century Dutch musical culture. At this level, attentive listening is only an idea, articulated in music criticism that sought to elevate Dutch musical culture to the standards of a distinctly German idea of musical culture. In subsequent chapters, I examine how this idea was translated from critiques that reflected a new musical culture into a building that mediated this musical culture.

5.2. *Frisia Non Cantat*

The Dutch are not known as a musical people. The Netherlands is a land of painters, a nation whose achievements with the brush seem disproportionate to its size. Although not as prolific as painting, the Netherlands has also produced a number of important writers, including Erasmus, Spinoza, Multatuli, Johan Huizinga, Willem Hermans, and Harry Mulisch. It is little wonder, then, that to the Dutch themselves, the Netherlands is a country that “writes with its left hand and paints with its right hand.”²³³

²³³ This phrase is attributed to Dutch cultural historian Gerard Brom, quoted in Emile Wennekes, “Music and Musical Life,” in *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective Volume 5, Accounting for the Past: 1650-2000*, ed. Douwe Fokkema and Frans Grijzenhout, trans. Paul Vincent (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 253.

The creative talents of the Dutch are hardly limited to the canvas and the page. Yet, one can't help but think that their achievements in these fields have led to impossible expectations in other artistic endeavours. This may explain why, when considering themselves a musical nation, the Dutch are masters of self-deprecation. The idea that the Dutch are unmusical dates back almost two millennia. In *Germania*, Tacitus (56-117) characterizes the Frisians, located in what is today the northern Dutch province of Friesland, with the phrase *Frisia non cantat*—Frisians do not sing. This slogan re-emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to explain the quality of Dutch music in contrast to the Italian, French, and German music that was popular amongst the Dutch cultural elite. In 1820, the Rotterdam organist and music critic Job Robbers proposed an interesting theory to explain his country's lack of musical proclivity—blame it on the weather:

Without a doubt we may rank ourselves among those nations that live beneath somber, dark, and cloudy skies, who scarcely enjoy more than a few hours each day of the cheerful, elating rays of the sun...This is the true cause of our backward nature in song...²³⁴

Meteorology notwithstanding, the apparent truth of Tacitus's remark was confirmed by the Dutch composer and critic Willem Pijper in his polemical essay *The Anti-Musicality of the Dutch* (1929).

Other peoples sing, play violin, practice the piano diligently and thoroughly; in Italy one hears the music of mandolins and guitars, the Scots amuse themselves with the barbaric wail of their bagpipes, and the South American Mycetes tribes actually roar in unison. But in Holland the production of a series of sounds that more or less fit into a system has become an activity that falls first and foremost under the concept of Sunday.²³⁵

It may not have been Pijper's intent, but his comment that the Dutch are only musical under the concept of Sunday highlights the diminished place of music within the religious life of the Dutch. Whereas in other countries musical life flourished under the

²³⁴ Quoted in Kloek & Mijnhardt, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective* Volume 2, 483.

²³⁵ Quoted in Wennekes, "Music and Musical Life," 253.

auspices of the Christian church, this was not the case in the Netherlands. Here, Calvinism, in the form of the Dutch Christian Reformed Church, has had a distinct cultural influence since the sixteenth century.²³⁶

Calvin was suspicious of music, writing: "As wine is poured into the cask with a funnel, so venom and corruption are distilled to the very depths of the heart by melody."²³⁷ He believed that improperly used, music led to "unbridled dissipations" and "immoderate pleasure" and so he banished musical embellishment from the service.²³⁸ As nineteenth-century literary critic Conrad Busken Huet wrote in *Land of Rembrandt* (1879), the Dutch faithfully adhered to Calvin's musical edicts, declaring war "against all musical forms without distinction, except for the singing of Psalms."²³⁹

In contrast to other traditions of sacred music that contain moments of celebration, triumph, and elation, the lack of harmony and unchanging pitch that characterizes the unaccompanied singing of Psalms is the sound of thrift, toil, and the cruel fate of pre-destination.²⁴⁰ This was a tremendous disadvantage for the development of a creative, or compositional, culture. Compared to the musical embellishment encouraged by other denominations, the unaccompanied singing of Psalms is not conducive to elaborate creativity. In this regard, it is not surprising to discover that the only Dutch composer of international renown is Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621) who served as the organist in Amsterdam's Oude Kerk (Old

²³⁶ The Southern part of the Netherlands (the province of Limburg and surrounding area) remained Catholic after the reformation and Spanish revolt while the central and Northern provinces of the Netherlands (including the major cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht, Den Haag, and Rotterdam) embraced Protestantism.

²³⁷ Jean Calvin, "Geneva Psalter," in *Source Readings in Music History: From Classical Antiquity through the Romantic Era*, ed. Oliver Strunk (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950), 347.

²³⁸ Quoted in Tim Blanning, *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians, and Their Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 10.

²³⁹ Quoted in Wennekes, "Music and Musical Life," 259.

²⁴⁰ Herman Hesse writes, "the music of a well-ordered age is calm and cheerful, and so is its government. The music of a restive age is excited and fierce, and its government is perverted. The music of a decaying state is sentimental and sad, and its government is imperiled." Perhaps there is a religious equivalent to Hesse's political theory of music. See Herman Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 31-32.

Church). After the establishment of a Calvinist administration in Amsterdam in 1578, the churches, and the organs they contained, became the property of the City of Amsterdam. In service to the City, organists were expected to perform musical works on these massive instruments for the middle class public who routinely gathered or passed through the church over the course of their daily activities. After Sweelinck, Calvinism became increasingly influential throughout the Netherlands, and music was pushed aside to satisfy the demands of the stubbornly orthodox Calvinists.²⁴¹ To make matters worse for the development of a compositional culture, the Netherlands did not have a strong court culture outside of the minor court located in The Hague. Thus, the two primary institutions through which compositional talent flourished in Europe between the seventeenth century and nineteenth century—the church and the court—were not widely recognized or exploited as musical institutions in the Netherlands.²⁴²

After the eighteenth century, the Dutch became increasingly aware of their compositional impoverishment. Rarely would indigenous talent be considered the equal of Italian, French, or German composers, and some audiences did little to discourage the idea of a national compositional inferiority. In the eighteenth century, for example, when fashionable Dutch audiences “knew” that Italian music was the only music worth listening to, the Dutch composer Quirinus van Blanckenburg (1654-1739) exploited this pretension to sell his music in his native land,

When a few years ago I presented a musical composition of my own, it could not be sold at any price. But when, in place of my own name, van Blanckenburg, I put the Italian Di Castelbianco [being a direct translation] under it, it suddenly became exceedingly beautiful.²⁴³

For nationalistic music lovers of the nineteenth century, the lack of noteworthy Dutch composers became a source of consternation. In 1819, the first journal dedicated to music in the Netherlands, *Amphion*, printed an article in which an anonymous critic

²⁴¹Wennekes, “Music and Musical Life,” 260.

²⁴²Kloek and Mijnhardt, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective* Volume 2, 484.

²⁴³Quoted in Wouter Paap, “Composers,” *Music in Holland*, ed. Eduard Reeser (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1959), 4.

conceded that music in the Netherlands was not Dutch, but French, “We Dutch have no music of our own. Hard as I find it to make this confession, it is none the less based on the truth.”²⁴⁴ A century later, in 1920, the composer and writer Alphons Diepenbrock (1862-1921) reiterated this sentiment in a letter to the conductor Willem Mengelberg: “there is still no ‘Dutch’ music, any more than there is a ‘Dutch’ practicing of music, and that all our music is something imported from Germany, as it was imported from France and Italy during the eighteenth century.”²⁴⁵

Although Diepenbrock’s letter to Mengelberg implies that Dutch musical culture is deficient, his remarks provide an insight into the unique path that musical romanticism took in Amsterdam. Diepenbrock held true to the ideals of musical romanticism throughout his life, including the idea that the composer is the personification of romanticism. His lament that Dutch musical culture is not even remotely Dutch confirms his adherence to an idea of musical culture founded on the relationship between composers and national identity. As Carl Dahlhaus writes, one of the conceits of musical romanticism is that individuality, originality, and nationalism are intertwined: “A composer was expected to be original, to bring forth the new in a manner which, at the same time, manifested the “origins” of his existence.”²⁴⁶ For Diepenbrock, without any renowned composers to call their own, Dutch musical culture would always be second-rate, nothing more than a copy of another country’s musical culture.

What Diepenbrock didn’t realize is that it is only because of romanticism’s influence in the Netherlands that this critique of musical culture is relevant. Commenting on E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Beethoven review, R. Murray Schafer writes that the idea of the great composer is unique to musical romanticism: “...the whole concept of the composer in the present-day sense of the word did not begin to be formulated until 1800...the romanticists fashioned the concept of the composer in our sense of the word and flung

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Eduard Reesor, “Introduction,” *Music in Holland*, ed. Eduard Reesor (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1959), viii; see also Eduard Reesor, *Een eeuw Nederlandse Muziek 1815-1915* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1986), 10.

²⁴⁵ Reesor, *Een eeuw Nederlandse Muziek*, 10.

²⁴⁶ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 37.

him upward, a luminary, above other kinds of men and musicians."²⁴⁷ Basing his tragic perspective on the notion of the great composer, Diepenbrock failed to recognize that the serious musical culture of musical romanticism could flourish without a strong compositional tradition. Romanticism, Dahlhaus writes, is so expansive that it does not depend on one single element. Even without a roster of canonic composers, it could still take hold.

...a collective term such as "romanticism" will contain some ideas that derive from a common root, others that merged from different sources, and still others that only came into casual contact with each other. And while the web they form is loose in some places and tight-knit in others, it nonetheless deserves the appellation of a collective name without necessarily being reconstructable from an underlying structure or substance from which all its elements derive.²⁴⁸

It was only in the mid-twentieth century that Dutch musicologists and historians confronted their compositional inferiority and recognized the unique qualities of Dutch musical culture. In doing so, a new history was constructed, one aware that the value of a country's serious musical culture cannot be reduced to a list of great composers. Critic, author, and composer Wouter Paap considers the history of Dutch musical culture this way, writing that the Netherlands, since the time of Sweelinck, is "certainly not favourable to *creative* music...In spite of all this, however, music was diligently practiced in Holland in the 17th and 18th century."²⁴⁹ In his post-romantic summary of twentieth-century Dutch musical culture, Reeser explains this perspective in more detail:

There was a time when the musical culture of a country was measured mainly according to the brilliant individual creative talent which could develop there. Every valuation was made subservient to that standard, and thus it could happen that a country with few or no 'great' composers was passed over as being 'unmusical', without sufficient account being taken of other factors that can be of primary importance for a musical culture, such as a fertile musical folklore, flourishing amateurism, sound instruction in music, a widely varied

²⁴⁷ R. Murray Schafer, *E.T.A. Hoffmann and Music* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 76.

²⁴⁸ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 25.

²⁴⁹ Paap, "Composers," 4.

concert and opera life, reproductive achievements of a high standard...the lack of famous musicians in the Northern Netherlands by no means implies that there was no intensive musical life in these regions; on the contrary, there is ample proof that music had been practiced here with great enthusiasm at all times and by all levels of the population.²⁵⁰

Following Reeser's and Paap's historiography, the history of Dutch musical culture is a history of *performance* and *reception*, and it was through these aspects that romanticism found a foothold in the Netherlands. The Dutch need only recall Gustav Mahler's comment upon his first visit to the Concertgebouw in 1903, "the musical culture in this country is stupendous! The way the people can just listen!"²⁵¹ Or Edvard Grieg, who in 1897 praised the Concertgebouw orchestra, imploring that Amsterdammers "should be proud of possessing such an orchestra."²⁵² The praise from these composers put Reeser's and Paap's comments in a romanticist context; with neither a history of compositional talent nor a musical culture that seemed favorable to developing composers of instrumental music, musical romanticism was realized through attentive listening and an expectation of orchestral performances that emphasized discipline and fidelity to the musical work.

Ideas about music are informed by what is written about music. The virtual explosion of music journalism that occurred in Europe in the early nineteenth century provided the means by which musical romanticism was introduced to a growing audience. In the Netherlands, musical romanticism was introduced through ideas concerning *how* to listen and *what* to listen for. In what follows, I tell this history of musical romanticism in the Netherlands by examining how it was articulated through music criticism, paying close attention to the critiques of audience behaviour that appeared in Dutch music criticism in the early nineteenth century.

²⁵⁰ Reeser, *Introduction*, vii-viii.

²⁵¹ Truus de Leur, "Gustav Mahler in the Netherlands" in *Gustav Mahler: The World Listens*, ed. Donald Mitchell (Haarlem: Tema Uitgevers, 1995), 18.

²⁵² Jos Wouters, "Musical Performers," in *Music in Holland* ed. Eduard Reesor (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1959), 55.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Dutch journals began publishing what was considered to be serious music criticism. A recurring theme in these early formulations of music criticism was a critique of audience behaviour that was better suited to social clubs and bars than orchestral performances. Following this, I examine how critics taught audiences what to listen for. This educational mission culminated in the reviews of the three performances of the Meininger Hofkappel (Meininger court orchestra) in Amsterdam in 1885. Astonished at the quality of the Meininger orchestra and its conductor, Hans von Bülow, the reviews of these concerts identified a new standard of performance and pointed to a “lack” within Amsterdam’s musical culture. As cultural historians Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren write, the Meininger concerts were a turning point for Dutch musical culture: “From then on it had been impossible to conceal the mediocrity of the average orchestral playing in the Netherlands. People also started to look with new eyes at Dutch conductors, who had been for so long regarded, with chauvinistic short-sightedness, as stars.”²⁵³ Although the Amsterdam critics did not openly critique their city’s orchestras, their reviews made sure to emphasize that Amsterdammers had never heard such tremendous performances. Examining these reviews, it becomes clear that critics used these concerts to highlight what Amsterdam audiences should be listening for in orchestral performances. Before these case studies, I briefly review the origins of modern music criticism in Germany. In the Netherlands, music criticism was based on the German model. Throughout the nineteenth century, Dutch journals imported ideas about musical taste and a style of writing that was developed first by German critics. By reviewing studies of German music criticism, it is possible to gain a better understanding of their Dutch counterparts.

²⁵³ Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective Volume 3 , 1900: The Age of Bourgeois Culture*, trans. Lynne Richards and John Rudge (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 471.

5.3. Nineteenth-Century Music Criticism

Up until the mid-eighteenth century, music criticism was largely theoretical or didactic; there was hardly any mention of actual pieces of music, commentary on musical taste, or discussions of music history.²⁵⁴ This changed when German critics invoked romanticist ideals to transform the standards through which musical culture would be judged. Non-representational instrumental music was now considered sublime, not incomprehensible. This new standard corresponded with a new style of music criticism. Criticism would no longer be written for professional musicians. It would appeal to a wider audience by including essays, reviews, and editorials written for interested listeners and other musical laity.

The birth of modern (romanticist) music criticism can be dated to 1789 with the founding of the Leipzig-based journal *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*AmZ*), whose editor was Friedrich Rochlitz (1769-1842). Translated as “universal musical news,” or, with more precision, “musical newspaper for the general public,”²⁵⁵ the *AmZ* was the most important music journal of the early nineteenth century and played a crucial role in defining the romanticist outlook.²⁵⁶ The *AmZ* emerged in response to the growth of musical culture and the subsequent demand for a non-specialist literature about music. It was in this context that E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Beethoven review appeared in the *AmZ* in 1810 (an abridged edition was published in 1813). What is unique to Hoffmann, and other critics who shared his aesthetic disposition, is a style of criticism that is romantic in both spirit and subject matter. Unlike eighteenth century criticism that tended towards pedantic treatises written for specialists, the criticism found in the *AmZ* emphasized “the interplay and correlation between musical details and the stimulating effects derived

²⁵⁴Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Vol.3: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapt.38; William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20.

²⁵⁵Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music Vol.3*, 289.

²⁵⁶William Weber, “Wagner, Wagnerism, and Musical Idealism,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 34-37. See also J. Murray Barbour, “Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung: Prototype of Contemporary Musical Journalism,” *Note*, 5 no.3 (June 1948): 325-337

from them,” what Antje Pieper cleverly terms “subjective music criticism.”²⁵⁷ Subjective music criticism is intended to teach audiences how to listen and what to listen for through terms and concepts that discuss music from the audience’s perspective. Thus, for the growing audience of nineteenth-century music lovers, musical romanticism was not something encountered only in the concert hall. It was also discerned from the standards and rules that informed the music criticism found in journals, newspapers, and other cultural magazines.

The task of the critic, by virtue of extensive knowledge, professional instinct, and rhetorical persuasiveness, was to mold the taste of readers. This was a completely new profession within musical culture—someone who evaluates and judges music for the benefit of nonprofessionals and other listeners. Prior to the growth of music journalism in the early nineteenth century, the musical taste of the aristocracy, by virtue of their patronage and breeding, was good taste. As the cultural prestige of the aristocracy declined, publishers, and the critics they paid, became the self-styled cultural elite who took it upon themselves to tell others what they should listen to. It is important to note that although the critic stood between listeners and composers, they were firmly on the side of composers, attempting to teach listeners to appreciate music as composers would like them to appreciate it. Thus, the birth of music criticism was also the birth of a conflict that persists in music criticism to this day—the conflict between the interests of the masses (whoever they may be) and an authentic devotion to music that only great artists pursue (as decided upon by critics).

Musical taste, Dahlhaus writes, is the exclusive property of distinct groups—from subcultures to nations—and the expression of taste serves a social function. “The taste a person had, be it for *Opusmusik* or *Trivialmusik* (to use the pejorative catchphrases of their respective strata), associated him with “his own kind” and separated him from “others” (whether “above” or below).”²⁵⁸ The criticism found in German music journals

²⁵⁷ Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture: A Comparative History of Nineteenth Century Leipzig and Birmingham* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 45-46.

²⁵⁸ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 246.

invoked a notion of taste premised on the aesthetic superiority of the symphony, and German critics distinguished their “superior” taste against what they felt was the trivial music of virtuosos and dilettantes. For some commentators, the aesthetic idealization of the symphony in nineteenth-century German criticism was a vehicle for German nationalism. As Sanna Pederson writes, “German music was being proclaimed as high art by designating foreign music as frivolous, unsubstantial, and unworthy. Aesthetic and national categories of distinction coincided, overlapped, and blurred.”²⁵⁹ Against German music, critics usually equated poor musical taste with an inclination for either French or Italian music. The music of these countries, it was felt, did not aspire to the heights of German symphonic music; it was oriented towards entertainment instead of transcendence, dazzling spectacle instead of serious devotion. A powerful rhetoric against the culture of superficial (and “irrationally” popular) musical frivolity associated with non-symphonic performances became common in German-language publications. As Weber writes: “Dilettante and Virtuoso soon became the idealists most important code words for musicians who capitalized on bad taste...fashion and mode were the unkindest words in their vocabulary, but gain and profit came a near second.”²⁶⁰ Of the two, dilettante and virtuoso, the latter was considered a greater threat to musical culture. While the former referred to amateur musicians who, it was felt, brought down the level of performance, the latter brought down the standards of good taste by appealing to listener’s baser instincts. Virtuosos were superficial and egocentric; against the timelessness of “great” symphonic music, the significance of virtuosos was reducible to dexterity and a sort of musical gymnastics.

Nationalism aside, the war against virtuosity was primarily a means to establish the aesthetic hegemony of the symphony. It is possible to discern nationalist sentiments

²⁵⁹ Sanna Pederson, “A.B. Marx, Berlin Concert Life, and German National Identity.” *19th-Century Music* 18, no.2 (Fall 1994): 89. For more on German nationalism and nineteenth-century music criticism see Blanning, *The Triumph of Music*, 279-285; Dana Gooley, “The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Franz Liszt and his World*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75-112; David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture 1770-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁶⁰ Weber, “Wagner, Wagnerism and Musical Idealism,” 35-36.

from the invectives leveled against virtuosity in the pages of the *AmZ*, but the critique of virtuosity is primarily a commentary on the musical taste of audiences, as can be read in Rochlitz's many sermons against non-symphonic music: "The best artists find themselves compelled to waste their time in deceitful practices of petty artistry and charlatanism...the contortions and excrescences, which the crowd is accustomed to seeing as something sublime, are among the many unfortunate effects of virtuosos upon the public."²⁶¹ Framed in this way, the battle against virtuosity was a battle over the meaning of music. As Dana Gooley writes, music critics concealed "values as observations," ensuring "that a preference for serious symphonic works would appear to have emerged spontaneously and naturally."²⁶² He continues:

The most effective and concrete strategy for advancing the virtues of the symphony was to profile it against other *instrumental* music—variations, potpourris, fantasies, and concertos—not deemed "serious" or "symphonic." Advocates for the symphony (above all Mozart and Haydn, but somewhat later Beethoven as well) thus built and reinforced an ideologically charged binary opposition positioning serious or "symphonic" music against insignificant, "dilettantish" instrumental music.²⁶³

Music criticism, Dahlhaus writes, "is no mere reflection of what happens in the musical practice of composition, interpretation, and reception, but rather belongs, in a certain sense, to the constituent forces of music itself." The realm of music, he points out, is not limited to the sounds we hear. Beyond the acoustic substrate, music "takes shape through categorical ordering of what has been perceived...the system of categories of reception immediately affects the substance of the thing itself."²⁶⁴ Dahlhaus's point, that the ontology of music is linguistic *and* acoustic, is important to consider when thinking about the development of musical romanticism in the Netherlands. In the nineteenth century, music criticism introduced ideas about music

²⁶¹ "Ueber reisende Virtuosen," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 4 (Aug. 18, 1802): 753, quoted in Weber, "Wagner, Wagnerism, and Musical Idealism," 34.

²⁶² Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity," 76.

²⁶³ Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity," 77.

²⁶⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 63.

that fundamentally altered the path of musical culture in the Netherlands. Influenced by German music criticism, nineteenth-century writers were the first to critique Dutch musical culture through what were formerly unimaginable categories: audience behaviour, musical taste, and the level of musicianship in orchestras. The transformation of Dutch musical culture over the course of the nineteenth century was a transformation of inattentive audiences interested in what is fashionable to audiences that listened attentively to the works of the classical canon. This change began in the early decades of the nineteenth century when “subjective” music criticism began appearing in the Netherlands. Criticism introduced the ideals of musical romanticism to Dutch readers, planting the seeds of a musical culture that would culminate in the opening of the Concertgebouw.

5.4. Learning How to Listen: Early Music Criticism in the Netherlands

As discussed in the introductory chapter, by the standards of musical romanticism, the listening habits of Dutch concert audiences throughout most of the nineteenth century were uncivilized. Influenced by the ideas of Wackenroder and Hoffmann, nineteenth-century audiences in Germany, Austria, England, and France listened devoutly as a means of potential aesthetic transcendence. In the Netherlands, concerts were social events, places to converse and socialize, not listen.

