

review-essay

When the Music of Psychoanalysis Becomes the Psychoanalysis of Music

David Schwarz. *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture.* Durham and London. Duke University Press, 1997. 211 pp.

Reviewed by Martin Scherzinger

Introduction: A Historical Note

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 Wackenroder's idealism (in which music occupied a pure angelic domain independent of the actual world), or 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 Kierkegaard's analysis of the absolutely musical (which best exemplified the highly erotic striving of the pure unmediated life force), music has frequently served as a discursive site for speculation on the limits of philosophy, knowledge, and meaning. A central metaphor for that which resists epistemological certainty, music in philosophical discourse has functioned as a kind of discourse of the un-image, the non-significant, the unsayable *par excellence*.

Less apparent, perhaps, today is the way that 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 post-structuralist 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. Jacques 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 Rousseau's consideration of melody and speech in the *Essai sur l'origine de langue*. And Julia Kristeva points to the musical basis of a nonrepresentational theory of language—one in which the desemanticized "pure signifier" reverberates as if in musical space. This rather complicated path in the history of philosophy via German metaphysics to post-structuralist 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. Historically speaking, their discursive 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 post-structuralism. On the contrary, the lack of historical perspective has frequently resulted in just the mistaken views I have mentioned.

What happens, then, when music theory, somewhat paradoxically, turns (back) to post-structuralist French theory for inspiration? *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* by David Schwarz provides one kind of answer. In this collection of essays, Schwarz explores the multi-capillaried interface between musicology and psychoanalysis on the terrains of both "popular" and "serious" music. *Listening Subjects* is a thought-provoking book. Schwarz is full of ideas and his musical analyses are bristling with tantalizing speculation. Despite the occasional anxieties about its own formalism, this text connects an investigation into psychoanalysis with traditional music analysis in startling and productive ways. This alone counts as a praiseworthy contribution to the ongoing application of literary and critical theory to music studies in the work of Rose Rosengard Subotnik, Lawrence Kramer, Gary Tomlinson, Ruth Solie, Kofi Agawu, Susan McClary, and Robert Fink, to name a few. Perhaps what distinguishes Schwarz from these authors is that he addresses questions that attempt to forge a kind of music theory of the body.

Drawing on the theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his successors Slavoj Žižek and Julia Kristeva, whose work is a reinterpretation

of Freud in the contexts of structuralism and post-structuralism, Schwarz undertakes to show how certain musical experiences frequently represent a host of (often unconscious) psychoanalytic dynamics. For example, Schwarz elaborates a hearing of John Adams's *Nixon in China* in terms of a fantasy of an archaic sense of self, enveloped in sound, before its emergence into conventionality. In psychoanalytic parlance, this archaic self refers to the infant's state of organic needs (with a minimum of instinctual guidance) before it has gained a sense of itself as a spatially situated whole (via an imaginary ego). The initial harmonic and rhythmic familiarity and simplicity of *Nixon in China* evokes the pre-imaginary state in which one has direct access to the mother—a listening experience that Schwarz characterizes as a *fantasy thing*. On the other hand, the changes in perception that occur through the shifts in harmonic organization and quotation introduce a “conventional” dimension that severs the fantasy of the pre-imaginary state and reminds the listener of the irreducible split between mother and child. Such a hearing, now characterized as a *fantasy space*, registers a kind of acoustic-mirror stage in which “the subject experiences a series of splits away from phenomenal experience, from the sonorous envelope, through the binaries of the Imaginary Order, and into the plural, dispersing signifiers of the Symbolic Order” (16). The references here are to Lacan's theory of the development of the human ego. In order to gauge the plausibility of Schwarz's account, I will briefly outline Lacan's theory before examining Schwarz's way of logically linking music to it. Finally, I will critically assess the notions of fantasy thing and fantasy space in some detail.

Lacan's Theory

According to Lacan, an integrated sense of self begins to form when the infant finds reflected back to itself a satisfyingly unified image with which it identifies. Although this image is essentially an alien fiction, a metaphor, a fictive self constructed through misrecognition, the infant is wholly absorbed in the identification. Thus the infant moves in a ceaseless closed circuit between imagined object and subject. Caught in “a jubilant assumption of his specular image” (Lacan 1977: 2), the infant is unable to tell the two apart.

