

(En) Corps Sonore:
Towards a Feminist Ethics of the 'Idea' of Music in
Recent French Thought

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
SHORT ABSTRACT.....	6
LONG ABSTRACT	7
ABBREVIATIONS	12
<i>I. Nancy</i>	12
<i>II. Lacoue-Labarthe</i>	12
<i>III. Badiou</i>	12
Introductory Prelude.....	13
Chapter I: Music, <i>Mousike</i>, Muses (and Sirens)	24
MUSIC: TERMINOLOGY, GENEALOGY, HISTORY	28
<i>I. Allography: The Ontological Problem</i>	28
<i>II. Reluctant Mimesis: Noumena, Phenomena, and the Problem of Musical Representation</i>	31
<i>III. Music, Logos, Musicology: The Problem of Musical Meaning</i>	40
<i>IV. Music in the Quadrivium: The Science and Art Problem</i>	49
MOUSIKE: CULTURE, POLITICS AND EDUCATION	54
MUSES (AND SIRENS): GENDER, AUTHORITY AND ANXIETY.....	58
Chapter II: Music, Meaning and Materiality: Nancy's <i>Corps Sonore</i>.....	67
OUVERTURE	67
THE MULTIPLE ARTS: PRESENTATION AND THE SENSE OF PHILOSOPHY	72
FROM 'SONOTROPISM' TO SONOROUS ONTOLOGY	79
ORIGINS: NATURE AND CULTURE; NOSTALGIA AND COMMUNITY.....	83
<i>I. Rameau: The Genealogy of the Corps Sonore</i>	83
<i>II. Rousseau: The (Musical) Origin of the Origin of Culture</i>	84
<i>III. Music and Community</i>	85
GENS, GENRE, GENEALOGY.....	89
NANCY AND THE FEMININE: AESTHETIC GENESIS	92
RENVOI À JEAN-LUC NANCY (BETWEEN SILENCE AND SOUND)	96
CODA.....	102
Chapter III: 'Catacoustic' Subjects and the Injustice of Being Born: Lacoue-Labarthe's Musical Maternal Muse	107

LEGACIES AND LEGENDS: UNPICKING THE PHILOSOPHICAL INHERITANCE	108
‘WOULDN’T YOU JUST DIE WITHOUT MAHLER?’	114
<i>I. Autobiography</i>	115
<i>II. Allo-/Heterothanatology</i>	117
MUSIC AND LANGUAGE	118
CULTURE, HISTORY, AND ABSOLUTE MUSIC.....	124
CATACOUSTICS #1.....	130
CATACOUSTICS #2: EDUCATION, <i>FORMATION</i> , <i>PAIDEIA</i>	133
MUSES, MEMORY, MATERNALITY	136
LACQUE-LABARTHE’S <i>ALMA MATER</i>	142
Chapter IV: Midwives and Madams: Mus(e)ic, Mediation, and Badiou’s ‘Universal’ Subject	147
PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS, ANTIPHILOSOPHY, AND SOPHISTICAL RHETORIC.....	152
BEING (MATTER AND ONTOLOGY) AND EVENT (DIALECTIC AND IMMORTALITY)	155
<i>ENCORE (EN CORPS)</i> : TRUTH, METAPHYSICS, BODIES	160
MUSICAL MARGINS: ‘UNE VARIANTE MUSICALE DE LA MÉTAPHYSIQUE DU SUJET’	161
HISTORY AND WORLDS (OR THE PROBLEM OF PARTICULARISM AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH)	166
PHILOSOPHY AND ITS CONDITIONS: SCIENCE, LOVE, POLITICS AND ART	170
ART AGAIN, OR <i>INESTHÉTIQUE</i>	171
HANS JÜRGEN SYBERBERG’S (AND WAGNER’S) PARSIFAL	174
BADIOU AND FEMINISM	182
BADIOU AND THE FEMININE (GENERIC) ♀	185
TECHNOLOGIES OF ‘TRUTH’ AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC (OR PHANTASMAGORIA AND FORMALISM)	188
VEILS AND MORE VEILS: ACOUSMATIC IDEOLOGY.....	192
FROM <i>INESTHÉTIQUE</i> TO <i>ANESTHÉTIQUE</i> : MEDIATION, TRUTH, OPINION.....	202
CONTRA A MUSICAL(OGICAL) THERMIDORIANISM.....	207
Chapter V: From Parnassus to Bayreuth: Staging a Music which is not One	210
RESONANCE/DISSONANCE: SONOROUS, RHYTHMIC AND UNIVERSAL SUBJECTS	210
MUSIC AND POLITICS.....	214
<i>I. Logos</i>	215
<i>II. Pathos</i>	218
<i>III. Ethos</i>	220
TO PERFORMANCE AND BEYOND (SIGNIFICATION)	224

<i>TECHNE/EPISTEME/DOXA</i>	228
THE WORK OF OPERA	233
BACK TO THE FUTURE: PHILOSOPHY, (GREAT) ART AND ORIGIN(ALITY).....	238
BEYOND HYSTERIA: TOWARDS A FEMINIST ETHICS OF MUSIC (THAT IS NOT ONE)	244
Encore: After Music	254
Bibliography	258

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Name: Sarah Hickmott

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Thesis title: *(En) Corps Sonore: Towards a Feminist Ethics of the 'Idea' of Music in Recent French Thought*

This thesis explores the way music is characterized, used, or accounted for in recent (post-1968) French thought, focusing in particular on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Alain Badiou. In spite of the differences in their philosophical-theoretical positions, all of these writers invoke music – both directly and indirectly – to negotiate their relationship to ontological, political, ethical and aesthetic concerns, particularly in terms of how it relates to the (im)possibility of a subject, the condition of truth, and the role of philosophical thought itself. The thesis situates these texts in a longer genealogy of musico-philosophical interactions and also brings them into dialogue with recent musicological approaches, thus showing how an inherited idea of what music 'is' is often assumed rather than critically re-evaluated. In short, by tracing the musical-transcendental baggage of an inherited metaphysical conception of music – one which often understands music in close relation to the feminine, (sexual) excess, and the beyond of language and/or the symbolic – the thesis shows that though music is instrumentalized by progressive thinkers as a way of shifting theoretical/philosophical paradigms, it nonetheless does so in a way that has a strong sense of continuity with previous thinking on music. Secondly, the thesis highlights the way in which music in its metaphysical-ontological guise is often conceived as synonymous with Western high art classical music (which is itself constructed as absolute and transcendent, and ontologically independent of its means of (re)production or context) whilst non-literate, popular, folk and world musics – on the occasions that they are considered and not simply ignored or denigrated – are notably considered almost exclusively in terms of their social-cultural or technological contexts. Finally, the thesis demonstrates that much of this takes place through a simultaneous instrumentalization of gender as an organisational category for philosophy, and one which all too often has the consequence of sending women – along with music – to the beyond of pre-, inter-, or post-signification.

LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the way music is characterized, used, or accounted for in recent (post-1968) French thought, focusing in particular on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Alain Badiou. Though passing and even extended references to music can be found in the work of many (past and recent) philosophers, the selected philosophers under consideration here can be seen to exemplify a recent resounding of a tendency that is as yet substantially under-commented on: the invocation of music (as an idea, theory, or practice) in order to change or reshape a philosophical project. Indeed, and in spite of the differences in their philosophical-theoretical positions, all of these writers invoke music – both directly and indirectly – to negotiate their relationship to ontological, political, ethical and aesthetic concerns, particularly in terms of how it relates to the (im)possibility of a subject, the condition of truth, and the role of philosophical thought itself.

Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe can be seen to be situated within what has been termed a broader ‘anti-ocular’ turn (see Martin Jay, 1993) in twentieth and twenty-first century thought whereby a variety of non-visual phenomena have been seen to offer a way beyond or against traditional Western metaphysics centred on the primacy of vision as instrumental to knowledge (via representation/mimesis etc.). Music is thus the primary socio-cultural exemplar of the specifically sonorous dimension which they would contend philosophy has had to repress in order to guarantee its own self-authorizing, vision-oriented, objectivity. Thus, by attending to music and what the sonorous dimension affords philosophical thought, Nancy (explicitly) and Lacoue-Labarthe (implicitly) rehabilitate a meaningful and sensuous dimension to philosophy that has tended to focus only on that which is understandable in terms of *logos*. Moreover, in highlighting the way that philosophy has conventionally ignored meaningfulness (in its sensuous rather than logocentric guise) and insisting on the centrality of *sens* (in its multiple resonances) to ontology and epistemology, they are able to highlight the way in which philosophy has traditionally grounded itself on an illusory belief in a universalism that exceeds or transcends the sensuous presentation of the world. In sharp contrast, then, for Badiou, music is not granted any special status (not, at any rate, above or beyond that accorded to Art in general) though it is one domain in which a ‘processus de vérité’ can occur; Badiou’s invention or identification of truth-procedures is itself part of his broader philosophical attempt to restore fundamental (neo-Platonic) categories to philosophy, such as truth and the universal; in short, to retrieve philosophy from what he considers to be its dominant postmodern guise (cf. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe) which refuses the possibility of truth (at least in any absolute or universal sense). Music, then, is invoked by philosophers whose projects can be understood, in the broadest of sweeps, as oppositional – or at least with opposing aims.

Furthermore, because music is being considered in this body of work in order to recondition, transform, defend, or interrogate philosophy, it is often invoked in ways that assume music itself to be a pre-analytic or an *a priori* given: in short, scant attention is paid to the question of how or why we define or understand music in the first place. This is the first scholarly omission to which this thesis responds; the thesis demonstrates that an inherited definition of the 'Idea' of music – one with a strong lineage both in German Idealism and its critiques by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy – is assumed rather than critically (re)evaluated in otherwise critical thought. Within this broader claim, there are two more specific concerns: firstly, there is a pervasive assumption that music is (more or less) synonymous with the canonical works of Western high art culture. Crucially, this is a repertoire that has often been conflated with the Romantic (German Idealist) aesthetics outlined above – that of (great) art's autonomy, transcendence and universalism; as a result, the music produced concurrently with this idea (or retrospectively co-opted to it) has often been constructed as or perceived also to be non-functional and self-referential, and independent of its means of (re)production – thus universal and self-justifying. In sharp contrast, popular, folk and world music's are often assumed to be particular, local, specific, and trivial. Secondly, music (or at least music's 'essence') has been relentlessly connected to the feminine, the body, and the emotions in Western thought – it also has a longstanding association with the subordinate term in related pairs of binary oppositions. Indeed, the extent to which music is figured as a generic (affective) beyond is evident in the commonplace tendency (not only within philosophy) to invoke the idea of music (or the 'musical') as a generic description, for example, of certain types of writing in order to suggest a value in the sound pattern of the words or often, perhaps more problematically, to simply indicate something imprecise beyond or in excess of the 'literal' meaning of the text.

Though the larger philosophical projects of Nancy/Lacoue-Labarthe and Badiou are framed, above, in a way that highlights their conflicting agendas, they nonetheless share the aim of moving philosophy beyond a foundationalism that depends on a transcendental signified in order to ground its meaning or guarantee epistemological stability. The problem that ensues, however, is that once all recourse to a fixed or determinate reserve of meaning is withdrawn, it becomes particularly difficult to account for any human specificity or 'exceptionalism'; almost by default, then, the concept of the (Lacanian) linguistic symbolic is assumed to resolve this problem in the way that it allows for something distinctly human. However, because of the predominance of the visual in the symbolic realm, the role of music (as a sonorous and non-representational – or at least deficient with regards to representation) within this schema is more complicated; indeed, the pre-symbolic is often expressly understood both as sonorous (or rhythmic) and as linked to the mother-infant dyad – the best example of this is probably Kristeva's *chora*.

The originality of this thesis, then, is in the way it pursues the questions at stake in this particular musical-philosophical interaction: instead of asking what philosophy can tell us about music, or even what music can tell us about philosophy, this thesis demonstrates that a certain idea of what music *is* pervades recent philosophical thinking. This 'Idea' of music is invariably considered to lie beyond language (beyond philosophy, even) and is thus characterized by some combination of the pre-symbolic, the feminine, the bodily, and the transcendent. Tellingly, however, the 'real-world' music considered aesthetically or ethically valid by these same philosophers comes almost exclusively from the canonical works of the European tradition; non-literate, folk, popular or non-Western forms of music-making are conspicuous by their relative absence or even denigration. It is, in particular, this tension between idea and 'actuality' to which this thesis responds.

The thesis approaches the questions at hand in a number of ways: firstly, the extended genealogies of musical-philosophical interactions are traced in order to place recent work in a longer context. This is approached both chronologically, by marking out key moments in the history of Western thought on music (for example, Plato's foundational redefinition of art as mimetic and the dismissal of the poet (musician) from the ideal state; music's role in the *querelles* and the Enlightenment more broadly; and (instrumental) music's hyper-valorisation in German Idealism as the privileged conduit or expression of both transcendentalism and interiority) and also thematically (in particular, the thesis identifies changing conceptions of and relationship between music's 'essence' and its 'effects' as well its changeable status as an art and/or a science; it shows the way musical practices change alongside changing aesthetic/philosophical priorities; it explores music's complicated role *vis-à-vis* mimesis and representation; and considers its ancient and/or mythological associations with the feminine – notably through the figures of the muses and the sirens). The critical value of this is twofold: it demonstrates the dis/continuities in the longer history of philosophical attempts to apprehend music, and also shows how issues raised about music are never merely musical, but rather tap into broader ideological debates – especially about meaning, reason, education, aesthetics, politics and even the origin and value of society and the state. Moreover, and indispensable for the later arguments of the thesis, it demonstrates the way a philosophical legacy (Idealism's emphasis on music as an expression of interiority) coordinates with a psychoanalytic account of the subject that places the sonorous or the musical, chronologically and logically, in the pre-symbolic (and thus asocial, ahistorical, etc.). Secondly, the central concerns of the thesis are brought into dialogue with 'critical musicology' – a body of work which has already deconstructed in extensive and important ways many of the above assumptions or preconceptions about what music 'is.' Crucially, though the emergence of critical musicology (sometimes also called 'new musicology') was indisputably methodologically and ideologically influenced by (largely French) poststructuralism and deconstruction, there has been far less

engagement with the way music itself is deployed, understood, or characterized within poststructuralism (or recent French theory) itself. The above genealogies and perspectives are thus brought to bear in the close reading of the texts by Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Badiou.

The chapter on Nancy focuses largely on *À l'écoute* as well as his (rarely considered) writings on rock and techno, highlighting the divergent ways in which different genres are approached. It explores the relationship between music, community and language in his thinking, and locates in Nancy's utilisation of the *corps sonore* a longer genealogy that links Nancy's musical thinking to Enlightenment discourses that simultaneously construct gender in problematic ways; it also probes at the underlying assumption that tonality and concert hall listening are synonymous with music in general. In short, the thesis shows how Nancy's attempt to recoup the sensuous sonorous to philosophy depends on a pre-symbolic (thus pre-cultural, timeless, essentialising) maternal-feminine. The chapter on Lacoue-Labarthe deconstructs the assumption of a bound and autonomous musical work; it also considers music's relation to education and pedagogy, as well as probing at Lacoue-Labarthe's construction – via extended notions of (auto)biography – of an essentially rhythmical/emotional subject that is also linked to the maternal-feminine, locating in this gesture his own autobiographical impulse. The chapter focused on Badiou highlights the way that the canonic works of the Western high art tradition have ignored or avoided the question of their technological mediation – a gesture that Badiou explicitly rehabilitates through his *a priori* dismissal of all other music *as* music and his insistence on formal innovation as the sole locus of truth-procedures. Instead, the chapter deconstructs the assumptions underlying this and demonstrates the multiple ways in which music is mediated (socially, institutionally, technologically, affectively, educationally, etc.). Finally, the three philosophers are considered together in the fifth chapter – ostensibly through their overlapping considerations of Wagner – in order to note both what is most productive in their engagements with music, and what is problematic. In summary, both Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe reinstate a gendered foundationalism (specifically the musical maternal-feminine which logically and chronologically precedes the symbolic, language, and culture) that is so at odds with their broader projects; though Badiou never identifies music 'itself' with the feminine, the way in which he constructs 'truth' nonetheless rehabilitates a certain feminine exceptionalism alongside a pervasive misogyny in his work. Moreover, Badiou's delimitation of musical 'truths' to the musical works which occur from Haydn through to the Schoenberg-event parallels exactly the repertoire that has been constructed *as* universal (and thus true, transcendent, etc.), but in so doing it implicitly claims elite European culture *as* universal which replicates the Romantic gesture of conflating an idea with a specific repertoire. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's emphasis on *techne*; Nancy's commitment to sense *as meaningfulness* (in and of itself); Lacoue-Labarthe's relation of music to 'formation' and pedagogy; and Badiou's conception of truth as

a novelty that *actively* impels a new subject are highlighted as the most productive aspects of their thinking for future musical-philosophical encounters.

Broadly, then, this thesis shows that there seems to be little correspondence between the 'Idea' of music as a concept used to steer and support a philosophical or theoretical project towards other possible sources or conditions of knowledge, and accounts of real-world, historically specific, socio-culturally situated music. There is a particular tension between metaphysical-philosophical claims about music and ethical and/or aesthetic accounts of actual music-making, as well as insufficiently critical assumptions about music's privileged relationship to subjectivity. Further still, then, it seems that the very 'essence' of music – its specifically non-symbolic, auditory and temporal materiality – is both the reason for its privileged position in 'anti-ocular' (cf. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe) discourse and also, paradoxically, of no consequence at all. Though Badiou's project is premised on rehabilitating the central importance of (universal and eternal) truth for philosophy, he does so in such a way that is incontrovertibly Eurocentric. Finally, the thesis demonstrates that much of this takes place through a simultaneous instrumentalization of gender as an organisational category for philosophy, and one which all too often has the consequence of sending women, *encore* – along with music – to the beyond of pre-, inter-, or post-signification. In conclusion, the thesis makes a strong case for an anti-essentialist approach to future considerations of both music and gender.

ABBREVIATIONS

I. Nancy

Cd – *La Communauté désœuvrée*

Ec – *À l'écoute*

Idv – *Inventions à deux voix: entretiens*

M – *Les Muses*

MSR – 'March in Spirit in our Ranks' in *Listening* (trans. Charlotte Mandell)

Sm – *Sens multiple: la techno, un laboratoire artistique et politique du présent*

Smr – 'La Scène mondiale du rock'

II. Lacoue-Labarthe

CM – *Le Chant des Muses*

DO – 'Remarque sur Adorno et le jazz, d'un désart obscur' in *Pour n'en pas finir* pp. 73-90

Es – 'L'Écho du sujet' in *SPT1*

Imt2 – *L'Imitation des modernes: typographies 2*

Fp – *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l'Art et la politique*

Lm – 'Une lettre sur la musique' in *Pour n'en pas finir* pp. 57-72

Mf – *Musica ficta*

Pnpf – 'Pour n'en pas finir' in *Pour n'en pas finir* pp. 91-108

Spt1 – *Sujet du philosophie*

III. Badiou

CS – *Conditions*

E – *L'éthique: essai sur la conscience du mal*

EE – *L'Être et l'événement*

LM – *Logiques des mondes: L'être et l'événement, 2*

OT – *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire*

OTP – *On the Truth-Process*

PE – *La philosophie et l'événement*

PMI – *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*

Sc – 'Scolie: Une variante musicale de la métaphysique du sujet' in *Logiques des mondes*

SMP – *Second manifeste pour la philosophie*

StP – *Saint Paul: la fondation de l'universalisme*

W – *Five Lessons on Wagner*

Introductory Prelude

Without music life would be a mistake.

– Nietzsche¹

The aphorism above, from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols, Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, is just one of a vast many that allude to the centrality of music to life, and especially its privileged relation to what makes a life worth living. For Nietzsche, as for many others, this trope locates in music a profound ability to stir not only our emotions but our deepest and most essential selves, and so links us to something primordial and originary – something other or more than 'worldly.' Music, it seems, both makes life worth living, and also transcends the drudgery of our daily lives; it removes us from and operates beyond the passing appearances of both language and the mundane. Indeed, that Nietzsche repeatedly invokes aural metaphors in the philosophical task he has set himself, that of 'sound[ing] out idols', only makes this constellation of assumptions all the more interesting.² He sets out 'to ask questions with a hammer', thus framing himself as an iconoclast (εἰκονοκλάστης, an 'image-breaker'³) who will unseat the false, though often 'most believed in' idols of Western philosophy.⁴ Idol, too, like iconoclast, has a strongly ocular bias, and is variously defined as 'an image or similitude of a deity', 'a representation', 'an image, effigy', 'a counterpart, likeness, imitation', 'visible but unsubstantial' or a 'false mental image.'⁵ Nietzsche's 'great declaration of war',⁶ through his sounding out of idols is therefore premised on the apparent duplicity of the visual domain – the

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, Or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. by Duncan Large, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xxxviii.

² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. xxxiii, italics in original. The title of this work in German is, of course, *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder, Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt* – a play on Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* – against which much of this work is a sustained attack. Thus not *all* music makes life worth living – especially not that which Nietzsche sees as heavy, unliberated and ultimately *unmusical* music; or, in his words, 'constipated, constipating German music' (i.e. Wagner). See p. 7.

³ See 'Iconoclast, N. (and Adj.)', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. xxxiii, italics in original.

⁵ See 'Idol, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. xxxiii, italics in original.

dissimulation of the world as it appears – and the privileged relation of the auditory domain – of sound, hearing and perhaps even music – to depth, truth and the real.

I

This thesis thus explores, expands and critiques this line of thinking in its more recent incarnations and especially, as Kara Keeling and Josh Kun describe, at ‘a moment [in the humanities] when the study of sound and listening is suddenly more ubiquitous than ever.’⁷ Within this remit, however, the role of the specifically musical is somewhat more complicated – it is both the artistic and cultural form that most closely corresponds to the privileged auditory or sonic domain and yet, because of its entanglement with art and culture, it is also ‘contaminated’ by concerns beyond the ‘simply’ sonorous. Indeed, as we have seen above in Nietzsche’s musico-philosophizing (see p. 13, n. 2), not all music fulfils this auricular ideal. Though philosophy’s interest in sound and music has a history extending back much further than Nietzsche – at least to Plato – the twentieth century, and most especially the second half, appears to have witnessed a boom in this area of interest. Martin Jay, for example, has convincingly described this trend in twentieth-century French thought as an ‘anti-ocular’ turn.⁸ In this move towards music and/or sound as a possible ‘other’ source of knowledge and/or truth, a variety of auditory concepts and acoustic phenomena have been seen to offer a way beyond or against traditional Western metaphysics centred on the primacy of vision as instrumental to knowledge (whether through representation/mimesis or visually oriented, empirically minded science). As Keeling and Kun describe, it is an attempt to ‘take the culture, consumption, and politics of sound seriously’ and stands in contradistinction to ‘the nagging dominance of the visual’ – or at least a concept of vision that has ‘traditionally been linked to reason, knowledge, science, truth and rationality.’⁹ Within the French philosophical tradition, however, most of the best known oto-centric

⁷ Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, ‘Introduction’ in *Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies*, ed. by Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, A Special Issue of *American Quarterly* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 1-16, p. 2.

⁸ See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁹ Keeling and Kun, p. 2.

theorisations have specifically concentrated on the concept of rhythm: for example, Henri Lefebvre's *Rythmanalyse*, Henri Meschonnic's *Critique du rythme*, as well as Julia Kristeva's ultimately rhythmic conception of the musico-poetic *chora*, thus leaving the position of music itself in the 'anti-ocular' turn far from clear.¹⁰ Similarly, the theorisations of 'rhythm' often correspond to a description of certain types of literature or writing as 'musical' (in a generic and even metaphorical sense) suggesting a value in the sound pattern of the words and often, perhaps more problematically, merely indicating something imprecise beyond or in excess of the 'literal' meaning of the text. In short, as Peter Dayan has argued, '[m]usic saves language from representation.'¹¹

This thesis explores the way music, specifically, is characterized, used, or accounted for in recent (post-1968) French thought, focusing in particular on the work of Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. In spite of the differences in their philosophical-theoretical positions, all of these writers invoke music – both directly and indirectly – to negotiate their relationship to ontological, political, ethical and aesthetic concerns, particularly in terms of how music relates to the (im)possibility of a subject, the condition of truth, and the role of philosophical thought itself. In addition to using sound as a tool to steer legitimate philosophical consideration and even methodological concerns beyond an ocular bias, all of the aforementioned philosophers also make reference to examples of actual, or 'real-world' music in their work. In particular, then, the thesis pays close attention to the extent to which an inherited definition of the 'idea' of music – one with a strong lineage both in German Idealism and its critiques by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy – is assumed rather than critically (re)evaluated in otherwise critical thought. Tracing the musical-transcendental baggage of a traditional metaphysical conception

¹⁰ Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1982); Henri Lefebvre, *Eléments de rythmanalyse: introduction à la connaissance des rythmes* (Paris: Syllepse, 1992); Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique: L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Seuil, 1974); Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

¹¹ Peter Dayan, *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 131.

of music – as essentially feminine, corporeal, (sexually) excessive and too straightforwardly the ‘other’ of language – brings to the fore an important critical tension, and further provides ample ground for an ethical feminist perspective.

II

A guiding aim of this thesis is, then, to sharpen the critical tools with which we approach the inclusion of music in contemporary theorizing, and to embolden a more substantive understanding of the kind of issues that might be at stake when we think about music – especially when we lay claim to its supposedly special powers or political meanings. It takes 1968 as a critical moment for two reasons: it is – it hardly needs to be said – of social and political significance following the student and worker protests in Paris and elsewhere. As we approach the semicentenary of this tumultuous and inspirational year, and in light of increasing instability and tension in the present, it seems of renewed significance for those on the left to reflect on the lessons learned and those lost, and to (re)consider the philosophical trajectories it launched. All three of the philosophers considered in depth in this thesis were involved – directly or indirectly – with the protests in 1968 and, more importantly, were (and remain, I think it can be argued) committed to many of the principles that guided and motivated this period of unrest. Secondly, 1968 serves as a useful (if approximate) date to mark the transition from the dominance of structuralist to poststructuralist perspectives in French thought.¹² Tzuchien Tho and Giuseppe Bianco highlight that Badiou himself designates the mid-60s as a turning point for philosophy, citing the ‘exceptional set of thinkers who served as professors for the generation who, in 1965, were in their 20s and 30s’ as well as noting that it is significant that this is the moment when the nomenclature changes: philosophy – or at least that which is exported largely from France into a

¹² Barthes’s *S/Z* (published in 1970) is often considered the pivotal work in this respect, being structuralist in orientation whilst simultaneously undermining the structuralist project and paving the way for poststructuralism. See Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), particularly p. 249.

anglophone context – becomes ‘theory.’¹³ This move towards ‘theory’ (from the Greek *θέα* ‘a view’ and *όράω* ‘I look, see’ gestures towards the partiality of any perspective) perhaps reflects the shift from the proclaimed objectivity and scientism of structuralist approaches to the deconstructive concerns of post-structuralism and the concomitant instability of the texts (literary, philosophical, or otherwise) at hand, and thus the refusal of final or absolute truths. It shouldn’t be understated, however, that though poststructuralism both grows from and responds to structuralism, what it sets in motion is a ‘fundamental challenge to the defining intellectual ideal of philosophy since Plato: the possibility of attaining knowledge about the ultimate nature and meaning of human existence.’¹⁴ In this respect, the philosophers considered in this thesis represent (and were chosen partially because of) two opposing responses to this definitional moment. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, often writing together and drawing particularly on Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, can be considered as staunch defenders of this position, exploring the consequences (whether personal, political, or philosophical) of a world without (absolute) truth and the instability of language, meaning and the subject. In stark contrast, though Badiou is implicated in this pivotal moment – he, too, came of (philosophical) age in the mid-60s and was no doubt influenced by it – he has been one of poststructuralism’s most relentless and prolific opponents; instead, Badiou makes a strong case for the rehabilitation of philosophy proper (along with its attendant categories of Truth, rationality, and knowledge). It is down to this that the disparate lengths of the individual chapters can be attributed: the shorter chapters on Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe represent two faces of a shared politico-philosophical commitment and thus the critiques offered – though distinct – are closely related. By contrast, the chapter on Badiou offers the longest sustained interaction with an individual philosopher and his somewhat oppositional approach yields, unsurprisingly, a rather different critique.

¹³ *Badiou and the Philosophers: Interrogating 1960s French Philosophy*, ed. & trans. by Tzuchien Tho and Giuseppe Bianco (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. x.

¹⁴ Gutting, p. 251.

The shift towards theoretical perspectives nonetheless imports other complications. Most significantly for the concerns central to this thesis it is, despite an alleged anti-ocular turn, the continued predominance of the visual (looking, seeing, and views being etymologically embedded in the term ‘theory’) that sits uncomfortably alongside the distinctively auditory considerations at hand. The thesis is also, necessarily, a partial account and a mere snapshot of a much broader and richer theoretical tradition; there are a number of other thinkers who could have been the focus of sustained attention along these lines and who would have extended the range, scope, and value of the considerations in this thesis. The most conspicuous absences to my mind are the works of Gilles Deleuze and Bernard Stiegler: as Claire Colebrook and David Bennett describe, Deleuze (along with Félix Guattari) ‘frequently cite music as their privileged analytic example because it discloses the potential of all art: higher deterritorialisation [...It] becomes a privileged example in their work precisely because, as a non-referential regime of signs, it enables us to think how a form of expression (a relation among sounds) enables a form of content (a body and its orientations).’¹⁵ Though it is certainly true that music is a privileged referent and source of inspiration for Deleuze, there is already a substantial and growing body of work that explores this specific intersection of musical and philosophical thought – much of which intertwines and intersects with the concerns of this thesis, and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.¹⁶ With this in mind, it seemed sensible not to focus on Deleuze’s musical offerings, but rather to point readers in the direction of other work and hope that they will nonetheless find points of contact with this thesis. Secondly, though Stiegler has not published a volume dedicated specifically

¹⁵ Claire Colebrook and David Bennett, ‘The Sonorous, the Haptic and the Intensive’, *New Formations* 66 (2009), 68–80 (p. 76).

¹⁶ See, for example, Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Ian Buchanan, *Deleuze and Music* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); *Deleuze and Music*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2006); Edward Campbell, *Music after Deleuze*, *Deleuze Encounters* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Danielle Cohen-Levinas, ‘Deleuze Musicien’, *Rue Descartes*, 1998, 137–47; *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*, ed. by Brian Clarence Hulse and Nick Nesbitt (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Nicolas Marty, ‘Deleuze, Cinema and Acousmatic Music (or What If Music Weren’t an Art of Time?)’, *Organised Sound*, 21.2 (2016), 166–75; Gregg Redner, *Deleuze and Film Music: Building a Methodological Bridge between Film Theory and Music* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011); *Gilles Deleuze: la pensée musique*, ed. by Pascale Criton and Jean-Marc Chauvel (Paris: Centre de documentation de la musique contemporaine, 2015); Richard Pinhas, *Les Larmes de Nietzsche: Deleuze et la musique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).

to music, one of his core philosophical concepts, that of *organologie générale*, is derived from a musicological context – organology was historically the study of instruments – and indeed Stiegler affords music a privileged role in this analytic framework; in addition, Stiegler was also the director of the *Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique* (IRCAM) from 2002-2006. Though his work is not considered in depth, Stieglerian perspectives are brought to bear in the final chapter, and the role of music in his work certainly deserves more consideration in the future. More problematically, perhaps, because of the constraints of time and space, this thesis has confined its analysis to thinkers whose work has received substantial uptake for reinvigorating theoretical perspectives at large. For this reason scant attention has been paid to the work of Bernard Sève and Marie-Louise Mallet, neither of whose work has experienced the same kind of uptake – whether in France, the U.K., or elsewhere – as Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe and Badiou.¹⁷ Though a select corpus has the benefit of the kind of close reading that these philosophers demand and deserve, there is no doubt much more to be explored in future work.

III

Music is often aligned with the subordinate term in a long list of binary oppositions, and especially has a longstanding and powerful association with the feminine, the body, emotions and excess, and also with the overwhelming if elusive nature of water and the sea – a history that will be fleshed out more fully in chapter one and throughout the thesis. At the same time, it is the potential of sound and resonance, as Michelle Duncan describes, to dismantle ‘the dualism between subject and object that has governed perception and on which the logic of enlightened reason depends’ that has seduced philosophers and theorists to a closer consideration of sound, audition and music.¹⁸ As Jay has

¹⁷ See, for example, Bernard Sève, *L’Altération musicale, ou, ce que la musique apprend au philosophe* (Paris: Seuil, 2002); Bernard Sève, *L’Instrument de musique: une étude philosophique* (Paris: Seuil, 2013); Marie-Louise Mallet, *La Musique en respect* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).

¹⁸ Michelle Duncan, ‘The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16.3 (2004), 283–306 (p. 299).

explored, the ocularcentrism of Western philosophy – the visual bias which produces the ever proliferating list of binary oppositions – is also indissociably connected to both phallogocentric and logocentric regimes: in short, Western philosophy is not merely ocularcentric but also phallogocentric.¹⁹ With this in mind, this thesis pays especially close attention to the way gender constellates with or is constructed alongside theorising purportedly about sound and music; despite its controversial reception with regards to essentialism, Luce Irigaray's foundational work on the way philosophy (and psychoanalysis) locates in the maternal-feminine an illusory ground upon which an originary scene of (patriarchal-masculine) representation can be played, has been indispensable.

Though the critical focus is on the way music is (or isn't) related to the feminine, as Kimberlé Crenshaw so necessarily articulated, gendered identity always already intersects with other forms of oppression and discrimination, such as race, class, sexual orientation and (dis)ability – intersecting identities that are considered in the thesis though they are not the explicit focus.²⁰ Though this thesis aims at no point to validate feminine identity as distinct from overlapping forms of oppression, it will nonetheless be important and interesting to focus more precisely on the way race, class, and (dis)ability (amongst others) constellate at the nexus of music and contemporary philosophy in future work. Whilst my consideration of the characterization of music is motivated by a commitment to the perspectives outlined above, I have nonetheless tried as much as possible to be guided by the close reading of the texts at hand (and issues engaged by the broader philosophical projects of their writers) as to the specifically 'musical' considerations that arise as they occur to me; no doubt another reader would identify other angles for consideration.

As a final word of caution, though there is often a substantial blurring between the specifically musical and the 'simply' sonorous – a blurring that is produced partly by the texts themselves as well as by a

¹⁹ See Jay, particularly 'Chapter Nine: "Phallogocentricism": Derrida and Irigaray', pp. 493-544.

²⁰ See Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140 (1989), 139–67.

much broader question of how to define what counts as specifically musical in the first place – I have tried as much as is possible to avoid replicating the tendency to see voice and music as near synonyms in philosophical work. Though there is a long and contentious debate about the possibility of music’s essentially vocal origins – in part because vocal music is by far the most common and prevalent form of music-making across both geographical and historical planes and in part because they seem to overlap in their capacity for non-semantic but distinctly human expression – both terms too often function as stand-ins for a generic ‘beyond’ of logocentric meaning. Moreover, there is already a significant body of literature on the voice, especially in its psychoanalytic and phenomenological guises.²¹ Instead, unless the relationship of music to voice emerges in the writing of the philosophers at hand (such as is the case in the work of Lacoue-Labarthe) I have tried to delimit my attention to the distinctly musical inclusions in their work – by which I mean objects or processes recognized in commonplace discussion as music or having to do with music explicitly (works, performances, composers, recordings etc.) as well as anything claimed *as* music(al) by these philosophers. In so doing, instead of trying to ask what philosophy can tell us about music, or even what music can tell us about philosophy, this thesis explores the way a variety of assumptions about what music *is* inhabit these texts.

IV

The main body of the thesis opens with ‘Music, *Mousike*, Muses (and Sirens)’ – the first substantive chapter which sketches out some of the key issues in any thinking about music, before exploring in more detail those that are most pertinent to the particular considerations at hand. It also introduces certain crucial tropes and associations – many of which will be more than familiar, some less so – as

²¹ See, for example, Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutterers and Other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014); Michel Chion, *La Voix au cinéma* (Paris: Editions de l’Etoile, 1982); Denis Vasse, *L’Ombilic et la voix: deux enfants en analyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006); Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005); Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Anja Kanngieser, ‘A Sonic Geography of Voice: Towards an Affective Politics’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 36.3 (2011), 336–53.

well as drawing on the musicological literature that has sought to deconstruct in critical and political ways what it is we mean (or often don't mean) when we think or speak about 'music.' Throughout the thesis, I have tried to develop an additive critique of what music 'is' progressively across the three chapters on individual philosophers and in the final chapter that brings them together; much of this will be very familiar to readers acquainted with Anglo-American musicological discourse from the previous two or three decades – less so to those who are unaware of these developments. It might be noted that there is a distinct lack of musicological perspectives from francophone perspectives – a fact owing to the relative infancy of socio-politically minded and gender-informed approaches in French musicological discourse.²²

The second chapter, 'Music, Meaning and Materiality: Nancy's *Corps Sonore*', explores the role of music in Nancy's broader sensuous philosophy along with the genres he draws on for his philosophical meditations: notably rock, techno and *musique savante*. It explores the relationship between music, community and language in his thinking, and locates in Nancy's utilisation of the *corps sonore* a longer genealogy that links Nancy's musical thinking to Enlightenment discourses that simultaneously construct gender in problematic ways. It also addresses tonality as a particular historical construct and engages with the role of silent, reverent concert hall listening as the assumed space of musical audition, whilst simultaneously highlighting this construction's participation in and production of particular social, cultural, and classed formations. The chapter on Lacoue-Labarthe, "'Catacoustic" Subjects and the Injustice of Being Born: Lacoue-Labarthe's Musical Maternal Muse', develops from the thinking on tonality outlined with Nancy, to develop (notably via Lydia Goehr) a critique of the assumed notion of the musical work: a static, total, bound and autonomous object whose meaning is identifiable only in relation to itself, and one which obscures its means of production and the labour required for its (re)production (regardless of whether it is actually performed, as such). The chapter

²² An early and significant exception to this would be Catherine Clément, *L'Opéra, ou, la défaite des femmes* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1979). The infancy of these approaches to the study of music 'encore relativement peu étudiées en France' is attested to in this 2015 call for papers exploring the current state of research "Musique et genre", Call for papers, *Calenda*, Published on Friday, July 17, 2015, <http://calenda.org/335269>.

also considers music's relation to education and pedagogy, as well as probing at Lacoue-Labarthe's construction – via extended notions of (auto)biography – of an essentially musical subject, locating in this gesture his own autobiographical impulse. The fourth chapter, 'Midwives and Madams: Mus(e)ic, Mediation, and Badiou's "Universal" Subject' spends some time outlining Badiou's rather different philosophical project, before developing both the critique of concert hall listening and of the work-concept further by addressing the multiple ways in which music is mediated (socially, institutionally, technologically, affectively, educationally, etc.), focusing in particular on the way in which the role of technology has historically been *actively* obscured or, rather, veiled, in order to produce the illusion of the transcendental and autonomous musical work. Finally, 'From Parnassus to Bayreuth: Staging a Music Which is Not One' brings the three philosophers together – ostensibly via their mutual considerations of Wagner and the ongoing debate as to his music's relation to National Socialism – in order to suggest, through questions of performance and multiply intersecting planes of mediation, a non-reductive approach to both music and gender that refuses to attribute a single essence to either. The concluding analytic thus aims to offer a distinctly musical complement to ongoing debates that seek to move criticism beyond, as Rita Felski describes, 'the Scylla of political functionalism and the Charybdis of art for art's sake.'²³ In short, the final chapter aims to take Nietzsche's hammer one final time to musical 'idols' in order to disrupt yet further any clear opposition between acoustic and visual practices, affective and cognitive modes of musicking,²⁴ reductive positivism and contextual hermeneutics, instead locating in both music and philosophy a (changeable) repository of tools and techniques that both shape and are shaped by social, cultural, political and performative practices – including articulations of gendered identity.

²³ Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature*, Blackwell Manifestos (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 9.

²⁴ This is a verb coined by Christopher Small to denote all kinds of musical activity, from composition, performance and listening (whether live or recorded) through to singing in the shower. See *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998).

Chapter I: Music, *Mousike*, Muses (and Sirens)

Elle n'existe pas. C'en est même agaçant; si je me levais, si j'arrachais ce disque du plateau qui le supporte et si je le cassais en deux, je ne l'atteindrais pas, elle. Elle est au-delà – toujours au-delà de quelque chose, d'une voix, d'une note de violon. A travers des épaisseurs et des épaisseurs d'existence, elle se dévoile, mince et ferme et, quand on veut la saisir, on ne rencontre que des existants, on bute sur des existants dépourvus de sens. Elle est derrière eux: je ne l'entends même pas, j'entends des sons, des vibrations de l'air qui la dévoilent. Elle n'existe pas, puisqu'elle n'a rien de trop: c'est tout le reste qui est de trop par rapport à elle. Elle est. Et moi aussi j'ai voulu être. Je n'ai même voulu que cela; voilà le fin mot de l'histoire.

– Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*¹

In a famous episode towards the end of Sartre's *La Nausée* the protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, finds temporary solace in the familiar melody of an old ragtime tune, 'Some of these Days.' The tune he is listening to appears a number of times throughout the philosophical novel and is, he imagines, sung by 'une Nègresse' – though the song is strongly associated with (and thus likely the recording by) Sophie Tucker, a Jewish Ukrainian-born American vaudeville and blackface songstress best known as the 'last of the red-hot mamas.'² For Sartre, via Roquentin, music not only seems to offer respite from the nauseating malaise that guides much of the book – that of Roquentin's 'inability' as Carroll describes, 'to distinguish his conscious self from the objects around him'³ but also seems to bypass the ontological duality laid out in Sartre's distinction between the mundane physicality of *être-en-soi* and the distinctly human freedom described as *être-pour-soi*.⁴ Though, as sonorous artefact – let us not forget that Roquentin, as always, is listening to the song on the café gramophone – we might be inclined to think of 'it' ontologically as *en-soi*, it is very clear that for Roquentin the 'identity' of the tune is other than the physical or material props that (re)produce the 'vibrations de l'air qui la dévoilent' indeed, it *is not* even the vibrations, but rather the vibrations merely reveal or 'unveil' it. Similarly, its 'being' is not dependent on or affected by its surroundings or contingent factors – just as

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), pp. 245-246.

² See Sophie Tucker, *Some of These Days: An Autobiography* (London: Hammond, 1948), especially 'Blackface' pp. 37-45, 'My Yiddisha Mama' pp. 213-224, and 'The Last of the Red-hot Mamas' pp. 233-241.

³ Mark Carroll, "'It Is": Reflections on the Role of Music in Sartre's "La Nausée"', *Music and Letters*, 87.3 (2006), 398–407 (p. 400).

⁴ Sartre characterizes music specifically in a similar way in *L'Imaginaire*, see Jean-Paul Sartre and Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, *L'Imaginaire: psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007). This is not necessarily consistent with his broader reflections on art, however. See in particular Christina Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 116-144.

it exists independently of the record which could be broken in two, the passage strongly suggests that it would also be unaffected by such factors as the gramophone breaking or even by an instrumental or vocal failure in live performance: the fundamental essence of the song remains unaffected and unaffected. It is completely autonomous and free. Or, as Roquentin says elsewhere: 'rien ne peut l'interrompre, rien qui vienne de ce temps où le monde est affalé; elle cessera d'elle-même.'⁵ Towards the very end of the novel, Roquentin asks Madeleine to play the record a final time, during which he muses on 'ce type de là-bas qui a composé cet air' (wrongly, again⁶) assuming him to be a 'Juif aux sourcils de charbon.'⁷ In the music he claims to be able to locate a sense of suffering and wonders about the troubles of the fellow who wrote it. More extraordinarily this leads him to suggest that when 'la Négrresse' sings this song, two people 'sont sauvés: le Juif et la Négrresse. Sauvés. Ils se sont peut-être cru perdus jusqu'au bout, noyés dans l'existence. Et pourtant, personne ne pourrait penser à moi comme je pense à eux, avec cette douceur.'⁸ There is, nonetheless, a certain circularity to this: music is both a site where suffering is perceptible and also the cathartic balm that soothes this (or at least *his*) very suffering; it reveals an (ontological) lack and yet heals the void it identifies. Ultimately, however, not being a musician, Roquentin resolves instead to write a book which, we realize may be (despite its self-reflexive framing as a posthumously edited diary of Roquentin from the time of his research for a book on Monsieur de Rollebon) the book we have just read.⁹

La Nausée is, then, at once literary and philosophical, political and (auto-) biographical in the way it fictionalizes, via Roquentin, the political and philosophical commitments of Sartre himself. It is yet more intriguing though that music is of such key importance in this endeavour; it is music alone that,

⁵ Sartre, p. 41.

⁶ See Carroll. It was actually composed by Shelton Brooks, a Canadian of African descent, and based on a tune published in 1905 by Frank Williams, about whom we have no biographical information, see James J. Fuld, *The Book of World-Famous Music: Classical, Popular, and Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), p. 511.

⁷ Sartre, p. 248, p. 247.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 249.

⁹ It is interesting, then, that Derrida has spoken explicitly about the 'strong impression' *La Nausée* had on him and the way it creates 'the feeling of existence as excess, "being-superfluous," the very beyond of meaning giving rise to writing' – much like 'Some of these Days' does. See Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 36.

as Carroll describes, is 'beyond the physical realm and is free from the vicissitudes of day-to-day existence. The tune is neither *pour-soi* like Roquentin on a good day, nor *en-soi* like the trees that so depressed him.'¹⁰ At the same time, the narrator's existential meditation unwittingly seems to pose more questions than it solves, and brings into frame a number of key difficulties that occur frequently in the philosophy of music: its essence, definition and location, as well as its emotional and psychological impact (its effect and affective capacity more broadly), its similarities and differences with language, and the roles of composers, performers, listeners and, of course, technology, alongside music's relationship to identity, society, culture and politics. Most starkly, perhaps, in the way in which Sartre positions the musical 'object' as resolutely beyond the material props upon which the production of its sounding depends, whilst also mapping specific identities (the Jew and the Negress) and their attendant sufferings onto nothing more than its sounding, he highlights the way music seems to be both material and immaterial, mediated and autonomous, real and ideal, and deeply and viscerally human but also beguilingly transcendental.

It comes as little surprise, then, that what music actually 'is', is rather hard to pin down, and remains under ongoing debate in the philosophy of music (and elsewhere). Indeed, the definitions and conceptions of music are so plentiful and variable that their indisputable entanglement with other (social/cultural) concerns or values seems quite apparent: there is little geographical consistency, for example: some cultures have no word that can be reliably translated as what, in the West, we call music or, indeed, have a word that would loosely cover what we tend to mean by music but no distinction between that and what we would call dance. Equally, what we might broadly assume to come under the umbrella of music would be culturally inaccurate or even offensive in some cases, such as with Quranic recitation. Even within a relatively recent history and within a (broadly speaking) shared culture, the definitions proliferate: for composer Edgard Varèse it is simply 'son organisé'; for

¹⁰ Carroll, pp. 400-401.

music critic and aesthete Eduard Hanslick it is famously ‘form moving in sound;’¹¹ whereas for Luciano Berio it is ‘everything that one listens to with the intention of listening to music’¹² (and this, then, of course sets up a different relationship between ‘music’ and so-called ‘noise’). For some, the definition can be broadened beyond the human to include the cacophonous booms and shrieks of industrial machinery and the chirruping of birds and other animals, and even to the cosmos and the universal harmony of the spheres. Whilst all of this gestures towards the very mutable nature of what (we think) music ‘is’, suggesting that ‘[i]l n’y a donc pas *une* musique, mais *des* musiques, pas *la* musique, mais un fait musical. Ce fait musical est un fait social total’¹³, there is of course a long history of thinking music together with or as a science, and thus defining the essentially musical in terms of properties (overtones, ratios, etc.) that are supposedly eternal and universal and thus not subject to the whims of a particular human culture or society.

It is, quite clearly, beyond this thesis to determine what would be a useful or accurate definition for contemporary thought about music. However, an awareness of the extraordinary plurality of the possible meanings of ‘music’ certainly guides the approach to the texts at hand, both in terms of the close reading and analysis of what is at stake in any one philosopher’s implicit or explicit assumptions about what music ‘is’, and in terms of trying to sketch out what is at stake in the (French/continental) philosophical engagement with music more generally in the later years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. This chapter proceeds along three axes: firstly, key moments and configurations in the longer history of musico-philosophical interactions will be sketched out in relation to a number of recurring ‘problems’ or sites of contention. In so doing, this chapter urges readers towards a critical account of the history of (what we mean by) music – particularly in its instrumental (absolute) guise – and how this relates to changing musical styles and practices.

¹¹ See in particular ‘Chapter Three: On the Musically Beautiful’ in Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. by Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1986), pp. 28-44.

¹² Luciano Berio, Rossana Dalmonte, and Bálint András Varga, *Two Interviews*, trans. by David Osmond-Smith (New York: M. Boyars, 1985), p. 19.

¹³ Jean Molino, ‘Fait musical et sémiologie de la musique’, *Musique et Jeu*, 1975, 37–62 (p. 38).

Secondly, music's etymological derivation is considered as a tool to consider music's relation to other arts as well as to society and culture more broadly. The final axis introduces some of the ways in which historical and contemporary ideas about the interrelationship of music, gender and sexuality have tended to constellate.

MUSIC: TERMINOLOGY, GENEALOGY, HISTORY

I. Allography: The Ontological Problem

Though it is fair to say that the definitional project of ascertaining what music 'is' is more strongly associated with analytic philosophy than with the continental tradition,¹⁴ the question of music's ontology deserves to be addressed briefly if only to highlight the myriad approaches and difficulties faced. It perhaps helps to be clearer that often one is considering the ontology of different musical things, such as works, performances, recordings or scores, though the relationship between these different musical 'things' is far from clear. In particular, it is useful to flesh out a distinction between autographic (the singular, self-same, written repository of the musical work's identity) and allographic (the double or multiple, performed or sonorous re-sounding of music beyond or other than its notated version) approaches. Indeed, though sound is often assumed to be central to the concept of what music is, this doesn't necessarily hold for ontological considerations based around the score copy of a work; as Georges Bloch notes, 'une partition ne s'entend pas, même lorsqu'on la lit. Ce qu'on entend dans sa tête est, d'abord, une abstraction sonore.'¹⁵ This is a claim that would lead us also to include mental representations in the possible list of musical things – an idealist perspective that chimes with the way Sartre – or Roquentin – understands the fundamental essence of 'Some of these Days' as

¹⁴ See Andrew Kania, 'Definition' in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, ed. by Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3-13, p. 5.

¹⁵ Georges Bloch, 'Lettre à Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe' in *Penser la musique avec les mathématiques? Actes du séminaire mathématiques/musique/philosophie*, ed. by Carlos Agon, Gérard Assayag, and Jean Bresson, Musique-Sciences (Paris: IRCAM; Delatour, 2006), pp. 173-202, p. 175.

precious little to do with the musical text (its notation – not just the sung words), its performance or the instruments/technology used for its sounding. Along with idealism, philosophers have also made realist, anti-realist and nominalist claims for the best understanding of musical ontology which, in this respect, rehearse classical arguments about the problem of universals more generally. As Carl Matheson and Ben Caplan have shown, this has involved understanding music variously as sets, types, events and *sui generis* non-physical objects.¹⁶ As well as offering a very lucid account of what it means to be a realist, nominalist, or idealist when it comes to musical ontology, Lydia Goehr has described musical works as ‘ontological mutants’: a claim she builds on to make her case for a historicized or genealogical approach to ontology – a position explored more in chapter three of this thesis.¹⁷

A primary difficulty is the impossibility of reducing music (presumptively a musical work, which is in itself problematic, as Goehr, noted above, goes to great lengths to highlight) to any one of its potential instantiations. Furthermore, when claims are made for locating the essence of music in one type of musical thing, such as in performance, not only are seemingly incommensurate difficulties encountered in relation to its other possible instantiations (does it come into existence when it is first performed rather than when it is ‘written’, and what if it is never performed?) but also within the category proposed: which performance? Do recordings of live performances have the same or different ontological statuses? Do (inevitable) wrong notes make it the same or a different piece of music? What if it is played by ‘wrong’ instruments (i.e. other than those for which it was scored)? What if it is ‘performed’ using sampled and synthesized instruments on a computer? And, to push things further still, when large amounts of particular, identifiable works are reworked or recycled is a new piece created or is it just a new version of the original? Though we might instinctively feel that Jane Birkin’s ‘Jane B’ or Suprême NTM’s ‘That’s My People’ are pieces in their own rights, rather than

¹⁶ See Carl Matheson and Ben Caplan, ‘Ontology’ in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, pp. 38-47.

¹⁷ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 2, and ‘Part I: The Analytic Approach’ for an elucidation of the various positions.

re-workings of Chopin's Prelude No. 4 Op. 28, this becomes less evident when the piece is explicitly framed as a remixed or re-orchestrated version of the original, such as a trance remix of Barber's *Adagio for Strings* or Schoenberg's orchestration of Brahms's Piano Quartet; and it is yet less clear still when it is supposedly the piece in question just in a different 'style' – such as a salsa version of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.¹⁸

One aspect that is made particularly plain in light of these examples is the presumptive role of the composer function as central to the work's identity – of the autographical function – both in the sense of the ideologically privileged role of the composer (and possibly their intentions and/or biography) but also the written (rather than performed) location of the musical work – the score-copy – as central to the musical work's ontology. Additionally, this goes beyond – or is at least concerned with something in addition to – the destabilisation of the authorial function as key to interpretation; it is also a historicization of the 'invention' of the composer-concept. As Georges Bloch states, '[o]n oublie souvent que, avant 1795, il n'y a pas de "compositeur." Il n'y a que des musiciens de statuts sociaux divers (violon du roi, *kapellmeister*, musicien de cour, de rue, de bal, etc.) [...] il n'y a ni dichotomie ni même simple distinction entre création et réalisation musicale.'¹⁹ This is not to say that prior to this point there were not figures who acted or created in ways that seem fairly indistinguishable from our modern conception of a composer, but that the move to an identified composer-function also entails other significant changes.²⁰ The two most important points are perhaps drawn from the realisation that prior to this point in the literate high art tradition, 'toute musique est originale, puisque toute occasion ou presque est prétexte à une musique nouvelle':²¹ firstly, the invention of the composer-function is inseparable from the creation of the canon and the (emerging) practice of concert hall

¹⁸ See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvHrj7p1z34> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jafWlyfUabw> [both accessed 20/10/2016].

¹⁹ Bloch, p. 177.

²⁰ Interestingly, however, feminist musicological research focusing on the previously understudied work of Hildegard von Bingen has led to the claim of an astonishingly early example of a self-consciously identified composer-figure. See Susan McClary, 'Why Gender Still (As Always) Matters in Music Studies' in *Dichotomies: Gender and Music*, ed. by Beate Neumeier (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009), pp. 49-60.

²¹ Bloch, p. 177.

listening (itself inseparable from the various revolutions of the eighteenth century and the growing middle classes) which means that works will be heard on multiple occasions and will be played by people who have nothing to do with the person who wrote them. Secondly, and not unrelatedly, this entails a shift in musical consideration towards the written score-copy of the work as the repository of the work's identity.²² Finally, then, drawing on Lydia Goehr's use of Nelson Goodman's distinction between autographic (i.e. irreplicable – there is and can only be one 'Mona Lisa', for example) and allographic arts (which allow for multiple instantiations) is thus useful in attempting to keep in mind some of the difficulties particular to the thinking of musical ontology, specifically when it comes to questions (and assumptions) about music's identity, essence or 'location.'

II. Reluctant Mimesis: Noumena, Phenomena, and the Problem of Musical Representation

Another difficulty that has been central to considerations about music's essence is the question of representation and mimesis; as Christopher Hasty describes, music's 'resistance to representation has long been its curse and its promise.'²³ In particular, this forces considerations of music into a vexed relationship with language (typically seen as mimetic and representational) – a factor that is worth bearing in mind throughout the following considerations. Further still, it refracts in yet more complicated ways with the questions of autography and allography outlined above, depending on where one locates the identity of the musical text: could it be that the performed version is a representation of the essential score-copy, or is the score-copy merely the mnemonic for the 'actual' music in its aural instantiation(s)? In short, is it possible to discern which version is the copy and which is the original – or indeed is it neither and/or both? As mentioned in the 'Introductory Prelude', part of the very reason for a renewed interest in music (at least for some recent philosophers) is the way in which, as an auditory phenomenon, it offers a non-visual 'object' of study that evades, avoids or

²² Of course, all of this is entirely commensurate with Goehr's critique of the work-concept mentioned above and explored in more detail in chapter three.

²³ Christopher Hasty, 'The Image of Thought and Ideas of Music' in *Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music*, ed. by Brian Hulse and Nick Nesbitt (Ashgate, 2010), pp. 1-22, p. 1.

problematizes the role of (vision-oriented and linguistic) representation in meaning-making.²⁴ It is worth setting out in a bit more detail some of what is at stake in these considerations as well as the way it has been dealt with in previous attempts to think about music, as it taps into vast questions to do with perception, value, meaning, truth and knowledge.

The concept of mimesis continues to hold firm sway in philosophy, much of which can be traced back to its formulation in Platonic metaphysics; crucially, from the off, mimetic thinking – usually understood as imitation – entails a deep anxiety. And indeed, it is Plato’s foundational redefinition of art as fundamentally mimetic – and thus duplicitous (with regards to truth, rationality, and pleasure) – that is at the root of the banishing of the poets from the *callipolis* (the ideal state). As he says to Glaucon in the *Republic*, ‘[i]f you admit the entertaining Muse of lyric and epic poetry, then instead of law and the shared acceptance of reason as the best guide, the kings of your community will be pleasure and pain’ (607a).²⁵ Underlying all of this is of course a concern with our ability to be able to discern what is or is not true (and consequently good, for Plato). Music’s apparent lack of semantic content thus puts it in an especially fraught relationship to representation and so its potential for disclosing or embodying truth; for Plato, this accords music both a privileged and a derogatory status. Though art is definitively mimetic, music nonetheless appears to maintain a more immediate relation to the psyche and a distinct capacity to model *ethos*; as Jeremy Begbie describes, ‘Plato weaves Pythagorean and other traditions in a quite stunning synthesis, encompassing the mathematical proportions of the world soul as well as of the human soul and body. Music gives us not only a model of harmonious balance, unity and integrity, it actually implants cosmic harmony into the soul of humans [...and in] this way, music and morality become closely linked.’²⁶ The extent to which we can think of music as non/representational will be considered in more depth below, but firstly it is helpful

²⁴ See the ‘Introductory Prelude’.

²⁵ Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 361. Just prior to this he has claimed that ‘the only poems we can admit into our community are hymns to the gods and eulogies of virtuous men.’

²⁶ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 80.

to outline how other philosophers have figured music's relation to sensory perception and worldliness more broadly, particularly following the transcendental idealism of Kantian philosophy.

Prior to the Kantian intervention in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there is of course still a distinction between noumena and phenomena – noumena being objects or things (so, in a Platonic guise, ideas and forms) that are inaccessible to experience (but not to knowledge), and phenomena being what is perceived through the senses. Kant, however, critiques previous metaphysics for conflating the two: for Kant, all things that exist exist independently of the human mind but we cannot *know* anything directly about things that exist but are unavailable to our perception. It is therefore crucial to distinguish, as Azade Seyhan describes, 'between the thing as it is synthesized by *a priori* forms of intuition and the thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*). The thing-in-itself is not accessible by the faculties and forms a limit to human knowledge.'²⁷ This 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy placed 'the human mind at the center of all operations of knowledge' and bequeathed to us the prevailing and pervasive notion 'that some primary presence or truth remains inaccessible to consciousness [and it is this that] lies at the heart of the problem of representation.'²⁸ As several commentators, including Alison Ross, have highlighted, from this point on the entire practice of philosophy stands in an essential relationship to aesthetics (Αισθητική having to do with all that is perceptible through the senses): literary and artistic endeavours foreground the intertwining of (re)presentation and aesthetic (sensory) experience, which philosophy becomes interested in as a 'mode of relation between the forms of material nature and human freedom.'²⁹ The consequences for the specifically musical for Kant are, however, rather ambivalent: as Marian Hobson describes, 'chez Kant, la musique prend [...]

²⁷ Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 5.

²⁸ Seyhan, p.5, p.3. It should be noted that there is sustained and increasingly determined attempt to move beyond the Kantian problematic, for example in the fields of New Materialism, Speculative Realism and Object-oriented Ontology.

²⁹ Alison Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 1 and in general.

deux valeurs à la fois: elle est l'art à la fois le moins important et le plus élevé, celui qui doit se faire compléter par d'autres arts, et qui pourtant les prime tous.³⁰

One reason for this ambivalence is the way Kant understands or conceptualizes aesthetic judgement and then how this relates to music's ambiguous relation to representation. Though Kant is concerned with perception as central to how we can know things more broadly, it is also through his work that aesthetics acquires its modern meaning as the branch of philosophy concerned with beauty (and associated concerns, such as the good and the sublime). Though judgements of beauty are subjective in that the affective and cognitive responses to a given art object necessarily require individual sense perception and cannot be proven according to objective criteria, the claim to beauty (rather than the merely agreeable, for example) is a normative claim that states that others, too, should also find the given object beautiful, and thus the claim is universal.³¹ For Kant, then, judgements of beauty are neither entirely objective nor merely subjective; the claim is universal but not about a known universal.

Beauty is, however, divided into two categories: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) and adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*), where the first 'presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance with it.'³² This is important for the concerns at hand because it is firstly a distinction that allows Kant to relate the experience of beauty to the exercising of taste, and secondly this plays out in interesting ways when it comes to music. Free beauty is found in abundance in nature (Kant gives examples of flowers, various birds and crustaceans³³) where the beauty found is not bound up with what the object is supposed to be: a flower's beauty is not related to how successfully it is being a flower. In addition,

³⁰ Marian Hobson, 'Kant, Rousseau, et la musique' in *Reappraisals of Rousseau: Studies in Honour of R.A. Leigh*, ed. by Marian Hobson and others (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 290-307, p. 291.

³¹ See Hannah Ginsborg, 'Kant' in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, pp. 328-228, for a description of much of this.

³² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 114.

³³ See Kant, p. 114.

under this same category he lists the foliage pattern on wallpaper, designs ‘à la grecque’ and ‘music fantasias (without a theme), indeed all music without a text’ because ‘they signify nothing by themselves: they do not represent anything, no object under determinate concept.’³⁴ Judgement about this kind of beauty might be pure (as it depends on nothing else), but the exercising of taste benefits through the ‘combination of aesthetic satisfaction with the intellectual.’³⁵ Though the perception is aesthetic, Kant foregrounds that what we find beautiful when we are exercising taste is the pleasure derived from the experience of the ‘free yet harmonious play between the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding.’³⁶ Thus when we exercise taste about the beauty of a painting of a flower, it is an experience of beauty – the (painting of the) flower is beautiful – but we can also decide if it is good because we have the concept of a flower in our imagination; it is this harmonious play between sensory perception and cognitive understanding that is at stake.³⁷

Furthermore, the moral value of cultivating aesthetic judgement is characterized as a distinctly human endeavour, with ‘the culture of mental powers’ that are the basis for this cultivation of taste being linked to ‘the universal feeling of participation [...and] the capacity for being able to communicate one’s inmost self universally, which [...] together constitute the sociability that is appropriate to humankind, by means of which it distinguishes itself from the limitation of animals.’³⁸ For Kant, instrumental music may well be beautiful but without words its representative function is deficient in its ability not only to convey but also to activate this kind of properly conceptual and rational thinking: it ‘occupies the lowest place among the beautiful arts [...] because it merely plays with sensations.’³⁹ Conversely, however, as we shall see (particularly in chapter three) the aesthetic thinking of Kant and

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁶ Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 77.