In the 1806 Dutch novel, *Historie van Mejufvrouw Susanna Bronkhorst* (History of Miss Susanna Bronkhorst), an idea of what the atmosphere was like at an orchestral performance in early nineteenth-century Amsterdam is conveyed when a character states that he could not hear the music over the conversations: “I would not have noticed that they were already playing if Suse Bronkhorst, after a movement of the first

symphony had already passed, had not drawn my attention to this.”²⁶⁵ Writing about local musical audiences in 1814, the Amsterdam correspondent for the *AmZ*, German-born Dutch composer Johan Wilhelm Wilms, divided Amsterdammers into three categories: First, there was a small group who loved good music, like Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven or related composers; second, a more substantial group, “who seek to enjoy the moment, but would rather not think whilst enjoying;” and finally, a third group who were satisfied when music “made a sound, was new, and pretty and light.”²⁶⁶

An example of this last attitude can be found in an article that appeared in the journal *Euphonia: een weekblad voor den beschaafden stand* (Magazine for the Cultured Class) in 1818. Written in the form of a dialogue, this short piece, entitled “Letter to Cousin Abraham,” was written by “Christiaan,” who described how his “Friend G” took him to his first concert, only to mock him for listening with the utmost attention:

He: “One can indeed see that you are not yet accustomed to attending concerts. But please enjoy yourself, it gives me great pleasure...”

I (*gazing in surprise*): “But are you not enjoying yourself?”

He: “Oh yes, just not when hearing the music for the full orchestra. [...]—Moreover, this symphony is already old.”

I: “Old or not—what is beautiful will be so forever”

He: “One has a completely different style nowadays”

I: “[...] Is beauty therefore in the new?”

²⁶⁵ Adriaan Loosjes, *Historie van Mejufvrouw Susanna Bronkhorst* (Haarlem, 1806), 13, quoted in Helen H. Metzelaar, *From Private to Public Spheres: Exploring Women’s Role in Dutch Musical Life from c.1700 to c.1880 and Three Case Studies* (Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1999), 51.

²⁶⁶ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, XVI (1814): 413, quoted in Jeroen van Gessel, *Een Vaderland voor Goede Muziek: Een halve eeuw Maatschappij tot bevordering der toonkunst (1829-1879) en het Nederlandse muziekleven* (Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 2004), 135.

He: "Fashion, my friend!—the spirit of the age—Besides, who visits a concert as if he were in church?"

I: "One is here to listen to the music, are they not?"

He: "And to meet one's friends—to be able to say that one was there— [...] etc. etc."²⁶⁷

As these articles hint at, inattentiveness corresponded with a musical culture that was interested in fashion, spectacle, and sensationalism—the antithesis of musical romanticism. Music criticism of the type found in journals like the *AmZ* had to wait until the publication of *Amphion* in 1818 to find a dedicated outlet in the Netherlands.²⁶⁸ The editor of *Amphion* was N.W. Schroeder Steinmetz (1793-1826), an avowed proponent of musical romanticism and a loyal follower of E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose influence was decisive in the development of Steinmetz's musical sensibility. Both Steinmetz and his journal were located in the Northern Dutch city of Groningen which was geographically and culturally close to Germany. Steinmetz was a reader of romantic literature (Novalis, Jean Paul, Johann Ludwig Tieck) and wrote in a style influenced by the writers whom he admired. The following is excerpted from a review in which Steinmetz laments a

²⁶⁷ Hij: "Men kan wel zien, dat gij nog niet aan het bijwonen van concerten gewoon zijt. Maar vermaakt gij u, het doet mij plezier..."
Ik (hem vreemd aanziende): "Vermaakt gij u dan niet?"
Hij: "O Ja, maar niet in het aanhooren van muziek voor het vol orchest. [...] – Bovendien, deze symphonie is reeds oud."
Ik: "Oud of niet – wat schoon is, blijft dit altoos."
Hij: "Men heeft heden een' geheel anderen trant."
Ik: "[...] Bestaat dan het schoone in het nieuwe?"
Hij: "De mode, mijn vriend! – de geest van den tijd – Bovendien wie bezoekt een concert als of hij in de kerk kwam?"
Ik: "Men komt toch om de muziek te horen?"
Hij: "En om zijne vrienden te zien – om te kunnen zeggen, dat men er geweest is – [...] enz. enz." *Euphonia* IV (1818): 90-94, quoted in van Gessel, *Een Vaderland*, 153.

²⁶⁸ The first Dutch journal dedicated to music was published in 1756 and existed for only one year. *Samenspraaken over muzikaale beginselen* (Dialogues about Musical Principles) was modeled on the Hamburg-based journal *Critica Musica* (1722-1725) and contained information about musical literature, short reports on musical events, and translations of articles that had appeared in German music journals. Between the last issue of *Samenspraaken over muzikaale beginselen* (1756) and the first issue of *Amphion* (1818), there was little written about musical culture in the Netherlands. See Dick van den Hull "Early Music Periodicals in the Netherlands," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 35 (1988): 171-174.

composer whose work is performed by inadequate musicians for an unappreciative audience:

Poor composer! Why do you not pull yourself out of the stream of diatribes that cover you from all sides? Why not hide yourself and your art in a desolated corner of the earth, where you, albeit in solitude, can quench your heart with the fruits of your genius, where you are free of the painful tortures of a beastly tyranny.²⁶⁹

The rhetorical flourishes Steinmetz uses are reminiscent of Hoffmann's style, and under Steinmetz's guidance *Amphion* introduced Hoffmann to a Dutch audience by publishing translations of his musical writings that had appeared in the *AmZ* (*The Musical Sufferings of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler and Ritter Gluck: A recollection from the year 1809.*)²⁷⁰

Amphion was, in many ways, the Dutch version of the *AmZ*. Like the *AmZ*, *Amphion* was directed to a broad audience, indicated by its subtitle, *A Journal for Friends and Students of Music*. Like its German equivalent, the editors of *Amphion* promised to publish pieces written in a way that would be, "not only understandable and useful to musical professionals and experts, but also music lovers."²⁷¹ More concretely, the content of *Amphion* matched the content of the *AmZ*: philosophical and historical essays on music, short outlines of theoretical works on music, concert reviews, reports from cities in the Netherlands and abroad, and news items. And perhaps most telling if

²⁶⁹ "Arme komponist! Waarom rukt gij u niet uit den stroom der schimpredenen, die u van alle kanten bedekken? Waarom verbergt gij u niet u en uwe kunst in eenen afgelegen hoek de aarde, waar gij wel is waar, slechts in eenzaamheid uw hart aan de vruchten uwer genie kunt laven, maar waar gij ook bevrijd zijt van de pijnigende martelingen eener onmenselijke dwingelandij." *Amphion* 3, no.1 (1820): 5.

²⁷⁰ E.T.A. Hoffmann, "De muzikale pijnbank van den kapelmeester Johannes Kreisler," *Amphion* 1, no.2 (1818): 136-149; E.T.A. Hoffmann, "De Ridder Gluck, een herinnering uit het jaar 1809," *Amphion* 2, no.1 (1819): 66-72. For English versions see Schafer, *E.T.A. Hoffmann and Music*. Steinmetz also translated Hoffmann's collection of short stories, *Nachstücke* (Night Pieces [1817]), which was published in the Netherlands in 1826.

²⁷¹ "...dat niet slechts de eigenlijke muzikgeleerde, maar ook de liefhebber dezelve verstaan en daarvan nut trekken kan." Quoted in van Gessel, *Een Vaderland*, 98.

we consider *Amphion* to be the Dutch version of the *AmZ*, Steinmetz was in possession of every volume of the *AmZ* published since 1798!²⁷²

Befitting a journal that took the *AmZ* as its model, Steinmetz made it the mandate of *Amphion* to introduce a serious (German) approach to music. Steinmetz characterized the Dutch as people who enjoy music, but do not take it seriously, writing that music was generally considered “a means to spend time pleasantly.”²⁷³ An important part of remedying this attitude was critiquing inattentive listening. “And what are our concerts?” an essay in the first issue reads, “nothing other than talking parties...the artist, in vain, displays his talents while audience members only want to draw attention to themselves.”²⁷⁴ In a later issue, the same complaint is raised in response to a performance of a Haydn symphony. The anonymous reviewer is distressed by Dutch audiences who amuse themselves by chattering on about the weather: “But why does one not try to let the audience, when it is in a talkative mood like that, be inspired by new and fine music, which we truly have in abundance, and instill interest in the true purpose of these musical gatherings?”²⁷⁵ The idea that music could inspire listeners, that it had a “true purpose” other than a pleasant backdrop for conversation, must have been a new concept for many Dutch readers.

The noise and inattentiveness of Dutch audiences may have seemed natural to the Dutch, but it was conspicuous to foreign musicians and writers who attended concerts in the Netherlands. In a 1823 letter to Goethe, the German composer Carl Friedrich Zelter described a performance he had attended at Amsterdam’s Felix Meritis.

²⁷² Tod van Huffelen, “Het Muziektijdschrift ‘Amphion’ (1818-1822),” *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 42, no.1 (1992): 40; van den Hul, “Early Music Periodicals in the Netherlands,” 173.

²⁷³ “...de muziek beschouwd al seen middle, om den tijd aangenaam door te brengen...” *Amphion* 1, no.1 (1818): 119.

²⁷⁴ “En wat zijn onze concerten? Niets anders, als ik mij zoo een moge uitdrukken, dan praatpartijtjes en zamen komsten, om zich met elkander bezig te houden, terwijl de kunstenaar, vruchteloos, al zijne talentlenten ten toon spreidt, om de aandacht tot zich te trekken.” *Amphion* 1, no.1 (1818): 80.

²⁷⁵ “Maar waarom tracht men ook niet, het publiek, wanneer het zoodanig tot spreken gestemd is, door nieuwe schoone muziek, waaraan het toch waarlijk niet ontbreekt, meer belang voor het eigenlijk doel der muzikale bijeenkomsten in te boezemen?” *Amphion* 3, no.3 (1820): 154.

He describes an audience who arrived intermittently, unaware that one should listen to the entire performance, not just the last part. Zelter describes an audience seemingly interested in everything but the performance: “the men are smoking, the women are knitting...one has a book and is reading, the ear itself shies off, reluctant to listen.”²⁷⁶ In the *AmZ* we find similar observations. A review of a Rotterdam concert from 1826 reported that the Dutch considered music to be merely fashionable, not the “independent supreme art” that the romantics had made it out to be. For the Dutch, the concert hall was not a temple of art, but more like a casino, a place where people would meet their friends to the accompaniment of music. So long as this attitude towards music prevails, the correspondent wrote, silence would remain a pious hope.²⁷⁷

The ideal of attentive listening was a hard sell in the Netherlands. In 1830, an anonymous member of an Amsterdam orchestra published a complaint about audience behaviour. He felt that a concert was a place “to listen to music,” and demanded that during performances “the audience be quiet and calm.” Many attended concerts, he complained, “to see people whom they don’t see every day, observe other’s attitudes, clothes, hair, etc. etc., even during the most beautiful performances, loudly discuss this with their friends, even so loudly that the people who were talked about could hear the often inappropriate remarks as if they were directly spoken to.”²⁷⁸

Attentive listening was something that had to be learned. In the nineteenth century, the task of educating and disciplining audiences was undertaken by music critics whose readership was the increasingly prosperous bourgeoisie. As Dahlhaus writes, an appreciation of instrumental music realized through attentive listening was indicative of a well-mannered and well-educated person—exactly how the Dutch middle-class wanted to be seen by others:

²⁷⁶ E.A. Klusen, *Johann Wilhelm Wilms und das Amsterdamer Musikleben 1772-1847* (Buren: F. Knuf, 1975), 119, quoted in Metzelaar, *From Private to Public Spheres*, 51.

²⁷⁷ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, XXVIII (1826): 388-389, quoted in van Gessel, *Een Vaderland*, 153.

²⁷⁸ *Algemeen nieuws- en advertentieblad*, no. 24, March 24 1830, quoted in van Gessel, *Een Vaderland van Goede Muziek*, 154.

Education – *bildung* – meant gaining an inner detachment from the “realm of necessity” as the bourgeoisie regarded their everyday existence, and one of the paths to education, in the still untarnished sense of the term...was aesthetic contemplation, the selfless immersion in a type of music held by romantics to manifest “another world.” Music was meant not to merely be “enjoyed” but to be “understood.” And in order to fulfill its educative function it forced audiences to listen silently, a mode of behaviour which only after a long and tedious process gained ascendancy over the earlier habit of using music as a stimulus to conversation, at least in those moments when the emotions were not being touched.²⁷⁹

Of course, it was necessary to know what to listen to, and so the educating mission of critics and musicians did not stop once audiences started listening attentively.

5.5. What to Listen For: Taste & Performance

For the romantic reformers of Dutch musical culture, the battle against inattentive listening was waged throughout the nineteenth century. In 1848, the conductor Johannes Verhulst, who at this time was the most important conductor in the Netherlands, decided to use his privileged position to discipline audiences; when people started talking and getting up to leave before the completion of a performance, Verhulst stopped the orchestra and, with arms crossed, stared at those who were making a disturbance until they returned to their seats.²⁸⁰

The battle against inattentive listening was not the only battle being waged. Critics and commentators also sought to introduce ideas regarding what to listen for. After all, if audiences were expected to listen attentively, they should be educated in regards to what to listen to. Musical romanticism is certainly not an inclusive musical culture, and so it was important for critics to inspire Dutch audiences to be more discerning. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the question of what to listen to was articulated around ideas of musical taste. Unsurprisingly, these ideas were in-

²⁷⁹ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 50.

²⁸⁰ van Gessel, *Een Vaderland*, 155.

step with the taste of German musical critics. This was especially true in *Amphion*, where symphonic works by German composers were taken to be the pinnacle of musical expression. This distinctly German idea of taste was also developed in *Amphion's* anti-French bias and its derision of virtuosos. In regards to the latter, part of *Amphion's* civilizing mission was to scorn the taste that Dutch audiences had for bravura and shallow exhibitionism. In a review written by Steinmetz, he dismissed the virtuoso embellishment of a composition as nothing more than spectacle, “*ritardando, tempo rubato*, or whatever these tools to enchant the audience are called.”²⁸¹ Fidelity to the score was the goal of musical performances, not cheap pandering to the audience.

A negative attitude towards non-German music, especially French music, was also evident in the pages of *Amphion*. When considering this attitude towards French music, it is important to recognize that these aesthetic critiques were influenced by nationalism. The French occupation (1795-1806) and annexation (1806-1815) of the Netherlands resulted in animosity towards the French. Steinmetz in particular had reason to be angry with the French—his father was conscripted into the French army and killed in the Battle of Talavera de la Reina (1809).²⁸² In an essay entitled *Over het karakter der Fransche muziek en over den muzikalen aard der Hollanders* (About the Character of French Music and the Musical Nature of the Dutch), Steinmetz intertwined aesthetics and nationalism by warning readers against the nefarious tendencies of French culture: “For truly it is about time to open our eyes and learn to see how the excessive use of French music can negatively influence our musical nature, indeed, even our moral and political culture.”²⁸³ In the aftermath of Napoleon’s defeat and the departure of French troops from Dutch soil, the term “French” had derogatory connotations. In *Amphion*, a reviewer complained that a composition was “put together in an entirely French way, this being with little plan and without any salt or spirit in the

²⁸¹ “Wars van alle mibbruiken van *ritardando, tempo rubato*, en hoe die hulpmeddeltjes tot begoocheling van den toehoorder verder heten mogen...” *Amphion* 2, no.4 (1819): 279.

²⁸² van Huffelen, “Het Muziektijdschrift ‘Amphion,’” 41.

²⁸³ “Waarlijk het is meer dan tijd, dat wij onze oogen openen, en dat wij leren inzien, welke nadeeligen invloed dit onmatig gebruik der Fransche muziek op onzen muzikalen aard, ja zelfs op onze zedelijke en politieke kultuur zal uitoefenen.” *Amphion* 1, no.3 (1818): 202.

arrangement.”²⁸⁴ For readers of the time, it may have been difficult to distinguish between the aesthetic and national. Regardless, the sentiment was the same: French music was not “art” in the same way that German music was. This equation of French music with frivolity continued throughout the early nineteenth century. In 1825, the future Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke (1798-1872) wrote a letter to his father in which he complained that Amsterdam audiences follow the dictates of fashion, not art, and would probably go so far as dismissing Haydn and Beethoven if it was fashionable. The cause of this was the negative influence of French music: “Amsterdam’s high culture wants compositional tricks and skills rather than real masterpieces...in this too they are imitating superficial French music and have no sense for art other than pleasure.”²⁸⁵

These comments and critiques demonstrate a tendency amongst the self-appointed promoters and guardians of musical taste: superficial music characterized by virtuosity was the choice of the masses. For those few gifted with an ear for music, only serious works by German composers qualify as art. An appreciation of the composers who made up the romantic canon—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann—was an indication of what critics deemed to be good taste. But more than this, critics began expecting these works to be performed professionally. The level of the Dutch orchestras left much to be desired. This was especially true in Amsterdam. In an 1815 concert review, the *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* reported that the musicians were out of sync and the conductor, instead of correcting them, just laughed. It seems that this was not an unusual occurrence. An 1816 review of a symphony in Amsterdam’s Felix Meritis printed in the same magazine complained of a disjointed performance in which many musicians lost their composure, laughing throughout the

²⁸⁴ “...geheel naar de Fransche wijze zamengesteld is, namelijk, met weinig plan en zonder zout of geest in de bewerking.” *Amphion* 3, no.4 (1820): 229.

²⁸⁵ “De Amsterdamsche hoogbeschaafde toon wil liever kunststukjes van compositie en uitvoering, dan ware kunstwerken, die men toch niet verstaat te genieten. Men loopt ook in dezen de oppervlakkige Fransche muziek en uitvoering na en heeft dan geen zintuig meer overig voor eigenlijk kunstgenot.” Quoted in van Gessel, *Een Vaderland*, 136.

performance.²⁸⁶ Thus, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Dutch readers were confronted with ideas about musical taste that may have contradicted their inclinations, or at the very least, the inclinations of the majority of Dutch citizens.

By the 1850s, musical romanticism had slowly begun infiltrating Amsterdam's musical culture, influencing how musicians, critics, and audiences thought, wrote, and spoke about music. Although the Dutch were convinced that their orchestras had improved, they were still second-rate when compared to orchestras from other European cities. There were two enduring problems with Dutch orchestras—the number of amateurs who filled their ranks and the lack of rehearsals. The former plagued most orchestras in the Netherlands and was unavoidable given the cost of outfitting an entire orchestra. The latter problem, Reeser writes, was the result of limited funds to pay musicians. Musicians had to play in as many orchestras as possible to earn a living. Given this situation, musicians did not have the time to dedicate themselves to one orchestra or one performance, thus rehearsals were a luxury.²⁸⁷ “Until the end of the century, rehearsals were, as a rule, limited to one plus a dress rehearsal, with the orchestral accompaniments for soloists often played *a prima vista*.”²⁸⁸

The shortcomings of Amsterdam orchestras could no longer be hidden after the Meininger Hofkappel (the Meininger Court Orchestra) performed three concerts in the Dutch capital in 1885. Amsterdam audiences who had been educated by romanticist critics to celebrate German composers must have been impressed by the programs for these concerts:

Thursday November 12, 1885

Brahms—Tragic Overture

Beethoven—Symphony No.4

²⁸⁶ W. Drop, “Het Nederlandse muziekleven tussen 1815 en 1840 in tijdschrift weerspiegeld.” *Tijdschrift der Vereeniging voor Noord-Nederlands Muziekgeschiedenis* 18, no.4 (1959): 187.

²⁸⁷ Reeser, *Een eeuw Nederlandse Muziek*, 21.

²⁸⁸ Metzelaar, *From Private to Public Spheres*, 31.

Brahms—Symphony No.3

Beethoven—Leonora Overture No.1 & Leonora Overture No.3

Friday November 13, 1885

Berlioz—King Lear Overture

Brahms—Symphony No.4 (Conducted by Brahms)

Wagner—Faust Overture

Beethoven—Symphony No.8

Friday November 20, 1885

Beethoven—Die Weihe Des Hauses Overture

Schubert—Grosse Fantasie (Liszt arrangement)

Saint-Saëns—Tarantelle

Brahms—Variations on a Theme by Haydn

Beethoven—Symphony No.5

In the reviews of these concerts, critics emphasized that what they had heard from the Meininger Hofkappel was a level of precision that was lacking in Amsterdam orchestras. In a review of the first performance, the music critic from the *Nieuws van den Dag* wrote, “the performance of Brahms’s Symphony was more than excellent. The clear phrasing and the outstanding differentiation of what usually remained slightly vague was so pure and clear that no doubt remained about the composer’s intentions...the two Leonore overtures, especially No.3, were performed in a way we seldom get to hear.”²⁸⁹ The *Algemeen Handelsblad*’s music critic was impressed by the way the orchestra operated as a whole, “What one admires most about the Meininger Orchestra is not the virtuosity of some of its members, although it undoubtedly contains several talented soloists, but the exceptional beauty of the *ensemble*...the whole body,

²⁸⁹“de uitvoering van de symphony van Brahms was daarentegen boven allen lof verheven. Het duidelijk phraseeren, het voortreffelijk nuanceeren maakten nu, wat anders licht onduidelijk blijft, zoo klaar en helder, dat geen twijfel overbleef omtrent de intentiën van den componist...Eenzoo wedervoer de twee Lenore-Ouverturen, vooral de 3de, eene uitvoering zooals men ze wel zelden te hooren zel krijgen. *Nieuws van den Dag* (November 14, 1885).

as it were, is one big instrument, played by its conductor.”²⁹⁰ In *Caecilia*, the critic writes, “There have never been orchestral performances that we admired or enjoyed as much as these concerts...The highlight of the three evenings was Brahms’s Third Symphony. We have heard this piece five times before, once even conducted by the composer himself, but all pale before the rendering heard the first night. It was if a new light was shed on this piece of music.” And, in response to the Beethoven symphonies performed, this same critic writes that audiences heard, “elements in these symphonies we never noticed before, symphonies we thought we knew very well sounded completely different, much better than in the past.”²⁹¹

The conductor of the Meininger Hofkappel, Hans von Bülow (1830-1894), was a revelation for Amsterdammers. At the time of these performances, von Bülow was one of the most famous conductors in the world, and under his leadership, the Meininger Hofkappel, to which he was appointed conductor in 1880, had become the most famous orchestra in Europe.²⁹² Von Bülow studied music intently, rehearsing and conducting without a score. He expected the same from his musicians and rehearsed until every tiny detail was as he wanted it.²⁹³ Writing in the music journal *Caecilia*, composer W.F.G. Nicolaï’s remarks concerning the control that von Bülow had over his orchestra

²⁹⁰ Wat men bij de Meiningerkapel het meest bewondert, is niet de virtuositeit van sommige harer leden, ofschoon zij ongetwijfeld verscheidens talentvolle solisten tel, maar het zeldzaam schoon *ensemble*...Het geheele lichaam is als ‘t ware één groot instrument, dat bespeeld wordt door zijn directeur. *Algemeen Handelsblad* (November 15, 1885).

