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INTRODUCTION

On Sonotropism

Martin Scherzinger

This double issue of *Contemporary Music Review* assembles 10 essays that examine the functional place of music in contemporary European philosophy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The essays explore the musical dimensions of lesser-known figures as well as well-known philosophical figures in relation to their lesser-known musical dimensions. Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Rancière, and Alain Badiou, for example, are central figures in debates concerning phenomenology, postmodernism, and political philosophy. Their musical writings, however, have been largely overlooked. Of those discussed here whose musical writings have gained some currency—Ernst Bloch, Theodor W. Adorno, Jean-Luc Nancy, Edward Said, and Slavoj Žižek—music mostly constitutes but a partial aspect of their overall philosophical output. These essays attempt to supplement the gap, raising more prominently than hitherto the question concerning music in this philosophical *milieu*.

The collection represents some of the distinctive recent work of an emerging generation of American-based music scholars tackling the relationship between philosophy and music in a qualitatively new way. While this intellectual output cannot be easily summarized, one detects certain features. If what was once called ‘New Musicology’ in the 1990s can be characterized by a turn to literary theory and philosophy—treated as sources of (mostly nonjudgmental) inspiration—then we find here a new body of work that turns the tables on the relation between music and philosophy. Instead of bringing philosophy to musicology, this work critically analyzes how music inhabits philosophy itself and then assesses the ethical and political dimensions of these philosophical positions and their relation to lived history.

It is a curiosity of the new musicology that its central philosophical referents—Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, to name a few—underwrote a kind of historicizing and contextualizing tendency in the field. In the process, the *musical* aspects of French structuralism and poststructuralism were paradoxically passed over. It is a further curiosity that the central arguments of structuralism and poststructuralism are themselves genealogically articulated to a German metaphysical

tradition that persistently afforded a privileged place to music, further linking the former philosophy to musical reflection. Instead of noting musicality as a constitutive dimension of structuralism and poststructuralism, the new musicology tended to derive from these fields the culturally determined character of music as a communicative praxis. In contrast, this collection aims to retrieve some of the musical character of this philosophical tradition, demonstrating how music helps to shape the very nature of its theoretical arguments. It thereby attempts to go beyond a research agenda that simply situates modes of variously mediated ‘musicking’ in webs of cultural context and practice (Small, 1998). Furthermore, instead of linking music, understood as a context-bound carrier of meaning, to an undefined ‘political force field’, these essays interrogate the theoretical dimensions of what constitutes such a political field in the first place (Moreno, personal communication, December 12, 2010). Gathered here, then, are 10 essays written by music scholars reflecting on and critically gauging the thought of 10 philosophers who investigate music and sound as a prominent regulative concept.

Music has long claimed residency in and served as an important conduit for philosophy. From the era of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment to the present, philosophy has amply granted the figure of music a certain pride of place. In general, music’s valence in early idealist philosophy was grounded in its ineffability, construed as lying beyond the logic and grasp of propositional nomenclatures. In this tradition, music’s failure to operate according to the model of language paradoxically afforded it the capacity for elevated metaphysical reflections on human existence. The idea is latent already in Emmanuel Kant’s rationally oriented philosophical critique. In his *Critique of judgment*, Kant argues that music was able to ‘agitate the mind *more* diversely and intensely’ than poetry, which was the highest form of the art (italics mine, 1951, p. 198). On the one hand, Kant demoted music’s value on account of its inability to be reined in by determinate thought, and yet, on the other hand, music thereby (excessively) exhibited the imaginative play central to idea formation. Also, Kant describes the free play of the faculties that grounds the feeling of the beautiful in musical terms: he calls it a ‘harmony’, even a ‘concert’, of the faculties. Music’s ‘*unspeakable* wealth’, set adrift from conceptual determination, took on increasingly affirmative and idealized tones in much nineteenth-century metaphysics. For example, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder construed music as angelically floating free from the restraints of the material world. Friedrich Schelling argued that music’s ability to combine cognitive and sensuous experience should stand as a model for philosophy. In Kierkegaard’s (1987) philosophical scheme, the boundless erotic striving of the pure unmediated life force was best exemplified by music. Music, for Arthur Schopenhauer, was the closest possible analogy to the endlessly striving ‘will’—a precursor to the Freudian unconscious. Schopenhauer valued the ‘delays and postponements’ that characterized music, no less than the will, over the referential abstractions that characterized language (Schopenhauer, 1958, p. 451). It was music’s endless deferrals that reflected most vividly on our essential human nature. In his early work, Nietzsche (1967) too would subordinate the epistemological status of language,

