

NINE

The Return of the Aesthetic

Musical Formalism and Its Place in Political Critique

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A few rungs down. One level of education, itself a very high one, has been reached when man gets beyond superstitious and religious concepts and fears and, for example, no longer believes in the heavenly angels or original sin, and has stopped talking about the soul's salvation. Once he is at this level of liberation, he must still make a last intense effort to overcome metaphysics. Then, however, a retrograde movement is necessary; he must understand both the historical and the psychological justification in metaphysical ideas. He must recognize how mankind's greatest advancement came from them and how, if one did not take this retrograde step, one would rob oneself of mankind's finest achievements.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Human All Too Human*

INTRODUCTION: TURTLES, TIGERS, TROUT

In the late twentieth century, the landscape of musicology witnessed many new cultural and historicist approaches to music. These approaches challenge the institutionalized priorities of a field of studies that tended to reflect a formalist emphasis on the self-referential aesthetic autonomy of music and its independence from other forms of social discourse. The new critical stance has produced a heightened awareness of the ideological dimensions of the latter “purely aesthetic” paradigm and a renewed interest in the heterogeneous and much contested cultural arena that is its condition of possibility. Various traditionally excluded categories, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on, became legitimate topics for musicological debate, and a renewed faith in the political relevance of musicological writing was instituted. Thus, the turn to cultural critique brought a new agenda to the academic study of music that sets out to contest the status quo, effect positive social change, and resist negative social change.

This essay shares a deep concern for the social and political issues raised by this critique, but it argues for the importance of aesthetic values and formal characteristics specific to musical texts. While this theme seems to take

on an antagonistic quality in these times, I hope it will become clear that standing as the opposition to the opposition of orthodoxies does not mean standing as the *enemy* of that opposition. Indeed, far from dismissing the new musicological writings I criticize below, this project is an effort to take in new directions the debate these writings have made possible. Moreover, by rejecting the widespread turn against the aesthetic, I do not want to isolate music from everyday life and then buttress that isolation in terms of universal and eternal ideas; nor do I aim to defend or redeem music theory and analysis as it is generally practiced today. Indeed, most theory and analysis, conceiving its terrain of investigation in wholly abstract and hermetic terms, is a genuine impediment to the development of political interpretation. The rigorous critique of such detached formalism has played a significant role in forging a socially responsible and politically concerned musicological praxis. What follows is an effort to offer a third possibility between, on the one hand, an apolitical analytic practice and, on the other hand, an anti-analytic political practice. While there is a risk of aesthetic escapism or narrow idealism whenever music asserts itself independent, this is not inevitable. By broadening our historical sense of what aesthetics at its best meant, we might once again imaginatively grasp the radical particularity of musical experience, which in turn can resist the control of totalizing concepts and sedimented beliefs about it. On the other hand, the impact that aesthetic elaborations on music can have on the sociopolitical scene is complex and multifaceted, and I want to include this kind of emancipatory figuration of the aesthetic as but *one* option among many for imaginative political intervention in the world. Indeed, I will speculate on specific ways that, via close formal analysis, reflections on the purely aesthetic aspects of music may productively address social and political matters in very diverse music-cultural settings. In particular, I will offer examples of how various formal music analyses can alleviate concrete political difficulties in these different social contexts.

Let me begin with a brief critique of the ideological exclusions effected by the kind of musicological discourse that tends to read musical production in social or political terms, rather than according to the formal categories of music analysis. I will argue in two ways: First, I will suggest that, caught in the throes of a variety of cultural and historicist studies, musical interpretation risks reading right through the musical text as if it was a mere representation of the social. The resistance in contemporary musicological writing to the aesthetic autonomy of the musical work (understood as a self-enclosed and internally consistent formal unity) thereby risks erecting an equally self-enclosed system of relations between world and work. That is, the social interpretation of music risks simply transposing those attributes formerly associated with musical form onto the world and then reading them as if they were a genuinely historical or sociological approach to the musical object. In this process, the music as such is in danger of disappearing against a gen-

eral background of social determination, and, in the absence of any dialectical antithesis to that social network, the possibility of productive autonomy and effective resistance wanes.

Paradoxically, the new musicology was launched in the name of a historical and social inquiry (that insists on subordinating the musical text to its function within a broader social context) precisely to resist its naturalized ideological function. But the idea that historicizing (or contextualizing) musicological inquiry functions as a panacea to the ideology of the “purely musical” is equally based on error. When Daniel Chua writes, “To write a history of absolute music is to write against it,” he also creates a lack of interest in the independent formal dimensions of historical inquiry—its absolutist hold on the “absolute” music under investigation no less than its promise of absolution from that music’s ideological curse (Chua 1999, 7). Just as Fredric Jameson’s call to “Always historicize!” is menaced by his observation that history “is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and . . . our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization” (1981, 35), so too is the rush to historicize (or socially contextualize) musicological inquiry substantially complicated by the fact that historical and social content too is patterned by an aesthetic form. In short, getting rid of formalism in music studies does not get rid of the problem of form.

The second point I want to make is that the new musicological insight that music’s aesthetic autonomy is a cultural convention (or invention) seems to have implied a lack of importance and significance for close music analysis in general. Of course this does not follow. In fact, it is only possible to elevate the social world (or, conversely, the musical work) as the determining factor of musical experience when world and work are construed antithetically. In this construal, the dialectical relations between them dwindle and musical “formalism” becomes falsely understood as (what Theodor Adorno might call) a “self-identical” repressive practice. While it is true that all close analysis of music cannot not close down various options for debate, it is not true that such analyses (elaborated *as if* the music were autonomous) cannot open up other options. Susan McClary’s observation that the “purely musical” should be granted no metaphysical independence because of its intensely ideological legacy overlooks the possibility that metaphysics may be strategically harnessed to allay political problems in the social world. On the nature of musical processes as they figure in her academic project, she writes, “No metaphysics—just cultural practice. Nothing but turtles. All the way down” (2000, 4). The turtles are a reference to an old legend about the foundations of the world. In the story, a holy man explained to a disciple that “the earth sits on the back of a huge tiger, which stands on the flanks of an enormous elephant, and so on. When the cosmological series reached a giant turtle, the sage paused. His enraptured pupil—believing he had arrived finally

at ultimate truth—exclaimed, ‘So the universe rests on that turtle!’ ‘Oh, no,’ replied his mentor. ‘From there it’s turtles all the way down’” (1).

But, contra McClary, the wisdom of the tale may not be that the world rests on many, many turtles (a.k.a. “cultural practices”) instead of only one, but that the sage cannot quite say this. The sage’s pause marks the limit (or what Gayatri Spivak might call the “perhaps-structure”) of all knowledge, and the statement about turtles, framed as a negation of the youth’s hasty conclusion, marks the eternal return of the same that haunts all efforts to determine knowledge of the world once and for all. The point is that the world only becomes “turtles all the way down” when the desire for knowledge becomes absolute; when *becoming* becomes a world-picture. So, not only does McClary’s text elevate the moment that the sage utters his most empty formalism, but it overlooks the beautiful tiger (and the elephant) upon whose backs we are hanging in dreams. After all, how beneficial to life, how beautiful, is the giant turtle upon whom our perspective is narrowed to endless turtles? And in what darkened waters does it swim?

In musical terms, what I am saying is that the observation that all musical processes (including “purely musical” ones) are so many cultural conventions is a preamble to knowledge passing as a conclusion. This observation does not register the irreducible metaphysical step required to institute any form of political commitment; still less does it register the role that those musical processes that do not take themselves to be reducible to cultural practice might play in these commitments. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, after overcoming metaphysics, the possibility of advancing depends on a “retrograde movement” (1986, 27). That is, to inhibit the maelstrom of radical skepticism from becoming an absolute formula, an imaginative leap of faith is required. I want to advance a series of faithful leaps (or retrograde musicological movements) that idealize music as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, but that simultaneously rein back its imaginative flight, like a trout on a line, to the project of productive political intervention and social upliftment in the social world.

