

REVISITING LUCY GREEN'S THEORY OF MUSICAL MEANING

I do not believe in coincidences. Or, rather, it seems to me worth holding on to those moments when different worlds collide. I have recently been thinking (again) about Lucy Green's theory of musical meaning, as put forward in *Music on deaf ears*¹. Green divides the realm of musical meaning into two: *inherent* (broadly the relationships which sounds are construed as making one with another - pp.12ff.) and *delineated* (broadly the relationships we make between those sounds and the extra-musical world - pp.26ff.) There are two aspects of her theorization which improve on the 'standard model' (e.g. Leonard Meyer's formulation of *absolute* and *referential* modes of meaning²). The first is the near-autonomous nature of the development of inherent meanings (which is how I read the quasi-autonomy of style change), a matter with which she would again disagree with Meyer³, although his definition of style is decidedly non-standard. The second is her characterization of the *inherent* and the *delineated* as *virtual* moments, by which I take her to mean that the distinction is one made in theory, but that during the act of listening, the two realms of meaning exist as one.

I recently encountered a new book by the philosopher of science Alan Chalmers: *Science and its fabrication*⁴. Chalmers achieved notoriety a decade or so ago for his version of the attack on the apparent value-free status of scientific research. In this latest book, he is concerned not only to refute (what he calls...) the extreme empiricism of the positivists, but equally the extreme empiricism of sceptical radical sociologists (refutations of rationalist positions being taken as read). He argues that the material criticisms the sociologists⁵ have of scientific practice would be shared even by Popper and Lakatos, scholars whom they universally condemn. Chalmers, also, is critical of Popper (for his proximity to the positivist position), and develops his thesis in an interesting fashion. He claims that there are two modes of

explanation, the *internal* and the *external*, arguing that the *internal* operates with a high degree of autonomy.

The claim I make for a legitimate domain for internal history of science and for internal, non-sociological explanation and appraisal does not compel me to deny any explanation for science nor to regard science as its own explanation, proceeding according to an eternal, God-given mode of rationality ... the methods and standards implicit in the practice of science .. are subject to change, and any such change requires explanation. However, in a context where the aim of science is adopted such changes can be explained internally, by reference to practical and theoretical discoveries and developments, rather than externally, by reference to class interests and the like. (p.94).

His *internal* corresponds remarkably with Green's *inherent*, while his insistence on autonomous internal history has correspondences with her autonomy of style history. What is particularly interesting, however, is the way Chalmers considers these different realms to coexist. He identifies the *internal* with the pursuit of what he calls the *aim* of science, which he defines (roughly) as

the production of knowledge of the world (p.24),

pointing out that

[t]he natural world is the way it is independently of the class, race or sex of those who attempt to know it ... [i]n spite of the social character of all scientific practice, methods and strategies for constructing objective, albeit fallible and improvable, knowledge of the natural world have been developed in practice and have met with success. (p.115).

Having taken this position, he claims that

[w]hile the aim of science can be *distinguished* from other aims and epistemological appraisals, the scientific practice involved in the pursuit of that aim cannot be *separated* from other practices serving other aims. (p.116).

These twin ideas of *distinction* and *non-separation* are directly correspondent to Green's treatment of the *inherent* and the *delineated* as *virtual* moments, the crucially valuable feature of her theory.

So, what should I make of this set of correspondences? There are notable differences, of course. The practitioners of science, the pursuers of its aim (its *internal* aspect), are human beings (so far as I am aware), while *inherent* meanings are formed simply between sounds (even though, like the results of the pursuit of the scientific aim, they are perceived by human beings). Additionally, Green does not restrict *style* simply to the *inherent* realm (as I have

represented her as doing above), but claims that it mediates the inherent and delineated realms (p.37). And, of course, any exact set of correspondences between such different fields (not between authors, I hasten to add) would smack either of collusion or appropriation (which cannot be the case, of course, since science and music are such separate worlds!). But, largely convinced as I am of the arguments both of Green, and of Chalmers, are these differences necessary grounds for my regarding this collision as merely coincidental?

NOTES

1. Manchester UP, 1988.
2. In *Emotion and meaning in music*, Chicago UP, 1956.
3. As in *Style and music*, Pennsylvania UP, 1989.
4. Open UP, 1990.
5. Chalmers cites most consistently David Bloor, Barry Barnes, M.J.Mulkay and H.M.Collins. Is it not strange that those to whom we extend the comradeship of familiar address are those whose views we most strongly damn!

Allan F. Moore

THAMES VALLEY
UNIVERSITY