figured as abstract and reductive, to that of music, figured as creative and generative. By musicalizing philosophy, Nietzsche sought to reinvigorate its creative and critical potential for thought. In short, as a central case for a human expressive practice that resisted epistemological certainty, and yet simultaneously aroused deep feelings, enhanced social activities, and inspired profound ideas, music functioned in these philosophical texts as a discourse of idealized negation *par excellence*.

The negative privilege accorded music in nineteenth-century metaphysics had a remarkable afterlife in philosophy of the twentieth century. Despite the materialist and linguistic turns that marked much philosophical engagement with music during the modern and postmodern eras, respectively, strains of idealism persisted. Bloch figured the open-ended and refractory qualities of music as an entryway to a politics of hope. It was precisely music's objectless expressive character that rendered it a potent symbol of subjective longing and political aspiration. For Bloch, music's material is embodied in its 'tone', whose openness surpasses the limits of language and thereby opens to future possibility. Relatedly, Adorno's negative dialectical approach prominently explored musical experience (albeit by way of relentless self-abnegation) in relation to the appearance of the non-existent. Music, for Adorno, unfolds a kind of truth by developing its formal structure on the model of 'constellation' and thereby permitting the utterly different to emerge within it. The politically minded materialism of these modernists, nonetheless, sustained music's idealism, derived in part from the Hegelian principle of non-identity.

While the language of negation persisted in poststructuralist thought, the figure of music receded somewhat. Even so, it revealingly resurfaced in ways that were consonant with the idealist tradition. Roland Barthes's often-cited essay 'The Grain of the Voice', for example, drew on the historical idea that musical materiality eluded the authority of predicative language (Barthes, 1985). Similarly, Julia Kristeva's non-representational theory of language drew on a musical lexicon; indeed, the 'tone' and the 'rhythm' of the pure signifier reverberated as if in musical space (in Eagleton, 1983, p. 188). Following Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida too granted the art of musicalized listening pride of place. He associated the origin of philosophy with the death of music: 'But I wonder if philosophy, which is also the birth of prose, has not meant the repression of music or song. Philosophy cannot, as such, let the song resonate in some way' (Derrida, 1995, p. 394). Against the irreducible conceptual inertia of philosophy, Derrida (1995) sought to allow 'the multiplicity of voices in music [to] take over' the philosophical inquiry (p. 394). Textual polyvalence was here associated with music's many-voiced resonance. Music was the art that suspended the assurance of referential self-presence. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari (1979) ekphrastically deployed music and musical thought to define new philosophical concepts, such as 'synthesizer', 'smooth', 'striated', and 'diagonal'. The second volume of their *Capitalism and schizophrenia* can be described as a study in inter-semiotic transposition, amalgamating the conceptual and sensual dimensions of a modernist musical lexicon (most notably borrowed from Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, and Luciano Berio) for a politically oriented philosophy. For all their interest in politics, language, culture, and history,

then, we find in these texts a recurrent attempt to metamorphose philosophical thought on the model of musical sound. This theoretical aspiration toward the condition of music—much as plants turn toward sunlight—is philosophy's *sonotropism*.