Lacan extends the operations of this “imaginary order” well beyond the purview of the developing subject, especially in his critique of “philosophical idealism”—a form of knowledge that involves a kind of mirroring or picturing of that which is outside the consciousness of the knower. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, Lacan disengages from any kind of investigation predicated on a unitary self or a consciousness set over and above the social network in which it emerges. For Lacan, knowledge, like the self, comes into being (at its very beginning) within a

symbolic matrix, a conceptual scheme that anticipates its lineaments. Thus, Lacan insists on the predetermining role played by language in the formation of knowledge of the world.

The analogy between this non-idealist philosophical stance and Lacan's description of developing subjectivity is found in the "symbolic order." Here the child encounters the figure of the father (or the "Law") and recognizes that it is merely a part of a wide familial and social system of relations. The child's undifferentiated relationship with the mother becomes mediated by language while its bodily union with the mother is opened up to unconscious desire. Thus the appearance of the Law inaugurates the repression of desire that constitutes the unconscious. Instead of being pre-linguistic and instinctual (in the manner of Sigmund Freud), the unconscious is an *effect* of language—indeed, it is structured like one, for language is that which "hollows being into desire" (Eagleton 1983: 167–68); it divides up the fullness one knows in the imaginary, and irrevocably severs the subject from an experience of unmediated reality. Access to such reality, like access to the mother's body, is no longer direct; the child is plunged into the primary repression of desire. This movement in which fullness of meaning perpetually fades (or where signified constantly "slides beneath" signifier) is the unconscious.

Paradoxically, Lacan calls this inaccessible realm (always beyond the reach of signification) the "real," thereby destabilizing the customary meaning of the term. Far from representing reality in the objective sense, the real is that which eludes conceptualization. It is revealed precisely in those moments when the signifying system is considered inadequate and the subject is put into a relation of desire to unreachable objects. Despite the permanent separation from the mother and from the plenitude of the imaginary order, the subject seeks to fulfill his desire through a substitute object. Such an object, which Lacan refers to as the *objet a*, has a metonymic relation to the original experience of union with the mother. It can never lead to the ultimate source of total fulfillment, nor can the subject ever know what this unconscious object-of-partial-fulfillment is. It is the radically contingent thing that interferes with any network of signs that tries to pin it down and is thus necessarily outside of language. Only through an experience of the impossibility of reaching out for or representing the object of desire does the subject gain a vague expectation of the true dimensions of it. Hence the real emerges in a kind of mismatch between the symbolic and the imaginary orders, the moment when the limits of signifying practice issue forth desire.

Listening Subjects and the Problem with Representation

One might expect that a psychoanalytic inquiry into the subject of listening—whether this focuses on the listening subject or on the subject-

tion of/through listening—would make much of the extra-linguistic dimensions associated with the unconscious. For, as a continual activity of sliding signifiers whose exact meanings (signifieds) are beyond reach, this model of the unconscious can, historically speaking, be said to have genealogical links to an essentially musical one. However, Schwarz's approach offers a different perspective. 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.

Thus, for example, the real becomes the focus of Schwarz's interpretation of the Beatles' use of white noise at the end of their song "I Want You (She's So Heavy)." The connection of this noise to the real is that of *representation*. Schwarz asserts, "The wall of noise is a representation of the Lacanian concept of the Real as both fantasy thing and space" (31).¹ By prolonging the noise of the guitars for three minutes—beyond what, for Schwarz, could credibly pass as a symbol of frustration—the "white noise suggests a nightmarish nothingness within male desire." Thus, "quantity produces a qualitative shift from the symbolic to the Real" (35). (To assist the reader, Schwarz likens this to the grotesque facial images of Cindy Sherman and to Žižek's analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds*. For Schwarz, Sherman's photographs, which arbitrarily assemble various representations of facial parts into a hideous whole, are "a representation of the pulp that lies just beneath the surface of the face" (32), while the devastating and overwhelming presence of birds in *The Birds* "renders the birds Real" (35). Analogously, the lengthy segment of noise in the song, to which the guitars seem unmoved and indifferent, exceeds symbolic interpretation and is transformed into a representation of the real.)²

