On the Familiar Strangeness of Musical Phenomena:
An Old Problem Outgrowing its Traditional Bounds

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Music has the force of verbal expression or description without the substance. It is like a seemingly grammatical sentence that says nothing: “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously” is the standard example. Like a figure on a staircase drawn by Escher, you can never get to where it leads. Why do we take this strange thing so much for granted? And what would happen if we didn’t? - Lawrence Kramer (2012 8)

Musical sound is set apart, and its traditional connection with the soul and with feelings has divorced it from the intellect, at least as far as its essence is concerned. Its outward, technical manifestation absorbs the theorists, provided the ultimate question is not posed - how is music possible? This is more profound even than it looks, for in it is hidden a deeper question, namely what is the nature of the world if it contains this extraordinary phenomenon called “music?” - Richard Ellyn Jones (2007 43)

This is a paper about music. But not simply about the face of music we are so familiar with as an embodied social phenomenon, nor its other common face as a manifestation of disembodied mathematical relationships. Rather, my purpose in writing about music is to examine ways in which the familiar strangeness of musical phenomena highlights the mind/body problem and has thusly been addressed by various disciplines in efforts to search out its roots and map its edges. The primary strand of the “strangeness” to which I refer is music’s ability to communicate ideas, affects, and moods without the use of language and, secondarily, music’s association with trance. The common occurrence of but difficulty in addressing these characteristics have anecdotally helped the phenomenal experience of music to be termed ineffable, numinous, “other”, and helped traditionally bind it to spiritual discourse. The experiences commonly reported while being musicked\(^1\) can be difficult to discuss in that they

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\(^1\) I will consistently borrow the increasingly popular gerund “musicking” from Judith Becker’s book *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*. I prefer this term as it gives “emphasis (to) the processual, active, performing aspects of music rather than the scholarly, historical emphasis on music as text” (7). Musicking, and being musicked, are therefore activities concomitant with embodied musical performance and active listening rather than disembodied theoretical discourse.
reside between disciplines. They tend to violate a Western, individuated sense of self, and bear philosophical implications about the nature of being as well as the limits of discursive logic to communicate and describe phenomenal experience. I have found the best way to approach these phenomena is via a rigorous interdisciplinary approach which allows a clear framing of the aforementioned issues while respecting the phenomena without intent to explain them away.²

The activities of making and listening-to music are inherently embodied. Yet, music has been confused as to its place in the world for a very long time. Even before René Descartes’ formal splitting of all things into either the res cogitans (mind/non-material substance) and res extensa (body/material substance) in the seventeenth century, music has had a foot in the embodied world of material substances as well as in the realm of the non-material thought and emotion. For thousands of years thinkers have wondered by what mechanism arrangements of vibrating strings, columns of air, and masses of wood and metal possibly affect the very passions of the soul, the resonant affective core of human emotion? How can organized sound drive people to cathartic frenzy followed by feelings of well-being? And how can ideas of narrative and affect be conveyed without traditional language? Why should musical phenomena be consistently coupled with ritual by all people groups mutually exclusive of one another? I make no claim here to be able to thoroughly address these questions with regard to all traditions, therefore I will focus rather on the musical tradition beginning with the ancient Greeks which unfolded into the Western European musical tradition, and only the type of music referred to as

² 19th Century philosopher Frederich Schelling sums up this attitude well, “First and above all, an explanation must do justice to the thing that is to be explained, must not devaluate it, interpret it away, belittle it, or garble it, in order to make it easier to understand. The question is not ‘At what view of the phenomenon must we arrive in order to explain it in accordance with one or another philosophy?’ but precisely the reverse: ‘What philosophy is requisite if we are to live up to the subject, be on a level with it?’ The question is not how the phenomenon must be turned, twisted, narrowed, crippled so as to be explicable, at all costs, upon principles that we have once and for all resolved not to go beyond. The question is: ‘To what point must we engage our thought so that it shall be in proportion to the phenomenon...?’” (Philosophie der Mythologie, quoted in Zuckerkandl, 1956: frontpage)
absolute music - music which is non-representational and not “about” anything. We can then follow the path of philosophers, composers, and musicologists as they have attempted to account for and situate music’s unique affective qualities. By investigating the roots of their work, where they’ve failed, truths about the world they suggest, and questions still unanswered, we can then look in the direction in which their constellation of ideas have pointed toward a better understanding of musical phenomena and its implications. In the end, music will be shown as a deeply complex, necessarily embodied phenomenon in which we revel in intuition, inhabit the excluded middle, manifest non-teleological becoming, and celebrate the import of altered states of consciousness. All this in an effort to answer Jones’s (and my own) questions about ourselves and the nature of our world which “contains this extraordinary phenomenon” called music (43).

Musica Universalis: Pythagoras to Kepler

The story of inquiry into music’s affective vehemence is closely related to the story of humanity’s search for meaning and first principals. That music could directly affect people was not strange to ancients who prescribed to the concept of musica universalis, or, the music of the spheres. This concept described the relationships of celestial bodies as ratios expressible as geometrical shapes, numerical values, etc. Pythagoras’s well defined theory of the Harmony of

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3 The importance of addressing these types of consciousness is well articulated in William James’s The Varieties of Religious Experience. “...[O]ur normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question, - for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality” (272).
the Spheres, developed sometime in the sixth century BC, suggested that inaudible resonances of celestial bodies had direct influence on events and life on earth, and harmony in the human soul. His efforts tied music to number and ratio as a manifestation of universality, divinity, and the sacred. Plato himself considered music to be of great import with the direct ability to inform the nature of a society. In his Republic he states that too much music will make a man effeminate or neurotic and must be balanced with athleticism: “He who mingles music with gymnastics in the fairest proportions, and best accommodates them to the soul, may be rightly called the true musician.” Similarly, he believed that only certain modes (scales) of music would foster correct virtue and temperance. His political maxim “Let me make the songs of a nation and I care not who makes its laws” is a pun on the word nomos, which means “custom” or “law” but also designated the melodic scheme of a piece of music. Another instance of Plato’s play on the significance of harmony between musical phenomena and the world as generated by the logos of the cosmos and life on earth is his reference to the number 729 and its musical import:

Another number to which Plato makes explicit reference is 729...This, Plato claims, is the number of times by which the philosopher king lives more pleasantly than a tyrant. Often assumed to be no more than a rhetorical flourish or poetic exaggeration, the choice of 729 will quickly be recognized by students of harmonics as particularly apt. Assuming octave equivalence, powers of 3 generate a series of perfect fifths, $729 = 3^6$, and produces the tritone (e.g. F to B), an

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4 “To the objection that we do not hear this music it is answered that we cannot expect to be aware of a sound which was going on when we were born and has continued without intermission ever since. It is only by contrast with intervals of silence that a sound becomes perceptible.” Aristotle, On The Heavens, Bk II, Chap IX, p 190; Harvard University Press, Cambridge: 1939.


interval shunned by mediaeval musicians as *diabolus in musica* (the devil in music). Thus, by his choice of 729, Plato is identifying the life of a tyrant with the worst possible dissonance known in the musical system of his time. In fact, this kind of harmonic metaphor pervades the whole of Plato’s *Republic*...moral virtue is a harmony in the soul; social justice is a harmony between rulers, guardians and workers (Crickmore 339).

Referring to the Pythagoreans, Aristotle noted in *The Metaphysics* that "they saw that the modifications and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers; - since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modeled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number" (Bk. I, Chapter V, 698). This perception of a rational and harmonious construction of the universe and its relationship to life on earth was cemented into the consciousness of Western academia at least until the time of the renaissance.

In the seventeenth century, astronomer Johannes Kepler wrote in the fifth book of his “Harmonies of the World” that he wished "to erect the magnificent edifice of the harmonic system of the musical scale ... as God, the Creator Himself, has expressed it in harmonizing the heavenly motions." He was deeply convinced that “...the Creator, who is the very source of geometry and, as Plato wrote, ‘practices eternal geometry,’ does not stray from his own archetype” (11). By developing his laws of planetary motion he described the relationships of planets and their orbits through numbers and ratios reflected in an hexachordal musical system manifest in traditional musical notation. This allowed Kepler to show the “symphony of the
cosmos,” stating that “the movements of the heavens are nothing except a certain everlasting polyphony,” as notable from even the very title of section seven of book five of *Harmonies of the World*: “The Universal Consonances of All Six Planets, Like Common Four-Part Counterpoint, Can Exist” (37).

