

Dell'Antonio, Andrew, ed. 2004. *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Reviewed by Julian Horton

“Diagnosing the present,” writes Rose Subotnik in her afterword to *Beyond Structural Listening? Postmodern Modes of Hearing*, “is a lot like predicting the future, only riskier” (280). Subotnik’s cautionary remarks notwithstanding, it seems that few periods in the history of musicology have inclined so thoroughly towards disciplinary self-scrutiny as the past twenty years. Despite widespread protestations of pluralism, the sources of influence propelling this introspection are relatively homogeneous, and as such are readily identifiable. If the recent course taken by Anglo-American musicology is characterized by any one single development, it is surely a belated engagement with the various discourses of postmodernity that have gathered force in other areas of the humanities since the 1960s.

In the wake, so to speak, of this postmodernization, concerted efforts have been made towards institutional consolidation, evinced in the various corporate and single-author volumes seeking to define the scope and terms of the “new paradigm,” to use Subotnik’s term.¹ *Beyond Structural Listening* adds fresh momentum to this tendency. Its point of orientation is the concept of “structural listening” as defined and critiqued by Subotnik: the reason-centered mode of engagement with autonomous musical structure, particularly as propagated by Schoenberg and Adorno, that had, until recently, come to dominate Anglo-American music-analytical practice.² The collection assembles essays by Fred Everett Maus, Tamara Levitz, Robert Fink, Paul Attinello, Joseph Dubiel, Andrew Dell’Antonio, Elisabeth Le Guin, and Martin Scherzinger on a wide range of topics, from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony to MTV, with the broad intent of establishing what it might mean to listen or think beyond these parameters. In so doing, it delineates very clearly a gamut of “modernist” musicological and analytical tendencies and their putative postmodern alternatives.

Despite this diversity of subject matter, each essay in its own way addresses one vital question: what role should analysis, in the sense of the close reading of immanent musical material, play within the new paradigm of musicology? Subotnik herself has urged a form of “stylistic listening,” of which structural listening strategies would form one component part. The interrogative nature of the collection’s title is salutary in this regard, for the authors do not unanimously accept Subotnik’s position. It is most tren-

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chantly critiqued in Scherzinger's "The Return of the Aesthetic." As he sensibly observes, the abandonment of structural analysis in favor of social, cultural, and political investigation cannot of itself guarantee the obviation of concealed ideology that much new-musicological commentary urges. Rather, disposing of analysis risks "reading right through the musical text as if it were a mere representation of the social"; as a consequence, "the music as such is in danger of disappearing against a general background of social determination" (253–54). Far from rendering musicology ideologically aware, the neglect of close reading dissolves music into a complex of socio-political ideologies, the detection of which is itself ideologically motivated. If musical commentary is to avoid this pitfall, we have to recognize the dialectical dependency of socio-cultural commentary on the autonomous text, since "it is only possible to elevate the social world . . . as the determining factor of musical experience when world and work are construed antithetically" (254).

The points raised by Scherzinger hold up a kind of critical mirror to the other contributions: each essay in its own way tests the antithetical construal of world and work. In Fred Everett Maus's essay, this takes the form of a comparison between listening and analysis and certain types of sexual relations. He undertakes a critical comparison of two landmark models of music-analytical engagement—Allen Forte's "Schenker's Conception of Musical Structure" (1959) and Edward T. Cone's *The Composer's Voice* (1974)—with the ultimate aim of identifying points of similarity between listening, analysis and the psychology of sado-masochism. Thus Cone's depiction of the relationship between performer as active participant and listener as passive recipient tends "toward the range of sexual activities known as sado-masochism, or bondage and discipline . . . where partners agree that one partner will relinquish overt control and activity to the other" (Dell'Antonio 2004:35). Listening, in short, is an act of submission, while performance and composition entail domination of both the audience and the musical material. Analysis, in turn, seeks to regain a measure of the control that listening gives up. Maus invokes Joseph Dubiel's characterization of Schenkerian analysis as a kind of "fantasy recomposition," or the process of comprehending music "by taking on the perspective of a fictionalized creator" to reinforce this point (30).³

