

BETWEEN RESONANCE AND SIGNIFICATION: LISTENING, HEARING, AND MUSICOLOGY¹

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ABSTRACT

The relation between listening and analysis is a central problem for musicology: analyses propose particular hearings of works, yet the experience that motivates them exceeds what analysis can signify. Drawing on Marion Guck and Jean-Luc Nancy, this article reframes that gap as phenomenological, distinguishing resonant listening, which suspends the subject–object distinction and lets musical sense arise, from hearing, which yields analytic significations. In between lie hearings and their coupled feelings: meaningful unities that emerge from resonant listening yet cannot reproduce it. Recognizing this lets us ask of any analysis whether it issues from lived resonance or from detached signification.

INTRODUCTION

The relation between listening and analysis remains a central—yet conceptually unstable—problem for musicology. Analyses routinely propose particular hearings of musical works, and in doing so shape what counts as musical understanding; yet the experience that motivates such hearings is not itself reducible to what analysis can specify. This article argues that the gap is not merely methodological but phenomenological. Building on Marion Guck’s account of analysis as interpretation, and informed by Jean-Luc Nancy, I propose a phenomenology of listening in which resonant listening grounds musical ‘feelings’ and gives rise to the significative unities we communicate as ‘hearings’. Hearings, on the view I develop here, can be guided, cultivated, and shared, but they do not embody listening in the literal sense: one cannot reconstruct the listening subject from the hearing it communicates.

Research from the last few decades has increasingly foregrounded the need to account for subjective factors in analysis, both with regard to the analyst and with regard to their object. The embeddedness of any given

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phenomenon surrounding Western art (and other) music—scores, programmes, criticism, biographies (or mythologies) surrounding ‘geniuses’, and above all, the musical *work*—in a very wide array of pre-conditions for its understanding, has been widely acknowledged. Subjectivity and agency are, in this view, not simply insightful—they are inevitable. Music and the actors in the stories that analysts and historians narrate carry as much ideological baggage and subjective idiosyncrasies as these scholars themselves². A great amount of work has been produced to defend a view of musicology that is left not only unhindered but emerges even stronger from this acknowledgement³. This has been one of the main methodological contributions of critical musicology in the last 40 or so years. Additionally, substantial efforts have been made to understand the participatory, experiential side of music, sometimes in a more philosophical vein⁴. Importantly, there have been attempts to investigate how our mode of listening to music may inform the analysis of music—a problem that has been approached in various ways. This is where the present paper enters the conversation.

When we talk about listening, what do we mean exactly⁵? Is it me listening, by myself, as a music lover, an analyst, a scholar (or all of the above, all at once)? Is it a(n imagined) we—we, the audience (at a concert), the musicologists (at a conference), the people of my generation, my high school class, congregation? Or do I listen with the ears of a first-year student in musicology on their ear training exam, desperately trying to make out whether that was a fourth or a sixth they heard in the bass two bars ago? The topic of listening can clearly be discussed with a variety of perspectives

² Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and discourse: Toward a semiology of music* (Princeton University Press, 1990); Marion A. Guck, ‘Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention’, *Music Theory Spectrum*, 28.2 (2006), 191–209.

³ Lawrence Kramer, *Music as cultural practice, 1800-1900* (University of California Press, 1990); Susan McClary, *Feminine endings: Music, gender, and sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Harvard University Press, 1986); Richard Taruskin, *Text and act: Essays on music and performance* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴ Nicholas Cook, *Music as creative practice*, Studies in musical performance as creative practice, 5 (Oxford University Press, 2018); Bruce E. Benson, *The improvisation of musical dialogue: A phenomenology of music* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Erik Wallrup, *Being musically attuned: The act of listening to music* (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015); Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Music Culture (Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

⁵ Janet Bourne, *Who listens?: Experience, cognition, and musical meaning* (Oxford University Press, 2025).

in mind, all of which may have an impact on the way we analyse music and musicking. In the following, I will concentrate the discussion around the phenomenological meaning of listening and hearing, that will hopefully produce a useful reference point for thinking about them with regard to analysis.

A good starting point in approaching this is Marion Guck's theory of analysis as interpretation⁶. Guck distinguishes between the 'real object', such as musical sounds or notes, and the 'intentional object', music as heard and understood⁷. Musical interpretation is a particular *hearing* of a real object (analogous to a 'reading' of a text), making it an intentional object. Even 'conventional notions (e.g., of interval quality and contrapuntal motion)' and the most basic terms we use for music are 'aspects of the intentional object'⁸. Despite being taken purely as observable facts, they require 'interpretative participation' on behalf of the subject to hear them in sounds⁹. The same real musical object can be associated with different hearings, albeit often with similarities, which is clear when we compare analyses of the same piece. Guck gives an example with two descriptions of Schubert's Impromptu No. 3 in G-Flat Major, Op. 90, D. 899, one by an informant named Lucy as interviewed by Tia DeNora¹⁰, the other by analyst Charles Fisk¹¹. DeNora narrates how Lucy describes the Impromptu as 'soothing' and 'de-stressing' and then, in 'sympathizing' with Lucy's interpretation, finds that 'she can hear in its terms'¹². Guck tries on Lucy's hearing herself and produces the following description of this experience:

In the brief period since the piece began I have been hearing a very full-voiced G $\flat$ -major triad. The sonority of the slowly repeating outer voices, sounding a tenth between the bass G $\flat$ and the treble B $\flat$, is sustained by arpeggios rolling in the space between them. It is a mildly active, warmly resonant sound. Still, by the time that E $\flat$ enters I am ready for a change. I appreciate its being as small a change as can be, made as smoothly as possible. The treble B $\flat$ persists and the bass's fall from $\wedge^1$ to $\wedge^6$ is gentle. Altogether, I hear the treble B $\flat$ undergo a change of color or atmosphere

⁶ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention'; Marion A. Guck, 'Perceptions, Impressions: When Is Hearing "Hearing-As"?', *Music Theory and Analysis*, 4.2 (2017), 243–54.