All of these models of music’s relationship to affect are important in that they explained music’s affecting power by asserting a direct causal relationship between the construction of the universe and the construction of the soul. In this case, the physical ratios of the universe mirrored the physical ratios of the soul and music’s affective capability was not a metaphysical mystery, but a direct relationship. If the same *logos* which allowed the harmony of the spheres could be extrapolated to be the same *logos* which informed the soul, music was indeed a very real and important phenomenon. It was Aristotle’s efforts, though, toward describing the nature of the soul and its relationship to the world which have eventually bred much of early Western theory about the passions of the soul and music’s ability to affect them.

**The Passions of the Soul: Aristotle to Descartes**

The underlying concepts of the affect theory of music can be traced at least to Aristotle in his definition of the soul and its passions which was later syncretized into Christian theology in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas. The systematic way in which the passions (similar to affects or moods) are described in the *Tractatus de Passionibus*, part of Aquinas’s *Summa*...
Theologica, shows that despite the belief that the soul and passions are intangible, they are acted upon in consistent and predictable ways by the tangible world. This approach is the same eventually offered by Descartes in his treatise, *The Passions of the Soul*, and later extrapolated into his attempt at analyzing musical phenomena, his *Compendium of Music*. Here Descartes echoes Aristotle’s praise of moderation and the reality of the objectively musically-correct, reminiscent of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. In his preliminary statements of the *Compendium of Music*, Descartes asserts, “Among the sense-objects the most agreeable to the soul is neither that which is perceived most easily nor that which is perceived with the greatest difficulty; it is that which does not quite gratify the natural desire by which the senses are carried to the objects, yet is not so complicated that it tires the senses” (13). He goes on to offer objective rules for musical aesthetics derived from what is “pleasing” as well as via physical ratios as presented in the harmonic overtone series as described by Pythagoras. What is important to note in this treatise is the assertion that there are objectively right and wrong aesthetic and moral implications with regard to musical composition and performance, and that the success of a musical work can be defined by its adherence to the mathematical propositions laid out. There are, for Descartes and theorists influenced by him, objective nuts and bolts of music that quantifiably and predictably alter our passions (affect) both aesthetically and morally. Affect theory as such addresses the affectual quality of musical experience in such a way as to create an objective vocabulary for criticism of written, analyzable music. By this method, one could study a musical score, take it apart, and evaluate it not by the merits of its experiential content, but by the relationships of its structural content.
For the pre-modern composer and musician, the world was still ringing with the order and celestial music of God’s design while simultaneously wrapped in a mysterious cloud of grace and unknowing. Whether Catholic, or later, Protestant, the early understanding of the soul in its relationship to music was by-and-large Christian with an understanding of the passions (affect) which was distinctly Aristotelean by way of Augustine of Hippo’s, and then later Thomas Aquinas's, thousand-year-later syncretic reading of the ancient Greeks. Any absolute-music from this period was necessarily composed for church services by composers of music who understood music in relationship to the human soul as defined by Aquinas, made up of three parts: the vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls. This soul then harbored eleven basic passions which could be, or so believed the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians and thusly the church doctors, predictably and consistently stirred by the arts and the use of rhetoric, among other things.

It is true that the nature of the passions and the mechanism by which music’s affectual vehemence acted on the passions was a topic that was very much au courant in the early modern period. Eighteenth century music theorist Johan Mattheson borrowed from Descartes in his discussion of how music affects the listener in a mechanistic fashion. In his work *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes asserts that a certain “very fine air or wind [elsewhere very fine parts of the blood], called the animal spirits,” moves within the nerves of the human body to communicate movements, sensations, etc. (22). The “perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul which are referred to it in particular and which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of” (ibid 34) the animal spirits are what make up the passions. Mattheson,

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8 Composers were trained by and for the church and large instruments (organs, etc.) were built for and owned by the church.
like Descartes, attempts to describe a mechanism for the way in which sound affects the passions and suggests that sound is made up of “certain rapid movement and collision of the finest particles of air which penetrate into the hearing” (112), ultimately affecting the soul. He mentions Descartes in his Der Vollkommene Capellmeister and states that he is to be read “because he has done much in music,” and “…teaches one to distinguish well between the feelings of the listeners and how the forces of sound affect them” (130). The passions were, to Mattheson, phenomena which could be directly addressed by the Capellmeister whose work it was to improve his listener’s morality. A perfect musician must “present the virtues and vices in his music well and…arouse skillfully in the feelings of the listener a love for the former and disgust for the latter” (131).

J.S. Bach, perhaps the greatest example of a baroque composer, himself hearkened to Pythagoras for evidence of the special nature of music. Additionally, Bach was part of a wave of composers and theoreticians which looked to the ancient Greek art of rhetoric as a manual for musical composition. As in the art of rhetoric there is an effort to analyze and enumerate elements of language to engender persuasive communication, so have there been historical efforts to apply the concept of rhetorical analysis to musical communication. This rhetorico-

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9 Martin Luther, himself setting precedent for Bach as an avid composer in the service of God, looked to the ancient Greeks for indication of the universal and cosmic import of music and its affect on the human soul. In his commentary of Genesis he laments the fact that “we have become deaf toward what Pythagoras aptly terms this wonderful and most lovely music coming from the harmony of the spheres” (Gaines 49). The process of musical composition, especially in regard to the mathematically dense tradition of counterpoint, was an attempt to replicate in earthly music the celestial harmony with which God had joined and imbued the universe, and so in a way to to take part in the act of sacred Creation itself.

10 “Bach had studied rhetoric...since his earliest years. At the excellent lyceum in Ohrdruf he had learned more Latin and rhetoric than any other other subjects, and at the school of St. Michael in Lüneburg he progressed to more advanced readings in Latin authors, including Cicero’s letters, orations, and philosophical works. At the beginning of his tenure at the school of St. Thomas in Leipzig he taught Latin himself, and throughout his life he seems to have explained the rules of composition from the theory of rhetoric” (Kirkendale 132).
musical tradition in Germany was referred to as *Figurenlehre*.\footnote{This tradition was also referred to as the Doctrine of Affections and though most exhaustively codified by Burmeister, was practiced by other German composers and theorists in the 17th and 18th centuries. Reference and of *Figurenlehre* can be found in the theoretical works of Georg Rhau (*Enchiridion utriusque musicae practicae*) and Sebald Heyden (*De arte canendi*) and in the musical compositions of Christoph Bernhard, Johann Mattheson, J.S. Bach, and others.} Perhaps the most important and exhaustive of these efforts is Joachim Burmeister’s 1606 publication of *Musica Poetica* which systematically maps the figures and tropes of rhetoric to musical compositional elements. Burmeister’s goal in analogizing figures of speech to figures of music was to create a system by which theorists and composers could systematically understand and manipulate the parts of musical composition which they believed affected listeners’s passions in a hope to allow more consistent and easier study and composition. As applied to music, this rhetorical account of music’s affective vehemence has been considered “atomist” and “universalist” as its aim is to define and encapsulate particular figures and to universalize their effects. Twentieth century music theorist Leonard B. Meyer expresses the opinions of many modern thinkers of the psychology of music when he refers to the atomist attempt to explain music as a succession of separable, discrete sounds and sound complexes as an error. Also now believed to be fallacious is “The belief that affective responses to music are universal [as it] is related to the time-honored search for a physical, quasi-acoustical explanation of musical experience - the attempt, that is, to account for musical communication in terms of vibrations, ratios of intervals, and the like” (1956 5). Most modern music theorists would now agree that “the particular organization developed in Western music is not universal, natural, or God-given” (ibid 6). Regardless of its atomistic and universalist models being fallacious from a modern perspective, they are precisely what Burmeister describes in his *Musica Poetica* and what early-modern composers counted on to influence their listeners. Importantly, the bedrock of belief in the atomist and universal concept
of Figurenlehre is belief in the Thomist-cum-Aristotelean model of the soul and passions. One could only address the passions in this way if one understood them to be shared by all people and addressable via the medium of music.