To sum up, in this paper I want, first, to elaborate various means of resisting the ideological closure and programmatic constraint of recent trends in musicology—especially those that emphasize social and political issues over close reading and other formal techniques associated with musical analysis; and second, to elaborate new kinds of closure and constraint produced by music analysis that may be politically beneficial in various quarters. Let me turn now to a more sustained critique of the new musicology. To avoid reducing this remarkably rich field of discourse to a checklist of essential features, I will launch my critique of it in the context of a particularly impressive, indeed exemplary, case of new musicological writing, namely the work of Rose Rosengard Subotnik. In fact, Subotnik’s awareness of the dialectical relation between work and world confounds the simplistic distinctions

between these two realms to which I have alluded. Also, she recognizes the necessity of a moment of faith in all scholarly discourse and thereby reduces the essentialized methodological grip of the metaphors of “cultural practice.” It is hoped, therefore, that my critique of Subotnik’s quite complex position has implications beyond the context of her project.

THE PROBLEM OF “STRUCTURAL LISTENING”

In *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society*, Subotnik raises the question of the political, social, and moral significance of music scholarship with an interest in “improv[ing],” or “changing the conditions of” society (1996, 50). By investigating and assessing the “social and moral significance of the values discerned in music” (171), she hopes to “develop a new paradigm for the relationship between musical responsibility and society” (173). Broadly speaking, the imagined social improvements hinge on a kind of liberal pluralism that will accommodate “a variety of perspectives” on various scholarly assertions (65); where different “schools of thought can flourish in a constant and creative tension with each other” (61); and where the “dogmas and value judgments that separate us into particularized subcultures are swept away” (59). In the chapter “How can Chopin’s A-Major Prelude be Deconstructed?”, Subotnik elaborates two incompatible readings of the prelude neither one of which should be “more forcefully encourage[d]” (143). Deconstruction is introduced as a safeguard against foundationalism in the following way: Because Derridean *différance* insists on “the irreducible distance between initial and subsequent meanings,” our claims to objective knowledge are disconcerted (56). Thus, as a persistent reminder of the limits of our knowledge—which is implicated in our “moral certainties” (172)—deconstruction “keeps us honest”; it “encourages our integrity as critics” (56).

At the same time, Subotnik resists relativism all-the-way-down (associated with this construal of deconstruction) by insisting, with E. D. Hirsch, on “honoring the value, no matter how unattainable the realization, of attempts at reconstructing original [authorial] intention” (69). Indeed, such “good faith efforts” condition the “very possibility of human communication” (69). Subotnik then advances a method that may begin to recapture such an “[original] source of signification” via the concept of “stylistic listening” (169–70). Applied specifically to the terrain of twentieth-century music, her argument “suggests that only something akin to ‘stylistic listening’ would permit contemporary listeners to exercise any prerogatives they might have as cultural insiders” (170). So, “emic” access to a source of signification, while “unrecoverable” in the robust sense, is best approximated in the context of stylistic listening (168).

In contrast, another kind of listening that seems to be inherently out of

sync with the cultural inside is posited as politically reactionary in general. This way of hearing is called “structural listening.” This essentially formalist way of listening is defined as “a method which concentrates attention primarily on the formal relationships established over the course of a single composition” (148). Subotnik carefully exposes the limits of this modality and finally subordinates it to the broader category of stylistic listening. Indeed, the “method” of structural listening, as the “primary paradigm for listening, cannot define much of a positive role for society”; by itself it “turns out to be socially divisive”; “limits the benefits of musical education”; advances, by implication, “ideological deception”, and “selfishly refuses to participate in the discourse of society” (170–71). Structural listening is thus both epistemologically flawed (by failing, for instance, to confront the “irreducibility of style, both in its concrete physicality and in the ever-changing face it presents to new contexts of interpretation” [169]) and politically conservative (by, for instance, “beg[ging] off its social responsibilities” [175]).

My critical reflections on Subotnik’s argument to follow come out of a growing skepticism about the distinction that such a focus makes between “structural” and “non-structural” listening. It seems to me that this kind of argument does less to undercut than to underscore the opposition, and that it essentially accepts formalism’s hermetic claims, instead of configuring the business of analysis and close reading *as* social. This opposition is then hierarchized, with “stylistic listening” as the master-word, so that “structural listening” cannot impose itself on the interpretation of music. In Jacques Derrida’s terms, the opposition has become a violent hierarchy in which one term controls the other both logically and axiologically. At best then, Subotnik’s text reads “structural listening” as if it were not material but transparent, as if it were a mere instance of “stylistic listening.” That is its limit. I want to argue against this asymmetrically bifurcated way of describing musical listening, and I will do so on deconstructive grounds. What follows is an attempt to reconfigure the similarities and contrasts between deconstruction and different approaches to the study of music in the academy today. My argument will take a simple shuttling strategy: First, I will show that Subotnik’s reading of deconstruction is limited and perhaps even undermining of some basic poststructuralist insights. Second, I will show that certain practices of music analysis paradoxically share basic ground with deconstruction. This I will do through a comparison of the work of (1) Jacques Derrida and David Lewin, and (2) Ernesto Laclau and Benjamin Boretz. Following that, I will return to the critique of new musicological uses of poststructuralism, this time via a close reading of David Schwarz’s elaborations on musical hearing in the context of French psychoanalytic categories. It is hoped that this back-and-forth argument will begin to complicate the network of relations between formal music analysis, anti-formalist musicology, and poststruc-

turalism. Following that, I will offer perspectives on the way these fields of discourse intersect with politics and strategies for the progressive use of formal analysis.

THE FORMALISM/DECONSTRUCTION NEXUS

Like Subotnik, I am interested in the politics of musical formalism, but unlike Subotnik, I do not want to make a case for or against its place in the study of music based on unfettered epistemological grounds. Facts are probably theory-laden—selected, organized, hierarchized, formalized, narrativized—and theories probably instantiate ethical values that are founded on political commitments. This is why the question of the ethico-political can supplement the gap upon which the factual rests. I want now to raise some questions about Subotnik's text, and then to compare the practice of deconstruction with the work of specific music theorists. This comparison will set the stage for various proposals for the politically strategic use of musical formalism.

Subotnik's text raises many more questions than I have time to address here. For example, has "structural listening" perhaps been so narrowly defined in her text that it loses all applicability; that it does not capture the concrete practice of formalism in our discipline? Concomitantly, has "stylistic listening" been so broadly defined that it loses all specificity? Do two incompatible readings of a musical text amount to a "deconstruction" of that text? Or is this more like two different interpretative *commitments*? Also, does Derridean deconstruction encourage the liberal pluralism endorsed by Subotnik? Can one derive from purely deconstructive premises a democratic politics? At this point, it is worth introducing a second reading of deconstruction: one that involves less an embrace of the tolerant coexistence of different readings and more the experience of a structural undecidability; one whose irreducible undecidability is less the result of some empirical imperfection (or the "unrecoverable" emic access to the "source of signification" (1996, 169)) and more the result of a trace of contingency lodged within the logic of any structure (at its origin); and one through which no specific political program can be advanced. With both Subotnik's reading and this second reading of deconstruction in mind, I will now examine some of the relations that deconstruction has to some types of musical formalism. In both cases, I want to note, first, the similarities (too often overlooked) between a kind of 'open' formal analysis and the values that Subotnik upholds; and second, the similarities (also generally overlooked) between such analysis and Derridean deconstruction.