²⁹¹ “Nooit hebben wij bij eenige orkestuitvoering dermate bewonderd en genoten als bij deze concerten... voor ons was het glanspunt der drie concertavond de uitvoering van Brahms’ 3de symphonie (in F.). Vijf malen hebben wij dit werk reeds gehoord, waarvan eenmaal onder leiding van den componist, maar voor eene wedergave als het nu het geval was, zwijgt alles; het was ons als trad dit werk een geheel ander licht voor onze oogen, en dit was met al de werken van Brahms het geval... Dit een en ander maakte, dat wij in deze symphonien, die we toch goed meenden te kennen, werkingen hoorden, die wij nog nooit opgemerkt hadden en dat alles somtijds geheel anders, maar ook veel beterklonk dan vroeger.” *Caecilia: Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland*, No.23 (December 1 1885): 222.

²⁹² For more on von Bülow see, Raymond Holden, *The Virtuoso Conductors: The Central European Tradition from Wagner to Karajan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 11-37.

²⁹³ Rufus Hallmark, “The Star Conductor and Musical Virtuosity,” in *The Orchestra: A Collection of 23 Essays on its Origins and Transformations*, ed. Joan Peyser (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp 2006), 548-560.

and the infectious love of music he instilled in his musicians introduced readers to a new standard of what is to be expected from an orchestra.

Discipline in the Meininger orchestra is of great importance. The eyes of the players were continually fixed on their leader or their score; their attitude was spirited and cheerful and on their face one could read an expression that reflected the warmth and pleasure for what they were doing. No one ever complained about rehearsals being too many or too long; on the contrary, the musicians themselves were convinced that only by constant practice could they achieve a result equal to what was expected from their orchestra.²⁹⁴

Like Nicolai's remarks, the praise heaped upon von Bülow by Amsterdam critics can be read as a reflection of his talent and a reflection of the level of conducting in Amsterdam. After the first concert, the critic for the *Nieuws van den Dag* wrote, "In one word, the Meininger Hofkappel is a company with a soul, and that soul is von Bülow."²⁹⁵ The critic for the *Algemeen Handelsblad* was similarly impressed after this first performance, "What a conductor! Few orchestras have the privilege of being conducted by such a gifted and intelligent man as Dr. Hans von Bülow."²⁹⁶ In *Caecilia*, Nicolai's lengthy article about von Bülow which was published alongside the reviews of the Meininger's concerts was filled with enthusiastic praise for von Bülow:

All the qualities that one could ask for in an orchestra director come together in this exceptionally gifted man: he conducts everything from memory, indicates the different tempi with decisive gestures, just as he does with the entry of the different instruments or the sudden shift in nuance; he makes sure the principal motifs of each work can be

²⁹⁴ "Een punt van groot belang is de discipline die zichtbaar in het Meiningsche orkest heerscht. Onafgebroken was de blik der spelers op hun aanvoerder of hunne partij gevestigd; hunne houding was flink en opgewekt en op get gelaat eene uitdrukking waarin zich warmte en ingenomenheid met hetgeen zij te doen hadden, duidelijk afspiegelde. Geen klachten over te veel of de langdurig repeteeren hoorde men uit hunnen mond; integendeel ze waren zelf overtuigd dat slechts door aanhoudend oefenen een uitslag te verkrijgen was gelijk aan die van hun orkest." *Caecilia: Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland*, 23 (December 1, 1885): 219.

²⁹⁵ "In één woord, de Saksen Meiningsche is een korps met eene ziel, en die ziel is Von Bulow," *Nieuws van den Dag* (November 14, 1885).

²⁹⁶ "En welk een directeur! Weinig orkesten hebben het voorrecht door een zoo begaafd en intelligent man als dr. Hans von Bulow te worden aangevoerd." *Algemeen Handelsblad* (November 15, 1885).

heard above the others, or rather, he always makes sure the accompanying parts are subordinate; he is cosmopolitan inasmuch as he performs the masterpieces of the German as well as of the French school; he offers his orchestra and the audience the opportunity to become acquainted with the latest and most recent masterpieces; he introduces every improvement that has been made in the construction of musical instruments to his orchestra and...he rehearses every piece with unflagging zeal, ensuring he will only appear in front of an audience when each and every member of the orchestra completely masters his or her part.²⁹⁷

One can't help but think that Nicolai's remarks concerning rehearsals were intended to draw attention to the dismal state of preparation that plagued Amsterdam's orchestras. The review that appeared in *Caecilia*, for example, pointed out that the Meiningen orchestra "rehearses every day for a few hours and that the members of the orchestra have no other task than attending these rehearsals and the concerts."²⁹⁸ That it was necessary to print this seemingly innocuous fact is evidence of how rare rehearsals were for Amsterdam's orchestras. "It would be desirable," Nicolai wrote, "for the many orchestral musicians...who attended these 'von Bülow concerts' to...follow the wonderful examples they were given."

The Meiningen concerts provided music critics with an example of what Amsterdam audiences should expect from orchestral performances. Amsterdam audiences should listen attentively to the works of the German masters, which,

²⁹⁷ Alle eigenschappen, die men in een voortreffelijk orkestdirecteur zou kunnen zoeken, vindt men in dezen buitengewoon begaafden man vereenigd: hij dirigent alles uit het geheugen, geeft de tempo's met beslistheid aan evenals het intreden der verschillende instrumenten of de plotselinge afwisseling van nuance; hij laat de hoofdmotieven van elk stuk boven de andere uitkomen, of liever hij laat de begeleidende partijen steeds ondergeschikt zijn; hij is cosmopolite insooverre hij de meesterwerken zoowel der duitsche als de fransche school laat uitvoeren; hij stelde zijn orkest en het publiek in de gelegenheid onbekende of de nieuwste meesterwerken uit den jongsten tijd te leeren kennen; hij voert alle verbeteringen bij zijn orkest in, die tegenwoordig op het gebied van den instrumentenbouw worden uitgevonden en...hij is onvermoeid in het repeteeren der uit te voeren werken, zoodat hij daarmede niet voor het publiek verschijnt tenzij ieder lid van het orkest zijne partij geheel in zijne macht heeft. *Caecilia: Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland*, 23 (December 1, 1885): 219.

²⁹⁸ "Naar wij uit goede bron vernamen, repeteert dit korps dagelijks eenige uren en hebben de orkestleden niets anders te doen, dan zich juist bij die repetitie en hunne concerten te bepalen." *Caecilia: Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland*, No.23 (December 1, 1885): 222.

performed with precision and discipline, reveal nuances and compositional techniques that highlight the genius of these masters. The Meininger concerts, by opening the eyes of the Dutch “to the painful and irreversible fact that Dutch musical life lagged far behind what was happening in other countries,”²⁹⁹ transformed the expectations of what an orchestra should sound like and encouraged the transformation of the state of musical culture in Amsterdam.

5.6. Conclusion

It seems difficult to reconcile the idea that musical romanticism could flourish in Amsterdam, a city that is bereft of compositional talent, even to its own composers! The musical capitals of nineteenth-century Europe are synonymous with the great composers of the romantic canon: Vienna has Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler; in Leipzig, J.S. Bach and Mendelssohn; and in Paris, Berlioz and Saint Saëns. But musical romanticism is not limited to composers and their works; it is a musical culture that encompasses composition, performance, and reception. In his study of the reception of Beethoven’s music in the Netherlands, D.J.H. ter Horst wrote that the Dutch didn’t lack sensitivity or intelligence in matters of musical aesthetics, but were averse to the heavy philosophical-aesthetic work of writers like Eduard Hanslick. Dutch audiences of the mid-nineteenth century preferred listening to Beethoven rather than thinking about Beethoven.³⁰⁰ This point is indicative of how the Dutch came to embrace musical romanticism—not through composition or aesthetic theory, but through listening.

Musical romanticism did not occur naturally in the Netherlands. It arrived in the Netherlands as a copy of something that had originated in Germany and Austria. Normally, this would imply a deviation or depreciation of the original culture. This was not the case in the Netherlands. The assimilation of musical romanticism was an assimilation of certain elements of musical romanticism, namely attentive listening, and

²⁹⁹ de Leur, “Amsterdam-A Courageous Community,” 76.

³⁰⁰ D.J.H. ter Horst, “Beethoven in Nederland,” *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap*, 6 no.2/3 (April 1952): 137-138.

related to this, the creation of a professional orchestra. When the patrons of the Concertgebouw looked for models upon which their city's classical musical culture should be based, they were attracted to those cities that had concert halls, educated and attentive audiences, and professional orchestras. This is how romanticism would be assimilated in the Netherlands, by building a concert hall that encouraged attentive listening.

Between 1818, when the first issue of *Amphion* was published, and 1885, when the Meiningen concerts occurred in Amsterdam, a fundamental shift had occurred in Dutch musical culture. The meaning of instrumental music was transformed from a pleasant backdrop to the object of devout attention. The ideals of musical romanticism, including attentive listening, circulated in newspapers and journals. For these ideas to become a permanent part of Amsterdam's musical culture, they would have to be translated from the realm of ideas into a concrete object that would enable attentive listening, the classical canon, and a professional orchestra to be more than just ephemeral ideas. The construction of the Concertgebouw accomplished this. This chapter examined how the idea of attentive listening originated in Dutch musical culture. In the following chapter, I examine how this idea was acted upon by social groups who would re-define the question of attentive listening into a problem with a technical solution.

6. Building Musical Culture: The Amsterdam Bourgeoisie and the Concertgebouw

For her, the deeply treasured art of music, the sacred Muse, we have erected this temple.

- D.H. Joosten, from his speech given on the opening night of the Concertgebouw

6.1. Introduction

Although *Amphion* had a limited run (1818-1822), it had a tremendous influence on the development of musical culture in the Netherlands. After *Amphion*, German essays and articles were translated in Dutch publications with greater regularity. Examples include Beethoven's *Heiligenstadt Testament*, which was published in *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* in 1828, and more of E.T.A. Hoffmann's musical writings, which were published in *Argus* (1828/1829) and *De Nederlandse Mercurius* (1828/1829).³⁰¹ *Amphion* was also the first journal to publish the work of Dr. F.C. Kist (1796-1863).³⁰² Kist played an important role in nineteenth-century Dutch musical culture. He served as editor for the *Nederlandsch Muzikaal Tijdschrift* between 1840 and 1844 before starting his own musical journal, *Caecilia: Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland*, which was the longest running music journal in the Netherlands (1844-1944).

³⁰¹ Jeroen van Gessel, *Een Vaderland van Goede Muziek: Een halve eeuw Maatschappij tot bevordering der toekunst (1829-1879) en het Nederlandse muziekleven* (Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 2004), 97.

³⁰² *Amphion* 3, no.1 (1820):48-80.

As explained in Kist's introductory essay, *Caecilia*, like *Amphion* (and the *AmZ*), would not be a specialist magazine for musicians, it would be a "general" music magazine intended for a wide audience of listeners. "The Netherlands should...have a musical journal guided by impartiality, and, its single and only goal should be the promotion of good taste in music and the flourishing of the art in this country."³⁰³ For Kist, as it was for Steinmetz (the founding editor of *Amphion*), impartiality meant that the tenets of musical romanticism were the standards against which musical culture was to be judged. This meant that German musical culture would continue to influence the development of music in the Netherlands. As Reeser writes, Kist had a never-ending enthusiasm for German music and admired everything that Germany had to offer musically.³⁰⁴ That this enthusiasm for German musical culture inspired Dutch music criticism was, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a matter of course.

An example of musical romanticism's influence in Amsterdam was the formation of the Maatschappij Caecilia (Caecilia Orchestra Society) in 1841.³⁰⁵ The Caecilia orchestra introduced a new standard for Amsterdam concerts by first, banning virtuoso performances, and second, institutionalizing the classical canon. Between 1841 and 1856, J.B. van Bree conducted 33 Caecilia concerts, most of which were orchestral works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Mozart, and Carl Maria van Weber, with occasional works by Haydn, Schumann, and Bach filling out the repertoire.³⁰⁶ In *Caecilia*, Kist lauded this orchestra and their concerts with what, to him, must have been the greatest compliment imaginable—they were better than a German orchestra! In 1853 he wrote, "there is no city in Germany that can boast an equal to this orchestra's exquisite execution. The choice of works is outstanding...No wonder that not only the citizens of Amstel (Amsterdam) rush to be a part of the most beautiful concerts in Holland, but

³⁰³ *Caecilia* 1 (1844): 1-3, quoted in Liesbeth Hoedemaeker "Caecilia: Algemeen Muzikaal Tijdschrift van Nederland," *Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals (RIPM)*, www.ripm.Org/pdf/Introductions/CAEintroor.pdf

³⁰⁴ Eduard Reeser, *Een eeuw Nederlandse muziek 1815-1915* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1986), 64-65.

³⁰⁵ There is no association between the journal *Caecilia* and the Caecilia orchestra—both are named for Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians.

³⁰⁶ Reeser, *Een eeuw Nederlandse muziek*, 59.

artists and amateurs from all over the country set out for them.”³⁰⁷ In 1865, Johannes Verhulst was appointed director of the Caecilia concerts, and between his appointment and his retirement in 1886, he maintained an adherence to German symphonic music, favouring the works of Beethoven, Schumann, and Mendelssohn.³⁰⁸

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, musical romanticism defined the horizon of expectations within which Amsterdam’s cultural elites understood the performance and reception of music. Discussions and debates about classical music were framed around a set of norms concerning audience behaviour, recognition of the romantic canon, and the performance of these canonic works. Musical romanticism was certainly “in the air,” but its influence was limited to criticism and discussions about music. For romanticism to become a permanent part of Amsterdam’s musical culture, the ideas that guided music criticism had to influence more than just concert programming because there is no guarantee that these ideas will lead to anything more substantial. For ideas to endure, they need to be translated into objects, and for this, intermediaries are required. These intermediaries are people and institutions who translate ideas that are “in the air” into problems that have technical solutions.

In his study of the Minitel, Feenberg identifies this level with the cadre of French bureaucrats, mostly engineers and managers, whose policies led to the creation of the Minitel.³⁰⁹ These policies spelled out a technical solution to the problem of how France should become a post-industrial society, translating what had been a macro-level social problem (the modernization of France) into a concrete problem with a technical solution.

³⁰⁷ *Caecilia* 10 (1853): 104, quoted in Reeser, *Een eeuw Nederlandse Muziek*, 59.

³⁰⁸ Reeser examined the programs from the Caecilia concerts that Verhulst conducted between 1865 and 1886. He found that German composers dominated Verhulst’s programming. First was Beethoven with 45 performances, followed by Schumann with 23, Mendelssohn (16), Weber (16), Gade (15), Schubert (13), Haydn (11), Cherubini (11), Bach (9), Mozart (8), and Brahms (8). Reeser, *Een eeuw Nederlandse Muziek*, 107.

³⁰⁹ See Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 148; Andrew Feenberg, “Encountering Technology” (Lecture, Netherlands Graduate Research School of Science, Technology, and Modern Culture, Soeterbreek, Ravenstein, NL, 2008). Available at: <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/encountering.pdf>

I would be remiss if I did not mention the similarities between this level and ideas familiar from constructivist technology studies. Within technology studies, studying the individuals and social groups who translate ideas into technical objects has resulted in fascinating studies that detail the processes through which technical innovations come into being.³¹⁰ Where Feenberg's approach differs from the constructivist agenda is his insistence that technologies are preceded by decades, and sometimes centuries, of culture. This cultural context is the milieu in which particular technologies are possible. Constructivist technology studies seem to be only interested in *how* technologies come into being—recognizing the context within which technologies are formed and acquire meaning, Feenberg's theory points towards questions concerning *why* and *how* technologies appear.

6.2. Het Concertgebouw NV

In the case of the Minitel, the bureaucrats who ran France Telecom translated ideas about modernization and post-industrial society into an object that would embody these ideas. In the case of the Concertgebouw, the Amsterdam bourgeoisie played this role. The bourgeoisie took it upon themselves to fund and organize the building of a concert hall as a way to make musical romanticism a permanent part of Amsterdam's musical culture.

³¹⁰ Perhaps the most famous example of this is Trevor Pinch's and Wiebe Bijker's "relevant social groups." See "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and Technology Might Benefit Each Other," *Social Studies of Science*, 14 no.3 (1984): 399-441. This concept has also been developed by actor-network theorists: see Michel Callon's concept of Sociologist-Engineers in Michel Callon, "Society in the Making: The Study of Technology as a Tool For Sociological Analysis," in Bijker, W., Hughes, T., & Pinch, T. (eds.) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987): 83-107, and John Law's concept of Heterogeneous Engineering in John Law, "Technology and Heterogeneous Engineering," in Bijker, W., Hughes, T., & Pinch, T. (eds.) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987): 111-134. See also, John Law and Michel Callon, "Engineering and Sociology in a Military Aircraft Project: A Network Analysis of Technological Change," *Social Problems*, 35 no.3 (1988): 284-297.

In order for this to happen, the problems that had beset Amsterdam's musical culture had to be re-defined as a problem with a technical solution. In 1881, an article written by G.C.C.W. Hayward appeared in the newspaper *De Amsterdammer* that did just this—the solution to Amsterdam's musical woes, Hayward wrote, would come through, “a serious attempt to build a temple dedicated to musical performances.”³¹¹ In the nineteenth century, there were many ways that musical romanticism could be invoked to problematize Amsterdam's musical culture: inattentive listening, undisciplined orchestras, a lack of compositional talent, and so on. Hayward's article is intriguing because he defines Amsterdam's musical impoverishment as a material problem and proposes the construction of a new concert hall as the solution to what had been, up to that point, an aesthetic problem.

Hayward draws attention to the fact that with the upcoming demolition of the Parkzaal (Park Hall), there would be no adequate venues for musical performances in Amsterdam: “The Parkzaal will be demolished, and consequently, Amsterdam will lose its only concert hall because neither the Felix (the Felix Meritis) nor the Odeon (theatre) are big enough for large ensembles.”³¹² Opened in 1851, The Parkzaal was the centre of classical musical life in Amsterdam in the 1860s and 1870s. It had hosted performances by Liszt and Brahms and was home to the Park Orchestra (Parkorkest). The Parkzaal was the heart of Amsterdam's classical musical culture, and its impending demolition (which happened in October 1881) was cause for concern among Amsterdammers.

³¹¹ “...een krachtige en ernstige poging worden gedaan, om hier ter stede een aan de eischen des tijds beantwoordenden, waardigen tempel, aan degelijke musiek-uitvoeringen gewijd, te stichten,” *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

³¹² “De Parkzaal zal worden gesloopt, en daardoor zal Amsterdam zijn eenige concertzaal verliezen, want noch de Felix-, noch de Odeon-zaal is voor groote uitvoeringen geschikt.” *De Amsterdammer: Weekblad voor Nederland* (June 26 1881). The archives of *De Amsterdammer* (now *De Groene Amsterdammer*) are available online: <http://zyarchive.groene.nl/dga/>. For reproductions and commentary on this article see S.A.M. Bottenheim, *Geschiedenis van het Concertgebouw: Eerste Deel* (Amsterdam: Joost van den Vondel, 1948), 11-14; Lydia Lansink and Jan Taat, *Van Dolf van Gendt naar Bernard Haitink: Negentig Jaar Concertgebouw en Concertgebouworkest* (Amsterdam: Het Concertgebouw NV, 1978), 8; Jan Taat, *Amsterdam Heeft Het Concertgebouw* (Amsterdam, Het Parool, 1985), 8-12.

As Hayward notes, other buildings that could serve as a potential replacement for the Parkzaal fell short of what was expected from a proper concert hall. The best of these was the music room of the Felix Meritis. It was opened in 1788 and was the first venue in Amsterdam built specifically for music. Although the acoustics of the room were renown across Europe, it could only hold an audience of 600, far too small for symphonic performances. Besides this shortcoming, the Felix Meritis was a private society where membership was too exclusive and too expensive for many Amsterdammers. The Odeon's dimensions and capacity were similar to the music room in the Felix Meritis and so it too was unsuitable for anything beyond chamber music or other small performances.

Apart from these buildings, musical performances were also held at the Paleis voor Volkvljijt (Palace of People's Industry), a building modeled on London's Crystal Palace. Compared to the Felix Meritis and the Odeon, the thought that the Paleis could replace the Parkzaal was, for Hayward, "too preposterous to consider." The Paleis was too big, it had terrible acoustics, and its cavernous size gave it a Dionysian atmosphere of pleasure and party where many musical performances took on the atmosphere of what were known as "beer concerts."³¹³ The Paleis, Hayward writes, "totally unsuitable for music."³¹⁴

Hayward finds it remarkable that in only a few months there would be no proper concert hall in the Dutch capital. "Imagine Berlin, Vienna, or Paris without a concert hall!" To the reader of *De Amsterdammer* in 1881 this comparison probably seemed a bit ambitious. These cities were much larger than Amsterdam and could maintain musical cultures that surpassed what could be expected in Amsterdam. This was not lost on

³¹³ Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective Volume 3, 1900: The Age of Bourgeois Culture*, trans. Lynne Richards and John Rudge (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 471; see also Emile Wennekes, "Het Paleisorkest en de professionalisering van het orkestwezen," in *Een muziek geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, (ed.) Louis Peter Grijp (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), 468-474.

³¹⁴ "Zal men Volksvlijjt tot Amsterdam' concertzaal promoveeren? Doch neen, deze gedacht is tee ongerijmd om lang bij stil te staan, want die enorme ruimte is te prefondervindelijk voor muziek volkomen onbruikbaar bevonden." *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

Hayward. But as he points out, there are other cities comparable to Amsterdam where one can find proper concert halls and, unsurprisingly, superb musical cultures: Düsseldorf has its Tonhalle, Cologne its Gürzenich, Frankfurt has its Saalbau, and Munich its Odeon.³¹⁵ Hayward argues that the loss of these buildings and the depreciation of musical culture that would inevitably follow would be impossible because local authorities would not allow it to happen.