This conflation of musicological, analytical, and psycho-sexual concepts tends towards a kind of essentialism. At base, it assumes the pervasiveness of types of sexual interaction in the relationship between subject and musical work, made possible by borrowing Cone's notion of the persona, through which works take on the character of a controlling subject. But what grounds are there for accepting this analogy? Why should we assume that modes of

sexual interaction also govern our relationship with works of art? Even if we accept the idea that the object of artistic experience substitutes for that of interpersonal experience, we still face the problem, which Maus does not acknowledge, that such interaction is not purely sexual. And if relationships are more variegated than this characterization might allow, then the putative relationship with the persona of the work has concomitantly to be elaborated. Moreover, if the argument is accepted, then it must also hold for the relationship between analysis and the critique of analysis. In other words, some kind of sexual power relation must also exist between Maus as critic and the texts of Forte and Cone as objects of critical scrutiny.

The distinction between passive listener and dominant analyst is also problematic, assuming as it does that listeners do not participate in the construction of the works they hear. Yet aural reception is at least as much about making sense of music as it is about being its passive recipient. In this respect, structural listening is not just a cultural construct, but also a fundamental condition of audition, since listening is an act of comprehension as much as it is of perception. Comparison with Elisabeth Le Guin's contribution is instructive in this respect. The listening experiment she conducts on Debussy's song *Soupir* tests precisely this issue. Le Guin begins with Debussy's own supposition that "[w]hen one really listens to music . . . one hears at once what should be heard." In order to assess this claim, she sets out to establish what, subjectively, is immediately apparent in the song, without the interventions of musicological knowledge or the analysis of the score (216).⁴ Le Guin ruminates compellingly on the relationships between this experiment and the problems of capturing experience descriptively or analytically, taking in the views of Diderot, Rousseau, Proust, Bergson, and Husserl along the way. When she remarks of the experiment that "[t]he desire for something to look at is acute: I want a means to winnow these wayward perceptions, confirm the good ones, dismiss the embarrassing ones, and salve my musicological ego in the process" (240), she explains an urge towards conceptualization that collapses Maus's distinction between passive listening and analytical construction. Listening, in other words, might be bound up with analytical construction as a basic cognitive response.

The essays by Levitz and Fink form a pair, in the sense that both engage afresh with works that have courted sexual-political controversy; and again, the interaction of analytical and contextual evidence is a central concern. Levitz responds to the critical accusations of anti-humanism and proto-fascism levelled at *The Rite of Spring* by Adorno and Richard Taruskin.⁵ Above all, she takes issue with the way Adorno and Taruskin have understood the role of the Chosen One, contending that Adorno's view of her sacrifice as an annihilation of subjectivity in the name of the collective, and Taruskin's

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complementary idea that *The Rite's* musical construction purposely drains the Chosen One of her subjectivity, neglect the role of Nijinsky's choreography in constructing her character and function. Instead, Levitz sees *The Rite* as an instance of *art plastique*; its full meaning can thus only be revealed in the relationship of music and dance. Reconstruction of the choreography consequently reveals the tragic subjectivity of the Chosen One, a crucial component of the work, but one that is lost if the nature of the dance is simply inferred from the material evidence of the score.

Fink, in turn, leaps to the defense of Susan McClary, reinforcing her sexual-political reading of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony by tracing its covert lineage in the work's nineteenth-century reception, and by inscribing the hermeneutics of violent sexual failure in the failed Lydian ascent underpinning the famously unorthodox German-sixth harmony at the point of reprise in the first movement (McClary 1991). Fink pursues this property into the Finale, asserting that the "Lydianized" tonic preparation is never adequately resolved. The closing cadence exchanges "linear and harmonic subtlety for brute force," "the level of orchestral violence needed to maintain the celebration of brotherhood" indicating an enforced conclusion that masks formal failure with "pure noise" (Dell'Antonio 2004:140-41). Fink concludes that Beethoven

is in fact a rapist, but it is his own composition that he violates. [He] sets up an immense and complex formal dialectic, uses it to channel huge amounts of musico-libidinal energy—and then finally, impatiently, violates his own form by using it to enact his crude, solipsistic tonal desires. (147)