The first obvious point is that, like Nietzsche, who in his Preface to *Daybreak* asks us "to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and after, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers" (1997, 5), Derrida urges us to read closely by arguing that certain important differ-

ences “come . . . to light only under a microscope, a divine microscope capable of perceiving delicate sculptures on the scales of reptiles” (1997, 62). But more specifically, I can think of two accounts, corresponding to the two construals of deconstruction mentioned above, that share unexpected affinities with the practice of formal music analysis. First, the work of David Lewin, a musician and mathematician who consolidated the field of set theory in music studies and who is sometimes regarded as a preeminent formalist in the domain of music scholarship, can be considered from the perspective of the first construal. In Subotnik’s terms, this is a perspective that rejects “narrowly . . . ‘fixed’ musical structures” (1996, 173) and concerns itself with the “diverse, unstable, and open-ended . . . multitude of contexts in which music defines itself” (175).

On David Lewin and Jacques Derrida

In his article “Music Theory, Phenomenology, and Modes of Perception,” David Lewin is interested in examining with some precision the variety of formal perceptions that are generated by musical events (1986, 327–92). He reacts, in step with Subotnik, against the view of art (especially musical art) “as something ‘given’ and ‘there’” upon which the expert interpreter “exercis[es] mechanical skills” (378). To allay this kind of problem, Lewin draws to our attention “the need for studies in *the poetics of analysis*” (382). Resisting musical interpretation that claims to exhaust the subject through formal closure, he builds into his analyses a variety of phenomenal time-spans (or “occupational contexts”) that build “a different family of mental constructs for perceiving . . . passage[s] of [musical] time” without assuming that these time-systems are functionally isomorphic (359). This leads him to musical reflections that fall outside the logic and grasp of the kind of either/or methodological commitment that wants to fix the meaning of a musical event irreducibly. With reference to Schubert’s song *Morgengruß*, Lewin says:

By saying, “the harmony of measure 12 is” . . . , we are already falsely constraining our musical perceptions by implicitly asserting that there is *one* phenomenological object called “the harmony of measure 12,” and we are also constraining our perceptions by saying of this object that it “*is*,” putting it as *one* location in *one* present-tense system that renders falsely coextensive a number of different times. (Lewin 1986, 358)

Lewin surmises that the temptation to place musical things in unique spatial locations is “prompted by the unique vertical coordinate for the . . . note-head-point on the Euclidean/Cartesian score-plane” (360). Indeed, succumbing to this temptation by rendering conclusive analytic verdicts strikes him as “fantastically wrong” (359).

To dramatize the point, Lewin paradoxically begins his analysis by narrowing the focus on the contents of measure 12 *as if* they could be spatialized in a Euclidean/Cartesian way. This is where the argument becomes deconstructive. In Derrida's scheme, dissemination/*différance* interrupts any identity of a term or concept to itself, or any homogeneity of a term/concept within itself. By marking the detour/supplement through which a concept comes to meaningfulness, *différance* submerges the concept in a signifying chain that lies beyond the immediate context of that concept. Hence, deconstruction reveals the differential structure of the concept, which is no longer only itself in itself. It becomes a conceptual effect, a nominal accretion produced by a complex interweaving of signifiers; in short, it becomes a concept-metaphor. Likewise, Lewin insists that even the apparently simple perception that engages measure 12 of *Morgenruß* "in its own context" (1986, 346) necessarily involves contexts that "lie outside of the time of the entire musical performance" (332)—socio-cultural forces, or what Lewin calls "a long historical/cultural shadow" (342) that make this perception possible. At its most self-evident then, measure 12 might sound something like a measure of g^6 harmony, with a D in the upper voice. Quite different things emerge when we hear the measure in more extensive contexts. The fact of a "density of attacks in the accompaniment" (347), with one (but only one) attack on every eighth-note beat, or the fact of lying in a high register, is noticed only in relation to "what-[is]-notice[d]-elsewhere" (347); in this case the opening eleven measures, which contrast in these respects. Like Derrida in his discussion of *différance*, Lewin calls these absent presences "retentions"—when they project "remembered past times" (329)—and "protections"—when they project "future expectations into present consciousness" (329). The latter are not to be equated with traditional conceptions of "expectation" or "implication" because, as he explains, "[i]n the traditional view, [the implied] perception . . . 'has not yet happened' at [the time of the event under investigation] , but we 'expect' it, perhaps with a certain probability or entropy value" (323). For Lewin, in contrast, the said perception "does actually happen" (332) at that time. Like Derrida's figuration of the differing/deferring of *différance*, measure 12 is thus shot through with temporality within the perception of its "present." Thus, like Derrida's sign, measure 12 is dynamically divided with itself. In short, the "being" of measure 12 is inflected with "time."

Remaining in the context of retention, Lewin advances a second perception of measure 12 in terms of its tonal function. The dominant prolongation that we have at hand in the three measures leading up to it furnishes measure 12 with the sound of a challenge, one that denies the dominant its "leading-tone function in a context that otherwise clearly prolongs 'dominant' sensations" (1986, 348). This perception obviously flies in the face of the phrase boundary at measure 11, which encourages hearing measure 12

as a beginning and so in terms of protensions. Now, in conjunction with measure 13, measure 12 sounds like “d minor is being tonicized,” and involves constructing a D-minor tonic somewhere in protension, perhaps around measure 14 (349). But, once this perception opens up to previous measures, another perception comes into play, one that *denies* the perception of a confusing blues-inflected dominant. Importantly, for Lewin, the denial is itself regarded as substantially perceptual and ultimately as aesthetically relevant. This is why he resists falsely dichotomizing the musical perceptual field, and asserts as a rule of thumb for analysis: “mistrust anything that tells you not to explore an aural impression you have once formed” (359). Instead of “trying to deny and suppress various of our perceptual phenomena,” Lewin advocates a multi-capillaried approach that takes changes of mind seriously (359). Ultimately, an ideal analysis will want to sustain a variety of perceptions formed in differently determined connections, however incompatible these perceptions seem to be with one another.

The perception that denies the dominant function of measure 12 because of holding a D-minor tonic in protension yields a second perception that connects D minor-in-waiting with the fleetingly tonicized D-minor harmony in measure 8, suggesting an elaboration or expansion of that tonicization. The temporal context for this perception includes measure 8-in-retention and measure 14-in-protension. Another perception of these events involves an effort to make sense of the tonicization of D minor in the context of the prolonged dominant in measures 9–11. Lewin contends that, partly because of the melodic D₅ that is prolonged throughout this span, one expects a return to dominant harmony following the tonicization of D minor. The G-minor 6th chord under this perception is rendered “completely *forwards-looking*, inflecting a subsequent (protensive) d minor harmony; in *this* perception, the g minor chord has no direct prolongational relation to the dominant harmony that precedes it” (350–51). The denial mentioned above is reinforced; indeed, the blues-perception is virtually annihilated. Lewin then reads the ensuing sounds of measure 14 as an inverted and chromatically inflected D-minor chord with a passing seventh instead of as merely an F-minor triad. Thus we expect C₅ and A_b in the bass, *dissonant* in the context of D-minor tonality, to resolve downwards to B_b₄ and G₃ respectively. But another perception, engendered by the same temporal context, has different expectations, because it is oriented to hearing sequential patterns instead of maintaining D-minor harmony. This hearing, encouraged by the recognition that measure 14 has the same intervallic structure as measure 12, thus projects a iv⁶–V progression in “c minor” (352). Notice that this perception again involves a denial of the previous perception. And yet, because the last two perceptions involve coextensive segments, Lewin draws on Rameau’s idea of *double emploi* to show how the same sound signifies a kind of f and d chord at once. For Lewin, traditional temporal parlance is not ade-

quate to capture these distinctions because it assumes that a single event can emerge only within a single temporal frame. When the events of measure 15 confirm the sequential reading, a new connection is established with the $A\flat$ in the bass in measure 9 (the former possibly an expanded recapitulation of m. 9) and the span from measures 9 to 15 sounds like an elaboration of dominant harmony in C major instead of C minor. This permits us to revisit the blues-perception of G minor once again, albeit from a different phenomenological space and time. In other words, it is not that we rehabilitate this perception, because, as Lewin says, it is “not necessarily ‘really’ dead,” even if some perceptions took it that way.