But if the real is that which lies outside of the imaginary and in the fissures of the symbolic (and thus necessarily beyond the reach of representation) how is the real *represented* in the song? Or is this a representation of the unrepresentable? If so, can all white noise produce such a super-signifying maneuver? Or does the song's text give us the necessary clues? This is where Schwarz's understanding of the real needs to be scrutinized. According to Schwarz, "the Real is an inscrutable force or thing beyond the limits of sensory or linguistic representations. It cannot be heard, seen, or named directly since the Real is that which supports but evades signification. Yet, in the fissures of some representations, it can and does appear, as in the 'face' [created by Cindy Sherman]" (32). It is worth considering what kind of fissure Schwarz has in mind here: "If we subtracted all our experiences from our lives," he explains, "all our patterns of sensory and linguistic understanding, all social conventions, all cultural memories, all personal and collective identities, all historical contexts, we

would be left with the Real" (32). It is not only that this notion of the real is undermined three paragraphs later when Schwarz proposes that the real is linked to, not severed from, culture and convention—indeed it "is clearest when it is attached to conventional representations in social space" (34)—but that this notion of the real resonates, if at all, more with Freud than with Lacan. Far from the remainder when history, culture, symbolic systems, and convention are somehow subtracted away, Lacan's real is instantiated precisely in the social moment, where signifying conventions beget desire. Under Schwarz's definition of the real, the noise in the Beatles song becomes a kind of pre-linguistic, instinctual, inarticulate din whose most obvious interpretation is simply the narrator's frustration—a "nightmarish nothingness within male desire" (35). The sound of the song's ending supports such a reading, for, unlike Hitchcock's overwhelming birds, the white noise remains in balance with the guitars throughout. Is it an exaggeration then to call this a representation of Lacan's real? Or has Lacan's real become too "real" (in the so-called ordinary sense) under Schwarz's gaze?

In chapters 3 and 4, Schwarz turns his attention to the songs of Franz Schubert. In an innovative encounter between Lacan and Schenker, Schwarz examines "Der Doppelgänger" and "Ihr Bild" from *Schwanengesang* in light of ideas such as 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" (Sartre 1992: 256–57). The gaze identifies the subject as essentially a "given-to-be-seen" (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" (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#, which is ubiquitous in the music," while "the musical signifier of recognition is the pitch class G as upper neighbor to F#" (66). It is true that the climactic G5 in m. 41 articulates the "eig'ne Gestalt" with which the narrator is ultimately faced, but it is less clear why the repeated F#s signify the structure of the gaze. In

Schenkerian terms, the way in which F# 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 Heine's poem. Harmonic activity is kept to a minimum and the melodic line circles tirelessly around F#1. Finally in m. 25, the melody begins on a note other than F#1. This is the moment in which another person enters the scene: the moment in the text that might plausibly suggest 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 m. 42. Thus, far from "signifying the gaze," F# 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#.

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 Lacanian terms. While the registral sweep from m. 25 to m. 41 ultimately settles on the pitches F# 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# a representation, once again, 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?

Another 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.

Example 1: Franz Schubert, "Der Doppelgänger."

Sehr langsam

Still ist die Nacht, es ru-hen die Gas-sen,

pp

m.9

in die - sem Hau-se wohn - te mein Schatz; sie hat schon

m.16

längst die Stadt ver - las - sen, docht steht noch das Haus auf dem sel - ben

m.22

Platz. Da steht auch ein Mensch, und starrt in die Hö - he,

cresc. poco a poco

Example 1 (cont.)

m.29

und ringt die Hän - de vor Schmer - zens - ge - walt; mir graut es,

fff *ffz* *decres.* *p*

m.36

wenn ich sein Ant - litz se - he, der Mond zeigt mir mei - ne eig' - ne Ge - stalt,

cresc. *ffz* *fff*

m.42

— Du Dop - pel - gäng - er, du bleich - er Ge - sel - le! was äffst du nach mein

decres. *p* *accelerando* *cresc.* *ff*

m.48

Lie - bes - leid, das mich ge - quält auf die - ser Stel - le so man - che

ff *ff* *fff*

m.53

Nacht, in al - ter Zeit?

p *pp* *mp*

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" (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" (97). Elsewhere, in a portion of Diamanda Galás'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 object 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 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" (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. With "Ihr Bild" in mind, 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 mm. 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 m. 10, the A \flat relates to C minor—to which triad it moves in mm. 10–11—and in m. 12 it relates to E \flat major.) When the turn to B \flat minor becomes more pronounced in mm. 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 m. 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 mm. 17–18 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 Wehmuthsthränen 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 m. 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.³ The point is that 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 that 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 kilter with what is readily apparent as a syntactical norm of the piece or as a stylistic convention. It is worth pointing out that some recent music theory, while it has not overtly identified itself as psychoanalytically oriented, is preoccupied with just these kinds of moments. For example, in a fascinating essay, "Contradictory Criteria in a Work by Brahms," Joseph Dubiel (without Lacan on his mind) elaborates an exemplary case of the kind of orientation I have in mind. He coins the

Example 2: Franz Schubert, "Ihr Bild."