⁷ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 194.

⁸ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 194.

⁹ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 194.

¹⁰ Tia DeNora, *Music in everyday life* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹¹ Charles Fisk, *Returning cycles: Contexts for the interpretation of Schubert's impromptus and last sonatas* (University of California Press, 2001).

¹² Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 195.

rather than movement or progression. That will come as the music continues, and, even then, gently.¹³

With her description, Guck essentially reinforces Lucy's hearing with an analytic backbone. Fisk's analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the expressive content of the Impromptus, and the image of an alienated wanderer. He associates the persistence of E $\flat$ minor with 'disillusionment, crisis, and anxiety'¹⁴. Both Lucy and Fisk find something gentle in the E $\flat$ minor chord, Guck writes, 'but hear *that* as having different implications'¹⁵.

Hearings open up possibilities for musical understanding. Each analysis is essentially telling us to 'hear it like this'¹⁶, in Wittgenstein's terms, or as he put it elsewhere, to *hear* something as something. Each hearing may reveal a different and potentially insightful perspective towards a piece of music. However, because of their inherently subjective component, hearings are the result of experiences and these experiences always have a component of *feeling*. Guck follows Diana Raffman who writes that 'musical understanding is the ability to "use" musical strings... to have certain sorts of *feeling experiences*'¹⁷, such as feeling musical events as stable or unstable, tense, resolute, also when naming these states in a theoretical framework as 'tonic', 'dominant', etc. Raffman describes knowledge of a musical work as 'sensory-perceptual or "experiential" or "felt" knowledge; mere "propositional" or "descriptive" knowledge won't do.'¹⁸ For Guck, hearings are rooted in musical feelings (in the above sense), and analysis entails an investigation into how these feelings are instigated in the relation between music and the 'involved listener'.¹⁹ Feelings, in this sense, belong to the same liminal zone as hearings: they emerge from resonant listening, as states that can be (partially) articulated and communicated.

¹³ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', pp. 196–97.

¹⁴ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 196.

¹⁵ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 197.

¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology: Volume I*, ed. by G. Anscombe and G. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 102.

¹⁷ Diana Raffman, 'The Meaning of Music', in *Philosophy and the arts*, ed. by Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling and Howard K. Wettstein (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. 360–77 (p. 369).

¹⁸ Diana Raffman, *Language, music, and mind* (MIT Press, 1993), pp. 37–38.

¹⁹ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 193.

LISTENING AND HEARING – FROM SENSE TO SIGNIFICATION

How does one listen, in order to hear? And does one have to listen, in order to hear? It has been noted many times, from a variety of perspectives, that what music *is*, is very much dependent on my position towards it: ‘sounds do not become music until they have entered a person, until they have been heard or imagined and attended to. Music exists only in the interaction between sound and the body-and-mind of an individual.’²⁰ Of course, in some ways this may be said of other things as well, such as paintings, movies, etc. Interpretation is always needed for an object to appear with meaning. But music is specific in that what ‘makes sense’ in it is unthinkable without one’s own *participation* in it. With paintings or movies, I may empathize or identify with characters, contexts, values, even atmospheres—but I do not participate in the work in the way that I do in music when I am listening. The experience of music is an experience of an *in-between*, of a specific type of relation between the subject and music. Music is not yet music when conceived as something ‘out there’, as Guck writes, ‘lying on a desk perhaps, unperceived by anyone. As if one really could stand at a distance from it.’²¹ Well, one *could* stand at a distance from it—but that depends on how we define ‘it’. If I analyse musical scores chemically to date and locate the origin of the paper that was used for the manuscript, or if I study the build and tunings of historical instruments—these scholarly activities have ‘musical’ objects, in broad terms. Yet one doesn’t have to participate in these objects in order to understand them—one doesn’t have to hear the ink or paper pulp, and arguably one can reconstruct an instrument without ever having heard it play. Of course, these are clearly abstractions: I doubt there has ever been an instrument maker that hasn’t played the instrument they’ve made. But there is admittedly a detached aspect to these activities, and this is a significant part of musicological research: scores, recordings, instruments, performance manuals, correspondence between musicians and many other historical documents may be studied in such fashion. Even J. S. Bach’s finances are a part of music history²², as much as anything else connected to this most significant figure for Western music.

²⁰ Marion A. Guck, ‘Music Loving, or the Relationship with the Piece’, *Journal of Musicology*, 15.3 (1997), 343–52 (p. 346).

²¹ Guck, ‘Music Loving, or the Relationship with the Piece’, p. 346.

²² Noelle Heber, ‘Bach and Money: Sources of Salary and Supplemental Income in Leipzig from 1723 to 1750’, *Understanding Bach*, 12 (2017), 111–25.

If we accept both the participatory and the detached definition of what music is, we become aware that the relationship between those ‘musics’ is unclear. And it is important, because musicologists often find themselves on the threshold between these different conceptions. For example: I may understand that the Baroque dance style *siciliana* requires compound metre (typically 6/8 or 12/8), drone bass, slow or moderate tempo and various other stylistic features; I may recognize the fact, as shown by Raymond Monelle, that Alessandro Scarlatti used it in his operas, sometimes under the name “aria siciliana”²³, sometimes not, keeping the metre, but not the drone bass; and I may also speculate on whether Scarlatti’s Sicilian background had anything to do with this (Monelle finds the connection between the *siciliana* and Sicily more metaphorical than historically verifiable²⁴).