The 10 essays in this collection investigate aspects of the philosophical turn to sound and music. Amy Cimini notes the strikingly sonorous character of Husserl's theory of *vision*. Husserl's anti-Cartesian phenomenology, grounded in non-discursive bodily experience, for example, emphasizes the immersive and vibrational aspects of seeing. On the other hand, the philosopher's actual account of music negates dynamic co-constitution in favor of an anachronistic model that grants music temporal priority in a one-way flow between world and body. Cimini argues that this missed opportunity creates the condition for the theory's undermining. For Cimini, the latent mind-body split recapitulated by Husserl here persists even in the recent context of musicology that has ostensibly turned away from hermeneutics and toward affect and embodiment. Adorno too detected in Husserl's phenomenology an account of consciousness that was overly idealist and thus sealed from historical determination. Stephen Smith shows how Adorno effectively harnessed the experience of *musical* time to brush against the grain of the Husserlian consciousness. One may speak here of a more effective sonotropism than we find in Husserl, save for the fact that Smith demonstrates how Adorno's construal of musical time is actually indebted to Walter Benjamin's dialectical analysis of phantasmagoria. Nonetheless, for Adorno, it is musical experience that can register irreducible transience and contingency, offering up traces of 'forgotten histories' and 'unimagined futures' that are occluded by phenomenological idealism. Adorno's concern for political hope is central to Bloch's music-inflected philosophy as well. Michael Gallope explores the peculiar link between music and politics in Bloch's philosophy. For Bloch, music's non-referential *Ungleichzeitigkeit* can function as a cipher of political hope. Gallope tests the proposition in relation to actual history, using the 2011 Egyptian Revolution as a central referent. Gallope demonstrates compelling links between Bloch and more recent commentators such as Alain Badiou, Peter Hallwood, and Slavoj Žižek. For example, Gallope notes the affinity between Bloch's oblique musical indicators of hope and Žižek's anti-relativist insistence on eternal ideals such as freedom, justice, and dignity, which, for Žižek, most accurately capture the political aspirations of the protests on Tahrir Square. On the other hand, Gallope ultimately reads Bloch's romantic idealism as symptomatic of its time.

Even if music's overt political value is contested and in doubt, its apparent openness to difference and becoming remains relevant to aspects of the political and modes of critical thought. Heidegger, for example, rarely addressed music directly, yet his philosophy bears the marks of sonotropism. Heidegger's philosophical concept of attunement, for example, is a sensory mode of attention in which man's non-objective relation to the world is disclosed. Jennifer Heuson outlines the priority Heidegger grants to hearing in the context of attunement. In Heidegger's text, she argues, hearing constitutes the primary openness of *Da-sein*. Heuson describes the complex and contradictory soundscapes of Heidegger's time and speculates on the way these

are sublimated into his work. Against the idle talk and chatter that sponsors the pre-given, Heidegger emphasizes the role of the 'silence' that 'lets something be understood'. For Heidegger, hearing as such paradoxically involves a 'complicated attitude' that effectively leads the ear away from what we are immediately given to hear. As with Heidegger, Lyotard too describes the silence, or 'non-articulable' qualities to which music gives voice. Trent Leipert examines Lyotard's thinking about music, with a special emphasis on its relation to affect. Leipert describes the links between the figure of music and some of Lyotard's central philosophical concepts (including *passability* and the *differend*). In a manner that echoes Bloch, Lyotard places a high value on the resonant tone, construed as 'sound-matter-timbre'. Freed from all referential 'destination', the tone ultimately strives to bring to the ear that which ordinarily escapes being heard. Leipert shows how music, in Lyotard's theory, thus proffers a mode of listening that opens to something unanticipated.