The references that Hayward makes to concert halls in Cologne, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, and Munich indicate that musically minded Amsterdammers should look to German cities with purpose-built concert halls as models for how musical romanticism should be realized in Amsterdam. That Hayward envisioned a new musical culture emerging alongside a new concert hall is evident when we read the description of his proposed model for Amsterdam's concert hall, Düsseldorf's Tonhalle. Hayward writes that the Tonhalle is perfect in its simplicity and austerity. Without excessive luxury, it contains a spacious concert hall with an organ alongside the necessary non-musical requirements (cloakroom, restaurant) found within a proper concert hall. These are mere details though. Hayward's description of the Tonhalle was intended to convince Amsterdammers that a proper concert hall would lead to the development of a serious musical culture that could rival those found in European musical capitals. In terms that imply an expectation of attentive listening and the romantic spirit of musical transcendence, he describes the Tonhalle as a building, "in which you can't set foot without feeling solemn, even though there's a lack of all colour and gold, and everything is very simple...when one enters, one's mind comes to ease, which is necessary to

³¹⁵“Men denke zich eens Berlijn, Weenen, Parijs zonder concertzaal!...Het is waar, ik noem hier juist drie plaatzen van hooger rang dan Amsterdam; doch ook Dusseldorf heft zijn stads Tonhalle; Keulen zijn stads Gursenich; Frankfurt a.M. zijn stads Saalbau; Munchen zijn stads Odeon. Hoewel het zielenaantal dezer steden bij het onze ten achter blijft.” *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

experience the true enjoyment of the arts.”³¹⁶ In 1881 Amsterdam, it is doubtful that any musical venue could invoke such feelings—including the beloved Parkzaal!

Although it is the centre of Amsterdam’s classical music culture, Hayward notes that the Parkzaal contains a litany of shortcomings: there is no proper entranceway and so people have to enter through a maze of narrow corridors, there is no cloakroom for coats, and the hall is too small to include the whole audience and so many people’s experiences are spoiled because they are “packed like sardines in a tin.” More pressing, though, is the design and acoustics of the hall. The stage is not large enough to properly contain all the musicians and so the strings are unusually positioned, leading to a weakened sound when compared to the brass, percussion, and wind instruments.³¹⁷ As a venue for music, the opinion of many Amsterdammers was that the Parkzaal was simply unacceptable for the types of musical performances that were indicative of a

³¹⁶“Men stelle zich b.v. tot voorbeeld de Tonhalle te Dusseldorf, een ideaal-concertgebouw. Daar vindt men goede nevenlokalen, dienende tot garderobe, restaurant en stemkamer; een met gallerij en orgel voorziene ruime concertzaal, waarin men den voet niet zetten kan, zonder een plechtigen indruk te gevoelen, ofschoon alle kleuren en goud ontbreken, en alles hoogst eenvoudig en toch voor het oog weldadig zich voordoet. Er daalt daar bij het binnentreden een rust in het gemoed, die onontbeerlijk is voor het smaken van waarachtig kunstgenot.” *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

³¹⁷ “Niettemin alle dingen hebben hun goede zijde. Zoo ook deze afbraak van de Parkzaal. Het zal immers door niemand worden betwist, dat dit lokaal groote gebreken bezat. zonder vestibule vond men den toegang door eenige nauwe, hoekige gangetjes, een doolhof, waarin slechts de trouwe bezoeker den weg kende. Vreemdelingen zijn stellig dikwijls en de keuken terecht gekomen, die, evenals de plaatsen, die men niet openlijk noemen kan, links en rechts in het oog vielen. Een behoorlijke ingerichte garderobe ontbrak, zoodat daarin de zoogenaamde wintertuin moest voorzien. De concert zaal zelf was in de minst buitengewone gevallen steeds te klein om alle toehoorders te bevatten. Wie heeft zich niet jaren lang een groot gedeelte van zijn genot voelen vergallen, wanneer hij de uitvoeringen der Maatschappij tot Bevordering ter toonkunst in het park bijwoonde, en in de bekende positie der getonde haringen verkeerden moest, die het nog in zoover beter hebben, dat zij daarbij geen tropische hitte behoeven te verduren...Eindelijk het voornaamste van iedere concert zaal: de orkestruimte. Hoeveel liet die te wenschen over. De nis kon slechts de blaas- en slaginstrumenten en contrabassen herbergen, zoodat het strijkkwartet te veel naar voren in de zaal sprong, waarvan te zwakke kracht in verhouding tot de nis-massa het natuurlijk gevolg was.” *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

leading musical culture. Indeed, shortly after it was destroyed, it was remembered in *De Amsterdammer* as, “too small for big ensembles and too big for small ensembles.”³¹⁸

Hayward’s article was another reminder that Amsterdam audiences and orchestras had failed to keep up with standards established elsewhere in Europe and the time had come to remedy this musical deficit. If it took the destruction of the Parkzaal to rouse Amsterdammers from their musical complacency, then so be it. Given the deficiencies of Amsterdam’s musical culture—both materially and musically—Hayward did not harbour any regrets for the fate of the Parkzaal and encouraged music-loving Amsterdammers to adopt the same perspective. “The Parkzaal’s glory as Amsterdam’s concert hall is over, and her disappearance is in a way a happy occasion.”³¹⁹

Hayward writes that unlike other European cities, neither the state nor the municipal government would be expected to fund the construction of a concert hall in Amsterdam: “Whereas in other countries the officials of all self-respecting cities provide good concert halls, our government boasts the fateful motto: art is not a matter for the government.”³²⁰ Hayward nominated the *Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst* (The Society for the Promotion of Music [MBT]) to guide this initiative. The MBT was a national organization established in 1829 that had branches in most Dutch cities.³²¹ The funding would come, Hayward hoped, from the Amsterdam bourgeoisie. Amsterdam

³¹⁸“Reeds lang was er gesproken over het onvoldoende van de Parkzaal, dat ze te klein was voor groote, te groot voor kleine muziekkuitvoeringen.” *De Amsterdammer* (January 19, 1883), cited in Johan Giskes, “Opbouw,” in *Historie en kroniek van het Concertgebouw en het Concertgebouworkest 1888-1988 Deel 1*, ed. H.J. van Royen (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1989), 14.

³¹⁹ “De Parkzaal had als de concertzaal van Amsterdam reeds lang haar tijd gehad, en haar verdwijnen is dus in zeker opzicht gelukkig.” *De Amsterdammer*, (June 26, 1881).

³²⁰ “Waar overal in Europa zichzelf respecterende gemeenten zich van overheidszijde voorzien van goede concertzalen, voert onze overheid echter het noodlottige woord “kunst is geen regeeringszaak.” Ibid.

³²¹ For more on the MBT see van Gessel, *Een Vaderland van Goede Muziek*; J.D.C. van Dokkum, *Honderd Jaar Muziekleven in Nederland: Een Geschiedenis van de Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst bij haar Eeuwfeest 1829-1929* (Amsterdam: Uitgegeven door het Hoofdbestuur, 1929).

had undergone an economic resurgence in the second half of the nineteenth-century and it was about time, he wrote, that money be spent on music:

The reborn spirit of enterprise has led to financial profits for many, and history can prove that where people make money, there is money for the arts...If one thinks about how much money is annually spent by the rich on buying paintings, then it wouldn't be that hard or impossible to ask them for help in the name of a 'sister art'.³²²

If this were to happen, if a proper concert hall were to be built, the destruction of the Parkzaal, "will have been a blessing for our city...Amsterdammers will be able to show that they are not only able to satisfy their material and practical interests, but also their interest in a higher ideal of living."³²³

A little less than three months after Hayward's article appeared in *De Amsterdammer*, the first steps were taken toward building a concert hall in Amsterdam. On September 15, 1881, a group of prominent Amsterdammers came together to form what they called the "Temporary Committee for the Building of a Concert Hall." The individuals who formed this committee came from the class of merchants, bankers, stockbrokers, lawyers, government officials, and professors who made up the Amsterdam bourgeoisie: J.A. Sillem (1860-1912) and A.F.K. Hartogh (1844-1901) were lawyers, H.J. de Marez Oijens (1843-1911) and P.A.L. van Ogtrop (1835-1903) were stockbrokers, W. Cnoop Koopmans (1837-1895) was a professor of theology, and D.H. Joostens (1840-1930) was a realtor.³²⁴ Distancing themselves from the stereotype of

³²² "De herboren ondernemingsgeest heeft voor velen geldelijk winsten gebaad, en de geschiedenis kan bewijzen, dat daar waar geld verdiend wordt, ook geld over is voor de kunst...Als men bedenkt, hoeveel kapitaal jaarlijks door onze rijken besteed wordt tot aankoop van schilderijen, dan zal het toch zeker niet toemoeielijk of onmogelijk zijn bij hen aan te kloppen uit naam eener zustermuze," *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

³²³ "Amsterdam weldra bewijze, dat naast practischen zin en materieele belangen, ook nog een drang tot hooger leven bij zijn gegoede burgers wordt gevoeld en bevredigd. Dan zal de verdwijning der Parkzaal, trots de vele goede herinneringen aan haar bestaan verbonden, een zegen voor onze stad zijn geweest," *De Amsterdammer* (June 26, 1881).

³²⁴ Jan Bank, "Music and Patronage in Amsterdam," in *Gustav Mahler: the World Listens* ed. Donald Mitchell (Haarlem: TEMA Uitgevers, 1995), 8-11; Lydia Lansink and Jan Taat, *van Dolf van Gendt naar Bernard Haitink: Negentig jaar Concertgebouw en Concertgebouworkest 1888-1978* (Amsterdam: Het Concertgebouw N.V., 1978), 8.

Multatuli's crass philistine Droogstoppel, the Amsterdam bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century took it upon themselves to organize and fund, often at personal expense, a variety of cultural enterprises including the Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk Museum (Museum of Modern Art), and the Stadsschouwburg (Performing Arts Theatre). The members of the committee knew each other through their involvement in cultural groups including the *Vereeniging tot het Vormen van een Openbare Verzameling van Hedendaagsche Kunst* (the Society for the Creation of a Public Collection of Contemporary Art), the Rembrandt Society, and, most importantly, the *Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst*. As Dutch historian Jan Bank writes, in a period when "neither liberal nor conservative governments felt it incumbent upon them to become actively involved with the arts,"³²⁵ many members of the bourgeoisie took it upon themselves to undertake cultural initiatives that would have otherwise been neglected.³²⁶

At the first meeting of the Temporary Committee for the Building of a Concert Hall, they worked out the details of their plan. First, in consultation with the prolific Dutch architect P.J.H. Cuypers, a plot of land was selected where a concert hall could be built and a fair price could be negotiated. This land lay outside of the city limits, in the region known as Nieuwer-Amstel. Although fields surrounded part of it and it was difficult to access from Amsterdam, it was no more than 100 meters from the location of the Rijksmuseum (designed by Cuypers and opened in 1885) and was in close proximity to the Vondelpark and the Manege (stables). By the end of the century the Concertgebouw would also be joined by the Stedelijk Museum, the Vondel Church (also designed by Cuypers), a post office, and a fire station.

At this early stage, influenced by Hayward's suggestion of following the model of Düsseldorf's Tonhalle, Cuypers provided a rough sketch of what the new concert hall should look like.³²⁷ To pay for the building, funds would be raised through the sale of

³²⁵ Bank, "Music and Patronage in Amsterdam," 3.

³²⁶ For another example of bourgeois cultural patronage in Amsterdam in the nineteenth century, see Donna C. Mehos, *Science & Culture for Members Only: The Amsterdam Zoo Artis in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

³²⁷ Netherlands Architectural Institute (NAI), archive CUBA, no. t192.

shares in a limited public company (Naamlooze Vennootschap [NV]) that would oversee the construction and management of the building. The cost was estimated to be 400,000 guilders, which was to be raised through the sale of 400 shares valued at 1000 guilders each.³²⁸ Each share would guarantee the bearer two seats for every performance as well as an undetermined percentage of any profit.

The temporary committee announced that a public meeting to discuss this plan was to take place on Tuesday March 7, 1882 at the Odeon Theatre and invited anyone interested in supporting this project to attend.³²⁹ The list of those who attended reveals a cross-section of Amsterdam's cultural elite. In addition to the committee members and the architect Cuypers, economics professor and future minister of finance N.G. Pierson (who chaired the meeting), Willem Stumpff (former director of the Park Orchestra), and the composer and writer Daniël De Lange were among the almost 50 attendees at this meeting.³³⁰ The result of this meeting was positive; the plan was agreed upon by everyone in attendance and financial commitments were made. In a report written by N.G. Pierson that appeared in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* the next day, Amsterdammers read that, "a decision was made that will be approved of by everyone who loves our capital. Amsterdam will get...a concert hall that will hold about 2200 people and 600 to 700 performers, an institution so desperately needed in present circumstances to do justice to the works of the great masters."³³¹ Given the overwhelming goodwill that resulted from this meeting, the journalist for *De Amsterdammer* couldn't resist inserting a

³²⁸ As a point of comparison, the most expensive ticket to the 1885 Meininger Hofkappel Concerts was five guilders or twelve guilders for all three concerts.

³²⁹ Of note, G.C.C.W. Hayward was invited to attend this meeting, but could not attend. He wrote to the committee that due to changed circumstances he was not able to attend, but that he would continue to support the initiative. Unfortunately, Hayward died in Paris on July 7, 1882. Lydia Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," in *Historie en kroniek van het Concertgebouw en het Concertgebouworkest 1888-1988* ed. H.J. van Royen (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1989), 69.

³³⁰ The attendees of this meeting signed a "Presentie Lijst." GAA 1089, no.10

³³¹ "Amsterdam verkrijgt...een muziekzaal, ruimte biedende voor ongeveer 2200 personen en 600 à 700 uitvoerenden, een inrichting dus in de tegenwoordige omstandigheden hoog nodig, wil men recht doen wedervaren aan de werken der groote meesters." *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Wednesday March 8, 1882).

musical metaphor in his report: “the meeting was a perfect example of harmony...very seldom has there been such a tempting voice calling to all citizens of Amsterdam.”³³²

The committee sought to attract attention to their project by distributing a circular to potential investors.³³³ Foregoing the economic challenge of building a new concert hall, this circular was addressed “to the true friends of music,” for whom “this art is not just a diversion or entertainment, but a means of elevation and refinement.”³³⁴ It was the love of music, and the promotion of serious musical culture in Amsterdam, that would guide the project. It was not a financial investment, but an investment in the cultural infrastructure of Amsterdam: “The driving power...cannot be self-interest. What we predict is not the assurance that good dividends will be enjoyed, but that by promoting this useful work the glory and prestige of our city will increase.”³³⁵ The circular followed the points that Hayward made in *De Amsterdammer* three months earlier: the Parkzaal no longer exists, the Paleis voor Volksvlijt is too big, and all other venues are too small. The consequence of this situation was obvious: “So long as The Parkzaal is not properly replaced, Amsterdam will miss out on an institution that for a city as big as ours is not a luxury, but a necessity of life.”³³⁶ The situation was dire and the solution was obvious—a new concert hall should be built, “a building that will equal the famous Music Hall in

³³² “Haar voorstellen werden schier zonder debat goedgekeurd. De meeting was een coorbeeld van harmonie...Zelden kwam er een zoo verlokkende roepstem tot de gezeten Amstellaren.” *De Amsterdammer* (March 12, 1882).

³³³ GAA 1089, no. 73.

³³⁴ “Voor wie deze kunst niet enkel een verstrooiing, een uitspanning is, maar een middel tot verheffing en veredeling.” Circular No.1, GAA 1089, no. 73.

³³⁵ “Intusschen, dienaangaande is geen zekerheid te gefen, en wij willen de mogelijkheid niet verheelen, dat onze gunstige verwachtingen worden beschaamd. De hefboom, dien wij in beweging moeten brengen ter verkrijging der benooidigde f. 400.000, kan niet enkel die van het eigenbelang zijn. Wat wij U voorspiegelen is niet de zekerheid van een goed dividend te zullen geneiten, maar die van een nuttig werk te bevorderen, een werk, dat den roem en het aanzien onzer stad in geen geringe mate zal verhoogen.” Circular No.1, GAA 1089, no. 73.

³³⁶ “...Zoolang het Park niet behoorlijk is vervangen zal Amsterdam een inrichting missen, die voor een groote stad als de onze, geen weelde, maar levensbehoefte is.” Circular No.1, GAA 1089, no. 73.

Düsseldorf in size and interior. There will be space for 600 performers and 2200 people in the audience.³³⁷

Shortly after, another circular was distributed that described in detail the economic situation: the committee had sold only 250 of the 400 shares (250,000 guilders). To achieve the total amount required, it was suggested that perhaps the committee could pursue a loan. This step, though, would considerably lessen the chance that shareholders would receive any dividends. The other option would be for the existing shareholders to put up the remaining money. Another meeting was called for April 25, 1882 to discuss these options.³³⁸ The result of this meeting was much more promising. It was decided that although the committee had sold only 250 of a possible 400 shares, it would pursue formal incorporation as a limited company (NV). As an NV, the committee was now entitled to legal protection while also enabling it to pursue bank loans. On July 8, 1882 Het Concertgebouw NV was formally incorporated under the auspices of public notary J.C.G. Pollones (a fellow member of the Amsterdam branch of the MBT).

Reviewing the list of shareholders printed in the *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* on August 28, 1882, the original members of the committee (who would make up the board of Het Concertgebouw NV) each bought a number of shares. H.J. de Marez Oijens, P.A.L. van Ogtrop, D.H. Joosten and W.Cnoop Koopmans bought three shares and J.A. Sillem bought six shares. Besides the board members, other names stand out: P.J.H. Cuypers bought five shares, the philanthropist and tobacco magnate Peter Wilhelm Janssen also bought five shares, N.G. Pierson bought three shares, and the Mayor of Amsterdam, and future Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Gijsbert van Tienhoven, bought two shares.

³³⁷ “Wij wenschen daar een gebouw te doen verrijzen, welks afmetingen en inrichting de beroemde Muziekzaal te Dusseldorp evenaren. Er zal plaats zijn voor ruim 600 executanten en 2200 toehoorders.” Circular No.1, GAA 1089, no. 73.

³³⁸ Circular Number 2, GAA 1089, no.73.

Besides these individuals, the list of people who bought shares in Het Concertgebouw NV is evidence that the construction of the Concertgebouw was an endeavour paid for by the bourgeoisie. The list of shareholders printed in the *Nederlandse Staatscourant* includes the occupation of these shareholders. Other than 15 individuals listed as “private” and the 12 who did not have to work (zonder beroep [without a job]), the occupations of the individuals that made up Het Concertgebouw NV were consistent with the stereotype of late nineteenth-century European bourgeoisie. The largest group of shareholders was stock and commodity brokers, followed by merchants, bankers, lawyers, corporate directors and administrators, politicians, professors, and physicians.

6.3. From the Opera Houses of the Aristocracy to the Concert Halls of the Bourgeoisie: Patronage and Buildings for Music

This relationship between bourgeois patronage and the concert hall was in line with cultural developments that had been occurring in European cities since the late eighteenth century. Aristocratic patronage, which had shaped European musical culture since the fourteenth century, was giving way to bourgeois patronage. This transformation of musical patronage had its material corollary in the venues where music was performed. The concert halls of the bourgeoisie became the centres of European musical culture, supplanting the courts, churches, and opera houses of the aristocracy.

In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali tells the history of Western musical culture as a history of music’s production and consumption. For Attali, aristocratic patronage emerged in the fourteenth century when the itinerant musicians (jongleurs, minstrels, troubadours) who populated medieval Europe were domesticated into churches and courts. This was the first great transformation of Western musical culture.

Until that time, the musician had been a free craftsman at one with the people and worked indifferently at popular festivals or at the court of the lord. Afterward, he would have to sell himself entirely and exclusively to a single social class...The musician, then, was from that day forward economically bound to a machine of power, political or

commercial, which paid him a salary for creating what it needed to affirm its legitimacy.³³⁹

Reliant upon aristocratic patronage, the musician was a domestic servant, “an unproductive worker like the cook or the huntsman of the prince, reserved for his pleasure, lacking a market outside of the court that employed him, even though he sometimes had a sizeable audience.”³⁴⁰ For some, like Mozart (1756-1791), this relationship was intolerable; his tumultuous relationship with patrons like the archbishop of Salzburg forced him into a marketplace where financial compensation for his talents was precarious. For others, like Haydn (1732-1809), aristocratic patronage provided the means (including his own orchestra and private theatre) by which he could compose without the necessity of having to sell his music in an unpredictable marketplace.

Aristocratic musical culture was either sacred or secular. There were no romanticist notions of *l'art pour l'art*; the purpose of music was the exaltation of either God or the Sovereign, and the buildings in which it was performed and listened to confirmed music's subservience to these masters. Although the church was a musical venue, it was not purpose built for music, and so it is difficult to theorize how musical culture influenced architectural design. Inversely, church architecture did have an influence on music. An example drawn from the musical career of J.S. Bach demonstrates this. Bach was appointed cantor of the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church) in Leipzig in 1723, a position he held until his death in 1750. Acousticians have argued that many of Bach's compositions, including the St. Matthew Passion, were written for the acoustics of the Thomaskirche. Filled to its capacity (1800 people) the Thomaskirche has a reverberation time of between 1.6 and 2.5 seconds (the time it takes for sound to disappear in an enclosed area). This is unique for a fifteenth-century gothic church, as an English gothic church of the same size would have a reverberation time of 4 or 5 seconds, whereas a shoebox-style concert hall that holds 1800 people

³³⁹ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 16-17.

³⁴⁰ Attali, *Noise*, 47.

would, ideally, have a reverberation time of about 1.5 to 2 seconds.³⁴¹ As Leo Beranek writes, “Bach knew the difference between the live acoustics of the St. Jacobi Kirche in Luebeck and the relatively dry acoustics of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. His compositions for organ, written for churches like the St. Jacobi, differ markedly in style from his St. Matthew Passion, written for the St. Thomaskirche.”³⁴²

In the case of secular music, opera house design clearly reflected the relationship between patronage and music. The Margrave of Bayreuth, for example, built an opera house in 1748 (Margrave’s Opera House) that resembled a palatial court, and was designed so that the eyes of the attendees (including the performers) were directed towards to the Margrave’s luxurious box. Another example comes from pre-revolutionary Paris, where the Palais Royal contained a hall that was home to the French Opéra. The Opéra, known officially as *Académie Royale de Musique*, was established by Louis XIV in 1669, and by 1750 it was the exclusive refuge of the French aristocracy. As James H. Johnson describes it, the hall in the Palais Royal was designed so that the audience, not the musicians, would be on display:

Like most eighteenth-century Parisian theaters, the hall in the Palais Royal was in the form of a rectangle with rounded corners. Three levels of boxes lined the walls of the auditorium, so that the spectators on either side faced one another and had to turn their chairs to one side to view the stage. Unlike most other European theaters, the partitions between the boxes pointed not toward to the stage, but toward the center of the hall, a construction that gave a clear line of sight to virtually every other box but made seeing the stage all the more difficult.³⁴³

³⁴¹ Hope Bagenal writes that the reverberation time of the Thomaskirche during Bach’s time works out to be 2.5 seconds, “Bach’s Music and Church Acoustics,” *Music and Letters*, 11 no.2 (April 1930): 149. Leo Beranek estimates the reverberation time to be about 1.6 seconds. Leo L. Beranek, *Music, Acoustics & Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1962), 46.