The crux of both essays is the claim that forms of structural hearing have colluded to misrepresent the social import of canonical works. Levitz does not reject structural evidence outright; rather, by focusing on the links between choreography and the structural techniques in the "Danse sacrale" that Taruskin regards as anti-human, she imbues them with a renewed subjectivity, and so affords the Chosen One her humanity. The point that the original choreography is important to a substantial understanding of *The Rite* is well taken; at the same time, it provokes questions of the relationship between musical and extra-musical evidence that are not developed. Even if Levitz is correct in asserting that the work should be understood as a collaborative art form, we must still confront the issue of how smoothly its component art forms conjoin. In other words, it is entirely possible that the meanings of Nijinsky's choreography might fail to permeate the musical material, or that the music might escape from its choreographic context and take on broader political and aesthetic connotations. This possibility

sits behind Adorno's observations: *The Rite* is more than the sum of its compositional, choreographic, and theatrical intentions; it also dialectically reflects its social and political circumstances, and does so because, if Adorno is to be believed, musical material and its processes have a quasi-historiographical function.

Although the arguments *pro* and *contra* McClary's reading of Beethoven's Ninth have been rehearsed exhaustively, Fink's article adds a genuinely fresh dimension to the debate. Its Achilles heel is again the relationship between analysis and hermeneutics. The entire reading turns on the presumption that an isolated voice-leading phenomenon (the Lydian ascent) guides, or fails to guide, the structure of the whole symphony, and that this is the arbiter of sexual politics. The extent of the Lydian ascent's influence is in itself questionable: the formal mechanisms of so substantial a work are likely to be conditioned by much more than a single, albeit crucially positioned, voice-leading dysfunction. Neither is its disruptive force in the first movement as extreme as Fink suggests. The recapitulatory problem Beethoven confronts is that his exposition first-theme group is both teleological (it builds towards a climactic assertion) and rotational (the intensification occurs in two varied forms). The difficulty faced in the recapitulation is how to make the initial intensification function as a point of thematic and tonal stabilization. This formal dialectic is exposed rather than resolved by the return of the first theme, and one of the casualties is the orthodox resolution of a German sixth. The tonic, however, is not damaged irreparably; the resolution of V onto I is simply transferred into the tonic major at the start of the second theme, in which context the entire first-theme reprise appears as a preparation for the second group, or as a digression inserted between the dominant preparation in the retransition and its resolution at the start of the second group. Both the tonic major and minor then receive ample cadential support later in the recapitulation, especially in the closing section, which is replete with unproblematic D minor cadential harmony. To tie the stability of the tonic entirely to the voice leading of the reprised first theme is seriously to overstate its formal repercussions.

The next stage of Fink's argument is to regard voice-leading tendency and libidinal energy as equivalent; the failure of an F# to resolve upwards, with adequate bass support, through G# onto A thus becomes a failure of sexual conquest, for which Beethoven will ultimately compensate by the sheer gestural force of the Finale's closing cadence. But what is the precise nature of the resulting "musico-libidinal energy"? What grounds do we have for assuming its existence? If such grounds can be identified, what is the mechanism through which libidinal energy becomes voice leading? Can we really claim that human libidinal urges are somehow contained within the

technical properties of its cultural products? Hermeneutics, as Lawrence Kramer has recently insisted, need not be empirically responsible in this way; however, in the absence of any kind of objective verification for a concept like “musico-libidinal energy,” the validity of the observation ends up being drawn itself from the realm of hermeneutics, as a result of which it courts self-justification.⁶ The whole sexual reading moreover depends on the Finale being understood as a closed form: it aims, in other words, at the kind of closure we would expect from a sonata form or rondo, through which Beethoven imposes his will on the recalcitrant voice leading of the first movement. But the form of the Finale is infamously problematic; and, as Robert Pascall has recently pointed out, it may be both historically and analytically advantageous to regard it as an open, or events-based, form, which composes out Beethoven’s concept of improvisation (2005). In this case, the sort of resolution that closed forms demand, the frustration of which is basic to the sexual-political argument, may not be an embodied property of the Finale’s formal design.