As much of a stretch as it may have been, Burmeister was not alone in attempting to draw parallels between musical communication and speech. As musicologist Claude V. Palisca points out, “There is hardly an author on music in the last half of the sixteenth century who does not dip into Quintilian’s *Instituto oratoria*” (1974). Sixteenth century music theorists such as Gioseffo Zarlino and later Vincenzo Galilei were deeply invested in discussions about music’s affect on listeners and the similarities of music and language. While their chief disagreements had more to do with the use of polyphony versus monody and characteristics of modal sonorities rather than atomistic turns of phrase, their publications show it to have been widely understood that, for all intents and purposes, speech and music were considered to function analogously and that music, like language, could be counted on to affect listeners in reliable ways. Further theories regarding music’s affect on listeners moved from the merely affective to the physical. Johann Mattheson went so far in the eighteenth century as to suggest that “Health is so musical that all sicknesses consist merely of discords and dissonances as has been reported of Arion and Terpander who happily cured many Ionians and Lesbians with singing. Ismenias cured sciatica with the flute” (128). Another slightly more contemporary (and erroneous) instance of a belief in a physiological relationship of music to the body is the seventeenth century Italian phenomenon of tarantism. A phenomenon only associated with women, tarantism occurred when a woman

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12 The *Doctrine of the Affections* model of music’s relationship to affect has a special propensity in allowing analogy of music to language as the direct atomistic and universal relationship of the passions to musical figures is much like the direct relationship of symbol to referent assumed for much of basic language theory - as well as the basic correspondence theory of truth.
believed herself to have been bitten by a tarantula and subsequently fell into a malaise. The only cure was music to dance the malaise out of the woman before she fell into a malaise. Peculiarly, each case of sickness responded only to particular songs and modes that would inspire the restorative dance\textsuperscript{13}, hence the reification of the belief that particular sounds inspire particular somatic responses. In spite of the assertion of ailing patients, this phenomenon proved to be social rather than genuinely physiological (Butler 35).

\textbf{Eschewing Affect, Embracing Form: Traditional Musicology}

As outlined above, until the Romantic Period the corpus of music theory and analysis existed as treatises of rules and explanations appealing to universalized and atomistic Scholastic-cum-Aristotelean concepts of affect and aesthetics. Theorists in the Romantic period moved away from the Doctrine of Affections to embrace a relatively un-systematic view of the affectual power of music. The romantics, in an effort to magnify the genius of the composer, recognized music as a manifestation of the composer’s interior emotions and thought processes and to be a miraculous distillation thereof. This recast music’s affective vehemence in an art-religion which identified the composer as a pseudo-divine being with a mystical, somnambulistic connection to the ineffable nature of music by which he could edify mankind. The apotheosis of this model was Richard Wagner, and “[t]hrough forging a new union of Dionysian and Apollinian impulses that purportedly surpassed the achievement of the Immortal Beethoven, Wagner’s artwork...installed the pseudomythic consciousness of a community devoted to the

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{13} Apparently Tarantism is not the only manifestation of this type of phenomenon: “There are references in Greek literature where Bacchic priests would assemble the women who were tormented and distracted of mind and bring them to the temple for treatment. The priests would then play wild pipe music and these women would be moved to dance and the more frantic the music became the more frenzied did the dance become. When the women were exhausted they would fall to the ground and sleep. Upon waking, their irrational mental states would have subsided and they would be either temporarily or lastingly cured” (Portnoy 24).
\end{footnote}
religion of art within a culture dominated by art’s positivist ethos” (Savage 52). But in marrying his revolutionarily chromatic, Dionysian concept of harmony to a systematic schema of Apollinian forms via his *leitmotifs*, as in *Das Rheingold*, *Parsifal*, etc., Wagner’s willingness to focus on forms would alter the course of musicology. Embracing the focus on form as a stepping stone toward empirical truth, 19th century music theorist Eduard Hanslick dreamed of putting musical aesthetics on the same empirical ground as the sciences. His dream of a science of absolute music understood within an epistemological framework referring to nothing but itself set the stage for musicology’s early positivist, scientific stance. For Hanslick, music refers to nothing but itself; and “music is music purely and absolutely” (Hanslick 15). Rejecting the communication of affect via music as the result of the genius composer articulating their own interior emotions via a magical pseudo-religious process, musical analysis was born. In a career straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, British music theorist Donald Tovey famously offered analyses of the music of J.S. Bach which supplanted affect theory and the cult of genius with an appeal to organicism which praises form, structural coherence, and unity.14 Borrowing from Hanslick’s foundational text on musical aesthetics published in 1854, *On the Musically Beautiful*, Tovey asserts that music is solely “sounding form in motion.”15 If music really is only “sounding form in motion,” then the only meaningful study of music must be formalistic and nothing can be said of music as directly related to affect.

...in what he called the "superb rhetoric" of Bach's F-sharp-minor setting of *Aus tiefer Noth* in the *Clavierübung*, part 3—a chorale in which the melodic and

14 Note that by lauding the perfection of abstract musical forms rather than the direct ability of atomistic musical figures to affect the soul, music theory loses its ability to claim music as directly analogous to language.

15 Kerman, 314.
rhythmic substance of the given *cantus firmus* is drawn into all of the polyphonic voice parts according to a rigorous system, so that every note is practically predetermined by an external scheme - Tovey found unshakable evidence that form in art is equivalent to content. "The process miscalled by Horace the concealment of art," wrote Tovey, "is the sublimation of technique into aesthetic results." \(^{16}\)

Further glorifying structure as content and constituting the overwhelming majority of musical analysis in the twentieth century is Viennese theorist Heinrich Schenker’s method of analysis. Schenkerian Analysis seeks to interpret underlying structural elements of musical works in order to define its hierarchy of tonalities via pitch relationships and to reduce complex works to their affective essence. The culmination of structure-as-content composition and analysis arrived in the early 1920s with the twelve-tone serial compositional technique devised by Arnold Schoenberg. Serialism denies traditional harmonic structure and content in favor of a self-coherent and atonal harmonic system. With serialism, traditional associations between harmony, affect, and content were utterly disregarded and the listener was entirely removed from consideration in favor of internal structural coherence. \(^{17}\) This set the scene for further traditions

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\(^{16}\) Kerman, 316.

\(^{17}\) “The universal impetus behind analysis was expressed with particular innocence by [Rudolph] Réti when he recalled asking himself as a young student why every note in a Beethoven sonata should be exactly that note rather than some other. Réti dedicated his career as an analyst to finding an *objective* answer to this question. And questions of the sort can indeed be answered in respect to the totally organized serial music of the 1950s. Every pitch, rhythm, timbre, dynamic, envelope, and so on can be derived from the work's 'pre-compositional assumptions' by means of simple or slightly less simple mathematics. Whether this derivation provides the right answer—that, to be sure, is another question. But the answer provided by serial analysis is, undeniably, *objective*” (Kerman 318). This type of “derivation from pre-compositional assumptions” echoes Aristotle's description of proper internally-coherent narrative structure as described in his *Poetics* wherein “all parts of a narrative can be extrapolated via knowledge of the character of characters.” In serial music, the twelve-tone row comprises said pre-compositional assumption from which the composition is then drawn for perfect internal coherence (Frede 203).
of analysis to completely disregard aesthetic or value judgement in favor of strictly objective analysis. Joseph Kerman sums this final movement in composition and analysis thusly:

Certainly the original masters of analysis left no doubt that for them analysis was an essential adjunct to a fully articulated aesthetic value system. Heinrich Schenker always insisted on the superiority of the towering products of the German musical genius. Sir Donald Tovey pontificated about "the main stream of music" and on occasion developed this metaphor in considerable detail. It is only in more recent times that analysts have avoided value judgments and adapted their work to a format of strictly corrigible propositions, mathematical equations, set-theory formulations, and the like—all this, apparently, in an effort to achieve the objective status and hence the authority of scientific inquiry. (313)

By finally arriving at something like scientific inquiry, the path of music theory and analysis mirrors that of the tradition of philosophy where, “from Parmenides to Hegel...Truth would be that which conforms to the fundamental requirements of logical thought, to the hard rules of noncontradiction and excluded middle...”