To understand compound metre or recognize a drone bass, I need to be able to *hear*, and, when pointed to Scarlatti’s arias “Se tu della mia morte” and “S’io non t’amassi tanto” from the opera *La Caduta de’ Decemviri* (1697), I need to be able to *hear-as*, to interpret them according to a specific hearing²⁵. Yet a hearing requires my ‘feeling’ of metre and register, and thus my participation, while my recognition of Scarlatti’s background and the possible appropriation of the *siciliana* style do not require such feelings. I may presumably be amusical and understand the implications of his biography for his use of musical styles. Even metre and register I can more or less work with, without having heard them—for example, as computable parameters of sound—but many musicians would judge such knowledge as incomplete with respect to practical, embodied understanding.

The tension between the participatory and the detached approach to music is immanent to musicology. For while a detached investigation of Bach’s finances remains uncontroversial, a detached analysis of his music and its performance, including analyses of instruments and tunings, is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding. I am missing something if I cannot ‘hear’ (into) music. Conversely, if I do hear, then I also feel, for ‘it

²³ Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 217.

²⁴ Monelle, p. 220.

²⁵ Guck, ‘Perceptions, Impressions: When Is Hearing “Hearing-As”?’; Joseph Dubiel, ‘Music Analysis and Kinds of Hearing-As’, *Music Theory and Analysis*, 4.2 (2017), 233–42.

is not clear that a distinction between “heard” and “felt” can be maintained’²⁶.

Archival or documentary research does not have to involve “feelings” in its procedures and does not require participation. Musicology can, and often must, approach sources, conventions, institutions, and material traces with analytic distance. For example, imagine working through an archive of eighteenth-century musical works and discovering a manuscript of a lost Passion by Georg Philipp Telemann. Such a discovery is in no way conditioned by a participatory approach, at least not directly. Knowledge of archival methods, early eighteenth-century notation and score organization, Telemann’s compositional style, and many other competencies would come into play. The retrieval, analysis, scholarly description and presentation of this hitherto lost work, including digging up, understanding and synthesizing relevant historical and contextual factors of its emergence and reception, are also part of the work of the musicologist. None of these requires listening as such. Yet my claim is different: such reconstructions take on specifically *musical* relevance only insofar as they are ultimately re-related—explicitly or tacitly—to the practices in which, across most of human history, music has been encountered as music: composition, performance and listening. Detached description can secure knowledge of traces, but it cannot, by itself, make evident the sense that made those traces worth producing and preserving in the first place.

The distinction between detached knowledge and specifically musical relevance also raises the question of what ultimately motivates musicological inquiry. Knowledge, in any area, is infinite. And since pursuing it is no simple matter, it always makes sense to ask *why* we pursue it. The *why* has many possible answers. And one of them is the focus of this article, namely the profound and existentially saturated experience of listening. In Guck’s terms, ‘Musical analysis can be seen as a way that analysts work on themselves to understand and improve their experiences of music they have chosen, as well as offering the possibility of musical self-improvement to their readers.’²⁷ To understand how musicological discourse is related to listening, we should first understand what listening is.

²⁶ Guck, ‘Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention’, p. 201.

²⁷ Guck, ‘Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention’, p. 207.

If my hearings and feelings, in the above sense, are often a substantial part of my work as a scholar of music, how do we define the object of inquiry? In the case of the detached approach, we may easily define music *per se* as an object, while in the participatory one we would be hesitant to do so, because it must be a special kind of an object if that requires the subject's participation in it. This not only presents a challenge for the scientific validity of musicology, but is also, more generally, an epistemological problem. How can I truly know something that I am a part of, and that is part of me? What kind of knowledge is one which doesn't require distance, but closeness?

To answer this question, it is necessary to propose an account of the relationship between subject and object in musical experience and then understand how musicology may convincingly approach its object. A good place to start is Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of listening²⁸. The locus of musical feelings, to echo Guck's use of the term, is the domain of listening. Listening (*écouter*) involves focused attention that remains receptive to the acoustic environment, allowing the subject to immerse itself in it. The term 'immersion' does not just reflect a state of the subject, but is also a reflection of the way the object is given. Subject and object are in a relational state that constitutes them, which Nancy calls 'fundamental resonance'²⁹. In resonance, the subject is extracted from its self-sufficiency, while music is deprived of its purely 'objective' character. Both are connected in a way that to some extent diffuses them into one another.

Importantly, issues related to subjectivity and objectivity in music have been very extensively debated in musicology, as well, but discussions have usually taken a very different path.³⁰ In analysis, objectivity is advocated for

²⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (Fordham University Press, 2009).

²⁹ Nancy, p. 6.

³⁰ The debate has a long history. Twentieth-century articulations of an objectivist conception of music theory and analysis—exemplified by Milton Babbitt, 'Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music (1961)', in Milton Babbitt, *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. by Stephen Peles and others (Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 78–85—provoked a sustained critical reaction from Joseph Kerman, 'How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get out', *Critical Inquiry*, 7.2 (1980), 311–31, onwards. See further Rose R. Subotnik, *Deconstructive variations: Music and reason in western society* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Lawrence Kramer, 'The Mysteries of Animation: History, Analysis and Musical Subjectivity', *Music Analysis*, 20.2 (2001), 153–78; Carolyn Abbate, 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30.3 (2004), 505–36 and the essays gathered in Andrew Dell'Antonio (ed.), *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (University of California Press, 2004), especially Fred E. Maus, 'The Disciplined Subject of Musical Analysis', in *Beyond Structural Listening?*, ed. by

by proponents of what are often referred to as structural or formal analytic methods, of which Schenkerian analysis has been the most institutionally dominant in the Anglophone tradition (even if its hegemony has been substantially contested in recent years). This type of analysis focuses on the intramusical relationships between motives, chords, structural elements and unities, and proceeds to draw a unified picture of the musical work, considered, for the most part, as self-contained. Other proponents of objectivity, broadly speaking, are scholars who focus on music as a detached object, for example in historical work on manuscripts, biographies, performative conventions, etc. When it comes to the ‘subjective’ in music and analysis, it has often been seen in light of the contextual or discursive fabric of subjectivity: the social, cultural, political aspects of the subject of the composer, performer, listener, analyst, or the virtual or imagined subject embedded in the music itself. The proponents of subjectivity as an integral part of music research are usually referred to as critical musicologists.