For Lewin, the point is to hear the musical work as a complex structure of interrelationships, weaving different threads of perceptual meaning in different temporalities. Elsewhere he draws on Edmund Husserl’s distinction between understanding the work as “*Gegebenheit* and *Dasein*” instead of as “*Sinn* and *Anwesenheit*,” as “*given* and *there* (regardless of the temporal situatedness of the listener), not just *sensible* and *present*” (1986, 375). Although they are described in a style quite remote from Derrida, Lewin’s irreducibly temporalized perceptions approximate the workings of Derrida’s deconstructive phenomenological inquiries, especially his discussion of the sign’s *temporization* (or the becoming-time-of space)—a notion that he also borrows from Husserl.¹ At the very least, Lewin’s project resembles that of Derrida in the terms that Subotnik interprets the latter. It is wholly compatible with Subotnik’s general description of an ideal way of listening. That is, while it might eschew the radical polyvalence of a genuine deconstruction (if only because of the conceptual limits it places on its “poetic” apparatus or the certainty with which it regards the horizons of the work), Lewin’s analysis resists “fixing” musical structures (in the narrow manner that Subotnik associates with “structural listening”) and precisely concerns itself with the “diverse, unstable, and open-ended . . . multitude of contexts in which music defines itself” that characterize “stylistic listening” (1996, 173; 175). I could also make the point that Lewin, like Derrida, asserts a kind of linguistic component for his model of listening, which irreducibly enmeshes these perceptions in socio-cultural forces that exceed the work’s temporal enclosures. However, it should suffice here to note that, far from constraining the terms of listening in a pedantically technical vocabulary, Lewin puts a high premium on the task of raising perceptual possibilities, or even inventing categories of musical listening.

The general point I am trying to make is that Derrida, a crucial philosophical underpinning for the new critical musicology, shares various premises with Lewin, whose work is sometimes identified as formalist. In a commentary to *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, Hayden White, for example, writes that Lewin’s reading of a phrase in Mozart’s *Figaro* is “a rigorously for-

malist analysis of the score," which ignores an "ideological analysis of the extent to which it participates in or resists complicity with the dominant structure of social relationships, class and gender roles especially, of the historical moment in which they were composed" (in Scher 1992, 311; 313). Without denying that Lewin bypasses this order of social issues in his analyses, it is important to recognize that his *transformational* stance, which redefines various theoretical ideas in terms that are shot through with temporality (past and future elements) in the moment they are thought on the basis of the present, has important (if unexpected) affinities with deconstruction.² This kind of musical experience is thus constituted as a complex structure of transformational weaving, an interlacing that permits different threads of (what Joseph Dubiel might call) "sense" to tie up in different ways.³ It is a musical system that closely resembles the non-representational model for language proposed by Derrida, and thus signals at least a simulative kinship between deconstruction and a close analytic listening. It might even be argued that Lewin's manner of close listening supplements the gap upon which our language to describe that listening rests. In other words, the omnitemporalized musical experience resists absorption into the discourse (with its spatializing tendencies) used to describe it. Thus, music, like dissemination, multiplies a non-finite number of semantic effects, which in turn breaks down a certain limit of the music/text, or at least prohibits an exhaustive checklist of its signifieds.

Perhaps the parallel between Derrida and Lewin, while unnoticed in new musicological writings, should not be that surprising. It is worth remembering, for example, that Derrida's philosophical perspectives are genealogically linked to nineteenth-century German metaphysical reflections precisely on the figure of music. This historical linkage further argues against construing music-formal and deconstructive premises antithetically. Since the invention of aesthetics in the eighteenth century philosophers have long taken music as a paradigm case for asserting a realm that is beyond the reach of linguistic signification and implicated instead in an ineffable higher truth about the workings of the world. Whether this interest took the form of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's idealism (in which music occupied a pure angelic domain independent of the actual world), or Arthur Schopenhauer's endlessly striving Will (to which music bore the closest of all possible analogies), or Nietzsche's Dionysian strain (which represented the rapturous musical frenzy that destroyed the veils of *maya* and freed us from norms, images, rules, and restraint), or Søren Kierkegaard's analysis of the absolutely musical (which best exemplified the highly erotic striving of the pure unmediated life force), music frequently served as a discursive site for speculation on the limits of philosophy, knowledge, and meaning. A central metaphor for that which resisted epistemological certainty, music in philo-

sophical discourse functioned as a kind of discourse of the unsayable par excellence.⁴

Less apparent today is the way this kind of theorizing of fundamental negativity (which came out of German metaphysics) has impacted the current French philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary-theoretical scene. While the explicit reference to music has receded in most poststructuralist writings, the form of the inquiry has not changed much. Like the older figure of music, the operations of deconstruction, for example, mark what is semantically slippery, and puzzle the divide between hardened historical oppositions. Coming out of the Hegelian principle of non-identity, what counts as meaning in the deconstructive account includes what is not said, what is silenced out of discourse, and that which impedes narrative coherence. Still, despite the general evacuation of thought about the purely musical, the metaphor of music is never far away in these later writings. In his description of the sound of the operatic voice, for instance, Roland Barthes isolates that which imposes a limit on predicative language as the “grain of the voice,” the visceral materiality that escapes linguistic significance (Barthes 1985, 267–77). Julia Kristeva too points to the musical basis of a non-representational theory of language—one in which the “tone” and the “rhythm” of the pure signifier reverberates as if in musical space (Eagleton 1983, 188). And Derrida works out his notion of the *supplement*—the negatively privileged term that marks a semantic excess that cannot be subsumed into the discourse under investigation—in the context of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s consideration of melody and speech in the *Essai sur l’origine de langue* (Derrida 1976, 141–64).

This rather complicated path in the history of philosophy via German metaphysics to poststructuralist French theory (to use shorthands) ought to disconcert both the view that thought about music somehow lags behind the recent theoretical developments in postmodernism, critical theory, and cultural studies, and the view that music figured as pure sounding forms in motion, precisely the discourse lacking significance, is somehow the antithesis of these developments. Broadly speaking, their historical affinities are more prominent than their differences. This is not to say that writers on music today are generally aware of music’s influence on poststructuralism. On the contrary, the lack of historical perspective has frequently favored the view that music’s aesthetic autonomy signals an unanchored (other-worldly) realm absolutely free of social considerations, instead of that it signals a resistance to a saturating taxonomy of its themes in the social world. As a result, certain forms of music theory that share a basic preoccupation with poststructuralist premises are routinely read as disengaged formalisms. It is this mistaken reading that I am trying to challenge here. Let me give another example.