By situating music’s affective vehemence within a logical/positivist epistemological framework, its ability of proffering knowledge and truth was limited by a model of knowledge which championed adequation as per the standard correspondence theory of truth. However, a new model for the communication of knowledge which allowed truth to be shown (or to show itself) rather than to be spoken of began to emerge via a new epistemological model. That which has become the phenomenological model of truth, a model which incorporates embodiment and intuition as necessary elements, was coming about.

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Edmund Husserl’s criticisms of the limits of knowledge and his attempts to bridge the Cartesian divide has laid the groundwork for phenomenological knowledge which can be applied to musical phenomena. For example, his criticism of the scientific urge for apodictic grounding of fact in favor of intuition:

“But science looks for truths that are valid, and remain so, once for all and for everyone; accordingly it seeks verifications of a new kind, verifications carried through to the end... it does not attain actualization of a system of absolute truths, but rather is obliged to modify its ‘truths’ again and again...and accordingly it reconciles itself to an infinite horizon of approximations...” (12).

Rather than beginning with a grounding in concrete objective reality as posited by Descartes, Husserl finds that knowledge can only be claimed via a transcendental grounding of knowledge in embodied experience and intuition. And Husserl was not alone as other thinkers began to question the limits of knowledge and set a precedent for musical thinkers to do the same. With his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* published first in 1921, Ludwig Wittgenstein believed himself to have cleared up thousands of years of wrong thinking with regard to what can be considered factual knowledge and what can be truthfully, clearly known and articulated. With a lamenting but straight-forward tone he acknowledges in his own preface of the work that it “shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved,” suggesting that our real lives are not made of facts but rather of communications and experiences which are not clearly delimited, can not be spoken of as fact, and philosophically speaking, “...we must pass over in silence” (74).

Susanne Langer addressed the difficulty of a theory of communication inherent in music in 1941’s *Philosophy in a New Key*. Considering the problem of musical communication and
affect, Langer evaluates theories of the structure of music-as-grammar. In light of theories of language as the relationships of signs to symbols, she defines music as a symbol lacking a specific referent but somehow still communicative. She asserts then, that treatment of musical phenomena as a system of language is incoherent as, in music “[t]he assignment of meanings is a shifting kaleidoscopic play, probably below the threshold of consciousness, certainly outside the pale of discursive thinking.” As Langer continues, her language suggests familiarity with Heideggerian ideas of care and concern in regard to a situated being-in-the-world, falling, and being-toward-death:

The imagination that responds to music is personal and associative and logical, tinged with affect, tinged with bodily rhythm, tinged with dream but concerned with a wealth of formulations for its wealth of wordless knowledge, its whole knowledge of emotional and organic experience, of vital impulse, balance, conflict, the ways of living and dying and feeling [emphasis in original]. (244)

In what is perhaps a riposte to Wittgenstein’s famous assertion from the *Tractatus* that “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (56) - at least the world that can be factually spoken of - she asserts that “the limits of language are not the last limits of experience, and things inaccessible to language may have their own forms of conception... Such non-discursive forms, charged with logical possibilities of meaning, underlie the significance of music...” (265). For Langer, music articulates forms which language cannot set forth and does so in a way that shows rather than says. Still present in Langer’s assertion of “presentational” symbols rather than “discursive” symbols are the assertions of logic and form in a subject/object-oriented sense. In her system, all experience exists in a dialectic structure which assumes representational
coherence and logical constants which mediate our experiences with the things themselves. This is reminiscent of Hanslick’s aforementioned attempt to assert discursive and logical self-referential relationship of forms within absolute music but still sneaks a privileging of *logos* in the back door of her model of communication, if only via what she calls “presentational” rather than “discursive” symbols.

Music theorist Richard Elfyn Jones notes that in the focus on structure which subsumed music theory and analysis until the twentieth century, theorists had lost their way with regard to the affectual power of music. “Musical sound is set apart, and its traditional connection with the soul and with feelings has divorced it from the intellect, at least as far as its essence is concerned. Its outward, technical manifestation absorbs the theorists, provided the ultimate question is not posed - how is music possible?” Here Jones sounds something like Heidegger in the opening chapter of *Being and Time*, asserting the necessity, structure, and priority of the question of *being*. Again, like Heidegger’s marveling at the existence of anything at all, Jones continues, “This is more profound even than it looks, for in it is hidden a deeper question, namely what is the nature of the world if it contains this extraordinary phenomenon called ‘music?’” (43). The attitude that led to the tradition of analysis and the positivist worldview it asserts is ultimately one attempting to describe and atomize musical phenomena as abstract and perfect structural atoms which exist outside of perception in an “external world” in order to reify the Cartesian duality of subject and object. In section forty-three of *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls the track record of Western Philosophy, fueled by this same propensity, the “scandal of philosophy.” He identifies the motivation of philosophy which seeks to prove the existence of external and

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19 The final line of Heidegger’s *What is Metaphysics* asks perhaps most important question of all, “Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?” (110)
inherently meaningless phenomena, what he calls the “Dasein of Things outside of me,” as foundationally fallacious. “If Dasein is understood correctly, it already is what subsequent proofs deem necessary to demonstrate for it” (249). Furthermore:

The ‘problem of Reality’ in the sense of the question whether an external world is present-at-hand and whether such a world can be proved, turns out to be an impossible one, not because its consequences lead to inextricable impasses, but because the very entity which serves as its theme, is one which, as it were, repudiates any such formulation of the question. (250)

In the Cartesian tradition of musical analysis, we are, like Cartesian philosophy, asking a broken and incoherent question and left with a broken and incoherent answer. Heidegger suggests that we can not remove ourselves from the intersubjective relationships we have to the phenomena we are questioning. By merit of the nature of Being-in-the-world which he systematically describes at great length in *Being and Time*, any phenomena we perceive are placed in meaningful relationship to us and other phenomena. The very idea of a meaningless “external world” which we can measure and manipulate is a necessarily incoherent and false abstraction.

Saxophonist Evan Parker elegantly voices the incoherence between disembodied musical analysis and phenomenally experienced musical practice with the following anecdote:

There’s an analogy with the spokes on a revolving wheel. Everything’s in motion, the rim of the wheel is supported by the spokes, but when the whole thing is turning you don’t see the spokes any more. If the thing didn’t have that speed of rotation, it would make sense to count the spokes and think about them one at a time. But the whole point is to get the thing revolving and the spokes are only
there to enable the rim of the wheel to turn. There’s some kind of equivalent of that in the music. You could, you can, after the event, slow the thing down and look at how all the pieces fit together. But the whole point is that the pieces fit together that way in order to generate the speed of movement which is the music. ...The music is not what you hear in analysis, it’s what is there in the real time of performance. (Borgo 54)

If the music is not what you hear (or see) in analysis, what is it? I’ve shown the traditional methodology of addressing music via the doctrine of affections incapable of explaining music’s affective vehemence, as the reduction of music to formal properties also fails. To begin to address music’s ability to alter our consciousness we must move away from abstract explanations of music to description of what music feels like in the world; toward a new kind of musicology embracing embodied, phenomenal experience.