Langsam

Ich stand in dunk-len Träu - men und starr' ihr Bild - niss

m.6

an, und das ge - lieb - te Ant - litz

cresc.

m.11

heim - lich zu le - ben be - gann. Um

pp

m.15

ih - re Lip - pen zog sich ein Lä - cheln wun - der - bar, und

Example 2 (cont.)

m.19

wie von Weh - muths - thrä - nen er - glänz - te ihr Au - gen - paar.

m.23

Auch mei - ne Thrä - nen flos - sen mir von den Wan - gen her -

m.28

ab und ach, ich kann es nicht glau - ben, dass ich

m.33

dich ver - lo - ren hab'.

term *abnorm* to capture “definably irregular events that become criteria of prolongation or succession in violation of larger norms of the pieces in which they occur” (Dubiel 1994: 82). In the same way that Lacan’s real is only partially divulged in the moment that signifying systems falter as a result of an ever-elusive *objet a*, the expressive identity of a musical work is partially divulged when an *abnorm* seems to interfere with the network of musical norms. To my mind, an analytic approach that is vigilant about those musical moments that elude normative paradigms shares more philosophical ground with psychoanalysis than does one whose musical events *represent* psychoanalytic modalities.

It is crucial to point out that these abnormal moments are experienced and conceptualized in negative terms, when something in the music seems to flounder, bend, stoop, equivocate, hesitate, halt, confound, or protrude. In his account of the anomalous repeated D#s near the beginning of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, for example, Dubiel describes an experience that bears the weight of acknowledging what does not happen to the D#s. This permits a hearing that is beholden to neither a paradigm that wants to alleviate what is problematic about the anomalous tones nor an analysis that anticipates hearing any particular thing, like a “direct connection to the pitch (or pitch class) D#” (Dubiel 1996: 44). Instead, this more “ad hoc” than “principled” attitude opens the realm of possibility for what might count as hearing under the influence of those weird D#s (1996: 44). Radically unpredictable and radically ungeneral, Dubiel’s approach is alert to events (and non-events) that are not given by stylistic norms, on the one hand, and to descriptions of these that are not given by ready-to-hand music-theoretical paradigms, on the other. This kind of analysis is a critical gesture. Beholden to the radically contingent aspects of a particular musical piece, and thereby to its absolute peculiarity, it dialectically challenges the control of those normative generalities within which the piece operates. Despite its seemingly formalist account of the notes alone then, this interest in marking what is recalcitrant to contextual standards established by musical sounds is, in fact, not far away from Lacan’s psychoanalytic interest in the mismatch between the imaginary and the symbolic orders. It is worth reconsidering the work of Dubiel, David Lewin, Andrew Mead, Marion Guck, Fred Maus, Benjamin Boretz, Suzanne Cusick, and others, in these terms.

This is why the “representational” stance in *Listening Subjects* is so problematic. It tends to disengage from such dialectical considerations and analyzes music’s relation to psychoanalysis by way of one-to-one mappings. To take a paradoxical example from the analysis of Diamanda Galás: how does a note “signify” the abjection that “erases boundaries among . . . signifying categories” (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 traditionally signifying discourse becomes pure movement. The priorities have been reversed with frequently paradoxical results.

A second problem with the "representational" stance is the way in which it all too often produces analyses that 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*. The 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*]" (69); Peter Gabriel's "Intruder" "represents . . . [the] language-bound fantasy of power" (93–94); Diamanda Galás'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. An object *musicology* has not yet had its day.