Resonance, and the transformation of subjectivity and objectivity that it implies, do not fit in these disciplinary lines. First, resonance has no place within a positivistic view of objectivity in musicology. But what about resonance within a subject-oriented musicology? Critical musicology focuses on the subjective, but it has often treated the subjective as woven by various discourses. It sees the counterpoint to the enclosed musical work in a diffusion of contextual meanings and values, embedded in the score, or, more likely, the product of (analytic) interpretation. Subjectivity is, in this view, inherently discursive, it is akin to a text—a view, which can be summed up in Derrida’s famous dictum *Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*, there is no outside-of-text³¹. Nancy’s resonant listening, however, goes in a different direction. The idea of resonance implies that *who* the subject is, is inherently related to music. In listening, music does not appear as an object either in the positivistic or in the critical sense, the latter seeing in it a projection of subjective interpretative frameworks, ideological motivations, or societal forces. Its existence is not objective per se, but rather, entails a suspension of the subject-object dichotomy.

In various forms, this view has had a hard time with musicology. Resonance problematizes the possibility of researching music and some musicologists may find it irrelevant for research. For how can an ‘object’

Dell’Antonio, pp. 13–43. Guck’s own work, on which the present argument builds, is itself a contribution to this debate.

³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology* (Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 158.

that exists in a resonant relation with the subject be observed, analysed, interpreted, discussed? This apparent dead end is one of the reasons why, though far from unknown, Nancy's work on listening has been selectively taken up—and often critically—within musicology.³² But I think it affords much more to musicology than it initially seems to.

In Nancy, resonant listening (*écouter*) is distinguished from hearing (*entendre*). Unlike the former, hearing is always transitive: one always hears *something*, and thus hearing always has an object. Hearing is part of the everyday practice of analysts: tonal motion, formal divisions, stylistic topics, expressive intentions are heard. Music educators frequently urge students to learn to hear a section, passage, motive, in a particular way. As immersed as one's listening may be, one may struggle to identify, i.e., 'hear' a chord in a progression, the theme in a variation, a timbral colour, etc. Hearing *in* music requires discriminative force, and even a linguistic supplement, which is sometimes indispensable for the act of hearing itself.

Nancy's concept of hearing (*entendre*) corresponds to what Guck calls hearings. This is remarkable, because the former does a philosophy of listening, while the latter develops a conceptual language for music analysis. If the use of the term 'hearing' more or less coincides in both authors, then what role may listening play in Guck's vision of analysis? Listening, I argue, is at the root of musical 'feelings'. Feelings, coupled with hearings, emerge from listening. To go back to the example of Schubert's Impromptu No. 3, hearing the beginning as a 'very full-voiced G $\flat$ -major triad' may carry a soothing feeling only if the piece is *listened to*. Feelings are states that we can (try to) articulate from the experience of resonant listening. Music can truly have a 'soothing' effect on us only if we are in a resonant relation with it. But at the same time, neither the hearing of the G $\flat$ -major triad, nor the feeling of being soothed, are a sufficient description of resonant listening. And this is where, in my opinion, Nancy's philosophy can contribute something substantial to the discussion.

In order to understand this better, it is useful to introduce Nancy's differentiation between *sense* (sens) and *signification*, which are correlated with listening and hearing. According to Nancy, 'fundamental resonance' is

³² Lawrence Kramer, *Expression and truth: On the music of knowledge* (University of California Press, 2016); Erik Wallrup, 'Hermeneutics and Anti-Hermeneutics of Music: The Question of Listening in Jean-Luc Nancy and Lawrence Kramer', *Epekeina*, 3.2 (2013), 307–20.

‘a first or last profundity of “sense” itself’³³. In this perspective, sense emerges in the *in-between* between music and self:

The possibility of sense is identified with the possibility of resonance, or of sonority itself. More precisely, the perceived possibility of sense [...] is overlaid with the resonant possibility of sound: that is, when all is said and done, with the possibility of an echo or a return of sound to self in self.³⁴

Listening is essentially an openness to sense³⁵. Conversely, sense exists only in resonance with a subject. It is simultaneously the sense *of* the music and the sense *of* the subject, because the subject itself is constituted within this act of resonance. As Nancy writes:

One can say, then, at least, that sense [sens] and sound share the space of a referral [renvoi³⁶], in which at the same time they refer to each other, and that, in a very general way, this space can be defined as the space of a *self*, a subject. A *self* is nothing other than a form or function of referral.³⁷

In this perspective, within resonance, musical sense and the sense of the subject are not two ‘senses’, but *one*.

Signification, in contrast, projects meanings which are detached from the subject. These may be deciphered, interpreted, negotiated. They may be projected onto the object, or the subject might project them on itself, but they are, in any case, not in a resonant relation with it. There are various examples for signification in musicology and music in general. The metre of the siciliana or Scarlatti’s Sicilian background are meanings within a larger framework of signification that we may discuss, question, or re-interpret in various ways. But we do not resonate with them as such. Or imagine I am a music student doing a two-voice dictation. I hear melodic contours, melodic and harmonic intervals, perhaps a familiar cadence. I am so keen on writing down the correct notes and keeping up with the teacher at the keyboard that I am completely detached from what I am hearing. Will I get an A? (Will my GPA be enough for my next scholarship application?) Perhaps I did, or perhaps I didn’t, but, either way, it was never a question of sense, but a question of signification: to translate acoustic impressions onto a five-line staff. For some, precision may even *require* an intentionally maintained

³³ Nancy, p. 6.