**A Move Toward Phenomenal Experience: the New Musicology**

So then, if the traditions of affect theory, music-as-grammar, and structure-as-content fail to account for musical experience, we must re-established and re-addressed the goals of music criticism. Whereas early music theorists believed they could sublimate universal elements of structure to aesthetic results - and assumedly, *meaning* - the phenomenology of the early twentieth century asserts that meaning can only be hermeneutic, interpretive. This is precisely the point from which the school of thought manifest by thinkers calling their body of work the New Musicology embarks. Theorist Robert P. Morgan articulated the potential goals and methods of the New Musicology; asserting that it must
...examine the composer's intentions in relation to their compositional realization, must discuss the implications of the compositional system in regard to the music it generates, consider how the resulting music relates to older music and to other present-day music, examine its perceptual properties and problems, etc. There is really no end to the possibilities that could enable this list to be extended. (40)

The New Musicology has moved to do exactly this, to recognize musical phenomena as inherently situated in relationship to prior traditions, the historical and personal embodied nature of the composer, and ultimately the listener. Noting that by not taking the phenomenological reality of musical experience seriously, we are left only with a body of musical study which offers an “impressive mass of facts and figures about music of the past, codified into strictly non-valuative histories, editions, bibliographies, and the like (Kerman 319). Instead of attempting to offer abstract knowledge divorced from reality as did traditional positivist music analysis, phenomenological method provides the opportunity for non-definite but accumulative insight into musical affect through successive re-examinations of the music via differing interpretive contexts. Scholars aligned with the motivations of the New Musicology looked to analyze not only the nuts and bolts of a work, but also implicit motivations and intentions which might be gleaned from a composer’s historical situatedness, political affiliations, class, and sexuality.

Edmund Husserl offered a valuable and phenomenologically oriented example of time-situatedness in using the experience of the hearing of a musical melody to describe his idea of Internal Time-Consciousness. Comparing the path of a melody to the path of a comet, Husserl offered the terms “retention” and “protention” to describe how an observer can perceive the

consistency of a phenomenon through time as well as its potential path. When we engage an
object, he asserts, it continues to be the “same object” as it moves in time and space because our
consciousness “protends” or anticipates its path due to previously subsumed and “retained”
experience. By immediately consummating our “protentions” with past “retentions,” we can
recognize an object as consistent in space and time. This applies to music as it does to the comet
in that while experiencing the work we are consistently “protending” its direction. We are
experiencing and retaining the “now” which consummates with knowledge that was, just until
now “protention,” but now “retention.” In this way we hear the “now” of a melody (the head of
the comet) while still retaining the previously heard notes of the melody (the comet’s tail). This
important theory of Time-Consciousness is then applicable to all perceptions, phenomena, and
in-the-world context in general.

Drawing from the assertions of Husserl and the stable of phenomenological thinkers
inspired by his work, New Musicologists recognized the long-sought-after objectivity of the
positivists, whether theoretical or historical, as a myth. The meaning of a musical work was now
to be found in the situatedness of the composer’s and listener’s experiences. According to
phenomenological theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the temporal present is - like Husserl’s
Time-Consciousness - part of a stream of history that grows from the past and moves toward the
future. There is no objective “now” or “present.” Composers and listeners participate in and
contribute to the stream of history as they move with it toward the future, always building one’s
contextual milieu on the shoulders of the past and projecting toward the future. The phenomena
and events in one’s world are hence saved from meaningless incoherence by the prejudices

informed by prior affects and experiences. This is not unlike Heidegger’s “scandal of philosophy,” as, because we are always situated in the unfolding of the present/future growing out of the past, an assertion of an external “now” is incoherent.

An interesting consequence of this contextual situatedness of a work is that both the composer and listener are independently but intersubjectively situated in the world. Therefore, the composer’s intentions and perception of meaning surrounding a work may not be in line with the meaning found by the listener. In the familiar trope of the post-modern death of authorial intent, musical significance is thereby lifted from the realm of the strictly theoretical to the realm of criticism. The goal of the New Musicology has been to describe and understand interpretations of musical meaning from within their own subjective context rather than universal abstraction. The real value of a phenomenological inquiry of musical events, then, is the deepening of understanding which occurs as heretofore mutually-exclusive contexts intermingle.

The analyst who seeks to disclose ontological meanings of a past world risks his own historical reality in order to understand the other. However, when the analysis is complete, the analyst may have a more comprehensive sense of his present. The musical experience informs him of another world and empathetically provides insight into his present. In learning how to be open to and come to understand the composer’s world, the analyst may open and understand his own world in a more substantive manner. Thus, analysis does not “restore” an old work to its original meaning in an absolute way. The original meaning of the work is synthesized with what it can mean now, in the analyst’s present. (Ferrara 35)
This goal of deeper insight and empathy into the contextual worlds of those who’ve come before us or who currently inhabit differing social contexts is perhaps the most virtuous and honorable motivation an academic discipline can possess.

Presaging the New Musicology’s phenomenological motivations stemming from intersubjective context and interpretation, an earlier use of Husserl’s phenomenology was brought to bear upon musical phenomena by the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden. In his treatise, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity* - first published in Polish in 1931 - Ingarden presciently recognized the potential pitfall of obfuscating philosophical pursuits by myopically focusing on a composer’s life and social context to gain interpretive veracity.

But we must guard against drawing conclusions solely derived from speculations regarding, say, the author’s love life and the extent to which the author’s creative states have been conditioned by sexual processes; nor is it sufficient to examine only the social and economic conditions in which the work was formed. If anyone is interested in these kinds of dependencies and relationships between properties of works of art and music especially, let him study them by all means, as long as he takes everything into account without distorting the picture of the world. But all these dependencies still do not prove that the product arising under real conditions, brought about by the author’s real activity, must itself be something real and that its whole significance should be confined to such dependencies. (57)

Rather than focus on contextual hearings and interpretations of musical works and their accompanying affects as many scholars might in the New Musicology, Ingarden focused on his confusion regarding the ontological nature of musical works. The problem he identified
regarding the identity of a work of music has much to do with the plasticity of an analyst’s
demarcation of what defines a work’s essential and accidental characteristics as performed events
and how said events relate to the score. He notes that a musical work exists with consistent
identity only as an un-performed syntactical system on the page. When this work is performed,
notations from the composer to the performer which delineate affect, tempo, vibrato, and a
myriad of further interpretive directions, allow for performances of the same written work to
vary wildly from one another. There is a problem here for the positivist as to the limits of what
can be communicated by notational language, the indeterminacy of how a performer interprets
notated direction, and what can be considered a successful performance of the piece with
indeterminate directions. Can we really concede that the “same” work of music can, when
performed by different musicians be two very different pieces of music? “Consequently, in one
performance everything valuable is concretized, all the ‘beauties’ of the work are disclosed in
their uniqueness, while on another occasion the work is robbed of all its values and offered to the
listener as boring and dead” (Ingarden 107). The musical work is an object which, as a written
score, is itself intersubjective via the limits of language whereas performances, or
*concretizations*, are individually experienced and mono-subjective. The objective reality of the
musical work’s identity is very much in question. As such, Ingarden asserts that the music works
are not “real” objects as they can not be coherently identified with an individual performance or
copy of the score, nor are they “ideal” entities as they are things existing in time and context,
created by an historically-situated composer. Musical works are, he insists, are neither “real” or
“ideal,” but are rather purely “intentional objects” with their source of being found in the creative
act of the composer, its ontic foundation in the score, and made manifest in each act of performance.