³⁷ This isn’t necessarily to say that the best painting of a flower is the one that is most like a ‘real’ flower: it could be good precisely because it plays with our concept of ‘floweriness’ without being the most life-like representation of a flower.

³⁸ Kant, p. 229.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 206.

his followers has a huge bearing on the development of music in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most demonstrably – if ironically – in the way that instrumental rather than texted musical forms come to be the privileged as the most highly valued form of music making. Ultimately it is Hegel, perhaps the most famous inheritor of the Kantian legacy, who develops many of the concepts initiated by Kant. The theory of art as proposed by Hegel is primarily cognitive and, as with his broader philosophical project, assumes a progressive teleological understanding of art – a narrative that has been central to the musicological understanding of evolving musical styles over time. As Gordon Graham outlines, a central conviction of Hegel’s philosophy of art is that value lies in art’s distinct ability to convey knowledge, rather than in being ‘hedonic (giving pleasure), or aesthetic (being beautiful) or expressive (communicating feeling).’⁴⁰ Though an artwork might indeed be intensely pleasurable, beautiful, or emotive, these aspects are insufficient for determining its value. Above all, with regards to music, it is Hegel’s idealist emphasis on interiority and immediacy – ‘the abstract interiority of pure sound’ – that offers a direct voicing of the transcendent and the unity of form and content freed of extra-musical considerations, such as day-to-day life, the contingent, and the merely mortal.⁴¹

Schopenhauer both draws on the Kantian legacy and simultaneously critiques it. One of the most obvious differences is how much of a central role music is accorded in his work; as Jerrold Levinson describes, he ‘both accords music a supreme role in the search for personal fulfilment and also views music as a mirror of the underlying nature of things.’⁴² As an idealist, like Kant before him (though critical of Kant’s understanding of the noumenal), Schopenhauer understands noumenal reality to be only indirectly available to perception: we are offered an incomplete glimpse as it is revealed through its manifestations in objects or phenomena. His name for the-thing-in-itself, this deeper or more

⁴⁰ Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 46.

⁴¹ Goehr, p. 154. See also p. 157.

⁴² Jerrold Levinson, *Musical Concerns: Essays in Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 7.

essential reality, is 'Will' and it is strongly equated with desires and impulses: it is the fundamental principle of both the world and the individual and articulates a specifically non-rational and non-intellectual urge. For Schopenhauer, music 'stands completely apart'⁴³ from the other arts: though the arts in general have as their aim the repetition of 'the eternal Ideas grasped through pure contemplation [...their] only goal is the communication of this cognition [of the Ideas]', music is explicitly described as 'not an imitation or a repetition of some Idea of the essence of the world.'⁴⁴ Though it must be the case that music functions analogously to the other arts and 'in some sense relate[s] to the world as presentation to presented, as copy to original', for Schopenhauer this suggests that music is, instead, a '*copy of the will itself*.'⁴⁵ Music is not representative as such, or at least its 'imitative relation to the world must also be very intimate [...] because it is instantaneously comprehensible to everyone.'⁴⁶ It is this perspective that allows Schopenhauer to explain the seductive powers of music and the profound emotional impact it appears to have. Though the (Platonic) Ideas as manifested by the arts are themselves objectifications or presentations of the will (as underlying essence), they 'objectify the will only indirectly' whereas 'music is an *unmediated* objectification and copy of the entire *will*, just as the world itself is [...] this is precisely why the effect of music is so much more powerful and urgent than that of the other arts.'⁴⁷ Music, rather than depicting 'things' (the world as it appears, in its external aspect) is a copy of the irrepressible and irrational will (which is the world as it is rather than how it appears: its essence or its internal aspect). Music's potential freedom from representation – its explicitly *meta*-physical status – thus endows it with special powers to reveal or at least express fundamental truths about the nature or deeper essence of things than the passing appearance of the world (as representation, language, etc.).

⁴³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation (Vol. 1)*, ed. by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman and Christopher Janaway, trans. by Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 283.

⁴⁴ Schopenhauer, p. 207-8, p. 283.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 283, p. 285.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 283.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 284, p. 285.

Following on from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche – perhaps the archetypal musical philosopher – in *The Birth of Tragedy*, famously discerns two naturally occurring tendencies: he borrows figures from Greek mythology to articulate what he understands as the calm and restrained Apollonian which is associated with images (or at least the imagistic) and architecture and the more primitive Dionysian, which is strongly associated with immediacy, excess, intoxication and dancing and is quite evidently influenced by Schopenhauer’s idea of the Will. Though Apollo is clearly also associated with music in mythology, it is the Dionysian strain, for Nietzsche, that is the properly aesthetic force; unlike the more rational and cognitive sedimentation of rules and traditions represented by the Apollonian, the Dionysian is considered to be strongly connective, encouraging the forgetting of the self in order to be better and less self-consciously immersed in social gatherings and rites. Music (and its corollary dancing) is to be understood as the most (potentially) Dionysian of the arts, and thus music is characterized as the pinnacle of artistic endeavour: it is ‘the fundamental artistic impulse behind all the special arts and philosophy.’⁴⁸ Famously in his early writings, Nietzsche believed that a properly Dionysian and non-imagistic art was being reborn in Wagner’s music dramas, though he later changed his mind.

Though post-Kantian philosophy has tended to operate on the assumption that absolute music is non-representational (or at least seriously deficient in its capacity for representation) and, perhaps more problematically still, the assumption that absolute music represents the pinnacle or archetype of the properly musical – the essence of music – musicology, particularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century has deconstructed both of these assumptions. With regards to the question presently under consideration, the possibility of musical representation is often approached by distinguishing between different types of representation. Thomas Clifton, for example, understands musical representation as presentative rather than denotative,⁴⁹ whereas Georgina Born agrees that

⁴⁸ John M. Carvalho, ‘Nietzsche’ in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, pp. 350-359, p. 357.

⁴⁹ See Thomas Clifton, *Music as Heard: A Study in Applied Phenomenology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

music lacks denotative meaning but, precisely because of that, figures it as ‘*hyperconnotative*’ in its extraordinary ability to elicit ‘imaginary evocation[s] of identity and of cross-cultural and intersubjective empathy.’⁵⁰ Indeed, as soon as contemplation is shifted from the largely score-based – specifically musical-syntactic – analysis of Western literate music, broader questions about representation emerge. For example, Born and Hesmondhalgh’s collection *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* asks ‘how other cultures are represented in music through the appropriation or imaginative figuration of their own music, and, conversely, how social and cultural identities and differences come to be constructed and articulated in music.’⁵¹ This kind of representation of the Other has a long – often Orientalising – history from the ‘Turkish march’ or ‘Arabesque’ trope used by composers such as Mozart and Beethoven through to Bizet’s appropriation of the ‘Seguidilla’ genre (amongst a multitude of other styles/techniques) to represent the gypsies of southern Spain in *Carmen*, and on to Elton John’s evocation of Africa in the ‘Circle of Life.’ Though all these examples strongly suggest that music does partake in representation, in all of these instances it can of course be argued that representation is taking place at the second degree – all involve the appropriation of a pre-existing musical genre or style being lifted into a different context to represent a different group (accurately or otherwise). But there are also examples where music seems to have some power to represent feelings, moods, or atmospheres, without any external reference. For example, as Daniel Albright has described, Schoenberg’s period of free atonality places him alongside ‘Sigmund Freud (and the painter Edvard Munch and the novelist Joseph Conrad) in a common project to map [i.e. to represent] areas of feeling little explored in previous ages.’⁵² The extended chromaticism of works such as *Erwartung* (a texted monodrama, though the claims being made refer exclusively to the musical and not the texted aspect) perfectly captures the

⁵⁰ Georgina Born, ‘V. Techniques of the Musical Imaginary’ in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. by David Hesmondhalgh and Georgina Born (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 37-58, p. 32, italics in original.

⁵¹ Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, ‘I. Postcolonial Analysis and Music Studies’ in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, pp. 1-3, p. 2.

⁵² Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 4-5.

state of anxiety and inner turmoil of the protagonist, and leads Albright, again, to suggest that ‘what onomatopoeia is to outer realism, chromaticism is to inner realism.’⁵³ Finally, then, though music may struggle to represent if we limit it to the narrower concerns of denotative or semantic meaning, it certainly is implicated in other forms of representation and meaning-making.

III. Music, Logos, Musicology: The Problem of Musical Meaning

As the considerations above suggest, the question of music’s representational capacity seems to hinge ineluctably on its relation to language, and to how we understand or construe the similarities and differences between music and language. While we are fairly comfortable with the assumption that language is capable of *saying* something, ‘it is problematic how and whether music can “say” anything [though] many composers and musicians have attributed to it a power to reveal something about human life and experience.’⁵⁴ And, as we have seen above, though Kant thinks music needs words if it is to be both beautiful *and* good, as well as to represent concepts and ideas, the Kantian legacy nonetheless also bestows on music a profound ability to reveal truths and be meaningful; at the same time, it is often extremely difficult to say what truth or meaning is revealed though we have little difficulty describing music in more vague terms as ‘heroic’, ‘beautiful’, or ‘haunting’, etc., even when the music is purely instrumental. Further still, though music is differentiated from language in its commonplace sense, it is simultaneously considered as a type of language, or language-like; indeed, for Schopenhauer music is explicitly and repeatedly framed as a ‘universal language.’⁵⁵

The way the relationship between music and language is construed has not remained entirely consistent over time, but in all instances seems to be framed in relationship to what we think music ‘is’ and how music’s affective dimension is understood. Voice is often assumed to be central to our understanding of both music and language, and this is perhaps one reason why music has often been

⁵³ Albright, *Modernism and Music*, p. 8. Similar claims could be made for other musical works, such as Berg’s *Wozzeck*.

⁵⁴ Graham, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Schopenhauer, p. 283, p. 289, p. 290, p. 291, p. 292.

considered as a type of language. Daniel Albright has shown how this model of understanding musico-linguistic relations both imagines music to be a language that is intuitively understood by all and simultaneously deficient *vis-à-vis* language.⁵⁶ By understanding music as a language, its specific powers are ignored. In contrast, those that have figured music as a non-language often reduce it to arithmetic, ratios or quasi-architectural structure, and ‘embrace the idea that music is a species of visual art realized in sound.’⁵⁷ This is less in the sense of music’s capacity (though it may have this too) for what we might describe as ‘sound-painting’ – the sonorous depiction of, say, bells tolling or hens pecking through musical means – but music ideated into quasi-visible structure and form. As Mark Evan Bonds has shown, the relationship between music’s (perceived) essence and its effects – its nature and its power – along with how different historical periods and epochs have conceived of this is of great interest. Though there are always a multitude of competing theories at any one time, Bonds has argued that in the broadest of strokes the dominant perspectives on this relationship can be divided down into three key periods: antiquity through to around 1550; 1550 through to around 1850; and 1850 through to the mid twentieth century.⁵⁸ From antiquity through to the mid sixteenth century it is not so much that music is capable of ‘saying’ something, but it has an extraordinary power to mimic or model character, and in its broader conception as *mousike*, as we will see later, is central to a good education and the upholding of social and cultural values. Music’s essence was simply conceived of as the ‘source of its effect’ and this relationship was embodied in the complementary but oppositional figures of Orpheus and Pythagoras.⁵⁹ Orpheus is the archetypal musician who used music and its magical powers to charm not only humans but animals too; Pythagoras is the theoretician who is able to show how music’s natural basis in number is inseparable from its powerful role in the cosmos. In both cases what music *is* is inseparable from what it *does*; nonetheless, it sets

⁵⁶ See Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 163-173.

⁵⁷ Albright, *Panaesthetics*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ See Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁹ Bonds, p. 10.

up a series of oppositions between theory/practice, mind/body, abstraction/sensation, etc.⁶⁰ To complicate things further, some of these concerns clearly also relate to the distinction between *phonos* and *logos*; Aristotle famously uses this distinction to set out what makes man political when he claims that ‘a human being is more of a political animal than is any bee or than are any of those animals that live in herds [...because] humans are the only animals who possess reasoned speech. Voice, of course, serves to indicate what is painful and pleasant [...but] speech serves to make plain what is advantageous and harmful and so also what is just and unjust (1253a7).’⁶¹ Thus, humans are the only animal capable of *logos* (i.e. not just speech, but also rationality) and therefore politics, whilst humans and animals alike share a capacity for *phonos* (i.e. sound). For both Plato and Aristotle, music is ‘natural’ but also plays a crucial role within culture/society. It ‘contributes [...] to character and the soul (1339b42),’⁶² and because of this powerful ability to represent or model character (*ethos*) in line with the (rational) values of society it is of central concern to the imaginings of the ideal state: music has enormous potential for both good and bad because it can ‘intervene efficiently on the human *psyche* and condition the mechanisms of social aggregation.’⁶³ In short, in antiquity, music is not a language, but shares or overlaps with some features of language, such as *phonos*, and is never entirely separable from other socio-cultural and political practices/processes more broadly. Finally, though it is fair to say and important to acknowledge that most music in antiquity involves some form of oration or chant (along with rhythm and harmony) – we will see this in more detail later when we consider *mousike* – non-texted music, though uncommon, existed in Plato’s time and was in no way exempt from the same set of considerations. Purely instrumental music is not void of ethical content, it is simply much harder to identify ‘the *ethos* of absolute music’ and thus when in combination with a text

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, see p. 10.

⁶¹ Aristotle and Peter L. Phillips Simpson, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. by Peter L. Phillips Simpson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 11.

⁶² Aristotle and Simpson, p. 162.

⁶³ Francesco Pelosi and Sophie Henderson, *Plato on Music, Soul and Body* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 31.

it is one of the tasks of someone trained in *mousike* to match this appropriately to ‘the *ethos* of the verbal component.’⁶⁴

The second period, from the mid sixteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, by contrast, tends to understand music’s essence alongside its effect but no longer assesses them as directly causal. By this point the mathematical basis for Pythagoras’s ratios were in doubt and so the ‘ear, along with the senses in general, began to challenge the mind as a source of knowledge.’⁶⁵ Alongside these shifts in the understanding of music’s essence, not only did its relationship to language change, but as Andrew Bowie has explored, in the second half of the eighteenth century language too was under interrogation: as a result, it ultimately ‘ceases to be clear what language is.’⁶⁶ The flourishing scientific revolution and its epistemological consequences, along with the difficulty in pursuing a properly scientific analysis of language given that any description of language involves the circularity of also being the medium in which the description (meta-linguistically) takes place, informs the search for a ‘purer’ language: a search for the origin of language, from which ‘impure’ natural languages have derived.⁶⁷ Though mathematical theories continued to abound – Rameau being a case in point, as we will see, again, later and in chapter two – there is nonetheless a shift towards considerations of music’s language-like qualities, particularly through the notion of *melos*. This shift forces the understanding of music and language into closer – almost inseparable and certainly mutually reinforcing – proximity. Music is saved from becoming an art entirely to do with the senses by relating its expressive capacities to similar linguistic capacities,⁶⁸ at the same time, as we will see in greater detail in chapter two, music becomes a good candidate for a possible origin to language for some thinkers – a move which also helps traverse some of the difficulties in understanding why or how music seems so expressive and to be able to communicate (in the broadest sense) something meaningful without appearing to have

⁶⁴ Pelosi and Henderson, p. 60.

⁶⁵ Bonds, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 48, Bowie’s emphasis.

⁶⁷ See Bowie, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁸ See Bonds for more on this.

anything like a clear semantic content. And so the mutual reinforcing of music's and language's quests for origins continues: music becomes the pre-linguistic origin of language and is also framed *as* a universal language.

In parallel motion to these theoretical developments, both the understanding of music and its attendant practices are also undergoing significant changes, especially as we reach the end of the eighteenth century: it is during this period that the hierarchy of value is inverted, with text-less instrumental or 'absolute' music now occupying the top spot with texted musical forms deemed less worthy or exemplary of 'good' music. This system of values is quite evident from this period onwards; Schopenhauer, as we have just mentioned, is explicit that music has priority over words, and if music is texted, then the text must be subordinate if it is to be considered 'good' music. The extent to which we have internalized the priority of music in hybrid musical forms, most obviously in opera, is perhaps affirmed in our tendency to speak of the operas of Mozart, Verdi, Bizet, or Puccini, and rarely – perhaps never – of those by Da Ponte, Schikaneder, Ghislanzoni, Piave, Meilhac, Adami and Simoni or Illica and Giacosa (the librettists). Similarly, for Nietzsche, the Apollonian is associated with symbolic forms, staid and unnecessary ornamentation and above all, words, which communicate messages at the expense of the Dionysian emotional spirit. In his later work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which elucidates the concept of the eternal return (which can also be understood as a reformulation of the creative force inherent to the Dionysian), music is again affirmed as superior and more vital than language. With his 'bird-wisdom' he exclaims: 'Sing! Speak no more! – are not all words made for the heavy? Do not all words lie to the light? Sing! Speak no more!'⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the Dionysian might be archetypically musical but the Dionysian spirit infuses and informs non-musical art forms: the Dionysian spirit is not to be found in pure music alone but connotes what is *essentially* musical about music. Crucially, this is primitive and pre-linguistic. All of this simply adds further context to the

⁶⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 187.

philosophical perspectives elucidated above; it is, however, necessary to set it out in detail in order to understand what is at stake in the third period.

From the middle of the nineteenth century and owing in major part to both the changing prestige of texted and un-texted musical forms mentioned above along with a set of polemics between Wagner, Hanslick and Liszt, the idea of music's essence and its effects become strictly separated. The notion of absolute music (not the practice: as mentioned, un-texted music dates back to the ancient world) is coined by Wagner, and though the use of the term is inconsistent in his writings, it was first used as a dismissive term to deride purely instrumental music and to bolster his own theories about opera and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁷⁰ It is Hanslick's positive appropriation of the term that sets the course of thinking – and especially musicological thinking – on a particular trajectory that has ramifications for at least a century, and it is the legacy of this conception of music that, as this thesis argues, we are often still in the process of deconstructing. Firstly, as Bonds has described, Hanslick separates essence and effect: it is not that he denies the deeply powerful effects music can produce, but no longer associates these effects with the question of what music 'is.' Secondly, it is musical form that becomes central to what music 'is' – as can be seen in his well-known definition of music as 'tonend bewegte Form' (translated variously as 'form moved in sounding/tones' or 'tonally moved form' amongst others), thus settling or at least closing a long debate on music's potential for representation: it simply no longer matters, as all that matters – and is essentially musical – is form. Music no longer *means* anything, as such, and as a result the academic study of music can concern itself entirely with formal analysis and jettison all questions of its emotional, affective, material, performative, social and political dimensions as non-essential to what music fundamentally is. Finally, and especially once the retronym of 'programme music' is coined by Liszt, these two ideas of music (i.e. absolute, autonomous, text-less vs. texted or at least programmatic *ergo* representational, no matter how that happens) are mapped onto specific repertoires. As Bonds describes, 'by aligning the age-old idea of

⁷⁰ See Bonds, p. 1.

“pure” music with a specific repertory – instrumental, non-programmatic music – these three figures [Hanslick, Wagner, Liszt] together changed the framework of the debate about the relationship between music's essence and effect’ and by extension its relation to language and *logos* more broadly.⁷¹ Absolute music is thereafter valued and validated as the superior form of high art music. Concomitantly music’s essence is identified with the rational free-play of formal properties apparently uncontaminated by social context or history, whilst it is simultaneously framed as a universal language despite being conflated with a particular repertoire – a manoeuvre which completes a thoroughly transcendentalising and universalising gesture.

Surprisingly – or perhaps not – the assumption that music was synonymous with the largely instrumental repertoire of the classical concert hall remained the assumption until the intervention of post-structuralist influenced ‘critical musicology’ in the last two decades of the twentieth century. This assumption fed into the emergence of musicology – predominantly historical musicology – as a discipline that was by and large palaeographic and philological in its methods: in short, it was generally quasi-scientific, positivist, score-oriented and interested in the syntactic relations between notes (primarily in terms of harmony, but also including rhythm and melody) at a local level, and the architectonics of structure in individual pieces or movements as well as across multi-movement works, as well as sketching out the autonomous teleological unfolding of changing musical structures/styles across time. Serious consideration about music’s relation to bodies, emotion, or even performance, as well as non-structural if seemingly ‘musical’ concerns such as timbre are minimal at best. As Olivia Bloechl and Melanie Lowe clearly recount, musicology was transformed in the 1980s and 1990s by its (belated) encounter with both structuralist and poststructuralist, largely French, left-oriented, ‘theory.’⁷² It is notable, however, that it has very often been (non-musical) philosophical concepts drawn from this body of theory that were used to analyse musical texts, rather than (post-

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷² See Olivia Bloechl with Melanie Lowe, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Difference’ in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Olivia Ashley Bloechl, Melanie Diane Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1-52, p. 21.

)structuralist attempts to theorize music itself. Legitimate areas of study rapidly expanded, including a significant body of work on music's relation to, reflection of and reproduction of gender binaries and sexuality, as well as postcolonial perspectives and the growing fields of ethnomusicology and popular music studies (amongst others). As Susan McClary, one of the early proponents of the so-called 'new musicology' (now more often referred to as 'critical musicology' as mentioned above) described, this new movement was motivated by the need to deconstruct the inherited transcendental baggage of the supposedly autonomous and universal value of the music of the high art canon, insisting instead that 'music is always a political activity' and thus also incontrovertibly enmeshed in relations of power.⁷³ In so doing, the idea that music might be meaningful beyond its logical, rational, note-relations – that its various social and cultural 'meanings' might be inseparable from what it 'is' – was brought back into consideration, along with increased scholarly consideration of non-literate and non-high art forms of music making.

Finally, then, before we move to a new set of considerations, I want to suggest another outcome of the genealogy that extends out of the philosophical conceptions of music from the nineteenth century that has perhaps unintended but important consequences for the considerations at hand. It is well documented and understood that Freud had read Schopenhauer and that Schopenhauer's conception of the Will can be seen as a precursor to Freud's theorisation of the unconscious; there has also been much speculation as to the influence of Nietzsche on Freud, especially with regards to the centrality of urges, desires and impulses to the underlying and more primitive Dionysian.⁷⁴ Given that both the Will and the Dionysian are modelled on music, or music is the worldly manifestation of these principles, the Freudian *Trieb* is easily – albeit retrospectively – understood as 'musical.'⁷⁵ The significance of this is made manifest following the structuralist linguistic intervention of Lacan's re-

⁷³ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 26; see Bloechl, Lowe, and Kallberg, p. 25.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud et Nietzsche* (Paris: PUF, 2008).

⁷⁵ To be clear, this is not a claim made by Freud, who at any rate was famously amusical.

reading of Freud: the emphasis is on the visual (cf. 'Le Stade du miroir'⁷⁶) and on language, law and representations as constituent (and constituting) parts of the entry into the symbolic order (as well as the structuring of the imaginary). In contrast, the real is understood as 'the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the *umbilical cord* of the symbolic.'⁷⁷ Though, for Lacan, the symbolic necessarily fails to grasp or have direct access to the real – it falters at every attempt to approach it – the real nonetheless exerts powerful pre- or non-linguistic influences and is an essential part of the psyche as whole. No matter how ungraspable or impossible the real is (from the vantage of the symbolic order), it nonetheless – as is suggested by the citation above – seems to retain some kind of essential link, whether metaphorical or 'actual', to the pre-individuated space of the womb and the mother-infant dyad more generally. For the subsequent feminist revisionings of Lacan, most evidently in the work of Julia Kristeva, this pre-symbolic space assumes a more expressly musical character. She borrows the term *chora* from the *Timaeus* – Plato's dialogue of origins which is fundamentally concerned with the creation of the possibility of truth. As John Sallis describes, the *Timaeus* tells of 'the beginning, the origin, of nature, even a kind of nature before nature, the mother, as Timaeus calls it, of all natural things.'⁷⁸ Kristeva uses the *chora* 'pour désigner une articulation toute provisoire, essentiellement mobile, constituée de mouvements et de leurs stases éphémères.'⁷⁹ She characterizes it as a 'space' – albeit one preceding space and time – where, through rupture and rhythm, 'La fonctionnalité kinésique à laquelle nous pensons en parlant du *sémiotique*, est antérieure à la position du signe.'⁸⁰ It is 'in' this primeval womb-space that Kristeva develops her theory of *le sémiotique*, in opposition – though complementary – to the mature symbolic in her theory of signification. The rhythms of the *chora* are articulations of early drives, and coded as

⁷⁶ See Jacques Lacan, 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique', *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 13.4 (1949), 449–55.

⁷⁷ Alan Sheridan, 'Translator's Note' in Jacques Lacan and Alan Sheridan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by Jacques Alain Miller (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 277-282, p. 280, my emphasis. This is especially pertinent to the concerns of chapters two and three.

⁷⁸ John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 4.

⁷⁹ Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique*, p. 23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

essentially musical in their capacity for gestural, pre-symbolic communication. *Le sémiotique* finds its most common articulation in the echolalia of infants and the psychotic babble of the mad, as well as in poetic language; it precedes and is indeed the precondition of the entire symbolic enterprise, though it manifests only in moments of rupture in mature symbolic communication. As Kristeva states, in an extraordinarily Nietzschean vein, '[l]e signe refoule la *chora* et son éternel retour. Seul le *désir* sera désormais le témoin de ce battement "originaire".'⁸¹

We can thus see how at this juncture, both philosophy – strongly influenced by German idealism – and psychoanalysis coordinate in figuring music (or the essentially musical) as pre-linguistic or a proto-language intimately related to desire, bodily impulses and drives; at the same time, by the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant musical trajectory as practised and preached by composers and theoreticians alike has also drawn on the post-Kantian legacy to validate the free-play of formal syntactical elements as the properly musical and so conflated the 'idea' of absolute music with a particular repertoire. As a result, one of the guiding aims of this thesis is to explore, in greater depth, the often unacknowledged consequences of this heady alignment of music's purported essence not only with a particular repertoire but also with a theory of the subject and of origins.

IV. Music in the Quadrivium: The Science and Art Problem

Briefly, to conclude this section, it seems pertinent to highlight the way in which discussions about music frequently also involve considerations about whether music should primarily be understood as an art or a science – or indeed both – a consideration that often elicits vehemently polarized responses. From Pythagoras who, as mentioned, considered music's essence to be cosmic mathematical ratios, through to the Boethian *quadrivium* which considered music, along with geometry, arithmetic and astronomy to be one of the four branches of mathematics or science,⁸² and

⁸¹ Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 21.

⁸² See *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 243.

onto Leibniz, 'who proposed that the comprehension of music was at base a kind of unconscious calculation or computation',⁸³ music – or at least its essence – is understood primarily as scientific/mathematical rather than artistic in nature, though of course the practical artistic aspect is still represented in ancient thought through the figure of Orpheus. Even when the ratios devised by Pythagoras had been disproven, for the Pythagoreans and those working in his legacy, music continued to be understood as intimately related to ratio, mathematics and number. In ancient thought, most clearly as developed by Plato and in the notion of the harmony of the spheres, even when music is considered primarily as an ethical force, it is still thought of 'as a *science* that reveals the secrets of nature and exerts a powerful force on the character (*ethos*) of individuals and society as a whole.'⁸⁴ The ancient model thus also attests to a different conception of the relationship between science and art in the ancient world; a distinction that is necessary to acknowledge but ultimately beyond this thesis to consider in any detail.

Both these ancient conceptions of music, 'as sensuous embodiment of the intelligible universal harmony and [...] as ethical imitation of human passions and characters',⁸⁵ coexisted in subsequent European traditions with either conception dominating in different epochs, for different writers, or in different contexts. Though vocal music remained consistently dominant in terms of genre throughout – much literate music from this period is, of course, liturgical – the respective value placed on harmony or melody was more variable. As Karol Berger has clearly laid out, whilst harmony was the dominant paradigm in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the end of the sixteenth century witnessed a shift back towards the privileging of music's mimetic ability to model passions and thus an increasing emphasis on melodic or texted aspects, as harmony alone seemed inadequate for conveying ethical education.⁸⁶ During the Enlightenment and throughout the *querelles*, music at large maintained a fairly

⁸³ Levinson, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Thomas J. Mathiesen, 'Antiquity and the Middle Ages' in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, pp. 257-272, p. 256, my emphasis.

⁸⁵ Karol Berger, 'Concepts and Developments in Music Theory' in *European Music 1520-1640*, ed. by James Haar (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 304-328, p. 313.

⁸⁶ See Berger, 'Concepts and Developments in Music Theory', p. 313.

prominent position, especially as it could be understood as something that broached both the arts and the sciences and thus served as a useful conceit to consider ideas central to the *siècle des Lumières*, such as the relationship between reason, perception and experience in both artistic and scientific domains. The melodic aspect generally continued to be privileged, though certain key thinkers – especially those influenced by the burgeoning scientific revolution – sought, yet again, a mathematical or scientific basis for music. As suggested above, the sonorous, voice-like character of melody is given greater prominence by Rousseau, whereas Rameau rehabilitates the attempt to think music in terms of its mathematical relation to proportions and ratios; an endeavour he attempted to prove by drawing on empirical experimentation. His commitment to this scientific understanding could not be clearer than in the opening to the *Traité de l'harmonie* of 1722 when he states:

La Musique est la Science des Sons: par consequent le Son est le principal objet de la Musique. On divise ordinairement la Musique en Harmonie & en Melodie, quoi-que celle-cy ne soit qu'une partie de l'autre, & qu'il suffise de connoître l'Harmonie, pour être parfaitement instruit de toutes le proprietez de la Musique, comme il sera prouvé dans la suite.⁸⁷

As will be further explored in chapters two and five, the tension between this double conception of music is not without conflict, however, and ultimately comes down, again, to the privileging of melody over harmony as music's essential musicality (or vice versa). In a more tangible way, the dispute is also enfolded within a larger debate about French opera (or *tragédie lyrique*), which is unsurprising given that at this point texted music is still the most exalted form of music – though given the shift that occurs as we approach the nineteenth century, it is perhaps predictable that much of the debate centred around the respective values of the text or the music (whether in terms of the balance between arias and recitatives within an individual opera, or more broadly about whether it is the text or the music that is the driving force behind the opera at large). Ultimately, this becomes a debate

⁸⁷ Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie* (Paris, 1722), book I, ch. I, p. 1, also cited in Berger, 'Concepts and Developments in Music Theory', p. 313.

about the relative values of Italian and French (style) music, with Rameau (and the Ramistes) attacked initially by the Lullistes for being too 'Italian' (amongst other things) and then later, in the *querelle des bouffons*, for being too committed to the French tragic style in the debate with Rousseau, who was a keen proponent of *opera buffa* (and Italian opera more generally). Daniel Chua has written astutely about the specifically musical refractions of the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, showing how until the canonisation of a repertoire (coinciding with the above-mentioned 'invention' of the composer-function) in the nineteenth century, and especially the retrospective 'deification of Bach in the eternal pantheon of absolute music', it was not possible to 'formulate a timeless norm out of its [music's] ephemeral, ever-progressing identity.'⁸⁸ Instead, a comparative stylistics is inculcated: music is either 'sacred or secular, old or new, high or low, French or Italian' with the upshot that 'one's judgement depended on which side of the *querelle* one was on: to become ancient was either to be "classic" or out of date; conversely, to be modern was either to be a passing fashion or to be a sign of future perfection.'⁸⁹ Finally, then, despite attempts by theorist/practioners such as Rameau to (re)find a scientific, numerical and natural basis for music, the figuring of music in the *querelle* is itself nonetheless distinctly modern, and 'attests to music's epistemological shift from the quadrivium to the trivium [the lower, non-scientific arts of grammar, logic and rhetoric], for quarelling is a method of positioning style within the relativity [rather than scientific objectivity] of the trivium.'⁹⁰

Alongside these developments in popular polemics and philosophies of music which, from the late sixteenth century onwards, increasingly understood music through analogy to language and thus as a discursive or rhetorical practice, rational and systematic pedagogical approaches to the teaching of music theory and composition co-emerged. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Johann Joseph Fux's eponymous 1725 *Gradus ad Parnassum*: a pedagogical manual for the teaching of species counterpoint (i.e. Renaissance polyphony) and which remains to the present day a central, if not *the*

⁸⁸ Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 67.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 68.

central text for the teaching of this topic. The less well-known first part sets out the theoretical basis for the understanding of music in terms of numbers and ratios (the teaching method also strongly relies on ratios), and thus presents yet another attempt to understand music in quasi-scientific terms, though the text itself is often presented in the form of a dialogue. From the late eighteenth century onwards and coming into full force in the (late) nineteenth century, quasi-scientific methods are developed as ways of analysing musical form and structure, as can be seen in the figures of Schenker, Réti and Riemann. In stark contrast, by the time we reach the nineteenth century, the dominant perspectives in philosophy seem to have shifted towards a conception of music as defiantly non-scientific, but rather as the pinnacle of all art, as is manifest in Walter Pater's famous assertion that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.' For Schopenhauer, for example, the fact that music does not represent ideas does not mean that music is reducible to the formal (i.e. mathematical) relations between sound phenomena. This is even more the case for Nietzsche, who quips in the *Gay Science* of 1882, 'Suppose one judged the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas – how absurd would such a "scientific" assessment of music be! What would one have comprehended, understood, recognized? Nothing, really nothing of what is "music" in it!'⁹¹

Ultimately, of course, what becomes quite clear when considering the longer history of the intersections of music, philosophy, art and science, is the strong sense in which all of these concerns were never merely musical, but rather tapped into broader ideological debates especially about meaning, reason, education, aesthetics, politics and even the origin and value of society and the state. As we will see shortly, perhaps none of this is at all surprising when we consider the etymology of the word music itself.

⁹¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. by Bernard Williams, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 239.

MOUSIKE: CULTURE, POLITICS AND EDUCATION

As Sartre suggests, perhaps against himself, music and its different styles, genres, and types are often strongly linked to different cultural and socio-economic identities. Though he misreads (or rather ‘mishears’) the musical cues that might allow him to identify a particular musical work as coming from a performer or composer of a particular background or identity, his assumption that one can identify such things from musical cues nonetheless highlights one of the ways in which we often listen to music: music is, in this respect, clearly not separate from society and daily life, but rather a very complex part of it. As is well known, the word ‘music’ derives from the Greek word *mousike* (μουσική), which stems from the word ‘muse’, and simply relates to ‘anything pertinent to the muses.’⁹² It is often collocated with *techne*; the composite, μουσική τέχνη, refers more specifically to the arts of the muses, and which includes (what we would today call) song, dance, and many types of poetry and music. In fact, the ancient conception of *mousike* is so broad that several commentators, including Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson, have suggested that it is ‘a contender for the closest term in Greek to our (polymorphous) “culture”.’⁹³ Consequently, in its original derivation *mousike* is inseparable from other cultural and artistic forms, and especially from poetry, with which the muses were especially associated; indeed, in contemporary parlance they are perhaps associated most strongly with poetry (rather than music), and above all with artistic inspiration. Additionally, though instrumental music certainly existed in the ancient world – albeit as a minor genre – the differentiation between (what we would call) music and poetry, chanting, and incantation is far from clear. Prior to the literate revolution and the invention of a written literature that took place between the fourth and fifth centuries BCE, all previous poetry, literature, and even philosophy were orally transmitted. This means that the founding works of Western literature – most prominently, of course, the works

⁹² Albright, *Panaesthetic*, p. 1.

⁹³ Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson, ‘Introduction’ in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of ‘Mousikē’ in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. by Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-8, p. 1.

of Homer and Hesiod – were either sung or narrated, and likely accompanied by a lyre.⁹⁴ Furthermore, as Daniel Albright suggests, even the distinction between different media was less pronounced in the ancient world: ‘an artistic medium was not a distinct thing but a kind of proclivity within the general domain of Art.’⁹⁵ Thus, though *mousike* might be comprised of many different aspects as described, the practice of *mousike* is a far more wide-ranging and all-encompassing endeavour; ‘in the view of Antiquity, they [the muses, and thus *mousike*] belonged not only to poetry but to all higher forms of intellectual life.’⁹⁶ Indeed, even the parental lineage of the muses – they are the offspring of Zeus, king of the gods, and Mnemosyne, the personification of memory – guaranteed the authenticity of their arts in an oral tradition, and thus their role as the legitimate repository of cultural memory was their birthright. *Mousike* was fundamentally associated with education (the transmission of cultural messages and information from generation to generation, both implicitly and explicitly) and is thus inseparable from society, culture, and politics. Though we often consider music in an abstract or intellectual sense, Danielle Cohen-Lévinas has argued that music is perhaps in an even closer relation to education – especially to a more practical, skills-based learning – because music ‘nécessite une connaissance de l'accord, du rythme, du chant choral, de la citare, de la lyre, de la flûte. Elle nécessite par conséquent un apprentissage, ce que nous nommons un métier. Il faut rappeler que la conception musicale selon les Grecs (*Mousiké*) donne naissance aux sept arts libéraux en vigueur au Moyen Âge.’⁹⁷ More precisely, then, as Murray describes, it was through ‘the complex interplay of Muses, *mousike* and *paideia* [education] that Greek cultural values were articulated.’⁹⁸

This can be seen perhaps most clearly in Plato, as already suggested above. As Danielle Lévinas-Cohen remarks, ‘[d]ans la *République*, Platon réserve à la musique une place prépondérante. Elle devient une

⁹⁴ There remains a debate as to whether it is possible to distinguish between sung and narrated literary texts in the oral tradition. See work by Martin L. West and Gregory Nagy.

⁹⁵ Albright, *Panaesthetics*, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Curtius, cited in Penelope Murray, ‘The Muses and their Arts’ in Murray and Wilson, pp. 365-389, p. 365.

⁹⁷ Danielle Cohen-Lévinas, ‘Les Icônes de l’écoute, d’après une lecture de Platon et de Hegel’ in *Musique et Philosophie*, ed. by Danielle Cohen-Lévinas (Paris: Harmattan, 2005), pp. 101-121, p. 102.

⁹⁸ Murray, ‘The Muses and their Arts’, p. 389, emphasis in the original.

des disciplines piliers de l'éducation'; moreover, owing to the influence of Pythagoras, 'la musique exprime tout à la fois un ordre moral, un ordre arithmétique et un ordre cosmique.'⁹⁹ Though there are many reflections on the technical and practical aspects of music, for Plato music is always also centrally concerned with *ethos* and the possibility of modelling or regulating good moral character for both individual citizens and the city-state at large: it is precisely the ability of *mousike* to mediate – and indeed regulate or attune – between different layers, and to inculcate harmony from the psychological through to the cosmic realm that is of interest. Though the ethical 'content' of music is notoriously difficult to identify, throughout Plato's œuvre there are many attempts to understand and regulate the way in which a correct (i.e. ethical) pleasure can be taken from music as well as its role in the education of citizens through its ability to act as an interface between the soul and the body, and as 'a powerful instrument in forming and directing the emotivity and morality of citizens.'¹⁰⁰

Music is thus thoroughly and inextricably bound up in the daily life of the *callipolis*; it is both a tool for the cementing of social values and a reflection of the society from whence it emerges. As Babette E. Babich has described, 'the modern tendency to reduce music to the "organised" art of sound obscures the equiprimordial sense in which *musike* could be regarded, as Nietzsche saw it, as the enabling element of intellectual or spiritual as well as aesthetic and physical education and in which *musike* figures as the determining force of both individual and societal character [*ethos*].'¹⁰¹ To complicate things yet further, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates aligns *mousike* with the practice of philosophy; in the dialogue he suggests that philosophy is the highest form of *mousike*, and thus troubles easy assumptions that *mousike* is even necessarily to do with art, and concomitantly that music is to do with sound. He says:

In the course of my life I have often had intimations in dreams 'that I should make music.' The same dream came to me sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another, but always saying the same or nearly the same words: Make and cultivate music, said the

⁹⁹ Cohen-Lévinas, 'Les Icônes de l'écoute', p. 107.

¹⁰⁰ Pelosi and Henderson, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Babette E. Babich, *Words in Blood, like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 100.

dream. And hitherto I had imagined that this was only intended to exhort and encourage me in the study of philosophy, which has always been the pursuit of my life, and is the noblest and best of music.¹⁰²

Similarly, in the *Republic*, Plato explicitly articulates being self-disciplined and virtuous in terms of being a 'true virtuoso' – being musical is thus not necessarily to do with being practically or technically accomplished and trained in specific skills such as singing or playing an instrument, but rather describes the need for a philosopher to attune 'his body in order to make music with his mind' (591d).¹⁰³ By describing philosophy as 'the highest form of *mousike*' Plato thus positions musical life as 'an analogue for the life of the mind.'¹⁰⁴ Crucially, as Halliwell describes, it would be wrong to think of this as purely metaphorical; the entire understanding of *mousike* is such that an explicitly 'musico-poetic education and culture' is essential to and inseparable from the 'virtues and balanced passions of "the philosophical nature"' that is induced through this sensuous and aesthetic pedagogical process.¹⁰⁵

Finally, in returning to the ancient conception of *mousike* I simply wish to highlight music's thoroughgoing relationship to society, education and values. This may, perhaps, seem an obvious point, but it is one that is essential to highlight given the legacy outlined above that, following Kant and Hegel, has understood music and the arts more broadly to be 'separated completely from the world of the ordinary, mundane, and everyday [...and severed] from anything associated with the transient, contingent world of mere mortals.'¹⁰⁶ Moreover, as mentioned, this legacy aligns itself with a particular repertoire which is itself constructed as autonomous, free of function and is thus purportedly in a special relation to absolute freedom and truth, unbound by the passing constraints of daily life. As Hegel describes, it 'cuts itself free from this servitude in order to raise itself, in free

¹⁰² Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 2001), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰³ Plato, *Republic*, p. 343.

¹⁰⁴ Murray, 'The Muses and their Arts', p. 376.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Halliwell, 'Plato' in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, pp. 307-316, p. 315.

¹⁰⁶ Goehr, p. 157.

independence, to the truth in which it fulfils itself independently and conformably with its own ends alone [...and] in this its freedom alone is fine art truly art.'¹⁰⁷ Though the final section of this chapter will outline some problematic aspects of the ancient conception of *mousike*, this thesis nonetheless upholds that there remains 'an insurmountable conflict between the ancient conception of music and our contemporary understanding of music [...which] refers to a world *apart from* the everyday.'¹⁰⁸ By insisting on the lived, material, everyday-ness of music in all its forms, one can launch a productive counter-narrative to the project of Western high art culture understood as 'universal, self-justifying, [and] ostensibly place-less' – a position that simultaneously derides popular (and other) musical forms for being local, specific, particular, emotional, bodily and trivial.¹⁰⁹ Throughout, I will draw on the body of work described above as 'critical musicology' which sought to challenge the hegemony of this extremely powerful ideological construct; however, though 'critical musicology' was strongly influenced by the (post-)structuralist turn in largely French theory for its own theoretical underpinnings, this thesis will ultimately suggest that concept of music is often substantially untheorized – or at least uncritically deployed – in poststructuralist and contemporary theory itself.

MUSES (AND SIRENS): GENDER, AUTHORITY AND ANXIETY

The derivation of 'music' from *mousike*, which inviolably links music to the muses and thus to the feminine in our cultural heritage will be the subject of the final section of this chapter; this is also indissociably linked to questions of authority, value, and legitimacy. Though the genealogy of the muses themselves, the number of them, and their exact skills vary according to author and across time, it is the version articulated by Hesiod in the *Theogony* that has been the major source for

¹⁰⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Vol. 1*, trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 2010), p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Babich, p. 100.

¹⁰⁹ Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 'Introduction' in Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill, *The Place of Music* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), pp. 1-30, p. 5.

subsequent generations. According to Hesiod, the muses were a ‘composite of nine sisters (a choir?) who were daughters of Zeus – this gave them Olympian prestige – and their mother “Remembrance” (*Mnemosune*).’¹¹⁰ Crucially in this early work – itself an orally transmitted music-poetic hymn until it was written down in the sixth century BCE – Hesiod makes it clear that the muses have conferred upon him, as poet, two gifts: ‘a staff [...and] their divine voice, so that I might tell of things to come and things past.’¹¹¹ In figuring the orator of the hymn as a king (represented by the staff or sceptre), the poetic voice is both legitimized and given great power. From this early vision it is clear to see how the muses are both embodiments of all the arts that comprise *mousike*, and simultaneously the divine source that inspires and sanctions the (male) poet’s voice; the poet is both mediator (between the divine and the audience) and a vessel for a source whose power and authority is external to himself. Moreover, as Penelope Murray has described, in the way that Hesiod establishes a direct link between the muses and the gift of convincing oratory (i.e. rhetoric) we are invited to rethink ‘the relationship between poetry and rhetoric, and even between *mousike* and *logos*’ – and we might also add music and philosophy.¹¹²

There is of course a distinction to be made between the *Theogony* as an orally transmitted practice, concerned with the transmission and memorization of cultural narratives, stories, and beliefs, and which formed an essential social function – ‘that of preserving the tradition by which the Greeks lived and instructing them in it’ and the literate repository we have available to us as a trace of these practices.¹¹³ Though scholars have made many attempts at imagining and reconstructing oral practices (along with specifically musical practices in antiquity) it is of course only from the written texts that remain and describe oral traditions that we can piece together any idea of these practices, and thus we appear to be stuck with the sense that we are trying to (re)find a lost origin – an origin where there

¹¹⁰ Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 20.

¹¹¹ Hesiod and Norman O. Brown, *Hesiod’s Theogony*, trans. by Norman O. Brown (The Liberal Arts Press, 1953), p. 54.

¹¹² Murray, ‘The Muses and their Arts’, p. 371.

¹¹³ Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, p. 8.

was no distinction between written and oral forms, theoretical and practical accounts and, crucially, between music and literature (and within that between poetry and prose). Central to this is of course the fact that, as abundantly mentioned, *mousike*, which becomes interchangeably (and anachronistically) music, song, or poetry, amongst others, did not differentiate in our modern sense between these different artistic media. As we will see, particularly in chapter five, the quest for this over-determined lost origin becomes a major drive of aesthetic aspiration in the late nineteenth century – most iconically, if not actually, with the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* which sought an all-embracing synthesis and unification of the individual arts, modelled on a (largely fictive) notion of art at its point of origin in the ancient world.

As Eric A. Havelock has documented, this shift towards a literate culture in the ancient world also changes the way people imagine themselves – even what it is possible to imagine – and also coincides with Plato’s reconceptualising of art as fundamentally mimetic.¹¹⁴ At stake in the shift from orality to literacy then is a shifting set of cultural values. Central to this observation is the sense that the emergence of two related, but distinct practices – ‘singing, recitation, and memorization on the one hand (a cultural combination we can conveniently label as orality) and reading and writing on the other (the habit of a documented and literate culture)’¹¹⁵ – are brought into competition and conflict with each other. Havelock famously asserts that there is a fundamental rupture between the literary and philosophical practices of the (predominantly oral) fifth and sixth centuries and those of the (literate) fourth century; indeed, the ethical life with which Plato is so concerned relies on ‘the notion of a moral value system which was autonomous, while at the same time capable of internalization in the individual consciousness, [this] was a literate invention.’¹¹⁶ Similarly, in the eyes of Havelock, Plato’s famous exile of the poet alludes more to a shifting identification of the source of authority; it is less the poet (or indeed the poetry) that Plato attacks, and more the didactic ‘instruction it had been

¹¹⁴ See Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2004).

¹¹⁵ Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 4.

their role to provide.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, the Platonic understanding of art (and thus *mousike*) as mimetic, and its indissociable origin as the art of the muses, thus concomitantly describes or sets in motion a set of assumptions and values that also relate to gender. Though in the simplest sense mimesis is often understood as ‘imitation’, the ramifications of what that means – in terms of authenticity, reality and truth – is far more complicated, both within Plato’s own oeuvre and for subsequent commentators given that it is used to mean both truthful and bogus imitation. Ronald Bogue, drawing on the work of Mihai Spariosu who has related faithful mimesis and deceptive mimesis to pre-rational and rational mentalities respectively in ancient Greece, has persuasively laid out what this means for the questions at stake here, and deserves citation at length:

Mimesis in its older meaning seems to have been allied with ritual, dance, music and play, with performances in which mythic and divine forces are not so much represented as brought into presence through their (re)enactment. Mimesis in this pre-rational sense is one with ‘the non-imitative, ecstatic, or “dionysian” movement of Being.’ In Plato, one finds a later, rational conception of mimesis as imperfect representation or imitation of inaccessible Being, as well as a negative characterization of prerational mimesis as hollow simulation and misleading appearance [...This dual conception] marks a struggle for domination, an effort to replace the unmediated, amoral power of prerational mimesis with the mediated, truth-grounded power of rational mimesis, and to dislodge myth, poetry and rhetoric from their positions of authority and establish in their place the sovereignty of philosophy.¹¹⁸

Ultimately, the understanding of both mimesis and *mousike* is deeply ambivalent in Plato. As Spariosu has shown, this is clearly demonstrated in the debate between Socrates and the rhapsode Ion, where rational philosophy is pitted against the magnetic and emotional appeal of prerational poetry; at the same time, however, Plato has self-consciously staged this as a dialogue and has Socrates himself reciting Homer and acting in accordance with prerational values.¹¹⁹ Similarly, elsewhere, mimesis is at once necessary and condemned; it is necessary for education (children imitate stories which in turn

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Bogue, ‘Introduction’ in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach, Volume 2: Mimesis, Semiosis and Power*, ed. by Ronald Bogue (Philadelphia, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 1-12, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ See Mihai Spariosu, ‘Plato’s *Ion*: Mimesis, Poetry, and Power’ in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory*, pp. 13-26.

form or shape them) and yet also condemned for its role in privileging emotion over reason. Of central importance is the way in which, as Potolsky has shown, 'Plato subtly opposes mimesis to the ideals of masculinity. He associates imitation with women, children and the insane, all of whom were expressly excluded from Athenian political life.'¹²⁰ Plato's paradigm-shifting conceptualisation that identifies the arts of the muses as fundamentally mimetic also repudiates them for being a 'technology of the past, limited to and by oral culture' and also denigrates them 'as secondary and derivative, distinguished from reason and truth and associated with femininity and childhood [...and as a result] poetry comes to seem inappropriate to the needs of current Greek society.'¹²¹

It is evidently entirely impossible for Plato to dismiss poetry and music completely from the *callipolis*; the muses' longstanding relation to education by no means disappears and the powerful ability of *mousike* to shape the soul remains one of the essential tools for the education of model citizens. As mentioned above there is, however, a vast amount of attention paid to selecting the 'right' forms of artistic practice in order to shape young minds; this is something that will be explored in more detail in chapter three. For now, it is simply necessary to highlight the way in which this conflicting and complicated conception of *mousike* and mimesis sets in chain what is in effect a set of value judgements about what constitutes good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate types of music and poetry, and what the *role* of music in the *callipolis* should be. In short, though Plato at points aligns the highest forms of learning, including philosophy, with *mousike*, and is clearly deeply invested in music's ability to model ethical and harmonious attitudes both individually and in society, he is nonetheless deeply sceptical of mass audiences and popular music (see the *Laws* and the *Republic*) and in general with the idea of music as 'mere' entertainment. As Murray notes, Plato 'dismisses aulos-playing, lyre-playing, dithyrambic choruses and tragedy [...] as a species of *kolakeia*, flattery, whose sole purpose, like that of rhetoric, is to gratify the whims of the masses.'¹²² The ability of music to elicit strong and

¹²⁰ Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 28.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 31, p. 30.

¹²² Murray, 'The Muses and their Arts', p. 376.

pleasurable responses is never in doubt in Plato; in contrast, it is precisely because of this that Plato is so keen, as Halliwell outlines, 'to deny that pleasure in itself can be the sole criterion of musical value.'¹²³

When it comes to the strong – whether pleasurable or painful – reactions that music can elicit, there is another archetypal feminine figure that perhaps brings this heady cultural constellation into view yet more sharply than the muse: that of the siren. Though both the muses and sirens are mythological female figures primarily associated with song – then as much as now – whether they have shared or distinct genealogies is less than clear.¹²⁴ The story is infamous: the sirens were dangerous but enticing half-women, half-creatures, whose enchanting song lured mariners to their death on the rocks surrounding their island. Their song is at once irresistible – Odysseus has himself tied to the mast of his ship and plugs his oarsmen's ears with wax in order that he can safely pass the sirens and hear their legendary and magical music – and dangerous: had he not gone to such lengths he and his crew would be unquestionably lured to the shore and to certain death. Though the sirens themselves are charged with a forbidding but compelling eroticism – as not entirely human *femmes fatales* – it is above all 'the siren's *music* that positions her in the flowing spaces between the human, animal, and spirit worlds, between past and present, danger and delight.'¹²⁵ Not only have we inherited their legacy – a legacy which posits an insoluble link between sound's capacity to elicit our immediate, spellbinding attention and danger – through our use of the word siren as an alarm or acoustic warning, but the sirenic fantasy also links the act of listening, '[f]rom Homer through Joyce and beyond [...] to subjective displacement, to personal decentering, and to an ecstatic connection to the infinite polyphony of the world that threatens to engulf the self.'¹²⁶ As Adorno and Horkheimer famously argued in their critical analysis of the myth, the story of Odysseus is a 'prescient allegory of the dialectic

¹²³ Halliwell, p. 312.

¹²⁴ See J. R. T. Pollard, 'Muses and Sirens', *The Classical Review*, 2.2 (1952), 60–63 (p. 60).

¹²⁵ Naroditskaya and Austern, 'Introduction: Singing Each to Each' in *Music of the Sirens*, ed. by Linda Phyllis Austern and Inna Naroditskaya (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 1-15, p. 3, my emphasis.

¹²⁶ Linda Phyllis Austern, "'Teach Me to Heare Mermaides Singing": Embodiments of (Acoustic) Pleasure and Danger in the Modern West' in *Music of the Sirens*, pp. 52-104, p. 53.

of enlightenment'¹²⁷ whereby the rational, bourgeois individual triumphs over the mythical lure of the siren's song, but only at the cost of aligning progress and enlightenment with the intellect rather than with (bodily) labour; the oarsmen, after all, are never afforded the painful pleasure of hearing the siren's song though Odysseus's audition depends on their labour.¹²⁸ This potent configuration also orbits around the supposed complementarity of the alluring but monstrous feminine and the power of the voice, audition, and music in general to transcend the reason and rationality of the men who find themselves impelled to listen and subsequently obliterated.

In a more explicitly psychoanalytic vein, through the conjoining of the thematics of death, anxiety, femininity and their sonorous realisation, the mythological siren song is figured as the shared sonic essence of both the 'mother's lullaby and the lover's exaltation' and thus as a fantasy that is at once an erotic desire for self-obliteration through sexual climax and also 'a longing for death as a return to the womb.'¹²⁹ For other thinkers, the sirens exemplify a nodal point for the coming together of music, sound and queerness; in their visible appearance the sirens clearly transgress the boundaries of the human, but they also represent music's multifarious and even duplicitous nature. As Judith Peraino highlights, they represent the way in which music participates in the 'normalizing and *abnormalizing* of the subject' as well as the way in which 'Western culture has used music to explore, celebrate, manage, and police aspects of gender and sexuality that are irreducible to verbal description and visual representation, as evidenced in the anxiety and ambivalence that frequently condense around music and musicians.'¹³⁰ Though a consideration of the sirens and their powerful song is perhaps most

¹²⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 27.

¹²⁸ There is, of course, an argument to be made that Adorno, too, in his own musical philosophy also forgets the oarsmen. See Judith Ann Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), particularly p. 2.

¹²⁹ Austern "'Teach Me to Hear Mermaids Singing'", p. 58, p. 56. See the chapter in full for more details of this line of thinking.

¹³⁰ Peraino, pp. 7-8. There is an abundance of literature that addresses or alludes to this, either explicitly or implicitly. For example, Fred Everett Maus speaks of the way in which anxieties about the 'unmanliness of musical experience' have fed into the way the discipline of music analysis defensively attends to structural, score-based concerns in order to evade the (stereo-)typically feminine questions about music's expressive, sensuous nature. See Maus, 'Feminism, Music Theory, Time and Embodiment' in Neumeier (ed.), pp. 61-73 (p. 64). In a different vein, the late Philip Brett argued that not only do homosexuality and music have a long and

obviously a consideration of ‘cultural constructs of performance and audition, [and the] diverse links between [the] sounding body and hearing body’ it is quite clearly also a particularly neat nexus for the consideration of the cultural constructs that intertwine music, sound, gender and the subject in both ancient and more recent thought.¹³¹ Indeed, as I hope is evident, much of the above resonates strongly with the essential musicality of Kristeva’s pre- and paralinguistic *sémiotique*, as well as with Luce Irigaray’s association of liquids and fluidity with the feminine. Ultimately, then, as Linda Phyllis Austern describes, the ‘sirenic fantasy relies largely [...] on conceptions of hearing as a passive, feminine sense, and on the links between women, water and the insubstantial, affective flow of music.’¹³²

Finally, then, all that remains is to highlight the way in which, despite the centrality of the sonorous dimension to all of these constructs, neither the music of the sirens nor even that of the muses is ever actually heard, as such. Rather, both serve to figure an ambivalent source of either inspiration or lack that propels the (usually) male poet’s artistry; crucially, they themselves are insubstantial – nonexistent – except in their subsequent portrayal by the men who depict both them and their songs. In this respect, even Sartre’s *La Nausée* is sirenic in structure: though the song ‘Some of these Days’ does exist and has been sung and recorded by a ‘real’ singer, Sartre continues to figure the identity of the song beyond that of its realisation. Indeed, as we have seen, Roquentin repeatedly claims that ‘elle n’existe pas.’ It is precisely this absent presence that serves as the inspiration for his own artistry, with the song figuratively and literally (the lyrics are all about ‘missing your honey’) also mirroring and sustaining the lost feminine as manifest in the recent dissolution of his romantic relationship with Anny. Crucially, as Naroditskaya and Austern describe, ‘[t]he poet, the composer, the painter, the visionary, who (re)presents the song of the siren [or, one might add, the muse] in his own terms usurps her power [...because] her performance is not heard without his mediation.’¹³³ Indeed, by rejecting

shared history, but that music has historically acted as a safe refuge for homosexuals, see Brett, ‘Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet’ in Brett, Wood, and Thomas, pp. 9-26.

¹³¹ Naroditskaya and Austern, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

¹³² Austern, “‘Teach Me to Hear Mermaids Singing’”, p. 58.

¹³³ Naroditskaya and Austern, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

entirely the role of Sophie Tucker (and the other performers/instrumentalists) in the performance of 'Some of these Days', Sartre too goes some way to usurping much of her power. It turns out that the sirens' song, despite its notoriously potent powers, has been man's (re)construct(ion) all along; though they are portrayed as sources of inspiration they are simultaneously and indistinguishably repositories of male fantasy – a fantasy that, when it comes to the sirens, constructs femininity, and especially female sexuality, as inherently dangerous. At the same time, it signals a deep anxiety about all that appears to evade the grasp of the linguistic symbolic, setting in place a familiar chain of binarisms that oppose men/women, culture/nature, language/music, mind/body, etc. Moreover, though the sirens are a source of inspiration, they are also permanently de-substantialized and *en abyme*; thus to figure man's lack as, essentially, the (sonorous) feminine ultimately serves, *encore*, to send both women and music to the interminable beyond of signification – a gesture which relentlessly aligns women with the subordinate term in the list of oppositions whilst erasing the lived presence of women in the signifying, symbolic and linguistic domain.¹³⁴ As Daniel Albright convincingly shows, this is rarely, if ever, an innocent gesture, because 'fictions of gender and race [amongst others] can be and have been used to inflict harm. Myths tend to have sharp edges.'¹³⁵ It is ultimately this metaphoricity – whether of music and/or of gender – to which the rest of this thesis attends.

¹³⁴ I am of course referring to Lacan's famous seminar where the feminine is figured, *encore*, in permanent relation to the body (*en corps*) and thus as constituent lack of the phallogocentric regime of the symbolic. See Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, *Encore: le séminaire, livre XX (1972-3)*, Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre 20 (Paris: Seuil, 2005). This will be discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this thesis.

¹³⁵ Albright, *Panaesthetics*, p. 28.

Chapter II: Music, Meaning and Materiality: Nancy's *Corps Sonore*

[L]a jouissance phallique est l'obstacle par quoi l'homme n'arrive pas, dirai-je, à jouir du corps de la femme, précisément parce que ce dont il jouit, c'est la jouissance de l'organe.¹



Figure 1. Titian, 'Venus with an Organist and Cupid' (ca. 1555)

OUVERTURE

This chapter explores the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, paying close attention to a profusion of musical references across his vast oeuvre, but homing in on the slim volume, *À l'écoute* (2002), dedicated largely to the question of what (musical) listening affords philosophy.² It seems an appropriate point of opening to the questions that are sustained and developed across the thesis, precisely because it

¹ Lacan and Miller, p. 15.

² I have already made the central argument about Nancy's *À l'écoute* elsewhere, see Sarah Hickmott, '(En) Corps Sonore: Jean-Luc Nancy's "Sonotropism"', *French Studies*, 69.4 (2015), 479–93.

approaches the complex issue of what sound and music do, or could do, for philosophy head-on. Or, perhaps more accurately, and less instrumentally, it exposes the way in which philosophy has (had) little purchase on the sonorous precisely because it is beyond signification, if not beyond meaning. All of this is in order to propose the possibility of a philosophy that listens; a philosophy that is attentive to meaning not merely as *logos*, and the passing of sounds always yet to come. For Nancy, it is precisely resonance that is this point of opening.

To begin, then, at the end of the extended essay, *À l'écoute*, we find a short coda based on Nancy's reading of Titian's painting *Venus with an Organist and Cupid* (see figure 1). This musical tableau depicts an organist gazing at a nude Venus; she appears to pay him no attention, instead attending to Cupid who is embracing her. Behind these figures we can see out to the fairly modestly landscaped garden of the villa in which the musical scene presumably takes place; the pipes of the organ in the upper left blend almost seamlessly with the lines of trees outside which demarcate the limits of the garden. In an appropriately musical fashion, this 'tail' is more or less inessential to, and independent of, the preceding text, yet ultimately serves to bring it to a more satisfactory close. In effect, Nancy's short oto-iconographical analysis allows for a more lucid recapitulation of the key claims of the short but dense text: firstly, that sound is always already a re-sounding that folds into itself any distinction between subject/object and inside/outside. Secondly, that sound subsists as a kind of opening or sharing, and in a privileged relation to all the resonances of *sens* (as perception, intelligibility and direction). Finally, in bringing these observations together, Nancy is able to articulate a sonorous theory of the subject — frequently referred to as the *corps sonore* — to complement his broader political-philosophical project based on a singular plural ontology. In the organist's sensuous gazing at the naked Venus, we learn how 'l'oreille ouvre sur le ventre, ou bien même elle l'ouvre' (*Ec*, p. 84). The resonant chamber of Venus' belly is both, Nancy claims, 'le lieu où vient retentir sa musique' and where the inside and outside open up to one another, itself echoed in the externality of the garden scene in the background of an otherwise intimate indoors scene (*Ec*, p. 84).