Morris’s and Attinello’s contributions also make an instructive pairing. Both, in their own ways, compel a kind of musicological self-scrutiny: in Morris’s case, a moral self-regard; in Attinello’s, an awareness of the subjectivities attending scholarly discourse. For Morris, the difficulty with the notion of structural listening is its evasion of ethical responsibility. Musicological questions that, on the face of it, seem epistemological in fact “contain indirect arguments about morality” (Dell’Antonio 2004:46). Morris traces three prominent strands of moral engagement: the status of music as a type of “moral action”; the ethics of composition, performance, reception, and scholarship; and the morality of musical institutions. He invokes Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1984) as a way of grounding the investigation of these issues, isolating in particular MacIntyre’s deployment of the concepts of virtue, practice, and tradition as alternatives to Enlightenment notions of moral reasoning, before scrutinizing the moral underpinnings of structural listening habits in these terms. The practical result of this is a type of musical engagement examining “lines of ethical inquiry that resonate with ethical moments within . . . pieces” (Dell’Antonio 2004:58), an aim Morris follows up in considerations of Brahms’ *Intermezzo* Op. 118, no. 2, Steve Reich’s *Come Out*, and “Reptile” by Nine Inch Nails.

Despite Morris’s avowed distance from the misleading objectivities of structural hearing, his readings nevertheless depend on the assumption that the works he considers have embodied moral qualities, located principally in their structure and affect. Thus the ethics of “lateness” in Brahms’ *Intermezzo* are revealed in certain of its voice-leading characteristics, particu-

larly in the deferral of resolution of the pitches D and F# expressed in the piece's opening gesture. This deferral, and the "hollowness" of the resolution when it finally comes, indicates for Morris that "lack is the normal state of affairs in this piece, as indeed it is in human life." The *Intermezzo* therefore "[teaches] us what it means to live with reduced expectations," but also "reveal[s] this poverty as partially compensated for by art" (61). Tellingly, Morris is forced to rely on a form of structural listening in order to make this reading stick, and indeed marks this resort rhetorically in the text: "If we must think in structural terms, we can note that the tonic triad of A major is only genuinely resolved at the very ends of the A sections" (60). Thinking "in structural terms" is therefore the key to thinking in moral terms, and we essentially return to Adorno's structure-as-metaphor argument: general issues of society and morality will remain detached from musical content and material unless the former are understood to have structural parallels in the latter.

Attinello focuses instead on the subjectivities underpinning the act of musicological writing. He begins by suggesting that the use of angels in Rilke's *Duino Elegies* ([1992] 1977) and Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* ([1939] 1968) might serve as metaphors for the "sonic violence" expressed in much post-war musical modernism. Attinello then reflects on the motivations guiding this research, and on how personal circumstances can inflect both our choices of, and responses to, research topics. His perceptions are sensitive, thoughtful, and at times painfully honest, inclining towards a kind of fragmentary autobiography. Yet the implications of such intense self-scrutiny for scholarly practice are not altogether positive. Attinello's concluding observation that "you can't live in a permanently self-conscious state—you can't dance if you're always looking at your feet" isolates the central issue: the very notion of scholarship is ultimately in danger if the sovereignty of objective content is jeopardized (Dell'Antonio 2004:172). We face, at best, a manipulation of the objects of scholarly investigation to the end of subjective confession; at worst, a collapse of scholarship into autobiography. Even in this context, moreover, structural matters cannot be entirely suppressed. The "sonic violence" of much integral serialism must in some sense be embodied in its musical material; music's affect is, after all, not separable from its structural properties. Structural listening therefore attends Attinello's reading as a supplement: if we wish to locate the sources of sonic disruption, we need to engage in analysis.

Dell'Antonio and Dubiel perhaps occupy the opposite poles of Scherzinger's antithesis: Dell'Antonio focuses on an empirical musical phenomenon that challenges the relevance of structural listening while Dubiel scrutinizes it from within, relating analysis and listening in three very spe-

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cific situations. The types of “collective listening” undertaken by audiences of MTV, Dell’Antonio argues, undermine the notions of artistic autonomy and centered subjectivity that are basic to Adornian critical theory, betraying a plurality of authorship and inviting a type of critical group response that marks them out as “non-modernist” cultural products. The essay critically invokes a number of authorities to establish this point, among them Eco, Gramsci, and Deleuze and Guattari. Carving out a legitimate critical space for such cultural phenomena necessarily involves rebutting the Marxist critical opprobrium of Adorno, Horkheimer, and more recently Jameson, and especially the accusation that popular music is *en masse* complicit with the commodification of culture, a view Dell’Antonio labels as “simple” Marxism. While recognizing the commercial aims of music videos, and of MTV as a forum for their dissemination and critique, he contends, in part following Andrew Goodwin, that “commodity-value does not exclude other values to the appraiser.”⁷ MTV, on the contrary, requires videos and the songs they convey to be judged “aesthetically satisfying” by their audience; the critical “negotiation” that results undermines the possibility of a “stable commodity-status” (227–28).