Are we any closer to offering answers to Jones’s question as to the nature of the world if it contains this extraordinary phenomenon called “music”? Neither traditional positivist methods nor newer phenomenological ones of musical description answer this underlying ontological question. If anything, we humanize musical events - it is a uniquely human activity, after all - when we question them from phenomenological perspective. But just how or why these organizations of vibrating substances we call “music” alter a listener’s affect is yet to be understood. Theories of music and emotion abound but all too commonly are lost in the mire of aesthetics. Leonard Meyer, who counts the aesthetic work of Langer as an important influence, famously borrowed Dewey’s theory of emotion for his seminal work of music cognition, Emotion and Meaning in Music. According to his theory, responses to music are due to a situated psychological context wherein the listener builds a habitus for listening via years of expectation and satisfaction of musical tropes. By this explanation, when expectations extrapolated from a listener’s acculturated musical construct are violated, the listener experiences an emotional response. This type of musical meaning he calls “referentialist.” He asserts, however, that musical works also have absolute meaning without referent.\(^{22}\) For Meyer, aesthetics are both subjective (referentialist) and objective (absolute). Two decades before Meyer, Langer stated that “great art is not a direct sensuous pleasure,” for, if it were, it would appeal, “like cake or cocktails - to the untutored as well as to the cultured taste” (205). She does, however, note that then-new or difficult art such as the non-representational work of Kandinsky or the serialist

compositions of Schoenberg have the ability to alter a viewer’s or listener’s affect regardless of stylistic acculturation. This is again implicit of a confusion regarding whether aesthetic qualities are \textit{a priori} and objective or acculturated and subjective. Heidegger sidestepped this question of the objectively or subjectively beautiful in his essay \textit{The Origin of the Work of Art} by defining the role of art as outside of said dialectic. He deems an artwork to be that which allows an \textit{unconcealment} of the true nature of an object or idea. Using as example the van Gogh painting, “Les Souliers,” he suggests that the painting allows the image of the shoes to be transformed from their usual \textit{equipmental} role to one which \textit{unconceals} the truths of an entire world, “In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain...pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbirth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death” (159). Heidegger’s concept of truth is not here the referential, correspondence-oriented truth of logic. Rather, it is \textit{aletheia}, or, \textit{unconcealment} occurring in the milieu of the embodied person’s Dasein, or, \textit{being-there}. While Heidegger applies this epistemological model to representational art, it is still not directly applicable to the non-referential nature of music. Theorist Lawrence Ferrara, though, synthesizes Heidegger’s and Langer’s artistic theories thusly in an effort to forward an alternate and useful model of knowledge:

One might say that van Gogh transformed the actual shoes (in real life) into a “virtual” form (to use Susanne K. Langer’s term). Art presents the artist’s crystallization of human feelings and (though Langer would not take this leap) ontological (e.g., relating to a life-world) insights. That crystallizing process from the stage of proto-musical sounds and rhythms to music, accomplishes nothing
less than a transformation of the forms of human feeling and existence (what Langer calls the “ineffable”) into art. Virtual forms are the ideas or concepts of actual, human feelings and existence. One can have a profound experience of joy listening to a joyous piece of music because the music presents the idea of joy in a quintessential form. In a Heideggerian view, these virtual forms in art can be distinguished from the actual things that they artistically express insofar as virtual forms are marked by the happening of truth. (130)

Ferrara is here suggesting a hermeneutic affectual model, as does Langer, that emotions conveyed by music are not themselves emotions, but virtual emotions which are thereby virtually-discursive symbols of emotions. This analysis still retains a dialectic of symbol and referent, albeit with a modified “virtual” referent. While this concept of music’s affectual capability allows consistent description of music’s affective vehemence, it is again an appeal to a Hanslickian/analytical return to the privileging of *logos* and forms in music. Ferrara’s attempt to integrate Langer’s and Heidegger’s epistemological frameworks seems to - as pointed out earlier with regard to Langer’s model - sneak logic and a privileging of the correspondence model of truth and communication into a theory for communication of affect. This encroachment on *mythos* by *logos* ultimately fails to address our questions about the nature of the world which contains musical phenomena as it does not allow for music’s other important associates: intuitive knowledge and obfuscation of the individuated Western concept of self in the experience of trance.
Embodyment: Musicking and Heidegger’s “Desevered Space”

Above, I have described Heidegger’s theory of truth and affectual vehemence via aletheia or unconcealment. Necessary to this concept of knowledge is his idea of the worlding nature of embodied phenomenal experience which, while not necessarily able to explain the communication of affect or varieties of trance experience, it can serve as a model for talking about what musicking or being musicked is like. I will here describe that special sort of musicking which creates for the musician (and perhaps for listeners) an internal world apart from what Heidegger calls “average everydayness”; a world shining with meaning, rapidly shifting desevered (subjectively observed and understood rather than objectively measured) spaciality, and experienced through an ontological lens of being rather than an ontical one simply of observed qualia. Truth, in his sense, is not objective and universal but subjective and interpretive.

The world of the performing musician is in many ways similar to the world of the craftsman - a world commonly used as an example by Heidegger to describe what Dasein is like. The musician has equipment, but rather than screw drivers, chisels, and the like, it is to be found as sheet-music, metronomes, tuners, the physical musical instruments themselves, music stands, accessories, etc. These things are always about the musician as present-to-hand items in the “musical workshop”, the real ready-to-hand piece of equipment in use during performance being solely the musical instrument itself. The ontic elements of the instrument include the material of its construction, it’s weight, volume, color, smell, etc., but these elements are only conspicuous to the musician before or after performance. If all activity is going to plan and the performer is well acquainted with the instrument, the instrument’s ontic characteristics are

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23 In the following paragraphs, words used by Heidegger in uncommon or specialized ways are presented in italics in an effort to use his special language for the worlding nature of embodied experience.
entirely forgotten during performance, only to emerge should something fall out of adjustment, not respond correctly, or break. This event would, of course, throw all elements of the instrument and its concomitant tools into field of **circumspection**; for active consideration as per the musician’s *concern* via *care* apart from the auto-poetic flow of musical creation until they are again put in place. The instrument and its accompanying *present-to-hand* ephemera are also simultaneously implicit of their creators, relationships to other musicians, shop owners, manufacturers, and are therefore present as instances of degrees of a *deficient mode of being-with* others while also instances of varying degrees of *being-alongside* things. The fact that music is commonly, though certainly not always, performed for others makes the production of music an activity that directs the intentions of the performers *towards* others and brings the musician into a position of *being-with* those others. Strangely, this can be true even in the absence of others as the very act of making music only for one’s self may be to escape said others, thereby making the act one related to the musician’s *solicitude* and a *deficient-mode of being-with* others.

More interesting than description of the performer’s relationship to his tools or others, and germane to my interest in describing music’s relationship to trance, is Heidegger’s description of the performer’s relationship to space both external and internal during performance. For example, the specialized activity of musical improvisation is implicit of a wealth of pre-attained knowledge and experience which can build for the improviser a sort of interior structure of harmony and form, a veritable harmonic world. The Western twelve-tone system of music is made of a finite set of relationships between scale steps and intervals which can occur simultaneously in stacks to create chords - which are analogous and apt to description
borrowing from spacial vocabulary - or one-at-a-time consecutively, whether by step or intervalic leap, to create melodies in a way which can be spatially described but also with more necessary reference to temporality. These matrices of intervalic relationships unfold temporally in a way which can, for the performer, create a sort of structural lattice through which melodies travel as they unfold in time. The path created by a melody through this harmonic landscape begins to describe and define relationships which, though static in a theoretical sense, disclose a dynamic and desevered spatial relationship for the performer. For example, the melodic movement of a C# ascending to a D is only a half-step yet, it can feel at times for the performer to be a “big” half step if first approached by a large intervalic leap or perhaps as a “small” half step if approached step-wise. The half-step itself is theoretically the very same distance each time but for the performer it can feel very different. The actual experience of creating the music, the factual surroundings and the mood (affect) of the performer, can alter the understanding of the musician and create varying interpretation of what is theoretically something which is not open to debate or interpretation. This worlding for the musician is constructed via hermeneutic experience of inter-related references, i.e.; music theory. While the musician is performing in a non-circumspective manner, the musician experiences the reality of Being-in-the-world of Dasein.

Heidegger’s phenomenological description of Dasein allows, in this case, a much more authentic representation of the performer’s experience. The creative act of reciprocal engagement with materials in theoretical musical space implicit in musical improvisation, while capable of being explained and described analytically and theoretically, is much more effectively described
and understood by Heidegger’s philosophy. The possibility for the performer and listener to desever harmonic space may be at the heart of the fecund nature of the mere twelve tones in our Western harmonic system.

I’d like to now make a philosophical turn away from phenomenology’s ability to describe what music is “like”, to several philosophical attempts at describing what music “is” and what its existence may imply about the ontological nature of the world.