Reconsidering Hearing as *Fantasy Thing* and *Fantasy Space*

What exactly is happening to the body when one listens to music? Why, for example, does David Schwarz get goose bumps when he hears Bruckner's Ninth in Hamburg's *Musikhalle*? Schwarz makes the wonderful and provocative suggestion that it is because he is crossing a threshold between two psychoanalytic registers—fantasy thing and fantasy space. In this case, he shuttles between fantasy space and fantasy thing; he thus "crosse[s] the threshold between [his] clearly marked-off adult body and a fantasy of a familiar but archaic body less distinctly marked off from the external world than its adult counterpart" (8). The experience of this more blurred body, issued forth by the "oceanic" effect of the symphony's resonance in the *Musikhalle*, is "made possible" by an early childhood

experience—the sounds of the maternal voice, which Schwarz likens to what Guy Rosolato calls “a sonorous womb, a murmuring house” (8). To my way of thinking, this might be one interesting starting point for an account of the goose bumps insofar as it opens up many compelling paths of music-analytic inquiry.

On the other hand, there are confusions and inconsistencies that frequently make it difficult to follow Schwarz’s meaning. For example, is this hearing—this experience of a phantasmic return to the pre-Oedipal state (lacking any defined self) with bumps marking the impossible transition to skinlessness—an experience of a fantasy *thing*? Or is the crossing a fantasy *space*? The former is suggested by the assertion that such hearing is a “representation of having been one with the mother” (8), and the latter is suggested by the assertion that the “*threshold crossing*” is itself “a crucial component of listening as *space*” (8). Alternatively, are these perhaps *two* ways of hearing the same music? But even so, this does not solve the dilemma, because a host of logically independent ideas and values are freighted by the definitions of these terms. It is worth examining more closely what Schwarz means by “fantasy thing,” or, in more appropriate parlance, how it is different from “fantasy space.”

The first definition reads: “Listening as a fantasy thing is produced when attributes of a structure represented in music are described and related to one another” (4). Joining forces with the new musicologists here, Schwarz implies that the fantasy thing is formal music analysis—a *description of structural* attributes of music (3–4). For example, describing “The Star-Spangled Banner” as a composed-out overtone series produces a “fantasy of a listening thing” because it proceeds as if the overtone series and the pitch structure of the song “were objectively ‘there’ on the page, in the music, in our ears” (4). Without worrying about what these objectives might mean, it seems that listening as a fantasy thing, at this stage of the story, involves naturalizing something (not inherently stable) and describing it.

Fantasy space, in contrast, is produced when “musical-theoretical, musical-historical, cultural, psychoanalytic, or personal thresholds are crossed and enunciated” (4). Thus we pass beyond a limit of some kind and express *that* in some way. So, when we realize that the “natural status” of the overtone series is partly an ideological construction, for instance, we cross the threshold “between pitch structure, form, and musical language, on the one hand, and a historical context that makes pitch structure, form and musical language possible, on the other” (4). Thus, fantasy space involves knowing the historical context that made our thing possible and a residual sense that we were duped by this thing (under a certain nat-

uralized gaze). But what is this naturalized thing? Is it the overtone series—the thing we seem to transform when we come to know it as historically conditioned? What happened to the “composing-out” part? Did we already know that *that* was not natural in the same way as the series was; that it was artistically made (even made-up) and therefore inherently un-thing-like? If so, the overtone series, and not the song, is argumentatively relevant to the distinction between fantasy thing and fantasy space and not, as previously asserted, that the thing was a matter of describing structural relations.

Here is a checklist of characteristics of these two terms: “[A] fantasy *thing* can be formalistic, ‘whole,’ hierarchical, subordinate, transhistorical, ‘purely’ textual; [while] a fantasy *space* can be heterogeneous, fragmented, coordinated, culture specific, and personally specific” (4). So the fantasy thing is a hearing that is wholly immanent, where all the elements seem to persist within a system and there is no detaching the event from its meaning. It inhabits a world of plenitude, without lack or exclusion. Signifier and signified clamp together in a mutually exhaustive embrace and never the twain shall part—in short, an acoustic likeness to Lacan’s mirror stage. “Given its retrospective structure,” Schwarz writes, “the sonorous envelope can be described as a *thing*, an immanent experience whose features represent how we imagine the sonorous envelope might have sounded” (8). But why is the immanent experience *given* by the retrospective structure of the sonorous envelope? Because, the argument goes, it is a *fantasy*—“a representation of an experience to which neither I nor anyone else can have direct access” (8). But what kind of immanence is imaginable here? What kind of immanence is a *representation* of something to which *we have no direct access*? Has this description of the thing already crossed the threshold? Does it already know the irreducible absence?