Although Dell’Antonio is certainly not guilty of understating MTV’s market orientation, I remain skeptical about the extent to which the critical processes it encourages stand apart from popular music’s commodity function. The impulse towards critical participation may, after all, have motivations that are more or less covertly compelled by the market. Critical judgements may, in other words, amount to validations of taste, and taste is scarcely unaffected by the culture industry. Indeed, any mode of cultural production that has within its motivation the reproduction of capital will necessarily seek to shape taste as much as respond to it. The success of the cultural product as commodity will depend upon the extent to which the conditions under which the consumer might identify with the product can be established, in which context it is not unreasonable to speak of the emergence of a condition of false consciousness. Furthermore, the fact that MTV’s audience engages in a kind of collective appraisal appearing remote from immanent musical considerations does not necessarily mean that structural listening strategies are inappropriate to popular music. Its materials are, after all, not ontologically or historically distinct from those of art music, relying as it does largely on the appropriation of tonal idioms. And if the materials of tonality are present in popular music, then they are susceptible to structural analysis. It is even possible that, in this context, immanent analysis performs an act of resistance: by refusing to engage with the product at the level of social signification, structural listening forcibly resists the kinds of concealed economic coercion that might underpin collective, non-

structural appraisal.

Dubiel, on the other hand, problematizes structural listening by problematizing the concept of structure, contending that, if structure is defined as any kind of musical relational perception, it could potentially apply to the audition of any musical event. This definition is usually narrowed by making a distinction between structural and non-structural properties, an act of selection that, as Dubiel puts it, “tempts us . . . to bend our experience of music” towards the relationships prescribed by our concept of structure (174). In an effort to avoid this tautology, he investigates brief examples of relationships, which he has identified “by some means other than hearing” but which he is “for some reason unsure how to hear” (175), in the *Tristan* Prelude, Morton Feldman’s *Triadic Memories*, Schoenberg’s Op. 19, no. 6, and the C# minor Prelude from Book 1 of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

In a sense, Dubiel transfers Attinello’s subjectification of the act of writing into the realm of analysis. In each example, attention shifts from structural properties themselves to the question of what their analysis means for subjective audition. In the *Tristan* Prelude, for instance, Dubiel focuses on the theme presented in mm. 17–22 and repeated in mm. 32–36, pinpointing a subtle alteration of the bassline in mm. 32–36, whereby an F–F#–G ascent occupies one-and-a-half measures rather than two, a property that, for him, is analytically evident but aurally evasive. The issue here, as for Dubiel’s examples in general, is the relationship between conception and perception: between how we model conceptually the way the music is organized, and what is perceived during the process of listening, with or without the benefit of an analytical conceptual framework. When he states, in conclusion, that “although I may derive a stimulus from some bit of musical analysis, it is important that I avoid any obligation to listen to, or for, the particular facts the analysis manages to mention, in the terms in which it mentions them” (198), Dubiel draws a clear distinction between conceptual and perceptual modes of understanding. The problem with structural hearing is that it forces perception to submit to conception: how we hear a given moment becomes burdened by the injunction to place this moment in a predetermined conceptual framework. Instead, it should be possible to listen structurally in a broad sense without the anxiety of “intellectual mastery.”

It is not clear, however, that perception and conception can be separated in this way. Questions of what an unmediated perception or conception might be persist: on the one hand, structural analysis is always, at some level, referential to a perceived object that is the musical work; on the other hand, audition never occurs unaccompanied by some kind of conceptual

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frame of reference or expectation. There is more at stake here than the matter of how we might best mediate these two polarities. If musical scholarship is to distinguish itself from non-scholarly modes of writing about music (and I would maintain the necessity of this distinction), then we need a means of identifying what is or is not an appropriate mode of scholarly discourse. Analysis is vital in this respect, because it draws a distinction between the classifiable content of an aesthetic document and the general morass of subjective perceptions, and thus places a limitation on the field of discourse. The postmodern rush towards readmitting subjectivity cannot in the end obscure this demand; if musical scholarship is defined as any possible discourse about music, then it has no definition. Dubiel more-or-less explicitly limits this field through recourse to analysis. It is not the subjectivities of hearing that demarcate the boundaries of his project, but the analytical evidence that has been established as a classified property of the musical object.