**Time and Process: Heraclitus, Nietzsche, and Whitehead**

Rather than perceiving the reality of phenomena as in a static state of “being” or “not-being”, there have been thinkers who perceive all things to be in radical state of flux. Music is uniquely suited to this line of thinking as it occurs temporally and - as noted by Husserl’s theory of Internal Time-Consciousness - is never fully realized in an instant. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus famously described all phenomena as simultaneously coming into being and passing away; as being in a state of perpetual and radical flux. This same view of perpetual flux was embraced by Friedrich Nietzsche as he described all reality as an expression of an innate and perpetual will to create. Thusly, he believed that “It was the artist, particularly the musician, who could partially redeem corrupt society. The musician could transport us to more rarefied heights by enhancing his art with the imaginative realization of our cravings and desires in formal framework, and so help bring into our chaotic lives harmony and order” (Portnoy 173.)

Music was, for Nietzsche, primordial to language:

> Language can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial
pain in the heart of the primal unity, and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena. Rather, all phenomena, compared with it, are merely symbols: hence language, as an organ and symbol of phenomena, can never by any means disclose the innermost heart of music; language, in its attempt to imitate it, can only be in superficial contact with music; while all the eloquence of lyric poetry cannot bring the deepest significance of the latter one step nearer to us.” (BT 6, 56)

In his model, musical phenomena are a manifestation of the “real” ontological nature of the universe as an experiment of aesthetics or, the “[E]ternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of appearances!” (BT 16, 104).

In Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, he suggested two modes of understanding which, though seemingly opposite, are complementary parts of a chiasmic unity and are mutually necessary and expressive of human experience. The tropes reflecting these differing modes he identifies as the Apollinian and the Dionysian. The Apollinian tendency is inclined toward form, order, and representation (observable in language, sculpture, and informing the Will to Power as *Will to Make Same*) whereas the Dionysian is one of change, annihilation, and ecstasy (observable in music, dance, and the Will to Power as *Pathos of Creation*). Nietzsche’s Apollinian and Dionysian forces are not imaginary metaphysical concepts but immanent realities; they are “artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist” (BT 2, 38). Throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that the

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25 Which bears the suggestive subtitle: *Out of the Spirit of Music.*
dominant Western idea of the individual as a bounded, masterful self, is overly bound in the Apollinian tendency toward form and control and does not allow humanity a balanced and full experience of life. The Dionysian man, drunk on the primordial truth of non-discursive musical affection, is expressive of this fullness:

[H]e has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing. His very gestures express enchantment. Just as the animals now talk, and the earth yields milk and honey, supernatural sounds emanate from him, too: he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. (BT 1, 37)

The nature of reality, Nietzsche argued, is not ultimately one of forms, logic, or phenomena, but of a great sea of heterogeneous events constantly in the process of becoming and passing away. This idea is an echo of Heraclitus’ aforementioned belief of the illusory nature of permanence and the reality of all things/events being in a state of radical flux. The Will to Power as the Will to Make Same is then a human assertion to tame and generalize these unique events, reduce them to controllable phenomena, and manipulate them. Nietzsche does not qualify or moralize the idea of the Will to Power as Will to Make Same as a necessarily negative or evil thing, rather he attests to its usefulness. An unbalanced focus on Apollinian structures and forms, though, leaves humanity aching for the reality of chaos; for poetry and myth. For Nietzsche, all music is therefore a salve to the pain caused by the emptiness of Apollinian forms as manifest in the Will to Power/Will to Make Same. Philosopher Christopher Cox describes the differences between Apollinian and Dionysian as presented in music in his essay Nietzsche, Dionysus, and the Ontology of Music:
The Apollinian celebrates the human artist and hero, while the Dionysian celebrates the individual artist’s dissolution into nature, which Nietzsche calls the “primordial artist of the world” (BT 5; cf. 1, 8). The Apollinian is a gallery of “appearances,” “images,” and “Illusions,” while the Dionysian consists in the perpetual creation and destruction of appearances. “In Dionysian art and its tragic symbolism,” Nietzsche writes, “nature cries to us with its true, undissembled voice: ‘Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of appearances, I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of appearances!’” (BT 16; cf. 8; WP 1050). (500)

Alfred North Whitehead’s system of Process Philosophy is another onto-theological model which focuses on a perpetually changing universe to account for music’s affectual vehemence. In his thoroughly articulated system, the universe is comprised of “eternal objects” which, like Platonic universals provide a referential framework for “superjects”, (object/events which occur in time) which he refers to as “actual entities”. Hence no real objects exist, only entities occurring in time manifesting characteristics of Platonic-like “eternal objects”. The only absolute which exists is change and only process and change can be counted on to be the basis of reality.26 Whitehead’s motive for creating such a philosophy was to create a framework which situates axiomatic mathematics in a universe which was self-referential and holistic of all phenomena, e.g., religious, scientific, and aesthetic. In the parlance of process philosophy, music

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26 “Thus, with events we do not talk of how things are (what they are made of) but of how things become. The process of events, their “becoming” is fundamental...In older philosophies substance plays a fundamental role, but unlike substance (which endures), an actual entity has no permanence. And as if to emphasise this point he, in typical neologistic fashion, describes an actual entity not as a subject but as a superject, thus suggesting its emergence from antecedent entities to itself. The provenance of this concept in classical antiquity is immediately apparent when we recall Heraclitus’ famous assertion that no man could step twice in the same river” (Jones, 63-4).
has a special ability to communicate “causal efficacy” and “presentational immediacy”. Philosopher F. David Martin describes process’s relevance to music by situating its vehemence in time, process, and embodiment not unlike Husserl’s *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*:

Music more than any other art forces us to feel causal efficacy, the compulsion of process, the dominating control of the physically given over possibilities throughout the concrescence of an experience. The form of music binds the past and future and present to tightly that as we listen we are thrust out of the ordinary modes of experience, in which time rather than temporality dominates. Ecstatic temporality, the rhythmic unity of past-present-future, is the most essential manifestation of the Being of human beings. (94-5)

Whitehead’s cosmological model is very similar to Nietzsche’s model of becoming, at least with regard to a denial of the existence of being in favor of phenomena constantly becoming and passing away. The greatest difference, of course, being Whitehead’s assertion of theological structure including God, eternal objects, and therefore inherent ethical and moral concerns whereas Nietzsche’s concept is atheistic and considers morality an aesthetic choice. Importantly, both models create a special space for music in relation to becoming and allowing for transcendence as a special resonance with that becoming.

Not all problems which present themselves when we approach musical phenomena philosophically can be successfully answered by either the analytic (*logos*) approach or the phenomenological (*mythos*) approach. Questions about the nature of aesthetics remain unsolved, music’s ability to communicate affect is still an enigma, the ontological question of the nature of
the world which allows musical phenomena remains unsolved, and the questions regarding the epistemic nature of the identity of a musical work remain unsatisfied. While a traditional musicological approach of formal musical analysis offers a huge amount of empirical data regarding the construction of musical works, the phenomenological approach to the analysis of musical phenomena offers a better understanding of what the musical world is like. Still, a more explicit situating of musical phenomena in the body is necessary. By recognizing the nature of perception as necessarily embodied, we can approach music’s association with trance.

**Music and Trance: Music is Necessarily Embodied**

Phenomenological consideration of musical phenomena as manifest in the New Musicology movement has lifted academic inquiry of musical meaning from its traditional world of universal and self-referential forms and placed it in contextual, lived, human social states. This certainly situates music as an embodied phenomenon, but does not account for another important characteristic of music: its association with trance. In her seminal book, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*, ethnomusicologist Judith Becker asserts the importance of investigating music’s association with trance experience. She cites that the academy in general has shied away from approaching phenomenal models of trancing due to a fear that embracing a “messier, much more complex, and uncertain model based on biology and phenomenology can seem like a giant step backward, away from scientific elegance, away from empirical controls, away from universality.” Still, to avoid such a shift would be limiting. She continues: “To subscribe to a theory of musical cognition which cannot deal with the embodiment of music, of the involvement of the senses, the visceral system, and the emotions is to maintain a Cartesian
approach of mind/body dualism” (6). I have shown above that music has been at times considered approachable solely as a disembodied, logical, self-referential phenomenon. Music’s association with trance, though, shows it to be inextricably linked to embodiment. We make music with our bodies: our limbs, lungs, and fingers - and we react to music with our “skins, with our pulse rates, and with our body temperature” (ibid). There is no neat category into which we can place all events of music and its association with trance. Still, the relationship is important and can...