Another sentence about the fantasy thing reads: “Music represents the sonorous envelope as a fantasy thing when there are one-to-one correspondences between musical details and an archaic oceanic fantasy” (8). Conjuring the philosophical truth-by-correspondence, Schwarz’s musical thing maps musical details to an archaic fantasy. But what kind of one-to-oneness do we hear here? What are the corresponding oceanic details? Is enough surprise being expressed at the fact that this substantialist site of one-to-one correspondences (where we find a plenitude of positive terms) is at once the same as the production of a description of the structural relations of a piece of music (which was our first definition of fantasy thing)? How is the fantasy thing beholden to both a substantialist and a structuralist account? This becomes still more puzzling when, for example, Schwarz reads the threshold crossing in Steve Reich’s *Different Trains* as

one “between clear denotative language and fantasies of prelinguistic sounds” (19). Now the substantialist moment is *opposed to* the prelinguistic.

What I am trying to say is that the writer is crowding the definition of “fantasy thing” with characteristics that are in tension with one another. The same problem accrues to the definition of “fantasy space.” “Music represents the sonorous envelope as a fantasy space when attributes of the thing are related to other conventional registers in which the subject finds him/herself” (8). Schwarz coins and then frequently repeats the related phrase “emergence into conventionality”; it proves to be decisive for his musical analyses, and for the phenomenon of crossing the threshold. I should mention that I am a bit disturbed by what happens to ideology as the account progresses, or rather, by what does not happen. Where the first definition of fantasy space involved an ideological unmasking of the naturalized thing, the later definitions merely “*relate* [the thing] to conventional registers [like] my adult self-awareness and all the baggage associated with my social identity” (8, italics added).

It is perhaps not surprising that the only music in the book that is examined in terms of ideological interpellation (Althusser’s Marxist use of psychoanalysis) is music with which the author does not seem to identify—in this case, that of right-wing German skinheads. Addressing the question whether the recent turn away from “right-wing ideology” (128) by Die böhse Onkelz is “genuine or [whether it is] a screen for continuing the right-wing politics that lie behind the music” (128), Schwarz maintains that the same ideology persists; that the euphemisms efface what they in fact underline. “I hear,” he writes “a continuum in which lyrics move from explicit to implicit representations of Oi subjectivity” (128). Thus, a song like “Heilige Lieder” really suggests “hidden aggression behind its surface mourning” (129). But the evidence for this assertion is not convincing. The text has no literal referent and is open to many readings: “Hier sind die süssesten Noten jenseits des Himmels / heilige Lieder aus berufenem Mund / wahre Worte im Djungel der Lüge / das Licht im Dunkel ein heiliger Bund” [Here are the sweetest notes this side of heaven / holy songs from appointed mouths / true words in a jungle of lies / a light in the darkness, a holy offering] (117, Schwarz’s translation). Nor does the music analysis suggest anything inherently fascist. Does the certainty on the matter answer to another need by asserting its own non-racism via the clear sighting, against odds, of a fascist ideology? The text falls prey to the process it is criticizing. Like the fear these musicians have of the chameleonic powers of the foreigner—the latter’s ability to insinuate him/herself into German society⁴—we are warned about the insinuating powers of Oi song and its inherent fascism (whatever the surface appearance). Who is being protected in this account? Does foreclosing the matter like this de-

flect attention from another kind of ideological critique? For example, is this chapter on ideology thus opposed to—or in sync with—the process of capitalist modernization?