³⁴ Nancy, pp. 29–30.

³⁵ Nancy, p. 27, trans. modified.

³⁶ ‘a word whose translation as ‘reference’ obscures its double meaning as both a sending-away (a dismissal) and a return’ (Brian Kane, ‘Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 31.5-6 (2012), 439–47 (p. 445))

³⁷ Nancy, p. 8, trans. modified.

analytic distance. Finally, signification is also at work when we try to interpret the meaning of music in discursive terms, as a social or political entity. And while we may be emotionally or morally engaged with such topics, even as analysts, our engagement often does not proceed from resonance, but from an emotional projection onto our objects of inquiry. As Robert Fink has shown, this seems to be the case with Beethoven's Ninth, which has been an object of a number of such interpretative projections, each following the same immanent structural sequence of the work, but within widely variable frameworks.³⁸

Appeals to 'objectivity' in the ordinary sense of the term typically presuppose the recognitional framework of signification. One might maintain, for example, that Beethoven's Fifth exists as a phenomenon in the world and that it has properties distinguishable from subjective impressions, purely mental states, or private emotional associations. Within such a frame of reference, I recognize a score or a recording as Beethoven's Fifth because I am working—through memory, metatexts, or context—within a nexus of significations through which an object is identified as this particular work. Recognition here proceeds by signification: this is 'Beethoven's Fifth', and its objectivity is secured by the stability of its signifiers or other conventional sign-vehicles, such as scores, concert programmes, analyses, and the network of references that sustains it.

Resonant listening operates differently. In such listening, the operative frame is not the score, my memories of the work, analyses or program notes. What the musical work *is* in the moment of resonant listening is dependent on my relation with it; it is not primarily encountered through the recognitional apparatus by which it is known as 'Beethoven's Fifth'. Beethoven's Fifth does not make sense here by virtue of its 'objective features' as such. The sense of Beethoven's Fifth in resonant listening does not coincide with the meaning of 'Beethoven's Fifth' as a well-known work situated within a significative nexus. This does not mean that the Fifth, even within a resonant relation, does not retain its identity as a musical work in a trivial sense—but the sense that it now carries is beyond its signifiable features. Both the listener and the work are something different than they are without one another.

³⁸ Robert Fink, 'Beethoven Antihero: Sex, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Failure, or Listening to the Ninth Symphony as Postmodern Sublime', in *Beyond Structural Listening?*, ed. by Dell'Antonio, pp. 109–53.

Feelings and hearings inhabit a middle ground between sense and signification. Each hearing is coupled with a feeling, and each couple is a unity of meaning singled out from resonant sense. Let's imagine I remember listening resonantly to the first three chords of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 26, 'Les Adieux'. Metaphorically, I could say that the sense was between the notes, in the reverberating quiet between each attack. But this is only a metaphor, and it serves to show only that what it is referring to cannot be signified. Once I begin analysing my experience, the best that I can do is to try to single out relevant hearings and their corresponding feelings, in the hope of expressing a personal perspective on the work. In order to do this, I may point to the tonality (E♭ major), the dynamics, the deceptive cadence, and the fact that only on the submediant does a wider register appear, in a provisional metrical and tonal point of rest. I could point to the feeling of warm nostalgia that I found myself embodying, and discuss how it may connect with Beethoven's programmatic title of the first movement, 'Lebewohl', with a syllable assigned to each of the first three chords.

Yet it is clear to me as an analyst that resonant sense, in Nancy's words, 'is impossible to hear/understand, an unsignifiable sense but one that, perhaps, lets itself... be listened to.'³⁹ I realize that in communicating a hearing, and its coupled feeling, I am referring to my own experience or memory of it—to a listening self that was, indeed, *my* self—but I cannot make this experience as such heard or understood by another.

Importantly, unlike sense, our feelings and hearings can still be communicated to and perhaps even approximated by others. In analytic discourse, they appear as significative unities that expand our capacity for hearing and understanding music in new ways. Yet while the analyst 'directs the reader's attention toward a way of hearing the music in question', as Guck writes, there is a limit to the reader's capacity to use 'the analysis as guidance for approximating the experiences recommended'⁴⁰. Nevertheless, there are significations that seem to carry a trace of the sense-experience that gave birth to them, and others that seem to be more a result of an autonomous rational project of the musicologist. Interestingly, this distinction doesn't fall neatly into the 'formalist' vs. 'critical' debate in musicology, and thus may help override some points of contention. Whether they are engaging in Schenkerian analysis, a study of musical conventions, or have a gender-critical approach, the analyst may or may not

³⁹ Nancy, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 201.

have resonant sense as their experiential background. In this perspective, the difference lies not in their methodological or ideological premises, but in whether they carry a seed of an intuition that precedes their discursive articulation. We may hear in such significations that a sense has been.

FROM RESONANCE TO INTERPRETATION: CONVERGENCE OR DISRUPTION?

Yet, if listening and hearing, sense and signification are so drastically different, then how is the transition between them possible? Doesn't sense, under these conditions, remain opaque and hermetic, closed off in the singular experience of a listener or a performer that is arguably even inaccessible to them once the experience is over? Signification cannot contain resonant sense, but it does emerge from it: 'musical listening, in sonorities and in their rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic arrangements, *hears/understands* [*entend*] articulations and consecutions, sequences and punctuations'⁴¹. In this sense, most musical units in analytic discourse—motives, harmonic progressions, forms, musical topics, notions, ideas—emerge from listening. The crucial point, however, is that we sometimes speak about forms or topics without any hearing or feeling in mind, and without having any resonant listening experience to remember and draw from; and we may be governed in our discussions of music by various other factors, ignoring our experience altogether.