Lyotard's musical listening resonates overtly with the kinds of listening elaborated in the work of various French theorists, including Pierre Schaeffer, Barthes, and Nancy. In his essay, Brian Kane unpacks the sense of various listening modes as they are apprehended in the French language. To contextualize Nancy's subject of listening, Kane describes four modes of listening found in Pierre Schaeffer's *Traité des objets musicaux: écouter, entendre, comprendre, and oïr*. Of these, *entendre*—a kind of listening that directs attention away from the source and toward the sound as such—most closely resembles the character of Heidegger's hearing as attunement as well as Lyotard's non-referential musical tone. For all its sensory acuity, however, Nancy contests Schaeffer's taxonomy, arguing against its reliance on a latent dichotomy between sensibility and understanding. Kane outlines Nancy's critique and demonstrates Nancy's alternative model for listening. As with Schaeffer and others, Nancy also notes the value of non-signifying listening—musical sounds, for example, make 'sense in their own resonance'. Ultimately, however, Nancy construes listening as an 'infinite *renvoi* of meaning, sound, and self', which applies equally to all practices of listening. Once again, sonotropism becomes a productive site for theorizing the subject. Just as Adorno's attention to musical temporality shifts the contours of Husserl's model of the subject, Nancy's attention to music and sound shifts the contours of Schaeffer's model of the subject of listening. Music takes up a similarly structural place in Žižek's psychoanalytic theory of the subject; indeed, music 'represents a privileged mode of entreaty to the Other'. Holly Watkins examines the affordances and limits of Žižek's position, arguing that Žižek overvalues music's metaphysical character. Watkins detects in Žižek an uncritical romantic view of music—music 'renders the true heart of the subject' as an 'inaccessible excess', and so on—that ultimately disavows historical responsibility. The paradox here is that where Adorno's revision of Husserl's subject deploys musical temporality to retrieve a historical dimension, Žižek's use of music apparently evacuates history in outlining a theory of the subject. On the other hand, Žižek shares with Adorno an interest in the possibility of political hope.

As it is for Žižek, the possibility of politics is a central concern for Badiou and Rancière as well. For Badiou, the formal protocols of music effect modes of possible

political transformation that imaginatively transcend the conceptual limits of linguistically or historically mediated ones. Martin Scherzinger outlines the scope of this claim in relation to Badiou's interpretation of Richard Wagner's output. Scherzinger argues, on the one hand, that Badiou does not fully account for the formal procedures found in Wagner, and on the other, that Badiou astutely detects in Wagner's music a mode of thinking that casts innovative perspectives on processes that effect shifts in power. Badiou's sonotropism thereby underwrites his unorthodox Marxism. In contrast, Rancière's Marxism does not privilege the role of music and sound. Jairo Moreno and Gavin Steingo outline Rancière's fourfold division of regimes of art and their relation to music: *ethical*, *poetic*, *esthetic*, and *equal*. Following Rancière's axiomatic assertion of equality, Moreno and Steingo ultimately acknowledge the irreducible compromise of music's various distributions when it comes to politics. This worldly turn toward esthetics, understood as a distribution of the sensible, grants music no special metaphysical value. Thus, music cannot function to transcend, distill, or clarify political action as much as become a way of doing, making, and perceiving like any other. While the specifics of their political orientations differ, Rancière's worldly distribution of the sensible is consistent with the secular humanism adumbrated by Edward Said. James Currie, however, excavates a moment in Said's thinking that fits awkwardly with the humanism that ostensibly characterizes his *oeuvre*. Currie examines the West-Eastern Divan orchestra, which Said co-founded with Daniel Barenboim, as a vehicle for narrowing the gap of cultural understanding between Palestinians and Israelis. Currie demonstrates precisely how musical labor served to loosen the grip of an ossified set of social interactions. While music is not elevated to the metaphysical heights we find in romanticism, it nonetheless effects a moment of productive forgetting, in Nietzsche's sense. Participants thereby momentarily give life to music's metaphysical *claim* to transcendence.

In even the most 'worldly' of these philosophical encounters with music, then, we detect a lingering note of music's ethical promise. Thus, the construal of music as a human practice within social history rarely expunges entirely the idealist tendencies of nineteenth-century metaphysics. Sonotropism in philosophy proceeds *as if* music held a metaphysical valence in excess of the usual mediators of language, culture, and history. The question is: Does music's non-referential excess hold out the promise of political hope, utopia, becoming, attunement, deconstructive resonance, productive forgetting, transformation, and so on? Or does its lack of specificity bring down a curse thereby efficiently functioning as the ideological ruse for such transformation and hope?

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