³⁴² Beranek, *Music, Acoustics & Architecture*, 31.

³⁴³ James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), 13.

Another design feature unique to the era of aristocratic patronage was the placing of boxes on the stage. Again, as Johnson describes it, this design feature was certainly not intended to enhance the musical experience:

The six boxes on the stage were the most prestigious in the theater. They were the most expensive but provided a terrible view of the spectacle, as the lamps on the stage shone directly into the spectator's eyes and much of the action took place farther upstage. Princes of the blood, foreign diplomats or the king's inner circle of advisors typically sat here....Of course, being blinded by the oil lamps had its advantages for these spectators: their dress, their behavior, and their reactions to the performance were every bit as visible to the rest of the audience as were the singers and dancers.³⁴⁴

Unlike Paris or Bayreuth, Amsterdam contained neither a royal court nor an extravagant opera house. In the eighteenth century, Amsterdam's ruling class was a patrician elite whose musical home was the Felix Meritis. Felix Meritis (Latin for Happiness through Merit) was a private society founded in 1777 to advance the enlightenment ideals of reason and education. The society was divided into five departments: physics, commerce, drawing, literature, and music. In 1788, the society moved into a new building on the Keizersgracht, part of Amsterdam's exclusive canal belt. This building, which still stands today, contained a concert room, the first purpose-built music room in Amsterdam. The hall was oval-shaped and held an audience of 600 and an orchestra of 80 musicians.³⁴⁵ The acoustics of the room were excellent, and throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the Felix Meritis was the home of classical musical culture in Amsterdam. Because of this, the Felix Meritis became known primarily as a musical organization.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 16.

³⁴⁵ J. Brants, "Felix Meritis, voorloper van het Concertgebouw," *Noord-Holland: tijdschrift gewijd aan de sociaal-culturele situatie in Noord-Holland*, 12 (1967), 53.

³⁴⁶ For more on the Felix Meritis as a musical organization, see: H. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam: Deel 6 Opgaand getij, 1848/1925* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum B.V., 1973), 230; Mehos, *Science and Culture for Members Only*, 31; Helen H. Metzelaar, *From Private to Public Spheres: Exploring Women's Role in Dutch Musical Life from c. 1700 to c. 1880 and Three Case Studies* (Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1999), 53-59.

It seems somewhat fitting that the building that housed Amsterdam's aristocratic musical culture was not ostentatious. Its design reflected the sensibilities of a city whose ruling class were traders, bankers, merchants, and brokers. Yet, this did not stop the Felix Meritis from being the most exclusive social organization in Amsterdam. Musical performances were restricted to members, and the high cost of membership meant that only the richest Amsterdammers could be considered for membership. Besides this monetary exclusivity, membership was also limited to Christians, a rule created to block Jewish citizens from becoming members.

By the 1860s, the Felix Meritis was no longer the top musical society in Amsterdam. Membership at the Parkzaal (opened in 1851) and Het Paleis (opened in 1864) was significantly cheaper and more inclusive than the Felix Meritis. Because of this, audiences at these venues were larger than what the Felix Meritis could attract, generating more money to pay internationally renowned musicians. As such, many famous German and French performers who would have previously performed at Felix Meritis were now performing at The Parkzaal. Faced with increased competition, increasing costs to hire musicians, and decreasing membership, Felix Meritis began to change its policies in the 1860s to be more inclusive. This failed, though, and by 1889 (the year after the Concertgebouw opened), Felix Meritis no longer hosted musical performances.³⁴⁷

Although aristocratic patronage in Europe endured until well into the nineteenth century (when the Meininger Hofkappel performed in Amsterdam in 1885 it was still a court orchestra), the seeds of its destruction were planted in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when musicians began selling their services to paying customers. It was here, Attali writes, that Western musical culture underwent its second great transformation: "the musician no longer sold himself without reserve to a lord; he would sell his labor to a number of clients, who were rich enough to pay for the

³⁴⁷ J.Th.M. Bank, "Mecenaat en stadsontwikkeling in Amsterdam, 1850-1900," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 104 (1991), 556.

entertainment, but not rich enough to have it to themselves.”³⁴⁸ The clients that Attali refers to were part of the increasingly prosperous European bourgeoisie who, by the mid-nineteenth century, had largely supplanted the aristocracy as patrons of musical culture.

The spirit and style of the bourgeoisie, Dahlhaus writes, found its musical manifestation in the public concert.³⁴⁹ Unlike concerts at the court or the opera house, public concerts are open to anyone who can afford a ticket. As Antje Pieper puts it, “access to a concert was a right to be exercised rather than settled by invitation.”³⁵⁰ The first public concert of instrumental music took place in London in 1672 at the home of John Banister (1630-1679). Banister was a violinist who in 1662 was appointed to a prominent place in King Charles II’s court orchestra, however, in 1667 he was relieved of this position.³⁵¹

Little is known about Banister’s activities after his dismissal from the court orchestra until the following advertisement appeared in the *London Gazette* on December 30, 1672:

There are to give notice, that at Mr. John Banister’s house (now called the music school) over against the George Tavern, in White Friars, near the back of the Temple, this Monday, will be music performed by excellent masters, beginning precisely at 4 of the clock in the afternoon, and every afternoon for the future, precisely at the same hour.³⁵²

³⁴⁸ Attali, *Noise*, 47.

³⁴⁹ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 49.

³⁵⁰ Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 58.

³⁵¹ Banister was given the responsibility of organizing and paying an ensemble of twelve string players. There is some debate regarding the reason for his removal. Nationalists argued that Banister had the audacity to claim that English music and English musicians were better than French, thus raising the ire of the King who held French music in the highest regard. It is more likely, though, that Bannister was fired because he kept most of the £600 payroll for himself. Percy Young, *The Concert Tradition: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 31.

³⁵² Young, *The Concert Tradition*, 34.

As the advertisement states, Banister's concerts were held in his house, which could be considered the first ever venue for a public concert. The audience for these concerts consisted of shop-keepers who sat around tables and who, for a shilling, were entitled to as much ale and tobacco as they required and could call for any music they pleased.³⁵³ In 1673 Banister moved his concerts to a larger room close to his house, and until his death in 1679, he changed venues, from taverns to inns to houses, every couple of years.³⁵⁴

Banister's success encouraged other impresarios to hold concerts in taverns and inns, and in 1675 the first concert room was opened in what was known as the "York Buildings."³⁵⁵ The concert room at the York Buildings was quite small: it was 48 ft. long and 32 ft. wide and could hold 300 audience members.³⁵⁶ Following the York Buildings (which stopped hosting public concerts in 1732), other venues in London were used for public concerts, including the Vendu, which opened in 1690, Hickford's Room, which opened in 1697, and Hickford's Great Room, which opened 1738.

Shortly after the centennial of Banister's first public concert, the first purpose-built hall for public concerts was erected in London, the Hanover Square Rooms (preceding venues were used for music, but not built for music). The Hanover Square Rooms were opened in 1775 through the initiative of two enterprising German musicians and impresarios: Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-1787) and the eighteenth child of Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann (John) Christian Bach (1735-1782). In the late eighteenth century, the Hanover Square Rooms was considered the greatest concert hall in London. It was larger than any previous building used for concerts; designed to hold 800 people, it measured 79 ft. long, 32 ft. wide, with a ceiling that is estimated to be 22

³⁵³ Young, *The Concert Tradition*, 35; see also Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 1990), 204-205.

³⁵⁴ Hugh Arthur Scott, "London's Earliest Public Concerts," *The Musical Quarterly*, 22 no.4 (October 1936), 454-455.

³⁵⁵ Michael Forsyth, *Buildings for Music: the Architect, the Musician, and the Listener from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 27; Hugh Arthur Scott, "London's First Concert Room," *Music and Letters*, 18 no.4 (1937): 379-390.

³⁵⁶ Scott, "London's First Concert Room," 385.

to 28 ft. high.³⁵⁷ Of note, Haydn wrote his London Symphonies (nos. 93-101) specifically for this hall and conducted these symphonies during the 1791/1792 and 1793/1794 seasons.³⁵⁸

As Tim Blanning writes, if music was to free itself from aristocratic subservience to God and Crown, it would have to find a building in which it could be worshipped in its own right. The Hanover Square Rooms was an early model of a building type designed exclusively for the worship of music.

These early concert halls....gave architectural expression to the growing and powerful sacralisation of music. The spatial arrangement of the Hanover Square Rooms, for example, resembled a church, with the audience seated as if it were a congregation, the orchestra positioned in a chancel-like space on a raised dais fenced off by a rail, and an organ taking the place of the altar.³⁵⁹

It was not long after the initiatives by Banister, Abel, and Bach that similar developments began to occur in continental Europe. In Europe, especially in German speaking Europe, the development of the public concert was more closely associated with musical romanticism, an aesthetic that influenced the design and meaning of the buildings constructed to house public concerts. Whereas in London, public concerts were almost exclusively a money making operation, in German cities, commerce was a means towards an end that was wholly aesthetic.

In German speaking Europe, the public concert originated in 1712 when the *collegia musica* (amateur music society) of Frankfurt began performing concerts to an audience of subscribers. This was followed a few years later by similar developments in Hamburg.³⁶⁰ Frankfurt and Hamburg may have been the first German cities to hold public concerts, but Leipzig was the city where the public concert and the concert hall became firmly established as the musical institutions we know them as today. It is not

³⁵⁷ Forsyth, *Buildings for Music*, 38.

³⁵⁸ Forsyth, *Buildings for Music*, 35.

³⁵⁹ Blanning, *The Triumph of Music*, 135.

³⁶⁰ Harry Raynor, "The Rise of the Public Concert," *A Social History of Music: From the Middle Ages to Beethoven* (New York: Schoken Books, 1972), 314.

surprising that these institutions of bourgeois musical culture became associated with Leipzig as opposed to larger cities like Berlin or Dresden. As Arthur Loesser writes, Leipzig's status as a trading city encouraged the development of bourgeois culture.

Among German cities during the eighteenth century Leipzig was at the forefront of progress. It was not a capital, nor a court town or *Residenzstadt*, as they said; on the contrary, its prominence was commercial. Its leading people were less concerned with passive administration routines and courtly precedents than with the needs of a growing trade and the potentialities of new enterprise. The town harbored few privileged aristocrats or court functionaries who could perpetually remind the citizen of his social inferiority. Within the limits set by a small absolute monarchy such as the Kingdom of Saxony was, the Leipzig burghers yet could develop a considerable measure of independence and self-reliance....Commercial and cultural development went hand in hand and encouraged each other. More people made more money and came into a position to demand more cultural goods; whereupon this demand spurred businessmen to new enterprise toward supplying it, and toward better methods of distributing this supply.³⁶¹

The origin of Leipzig's concert culture begins with the formation of two *collegia musica* in 1702 and 1708. These organizations were made up of amateur musicians who would rehearse and perform once or twice a week at coffeehouses. Loesser's description of these coffeehouse performances points out the rudimentary capitalism at work in this early iteration of the public concert.

One such group met at Enoch Richter's coffeehouse, another at Zimmermann's hostelry, the ordinary customers sipping beer and puffing their long pipes while they listened...the young men played for fun and for the good of their souls, but apparently also for emolument or the hope thereof. The *collegia* were an advantage to the taverns, for during the times of the fairs many strangers as well as residents were attracted by them. Undoubtedly, Richter and Zimmermann assured the permanence of their interesting house-feature by giving the young men free meals and, possible, a small honorarium.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 67.

³⁶² Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 90.

Of note, J.S. Bach served as director of one of the *collegia musica* between 1729 and 1737, a position he used to develop and refine his secular compositions.³⁶³

This arrangement—the two *collegia musica* performing concerts at coffeehouses—continued until 1743 when sixteen Leipzig businessmen created an orchestra from the two *collegia musica* and founded what they called the Grand Concerts (*Grosses Konzert*, also popularly known as the *Kaufmannskonzerte* [merchant concerts]). These sixteen businessmen set up a board of twelve directors, made up of local merchants and headed by Leipzig's mayor, who would take charge of the Grand Concerts. To finance these concerts, potential patrons were asked to purchase subscriptions that would entitle them to a season's worth of concerts.³⁶⁴

The Grand Concerts were held once a week in winter and once every two weeks in the summer. These concerts were held at the Three Swans Inn until 1756 when the Seven Years War forced their suspension. They were revived at the same venue in 1762 under the leadership of Johann Adam Hiller who established a program of 24 concerts per year, financed by the sale of annual subscriptions. This continued until 1778 when, due to an uninvolved administration and poor ticket sales, the Grand Concerts ceased operation. Hiller carried on his concert activities as best he could, and in 1780 the city of Leipzig intervened with a proposal to build a purpose-built concert hall in the Gewandhaus.

The Gewandhaus, literally translated as Cloth Hall, was built in 1587 and was used as a trading hall for cloth merchants. It was redesigned and refurbished by the architect Johann Friedrich Carl Dauthe and opened as a concert hall in 1781. The design of the Gewandhaus contained many unique features that contributed to an ideal acoustic and aesthetic experience, that, as Michel Forsyth writes, “has come to stand at

³⁶³ Friedrich Blume, “Outlines of a New Picture of Bach,” *Music and Letters*, 44 no.3 (1963): 225; Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, 31; Young, *The Concert Tradition*, 69-72.

³⁶⁴ Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, 19.

the head of a recognizable tradition in concert hall design that has continued to this day.”³⁶⁵

The hall itself was rectangular with curved ends. It was designed to hold an orchestra of 50 to 60 musicians and an audience of 400 (increased to 570 in 1842) and it measured 76 ft. long by 38 ft. wide by 24 ft. high. Architecturally, the Gewandhaus was quite resonant due to Dauthe’s decision to build the concert hall within the stone walls of the existing structure—sort of a box within a box. The walls and the floor of the concert hall were lined with wood, and as described by Hope Bagenal, the weight of the roof was partially transferred from the old stone walls to the new wooden walls, meaning that the whole structure was tense and resonant, capable of delivering a rich sound.³⁶⁶ As Forsyth describes it, the wood walls and floor resulted in short reverberation time (about 1.3 seconds) that allowed the orchestra to be heard with great clarity and volume.³⁶⁷

As Antje Pieper writes, the interior design of the Gewandhaus was intended to express “noble simplicity and serene greatness,” an aesthetic that appealed to the bourgeois sensibilities of the hall’s patrons: “to the aristocrat, culture was a means of entertainment, to the bourgeoisie it was a means of spiritual elevation; bourgeois public space was thus designed accordingly.”³⁶⁸ This ideal of secular transcendence, Pieper writes, was mirrored in the lack of visual decorations and adornments, features that could distract the audience from solemn aesthetic contemplation.³⁶⁹

Pieper writes that the opening of the Gewandhaus corresponded with a transformation of listening habits in Leipzig. The Grand Concerts that occurred between 1743 and 1778 were social occasions with musical accompaniment. Pieper quotes a review of these concerts that highlights the behaviour of the audience.

³⁶⁵ Forsyth, *Buildings for Music*, 64; see also Hope Bagenal, “The Leipzig Tradition in Concert Hall Design,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 36 no.19 (September 21, 1929): 756-763.

³⁶⁶ Bagenal, “The Leipzig Tradition in Concert Hall Design,” 757-759.

³⁶⁷ Forsyth, *Buildings for Music*, 64.

³⁶⁸ Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, 101.

³⁶⁹ Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, 102.

I have attended the Grand concert several times and have always regarded the choice and performance of music worthy of everyone's attention. However, I saw that only the tiniest part of the audience pays attention. A man peers at the young ladies, a woman inspects the finery of her female neighbours and even during the most touching pieces, people are whispering and I began to wonder whether these ladies and gentlemen were subscribing merely in order to appear to be pillars of the Grand Concerts.³⁷⁰

Upon the opening of the Gewandhaus, any doubt as to the proper behaviour of the audience was removed upon glancing towards the orchestra platform. There, affixed in bold letters for everyone to see, was the maxim *Res Serva est Verum Gaudium*—True Joy is a Serious Matter.

6.4. Conclusion

In 1938, Rudolf Mengelberg wrote the first history of the Concertgebouw in honour of the building's fiftieth anniversary. In it he wrote, "The concert hall is a product of the bourgeois culture of the nineteenth century. The whole of the symphonic art and the style of its execution mirrors the spirit of a society that evolved from the spirit of the French Revolution."³⁷¹ It is ironic that the sacralization of secular music corresponded with its commercialization. Perhaps this is one of those paradoxes that constitute the enduring cultural legacy of the bourgeoisie—only that which is for sale can transcend the bounds of the material world; or, as Attali cynically notes, "the artist was born, at the same time as his work went on sale."³⁷² As Michael Chanan writes, this contradiction between aesthetics and economics is reflected in the buildings that housed bourgeois musical culture:

³⁷⁰ Quoted in Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, 107 ff.94.

³⁷¹ "De concertzaal is een product der burgerlijke beschaving der negentiende eeuw. De geheele symphonische kunst en de stijl harer beoefening weerspiegelt den geest eener maatschappij, voortgekomen uit ge ideologie der Fransche revolutie." Rudolf Mengelberg, *50 Jaar Concertgebouw 1888-1938* (Amsterdam: NV Van Munster's Drukkerijen, 1939), 33.

³⁷² Attali, *Noise*, 47.

The concert-hall is more democratic than the opera house—at any rate, more bourgeois. The opera-house horseshoe had a triple function: to project the musical sound forwards; to allow the members of the audience themselves to be on visual display; and to minimize the diffusion of their chatter. The concert-hall works differently. The spatial-acoustic arrangement developed during the nineteenth century...is intended to create a balanced sound, while the seating arrangement, with the audience now mostly facing the orchestra directly, suppresses individual display in the auditorium and displaces it to corridors, bars and salons...Architecturally, these halls are masterpieces of both acoustic and social engineering; seating an audience between two and two and a half thousand, of a size and shape which produces a pattern of sound reflection and resonance such that the sounds are fused without being muddled—above all, they are halls to embody the ideals of bourgeois democracy; it is true that the size of the audience is limited, but inside they share a uniformly warm and responsive acoustical state of being.³⁷³

The following chapter focuses on the design of the Concertgebouw. Moving from the idea of musical romanticism and attentive listening to the Amsterdam bourgeoisie, whose patronage and initiative ensured that these ideals were made durable through the construction of a concert hall, the next step is examining the processes by which attentive listening was designed.

³⁷³ Michael Chanan, *From Handel to Hendrix: The Composer in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 1999), 282-283.

7. Designing Listening: The Concertgebouw and the Technical Code of Attentive Listening

It is not my fault that acoustics and I can never come to an understanding. I gave myself great pains to master this bizarre science, but after fifteen years labour, I found myself hardly in advance of where I stood on the first day...I had read diligently in my books, and conferred industriously with philosophers—nowhere did I find a positive rule of action to guide me; on the contrary nothing but contradictory statements.

- Charles Garnier, 1880
(Architect of the Opéra Garnier, Paris)

7.1. The Concert Hall Before and After Science

The success of any concert hall is its sound. A beautiful building with horrible acoustics can never be redeemed. Thus, for the board of Het Concertgebouw NV, the days leading up to opening night (April 11, 1888) must have been tense. Not only were there constant worries about money, they also had no idea how the hall would sound. Prior to the twentieth century, there was no quantitative theory that could be used to predict how a building would sound. As well, a “dress rehearsal” to test the acoustics of the concert hall was logistically difficult because a full concert hall sounds different than an empty concert hall. Plus, if a full dress rehearsal revealed poor acoustics, what could be done?

Given these circumstances, it must have been a great relief that the acoustics of the Concertgebouw were well received. The critic from the music journal *Caecilia* wrote,

“the hall has excellent acoustics;”³⁷⁴ the *Algemeen Handelsblad* reported, “several people who sat in different places in the hall praised the acoustics;”³⁷⁵ and in the *Haarlemshe Courant* (Haarlem), “good acoustics...the sound spreads evenly in the new hall without the annoying echoes that can be heard in other halls...not only does the massive choir and orchestra sound good, the soloists are clearly audible to everyone.”³⁷⁶

Because the success of a concert hall is so dependent on its sound, it seems strange that a little more than a hundred years ago, architectural acoustics was left to chance, guided by knowledge and practices that would not be considered out of place in the sixteenth century. Prior to the twentieth century, concert hall designers learned about what Garnier called the “bizarre science” of acoustics by observation and speculation. Without a reliable formula to predict how a building would sound, acoustic success was guided by myth and superstition, and architects relied on imitation, intuition, and luck to ensure good acoustics. One of the first theories, or myths, of acoustic architecture comes from Vitruvius’s *De Architectura* (15 BC). Vitruvius encourages architects to embed bronze “sounding vessels” in theatres as an aid to good acoustics: “the voice, uttered from the stage as from a centre, and spreading and striking against the cavities of the different vessels, as it comes in contact with them, will be increased in clearness of sound, and will wake an harmonious note in unison with itself.”³⁷⁷ These vessels, or vases, were resonant, but whether or not they enhanced audibility, muddled the sound, or did absolutely nothing depended on other variables, including the cubic volume of the room, the angle of the walls, and the sonic absorbency of these walls. Yet, as Dorothea Baumann notes, throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, Vitruvius’s suggestions were taken by some architects to be acoustic facts, demonstrated by

³⁷⁴ “De zaal is, voor zoo verre ik er over heb kunnen oordeelen, uitmuntend van acoustieke eigenschappen, tochtvrij, ruim, licht en stil.” *Caecilia* 45, no.10 (April 15, 1888): 94.

³⁷⁵ “Door personen, die op onderscheidene punten der zaal waren gezeten, hoorden wij de acoustiek roemen.” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, (April 12, 1888)

³⁷⁶ “goede acoustiek... in de nieuwe zaal het geluid der massa's zich gelijkmatig kan verbreiden, zonder de hinderlijk weerkaatsing in andere gebouwen van dien aard te vinden...en niet alleen de massa klinkt goed, ook de solo's worden door ieder duidelijk verstaan.” *Haarlemsche Courant* (April 13, 1888).

