

Semantics of Music Scholarship: Concepts True of All Music

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Abstract*

Philosophers of music and music theorists go their separate ways, sometimes disdainfully, ignoring the fact that they occupy common semantic ground: they both speak natural language. This fact acquires remarkable significance in the twentieth century due to the widespread interest in semantics of natural language on the part of scholars in a variety of subject-fields. For as formal semantics has advanced generally, the semantics of music scholarship (not only philosophy and theory, but also musicology, composition, aesthetics, and pedagogy) has not kept pace. It is possible to identify semantic errors widespread in the discourse of music scholarship that would be unacceptable in the scholarly literature on semantics, notably 1) a profound error in exemplification that renders generalizations about musical expression invalid, and 2) a profound error in extensional identity that renders knowledge claims about music incoherent. This semantic confusion has been unwittingly compounded as music scholarship has, over the past several decades, moved away from a Eurocentric perspective in attempting to define fundamental concepts true of the entire world's music. Multi-culturalists and traditionalists alike perpetuate the problem, because they all employ the same imprecise mix of technical and natural language. Clarity can only be achieved via a major semantic reform: the method of conceptual deduction, which correlates logic and semantics, synthesizing a precise language for music theorizing capable of correcting old errors and opening up new perspectives. Semantic errors in exemplification and extensional identity are demonstrated and dissected. Technical terminology is drawn from a variety of disciplines but clearly separated from those fields in order to create an analytical language unique to music scholarship. The "meta-language"/"object-language" confusion – widespread in the professional discourse – is disentangled. This thorough re-examination of scholarly talk centers the persistent debate about music's meaning on language about music rather than music itself, which has no semantic content to debate.

Volume 1 – *Formulating Concepts True of All Music* – comprises eight chapters of conceptual theory; Volume 2 – *Teaching Concepts True of All Music* – develops curricular principles enabling these concepts to be taught at any educational level.

For more information on Cantrick as well as access to the most complete version of his scholarly work, which he had intended to publish in book form before his death in 2006, readers may consult the following Web Site:

<http://cantrick-semantics-music.csdco.com>

** not by author, who died in April 2006, before completing and publishing this work*