

INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL THEORIES AND MUSICOLOGY

The Critical Theories Symposium presented at the University of the Free State (22-24 October 2003) provided an important forum for an intensive discussion of the relevance of critical theory for musicology in South Africa today. Apart from any disciplinary 'compartementalisation', the highly politicised premises of local music scholarship involve not only notions of difference and social boundary, but also organising hierarchies of a political and moral order. Thus, it is a research area urgently in need of continuously evolving critique of dogmatism, prejudice, and self-deception in all their forms. This was part of the important task of the symposium, providing a unique opportunity for navigating an intellectual terrain in which music no longer simply provides a marker in an ideologically pre-structured space, but one in which music also becomes the means by which this space may be transformed. It is a task that is reflected compellingly in this collection of scholarly articles resulting from the symposium, offering striking perspectives on a broad range of critical thought relevant to current musicology.

The articles collected here include scholarly contributions of experts from the field of critical theory, namely the international scholar Christopher Norris, a leading figure within the field, as well as the South African philosophers Johann Visagie and Bert Olivier. Arguing from different disciplinary vantage points, these scholars all investigate hitherto under-explored musicological possibilities of critical theory. Visagie demonstrates how tools of critical analysis may apply to critical theory and its uses (and abuses) in musicology. These tools amount to partial models of ideology theory, rationality theory, and to what he calls »conceptual key-formulas«. Certain deficiencies in critical theory (and its approach to music) are exposed, and note is taken of the special case of Derrida and deconstruction.

Christopher Norris continues this intensive line of investigation in his studious critique of aspects of the 'New Musicology' where deconstructionist ideas have been taken up and deployed in a manner that shows less than adequate regard for their primarily language-oriented context of valid application. He urges us not to take refuge in doctrinaire theories which reject the very notion of 'structural listening', along with those of thematic integration, tonal development, and 'the work' as an object of duly perceptive and keen-eared formal analysis, but rather to in-

investigate recent ideas in cognitive psychology as a counter to the textualist bias of 'deconstructive' music theory.

Bert Olivier attempts to show the significance for critical musicology of the work of the psychoanalytical poststructuralist thinker, Jacques Lacan. To that end Lacan's registers of the imaginary and the symbolic are elucidated. Lacan, it is argued, offers an understanding of intermittent emancipation from the potentially suffocating armour of the imaginary, which may also be understood in ideological terms. The potential fruitfulness of the Lacanian conception of the subject for the hermeneutic or ideology-critical dimension of musicology is furthermore explored.

The articles by Stephanus Muller, Shirli Gilbert and Martina Viljoen represent recent work by South African musicologists based on and/or examining critical theory. Muller considers the ambivalent disciplinary space occupied by music criticism, using as a point of reference the thought of Theodor Adorno. He investigates, among others, the position of the music critic vis-à-vis society as an enabling position for Adorno's so-called 'immanent' criticism by restating and interrogating important arguments in his essay in *Prisms*, 'Cultural Criticism and Society'.

Situated at the intersection between social history and musicology, Shirli Gilbert's article illuminates the distinctive ways in which musical texts can enrich our understanding of particular historical contexts or events. Gilbert is concerned with how music can be used in an interdisciplinary framework, and focuses on some of the key methodological issues underlying music's potential value as historical source material. Drawing on the example of music in the context of Nazi Germany, theoretical areas are suggested where productive disciplinary exchange might be found.

Martina Viljoen's paper is a reflection on the basic assumptions of cultural musicology itself, drawing mainly on the interpretative framework of ideology critique and metaphor analysis. Focussing on the 'gendered' poststructuralist theories of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, analytical tools adapted to the study of music as a complex ideological entity are introduced. These are consequently employed to elucidate the relative truths inherent in both absolutist and anti-rationalist models of musical meaning.

The literary scholar Michael Titlestad explores the thought of Michel de Certeau in a critical reading of Felix Laband's album *4/4 Down the Stairs*. Co-authored by Martina Viljoen, this article theorises Laband's use of the 'low-other' as festive critique. Second, the extent to which Laband's work registers as 'consumer music' is considered, while the final section of the article develops, more optimistically, a theory of 'subversive' agency through the ideas of Michel de Certeau. The argument both exemplifies and challenges some of the range of practices and protocols that are considered acceptable, even normative, within the South African musicological and cultural theory institution.

Suzanne Human's article on metaphors of excess, eruption and outburst is situated in the intersection among philosophy, literary criticism, and the history of art and visual culture. She argues that there are various basic orientations, persuasions and biases underlying specific uses of metaphors of somatic eruption. Her article endeavours to propose an alternative reading of body fluids as metaphoric sites of festive critique in subversively humorous discourse and art that differs from more prevalent psychoanalytic interpretations. Human's work strongly suggests that festive metaphors of explosion and eruption in music present an under-explored terrain of research beckoning critical investigation.

The Critical Theories Symposium offered opportunities for exploring less parochial disciplinary questions relevant to international scholarship, stimulating inter-disciplinary contact among a variety of disciplines. As an eminent example, Andrea Hurst's paper was not part of the symposium, but written afterwards in response to Johann Visagie's appraisal of Derrida. It is included in this collection of studies because Hurst offers important insights concerning Derrida and music. She stresses the importance of Derrida's thought for critical musicology that has to do with its power to address the dangers of ideological blindness that are the result of placing musicologists and/or artists strictly on opposite sides of the invention-convention coin.

The Critical Theories Symposium brought together scholars from diverse demographic, cultural, and academic backgrounds, all committed to a deepening of their knowledge regarding the topic. It is hoped that this collection of studies will stimulate a further exploration of critical theories and their relevance for current musicology, opening up also new possibilities for interdisciplinary dialogue.

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It is with sincere gratitude that the opportunity to publish this collection of papers in a special volume of IRASM is acknowledged. In view of the cultural isolation during the apartheid era which in turn led to the isolation of South African musicology — a situation which to date has not yet been fully overcome — the wider exposure of the conference proceedings to an international readership is invaluable to South African musicologists. In South African music scholarship today, it should be acknowledged that scientific social knowledge bears the imprint not only of broad civilisational and national culture, but also typically of the more specific class, race, gender or sexual orientation of its producers. Furthermore, the politics of scientific social thought are inextricably linked to its epistemology. The categories and explanations of critical theory construct social reality in a way which emphasises certain social processes and privileges of specific groups and social

agendas. Within the volatile context of our political past (and present), the establishment of a dialogue between heterogeneous local *and* international musicological 'communities' is therefore crucial for the survival of South African musicology.

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