³⁷⁷ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hickey Morgan (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 143.

acoustic vases found embedded in the naves and choirs of medieval European churches.³⁷⁸

Sonic analogy was also a trusted method for acoustic success. Emily Thompson writes that some architects assumed that because a bell was a sonorous object, a bell-shaped hall would be equally sonorous.³⁷⁹ In a similar vein, Beranek mentions that some architects believed that a concert hall should be lined with thin wood. The rationale being that because wood acts as a resonator to enhance a violin's sound, the sound inside a concert hall would be enhanced by a layer of thin wood.³⁸⁰ Of all the myths and superstitions surrounding architectural acoustics, none seems more outrageous than the one passed on to Beranek by the conductor Herbert van Karajan. Van Karajan had once asked him, "I don't suppose you subscribe to the theory that broken wine bottles beneath the stage are good for the acoustics of a hall?" Beranek responded that he did not believe this, countering that any broken wine bottles found when refurbishing older European halls were probably the result of workers who, during the original construction, "flung the remnants of innumerable déjeuners into the most convenient and most hidden places."³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Dorothea Baumann, "Musical Acoustics in the Middle Ages," *Early Music*, 18 no.2 (May 1990): 201-202. On Vitruvius's influence on the design of churches in Venice, see Deborah Howard and Laura Moretti, *Sound and Space in Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Music, Acoustics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 6-9.

³⁷⁹ Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1935* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 20.

³⁸⁰ Beranek explains the fallacy of this assumption: "The sound of a violin as we hear it is produced by the vibration of its strings, which transmit energy into the belly and back of the instrument. These surfaces radiate sound in much the same way as does the lightweight paper cone of a loudspeaker; thus they must be thin, of light weight, and highly responsive to vibration. Thick heavy surfaces could not easily be set into motion by the delicate vibrating strings, and thus a loud, clear tone would not emanate from a thick-walled violin. In a concert hall, we do not want to radiate sounds beyond the walls of the hall, but rather we want to conserve the energy by keeping it inside. This required that the walls be hard and heavy, made of plaster or masonry or thick wood. Contrary to popular impression, the great concert halls and opera houses of the world contain very little, if any, thin wood on the walls and ceilings—the very best of them are lined almost entirely with heavy plaster or thick, heavy wood—materials that keep the sound inside for the enjoyment of the listener. Leo Beranek, *Music, Acoustics & Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1962), 8-9.

³⁸¹ Beranek, *Music, Acoustics & Architecture*, 5.

The validity of acoustic vases, bell-shaped rooms, or broken bottles was put to an end after Harvard physicist Wallace Sabine (1868-1919) developed the first predictive theory of acoustic architecture in 1898. Sabine served as the acoustic consultant on the design of Boston's Symphony Hall, which opened in 1900 and was the first concert hall designed in line with a quantitative theory of acoustics. Sabine recognized that the acoustic quality of an enclosed space was related to reverberation time and he came up with a formula that could accurately predict what the reverberation time of any enclosed space would be. Of course, there is more to acoustic success than reverberation—the shape of the hall, the angle of the walls, and the height of the stage all influence the reflection of sound in a concert hall—but, Sabine's reverberation equation marked the first time that architects had a quantitative theory that could be used to predict how a building would sound.

Measuring how long sound reverberated in an enclosed space may seem like the obvious measure for room acoustics, but at the time of Sabine's research this was not the case. Up to that point, physicists believed that a theory of architectural acoustics required a visible representation of sound; another example Western culture's visual bias—for something to exist, even sound, it must first be visible!³⁸² Ignoring the long-standing tradition amongst his colleagues of privileging the eye over the ear, it was only once Sabine began to measure and record sound as an *aural* phenomenon that a predictive theory of architectural acoustics could be developed.

The process by which Sabine developed his reverberation equation began in 1895 when the President of Harvard, Charles Eliot, asked him to improve the acoustics of a lecture room in the recently built Fogg Art Museum. This particular lecture room

³⁸² Despite Sabine's accomplishments, the tendency to identify visual representations of sound as sound itself persists in acoustic research. "Books on acoustics, following the general development of the discipline, have come to rely more and more heavily on visual representations of their subject matter. One almost comes to think that the two-dimensional wave diagrams that populate these books, showing undulating lines moving around a horizontal one, must actually correspond to what's happening in the air (or "medium," as it is always generalized), instead of being simply a convenient representation of a three-dimensional phenomenon in only two." Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 2nd ed. (Westport CT: Ablex Publishing, 2001), 3.

was so reverberant that it could not be used for its intended purpose. Its reverberation time was about 5.6 seconds, leading to what could only be imagined as a horrible listening experience—imagine a lecture where each word reverberated for 5 seconds, muddling each subsequent word, turning an otherwise simple lecture into an exercise of impossible interpretation! To correct this problem, and to ensure that it would not happen again, Eliot suggested that Sabine develop a quantitative formula that could be used to explain why acoustic quality differed from room to room.³⁸³

In 1898, Boston arts patron Henry Lee Higginson contacted Eliot for any advice he may have for the design of his new concert hall and Eliot put him in contact with Sabine. Sabine was reluctant to work with Higginson because he had yet to come up with a scientific formula that could accurately predict reverberation. Contemplating Higginson's offer to consult on the design of a new concert hall, Sabine went home to review his copious notes, and in one of those eureka moments that punctuate the history of science he figured out a mathematical formula which explains that reverberation time is directly related to the room's cubic volume (if the room's volume is twice as big, it is twice as reverberant) and inversely related to the amount of sound absorbing material in the room (increase the absorption and the reverberation declines).³⁸⁴ Following this, Sabine was able to provide a table of absorbent materials commonly found in concert halls. As Thompson explains, Sabine registered the absorption coefficient of, for example, plaster on tile as .025, meaning every time sound energy encounters a surface

³⁸³ Sabine's experiments consisted of using compressed air to activate a steady sound from an organ pipe. Sabine would then shut the air off and measure how long it took for the sound to fade away. He did this in many rooms at Harvard, paying attention to any variables that may effect reverberation. Sabine undertook these experiments for two years, collecting hundreds of pages of data before Eliot demanded a solution to the reverberation problem. Unable to provide a concise scientific solution, Sabine suggested hanging sound-absorbing material on the walls of the lecture hall to lower the reverberation time. This made it better, but not ideal (in time, the room was demolished). For a comprehensive review of Sabine's tests, see Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 34-37.

³⁸⁴ Leo Beranek, *Concert Halls and Opera Houses: Music, Acoustics, and Architecture*, 2nd Edition (New York: Springer, 2004), 92. For a more detailed description of Sabine's formula see Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 35-41.

of plaster on tile, 2.5% of this energy was absorbed and 97.5% of the energy was reflected back into the room.³⁸⁵

Once he had formulated a reverberation theory, Sabine could confidently assist Higginson in the design of his new concert hall. Higginson wanted a rectangular concert hall and looked to Boston's old Music Hall and Leipzig's Neue Gewandhaus as models for his building. Higginson chose these buildings because, according to experts and his own experience, music sounded best in these halls. However, there were to be significant differences between the design of Symphony Hall and these other halls. First, Symphony Hall was designed to hold an audience of 2600, 70% greater than the Gewandhaus's capacity of 1560. Second, the new hall was going to be 40 feet longer than the old Boston Music Hall. To guarantee that the new hall would have acoustics similar to the Gewandhaus and the old Music Hall while maintaining Higginson's specifications concerning the size of the building, Sabine acquired scaled drawings and other images of the Gewandhaus and Boston's old Music Hall and from these calculated the reverberation time of each hall (2.3 for the old Music Hall and 2.44 for the Gewandhaus). Turning to the plans for Symphony Hall, he calculated the overall volume and the surface area of the different materials from which it was to be constructed (including the sonic absorbency of the audience and the orchestra) and calculated that the acoustics would not correspond with Higginson's preferred acoustic models. Sabine thought the hall was too long and suggested reducing the overall volume of the hall (thus reducing its reverberation) by adding a second gallery/balcony to maintain the desired seating capacity. The architects adopted these suggestions and upon studying the revised plan, Sabine reported that the hall would have a reverberation time of 2.31

³⁸⁵ Michael Forsyth, *Buildings for Music: The Architect, the Musician, and the Listener from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 247-250; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 40-41. According to Sabine's table, an open window measured 100% absorbency because an open window absorbs all sonic energy without any reverberation. Prior to this, absorbency was measured in seat cushions because during his Harvard tests Sabine would adjust the reverberation time of rooms by the adding or removing seat cushions.

seconds, which was close enough to the acoustics of the old Music Hall and the Gewandhaus to be considered acceptable.³⁸⁶

Although Sabine's measurements were a bit off (with a full audience, the old Boston Music Hall had a reverberation time of 1.8 seconds and the Neue Gewandhaus had a reverberation time of 1.6 seconds), Thompson writes that Sabine's reverberation formulation, which was published in 1900, was the first tool that could provide a degree of certainty in predicting the acoustics of a building:

[Sabine's] formula could now be used to predict the reverberatory quality of a room in advance of its construction, a privilege long sought, but never enjoyed...If the reverberation time that resulted from such a calculation were deemed unsatisfactory, an architect needed only to modify his designs—changing the overall volume of the room, or the type or proportion of materials employed within it—until a satisfactory result was achieved. With this equation, Sabine had finally achieved the fundamental, quantitative understanding of reverberation that he had long sought.³⁸⁷

But, however useful Sabine's reverberation equation is, on its own it cannot guarantee good musical acoustics. Measuring sound is one thing; deciding what constitutes good or bad *musical* acoustics is something completely different.

Acoustic architecture is judged according to an expectation concerning how music should sound. In the case of Symphony Hall, a reverberation time between 2 and 2.5 seconds was desirable because the repertoire of concert halls and orchestras in the decades leading up to the opening of Symphony Hall sound best in halls with this reverberation time. Beranek argues that symphonies written during what he terms the Romantic period (from about 1820 to Mahler's death in 1911) sound best in an acoustic environment with a long reverberation time, usually 1.9 to 2.2 seconds. In what Beranek terms the Classical period (1750-1820), a shorter reverberation time, about 1.5 to 1.7 seconds, was desirable. This shorter reverberation time was a continuation of listening expectations and a style of music developed during the Baroque period (1600-1750).

³⁸⁶ Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 42-44.

³⁸⁷ Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 41-42.

During the Baroque period, Beranek writes that each musical detail was important and no portion of the sound should mask any other portion of the sound. In the Classical period, listening became more attuned to non-notational elements like tone and feeling, but it was still predominantly oriented towards identifying the parts that made up the whole, reflecting a style of music where independent musical ideas can be identified as they come together, as in the symphonies of Mozart and Haydn. In the Romantic period, it was not necessary to separate out each musical detail. As composers like Berlioz and Brahms experimented with increasingly larger orchestras, the musical details were not as important as the overall impression of the sound. In buildings designed for the performance and reception of nineteenth-century symphonies, acoustic success is achieved by maximizing the fullness of tone, not clear definition of each musical idea.³⁸⁸ Architectural historian Michael Forsyth expands on this idea, using analogies from visual art to explain how the aesthetic expectation of listeners corresponded with the style of music being performed and how this music, as sound, behaved in enclosed spaces:

Music of the Romantic period is best heard in a relatively reverberant hall...The blending effects of reverberance is like the brush strokes of an impressionist painting, which obscures the subject so that the onlooker is induced to project his senses and emotions into the work in order to perceive the image...the formally structured music of the Classical period, unlike music of the Romantic era, which predominantly expresses emotion, has reason and clarity as its basis. The detail (such as ornamentation, which embroiders the basic melody and provides "luster") and the subtler emotional characteristics of eighteenth-century music were revealed to advantage in small, often overcrowded concert rooms of the time, such as the Holywell music room and the Hanover Square Rooms... [and] the Altes Gewandhaus,

³⁸⁸ Beranek, *Music, Acoustics and Architecture*, 43-49; Beranek, *Concert Halls and Opera Houses*, 8-13. It is interesting that the transformation of acoustic expectations paralleled changes in music criticism. As discussed in Chapter Five, nineteenth-century music criticism was written for the general listener. Prior to this, music criticism was written for musicians and composers. Music criticism went from detailed treatises on the arrangement of musical notes and other compositional themes to discussing music through the language of musical romanticism. In the nineteenth century, descriptions of music were characterized by poetic ambiguity and imprecise musical terms that conveyed the emotional experience of listening. Influenced by the spirit of musical romanticism, critics and readers did not have the patience for pedantic descriptions of compositional techniques.

Leipzig, where acoustic clarity was gained by a short reverberation time and extreme acoustic intimacy.³⁸⁹

Reverberation time, as a measurement of sound, is only meaningful in the context of a specific musical culture and a horizon of listening expectations. Musical romanticism, in this sense, is realized through the aesthetic privileging of a style of music (the symphony), a mode of listening (attentive), *and* a reverberation time.

In any building designed for music, both before and after Sabine, aesthetic considerations (how music should sound) take precedence over acoustics (how sound behaves in enclosed spaces). Or, as Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter put it, “cultural values convert physical phenomena into experiential phenomena.”³⁹⁰ Sabine’s reverberation equation transformed our understanding of how music behaves in enclosed spaces, but it did not change how music should sound in these enclosed spaces. Consider Symphony Hall. Sabine’s reverberation equation is only useful in the context of Higginson’s request that Symphony Hall sound like Leipzig’s Neue Gewandhaus and Boston’s old Music Hall. The desire to imitate the sound of music in these halls enabled the identification of a reverberation time that was considered musically ideal.

Prior to Sabine, acoustic success was guided by listening expectations and achieved by architectural imitation. The design of Leipzig’s Neue Gewandhaus, which opened in 1886 and served as one of the models for Boston’s Symphony Hall, is an example of how good acoustics were achieved before Sabine’s reverberation equation. Without a predictive theory of acoustics, the Gewandhaus’s architects were dependent on a tradition of concert hall design that had shaped musical venues in Leipzig for centuries. British acoustician Hope Bagenal calls this the Leipzig tradition in concert hall design and identifies features found in the Neue Gewandhaus with the inns and coffee houses which were home to the Grand Concerts of the eighteenth century.

³⁸⁹ Forsyth, *Buildings for Music*, 17.

³⁹⁰ Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are you Listening? Experiencing Aural Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 70.

Several old coffee houses survive in Leipzig, and in one I found a room having a dais with a low balustrade at one end, such as may have served the musicians at the "Three Swans," and as certainly can be seen in the section of the old Gewandhaus. The low balustrade to the platform is a feature to this day of Leipzig concert halls, even those of recent date, and suggests an ancient tradition.³⁹¹

As Bagenal remarks, Leipzig's concert hall tradition dates back to venues that preceded the construction of the first (Altes) Gewandhaus in 1781.³⁹² The Leipzig tradition in concert hall design is a combination of aesthetic standards in regards to how music should sound and architectural imitation of buildings designed for music. This culminated in the design of the Neue Gewandhaus. The only way that this building could be considered a success was if it satisfied what Bagenal describes as, "the discriminations and requirements of an unusually sensitive society."³⁹³ This was accomplished by slavishly imitating design specifications of the musical venues that had preceded the Neue Gewandhaus. Imitating architectural features of the buildings that had housed Leipzig's superb musical culture was the only way to ensure the acoustic success of the Neue Gewandhaus.

By using Leipzig's Neue Gewandhaus as an acoustic model for Symphony Hall, Sabine's genius was his ability to quantify and successfully predict an ideal of musical acoustics that, to that point, had been judged against a horizon of musical expectations and sought through architectural imitation. Sabine's reverberation equation took an existing idea of how music should sound and ensured that this measurement could be copied in other buildings. As Blesser and Salter point out, the acoustic design of Symphony Hall marks the transition from humanistic theories of acoustics to an empirical theory of acoustics:

³⁹¹ Hope Bagenal, "The Leipzig Tradition in Concert Hall Design," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 36 no.19 (September 21, 1929), 757. See also Beranek, *Music, Acoustics & Architecture*, 273-277.

³⁹² Bagenal's suggestion that Leipzig's concert hall tradition is "ancient" hints at a hidden history of Leipzig's status as a leading European musical city. It may be the case that venues for secular music were influenced, and inspired, by the architecture and acoustics of the Thomaskirche, which dates back to the thirteenth century. Leipzig's renown as a musical city, it could be argued, is intertwined with buildings for music that have great acoustics.

³⁹³ Bagenal, "The Leipzig Tradition in Concert Hall Design," 756.

Sabine's design of the Boston Symphony Hall was therefore an extension of musical traditions that predated modern acoustics...the aural success of Boston Symphony Hall was, in part, the result of three centuries of accumulated knowledge about sound as a physical phenomenon. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sabine transformed the basis of acoustics—from philosophy to science and engineering.³⁹⁴

This brings us back to the Concertgebouw. With a reverberation time of 2 seconds, the Concertgebouw is considered to be one of the best concert halls in the world for the symphonies of the romantic period.³⁹⁵ With neither Sabine's reverberation theory nor Leipzig's musical heritage to draw upon, was it simply luck that the Concertgebouw sounded like it did? Like all successful concert hall designs, luck did play a part; but the design and acoustic success of the Concertgebouw can also be interpreted as the result of a process that began with the introduction of musical romanticism in the Netherlands in the early nineteenth century. Through the initiatives of Dutch music critics and publishers, musical romanticism was articulated through new standards concerning the performance and reception of music. When members of the Amsterdam bourgeoisie proposed organizing the funding and building a new concert hall, they were translating these aspects of musical romanticism into something more durable than an aesthetic philosophy.

This process, which draws upon cultural theories and social initiatives, provided the background against which particular design decisions were made: Would acoustics be important? What about sightlines? Would the hall be shaped like a shoebox or a horseshoe? Would there be royal boxes? Would there be chairs for the audience, or would people be encouraged to stand and move about? Would the stage be big enough for an orchestra? Answering these questions requires drawing upon a cultural horizon that includes the meaning of instrumental music and the standards of the public concert. This cultural horizon would be realized in seemingly neutral design decisions like the size and shape of the concert hall and the materials used to build it. A horseshoe

³⁹⁴ Blesser & Salter, *Space Speak, Are you Listening?*, 79.

³⁹⁵ Beranek, *Concert Halls and Opera Houses: Music, Acoustics, and Architecture*, 425; Fritz Winckel, "Space, Music, and Architecture," *Cultures*, 1 no.3 (1974): 180.

shaped hall with royal boxes on the stage embodies a technical code that is different from the one that considers a shoebox hall the best choice.

Once realized in technical design, cultural horizons become technical codes. The technical codes that shape design are subtle, and their anonymity ensures the persistence of distinct social goals over time and space. As Feenberg writes, technical codes create the implicit frameworks within which seemingly self-evident design decisions are considered rational (manufacturing technologies are designed for adults, not children).³⁹⁶ The concert hall, from this perspective, embodies a technical code of attentive listening, guaranteeing that wherever this medium of musical culture is built, a musical culture can be found whose social values and aesthetic ideals are confirmed through tightly circumscribed behavioural norms that govern listening.

In the following two sections, I describe the process by which the design of the Concertgebouw was selected by a jury of architectural experts and members of Het Concertgebouw NV. What is interesting about this process is the emphasis that the jury placed on acoustics. A concern with acoustics is a concern with listening, and predictions of what will ensure good acoustics, albeit scientifically suspect, were a constant reminder to jury members and architects that an expectation of attentive listening was assumed by all involved. Translating this expectation of attentive listening into the design of the Concertgebouw is the final step in the establishment of a technical code of attentive listening.

7.2. Eyes or Ears? Düsseldorf's Tonhalle, Leipzig's Gewandhaus, and Amsterdam's Felix Meritis as Models for Amsterdam's new Concert Hall

The starting point for building the Concertgebouw was selecting a concert hall to imitate. Like all concert halls built prior to 1900, imitation was understood to be an

³⁹⁶ Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 74-88.

important component of acoustic success. The idea to build a new concert hall began with G.C.C.W. Hayward's 1881 article from *De Amsterdammer* and so it is not surprising that the Temporary Committee for the Construction of a Concert Hall took up Hayward's suggestion that they should model their concert hall on Düsseldorf's Tonhalle.

The Tonhalle was a large structure that contained within it a well-known concert hall, the Kaisersaal, which was opened in 1865 and was destroyed in 1942. Although it wasn't a particularly large hall, its capacity was large. It was designed to hold 2820 people and measured 42.48 meters long and 24.2 meters wide with two large galleries/balconies on the second level.³⁹⁷ But, as Hayward writes, the size and layout of the Tonhalle is not what attracted him to this building; it was the aesthetic experience. Hayward writes that the Tonhalle not only contains "an ideal concert hall" that has all the practical necessities (organ, restaurant, and cloakroom), it is designed to meet the demands of a temple dedicated to music: "even though there's a lack of all colours and gold, and everything is very simple...When one enters, one's mind comes to ease, which is necessary to experience true enjoyment of the art."³⁹⁸

Hayward's terms describe a musical experience that would have been quite foreign to Amsterdammers in the early nineteenth-century. These listeners thought of music as a pleasant diversion, and their expectation of listening was certainly not oriented towards experiencing the true enjoyment of the art of music. To publish an article in a widely read newspaper that celebrated a building whose purpose and meaning was interpreted through musical romanticism is an indication of just how aware Amsterdam had become of musical standards that, for decades, were distinctly non-Dutch. It is not surprising, then, that Hayward's description stuck a chord with a committee intent on building a concert hall as a means to ensure that attentive listening had a dedicated venue in Amsterdam.

³⁹⁷ Lydia Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch bezien," *Preludium*, 36 no.8 (1978): 36.

³⁹⁸ "...alle kleuren en goud ontbreken, en alles hoogst eenvoudig en toch voor het oog weldadig zich voordoet. Er daalt daar bij het binnentreden een rust in het gemoed, die onontbeerlijk is voor het smaken van waarachtig kunstgenot." *De Amsterdammer*, June 26, 1881.

The prolific Dutch architect P.J.H. Cuypers, whose monumental buildings include Amsterdam's Centraal Station and the Rijksmuseum, worked closely with the committee, consulting on all decisions concerning the location and potential design of the new concert hall. Cuypers suggested a plot of land behind the Rijksmuseum as a perfect location for Amsterdam's Tonhalle. At the first meeting of the Committee (September 15, 1881), it was decided that Cuypers's suggested plot of land would be purchased, and on September 18, 1881, the committee confidently announced that on this piece of land, "a new concert hall will rise, entirely in the spirit of the hall in Düsseldorf."³⁹⁹

The next step was coming up with a preliminary design for the new concert hall. This would be Cuypers's task, and to help guide him, he borrowed a copy of the blueprint of the Tonhalle from the Committee.⁴⁰⁰ On September 24, 1881, working from this blueprint, Cuypers sent the committee his preliminary sketch of a concert hall.⁴⁰¹ He suggested a building measuring 30 meters by 60 meters. In the hall itself, the parterre was designed to hold 1600 seats and the galleries on the second floor to seat 800 people. The stage would hold an orchestra of 130 musicians and a choir of up to 700 singers. Besides the concert hall, the building also included lavatories, coffee rooms for intermissions, a billiard room, and a reading room. Cuypers estimated the cost of this building to be 350,000 guilders.⁴⁰² Shortly after completing his first sketch, Cuypers submitted a second design that, like his first sketch, took the Kaisersaal as its starting point.⁴⁰³ Unlike the first design, however, this new design included a restaurant and a smaller concert hall intended for chamber music.⁴⁰⁴ This too follows the model of the Tonhalle, which contained a restaurant and smaller hall for chamber music (The Rittersaal).