Given both the emphasis Nancy places on the sensuous presentation of the world (on sense *as* meaning(ful) rather than *having* meaning that needs to be located ‘elsewhere’) and the obviously auditory nature of sensuous lived existence, it seems perfectly logical to offer an acoustemological complement to his other work on the sensuous subject. In addition, it is not only sound that is theorized in *À l’écoute*, but the specifically musical. As Roger Grant notes, it also offers a specifically ‘musicological counterpart to his work on the visual and written arts’ as a consequence of the inclusion of specific references to music (composers, works, etc.) rather than restricting its focus to abstract, environmental, ecological or non-musical sounds.³ However, despite a more sustained interest in this short but wide-ranging text in France, the critical reception of *À l’écoute*, both within Anglophone French studies and within music and/or sound studies, has been notably lukewarm. In comparison to the rest of his substantial œuvre, even Nancy scholars seem to have been reluctant to engage with this text (a small number of notable exceptions notwithstanding⁴) and thus, despite being a rich text that adds a significant sonorous dimension to his broader philosophical project, it has remained somewhat sidelined.

Though *À l’écoute* is undoubtedly Nancy’s major text addressing music and sound and will thus be the major focus, this chapter – along with chapter five – will also confront other musical moments in Nancy’s œuvre. Most notably, these come from various references in *Les Muses*; the short chapter ‘Musique’ in *Le Sens du monde*; two essays from the subsequent English translation of *À l’écoute*;

³ Roger Mathew Grant, ‘Review: Jean-Luc Nancy’s “Listening”’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 62.3 (2009), 748–52. Of course this is a glib generalization that ignores all the difficulties outlined in chapter one about how we define ‘music’ in the first place. Nonetheless, it is Nancy’s specific reference to composers and works that I wish to highlight as it demonstrates a clear intention to include what is conventionally – albeit uncritically – understood as music within the text. Indeed, Nancy is explicit about this, when he says: ‘J’aimerais [...] pousser un peu plus avant, pour aller à nouveau vers la musique, par delà le sonore abstrait’ (*Ec*, p. 58). What is less clear is the positioning of the musical vs. the ‘simply’ sonorous.

⁴ For example, Adrienne Janus, ‘Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the “Anti-Ocular” Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory’, *Comparative Literature*, 63 (2011), 182–202; Adrienne Janus, ‘Soundings: The Secret of Water and the Resonance of the Image’, *The Senses and Society*, 8.1 (2013), 72–84.

various of the ‘inventions’ from the set of interviews between Nancy and musicologist-philosopher Danielle Cohen-Lévinas; and, most significantly for this chapter, an interview with Michel Gaillot contributing to a volume on techno music and the published text of a lecture originally given at La Cité de la Musique in Paris, entitled ‘La Scène mondiale du rock’ where Nancy suggests that there are ‘de bonnes raisons de traiter le rock comme un phénomène philosophique’ (Smr, p. 77). As we will see, Nancy, the self-professed ‘philosophe non-rocker’ (Smr, p. 76) has thus made a rather larger contribution to musico-philosophical thinking than has hitherto been appreciated. Just as Nancy’s various musical meditations have received relatively scant attention in Anglophone French criticism, scholars in music departments — despite a short-lived initial flurry of excitement — have also been reluctant to engage with the text. As was highlighted in the chapter one, it may be down to historical disciplinary reasons and musicology’s tendency to import concepts seen to have instrumental value as interpretative tools when ‘applied’ to particular musical works, processes or genres, that there has been minimal engagement with *À l’écoute* and Nancy’s œuvre more broadly.⁵ Indeed, though the innovations of critical musicology were deeply indebted to poststructuralism and (largely French) theory more generally, attempts to engage with theoretical works that seek to deal with music or sound ‘itself’ have been notably less prominent.⁶ This, however, seems to be changing and ‘a new body of work’ can be seen to be emerging at the intersection of music studies and philosophy which, as Martin Scherzinger describes, ‘instead of bringing philosophy to musicology [...] 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.’⁷

This chapter – along with the thesis as a whole – seeks to contribute to the emerging area of scholarship that Scherzinger identifies above, a field that, to borrow Andrew Bowie’s words,

⁵ In fact, engagement with Nancy’s work within Anglophone musicology seems to be limited to a handful of reviews of *À l’écoute* (usually of the English translation) and very little else.

⁶ See chapter one, particularly p. 58.

⁷ Martin Scherzinger, ‘On Sonotropism’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 31.5–6 (2012), 345–51 (p. 345).

is committed to ‘rehabilitating the claim that philosophy should be concerned with the idea of what constitutes a meaningful world.’⁸ In this respect, though Nancy has received faint praise on occasion – Michael Gallope has suggested that, at least in theory, *À l’écoute* offers a ‘completely different philosophy of music’ and one that has the potential to transcend the dualism of approaches focused on either the ‘immateriality of sonorous structure [...or the] materiality of practice and context’⁹ – given the central importance that Nancy places on the co-valence of sense as both sensuousness and meaning, it is all the more surprising that his work has not been taken up more widely in this turn. The text on rock music is, in this regard, particularly ‘worldly’, and neither disparages rock as merely popular, mass culture entertainment, nor idealizes it – it is simply a ‘porteur d’un sens’ (*sens* in its polyvalent meanings) (Smr, p. 77). At the same time, in both the rock and the techno texts, Nancy also considers how the birth of these genres co-emerges alongside other social, political, artistic and intellectual forces, such as mid-twentieth century philosophy and the ‘fin de la métaphysique’ (Smr, p. 77). In so doing, Nancy lays bare the sensuous criss-crossing of seemingly distinct areas of study, people, geographies, and ideologies. Nonetheless, one of the striking features of these texts is simply the hugely different approach to the understanding of rock and techno music when compared to the major musical referent of most of the other musical texts: *musique savante*. Indeed, for all its emphasis on sonority and on what listening offers or affords philosophy, *À l’écoute* still comes across as a ‘proper’ work of written philosophy, especially in comparison to the less formal style of the rock and techno texts that were originally delivered orally. In the process, *À l’écoute* invokes a metaphysical-ontological notion of what music ‘is’ in order to remake philosophy’s bias towards vision as central to meaning. In contrast, again, the rock and techno texts – which will be engaged with here, but approached anew in chapter five – offer considerably less formal meditations on music ‘itself’, focusing instead on the ethico-aesthetic and political ramifications of particular genres; in so doing, music is characterized in radically different ways across the different texts, leaving an uneasy tension

⁸ Bowie, p. 46.

⁹ Michael Gallope, ‘Review: Jean-Luc Nancy. 2007. *Listening Translated by Charlotte Mandell*’, *Current Musicology*, 86 (2008), 157–66 (p. 157).

between the different approaches. The major aims of this chapter are thus to critically (re)position Nancy's work on music in relation to two more or less disparate disciplines, and also to pursue a further — explicitly feminist — critique, which locates *À l'écoute* and several other musical moments within a problematic genealogy of thought on sound and/or music. By attending to the specifically musical in Nancy's texts, and then finally returning to his reading of Titian's musical tableau, this chapter aims to locate some of the tensions that arise from what appears to be a fairly uncritical engagement with music — especially in *À l'écoute* — suggesting that there are consequences beyond the explicitly musical moments for Nancy's theory of philosophical listening.

THE MULTIPLE ARTS: PRESENTATION AND THE SENSE OF PHILOSOPHY

The central feature of Nancy's philosophy is perhaps his unremitting focus on the senses and their relation to philosophy at large. Though philosophy's 'aesthetic attitude'¹⁰ is, as laid out in chapter one, born of a history beginning with Kant, it would seem fair to say that whilst Nancy is no doubt influenced by this legacy he nonetheless brings something distinctly novel to the table with regards to the sensuous nature of being — or rather 'being *with*.' B.C. Hutchens has described Nancy's broader project as 'a rousing critique of, on the one hand, any transcendental thinking that implies a source of sense "beyond" the world and, on the other, immanental thinking that mimetically conceives of such a source within the world.'¹¹ Instead, for Nancy, sense is simply the sense of the world *itself*, with no recourse to other grounds, sources, or reserves of meaning. Strongly influenced by Derrida, Nancy's philosophy draws on his work to continue the critique of '*logocentrism* and the determination of being as *presence*',¹² both of which require either a foundational or transcendental signified in order to guarantee epistemological stability and coherence. This does not, however, lead to a world void of

¹⁰ Ross, p. 1.

¹¹ B. C Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), p. 33.

¹² Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 12, italics in original.

meaning – far from it. Though Nancy’s philosophy insists on the ‘absence de sens’ (as given, appropriable, recognizable, etc.) it is precisely ‘un sens qui fait sens, dans son absence, on pourrait même dire depuis son absence’ to which Nancy so intimately and inventively attends (*SM*, p. 92). This absence of meaning points therefore not to a nihilistic embrace of meaninglessness, but simply to the ceaseless deferral of a final, authorising or transcendental meaning; in this respect, Nancy’s work is clearly anti- or non-Platonic in that it refuses the identification of meaning with the mimetic copying of fixed and eternal forms or Ideas. In so doing, Nancy’s philosophy takes this opportunity – or we might rather say that it is Nancy’s philosophy itself that affords this very opening – to play with the various meanings of *sens* as afforded by the contingencies of the French language, and thus to reaffirm the centrality of sensuousness (thus aesthetics in its etymological derivation) to meaning – a meaning that is always presented sensuously or sensorially.¹³ Indeed, as Ian Maclachlan describes, for Nancy, ‘sense [and presumably, therefore, also meaning] always comes in the singularity of a “here and now”’.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, then, Nancy’s critique of traditional philosophical approaches to meaning, that of ‘referential ideality’,¹⁵ as Alison Ross describes, thus invites an opportunity to rethink the historically difficult relationship between music and meaning. Though we will explore in detail the way Nancy characterizes music below, in short, his philosophy answers the question as to whether meaning is something of which music is capable as soon as it is asked: by virtue of its sensuous presentation in and of the world it simply *is* meaningful. This conviction alone offers a radically refreshing starting point from which to pursue the philosophy of music. Finally, then, embedded within this critique of universal, eternal and fixed meaning as distinct from sense *qua* sensuousness is, as Ian James notes, a triad of thinkers all of whom have been more or less significant to Nancy’s work: the Nietzschean critique of Christian-Platonic thought, Heideggerian destruction of the tradition of onto-theology, and the Freudian critique of the subject.¹⁶ Whilst critics such as Simon Critchley have

¹³ See Ian Maclachlan, ‘Contingencies: Reading between Nancy and Derrida’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 27.1 (2005), pp. 139–58 on the role of contingency more broadly.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁵ See Ross, p. 136 and p. 153 in particular.

¹⁶ See Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 12.

judged Nancy to be, above all, neo-Heideggerian, others such as Ian James have seen his 'initial Nietzschean emphasis against Heidegger [...to be] decisive.'¹⁷ Nonetheless, 'all commentators agree that [...] the task of his philosophy is to enquire into the sense of the world', whilst also engaging with the 'overcoming of metaphysics' (whether in a transcendental, immanent, or substantialist sense) as were many of his contemporaries in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸

With all this in mind, it is easy to see why art – or more precisely, the 'arts' – is a central concern in almost all of Nancy's work. It is tempting to say that, along with the philosophical forebears mentioned above – namely Nietzsche, Heidegger, Freud (perhaps also Lacan) and Derrida – art itself is the other major interlocutor in Nancy's philosophy. *Les Muses* opens with the question '[p]ourquoi y a-t-il plusieurs arts, et non pas un seul?' (*M*, p. 9) He draws on the figure of the muse both to note its etymological connotations (from *mens*, which has to do with the mind, thinking, and spirit), describing how the muse 'anime, soulève, excite, met en branle' before noting that this 'force' has also always been plural: 'Il y a les muses, et non la Muse' (*M*, p. 11). He goes on to assert that this division and diversity is in fact the innate condition of art, and highlights that it is only 'depuis un moment récent' (i.e. since the effects of a largely German Romanticism and the notion of *Kunst*) that art has been referred to in the singular in French, rather than 'les beaux-arts' (*M*, p. 17). Elsewhere, in an interview with Michel Gaillot, he locates this claim more precisely between 1750 and 1850, noting 'que dans ce siècle d'intervalle, l'"art" lui-même est apparu [...et,] en outre, pour corser la chose si je puis dire, l'"artiste" est apparu' (*SM*, p. 97).¹⁹ All of this is simply to highlight the essential multiplicity of art in Nancy's thinking, and to gesture towards some of the crucial ways in which his work diverges substantially from previous (Romantic) thinking on aesthetics. For Nancy, the lack of unity runs parallel to the critical historicizing of (singular) 'Art' as born with the Romantics – a moment that coincides

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 19; see Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Hutchens, p. 5; see James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 8.

¹⁹ This clearly coincides also with the invention of the composer-function, as was mentioned in chapter one, especially p. 30.

also with the birth of philosophical aesthetics. Whereas the post-Romantic baggage leads to a conception of art understood as ‘a distinct and autonomous sphere’²⁰ – a sphere which is concerned with the (re)presentation of meaning *qua* (universal, eternal, transcendent) truth – Nancy attempts to rehabilitate a more ancient, Greek, understanding of the arts. Most importantly, this version draws no clear distinction between ‘Art’ and its practice: *techne*. As Ian James describes, for Nancy it is the very ‘technicity of art and the plurality of artistic techniques that gives rise to the diversity of forms.’²¹

Crucially, then, this observation touches on another central feature of Nancy’s thinking on the arts: their essential and constitutive materiality. This is both materiality in the sense of their inseparable craft and practice, as suggested above, and also the bodily materiality of musical participation, Nancy says: ‘la musique ne peut être que *jouée*, y compris par qui ne fait que l’écouter. Tout le corps est pris à ce jeu – tensions, écarts, hauteurs, mouvements, schèmes rythmiques, grains et timbres –, faute de quoi il n’y a pas musique.’²² But it is also in terms of Nancy’s insistence on the materiality of the medium – even, crucially, when it comes to music, which often seems so tantalizingly immaterial, as was gestured to by Sartre in *La Nausée* and noted in chapter one. Nancy describes music and sound specifically as ‘matière sonore’, and then clarifies that ‘[j]’ai écrit “matière” sans doute parce qu’il me venait un désir de rappeler que le son est matériel, physique. Il n’est pas éthéré et presque immatériel comme on peut être porté à le représenter’ (*Idv*, p. 61). The sensuous materiality of the arts is thus the keystone of Nancy’s broader philosophical project, as Alison Ross describes:

Art offers an answer to the problem of presentation posed in Western philosophy [...because] in the arts the emergence of sense from sources of sensible materiality is staged or presented. In this respect art exemplifies the core precepts of Nancy's ontology: specifically, that sense takes place in relations of exteriority and that affect is the hinge that joins materiality and sense as an act rather than a passive state of becoming.²³

²⁰ Ian James, ‘Art - Technics’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 27.1 (2005), 83–102 (p. 86).

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 86. See the rest of this article along with *The Fragmentary Demand* for more on this idea.

²² Nancy, ‘Musique’ in *Le Sens Du Monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), pp. 133-138, p. 136.

²³ Ross, pp. 151-152.

In this respect, not only does Nancy's philosophy afford an 'ontological rehabilitation of pleasure',²⁴ but it is art itself that offers philosophy an escape from the impasse of representation at large. Indeed, in *Les Muses*, rather than offering a formulation based on mimesis, whereby the material world (and thus art) is always a copy of some 'original', Nancy radicalizes Hegel's essentially Platonic formula – that 'art is the sensuous expression of the Idea' – claiming instead that the embodied gesture of painting (or of art in general) is *itself* the Idea. Through art, man sensuously reveals himself *to* himself; 'non pas la sensibilité comme telle, mais la ou les distributions des sens seraient elles-mêmes les produits de l'"art"' (*M*, p. 26). For Nancy painting, for example, is explicitly not the inadequate (re)presentation of the Idea (rather it *is* the Idea), and this holds true for song, too, when Nancy states '[c]e fut peut-être, aussi, un chant. Il faut entendre le premier chanteur accompagner le premier peintre' (*M*, p. 121). In *Les Muses*, art is figured as nothing more (and nothing less) than the production of sense, but through this gesture (this Idea) sense reveals itself to be produced, 'du sens en tant que ce qui le "produit" comme tel, c'est d'abord qu'il soit reçu, éprouvé, bref *senti* comme sens' (*M*, p. 53, Nancy's emphasis).

The arts' essential relation to aesthetic perception – again conceived of in its etymological derivation to connote all that is perceptible through the senses – thus affords and sustains its privileged place in Nancy's thought; it is indissociable from Nancy's conviction that we cannot speak of truth in any singular or given sense, and it is for this reason too, no doubt, that "Art" cannot be evoked in the singular' – a move which 'would reinstall a position of "referential ideality" at the core of his ontology.'²⁵ As we will see in chapter four, this positions Nancy in sharp contradistinction – if not outright opposition – to the eventual philosophy of Alain Badiou, for whom philosophy's purpose is the rehabilitation or identification of (Platonic) universal truth as manifest in artistic events (and other domains). Quite conversely, Nancy insists, as Ross describes, that it 'is not truth but meaning or sense

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 153.

on the verge of its emergence that art presents' or, elsewhere, 'the coming of sense over the event of taking place.'²⁶ Though Alison Ross beautifully presents what is at stake in Nancy's sensuous philosophy, she nonetheless seems to retain a degree of ambivalence as to whether by positioning art as a 'first philosophy' – albeit a pluralistic one – Nancy doesn't in fact reinstate 'art in precisely the position of exception that, in Heidegger's late work, is a matter of considerable ambivalence and debate.'²⁷ This is a concern worth bearing in mind, and one to which we will return later in this chapter.

It is also worth a brief word about how Nancy's rethinking of, art, sense, and metaphysics corresponds – indeed is essential to – his thinking on being. Though Ross advances concern at the possibility that Nancy restores art to the position of a first philosophy, it is certainly true that Nancy's broader project is definitively anti- or post- foundational. He writes in *Les Muses* of the illusory nature of foundational thought when he says:

Le fond ne se produit pas lui-même et il n'est produit en aucune manière. Le fond est l'évidence ou la patence de l'être : l'existence, avec laquelle on ne peut en finir, dès lors, du moins, qu'on ne la manipule pas à quelque fin, l'existence en tant que 'l'infinie multiplicité du monde.' Mais la multiplicité du monde ne reste même pas la multiplicité d'un monde : elle qualifie le monde comme hétérogénéité de mondes *en quoi consiste l'unité du monde*.²⁸

In this way, Nancy is able to develop his own radical, anti- or post-metaphysical ontology, articulated as *être singulier pluriel*, which allows him – as we have seen above in regards to art – to dissociate himself from the shackles of representational thought which identifies Being (and, therefore, the dualisms of subject/object, idea/representation, et al.) through reference to a predetermined ground (substantialism) or to either an external (transcendental) or an internal (immanent) reserve of meaning/spirit/idea 'by which singular beings' identities could be mimetically determined and

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135, p. 153.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁸ Nancy, *Les Muses*, p. 51, Nancy's emphasis. The citation is, despite their differences, from Badiou's *Conditions*, p. 361.

reflected.²⁹ Instead, for Nancy, Being (and meaning *as* sense) *comes into being* (always a being *with*) only in the relational and dynamic space *between* beings (as well as ideas, things, bodies, etc.), which are always exposed to a shared but unknown futurity, but with no preceding (fixed) ground or foundation. Martin Crowley describes how Nancy ‘situates the objects of his interest in relation to the broad horizon he calls “sense,” namely, the fact of existence [...which is] irreducible to any determinate signification, the opening to and of the world that is re-marked – but not appropriated – by any act of figuration.’³⁰ Or, as Hutchens states, describing Nancy’s ontology, ““we” just is this ability to open ourselves to the spacing of a world, a world that is always “to-come”.”³¹ This ontological formulation also permits Nancy to navigate the philosophical terrain between the polar extremes of what the English translator of *Le Sens du monde*, Jeffrey S. Librett describes as the mythical and the nihilistic; the way in which Western thought has located in symbolic figures or structures, such as religion, totalising and ‘full’ systems of belief, and thus a guarantee of meaning.³² Or, in contrast and as mentioned above, its opposite: nihilism as a proposition of (absolute) lack and the consequent relativism of infinite self-difference. As a result of Nancy’s careful re-articulation of this dualism, sense – and a concomitant or synonymous ‘sense of the world’ – is not something that the world either *has* (in reference to some external symbolic guarantee of plenitude) or *does not have* (in reference to an absolute and constitutional lack). Rather, the fact of the world just *is* sense ‘on the grounds that there could be nothing else. Sense and the world are coextensive, perfectly commensurate, with no superfluous meanings overhanging this coextensivity.’³³ For Nancy, there is no difference between meaning and the material world we find ourselves in. He traverses what he sees as a false dichotomy between an illusory plenitude of presence pitted against the equally illusory void of a constitutional

²⁹ Hutchens, p. 156.

³⁰ Martin Crowley, ‘Being Beyond Politics, with Jean-Luc Nancy’, *Qui Parle*, 22.2 (2014), 123–45 (p. 123).

³¹ Hutchens, p. 160.

³² See Jeffrey S. Librett, ‘Foreword: Between Nihilism and Myth: Value, Aesthetics, and Politics’ in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. by Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

³³ Hutchens, p. 6.

lack to articulate the sense of the world ‘precisely in the interstitial space *between* these two extremes of myth and nihilism, in the space of their mutual and endless approach.’³⁴

FROM ‘SONOTROPISM’ TO SONOROUS ONTOLOGY

As we have seen in chapter one, a philosophical attempt to think about, characterize or describe music — whether in metaphysical, spiritual, aesthetic or ethical terms — is prevalent in Western thought since Plato. In particular, much philosophical commentary has focused on music’s seemingly privileged relationship to both emotions and subjectivity. The genealogy of such a privileged linking of music and the subject runs all the way from Plato’s concern about music’s profound ability to manipulate behaviour, character and the emotions, through to the lofty metaphysical reflections of German idealism and beyond. In this substantiation of the perceived ‘nature’ of music — its supposed metaphysical power to reveal some ‘essential’ facet of human existence — Martin Scherzinger has located what he describes as philosophy’s ‘sonotropism.’ He notes the way in which sonotropism ‘proceeds as if music held a metaphysical valence in excess of the usual mediators of language, culture and history.’³⁵ The trajectory of sonotropism continues, then, to the Schopenhauerian idea of music as ‘Will’ and arguably further, to poststructuralist attempts to pattern politically engaged philosophical thinking on a kind of musicalized imaginary or virtuality — even a liberating musicalized ontology — such as with Deleuze and Guattari’s *ritournelle*.³⁶ Nevertheless, despite the ‘*unutterable* fullness of thought’³⁷ that music has afforded philosophical thought, the very attempt to *theorize* the audible is centred around the conflict noted in the ‘Introductory Prelude’ (the inherent visual bias of theory), leaving the (im)possibility of *theorizing* music, or sound, in perpetual debate.³⁸ Indeed, this is precisely the starting point from which Nancy proceeds, when

³⁴ Librett, p. xv.

³⁵ Scherzinger, p. 350.

³⁶ See, in particular, Deleuze and Guattari, ‘1837 – De la ritournelle’ in *Mille plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Paris: Minuit, 1980) pp. 381-433.

³⁷ Kant, p. 206, my emphasis.

³⁸ See the ‘Introductory Prelude’.

he states that ‘figure et idée, théâtre et théorie, spectacle et spéculation se conviennent mieux, se superposent, voire se substituent avec le plus de convenance que ne le peuvent l’audible et l’intelligible ou le sonore et le logique’ (*Ec*, p. 14). Or, more simply, ‘on demandera ceci: l’écoute, est-ce une affaire dont la philosophie soit capable?’ (*Ec*, p. 13).

In apparently stark contrast to Western philosophy’s historical bias towards vision, Nancy’s sonorous counterpoint to his broader ontological project instead finds common ground with a more general trend of critiquing Western metaphysics’s ocularcentric discourse, a move which, as already noted in the ‘Introductory Prelude’, has been termed an ‘anti-ocular’ turn.³⁹ Adrienne Janus even goes as far as to position *À l’écoute* at ‘a culminating moment’⁴⁰ of this turn, and indeed, *À l’écoute* does strive to challenge the predominance of vision as central to knowledge, expounded and expanded genealogically from philosopher-king to philosopher-king. With this in mind, however, Nancy’s work at large doesn’t eschew the visual in favour of the auditory; indeed, he has written extensively on the cinema, and references to specific music in *À l’écoute* are notably mediated through some kind of visual – the film through which we ‘listen’ to Mozart’s clarinet concerto, or the Titian painting to which Nancy responds with the theatrics of Wagnerian music drama. Elsewhere, the musical resonances or implications of the collected interviews, *Inventions à deux voix* are explicitly gestured towards in the cover art that shows the score of Bach’s two-part invention in E flat major; similarly, Nancy’s presentation on rock music proceeds from an advertisement (for chocolate) which reads: ‘[c]ontre le blues, rien ne vaut le roc’ (*Smr*, p. 74). Rather, then, Nancy is interested in the distribution, or the (re)routing of the senses, especially in the arts – a move that nonetheless displaces the singular authority of the visual in traditional theorizing. Nancy moves against a traditional metaphysical position that had tended to locate in music (and in ‘great art’ more broadly) a transcendental reserve (of spirit, will, etc.) that neutralized the cultural and historical implications or ramifications

³⁹ See Jay.

⁴⁰ Janus, ‘Listening’, p. 182.

— in short, the situatedness — of these aesthetic ‘objects’, and in this way, it is evident that Nancy’s anti-ocular turn (or, perhaps more precisely, anti-ocularcentric turn) comes hand-in-hand with an implicit commitment to a broadly materialist position that acknowledges how seemingly abstract thought necessarily relates to economic, social and cultural conditions.

As a result, then, *À l’écoute* offers a way of thinking about sound and/or music beyond inherited binaries; commensurate with his singular plural ontology, Nancy resists reinscribing a listening subject and a listened-to object. Instead, the audible appears affirmatively as the perpetual flux of a shared, sonorous world. Nancy’s position suggests a potentially radical avenue beyond a dualism that has often seen music considered in either wholly immaterial terms — the closed, positivist approach to score-based analysis or ‘purely’ formal procedures — or as a mere product of a particular socio-cultural context, with no specificity of its own. Nancy either refuses or exceeds this distinction, and instead positions music as a shared space of resonance; as the auditory distribution of sense (*sens*) in which ‘se met à l’écoute simultanée d’un “soi” et d’un “monde” qui sont l’un à l’autre en résonance’ (*Ec*, p. 82). He also notes how all the senses have both ‘passive’ and ‘active’ states (for example, seeing and looking, smelling and sniffing, etc.) and uses this observation to draw a distinction between hearing [*entendre*] and listening [*écouter*], noting how *entendre* is not just ‘hearing’, but also ‘understanding’ and even ‘intention.’⁴¹ In order to pursue his philosophy of *listening*, rather than *hearing*, he posits that the auditory pairing subsists in a privileged relationship to intellectual or intelligible sense; in short, whilst *entendre* preserves the dichotomy between a perceiving subject and a perceptible object, Nancy’s philosophy of listening demands that ‘le sens ne se contente pas de faire sens (ou d’être *logos*), mais en outre résonne’ (*Ec*, p. 19). This allows him to challenge the traditional philosophical pursuit of ‘truth’, or the ‘hidden’ meaning of sense (as *making* sense or *logos*), and instead to pursue a dynamic, resonant philosophy that subsists in the space of the *renvoi*;

⁴¹ See Nancy, *À l’écoute*, p. 18. Brian Kane explores these distinctions in depth in his article on *À l’écoute*. See Brian Kane, ‘Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 31.5–6 (2012), 439–447.

in sound that exists only as a *resounding*. As Nancy states, '[t]out mon propos tournera autour d'une telle résonance fondamentale, voire autour d'une résonance en tant que fond, en tant que profondeur première ou dernière du "sens" lui-même (ou de la vérité)' (*Ec*, p. 19). Whilst it may appear that the *renvoi* reinstates a kind of fundamental ground or essence towards which we can turn, the emphasis on the 're' negates any claims of foundationalism; any sounding is always already a *resounding*, with no recourse to an originary or 'pure' sounding.

In particular, the auditory articulation of a sonorous *renvoi* allows Nancy to (re)theorize in ontological terms the specifically ocularcentric aspects of the oppositional pairing of subject-object. Nancy's subject, described as 'un diapason', is one which is 'réglé sur soi', but is nonetheless a 'self' without substance; it is only a 'self' insofar as it exists in the sonorous *renvoi* itself (*Ec*, p. 37). Only through this 'return' can the self be said to come into being; through feeling oneself feel [*se sentir sentir*] the self feels itself, and is only a self in this feeling. As Nancy himself describes — insisting on the non-metaphorical nature of this sonorous ontology — listening is theorized 'pas comme une figure de l'accès au soi, mais comme la réalité de cet accès, une réalité par conséquent indissociablement "mienne" et "autre", "singulière" et "plurielle"' (*Ec*, pp. 30-1). Nancy also develops his account of subjectivity through his conceptualization of the *corps sonore*, where both the object and the subject of listening resonate: 'Lequel est toujours à la fois le corps qui résonne et mon corps d'auditeur où ça résonne, ou bien qui en résonne' (*Ec*, p. 22n.2). The remarkable corollary of this, as Adrienne Janus has noted, is that 'all objects, insofar as they resonate' are able, therefore, to be listening *subjects*; this has the consequent (and no doubt intentional) effect of making Nancy's 'human' subject less properly "'subject"-like, less human.'⁴² Finally, then, despite the essentially rhythmic constitution — the resonance created by the fundamental *renvoi* — of the *corps sonore* that might lead us to think of it in purely temporal terms, Nancy's *corps sonore* also opens onto a spatiality; 'il se propage dans l'espace' (*Ec*, p. 22). This temporal movement even seems to constitute, be a pre-condition of,

⁴² Janus, 'Listening', p. 194.

or afford the *manifestation* — which Nancy has been keen to insist on as an inherently *visual* domain — of a spatial dimension, and thus to a relation with others. Or, as Wagner’s Gurnemanz, cited by Nancy, sings in *Parsifal*: ‘Ici, le temps se fait espace’ (*Ec*, p. 33).

ORIGINS: NATURE AND CULTURE; NOSTALGIA AND COMMUNITY

I. Rameau: The Genealogy of the Corps Sonore

Although unacknowledged in *À l’écoute*, the genealogy of the *corps sonore* returns us directly to the Enlightenment and specifically to Rameau, who coined the phrase to describe the ‘natural’ and ‘scientific’ basis for music that he claimed to have found through experimentation. As well as being a significant composer of the Baroque era, Rameau was also a music theorist, and the ‘individual who first recognized that all those components [of music] interacted to create a sense of tonality.’⁴³ Rameau’s project was significant in the way it codified, for the first time, what was later seen to be the dominant harmonic practice in literate (high art) European traditions. By 1737, Rameau was able to publish *Génération harmonique* which fully exploited the *corps sonore* as the theoretical basis for his harmonic theory and, via Dortous de Mairan’s theories of sound propagation, was closely patterned on Newtonian optics.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as Christensen continues, Rameau’s prefatory material to the *Génération harmonique* is a calculated emulation of Newton’s *Opticks*, which was seen as the paragon of empirical Enlightenment science.⁴⁵ The *corps sonore* itself was ‘Rameau’s term for any vibrating system such as a vibrating string which emitted harmonic partials above its fundamental frequency.’⁴⁶ For Rameau, music was a matter for the sciences, and his agenda held at

⁴³ Joel Lester, ‘Rameau and Eighteenth-Century Harmonic Theory’ in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. by Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 753–77, p. 753.

⁴⁴ Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 139.

⁴⁵ Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, p. 145.

⁴⁶ Thomas Christensen, ‘Eighteenth-Century Science and the “Corps Sonore:” The Scientific Background to Rameau’s “Principle of Harmony”’, *Journal of Music Theory*, 31.1 (1987), 23–50 (p. 23).

its core a belief not in the creative *invention* of a system to explain harmonic procedures, but a commitment to the *identification* of the principle from which this apparently ‘natural’ system can be seen to arise. What interests us here is not so much the linking of music and science; that, of course, has a much longer history as outlined in chapter one. Rather, what Rameau’s *corps sonore* seeks to provide, via Newton’s optical theories, is a purportedly objective account of a harmonic practice divorced from the social and historical context in which it emerged; as asocial, pre-cultural, ‘purely’ scientific and naturally occurring. Not insignificantly, it would seem, despite his almost obsessive commitment to the *corps sonore* (which by the end of his life was so loaded with metaphysical excess that he saw it to be the generative principle not only of music but also to assume ‘cosmic proportions [...as] the progenitor of all the arts, sciences, and even religion’⁴⁷), the *corps sonore* was actually no more capable of offering an explanation for subdominant harmony or the minor triad in standard tonal procedures than was any other theory.

II. Rousseau: The (Musical) Origin of the Origin of Culture

In contrast to Rameau’s scientific approach, we find points of correspondence also in Rousseau — another Enlightenment progenitor of many contemporary discourses on music and/or sound — who takes an anthropological approach towards the question of sound. In the *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, Rousseau focuses on the voice as that privileged threshold between music and language, or song and speech, and locates in this liminal space between meaning and materiality the originary link that allows language to connect sound and idea — the sensory with the symbolic. For Rousseau, music is seen as an originary ‘proto-language’ that allows him to posit, as Downing A. Thomas demonstrates, the anthropological missing link that connects semiotics to origins, culture to nature, and man to animal; the origin of the origin of culture.⁴⁸ Similarly for Nancy, *diction*, ‘la constitution

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Downing A. Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 9. The origin of the origin in the sense that ‘music’ is prior even to the split from which culture originates.

matricielle de la résonance lorsqu'elle est mise dans la condition du phrasé ou du sens musical' precedes both music and language, even though it is common to both (*Ec*, p. 72). In Rousseau's originary scene — a scene of communal cultivation in the fields or around the water fountain — he finds that everything, including the origin of art, 'se rapporte dans son principe aux moyens de pouvoir à la subsistance.'⁴⁹ He differentiates between needs — which he claims lead to 'mediate' communication through gesture or movement — and passions which 'arrachèrent les premières voix', finding the idea that the communication of *needs* lies at the root of language, 'insoutenable.'⁵⁰ Furthermore, although Rousseau is quick to chastise Rameau's ultimately harmonic conception of the *corps sonore* for effectively universalising an ethnocentric conception of music (because harmony 'ne flate à nul égard les oreilles qui n'y sont pas exercées' or 'c'est une langue dont il faut avoir le Dictionnaire'⁵¹) Rousseau's conception remains problematic for different reasons. It is clear that Rousseau insists on a logocentric investment in voice *as* presence; indeed, Derrida famously accorded Rousseau a privileged and singular position in the history of metaphysics as the 'détermination de l'être comme présence' and devoted much of *De la grammatologie* to unpacking the subterranean but ultimately constituent logocentrism of Rousseau's thought.⁵² As a result of this and, more precisely, because of the way in which he articulates the relationship between music and language in this logocentric formulation, he invests music with a pre-cultural, transhistorical essentialism.

III. Music and Community

Perhaps, though, Rousseau's influence on Nancy's broader philosophical-ontological project is felt much more obviously elsewhere, in their shared conviction that politics originates from the shared space of communal activities. In *La communauté désœuvrée*, Nancy recognizes Rousseau — most obviously the Rousseau of the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*,

⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues; où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale*, ed. by Charles Porset (Bordeaux: Ducros, 1970), p. 107.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 155.

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 145.

but the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* is no doubt relevant here too – as the first properly modern thinker of community. Rousseau's nostalgic characterisation, or experience, of community is as 'une rupture (peut-être irréparable) de cette communauté' (*Cd*, p. 29). Rousseau puts this modern conception of society – founded on a fundamental loss – in contrast to a (fictive) state of nature where natural man in his originary unity has 'amour de soi' and 'pitié', and no (need of) language proper yet. Nancy, however, as Ian James has shown, inverts Rousseau's supposition.⁵³ Nancy argues instead that it is not this rupture or loss that impedes our return to an idealized and desired community, but conversely that 'une telle "perte" est constitutive de la communauté elle-même' (*Cd*, p. 35). The thought of or desire for a 'return' to community that can be traced from Rousseau, Nancy claims, through to many other philosophers, poets and composers including, of course, Wagner, is perhaps nothing other than 'l'invention tardive qui tenta de répondre à la dure réalité de l'expérience moderne' (*Cd*, p. 32). Structurally, then, this illusory 'return' – the always already lost community as the condition of the possibility of community – plays an analogous role to the *renvoi* in *À l'écoute*; the dynamism of the sonorous *renvoi* that subsists only ever as a *resounding* or *return*, thus aims to *resist* at every turn any claim of originary sounding, just as Nancy's inversion of Rousseau denies an originary community. Finally, as Thomas notes, in Rousseau the aesthetic domain emerges as a relation between an individual and a collective; in the end, just as a musical aesthetics *silently* emerges – as an apparently neutral by-product – in Rousseau, the specifically musical appears in Nancy as a folding back on itself of the more essential resonant space of the *renvoi*.

Following from this, then, it is worth another brief word about the often presumptive relationship of music to community, in part because the idea of community has been so central to Nancy's thought, but also because it is a question that is raised anew in the text on techno music. It has often been through the notion of harmony that the question of community has been attributed a distinctly musical flavour; harmony, with its roots in *harmos* and thus joining or concord, make it almost too

⁵³ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, pp. 175-176.

easy to map musical harmony (the practice of combining separate tones simultaneously to create a usually pleasurable effect) homologically onto social harmony (the combination of individuals to form a consonant, coherent and unified social whole). As we have seen, this is precisely the positive connotation that Plato affords music; for Plato, music has a unique ability to model harmony on micro- and macro-logical levels. No matter the significant differences in their respective positions, the question of harmonious relations also subtends the musico-philosophical thinking of both Rameau and Rousseau. Rameau's 'naturalistic *mathesis* which locates the essence of music in harmonic simultaneity'⁵⁴ concerns the way in which the overriding harmony of the cosmos might be presented to us in aesthetic experience; in apparent contrast, Rousseau's concern with the alienation of modern man identifies music (or at least its emotional power) with nostalgia, and as a privileged reminder of a lost state of social harmony. For Nancy, the question of community is quite different: it is precisely against any notional recovery of a substantive ideal that Nancy argues, aligning the rehabilitation of an illusory essence, matter or subject (such as the Fatherland) with political terror and fascism (see *CD*). Such an imaginary substance may unify through a figure (such as nationhood, religion, a leader or a supposedly shared identity) but has little to do with *être-en-commun*. Instead of the unification around some kind of delusory identification, it is through our shared exposure to *sens* that Nancy theorizes the commonality of being-with, and in particular 'l'être-en-commun comme tel, avant même de l'organiser, de le rapporter à un principe' (*Sm*, p. 84).

Nonetheless, in the text on techno, Nancy is reluctant to wholly commit to the idea, proposed by Michel Gaillot, that raves 's'ouvrent en quelque sorte de l'espace et du temps communs, où les individus, par la musique, la danse, par le contexte singulier, inhabituel de ces fêtes, sont comme aspirés dans un "avec", un "ensemble" ou un "partage" autre que celui qui les lie d'ordinaire dans l'espace social' (Gaillot, in *Sm*, p. 74). For Gaillot, the spontaneity of emergent raves associated with

⁵⁴ Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, 'Introduction: Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy' in Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward, pp. 1-20, p. 19.

techno, and its lack of an ideological, political, or organisational principle, along with its technological and aesthetic innovation, points towards a capacity for authentic experiences of being-with; it preserves 'un aspect archaïque – archi-originaire si l'on peut dire – dans la mesure où subsistent ou plutôt resurgissent en elle des comportements, qui sont propres au festif en général, tels qu'on pouvait les voir à l'œuvre dans les fêtes des sociétés traditionnelles (dionysies, bacchantes, carnaval...)' (Gaillot, in *Sm*, p. 71). In this way techno, at least for Gaillot, appears to return (us) to the ritualistic and festive (i.e. the Dionysian) aspects of music that have lain dormant or 'anaesthetized' in Western musical traditions, or of which the West has only enacted spectacles or simulations. Nancy is cautious about the way in which Gaillot frames this as a return, however, emphasizing that there can be no return to the archaic, but that perhaps it is possible to shed light on 'quelque chose qui appartient en effet à un ordre, à une couche, à une strate fondamentale de l'expérience' (*Sm*, p. 72). Nancy highlights the (dangerous) nostalgic dimension of the desire to return to something archaic, and stresses his preference for framing it as 'archi-originaire' rather than archaic, and thus something 'qui n'a jamais eu lieu, qui n'aura peut-être jamais lieu et qui est sous toute l'expérience de l'être-ensemble' (*Sm*, p. 72). In this respect, it is perfectly possible to understand techno's aesthetic and technological innovation as key to its archoriginal dimension; it is precisely the 'return' of something entirely novel and thus of something 'qui n'a jamais eu lieu.' Finally, then, without passing final judgement on whether techno corresponds to a nostalgic desire for the archaic, or whether through its innovations it 'returns' us to something sensuously new (or, indeed, both), Nancy asks pertinent questions such as what 'risquerait de n'être que "retour", nostalgie donc, nostalgie de choses tribales, archaïques, de l'idée qu'il y aurait pu y avoir de la fête immédiate' (*Sm*, p. 72).⁵⁵ All of this substantially develops Nancy's positioning of the aesthetic, and probes at questions that seem as complex as they are essential. Whilst the aesthetic domain no doubt remains a privileged source of the sensuous immediacy of being-with, musical works or processes and their indisputable entanglement with social

⁵⁵ As Nancy points out, archaic festivals are inseparable also from their religious aspects, and so in this respect techno risks 'le retour du sacré simulé' (*Sm*, p. 76).

forms, practices, institutions, beliefs and politics thus by no means appears to afford music 'itself' any such privileged role.

GENS, GENRE, GENEALOGY

Interestingly, Nancy identifies the first instance of this 'return' (here understood as the new return of the underlying dimension that always traverses the shared experience of meaningful worlds) not with the genre of techno, but with that of rock. It is, however, unclear as to whether it is rock/techno that returns us to this experience (especially because they both also involve dancing), or whether it is our conception of these genres (in contrast, perhaps, to our ideating conception of *musique savante*) that returns us to an understanding of music as always already participating in this shared sonorous affectivity. For Nancy, the 'retour' is contemporary with the emergence of rock, which he describes as 'un phénomène énorme. Ce n'est pas par hasard s'il a commencé, et s'est développé en même temps que commençait et se développait une espèce de grande torsion de société, de civilisation qui dans un moment particulier, en 68, a fait craquer tellement de choses' (*Sm*, p. 73). In this respect, Nancy explicitly relates rock to the society whence it emerged; a suggestion that is developed more extensively in 'La Scène mondiale du rock', where he expressly describes music as something that 'configure du rapport social. La musique donne une cadence à l'être-ensemble', and also presents rock itself as 'un phénomène philosophique au sens très large et courant du mot, c'est-à-dire une forme de pensée, de représentation du monde, des valeurs, voire de sens. Ce qu'on appelle aussi une culture' (*Smr*, p. 79, p. 76). Throughout the text, rock is characterized as something that both influences society and is influenced by society (or at least 'external' factors); in this respect rock is considered as both a subject-like form of affective agency and an object-like repository that resounds with contemporary values, meanings, identities and politics. For Nancy, rock played a crucial role in socio-political events such as the fall of the Berlin wall; indeed, he suggests that there are few 'phénomènes culturels qui

puissent revendiquer une pareille vertu de propagation, de contamination, de contagion;’ rock is ‘un appel [...] à refaire un monde’ (Smr, p. 78, p. 84).

Alongside this conception of rock as a musical force that is able to act on the world, it also appears to reflect prevailing concerns and discourses in its narrative and aesthetic innovations. Nancy explicitly parallels the emergence of rock in the middle of the twentieth century with the concurrent ‘fin de la métaphysique’ in philosophy. Just as this philosophical trajectory is described as ‘le passage d’une époque où la philosophie consistait en une vision du monde ou en un système de vérité, à celle où elle a cessé de se concevoir comme savoir ou construction de systèmes de pensée’, rock is understood as a composite genre (rather than a self-authorising musical system) that ‘remet entièrement en jeu la question du sens’ (Smr, p. 77, p. 83). As a genre it insists on more than signification in processes of meaning, on ‘autre chose que la signification [...] il lui faut l’énergie, la force’ and also sustains a degree of ‘auto-réflexivité’ that would be consonant with this philosophical movement (Smr, p. 83, p. 77). With this in mind, the final chapter, ‘Narrations’, of Pauline Nadrigny’s monograph *Musique et philosophie au XXe siècle*, offers a rich supplement to some of Nancy’s core observations on rock. By insisting on the interrelation of the sociological and the ontological – as does Nancy, in the texts on rock and techno – Nadrigny is able to expose the way in which rock both *figures* itself as a fundamentally modern rupture with the past and simultaneously quests for its origins; it is positioned as ‘anhistorique et archétypique’ and yet ‘ne cesse de raconter son histoire, de se raconter.’⁵⁶ Finally, then, along with advancing a degree of ambivalence about rock’s constitutive relationship to mass consumer culture and processes of globalisation, Nancy also highlights the way rock manifests a fundamental change in the way different generations relate to each other (he clearly positions himself on the side of the pre-rock generation), suggesting also that it reflects or authorizes a changing system of taste and value. Whereas previously a difference was drawn intra-socially between ‘les gens cultivés

⁵⁶ Pauline Nadrigny, *Musique et philosophie au XXe siècle: entendre et faire entendre* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), p. 202.

et les autres' because, following rock, music is understood in a broader sense *qua* culture itself, the differentiation happens interculturally between those who like a particular genre, say, rock, and those who like another, say jazz, or hip hop (see Smr, p. 82).

At the same time, though Nancy brings to the fore the way in which interesting and, one would imagine, important distinctions between different groups of people ultimately sound on the level of the ethico-aesthetic, Nancy nonetheless considers rock as the genealogical starting point for a wealth of sub-genres including 'le pop, la techno, le rap, après être passé par toutes les variantes du rock que vous voudrez, le hard, le *metal*, la *house*, le funk' all of which appear to be subsumable under the name 'rock' and between which Nancy draws no fundamental distinction (Smr, p. 77). Though he is aware that genres such as rap and techno do not consider themselves as rock, he nonetheless insists that 'tout le monde sait de quoi on parle quand on dit rock' (Smr, p. 77). Though much of this likely comes down to his self-professed ignorance when it comes to the actual music, technique or practice of any of these (sub-)genres, it provokes an odd tension with other of his writings.⁵⁷ For example, though Nancy at least implicitly continues to understand musical ontology as fundamentally related to society and politics when he considers the relationship between fascism and European art music in 'March in Spirit in our Ranks' – a question to which we will return in depth in chapter five – the ease with which Nancy is able to make intra-genre distinctions when it comes to this repertoire is striking in comparison (see MSR).

⁵⁷ Nancy is explicit about his ignorance in 'La Scène mondiale du rock'. Similarly, he states 'je suis tout à fait incompetent en technique et en esthétique de la techno' (Sm, p. 71).

NANCY AND THE FEMININE: AESTHETIC GENESIS

*Ève, Hawwah, ce nom fut donné par Adam à la femme parce qu'il signifie 'la vivante'. La Genèse dit : 'parce qu'elle fut mère de tout vivant'. Ève est la vie de la vie, ce qui s'entend du plaisir comme de la mort. Cela s'entend comme cela se divise. La femme est ce qui se divise.*⁵⁸

With all this in mind, and especially with regards to the musical resonances between Nancy's writing on music and the work of Rameau and Rousseau, Elizabeth Tolbert's assertion that any 'critique of contemporary ideas about music and language must begin with an awareness of their intellectual history, specifically of their roots in Enlightenment discourses about human nature and the origins of human culture' seems compelling.⁵⁹ As we have seen, music's 'innate' expressiveness led many Enlightenment philosophers to posit that '[l]anguage, music, and knowledge were all unified in a single divine origin.'⁶⁰ This means that language, having subsequently 'split' from a shared origin with music is still, nevertheless, *directly* connected to the passions and thus allows for an explanation of how language is able to traverse the non-parity of sound and idea. Accordingly, music is then comprehensible — if not properly utterable — as a more immediate and affective proto- or not-yet-language, connecting the natural and non-semantic to the semantic and cultural.⁶¹ Thus music — characterized as 'not (yet) language' — becomes inextricably linked with certain other ideas; a genealogical glance to the philosophy of music demonstrates that it is not only in ancient thought, through the figures of the muses and the sirens, that music has been characterized as essentially 'feminine' — sometimes dangerously so. During the Enlightenment, music is, as Elizabeth Tolbert states, 'elided with the subordinate term in oppositions such as culture/nature, human/animal, mind/body, or reason/emotion. Implicit in music's feminization is its opposition to language, exhibiting qualities such as non-referentiality, syntax without semantics, pure form, the music "itself".'⁶² Western

⁵⁸ Nancy, *Les Muses*, p. 113-4.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Tolbert, 'Untying the Music/Language Knot' in *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, ed. by Linda Phyllis Austern (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), pp.77-95, p. 79.

⁶⁰ Thomas, p. 34.

⁶¹ See Bowie, p. 54.

⁶² Tolbert, p. 77.

thought's logocentric emphasis on voice (and the materiality of sound) as 'presence', has the corollary of also privileging 'referential meaning [...and] metaphorical, as opposed to metonymic thinking.'⁶³ Consequently, music is castigated as lacking propositional content and is therefore aligned with the 'lesser' term in the corresponding binarisms: as emotional, primitive, and certainly feminine. As this dualist thinking demonstrates, debates that seek to position music in a particular way are necessarily involved in (re)articulating all kinds of other (op)positions at the same time. Any contemporary philosophical account of music will necessarily be consistent with, or provide a challenge to this traditional construction and, given Nancy's determination to destabilize the false dichotomies set up by traditional metaphysical and representational thought, it seems pertinent to explore more thoroughly how these binary oppositions are dealt with, or refuted, in his work. As Gill Howie, following Jean Grimshaw claims, 'it is not incidental that within philosophy the concept of the "feminine" carries specific connotations [...and so] one must analyse the construction of the philosophic canon and consider philosophy a social practice.'⁶⁴

Whilst there remains significant 'disagreement concerning the relevance of social and sexed location to philosophy', feminist philosophers contend that 'the assumption [...of] an irreducible sexual difference has played a key part in the sexual division of labour and power.'⁶⁵ Thus, as long as we continue to find it acceptable to *think* in terms of an *essential* difference between the genders and deploy that difference metaphorically as a signifier of a natural and biologically fixed, rather than socio-culturally constructed meaning, we will continue to reproduce that 'difference' in the material world. For similar epistemological reasons (that are themselves part of the critique of Western thought's ocularcentrism) post-Enlightenment ways of knowing, or validating what counts as knowledge, have tended towards a privileging of rationality which has also been critiqued from a

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 81, in the sense that the 'vertical' axis of metaphor presumes a reference to something, whereas the 'horizontal' axis of metonymy suggests a potentially infinite deferral of contiguous meaning.

⁶⁴ Gill Howie, 'Feminist Philosophy' in *The Future of Philosophy: Towards the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Oliver Leaman (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.105-119, p. 105.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 105, p. 106.

feminist perspective. The epistemological consequences of being a woman, or a feminist, thus raise methodological questions about both the reading and writing of philosophical texts; not only does the metaphorical articulation of masculine and feminine terms as fixed bearers of meaning make philosophy uncritically complicit – perhaps even involved – in perpetuating an apparently ‘natural’ difference between the sexes in the ‘real’ world, but it concurrently aligns the hegemonic masculine position – and consequently philosophy itself – with non-identity, neutrality, rationality and objectivity.⁶⁶ A materialist feminist approach demands that *all* philosophy be seen as a situated social practice, and that the standpoint of a self-same, invariably white, male, all-knowing philosopher-king is also a historically specific subject position. The commitment to a philosophy that concerns itself with the sensuous presentation of the ‘real’ world (as in, the material world in which we find ourselves presently and as the only one available to us) should necessarily remain attentive to the position of women in this ‘real’ world, whilst also considering the philosophical positioning of women to have a bearing on this, and vice versa. With this in mind, the final and critical re-reading of Nancy’s *À l’écoute* proceeds not simply from an anti-ocular orientation but from a specifically anti-phallogocular perspective.

In *Les Muses*, Nancy visits the caves of Lascaux – also, by extension, Plato’s cave – in order to (re)theorize the Platonic metaphysics of creation, and the role of the aesthetic in this creative act. Through this gesture Nancy indubitably also enlists a classical figure of femininity: the muse; Nancy’s œuvre is, however, remarkably silent when it comes to articulating any specific position in relation to gender and sexuality. Kalliopi Nikolopoulou has demonstrated how, in *Les Muses* ‘a thematic link is established through recurring images of femininity.’⁶⁷ She continues to ask, ‘[w]hy does discourse on art – after art’s declared end – need femininity as a necessary topos in order to exist at all?’⁶⁸ Through

⁶⁶ This is a key tenet of Luce Irigaray’s work. See *Ce Sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977) and *Speculum de l’autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974). This line of thinking will be developed more extensively in chapter five.

⁶⁷ Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, “‘L’Art et Les Gens’: Jean-Luc Nancy’s Genealogical Aesthetics’, *College Literature*, 30.2 (2003), 174–93 (p. 176).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 176.

his invocation of a mythological feminine imaginary (in particular, the muse figure who ‘*compels* the poet to do her bidding’⁶⁹) and the metaphors of ‘gesture and its etymological link to gestation’,⁷⁰ Nancy positively rehabilitates the unequivocal materiality of the aesthetic domain that has, in some approaches to the philosophy of aesthetics, been maligned as proof of the art works’ status as mere ‘copy.’ ‘By linking processes of carnal and aesthetic creation’, as Nikolopoulou demonstrates, Nancy articulates a ‘dissipated ancient Greek sense of materiality, for the meaning of *aisthesis* was precisely sense *qua* sensuousness.’⁷¹ Of course this works well for Nancy’s larger project, focused as it is on the always already sensuous presentation of the world and on (re)articulating all the senses of sense (*sens*), comprised as intelligibility, as perception and as direction. Nonetheless, Nancy does this by resorting to metaphorical figures of femininity, which runs the risk of eclipsing – or at least conflating – the lived experience of a historically specific feminine subject position with a fixed mythological imaginary feminine. Or, as Nancy says himself, ‘la jeune fille [la muse] qui est à la fois l’extrémité infiniment fragile de l’art et le passage infiniment ténu de la belle forme dans la transformation de la forme en vérité, cette jeune fille n’a d’autre existence que celle des fruits qu’elle présente’ (*M*, p. 96).

Finally, as Robin James has demonstrated, just as the invocation of the metaphorical feminine has consequences, so too does the invocation of music as a metaphor – and in ways that often overlap with this feminine metaphoricity. In ‘Affective Resonances: On the Uses and Abuses of Music In and For Philosophy’, a formidable article that makes several claims about Nancy’s *À l’écoute* that complement the argument advanced in this chapter, James draws our attention to the way in which affect is often presented as an alternative to theories centred on representation or vision and, crucially, that music is often used ‘as a metaphor for affect.’⁷² Though James in no way challenges the

⁶⁹ Nancy, p. 9 cited in Nikolopoulou, p. 187.

⁷⁰ Nikolopoulou, p. 187. As Nikolopoulou explains, both gesture and gestation etymologically derive from the same Latin root, *gerere*, which means ‘to bear or to carry.’

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷² Robin James, ‘Affective Resonances: On the Uses and Abuses of Music In and For Philosophy’, *PhaenEx*, 7.2 (2012), 59–95, (p. 59).

notion that music is affective, she simply urges philosophers to augment their theorizing about an abstract and affective quasi-magical and extra-logical 'music' with a fuller understanding of musical practices, musicology, and music theory, especially in order to help us better understand 'how actual *music* (practices, theories, works) can help us understand the political dimensions of affect.'⁷³ James also outlines the way in which the philosophical recuperation of metaphorical musical affect too often simply recasts the set of binaries described above. Vision, representation and meaning (*logos*) are associated with masculinity, activity, whiteness and rationality, whilst the object of the gaze, sound, 'music' and sensuous (a-logical) meaning are associated with feminine passivity, the body, and Otherness; rather than disrupting the fundamental binary, the male philosopher is able to appropriate 'feminized experiences of being affected or acted upon while avoiding the denigration and marginalization that go with these experiences *when they are attributed to women*.'⁷⁴ It is thus James's contention that a long history that associates femininity with aesthetic receptivity is indeed rehabilitated to philosophical ends, but 'in terms that reinforce an underlying patriarchal, Orientalist value structure.'⁷⁵

RENVOI À JEAN-LUC NANCY (BETWEEN SILENCE AND SOUND)

In the second section of *À l'écoute* the *corps sonore* is theorized more precisely. We find Nancy's articulation of an acoustic plural ontology replete with maternal metaphorizations: it is the '[c]onstitution matricielle de la résonance' or, as Nancy asks, 'qu'est-ce que le ventre d'une femme enceinte, sinon l'espace ou l'ancre où vient à résonner un nouvel instrument, un nouvel *organon* [...] L'oreille ouvre sur la caverne sonore que nous devenons alors' (*Ec*, pp. 72-3). Or: 'le bruit de son partage (d'avec soi, d'avec les autres): peut-être encore une résonance plus ancienne dans le ventre et du ventre d'une mère' (*Ec*, p. 79). Adrienne Janus has considered *À l'écoute*, and particularly

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 68, James's emphasis.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 68.

Nancy's conceptualization of the *corps sonore*, to be compatible with the kind of 'otocentric' feminist genealogy that she finds in the anti-phallogocentric philosophy of Luce Irigaray. She draws a parallel between the 'dynamic multiple resonances propagated by the embodied female self' and Nancy's *corps sonore* as an 'organ of acoustic parturition from which is born the multiple resonances that give birth to sense.'⁷⁶ However, it provokes an uneasy tension with Irigaray's playful but critical re-appropriation of the link between the womb and the *matriciel* (via *la matrice*) and ultimately to what she sees as Plato's foundational gesture of metaphysical matricide.⁷⁷ Too often, and in spite of the careful destabilization of a straightforward subject-object dichotomy and Nancy's insistent rejection of any original sounding, this mapping onto the maternal-feminine womb/belly risks figuring the *corps sonore* as a receptacle – or at least a space, a 'somewhere else' (*ailleurs*) than the resonance itself, a risk that is fully exposed later when Nancy asks 'ce ventre qu'il regarde n'est-il pas *le lieu où vient retentir sa musique*' (*Ec*, p. 84, my emphasis)? Certainly, it is a considerable limitation that Nancy's sonorous ontology, in spite of itself, requires the resonant chamber of a mother-womb-matrix for its articulation, and resonates with Irigaray's critique of the dominant specular economy which reduces feminine and maternal sexuality to an ultimately unproductive womb, and the illusory ground upon which the male philosophical fantasy is staged. The recurrent slippage between the morphological and the metaphorical maternal reinstates a kind of (specifically gendered) foundationalism that seems to be so at odds with Nancy's larger, anti-foundationalist thinking. Furthermore, he equates the *possibility* of sense with sound; resonance and sonority become the *pre-condition* of significance, whilst somehow also being *beyond* meaning (*l'outré-sens*). Similarly, in 'March in the Spirit in our Ranks', to which we will return in chapter five, music's essentially 'ineffable' quality is aligned not with oversignification which Nancy sees as a fascist perversion, but explicitly, again, with 'a beyond-significance [*outré-signifiance*]' (*MSR*, p. 58). In one of the

⁷⁶ Janus, 'Listening', p. 187.

⁷⁷ See Irigaray, *Speculum*, particularly 'L'ὕστερα de Platon' pp. 301-457. It is worth noting that there are also strong resonances with Derrida's deployment of the 'stéréographique' tympanum in his consideration of philosophy's limits. See 'Tympan', in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. i-xxv.

most problematic passages of *À l'écoute*, where Nancy specifically suggests that we turn 'à nouveau vers la musique, par-delà le sonore abstrait', he asks us to heed three demands (*Ec*, p. 58). Firstly, that we treat "pure résonance" non seulement comme la condition mais aussi comme l'envoi même et l'ouverture du sens' (*Ec*, p. 59). Secondly, we should 'traiter le corps, avant toute distinction de lieux et de fonctions de résonance [...comme] caisse ou tube de résonance de l'outre-sens' (*Ec*, p. 59-60); he also compares this to the sound board of a violin and the 'little hole' in the clarinet. And thirdly, from this point, to consider the 'subject' as (the echo of) the 'l'outre-sens' (*Ec*, p. 60). Given that this has been theorized around the 'resonant chamber' of the maternal belly-womb, we might want to question how it is that 'before any distinction of places' (or functions) — the Artaudian-Deleuzian Body without Organs, to which Nancy intentionally refers — the sonorous body is *already* feminine? We are left to assume that the womb-belly-matrix does not *count* as a function or a specific distinction. It is instead, like the resonance Nancy theorizes, both anterior and posterior, elsewhere or beyond, and timeless.

Nancy also invokes the auditory dimension of the not-yet-subject through the birth-cry of the vagitus — or even the infant still *in utero* — to insist on the materiality of sound as meaning. In many respects, it closely resembles Julia Kristeva's theorizations of *le sémiotique* — the gestural and communicative 'space' of the pre-symbolic (ergo pre-linguistic) — through the (somewhat more conscious, if still problematic) appropriation of Plato's maternal-feminine *chora*. Just as with Nancy's *corps sonore*, the *chora* is both spatial and temporal, and as '[n]i modèle, ni copie, elle est antérieure et sous-jacente à la figuration donc à la spécularisation.'⁷⁸ We might wonder, then, whether Judith Butler's well-known critique of Kristeva — that she 'defends a maternal instinct as a pre-discursive biological necessity, thereby naturalizing a specific cultural configuration of maternity' rather than seeing the maternal body itself as 'a production of a given historical discourse, an effect of culture rather than

⁷⁸ Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique*, p. 24.

its secret and primary cause' — would apply to Nancy too.⁷⁹ It certainly seems that Nancy's *corps sonore*, whilst introducing bodily materiality as indissociable from meaning in a certain sense, also goes a fair way to obscuring — even de-materialising — the maternal-feminine body as a 'lived' body, instead identifying it, as Butler claims of Kristeva, as 'bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself.'⁸⁰

Along with the tendency to describe or articulate music in reference to an uncritically 'fixed' conception of the (maternal) feminine, Nancy also maintains other aspects of the inherited discourses on music and sound (though, no doubt, they are also articulated in relation to the feminine as well). Just as, for Nancy, '[l]a femme est ce qui se divise' (and thus 'woman' ceases to articulate a clear distinction between inside/outside, internal/external, subject/object, etc.) this is more or less homologically mapped onto music's (or sound's) liminality; its ability to traverse the supposed borders or boundaries of a 'subject.' Nancy often characterizes music as an uncontrollable invasion; 'la présence sonore arrive: elle comporte une *attaque*' (*Ec*, p. 34). Whilst this co-mingling of sound is figured, also, positively — as the inherently 'shared' nature of sound, or the essential sonority of the being-with — it is also recast in alarmingly familiar terms. He asserts that 'le visuel serait tendanciellement mimétique, et le sonore tendanciellement méthexique (c'est-à-dire dans l'ordre de la participation, du partage ou de la contagion)', thus preserving a line of thought directly from Plato that sees music as having a privileged and direct access to the soul, and to be intimately related to interiority (*Ec*, p. 27); a lineage that doubtlessly assists — *persists* — in also keeping other inheritances in play. As outlined above, there is a long history of figuring aesthetic experience in terms of a feminized passivity or receptivity, and indeed it seems clear that Nancy too participates in this assumption; Robin James has shown convincingly the extent to which this assumption is omnipresent in *À l'écoute*, where vision is associated with masculinity, whilst being "resonant" is to experience

⁷⁹ Judith Butler, 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva', *Hypatia*, 3.3 (1988), 104–18 (p. 104, p. 106).