...best be thought of as a category not defined by “singly necessary” and “jointly sufficient” properties but, rather, should be thought of as a Wittgensteinian category, a set of similar events that bear “family” resemblances to one another, a family of events that have some overlapping, and some nonoverlapping external symptoms. Trance, like most natural language categories, is a cover term of events that more or less resemble each other. (Becker 43-44)

The Western concept of the individuated mastered self is couched within the Cartesian dualist concept of self which locates the site of self and knowledge in one body but differentiated from said body; in but not of the body. Trance\textsuperscript{27} experience is necessarily embodied as it is characterized by movement, noise, and being in the company of others. The type of meaning and knowledge gained by said experience can not be explained by a theory of music’s universal, self-referential relationships of forms as Hanslick and others had asserted, but rather must recognize

\textsuperscript{27} It is useful here to define and differentiate \textit{trance} from \textit{ecstasy}. Though the term “ecstasy” is commonly used by ethnomusicologists to “indicate states of consciousness that are musically based, and in some cases also mystically oriented” (Racy, 6), I prefer and will employ the differentiation of ecstasy from trance offered by Gilbert Rouget. He differentiates these commonly confused concepts, asserting that ecstasy is associated with immobility, silence, solitude, sensory deprivation, recollection and hallucinations, whereas trance is characterized by movement, noise, being in the company of others, sensory over-stimulation, amnesia, and lack of hallucinations (11).
the necessity univocality of the body and the mind. As Merleau-Ponty asserted in his *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception.

(239)

Having finally recognized the body as “knower” and “natural self”, approaches which recognize embodied knowledge and social contextuality to inquire about music’s familiar strangeness can offer new answers to the question of music’s affective vehemence. Namely, the approaches from evolutionary biology and neuroscience.

**Evolutionary Psychology and Theory of Mind**

Perhaps the most forward looking and interdisciplinary approach to situating music’s import can be found in recent scholarly attempts to recast music as an evolutionary artifact.\(^{28}\) Music’s primordial ability to communicate affect without language may be due to its advent prior to

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\(^{28}\) “Adaptationist theories of music origins dominate the intellectual landscape” (Livingstone & Thompson, 83).
to language in centers of the brain still extant in humans. In this light, music’s affective
vehemence is lifted from the spheres of philosophy and language theory and placed within the
confines of the hard sciences of biology, psychology, sociology, etc., and therefore should be best
addressed by somehow attempting to integrate data and methods from these disciplines.29 In
Merlin Donald’s Origins of the Modern Mind, he theorizes a pre-linguistic adaptation for
mimesis in early social primates which eventually evolved into musical phenomena. Elizabeth
Tolbert fleshes-out this concept in her Music and Meaning: An Evolutionary Story wherein she
suggests that mimetic emotional indexing in embodied, social primates bound the act of sound-
making to affect:

To the possessor of a social mind, the voice could now be interpreted
ambiguously as both an intentionally modeled emotion call and as an
unintentional index of an internal state; furthermore, a socially aware being would
know that others could interpret one’s own vocal utterances in this way. this
double-edged interpretive possibility was not possible before crossing the
symbolic threshold, when an indexical sign would have been taken at face value.
(Tolbert 91)

Mimetically informed, a voice could be imitated by an instrument as well, thereby allowing for
the growth of a tradition of various sounds to index emotions entirely pre-linguistically. The
affective vehemence of music is therefore embodied and socially reified but not symbolically
discursive:

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29 Tolbert, Elizabeth. “Theories of Meaning and Music Cognition: An Ethnomusicological Approach” Journal of the
Even though indexical reference to emotion calls cannot be taken at face value, vocal symbols cannot help but be apprehended in terms of their indexicality to emotion. Any intentional use of the voice can only be understood as “true” if it is linked through intercorporeal iconicity to a socially and emotionally mediated cultural truth. The iconic and indexical underpinnings of music are exposed by formal ritual techniques that highlight vocal mimesis, *i.e.*, that emphasise the sonic qualities of voice, which in turn heighten socially embodied “disclosure meanings” (Watt and Ash, 1998). The symbolic use of vocal indices to emotion thus guarantees the circulation of cultural truth by means of an intercorporeally verifiable emotional truth. (ibid)

This model of musical meaning situates music’s primary referent as indexicality to social presence, which in turn refers to the bodily conditions of representation that underlie society itself. Therefore, music cannot help but be meaningful due to the universal processes of vocal mimesis that underlie human symbolic thought (ibid, 92). Musical meaning and affective vehemence in this system are therefore made up and intersubjectively reified by subjects within localities. Like the aforementioned doctrine of affections which arose from Aristotle’s atomist and universalist concept of the passions of the soul, indexical reference to emotion in music is atomistic in correlating mimaetically relevant sounds to affects. It is not, however, universal. Rather, it is embodied and socially situated between intersubjectively related musicking subjects.
The only truth that exists in this system is the truth agreed upon and propagated by the consistency of the social system.\textsuperscript{30}

In addition to indexical affect-relation theory is the burgeoning corpus of research into Theory of Mind (ToM). ToM is a psychophysiological theory which aims to explain the mental and social evolution of humans which occurred in recent evolutionary history on time scales orders of magnitude faster than genetic evolution. Via ToM, humans’ ability to “understand people as mental beings enables an individual to imagine themselves ‘in the mental shoes’ of another person” (Livingstone & Thompson, 96). This process of reflectively and abstractly observing properties of success could have served as an excellent mechanism in the cultural transmission of knowledge, or “cultural ratcheting”. Thusly, the indexical affect-relation theory described by Tolbert above can be understood as a useful and desirable adaptation:

The emotional experience generated by music permits a safe learning environment for affective engagement — the exchange of psychological state for the development of higher-order models of emotion regarding conspecifics. In this view, “a ToM is essentially a derivative of the Aristotelian position in which our experience with artworks is a form of affective sandboxing; a means of pursuing

\textsuperscript{30} This socially reified concept of truth is exactly what Nietzsche presciently refers to in his 1873 essay, \textit{On Truth and Lying in a Nonmoral Sense}: “What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions - they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.”

\textsuperscript{31} Additionally, research into how the brain channels perception is showing that synaesthesia of number, color, ratio, and tone are real, more common, and have a greater role in cognition than previously thought. Hubbard, E.M. & Ramachandran, V.S. “The Phenomenology of Synaesthesia” \textit{Journal of Consciousness Studies}, Vol. 10 (No. 8, 2003), pp. 49-57.
affective exploration / hypothesis testing in a safe environment”... Thus, while a
listener may feel sad as a result of certain types of music, the experience is still a
beneficial or positive one. (ibid 98)

By moving the motor of meaning from philosophy to cognition and an embodied process of
mind, these theories account for music’s primordial nature and presentation, association with
embodied movement (musical performance, dance, entrainment), affective vehemence, and
create a framework which allows non-rational states of consciousness such as trance.

*Fine: An Unresolved Fugue State*

Musical phenomena will continue to be recast as our conceptual tools for considering
them grow and allow us to understand cognitive processes and their relationship to social
phenomena more clearly. As our granularity of perception with regard to process of mind
becomes finer, our glimpses at the inner workings of the motor of cognition will no doubt shed
new light on music’s unique standing as affective art. Though the move in academia to consider
music as an evolutionary artifact describable via the discourses of biology and psychology is an
important one, it is unclear if, when all of the biological functions of the brain come to be
understood, the subjective sense of self and perception can be explained away. Perhaps like
Leibniz’s perception mill32, on examining its interior we will find only parts which work one
upon another and never anything by which to explain a perception, and still be left wondering at

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our epistemological and metaphysical conundrum. Happily, the long philosophical and musicological traditions which have carried us this far on our search for answers will remain, grow, and be present to buoy our growing disciplinary methodology. And still, regardless of all of these abstractions, we will continue to revel in music’s familiar strangeness as no amount of thinking about or explaining music’s enigmas will be able to supplant the layered and sublime experiences it continues to offer.