On Benjamin Boretz and Ernesto Laclau

The thought of Benjamin Boretz (another apparent arch-formalist) can be productively compared with the second construal of deconstruction outlined above. Recall that this construal was less concerned with multiple readings of a musical passage (or linguistic text) and more concerned with showing how close reflection on some concept issues forth an encounter with the concept's wholly intimate other. Thus Boretz's reflections on the concept of "rhythm," say, can be shown to share a kinship with Derrida's reflections on "friendship" or Ernesto Laclau's reflections on "toleration".⁵ Arguably, Boretz's work amounts to a deconstruction of the concept-metaphor under scrutiny. Again, this argues against contrasting deconstruction with formal musical analysis too vividly. Perhaps the radical decontextualization of the concept-metaphor under deconstructive scrutiny is itself a kind of formal musical activity—a suspension of a certain context in order to elaborate the conditions of the concept-metaphor's possibility and thus also to open up the logical horizon of its possibility. Let me explain.

In "Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony," Laclau is interested in thinking about the category of "toleration" as it might matter in the context of a radical democracy (1996, 47–67); in "In Quest of the Rhythmic Genius," Boretz is interested in thinking about the category of "rhythm" as it might matter in a work of Stravinsky (1971, 149–55). Both proceed by examining the conditions of possibility (and thus of impossibility as well) of the respective categories, starting with an effort to ground the categories in themselves. Both arguments proceed in a manner that resembles the early arguments of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, by following a kind of *to-know-is-to-say* logic. That is, by taking the content-less categories at their word, as exhaustive or self-sufficient, these writers show how the intuitive content of these concepts is out of kilter with what they turn out to be when they are reflected upon or brought to articulation. For both, this attempt confronts them with two vanishing points. First, to be closed in themselves, these concepts must exclude that which is their other: on the one hand "intolerance," and, on the other, "non-rhythmic strata" (such as pitch or timbre) (Laclau 1996, 50; Boretz 1971, 151).

If the definition of toleration is taken as abstractly self-sufficient, Laclau argues, it would be logically possible to have a situation in which one "accepts tolerating the intolerant beyond a certain limit, one could end up with the installation of an entirely intolerant society under the auspices of toleration" (1996, 50). Absolute toleration, that is, can logically become intolerance. Alternatively, if the definition of "rhythm" is taken that way, it would be logically possible to infer the same rhythmic genius to a string of thirty-two equally-spaced metronome ticks as to the chord-repeating opening of Stravinsky's "Dance of the Adolescents" in his *Rite of Spring*. That is, if

the (identical) pattern of attack points were the sole determinant of musical “rhythm,” there would be no telling these examples apart.

On the other hand, it is plausible to think that other principles—not provided by the notions of “toleration” or of “rhythm” in themselves—can capture the necessary discriminations in these examples. This would solve the problem of what should and should not be tolerated with an appeal to some kind of limiting claim, perhaps a normative principle; and of what counts as a “‘transcription of the [*Sacre*] passage . . . with respect to ‘preserving the rhythm,’ ” (Boretz 1971, 150) with an appeal to various limiting functional events in the non-rhythmic auditory dimensions of the piece. Boretz demonstrates how the rhythmic quality of any musical passage is inevitably beholden to aspects of timbre, dynamics, registral locutions and dispersions, polyphony, modes of articulation, concepts of pitch relation, tonal function, and extramusical predisposition. So, if these categories are to avoid the situation (issued forth by a self-grounded definition) of becoming their opposite, we must appeal to independent, or *supplemental*, contents that functionally guide our understanding of them. Both writers provisionally reverse the priority of the pure concepts and these seemingly infelicitous contents: the prior identification of supplemental normative criteria would disambiguate what should and should not be tolerated; and the prior identification of functionally significant non-durational events would specify which durations are relevant to a rhythm.

But this structural dependence on events outside of the categories’ felicitous denotation confronts each writer with a second vanishing point: Laclau asserts that the terrain dividing the tolerable from the intolerable has been qualitatively transformed into one between “the morally acceptable and the morally unacceptable” (1996, 51). Thus grounding toleration “in a norm or content different from itself dissolves it as a meaningful category” (51). Likewise Boretz claims that grounding rhythm in non-rhythmic dimensions “deprives rhythm of its independent status as a musical stratum,” and the concept ends up denying “the very intuition on which it is principally founded and by which it is principally motivated” (1971, 153).

Now, for both writers, this seeming deadlock also points to a solution, albeit not of the Hegelian sort. Laclau argues that, from the point of view of the content, toleration is meaningful only insofar as one accepts that which one finds morally disagreeable. Why should this matter? Perhaps because one has a political interest in a society that can cope with a certain degree of internal differentiation. From the point of view of the concept itself, toleration cannot be entirely without limit because of the necessary relation tolerance has to intolerance. That is, intolerance conditions the possibility and the impossibility of tolerance—it is an inevitable accomplice. Again the grounds for deciding what is and is not tolerant is a matter of political commitment: a “radical democrat” might want to cope with more differences

than a supporter of the “moral majority” would (Laclau 1996, 51). Indeed, the struggle concerning the contents of toleration in any given society is made possible by the very lack of a necessary content in the term.

Boretz argues slightly differently: from the point of view of the content, rhythm is meaningful only insofar as it “subsum[es] every dimensional and inter-dimensional substructure” of the music under investigation (1971, 154). Why should this matter? Perhaps because one has a musical interest in a rhythmic theory that can cope with a certain degree of internal differentiation between different inter-dimensional settings. From the point of view of the concept itself, rhythm cannot be a mere matter of “timelength pattern[s] exhibited by an (auditory) succession” because of the necessary relation this has to any auditory event whatever (1971, 150). Again, the grounds for deciding what is and is not pertinently rhythmic is a matter of musical commitment: one theorist might want to say that rhythm is the least systematic of parameters, irreducibly contingent on particularities like pitch, polyphony, concepts of harmony, and extramusical predispositions, while another may want to say that not so many of these factors count in a discussion of rhythm itself. Perhaps the former orientation also prefers to focus on particular instances of rhythmic activity while the latter prefers the context of a general theory. Indeed, the debate concerning the contents of rhythm in any music-theoretical community is made possible by the very lack of a necessary content in the term.

The point of this comparison is to show that Boretz and Laclau share the same basic argumentative strategy. Both read deconstructively: a category of thought is placed under context-free investigation precisely in order to identify the conditioning grounds of its emergence. Both achieve this by way of a kind of Freudian “talking cure” that insists on articulating, or bringing to linguistic expression, the meaning of the concept. This illuminates the inadequate handle the expression seems to have on what the term takes itself to be. Where the line dividing the poles of the term and its opposite is drawn, is (speaking in terms of the duality itself) logically undecidable. (The opposition turns out to be more basic than either of its poles in itself; indeed the duality is the undecidable ground of possibility for both terms.) Finally, both accounts want to resist a general abstract theory of the respective concepts and to open the horizon of possibility for their coming to mean.

This is where the aesthetic imagination of music analysis can be productively set against the largely demystifying work of the new critically-oriented musicology. Indeed, the mere presence of poststructuralist premises in musicological discourse does not assure that these are productively implemented. Sometimes musicologists who explicitly reckon with such premises even close down their imaginative horizons. One might expect, for example, that a psychoanalytic inquiry into the subject of listening—whether this focuses on the listening subject or on the subjection of/through listening—would

make much of the extra-linguistic dimensions associated with the unconscious. As a continual activity of sliding signifiers whose exact meanings (signifieds) are beyond reach, Jacques Lacan's model of the unconscious, say, can be said to have historical links to an essentially musical one. However, in his book *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture*, David Schwarz approaches the subject in a surprisingly reductive way. Instead of figuring the terrain of the absolutely musical as analogous to the movements of the unconscious per se, his musical analyses, which for the most part are beholden to texted music, usually take the argumentative form of some or other musical "representation" of a Lacanian process. Let me demonstrate this paradoxical problem.

