

I begin by confessing that part of me feels reluctant to comment on what I think *Critical Inquiry* should become during its next phase. I believe journals should respond to the wishes of their editors and readers, whatever those turn out to be, and that this is impossible to predict. Suffice to say that so far *Critical Inquiry* has done extremely well in this respect, and I trust it will continue to do so. But because the editors will determine what the journal publishes in the future, and much of their responsibility will be to identify material that appeals to and challenges their constituency, it seems foolish to me to speculate about how all that might in fact turn out.

It will depend upon a myriad of uncertainties and imponderables. One of these is how the political situation will look in *Critical Inquiry*'s future, and that, in turn, will be affected by international and domestic events about which we have no knowledge. In addition, because *Critical Inquiry* is inseparably tied to the academy, the state of higher education in the coming years will play a major role—how the academy continues to develop and, especially, how free and independent it is able to remain. And this too is necessarily dependent upon the vicissitudes of local and international politics. A third factor, though one about which I have absolutely no expertise, concerns technical innovations. They have already transformed how information is processed, stored, and disseminated, and they will undoubtedly continue to do so in ways that are largely unpredictable. This will assuredly have a profound effect upon *Critical Inquiry*, whether one likes it or not. Nevertheless, my own guess (and desire) is that whatever impact such developments have on *Critical Inquiry*'s interaction and communication with its readers, a place will be preserved, at least in the foreseeable future, for a printed journal in something like its present form—that is, a piece of hardware that one can hold in the hand, store in a handy place, annotate, hurl at friends and enemies, or inscribe with obscenities. Moreover, at least in my mind and hopes, the commitment associated with having one's ideas appear in real rather than virtual form will retain a fundamental role in the ongoing life of ideas and opinions.

Since my ties to *Critical Inquiry*, both as a writer and an editorial board member, are linked to my professional life as a musician and music scholar, I want to say something about the journal's future in connection with its commitment to my own field. *Critical Inquiry*'s heartening interest in music is of course part of a larger concern for all the arts, in whatever form. It has never been content, that is, to be an exclusively literary journal, despite its roots in that discipline. It has consistently provided a forum for material that deals with a remarkably broad range of disciplines throughout the arts and sciences. So in speaking of music, I am in a sense using it as one indication of a more general orientation in the journal. Music does offer, however, for many reasons, an especially telling case. In part this is because of its very lack of material substance, which earns it both envy and mistrust and which tends to make its uses particularly revealing and fascinating. But what perhaps sets music off most is its grounding in a specialized language, one absolutely unique to itself and with technical features that remain relatively mysterious to all but a small number of nonmusicians. One of the most difficult problems for musicians who wish to communicate with nonmusicians is to find ways to skirt this technical barrier without reducing the result to platitudes and generalizations. It can be done, but it is no easy task, and it is one that, for whatever reasons, seems to elude most serious writers about music. *Critical Inquiry* has been remarkably successful in negotiating this hurdle, finding musical authors who manage to avoid technicalities and develop ideas that resonate beyond the limited scope of their own specialty. Consider three articles on music (two by musicians, one not) chosen more or less at random from each of the first three decades of *Critical Inquiry*'s existence: Leonard B. Meyer's "Grammatical Simplicity and Relational Richness: The Trio of Mozart's G Minor Symphony" (*Critical Inquiry* 2 [Summer 1976]: 693–762), Gary Tomlinson's "Music and the Claims of the Text: Monteverde,

Rinuccini, and Marino” (*Critical Inquiry* 8 [Spring 1982]: 565–90), and Caroline A. Jones’s “Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego” (*Critical Inquiry* 19 [Summer 1993]: 628–65). The range and diversity of these three, dealing with formalist matters, the aesthetics of text/music relationships, and painter/musician interactions in the mid-twentieth-century American avant-garde, reflects the journal’s response to shifting notions of what is worth writing about in music. I trust that if three articles were to be chosen after the next thirty years, they would reveal a comparable, perhaps even a broader, range.

One may of course wonder if theoretical writing of the kind *Critical Inquiry* has fostered will continue to engage us in the coming years. But surely the answer is yes, at least if one takes theory in its broadest sense as an effort to grasp the meaning and purpose of human thought and action in whatever dimension. In the case of our journal, the primary focus of this critical impulse will presumably remain the arts; at least I see no reason or evidence why this should be otherwise—though no doubt the nature of the writing itself will change. But whether such writing will be politically committed or aesthetic in orientation, will search for universal truths or local differences, that I cannot say—though personally I would like to think that there will be room for all.

Meyer, himself a former member of *Critical Inquiry*’s editorial board, has persuasively argued that one of the best ways of understanding the present is to consider its implications for the future. Yet what strikes me most forcefully about our current moment in history is that it offers so little indication of where the coming age will take us. To paraphrase a well-known maxim, the only thing that seems certain is that nothing seems certain—except (probably) change itself.

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