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 105.

“acoustic penetration”.⁸¹ This provokes not only an uneasy tension with feminist ontologies ‘for which bodily integrity is an almost unquestioned good’, but leads to the question, as Diane Perpich outlines, of ‘whether Nancy’s conception of bodies as subject to a law of inevitable, multiple intrusion is not in some ways a very white, masculine move, attached to a horizon and history of privilege that should give feminists and others pause.’⁸² Simultaneously, though Nancy’s work may, in a certain sense, be doing crucial work in terms of rehabilitating a sonorous and affective dimension to philosophy, by retreading the path of a feminized aesthetic passivity, femininity itself is only valued ‘when it appears in males, only when it dons the trappings of whiteness, and thus continues to marginalize women and non-whites *as listeners*.’⁸³ Indeed, as we will see shortly, the Titian painting which Nancy enlists as a visual support for his sonorous ontology displays the naked Venus apparently unaware of the organist’s music. In Jonathan Sterne’s compelling introduction to *The Audible Past* – an interdisciplinary and thought-provoking history of sound that avoids many of the pitfalls of musicology or theory working independently – he cautions against invoking such assumptions, which he sees as stemming from a kind of otic essentialism. As he points out, the difference between sight and sound has often been pre-conceived as emerging from naturally occurring ‘biological, psychological, and physical facts’, and it is from this implied assumption that even supposedly ‘cultural’ analyses of sound (and music) emerge.⁸⁴ Sterne constructs a compelling ‘audio-visual litany’ that demonstrates the inherent dualities in our sound-thinking. It includes, amongst others, observations such as: ‘hearing immerses its subject, vision offers a perspective’ or ‘hearing is about affect, vision is about intellect’ or ‘hearing tends toward subjectivity, vision tends toward objectivity.’⁸⁵ All of this, he

⁸¹ James, ‘Affective Resonances’, p. 67, citing Nancy, *Listening*, p. 3.

⁸² Diane Perpich, ‘Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity’, *Hypatia*, 20.3 (2005), 75–91 (p. 85-6).

⁸³ James, ‘Affective Resonances’, p. 68.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 15.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

goes on to say, 'idealizes hearing [...and thus voice as speech and as presence] as manifesting a kind of pure interiority.'⁸⁶

With this in mind, it becomes somewhat easier to explain how quiet — perhaps even 'silent' — the *corps sonore* is. Whilst certain sounds have 'theoretically' been allowed in — certainly the vagitus departing from the womb and the borborygmous of the digesting belly — the remainder comes primarily from the canon of high-art music. We have a reference to Mozart's clarinet concerto (although, rather interestingly, heard only through the spectacle of a film, *Le Concert de Mozart*) and, above all, several references to Wagner (*Ec*, p. 63). In spite of the invasive nature of sound that Nancy theorizes, Janus observes how the *corps sonore* 'never takes on the substantiality and volume of the noises that both attack and envelop us in a world where we increasingly use the noise of one technology [...] to block out the other.'⁸⁷ As Janus continues to ask, '[h]ow much does the relative suppression of noise in his space of listening resemble a nineteenth-century concert hall? Why does he not make use of concepts associated with recent developments in music that would potentially be productive [...For example,] the concept of "renvoi" as reverberation, offering and return, as the subject sensing itself sensing, is never linked to the notion of a feedback loop.'⁸⁸ We might wonder whether there really is any sound in the *corps sonore* at all. Whilst examples of sounds are invoked, they are instrumentalized in articulating not a philosophy of sound, but the (maternal) *space* of its endless return, the *renvoi*; resonance as a first principle, and as pre-condition or possibility. It is not the 'beat' itself, but that rhythm, as he states elsewhere, 'n'"apparaît" pas, il est le battement de l'apparaître en tant que celui-ci qui consiste simultanément et indissociablement dans le mouvement de venir et de partir des formes ou des présences en général, et dans l'hétérogénéité qui espace la pluralité sensitive ou sensuelle' (*M*, p. 46). Perhaps the title of the middle section, 'Interlude: musique mutique', is rather more revealing than at first it might

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ Janus, 'Listening', p. 198.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 200.

appear. Finally, through his etymological meditation on the word *mot* (from *mutum*, then, variously, *mu*, *motus*, *muô*, *mouth*, et al.) we find the same pull towards a story of origins as in Rousseau, replete with an evocation of an originary scene of harvest and cultivation (see *Ec*, p. 48).

Nancy's collaborator and colleague, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, whose own musical offerings we will consider in depth in the following chapter, suggests that philosophy has often aspired to 'un *dire pur* (d'une parole, d'un discours purement transparent à ce qu'ils devraient immédiatement signifier: la vérité, l'être, l'absolu, etc.)' (*Spt1*, p. 9). We might wonder here whether Nancy is guilty of entertaining the dream of a 'pure listening', upon which an anti-ocular philosophy could be built? De-historicising listening in order to think of it as a 'natural' phenomenon to which we can legitimately turn simply buys into a problematic essentialism, rather than understanding the inheritance of our ears as always already cultural. As Sterne asserts, '[t]here is no "mere" or innocent description of interior auditory experience. The attempt to describe sound or the act of hearing in itself — as if the sonic dimension of human life inhabited a space prior to or outside history — strives for a false transcendence', and reinstates the kind of philosophy against which Nancy is trying to turn by asserting a sonic, but nonetheless 'universal human subject.'⁸⁹

CODA

Finally, this chapter (re)turns to Titian's painting. Nancy concludes his meditation on listening by reading this painting as a manifestation of the specifically musical *corps sonore* in action. He asks: 'ce ventre qu'il regarde n'est-il pas le lieu où vient retentir sa musique, et n'est-ce pas aussi bien de la résonance de son instrument qu'il est à l'écoute?' (*Ec*, p. 84). He argues that this properly theatrical scene, by way of the perspective of the trees and the supposedly 'outside' space against which this more intimate scene of music-making is played intermingle so that 'le dedans et le dehors ouvrent

⁸⁹ Sterne, p. 19.

l'un sur l'autre' (*Ec*, p. 84); the trees outside expand the pipes of the organ, and thus the 'resonance' of the scene as a whole. Nevertheless, why does Nancy require the naked body of a woman — and Venus, as the archetypal image of feminine sexuality, no less — to propound his musical theorizations? Janus suggests, in her reading of the same moment in *À l'écoute*, that Nancy both offers 'the embodied mass of Titian's fleshy Venus as a buffer' and also that the scene presents a 'visual image of a mode of listening that is different to that of Schopenhauer, Wagner, and the early Nietzsche, indeed different to the whole Western (Helleno-Christian) tradition of musico-theological listening since Plato.'⁹⁰ As Janus acknowledges, in this sacrificial tradition of musical listening, auditors are required to sublimate their bodily responses to the music and instead attend to primarily structural or harmonic features in order to ideate the sonorous in visual or spatial terms. However, whilst Venus's fleshy body is instrumental in suggesting, even demanding, that listening be conceived in corporeal and not just intellectual terms, the role of Venus's body in facilitating the organist's bodily response — his (and our) experience of a 'sensual excess' — is, nonetheless, contestable. In so doing, the female body is simply (re)aligned with the apparently sensuous, methexical, 'watery' — to follow Janus — nature of sound, and all in music — the properly *musical* — that is irreducible to *logos* or sense (as meaning).

Moreover, although Nancy is happy to acknowledge that the organist is certainly gazing sensually at the naked Venus, he contends that the gaze is directed towards her belly (presumably in order to make his argument that the musician's gaze merely directs us to the belly-womb-matrix on, in, or with which the *corps sonore* is able to make itself resound, and thus folds the visual aspect into a more essential relationship to sonority), but it seems evident that the organist's gaze is actually directed towards Venus's crotch. Do we not find, rather more revealingly, a psycho-sexual scene of acoustic self-identification, whereby the male organist (read, also, philosopher) — effectively blinded by the threat of castration — has to continue to play his 'organ' in order to initiate an otic disavowal of what he has (not) seen. Furthermore, for all Nancy's emphasis on sound as sharing and opening, there

⁹⁰ Janus, 'Soundings', p. 79, p. 80.

is no reciprocity between Venus and the organist; he cannot solicit her (or Cupid's) attention, locked as they are in their pre-cultural dyad. Whilst she is required for *his* hearing and/or listening, the painting suggests that she cannot hear anything at all. She is absent, elsewhere, not-whole; permanently beyond the phallic circulation of law, language and meaning or, as Lacan famously put it in *Encore: le séminaire, livre XX*, 'il n'y a pas la femme, la femme n'est pas toute.'⁹¹

Finally, and perhaps most curiously of all, Nancy is keen to insist that 'on fera répondre à ce tableau la musique de Wagner, au moment où Tristan, à la voix d'Isolde, s'écrie: "Quoi, j'entends la lumière?"' (*Ec*, pp. 84-5). Although the musical response undoubtedly enables Nancy to fold the implicit sonority of the painting into a more explicit relation with sound and/or music, why Nancy views this music in particular as an obvious response to Titian's painting is far from clear. Nonetheless, it is certainly revealing in terms of the musical framing it alludes to. What Nancy offers us as 'proof' of his theoretical position is as before, the libretto, and rather strangely the score of the vocal line from Isolde's last utterance ('[unbe]wußt höchste Lust'/'unconscious supreme bliss') at the end of the opera, with *no mention* of the music accompanying them. Neither the quiet *tremolo* strings accompanying Tristan's final words nor the echo of the 'last consolation' motif in the woodwind, nor the timbre and texture of the voices and instruments nor even the luscious minor plagal cadence – itself a *re-sounding* of the long-awaited resolution of the Tristan chord, only heard for the first time a few bars previously and coinciding with Isolde's death/transfiguration – appear to be of any interest.⁹² Beyond the perhaps easy observation that Nancy is, despite appearances, not actually talking about music at all, he nonetheless offers us an interesting musical chronology of the *corps sonore*. Nancy's theorization of a philosophical listening takes us directly from Rameau's attempt at systematizing and codifying a nascent tonality, through to Wagner — and not just any Wagner, but Wagner's *opus metaphysicum*, *Tristan und Isolde*, where tonality begins its journey

⁹¹ Lacan and Miller, p. 14.

⁹² For more on the motives in *Tristan and Isolde*, see Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

towards modernist disintegration and fragmentation. The 'Tristan chord', in failing to resolve, by 'resolving' onto a dissonance – a dissonance only resolved 'properly' and thus (temporarily) restoring tonality nearly four hours later, at the very moment Nancy cites – brackets our 'mute' musical scene of philosophical listening as synonymous with the reverently 'silent' reception of canonic, predominantly tonal, works in the classical concert hall. The time-space of Nancy's *corps sonore* is an entirely tonal space, which serves, at the same time — as was Rameau's agenda in the original articulation of the *corps sonore* — to dehistoricize and naturalize tonality. Indeed, if we return yet again to the supposed 'representation' of the *corps sonore* in Titian's painting, we find a third instance of the internal/external dichotomy with the trees also circumscribing what is private and public; a distinction that has been crucial to the history of music, and the precise example – the mansion garden – that Richard Leppert gives as a 'prototype of the modern concert hall, which delineates a physical space for a certain kind of music, whose sonorities are the acoustic signs of a certain privileged group of people.'⁹³ Concomitantly, then, if silence and the delimited space of the concert hall are one and the same — remembering that Nancy's philosophical space of *renvoi* does not refer to the articulation of a 'beat' but the gap *between* the beats that allows the temporal-spatial matrix to unfold — the heyday of the Western high art tradition and its canonic works are also rendered neutral, transhistoric and asocial. In sharp contrast, the musical reflections on the ethico-aesthetic ramifications of techno and rock are *always* made through an understanding that they relate, constitutively, to the society and culture whence they came. Similarly, though jazz and rock (and its multitude of sub-genres) are credited with rehabilitating an essential 'force' – especially because they are 'à la fois une musique et une danse' (Smr, p. 79) – which subsequently effects changing morals or traditions on the socio-cultural level, they are never afforded such a privileged role *vis-à-vis* interiority and Nancy's resonant ontology. Whether one is convinced, or not, by Nancy's assertions about rock and techno, the attempt to grapple with the worldliness of specific musical genres leads to far harder,

⁹³ Richard D Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 32.

though considerably more interesting questions about music's affective relation to politics and society.

Ultimately, then, Nancy's insistence in *À l'écoute* that we should 'remonter du sujet phénoménologique [...] à un sujet résonant' thus appears to be founded on a fairly well-worn metaphysical sonotropism (*Ec*, p. 44). Although he claims that the move 'de l'ordre phénoménologique jusqu'au retrait et au recel ontologique, n'est pas par accident un pas qui passe du regard à l'écoute' this move necessarily resorts to an essentialising of sound and listening as somehow subsisting outside of time or culture and, more tellingly, perhaps, still relies on the very traditional realm of the (erotic) male gaze directed towards the naked female body for its final exposition (*Ec*, p. 45). Whilst it may be the case that what Nancy is trying to offer us in *À l'écoute* is a methodology for philosophy, one where, as Janus claims, we are asked to 'attend to resonances of perception and meaning yet to emerge and always passing away',⁹⁴ it nevertheless remains problematic to figure this in terms of an essentially 'natural' maternal-feminine, and to frame it against the apparently neutral backdrop of tonality figured *as* synonymous with music (in general).

⁹⁴ Janus, 'Listening', p. 189.

Chapter III: 'Catacoustic' Subjects and the Injustice of Being Born: Lacoue-Labarthe's Musical Maternal Muse

Pas de femme, donc, si j'ai bien lu. Fors la mère bien entendu. Mais cela fait partie du système, la mère est la figure sans figure d'une figurante. Elle donne lieu à toutes les figures en se perdant au fond de la scène comme un personnage anonyme. Tout lui revient, et d'abord la vie, tout s'adresse à elle et s'y destine. Elle survit à la condition de rester au fond.¹

This chapter approaches two texts by Lacoue-Labarthe, both of which focus – more or less explicitly – on the relationship between music and philosophy. The first, 'L'Écho du sujet', is from the well-known collection *Le Sujet de la philosophie: Typographies I* (1979) and is, Derrida claims, the 'déploiement le plus impressionnant' of a theme that runs across Lacoue-Labarthe's work: that of 'l'autos et de son rapport-à-soi comme rythme.'² The second text, which is far less well-known – in fact, I would venture to say, almost entirely unknown – is a succinct but lucid transcript³ of a talk given through the 'Petites conférences' series at the Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil: *Le Chant des Muses: petite conférence sur la musique* (2005). Aimed, as it is, at a young and non-specialist audience, the style and register are apposite to the context, and thus the absolute opposite of the rigorously academic and exceedingly technically and philosophically dense 'L'Écho du sujet;' and yet very little, *theoretically*, is found in one that isn't in the other. Indeed, both focus on several clear themes: the (essential) relationship between music and philosophy; the subject's relationship to sound/sonority and, ultimately, the specifically musical; the fundamental link between music and language, as well as teasing apart the supposedly 'musical' aspects of language itself (prosody, diction, and lexis). And most obviously, both apparently reach the same conclusion: that the specifically *musical* aspects of the 'catacoustic' subject – the subject that is given to 'itself' pre-specularly through echo, rather than through reflection – is profoundly and inescapably linked to the maternal. In the following analysis of these texts and their

¹ Jacques Derrida, Claude Lévesque, and Christie McDonald, *L'Oreille de l'autre: otobiographies, transferts, traductions: textes et débats avec Jacques Derrida* (Montréal: VLB, 1982), p. 56.

² Jacques Derrida, *Psyché: inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), p. 627.

³ Or rather, a retrospectively re-habilitated transcript as, '[e]n raison d'un dysfonctionnement technique' only the last third and the following questions were saved. See the 'Avertissement de l'auteur' in *CM*, p. 9.

treatment of such themes, I will also make occasional reference to what could be considered Lacoue-Labarthe's major work on music – *Musica ficta: figures de Wagner* – where relevant, as well as some of the essays collected in the recently published volume dedicated specifically to Lacoue-Labarthe's writings on music;⁴ *Musica ficta* in particular, however, will be the focus of a more sustained critique in the concluding chapter. Finally, this chapter aims to offer both a critical (largely in this chapter) though ultimately sympathetic (as we will see in chapter five) reading of Lacoue-Labarthe's still 'stubbornly under-appreciated' œuvre: an absence that is all the more remarkable, as Martin Crowley describes, given that he was 'so closely involved in the development of such a key part of recent French thought.'⁵

LEGACIES AND LEGENDS: UNPICKING THE PHILOSOPHICAL INHERITANCE

It seems germane to begin by tracing the broader strands of Lacoue-Labarthe's patient but dense thinking, before relating them to the specifically musical concerns at hand. His work is seen to be influenced primarily by Derrida, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, although a debt to Benjamin is often overlooked, certainly in Anglophone criticism,⁶ and often focuses on – or takes as its springboard – the topics of German Romanticism, tragedy, the Heideggerian legacy and its deeply problematic relation to Nazism. Much of his work, from its early underpinnings in the revolutionary verve of the late 1960s, has been in the form of collaborations with his friend and colleague, Jean-Luc Nancy who, as explored in the previous chapter, has also been strongly influenced by Heidegger and Derrida, and with whom he shares a profound concern about, and interest in, concepts such as community, aesthetics, and politics. As with many of his contemporaries thinking and writing in the exhilarating momentum of what has been labelled (sometimes with objection) as poststructuralism, disillusionment with

⁴ See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Pour n'en pas finir: écrits sur la musique*, ed. by Aristide Bianchi and Leonid Kharlamov (Paris: Christian Bourgois éditeur, 2015).

⁵ Martin Crowley, 'Review: *Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: (Un)timely Meditations*. By John McKeane. Oxford: Legenda, 2015', *French Studies*, 70.1 (2016), p. 130.

⁶ See John McKeane, *Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: (Un)timely Meditations* (London: Legenda, 2015).

structuralism alongside contemporary political instability (and the failed revolution of May 1968) led to a renewed engagement with important historical figures such as Marx and Freud (via Lacan) – including from a feminist perspective – as well as with anarchism and phenomenology. A major influence on Lacoue-Labarthe, as with Nancy, is of course Derridean *déconstruction*: a method or a reading strategy that challenges and exposes a reliance on, or assumption of, hierarchical binaries that fix meaning as monolithic, oppositional, and singular, and instead explores the multiplicity of signifiers and the perpetual interplay of differences which constitute, but are never reducible to, their meaning, leading to what is perhaps Derrida's most famous concept: *différance*. Furthermore, the destabilization of meaning parallels a decentering not only of the author but of the subject at large (again, famously, through Derrida's critique of the logocentric metaphysics of presence) and thus, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, critiques the fiction of the objective, universal, self-same, straight, white male. At root, then, Lacoue-Labarthe emerges from a group of figures whose core concerns are ultimately at the level of language though who, more importantly, 'insist upon the power of writing to transform rather than simply represent our experiences.'⁷

We can now turn to a consideration of how these concerns are dealt with in a specifically Lacoue-Labarthean vein; his own theoretical framing of subjectivity as – again drawing on the 'de-' prefix – *désistance*, and its underpinnings in what are likely his major philosophical contributions: his rethinking of mimesis and his formulation of (onto)typology. When it comes to the formulation of properly philosophical 'concepts' (rather than readings of, for example, Hölderlin, Celan, or Wagner) there are clearly two major interlocutors: Derrida and Heidegger, with an important third role played by Nietzsche. As John McKeane hints, following the Derridean project and its insuperable role in Lacoue-Labarthe's thought, it might be more appropriate to consider him not so much as a philosopher but as a practitioner of deconstructive reading, which instead 'looks at philosophical texts, stripping them of any privileged status [...] without affording privileged status to their concepts as opposed to the

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1.

repetitions and rhythms through and by which they are written.⁸ He thus explicitly rejects the notion that philosophy, through its reification of seemingly abstract or conceptual thinking, 'is able simply to sideline the difficulties posed by language.'⁹ Further still, he identifies in this aspiration one of philosophy's constitutively metaphysical moments; its hope of 'un *dire pur* (d'une parole, d'un discours purement transparent à ce qu'ils devraient immédiatement signifier: la vérité, l'être, l'absolu, etc.)' (*Spt1*, p. 9). His contention is, then, as Ian James summarizes, 'that philosophical discourse, in its metaphysical moment, is itself responsible for the distinction between philosophy and literature' and is a foundational move that allows philosophy to preserve its (false) illusion of objective purity.¹⁰ In this respect it should be clear that Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophy – unsurprisingly, given the extent of their collaborations – is interwoven with major strands of Nancy's philosophical agenda. Finally, this deconstruction of philosophy's own metaphysical constitution places him firmly in the neo-Heideggerian tradition of the overcoming of metaphysics; the legacy of which he both perpetuates and, significantly, critiques in deconstructive readings that reveal the *unthought* of Heidegger's project. Most provocatively, this critique has led to the claim that Heidegger's well-known affiliation with the Nazis can be traced back not only to his political actions – he not only joined the Nazi party in 1933, but ultimately failed to apologize, clarify or retract his apparent support for National Socialism – but to his philosophical thought too (see *Fp*, in particular).

These (re)positions and inheritances unsurprisingly have numerous resonances and consequences for his formulations of the (*désistant*) subject and (originary) mimesis, which are closely related to each other: given music's complex historical relationship to mimesis, as set out in chapter one, it will be interesting to see how Lacoue-Labarthe deals with the relationship between music and mimesis. Mimesis is generally taken to mean 'representation' or 'imitation', both of which presuppose a pre-existing and preceding 'presentation' (being, object, form, etc.) upon which the representation or

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁰ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 21.

imitation is modelled; of which it is a merely secondary and (often) impoverished imitation of the 'real thing.' For Plato (as for his student, Aristotle), mimesis is the representation of nature and ideal forms/worlds; in and of itself it is neither straightforwardly good or bad, but through its entanglements with truth and deception it can have respectively positive or negative consequences for the individual and the polis. It is also, in Plato's theorization, intractably connected to education and knowledge as demonstrated by the allegory of the cave; as noted in chapter one, Plato also redefines art as essentially mimetic – though as we have seen, music has a particularly complicated configuration in this regard.¹¹ As Potolsky notes, this 'conceptual revolution' has some considerable knock-on effects, most obviously that once art (and particularly poetry) is 'figured as secondary and derivative, distinguished from reason and truth and associated with femininity and childhood, poetry comes to seem inappropriate to the needs of current Greek society' and thus the poet is expelled from the ideal city state.¹² Furthermore, this provokes considerable difficulty when it comes to 'ideal' education. Children need to be told stories, the 'acceptable ones' that will instil in them virtuous characteristics; narratives that, through imitation and emulation of exemplary figures, will in turn form them as model citizens – an irreducibly mimetic process (377c).¹³ Historical narratives told, rather than demonstrated, in a *diegetic* rather than *mimetic* fashion are preferable in this regard; Plato is deeply suspicious of theatrical mimesis (such as in tragedy) which produces sympathetic feelings in the audience based on emotion, not reason, the effects of which can be felt, he claims, far beyond the theatre.¹⁴

Just as with Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe's post-Heideggerian project is concerned with the overcoming of metaphysics, and thus refuses to ground or locate Being through reference to a predetermined fixed and unchanging point of reference; thus identities are no longer mimetically determined as a mere reflection of some extra-worldly absolute and immaterial signified that guarantees subjectival and

¹¹ See chapter one, 'Music, *Mousike*, Muses (and Sirens).'

¹² Potolsky, p. 30.

¹³ Plato, *Republic*, p. 71.

¹⁴ See Potolsky, p. 27.

epistemological stability. Furthermore, this is interwoven with the thinking of a neo-Heideggerian and 'deeper' history of Being, or *Seinsgeschichte*; indeed, as McKeane has pointed out, it is Lacoue-Labarthe's (along with Heidegger's) contention that 'Western philosophy can and should be referred to as a unitary tradition, and what's more, as one requiring deconstruction i.e. requiring that we unpack the various stages of its construction and bring to light the various Others that have been excluded during this process.'¹⁵ It is thus interested in unpicking 'the fundamental attitudes that determine an entire civilization', rather than local or epochal histories (though these, as with Heidegger, may also be considered too).¹⁶ However, it is Lacoue-Labarthe's supposition – both with and against Heidegger – that the (problematic) thinking of mimesis is primary, and more deeply rooted than the (failed) thinking of Being (see 'Œdipe comme figure' in *Imt2*). This mode of thinking occasions a fundamental rupture with the Socratic tradition inherited from Plato onwards: mimesis is no longer to be thought as the (re)creation of a more fundamental (and unmediated) nature but instead describes identity (in the broadest sense) and acts of (re)creation (i.e. *poiesis*, whether as *physis* or *techne*) as a dialogue with or a response to what has preceded (which was itself a response to what preceded that, and so on, *ad infinitum*). It is therefore a theory of originary mimesis – a theory of (re)creation without recourse to a fixed origin from which it emerges; mimesis *as* origin – or, as McKeane confirms, of 'mimesis without model.'¹⁷ This has two immediate and obvious consequences: mimesis is no longer the process by which something is reproduced; it simply *is*, itself, *poiesis* (see, in particular, 'Typographie' in *Spt1* and *Imt2* in general), and secondly, Being is fundamentally and constitutively abyssal. It turns towards an essential relationality and asserts, as Alison Ross describes, that 'meaning is not beyond presentation, [but] that all occurs in history, God and all, as experience.'¹⁸

¹⁵ McKeane, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶ Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 104.

¹⁷ McKeane, p. 155.

¹⁸ Ross, p. 132.

As indicated above, this has particular consequences for the Lacoue-Labartheian subject. As John Martis demonstrates, Lacoue-Labarthe draws on and expands the common French usage of *désistement* (as in ‘withdrawal or standing down of a person from a political position, a law suit, and so on’¹⁹) to explicate his formulation of the subject that comes into being always already and only through an exposure to something beyond or outside of itself. Of course, *désister*, as Derrida has noted, shares a familial relationship with a whole host of Latinate words, such as consist, persist, insist, assist, etc., all marked by their shared root: *sistere*, meaning ‘to (cause to) stand.’ What Lacoue-Labarthe’s formulation thus highlights is the essential paradox of originary mimesis: the subject is only a subject through its withdrawal – its standing down (and this, as we shall see, is of central concern to the rhythmic and catacoustic subject articulated in ‘L’Écho du sujet’). Or, as Martis describes, ‘[w]hat is depicted *en abyme* is the infinite deferral of the identity of what is withdrawn. The subject is, in its very subjectivity, “revealed” as a withdrawn subject, and so on.’²⁰ Mimetic deconstruction, figured elsewhere in Lacoue-Labarthe’s work as an *hyperbologique*, concomitantly directs his project towards both aesthetics and politics; if identity (as well as origins or essences) are now secondary effects of a more fundamental or primary technique (mimesis without model/origin) his concern is now with how these ‘secondary terms [are] worked into form by a figure.’²¹

¹⁹ John Martis, *Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: Representation and the Loss of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 41.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 59.

²¹ Ross, p. 114.

'WOULDN'T YOU JUST DIE WITHOUT MAHLER?'

Il faut bien avouer que le moi n'est qu'un écho.
– Valéry

*Tout est rythme [Rhythmus],
le destin tout entier de l'homme est un seul rythme céleste,
de même que l'œuvre d'art est un unique rythme.*
– Hölderlin (as cited by Lacoue-Labarthe)

...parce que toute âme est un noeud rythmique.
– Mallarmé

And so now we can turn to the consideration of the specifically musical in Lacoue-Labarthe's œuvre. 'L'Écho du sujet' proceeds from what Lacoue-Labarthe intuitively feels to be true, based on a trilogy of citations, above, from Valéry, Mallarmé, and Hölderlin, all of which suggest that the self is either an echo (presumably, following Lacoue-Labarthe's thinking of originary mimesis, without origin) or a rhythm. This 'hunch' is put into play with the observation that in the history of modern philosophy, on at least two, highly prominent occasions, a certain confessional mode of philosophizing – as well as a sort of pathological delirium, or even madness proper – has played out alongside the would-be musician status of those philosophers: Rousseau and Nietzsche. Furthermore, Lacoue-Labarthe notes, a parallel trajectory exists in the literary domain, citing the examples of Proust, Diderot, and Laporte, as well as Mann and Hesse. This allows him to make sense of and add context to what is evidently the guiding question of the text: 'quel rapport y a-t-il entre *autobiographie* et *musique*? Ou, plus précisément, et pour expliciter quand même un peu les choses: qu'est-ce qui lie entre elles l'autobiographie, c'est-à-dire en fait la contrainte ou la compulsion (*Zwang*) autobiographique (le besoin de raconter, de s'avouer, de s'écrire), et la musique – la hantise ou l'obsession de la musique?' (Es, p. 221) And, finally, how does this relate to 'la problématique plus générale du *sujet*'? (Es, p. 221, Lacoue-Labarthe's emphasis). Just as we have seen with Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe appeals to the intra-philosophical distinction between the visual and the audible in order to explore whether it is possible to go '*en deçà* du "seuil théorique" lui-même [...] au lieu où la *théorie du sujet* (mais peut-être, aussi bien, le *sujet de la théorie*) devrait, si j'ose dire, se voir' and thus to disarm philosophy/theory of what is, from Plato

through to Lacan, its privileged specular weaponry, asking instead concerning ‘ce qui arrive lorsque l’on remonte de Narcisse à Echo [... ?] Qu’est-ce qu’un phénomène “catacoustique”?’ (Es, p. 227, Lacoue-Labarthe’s emphasis).

‘Catacoustics’ is the branch of acoustics that studies echoes and also derives, as Amittai F. Aviram notes, from the Greek verb *katakouein*, which means both “to listen to” and “to obey”.²² Thus the word both neatly encapsulates what is to become Lacoue-Labarthe’s figuring of a pre-specular, inner-echo, and the inescapable demand of the musical obsession. He takes as the central ‘object’ of his enquiry the widely known text by the psychoanalyst, Theodor Reik, *The Haunting Melody*, that documents a 25-year-long attempt at understanding his own experience of an ‘hantise musicale;’ the involuntary return of a melody following the death of his friend, mentor and fellow psychoanalyst, Karl Abraham. It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a thorough summary of what is an exceedingly well-worked and strikingly dense text; nonetheless, a brief excursus to explain the key moments of both Reik’s text, and Lacoue-Labarthe’s reading of it is, needless to say, necessary.

I. Autobiography

The starting point of the narrative for our purposes is when Reik, upon hearing of the death of Abraham, decides to take a walk in the (snowy and *unheimlich*) forest and realizes that he is being ‘haunted’ by the chorale from the final movement of Mahler’s second symphony – a haunting that both provoked the auto-analysis-cum-autobiography, and which continued until he gave the memorial speech at Abraham’s funeral. Reik initially struggles to understand the association of Mahler with Abraham, observing that Abraham did not even like Mahler’s music, until he notes that Mahler found the inspiration for the chorale at the funeral of his mentor, von Bulow. This realisation thus produces, as Lacoue-Labarthe comments, a complementary set of artistic/analytic filial pairings: through

²² Amittai F. Aviram, *Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 215.

Mahler's identification with his mentor, von Bulow, and Reik's identification with his mentor, Abraham, we are left with Bulow/Mahler (with Beethoven in the background) and Abraham/Reik (with Freud in the background). A number of key moments follow, which allow Reik to proceed with the analysis. Firstly, following the memorial speech given by Reik, Federn makes a 'Freudian slip' when he offers his thanks for the speech just heard by Abraham – an error which leads Reik to wonder whether Federn wished him also dead, or whether he saw him as an equal or successor to Abraham – a feeling he dismisses as impossible but that nonetheless, through self-analysis, reveals to him a sense of rivalry. Secondly, he witnesses a funeral procession where a young boy asks his mother why there is music as the dead cannot hear it. This incites the feeling – and his recognition – of an underlying guilt; the realisation that we do not share quickly enough our feelings of love and affection with the (still) living. Finally, he is proud of a moment in the memorial speech – the repetition of an i-vowel – that he considers to be particularly stylish, and the sense of style is linked, for Reik, to Abraham's 'proper' north German character and accent (especially in comparison to his own 'improper' Austrian accent) and consequently to the mother tongue. Thus, through Reik's auto-analysis, this heady trilogy of guilt, rivalry and style, become essentially linked to the autobiographical impulse. 'Style' – often called, in an Aristotelian vein, *lexis*, by Lacoue-Labarthe – appears to be essentially musical, or at least what lends music, drawing on Benveniste, its 'signifiante' (p. 243), and thus its participation in a shared (and inherently social) material and worldly universe of signs. As Lacoue-Labarthe demonstrates, what interests Reik here 'n'est pas de l'ordre, à strictement parler, du langage mais, intéressant la langue, intéresse dans la langue, dans l'usage de la langue [...] sa part *musicale*, prosodique ou mélodique'; in short, 'la voix: l'intonation, le débit, le ton, les inflexions, le mélisme, le rythme, voire le timbre (ou ce que Barthes appelle le "grain")' and thus 'une stylistique' (Es, pp. 243-4). He continues to explain how these aspects – that are not properly linguistic, according to Lacoue-Labarthe – undercut and escape 'la partition métaphysique (théorique) qui les sous-tend toujours: sensible/intelligible, matière/forme, corps/esprit, chose/idée, etc.' and are, as well as being untheorizable, also 'social, historique, culturel, esthétique, – bref, *éthique*, au sens rigoureux du mot *êthos*' (Es, p. 244). Lacoue-Labarthe thus invites

the suspicion that certain essential characteristics – supposedly untheorizable as they may be – are nonetheless equally applicable to aspects of both language and music, thus neatly deconstructing a clear music/language binary in the process.

II. Allo-/Heterothanatology

Of course, this doesn't fully explain either the observed connection between the musical obsession and autobiography, or the subject's reaction to – or affinity for – a particular piece of music. Needless to say, it is not insignificant that the symphony haunting Reik is Mahler's 2nd, also known as the 'Resurrection', after the poem (Klopstock's *Die Auferstehung*) that forms the text of the final movement (the haunting melody). The first movement begins with the death of the hero (the *Totenfeier* or Funeral Rites), the second through fourth movements remember happy times with the deceased and then subsequently meditate on the meaninglessness of life, and finally the fifth movement (re)presents the redemption and resurrection of the hero/protagonist. Thus we are presented with a narrative symphonic form – much as Mahler later withdrew the programme from circulation – that, through the resurrection of the hero, enacts the narcissistic wish for posterity, and the impossibility – well observed by Freud – of conceptualising one's own death, except as (still living) witness to it. However, whilst there is ample material for analysis in the text and programme of the chorale, Reik pushes the question further – and certainly beyond anything foreclosed by Freud's well-known amusicality – to try and understand the connection between the psyche and music 'itself'; the *characteristic* parallelism that Reik observes between himself and Mahler with regards to their respective filial pairs (compounded, further, by Bulow's admiration for Mahler as a conductor, but not as a composer and Abraham's respect for Reik as a *theorist*, but not as a practitioner) pushes him to locate the significance of the haunting melody in an unremittingly elusive and unconscious, but nonetheless perceptible stylistics. Music's *significance* is thus, as Lacoue-Labarthe surmizes in a Nietzschean or Heideggerian vein, associated with the 'représentation d'une *Stimmung* inconsciente' (Es, p. 273). Style is, therefore, double: 'c'est tout d'abord un phénomène de diction ou d'énonciation

[...] mais c'est aussi le "caractère": l'incisé et le grave, le prescrit (ou le pré-inscrit), le "programmé" d'un sujet – soit, dit-il, l'inconscient' (Es, p. 251). This returns us, then, to the intraphilosophical distinctions already commented upon by Lacoue-Labarthe (such as the visual and the audible), the musical subject's relation to these divisions, and the omnipresence of the specular threshold: all that is inadmissible *theoretically* seems to be provoked by music and yet is intelligible only through speculation. Nonetheless, the *désistant* and split subject – the subject apprehended through its mirror image, and who is therefore split from 'itself', from the (always already) dead other from whose non-separation the not-yet-subject constituted its non-identity, thus necessitating the subject's own imaginary death – appears to find a residue of its pre-specular echo in the affective dimension of music. The (tragic) catharsis is the 'première reproduction ou répétition, ce premier mimème *immédiat* de l'Un originaire [... ;] la musique guérit en somme', says Lacoue-Labarthe (Es, p. 275). Consequently, autobiography is reconceived as always allothanatography (or more properly, heterothanatography – allo- implying a doubling of the *same* subject, rather than radical exteriority of an absolute other), and the duplicity of style (as both enunciation and *ethos*; the subject as writer and as written) appears to ensure music's link to at least one crucial facet of heterothanatography; music's 'essential' nature based on repetition homologically mimes – or actually *is*, it is not clear – the unconscious repetition of the subject in its 'détermination fondamentale [...] comme "ethos" ou comme caractère' (Es, p. 272). For both Reik and Lacoue-Labarthe, then, music is consequently characterized as saving the subject from itself – or rather, from its own death: music 'resurrects.'

MUSIC AND LANGUAGE

Music thus reveals itself as just another mode of the subject writing 'itself.' And indeed, for Lacoue-Labarthe, the link between music and language is absolutely fundamental. In *Le Chant des Muses*, Lacoue-Labarthe is guided by such apparently simple questions as *what* is music and *why* do we have it? More specifically, he reminds us that we need the verb 'faire', which implies a 'qui' – we need a

human (or possibly an animal) agent, as music doesn't just 'naturally' occur. Although unacknowledged in the text – presumably owing to genre constraints – one would imagine that this is underpinned by a neo-Heideggerian deconstruction of a straightforward binary opposition between natural (*physis*) or artificial (*techne*) modes of production. He draws our attention to the etymology of music, deriving as we well know from *mousike*, which simply refers to 'l'art des muses' in general, and not just what we now think of music in the narrow sense (*CM*, p. 19). The muses, as he points out, are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne – a now forgotten goddess of memory, from which we derive both memory and 'mental' – and are generally thought of as the goddesses of the 'beaux-arts' (i.e. painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music, theatre and dance) which means art as *techne* (from which we derive technology), and thus art retains a strong link to artifice (see *CM*, pp. 20-21). However, he recants, this ignores an earlier conception of the muses that attaches them particularly (exclusively, even) to poetry and music, noting that all poetry was previously 'sung' or at least 'chanted;' the muses in their original incarnation, then, are 'porteuses de la musique, [et] sont les déesses de la poésie' (*CM*, p. 21). He continues by explaining that *poiesis* simply means production, making, or creation (as Daniel Albright has stated, 'we might speak of the poetics of a sonnet, and we might speak of the poetics of a sofa'²³) and that *within* this [*poiesis*] there is, as previously mentioned, *techne*, and also *physis*, which accounts for 'natural' production; it is simply synonymous with the whole concept of 'nature' and the physical world around us (see *CM*, p. 21). And yet, poetry is considered 'l'art par excellence [...] le plus "poïétique" [...] la plus pure' for the reason, claims Lacoue-Labarthe, that it is the art of *language* (*CM*, p. 22). Whereas Daniel Albright draws from the etymology of *poiesis* the conclusion that *poetics* 'does not exalt the literary as much as it seems',²⁴ for Lacoue-Labarthe, it is rather that language – as a distinctly human accomplishment – is seen to straddle thought, memory and meaning, and in its designation as the first 'technique' renders us, also, an 'être "technique"' (*CM*, p. 22). These formulations allow Lacoue-Labarthe to make his two principal claims about music: firstly, that music is

²³ Albright, *Panaesthetics*, p. 2.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 2.

fundamentally linked to language and, secondly, that it is an art – or more precisely ‘une *poièsis* technique’ (CM, p. 23).

The links with language do not stop there, however. The fundamental link that Lacoue-Labarthe observes between music and language (that of their being *techne*) ensures that music is seen not as a natural phenomenon – not just as environmental ‘bruits’ – albeit with the confusing caveat he accords the possibility that *certain* animal sounds, particularly those of birds and other ‘mugissements ou burglements, hurlements, etc’ remind us that the first musical instruments we know of are those made from hollowed bone and which may have been used to imitate the sounds of our prey (CM, p. 24). Imitation is thus key. He continues, rather surprisingly – given a declaration made earlier about his intention to treat the matter purely philosophically – by taking ‘un petit tour du côté de la science’ to show that various studies have demonstrated at least two things: firstly, that perhaps the only proper sense the child has in the womb – before its birth – is that of hearing, and that secondly, although it can’t hear sounds from the exterior very well, it can hear almost directly ‘la voix de sa mère: il entend sa mère parler’ (CM, p. 24-5). This means the infant must be aware of the alternations between ‘bruit/silence’ and ‘grave/aigu’, leading Lacoue-Labarthe to claim, consequently, that the infant *in utero* is first and foremost exposed to what is *already* musical in language. This aspect of language is of course *prosody*, from the Greek, *odos*, which is ‘song.’ Thus it seems our first experiences (and the essential facet?) of both music and language are of the natural melody, the ‘song’ of the mother tongue *in utero*; its cadence, melody, rhythm, intonation and phrase.

Lacoue-Labarthe concedes, even emphasizes, that these are insufficient grounds to account for music, which as ‘une *poièsis* “technique” [...] a besoin d’instruments; et ces instruments sont chargés de produire un certain effet, que rien de “naturel” ne peut produire’ (CM, pp. 28-29, Lacoue-Labarthe’s emphasis). Nevertheless, this does not seem to impede the return to the mother tongue and the inevitably Rousseauian turn of events: through music’s ability or attempt to ‘retrouver sa mélodie’ he

reveals that each type of music thus corresponds to its language 'type' (CM, p. 30). He supports this claim with the example of European orchestral music, stating that after listening to only a little bit, even if one doesn't recognize the particular work or composer – 'cela dépend de votre culture' – with just the slightest familiarity one will recognize whether the work is, for example, Russian or Italian (CM, p. 30). And not because the music is texted, he says (he's speaking particularly of the symphony, it seems), but because of 'la mélodie et la prosodie, le rythme' which are based on, or imitate (*calqué sur*) the language from which they come (*sur la forme de la langue de départ*) (CM, p. 31). Not only does this seem naively simplistic, but one is immediately struck by a plethora of examples that seem to refute this claim: what, precisely, in a Bach fugue corresponds to his Germanic mother tongue? Or in Purcell's *Fantasias* for viols to his English mother tongue? Or in Berio's fiendishly virtuostic *Sequenzas* to his Italian mother tongue? Or in John Cage's aleatoric music to his American English mother tongue? And what about when Bizet writes music that is meant to sound like southern Spain – where are we meant to locate his French mother tongue then? And it seems fairly evident that – curiously and complexly mediated via images, the other arts, recording technologies and historical, social and political factors (amongst many others) – that Vaughan Williams' identifiable pastoral 'voice' bears a (stylised) link to the British countryside rather than to English prosody, just as Mosolov's 'Iron Foundry' relates to post-Revolutionary Russia and the hyper-industrialisation of the Soviet Union. In fact, the only (tenuous) example that springs to mind would be something like the grandiose theme of the final movement of Sibelius's Second Symphony, which relentlessly places the stress on the first beat (though that in itself is entirely standard – it is the fact our attention is drawn to this that is notable) that it is tempting to draw a parallel with Finnish phonology and the invariably stressed first syllable. And this example is, perhaps, telling, coming as it does from a composer whose output was profoundly associated with the formation of Finnish national identity. Indeed, the repertoire to which Lacoue-Labarthe refers – the symphonic works of the classical and Romantic concert hall – unsurprisingly coincide with nascent and emergent European nationalities and nationalisms. His central claim here – that music is recognisable as, and is traced from, the *melos* of the mother tongue

– is either untrue, or positions music that doesn't 'work' according to this framing as non-music or, at least, unmusical music.

The Heideggerian-inflected Rousseauianism doesn't stop there, however. He claims perhaps an even more striking example would be that of jazz (even when the music in question is instrumental, it comes, as does all music according to Lacoue-Labarthe, from a vocal origin) which develops from gospel music or the blues – which themselves derive from work songs, he states. He asks his reader/listener: 'qu'entend-on dans cette musique?', replying, '[l]a langue des Noirs américains [...] l'anglais parlé – mal, si l'on veut, avec un accent, une élocution "étranges" – par des Africains déportés d'Afrique de l'Ouest aux Etats-Unis comme esclaves et qui ont gardé, forcément, l'accentuation, le rythme, la prosodie de leur langue d'origine' (CM, p. 31). Evidently, this characterisation conveniently skates over – or wilfully ignores – the complexity of the emergence of jazz and blues music.²⁵ It seems particularly problematic that he completely ignores histories that have demonstrated a history shared with minstrelsy; the fetishization of 'primitive' orality; and the construction of 'authenticity' through the cataloguing gaze of white men and their recording technologies that sought the most rural, 'rough' and reprobate examples, marketing the resulting recordings as 'race records' until the 1940s. Of course, this history seeks to highlight how in turn it also constructs notions of 'blackness' – inherently linked to criminality, drinking, violence and sexual excess – for the largely white audiences that bought these records.²⁶ Indubitably, this is just one (prominent) version of the history of the Blues; there is of course no singular or authoritative version – and indeed other scholars and musicians have contested at least aspects of such accounts.²⁷ However, its complete omission in the service of a transparently mimetic, essentialising and naturalized account is troubling both politically, and in terms of Lacoue-Labarthe's own critique of mimeticism. Comparably, Lacoue-Labarthe finds a similar phenomenon with

²⁵ Though he does offer a different description of jazz in the brief 'Remarque sur Adorno et le jazz, d'un désart obscur' in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Pour n'en pas finir*.

²⁶ Of course this is also a woefully inadequate explanation of the emergence of blues cultures, but serves merely to highlight some of the aspects that have been overlooked in Lacoue-Labarthe's construction.

²⁷ For a variety of positions see, for example, work by Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Angela Y. Davis, Houston A. Baker, Elijah Wald and Richard Middleton.

rap and hiphop, which he claims to be another vocal music that derives directly from the vernacular of young blacks, this time living in the suburbs of Los Angeles, which when transposed to France, becomes the vernacular of the Maghreb or other Africans living in the *banlieue*. Here, Lacoue-Labarthe's argument starts to collapse, even in its own terms: does rap thus correspond to ('badly') spoken English or French? Or are black American and black or Maghrebi French all so generically 'other' that it ceases to matter to distinguish between them? And does the rap *music* have nothing to do with it after all? His justification seems to be, indirectly, that (white?) people find it much harder to rap successfully – 'ceux dont la langue natale est le français ont beaucoup plus de mal à s'y faire' (*CM*, p. 33) – and therefore it must have something to do with the way non-white people *speak*; their (lexical) *style*. No doubt, stylistics has something to do with the overall aesthetic but, firstly, many French rappers *do* in fact speak French as their native language (white or not); secondly, this characterization erodes the complex socio-economic and cultural conditions with which this music is linked as well as its (often) engaged politicism; and thirdly, it completely ignores not only the musical/instrumental (where present) but also the richly literary and complexly crafted reliance on word play, extended metaphor, alliteration, double entendre and lyricism in exchange for a simplistic homological mapping onto the prosodic aspects of the vernacular. Whilst it is easy to demonstrate the problematic underpinnings of this type of argument when Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of popular music forms through his omission of their complex and well-studied relationship to social, political, and cultural concerns – these musics are studied almost exclusively sociologically (rather than in terms of aesthetics) in relation to the sub-cultures from which they emerge or are a part of – it perhaps rouses less immediate suspicion in the passages dealing with literate high art music; the possible reasons for which I will now address.

CULTURE, HISTORY, AND ABSOLUTE MUSIC

In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, Lydia Goehr launches a compelling critique of the way analytic philosophy has attempted to apprehend, or conceptualize the musical work. Her argument is centred around the fact that analytic philosophy tends to treat its subject matter scientifically or naturalistically, and thus ‘tallies with the belief that concepts are historically and ideologically neutral, unaffected by contingent changes, and undetermined in all essential respects by those “myths” or “prejudices” inherent in our different cultural, social, political and aesthetic milieux.’²⁸ Goehr is struck by the limited repertoire that philosophers consider when trying to make generalizing claims about the ‘nature’ of music, asking why it is that

theorists have chosen to focus on classical, concert music? For what reasons have ancient, Asian, folk, jazz and popular forms of music mostly been left out of the inquiry? These are complicated questions, and they are made all the more so when we realise that even ‘classical music’ is a troublesome concept which, having entered musical language at the turn of the nineteenth century, has already taken on two distinct meanings: to denote music written in ‘classical style’ in the second half of the eighteenth century and to denote European ‘concert’ music in its entirety.²⁹

Goehr explores a variety of theories from different branches of analytic philosophy, and demonstrates that as soon as one tries to apply their definition or description of what music *is*, to a non-Western, popular, folk or non-literate musical tradition it starts to fall short – or outright fail. She thus proposes a genealogical or historical approach to musical ontology; an approach that exposes the context of a particular concept and is thus able to ‘contribute to knowledge and, when desirable, social change.’³⁰ Although this critique could be seen to have little purchase on Lacoue-Labarthe’s work – he is, after all, a decidedly continental philosopher, and he does consider more than just ‘classical’ music, at least in *Le Chant des Muses* and on the odd occasion in some of the essays collected in *Pour n’en pas finir* –

²⁸ Goehr, p. 78.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 4.

I think its aptness is rather striking; unsurprisingly, it has been in relation to his claims about popular music or 'classical' (in the sense of genre, rather than epoch) music that either pre- or post-dates the formation of the classical/Romantic canon that the problematic aspects of his conceptualization of music are most clear.

In both 'L'Écho du sujet' and in *Le Chant des Muses*, there is a notable lack of consideration as to what actually constitutes the musical 'work.' Whilst Lacoue-Labarthe's arguments about the essential link to the 'musical' aspects of spoken language might lead us to think that he is considering music primarily as performance, the recourse to Mahler (and particularly the programmatic elements of the 'Resurrection' symphony which both Reik and Lacoue-Labarthe rely on) in 'L'Écho du sujet' is contingent on aspects also present in the score-copy of the work and certain 'syntactical' procedures (of which more later). Music's allographic nature is thus completely unaccounted for; music is at once both instantiated through performance, and yet no performance is identical to the work 'itself' (nor is it identical to the score). This problem has been dealt with in a number of ways, as Goehr has explored, but what attempts at reconciling this difficulty have in common is the failure to recognize this as a product of a certain historical conceptualisation of the musical 'work' that is specific to a particular time period and geographical area. Indeed, *literate* musical traditions are themselves a minority form, with the concept of the absolute musical 'work' (i.e. un-texted, bound, autonomous, sublime and accessible through the almost *unworldly* composer-genius) specific to just a few hundred years of European musical history. Given this, musicologist Gary Tomlinson has even suggested we would do well to substitute 'carmenology' or 'cantology' for 'musicology', given that by far the dominant form of 'music' – globally and historically – is song forms; a move that 'might unsettle rather than confirm our easiest assumptions' as well as 'serv[ing] to remind us that music signifies not an ideologically neutral, cross-cultural array of sounding phenomena but rather a constructed cultural category – one indeed that is, as we delimit it, and viewed against the long historical *durée*, recent and local.'³¹

³¹ Gary Tomlinson, 'Vico's Songs: Detours at the Origins of (Ethno) Musicology', *The Musical Quarterly*, 83.3 (1999), 344–77 (p. 344).

Furthermore, the ideology of this supposedly autonomous musical aesthetic emerges alongside Romantic idealism in general, and can be described as ‘an interplay between two claims’: ‘The first claim concerns the *transcendent* move from the worldly and particular to the spiritual and universal; the second concerns the *formalist* move which brought meaning from music’s outside into its inside.’³² Whereas when Lacoue-Labarthe asks, early on in *Le Chant des Muses*, ‘pourquoi fait-on de la musique?’ or ‘pourquoi y a-t-il la musique?’ (CM, p. 16) and argues that it must be something to do with our very first emotions, a form of catharsis ‘through a kind of mimetic reduplication of original pain’³³ Goehr would remind us that until about 1800 the response to ‘why’ or ‘what’ is music would have been answered with regard to its ‘*extra-musical* function and significance [...] shaped by the functions music served in powerful institutions like the church and the court.’³⁴ Music, in its Romantic conception, has henceforth been ‘separated’ from the mundane and quotidian, the transient and mortal, and instead allows for the unmediated *immediacy* of expression. Accordingly, the classical music forms – the concerto, symphony, and ‘sonata form’ in particular as the archetype – are not contingent on any ‘extra-musical’ occasion but are ‘independently designed and independently coherent.’³⁵ Thus, with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche clearly on the horizon, we see how easy it is for music – under this conception – to be understood as expressing (pure) will and primary essences.

Classical music forms and ‘sonata form’ in particular, invite us to consider another aspect that is remarkably – perhaps symptomatically – overlooked by Lacoue-Labarthe: harmony. Central to the construction of these musical forms is the role of functional harmony and the supposedly autonomous ‘dialectic of tones.’ In sonata form, which is the quintessential form of the first movement of any symphony, a dialectic is set up between the first ‘subject’ (or thesis) in the tonic key and a contrasting second ‘subject’ (antithesis) in a related key, followed by a development section where these ideas are

³² Goehr, p. 153.

³³ Felicia Miller Frank, *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice, and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 60.

³⁴ Goehr, p. 122.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 164.

explored and expanded, leading finally to a recapitulation where both subjects return, but this time with the second subject co-opted into the same key as the first subject (synthesis).³⁶ The extent to which we can straightforwardly read socialities or cultural forms – for example, the first (often heroic) subject has been frequently characterized as ‘masculine’, with the second (often lyrical) subject marked as ‘feminine’ – onto musical forms has been hotly contested.³⁷ Nonetheless, the teleological drive of functional harmony is at least one of the ways in which tension and release, passion and desire – and thus subjectivity – are constructed or represented in this repertoire. Susan McClary has demonstrated that the emergence of tonality – and its standardization in thinkers/composers such as Rameau, as seen in the previous chapter – is a musical convention that is constructed/constructs analogously ‘to such [eighteenth-century] emergent ideals as rationality, individualism, progress, and centred subjectivity.’³⁸ In this respect, the autonomous tonal works of the concert hall parallel the emergence of bourgeois subjectivity, particularly in the way that they both project teleologically through time a nonetheless coherent and organic whole; an entity with an identifiable essence. Further still, in a recent Bourdieusian ethnography of classical music practices, Anna Bull has argued convincingly that bourgeois ideals are built into the aesthetic and its contingent practices. Discipline and restraint – long-documented cornerstones of bourgeois identity – are cultivated through classical music practices and, significantly, are ‘inscribed onto the body in rehearsals.’³⁹ It is all too easy to forget that this supposedly autonomous music isn’t just played spontaneously, but that the idealized version we get either in the concert hall or in recorded forms is the product of innumerable hours of work – an extraordinary amount of labour (in fact, we would do well here to remember Lacoue-Labarthe’s own assertion that we must allow ourselves to hear the *ergon* beneath the *organon* (see *Fp*, p. 108)). Aside from the hours dedicated to private practice, the orchestral player submits to hours spent stop-

³⁶ The Hegelian overtones of this standard musicological explication of sonata form are far from coincidental.

³⁷ See, for a variety of positions, work by Susan McClary, Richard Taruskin, Lawrence Kramer and Georgina Born.

³⁸ Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 2001), p. 61.

³⁹ Anna Bull, ‘The Musical Body: How Gender and Class Are Reproduced Among Young People Playing Classical Music in England’ (unpublished Ph.D, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2014), p. 159.

and-start – an essential rehearsal procedure if one is to coordinate 60-odd players into a seemingly organic whole – under the control of the conductor who, in turn, sculpts or forms the ideal aesthetic. In so doing, Bull argues it is not that enjoyable and pleasurable aspects of music are eradicated; quite inversely, strong and embodied emotions are cultivated but controlled – pleasure is instead channelled, or ‘inheres in the *control over* the totality of the group and the musical whole.’⁴⁰ In this way, the ideology of this aesthetic – as abstract, rational, disembodied, etc. – is justified, demanding simultaneously bodily transcendence (individual desires, responses or pleasures must be subjugated to the demands of the whole) and the disciplining of these very bodies (which are nonetheless required to play this ‘transcendent’ music). This is just one way in which musical subjectivities might be formed or figured in line with the ideology of a particular aesthetic, no matter how abstract it might claim to be. We can thus see how music might be profoundly associated with, or experienced as, deeply emotional; that is to say above, beyond, or aside from any pre-symbolic associations with the maternal voice.

Even though the bounds of the tonal dialectic are notably expanded in the musical language of Mahler’s late Romanticism, as Lacoue-Labarthe himself remarks elsewhere, following Adorno, ‘toute cette dialectique des tons [i.e. Mahler’s extended tonality] (et, d’une certaine façon, la dialectique en général) n’est sans doute pas si étrangère au mode de composition de la grande symphonie post-mozartienne’ (*Imt2*, pp. 58-9). Whilst Mahler is playing with the limits of these forms – and the central role of ‘free play’ to the Romantic notion of autonomous music should be duly noted here – he never ‘breaks’ or escapes them; tonality even in its most expanded form remains central to the pulsional movement through time that allows for a sense of ‘narrative’ (which Lacoue-Labarthe is so keen to remark upon). And yet, Lacoue-Labarthe is absolutely silent about this when it comes to any question of what is ‘essentially’ musical; just as for Rousseau – who we have seen already to be so influential on Lacoue-Labarthe’s thinking about music – harmony seems to be an inconvenient, corruptive, or at least

⁴⁰ Bull, p. 160.

a post-hoc embellishment of what is *essentially* musical (i.e. melody and rhythm). We therefore have a deeply contradictory understanding of music whereby Lacoue-Labarthe appears to want to claim it as a universal language (albeit against himself, we might imagine) by importing the musico-transcendental baggage of a romantic conception of music, whilst also neglecting to take account of the role of functional harmony – the ‘free’ play of tones – which is clearly a, if not *the*, distinctive feature of this repertoire. Whilst there is certainly a case to be made for a neo-Heideggerian project that seeks to relate music and/or rhythm to a deeper or more fundamental history of Being, and thus excludes the local or epochal aspects from its purview – in this case, perhaps, functional harmony – Lacoue-Labarthe nonetheless retains an unmistakable and epochally distinct conception of what music *is*, i.e. a bound and self-sufficient musical work with an identifiable and organic essence, stemming from a post-Romantic transcendentalizing of aesthetics. Furthermore, such inherent conflicts (which are, necessarily, built into the very concept of such a thoroughly man-made ‘offering’ that nonetheless also claims cosmic transcendence) are found not only in recent philosophy but also in the work of the progenitors of this discourse, as Goehr argues is revealed by Kant’s aesthetic claims and ideals: ‘purposiveness without purpose’ and ‘disinterested attention.’⁴¹ Having suppressed the ‘spatial axis of harmony’, music’s drive through time is understood only as a rhythmic repetition compulsion which forcefully impels its writing/written subject regardless; it is, as Catherine Pickstock argues, just a ‘version of music as a universal language, which perpetuates the Wagnerian error’ – despite Lacoue-Labarthe’s damning critique of Wagner elsewhere⁴² – ‘of imagining that music has a “pure” essence, free from the mediation of verbal and symbolic convention.’⁴³

⁴¹ See Goehr, p. 158.

⁴² This is most evident, of course, in *Musica Ficta*, as well as in a number of the essays in *Pour n’en pas finir* and is a question to which we will return in chapter five.

⁴³ Catherine Pickstock, ‘Music: Soul, City and Cosmos after Augustine’ in *Radical Orthodoxy*, pp. 243-277, p. 255.