On David Schwarz and Jacques Lacan

In an analysis that innovatively intersects the writings of Lacan and Heinrich Schenker, Schwarz examines Schubert's "Der Doppelgänger" and "Ihr Bild" from the cycle *Schwanengesang*. The analysis employs the categories of mirror misrecognition, the uncanny, and the drive. For example, in "Der Doppelgänger" the narrator's confrontation with his own double in the second stanza is analyzed in terms of the psychoanalytic gaze. Lacan's concept of the gaze (*regard*) is shaped by Sartre's claims in *Being and Nothingness* that "my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of *being seen* by the Other" (1992, 256–57). The gaze identifies the subject as essentially a "given-to-be-seen" (in Lee 1990, 157). In other words, to grasp subjectivity outside of myself entails the reality of being looked at. Lacan makes this Sartrean goal explicit: "What we have to circumscribe . . . is the pre-existence of the gaze—I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (in Lee 1990, 156). Yet the gaze is not substantially tied to the actual presence of another object or subject manifesting the gaze; in fact, it is "invisible" and anonymous. Like the role of *Das Man* (the They) in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Lacan's gaze is the outside structuring activity—"the Other watching me"—that lays down the conditioning grounds of the subject's existence.

According to Schwarz, "the musical signifier of the gaze [in "Der Doppelgänger"] is the pitch class F \sharp , which is ubiquitous in the music," while "the musical signifier of recognition is the pitch class G as upper neighbor to F \sharp " (1997, 66). It is true that the climactic G \sharp in measure 43 articulates the "eig'ne Gestalt" with which the narrator is ultimately faced, but it is less clear why the repeated F \sharp s signify the structure of the gaze. In Schenkerian terms, the way in which F \sharp elaborates scale degree 5 projects a kind of fixation or stasis; an inability to unhinge the vocal line from its opening repetitions. Textually, this seems to conjure first the stillness of the night in which the poem is launched, and second, a hitherto still latent inertia of obsession and

melancholy. Like the house at which he is staring, the narrator (still) finds himself standing “auf dem selben Platz” (“in the same place”) in Heinrich Heine’s poem. Harmonic activity is kept to a minimum and the melodic line circles tirelessly around F \sharp 1. Finally in measure 25, the melody begins on a note other than F \sharp 1. This is the moment in which another person enters the scene: the moment in the text plausibly suggestive of the drama of the gaze. This is the stanza in which the melodic line is unhinged from its repetitiousness and becomes energized in an upward sweep into measure 42. Thus, far from “signifying the gaze,” F \sharp seems to signal a kind of brooding stasis that *precedes* the imagined presence of another. And this presence is felt precisely by departing from F \sharp .

Given the social emphasis on the structuring activity of the gaze, it may be inappropriate to explain this romantic experience of a double in these terms. While the registral sweep from measure 25 to measure 41 ultimately settles on the pitches F \sharp and G again, as if to lay bare the structure of the narrator’s fixation, the process seems more narcissistic than social. After all, the gaze of the narrator’s double is diverted (staring at the sky), while the Lacanian gaze is directed at the subject from a multitude of perspectives. More importantly, can the Lacanian gaze appropriately *be signified* by a pitch class? If the gaze is a kind of presentiment that lies behind conscious experience, the effect of which is manifested in that experience without itself being readily accessible to consciousness, can it be experienced through this repeated note? Or is F \sharp a *representation* of the gaze? If so, why is the invisible and inaccessible gaze represented by that which is ubiquitous and compulsively repetitious, by the sound that is closest and clearest to our ears?

The problem with Schwarz’s “representational” stance here and elsewhere in the book is that it does not bear the weight of the post-Freudian psychoanalytic apparatus at all levels of argument. Thus, while psychoanalysis in recent literary theory has served to disengage from interpretations of literary works as “expressions,” “representations,” or “reflections” of reality (understanding them instead as forms of production that effect a way of perceiving the world), Schwarz recapitulates the form of the former interpretations even if the “reality” his Schubert songs “represent” has been replaced by the real, the drive, or the gaze. It is as if these psychoanalytic modalities had already been established (thus functioning as the argument’s signified) and the music was a representation (or signifier) of them. This pattern of thought, a site of desire all of its own, pervades the book.

In the discussion of “Der Doppelgänger,” for example, Schwarz asserts that “E minor is the music’s *objet a*, the signifier of the music’s irreducible alterity” (1997, 70). In the discussion of Primus’s cover version of Peter Gabriel’s song “Intruder,” a “listening gaze,” whereby “the music [is] listening to us,” is evoked “through the pounding bass guitar and percussion that accompanies the text throughout, sounding just on our side of the listening

plane" (1997, 97). Elsewhere, in a portion of Diamanda Galas's *Plague Mass*, "B-flat signifies . . . the abjection of the voice stripped of its signifying function" (156). Thus the *objet a*, the gaze, and the abject are all positively elaborated by some musical sound: the suggested tonality of E minor, the pounding of a guitar and drums, and the note B \flat respectively. Strictly speaking, this is not theoretically possible. The *objet a*, for instance, which by Slavoj Žižek's account "is not a positive entity existing in space . . . [but] . . . ultimately nothing but a certain *curvature of the space itself* which causes us to make a bend precisely when we want to get directly to the object" (in Schwarz 1997, 160), exceeds signification; its presence is experienced only in the negative form of its consequences.

Perhaps one interesting implication of Schwarz's positive account of the *objet a* is the suggestion that the very act of hinting at a modulation somehow elaborates a certain curvature of musical space. Thus a musical passage's *objet a* is partly revealed when it seems to behave as if under the influence of a new key without actually stating it. This suggestion is tantalizing and may be worth exploring. In "Ihr Bild," for example, there is an interesting moment, deeply embedded within the narrator's vision of the beloved's seemingly living expressions, where the music seems to swerve from the possibility of changing mode. To begin with, the music contrasts stark octaves in B-flat minor of "Ich stand in dunklen Träumen und starrt' ihr Bildniss an" ("I stood in deep dreams and stared at her picture") with the naive, warm and obedient chorale harmonization in the parallel major of "und das geliebte Antlitz heimlich zu leben begann" ("and the beloved image secretly began to live"), and so sets up a modal opposition between the quiet stasis of dream-like staring, on the one hand, and the exquisite satisfaction of secret fantasy, on the other. But, unlike its minor counterpart, the major-mode material reveals a vulnerability to inflection by the minor throughout the piece. In measures 10 and 12, for instance, the chromatic A \flat briefly reflects the mode of contrast in phrases that are otherwise candidly in B-flat major. (In measure 10, the A \flat relates to C minor—to which triad it moves in measures 10–11—and in measure 12 it relates to E-flat major.) When the turn to (B-flat) minor becomes more pronounced in measures 15–16 (as the beloved's lips appear to move), the music turns out to be really becoming (G-flat) major. No longer even noticing the fantastical dimension of what he sees, the narrator is drawn still deeper into the object of contemplation: "Um ihre Lippen zog sich ein Lächeln wunderbar" ("around her lips appeared a wonderful smile").