In sum, although my overall impression of *Beyond Structural Listening* is overwhelmingly of an illuminating, challenging, and often provocative collection, its implications pull my critical judgement in two directions. If the postmodernization of musicology simply requires theory and analysis to be more attentive to historical, cultural, social, and performative circumstances, then the consolidation attempted here, as elsewhere, is a laudable disciplinary progression. It is, however, entirely possible that this debate has been reflexively determined by ethnocentrically defined institutional structures, and particularly by the rigorous distinction between analysis and musicology insisted upon by the institutions of North American musical scholarship. The new paradigm of which Subotnik writes may be nothing more than a dawning realization that this distinction is suspicious; that analysis, being concerned with historical phenomena, needs to be musicologically responsible, and that musicology, being concerned with the historical contexts of pieces of music, needs to be analytically responsible. If, in the end, this distinction collapses and the discipline of analytical musicology, or perhaps musicological analysis, emerges, then we may choose to define the result as postmodern, although nothing in the convergence of analysis and musicology itself compels this definition.

In this respect, *Beyond Structural Listening* occasionally perpetuates its core critical issue more than it offers any kind of ramified alternative, albeit in fascinating and thought-provoking ways. It makes especially clear that the continuing, and increasingly tired, insistence on the broadly postmodern concepts of plurality, decentered subjectivity, provisionality, performativity, the role of the body, and so forth does nothing to reduce the essential dependence of musicological discourse on the investigation of immanent

musical material. Each of the essays in *Beyond Structural Listening* remains indebted to structural-analytical modes of understanding, either by frank acceptance of their significance (Scherzinger), or by extensive appropriation (Fink, Dubiel), or by occasional tell-tale accessions (Morris, Le Guin, Levitz), or by identifying oppositional modes of discourse or phenomena (Maus, Attinello, Dell'Antonio).

It therefore seems, in conclusion, appropriate to reiterate a point that I have elaborated elsewhere, but which has direct relevance here, *pace* Lawrence Kramer's recent critical remarks.⁸ What *Beyond Structural Listening* makes consistently plain is that modes of musicological discourse of necessity require some kind of taxonomic engagement with musical material, or risk becoming a kind of scholarship that cannot ground its claims in pieces of music as objects of scholarly investigation. Such classification can quite easily take place without falling into the sort of instrumental rational mastery over which there has been so much recent intellectual anxiety. Analysis, in other words, may function as a kind of "communicative rationality," to appropriate Jürgen Habermas's phrase: as "the communicative employment of propositional knowledge in assertions," rather than "the non-communicative employment of knowledge in teleological action" (1984:10). The former is a necessity for the agreement and validation of claims pertaining to the properties of musical works; the latter appropriates knowledge as a justification for meta-historical or political agendas. If taxonomy is essential to the provision of musical-material evidence, it therefore follows that the autonomous identity of the musical work must in a sense remain axiomatic to musical scholarship, since there must be a classifiable object to which taxonomy refers. If this axiom is abandoned, then what remains tends towards a self-propelling discourse about discourse, or a loose assemblage of aural recollections, or an unmediated platform for cultural-political agendas.

Notes

1. "New paradigm" is Subotnik's term, which she derives from Thomas Kuhn (1965); see Dell'Antonio (2004:279–302). For a recent example of an anthology which attempts to define this "new paradigm," see Cook and Everist (1999).
2. See Subotnik (1996:148–76).
3. See Dubiel (1990:291–302).
4. Le Guin cites Claude Debussy (1971).
5. See Adorno (1978; 1997) and Taruskin (1997:360–88).
6. See Kramer (2004).
7. See Goodwin (1992).
8. See Kramer (2004:134–36n3,12) as a response to Horton (2001).

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