CATACOUSTICS #1

With all this in mind, it seems potentially fruitful to bring such perspectives to bear on Lacoue-Labarthe's most sustained development of the musical or catacoustic subject as figured in 'L'Écho du sujet', largely via his analysis of Reik's auto-analysis. Lacoue-Labarthe seems always to be interested in moments of failure; moments that reveal, foreclose, or short-circuit some 'deeper' logic at work, and for this reason, offer themselves as hermeneutic windows worthy of deconstructive philosophical reflection or praxis. Indeed, in 'L'Écho du sujet', it is Reik's failure to realize what is at work, unwittingly binding the musical obsession (catharsis), the autobiographical impulse, and lexis (as style) together. Moreover, in this instance, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, Reik's failure is, paradoxically, his success; what Reik's text reveals – perhaps more profoundly than Reik realized – is the failure of the theoretical *tout court*. Lacoue-Labarthe, having articulated his conception of the abyssal and 'desistant' subject that is neither the writing nor written subject but rather permanently lost 'between' the two in order to explain, *contra* Plato, that first-person narrative – or *haple diegesis* – is strictly speaking impossible, he returns to a key moment in *The Haunting Melody* in order to expose what Reik has implicitly identified as the autobiographical impulse (as opposed to the autothanatography that is actually written). The excerpt is, appropriately, *en abyme*: an extended citation from the programmatic description of Mahler's second symphony. It describes how, on the way back from the funeral of someone important, one finds oneself reminded of happy memories such that the overwhelming grief provoked by this person's death is temporarily lifted or forgotten. As one (re)awakens from this, not only is one filled with guilt, but 'il se peut que [...] l'incompréhensible remue-ménage de cette vie devienne agitation fantomatique de silhouettes dans une salle de danse; de la nuit profonde, vous regardez, mais c'est si loin que vous ne pouvez entendre la musique. Il vous manque le rythme, clef de ces mouvements; les tournolements, les virevoltes de ces couples vous paraissent insensés' (Reik, cited in *Es*, p. 282). In short, as Lacoue-Labarthe notes, he is describing the 'étrangement du familier', a thoroughly *unheimlich* scene (*Es*, p. 283). Crucially, then, what this reveals for Lacoue-Labarthe is that rhythm 's'entend. Il ne se voit pas [...] Sans rythme [...] la danse (c'est une valse) se désorganise et se

défigure. Autrement dit, le rythme, qui est ici d'essence spécifiquement musicale (acoustique), est antérieur à la figure ou au schème visible dont il conditionne l'apparition comme telle' (Es, p. 283) In other words, the rhythmic impulse is both pre-specular and the pre-condition of the specular ('la répétition ou la contrainte temporelle (et non topologique ou spatiale) comme facteur de diversification à partir de quoi peut se reconnaître, s'installer et se disposer du réel' (Es, p. 283)) both impelling and undoing, eliciting and interrupting, the whole theoretical framework from within. Likewise, rhythm is also 'la condition de possibilité du sujet', (Es, p. 285) and yet 'excède, commence à excéder ou à entamer l'économique. À le ruiner de l'intérieur' (Es, p. 277). As Amittai Aviram has observed, this would place Lacoue-Labarthe, alongside Nancy, firmly in the Nietzschean tradition that Kristeva assumes in her characterisation of the *chora*, for whom 'the musical or rhythmic is a state of being outside of and prior to the social, verbal, thinking subject, while the latter is a kind of construct that simultaneously represents (in images and in symbols) and represses its musical other, which is also its origin.'⁴⁴

Fortunately, however, Lacoue-Labarthe does not leave it there. Having set out with the intention of finding the link between the autobiographical impulse and the musical obsession – now identified as, essentially, (pre-specular) 'rythme' – he suddenly retracts and suggests that actually 'il faudrait probablement désolidariser, autant qu'il est possible de le faire, la question du rythme [...] de toute problématique musicale' (Es, p. 289). To explain this claim he complicates what appeared to be a more or less straightforward conception of rhythm; rhythm now bifurcates into what seems to be a modern, Platonic (i.e. what he has articulated so far) idea and a more ancient (pre-Socratic, following Leucippus, Democritus and Heraclitus) notion. Via Benveniste, again, he explains how '*rhuthmos* ou *rhusmos* [...] signifie primitivement *schema: la forme ou la figure*' (Es, p. 289) and is, rather, 'rhythm' (or whatever we now want to call it) as broached by time; it is 'la forme dans l'instant qu'elle est assumée par ce qui est mouvant, mobile, fluide, la forme qui n'a pas de consistance organique [...] improvisée,

⁴⁴ Aviram, p. 197.

momentanée, modifiable’ (Benveniste, cited in Es, pp. 290-1). In the coming together of these two aspects, then, is where we find what has previously been identified as *ethos*: type, imprint, style (*lexis*) etc. Concomitantly, then, there is also an uninterrupted filial link in the movement ‘du type à la disposition (*Stimmung*), à l’humeur et à ce qu’on n’appelle quand même pas en vain le *caractère*’, (Es, p. 290) a relation that is best understood, unsurprisingly, as an ‘echo.’ Finally, then, Lacoue-Labarthe returns briefly to the properly *musical* problematic, to remind us that even in the *Republic*, music is subject to the same distinctions as discourse: *logos* and *lexis*. Musical discourse is dealt with (as Lacoue-Labarthe has also done so far) as the strict equivalent of *lexis*, enunciation; however, unlike *lexis* itself (in discourse) specifically *musical lexis* is, Lacoue-Labarthe argues, itself mimetic. Music ‘doit s’accommoder (*akolouthein*) au *logos*’ (Es, p. 291). Music (or rather, musical *lexis* – with harmony and instrumentation on one side, and rhythm on the other) is subsequently understood as fundamentally imitative (but, crucially, as with his figuring of originary mimesis, without origin). And, indeed, this is achieved ‘selon des critères au reste fixes, traditionnels, soit (et cela concerne principalement l’harmonie) des traits “éthiques” (mollesse, supplication, violence, courage); soit, quant il s’agit du rythme, des *caractères*’ (Es, p. 292). In this way, pre-specular rhythm (the measure, metre and prosody of the mother’s voice *in utero*) is ‘calculé sur la *diction* en tant qu’elle imite ou représente un *caractère*’ (Es, p. 292) and *this* rhythm (as broached by time) – just as with the *unheimlich* dance movements witnessed, soundless, at a distance – is social, conventional, and historical. Perhaps here it would be wise to recall the muses’ profound link with both politics and (correct, virtuous) education (*paideia*) and thus, in a modern formulation, *Bildung*, which at root literally means form(ation). As Azade Seyhan has claimed in a different – but not altogether unrelated – context, the literary (or musical) work ‘becomes the embodiment or sensory representation of knowledge.’⁴⁵ Rhythm allows the manifestation of the always ungraspable *ethos*, therefore, at the perceptible but inassimilable interstices of consonance and dissonance, *eurythmy* and *arrhythmia* (see Es, p. 292). And this is the case just as much with music as with language, and is why, Lacoue-Labarthe claims, via Reik, that ‘le

⁴⁵ Seyhan, p. 18.

retour du choral de Mahler était simplement dû à l’analogie des circonstances [... et par conséquent] n’excède en rien les limites officielles de la psychanalyse’ (Es, p. 293).

CATACOUSTICS #2: EDUCATION, FORMATION, PAIDEIA

*As my father I have already died, as my mother I am still living and growing old.*⁴⁶

There is, then, an implicit if undeveloped – but very productive – way of thinking an enculturated and ecologically valid philosophy of music in Lacoue-Labarthe’s formulation of the catacoustic subject, in that it relates absolutely and unremittingly to the social. Perhaps none of this is so surprising, given the essential link between music, *mousike*, the muses, and education (*paideia*) and cultural values in Ancient Greek thought – as laid out in the first chapter – and Lacoue-Labarthe’s reformulation of mimesis – itself central to education. I would like to suggest that what is essential and most fruitful in Lacoue-Labarthe’s thinking of music – itself a category that I hope to have shown is, in itself, in need of deconstruction – is rather his insistent (re)linking of its relation to *mousike* which, as we have seen, comprises all the skills of the muses and as we have noted in chapter one, is broadly synonymous with our modern concept of culture.⁴⁷ By this measure, music is unthinkable except in relation to the social (and therefore the cultural, political, etc.) and is imbued with – and imbues – social, cultural, educational and moral values. Lacoue-Labarthe’s careful and patient tracing of the deeper history of rhythm as intimately linked to ‘*la forme ou la figure*’, and thus to sculpture, offers a powerful image of, or way of thinking about, music’s role in sculpting or forming citizens in line with the cultural and social values of the time. It also allows us to think about how music participates in the very model of education that Lacoue-Labarthe himself has so rigorously critiqued: that of exemplarity (a model that has been summarized elsewhere, quite succinctly, by Jaeger: ‘Education is the process by which a

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. by Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 7.

⁴⁷ See chapter one, especially the sections on *Mousike* and the Muses and Sirens.

community preserves and transmits its physical character. For the individual passes away, but the type remains'⁴⁸). From this vantage point, even the most abstract aesthetic partakes in the sculpting of bodies, minds, desires and values; as an intellectual and a physical education, music figures or forms both individual and social characters: in short, *ethos*.⁴⁹ In this respect, Lacoue-Labarthe's choice of *katakouein* (meaning 'to listen' and 'to obey') seems particularly apt, inviting as it does a consideration of how music is imbricated in the socio-politic and also relates to power, control, and ideology. It gestures towards the compelling 'nature' of music (that both Reik and Lacoue-Labarthe feel so keenly on an emotional level) whilst also suggesting that this arises – at least substantially – from the co-individuation of social and personal norms, values and aesthetic preferences, rather than from an extra-worldly reservoir of truth, spirit, or pure, unbridled emotion that only music has direct access to. Furthermore, it also allows – as Lacoue-Labarthe has made abundantly clear – for an account of how the (musical) writing subject also always writes another: style, whether musical, literary, or philosophical (here Lacoue-Labarthe's careful deconstruction of a straightforward distinction between music and language is particularly useful), betrays the duplicity of the subject, and the ever present other that can be traced in any (auto-/allo- or bio-/thanato-)graphical gesture. Catacoustics thus offers a compelling way of thinking about music's role – and a role moreover that does not differ substantially from literature, the visual or plastic arts, philosophy, science, or psychoanalysis – in processes of meaning making, mimesis, the creation and upholding of values, and the formation of minds, bodies and desires in irreducibly cultural, aesthetic and political ways.

In fact, another well-known text draws together so many of these same themes: autobiography, style, education, ethics, the ear and hearing (and its *unheimlich* nature), and the mother tongue: Derrida's *Otobiographies*. Moreover, within it, Derrida highlights a distinction between educational institutions (which he characterizes as 'acoustique' and 'acroamatique' – arcane, exclusive, cerebral and

⁴⁸ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, p. xiii, cited in Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 155 n. 13.

⁴⁹ See Babich, p. 100.

predominantly oral, as in Aristotle's teachings for his inner-circle), and texts/venues which are meant for public consumption and are thus accessible: the very duality we have between the two texts at hand here – Lacoue-Labarthe's *Le Chant des muses*, and 'L'Écho du sujet.' For all Lacoue-Labarthe's tentative 'I's, and the reluctance to be named as a 'philosophe', he is no doubt partaking in the very discourses he is critiquing – there could be no other way, of course – and it is striking that the text destined for a wider public consumption, *Le Chant des Muses*, makes claims, quite emphatically, that the far more sophisticated and nuanced 'L'Écho du sujet' appears to make but only with reluctance, caveat, or in a noncommittal manner. There is no reading of *Le Chant des muses* that allows for such a complex articulation of how we might think about music and its relation to the social, preferring instead the thoroughly naturalized account of music's fundamental link to the mother tongue and thus to emotions; whilst on one level this might be explained as a consequence of the genre – after all, the teenagers to whom the text was originally addressed have not had the years of philosophical training required to grapple with something as dense as 'L'Écho du sujet' – it nonetheless seems irresponsible to fill impressionable young minds with claims that one would not sign one's name (or 'name') to, at least wholeheartedly, in a properly academic context.

So to return to Derrida's *Otobiographies* which reads, amongst other things, Nietzsche's *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, and highlights both a critique of the cultural machinery of the state – particularly of the (university) education system functioning under the illusion of academic freedom – whilst also suggesting the possibility of a subterranean fascism at work, depending on the interpretation of Nietzsche's text. The educational institution is figured as an *omphalos* – an indistinguishable ear/mouth/umbilical cord that connects the student to the institution and thus to the state. The state educational institution, acting in place of the mother, in fact forges a link with the (dead) father/state; it is in this power – this cooptation of the living mother in service of the dead father – that Derrida locates the uncanny and the text's potential fascism, whilst also commenting on the specifics of the ear/hearing (as we have seen elsewhere) and the fact that the ear is the most

'open' organ, the organ famously without eyelids and thus the possibility of closure. As the students take notes, the (uncritical, for all the emphasis on academic freedom) passive ears accept and transmit through their pens – a profusion of umbilical cords – the teachings of the state. From a singular mouthpiece, the academic apparatus is multiplied into many ears and hands, the 'établissement pour la culture (*Bildungsanstalt*).'⁵⁰ Again, we are returned to familiar themes such as posterity, (auto)biography and the writing subject; through the writing and signing of a name – the father's (or the state's) name – we are returned to immortality; we continue to live after our death by signing a (dead) patronymic with the still living pen (umbilical cord) of the (m)other. The supposedly living feminine (with the name 'woman' standing at the origin of the (re)production of 'truth') is thus instrumentalized in the service of signing the dead father's name.⁵¹

MUSES, MEMORY, MATERNALITY

*Selon une très ancienne, très profonde et très solide équivalence – peut-être indestructible –, c'est [la musique] un art féminin, et destiné aux femmes ou à la part féminine des hommes. C'est un art, en tous sens, hystérique. Et c'est pour cette raison, essentiellement, que la musique est l'hystérie. Tout au moins une certaine musique.*⁵²

So then, the question beneath all of this – just as in Lacoue-Labarthe's 'L'Écho du sujet' – continues to be how and with what name do we sign, and how is this essentially – constitutively – a signing of (an)other? Unfortunately, (this time), Lacoue-Labarthe does not stop at the catacoustic and socialized account of music offered already. He returns to the question of music, and specifically the question of why it seems to have such a profound emotional effect on us. In turning to a different text in Reik's œuvre, *The Ritual*, he explains that Reik had once thought that rhythm was not, essentially, musical. In this text, Reik explores myths about the origin of music, discovering that primitive and archaic instruments in the Jewish (biblical) tradition cannot, properly, be considered as instruments, but as

⁵⁰ *L'Oreille de l'autre*, p. 52.

⁵¹ See Gayatri Chakrovoty Spivak, 'Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiating with Unacknowledged Masculinism' in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Teresa Brennan (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 206-224, p. 216.

⁵² Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica ficta*, p. 198.

mere 'machine[s] à faire du bruit' (Es, p. 294). This impels Reik to a deeper meditation on the shofar, which as a primitive 'instrument' with which he is familiar, leads him to recognize the profound and unusual emotional effect, despite the fact that '[l]es trois groupes de notes [...] ne se différencient que *par un changement de rythme*' (Reik cited in Es, p. 295, Lacoue-Labarthe's emphasis). As a result of this, he decides that the shofar is 'plus proche d'un instrument de percussion, de la crécelle primitive ou du *bullroarer* décrit par les ethnologues, que de la trompe ou du clarion;' its profound emotional effect comes from the way it somehow reconnects us with something archaic and unknown (Es, p. 294). Ultimately, then, Lacoue-Labarthe considers it as an 'appel à la résurrection' (not forgetting to remind us once more of the subject of Mahler's 2nd Symphony; again, claims Lacoue-Labarthe, music saves us from our own death), and in this 'point énigmatique' he locates this deep emotion's resistance to analysis (Es, p. 295).

The result of this is twofold, elucidates Lacoue-Labarthe: firstly, Reik suspects that something non- or ante-musical is understandable in terms of rhythm; secondly, that 'l'émotion que provoque en nous telle "musique" archaïque n'est pas une émotion proprement musicale' (Es p. 295). Thus it appears that music is not in itself the cause of the emotion – at least in the sense of eliciting or producing an emotion due to purely musical procedures – but that music, or 'musical' rhythm, remains, somehow, linked to the sense of something that precedes, but nonetheless determines us; it is the point of access that allows us, anamnesically, to recognize something fundamentally (pre-)originary. Though never mentioned explicitly, much of this would seem to tally with Lacoue-Labarthe's conviction that mimesis – and what seems to be its complex but essential relation to the musical, rhythmic or catacoustic constitution of the subject – is of an older and deeper nature than the properly Heideggerian problematic of the history of Being. The rough and raw power of the proto-musical shofar is thus understood, Lacoue-Labarthe states, as the repetition of the inaugural murder of the *Urvater* – the well known origin of art as proposed by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* – but this time recast with 'music'

rather than tragedy as its first re-sounding.⁵³ This is not surprising though, Lacoue-Labarthe says, given that precisely what we have established is that the analytic, or theoretical, schema necessarily involves a specular reduction, and thus we are always returned to the (theatrical) Oedipal scene (see Es, p. 296); the hated or feared father that inspires, encouraged by ‘la préférence maternelle qui [...] suscite le premier héros-poète’ to the collective, foundational, but phantasmatic, murder (Es, p. 296). Again, we are trapped at the specular threshold, where music can incite in us some recollection of something pre-originary, and yet is also only attainable from the vantage of an ineluctably scopic/theoretical (and thus theatrical) schema.

But there is more. Although Lacoue-Labarthe cautions that, strictly speaking, going beyond the specular model is quite impossible, he nonetheless suggests – noting the ‘voix maternelles’ that overwhelmed the musician-philosopher, Nietzsche – that the musical ‘echo’ corresponds to the mother: ‘De quoi d’autre que la mère pourrait-il y avoir au juste réminiscence?’ (Es, p. 297). And this is where ‘L’Écho du sujet’ rejoins with *Le Chant des Muses*: in both instances the conclusion is linked to an essential maternity. Lacoue-Labarthe reminds us in *Le Chant des Muses* that the infant *in utero* cannot distinguish between its body and that of its mother, space or distance (between the mother and child) does not yet exist; rather, anything (any sound) provokes an immediate reaction, a movement, the child is ‘ému’; music is thus first and foremost an art of emotion. Furthermore, and perhaps more clearly than in ‘L’Écho du sujet’ – although I think it is implicit there too – this echoing of an originary maternal emotion is linked to instrumentation and amplification. This allows him to reaffirm his earlier claim that although, as we have seen, *prosody* (song) is linked to the mother tongue, music is necessarily also a *techne*, and thus dependent on instruments. Given that the transmission of sound isn’t immediate like sight (although how this stands in relation to his much earlier claim that

⁵³ Though there is perhaps no fundamental distinction to be made here (i.e. between music and tragedy), especially given the way Lacoue-Labarthe understands our modern conception of music (*savante*) to be inextricably bound up in its quest to reinvigorate itself in the spirit of Greek tragedy – the elaboration of this line of thinking is the subject of chapter five. This all obviously rings heavy with Nietzschean overtones: see, of course, Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*.

sound is 'pire que les images, qu'on peut à tout moment ne pas regarder, il y a la musique à laquelle on ne peut pas échapper' (CM, p. 18)) we thus need assistance in order to '*clarifier* – de lui donner une puissance qu'elle n'a pas;' the task of music is to '*clarifier* l'étouffement (maternel) du son' (CM, p. 37). This helps explain an earlier claim that no matter the style or genre of a song, in order to sing 'de manière vraiment artistique, il faut un apprentissage encore plus difficile' (CM, p. 29). This makes of it a properly *technical* art, distinct from the utterly naturalistic 'music' of the mother's *melos* and though we can 'retrouve[r] un peu de la musique *d'avant* (la naissance) ou de la musique "antérieure" dont j'ai parlé' (CM, p. 30). Further still, it allows him to explain the concern over amplification in general – Bach's desire for an ever bigger organ or the permanently expanding Romantic orchestra (see CM, p. 41) – as the search, the attempt to *retrouver* that very first *émoi* (*é-moi*). Finally, then, in 'L'Écho du sujet', Lacoue-Labarthe reintegrates the *unheimlich* to complete the picture:

Quoi d'autre pourrait en nous résonner, faire écho, nous paraître familier? Rappelez-vous: 'l'antique patrie des enfants des hommes', 'l'endroit où chacun a dû séjourner en son temps d'abord' – le 'je connais cela, j'ai déjà été ici.' Je l'ai déjà entendu, donc. Platon pensait que ce sont les mères qui imposent ou impriment à chacun son type. Par quoi d'autre en effet serions-nous 'rythmés'? (Es, p. 297)

In both instances in order to work this theoretical (re)positioning, the same manoeuvre is performed: he invokes the help of science – or at least a scientist of sorts! Despite claiming early on in *Le Chant des Muses* that although science might have interesting things to say about music, he is nonetheless going to treat it from a purely philosophical perspective, at the final hurdle (as already mentioned) he makes 'un petit tour du côté de la science' (CM, p. 24). It is clear that without this foundation he has no way of claiming that the only sense available to the infant *in utero* is that of the mother's voice – indeed this not a position that philosophy alone could prove (nor, for that matter, is there scientific consensus on the matter) – and thus his essentializing claims about the natural (maternal and emotional) basis of music fall short. Perhaps more spectacularly – although he is careful not to claim it, *explicitly*, as proof of his theoretical position – in 'L'Écho du sujet', he turns to a short 1927 text, 'Musique et inconscient', by Georg Groddeck, a physician, psychoanalyst, and founder of

psychosomatic medicine. He claims that he is 'l'un des rares [psychanalystes] au demeurant à s'être affronté au problème de la musique' (Es, p. 297); the excerpt he offers us is extraordinary in its own right, articulating (with the authority of an early twentieth-century psychoanalyst who certainly considers his work 'science') this very point that Lacoue-Labarthe has been so keen to make: the role of the uterine sensory environment in forming the essential musicality – and thus music's essence – of the not-yet-subject. Groddeck states:

Les données physiologiques de la période qui précède la naissance, où l'enfant n'a rien d'autre à découvrir par ses impressions que le rythme régulier du cœur maternel et du sien propre, mettent en lumière les moyens dont se sert la nature pour inculquer aussi profondément à l'homme le sentiment musical [...] le musical trouve son origine avant la naissance.⁵⁴

This alone is evidently uncritical and problematic in the context of the discussions in both this chapter and the preceding one on Nancy. However, if we turn to the rest of the Groddeck text (un-cited in Lacoue-Labarthe's text except for the excerpt from which the above citation comes) and which Lacoue-Labarthe without doubt must have read, the results are quite illuminating. Whilst the excerpt seems at best naively idealistic and at worst misguidedly uncritical, the remainder of the text is manifestly problematic. Right from the beginning there is an 'unworlding' of music or at least its withdrawal into unconscious desires and drives when he states: 'la musique ne vient pas de la partie consciente de l'âme et ne s'adresse pas au conscient, mais sa force afflue de l'inconscient et agit sur l'inconscient.'⁵⁵ More significantly, after a long etymological meditation on the word 'clef' he is able to make what seems to be his major point: that music is both fundamentally linked to maternity – specifically the pregnant maternal body – and also to the mechanics of the reproductive act itself. He states that:

l'étymologie a toujours de semblables affirmations quand elle touche à la reproduction et à la grossesse. De toute manière la clôture concerne un espace vide, elle est réalisée grâce à la clef [...] Prenons alors les cinq lignes et les quatre intervalles où sont les notes, on obtient le nombre neuf. Et neuf est le nombre de l'achèvement, de la grossesse. L'espace

⁵⁴ Georg Groddeck, 'Musique et inconscient', *Musique et Jeu*, 9 (1972), 3-6 (p. 6), also cited in *Es*, p. 297.

⁵⁵ Groddeck, p. 3.

des notes serait par là le symbole de la mère nourricière, et la clef le symbole du masculin, qui féconde et ferme l'intérieur féminin.⁵⁶

This passage is no doubt worthy of extensive commentary, but for now let us focus on two of the most striking aspects: firstly, the recurring theme that assumes music (as an idea or concept in its ontological or metaphysical determination) is unambiguously equivalent to literate high art music produced in Europe over a few hundred years: 'classical' music. A move which, already noted, voids the music of the social and cultural context of its production (and reception) figuring it instead as timeless, placeless, ahistoric, and a thoroughly neutral category. Secondly, although this occurs in explicitly gendered terms – and unsurprisingly also in terms of passivity and activity – it is the choice of *mère nourricière* (rather than simply *mère*) that strikes me as most interesting and instructive: it suggests, obviously, a foster mother – or even a wet nurse – both of which are provisional roles, or rather feature as supplements or stand-ins for a 'real' mother, just as we have seen the educational institution is figured in Derrida's reading of Nietzsche. This suggests that just as Lacoue-Labarthe is keen to stress the essential splitting or doubling of the Father (as both symbolic and real) in the Lacanian psychoanalytic frame work he draws on in 'L'Écho du sujet', the mother (or the 'mother') is necessarily also (at least) double. The (symbolic) nurturing provided by the *mère nourricière* (whether as foster mother/wet nurse – or indeed care giver, in the hope of challenging the assumption of a biological basis for such a role – or as the stand-in educational institution) is clearly distinct from, or at least supplementary to, the 'real' space of gestation, and yet this is never clearly delineated (as it is with the father).

Finally, we are brought to another observation of an uncanny similarity between (Derrida's commentary on) Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* in *Otobiographies*, and Lacoue-Labarthe's two texts – again in relation to the question of the mother. Derrida comments on the striking hesitancy in Nietzsche's

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 4.

delivery, he states: ‘La chance de mon existence (*Das Glück meines Daseins*), son unicité *peut-être* [...] tient à sa fatalité: pour l’exprimer en forme d’énigme (*Rätselform*), je suis, en tant que mon père, déjà mort (*als mein Vater bereits gestorben*), en tant que ma mère, je vis encore et je vieillis (*als meine Mutter lebe ich noch und werde alt*).’⁵⁷ Similarly, as we have seen, Lacoue-Labarthe repeatedly uses a similarly tentative structure through the use of the conditional (‘Quoi d’autre pourrait en nous résonner?’ or ‘Par quoi d’autre en effet serions-nous “rythmés”?’) or *perhaps* more explicitly in *Le Chant des Muses*, ‘*peut-être* qu’elle retrouve un peu de la musique *d’avant*’ (my emphasis). As Derrida notes, through this seemingly careful and non-committal ‘*peut-être*’ Nietzsche – and thus Lacoue-Labarthe – in fact retain the possibility that this ‘situation chanceuse’ may nonetheless have a ‘caractère exemplaire ou paradigmatique.’⁵⁸

LACOUÉ-LABARTHE’S ALMA MATER

Que tout philosophe soit inscrit dans son discours, qu’il s’y marque, à son corps défendant ou non, qu’il soit par conséquent toujours possible de pratiquer une lecture « autobiographique » de n’importe quel texte philosophique, la chose n’est pas nouvelle, elle est même probablement constitutive, depuis Parménide, de l’énonciation philosophique comme telle (Es, pp. 222-3)

And so finally the analysis demands our return to Lacoue-Labarthe’s texts, to the stories they tell aside from themselves, and to the (m)others inscribed therein. The first point relates to Lacoue-Labarthe’s reluctance to deconstruct the category of ‘music’ itself; whilst he patiently and determinedly demonstrates that certain overlapping features of both music and language (lexis, style, rhythm, *melos*, etc.) prove fruitful in showing a less than clear distinction between what we can safely affirm is either ‘just’ music, or ‘just’ language (rather than music being an originary or proto-language, as we saw in the Rousseauianism of Nancy’s theorization) his thinking is nonetheless inflected with a residual transcendentalist metaphysics – indeed, John McKeane has also noted this to be the case in his archival work that explores Lacoue-Labarthe’s almost completely unknown and at the time unpublished

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p.7, also cited in *L’Oreille de L’autre*, p. 28, my emphasis.

⁵⁸ *L’Oreille de l’autre*, p. 28.

writings on opera – some of which are now available in *Pour n'en pas finir*.⁵⁹ Whilst he *does* consider music other than that belonging to the canonical repertoire of Western literate music – his mention of jazz, rap and blues in *Le Chant des Muses* and elsewhere accounts for a sizeable proportion of the music referred to – the way he goes about it, rather than getting him off the hook, actually compounds the problem; instead of moving from his deconstruction of a clear music/language binary to a nuanced account of how we might then think this ambiguous relation and their interactions with society, culture, and politics, he instead retains a notion of an organic musical work – one with a fixed essence. All the more disturbingly for a scholar so critical of mimetology and, moreover, profoundly troubled by Heidegger's quest for fundamental philosophical languages, he then articulates the fixed essence of musical works in relation to distinct languages – as if these were also neatly geographically bound, timeless and fixed, and not riddled with their own set of imperialist, classist, and nationalist politics. All of this seems all the more disappointing given the potentially fruitful line of (musical) inquiry implied in much of his thinking of 'catacoustics.'

Secondly, in both texts, his invocation of hegemonic, masculinist and 'objective' scientific discourse (or pseudo-scientific discourse – though of course if we are to believe Lacoue-Labarthe's own position vis-a-vis the fictioning nature of all discourses, then surely *all* science is pseudo-science?) in order to career his own discourse towards the maternal closures he seeks, seems deeply suspicious – not least because without the concession to (pseudo-)science in each instance, the weight of his argument is remarkably reduced. Again, not only does it rehabilitate a longstanding trope in the history of Western thought on music – that of its essential relation to the feminine, its concomitant passivity and to emotions – but in invoking 'science' to make his point, he grounds a contestable philosophical fiction as 'fact' (although for Lacoue-Labarthe this too would still be a fiction). Indeed, this trope is one that Lacoue-Labarthe is all too aware of, but is reluctant to intervene in or to attempt to imagine ways beyond its impasse, apparently settling instead for its inevitability. In *Musica ficta*, he explicates both

⁵⁹ See McKeane, p. 112.

Nietzsche and Heidegger's critiques of the fundamental passivity of the Wagnerian aesthetic state, 'comme le comble de la plasticité, de la malléabilité, de l'impressionnabilité. Comme pure "matérialité", si l'on préfère, selon – là encore – une très ancienne équivalence (*materia/mater*) qui, au-delà de telle ou telle ressource étymologique de telle ou telle langue naturelle, s'ancre aussi bien dans la détermination aristotélicienne – si même elle n'est pas bien antérieure – de la féminité ou de l'essence du féminin' (*Mf*, pp. 199-200). The conclusions that emerge once we place Lacoue-Labarthe's texts on musical ontology – 'L'Écho du sujet' and *Le Chant des muses* – alongside his major work on the aesthetics or ethics of a particular music – *Music ficta*⁶⁰ – are unsettling, to say the least. In both, the function of anamnesis is integral to a central argument: in 'L'Écho du sujet' and *Le Chant des Muses* it is the anamnestic recognition of the mother that provokes music's profound and cathartic emotional effects. The affective dimension of music is inseparable, for Lacoue-Labarthe, from a recollection of its maternal-feminine origins – and indeed he uses an extraordinarily explicit account of this in Groddeck to support this claim. And yet, the anamnestic quality of Wagner's music – especially as described by Baudelaire – is one of the aspects that informs some of his most stinging critique, as will be considered further in chapter five. Indeed, as Lacoue-Labarthe carefully points out, anamnesis is not only a recognition or recollection 'd'une tradition (d'une origine)' (*Mf*, p. 117) but, far more importantly, it is also a forgetting (of history). As Martis has argued, 'Lacoue-Labarthe's concern with Wagner's music [...is] as historically emblematic of the possibility that music can offer the subject self-appropriation, either as *feeling* or as *figure*.'⁶¹ It allows the subject, on a very affective level, to experience something as a pure and untainted origin – as essence and thus destiny. In this framing, Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of Wagnerianism is absolutely on a par with Nietzsche's; the endless melody renders it too feminine, too passive and, ultimately, lacking in (virile) style – indeed, as both

⁶⁰ Though it would be unfair not to acknowledge that Lacoue-Labarthe is himself deeply hesitant and cautious about whether this text is actually *about* music (or even Wagner's music) rather than, as the title suggest, 'figures de Wagner', I would nonetheless suggest that supposing that the two could ever be neatly separated simply sets one up for another set of charges of essentialism and commitment to the ideology of an autonomous musical object that is distinct from the social, cultural, and political contexts in which it is produced, performed, and received.

⁶¹ Martis, p. 241 n. 48, Martis's emphasis.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida have commented abundantly, style 'n'est pas sans connotation sexuelle' (*Mf*, p. 200). We are thus left to suppose that although music – or what is essentially musical – is fundamentally feminine, in order for it to be aesthetically or ethically valid it needs to be made *less* feminine; without the potent thrust of style to contain, give shape to, form, and figure the unbound feminine mat(t)er, it remains dangerous (implicitly fascist, even). And is this not precisely the image in the Groddeck text cited above: 'la clôture concerne un espace vide, elle [la clôture] est réalisée grâce à la clef' or 'le symbole du masculin, qui féconde et ferme l'intérieur féminin'? It is an empty, meaningless, nothingness that threatens to engulf the subject unless plugged by the male member. Of course, Pandora's 'box' must remain firmly shut.

And yet, Lacoue-Labarthe's account of subjectivity is figured along similar lines: the abyssal and desistant subject is constituted as a subject only through this exposure to a radical exteriority (without any implication that there ever was – or ever could be – a point or a subject 'prior' to this exposure). However, as so much feminist scholarship has bountifully noted, 'theories that de-center the (masculine) subject paradoxically privilege the feminine by turning her into a seductive figure of absence. To put it simply, they celebrate woman by effectively making her disappear.'⁶² Lacoue-Labarthe's desire to 'remonte[r] de Narcisse à Echo' now seems particularly apt; for what else is the myth of Narcissus and Echo than the celebration of Narcissus' tragic death (a death that nonetheless allows him to flourish – to flower – symbolically, and thus poetically) and simultaneously, to follow Lynne Huffer again, elsewhere, 'the story of a woman disappearing?'⁶³ Echo's voice remains, but idealized, unattainable and, significantly, disembodied. The question of whether Lacoue-Labarthe's figuring of the 'desistant' (and catacoustic) subject is possible without recourse to a feminized (m)other for its coherence is, certainly, beyond the scope of this thesis – I will nonetheless return to what is most productive in Lacoue-Labarthe's thinking for music in the concluding chapter. We might,

⁶² Lynne Huffer, 'Blanchot's Mother', *Yale French Studies*, 1998, 175–95 (p. 177-8).

⁶³ Lynne Huffer, *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics, and the Question of Difference* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 75.

however, turn one final time to the name Lacoue-Labarthe, to his mus(e)ical fantasy of maternal origins, and to his own musical obsession and autobiographical compulsion.

In an unpublished interview cited by McKeane, Lacoue-Labarthe states, 'je n'ai jamais pu ne pas penser à l'injustice qui nous fait naître.'⁶⁴ In this light, Lacoue-Labarthe's often obsessive, occasionally tortured, and above all, patiently persistent writing recounts as much his own nostalgic projection of irrecoverable origins as it does a theory of the subject – though we would do well to remember, of course, that these are axiomatically indistinguishable for Lacoue-Labarthe: the subject of theory and the theory of the subject are necessarily conterminously produced. In this way, and without apologizing for the ill-considered maternal fiction upon which he makes a false claim to fact – a fiction that for all its emphasis on mat(t)er, dematerializes the female body leaving only the acousmatic imago of the 'living' feminine as necessary supplement to the (dead) male subject – Lacoue-Labarthe's account is, nonetheless, deceptively coherent. Indeed, perhaps *his* failure is also his paradoxical success, revealing precisely one way in which the 'subject' is worked into a form by a figure. Music, as he states, primes: 'elle déclenche le geste autobiographique. C'est-à-dire, aussi bien, le geste théorique' (Es, p. 233). 'L'Écho du sujet', in particular, is beguilingly honest: it is all about his (m)other.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ McKeane, p. 1.

⁶⁵ I am, of course, making further reference to Lynne Huffer's article, 'Blanchot's Mother', already mentioned, which makes a similar claim about Blanchot.

Chapter IV: Midwives and Madams: Mus(e)ic, Mediation, and Badiou's 'Universal' Subject

[L]e cinéma c'est d'abord l'invention d'une technique.
– Alain Badiou (PE, p. 97)

[W]e are used to associating 'technology' largely with twentieth-century music: Theremins and synthesizers, and the tools of electronic music. But oboes and violins are also technologies. Acknowledging this simple fact might make us question the values and ideas that we have come to attach to certain technologies. Even more importantly, though, the history of the orchestra shows the indivisibility between technology and aesthetics.
– Emily Dolan¹

The question of technology, of modernity, of techne is in my opinion not a very important question. There are always technical questions, but there is no capital newness in the question of technology. There is no direct ethical question of the relation between ethics and technology.
Ethical questions, for me, are questions in the field of truth.
– Alain Badiou (OTP)

In the wake of the neo-Heideggerian infused poetics of many leftist French philosophers (Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe included), a distinct and rather different (counter-)movement can be traced in the work of Alain Badiou. Whereas Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe remain committed to the essentially Nietzschean-Heideggerian (and latterly Derridean) overthrow of Platonic metaphysics, Badiou, though arguably a post- (rather than anti-) Heideggerian, purposefully and clearly provocatively identifies himself not only as a neo-Platonist, but as the twenty-first-century's heir to Plato. Indeed, amidst his extensive and ceaselessly proliferating oeuvre we find his acclaimed 'hyper-translation' of *La République de Platon*, a text that seems to confirm, as François Laruelle argues, the suspicion that Badiou sees himself (or asks us to read him) in relation to Plato the way that Lacan saw himself in relation to Freud: as a rereading or making available of its fundamental truth. As a result, though Badiou is quite evidently a *soixante-huitard* through and through – and indubitably the trace of his enduring fidelity to those events is written into his philosophy in a much more explicit way than with Nancy or Lacoue-Labarthe – we find a commitment in Badiou to philosophical principles that seem to run against the grain of much continental thought in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century:

¹ Emily I. Dolan, *The Orchestral Revolution: Haydn and the Technologies of Timbre* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 22.

truth, universality, science (largely as mathematics), ‘great’ art, and to a rigorous, rational and organized philosophical system. Concomitantly, this comes also with a rejection of conventional ethics, aesthetics, sophistry and rhetoric, any discourse centred on the ‘other’ (including human rights), multiculturalism and diversity, environmentalism, and political correctness (including feminism, though Louise Burchill suggests his position on this has shifted slightly over the last few years²). The upshot of this is, perhaps not unsurprisingly, a philosopher who seems extremely difficult to place: whilst identifying and philosophizing as a Maoist-sympathizing communist militant, his aesthetic predilections (for all his rejection of aesthetics as philosophy) are explicitly and unapologetically for high art Western culture; his pronouncements on love seemingly in line with the validation of traditional, monogamous marriage; and his assertion of its fundamentally heterosexual basis (even though not necessarily biological in basis, sexuation is necessarily binary) at odds with contemporary understandings in queer theory.³

This chapter will explore Badiou’s relatively infrequent pronouncements on music in the rather different context of this anti-deconstructionist neo-Platonic philosophy. Chapters four and five of his major work on music, *Five Lessons on Wagner* – particularly the analysis of *Parsifal* therein – will provide the backbone of much of what is discussed, alongside musical ‘moments’ scattered rather more diffusely elsewhere in his œuvre, notably in *Petit Manuel d’inesthétique*, *L’éthique: Essai sur la conscience du mal*, and the little commented upon, marginal ‘chapter’ from *Logiques des mondes*, ‘Scolie: Une variante musicale de la métaphysique du sujet’ amongst others. In so doing, I hope to show that despite Badiou’s self-positioning as a Platonist, and his characterization of his work as the necessary antidote to the tired poetics of Heideggerian influenced modern sophistry, there are

² See Louise Burchill, ‘Feminism’, in *The Badiou Dictionary*, ed. by Steven Corcoran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 126-132, particularly p. 132.

³ That said, this is not a claim that Badiou, in the French context, is unique in his lack of engagement with queer perspectives – far from it. In fact, France’s (intellectual) resistance to queer theory – so much of which has itself been informed and influenced by French theoretical perspectives – is the subject of an AHRC-funded research project coordinated by Hector Kollias and Oliver Davis. The outcomes of this research will doubtless offer important points of reflection with regards to Badiou’s project.

nonetheless interesting points of contact between his work and that of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe when it comes to the specific themes that constellate around the consideration of music. One of the most salient (and welcome) features of Badiou's writing on music is that he doesn't appear to imbue it with any particular essence (unlike, as we have seen, the fundamentally pre-linguistic maternal-feminine origins of music as articulated by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe).⁴ Nevertheless, and rather differently to the previous two chapters which probed at the philosophical projects of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, homing in on their characterization of music to reveal a problematic and essentializing blind spot that stands in sharp contrast to their broader post-metaphysical thinking, this chapter exploits Badiou's writing on music as one critical angle (undoubtedly of many) through which a feminist objection to his concept of universal truth might still be launched. Ultimately, despite Badiou's indubitable innovations that have provoked a new and invigorating set of challenges for a leftist philosophy appropriate to the trials of the twenty-first century, the critique of Badiou is finally more severe than those of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe; whilst there is undoubtedly much of great political import in Badiou's philosophy (particularly his articulation of the self-serving hypocrisy of much human rights discourse and the war-mongering economic neo-imperialism it serves to obscure), his *opinions* on music – and moreover, the way they are instrumentalized – are nonetheless extremely problematic. Through their careful consideration this chapter aims to show how his thinking on music highlights how certain core axes of his thought are fundamentally intertwined with the deep-seated misogyny present in much of his work. The complicated resonances and refractions of all three critiques will finally be brought together in the following chapter, including further commentary on the first three lessons of *Five Lessons on Wagner*.

⁴ Even Badiou is not immune, on occasion, to these kinds of metaphors, however. In *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, (Paris: Seuil, 2011), he states: 'ce pouvoir de la langue est précisément ce que le poème ne peut nommer. Il effectue, en puisant dans *le chant latent de la langue*' (p. 43, my emphasis) or a little later on, drawing on Rimbaud, 'la pensée poétique a pour innommable cette pensée elle-même [...] Ce qui est bien aussi la venue de *l'infini de la langue comme chant, ou symphonie* qui ensorcelle la présence' (p. 45, my emphasis). This, however, is not typical of the way Badiou understands music on the whole.

As alluded to above, Badiou's philosophy is a stringent and well wrought maieutic system, one which sees philosophers, extending Plato's analogy to midwives, as 'maquerelles des Idées, nous [philosophes] présentons les vérités aux clients potentiels.'⁵ The role accorded to philosophy here brings into sharp relief the difference between the core beliefs or values of the Nancy-Lacoue-Labarthe project and the Badiouian one. In order to discuss in any detail the characterization of music for Badiou's thinking – especially as music appears to be accorded no specific essence or unique role – it is first necessary to delineate the key structures, claims, and orientations of Badiou's thought and, in keeping with his philosophical convictions, these will be outlined systematically, in a carefully structured though rather schematic way. After outlining the key terms essential to the understanding of Badiouian philosophy – notably, truth (as universal), ontology (as mathematical set theory), the 'event', the (immortal) subject, and the 'conditions' of philosophy (art, love, science, and politics) – this chapter will then put this into dialogue with feminist thought, particularly through a critique of the idea of the universal, and then continue with a critical discussion and analysis of Badiou's musico-philosophical playlist, which stretches from Haydn through to contemporary classical music. In so doing, I will both draw on and move beyond the perspectives (*viz.* Goehr, McClary, and Scherzinger) offered in the chapters on Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, and bring more recent work by Emily Dolan, Brian Kane, and Mark Evans Bonds (amongst others) into the frame in order to probe in more detail at the complicated interrelation of music, mediation and technology. In more concrete terms, then, this chapter will argue that Badiou's preference for Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's film version of Wagner's seminal and final opera *Parsifal* is revealing, bringing to the fore the ways in which music is multiply mediated – especially by technology and its in/visible relation to particular aesthetic, socio-cultural and ideological formations. Alongside this, inconsistencies and incoherencies in the way Badiou identifies pure and impure art forms (i.e. music vs. cinema), technologically and non-technologically mediated arts (and non-arts or 'entertainment'), and artistic responses to aesthetic 'events' will be

⁵ Private correspondence between Badiou and Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, attested to in Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, Alexandre Costanzo, and Alain Badiou, *Esthétique et philosophie: actes du colloque* (Saint-Étienne Métropole: Éd. du Musée d'Art Moderne, 2008), p. 73.

highlighted in order to demonstrate the way in which Badiou's system is responsive (perhaps purposefully) only to the inherited conceit of an autonomous, transcendent work (though he would no doubt reject this historicising) – something that is confirmed by his own musical timeline. For Badiou, the history of music (or truths in the specifically musical domain of art, which is itself (Art) understood as a 'condition' of philosophy – we will return to this) runs from the 'Haydn-event' (i.e. the invention/formalization of classical forms) through to contemporary classical music, which is largely understood as faithful responses to the 'Schoenberg-event' (i.e. the invention of serialism) and possibly some jazz, with all other musics disparaged and relegated to the status of entertainment or non-art (and thus of no concern to philosophy). Whilst much of this critique can be explained as the product of a fundamentally different philosophical orientation (I am, quite evidently, a historicizing sophist, by Badiou's account!) this chapter nonetheless hopes to demonstrate several inconsistencies and problems internal to Badiou's own thought along the way. Finally, by demonstrating that form is itself technologically and socio-culturally mediated – musical forms and processes are themselves inherently contingent, multiply mediated, and irreducibly enmeshed in their relations to particular social, cultural and political configurations, the effects of which can be discerned in Badiou's own musical periodization – and in ascertaining that Badiou's truths only pertain to the purely formal innovations or procedures of music, the inherited and geo-historically particular synecdochic relation between form and music (or art more broadly) profoundly troubles his claims to universality. Consequently, as already outlined in previous chapters, the very idea that music (or any 'art') could be absolute – divorced from the society that produces it – or at least its 'truth procedure' could be – is itself the product of a very particular (and relatively recent) ideological configuration. Furthermore, this ideological configuration has been complicit with and instrumentalized by capitalist ideologies such as our supposed (neo-liberally conceived) freedom, autonomy, and individualism (including the very human rights discourses Badiou explicitly rejects); in short, the very structures incommensurable with Badiou's universal truths. Ultimately, then, the crux of this chapter leads to two claims: firstly,

and despite a Badiouian turn of late,⁶ that recent musicology has much to bring to the table of (post-) postmodern theory and philosophy, and that the import of such critical interventions should not be underrated in avoiding a Thermidorian – to use a Badiouian term – musical(ogical) turn; and, secondly, that Badiou’s invisible role as the mediator or adjudicator of the distinction between truth and opinion reveals a distinctly Pythagorean (rather than Platonic) philosophical gesture, whilst also revealing an (in)aesthetic system that rehabilitates sets of hierarchical binaries which seem especially problematic in light of the self-evident misogyny found on numerous occasions in Badiou’s texts.

PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS, ANTIPHILOSOPHY, AND SOPHISTICAL RHETORIC

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the Nancy-Lacoue-Labarthe project and that of Badiou’s is their fundamentally oppositional understandings and characterizations of philosophy itself, very much of which hinges around their differing conceptions of language. Whilst Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe seek to redress the (im)balance between the statuses of literature (or the literary-poetic) and philosophy by identifying philosophy’s supposedly neutral and objective voice as its very own founding metaphysical moment – thus philosophy is strictly indistinguishable from literature – Badiou seeks to rehabilitate philosophy in its classical sense. For Badiou, ‘La philosophie est théorie générale de l’être et de l’événement, tels que noués par la vérité. Car une vérité est le travail *auprès* de l’être d’un événement évanoui dont il ne reste que le nom’ (*PMI*, pp. 45-46). In this way, his philosophical project at large makes a concerted plea, as Oliver Feltham describes, ‘for a return to philosophy, for an end to the end of philosophy and its endless deconstruction’⁷ and, moreover, as Fabien Tarby articulates, he remains committed to ‘une histoire de la vérité, dont la succession renvoie à des problèmes et des thèses éternelles’ (*PE*, p. 154). Badiou’s understanding or formulation of ‘truth’, ‘being’, and ‘event’

⁶ See, amongst several recent examples, James Currie, ‘Music After All’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 62.1 (2009), 145–203, and several texts by J.P.E. Harper-Scott.

⁷ Oliver Feltham, ‘Philosophy’, in *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts*, ed. by Adam John Bartlett, Justin Clemens, and Alain Badiou (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 13-24, p. 13.

will be delineated more clearly below, but for now it is his identification of philosophy as a ‘general theory’ – and one moreover that is systematic and identifies truth as universal – that gives us pause for thought; subtending all of this is, quite clearly, an entirely different conception of language than that which we have found in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe. For Badiou, then, whilst a philosopher might leave traces of his particular writing style, philosophy is fundamentally, as the translator of the English version of *Philosophie et l'événement* describes, ‘a protocol of transmission pertaining to something not constituted by the writing process itself [...It] is always *didactic* writing: its rationale consists in conveying the Idea.’⁸ The philosopher’s words – whether written or spoken – provide the means, or the material support, but are ultimately detachable from the information which they convey; they are mere “‘props” [...] for the full staging of the Idea.’⁹ Thus, in absolute contrast to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, there is an essential and fundamental difference between literary writing (which is to do with the bounds of language itself) and properly philosophical writing for which language and its accrued and philosophically specific technical terminology is simply the quasi-material support which allows the philosopher to convey his message: rationally, logically, and unbound by any limitation of language *qua* language.¹⁰

And indeed, nowhere is this more evident than in Badiou’s proposition of ‘antiphilosophy’ and his diatribes against sophistry. While the task of philosophy, for Badiou, is to orientate the thinking of thought to truth, what antiphilosophers and sophists have in common is a rejection of or relativizing of ‘Truth.’ Whereas antiphilosophy remains, in some sense at least, philosophy – and indeed in some substantial way it functions to counter philosophy ‘proper’ in that through the antiphilosophy/philosophy confrontation a task is announced, ‘philosophy is always heir to

⁸ ‘Translator’s Preface’, in Alain Badiou and Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. by Louise Burchill, 2013, p. vii, emphasis in original.

⁹ ‘Translator’s Preface’, in Badiou and Tarby, p. vii.

¹⁰ Interestingly, it is over this issue that Badiou disagrees with his long-time colleague and collaborator Barbara Cassin. See, for example, Barbara Cassin, *L’effet sophistique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). It is also worth noting, I think, that though he asserts philosophy’s ability to communicate quite straightforwardly, his writing is extraordinarily dense and difficult to understand!

antiphilosophy'¹¹ – sophistry is, by contrast, its negative double. The primary objection to sophistry is its delimitation of 'philosophy' to the play of language (games) and the signifier, and their replacement of (universal) Truth with a multitude of contingent opinions. As Badiou states, sophists are '[c]eux pour qui l'opposition fondamentale n'est pas entre la vérité et l'erreur ou l'errance, mais entre la parole et le silence, entre ce qui peut être dit et ce qui est impossible à dire' (CS, p. 60), or in his well-known maxim that serves as a corrective to the sophistic error that '*[i]* n'y a que des corps et des langages' (LM, p. 9, italics in original), to which Badiou retorts '*sinon qu'il y a des vérités*' (LM, p. 12, italics in original). It is worth highlighting that, as we have seen, this kind of sophistic practice has consequences for the way music (which as we have seen in Nancy is also, fundamentally, silent) tends to be categorized – or even instrumentalized – where it is enlisted to supplant or at least plug the void beyond the limits of what language cannot say; a move that, given the Lacanian identification of the symbolic (linguistic) realm with phallic/paternal law has, as its consequence, the (re)alignment of the maternal-feminine with the properly (non-linguistic) musical. Evidently this fundamentally different perspective has profound ramifications for Badiou's understanding of music. Finally, however, the sophists *do* in fact serve a 'purpose' for philosophy, in that they 'nous rappelle que la catégorie de Vérité est vide' (CS, p. 75); whilst philosophy affirms the category of Truth, the negative figure of the sophist 'prevents philosophy from becoming self-enclosed and mistaking itself for a meta-discourse that consequently substantializes the empty category of truth as a privileged access to the real.'¹² In short, philosophy *is not* truth itself, but should rather affirm the (com)possibility of heterogeneous truths as found in its four conditions: love, science, art, and politics.

¹¹ Alain Badiou, 'Who Is Nietzsche?' in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (2001), pp. 1–11 (p. 10).

¹² Samo Tomšič, 'Sophistry', in *The Badiou Dictionary*, pp. 317–320, p. 320.

BEING (MATTER AND ONTOLOGY) AND EVENT (DIALECTIC AND IMMORTALITY)

In terms of its philosophical foundations, Badiou's philosophy, as Fabien Tarby describes and as announced by Badiou's magnum opus, *L'Être et l'événement*, is primarily committed to two things: matter (which is 'mathématisable [et] logique'), and 'l'exception humaine' (which functions dialectically as a category of negation in the guise of an event) (see *PE*, p. 155). Less frequently acknowledged though important, it would seem, is that though Badiou rejects the poetics that ensue from philosophy's Heideggerian deconstruction, through the title he nonetheless conscripts himself into a lineage that runs from Heidegger's *Being and Time* through to, less controversially, Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*. Similarly, as Oliver Marchart asserts, 'there are many more similarities between Badiou and his alleged adversaries, the modern "sophists" [...] than there are incompatibilities.'¹³ Rather, he is as Oliver Feltham has described, 'a fellow traveller [...] of poststructuralism. He sympathized with its critique of philosophy's ubiquitous presupposition of unity and identity; he sympathized with its attempt to think multiplicity. One can detect thousands of tiny poststructuralist influences in every one of his texts.'¹⁴ At stake in rehearsing the common ground he occupies with other poststructuralists is acknowledging their shared commitment to the possibility of a post-foundational thinking; the commitment to a rethinking of materialism and the rescinding of the idealist transcendental – whether in terms of God, essence, soul or spirit, or any totalizing absolute including the illusory quest for lost origins. Tarby articulates this in terms of the horizontal nature of our material, (hum)animal, real(ity) and the verticality of idealism, whilst highlighting that 'nul matérialisme n'a jamais pu soutenir une horizontale pureté. Il y a toujours eu une sorte de supplément ou d'incise' – a difficulty that is often traversed through the invocation of the Lacanian and distinctly human symbolic, which in turn changes our relationship to the (no longer immediate) real (Tarby in *PE*, p. 162). The innovation we are presented with in Badiou, through the event, is the possibility of

¹³ Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 111.

¹⁴ Feltham, p. 13.

accounting for our more-than-animality without simultaneously invoking a (fixed or eternal) transcendental.

The first of the two major terms for Badiou, then, is that of 'being.' His mathematical ontology is a sustained attempt to dissolve the residual Romanticism in Heidegger's thinking of the unrecognized ontological difference subtending the entire history of Western thought; in short, Badiou's (in this respect, explicitly post-Heideggerian) philosophy can be understood as a '*materialist theory of "ontico-ontological" difference*.'¹⁵ Badiou's position *vis-à-vis* ontology is developed, through Cantorian set theory, perhaps most rigorously in the opening movements of *L'Être et l'événement*, and explores how what *is* (as such) is *multiple*; there is no fundamental consistency or *unity* – one-ness – to what *is*, but rather a radically infinite multiplicity. Crucially, the multiple is not substantialized, but is itself 'le régime de la présentation', insisting that 'l'un est [...] un résultat opératoire [...] mais] le domaine de l'opération n'est pas un (car l'un n'est pas), et que donc il est multiple, de ce que, *dans la présentation*, ce qui n'est pas un est nécessairement multiple' (*EE*, p. 32, Badiou's emphasis). Presentation, or rather 'présentation structurée' (*EE*, p. 33) thus effects a particular situation – 'Il n'y a que des situations' (*EE*, p. 33) – and yet remains ungrounded by a transcendental One as *l'un* is just an operational effect or result. Thus, critically, 'Le multiple, dont l'ontologie fait situation, ne se compose que de multiplicités. Il n'y a pas d'un. Ou: *tout multiple est un multiple de multiples* (*EE*, p. 37, my emphasis). Or, as he states perhaps more lucidly elsewhere: 'l'ontologie, si elle existe, doit être la théorie des multiplicités inconsistantes en tant que telles. Ce qui veut aussi dire: ce qui vient à la pensée de l'ontologie est le multiple, sans autre prédicat que sa multiplicité. Sans autre concept que lui-même, et sans rien qui garantisse sa consistance' (*OT*, p. 29). In short, ontology cannot be identified in reference *to* anything else – it has no substance – nor is it transcendental; it does not *mean* anything. So, for example, to be a man or a woman or a musician means nothing, as such – or is at least of no ontological interest; they are simply passing identifications/presentations borne of particular situations that are merely

¹⁵ Tarby, 'Being', in *The Badiou Dictionary*, pp. 25-27, p. 25, emphasis in original.

superfluous gloss to the properly ontological. These fundamental points of Badiou's ontology are important for several reasons (and likely many more than it is possible to enumerate here): firstly, these theorizations are at the very core of Badiou's determination not to slip into the fallacy of what is ultimately a theological ontology (i.e. the logic of the transcendental One); secondly, Badiouian multiplicity must be differentiated from the Deleuzian (and Guattarian) multiplicity which is related to the *virtuel* – and thus remains in some effective or essential link with the *actuel* – rather than *l'infini* or *éternel*; thirdly, the mathematical determination of being both acknowledges and troubles the Heideggerian distinction between the ontic and the ontological, and thus between *étant* and *être*. Certainly, the infinite multiplicity describes the ontological field, and not *merely* the ontic, but precisely what it also highlights, as Tarby acknowledges, is Heidegger's residual idealism in his desire to 'reach the ontological, *beyond* the ontic.'¹⁶ Instead, Badiou demonstrates that the task at hand is 'to unfold a sort of field that goes from apparent or phenomenal unity to ontico-ontological multiplicities, which themselves have only the void as their ultimate horizon.'¹⁷ Finally, then, in this resistance to figure the ontological field as in/inaccessible to philosophy and which also discards 'being' as an *object* of philosophy (i.e. something about which philosophy can, as self-imagined master discourse, either have direct access to or reveal truths about – a theme that will recur in many other fields as we will soon see) Badiou 'ne fait que *délimiter* l'espace propre possible de la philosophie' (*EE*, p. 22, Badiou's emphasis). In this way, then, the radical thesis proposed – that 'les mathématiques sont l'ontologie' (*EE*, p. 21) means that philosophy, in that it necessarily *speaks*, speaks only 'metaontologically' about being, whereas mathematics makes intelligible the infinite and eternal multiplicity (of being). It is in this way, precisely, that mathematics simply *is* ontology.¹⁸

The second crucial term for Badiou's philosophy is *l'événement*. An event can happen in any of four domains – art, love, science, and politics – which are also the conditions of philosophy (of which, more

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

¹⁸ See Alex Ling, 'Ontology', in *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts*, pp. 48-60, pp. 48-9.

below). As mentioned above, Badiou draws on Cantorian set theory (of the specifically Zermelo-Fraenkel variety) for his ontological project, and the development of Cantorian set theory is itself one of these events or, more precisely, simply the *name* of the event (to which Badiou is faithful). However, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle observes, it is indeed ‘never entirely clear why there should be events in those four fields, and only those’, though he proposes that it may originate in Badiou’s self-professed Platonism, so ‘the “matheme” of mathematics is broached in the theory of Ideas; politics is the object of the *Republic* and the *laws*; and poetry is excluded from the ideal city in a gesture that Badiou interprets as Freudian denial.’¹⁹ In its most fundamental sense, an *événement* is decidedly unpredictable, and has the potential (even if not realized) to effect monumental change in the domain in which it occurs through its disruptive and reconfiguring effects which demand ‘une *nouvelle* manière d’être’ (*E*, p.61, Badiou’s emphasis). As Badiou states, ‘[l]’événement crée une possibilité, mais il faut ensuite un travail, collectif dans le cadre de la politique, individuel dans le cas de la création artistique, pour que cette possibilité devienne réelle’ (*PE*, p. 19) – in and of itself, the event guarantees nothing, as it requires faithful subjects to carry out the work (the truth-procedure) it induces or demands. In this way, Badiou draws an emphatic distinction between ‘truth’ and knowledge: though knowledge is generated by truth (procedures), it is always specific and incomplete, and certainly not *éternel* as is truth. Whereas knowledge is partial, truth (even if it evades us) is absolute (see *LW*). Crucially, then, the event is not located ‘dans les usages de la situation, ni ne se laissait penser par les savoirs établis’ (*E*, p. 63, my emphasis), but is rather a ‘*supplément*’ (*E*, p. 61, Badiou’s emphasis) or, in Lacan’s sense, ‘une “trouée”’ (*E*, p. 63). It is this way of thinking that allows Badiou to sidestep any reference to a meaningful, transcendental beyond; the truth-procedure that unfolds ‘from’ the event is strictly *not* drawn from a pre-given (set of) truth(s) – ‘Il n’y a pas de Ciel des vérités’ (*E*, p. 63) – but rather *induces* new ways of being. The event and its attendant truth-procedure are both contingent and ‘une *rupture immanente*’ (*E*, p. 63, Badiou’s emphasis); a rupture in that the event was nowhere present *in* the

¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, ‘Cantor, Lacan, Mao, Beckett, Même Combat: The Philosophy of Alain Badiou’, *Radical Philosophy*, 93 January/February (1999), 6–13 (p. 8, p. 9).

given situation (hence, then, its unpredictability) and yet also immanent, in that the ensuing truth-procedure unfolds in a particular situation. Above all, then, the event is (or at least *describes* as 'it' has no substance as such) a disruption to or a reconfiguration of the present situation; in its wake a (new) subject is induced. The order, here, is crucial, and Badiou is absolutely clear on this point: though the trace of the event is only sustained by its faithful subject, '[l]e sujet ne pré-existe nullement au processus. Il est absolument inexistant dans la situation "avant" l'événement. On dira que le processus de vérité *induit* un sujet' (*E*, p. 63, Badiou's emphasis). Because 'Truth' is strictly speaking supplementary to '*ce qu'il y a*' (*E*, p. 61, Badiou's emphasis) the (faithful) subject induced through fidelity to the event '*oultre-passe l'animal*' even if '*l'animal en est le seul support*' (*E*, p. 61). Or, properly speaking, the subjectivation induced by the event makes the subject *immortel*. Because truth, for Badiou, is *éternel*, so the subject which is produced as a faithful response to its trace is *immortel*; and as Badiou describes, we all have this opportunity: '*À tout animal humain est accordée, plusieurs fois dans sa brève existence, la chance de s'incorporer au présent subjectif d'une vérité*' (*LW*, p. 536).

In this way, the eponymous '68 slogan to which Badiou often refers and to which he remains faithful, '*soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible*', helps to clarify what is at stake and knots together several key elements: the impossible (or the void) of a particular situation (the situation here being capitalism) is what makes that situation, as such, possible, or at least identifiable/thinkable in its totality. But it is only im/possible '*dans l'ordre établi*' (*PE*, p. 21) or in the current (state of the) situation. The event is thus the supplement to the 'what there is' (i.e., again, capitalism) but is nowhere present *in* the situation; as a result, if faithfully maintained, it induces a change of situation. To be explicit: a non-capitalist form of socio-economic organisation is nowhere present *in* the capitalist situation, but its non-existence (in the situation) is what enables us to think capitalism as the organising structure that there is. In this context, a political event (such as 1968) would be the supplemental rupture (whose trace is sustained by faithful subjects) that declares or proposes a (universal) truth that is both immanent to the situation and yet is nowhere contained within it. Furthermore, for Badiou, the slogan takes on extra resonances when we realize that it can also be understood in its Lacanian overtones –

after all, the Lacanian real is the quintessential what there is (not) that is both constitutive *and* beyond any symbolic manifestation (Lacan famously said ‘l’impossible, c’est le réel, tout simplement’²⁰). Further still, this brings us back into dialogue with Badiou’s difficult-to-think mathematical ontology: Lacan also described the real as ‘c’est la mathématique’²¹, and thus helps one to imagine the way in which it is incorrect to think of the ontic and ontological as oppositional – they are *both* only identifiable in terms of infinite multiplicities and there is no ‘pure’ ontological field to which we can return – and the way in which the event *is* properly exterior (‘inhumain’ as Badiou describes, see *PE* p. 23) to the ‘what there is’ of the situation, without being pre-determined, predictable, inevitable or, indeed, transcendental as such. All we can do is wait for an ‘event’ – a truth – to change the configuration of the situation and of knowledge.

ENCORE (EN CORPS): TRUTH, METAPHYSICS, BODIES

Badiou’s conception of history is closely related to – or even mutually dependent on – the way he understands truth; indeed the only history there is for Badiou, in any fundamental and certainly philosophical sense is, as Corcoran describes, ‘the history of truth, or rather of truths.’²² His work challenges or refutes the idealism of two classical positions: that of traditional metaphysics and also that of ‘democratic materialism’ (what he claims to be the dominant ideology of the (postmodern) present day), both of which, in different ways, oppose truth to history (and vice versa). Traditional metaphysics defends truth, contending that it exists outside of the historical context in which it may appear – truth is eternal and transcendental – whilst democratic materialism claims, conversely, that there can be no eternal truth; all truths are relative, discursive, and ultimately reducible to particular social and historical configurations. He also insists, as Corcoran again describes, that truth is not

²⁰ This was a claim made in a 1967 seminar (‘La logique du fantasme’) cited in Didier Castanet, ‘Éditorial. “L’impossible, c’est le réel, tout simplement”’, *L’en-je lacanien*, 7.2 (2006), 5–7, p. 5.

²¹ See Castanet.