It is in the next phrase that the music seems to swerve away from becoming minor once more. On the last beat of measure 20, a chromatic passing tone in the bass produces a \flat iv chord in G-flat minor, but it is denied any consequence. It is as if, after eluding the turn to (B-flat) minor in previous measures by elaborating G-flat major, the analogous possibility that minor can haunt major in a different key as well must be repressed to sustain the secret

phantasmic activity. The passage continues in G-flat major, as if nothing had happened, by imitating measures 18–19 almost exactly. At this point, the narrator's vision has been enfolded by another layer of unreality; he begins to probe the imagined reason for the beloved's imagined tears—"und wie von Wehmutstränen erglänzte ihr Augenpaar" (and, as if with tears of sorrow, her eyes shone). The point is that, while the previous phrase (mm. 15–18) takes seriously the possibility of changing mode, this one (mm. 19–22) represses it, and so betrays the desire to hold onto the major mode at all costs. Of course, G-flat major is more closely related to B-flat minor than it is to B-flat major, which (despite the music's efforts to avoid the sound of it) predestines the return of the minor to some extent. Also, the moment G-flat major seems to slip away in measure 20 (with a major-to-minor subdominant progression partly analogous to mm. 10 and 12), the chromatically descending bass line (E \flat , E $\flat\flat$, D \flat) also juxtaposes the enharmonic equivalents of the major and minor thirds of B-flat. And the fragility of this sustained fantasy (supported by a failure to modulate, by the haunting proximity of B-flat minor, and by faint references to both versions of the B-flat triad) is revealed in the next gestures (mm. 23–24) when the music is roughly yanked back to B-flat minor and the narrator finds himself reflecting on his own fixated condition once more.⁶ This swerve away from the option of modulating may be figured in terms of a kind of musical bend away from the reality of one's condition on account of desire, a kind of paradoxical *objet a*. This is not to say the C-flat minor triad, for example, *represents* the *objet a*, but that the failure to change mode in its presence discloses the dimensions of that desire.

This kind of approach to the psychoanalytic dimensions of music could be broadened to include all musical moments (not only not-modulating ones) that reflect something out of sync with (what McClary might call) the "conventional wisdom" of a piece of music (2000, 1–31). By swerving from the music's syntactic or stylistic norms, the particular musical expression dialectically challenges the control of those normative generalities within which the piece operates. This is why the "representational" stance in *Listening Subjects* is problematic. It tends to disengage from such dialectical considerations and to analyze music's relation to psychoanalysis by way of one-to-one mappings. To take a paradoxical example from the analysis of Diamanda Galas, how does a note "*signify*" the abjection that "erases boundaries among . . . signifying categories" (Schwarz 1997, 157)? The traditional roles of music and language have been dramatically reversed here. Schwarz grants music the power to signify and represent in positive terms that which eludes signification, while linguistic signifiers are caught in a kind of musical sliding. So, while Lacan's model of language inherits the lineaments of the nineteenth-century philosophical figuration of music, Schwarz's "Lacanian" hearing of music inherits the lineaments of a pre-Lacanian model of language. The discourse traditionally lacking significance signifies and the tra-

ditionally signifying discourse becomes pure movement. The priorities have been reversed with frequently paradoxical results.

A second problem with the “representational” stance is the way the analyses often uphold a passive view of the psychodynamics at work. If musical processes *represent* psychoanalytic ones, they cannot move beyond them, mark *their* limits, or offer a space for radical contingency. This is troubling, if only because the work of art for Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva (not to mention the musical work for Wackenroder, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard) is endowed with just this rupturing potential. For Lacan, for example, painting provides a way out of the alienation of the gaze. By resisting the gaze through the intervention of the “real” in painting, the viewer is able to accept the subjectifying effect of the gaze and thus be freed from his/her search for satisfaction through fantasy. In contrast, Schwarz’s music mainly *subjects*. His music is passively linked to some or other self-identical psychoanalytic dynamic: Schubert’s “Der Doppelgänger” is a “musical representation of the . . . Lacanian enjoyment [*jouissance*]” (Schwartz 1997, 69), Peter Gabriel’s “Intruder” “represents the . . . language-bound fantasy of power” (93–94), Diamanda Galas’s cries and declamations are “representations of abjection” (160), and so on. Unless the analyses can be moved out of the logic of “representation” nothing else is foreseeable.

IMMANENTISM, IMAGINATION, AND POLITICS

Let me now suggest another distinction instead between, on the one hand, a “structural” listening (or a “stylistic” listening for that matter) that entails a notion of arrest, of limiting an interpretation, and, on the other, a “structural” (or again “stylistic”) listening that opens doors of imaginative possibility. The first analytic orientation would yield an interpretation of music that is eternally firm, rendered immobile by a kind of self-announced, wholly immanent meaning. By “immanent” I mean an account in which everything that is analytically relevant persists within the system under investigation. Such an interpretation would recognize neither a disjuncture between what the musical event means and its *happening* nor any appeal to independent criteria. Perhaps a certain reading of Schenkerian analysis, one that reduces the *Urfinie* to some kind of essence; or perhaps a certain kind of set-theoretical reading, that hears various pitch-class sets as fixed (as nameable sonorities whatever their context) would count as such a limiting kind of approach. Perhaps, even, the technical language of music analysis generally, uninterested as it seems to be in permitting terms from ordinary language into its discourse, places music analysis in the domain of immanence, practically by definition. But, first, is this outer sign (the use of this language alone) enough to clinch the charge that this is a case of immobilizing our listening? I think the cases of Lewin and Boretz suggest that it is

not always enough. Second, does the problem of immanence also haunt accounts that go beyond (what Subotnik calls) the “internal configuration” of the musical text (1991, 244)? I think the cases of Subotnik and Schwarz suggest that it can do so. Moreover, when we speak of hearing tonal music in terms of cognitive archetypes, for example, or when we speak about the conventional dimensions of music-making as already established and fixed, we risk immanentism. Subotnik, for example, renders “the common musical logic or well-established set[s] of convention” as “irrefutable” fact instead of as negotiable determinant (1991, 245). What I am suggesting is that we can build neat formalist circuits with hybridized language as well, maybe even more believable ones.

The second orientation for listening, the “opening-possibility” sort, is one that widens the horizon of musical meaning by marking various moments of musical undecidability. This approach would give rise to new perspectives and new ways of organizing musical sounds and their possible intersections with social meanings. At the same time, it would resist meanings whose unity is determined by the totalizing tendency (however grammatically fragmented and diverse its terminology may seem) that structures the multiplicity of the text.

With this distinction between analytic orientations in mind, my argument is now going to take an unexpected turn. While I prefer the latter imaginative and open-ended orientation, I want to argue that, even though both are highly relevant to aspects of the political, *neither of these ways of listening is inherently more politically or socially beneficial than the other*. In fact, I think that assessing the political use to which ways of listening or methods of musicological study can be put entails, first, an explicit formulation of the political problem that is disturbing one (at least in the background of one’s work), and, second, a program that puts the former in service of the latter. To quote Derrida on the *Politics of Friendship*: “If the political is to exist, one must know who everyone is, who is a friend and who is an enemy, and this knowing is not in the mode of theoretical knowledge but in one of *practical identification*” (1997, 116). Now, even while this choosing of friends and enemies turns out to be a *mad* practice—a decision in the experience of the undecidable (radically unpredictable, radically contingent)—we are obliged to identify the contexts that factually limit structural undecidability if we want to institute political commitments.⁷

Now, I also think that *both* ways of listening I have just outlined (“immanentist” and “imaginative”) can be, and often are, put in political service. Let me demonstrate this with examples. First, let me mention two examples of how a rigidly structural analysis of the immanentist and pedantically “limiting” sort can yield ideas that can be put to politically *progressive* use.