While some studies of music may benefit from approaching it as a detached object of inquiry, for part of musicological research this is not the case. And while resonant listening has never and could never become a scientific criterion for discourse on music, one can appreciate the fact that it has often been present, albeit implicitly and in the background of scholarly works. It has been the case, throughout modern European history, in particular, that 'in analysis, the concepts [often] don't quite apply and the rules don't quite work. Instead, we use them to show that something unusual is happening, we extend their definition a bit, we move from one system to another, we give them up in favor of tailor-made notions.'⁴² Due to their origin, feelings and hearings are hard to put down in any language, and analysts have gone to great lengths to articulate them in the best way possible, even through conceptual arbitrariness and rapid methodological shifts, when necessary. Such was the case of, to name just one example,

⁴¹ Nancy, p. 34.

⁴² Guck, 'Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention', p. 203.

Jean-Philippe Rameau, who shifted between scientific theories—Sauveur’s, then Mairan’s—in trying to ground musical phenomena such as the overtone series, and who continued to maintain the natural origin of the minor mode even after his attempts at a scientific demonstration (via a hypothetical stacking of intervals below the fundamental bass) failed.⁴³ Rameau’s work lies in the tension between an immediately heard minor harmony in music and its non-verifiability in scientific terms. His disposition leads him to seek legitimation in acoustics in order to ground his musical intuitions. At the same time, when a contradiction arises between what is immediately experienced and what is physically demonstrable, Rameau decides to stick with the former, because it is what has motivated him to develop a theory in the first place.

This is a paradigmatic situation, one that can be extended far beyond Rameau and his day and age, in which instances of hearing are installed onto verbal significations, by bending them to fit the hearing. These can be scientific or poetic, formalist or critical. Perhaps the tragedy here, and, at the same time, an infallible reminder to analytic hearers of what music remains to be beyond analysis, is the contingency and imprecision of some of our descriptions of music. Austrian musicologist Gernot Gruber has described this in a stunning manner (in a paragraph that I have allowed myself to quote in full):

Confronted with an object such as music, one becomes especially aware of how deeply our desire to understand [Erkennenwollen] is an intervention—one which the object can hardly resist, and which it (or rather, our primary sensory experience of it) can at most avoid. A process—whether beginning by chance, through spontaneous insight, or deliberate intention—organizes itself as it progresses, as if of its own accord; it becomes increasingly dense and internally coherent, with concepts and their interrelations solidifying. We sense that something is coming into being: an interpretation, perhaps even a theory; and we continue refining this or that aspect of the structure’s internal logic. [...] Yet our remarkable human capacity to take distance—even from ourselves—leads us, after the joy of creation, to doubt the value of what

⁴³ Rameau cites Sauveur in J.-P. Rameau, *Nouveau système de musique theorique, où l'on découvre le principe de toutes les regles necessaires à la pratique, pour servir d'introduction au Traité de l'harmonie*. (Ballard, 1726) Rameau’s later citation of Mairan appears in J.-J. D. d. Mairan, ‘Discours sur la propagation du son clans les differens tons qui le modifient’, in *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences avec les mémoires de mathématique & de physique*, ed. by J. Boudot (Pierre Mortier, 1737), pp. 1–87. For the failed demonstration of the minor-mode derivation, see J.-P. Rameau, *Génération harmonique, ou Traité de musique théorique et pratique*. (Prault fils, 1737), p. 23.

we have achieved. For we become disillusioned as we recognize that, since the first step of distancing ourselves from the flow of time and perception to concentrate on something deemed important—and despite our effort to maintain a continuous, reflective interaction with the object, or with the original situation as we remember it—something has come into being that, in its existence and structure, has gained a life of its own in relation to that from which it emerged. We have created a different reality, though we had merely sought to explicate what we had experienced as a fascinating, iridescent stimulus.⁴⁴

Gruber points to a fundamental ambiguity of musicological research while sketching an account of how we bring about new interpretations or theories. Regardless of whether our investigation begins by chance, through insight or deliberate intention, it grows and becomes more and more coherent in itself. Yet as we approach the end of our investigation, it occurs to us that we have distanced ourselves from our original experience in order to concentrate on something else. We have left the ‘original situation’ and have created something new, that ‘has gained a life of its own in relation to that from which it emerged’. The interpretation or theory we have created has somehow departed from the fascinating and elusive experience that motivated us to begin in the first place.

The transition between listening and interpretation in an analytic or hermeneutical sense is indeed problem-ridden, despite the fact that it is a pervasive aspect of much discourse about music. Yet maintaining that they occupy different phenomenological realms does not imply that one of them is redundant. Quite the contrary: it is a challenge for musicologists to better understand the way in which we may or may not proceed from one to the other. This implies that certain epistemological criteria should be introduced to discern between theoretical discourse that is motivated by a listening experience, and one that isn’t, not because—and this should be emphasized—one has more scholarly value than the other (regardless of which one we choose to be more ‘scientific’), but because their epistemological background is different. When Hugo Riemann picked up Rameau’s harmonic insights and developed functional harmony⁴⁵, he thought about functions as something a student of music should learn to hear in music. Albeit a concept that encompasses a vast array of harmonic cases, ‘function’ meant for Riemann something quite perceptible and

⁴⁴ Gernot Gruber, ‘Zwei Vorüberlegungen’, in *Musikalische Hermeneutik im Entwurf: Thesen und Diskussionen*, ed. by Gernot Gruber and Siegfried Mauser, *Schriften zur musikalischen Hermeneutik*, 1 (Laaber-Verlag, 1994), pp. 13–46 (pp. 28–29).