²² Corcoran, ‘History/Historicity’, in *The Badiou Dictionary*, pp. 147-152, p. 147, emphasis in original.

singular, but rather is ‘spread across the above-mentioned singular and irreducibly heterogeneous truth procedures’²³ (love, art, science, and politics), and yet it ‘fixe de la sorte l’éternité d’une vérité, c’est-à-dire en définitive la puissance d’une humanité générique.’²⁴ The upshot of all this is that truth and history are thoroughly (even necessarily) commensurate with each other; the event is both immanent to the particular (historical) situation (in any one of the four conditions) *and* is only an event (i.e. produces a truth) if it addresses all (i.e. is universal). Crucially, then, a truth-process ‘*ne se communique pas* [...] Pour tout ce qui concerne les vérités, il est requis qu’il y en ait *rencontre*. L’Immortel dont je suis capable [...] doit être *directement* saisi par la fidélité’ (*E*, pp. 73-4, Badiou’s emphasis). Consequently, the event (of which all that we can speak is its name: 1848, 1968, Mallarmé, Schoenberg, Cantor, an amorous encounter, etc.) is only discernible *post hoc* as a trace, and in relation to the subjective formations/responses it induces (for example: fidelity, denial, occultation, resurrection – of which more later) all of which entail not only new subjective forms (the event is properly *incorporé*) but also a new situation (in whatever domain the event took place). A body is thus ‘la dimension mondaine du sujet. Et “trace” ce qui, à partir de l’événement, détermine l’orientation active du corps. Un sujet est donc une synthèse formelle entre la statique du corps et sa dynamique, entre sa composition et son effectuation’ (*Sc*, p. 89).

MUSICAL MARGINS: ‘UNE VARIANTE MUSICALE DE LA MÉTAPHYSIQUE DU SUJET’

I have made a discovery thanks to which the supremacy of German music is ensured for the next hundred years.
– Arnold Schoenberg²⁵

Having laid out in book one of *Logiques des mondes* his formal theory of the subject (or meta-physics) Badiou turns to a properly musical subject to elucidate over the course of a mere ten pages ‘une

²³ *ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁴ Alexandre Costanzo, ‘Le Gardiennage du réel’ in *Esthétique et philosophie: actes du colloque*, p. 29.

²⁵ Schoenberg, cited in Willi Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 130.

version compacte quelque peu décalée' (Sc, p. 89). This slight chapter is described as a 'Scolie', thus an explanatory comment, interpretation or exegesis usually given in the margin,²⁶ and thus formally gestures towards music's illustrative but by no means central role in Badiou's thinking and, at the same time, suggests a hesitancy in grappling with music in any depth that is even more profoundly marked in *Five Lessons on Wagner*.²⁷ For our concerns, this modest chapter is of particular interest because it is the only place in Badiou's œuvre where his theory of the subject (or anything approaching the formal rigour of his major philosophical texts) is laid out in terms of music; even the book devoted to Wagner is unusually scant when it comes to the dense technical terms that proliferate almost everywhere else. In order to do this, he elucidates his metaphysical theory of the subject in thirteen points – remembering that the subject is by no means reserved for solely human subjects, but also artistic, scientific, amorous, political, etc. subjects – elucidating further each of the thirteen points in relation to music. For example, his first point: 'Un sujet est une relation indirecte et créatrice entre un événement et un monde' is subsequently expounded by invoking 'comme monde la musique allemande à la fin du XIXe siècle et au début du XXe' (Sc, p. 89) and the post-Wagnerian disintegration of tonality as found in the music of not only Wagner, but also Mahler, Bruckner, Richard Strauss and the early Schoenberg and Korngold; a world which is fundamentally changed by 'l'événement-Schoenberg', an event whose trace creates a new musical world and which 'casse en deux l'histoire de la musique, en affirmant qu'un monde sonore est possible qui ne soit pas réglé par le système tonal' (Sc, p. 90). Crucially, the trace is not the dodecaphonic or serialist technique itself, but rather the body of musical works (which include serial/dodecaphonic compositions) that are responses to 'l'impératif que détient la trace' (Sc, p. 90).

²⁶ 'scholium, n.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. Web. 26 April 2016.

²⁷ Michael Gallope has also described *Five Lessons on Wagner* as being 'framed by a measure of hesitancy.' See Michael Gallope, 'The Universal Form of Badiou's Wagner', *The Opera Quarterly*, 29.3–4 (2013), 342–48 (p. 342). It should be noted that music is not alone in this marginal treatment: *Logiques des mondes* contains two other *scolia*, 'Scolie aussi impressionnant que subtil: Le Foncteur transcendantal' and of more direct structural equivalence to the musical *scolie*, 'Scolie: Une Variante politique de la physique du sujet-de-vérité' which offers a similarly tentative defence of Mao's political restraints in inducing a new political body/organization.

Badiou then continues to sketch out the different subjectivities induced by the evental trace, and the different configurations or negotiations of the new subject in the form of openings or closures (what Badiou terms 'points'). For Badiou, the subject 'est une séquence qui comporte des continuités *et* des discontinuités [with the old world], des ouvertures *et* des points. Le "et" s'incarne en sujet. Ou encore (en-corps): Un sujet est la forme conjonctive d'un corps (Sc, p. 93, Badiou's emphasis). Moreover it is, in the current example, according to Badiou, with the differing musical responses under the names Berg (oriented to openings with the old world) and Webern (oriented towards points of closure with the old world) as incorporated into the subject 'musique sérielle' that the truth of the Schoenberg-event is proven or revealed (see Sch, p. 94). Similarly, it is under the names Mozart and Beethoven as incorporated into the subject 'style classique' (i.e. the invention of the architectonics of large scale forms) that we find proof of the Haydn-event (see Sc, p. 94 and E, p. 93). Ultimately, then, it is in this *post hoc* identification of subjective constructions, bodies, and works that truth is announced, or 'dépliée point par point, elle ne tient dans aucune formule unique' thus on a more fundamental level 'l'événement-Schoenberg prononce la vérité du monde musical post-wagnérien de la fin du XIXe siècle et du début du XXe' (Sc, p. 95). In short, the truth of Schoenberg is not Schoenberg (nor his works) but rather what it reveals about a previous situation. Badiou sees the music of the late Romantic period to be 'une distorsion extensive du style classique' which in turn leads to 'une totalisation structurale [...et] une saturation émotive, une angoissante recherche, finalement en vaine, de l'effet' (Sc, p. 95). It is in this way, for Badiou, that serial music reveals the truth of the classical style which has reached its saturation. Given, then, that the truth induced by an event is the truth of the previous situation, this leads to an entirely teleological narrative that passes in a strictly filial fashion, and Badiou is absolutely clear about this:

il n'y a aucune intelligence contemporaine du style classique et de son devenir-romantique, aucune vérité éternelle, et donc actuelle, du sujet musical initié par l'événement-Haydn, qui ne transite par une incorporation à la séquence sérielle, et donc au sujet familièrement nommé 'musique contemporaine' (Sc, p. 96).

We might only note for now the way this reconstructs or realigns the history of universal truths with an entirely conventional narrative of Western music history (though this is unacknowledged, it is simply ‘l’histoire de la musique’); and, moreover, one that is unable to account for (or is at least unable to attribute any value or interest to) non-filial relations such as the ways in which Webern influenced Schoenberg: if the compositions of Webern and Berg constitute the body of the serial subject as induced by the Schoenberg-event, there is no way of articulating in these terms the interconnecting and mutually reinforcing influences the various members of the Second Viennese School had on one another (or indeed on anyone else). Nor does it lend us any way of understanding works within a composer’s œuvre that break the teleological narrative (such as Schoenberg’s late return to elements of tonality and even neo-classicism); or at least it denigrates them as having nothing to do with universal truths. It also reconstructs a conventional narrative that ignores the contribution of women composers which, if we were interested in the ‘serial subject’, could also include, for example, Ruth Crawford Seeger and Elisabeth Lutyens (though, again, it is unable to account for this in terms of filiation as it is not entirely clear that either were particularly inspired by Schoenberg; nonetheless they wrote works that are, *encore*, incorporable into the serial body) and finally refuses the possibility that influences from other domains (especially when it comes to technology and what Badiou would term ‘entertainment’ music) or non-formal procedures can be related to or understood in terms of the history of truths. This is a problem that we will return to later when considering Badiou’s self-professed affection for Messiaen who was a major influence on spectralism – a movement that is usually considered to be a significant counter-movement to the institutional domination of serialism. In addition, the process of influence is substantially dematerialized, suggesting that truths are communicated ‘telepathically’ rather than through ‘specific events [here in the conventional sense] and materialities’; as Piekut describes ‘influence [figured only in terms of formal innovations discerned retrospectively – usually in the score – by the attentive scholar] becomes a technique for erasing all the mediators that actually perform the act of influence. Any relation of influence surely relies upon many things to work – how else does composer A touch composer B, separate by fifty years, than by

virtue of her scores, performances, recordings, or writings?’²⁸ In short, just as Badiou’s philosophy describes the *post-hoc* identification of events (of which all remains is the trace), his philosophical system seems apt only to describe – again, *post-hoc* – what we already know to have been significant and canonical musical events (in a generic rather than Badiouian sense), thus obliterating alternative, minoritarian, or counter-histories and rendering the work done to uncover some of these histories as having nothing to do with ‘truth.’

In closer detail, Badiou concludes this brief excursus into a musical world by giving examples of composers or musical works in relation to the four affects that ‘signalent l’incorporation d’un animal humain au processus subjectif d’une vérité’ (Sc, p. 96). The first, *terreur*, is described as ‘une discontinuité décisive, qui installerait d’un seul coup le nouveau monde’ (Sc, p. 96); the second is *angoisse*, and is figured as a ‘recul devant l’obscurité de tout ce qui est discontinu [...et] cet affect signe le désir d’une continuité, d’un abri monotone’ (Sc, p. 96); the third, *courage*, ‘affirme l’acceptation de la pluralité des points, de ce que les discontinuités sont à la fois impérieuses et multiformes’ (Sc, p. 96); and finally, *justice*, which ‘affirme l’équivalence, au regard de la prééminence du devenir-sujet, de ce qui est continu et négocié, et de ce qui est discontinu et violent’ (Sc, pp. 96-97). This final affect, *justice*, about which Badiou speaks at much greater length than for any of the others, also affirms that these various ‘modalités subjectives’ (i.e. negotiation or violence) cannot be hierarchized in terms of value, and thus that ‘[l]a guerre peut valoir autant que la paix, la négociation autant que la lutte, la violence autant que la douceur’ (Sc, p. 97). Once these basic affective modalities have been established, Badiou continues by mapping them homologically onto various composers’ responses to the Schoenberg-event. So, for example, he aligns the fundamental rupture or break of a terroristic affect with the music of Boulez who, as he claims, ‘était sans égards pour la “musique française” de l’entre-deux-guerres’ and thus ‘dans son inflexible volonté d’incorporer la musique, en France, à un sujet qui en Autriche et en Allemagne avait un demi-siècle d’âge, Boulez n’hésitait pas à

²⁸ Benjamin Piekut, ‘Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques’, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 11.02 (2014), 191–215 (p. 202).

introduire [...] une certaine dose de terreur' (Sc, p. 97). Interestingly, this is later characterized as little more than a geo-culturally induced imperative when Badiou claims that Boulez 'ne pouvait ni ne devait éviter une certaine dose de terreur pour désembourber la prétendue "musique française"' (Sc, p. 98). This quite explicit value judgement is all the more striking coming just a few lines after he proscribes making value judgements about the relative value of the four affects – all of which are necessary – concluding that to fall prey to such opining 'n'est qu'un effet d'opinion' (Sc, p. 98). Apparently the same proscription doesn't hold true for music itself (which would appear to have an absolute rather than a relative value – an idea to which we will return later on). He then continues to align *angoisse* with the music not only of Stravinsky, but also of Berg and Dutilleux, and which he understands to maintain a fundamental relation to at least 'reste[r] [normé] par l'ouverture plutôt que par l'abrupt des points' (Sc, p. 97). Striking, yet again, is the way he characterizes those placed under the affective modality of *angoisse* who, he claims, took for granted 'l'existence d'un seul monde-musique' (Sc, p. 97); in denying the new musical world, named serialism, Badiou signals what he takes to be their false belief in tonality as constituting the only musical world. Again, this is a point to which we will return in light of Badiou's own pronouncements on music which suggest a singularly European (if not only tonal) musical world. Under the affect of *courage* he places Webern, who '[cherche] les points dont le nouveau monde-musique doit faire la preuve qu'il peut en décider' (Sc, p. 97); and finally, he claims that Boulez, ultimately, learned *justice* in his later years: 'entre 1950 et 1980 [...] il a acquis le pouvoir de détendre quand il le faut l'abrupt de la construction, de développer ses propres ouvertures' (Sc, pp. 97-98).

HISTORY AND WORLDS (OR THE PROBLEM OF PARTICULARISM AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF TRUTH)

In Badiou's extraordinary excursus into an explicitly musical subject, the crucial roles of history, worlds, truth and event are prominently foregrounded – all of which are inextricably bound up with his

understanding of universality. In his major work theorizing and describing his conception of the universal, *Saint Paul: La Fondation de l'universalisme*, Badiou describes how 'l'énergie d'une vérité, ce qui la fait exister dans le monde, est identique à son universalité'; moreover, the subjective form of this universal truth 'sous le nom paulinien d'amour' consists only in the way it is addressed 'à tous les autres, Grecs et Juifs, hommes et femmes, hommes libres et esclaves' (*StP*, p. 97). Whilst, I would contend, his (re)figuring of eternal truths challenges classical metaphysical (including Platonic) conceptions in interesting and both productive and potentially contentious ways, it is the universal address and its knock-on impact on notions such as difference, or 'particularism' that really rub against the grain of so much recent thought. The centrality of this to Badiou's philosophy cannot be emphasized enough; not only are truth procedures only truth procedures in that they are absolutely indifferent to differences (see *E*, p. 46) but, he claims, 'toute la prédication éthique sur l'autre et sa "reconnaissance" doit être purement et simplement abandonnée' (*E*, pp. 42-3). His entire philosophy is a rallying call to 'faire valoir une singularité universelle à la fois contre les abstractions établies (juridiques alors, [in St Paul's time] économiques aujourd'hui), et contre la revendication communautaire ou particulariste' (*StP*, pp. 14-15). Moreover, he frames the entire project of identarian liberation movements as fundamentally complicit with the throes of neoliberal capitalism (this is evidently quite difficult to reconcile with the incontestably positive outcomes of feminism, the civil rights and gay liberation movements for the *lives* – and not just the economy – of many, though far from all, women, non-white, and LGBTQIA individuals – none of which, it might be added, Badiou is...).

To return to Badiou's own words: 'Les deux composantes de l'ensemble articulé (homogénéité abstraite du capital et revendications identitaires) sont dans une relation de miroir et d'entretien réciproque' (*StP*, p. 14). His charge is, in effect, a more philosophically dense charge of the classic (white male, able-bodied, etc.) activist: 'You're dividing the movement! There's no war but class war!' (though Badiou would no doubt problematize the term 'class'). Or, as he states elsewhere, what we have now is 'la sociologie culturelle, pour les besoins de la prédication, à feu la lutte des classes' (*E*, p.

41). He then goes on to ask, rhetorically, and more than a little sarcastically, 'Qui peut prétendre que va de soi la supériorité du cultivé-compétent-gestionnaire-sexuellement-épanoui? Mais qui défendra le religieux-corrumpu-terroriste-polygame? Ou se fera le chantre du marginal-culturel-homéopathe-médiatique-transsexuel?' (*StP*, p. 14). Much of this, it seems, is provocative polemics aimed at inciting a reaction but also, ultimately, at unseating cherished and uncritical notions, many of which are, quite evidently, co-optable to free market profiteering. More succinctly it is the self-evident universality of capitalism (in our present situation) that requires, for Badiou, 'a struggle of universalism against universalism, not of particularism against universalism.'²⁹ It is not that Badiou denies difference (or even that differences manifest in particular ways in particular worlds) but conversely that difference is, ultimately, *all that there is*; the generic multiplicity of being is not, however, localizable in any one identity configuration. This leads Badiou to be able to say, for example, that '[i]l y a autant de différence entre, disons, un paysan chinois et un jeune cadre norvégien qu'entre moi-même et n'importe qui – y compris moi-même. Autant, mais donc aussi *ni plus ni moins*' (*E*, p. 44, Badiou's emphasis). Whilst there is without doubt some serious cause for reflection (about difference and identity and their relationships to capitalism) based on some of Badiou's claims, his position also has the consequence of flattening all differences (no doubt intentional given his singular interest in infinite multiplicities) such that the structural and systemic oppressions of our present situation (and thence their relationships to capitalism) cease to matter. It is quite evidently true that the hypocrisy of the supposed (Western) commitment to 'democratic materialism' (i.e. the ethics of 'recognising the other', in favour of diversity, multiculturalism, plurality of opinions and cultures premised on a fundamental and universal equality, i.e. 'human rights') is easily shown, in practice, to mean democracy for those, and only those, who believe in democracy (which in turn is ultimately shown to be the free market). This internal inconsistency and hypocrisy is, indubitably, grave and, it would seem, not only indisputable but a rallying wake-up call to the present realities of economic neo-imperialism.

²⁹ Alain Badiou, 'Appendix: Politics and Philosophy: An Interview with Alain Badiou' in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London; New York: Verso, 2001), p. 114.

At the same time, however, Badiou's incendiary invective against identity politics smoothes over a playing field – albeit one constructed by a particular world situation – that is fundamentally not smooth, and moreover for reasons that are indispensable to the very functioning of capital that Badiou aims to critique. His reproach is also cruel, patronising and self-serving, demanding that there be no significant difference between managers, terrorists or transsexuals, or that the politics of sexual liberation and polygamy do not also inflect a long, important, and ongoing history of sexism, trans/misogyny, and racism, particularly once the dynamics of power, control, and consent are brought into frame. Not only is the levelling gratuitous, but so too is the flattening; individuals are reduced to the composite of their supposed identities and voided of any reflective capacity (unlike Badiou, apparently) to recognize the way in which their battles are instrumentalized against them by market forces – not to mention the pragmatic reasons why an individual might opt 'in' to the system, even against themselves (or their politics). The ways in which Badiou – and philosophy at large – can be seen as co-opted into the neoliberal economic system (as if books were not commercial as well as informative or as if holding a professorship at the prestigious ENS doesn't offer institutionally sanctioned legitimacy along with the opportunity to preach and practice radical politics) are simply ignored. It is hard to see how this is anything other than a stereotyped caricature of identity politics and a woeful under-description of the complexities of (historically) identity-based movements that, in the twenty-first century tend to constellate around intersectionality, performativity, association and ally-ship. It also runs to the thoroughly absurd logical conclusion, as suggested above, that the only group not guilty of the vanity and fallacy of 'identity politics' is the (ever neutral) straight white bourgeois cisgender able-bodied man (such as Badiou) – as if his (non-)identity was not also an identity that is substantially responsible for making certain voices heard and for its easy identification of/as the universal.³⁰

³⁰ Similarly, Sara Ahmed identifies the way that, for thinkers such as Badiou and Žižek, 'identity politics' are derided and disparaged for creating a new set of marketable products (not only books, magazines, etc., but also lecture circuits) asking us to note 'the irony that Žižek and Badiou might not need to create a so-called "segment of identity politics" to guarantee their own lecture tours (indeed the critique of identity politics is

PHILOSOPHY AND ITS CONDITIONS: SCIENCE, LOVE, POLITICS AND ART

As abundantly mentioned above, any of Badiou's truth procedures take place in the domain of one of philosophy's four conditions, or generic procedures: science, love, politics and art. At their most basic and essential level, the conditions of philosophy as announced by Badiou are one of the features that refuse the temptation of philosophy to consider itself a master discourse; philosophy itself is incapable of truth (given that it is not independent) but can refer to the conditions *outside* of it wherein truth may be located. It is this exteriority of the conditions, the "outside" [...] required for its [philosophy's] own taking-place',³¹ as Justin Clemens describes, and their irreducibility to philosophy (or to each other) that is key. The crucial and singular role of philosophy, then, is not to provide (the content of) truth(s) itself – as if that were possible – but rather the identification of 'truth' is the central and irreplaceable role of philosophy in Badiou's thought. 'La philosophie est', as Badiou claims, 'l'entremetteuse des rencontres avec les vérités, elle est la maquerelle du vrai. Et de même que la beauté doit être dans la femme rencontrée, mais n'est nullement requise de la maquerelle, de même les vérités sont artistiques, scientifiques, amoureuses ou politiques, et non pas philosophiques' (*PMI*, p. 21). Philosophy identifies the singular, but ultimately empty, category of Truth and, in so doing, 'ensures the "compossibility" of its conditions by constructing a new articulation of them.'³² In this way, philosophy is both 'un diagnostique de l'époque [...et] une construction [...] d'un concept de vérité' (*PE*, p. 150). It is essential to remember that each of the conditions are distinct and irreducible to one another – and this would be one reason that we might have, for example, specific language and terminology in order to discuss condition-specific considerations on their own terms. They are truths precisely *because* they are autonomous and, as Clemens, again, describes, 'self-authorising, self-problematising, self-limiting, and self-sustaining processes.'³³ At every level, then, Badiou's project is

probably more profitable and more inductive to the logic of capital) see Sara Ahmed, 'Melancholic Universalism', *Feministkilljoys*, 2015 <<https://feministkilljoys.com/2015/12/15/melancholic-universalism/>> [accessed 14 December 2016].

³¹ Justin Clemens, 'Conditions' in *The Badiou Dictionary*, pp. 68-73, p. 68.

³² *ibid.*, p. 69.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 69.

also part of the ongoing attempt to resolve philosophy's residual Romanticism: the fields of love, science, art and politics are neither inaccessible to theory (i.e. because they are somehow beyond language) nor transcendently grounded or identifiable with meaning as such, but rather they produce truths across four domains (and four only) that are at once universal (not predicated on anything else) and singular (linked to a particular situation). As Simon Critchley has described, it is precisely a 'situated universality' that Badiou's project attempts to articulate.³⁴

ART AGAIN, OR INESTHÉTIQUE

The questions of art – and especially how art as a Badiouian truth-procedure plays out – will ultimately be the final focus of this chapter, most specifically of course in terms of 'musical' art (though Badiou offers no theory as such of 'art' or the specifically 'musical', he nonetheless pronounces on, or rather, identifies the truth-procedures of various 'musical' events as his philosophy sets itself up to do). From the off, however, Badiou's delimiting of this category (art) is itself contentious, as is his theory of *inesthétique*. Whilst Elie During claims that 'Badiou's writings make constant use of artistic examples and paradigms, taken from both "high" and "low" culture'³⁵ it is extremely hard to see any evidence for this except, to be generous, for his meditations on the horses painted in the Lascaux caves (though being prehistoric it seems evident that they refuse this distinction) and his otherwise relentless bemoaning of the 'democratisation of taste', cultural diversity and plurality, and his utterly disparaging remarks on all non 'high' art (to which he would hardly even accord the title of 'art'). To wit (and to mention just a couple of instances):

En réalité, il n'y a pas d'art populaire. C'est une expression dépourvue de sens. En quoi l'adjectif 'populaire' vient-il spécifier ou déterminer le mot 'art'? C'est une catégorie qu'il faut abandonner. Il y a la musique, c'est tout. *La musique sera jugée à partir de sa capacité à traiter des inventions formelles*. On verra alors que le degré de complexité, d'inventivité de la musique dite savante est sans commune mesure avec celle dite populaire. Il a fallu

³⁴ See Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London; New York: Verso, 2012).

³⁵ Elie During, 'Art', in *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts*, pp. 82-93, p.82.

d'ailleurs dire 'savante' uniquement parce qu'une musique se disait 'populaire'. Cette dernière doit être appelée musique de divertissement, ce qui n'a rien d'infamant (*PE*, p. 95, my emphasis).

And again (and yet more egregiously):

la 'musique contemporaine' [i.e. musique savante contemporaine], c'est-à-dire de cela seul qui, au XXe siècle, a mérité le nom de 'musique' – si du moins la musique est un art, et non ce qu'un ministre a cru devoir subordonner à une éprouvante fête (*Sc*, pp. 91-92).

His disdainful positioning of (all) non 'high' art forms (he mentions 'popular' or 'entertainment' arts most often in his invectives, but it quite clearly also includes folk, non-literate, and quite probably non-Western forms of music making, with a singular and revealing, though non-committal exception for jazz, which though not explicitly described in terms of truth, must nonetheless 'être incorporée à l'histoire de la musique savante' (*PE*, p. 96, though this is because jazz 'a progressivement rejoint [...] les problèmes les plus sophistiqués de la musique savante'). This is a position advanced across several texts, and appears to be motivated or justified by his commitment to defending 'l'idée d'unité de l'art, son unité de toujours' (*PE*, p. 97). Whilst these (contentious) assertions are presupposed as a non-historicizable fact, in *Inesthétique*, he plays close attention to the historical formulas that have connected art and philosophy – particularly in relation to truth – in distinctly different ways. It is his contention that there have been three previous conceptions of the relationship between art and philosophy, all of which are also related to education (as with Lacoue-Labarthe): firstly, there is the didactic or Platonic view of art that identifies its essence in mimesis, and therefore in the production of the *effect* of truth (which is in fact extrinsic to it) resulting in art's banishment – or at least its strict control; secondly the Romantic or German/hermeneutic schema whose thesis is 'que l'art *seul* est capable de vérité. Et qu'en ce sens il accomplit ce que la philosophie ne peut qu'indiquer' (*PMI*, p. 12, Badiou's emphasis), all of which leads to a hysterical glorification of art; and thirdly, finally, the classical or Aristotelian *dispositif* which, like the didactic schema claims that art, with its essence in mimesis, is incapable of producing truth but, in contrast, 'Ce n'est pas grave, parce que la *destination* de l'art n'est nullement la vérité. Certes, l'art n'est pas vérité, mais aussi bien il ne prétend pas l'être, et donc il est

innocent' (*PMI*, p. 13, Badiou's emphasis). It is this conviction, as Badiou goes on to describe, that leads to the Aristotelian articulation of art's relation or role with regard to the passions and to catharsis, and thus figures art as fundamentally therapeutic rather than cognitive or revelatory (see *PMI*, p. 13). Ultimately, then, these different approaches cast the specific relationship between art and truth in three distinct ways: in the didactic view truth is singular but not immanent; in the Romantic view it is immanent but not singular, and in the classical view truth is neither immanent nor singular, though it may appear to be – art is effectively an 'opération publique' (*PMI*, p. 14). Badiou's radical proposition in *Inesthétique* then, is to offer a fourth schema or method for the understanding of the relationship between art and truth: as both singular *and* immanent (i.e. universal and singular – in the way it is linked to a specific situation).

The role of philosophy, *vis-à-vis* art, then, is 'distinguer [la vérité] de l'opinion' (*PMI*, p. 29). This is strictly not, however, aesthetics in the conventional sense, where art is an 'object' for philosophical speculation and where art is also beholden to philosophy's interpretation and the (illusory) 'truths' *about* it which philosophy itself (and alone) is able to provide; instead, 'l'art *lui-même* est une procédure de vérité' (*PMI*, p. 21, Badiou's emphasis). Or, as Badiou describes in the epigraph:

Par 'inesthétique', j'entends un rapport de la philosophie à l'art qui, posant que l'art est par lui-même producteur de vérités, ne prétend d'aucune façon en faire, pour la philosophie, un objet. Contre la spéculation esthétique, l'inesthétique décrit les effets strictement intraphilosophiques produits par l'existence indépendante de quelques œuvres d'art (*PMI*, epigraph, unnumbered).

We might note, however, that whilst Badiou is adamant that philosophy is only philosophy in 'se gardant de *juger* le poème [or the artwork in general] et, singulièrement, de vouloir [...] lui administrer des leçons politiques' (*PMI*, p. 46, Badiou's emphasis), he has nonetheless quite clearly circumscribed and rhetorically defined – albeit within a fantastically well-wrought philosophical system – what we will admit into the arena of art (and thus truths) by *a priori* elimination of popular (etc.) arts: by *judging* them as, ultimately, *not art*. It is absolutely unclear in what way this is anything other than the kind of 'opinion' that philosophy should be distinguishing from truths – except that the whole system has

been built around Badiou's pre-philosophical exclusion of certain types of (non) art and thus appears at first glance, to be internally consistent.

HANS JÜRGEN SYBERBERG'S (AND WAGNER'S) PARSIFAL

Now we will turn to Badiou's other major text on music, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, which is admittedly hesitant at committing itself to being a book *about* music. After an unusually personal preface where Badiou gushes emphatically about his lifelong affection for the music of Wagner – a love inherited from his mother and cemented by life opportunities³⁶ – he indicates more than a little resistance to the idea of writing a book on Wagner, and claims that he would not have done were it not for the encouragement of his friend, composer and musicologist François Nicolas (see the *Preface*). He also describes how he was able to draw on this longstanding Wagnerian love affair in the *Concours* – the competitive national exam which awards places to the top-ranked students to the *Grandes Ecoles* – where he devoted the concluding paragraph of an essay on 'What is a genius' to *Parsifal*. The text itself has an unusual history, given that it comprises the amalgamated and edited version of a series of lectures (and the notes thereof) worked into a text originally in English – though the lecture notes were in French – by Susan Spitzer. Strangely, then, the French version of this text is actually a translation of the original English text (and is the reason for all following citations coming from the original English version), *Five Lessons on Wagner*, and not written directly by Badiou's own hand (though the content evidently derives entirely from the aforementioned lectures) the result of which is an uncharacteristically lucid and easy-reading text.

Interestingly – and I think aptly – Badiou characterizes the Wagner question as a specific genre for philosophy, one which, he claims, 'created a new situation with respect to the relationship between

³⁶ For example, in his role as the 'Oberbürgermeister of Toulouse', Badiou's father was personally invited to the 'New Bayreuth' under the direction of Wieland Wagner; he also gave Badiou and his school friends seats in the mayor's box when he brought *Tristan und Isolde* to Toulouse (see *W*, p. ix)

music and philosophy' (*W*, p. 56) but also suggests that Wagner has thus become a necessary 'subject' for any philosopher to approach. The first three lessons lay out, almost as a literature review, the historical and extant positions on the 'Wagner case' as he sees them, and summarizes the core objections levelled at him from Nietzsche through to Adorno and on to Lacoue-Labarthe alongside a few moments of personal reflection, analysis and commentary. Lessons four and five, 'Reopening "The Case of Wagner"' and 'The Enigma of *Parsifal*', offer much more in terms of Badiou's own analysis of the questions at hand, bringing it into a closer – though by no means as explicit as in his writing in general – dialogue with Badiou's philosophy (and politics) at large. The fourth chapter, 'Reopening "The Case of Wagner"' sets out to right what Badiou sees to be some of the false accusations levelled at Wagner in previous philosophical tracts, notably to do with the imposition of the 'endless melody' (*W*, P. 76-77); the way in which 'the Other's suffering is dissolved in a rhetoric of compassion' (*W*, 77); the charge that Wagner's music is ultimately dialectical in a resolving or reconciliatory sense (see *W*, 78); that the music is ultimately subjected to the narrative (see *W*, 78-79); and that Wagner is unable to create a new sense of time, especially in terms of 'waiting' (see *W*, 79-80). These fundamental questions about Wagner's musical practice and aesthetics – which ultimately hinge on the ever-present question of whether his music has some essential link to fascism – will be dealt with in a comparative analytic with Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's perspectives in the following and final chapter of this thesis. For now, it is to Badiou's characterization, analysis and understanding of *Parsifal* as mentioned on occasion in lesson four and as the subject proper of lesson five that we will turn our attention.

In 'Reopening "The Case of Wagner"' one of the central concerns is to pull a little at the inherited idea that Wagner, though he makes you wait – seemingly endlessly – for a resolution, is finally in the service of the ultimate (dialectical) resolution and, moreover, one that therefore dissolves all difference, in a formidable and totalizing gesture of closure. Thus, to give only the best known example (and one that has already come up in chapter two), in *Tristan und Isolde*, though we may wait around four hours for the desired resolution of the dissonance set up in the 'prelude', we nonetheless get the resolution we

have patiently waited for – and we might add in an almost excruciatingly sublime way that obliterates the suffering and, finally, the death of the protagonists alongside which this musical gesture of closure is carefully coordinated. Badiou, however, approaches this question of difference and closure from a rather different angle, arguing that the radically different ‘colour scheme’ (W, p. 99) of each opera instead indicates that ‘there is no one single, unifying pole towards which the music is somehow oriented as such, but rather an exploration of diverse possibilities’ (W, p. 99). In short, each opera is oriented towards exploring the possibility of a particular ‘hypothesis’ (W, p. 99). Rather than seeing Wagner’s infamously lengthy operas as the way in which he manipulatively builds such extraordinary tension so as to require a final gesture of ultimate and totalizing resolution of all differences, he senses in Wagner’s ‘difficulty in concluding’ a distinctive hesitancy and one, moreover, that ‘had a tendency to leave several interpretations of hypotheses open’ (W, p. 100). Badiou’s own proposition – that Wagner’s (overly) long operas in fact present us with a question to which Wagner is reluctant to conclude definitively – is then explored in relation to the various hypotheses that Badiou claims three of the operas present. Whilst *Götterdämmerung* and *Die Meistersinger* deal with, respectively, the question of what comes after the gods, proposing (in Badiou’s analysis): ‘humanity, regarded in a revolutionary sense, an utterly generic, not specific sense’ (W, p. 101) and ‘the essence of Germany’ to which (in Badiou’s analysis, again) is proposed, ‘high art’ (W, p. 103), *Parsifal* asks (as does Nietzsche): ‘Is there something beyond Christianity?’ (W, p. 103). The Christian symbolism employed in *Parsifal* is certainly without doubt, though Badiou, as usual, approaches it from a rather different angle: he suggests that the answer offered by Wagner to the question is that ‘what is beyond Christianity is actually the full affirmation of Christianity itself’ (W, p. 103). Of course this chimes rather nicely with Badiou’s own proposal of an essentially Christian materialism developed from his understanding of the fundamental message of the Pauline universal; but it also offers a very different take on one of the classic critiques of *Parsifal* – that ‘Redemption to the Redeemer’ is a deeply anti-Semitic ‘solution’ to the problem of Jesus being born a Jew, and thus that he, too, needs redeeming.

In stark contrast (and with no acknowledgement of how this either subverts or runs alongside – or even challenges – the problem of anti-Semitism of *Parsifal* in this regard) he claims that:

‘Redemption to the Redeemer’ means: Christianity has ceased being a doctrine of salvation, and it is only through the figural or aesthetic reaffirmation of the Christian totality, which in a certain way de-Christianizes and de-idealizes it, that something beyond Christianity can be found [...] *Parsifal* is the eternal return applied to Christianity. Christianity returns, but it does so in an aesthetically affirmed mode, that of the ‘Redemption to the Redeemer’, as though it had to return as something different from, yet based on, itself (*W*, p. 103).

All of this is initially presented fairly didactically without much (if any) recourse to either the music or libretto of *Parsifal*, but is then followed by a section dealing with the ‘*musical structure of the three [Götterdämmerung, Die Meistersinger and Parsifal] endings*’ where his claims are fleshed out with more reference to the works at hand. Though the specifics of the analyses offered of *Götterdämmerung* and *Die Meistersinger* are beyond our concerns here (only because neither receive the same level of sustained engagement as does *Parsifal*), it is notable that for *Götterdämmerung* – as we will see is also the case for *Parsifal*, which hinges on Hans Jürgen Syberberg’s centennial film production – the elucidating examples given often pivot around a particular performance or staging (in *Götterdämmerung* it is the Chéreau-Boulez collaboration). In contrast, this is not the case for *Die Meistersinger*, though the subject matter of this work is itself concerned with the question of aesthetics, art, performance, and thus representation.

The discussion of *Parsifal* begins from where the analysis of *Die Meistersinger* left off: with the issue of renunciation as exemplified most clearly in the finale. Having outlined already the hypothesis Badiou claims is presented in *Parsifal* – that of the redemption of Christianity in a de-Christianized form, and thus the renunciation of the ‘old’ Christianity – he explores how this plays out, and interestingly it intersects on multiple occasions with the question of gender. He describes the ‘old Christianity’ as represented by Titurel and his son Amfortas on multiple occasions as ‘moribund’ (*W*, p. 110), explaining this as a result of Christianity’s fixation on a survivalist mode, a parochial outlook, and its ‘defensive dimension’ (*W*, p. 110). Badiou then claims that when all that is being aimed for is survival,

'you are defenceless against the insistence of the sexual drive' (*W*, p.110), and thus we are seamlessly led into a consideration of Amfortas's infamous wound – not forgetting that Amfortas is a representative of the old Christianity. As Badiou describes, he 'has a disgusting, oozing fatal wound, owing to the fact he could not resist temptation' (*W*, p. 110); this 'utterly obscene wound' is then, as Badiou argues just a few lines below, 'aptly filmed by Syberberg with terrifying obscenity as a vagina displayed on a cushion' (*W*, p. 110, see *figure 1*). Not only does Badiou consequently identify vaginas as disgusting, obscene, a force of devastating *jouissance*, and the danger of not resisting temptation, his gesture is all the more disturbing given that the 'vagina displayed on a cushion' is just one incarnation of Amfortas's wound in Syberberg's production (nor is there any suggestion that it actually *is* a vagina or, rather, a vulva); though it is also displayed in a vulva-like manner in the 'prelude' (see *figure 2*) it is rather, as David Schwarz describes, 'a unique "performing object" in Syberberg's film. It changes in every scene it appears. As a performing object with no internal consistency from moment to moment, it is the purest form of Icon – one in which meaning is projected at every moment, changing the object each time it is seen.'³⁷ It is interesting, then, that the only meaningful identification Badiou projects onto Amfortas's 'disgusting, oozing fatal wound' is that of a 'vagina', and a vagina that is somehow associated with a moribund Christianity in need of both renunciation and redemption.

³⁷ David Schwarz, *Listening Awry: Music and Alterity in German Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 153.



Figure 1. Act I, Scene 4



Figure 2. Overture

Ultimately – misogynistic language temporarily placed to one side – Badiou makes a strong case for the central role of compassion (*Mitleid*) in *Parsifal* as being aligned with self-denial – because ‘survival is actually a form of *self*-concern, which explains why it does not protect us from the obscenity of *jouissance*’ (*W*, p. 111). We are thus faced with the pairs ‘compassion/self-denial’ and ‘Christianity/survival’ which are musically (re)presented, Badiou claims, ‘through the theme of Amfortas and his wound, and, on the other, through the theme of Parsifal, which is practically understated, barely phrased in the brass’ (*W*, p. 111). Amfortas’s theme is characterized as ‘lyrical’ and ‘fearsome’ (‘lyrical’ has a long history of being perceived as stereotypically ‘feminine’ in music,³⁸ and we have just noted Badiou’s own fear regarding female genitalia) whilst Parsifal’s, as mentioned, is ‘understated’, though there is no discussion of how that comes about musically save the reference to the brass (*W*, p. 111). All of this is simply to highlight that we are left to go on Badiou’s word alone that this is the case, as there is no illustrative reference to techniques of musical representation, orchestration, tonal/chromatic/diatonic relations, phrasing, timbre – let alone strictly *formal* relations.

Again, he says:

[i]n terms of the music, I would say that this whole finale, concerned as it is with replacing moribund, narcissistic, deathly Christianity with a new, reaffirmed Christianity around the idea of a central, innocent self-denial, will attempt to represent what I would call the evaporation of sovereignty into gentleness, or the transmutation of sovereignty into gentleness. That is what I think is really at stake in the music of the finale. Whether it succeeds or not is partly a question of analysis and taste (*W*, p. 112, my emphasis).

This is not to suggest, of course, that a musical justification for these claims could not be found; rather, it is to emphasize that, again, when Badiou speaks ‘of the music’ in Wagner he rarely lives up to his word (and not only in terms of the restricted and formalistic terms he has set for himself elsewhere). Likewise, his invocation of the roles of ‘analysis’ and ‘taste’ are instructive parameters he permits into the musico-philosophical discussion of Wagner which elsewhere he has repeatedly maligned (at least

³⁸ I am thinking in particular of the long association that contrasts the masculine heroic first theme of a sonata form movement with the lyrical feminine second theme. See chapter three, p. 127.

in terms of their interest for philosophy whose role is to birth, as ‘midwife’ the truth-procedures of any of the four conditions and avoid opinion).

So to return briefly to the analysis of *Parsifal*, we have quite evidently been presented already with a strong and problematic intersection with considerations of gender and sexuation, but this is not the only place this question comes up explicitly in his analysis. Because Badiou’s only referent for *Parsifal* is explicitly Syberberg’s film version, the question of gendered identity and sexuation becomes more or less unavoidable. Syberberg took the absolutely original move of having Parsifal played by two different actors (actually three actors, if you include the child Parsifal we witness in the animated ‘prelude’, in addition to the singer, Rainer Goldberg, who provides the vocal part throughout): a young man and a young woman. Parsifal has appeared, up until this pivotal moment, in more or less conventional fashion as a young man played by Michael Kutter (save that ‘he’ does not provide the vocal part but instead a singer’s voice is over-dubbed to his lip-syncing and he is also considerably younger than most operatic singers tackling the part on stage). However, at the well-known point of transformation – a deeply Oedipal scene where Parsifal is seduced, as Badiou states, ‘by a kind of weird mother [Kundry] who is both dead and alive, a sexual vampire of sorts’ (*W*, p. 113) – Parsifal either splits or is doubled – initially through a process of substitution and finally combination (see *W*, p. 113) – and the adolescent boy is first replaced by, then appears alongside, an adolescent girl. Though Parsifal initially yields to the kiss, he abruptly breaks away, thus representing two stages of transformation (one in relation to his own psychical and sexual maturation and the other in relation to compassion – the wound it provokes him to ‘feel’). This brings Badiou to suggest that a Christian renewal will also be to do with ‘the heralding of a new sexuation’ (*W*, p. 113) – a not altogether unwelcome proposal. This strikingly queer gesture – insofar as we continue to hear the voice of tenor Rainer Goldberg being emitted, now ‘from’ the body/mouth of Karin Krick – which Badiou understands to show that, as already suggested, it is ‘as if only either by combining the two sexes or showing that there is no difference between them or that they are hard to tell apart could represent the redemption of the deathly sensuality and obscene *jouissance* in which the Christianity of the past has exhausted

itself (*W*, p. 112-113). Later on, he also refers to Parsifal as 'the universal signifier' (*W*, p. 142) – a claim which one can see to be substantially buoyed by Syberberg's symbolic presentation of masculine and feminine poles within a single 'character' (or 'signifier', as Badiou also claims, see *W*, p. 140). Though we will return to this striking visual, technological, and symbolic splitting between masculine and feminine poles, between actor and singer, voice and body, for now it is necessary to bring this into closer dialogue with Badiou's understanding and characterization not only of the feminine, but also feminism, as found elsewhere.

BADIOU AND FEMINISM

As suggested above, Badiou aligns feminism, fairly uncritically, with all the other (and ever proliferating) identity-based movements. He cites it specifically in relation to his critique of 'ethical ideology' as manifested in human rights discourse and the prescription that we should respect the 'other', or those different from us, but only with the caveat, as he points out 'que le différent soit démocrate-parlementaire, partisan de l'économie de marché, support de la liberté d'opinion, féministe, écologiste...' (*E*, 41). More concretely, he explicitly frames his project as a battle against 'le culte des identités nationales, raciales, sexuelles, religieuses, culturelles tentant de défaire les droits de l'universel' (*SMP*, p. 10). For Badiou, then, the primacy of the universal trumps all other claims, and the prescription of the demand to respect the other (and our infinite particularisms) as the sole 'universal' to which we can legitimately refer is merely the misguided and illusory outcome of a sophistical logic. For Badiou, feminists are caught in the (false) logic of an ethics of difference, one that was clearly exposed when it came to the debate over the headscarf in France. According to Badiou, the logic goes something like this: feminism is rooted in an ethics of difference which demands respect for difference (for example, here, based in sex/gender), but is ultimately hypocritical because it rejects differences that conflict with its own (sense of difference/identity) as was borne out with (some) feminist's support for the burka ban (which they saw to index male domination and patriarchal control

over women's bodies). Secondly, as with any position that refutes the neutrality of the universal, it does so from the false basis of starting from a particularist difference as given (or constructed) in a specific (historical) situation: in this way Badiou is (rather welcomingly) deeply anti-essentialist. The foundations of this kind of argument are discussed in detail in his major text on the (neutral) universal, *St Paul*, notably including a lengthy discussion that aims to rehabilitate St Paul from the claims, 'souvent soutenu, que Paul soit le fondateur d'une misogynie chrétienne' (*StP*, p. 110-111). His major claim is that Paul's significant contribution is that 'On ne peut transcender les différences que si la b n volence   l' gard des coutumes et des opinions se pr sente comme *une diff rence tol rante aux diff rences*' (*StP*, p. 106, Badiou's emphasis) and which is summed up in the prescription: 'ne soyez pas un discutant des opinions' (Rom. 14.1, cited in *StP*, p. 107). Ultimately, much of this also constellates around the question of veiling and a process that he describes as 'la sym trisation seconde' (*StP*, p. 111) which consists in '*faire passer l' galitarisme universalisant par la r versibilit  d'une r gle in galitaire*' (*StP*, p. 111, Badiou's emphasis). The example given, as mentioned, is the command that women should veil when praying – a command that feminists have taken objection to as a founding moment of Christian misogyny. Badiou is quick to point out, however, that this prescription is symmetrically reversed with the assertion that 'si un homme prie ou proph tise la t te couverte, il d shonore son chef' (*StP*, p. 112). The demands made by Paul are thus symmetrical rather than unilateral, and herald a complete indifference to difference.

There are, of course, very many objections to this of which there is only the space to identify the few most pertinent to our current concerns. Firstly, part of Badiou's further justification for this is that symmetrical prescription simply attests to or symbolically mirrors the 'natural' veiling of women (i.e. that women have long hair) and thus that the real problem is women with short hair and men with long hair (see *StP*, p. 112). This seems somewhat of a shoddy defence for reasons that aren't even worth spelling out (though we will return to Badiou's *opinions* about the way women should present themselves later). Secondly, as Louise Burchill has described, this (universal) symmetry in no way enfolds into anything like equality; it remains deeply hierarchical, attesting to women's subservience

to men (and God) and men's subservience to God (alone). Thus, men and women are 'treated equally by the law only in the *formal* sense that both are submitted to constraints, while the law itself proves to be *substantively* unequal insofar as it makes man the unmarked term (wholly in "the image of God"), in relation to which woman is marked (both "naturally" and "artificially") as subservient – which is to say, other or different.'³⁹ Finally, though by no means least, feminism is given such short shrift in all of Badiou's work that his characterization and understanding of it simply does not chime with the realities of either feminist activists or academics. As Mari Ruti compellingly describes:

many of them [supposed 'identity' movements, in Badiou's terms] are actually not identarian at all but often work quite diligently to forge cross-identarian or postidentarian alliances. For instance, contemporary feminism, at least in its more theoretical valences, is rarely a movement for the liberation of 'women,' understood in some essentialist sense, but one that questions the very meaning and construction of gender and sexuality. Moreover, such feminism usually strives to combine an analysis of heteropatriarchy with an analysis of other related forms of social inequality, such as racism and class disparities.⁴⁰

Absolutely unacknowledged, then, in Badiou's oeuvre, and perhaps symptomatically so, is the fact that feminism itself has a long and arduous history (both in terms of theory and praxis) in (re)theorizing, understanding, negotiating, and challenging the concept of the 'universal.' Furthermore, and perhaps closer to Badiou's thinking, for some feminists this *also* comes hand-in-hand with a longstanding critique of relativism, including specifically feminist objections to the entire project of human rights (reaching, in many ways, a similar conclusion to Badiou: that the whole project of human rights functions as an 'opt-in' to the status quo, in this instance capitalist patriarchy, and thus in some fundamental sense it does not significantly challenge or alter the systemic oppressions of capitalist heteropatriarchy). In this respect, Badiou's generally reactionary and remarkably un-nuanced perception of feminism bears little relation to feminism as it is actually practised or theorized, and instead throws out a whole body of work that has itself spent so much time and energy devoted to the

³⁹ Burchill, 'Feminism', p. 129, emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ Mari Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan: Self, Other, Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 88.

extraordinarily difficult question of the relation between the local and the global or the particular and the universal.

BADIOU AND THE FEMININE (GENERIC) ♀

*Les différences nous donnent, comme font les timbres instrumentaux,
l'univocité reconnaissable de la mélodie du Vrai.
– Badiou, StP, p. 113*

Though Badiou is typically dismissive of feminism, he nonetheless accords the feminine 'position' an important role in his philosophy. As noted, he objects to what he sees as a (philosophical) position that proceeds from a particularism – that of 'woman' – rather than that of a universal. In this respect, it is Irigaray, for Badiou, who is the quintessential 'anti-philosophe' in the way that she espouses 'a violent determination of philosophy on the basis of the category of "woman".'⁴¹ It is for Badiou an illusory basis from which to proceed – not because he denies difference – but because (multiple/infinite) difference is simply what there is in the world. As he describes, '[t]out est différent de tout, tout est autre que tout. Étant donné que je suis dans une ontologie qui est radicalement une ontologie du multiple, la différence, l'altérité, c'est ce dont je pars; c'est le régime d'être [...] Je n'introduis la relation qu'au niveau de l'apparaître; c'est une catégorie du monde, non de l'être' (PE, p. 70). This, however, is where things start to become more complicated: though Badiou reduces the *category* 'woman' to an appearance that has nothing to do with either truth or Being (which simply consists of infinite multiplicities) he nonetheless insists on oppositional poles or positions, which he continues to name 'man' and 'woman' or 'masculine' and 'feminine.' He is, certainly, extremely careful to detach these poles from a biological sexuation (though he doesn't deny biological sexuation) when it comes to truth: 'on verra que, de l'intérieur même de l'amour, se construisent une position "homme" et une

⁴¹ Private communication between Burchill and Badiou, 2011, cited in Burchill, 'Feminism', p. 131.

position “femme” (PE, p. 74) – just as with Badiou’s truth-procedures in other domains, it is a ‘truth’ produced or induced by an event (of love, in this instance). In this respect, though love is fundamentally heterosexual, Badiou is not necessarily homophobic as such: as he states, ‘elle n’a rien à voir avec le sexe empirique des personnes engagées dans la relation amoureuse. J’admets tout à fait qu’il puisse y avoir de l’amour homosexuel [...et] le jeu de ces positions est universel’ (PE, p. 74). Nevertheless, in the descriptive language Badiou uses to talk about these poles, he uses what seem to be indisputably stereotyped associations, when he describes the position ‘man’ as rational, imperative, mute, and violent and the position ‘woman’ as wandering, narrative, garrulous and demanding (see CS, pp. 253-273, and Tarby in PE, p. 73). Moreover, it would seem that, though Badiou claims no biological basis for these positions, that ‘la position masculine est assez souvent occupée par l’homme’ – though this is of interest to sociologists and not philosophers, claims Badiou (PE, p. 75).

There is more, however. In Badiou’s difficult to parse instrumentation of Cantorian set theory as ontology, he replaces the standard marker for the (indiscernible) generic set (G) with the Venus symbol ♀ – a move that Burhanuddin Baki suggests may be ‘in order to insinuate some Lacanian connection he leaves open to speculation.’⁴² The generic set ♀ (elsewhere described as ‘une vérité générique’ or ‘une multiplicité générique’) is a ‘missing subset’⁴³ that conditions the situation S : thus $S(\text{♀})$ is the set theoretical procedure through which Badiou is able to account for the event (which is not contained within the situation but is its absent condition) and which, otherwise, is an ontological violation. In short, an inhabitant of S (the situation) cannot have knowledge of ♀ but can only have militant faith in it.⁴⁴ The problem with this, of course, is that Badiou enlists a distinctly feminine generic which, ‘by being exterior to the situation, is essentially independent of Being and ontology’⁴⁵ and, at the same time, denies the category ‘woman’ any significant existence on these levels. Femininity is precisely, he

⁴² Burhanuddin Baki, *Badiou’s Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 171.

⁴³ Baki, p. 216.

⁴⁴ See Baki, p. 198.

⁴⁵ Baki, p. 227.

claims, that which ‘consists in a “logic of the Two”, or “a passage-between-the-Two” that has traditionally undone the One of the masculine position.’⁴⁶ Badiou is thus charged with, as Louise Burchill describes, ““returning” to woman (pace Lacan) the universal quantifier within the sphere of the symbolic value or “the complete range of truth procedures”” and so, *encore*, a certain (absent) ‘feminine exceptionality’ continues to haunt Badiou’s thinking.⁴⁷

This is worth just one final word for clarification. There is no suggestion at all that only (biologically or otherwise determined) men are capable of militating faithfully for universal truth – though it is infrequent, women (as they ‘appear’) are occasionally accorded this success. However, as with the female protagonist, Paule (clearly a reference to the Pauline universal) in Badiou’s play, *L’Incident d’Antioche*, this appears to be through a rescinding of ‘womanly particularity’ and thus incorporating herself to the (revolutionary) universal truth-procedure.⁴⁸ Moreover, this is explicitly framed in contrast to (a stereotyped) feminism, from which Paule distances herself when she says ‘Et qui dit que la laideur, le cheveu plat, la femme éteinte au kaki de la guerre, la jupe de laine noire étaient requis, pour la promesse et l’enchantement de notre politique?’⁴⁹ Badiou thus appears to want to have his non/essentialist cake and eat it, so to speak, by enlisting a kind of generic feminine exceptionalism as a ‘hetero-sexual philosophical partner’⁵⁰ to which he can be militantly faithful, whilst insisting not only on the irrelevance of ‘woman’ as a category for politics (or indeed, philosophy) but that women (as they appear in the world) continue to ‘appear’ sufficiently ‘feminine.’

⁴⁶ Badiou, cited in Burchill, ‘Woman, the Feminine, Sexual Difference’ in *The Badiou Dictionary*, pp. 390-395, p. 395. I would not be the first to note an unexpected complementarity between Badiou and Irigaray. See, for example, Lisa Watrous, ‘Love’s Universal Impetus: Luce Irigaray and Alain Badiou’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 52.3 (2012), 66–73.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 394. See, also, CS, where Badiou explicitly describes women as ‘le quantificateur universel’, p. 273.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 392, and Act I, Scene IV of Alain Badiou, *Incident at Antioch/L’Incident d’Antioche* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ See Act III, Scene IV in Badiou, *Incident at Antioch/L’Incident d’Antioche*, p. 100.

⁵⁰ Maghan Helsel, ‘A (W)Holy Human Subject? Saintliness and Antiphilosophy in the Work of Alain Badiou’ in *The Postmodern Saints of France: Refiguring ‘the Holy’ in Contemporary French Philosophy*, ed. by Colby Dickinson (London: T & T Clark, 2013), 183-199 (p. 196).

TECHNOLOGIES OF 'TRUTH' AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC (OR PHANTASMAGORIA AND FORMALISM)

Having laid out several key moments in Badiou's understanding of music, I would now like to probe a little more at the periodization he offers us of music (that is philosophically identified as) participating in 'truth procedures' by putting it into dialogue with relatively recent musicological texts by Mark Evans Bonds, Brian Kane and Emily Dolan. The earliest occurring (and frequently recurring) musical 'event', for Badiou, is the Haydn-event, and the latest appears to be the Schoenberg-event – though considerable attention is also paid to the musical 'serial' subject that emerges through fidelity to this event, with all trails drying up (or rather fully saturated without any new and generative musical event appearing) around the 1970s. The only significant exception proposed to the purely classical schema (and fairly tenuously at that, in that it isn't explicitly accorded the status of an 'event') is jazz. Badiou states that '[a]vec le jazz, on est dans une sphère de propositions formelles qui n'ont pas été toutes anticipées par la musique savante, à cause en particulier de l'introduction à grande échelle d'un élément d'improvisation' (*PE*, p. 96). For now we will put this to one side, just noting that Badiou retains the criteria of *propositions formelles* as central to *savante* music and, though he acknowledges that a practice of (structural) improvisation exists in Eastern musics, he glosses over this without even attempting to explain why this has no relation to truth, as well as being oblivious to (or thinking unimportant) the long history of improvisation as a central feature of 'serious' European medieval (and even Renaissance and Baroque) musical practices.⁵¹ Music that participates in truth procedures appears to begin in the West with Haydn, then; though Baroque style is sometimes mentioned, the event of which it is the incorporated trace – the Baroque subject – is never identified. Further still, the Baroque style – and certainly those early music enthusiasts and followers of the historically informed performance movement – seem to be viewed with a certain disdain or dismissal at various points.

⁵¹ Moreover, improvisation doesn't disappear after the Haydn-event, though our dominant narratives about musical practices/aesthetics may underprivilege its role; see, for example, Melina Esse's fantastic article on female improvisers in the nineteenth century, 'Encountering the *Improvvisatrice* in Italian Opera', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 66.3 (2013), 709–70.

Consequently, identifiable musical events run from Haydn through to Schoenberg, with the subjective trace of this later event being faithfully instantiated in musical works for another five decades: thus from the final years of the eighteenth century through to the last quarter of the twentieth century – a periodization that parallels almost too perfectly the emergence and elevation of instrumental high art, rather than vocal musical forms through to its demise and the end of ‘modern music’ at the dawning of postmodernism. In short, music that falls fairly neatly under the particular ideological configuration of ‘absolute music.’

Emily Dolan points out how ‘we are used to associating “technology” with twentieth-century music.’⁵² And indeed, Badiou’s own proclamations on musical technology seem to follow this narrative – whilst technology is never invoked in relation to the truth procedures he identifies in ‘serious’ music, he does mention it – somewhat disparagingly – in relation to twentieth-century popular music (and particularly their associated socialities/social practices) as well as in relation to ‘impure’ art forms (that may include music within them) such as cinema. For example, to a certain extent he concurs with Lacoue-Labarthe’s concern that, following certain technological advancements based in musical amplification, we live in an age of ‘musicolatry’ where we are presented with and immersed in music on an unprecedented scale (though the extent to which Wagner is culpable for this technologically mediated modern configuration is far less clear). Badiou seems to be scathing, for example, about portable music players, exclaiming (and referencing Mallarmé *en route*):

Music was once ‘the last and most complete human religion’, but it has turned out to be a human religion in as sorry a state as the Brotherhood of the Knights in Act I of *Parsifal*. It has ended up being about having earphones in your ears – portable music players! Obviously nothing could be further removed from a ceremony than a portable music player. The ceremony is a meeting in a specific place; it is the constitution of a place, whereas the portable music player is music devoid of place (*W*, 148).

The implication being, of course, that this over(t)ly technologically mediated music is in need of redemption much as was the moribund Christianity of *Parsifal*. And yet, there is no sense within any

⁵² Dolan, p. 22.

of his musical considerations that, for example, as Dolan again states, ‘oboes and violins are also technologies.’⁵³ Anthony Gritten, for example, describes the musical instrument as a type of tool, understanding tool as ‘an object mediating between two domains and affording productive action, that is, a means of passing energy between domains in order to achieve some desired end, as with the transformation of potential into kinetic energy when bowing a violin string [...] every musical tradition maintains acoustical, symbolic, ergonomic, and aesthetic systems [...] by which musical tools are used to fulfil the desires and intentions of their performers.’⁵⁴ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the historically specific construction (and reification) of absolute music as textless, autonomous, self-referential and transcendental constellates around the work-concept; but it also (and inextricably) comes into being as – and only as – a form of *instrumental* music – it is explicitly and emphatically technological. This observation not only foregrounds the ‘indivisibility between technology and aesthetics’⁵⁵ but also brings aesthetics into dialogue with explicitly material and historical concerns. For example, not only do technological developments (such as the invention of piston valves and their vast extension of brass instruments’ capabilities in the early nineteenth century) shape what can be written for a particular instrument, but as with the discovery of (Brazilian) pernambuco wood – which to this day remains the most common material for professional bows – embed aesthetics and musical practices in a history of European imperialism and colonialism (and environmental degradation – despite replanting efforts, the tree is still endangered). Dolan’s work is groundbreaking in this regard, extending the now (musicologically) commonplace narrative that explains the emergence of ‘absolute music’ almost exclusively in relation to German philosophical idealism and the emergence of the work concept whilst ignoring the materiality of musical practices. Whilst these factors no doubt play a role, they nonetheless contribute to what is, as Dolan adroitly observes, ultimately a circular logic that continues to privilege form; her thesis is thus that ‘music’s perceived immateriality and absoluteness

⁵³ Dolan, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Anthony Gritten, ‘Instrumental Technology’ in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, pp. 187-198, p. 188.

⁵⁵ Dolan, p. 22.

depended upon concrete, material changes in orchestral practice' and she accords Haydn (or at least his orchestral practice) a central role in this regard.⁵⁶

Thus, whilst Badiou goes to great lengths to maintain his position that '[I]es événements artistiques sont de grandes mutations, qui portent presque toujours sur la question de savoir ce qui a valeur de forme et ce qui n'a pas valeur de forme' (*PE*, p. 83), the relationship of formal innovation to technological and material innovations (and constraints) is necessarily obscured – or at least ignored. Whilst Nancy attempts, albeit with some associated problems, to shore up a non-formalistic approach to listening by appealing to Venus's reposed and sensuous flesh – bodily responses firmly and necessarily in tow – Badiou is absolutely committed to perpetuating a history of listening that arises alongside the autonomous work-concept – that of structural listening. In this tradition, listeners must ideate the sonorous experience into visual or spatial concepts by validating, reifying, and attending to primarily structural (often, therefore, in this repertoire, harmonic rather than, say, rhythmic, timbral, orchestral or vibrational) features: in short, you must listen to – and (re)cognize – *form* as constituting what is essentially musical. All of this ultimately hinges on the construction (both imaginary and literal) of the essentially musical experience taking 'place' at a distinct remove from its material/technological means of (re)production; paradoxically, then, this has the consequence, as we will see, of foregrounding the central role of *invisibility* in this discourse. In the imperative to pay attention to 'the formal configuration of tones alone', Brian Kane convincingly articulates how the 'separability of the sound itself from its source also grounds two positions that are closely tied to the rise of the autonomous musical work: phantasmagoria and formalism.'⁵⁷ Finally, then, this careful deconstruction of the essential disavowal of music's material bases pushes Dolan's thesis to the stunning conclusion that ideality itself 'is marked by its own particular timbre' and, moreover, that the musical transcendental is nothing more – or less – than 'simply another orchestral effect.'⁵⁸ In this respect, a

⁵⁶ See Dolan, pp. 5-7.

⁵⁷ Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 136.

⁵⁸ Dolan, p. 264.

strong argument could be made in support of Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of 'musicolatry' – the genealogy of which Badiou rejects – as emerging out of the Romantic tradition of absolute music (for Lacoue-Labarthe, writ large in the Wagnerian project), as it suggests a different understanding of where the fundamental break comes: thence not with the emergence of the mechanical reproduction of art works (i.e. the shift from acoustic to recorded and amplified music), but with the ideological, technological and material practices embedded in absolute music, which construct the art 'object' at a fundamental – and essential – *acousmatic* remove from its practice and/or performance.