³⁹⁹ Guido Hoogewoud, Jan Jaap Kuyt, & Aart Oxenaar, *P.J.H. Cuypers en Amsterdam* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 119.

⁴⁰⁰ Lydia Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," in *Historie en kroniek van het Concertgebouw en het Concertgebouworkest 1888-1988* ed. H.J. van Royen (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1989), 70. A copy of this blueprint can be found in the Cuypers archive held at the Netherlands Architectural Institute (NAI), archive CUBA, no. t192.

⁴⁰¹ NAI, archive CUBA no. t192

⁴⁰² Hoogewoud, *P.J.H. Cuypers en Amsterdam*, 119.

⁴⁰³ NAI, archive CUBA, no. t192

⁴⁰⁴ Hoogewoud, *P.J.H. Cuypers en Amsterdam*, 120.

Upon seeing these proposed designs, the members of the Committee must have been impressed with the significance of their initiative. The proposed building was unlike anything that existed in Amsterdam. This new building was singularly monumental, designed specifically for the performance and reception of the great symphonies of the romantic canon. In this way, Cuyper's rudimentary sketch drew attention to the deficiencies of other venues in Amsterdam that the Committee would have known intimately. These venues included the Odeon and the Felix Meritis (too small), the Paleis (too big, not designed for music), and the Parkzaal (too small for big orchestras, too big for chamber music).

With a preliminary design in hand, the plan to build a concert hall was made public in early March 1882. At this stage, the committee used the example of the Tonhalle to convey an idea of their plans to Amsterdammers. In the first circular sent to potential investors, the committee announced it would build a concert hall, "equal to the famous music hall in Düsseldorf,"⁴⁰⁵ a message repeated in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* after the first public meeting of the Committee.⁴⁰⁶

The selection of the Tonhalle as the model for Amsterdam's concert hall seems, in retrospect, to be a hasty decision. After all, what other concert halls had the committee considered as models for their concert hall? It seems that for the Committee, the Tonhalle was not just a concert hall; it was an idea of musical culture. By imitating this building, what the patrons of the Concertgebouw sought to imitate was an idea of musical culture. Other than the details contained in Hayward's letter, in all of the references to the Tonhalle found in the Committee's communications, the Tonhalle is not described as a specific building that had characteristics that made it distinct from other concert halls. Rather, it was a symbol of the best qualities of German musical culture.

On March 28, 1882, a letter appeared in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* that forced the committee, and Cuypers, to re-consider using the Kaisersaal as the model for

⁴⁰⁵ GAA, archive 1089, no.73 (Circular no.1)

⁴⁰⁶ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 8, 1882.

Amsterdam's new concert hall. The author of the letter was W.F. Thooft (1829-1900), a well-known Dutch composer and former editor of *Caecilia*. Thooft writes that he was surprised to read that the committee would model Amsterdam's new concert hall on the Kaisersaal. Having lived in Düsseldorf for five years, Thooft was quite familiar with this hall and reported that it would be an unfortunate model because it contains, "a flaw that cannot be repaired...poor acoustics."⁴⁰⁷

Thooft takes this as an opportunity to provide the committee with advice as to a design that would lead to good acoustics. He writes that the biggest concern should be the shape of the hall. Square and rectangular rooms are fine for smaller audiences (600 people), but larger audiences require either a very long hall (which would result in a depreciation of sound quality) or the addition of galleries, which would be a dangerous acoustic experiment in square-shaped concert halls. Besides these potential acoustic problems, Thooft does not like the way sound behaves in square and rectangular rooms:

The science of acoustics is still far too uncertain to be able to point out with certainty what the causes of poor sound quality are, but one can easily assume, as in the case before us, that whether or not the architects tread with care, there are nooks and crannies in the space in front of the orchestra in which the sound gets stuck.⁴⁰⁸

The solution to these problems is to do away with all square and rectangular designs and concentrate on oval or circular halls:

In the case of very large concert halls (like the one that is going to be built in Amsterdam), I think the round shape is the preferable option. Only this shape can solve the problem of combining space and quality of sound in a satisfactory way. A round room has the great advantage

⁴⁰⁷ "...dat de genoemde zaal een enorm en zoo goed als onherstelbaar gebrek heeft, t.w. een slechten klank." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 28, 1882.

⁴⁰⁸ "De acoustiek is nog een veel te onzekere wetenschap, om alle oorzaken van slechten klank met juistheid te kunnen aangeven doch men mag gereedelijk veronderstellen, dat is het onderhavige geval, ook al is de bouwmeester voorzichtig, tegenover het orkest hoeken en gaten ontstaan, waarin het geluid blijft steken." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 28, 1882.

that even when it is big, the distance the sound has to travel remains reasonably short.⁴⁰⁹

Because Amsterdam already has an excellent oval concert hall in the Felix Meritis building, the architect of Amsterdam's new concert hall should simply multiply the diameter of this hall until it meets the design requirements.

Thooft offers one more suggestion to ensure good acoustics, "Experience has shown that the concert halls which have the best acoustics are the ones with walls that are not in immediate contact with the outside air, but have a hollow space around them."⁴¹⁰ In this regard, Thooft points out that both the Felix Meritis and Leipzig's Altes Gewandhaus—buildings known for good acoustics—have hallways that surround the hall itself.

This letter drew attention to a fact the committee had overlooked in their championing of the Tonhalle—Hayward's recommendation was not based on acoustics. Hayward did not clarify anything about the sound of the Kaisersaal. Rather, as Lansink points out, he was impressed by the simplicity, practicality, and overall prettiness of the interior.⁴¹¹ In other words, Hayward used his eyes to judge the Kaisersaal and Thooft used his ears.

Thooft's suggestion was a useful reminder that if the committee was serious about building a new concert hall, they would need to consider acoustics. For this, they

⁴⁰⁹ "De heeren bouwmeesters zullen dus voortaan bij het bouwen van concertzalen al wat hoekig is vaarwel moeten zeggen en een keuze moeten doen tusschen den ovalen en den cirkelronden vorm. Voor zeer groote zalen, zooals die aan de Van Baerlestraat zal moeten worden gebouwd, komt mij de laatstgenoemde vorm, de cirkelronde, het verkieslijkst voor. Deze vorm is de eenig geschikte, om het zoo moeilijke vraagstuk, vereeniging van groote ruimte met goeden klank, bevredigend te kunnen oplossen. Al dadelijk springt het belangrijke voordeel in het oog, dat in eene ronde zaal, ook al is die groot, de geluidslijn van het orkestfront af gemeten, altijd betrekkelijk kort blijft, terwijl het aanbrengen van galerijen hier geen bijzonder gevaar voor den klank oplevert." *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 28, 1882.

⁴¹⁰ De ondervinding heeft geleerd, dat die concertzalen het best klinken, wier muren niet onmiddellijk met de buitenlucht in aanraking komen, maar geheel en al omsloten zijn door een holle ruimte. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 28, 1882.

⁴¹¹ Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch gezien," 36.

needed to consider concert halls other than the Tonhalle. Thooft was hardly an architect, but he was a well-known musician and critic, and for the committee, his expertise and experience had a great deal of influence on the prospective design of the Concertgebouw. This influence was evident in the first program for the design contest, which was sent to the participating architects on June 9, 1882. Unique to this program was the request that the large concert hall be oval shaped.⁴¹² Prior to Thooft's letter, Cuypers's proposed designs contained a square or rectangular hall.

Shortly after coming up with this program, a meeting was called by the jury's architectural experts to reconsider the program's requirements. It was decided that another program would be drawn up. This final program, dated July 20, 1882, did not specify what shape the large hall should take. This key design decision would be left to the architect's imagination. The only requirement, other than adhering to the size of the land, was that there should be space for 2000 seats and the stage should hold 120 musicians and 500 singers. Thooft's influence was still present, though, as the measurements and shape of the small hall was to be based on the hall in the Felix Meritis. Other than these requirements, this final program is notable for its limited demands.⁴¹³

7.3. The Design Contest

The opportunity to design and build a concert hall in the Dutch capital was highly desired. Many famous Dutch architects jumped at the chance: J.H. van Sluijters, whose oeuvre included the Dutch and Swedish embassies in Paris, offered an existing design to the committee that he had on file; A.C. Bleijs, a renowned architect of churches, was willing to receive his wages in shares of Het Concertgebouw NV if he was given the

⁴¹² NAI, archive CUBA, g192. See also, Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch bezien," 37; Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 74.

⁴¹³ Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch bezien," 37; Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 75.

commission to design the Concertgebouw.⁴¹⁴ The committee turned down these offers and announced that the design would be decided by a private contest between five well-known Amsterdam architects: A.L. van Gendt, G.B. Salm, Th. G. Schill, C. Muysken, and Th. Sanders.⁴¹⁵ Van Gendt's design eventually prevailed, but not without a certain degree of intrigue and controversy.

In June of 1882, the jury for the contest was officially named: Sillem, von Ogtrop, Koopmans, and Joosten would represent the board of Het Concertgebouw N.V and three architects would serve as architectural experts, J.L. Springer, I. Gosschalk, and P.J.H. Cuypers. Interestingly, none of the architectural experts had any experience designing or building a concert hall. Another architect, De Kruijff, was asked to be part of the jury, but he declined because three of his friends (Muysken, Schill, and Sanders) were participants and he was familiar with their style. In a letter to the board of Het Concertgebouw NV, Muysken and Sanders wrote that what applied to De Kruijff should also be applied to Cuypers, Springer, and Gosschalk because in the small circle of Amsterdam architects, objectivity would be an illusion. Sanders and Muysken suggested adding two more members to the jury who would be appointed by the contestants themselves. This suggestion was not entirely unreasonable, as van Gendt (the eventual winner) had worked closely with Cuypers during the construction of Centraal Station and some believed that Cuypers would be able to recognize his style.⁴¹⁶

The architects were required to submit their designs by October 1, 1882 at which time each jury member would keep the designs for five days before compiling a report.⁴¹⁷ It was also arranged that in January 1883, before a decision was announced, the

⁴¹⁴ Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 75

⁴¹⁵ Interestingly, van Gendt and Salm were invited to participate in the design contest for Amsterdam's Vrije Gemeente (Free Congregation Hall) in 1879, which Salm won. Although the hall was commissioned and used for a religious group, in 1965 it became a music venue known as the Paradiso, a popular rock music venue in Amsterdam. Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 75.

⁴¹⁶ Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 74; Jan Taat, *Amsterdam Heeft het Concertgebouw* (Amsterdam: Het Parool, 1985), 35.

⁴¹⁷ Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 74; this was also announced in *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 2 no.42 (October 19, 1882): 419.

designs would be exhibited to the public in the Maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae (Artist's Society) building in Amsterdam.

Overall, the jury was unimpressed by all of the designs and concluded that none of the architects had met their expectations. Van Gendt designed a rectangular hall with rounded corners that the jury felt was too wide (35m) in relation to its length (42m). As well, the flat ceiling of the large hall was rejected because it would lead to poor acoustics.⁴¹⁸ Salm's large hall was rectangular, and like van Gendt's was rejected for being too wide (33m x 42m). As well, the jury noted that the galleries/balconies extended too far (11m), a feature that would lead to poor acoustics. Salm's design for the small hall was rejected because it had a glass ceiling, which the jury dismissed for acoustic reasons. Muysken's design was perhaps the most unique of the five: the large hall was oval with a glass ceiling, encircled by 21 real doors and two fake doors. Acoustically and stylistically, the jury felt that Muysken's design was quite limited. Sanders proposed an almost square hall with rounded corners. The dimensions of this hall (33m. x 32m.) were approved by the jury. However, the rest of Sanders's design (façade, interior, the design of the small hall) fell far below expectations. Schill also designed a square hall, but with galleries that were too large and a ceiling that was not conducive to good acoustics.⁴¹⁹

The architectural critics who attended the exhibition at the Arti et Amicitiae were also critical of the proposed designs. In *De Opmerker*, the designs were described as "uninspired."⁴²⁰ Salm's design was "unarguably the best plan," Muysken's "peculiar" oval hall was considered the worst, and van Gendt's was the most economical in regards to the available budget. However, the review concluded that this private contest had not

⁴¹⁸ Of the original designs, only van Gendt's were kept. NAI, archive ACON pf2.

⁴¹⁹ GAA, archive 1089, no. 990. See also: Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch bezien," 38; Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 76-79; Lydia Lansink and Jan Taat, *van Dolf van Gendt naar Bernard Haitink: Negentig jaar Concertgebouw en Concertgebouworkest 1888-1878* (Amsterdam: Het Concertgebouw NV, 1979), 22-23; Taat, *Amsterdam Heeft het Concertgebouw*, 34-38.

⁴²⁰ "Bij eene aandachtige beschouwing der ontwerpen trok het onze aandacht, dat geen der vijf geachte inzenders bijzonder geïnspireerd scheen geweest te zijn." *De Opmerker*, 18 no.3 (January 20, 1883): 23.

provided the expected results and perhaps an open contest would have attracted better designs. The *Bouwkundig Weekblad* identified Schill's design as the best because it met the requirements stipulated in the contest program better than the other submissions.⁴²¹

Faced with five inadequate designs, the jury decided that the architects of what they considered to be the two best designs—van Gendt's and Salm's—would be invited to submit revised designs. The three other architects protested this decision in a letter that was published in two Dutch architectural journals, *De Opmerker* and *Bouwkundig Weekblad*.⁴²² Salm, Schill, and Muysken wrote that they would like the designs judged by five expert arbiters, two selected by Salm, Schill, and Muysken, two selected by the committee, and one agreed upon by all parties. In response, the committee argued that the designs were examined thoroughly and precisely by the architectural experts on the jury and that the jury's decision was final.⁴²³

On April 6, 1883, A.L. van Gendt's revised design was declared the winner of the contest. Van Gendt's design responded to the jury's comments regarding his first design. He made the large hall narrower, longer, and higher, and replaced the flat ceiling with one that was made up of ornately detailed stucco arches and other protruding lines that gave the ceiling an acoustic quality the judges felt was desirable.⁴²⁴ Salm's revised plan confused the jury. Instead of revising his original design, he submitted an entirely new design that was an exact replica of van Gendt's first design!⁴²⁵

Although it was clear to the jury that van Gendt was the winner, declaring his design the winner was suspicious. To ensure that the jury members did not know whose design was whose, they were submitted with mottos, not names; van Gendt's motto was Apollo and Salm's was a Treble Clef. After the revised designs were submitted, the jury

⁴²¹ *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 3 no.3 (January 18, 1883): 14-16.

⁴²² *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 3 no.5 (February 1, 1883): 30; *De Opmerker*, 18 no.5 (February 3, 1883): 51. GAA, archive 1089, no. 989.

⁴²³ *De Opmerker*, 18 no.6 (February 10, 1883): 61.

⁴²⁴ NAI, archive ACON, pf1.

⁴²⁵ Taat, Amsterdam Heeft het Concertgebouw, 36.

were given two wax-sealed envelopes that had a motto on the outside and on the inside a slip of paper with the name of the architect. The plan was to select the best design, either Apollo or Treble Clef, and then open the envelope of the winner to discover which architect's design had won. This, however, was not necessary; to this day, both envelopes remain sealed in the archives of Het Concertgebouw NV.⁴²⁶ Commentators have speculated that because the jury did not open the envelopes, they knew in advance which architect was associated with each motto, contributing to the belief that from the beginning, this was not a fair contest.⁴²⁷

In 1890, van Gendt published detailed drawings of the Concertgebouw and with this a short essay about the building.⁴²⁸ What is unique about the Concertgebouw is its width, 27.7 m. As a point of comparison, of the shoebox concert halls with which the Concertgebouw is typically grouped, Boston's Symphony Hall is 22.9 m. wide and Vienna's Grosser Musikvereinsaal is 19.8 m; even the Kaisershall in the Tonhalle, a very wide hall, was only 24.2 m wide. These comparisons are interesting, but as van Gendt explained in his short essay, these halls did not influence the design of his Concertgebouw. It was Leipzig's Neue Gewandhaus that he sought to imitate, writing that he hoped that the Concertgebouw would become to the people of Amsterdam what the Gewandhaus is to the people of Leipzig.

Architecturally, there are many similarities between the Neue Gewandhaus and the Concertgebouw: The heating and ventilation systems are similar, the large hall in both buildings has rounded corners, similar placement of the staircases, the location of the small hall at the back of the building and the small hall itself was meant to imitate an older hall (the Felix Meritis in the case of the Concertgebouw and the Altes Gewandhaus in the case of the Neue Gewandhaus), and the construction of hallways that surrounded the large hall. But, there is one significant difference between the two buildings—size.

⁴²⁶ GAA, Archive 1089, no.989.

⁴²⁷ Taat, *Amsterdam Heeft het Concertgebouw*, 36.

⁴²⁸ A.L. van Gendt, *Concertgebouw te Amsterdam* (Arnhem: P. Gouda Quint, 1890); *De Bouwmeester*, 6 no.16 (1890).

The Concertgebouw was much wider than the Gewandhaus (19 m wide) and it could hold about 700 more people (1520 to 2200).⁴²⁹

Given these discrepancies, van Gendt's remark about the Concertgebouw becoming for Amsterdam what the Gewandhaus is for Leipzig was not intended as an architectural analogy. Referencing Leipzig, the most renowned musical city in Europe in the late nineteenth century, a city whose concert hall was widely considered to be one of the acoustically finest halls in Europe, was van Gendt's (and the board of Het Concertgebouw NV's) not-so-subtle hope that the establishment of the Concertgebouw would inaugurate a well-regarded, and lasting, classical musical culture in Amsterdam.

7.4. Amsterdam Becomes a Musical City

The inaugural concert in the Concertgebouw, which took place on April 11, 1888, began with "The Entry of the Guests" from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, followed by Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus from *Messiah*, Bach's *Orchestral Suite no.3 in D Major*, and "Autumn" from Haydn's *The Seasons*. The second part of the concert was a performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Reviews of the performance were overwhelmingly positive. The only complaints decried the lack of Dutch music on the program. In *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, Daniel de Lange wrote, "I think it is striking that at the inauguration of the Concertgebouw in the capital of Holland, there was not one work of Dutch origin...the front of the building features Sweelinck's bust and you can see his name in the hall, but his works seem to be hidden and kept safely under lock and

⁴²⁹ Lansink, "De akoestiek van het Concertgebouw historisch bezien," 39-40; Lansink, "Het Concertgebouw: Een drang tot hooger leven," 92-94; Taat, *Amsterdam Heeft het Concertgebouw*, 56-60.

key.”⁴³⁰ *De Amsterdammer* put it more bluntly: “The Concertgebouw is not a German ‘Tonhalle’ on Dutch soil!”⁴³¹

These nationalistic complaints were minor. The critics recognized that the significance of the evening was not the music. The critic from *Het Nieuws van den Dag* put it best when he wrote, “there is no serious music lover in the city who didn’t greet the beginning of this new era in the musical history of Amsterdam with interest, if not intense joy.”⁴³²

The transformation of Amsterdam’s musical culture accelerated after the opening of the Concertgebouw. Some of the credit for inaugurating this new era in the musical history of Amsterdam must go to Willem Kes (1856-1934). Kes, like the board of Het Concertgebouw NV who hired him, was an intermediary between the lofty ideals of musical romanticism and the material reality of the Concertgebouw. Kes was appointed the first conductor and musical director of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1888, a position he held until 1895. Kes differentiated the Concertgebouw from other musical institutions in Amsterdam by imposing an unprecedented degree of discipline on both his orchestra and the audience. The orchestra was expected to display the professionalism and dedication of leading European orchestras, like the Meininger Hofkapell. Kes enforced this through measures such as fines for missing rehearsals or for talking during performances. The transformation that Kes was attempting to create was not without its detractors, as seen from the complaints in the letter that began this work. But it was not long before the behaviour of the audience was transformed. As de Boer writes, “waiters were banished from the auditorium—when the orchestra played there was to be no tea

⁴³⁰ “Ten eerste treft het mij, dat bij de inwijding van een Concertgebouw in de hoofdstad van Nederland, geen enkel werk ouderen of jongeren datum van een Nederlandsch kunstenaar waardig gekeurd werd op het programma eene plaats in te nemen. Wel is b.v. Sweelinck’s borstbeeld in ‘t front gebeiteld, wel neemt zijn naam een plaats in de zaal in, maar zijn werken houdt men, naar ‘t schijnt, zorgvuldig achter slot...” *Het Nieuws van den Dag* (April 16, 1888).

⁴³¹ “Het Concertgebouw is immers geene Duitsche “Tonhalle” op Nederlandschen bodem!” *De Amsterdammer* (April 15, 1888).

⁴³² “Er is en de stad geen ernstig muziekvriend, die niet met belangstellen, zoo niet innige vreugde, den aanvang begroet van een nieuw tijdvak in de muziekgeschiedenis van Amsterdam.” *Het Nieuws van de Dag* (April 13, 1888).

drinking, no strolling about, no chatting. The audience was to sit and listen attentively.”⁴³³ Kes succeeded in maintaining the ban on smoking during performances, and in 1890 made it a rule that the doors of the hall were to be kept shut during performances.⁴³⁴

The disciplining efforts of Willem Kes could have only occurred in a musical culture that recognized the authority and legitimacy of musical romanticism. Kes’s demands did not fall on deaf ears because they occurred within a horizon of listening expectations that had become a cultural norm in Amsterdam. In this way, the Concertgebouw, and the musical culture it mediated, was not the beginning of a new musical era in Amsterdam, it was the culmination of a process that can be traced back to the first issue of *Amphion*.

Kes’s achievements were noticed elsewhere and in 1895 he accepted a lucrative offer to become the conductor of the Glasgow symphony. Kes’s replacement was the highly regarded pianist and conductor from Utrecht, Willem Mengelberg (1871-1951). Mengelberg inherited a well-trained orchestra (and audience) from Kes that, in combination with the Concertgebouw, propelled Amsterdam into the ranks of the foremost musical cities in Europe. Beginning shortly after his appointment, Mengelberg invited prominent foreign composers to perform their works with his orchestra at the Concertgebouw. One of the first of these guest composers was Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) who in 1897 praised the Concertgebouw orchestra, calling “upon the Amsterdam public to be proud of possessing such an orchestra and always to hold it in high

⁴³³ Henrietta Posthuma de Boer, *Concertgebouw & Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra*, trans. Lynne Richards (Amsterdam: Ludion, 2003), 40; see also de Leur, “Amsterdam—A Courageous Community: Mahler’s Fifth Symphony and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra,” 78.