Let me return to the sonorous fantasy space and its relation to musical examples. The argument is made that much minimalist music relies on “oceanic” sounding structures, particularly “familiar and simple *rhythmic structures* with . . . groupings of eighth and sixteenth notes” and “*pitch content*” that derives from “traditional harmonies from the canon” (9). So, the opening of John Adams’s opera *Nixon in China* “creates a fantasy of the sonorous envelope as thing through very repetitive and metrically regular fragments, on the one hand, and irregular entrances of sustained pitches, on the other” (9). Ignoring the fact that the sustained pitches in the upper voice are not irregular—they enter mostly at regular groups of six eighth notes yielding a 3:4 cross-rhythm with the scales—two questions emerge: Does the fantasy thing now involve a dynamic between regularity and irregularity? And/Or does it involve the “familiar but archaic quality” of the pitches and rhythms—the triadic harmony and the diatonic scales, the accompanying figuration elevated to a primary position, and so on? If the latter, is the familiar-but-archaic quality a measure of the nostalgia for the womb or of a historical style? Or does a kind of musical phylogeny (evolution of a musical style) recapitulate ontogeny (origin and development of an individual)? Or, more mischievously, does the womb resonate a regular triadic harmony, perhaps a ringing of the archetypal overtone series? Necessarily not, of course; but what then? Maybe it cannot be *explained* without falling prey to that small *objet a*; that bone stuck in the throat that reminds us of the insurmountable gap between representation and thing; that scapegoat that marks the metaphysical enclosure—Lacan’s signification-resisting impossible real. But maybe it cannot be explained because of other impediments.

The narrative on *Nixon in China* continues: “With the C# [in the bass] in m. 31, Adams hints at a cycle of major thirds as an organizing principle” (9). Therefore, because the C# hints at a cycle of thirds as an organizing principle in the music, the music gradually opens into sonorous *space*. Additionally, “conventional materials emerge gradually during . . . the piece” (9). How are we to understand the “conventional” here? Is it the “shift in perception of the harmonic organization of the music” that happens because of the C#; or is it the distilling of an organizing principle (that is, the cycle of thirds) in an otherwise so-called imaginary flow? What is this convention’s context? Where are its borders? As far as I can see, the “convention” emerges precisely in the internal structural dynamics of the work, and it is *this* shift in the harmonic structure that opens up fantasy space. What has happened? Formalism, the phantasmic “thing sound,” has

turned into culturally informed “space sound”—a different kind of threshold crossing. It is as if the imaginary order historically recalls canons and traditions while the symbolic order refers internally—a case of son begetting father. What has happened to the “historical context [of the book’s introduction] that makes pitch structure, form, and musical language possible” (4)? I should not leave unnoticed the fact that hearing C# as structuring a pattern in major thirds depends on the possibility of hearing symmetrical relations as equivalent—an interpretation that some may feel is disconcerted by the diatonic surroundings. (Is the perceptual revision at bass note F of the same order as that at bass note C#? What about the bass C-natural in mm. 18–21 that precedes C#? Did it sound dominant-ish of F? Or was the cycle suggested at this point structured in diatonic thirds, and then perhaps revised in m. 31 into a symmetrically equivalent one?) There is more to be said about this C#, nothing as problematic as the fact that a cycle of major thirds opens into convention.

Finally, the text asserts that there is something else that disconcerts the stability of the musical text and issues forth a hearing as fantasy space, namely “the emergence of half-formed quotes—not so much of specific pieces, but more an appropriation of a preexisting style” (9). The author illustrates the point with two examples of indirect quotation: Alban Berg and John Adams both quoting Wagner. Direct examples include the composers George Rochberg and Luciano Berio, where “everything in the musical text points to previous styles, previous pieces, or clichés from other eras” (13). Do these clichés from other eras have a “familiar and archaic” ring? Have we heard this before? In a different register? Was that hearing imaginary or is it the symbolic charged with convention? Symptomatically, the opening of *Nixon in China* has changed at this point in the narration; now it is merely “oceanic, undifferentiated texture” (13). Gone are the “traditional harmonies from the canon,” disappeared are the “rhythmic structures” that sound like the “accompanying figuration” of “canonic music” (9). Perhaps the canon is not a convention; or perhaps the undifferentiated is a tradition; or perhaps we are committed to the oblivion of contradiction after all.⁵

Notes

1. I will not adhere to Schwarz’s convention of capitalizing Lacan’s term “real.”
2. Lacan’s figuration of the real also has a historical link to Immanuel Kant’s notion of the sublime as described in *Critique of Judgment*.
3. 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 contrast 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 Joe Dubiel for prompting me to refine my analysis of “Thr Bild.”

4. Störkraft, for instance, sings “Fremde Völker mischen sich ein und behaupten auch noch Deutsch zu sein” [Foreign peoples mix themselves in and then also claim to be Germans].

5. I would like to thank Joseph Dubiel, Lydia Goehr, Jason Royal, and John Ito for their helpful suggestions.

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