VEILS AND MORE VEILS: ACOUSMATIC IDEOLOGY

Wagner's fantasy of the invisible stage was fulfilled more literally in that immaterial stage, cinema.
–Susan Sontag⁵⁹

As is well known, Wagner's project for a music drama that heralded back to the properly ancient Greek idea of tragedy (and thus the non-separation of drama and music alongside that of theatrical and political life) was also an architectural project. It is, as John Deathridge concisely describes, a 'heroic drama art based in part on the Greek ideal and borne on the wings of German music' though, no doubt, this is a 'homogenized, idealized, unified, purified, communalized, culturally deified' version of the Greeks that is both notionally instrumentalized and yet also requires some substantial technical support itself to pull off this phantasmagorical illusion.⁶⁰ Wagner's contradictory wish for an invisible stage thus requires not only the architectural conceit of the double proscenium (which was certainly not the case for Greek theatre) to create the framing effect of depth – a transcendental elsewhere – but also the more radical – and now infamous – construction of the recessed pit which hides the orchestra from sight at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. As Brian Kane argues, then, 'Bayreuth could be

⁵⁹ Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), p. 157.

⁶⁰ John Deathridge, *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 106, p. 107.

interpreted as an attempt to institutionalize the phantasmagorical power of the averted glance.’⁶¹

Moreover, such architectural innovations played their part in a broader programme of reform, ultimately influenced by Schopenhauerian aesthetics. They sought also to unify

concert programs, expressing the tendency toward unity and integration that had begun with Beethoven and was carried on through Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The aim of these reforms was primarily conservative and “spiritual,” an attempt to aesthetically shape the listening public, and in turn the social body, by creating the conditions for performances that could properly channel music’s transcendent content.⁶²

Ultimately, then, this move forms a central part of a story, as Kane’s compelling book aptly describes, that centres on acousmatic practices – the separation of sound from its source – and which has a much longer history, whether that be in the theatre where God or the divine is often represented (so to speak) offstage; in the practice of Catholic confession; or, ultimately in the architecture at Bayreuth.⁶³

At stake in acousmatic listening, then, is a practice of ‘privileging hearing over seeing, of cultivating situations where sounds are detached from their causal sources, and of technologies for listening to sounds unseen’ as a way of granting ‘auditory access to transcendental spheres, different in kind from the purely sonic effect – a way of listening to essence, *truth*, profundity, ineffability, or interiority.’⁶⁴

If we return to Syberberg’s film production of *Parsifal*, the question of acousmatic sound (and listening) is quite clearly foregrounded. Though Badiou reads the splitting/doubling of Parsifal into a young male *and* a young female protagonist as the representation of the possibility of a new means of sexuation in a redeemed Christianity, it is also a move that makes eerily manifest what has been happening all

⁶¹ Kane, *Sound Unseen*, p. 102.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 103. It is worth making a clear distinction, however, between the stated aims or ideals of structural listening and actual listening practices, which inevitably and undeniably include emotional responses/associations, sensuousness, embodiment, the mundane irritation of, for example, an uncomfortable chair, etc.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 9, my emphasis. Again, it is worth a note to caution that this is an analysis that speaks to the dominant cultural pedagogies and the triumph of the narrative of absolute (acousmatic) music and should not be confused with a historical narrative of ‘actual’ listening practices. Socially informed histories of musical ‘listening’ practices have made this point well. See, for example, J. Q. Davies, ‘Dancing the Symphonic: Beethoven-Bochsa’s *Symphonie Pastorale*, 1829’, *19th Century Music*, 27.1 (2003), 25–47 and Deirdre Loughridge, *Haydn’s Sunrise, Beethoven’s Shadow: Audiovisual Culture and the Emergence of Musical Romanticism* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

along: the acousmatic staging of the voice as separate from the body, of music from its instrumental source, of soundtrack from film and ultimately, following Badiou, truth from its (means of) production – the tenor voice of Rainer Goldberg is now emitted from the young Karin Krick in a move which certainly queers the portrayal of Parsifal.⁶⁵ And yet, the apparent ‘queerness’ of this cinematographic move seems not to be the decisive point here; in keeping with the Brechtian aesthetic throughout – the film is abundant with masks, figurines and puppets, all of which are shown as such, including the mechanics of the puppetry – the lip-synching is also made apparent. David Schwarz even describes the emergence of two Parsifals as ‘an extraordinarily puppetlike gesture.’⁶⁶ There is no attempt to hide the fact that the voice supposedly emitted has not been produced by that body; quite conversely, and confirming what we have suspected throughout, this fact is made incontestably evident through this confirmational supplement, reaffirming that the voice never was produced by the body on display – a move that purposefully obscures or veils the auditory source. It acquires the status of the Lacanian *petit objet a*, an imaginary element which is separable from the body, and which is ultimately the piercing lack, remainder or residue of the Real that is the (w)hole at the absent heart of the symbolic. The difficulty here, then, is that ‘universal truth’, *contra* Badiou, is substantialized in a culturally and historically specific practice; in short, it conflates an idea with an object/practice. Just as Susan Sontag describes cinema as the ‘muse’ of Syberberg’s *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, ‘represented on the wasteland set by Black Maria, the tarpaper shack built for Thomas Edison in 1893 as the first film studio’⁶⁷ we might also see the entire Wagnerian operatic project – as heady culmination of a particular musical tradition – in all its material, mechanical, technological and architectural glory as the muse of Syberberg’s *Parsifal*: an interpretation that gains traction when we recall that the film’s title is peculiar typographically (see *figure 3*) layering Wagner’s name above the title *Parsifal* which is then above Syberberg’s name, suggesting that it is not (only) a film of *Parsifal* (as such) but also a film of or about

⁶⁵ Queer as it may be, the feminine – as we have seen is the case in Badiou’s own figuring of the feminine pole – certainly appears to be the secondary term that allows for the transformation of the first.

⁶⁶ Schwarz, p. 154.

⁶⁷ Sontag, p. 142.

Wagner (as character or stage – indeed, the set for the production is giant version of Wagner’s death mask). Further still, it seems no coincidence that the Holy Grail is explicitly staged as the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. We might continue one step further, then, to suggest that the cultural conceit of absolute music – absolute by definition has no history, no qualification, nor can it be relative – could be seen as the all too convenient muse of Badiou’s own *inesthétique* philosophical project.

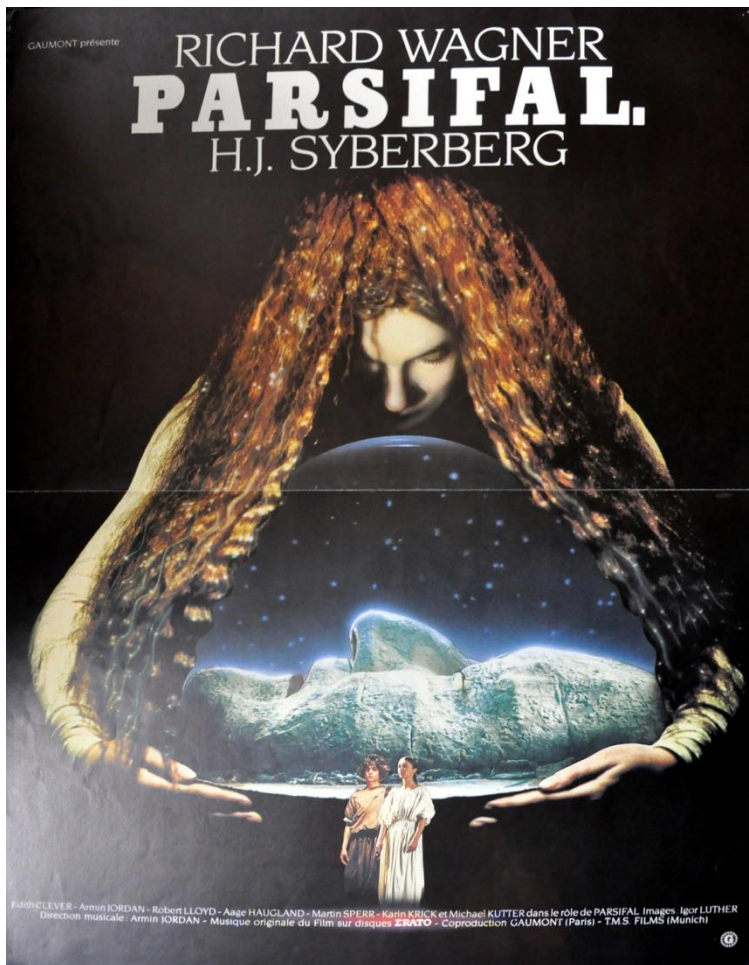


Figure 3

Analyzing the issues at stake is, of course, rather easier in this quite evidently multiply mediated format: there is no getting around the fact that cinema, as Badiou himself is aware, is a form of technology. Additionally, the ‘impure’ cinematic seems to legitimize commentary and analysis with strikingly little recourse to strictly musical formal features; indeed, Badiou has delineated the concerns of ‘impure’ arts as the formal procedures through which the different elements are combined (a

Wagnerian consideration if there ever was one!). In this way, then, though non-committal about whether there was ever a Wagner-event (François Nicolas has suggested that Wagner is, for Badiou, a singularity rather than an event⁶⁸), he certainly considers Wagner *as* art and, moreover, locates in our contemporary engagement with Wagner the fundamental question about – even the promise of – the future of ‘great works of art.’ However, the Wagnerian work of art – in its impure modality, an impurity which is surely augmented further in its filmic (re)enactment – seems to ask questions that at least straddle, if not outright trample on, another of the four conditions: namely politics. The question, Badiou claims, presented by *Parsifal* (including, it seems, by musical means) is the question of ceremony, and precisely the question of whether a modern ceremony is possible. This is a question that is of course structurally nested in both the dramatic narrative (the ceremony of the grail) and is also performatively enacted – strictly speaking it is not an opera, but ‘Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel’ (a festival play for the consecration of the stage) specifically for Bayreuth, and at which the audience are instructed not to applaud: it is not an opera for entertainment, but rather the ceremony itself. And of course, this is structurally (re)nested (for want of a better expression) in Syberberg’s film, with the endless meta-, extra-, inter- and intra-textual references – above all its staging in a dilapidated landscape that turns out to be, as mentioned, Wagner’s death mask (see figure 3), references to the journalistic reception of Wagner at the time (see figure 4) and, of course, the grail figured as Bayreuth. Though the question of Parsifal’s identity as a consecrational play has drawn extensive commentary, Badiou’s analysis and proposition (that it asks a more complex and probably unanswered question about the possibility of modern ceremony) is a fresh and interesting perspective. At the same time, however, *Five Lessons on Wagner* seems to avoid a close engagement with how this insightful analysis stands in relation to Badiou’s broader philosophical project – especially the formalist dictates of the *Petit manuel d’inesthétique* – by skirting around the fact that, *d’après* Badiou, the questions asked by *Parsifal* are not strictly formal. By this I mean that the questions are not *merely* self-referential ways of thinking (in a domain strictly delimited to (musical) art) through formal

⁶⁸ François Nicolas, ‘Wagner’ in *The Badiou Dictionary*, pp. 380-384, p. 380.

(musical/theatrical/cinematic) procedures – the identification of points and openings and their possible responses/solutions in Badiou’s terms – but rather that formal techniques are used as a means of *representing* extra-formal considerations i.e. the question of ceremony or the representation of time and waiting. It seems pertinent to point out again the degree of hesitancy that frames this book – along with its striking lack of Badiouian philosophical jargon – and thus, perhaps, to simply suggest that this is not, in Badiou’s sense, a properly philosophical book. At any rate, his admonition that philosophy’s job is ‘to distinguish truths from opinion’ is certainly not upheld – *Five Lessons on Wagner* is replete with endless (explicit) opinions: ‘my point of view’ (*W*, p. 135); ‘I think’ (*W*, p. 140, p. 147); ‘we might say that’ (*W*, p. 143); ‘in my opinion’ (*W*, p. 144, p. 152); ‘I personally think’ (*W*, p. 145); ‘as far as I am concerned’ (*W*, p. 145); ‘I don’t think’ (*W*, p. 147), etc. Perhaps, then, Badiou is here writing without his philosopher’s hat on, and simply using the ‘codes de la communication (ou des opinions que les animaux humains échangent sur “la musique”)’ safe in his faithful belief that, opinions aside, ‘les grandes créations du style classique [here he is speaking about Mozart *et al.*, though the same applies to all art], subsistent éternellement’ (*E*, p. 95).



Figure 4. Overture

As noted, this kind of critique is substantially easier when it comes to the ‘impure’ (albeit still ‘high’) art forms, such as opera, given that it has – as will be explored in more depth in chapter five – a more complicated and contradictory relation to the emergence of absolute music as a distinct, ideologically weighty, and privileged repertoire. And although I think we would do well to be suspicious of the extreme complementarity between the ideology of absolute music and that of Badiou’s universal truth procedures – they fit *too well* for domains that are allegedly distinct – if we pay close enough attention it is possible, nonetheless, to find moments where difficulties reveal themselves even in this *instrumentally* privileged repertoire. Most clearly, this can be found in the problem – already mentioned – that continues to plague any philosophy of music that starts from literate (often Western high art) music and hopes to extrapolate from that an understanding of music (writ large): that of its allographic nature and the seemingly irreducible chasm between the score-copy and the performance(s) of the musical work – the ontological location/identity of music is left in limbo and reducible to neither one nor the other. In Badiou’s work, this question enters through a side door

which in broad strokes can be understood as the gap between the notated formal procedures (i.e. the place where the self-referential formal procedures are worked out in strictly formal terms – the sole locus of Badiou’s identification of truth-procedures in ‘Scolie’) and music which *sounds like* it is participating in the same exploration of the sonic universe – experientially and sonically it seems to share a musical sound world or genealogy – though in terms of formal innovations it is doing nothing of the sort. Here Badiou flounders, wanting neither to drop Debussy (and the expressionistic soundscape he shares both with, say, moments in Wagner’s late tonal vocabulary or the way it pre-figures the (proto-)electronic work of a composer like Varèse) nor to accord him a proper place in the hall of truth-procedures fame.

Finally, then, this touches on what is one of the more frequent critiques of Badiou: that of the passage from being to appearance (and which *Logiques des mondes* sought, at least in part, to deal with), and how apparently ‘universal truths’ figure within this. Even Peter Hallward, a prominent and long-time exponent of Badiou’s philosophy shows more than a little hesitation over the specifically musical question, asking in his interview with Badiou included in the English translation of *Éthique*, ‘[j]ust what is culturally specific here? How do we measure the immanent universality of an artistic truth, to limit the question only to that?’ or previously ‘[w]hat relation is there between an artistic – let’s say musical – truth, and the (culturally specific) system of tonality which ensures that the truths of Haydn and Schoenberg – to take examples from your *Ethique* – are always truths *for* certain listeners?’⁶⁹ When pushed, Badiou is notably hesitant, shifting the core question away from the cultural specificity of tonality and towards the *scale* of change induced by the Haydn or Schoenberg event (i.e. not every novelty is an event) and reminding the reader that his approach forms part of a necessary shift away from author/composer centred accounts of ‘great art’ and towards a focus, instead, on the genealogies of the bodies of work(s) produced. Nonetheless, the question of the relation between cultural specificity and universal truths continues to hang, rather ominously.

⁶⁹ Hallward, ‘Appendix’ in Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 141; p. 138.

The invocation of universal truths, the seemingly non-culturally specific essence of music (or all that Badiou will allow under the term ‘music’ in its properly artistic guise), the mathematical basis of Badiou’s ontology and the dependence on acousmatic listening practices brings to mind the work and practices of an ancient philosopher other than Plato – that of Pythagoras.⁷⁰ Pythagoras, well-known as both the first self-appointed philosopher and founder of the first philosophical school traded well off the power of acousmatic sound by demanding that his probationary pupils, the *acousmatikoi*, were lectured to from behind a veil or screen in order that they could better concentrate on the message of his teaching. Considered the more religious branch of Pythagoreans (in relation to the other branch, the *mathematikoi*) their trust in their master depends not on empirical demonstration (nor even abstract reasoning/logic, dialogue and understanding – they were forcedly silent) but on faith. Central to this story is of course the fact that the practice requires the use of *techné* – the veil – for its exposition and yet, as Brian Kane describes is so often the case with acousmatic sound in general, the contribution of *techné* is ‘for the most part, dismissed or bracketed out of consideration. The simultaneous necessity and expulsion of *techné* aligns the tradition of acousmatic sound with a tradition of phantasmagoria, or the occultation of the means of production.’⁷¹ Most importantly, perhaps, this brings us into direct confrontation with notions of authority, power and faith – concerns that seem particularly pertinent given both Badiou’s philosophical project based around the faithful subject, and the difficulties in accounting for the passage from being to appearance in his work. Kane’s discussion and analysis of Mladen Dolar’s work on the acousmatic voice is worth citing at length here:

The Pythagorean veil also grants the voice an ‘authority and surplus-meaning.’ The very act of hiding the voice is also a technique for giving the voice certain power – namely, omnipresence and omnipotence. These powers of the voice are irreducible to the meaning of the statement; they are the product of a surplus-meaning that has nothing to

⁷⁰ Interestingly, mathematicians Nirenberg and Nirenberg have also suggested that Badiou’s mathematical basis is considerably more Pythagorean than Platonic and, moreover, their close reading of Badiou and in-depth understanding of the mathematics at stake highlight Badiou’s piecemeal adoption of set theory, posing some interesting angles of critique for the relationship between his supposedly mathematical ontology and identity. See Ricardo L. Nirenberg and David Nirenberg, ‘Badiou’s Number: A Critique of Mathematics as Ontology’, *Critical Inquiry*, 37.4 (2011), 583–614. Tarby, too, has noted that ‘[p]our Pythagore ce principe était constitué par les nombres [et en] un sens, Badiou reprend cette intuition’ (Tarby in *PE*, p. 156).

⁷¹ Kane, *Sound Unseen*, p. 220.

do with logos. Surplus-meaning emerges from the difference between the voice and its bearer or source, that is, between *phoné* and *topos*. Thus it is no coincidence that Pythagoras enjoyed cultic status in the ancient world. By means of the veil, he imbued his utterances with special powers. Dolar's reading of the Pythagorean veil is emblematic for philosophy in general; the power of philosophy itself does not wholly rely on the meaning or logic of its statements; rather, it resides in a hidden kernel of meaninglessness in excess of the statement. The voice becomes the voice of authority the moment it detaches from the speaker. The statement (logos) is enriched by this extra (alogical) power, a magic trick for compelling conviction.⁷²

Kane continues to identify this phantasmagoria as a mode of belief, and the modality 'je sais bien mais quand même...' as the structure of fidelity.⁷³ All of this brings the structures of disavowal, faith, and fetishism into a heady Marxist-Lacanian combination that taps into key questions of authority, gender and sexuality, commodity capitalism and authority, centred on the seen/unseen *techne* that allows the seamless ideological passage between being and appearance granting apparently unmediated identification, *en route*, of universal, self-authorizing, non-relativizable truth(s), without recourse to the way these supposed truths are produced or the way they are incontrovertibly enmeshed in social and cultural contexts. Just as Pythagoras's veil gave his philosophical voice the power of incontrovertible truth, so too does the 'invisible' instrumental basis of 'absolute' music grant it a status that appears universal and transcendent. Just as Kane articulates Wagner's own mode of phantasmagoric belief as 'I, Richard Wagner, know very well that the orchestra is a machine, but nevertheless [when I construct a theatre to hide the machinery of musical production] I believe that I enter a state akin to hypnotic clairvoyance',⁷⁴ we might propose that Badiou's is 'I, Alain Badiou, know very well that music arises from specific cultural contexts, but nevertheless [when I construct an elaborate philosophical system that sets the terms of the possibility of truth in relation to the art works of my own cultural context] I believe that I can identify the universal truth of these great works of art.'

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 209-10.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 222.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 221.

FROM INESTHÉTIQUE TO ANESTHÉTIQUE: MEDIATION, TRUTH, OPINION

As demonstrated above, Badiou's cherished canon of music he nominates as participating in universal truth procedures runs from Haydn through to Schoenberg (and the body of work produced under that name up to the second half of the twentieth century). Not only, as mentioned, was Haydn one of the chief proponents of new orchestral techniques and forms, but it is with Haydn (and his contemporaries in the years leading up to 1800) that the process of orchestral standardization begins (with regards to instruments, scoring, and layout, etc.). As the orchestra grew in size, so different performance practices emerged – for example, pitch was increasingly standardized (let us not forget that until the nineteenth century there is little consensus as to the pitch of notes, and no 'universal' pitch until the twentieth century) and performances moved from the often rowdy chambers of court patrons to newly built concert halls (again, this is occurring throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries). A combination of inadequate architecture (hearing unamplified instruments at a distance is notoriously difficult without the best thought-out acoustics) and an ideological shift in what it meant to listen to (certain types of) music brought with it concert hall etiquette: silence, reverence, and no clapping between movements as it would interrupt the organic whole of the musical work. Again, practices which have sedimented over time to seem natural or the 'proper' way to listen to music – unlike with headphones, according to Badiou – have quite clear, material and ideological genealogies. Concurrently, the assumption that these practices form the 'natural' site for (appropriately reverent) musical audition – and this is certainly the narrative that Badiou implicitly valorizes – privileges a (partial) story that ignores a myriad of other listening practices, even within elite musical cultures, such as domestic chamber music, aristocratic salon culture and promenade concerts.

Again, Haydn and his contemporaries are highlighted as some of the names that mark the beginning of this shift, with works appearing around the turn of the nineteenth century described, as Bonds has noted, as revelatory – even oracular – with truth-disclosing properties.⁷⁵ Whereas previously dominant

⁷⁵ See Bonds, p. 112.

narratives about music emphasized an understanding of music in terms that parallel rhetoric or oratory – the listener is simply swept along – with an oracle, ‘listeners struggle to understand [...] an oracle requires – demands – interpretation [...and] obscurity becomes a virtue.’⁷⁶ The extent to which Badiou has assumed this legacy as a non-historicizable given is quite extraordinary; his identification of ‘truth’ as synonymous with formal innovation aligns him fairly straightforwardly with German Idealism which reifies ‘pure’ art (i.e. divorced from any function and ceasing to be dependent on anything but itself) by elegantly bringing together both a metaphysical aesthetic perspective (non-functional transcendent beauty) and the imperative of ‘free-play’ and self-referential form. It places Badiou on common ground with musicologists writing prior to the emergence of critical musicology, such as Carl Dahlhaus, who famously spoke of music in this tradition (particularly Beethoven, as paradigmatic exemplar of the *idea* of absolute music that emerged around 1800) as ‘a revelation of the absolute [...] specifically because it “dissolves” itself from the sensual, and finally even from the affective sphere.’⁷⁷

Attempts to inculcate acousmatic listening as a practice come to something of a head with Wagner and the building of Bayreuth (he also famously hissed at an audience member for making noise).⁷⁸ It should be noted, however, that Wagner is simultaneously committed – at least at points – to art’s potential for revolution and social transformation – the complexity of the ‘case of Wagner’ will be explored in more detail in chapter five. A crucial aspect of the ideology of absolute music (and its attendant listening practices, successful or otherwise) is therefore the denial of bodily responses to music – the sacrificial tradition of musical listening to which Badiou adheres demands we attend to structure rather than sonority – by sidelining or attributing no essential or important role for somatic

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 115.

⁷⁷ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. by Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 17.

⁷⁸ Though Wagner is able to hide the orchestra there is, of course, little he can do about the singers. In this respect, Badiou’s commitment to Syberberg’s *Parsifal* (as the underlying ‘truth’ of Wagner’s *Parsifal*) where the means of vocal production are also made in/visible is particularly revealing, as noted above.

perception, nor for pleasure, desire and emotion in the musical experience.⁷⁹ And Badiou says precisely this: ‘Le plaisir viendra, par-dessus le marché’ (Sc, p. 96); pleasure is superfluous to what he considers to be the essential – or truthful – musical experience. Badiou is so evidently beholden to this particular tradition of musical listening as the sole locus of legitimate academic – certainly philosophical – enquiry, and yet his less properly philosophical work, *Five Lessons on Wagner* (and even in moments in ‘Scolie’) betrays a deeply passionate and profoundly emotional relationship with music – most obviously Wagner. Moreover, his often insightful and poignant analyses of Wagner’s works seem so clearly to be drawn from this deep love of and intimate – cognitive and somatic – knowledge of Wagner’s music rather than from the kind of formal or structural analyses he advocates as the locus of truth-procedures (remembering that is the sole interest of philosophy *vis-à-vis* art). As mentioned, any kind of formal analysis when it comes to music in Badiou’s texts – especially when compared to the sustained analysis devoted to, say, a poem by Mallarmé – is scant at best. This is not to say that his analyses are invalid because of this, but rather to point out that whatever their validity – infused as they are with great passion – they are not valid on the terms set by his own *inesthétique*. Ultimately, it seems hard to conceive of Badiou’s project of *inesthétique* – interesting history it offers of the relationship between philosophy, art and truth aside – as distinguishable from its minimal pair, *anesthétique* and the denial of the body as co-site of perception and understanding as found in the short history of the emergence of absolute (instrumental) music, sacrificial or structural listening, and its attendant acousmatic and concert hall practices. Perhaps this shouldn’t be so surprising, given the Platonic basis Badiou claims for not only for his philosophy, but philosophy in general; nonetheless, in theory – if not in practice – Badiou upholds an ontological duality as does Plato, that aligns intellect (i.e. the intelligible world of universal forms) with truth(s) and renders embodied and bodily perception/experience (i.e. the sensible, aesthetic in its etymological sense – from the Greek αἰσθητικός, meaning sensory perception) secondary, inferior, and ultimately irrelevant to a

⁷⁹ As Adrienne Janus has shown, it is precisely this sacrificial tradition of musical listening that Nancy is working against or trying to overcome. See Janus, ‘Soundings’.

philosophy interested in truth. Needless to say, the privileging of rational, cognitive, and intellectual properties over somatic, experiential, and bodily ones has a long and well-trodden history of mapping pretty neatly onto the long established binaries of male/female, culture/nature, mind/body, and so on. Of course, part of what Badiou is trying to do is reclaim categories such as ‘truth’ and the idea of ‘universality’ (*contra* the full gamut of all he subsumes, rather crudely, under ‘identity politics’) but this comes at the expense of an unproblematic (for Badiou) hierarchization of perception and rehabilitation of a binary opposition borne of a singular and specific musical tradition that already privileges the same things he sets out to espouse the value of: the argument is circular. And indeed, as other commentators have argued, Badiou’s universality in no way demands or even aspires to any kind of equality.⁸⁰

Finally, then, I would simply like to draw attention to Badiou’s own role as invisible (acousmatic?) mediator in setting up this frame of understanding. Not only does Badiou continuously evade formal, structural analysis in his Wagner book, but even in ‘Scolie’ where some formal analysis (or at least reference to intra-music(ological) distinctions and terminology) is present, all Badiou is able to do *vis-à-vis* his own philosophical system is to homologically map pre-determined categories (anxiety, terror, justice, and courage) onto certain musical responses to the ‘Schoenberg event’, without any consideration of how these links arise or how they are mediated (nor of the value judgements they imply, despite his command that philosophy abstains from *judging* the artwork). Though self-referential formal procedures invite (inexhaustible) formal analysis, their supposed autonomy is thus at odds with the rather active, interpretative, role of the analyst; just as, for Badiou, truth is itself an empty category, so too is music, in this tradition, into which you deposit... well, whatever you deem to have been determined from your analysis. Again, the invisible (and apparently unimportant) role of the critic/philosopher/analyst is precisely the problem that Brian Kane highlights, writing elsewhere

⁸⁰ See also, for example, C. Watkin, ‘Thinking Equality Today: Badiou, Rancière, Nancy’, *French Studies*, 67.4 (2013), 522–34 and Jeff Love and Todd May, ‘From Universality to Inequality: Badiou’s Critique of Rancière’, *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, 12.2 (2008), 51–69, who explore – slightly closer to the concerns at hand here – how Badiou’s sense of universality in no way precludes it from being hierarchical.

on Badiou's *Five Lessons on Wagner*, when he asks 'what is to prevent us from simply reading into Wagner's work the accomplishments we want to find? Where is the resistance to lie?'⁸¹ Ultimately, for Kane, this hinges on the central role of faith or fidelity in Badiou's work; authority, in Badiou, simply comes from the fidelity to the event but, this leaves us in a muddle of tautology and confusion. As Kane continues, '[h]ow are we to know where Wagner's greatness really lies? Without criteria, the answer is simply "Because I said so." If the faithful subject believes it, then, for the faithful subject it is so.'⁸² In addition, it is not at all clear what there is to stop us from using the philosophical framework that Badiou has given us to nominate non-Badiouian events as events – so long as we can (rhetorically) justify them as such. Obvious examples would be, say, the militant suffragette campaign or Rosa Park's refusal to give up her bus seat;⁸³ both, though told as part of the longer history of identity politics, could also be understood as events which induce universal truths and new subjective forms. Ultimately, this brings us back to the problematic role of language and rhetoric, despite Badiou's admonition against sophistry and his dependence on language as a transparent medium through which to convey philosophical ideas in a way that is not contaminated by the slippery and contingent, or by metaphorical and polysemic implications and associations. This also seems to be, at best, a question of faith rather than a demonstrable fact and at worst a convenient way of refusing linguistic/political responsibility for the misogyny found in his language on numerous occasions. Whilst much of this reluctance to adhere to Badiou's project (despite his astute articulation of many of our present political realities) is the product of a difference in orientation, as mentioned, it seems evident

⁸¹ Brian Kane, 'Badiou's Wagner: Variations on the Generic', *The Opera Quarterly*, 2014, 349-354 (p. 5).

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸³ Evidently the 'universal' aspect of the suffrage campaign is contestable for several crucial reasons which in no way would I suggest ignoring. But in terms of Badiou's philosophy, and in particular what he allows rhetorically under the remit of 'universal truth', it remains coherent; in particular, see Badiou's major text on the universal, *St Paul*, where one of the justifications offered for Paul's problematic statements on gender/women is the caveat that 'il est absurde de le faire comparaître devant le tribunal du féminisme contemporain. L'unique question qui vaille est de savoir si Paul, compte tenu de l'époque, est plutôt progressiste ou plutôt réactif en ce qui concernant le statut des femmes' (*StP*, p. 111). Other people have also nominated Rosa Park's refusal to give up her bus seat as an event in a Badiouian sense, though as far as I am aware Badiou himself has not.

that even on its own terms, when it comes to music and its analysis, Badiou is unable to offer what he demands – though perhaps trained musicologists would be better placed to do so.

CONTRA A MUSICAL(OGICAL) THERMIDORIANISM

Though trained musicologists may be better placed to offer the kinds of formal analyses of ‘strictly’ musical processes that Badiou seems to view as the sole locus of truth procedures in his maieutic system, this chapter will finally suggest that that itself would be a regressive or reactionary move – loosely Thermidorian in Badiou’s terms. This suggestion is articulated both in relation to Badiou’s philosophy, and in relation to the contemporary study of music (including but not limited to musicology). Badiou describes the Thermidorian subject as a subject who is initially faithful but then subsequently renounces their fidelity to a particular (truth) event and the new situation it entails. At the risk of instrumentalising a system whose fundamental tenets this chapter seeks to challenge, the notion of a Thermidorian reaction seems a useful explicatory schema to describe a certain type of reaction. I want to suggest that – whether we are happy to accept the accompanying Badiouian baggage for the moment to one side – the emergence of what was called ‘new musicology’ in the 1980s and its flourishing in the 1990s and early 2000s could aptly be described as an event. The (universal) truth it announced was, in perhaps overly grand and yet rather simplified terms, that music is an irretrievably social and cultural endeavour and is thus never neutral but rather embedded and implicated at every level in politics and ideology – and, perhaps most importantly of all, this includes the practice of apparently transcendental and absolute works of the recent Western high art canon. The trace of this event (of which ‘new musicology’ is but the name) continued to be felt in the new subjective forms of musicological practice, which expanded dramatically to include cultural, sociological, anthropological and ethnographical, geographical, literary theoretical, feminist, queer and explicitly political perspectives, amongst others, along with the diversifying of legitimate types of music up for academic consideration. Though the task of trying to unpick and better understand these

complex relations has at times been fraught, a vast and engaging body of work was produced in its name, asking quite different – and much harder – questions about the way music not only reflects particular socio-cultural configurations, but also its role in creating and sustaining them, as well as pushing important but more vexed questions of its relation to social control, surveillance, and terror.⁸⁴

Though there seems to be a sense of anxiety about the identity of musicology as a discipline – given its now strikingly diverse toolkit – and difficult questions about the limited efficacy of what gets crudely characterized (in an implicitly and sometimes explicitly Badiouian vein) as the neoliberal politically correct kowtowing to difference (or identity) *as* political category in and of itself,⁸⁵ it is difficult to see in what way Badiou's understanding and conceptualization of music is distinguishable as *post*-postmodern rather than, simply, pre-postmodern; a return to (modernist) formalism, staged as a phantasmagoria of rehabilitated beliefs in universal truths (and, apparently, musical values and tastes) staged, rather impressively, as a militant leftist philosophy. This is neither to say that many of the premises or methodologies of 'new musicology' were unproblematic, nor is it a condemnation of formal analysis; even less is it an apology for the neoliberal faux concern for minority and oppressed groups. It is simply to highlight Badiou's reliance on an ideology and understanding of music that reifies a particular musical tradition as arbiter of universal truths; not only does Badiou conflate an idea with an object⁸⁶ from behind his own Pythagorean veil, but the identification of truth solely in terms of formal, abstract, rational and structural procedures also rehabilitates the seemingly never-ending propensity to oppose mind and body or reason and emotion, often in moralizing terms that validate love over desire and truth over pleasure, all the while claiming these perspectives as neutral universals. When it comes to the study of music, the same questions are still off the table as were prior to the

⁸⁴ See, for example, Suzanne G. Cusick, 'Musicology, Torture, Repair', *Radical Musicology*, 3 (2008), 24 pars; Suzanne G. Cusick, "'You Are in a Place That Is out of the World. . .': Music in the Detention Camps of the 'Global War on Terror'", *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 2.1 (2008), 1-26 and Juliette Volcler, *Le Son comme arme: Les usages policiers et militaires du son* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011).

⁸⁵ James Currie, for example, claims that 'many in the academy have been tempted by the belief that difference is a kind of Trojan horse: a seemingly singular entity, which, once it has been allowed entry into the enemy's compound, will unleash a vanquishing swarm of plurality' in 'Music after all' p. 160.

⁸⁶ See Mark Evans Bonds and Carl Dahlhaus for more on this and its role in reification.

'new musicology' inaugurated in the 1980s – music's worldliness, situatedness, enmeshment in politics, bodies, technologies and means of production are deemed simply not *musical* questions. Moreover, the musics whose relation to such concerns seems unavoidable – rap, pop, etc. – are simply sidelined and deemed 'not art.' In short, the possibility of the deep thinking of hugely complex but extremely interesting and politically important questions about what it means to be a musicking humanimal in the twenty-first century are simply ignored. In this regard, the critical toolkit of musicology still has a lot to offer contemporary philosophy.

Badiou's narrative quite evidently serves to justify the canonical historical narrative of great art – a cause in which he is deeply invested. Despite his supposed leftist radicality, however, his novel philosophical system offers little more to music scholarship or appreciation than a robust defence of what the discipline had uncritically assumed to be valid, true, and aesthetically superior for most of the discipline's history. Badiou's own position, then – whether as critic or philosopher – is all the more vexed: whilst one kind of universalism – neoliberal human rights discourse in particular – is contaminated by social, historical, and (capitalist) political concerns, Badiou's universalism is, conveniently, absolute – like the music he reifies – and non-historical (or even historicizable). Again, all this seems to be premised on is a leap of faith and our fidelity to the master's voice – to his apparently unmediated utterances of truth from behind the veil.

Chapter V: From Parnassus to Bayreuth: Staging a Music which is not One

Between him and the picture to be looked at there is nothing clearly discernible, instead, only a shimmering sense of distance [...] in which the remote picture takes on the mysterious quality of a dream-like apparition, while the phantasmal sounding music from the 'mystic gulf', like vapours rising from the holy womb of Gaia beneath the Pythia's seat, transport him into that inspired state of clairvoyance in which the visible stage picture becomes the authentic facsimile of life itself.

– Richard Wagner¹

Il y a d'abord la question de la musique, laquelle, étrangement, n'est jamais la question de la seule musique.

– Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe²

RESONANCE/DISSONANCE: SONOROUS, RHYTHMIC AND UNIVERSAL SUBJECTS

This final chapter seeks to highlight more clearly both the irresolvable differences as well as the points of contact or resonance between the works of the three philosophers considered: Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Badiou. Despite the unequivocal dissonance between the post-metaphysical destabilization of the possibility of universal philosophical truths in the Nancy-Lacoue-Labartheian approach and the neo-Platonism of Badiou, this chapter also aims to show, perhaps even more forcefully than in the previous chapters, the way in which all three – albeit in different ways – inherit and deploy aspects of a Romantic and idealist conception of music in their work; it also foregrounds the way in which this often relates to an essentially psychoanalytic model of the subject. In addition, though it is beyond the bounds of this present work to consider in any detail, this chapter also notes the surprising and contradictory ways in which ancient thinking on music refracts in this more recent body of work. Finally, it demands that closer attention be paid to the way in which music is instrumentalized as a metaphor for progressive thinkers in a manner that has a tendency to reinforce rather than challenge both inherited conceptions of what music is and also certain hierarchical

¹ Wagner, cited in Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 52.

² Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica ficta*, p. 12.

binaries – most especially, though by no means only, in regards to the continued enlisting of gender as an organisational category for philosophy.

However, this chapter also aims to emphasize what is most useful in each of these thinkers' work to the philosophy of music: namely, Nancy's insistence on sensuous and aesthetic experience as meaningful in and of itself, rather than possessing a meaning that needs to be located elsewhere; Lacoue-Labarthe's (and sometimes Nancy's) implicit but underdeveloped attention to music as *techne*, both as a technology in its normative sense, but also as a technique of the self – as a mode of training, forming, conditioning or shaping; and finally, Badiou's conception of the *événement*, and the way in which the event *actively* impels a subject (to a kind of labour/commitment that perpetuates the 'truth' of the event). Above all, it seeks to radicalize the materialist gesture implicit in both Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe by urging closer attention to the practices, technologies and techniques (cognitive, bodily, compositional, theoretical etc.) that constitute a broader conception of music – a music that is neither wholly reducible to nor is entirely distinct from any one of these mediating planes – that better understands the relation of labour to the work of making music (*œuvre/opus/opera*). Most importantly of all, perhaps, this allows for a more cogent account of both the systems and mechanisms by which affect is instrumentally created and shaped in music, alongside a more rigorous account of the 'epistemic frames that organize music/noise distinctions.'³ In short, by drawing in part on the work of Luce Irigaray, this final chapter has no less grand aims than to propose that we consider music no longer as philosophy's (or language's) Other – an Other that is all too often sacrificed as the prior condition or ground for the philosophical or linguistic gambit – but as a sensuous, theoretical, material, cognitive and bodily creative and regulatory practice that, though difficult to pin down, is nonetheless as thoroughly and demonstrably worldly as any other social or cultural endeavour. Along with the indispensable work of musicologists such as Robin James, Emily Dolan, Daniel Chua, and Benjamin Piekut, the theoretical perspectives of Bernard Stiegler – most prominently his proposition of an

³ James, 'Affective Resonances', p. 60. I would also add 'music as art' and 'music as entertainment' distinctions.

organologie générale and his work on philosophy's 'forgetting' of *techne* – has also been influential in the attempt to articulate these kinds of approaches to the understanding of music.

So far, then, this thesis has taken each philosopher in turn and explored how music is understood, characterized, described: in short, how it is conceived of on the ontological level and in relation to the wider philosophical project, as well as how this resonates with the musical examples offered, used, exploited or argued to demonstrate the earlier claims. The relationship between these two distinct ways in which music is constituted in these philosophers' *œuvres* has been problematized, drawing largely on the poststructuralist-influenced musicology of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This final chapter aims to take things further, both in terms of the problematics identified and in terms of the musicological resources it draws on by moving beyond what is largely a context-oriented hermeneutic approach. Indeed, as Adrian Daub has described, 'while the New [or critical] Musicology of the 1980s was characterized by a sense of its own belatedness', new critical and methodological approaches such as 'ecomusicology, media studies, and new materialisms in music departments have unfolded largely parallel with their cognates in literary studies.'⁴ These developments suggest it is a particularly rich and exciting time to be considering the relationship between the kinds of thinking about music happening both within and without music departments, and particularly across supposed practical/theoretical divides – in turn illuminating surprising points of contact, contamination, cross-pollination and conflict. It will also return to many of the central issues raised in the first chapter in order to better understand how these philosophers' work relates to previous topics in the philosophy of music, namely: essence and effect; the relationship between music, emotion and meaning; form, performance and technology; gender and sexuality; and politics. We will start by bringing together the work of Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Badiou by taking as a starting point one of their most obvious points of musical overlap: their contributions to the question

⁴ Adrian Daub, in Azade Seyhan and others, 'Forum: Romanticism', *The German Quarterly*, 89.3 (2016), 344–60 (p. 348-9).

of the relationship of music to politics through the prism of the ‘case of Wagner’ and his compromising and complicated relationship to National Socialism. Though it will not seek to settle the debate on Wagner (impossible!), this relentless topic is not only a nodal point shared by all three philosophers, but in the way that the question brings together (fascist) politics and (musical) aesthetics in a particularly decisive way (no matter which side of the fence one is on) it brings us back to the questions of *what music is capable of* – a question that has been lurking and provoking anxiety, as we have seen, since Plato – and the unanswered question as to whether this is to be understood in relation to music’s essence, its effects, or both. Both Lacoue-Labarthe and Badiou have full books devoted to the Wagner question, and Nancy makes reference to Wagner – as we have seen – and also considers the larger political question of the relationship between music and Nazism in ‘March in Spirit in our Ranks’ – a short essay added to the English translation of *À l’écoute* and which seems not to exist anywhere in an original French version. Lacoue-Labarthe also considers the question in several of the essays collected in *Pour n’en pas finir*, notably ‘Une lettre sur la musique’ and ‘Pour n’en pas finir’ itself. With all of this in mind, however, it seems necessary to signal, yet again, that this chapter is less concerned with adjudicating on the question as to whether Wagner’s music is fundamentally and irretrievably aesthetically compromised by anti-semitism and (proto-)Nazism, than with probing at what these thinkers characterize as ethico-aesthetically problematic (or not) in the first place. Indeed, it would be easy to simply rehash the various arguments extant since Nietzsche’s seminal and historical turn *contra* Wagner – especially given that Badiou and Lacoue-Labarthe offer fairly oppositional analyses – and so instead this chapter homes in on how the relationship between music, its ethical ‘content’, and politics more broadly is constructed in these texts, as well as in relation to their broader conceptions of what music ‘is’, as explored in the previous chapters.

MUSIC AND POLITICS

As Badiou has described, Wagner serves as useful 'litmus test' for considering the relationship between music and philosophy and, more broadly, ideology; underlying this supposition is the sense in which music is presumed to be 'a fundamental operator in contemporary ideology' (*W*, p. 1). This conviction is nowhere proven, but is assumed – I think it is fair to say – across the work of all three of the philosophers in question.⁵ Less clear, however, is any analysis or justification of the distinct ways in which different musical genres are treated in relation to ideology: in the texts we have already considered in the previous chapters, popular music genres are often assumed to be playing an ideological role (to a lesser or greater extent in line with Adorno's critique of the culture industry) whilst *musique savante* often seems to be given a *carte blanche* to function as music (or what is *essentially* musical) freed of ideological constraints – a lineage that as we have seen has strong links in German idealism and the emerging dominance of absolute music in the nineteenth century. In this respect, Wagner's role is often seen as pivotal: he marks both the closure of one tradition (the end of both opera and tonality as the dominant organisational system in high art music) and, according to some commentators, the beginning of the art of the masses. As Badiou describes, all that has been (negatively) attributed to Wagner had already been identified by Nietzsche; it is also Badiou who lays out with utmost clarity the raft of charges historically laid against him; charges which tend to constellate around the roles of myth, technology, unification and totalization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* along with the spectacularized theatricalization of suffering and the saturated and overly sentimental 'nature' of Wagner's 'endless melody.'⁶ In short, as Badiou describes, the influential quartet of Wagner's primary detractors (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Adorno, and Lacoue-Labarthe) views Wagner 'as someone who forces musical unity upon a variegated mass, upon differences whose essential character of otherness disappears or dissolves as a result' (*W*, p. 57). All differences are erased or at least sublimated to the totalizing whole which, despite the inordinately delayed gratification typical

⁵ Badiou only seems to consider 'entertainment' music in this manner, however.

⁶ See Badiou, particularly lessons one and three, and pp. 59-60 for Nietzsche's identification of these features.

of Wagner's operas, nonetheless resolves in an all the more spectacular and conclusive fashion as a result of this delay. Further still, this unifying gesture is in the service of a mythological vision that is ultimately that 'of the nation in general and of the German nation in particular' (W, p. 58). For Badiou, it is because of the way in which the 'musical operation is also and at the same time a political operation by virtue of its mythological resonance' (i.e. 'the unifying regime of music [...] in collusion with a conception of the mythological origins of Germanness') that the Nazis were able to co-opt Wagner (W, p. 58). On this point, however, Badiou is rather circumspect: he both resists an analysis that identifies this as the essence of the Wagnerian project, whilst also conceding that the 'term "proto-fascist" was virtually invented to describe Wagner', and though Badiou doesn't 'go into detail about it', he nonetheless claims that 'the reasoning behind it does exist and there is solid support for it' (W, p. 58). This seems like an extraordinarily bold and central claim to make (especially in a text devoted to Wagner) and then instantly to drop – especially given that it is only refuted implicitly in the remainder of the work. With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that Badiou is uncharacteristically noncommittal as to whether Wagner's innovations actually constitute full blown truth-procedures.

1. Logos

In contrast to the negative charges levelled at Wagner, then, Badiou attempts to rehabilitate – at least in part – an alternative reading located largely in the (infra)structure underlying the appearance of endless melody and its totalizing and unifying effects and (the claim of) its violent aesthetic fashioning of national identity. He directs our analysis of Wagner towards a consideration of 'greatness, as distinct from totality' by articulating five rules or directives he claims to be found in the musical resources deployed by Wagner and which counter the prevailing critique of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the creation of possibility; the toleration of a multiplicity of hypotheses; the toleration of a split subject; a non-dialectical way of creating resolutions; and transformation without finality (W, pp. 130-1). All of these 'clues' quite obviously point towards ways in which it might be possible to rehabilitate a version of Wagnerian music that isn't co-optable to a totalizing logic; at the same time, as already noted in chapter four, Badiou's defence of Wagner is made not only in terms of strictly 'musical' (i.e.

formal, for Badiou) aspects, but also in relation to the broader musical-dramatic narrative, framing or staging, and/or in relation to particular performances that apparently excavate the underlying truth. Badiou also offers a number of hypotheses about what Wagner's 'great' art affords philosophical thought, including intra-musical theses such as 'the most important thing we can learn from Wagner is [...] the relationship of the local to the global' (*W*, p. 132) and that Wagner invented a new relationship between continuity and discontinuity (though both have political and not only musical ramifications); and an extra-musical proposition that Wagner created a new situation with regards to the relationship between music and philosophy (see *W*, p.56 and pp. 69-70).

For now, we will focus on a claim that appears to be made through reference to specifically 'musical' transformations in order to try and focus on how Badiou conceives of the relationship between music and politics: the claim about dis/continuity. Badiou describes a fundamental formal innovation of the Wagnerian music drama in the way that Wagner disrupts and transforms prior operatic conventions that depended on the alternation of static arias and kinetic recitative; in short, in the past, the dramatic action was propelled forward through the speech-singing of recitatives, whilst arias deployed largely melodic means (i.e. melisma, ornamentation, coloratura, etc.) to express a mood or emotion whilst pausing the narrative element for this reflection. This strategy involved a fundamental discontinuity that meant the relationship 'between the drama and the music was *decided* rather than being undecidable' (*W*, p. 69, Badiou's emphasis). Wagner's innovation was to make 'the interplay between drama and music [...] undecidable' and though discontinuity was not 'eliminated' it was significantly 'displaced' (*W*, p. 69). Similarly, earlier on in the text he commends the way in which Boulez's 'analytical kind of conducting' reveals the 'underlying discontinuity' to contest the charge of 'endless' melody that is so often pressed on Wagner (*W*, p. 6). All of this leads Badiou to suggest that Wagner's innovative approach to transitions has profound implications not only for musical questions but also for political and philosophical ones; specifically, Badiou suggests it offers a fresh perspective on how we think about the relationship between 'the local and the global, between continuity and discontinuity [...if] discontinuity is no longer expressed politically in the traditional figure of revolution,

how then *is* it expressed?' (W, p. 69) Though it is a fascinating and thought-provoking gesture to attend to the structural innovations of a musical/dramatic text and use these changes as a tool for rethinking political or philosophical questions, it remains entirely unclear – in any precise sense – what the relation between musical procedures and politics or philosophy is. Though Badiou entrusts Wagner with having 'invented a new *model* of the relationship between continuity and discontinuity' (W, p. 70, my emphasis), the implication is more that this affords us a resource with which we can think political questions that are in no essential sense connected to the music 'itself.' This observation is, in itself, by no means a fundamental objection to Badiou's instrumentalization of formal musical procedures as a tool for philosophical reflection – far from it – but it is entirely unclear how this claim could play any role in the exculpatory project. It is an interesting, but ultimately inconsequential remark that, though couched in relation to political concerns, does little to clarify Wagner's aesthetic relationship (or not) to National Socialism. Concisely, it simply confirms Badiou's *a priori* commitment to an understanding of music that locates its essence (or, more accurately for Badiou, its 'truth') not in its effects, but in its formal procedures. In short, Wagner is not acquitted because Badiou's musical analyses offer a counterargument to the charges at hand, but because Badiou has *already decided* that music's essence is independent of contextual, political or ethico-aesthetic responsibility, relation, or contamination. In this respect, Badiou is concerned only with music as a form of *logos* in the sense that it is a musical manifestation of rational and reasoned discourse as identifiable through structural and formal innovations that invite the philosophical identification of truth procedures (though, as noted, Badiou is noncommittal as to whether Wagner warrants being identified in this way); indeed, as we have already noted in the previous chapter, there is no relation between music's effects – especially on the level of musical pleasure – and truth. In short, though music may yield powerful effects, this is merely superficial (*vis-à-vis* truth) and not indicative of generic universal truth and so is, therefore, of no interest to philosophy.

II. Pathos

Unsurprisingly, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of the problem is rather different. Though a superficial reading highlights similar terminology in the Wagnerian analytic – for example, both Lacoue-Labarthe and Badiou speak of 'saturation' and the need for 'une "lecture" micrologique' (Lm, p. 68) or 'microscopic' (W, p. 68) – these descriptive terms are framed, in terms of value, in entirely oppositional ways. The crucial feature for Lacoue-Labarthe is Wagner's pivotal role in bringing art and politics together through the aestheticization of the political (see *Mf*, particularly p. 12). This critique is developed from one of the central claims in *Musica ficta* (and elsewhere) which is that *musique savante* has been principally understood as 'musica ficta' since the end of the Renaissance. Lacoue-Labarthe draws on the etymological valence of *ficta* to describe the way that music has been subjected to an aesthetic principle and thus a mimetic logic of representation; more specifically, (early) modern music is constituted (alongside parallel cultural movements in other spheres) as a nostalgic attempt to recover the music of the Ancients. In (re)discovering ancient texts on music, two things were made clear: for the ancients, music was powerfully and inextricably bound up with *pathos* – it 'agissait, avec une efficacité étonnante, sur les affects' (Lm, p. 63). Thus, what was discovered was 'une musique du *sujet*, au sens du sujet de la passion (de l'être-affecté)' (*Mf*, p. 14, Lacoue-Labarthe's emphasis). Secondly, and crucially, the only available description of *how* these effects were achieved – given that we have no knowledge of what ancient music/tragedy actually sounded like – was through the description of a codified grammar of the passions; each mode 'était charg[é] d'exprimer ou d'imiter – de représenter, dira-t-on à la Renaissance – ou bien de susciter' a particular passion or affect (Lm, p. 64). As Nancy describes, though the pathetic or affective dimension of 'music' has been well attested to since its inception as *mousike*, the 'expressive, communicative, pulse-shaping, disseminating power had acquired an entirely new consideration in the age of subjectivity' (MSR, p. 52). The task at hand, then, was the perfecting of techniques capable of moulding or shaping the passions (and thus the subject) in modern music; or, rather, 'c'est en cela qu'ils sont précisément modernes.' (Lm, p. 62)

The early modern tendency outlined above is then radicalized – and, most crucially of all, politicized – through Romanticism’s potent combination of politics, metaphysics and the invention of the singular category of ‘Art.’ As Lacoue-Labarthe describes, the ‘tâche *moderne* par excellence’ is assigned jointly to ‘*critique*’ (philosophy) and art, and is ‘la collusion effective d’une politique révolutionnaire, d’une philosophie-idéologie et d’un projet religieux-artistique’ (Pnpf, p. 103). Thus the Wagner question is not only about the relation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to National Socialism, but about the Romantic lineage from which it stems ‘et dont le Troisième Reich [...] est à bien des égards l’accomplissement’ (Mf, p. 20). As Nancy describes, National Socialism (and its music) ‘is not purely foreign to the musical possibilities awakened long before Nazism’ but rather Nazism ‘benefited from an encounter, which was not a chance one, with a certain musical disposition [...with] something had already been preparing itself for a long time – something that did not as such prefigure the Third Reich, but that offered it a choice space’ (MSR, p. 55, pp. 50-1). Though, to a certain extent, then, Wagner can be seen as merely the culmination and Germany the repository of this heady constellation of art, philosophy, and politics, for Lacoue-Labarthe, Wagner is nonetheless decisive. It is through Wagner’s formidable combination of myth and technology that he continues, and, most crucially, *amplifies*, the (German) Romantic legacy – a legacy that reveals itself to be founded on a desire for a religious (and thus political) art – and so he is able to manifest, ‘pour la première fois [...] la possibilité d’un “grand art” qui aurait la force de suppléer à la défaillance politique (ou “religieuse”) de la philosophie, qui est la conséquence inéluctable d’une défaillance quant à la vérité elle-même’ (Mf, p. 174). Wagner therefore continues the quintessentially modern task of ‘perfectionnements techniques’ but also brings this trajectory to a certain limit – to a point of saturation (Lm, p. 65). The technical means deployed by Wagner are far from ‘purely’ musical; as Lacoue-Labarthe has articulated they include, amongst others, many elements of scenography, ‘une métaphysique de l’Art complaisamment pessimiste et rédemptrice’ and ‘le dispositif de Bayreuth’, all of which are ‘mi[s] au service d’une idée nationale et d’une *katharsis* hypnotique de masses’ (Pnpf, p. 105, p. 106). Crucially, all of this works to render a music that is able to express the subject – its interiority and destiny – more powerfully than ever

before; it is ‘the propagation of subjectivity’ (MSR, p. 51) as Nancy describes or similarly, as Lacoue-Labarthe states, it is subjective appropriation, or the ‘retour à soi ou [...la] réappropriation de l’âme exaltée par la musique’ (Mf, p. 78). The definitive motif in this regard, then, is ‘anamnesis’ – a structure of recognition affirmed in Baudelaire’s audition of Wagner (Baudelaire is one of the four vignettes through which Lacoue-Labarthe considers ‘figures de Wagner’) and which Lacoue-Labarthe explains as the experience of already having heard this music (even though it is your first hearing) because it feels so intimately to express what is already yours: it is a matter of ‘la *destination du sujet*’ (Mf, p. 62, Lacoue-Labarthe’s emphasis).

III. *Ethos*

Though music and *ethos* have been understood to have a long and privileged relationship in philosophical considerations since Plato – most notably under the auspices of a psychagogical model – whereby music (or more broadly, *mousike*) has a central role in shaping, moulding, and training the psyche (in order to achieve psychical, social and even cosmic harmony) the relationship of *pathos* to *ethos* in the Wagnerian project takes a new and distinct form. Indeed, it is worth highlighting, as Nancy does, that the claim is not that the Nazis and their ideologues invent music’s ability to affect or effect, to mobilize and manipulate subjects, but it is rather a question of locating, within a longer continuity, ‘the turning point of a shift or of a specific perversion’ (MSR, p. 55). For Nancy, this turning point is figured as a reversal: it is ‘no longer a question so much of letting a fundamental affect come to expression but of shaping such an affect, of forming it and conforming it to a measure not yet registered in nature or in history’ (MSR, p. 55). In a similar figure of reversal or inversion, for Lacoue-Labarthe, it is no longer that ‘l’œuvre d’art (la tragédie, le drame musical) offre la vérité de la *polis* ou de l’Etat, mais que le politique lui-même s’institue et se constitue [...] dans et comme l’œuvre d’art’ (Fp, p. 98) – it is in the figuring of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* at the *Festspiel* of Bayreuth as, for Germany, ‘ce que les grandes Dionysies avaient été pour Athènes et la Grèce entière: le lieu où un peuple, rassemblé dans son Etat, se donne à lui-même la représentation de ce qu’il est, et de ce qui le fonde, comme tel’ (Fp, p. 97). In short, music is enlisted as a way of affectively training the subject to

recognize itself in the historical destiny of a particular collective or community (in this instance, the German *Volk*), and thus in terms of another resonance of *ethos* (as in ‘habitat’ or ‘community’) – crucially, however, this ‘*national-esthétisme*’ (see Pnpf, p. 105, and elsewhere) is in the service of a collective destiny figured by way of mythological origins but ultimately *yet to come*. For both Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, then, it is not music’s sensuousness (though the critiques of Wagner’s work are so often framed in terms of excess, hysteria, etc.) but rather the cooptation of music’s sensuousness to a signifying logic: Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of ‘surcodification’ (Lm, p. 68) whereas Nancy describes the way that music becomes ‘indexed to a mode of signification and not to a mode of sensibility’ (MSR, p. 57). It is a ‘signifying imposition’ that refuses any resonance or dissonance (i.e. sense rather than *meaning*) precisely because it is the ‘sensuous’ *representation of a signified ideal*; the form is also indistinguishably the (spiritual) content and thus ‘*feeling* manages to be identified all at once as signified and signifier of realities, images, or concepts like “people,” “community,” “destiny,” “mission” and so on’ (MSR, p. 57, p. 58). It is thus not music’s supposed ineffability – its ‘beyond-significance [*outré-significance*]’ – that is on trial, but the Romantic obliteration of the ‘*distance* between sound and sense, a distance without which sonority would cease to be what it is’ and which paves the way for the *over-signifying* proto-fascism of Wagner (MSR, p. 58).

Though Badiou’s critique of Lacoue-Labarthe (and by association, Nancy) is that he ‘*prescribes* a certain Wagner on the basis of a theory of politics as aestheticization’ (W, p. 10), it would seem to be equally true that Badiou, too, simply finds in Wagner what he wants to find. When he argues that ‘we need to make a distinction between what Wagner saw as his own greatness [...] and the place where his greatness really lies, namely, in the accomplishments that we can discern today’ (W, p. 130), though he suggests an incontrovertibly welcome shift beyond an intentional fallacy, there is ultimately nothing, as Brian Kane has astutely described, ‘to prevent us from simply reading into Wagner’s work the accomplishments we want to find.’⁷ Though Badiou does admit that it is ‘hard to deny that Wagner

⁷ Kane, ‘Badiou’s Wagner’, p. 5.

created a new kind of sensuality in music' (*W*, p. 64), this appears to be of no consequence for political or philosophical analysis; by having no concern for the affective dimension of Wagner's works (or of music more generally) Badiou is simply able to sidestep the far more complex question of the relationship of sensuous musical experience to politics. Indeed, the sensuous (and potentially manipulative – this is after all the Platonic concern) dimension of music is reserved, in Badiou, for the not-really-music of entertainment – a 'music' that is shackled to the whims of capital. 'Real' music (i.e. 'Art') may be affective but its truth lies in the rational apprehension of its form. Badiou, therefore, not only 'dismiss[es] the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as mere slogan' (*W*, p. 15), but rejects all the technological, material, performative and mediating practices associated with music (and not just Wagner's) in favour of a philosophical-political assessment that simply rehabilitates the (ultimately idealist) identification of essence with form – a claim to which we will return. On the level of truth, and in keeping with his self-professed neo-Platonism, 'music is an essentially mental phenomenon for whom the "real work" is something which exists outside its instantiation in performance'⁸ or any of the material/technological/bodily props upon which it depends for its sounding. In summary, music's effects are strictly independent of its essence. For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the question is more complex: though Badiou claims that Lacoue-Labarthe locates the essence of Wagner in the effects produced – and this would certainly seem to be a defensible argument – this is not the same as claiming that music's essence is locatable (only) in its effects. As we have seen, both Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy figure the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a perversion of music's essentially sensuous dimension (though this, too, is problematic) into a logic of (over)signification – as the annihilation of sense, resonance and dissonance.

Finally, then, before moving on to suggest some of the ways that critical thought on music might attempt to broach this seeming impasse, I want foreground in perhaps more stark terms the extent to which the Badiouian and Nancy-Lacoue-Labarthean analyses are opposed and, especially, the

⁸ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 259.

severity of the Nancy-Lacoue-Labarthe critique. Whilst their work is certainly oppositional, this chapter aims to highlight the extent to which both parties recuperate a certain transcendental Romanticism. Before doing that, however, it is also important to recognize the extent to which they all simply retread variations on longstanding themes: on the one hand, music is to be understood in quasi-scientistic terms as the formalistic exploration of sonic forms which are in themselves merely an ideation of music's rational, structural, *visual* aspect. Badiou betrays his indebtedness to this lineage when he says 'Wagner's music can actually be *seen* to consist of a very complicated play of little cells [...Boulez's conducting makes] us hear the complexity of Wagner's compositional techniques behind the flow of the music in the service of mythification' (*W*, p. 6, my emphasis). To this extent, Badiou never strays far from the positivism of score-based musicological approaches that were dominant until the latter years of the twentieth century which, even when attending to the sonorous dimension of music, does so in terms of 'literate or "structural listening"' which, as Fred Moten describes, is a way of 'imagining composition: the listener's impossible inhabitation of the imagination of the composer in order to discern those structural intentions upon which the interanimation of individual and universal autonomy is supposed to rest.'⁹ What we actually *hear* (beyond the analytic conducting of Boulez) is of no consequence or interest to Badiou. What is essential in music thus has nothing to do with its sound, but rather its ability to model/imitate/form (or rather create, for Badiou) the (eternal, universal, etc.) Idea. This kind of approach also absolves music of any relation to context – no matter how that is figured – as inessential to and independent of 'the music itself.' On the other hand, then, music is indelibly and essentially linked to the senses, the body and, in the final reading, the maternal feminine; indeed it is privileged in its ability to reveal to us some kind of deeper, more original, pre-symbolic essence. As noted in chapters two and three, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe make this quite explicit, although I hope to make a case, in what follows, for the critical valence of their more fluid conception of music's essence as found in the writings on Wagner; nonetheless, the question remains as to whether this is sufficient so as to recuperate a non-reductive and non-essentialising account of

⁹ Fred Moten, 'The Phonographic Mise-En-Scène', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16.3, 269–81 (p. 271).

music in general. With all this in mind, then, Badiou and Nancy/Lacoue-Labarthe's work could not be more opposed, and it seems that the depth of this disagreement has not yet been noted or explored sufficiently in critical responses to date: the music to which Badiou remains a faithful subject (i.e. *musique savante*) is figured in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's work as not only affording fascist cooptation, but has the very possibility of fascism inherent in its structures and practices. Whilst the critical reception of *Musica ficta* has often focused on the already radical claim that Adorno simply didn't go far enough in his critique of Wagner – that he was still enthralled or enlisted in a certain Wagnerianism himself – it seems the underlying claim (which is certainly more severe) has been largely ignored. It is nothing short of the (enormous) claim that Western musical-aesthetic practices, in nascent form from the early seventeenth century and amplified by Romanticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century have embedded within them if not the promise, then at least the possibility of totalitarianism and fascism. Nancy, too, insists 'stubbornly, on the intrinsic membership of fascisms [...] in the history of Europe and consequently in its essence or its truth' (MSR, p. 54). This is not essence or truth in a timeless sense (as is Badiou's interest in universal/generic truths) but as the constituting essence or kernel of a particular historical construction; the implication thus being that – assuming music isn't cleanly severable from the society whence it emerges – music has no fixed essence but is co-constituted or relates in some fundamental way to the historical epoch from which it comes. In this regard, it is less that Adorno remained enthralled to a certain Romantic/Wagnerian/proto-fascist legacy, but that so too does Badiou.