⁴⁵ Hugo Riemann, *Vereinfachte Harmonielehre oder die Lehre von den tonalen Funktionen der Akkorde* (Augener & Co., 1893).

visceral, belonging, indeed, to the very life of classical music. Hearing a function is always a ‘hearing’ in Guck’s sense, and it is connected with a ‘feeling’ of that function within a specific context. It is also embedded in an experiential flux that may involve resonant listening. While identifying and notating functions in a musical score without prior musical experience is possible—by simply following a rule-based procedure—they make sense to us in a completely different way once heard as the outgrowth of a resonant listening experience.

Yet clearly Riemann’s functional theory is limited—not only with regard to the music that can convincingly be approached by it (late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musical idioms, for the most part), but also with regard to other aspects it may leave unexplored. In fact, when it comes to harmony, in particular, Riemann has been overshadowed by Schenker and Schoenberg in the Anglophone world. Even a music theory that works so closely with hearings leaves much space for alternatives. This is because it is, essentially, of the order of signification, where the plurality of meanings provokes the establishment of multiple competing reference systems for the explanation of reality.

When it comes to far more ‘hermeneutic’ strands of analysis, the question of their relationship to resonant experience is not much different. Robert Fink’s comparative meta-analysis of interpretations of the first movement of Beethoven’s Ninth invites the question of how many of these interpretations were the product of feelings and hearings, emerging from resonant experience.⁴⁶ A. B. Marx, for example, speaks of the opening chord as being ‘immovable like a terrifying spectre, like the gloomily flaming Earth-Spirit that stood before Faust’⁴⁷. Wagner wrote of the first movement’s main theme in a programme for a performance of the Ninth Symphony: ‘The great main theme, which steps before us at one stride, naked and powerful, as if from behind an uncanny and spectral shroud’⁴⁸, and applied a quotation from Goethe’s *Faust*. Fink also cites examples from Riemann, who speaks of the ‘demonic power’ of the movement, and Donald Tovey, who hears in it ‘the heavens on fire’, something ‘catastrophic’ and ‘very terrible’⁴⁹. The lineage extends into the present: Fink’s central case is

⁴⁶ Fink.

⁴⁷ A. B. Marx, *Ludwig Van Beethoven: Leben Und Schaffen* (Janke, 1859), p. 272.

⁴⁸ R. Wagner, ‘Bericht über die Aufführung der neunten Symphonie von Beethoven im Jahre 1846, nebst Programm dazu’, in R. Wagner, *Richard Wagners Gesammelte Schriften Und Dichtungen*, 2nd edn (E. W. Fritzsche, 1887), 2 (p. 56); Fink, p. 117.

⁴⁹ Fink, pp. 118–19.

Susan McClary's reading of the recapitulation (mm. 301–15) as a scene of sexual violence, which he treats as continuous with the imaginative cathexis of earlier male critics, reinterpreted from a different subject position.⁵⁰

Were all these interpretations really *heard* in the music? Did these hearings, and their corresponding feelings, emerge from resonant listening? While some interpretations have been debated extensively, the discussion has often been confined to an already decidedly significative framework of what interpretation entails and what its origins are. Yet interpretations may be rooted in, or at least may try to express, a non- or pretextual mode of experience. And so, instead of asking what the discursive 'limits of interpretation' are, we may instead ask about the non-discursive limits of interpretation—did the hearings of the 'demonic', the 'terrifying spectre', the 'heavens on fire', emerge from a resonant relation with music? The framework allows clearer answers in some cases than others. When Riemann developed his theory of harmonic function, the concept was built from listening experience: a function is, before anything else, a felt position in a tonal sequence. Pedagogical and performance metaphors work similarly—when a violin teacher, for example, instructs a student to keep a line airborne against gravity, the metaphor succeeds insofar as it directs the student toward an embodied hearing they can take up themselves, rather than simply describing a property of the music as an object.⁵¹ The poetic descriptions of the demonic, the spectre, the heavens on fire are harder to read. Since we have no direct access to the writers' experiences, we cannot say if these were "heard" and if those hearings emerged from resonance. Usually, when we engage in good faith with a vivid description in another analyst's writing, we try to hear the music *that way*—to take up the metaphor as an invitation to a particular hearing, and to find out, in our own listening, what it offers. This is often how analytic discourse circulates in practice. If the metaphors by Marx, Wagner, or Tovey emerged from hearings, they were most likely communicated in this spirit. Whether an interpretation communicates a hearing, or not, does not so much validate or invalidate it; it points to the fact that interpretations may issue from

⁵⁰ Fink, p. 122; McClary.

⁵¹ On metaphor as the dominant mode of transmitting performance knowledge between teacher and student, see Sybil S. Barten, 'Speaking of Music: The Use of Motor-Affective Metaphors in Music Instruction', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 32.2 (1998), 89.

vastly different epistemological presuppositions about what expressions of musical meaning refer to, and from very different experiences.

A related question concerns the analyst rather than the analysis. Fink introduces the term ‘subject position’ en passant to explain how each analyst’s situation shapes their interpretation. What is meant by ‘subject position’ seems to be of a significative nature and does not directly refer to the existential position of the analyst. Yet arguably the subject position *of* the analyst may also come into play, in resonant listening, as it requires a specific involvement and the analyst’s participation in music. So a distinctive factor here is whether the subject position in question, in each of these analyses, is *lived* or *assumed*. An assumed subject position can be seen to express itself in or react to music, but it cannot resonate with it, because resonance, in its original meaning, is a relation between a living subject and music. Consequently, only a lived subject position may experience resonant musical sense, while an assumed one cannot. An assumed subject position may supply us with various interpretations, but they are confined to proceeding from signification alone, as they are devoid of lived experience. That may or may not apply to any of the analyses of the Ninth—Fink doesn’t discuss these issues—yet this is one more aspect in which resonant listening may be seen to influence analysis, despite being, in principle, unsignifiable.