Example 1: By taking seriously Schoenberg’s call for due attention to the abstract musical “idea,” as well as Adorno’s praise for Schoenberg’s “nega-

tion of all facades” (in Subotnik, 1996, 150; 162), a music analysis of the music of Webern (explicitly linked to Schoenberg throughout Subotnik’s text) that counterintuitively ignores aspects of “color,” “medium,” and “affect” (aspects of “stylistic listening”), and, in the domain of the brazenly “structural” alone, may issue forth a radical critique of gender hierarchy. The link between Webern’s musical material and the then prevalent discourse of “inversion” suggests that the former was elaborating, however implicitly, an androgynous musical ideal. In Webern’s terms, the new music’s preoccupation with formal symmetries was an effort to transcend the gendered dualism of major and minor that culminated in an ungendered atonal musical space.⁸ In short, reducing the music to its autotelic inner structural symmetries can contribute to imagining the institution of gender parity in the social world.

Example 2: By comparing the harmonic language, structurally speaking, of Shona *mbira dza vadzimu* music of Zimbabwe with the *nyanga* panpipe music of the Nyungwe of Mozambique or the kalimba and panpipe music of the VhaVhenda of South Africa, a musical analysis may show cultural resonances between these “tribal” groupings that traverse the political border of their respective modern nation-states. Thus, excavating various structural affinities in music can assist in rewriting the past in terms of a shared, instead of an irreducibly divided, history of southern Africa. In light of the legacy of colonial investments in the invention of tribalism in southern Africa, this music-analytic dogmatism can therefore challenge another, more virulent, dogmatism.⁹ In short, the strategic mobilization of starkly closed musical structures can contribute to the freeing up of post-colonial social space.

Second, let me mention two examples of how a structural analysis—now of the imaginative and “opening” sort—might equally yield ideas that can be put to politically progressive use.

Example 1: By marking for consciousness that which is contingent and particular (or inherently multiple and undecidable) in music of the canon, close music analysis may disturb the unitary conception of the Western canon figured as a cumulative-evolutionary narrative. For instance, if an analysis of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto is startled by the radical peculiarity of the D#s that interrupt the respectable tonal behavior (in D major) of the first movement in measures 10 and 12, instead of with the way the movement’s *Urlinie* realizes a latent world-historical trajectory, then Beethoven’s organic connection to Perotin, Machaut, Josquin, Monteverdi, and Bach cannot be taken with too much confidence.¹⁰ More generally, by resisting the reductive, predictive, and generalizing tendency of immanentist music analysis, imaginative close listening can encourage a social consciousness not wholly absorbed by (what Georg Lukács calls) the “reification” of capitalist

rationality.¹¹ In other words, the imagination can supplement the gap upon which social conventions are founded, and thus contribute to the devolution of power in the political world. This is why Murray Krieger insists that the aesthetic “can have its revenge upon ideology by revealing a power to complicate that is also a power to undermine” (in Clark 2000, 1).

Example 2: By analyzing, for example, the perceptually beriddling (indeed undecidable) harmonic and rhythmic patterning of Zimbabwean mbira music, we may be, first, opening institutional space for African music’s contribution to international musicological definitions and debates, and, second, staking a claim on the canon (globally conceived) for music in the marginalized world. First, the close analytic examination of African music’s temporalities can revise our understanding of perceptions of meter and rhythm *in general*. In this way, imaginative analysis may help to *Africanize* those (Western) theories that go as universal. Second, the close analytic examination of African harmony can demonstrate aesthetic complexities that may encourage canonizing the music outside of the foreclosed categories of “world music.”¹² This in turn can contribute to the structural uplifting of African music in global modernity.¹³ Perhaps structural listening can therefore help some of us hear value where we heard none before. (Or does the supposition that structural listening, for example, is irreducibly *not* “applicable to music that falls outside the canon” [Subotnik 1996, 158] answer to another need—one that will not grant African music an unmarked entry into global modernity?)¹⁴

I am trying to say that there are political reasons for not turning musical formalism into a kind of Correct Consciousness taboo in the domain of cultural politics on the left. If it is true, as Subotnik maintains, that structural listening yields an “impression of objectivity,” “a unifying principle [that] establish[es] the internal ‘necessity’ of a structure as tantamount to a guarantee of musical *value*” (1996, 158–9, italics mine) then why, in the wake of this knowledge, do we choose to turn away from structural listening instead of using its evident power to assign value to strategically reconstellate culture in terms that we prefer? Nietzsche’s insight that we continue to hold on to certain truths and values even after they are shown to be based on error or on values that we do not agree with, makes me worry about giving up the compelling territory of structural listening just because some musicologists believe it is based on values they do not uphold. Rephrased in more recent parlance, just because the emotional investments and the hopes that people have are the result of what Laclau calls a “complex discursive-hegemonic construction” (1996, 63), and not the expression of an *a prioristic* essence, is no argument against their validity. If *this* scenario is right, then it will not do for us to *either* celebrate structural listening as upholding some criterion of truth *or* to recoil from its ideology in alarm. While it is true that formal

approaches to the study of music are but interpretations, it is worth remembering that the McClary-like negation of all metaphysics, for example, which casts us forever out of the Eden of unmediated truth, is also an interpretation. And while it is true that formal approaches to the study of music inevitably close down various other approaches, it is worth remembering that such closure is a necessary condition for the openings it proffers. As Nietzsche writes in *Daybreak*, “One blinds some birds to make others sing more beautifully” (1997, 41). Let the structural riddles multiply! After all, if Nietzsche could hold *good* and *evil* to be gradations on a continuum, to be refinements of one another, how few risks must our musicology be taking to channel *ways of hearing* into irreducible opposites? How advantageous to life is the “Beyond” we imagine of “structural listening”?

NOTES

1. On *temporization*, see Derrida 1986, 1–28.
2. On “transformation,” see Lewin 1987 and 1993.
3. On musical “sense,” see Dubiel 1992.
4. On the “unsayable,” see Budick and Iser 1989.
5. Boretz 1971, 149–55; Derrida 1997; Laclau 1996, 47–67.
6. It is important to point out that hearing this moment as a swerve away from the opportunity to modulate depends on noticing mm. 15–18 as yielding to that possibility. This, to my mind, is what distinguishes the chromatic inflection in m. 20 from those in mm. 10 and 12. Only after hearing the move to the contrasting key succeed in the previous phrase does the one in mm. 19–22 feel like an evasion. On the other hand, the tenuousness of the B-flat major music (embedded in the key of B-flat minor) makes it sound like the return of the octaves in m. 25 is all too due. I would like to thank Joseph Dubiel for prompting me to refine my analysis of “Ihr Bild.”
7. Like those supplemental criteria that unexpectedly encroach upon the concept-metaphors of “friendship,” “toleration,” and “rhythm,” the political efficacy of a chosen modality of listening to music is not logically entailed in that modality.
8. On the gendered history of major and minor and its undoing in the new music, see Webern 1975, 28; 37; 43; For an extended analysis of these relations, see Scherzinger 1997.
9. On the invention of tribalism in this part of the world, see Ranger 1985.
10. On the peculiarities of the D \sharp s in Beethoven’s Violin Concerto and its connection to the practice of music analysis, see Dubiel 1996, 26–50.
11. On “reification,” see Lukács 1971. On predictive and generalizing conceits in music theory, see Maus 1993.
12. On the strategic canonization of African music, see Scherzinger 2001.
13. By focusing on harmony instead of rhythm, this kind of analytic work might also demythologize the shorthand view that African music is predominantly “rhythmic.” On the invention of African rhythm, see Agawu 1995.
14. Of course, Subotnik’s critique is concerned with legitimating non-canonic

music and not with marginalizing it further (as I suggest here). My point is that legitimation cannot be achieved through the critique of an institutionally accepted method, but only—and then only *perhaps*—through a strategic use of the sanctioned method. Therefore, the critique of a method (on grounds of its exclusionary “inapplicability” elsewhere) paradoxically produces a lack of interest in its progressive potential.