TO PERFORMANCE AND BEYOND (SIGNIFICATION)

As we have seen above, the debate about Wagner's relation to or prefiguring of National Socialism through musico-theatrical means constellates primarily around music's relation to signification, affect, and truth. It hinges most crucially of all, for Badiou, on the disjuncture between the location of truth in the truth-event and its transient but associated practices of performance and (re)production.

Though a great performance, in Badiou's eyes, may reveal or excavate the universal truth of a particular musical subject – and thus the performance event interacts in important ways with the more essential truth-event – it in no way constitutes it, nor is performance itself an event in the Badiouian sense of the term. In sharp contrast, neither Nancy nor Lacoue-Labarthe are concerned with the location or existence of absolute truths – indeed, it is such Platonic/metaphysical fictions that their entire philosophical projects set out to debunk. Instead, for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, it is the cooptation of the sensuous or sonorous dimension of music into the representational logic of signification that paves the way for Wagner's mythological music-drama, which aesthetically prefigures or anticipates National Socialism.

However, it is Lacoue-Labarthe's misappropriation of the term *musica ficta* that points us in the most productive directions for thinking about what is at stake. Lacoue-Labarthe takes the term (nominally via Adorno¹⁰) to mean the way in which music – at least since the Renaissance – has been subjected to the principle of the “esthétique”, de la *mimèsis*, présentation ou représentation. Le *figere* auquel renvoie *ficta*, dans *musica ficta*, est l'équivalent latin du *plassein/plattein* grec: façonner, modeler, sculpter – figurer, donc' (*Mf*, pp. 13-14). Though Lacoue-Labarthe is clearly aware of the usual connotation of *musica ficta*,¹¹ this symptomatic forgetting or omission nonetheless forces our reading of Lacoue-Labarthe in productive directions. Though Lacoue-Labarthe's misappropriation is without doubt strategic, as it allows for a detailed consideration of the way in which Western musical practices also participate in the mimetic logic that both governs metaphysical thinking and to which Lacoue-Labarthe devotes so much of his philosophical musings, it also gestures towards a constituent forgetting in this very tradition. Whilst *ficta* is taken in a flight of etymological fancy to relate to music's submission to a representative logic in the Western tradition, what the term actually refers to – in

¹⁰ This is a clarification added in the English translation. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. xvi.

¹¹ In 'Une lettre sur la musique' Lacoue-Labarthe states '[j]e prends le terme, non au sens strict, par opposition à la *musica vera* des Anciens ou de certaines spéculations médiévales, mais au sens "détourné" que lui a conféré Adorno.' See *Lm*, p. 63.

standard historical and musicological discourse – is notes outside the accepted gamut of notes in *musica recta/vera*, and so in practice, the way in which ‘some accidental inflections were conventionally implied by the musical context’ and were thus not notated though they were performed.¹² As Margaret Bent describes, ‘the application of unwritten accidentals was essentially part of the medieval [and Renaissance] performer’s art. Modern performers are no longer able to perceive instinctively the problems and choices involved’, meaning that in current performances of such works the manuscript editor stands in for the medieval performer, by adding suggested accidentals (sharp or flat signs above the note).¹³

As Eric Prieto argues, then, the notion of *musica ficta* offers a useful contribution to Lacoue-Labarthe’s theory of the relationship between the rhythmical subject and the mimetic paradigm of onto-typology (and thus his attendant concerns about the relation between politics and aesthetics); I would even go so far as to suggest it allows us to flesh out much of what is implicit, but ultimately underdeveloped, in Lacoue-Labarthe’s (and possibly Nancy’s) reflections on music. As Prieto describes, *musica ficta* ‘presupposes the need for a subject, the musician, who is able to interpret correctly the incomplete symbols in the score.’¹⁴ Thus, the *aide-mémoire* of the notated graphic representation as found in the score-copy has limited ability to guarantee with any exactitude the becoming sonorous or audible without the interpretive or intuitive actions of a performer. Similarly, I wish to suggest that it is highly revealing, to say least – and, at worst, deeply problematic – that Badiou so often has to resort to performed instantiations of the works he comments on in order to even locate what he claims as the (formally derived) truth of the work. This is not to suggest, however, that we should simply switch from an immaterial gnosticism that locates the essence of the musical work in its abstract formal innovations (as with Badiou) to a drastic but ineffable performance-as-essence. Indeed, whilst truth

¹² Karol Berger, *Musica Ficta: Theories of Accidental Inflections in Vocal Polyphony from Marchetto Da Padova to Gioseffo Zarlino* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. xi.

¹³ Margaret Bent, ‘Musica Recta and Musica Ficta’, *Musica Disciplina*, 26 (1972), 73–100 (p. 73).

¹⁴ Eric Prieto, ‘Musical Imprints and Mimetic Echoes in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 47.2 (2007), 17–32 (p. 31).

(or so claims Badiou) is located only in the formal innovations of the musical subject 'itself', external to and uncontaminated by the practices of the material world, the turn to performance risks equating music's essence with (still immaterial) transience, ineffability, and irrational or a-logical beyond language and/or (representational) meaning. As Robin James has explored in some detail, the philosophical recuperation of ineffability often performs its own kind of othering – it locates an excess or beyond (often strongly coded in racialized/gendered terms) – that the (white, male) philosopher can attempt to domesticate or rescue.¹⁵ Instead, a more thoroughgoing conception of the performer function brings into play some (though by no means all – the list is not exhaustive) of the interrelating ways in which the musical process is constituted. As Prieto describes, 'a musician is engaged in an immersive mimetic task – the (re)presentation of a (partially) pre-inscribed intention to an audience [...However,] it is not the musician's [innate] character or sensitivity that makes possible the correct interpretation of the score, but a combination of expertise, analytic ability, training, long experience, thorough preparation, mastery of tonal syntax, and musical intelligence.'¹⁶ Crucially, then, this also allows us to (re)think the role of instinct in performance via the notion of *musica ficta*: though it may certainly be true that '[m]odern performers are no longer able to perceive instinctively the problems and choices involved', the instinct involved here by no means equates to an innate capacity, but rather one that is learned through a specific constellation of situated practices, instruments, and internalized social, cultural and artistic norms.

¹⁵ See the text available on Robin James's website of her 'drastic' talk: Robin James, 'Eliza's "ai"s: Musical Ineffability, Implicit Understanding, & Racialized Virgin/Whore Dichotomies' (presented at the American Philosophies Forum, Emory University, 2013) <<http://www.its-her-factory.com/2013/04/my-talkpaper-on-musical-ineffability/>> [accessed 24 January 2017]. I am referring in passing to the well-known work by Carolyn Abbate and Vladimir Jankélévitch, see Abbate, 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30.3 (2004), 505–36 and Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

¹⁶ Prieto, p. 31.

TECHNE/EPISTEME/DOXA

A more nuanced consideration of performance, then, leads us towards a contemplation of the musical work/process not only in terms of the drastic act of performance itself, but in terms of the accumulated and enculturated norms, knowledge, and practices it utilizes, deploys and exploits. More precisely, a consideration of music demands not only that we ‘enter the debate between episteme (*epistēmē*) and techne (*technē*), between “knowledge” and what can be translated as either “craft” or “art”’,¹⁷ but also gestures towards the way in which practical and theoretical forms of knowledge are never entirely separable from one another, nor are they entirely distinct from the environment wherefrom they emerge or in which they participate. As Lehmann goes on to explain, for both Plato and Aristotle – albeit in different ways – though *episteme* and *techne* are contrasted with one another, there is no fundamental or radical separation between these two aspects in the way that we separate pure theory from experiential practice in contemporary conceptualizations: ‘[i]n the history of philosophy this apparent division between abstract theory and experiential practice has often been only a rhetorical one, as the interest lay in discovering productive relationships between theory and practice and not in separating them into cognitive entities.’¹⁸ Nonetheless, it has been the central commitment of Bernard Stiegler’s work that underlying the practice of most Western philosophy is the premise of an (illusory) distinction between *episteme* and *techne*. ‘L’héritage de ce conflit’, as Stiegler describes, is that ‘l’*épistémè* philosophique lutte contre la *tekhnè* sophistique, dévalorisant par là tout savoir technique.’¹⁹ In a specifically musical vein, Stiegler draws attention to the way in which organology (the study of musical instruments) has still not been assimilated into discourse on music in general, confirming ‘une séparation absurde entre objets d’une pratique (les instruments comme condition de possibilité de la musique) et phénomènes esthétiques (tels que les œuvres, les

¹⁷ Ulrich Lehmann, ‘Making as Knowing: Epistemology and Technique in Craft’, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 5.2 (2012), 149–64 (p. 150).

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *La Technique et le temps*, La Philosophie En Effet (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p. 15.

styles et les langages musicaux, les pratiques d'écoute, etc.).²⁰ Similarly, Emily Dolan and John Tresch speak of the 'urgency with which both the history of science and music studies are turning to studies of instruments.'²¹ Dolan and Tresch highlight the way that music and science have been intimately related since at least Pythagorus, and suggest the similar if inverted way in which music and science seem to relate to their respective instruments: 'musical instruments express the inner states of the composer or performer, moving outward from the mind to the world, while scientific instruments bring external states of the world into the consciousness of observers, moving from the world to the mind.'²² Though the scientific and musical paradigms seem to operate in opposite directions, as it were, they clearly share an investment in the fantasy of a "'transparent" instrument' – a fantasy that for science would be capable of transmitting the natural world *as it is* to the scientific observer's mind/eye, and for music delivers us directly to a kind of transcendental communion with the harmony of the spheres – with little concern for the way in which instruments themselves 'transmute or modify', mediate or, indeed, *create* these illusions of direct and unmediated access.²³ In this regard, as Heidegger describes, '*techne* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something *poietic*.'²⁴ As an undeveloped corollary, then, we are presumably every bit as able to speak of a poetics of scientific practice as we are of artistic or cultural modes. Given that the invention of new instruments extends, by prosthesis, the threshold of the human in the way that they create new possibilities through the extension and expansions (and subsequent redefinition) of intellectual and bodily capabilities (amongst others) there is, then, an inherent ethics of instruments to be explored. Most crucially, as Dolan and Tresch, again, describe, an ethics of instruments 'turns out to be

²⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique 2: la catastrophe du sensible* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), p. 29.

²¹ Emily I. Dolan and John Tresch, 'Toward a New Organology: Instruments of Music and Science', *Osiris*, 28 (2013), 278–98 (p. 279).

²² *ibid.*, p. 281.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 290, p. 281.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 13.

important for epistemology: knowledge appears not merely as a set of ideas or even practices, but as a form of life, with distinct ideals, moral codes, activities, and understandings of the self.²⁵

As I have attempted to show in the previous chapters – particularly with regards to Badiou – there is a pervasive forgetting or disavowal of the constituent *techne* of *musique savante* (evidently in terms of instruments and notation, but also the extent to which composition itself is a *technique* and thus a practice) that plays into the way it is conceptualized as a wholly autonomous, self-referential, auto-poietic and absolute entity, whereas contemporary popular music (whether in performance or listening practices) appears to be so evidently and obviously mediated through technological means. This is not to suggest that different genres or epochs of music should be directly equated or conceived of as having the same relation to *techne* or technology more broadly – it may indeed be one very interesting axis of consideration to explore processes of continuity and change in music’s technological aspect – but to insist on the quite indisputable facticity of absolute music’s technological mediation and the consequences this brings to bear for any philosophy of music. In fact, it is not only the forgetting or disavowal of *techne* that occasions the supposedly acousmatic foundations inherent to the construction of absolute music – a fantasy that allows this repertoire to be heard as if from a “mystic gulf”, like vapours rising from the holy womb of Gaia’ – but that acousmaticity is itself a practice and thus a *techne*,²⁶ as Brian Kane describes, *techne* ‘is the supplement that allows the acousmatic effect to emerge. To ignore that is to remain faithful to phantasmagoria.’²⁷

Though the framing of the argument above might most obviously seem to extend the critique of Badiou’s conception of music, it also has important ramifications for the thinking on music as outlined in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe’s projects. Though Stiegler suggests we can trace this illusory distinction between *techne* and *episteme* most clearly in music ‘puisque, toujours déjà *médiate*, la musique

²⁵ Dolan and Tresch, p. 282.

²⁶ And is nowhere more evident than in Wagner’s practical-technological endeavour to hide the orchestra from view.

²⁷ Kane, *Sound Unseen*, p. 222.

n’advient qu’à travers un système technique (comprenant aussi bien l’instrument que l’outil d’écriture ou la technologie d’écoute), the consequences of this line of thinking extend beyond the (technologically) mediate nature of music and into the terrain of the co-constituted realm of aesthetic experience and affect.²⁸ In a sense, it offers a way of de-naturalizing the account of aesthetic (especially affective) experience that we sometimes find in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe. Stiegler suggests that ‘il s’agirait de penser les techniques esthétiques depuis le point de vue d’une *organologie générale*, où les organes du vivant, les organes artificiels et les organisations sociales constituent le fait esthétique complet en nouant ce que Gilbert Simondon nomme des relations transductives (des relations qui constituent leurs termes).’²⁹ In this way, there is no originary aesthetic or affective dimension to which we can return, or which we can unveil; rather, though our musical-aesthetic experiences are no doubt meaningful (in Nancy’s non-foundational sense) in and of themselves and require no transcendental grounding through reference to meaning (in terms of signification), it is not because music is a sonorous residue of an effectively (affectively) pre-symbolic domain; rather, music’s affective dimension is not prior to – either logically or chronologically – but coeval and co-emergent with its technical and epistemic practices. The Stieglerian approach insists on the co-individuation of organs (whether biological, prosthetic, or social) such that our affective responses to music are not founded on a myth of origins, but are co-created alongside or along-with the specific practices in a particular context (which, crucially, is also not *prior* but co-constituted). This is a claim that no doubt highlights how easy it is to be blind to our own (intuitively ‘natural’) social doxa – in the sense that the force of doxa ‘has nothing to do with Truth. Its impact derives from its being accepted, or rather its being seen as probable.’³⁰ The claim about *musica ficta* is exemplary in this regard: the practice of adding inflections not notated in the score is no longer intuitive to contemporary performers and thus it is seen as a distinct historical practice (and one worthy of scholarly attention). At the same time, there is enough continuity in prevailing Western musical traditions to make a vast

²⁸ Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique 2*, pp. 21-22.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ Ruth Amossy, ‘Introduction to the Study of Doxa’, *Poetics Today*, 23.3 (2002), 369–94 (p. 371).

amount of the work involved in performing this repertoire seem 'natural' or intuitive – in short, 'normal.' Much is taken for granted, whether it is in the assumption that making/performing music involves the ability to read a score, the training of vocal chords or the development of instrumental technique, or the hours of repetitive rehearsal leading to a (hopefully) perfect or at least accurate rendition – none of which are natural givens but form a specific constellation of socio-aesthetic practices. Moreover, and most centrally to the concluding arguments of this thesis, there is also no music (or indeed musical essence) that we can 'salvage' prior to the amalgamation of these musico-aesthetic, cognitive, affective, bodily and social practices or conventions.

To ground this potentially contentious claim a little more, it is worth thinking in greater depth about what it is we really mean when we talk about emotion or affect in music – at least as it appears in philosophy. As Robin James has so convincingly highlighted, '[m]usic, like affect, emotion, or implicit understanding, is the Other of philosophy, at least as its conventionally defined and practiced' (and therefore sensuous, feminine, bodily, etc.).³¹ James is in no way refuting the sometimes intensely affective dimension of music – far from it – but is rather cautioning that if we fail to (or choose not to) 'understand all the work that goes into making music – from the epistemic frames that organize music/noise distinctions, to the logic of specific compositional strategies (like tonality or ragas), to more practical matters like audio engineering or how to play the piano – it might appear to affect us in relatively *immediate* ways.'³² We can thus better understand music's affective dimensions by attending to the specific practices, systems and mechanisms by which affect is instrumentally created and shaped, and the discursive practices that allow us to hear it precisely *as* music, rather than noise (or, indeed, as 'art' rather than mere 'entertainment'). Indeed, if music were 'extra-logical [...] then it would be indistinguishable from noise or sound.'³³ Although I am hesitant to draw such a sharp distinction between music and noise/sound (because noise/sound must also be discursively produced

³¹ James, 'Affective Resonances', p. 59.

³² *ibid.*, p. 60, my emphasis.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 60.

and multiply contingent) it is nonetheless worth emphasising that it is *music* – and explicitly not sound and/or noise – that tends to stand in as a generic synonym or placeholder for affect. For all the discussion of resonance and rhythm as the underlying (essentially musical) condition of this pre-symbolic and affective dimension, it is music (and not sounds in general) that are claimed – by philosophers – to have such a powerful effect (affect). It is thus even more surprising that closer attention is rarely paid to the specific practices that afford this socio-cultural affectivity. As Rita Felski describes (speaking about literature, though I think it applies equally to music), ‘aesthetic pleasure is never unmediated or intrinsic [...because] even our most inchoate and seemingly ineffable responses are shaped by dispositions transmitted through education and culture.’³⁴

THE WORK OF OPERA

Given that the ethico-aesthetic in question is the operas (or *Oper und Drama*) of Wagner, it is now worth a moment to consider what the relationship between *episteme* and *techne* outlined above contributes to the debate. Returning to the birth of the genre not only elucidates certain key points, but it also adds weight to Lacoue-Labarthe’s firm conviction that it is no accident or mere chance that the ‘*paroxysme du Moderne*’ was attained through music-drama (i.e. Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*) (Pnpf, p. 104). As he goes on to explain, much of what Wagner was trying to achieve (for the moment, irrespective of whether he met his aims) was already in place – was simply a repetition of – its Florentine/Mantuan incarnation: it is written into the story of the birth of opera itself. Though a full history of the birth of opera is far beyond the time or space available here, and thus this potted version will lack any of the specificity and nuance of a properly historical account, it is nonetheless true to say that ‘[f]ew genres in the history of music have their origins fixed with such apparent precision as opera: we know when and where the first through-composed music dramas appeared on the stage – in

³⁴ Felski, p. 15.

Florence in the mid-1590s – and the precise political, social, and cultural contexts that gave them birth. Moreover, few genres were from the outset subject to such intense theorizing about their *raison d'être*.³⁵ Additionally, its hybrid form and socio-political context – the combination of not only musical and dramatic but literary, mythological and theoretical aspects (opera emerges in the academic culture of late Renaissance courtly life) – makes opera a focal point for the discussion of questions ‘concerning the aims and effects of music, drama, and indeed the arts in general.’³⁶ At the same time, though the intellectual climate was indispensable in formenting the birth of this new genre, it was by no means an entirely abstract or theoretical endeavour but rather one that plays between what we might now think of abstract theory (*episteme*) and concrete practices (*techne*): indeed, though they were informed by ancient music theory, the techniques they sought were an overtly musical practice. Further, the word ‘opera’ itself means ‘work’ – both in the sense of the work carried out, the labour involved – and as the resulting work itself: the *œuvre*. Similarly, it is also acutely clear in the context of the emergence of opera that the genre is distinctly and indissociably bound up with the cultural context from which it emerged: its birth is inseparable from the context of the wealth and power of Florence – particularly the Medici family; the intellectual and practical labour of the Camerata de’Bardi (the Florentine Camerata); and the Renaissance rediscovery of ancient philosophy. Opera is not, however, merely a reflection of the context whence it emerges, but it too played its own formative and influential role by ‘making a powerful statement both about their [those involved in the first operas] time – when the arts had reached such a peak that Orpheus himself could be brought back to life – and about their princely patron, the Apollo/Sun-King around whom the political, social, and cultural world revolved.’³⁷ Moreover, as Gary Tomlinson has described, opera has itself ‘been a chief

³⁵ Tim Carter, ‘The Seventeenth Century’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, ed. by Roger Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-46, p. 1).

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

staging ground in elite Western culture for a belief in the existence of two worlds, one accessible to the senses, the other not.’³⁸

Lacoue-Labarthe draws our attention to the distinctly modern paradox upon which much of this is built: a *new* genre is founded in order to return us to the tragic dramas of ancient Greece and thus, from the off, opera is caught between the nostalgic ‘perfection’ of the ancients and the modern need of ‘perfectionnement technique’ aimed at surpassing the (already perfect) model which it is trying to revive (Lm, pp. 60-61). As already mentioned above, then, not only did the Camerata de’Bardi engage in a sustained attempt to resurrect ancient tragedy, but through the discovery of ancient texts (primarily Plato and Aristotle) their attention was drawn to the profound effects that music was apparently capable of in the ancient world. As Lacoue-Labarthe attests, this is not only reflected in the choice of subject matter for the earliest operas (Peri’s *Euridice* (1600) and Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* (1607) being cases in point) but in the attempt to (re)construct musical techniques for the excitation of the passions inspired by the ancient association of particular modes with particular affects. It is an explicit attempt to create a more expressive (but by no means *excessive*) music that is nonetheless founded on the recovery of a music that is, in its essence, (already) expressive – and particularly of the subject. Of course these developments do not take place in a vacuum – aside from anything else, early ‘composers’ (often court musicians alongside librettists and scenarists) of opera did not limit themselves to opera alone but also wrote madrigals, motets, intermedi, etc. – and resonances can be found more widely in relation to broader cultural process. Notions of perfection, modernity and novelty abound: ‘stile moderno’ (previously ‘seconda pratica’) was coined by Caccini in *Le nuove musiche* (1602), whilst Monteverdi planned to write a book called *Seconda pratica, overo perfettione della moderna musica* (though he never did). Equally, in terms of new musical practices, it is through the development of ‘stile rappresentativo’ – a style that is more expressive than speech but not as melodious as song – that the difficult task of achieving a ‘musical style that would cope with the

³⁸ Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 4.

demands of clear diction and dramatic flexibility while retaining at least a degree of structural coherence and musical integrity³⁹ was attained: this is one aspect of the aesthetic or mimetic principle to which music, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, is submitted (for the first time) (see, for example, Lm, p. 63). In a related vein, it is also this period that sees the first use of the word ‘technology’ (1612, in English, and 1607 in its Latinate root ‘*technologia*’ according to the OED); surprisingly (or not), in its earliest form it refers specifically to a treatise on the arts.⁴⁰

These developments no doubt correspond to the periodizations offered by Mark Evans Bonds as laid out in chapter one. He marks 1550 as a threshold of a shift from ancient, medieval and early Renaissance thought which figured music’s effects (fairly uncomplicatedly) as a consequence of its essence to a looser relationship between these two aspects; though essence and effect continue to be related, there is a shift towards music’s capacity for expression decoupled from an entirely clear sense of its essence. This brings it into parallel with language and a quest for origins: as we reach the eighteenth century, it became increasingly unclear what language is and music, as we have noted, is posited as a possible pre-linguistic origin of language itself, linking the natural and non-semantic to the semantic and cultural.⁴¹ In short, in the eighteenth century in particular, as Andrew H. Clark describes, music is made to *speak*.⁴² What Lacoue-Labarthe brings so forcefully into frame is an insistence on how what is at stake is not an ‘innate’ or unconstructed musical expressivity (whatever that might be) but a rigorous and laborious theoretical and practical endeavour that sets out to find (or invent) the *techniques* that will allow for a resurgence or reanimation of ancient music’s (supposed) expressive capacity.

³⁹ Carter, p. 9.

⁴⁰ See ‘Technology, N.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴¹ See chapters one and two.

⁴² See Andrew H. Clark, ‘Making Music Speak’ in *Speaking of Music: Addressing the Sonorous*, ed. by Keith Moore Chapin and Andrew Herrick Clark (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 70-85. It is notable that this is figured in terms of ‘common good’ and the ability of music, in a Platonic vein, to ‘effect and potentially control the public [...] and to create a sense of shared sentiment, purpose, and citizenship.’ See p. 70.

At the same time, Lacoue-Labarthe skates perhaps a little too quickly over what is of course a more complicated process of transformation: though the decoupling or loosening of the relationship between music's essence and its effect can be traced back to the late sixteenth century, it only really comes into full force in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – and even then remains dynamic rather than static, whether in terms of ontology, epistemology or technology. Daniel Chua has described this process as a 'naturalisation' of music by which music is no longer understood as *supernatural* (i.e. part of a unified totality that was at once worldly and magical; human and cosmic) but is instead aligned with nature – hence that whole raft of enlightenment binaries – and is therefore 'amenable to the interrogation and technological control of human rationality.'⁴³ This is, however, an ambivalent transformation: though there is an 'attempt towards the end of the sixteenth century to transfer music from the medieval quadrivium of music, geometry, astronomy and arithmetic to the rhetorical arts of the trivium; the shift split the nature of music.'⁴⁴ It is, on the one hand, an object – rational, scientifically and empirically knowable, and concerned with 'truth' – and, on the other, a subject (or at least subjective/subjectivizing) – thus natural, expressive and concerned with voice, words and meaning. Philosophers, musicians and critics – depending on their own epistemological commitments – thus locate music's essence on different sides of the split: whereas Rameau clearly locates music (itself grounded in the *corps sonore*) on the side of objectivity, Rousseau is evidently committed to music's essential linguistic and expressive nature.⁴⁵ This split of course reflects the changing experience and expression of subjectivity in this period. As Gary Tomlinson carefully outlines:

The distinction between Cartesian and pre-Cartesian subjectivity is not the difference between a mechanism and something nonmechanistic that preceded it. Rather the change is from a mechanism whose workings were thought to be fully explicable – a mechanism that seemed in the workings of its spirit to span physical and metaphysical realms – to one whose central operations had become opaque. The name this opacity

⁴³ Daniel Chua, 'Vincenzo Galilei, Modernity, and the Division of Nature' in *Music Theory and Natural Order from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. by Suzannah Clark and Alexander Rehding (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 17-29, p. 18.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, see pp. 18-19. Chua goes so far as to place different musical genres on either side of this split (i.e. symphony vs. opera) but to my mind, whilst this might work on a descriptive level, this runs the risk of ignoring the ambivalent or even conflicting elements of this split that are present *within* each genre's self-construction.

assumed in the seventeenth century is *representation*, which we define simply, for now, as the presenting over again of one thing in another place.⁴⁶

Importantly, then, music does not merely reflect – symptomatically – this epistemic shift from an ancient/medieval to an early modern worldview in which ‘the price of progress [...] is the loss of meaning’, but (modern) music is central to this narrative and is one of the very grounds on which this shift is played out or constructed, and thus bears within itself the trace of this essentially modern splitting.⁴⁷ Or again, in other words: music is not, and never was, an essence distinct or neatly separable from the theories and practices that constitute it.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: PHILOSOPHY, (GREAT) ART AND ORIGIN(ALITY)

Before we bring this chapter to a close, it is perhaps worth retreading one more time what is by now, one hopes, fairly familiar, and also to highlight a constellation of philosophical commitments that bring all three philosophers – Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Badiou – at once into close proximity whilst also maintaining the fundamental rift between the opposing camps. Having laid out immediately above the broad sweep of operatic development from its inception in late Renaissance Italy, it is necessary to rejoin this to the second, broad epochal sweep (as laid out already in chapter one and in the intervening chapters): the notion of absolute music. It is perhaps this trajectory that is least clearly plotted out in Lacoue-Labarthe’s account – an observation that leads Tomlinson to note a residual universalism (because of a generically unified and static conception of opera over time) in Lacoue-Labarthe’s otherwise ‘deeply thought’ account in *Musica ficta*.⁴⁸ As we have already noted, under the

⁴⁶ Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Chua, ‘Vincenzo Galilei, modernity, and the division of nature’, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, p. 157n.3. It is not that Lacoue-Labarthe is unaware of the absolutizing and Romantic trajectory – far from it, and his co-authored work with Nancy, *L’Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) is a case in point – but opera’s changeable metaphysical journey, from its inception in Florence through to the specifically Wagnerian project is never considered in any detail; nor is its (Italian/German) relation to French opera addressed.

influence of Kant and Hegel and along with changing practices such as the separation of musical life from courtly or religious functions; technological developments that impact the ability to make new or more complex instruments; the growth and standardization of the orchestra; the emergence of the canon (a musical museum cf. Lydia Goehr), concert halls, institutions, and their attendant social and cultural practices, from around 1800 – and especially after about 1850 – music reaches its Romantic apex. Instrumental music is validated as the highest form of elite art: through a potent combination of formalist self-referentiality and (staged) separation from the (functional) mundane, this repertoire manifests an interiority that transcends the world of mere appearances and drab, prosaic, daily life. Music and its attendant theories and practices thus again correspond to the changing nature of subjectivity over time – Tomlinson outlines these shifts as follows:

The history of Western subjectivity since the Renaissance might be written as this story of a shift from a *participating* subject, in contact with a unified cosmos extending smoothly from materiality to immateriality; to a *transcended* subject, whose knowledge depends on an unknowable harmony granted by a loving God between material and immaterial realms utterly out of touch with one another; and finally to a *transcendental* subject, encompassing within itself all the material and immaterial means necessary in order to know.⁴⁹

The difference here being that, whilst we can show how music evolves over time – informing and informed by changing conceptions of subjectivity and the place of the human in the world – music ‘itself’ takes on a particular role in the Romantic conception because (absolute, instrumental) music becomes prized as the ideal vehicle to express the transcendental subject. The split that was noted in the early modern period – between a subjective and objective understanding of music – is thus radicalized in the modern (Romantic) period. Autonomous and absolute works of music become concrete, formally analysable, independent objects aligned with rationality, truth, and transcendence (so long as we only attend to what is understandable in music as *logos*, i.e. form/structure); at the same time, music in its subjective guise (all that escapes *logos* and is thus aligned with nature,

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

emotion, bodies, the feminine, etc.: in short, philosophy's Other) – particularly as taken up by Schopenhauer – becomes a cipher less for subjectivity at large than for *what has been lost* of subjectivity: its constitutive lack; the Will oppressed by representation; the underlying *Trieb* that manifests symbolically or symptomatically; or the Lacanian-Kristevan *sémiotique*. It refers us to a pre-linguistic or pre-symbolic dimension, which as noted in chapter one, is a crucial point of contact between modern philosophy and psychoanalytic approaches.⁵⁰ Crucially, and this cannot be emphasized enough, this (subjective) conception of music is nonetheless equated with a particular repertory: largely post-1800 *musique savante* in the German tradition. At the end of this lineage (and by no means in an uncomplicated or uncontested way) stands Wagner who, depending on one's perspective, either succeeded in the totalising metaphysical gesture *par excellence* of submitting both language and politics to a musical adequation of the 'idea' itself, or who represents one of the last possibilities of 'great' art – who 'represents a music for the future' (*W*, p. 133).

In this regard, the Nancy-Lacoue-Labarthian and Badiouian projects are entirely incommensurable with one another: Badiou is fully committed to the idea not just of art, but of *great* art. His wager is that, no matter how compromised Wagner may be by his historical, philosophical and political associations, the Wagnerian work *itself* explores formal possibilities that gesture towards the possibility of a great art of the future. It is of central importance, then, that 'truth' only enters the Badiouian lexicon during the period of music/art history in which 'great Art' (singular, rather than *les beaux-arts*) emerges: as laid out in chapter four, Haydn, a 'founder of the classical style' is the earliest mention of truth-procedures in music because of his 'systematic use of the plasticity of short cells' (i.e. his formal innovations).⁵¹ Nonetheless, all three find a moment of relative consensus over a related issue, then: the crisis of contemporary 'Art.' For Badiou this is indexed to (liberal) socio-cultural processes that have validated pluralism, diversification, the democratisation of taste, and created a fundamental in-distinction – the inability, or perhaps just the lack of desire to distinguish – between

⁵⁰ See chapter one, especially p. 49.

⁵¹ Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, p. 132. For a more detailed account see chapter four.

art and non-art; between music (as Art) and music (as entertainment). These processes seem to have been amplified by the increasing capacity and availability of recording technologies and playback devices – the implication being that we live in a world where (entertainment) music is ubiquitous – though we (the generic populace) are unable to discern that it is not ‘Art’ proper. In stark contrast, then, though Lacoue-Labarthe speaks, using one of his favoured privative prefixes, of ‘la *désaffectation* de l’art lui-même [...parce que] l’art est désormais hors d’usage [...], “hors-service”’ (Pnpf, p. 98), he identifies this as a closure induced by the impossibility of the very concept of Art itself. In contradistinction to Badiou, then, he suggests that once we have finished blaming ‘l’industrie culturelle, la société spectaculaire-marchande, le libéralisme postmoderne, la mondialisation, l’étatisme social-démocrate, etc. [in short, everything Badiou holds accountable] la question reste entière: pourquoi l’art s’est laissé *assimiler*? Pourquoi a-t-il fait preuve d’une telle apathie, d’un tel manque de *résistance*?’ (Pnpf, p. 98) Lacoue-Labarthe goes on to remind us, as we have just outlined above and elsewhere, that the very concept of Art ‘est un phénomène récent’, which is found in its nascent form during the *querelles* but only reaching fruition in Jena Romanticism around 1800 (he notes, for example, that 1790 is the last mention of *les beaux-arts* in Kant’s *critique*) (see Pnpf, pp. 98-99): thus the early modern and modern phases outlined above. The point of Lacoue-Labarthe’s excursus is to highlight the inherent impossibility – the artifice – upon which the entire project of Art is built, urging us not to be misled by this notional rupture instigated by the modern: though ‘[o]n l’a saluée comme une naissance; elle était peut-être mortifère, ou suicidaire. Et l’Art, comme le Moderne, sont peut-être mort-nés, ou avortés’ (Pnpf, p. 99). Its own crisis is built into its (illusory) auto-conception, whereby it is charged (by philosophy) with manifesting the absolute, but all it can manifest is its capacity to manifest the absolute (and not the absolute itself): ‘l’Art naît sous le signe de sa fin, c’est-à-dire sous le signe de la réflexion (philosophique) sur l’art’ (Pnpf, p. 100). In moving forward, Lacoue-Labarthe draws on Adorno’s concept of *Entkunstung* – which he tentatively translates as ‘désartification’ – a neologism that has embedded within it Art’s constituent finitude and yet, in

figuring art as no longer singular (in the Romantic sense), allows the possibility of something 'artistic' to remain through its dis-articulation.

Despite their profound differences, however, what all three philosophers share is a commitment to or validation of the 'new.' Indeed, it is in this regard that the most valuable aspects of both Nancy's and Badiou's approaches to art can be discerned; for Badiou, truth is, by definition 'something new' – this stands in sharp contradistinction to knowledge, which 'only gives us repetition, it is concerned only with what already is' (OTP). It is this capital newness, and the potentiality for a reconfiguration not only of the subject but of the situation that seems to be most promising; indeed, the subject does not exist prior to the truth-event but it is the event itself 'which calls a subject into existence, into the creation of a truth.'⁵² In asserting the productive value of figuring the event as that which founds a (faithful) subject anew I am largely following Simon Critchley, who likewise finds value in Badiou's concept of the event as a creative (rather than imitative) thrust that impels a new subjective configuration. Critchley, I think rightly, maintains suspicion over the need to describe this in terms of truth, however – not only on an ethical level, but also in terms of the circularity and tautology of the logic that figures the subject and its constituent truth as equiprimordial.⁵³ 'Truth' is identifiable only by way of a fidelitous commitment from the subject who is instantiated by the same truth that it identifies.

Similarly Nancy, on the best reading, privileges the arts because of their aesthetic (in its fully etymological sense) rerouting of the senses – art is able to (re)configure the senses anew. As Christopher Watkin highlights speaking of the Nancean body, this is precisely where *techne* figures for Nancy: *techne* is not a (Heideggerian) strategy that reveals something truer or more originary, but is instead a creative practice; in short, *techne* simply is "art", "craft" or "creation" in the broad sense that blurs the distinction between the natural and the artificial, so the *techne* of the body is the

⁵² Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, p. 45.

⁵³ *ibid.*, see p. 48 in particular.

medicinal, prosthetic and technological extensions of, modifications to and replacements for parts of the body that blur limits of the body.⁵⁴ Indeed, as we saw in chapter two, Nancy is cautious in referring to raves – as Michel Gaillot does – as a ‘return’ to a something originary, often figured as festive and Dionysian. Instead, Nancy re-articulates this in terms not of origin but of originality – as something entirely novel ‘qui n’a jamais eu lieu’ (*Sm*, p. 72). Similarly, the radical indistinction between subject and object in Nancy’s articulation of the *corps sonore* at least affords the possibility of a philosophy of music that understands the affective dimension of music not as a ‘natural’ unidirectional effect of an object on a subject, but as something that is created in relation – where there are no naturally occurring subjects and objects (of music) but rather the *sens* of this distinction is in permanent and mutual flux and where music is one of the modalities through which the body and affect – as *techne* – is created (and not refound or excavated from its burial ‘beneath’ representation).⁵⁵ As a final point, *vis-à-vis* Nancy, one of the novelties – or so Nancy claims – that ‘rock, comme le jazz’ (and subsequent genres such as techno), attests to is the centrality of the body through its co-instantiation as both music and dance (*Smr*, p. 79). I want to both insist on and *desist* from this narrative: though it is welcome and necessary to admit the body ‘into’ musical ontology, this is not because ‘toutes les innovations musicales de notre histoire [musique savante] n’ont pas été accompagnées d’innovations de danse’ (*Smr*, p. 79) (what about *Le Sacre du printemps*?) or because *musique savante* doesn’t co-instantiate a vast repertoire of bodily techniques: indeed, ‘[w]ho would deny’ as Benjamin Peikut describes, ‘the agency of a training regimen that develops fine motor skill in the hands’ or the ‘corporeal protocols that discipline the performing body’ – not to mention the composite bodily practices (seated stillness, silence, applause at appropriate moments) that are demanded by idealized

⁵⁴ Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 85.

⁵⁵ Though I am insisting on this as one of the most valuable aspects of Nancy’s thinking for the philosophy of music, Nancy nonetheless often risks implying that affect/pathos is something to return to or to be refound – for example, when he characterizes rock in strict opposition to art music (itself founded, he claims, on a signifying logic): ‘un certain refus de tout ce qui peut faire construction du sens [...parce que] le rock déclare au contraire qu’il faut au sens quel qu’il soit autre chose que la signification, qu’il lui faut l’énergie, la force.’ See *Smr*, p. 83.

and reverent concert hall listening.⁵⁶ Just because they are bodily practices that aim at transcending the body – at subsuming the body to the total aesthetic truth – does not mean that they are not, still, bodily practices. Moreover, and as I hope to have highlighted in the previous chapter on Badiou,⁵⁷ this kind of approach continues to privilege an idealized narrative about musical listening and performance practices at the expense of considering the diverse ways in which people use, make and experience music (including that which is included in the repertoire of absolute music); in short, it perpetuates the idealism that denies the body as a legitimate co-site of expression in this repertoire.⁵⁸ This is, indeed, one of the fault lines in the construction of the absolute musical work, and one which warrants more attention and better understanding in philosophical attempts to think about music – especially in work, such as Nancy’s, which is so concerned with bodily sensuousness.

BEYOND HYSTERIA: TOWARDS A FEMINIST ETHICS OF MUSIC (THAT IS NOT ONE)

This final section draws attention to the perhaps obvious fact that there is both a long and a more recent history that associates music with the feminine; as Lacoue-Labarthe, in the scene in *Musica ficta* dedicated to Heidegger’s (and Nietzsche’s) ‘figures de Wagner’, states: ‘Selon une très ancienne, très profonde et très solide équivalence – peut-être indestructible –, c’est [la musique] un art féminin, et destiné aux femmes ou à la part féminine des hommes. C’est un art, en tous sens, hystérique. Et c’est pour cette raison, essentiellement, que la musique est l’hystérie. Tout au moins une certaine musique’ (*Mf*, p. 198). I want to suggest that the – not always intentional – intertwining of these related histories is worth paying closer attention to, and clues us in to the reasons for Lacoue-Labarthe’s concluding qualification: ‘tout au moins une certaine musique.’ In the way that Lacoue-

⁵⁶ Piekut, p. 202, p. 191.

⁵⁷ See chapter four, p. 192, pp. 202-203.

⁵⁸ See, for example, J. Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), which refuses this idealism and attends to the undeniably physical expression of nineteenth-century virtuosos.

Labarthe makes his claim, he asserts with absolute authority that music, fundamentally or essentially, *is* hysteria and/or feminine; and yet, at the same time, entirely undermines this claim. By restricting the purchase of his earlier claim to that of ‘une certaine musique’ he identifies the constitutive aporia of this trope: though music is defined as feminine, by delimiting the scope of that supposed essence to only certain music, it no longer holds as a definition for music at large. (It is significant, I would suggest, that a similar and de-essentialising gesture is also at play *vis-à-vis* gender). Indeed, as Lacoue-Labarthe continues, this anxiety over music’s (potentially feminine or feminizing) essence does not lead Plato to condemn all music: again, he condemns only certain music. From the beginning, then, music has been a matter for both politics and philosophy, and thus a question of disciplining dissonance – of setting the boundaries of the *polis* and of knowledge. As Laura Odello has described, in this regard throughout ‘the whole occidental tradition of metaphysics, from Plato onward, philosophy [has] tried to contain and neutralize music by reducing it to logos that resonates without harm in the political community. Yet, in the manner of a lapsus, music comes back to haunt the philosophical ear and to expose it to its own excess, that of an uncertain or lacking discourse – another discourse.’⁵⁹ It is a narrative that points us towards philosophy’s problematic desire for pure knowledge – the quest for (original, unmediated) truth – uncontaminated by the messy unpredictability and contingencies of the mundane. This much is, for the most part, known – indeed the anti- or post-Platonic approaches of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe are indebted to this kind of observation – even if, as this thesis has shown, it is sometimes (constitutively) forgotten. The aspects of music (but by no means *only* music) that are not subsumable to *logos* are subsequently redefined as the *essentially musical* and, in this sense, music is figured as philosophy’s conditioning ‘outside’ – its constituent ‘other.’

As Odello, again, describes, ‘[s]ince the Sirens appeared in the twelfth book of the *Odyssey*, they have dwelled in the margins, on the outer borders of the Western stage of speech, which they endlessly

⁵⁹ Laura Odello, ‘Waiting for the Death Knell: Speaking of Music (So to Speak)’ in *Speaking of Music*, pp. 39-48, p. 39.

haunt with their song, with a bewitching and seductive music.⁶⁰ Indeed, as we have seen, this peripheral figuring of music is explicitly manifest in the texts we have considered: with the exception of *Le chant des Muses*, in all instances the works devoted to the question either of the relation between music and theory/philosophy (Nancy's *À l'écoute* and Lacoue-Labarthe's 'L'écho du sujet') or offering a musical 'demonstration' or exemplar of philosophical system (Badiou's 'Scolie: Une variante musicale de la métaphysique du sujet') music's marginal status is textually performed. *In fine*, for philosophy, music remains inessential, supplementary, or explicatory. It is in the 'Coda' of Nancy's *À l'écoute* and 'La clôture maternelle' of Lacoue-Labarthe's 'L'écho du sujet' that the aspect of music that is irrecoverable to *logos* (and therefore philosophy) is most explicitly delineated: in both instances, this is also figured through an essential relation to the maternal (hysterical) feminine. Badiou's brief musical excursus in *Logiques des mondes* is explicitly figured as marginal: both in the sense that it is a remarkably brief segment in an otherwise hefty book, and also through its description as a 'Scolie' which, as we have already noted, usually concerns an explanatory comment given in the margins. In remarkable contrast, then, when discussion turns to 'actual' music (for want of a better way of putting it) – and not simply what music does for or demonstrates of philosophy – music appears to have a central and by no means marginal role in our political, social, and cultural lives. Nowhere is this tension more obvious than in the vast difference between Badiou's texts: he is clearly a passionate Wagnerian (as is so evident from *Five Lessons on Wagner*) but pleasure, for Badiou, has no place in philosophy. As Odello has provocatively argued, in insisting that music (or what is *essentially* musical) escapes the bounds of philosophy – is located beyond its logical purview – philosophy has also violently forced music into silent submission: music (which *is not music*, but a metaphor for what philosophy is not) is figured as 'a prostitute. We exploit it, we force it, we do violence to it, we rape it, for we desire it, it arouses our desire: we push it, we urge it into prostitution or substitution, putting it to good use (to our good use) by trading it, by selling it in the exchange of speech.'⁶¹ This is not,

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 40.

then, a discourse about musical pleasure – philosophy has already delimited that as outside its own bounds – but about control. Similarly, Badiou’s rejection of pleasure as a legitimate concern for philosophy is underpinned by (an unawareness of his own) authoritarianism: for Badiou, the philosopher must have total power as evidenced through his ability to identify (universal) truth. In the Romantic and sophistic relationship to aesthetics that he is so steadfast on critiquing, it is because art (the hysteric) reveals philosophy’s (the Master) partiality – her symptoms are resistant to a final or absolute reading – that ‘il [le philosophe] rechigne à l’asservissement amoureux’ and as a result ‘n’a guère d’autre choix [...] que de lui donner du bâton.’⁶² Rather than being the ‘master’ who runs the risk of being emasculated by the revelation of his non-totalising access to truth, Badiou simply opts to switch role in the drama, playing himself not as art’s ‘mistress’ but instead as her Madame: it is the philosopher’s (and the brothel keeper’s) prerogative to identify, for their own benefit, the good, the beautiful and the true, and to cast out all and any that refuse to work on their terms. It is telling, I wish to suggest, that Badiou explicitly figures the relationship between art and philosophy in this way, revealing his desire for music that is silent and submissive; one which never rubs philosophy up the wrong way, so to speak. Though it is welcome that Badiou, unlike Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, attributes no feminine ‘essence’ to music as such, he nonetheless identifies generic truth (to which Art, as one of philosophy’s conditions, can attest) with the feminine (♀), and which is itself figured as beyond not only experience but the world as it appears; in short, music must be (philosophically) seen and not heard.

The question of how each of the philosophers achieves their disparate aims, however, takes on a distinctly modern flavour. Though the longer history has always stood music in a compromised relationship to philosophy, in the modern period – as we have described above – musical theories and

⁶² *PMI*, p. 10. This is not the only place Badiou tacitly condones gendered violence. Elsewhere, he describes love as ‘une procédure sanglante qui peut entraîner des violences, des meurtres’ and so encodes sexual violence as a product of love rather than having to do with structural power differentials, coercion and control (otherwise known as patriarchy, racism and (neo)colonial violence, lesbophobia, transphobia, classism and ableism, amongst others) (see *PE*, p. 56).

practices change alongside changing conceptions of subjectivity. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, in similar ways, arguably fall prey to the very trap they themselves identify: though their commentary on the historical emergence of a modern concept of Art (and thus music) is welcome, and thus points towards a much more fluid conception of what music 'is' than in Badiou's work, they nonetheless replicate in their own work what they identify elsewhere. Though, on the one hand, Lacoue-Labarthe so clearly identifies this quintessentially modern conception of music – music's essence is identified with the nostalgic figuring of a lost expressive immediacy – on the other, this is precisely how music is identified for Lacoue-Labarthe. Music – or again, the fundamentally *musical* – once stripped of its representational trappings is, in the final reading, nothing other than this archeoriginal emotivity; a cathartic and hysterical fantasy that allows us to play out our own imagined maternal-oceanic obliteration. At the same time, however, though this is precisely how music's essence is identified (in both 'L'écho du sujet' and *Le Chant des Muses*), this causes irresolvable problems in *Musica ficta*, where there is an ethico-aesthetic endeavour to critique Wagner's artificial hyper-staging of music's emotional but non-signifying fundamental essence through figurative (thus signifying) means. As a result, music's ability to occasion powerful effects is 1) its pre-symbolic, maternal, essence, 2) its essence when perverted to a signifying logic, and 3) what philosophy has repressed or rejected. Though it is logically difficult to entertain all three premises, it is this willingness – intentional or otherwise – to entertain such dissonance that makes Lacoue-Labarthe's project both the most and least problematic – and certainly the most productive. There is similarly, for Nancy, an attempt to recoup for philosophy the repressed beyond (*outré*) of signification that is endemic to music: an endeavour that seems also to be modelled on a distinctly modern nostalgia that also figures 'woman' beyond signification (cf. Lacan).

Even Badiou's project takes on an unmistakably modern flavour: though, as a neo-Platonist, his ongoing commitment to truth and his rubbishing of hermeneutics, relativism, rhetoric and sophistry position him as distinctly anti-(post)modern in orientation, he nonetheless accepts the (entirely modern) doctrine of absolute music wholesale: by aligning the possibility of truth with formal

innovation and a repertoire spanning a mere 200 years he conflates the eternal and universal truths with a distinctly modern practice. He simply aligns himself with the side of the modernist split that seeks to reconcile its inherent tension by committing to an objectification of music in the name of rationality and reason. He participates in the kind of gesture that musicologist Richard Taruskin has described as ‘a police function rather than a scholarly one [...and] an abuse of disciplinary authority.’⁶³ Quite clearly, a major problem in Badiou’s project is the location of *his* role: whilst he lambasts sophists for their relativism, their concern with rhetoric and with language’s inability, in the final measure, to authorize or identify truth, he can only concede truth as something philosophy can identify through a process configured on nothing more than *fidélité*. As a result, he (necessarily) refuses to accept that he, too, is a product – and not just an omniscient observer – of ‘truths’ he identifies, and which ultimately depends upon ‘invidious clichés of judgment that, by giving an aesthetic cloak to social discrimination, perpetuate a foolish and needless (albeit familiar) class system.’⁶⁴ In short, Badiou codifies the musical practices specific to his milieu as neutral or the norm, and thus others all others; indeed, it is extraordinarily difficult to see what is radical about re-codifying something as universal that has coded itself as universal since its inception. Moreover, this is all within a discourse that all too often seems merely to perpetuate an assumption of European exceptionalism and ethnocentric universalism and that figures modern Western culture as the pinnacle of all civilization(s).

Finally, then, this chapter turns briefly to Irigaray’s powerful critique of philosophy’s (and psychoanalysis’s) phallogocentrism in both *Ce Sexe qui n’en est pas un* and in *Speculum de l’autre femme* to critique the ongoing deployment of gender as an organizational category in philosophy. Through a kind of feminist archaeology, Irigaray sounds out the way in which philosophy has tended to identify the feminine through an analogy between ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ in such a way that the ‘transcendent movement toward the Platonic ideal begins [...in] representational culture which

⁶³ Richard Taruskin, ‘Agents and Causes and Ends, Oh My’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 31.2 (2014), 272–93 (p. 277).

⁶⁴ Taruskin, p. 277.

produces an illusion of nature in the form of a maternal other.⁶⁵ Instead, Irigaray critiques Plato's *hustera* for the way in which it locates the mother-earth-matter as the illusory ground upon which the originary scene of representation is played out and thus positions the maternal-feminine as nostalgic projection of patriarchal Western epistemology. She is thus able to deconstructively critique the masculinist fantasy that has heretofore constructed the story of origins and the subject as self-same, teleologically determined and driven from an original 'oneness' or 'wholeness' in the pre-symbolic union with the mother. Likewise, through her infamous invocation of female *lèvres* in 'Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un', Irigaray playfully deploys a strategy that at once mimics and subsequently destabilizes the conflation between penis and phallus in psychoanalysis; she identifies the way in which the feminine sex (at least in philosophy and psychoanalysis) is not one – both in the sense that it has been conceived of as a lack, a grounding fantasy to secure the stability of the masculine subject and bares little relation to the 'actual' feminine, and in the sense that it is not singular (the feminine has multiple resonances). She therefore carves out a space for woman's specificity – both in terms of sexuality and language – that is positioned not in opposition to the masculine, but as supplementary. In so doing, she reveals men, also, to be 'not all.'

Notwithstanding the potential essentialism of which Irigaray herself has been accused – the fact that she too arguably reinstates a pre-discursive feminine essence to be excavated – her broader critique of philosophy's phallogocentrism seems cogent for our purposes. Just as postcolonial scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty have drawn on and then substantially critiqued and radicalized such notions to show how not just 'women' but also "the east" are defined as others, or as peripheral, [so] that (Western) man/humanism can represent him/itself as the centre. It is not the centre that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the centre',⁶⁶ I want to insist on the way that (Western high art) music *continues* to be deployed in similar ways – even

⁶⁵ Huffer, *Maternal Pasts*, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 41-2.

when it claims entirely otherwise, as in Nancy's *À l'écoute*. Moreover, this often participates in the kind of logic identified above and not only constructs music as a category prior to analysis but 'woman' too (along with assuming whiteness and heterosexual reproductivity as the norm).⁶⁷ Badiou, quite explicitly, identifies music's essence *a priori* with formal innovation – a move that derives from a specific historical understanding of music and which makes the actual happening of music (whether live, recorded, imagined, etc.) irrelevant to philosophy; it is avowedly beyond experience and so too, then, is the feminine generic truth that it births – though only with the help of the philosopher midwife. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, though often keenly aware of music's historical constructedness, nonetheless attempt to recuperate music as philosophy's other and in doing so identify a lost musical essence with a timeless maternal-feminine. This seems particularly unfortunate as, at other moments, their philosophies offer exciting ways to move beyond a singular musical essence that can be neatly separated from the broader context of its happening; both Nancy's sensuous relational approach and Lacoue-Labarthe's emphasis on *formation* and *techné* (as well as his larger commitment to originary mimesis) point towards the way in which context does not exist apart from the music. The very best readings of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe go so far as to entirely destabilize the text/context opposition to the extent that neither the subject (including gendered identity) nor the (musical) text/object *nor even the context* is identifiable in advance: instead, as Piekut describes, 'context' and 'music' are 'persistently re-enacted in patterns and ruptures that strengthen or weaken existing attachments. When we speak of music reproducing as well as affecting politics, we are really attempting to come to terms with a network of associations – neither strictly musical nor political – that falls across, and mixes up, disciplinary assumptions about what counts as context.'⁶⁸

It is thus, then, not a question of excavating the 'true' nature of music from a philosophy that has simply held it hostage, but instead to better recognize that though music may often have an identifiable origin (for example, opera; absolute music; rock) that doesn't mean, to rephrase Derrida,

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, particularly p. 22 for the way in which 'woman' is often deployed as pre-analytic category.

⁶⁸ Piekut, p. 205.

that there is an essence of music. It even means the opposite.⁶⁹ Accordingly, then, as Lawrence Kramer and others have argued, 'music is not one thing'⁷⁰ – and this applies both to Badiou's explicit attempt to identify a singular music and also to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's implicit re-essentializing of music's apparently feminine essence. One of the strategic methodologies that could be deployed to offset this tendency – especially given Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's identification of the inherent impossibility of the absolute – would be to attend more closely to music's practical and technological dimensions to better hear music as, at once, utterly material, mediate and discursively, heuristically and experientially constituted through a constellation of theories and practices. It is necessarily also the case, then, that music relates to gender not at the level of 'essence', *qui n'en est pas une*, but across multiple mediating planes: as Georgina Born has described, that might be in the micro-sociological division of musical labour and the hierarchical striation of different musical roles; the way it informs, refracts, or animates (imagined or actual) publics and hierarchical social identity formations (gender, race, class, nation, etc.) through sonorous, affective, ideational, and practical means (including ideologies attached to different instruments, styles of performance or listening practices); or in its means of (re)production (because, again, even *musique savante* does not operate in a vacuum beyond capitalist, institutional and state funding structures or indeed instruments and technologies), amongst others.⁷¹ Though music might be *irreducibly* composite – and indeed, irreducible also in the sense that its ontology cannot be pinned down to one plane alone (whether epistemological, technological, political, experiential, cognitive, affective, etc.) – what escapes in any attempt to pin it down is emphatically not the *musical*, but is rather a constitutive openness (and one that is by no means limited to music) that leaves it available to multiple – though not necessarily infinite or arbitrary – interpretations. To figure music, essentially, as that which always escapes is to place it forever *en*

⁶⁹ Derrida says this about literature in 'A Strange Institution Called Literature.'

⁷⁰ Lawrence Kramer, 'Philosophizing Musically: Reconsidering Music and Ideas', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 139.2 (2014), 387–404 (p. 400).

⁷¹ See Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135.2 (2010), 205–43 (p. 231) and G. Born, 'Music and the Materialization of Identities', *Journal of Material Culture*, 16.4 (2011), 376–88 (p. 378).

abyme, and to render lived musical practices (and theories), ironically, as *not musical*. Indeed, not only does such a move figure music's essence as the (non-existent) ground, periphery, or elsewhere upon or against which philosophy can stage its own (illusion of a) bounded centre, but it does so in incontrovertibly gendered terms, with the philosophical Idea of music (or its 'truth') figured as irretrievably feminine and so sends both music and women, *encore*, to the beyond of either pre-, inter- or post- signification.

Encore: After Music

What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. [...] The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.
-- Susan Sontag¹

In conclusion, then, this thesis has sought to analyse and identify the way certain ideas about what music 'is' inhabit recent and contemporary philosophy – focusing especially on writers whose aims are guided by their own deeply critical agendas to challenge certain key assumptions of their own philosophical forebears. For Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, music tends to be figured as the Other of language (and therefore representation/signification); for Badiou, music is accorded no special status *vis-à-vis* language, but is one domain within the condition 'Art' in which (eternal, universal, generic and feminine) truths can be created. This thesis notes, also, that these considerations often come hand-in-hand with the invocation of gender as an organising category for philosophy. In both instances, then, the (metaphorical) musical-feminine is aligned, *encore*, with the beyond of the symbolic, signification, or the world as it appears (and in which we live); at the same time, 'music' is something to which these philosophers aspire – or which offers, *in its essence*, some liberatory potential beyond the constraints of the mundane.

In so doing, this thesis has offered little – if anything – to the academic study of music, but has instead highlighted some of the genealogies of the conceptions of music that animate the philosophies of Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Badiou. To do this, it has been necessary to emphasize the (geographically specific) historicity of the concept of singular Art (of which instrumental, absolute music was the pinnacle); its reduction to (functionless) form *as* content (thus a way of conceiving music in terms of visualized ideation); its (illusory) abstraction from the mundane; and finally, the philosophical (largely Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean) cross-pollination with a psychoanalytic

¹ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' in *The New York Intellectuals Reader*, ed. by Neil Jumonville (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 243-254, p. 252.

conception of the subject that figures music's sonorous, rather than ideated, dimension (along with the feminine) in terms of the semiotic, pre-linguistic or pre-symbolic. None of these aspects, of course, necessarily have anything *essential* to do with 'music' in its multiple, variable, changeable determinations, but rather describe a specific configuration that inhabits the assumptions of the philosophers at hand. Indeed, a major criticism of this thesis might be that in my attempt to identify this singular story of music I, too, have simply replicated a singular story of music: and that is precisely my point.

Throughout the thesis, and especially in the previous two chapters, I have insisted on the way in which inherited narratives (derived largely from German Idealism) demand that we divert our attention from music's material and technological means of production in order to make their accounts coherent – an imperative which also obscures some of the ways in which music's affective and emotional dimension is also discursively and instrumentally mediated, preferring instead to draw on a mysterious maternal pre-symbolic reservoir of *immediate* emotion. In these final pages, then, I wish to go further, and to heed the calls made by various scholars, including Benjamin Piekut and Deborah Wong that we should, in fact, not only move beyond music as a singular category, but jettison the category of 'music' altogether. As Piekut describes, once you start to consider 'music' as an 'unpredictable conglomeration of things and processes [...the] distinctions between social, technological, or musical domains are difficult to make'² – indeed, a major critique of the poststructuralist-influenced musicology of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was that it took context as a fixed given that could be mapped onto the music (or which the music could be identified to be constructed by) rather than something co-created with and by music. In this respect, it would be particularly interesting to better understand how 'musical' theories, practices, and discourses also co-produce ideas about and experiences of gendered identity.

² Piekut, p. 212.

In a different vein, Wong writes as an ethnomusicologist and convincingly highlights ethnomusicology's perennially marginal status within music departments because 'its radical relativism challenges logocentric thinking about music.'³ Wong turns our curiosity about the lack of a word connoting (what we assume to be) 'music' in the majority of global cultures on its head, and suggests the more pressing issue is to better understand the extent to which we have reified music as an ontological construct;⁴ indeed, this chimes with some of Gary Tomlinson's work as mentioned in chapter three, whereby 'music' is deconstructed as a geo-historically specific (and very recent) subspecies of a much broader human capacity for organising sound phenomena, often including various forms of vocalisations.⁵ Music as an ontological category is, then, already inter-constituted through its relation to (the historically specific emergence of) aesthetics, such that in considering 'music' – even in remote geographical areas and specifically as a practice – there remains the tendency to recapitulate to the underlying assumptions and preconceptions of a romantic Eurocentric concept. As Wong states, 'if we [ethnomusicologists] hope to say what we really want to say, we will need to reject music.'⁶ Moreover, and beyond the specifically ethnomusicological context, Wong argues that music as a construct 'contains the very terms for our unimportance and irrelevance' – 'it *cannot* matter (and those who focus on it cannot matter, either) due to an extended post-Enlightenment ideological process casting Music as the feminine corner of the humanities.'⁷

Though in chapter five I tentatively advocated for Stiegler's project of an *organologie générale* as a productive way to consider 'music' – given that it insists on a non-essentialist co-individuation of biological, technological and social organs – this now comes with the caveat that this should be so *without* the category 'music.' The risk, otherwise, is already present in Stiegler, when he identifies 'music' as a privileged site of analysis in a theory that is, nonetheless, a philosophical one: yet again

³ Deborah Wong, 'Sound, Silence, Music: Power', *Ethnomusicology*, 58.2 (2014), 347–53 (p. 348).

⁴ *ibid.*, see p. 350.

⁵ See Gary Tomlinson, 'Vico's Songs', and also chapter three.

⁶ Wong, p. 349.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 350.

(as so often), music is instrumentalized as the thing that best exemplifies the theory because it is easy – too easy – to make music say whatever the theory demands of it. If none of the organs (somatic, sensory, prosthetic, technological, social, etc.) precede – in any essential *sens* – their co-individuation, then it follows, too, that neither does music. For future philosophy, then, this means far more caution about the assumptions brought into play, presumed, and carried by ‘music’ as a site for the composition of minds, bodies, and practices – including, even especially, with regards to gender.

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