⁴³⁴ Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective Volume 3, 1900: The Age of Bourgeois Culture*, trans. Lynne Richards and John Rudge (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 472. For more on Willem Kes’s disciplining efforts and the transformation of Amsterdam’s musical culture, see Jan Taat, “Willem Kes: zeven roerige jaren van het Concertgebouworkest,” *Ons Amsterdam*, 30 no.5 (May 1978): 147-154.

esteem.”⁴³⁵ In the same year, Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was so pleased with his experience in Amsterdam that he dedicated his symphonic tone poem *Ein Heldenleben* (which had its world premiere in the Concertgebouw in 1899) to the Concertgebouworkest.

Of all of the guests whom Mengelberg invited, composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) had the greatest association with both Amsterdam and the Concertgebouw.⁴³⁶ There was a special affinity between Mahler and Amsterdam’s musical culture. Speaking in 1910 with his friend, the musician and writer Otto Neitzel, Mahler claimed that Amsterdam was a musical city where “I am completely understood – by the conductor, by the orchestra, by the public.”⁴³⁷ Mahler first visited Amsterdam in 1903 to conduct the Concertgebouworkest’s performance of his Third Symphony and in a letter to his wife, Alma, proclaimed: “The musical culture in this country is *stupendous!* The way the people can just listen!”⁴³⁸ After returning to Vienna, Mahler was so impressed that he wrote to Mengelberg that Amsterdam had become a second home for him.⁴³⁹ Mahler returned in 1904 to conduct his Second and Fourth Symphonies; the Fourth actually performed twice in the same evening. Mahler could not contain his pleasure and wrote to his wife Alma, “I am truly delighted by the people here. Just imagine the program for Sunday: I. Fourth Symphony by G.Mahler, Interval, II. Fourth Symphony by G.Mahler. What do you think of that?!”⁴⁴⁰ Mahler returned to the Concertgebouw in 1906 to hear Mengelberg conduct the Fifth Symphony and in 1909 he returned to conduct his Seventh Symphony.

⁴³⁵ Jos Wouters, “Musical Performers,” in *Music in Holland: A Review of Contemporary Music in the Netherlands*, ed. Eduard Reeser (Amsterdam: J.H. Meulenhoff, 1959), 55.

⁴³⁶ On the relationship between Mahler and the Concertgebouw, see: Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler: The World Listens* (Haarlem: TEMA Uitgevers, 1995); Donald Mitchell, *New Sounds, New Century: Mahler’s Fifth Symphony and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra* (Bossum: Thoth, 1997).

⁴³⁷ Truus de Leur, “Gustav Mahler in the Netherlands,” in *Gustav Mahler: The World Listens*, ed. Donald Mitchell (Haarlem: TEMA Uitgevers, 1985), 15.

⁴³⁸ de Leur, “Gustav Mahler in the Netherlands,” 18.

⁴³⁹ Knud Martner, *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, trans. E. Wilkins, E. Kaiser, and B. Hopkins (New York: Farrer Straus & Giroux, 1979), 273.

⁴⁴⁰ de Leur, “Gustav Mahler in the Netherlands,” 22; Bank and van Buuren, “Dutch Culture in a European Perspective,” 469.

Mahler died in 1911, thirty years after the destruction of the Parkzaal and the publication of Hayward's widely discussed article suggesting a new concert hall would solve Amsterdam's musical malaise. Between 1888 and 1911, Amsterdam became widely known as a musical city on par with other musical capitals in Europe and North America. Audience behaviour typical of beer concerts was replaced by attentive listening, the mix of amateur and professional musicians that made up many Amsterdam orchestras was replaced by a professional orchestra, and most importantly, unsuitable second-rate venues were replaced by a purpose-built concert hall.

7.5. Conclusion: Media, Listening, and the Meaning of Music

In 1888, the meaning of the Concertgebouw as a medium of musical culture was debated in the pages of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Whether the Concertgebouw should be home to a musical culture familiar from the concerts at the Parkzaal or the Paleis voor Volksvlijt, or whether it should be home to a more serious musical culture, was disputed between two music lovers (Muziek liefhebbers). The letter from *Een Muziek liefhebber Teven Aandeelhouder* argued that an expectation of attentive listening was out of touch with what the majority of Amsterdam music lovers wanted. Music, for the audience members that *Een Muziek liefhebber Teven Aandeelhouder* represented, was entertainment; a pleasant soundtrack to the socializing and imbibing that was the real attraction for concertgoers. *Een Muziek liefhebber* disagreed with this, arguing that orchestral music is a serious art and deserves the full attention of the audience. If Amsterdammers wanted to be entertained, there were plenty of venues that catered to this type of musical culture. The Concertgebouw should be a monument to an idea of music where attentive listening would be the norm, and so it would be a waste to transform it into yet another raucous social club where the performance and reception of music was relegated to the background.

The debate between these two music lovers is a debate about the meaning of music. When we talk about types of listening behaviour, we are talking about what we consider the meaning of music to be. The demand that audiences listen attentively is an argument for music to be treated as a serious art form capable of transcendent aesthetic

experiences. Alternatively, the demand that the Concertgebouw be more favourable to socializing is an argument that the meaning of music is realized through the corporeal pleasures and enthusiasms that music can inspire.

That the Concertgebouw could mediate either of these two musical cultures is evidence of the social contingency of technology. But identifying this social contingency is not enough for a proper social theory of technology. A social theory of technology requires explaining why one design or one meaning triumphed over other designs or meanings. The answer to this question means identifying the social and cultural objectives that shape, and are reproduced, in technical design and then tracing the origins of these objectives. This social and cultural contextualization endows technologies with a history that potentially spans decades and centuries, a perspective on technology that can add to our knowledge of why we have the technologies we do.

Coda: Attentive Listening, High Fidelity, and the Future of Music

If at some later point, instead of doing a "history of ideas," one were to read the state of the cultural spirit [Geist] off of the sundial of human technology, then the prehistory of gramophone could take on an importance that might eclipse that of many a famous composer.

- Theodor Adorno, 1934

This dissertation developed out of an interest in the relationship between media history and Western musical culture, and to conclude this work I want to return to this topic. In particular, I want to outline a very rudimentary history of the technical mediation of listening that begins in the nineteenth century and continues into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is a history where there is no abrupt technical break between the era of recorded music and the era that preceded it, a history where the listening experience mediated by the concert hall can be identified in the listening experiences mediated by different configurations of recorded music. Freed from the conceptual and methodological obligation to define every new medium of musical culture as a technological revolution, it becomes possible to identify trends that occur over long

periods of time, which, in turn, enables a critique of technological progress specific to the technical mediation of listening.

The technical code of attentive listening originated in musical romanticism and was materialized in the purpose-built concert halls that were constructed in European and North American cities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The legacy of the technical code of attentive listening is the quest for fidelity that influenced the design and meaning of forms of recorded sound throughout the twentieth century.

Beginning in the early part of the twentieth century, recordings became the primary media for the technical mediation of listening to music. The majority of these media forms were designed and made meaningful as musical media through an expectation of audio fidelity. Although fidelity was an issue during the early years of recorded music, it was not until Edison introduced his diamond discs in 1913 that the technical code of attentive listening was explicitly materialized in recorded music as an expectation of fidelity. Once Edison realized that the future of recorded sound was in music, and that his cylinders were an inferior product to Berliner's discs, he set about creating the best possible disc and the best possible machine for playing discs. Best, for Edison, was measured through audio fidelity. Edison's diamond discs were acoustically superior to any other machine on the market, a fact that Edison exploited in advertising campaigns and in his famous "tone-tests."⁴⁴¹ These tests, which occurred between 1915 and 1920, took place in concert halls and consisted of a singer singing with a diamond disc. At times, the recording would stop, and the audience would only hear the singer. At other times, the singer would stop, and the audience would only hear the recording, demonstrating the fidelity of these discs for the audience. At a certain point, the lights would dim, the singer would stop singing, and the audience would have to guess what they were hearing: the singer or the recording.

⁴⁴¹Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877-1977*, 2nd ed. New York: Collier McMillan Publishers, 1977, 192-195; Oliver Read and Walter L. Welch, *From Tin Foil to Stereo: Evolution of the Phonograph*. Indianapolis: Howard W. Sams & Co., 1959, 189-219; Emily Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no.1 (Spring 1995): 131-171.

Edison's tone-tests and his marketing campaigns for the diamond discs were an attempt to use the acoustic standards of the concert hall performance to judge the quality of recorded music. Locating these tone tests in concert halls like Boston's Symphony Hall and New York's Carnegie Hall indicated that Edison's discs were a medium of serious musical culture. As Emily Thompson writes, Edison was appealing to "the cultural pretensions of a certain segment of the population, and the external trappings of the tone test—"high class" location, European "classical" music on the program—were enough to satisfy those pretensions."⁴⁴² Consumers were being taught to listen to recorded music in a way that mimicked the attentive listening found in the concert hall. And, just as nineteenth-century music critics convinced bourgeois listeners that attentive listening was a disposition demanded by instrumental music, in the twentieth century, advertisers convinced middle-class listeners that quality was measured through fidelity and that attentive listening was the only way to gauge the quality of recorded music.

A technical code of fidelity rooted in attentive listening and musical romanticism was part of the context that led to the development and success of the high-fidelity long-playing (LP) microgroove record in 1948. The LP was a technical solution to the problems that beset the classical music tastes of engineers at CBS who wished to listen to the full movements of symphonies in stereo sound without changing shellac-based 78-rpm recordings every 3 or 4 minutes.⁴⁴³

As Andre Millard writes, a survey of music consumers conducted shortly after the introduction of the LP revealed that the LP was enthusiastically welcomed by customers who, "tended to be of above-average income and interested in classical music...a group of people devoted to collecting and listening to records and who were willing to pay any price for improved sound reproduction."⁴⁴⁴ These were audiophiles, the guardians of

⁴⁴² Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity," 155.

⁴⁴³ Reebe Garofalo, "From Music Publishing to MP3: Music and Industry in the Twentieth Century," *American Music* (Fall 1999): 334.

⁴⁴⁴ Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208.

fidelity. For audiophiles, the standard against which recorded sound was measured was a concert of live, un-amplified music; a standard, Aden Evens points out, that privileges a particular kind of music: “although most “world music” is unamplified and acoustic, its contribution to the standard of fidelity is minimal compared with the institutionalized standard of the European art music tradition. Schematically speaking, according to the audiophile community, every good recording should sound like Beethoven played live: fidelity=*Fidelio*.”⁴⁴⁵

Fidelity and the culture of attentive listening were influential in transforming the meaning of rock music in the 1960s. Rock ‘n’ roll, as it was originally conceived in the 1950s and early 1960s, was music for kids, a means to a profitable end for record companies. Once rock fans reached a certain age, it was expected that their tastes would change and they would begin listening to more serious music, like classical, folk, or jazz. As Michael Coyle and Jon Dolan write in their history of authenticity and rock music, “Rock ‘n’ Roll throughout the second half of the fifties was party music: music to dance to, music to love to, music to dream to. It was not concerned with its legitimacy as culture; it was not troubled by questions of legitimacy at all.”⁴⁴⁶ Rock became a serious art form in the mid-1960s, and with this new seriousness came a dedication to creating sonically sophisticated recordings. Beginning with Phil Spector’s wall of sound (his self-proclaimed “symphonies for children”) and continuing through *Pet Sounds*, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and *Electric Ladyland*, these media of rock culture were self-aware sonic artifacts designed for attentive listening.⁴⁴⁷ Writing about their post-1966 sound, Tim Blanning writes that the Beatles turned rock from, “a medium for lifting people up and helping them dance their blues away,” to “a music of introspective

⁴⁴⁵ Aden Evens, *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 7. For more on audiophile culture, see: Joseph O’Connell, “The Fine-Tuning of a Golden Ear: High End Audio and the Evolutionary Model of Technology.” *Technology and Culture* 33, no.1 (January 1992): 1-37.

⁴⁴⁶ Michael Coyle & Jon Doyle, “Modeling Authenticity, Authenticating Commercial Models,” in *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics*, eds. Kevin Dettmar & William Richey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28.

⁴⁴⁷ Virgil Moorefield, *The Producer as Composer: Shaping the Sounds of Popular Music* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

self-absorption, a medium fit for communicating autobiographical intimacies, political discontents, spiritual elevation, inviting an audience, not to dance, but to listen—quietly, attentively, thoughtfully.”⁴⁴⁸ Although the rock music culture of the 1960s was 150 years removed from the musical culture of Wackenroder and Hoffmann, the cultural horizon that transformed the meaning of rock from party music to serious music was as useful to the Beatles as it was for Beethoven’s instrumental music.

In the 1960s, attentive listening not only shaped the meaning of rock music, it became a political disposition. In 1969, another debate concerning listening and the meaning of music took place against the backdrop of the Concertgebouw. This time, the debate was between two competing ideas of what constituted progressive and democratic musical culture. The incident that triggered this debate was the disruption, and premature halt, of Karlheinz Stockhausen’s performance of his composition *Stimmung*.⁴⁴⁹ The disruption consisted of loud applause, rowdy booing, shouting, laughter, and eventually, calls for quiet. The perpetrators of this disruption were composition students from the Amsterdam Conservatory who sought to make the musical experience inside of the Concertgebouw more conducive to audience participation. According to one of the noisemakers, theirs was an “impulsive reaction” to join in with the music, an initiative premised on the belief that the spirit of Stockhausen’s composition encouraged breaking the rules of concert hall decorum so as to enable the work to become “a true celebration of communicativity.”⁴⁵⁰ Clearly, Stockhausen did not agree with this interpretation and walked off the stage shortly after the disruptions began.

The idea of participation that had influenced these students was part of the larger counterculture movement that had taken hold of Amsterdam in the late 1960s. For some of the anarchists and hippies that constituted Amsterdam’s counterculture, the

⁴⁴⁸ Tim Blanning, *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 121.

⁴⁴⁹ Robert Adlington, “Tuning in and Dropping Out: The Disturbance of the Dutch Premiere of Stockhausen’s *Stimmung*,” *Music & Letters*, 90 no.1.

⁴⁵⁰ Adlington, “Tuning in and Dropping Out,” 97-98.

disturbance in the Concertgebouw was nothing less than a struggle to democratize musical culture against a form of exclusion that smacked of authoritarianism.⁴⁵¹

Ironically, it was a cadre of avante-garde Dutch composers—Louis Andriessen, Reinbert de Leeuw, Misha Mengelberg, and Peter Schat—who had strong ties to the radical left that led the attack against the motives and actions of the students. For these composers, the students were not on the side of participation and democracy. As Peter Schat explained in the debate that followed Stockhausen’s departure:

You want the whole hall to participate? You’ve achieved precisely the opposite...How can you participate if you don’t know the notion behind the piece?...You deprive people of their own way of participating, which is by listening.⁴⁵²

Schat’s appeal to attentive listening was premised on the idea that the only way to hear the progressive elements in music was by listening attentively. Thus, by disrupting the concert, the proponents of democracy who wished for audience participation had, inadvertently, prevented the ability to hear the potentially progressive, and political, nature of Stockhausen’s composition. As Adlington explains, for Schat, as it was for his fellow composers, silent attentive listening was necessary to hear the progressive elements in music:

In order properly to assess the composer’s contribution to music’s ‘development’, silent audition was a prerequisite. Unexpected noises risked obscuring the innovative particularities of the musical conception, and were thus unacceptable.⁴⁵³

Following the Dutch composers who were on the (traditionally conservative) side of attentive listening and concert hall decorum, the Concertgebouw, properly used, is a medium of musical culture where attentive listening is an aesthetic disposition and a political tool.

⁴⁵¹ Adlington, “Tuning in and Dropping Out,” 98.

⁴⁵² Adlington, “Tuning in and Dropping Out,” 99.

⁴⁵³ Adlington, “Tuning in and Dropping Out,” 109.

In a 1970 interview, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse adopted this same stance towards the music of Bob Dylan. After stating that Dylan's protest music signified, "the most radical stage of contemporary popular music," he took exception to the interviewer's disdainful remark that at Dylan concerts, "the people just sat there. There was no unification of experience."⁴⁵⁴

Marcuse: No, that is not essential. I believe in the effect of listening in silence...is there anything wrong with sitting there and listening in silence? Dylan's lyrics stick. They have contributed to changing people's minds as well their senses. At no point is the political impact of his songs lost, while in these "rock festivals" almost all such impact has disappeared.⁴⁵⁵

This interpretation of the mode and function of listening and the meaning of music is similar to the one developed by Theodor Adorno. Adorno expands on Marcuse's insights and presents a critical theory of listening developed for instrumental music. For Adorno, the subversive nature of music can only be realized through music that confronts the listener's expectations. Music must challenge the listener by containing within it a dynamic tension between the new and the recognizable. The basis of all social critique is recognizing the difference between what is and what can be. This dynamic tension can be expressed through instrumental music more forcefully, and with more immediacy, than it can in any other art form. But for this to occur, the listener must listen carefully, must "come to the aid" of that which "cannot be traced back and

⁴⁵⁴ "Interview with Marcuse," *Street Journal & San Diego Free Press* 2, no.22 issue 48 (April 17-23, 1970): 11.

⁴⁵⁵ "Interview with Marcuse," 11.

subsumed under the configuration of the known.”⁴⁵⁶ Only through attentive listening can the listener recognize the dialectic between the recognizable and the new.

Adorno argues that under capitalism, the dynamic between the new and the familiar is rarely developed, let alone audible. Most contemporary music does not challenge listeners. Instead, it delivers what they already know, “recognition becomes an end instead of a means.”⁴⁵⁷ Fed a diet of predictable music, listeners become unable, and unwilling, to listen to anything other than what they already know and recognize.

Listeners were introduced to digital music in 1982 with the release of a new configuration of recorded music, the Compact Disc (CD). Although the CD was initially the scourge of the audiophile community,⁴⁵⁸ the CD, like the LP before it, was designed to maximize fidelity, which appealed to classical music listeners much more than rock fans. For some rock listeners, the LP was the ideal medium of rock, and the CD would always be an inauthentic form of the music they loved.

⁴⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, “On Popular Music,” in *Essays on Music*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 2002), 453. See also Richard Leppert, who writes: “Within a work, the recognized and the new function in a state of productive tension, each informing the other, the result of which is expression, which serves as the intersubjective link between composer, performer, and listener. The new constitutes difference and spontaneity, in essence: agency. But the new ultimately both means and matters only in relation to the old. It builds from what is already known and by that means transforms the old, thereby providing the subject with an insight at once personal, historical, historically critical, and of the present: an engagement with the here and now.” Richard Leppert, “Commentary: Music and Mass Culture,” in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, p.343.

⁴⁵⁷ Adorno, “On Popular Music,” 453. See also: Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29-61; Richard Leppert, “Music Pushed to the Edge of Existence (Adorno, Listening and the Question of Hope).” *Critical Inquiry* 60, (2005): 92-133.

⁴⁵⁸ O’Connell, “The Fine-Tuning of a Golden Ear,” 26-35; “Eric W. Rothenbuhler and John Durham Peters, “Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory,” *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no.2 (1991): 242-264.

Given this resistance, it was not unusual, as John Corbett points out, that “compact discs experienced their first wholesale takeover in classical music.”⁴⁵⁹ The reason for this, he suggests, is the similarity between the aesthetic autonomy applied to the works of the classical canon and the pursuit of sonic autonomy pre-supposed by digital technology:

The compact disc is the latest in a long line of audiophilic devices in the history of the attempt to eliminate the long-standing enemies of “fidelity” in playback: surface noise, scratch, hum, and hiss. To render music free of noise is to grant it its proper musical status as sonically autonomous.⁴⁶⁰

This brings us to the latest configuration of digital music used for listening to music, the mp3. The mp3, unlike the concert hall, 78, LP, or the CD is designed for hearing, not hearing and listening. Jonathan Sterne writes that as a medium of musical culture, the mp3 is designed according to psychoacoustic principles:

The key point is that while traditionally, sound reproduction technologies have been theorized in terms of their relation to absolute fidelity to a sound source, the human ear is not capable of such fine distinctions. In fact, people can lose most of the vibrations in a recorded sound and still hear it as roughly the same sound as the version with no data compression. This is the principle upon which the mp3 rests...mp3s use psychoacoustic principles to get rid of the sounds we supposedly would not hear anyways.⁴⁶¹

The mp3 compresses music so that seemingly inaudible sounds are removed from the recording to make it smaller and easier to store, transport, and distribute. But, as Sterne writes, removing these supposed inaudible sounds has an audible result: : “mp3s do not sound the same as the CD recordings.”⁴⁶² The mp3, as medium intended to mediate listening to music, requires a great deal of acoustic compromise. Following

⁴⁵⁹ John Corbett, “Free, Single, and Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular Music Object,” in *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 41.

⁴⁶⁰ Corbett, “Free, Single, and Disengaged,” 41.

⁴⁶¹ Jonathan Sterne, “The mp3 as Cultural Artifact.” *New Media & Society* 8, no.5 (2006), 834.

⁴⁶² Sterne, “The mp3 as Cultural Artifact,” 835.

Sterne, the mp3 is designed “for massive exchange, casual listening, and massive accumulation.”⁴⁶³ It is designed so that “portability and ease of acquisition” are more important than the listening experience.⁴⁶⁴ Listening, from the design perspective of contemporary configurations of recorded music, is only peripherally considered an aspect of musical culture.

From this perspective, the significance of the mp3 is not portability, storage, or distribution, but the listening experience pre-supposed in its design. The slow decline of attentive listening, whose cultural origins can be found in what Raymond Williams calls the culture of mobile privatization, was materialized in transistor radios, cassettes, car stereos, and now, the mp3. Although the mp3 is the predominant form of music being listened to today, it would be too dramatic, and technologically deterministic, to claim that the mp3 marks the end of musical romanticism as the cultural context through which music acquires its meaning. Musicians and music lovers, Richard Taruskin writes, have lived under the iron rule of romanticism since Hoffmann’s Beethoven review appeared in 1810.⁴⁶⁵ Musical romanticism endures to this day in the cult of the musical celebrity, the idea of timeless musical works that constitute a recognizable canon, and the presumed aesthetic superiority of music.

Following Marcuse, Adorno, and a few avante-garde Dutch composers, if the waning of fidelity corresponds with the waning of attentive listening, then music is in danger of becoming increasingly unchallenging and listless. A musical culture where the technologies designed to mediate listening are no longer influenced by attentive listening is a musical culture where music is in danger of becoming nothing more than a series of meaningless and disposable aural stimuli. Thinking about the mp3 as a technology that mediates listening (as opposed to storage or distribution) can encourage the re-integration of an ideal of listening into new designs for media intended for listening to music. In this way, listening attentively, and thinking seriously about music, can

⁴⁶³ Sterne, “The mp3 as Cultural Artifact,” 838.

⁴⁶⁴ Sterne, “The mp3 as Cultural Artifact,” 836.

⁴⁶⁵ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music Volume Two* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 651.

potentially open up new forms of media and new musical expressions that are now unimaginable.

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