Fink’s analysis belongs to a broader critical project that targets *structural listening* as a regulative ideal of musicological discourse. Its locus classicus is Rose Subotnik’s *Deconstructive Variations*, where structural listening is identified as a *method*: ‘a method that concentrates attention primarily on the formal relationships established over the course of a single composition’⁵². Structural listening is ‘a process wherein the listener follows and comprehends the unfolding realization, with all of its detailed inner relationships, of a generating musical conception’⁵³. The structural principle is mostly connected, in Western music, to development: structural listening is developmental listening⁵⁴. Subotnik is critical of it because it ‘allows virtually no recognition to nonstructural varieties of meaning or emotion in the act of listening’⁵⁵. It is also limited in musical terms, because only a small portion of the world’s musics, and even of Western music, is organized in a purely structural way—Subotnik names the

⁵² Subotnik, p. 148.

⁵³ Subotnik, p. 150.

⁵⁴ Subotnik, p. 159.

⁵⁵ Subotnik, p. 170.

common practice period ‘between Corelli and Mahler’⁵⁶ (as well as Schoenberg) as the only music structural listening can appropriately be used for.

There is a wide margin between structural listening and listening as resonance. Structural listening is an analytic method for understanding and evaluating music. It is, in this sense, one species of analytic engagement within the order of signification. ‘Structural listening’ could produce various hearings, and thus should perhaps be translated as *structural hearing* in my current use of these terms. Importantly, structural listening is not meant to be experiential in the sense of lived, embodied, acoustic musical experience—it is essentially a reflective procedure that is mentally accomplished and may not involve actual sound⁵⁷. Subotnik quotes Adorno’s ‘suspicion of sound’⁵⁸ as a paradigmatic example of such an attitude. In fact, at one point Adorno saw sensuousness in general as a redundant aspect of music, appropriate only for the ‘infantile’:

The necessity to have something essentially spiritual mediated through its sensuous representatives, rather than perceiving those representatives themselves into the spirit, is infantile. Just as today only retrograde peasants read aloud in order to be able to read at all, and just as in reading prayer books the movement of the lips has survived only as a rudiment, so it may very easily one day be the same with music.⁵⁹

Perhaps few structural analysts would subscribe to the idea that music has a purely spiritual essence, devoid of actual sound. But this brings out an important problem concerning structural approaches: it is not methodologically clear to what extent they are dependent on, and aim at influencing, our ways of hearing a piece of music. The question arises: if we accept that hearings are unities of signification, emerging from listening, where do structural hearings fit in, and can they qualify as ‘hearings’ at all, if they result not from listening as such, but from methodical reflection?

Another question concerns how Subotnik’s proposed alternatives to structural listening, emphasizing sound and style, relate to resonant listening. Subotnik believes that analysis should explore the meaning and values imprinted on music and its various interpretations, as well as the

⁵⁶ Subotnik, p. 157.

⁵⁷ Subotnik, p. 163.

⁵⁸ Subotnik, p. 162.

⁵⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Zu einer Theorie der musikalischen Reproduktion Aufzeichnungen, ein Entwurf und zwei Schemata*, ed. by Henri Lonitz, 1st edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1750, p. 210.

analyst's own prejudices, in short, everything pertaining to the discursive nature of both musical objects, and verbal discussions of music.⁶⁰ What much of this critical work makes evident is the value its authors attribute to the explicit self-reflectivity and self-criticism of analysts both when investigating their own perceptions and concepts⁶¹, and when they investigate other analysts' language, presuppositions, etc.⁶²

Some of these contributions occupy an interesting middle ground between resonance and reflection, listening and hearing. Joseph Dubiel defines the structural not as a characteristic of listening, but as

a certain way of thinking about listening. It might be a kind of listening that involves wanting to make the way in which one's experience is elicited an object of appreciation in itself. The distinctive feature of such listening might be a certain kind of self-monitoring, motivated by a certain kind of wonder—wonder that sounds can do that.⁶³

Structural listening would be, in this definition, a *reflection* on the ways in which we hear music, far from listening as resonance. Listening structurally would then consist in the mental operations needed for hearings to become theory.

A counterpoint to structural listening is presented by Elisabeth Le Guin who experiments with a descriptive analytic approach by relating what she experiences when listening to Debussy's song 'Soupir,' one of the *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*.⁶⁴ In a controlled setting—listening on a sound system, without the score, with conscious reduction of bodily reactions such as twitching or holding of breath in sympathy with the singer—Le Guin writes down what she notices in several consecutive listenings, having read the original poem in advance. She writes down impressions of pitch, time, timbre, articulation. While she doesn't have a score in front of her, she does imagine one right away, and it gets filled up with more information at each listening, forming the background for the consecutive one. The lack of a score does not affect her ability to hear, but it does make it hard to maintain the heard in memory:

⁶⁰ Subotnik, p. 171.

⁶¹ Elisabeth Le Guin, 'One Bar in Eight: Debussy and the Death of Description', in *Beyond Structural Listening?*, ed. by Dell'Antonio, pp. 233–51 (p. 239); Joseph Dubiel, 'Uncertainty, Disorientation, and Loss as Responses to Musical Structure', in *Beyond Structural Listening?*, ed. by Dell'Antonio, pp. 173–200.

⁶² Fink; Maus.

⁶³ Dubiel, 'Uncertainty, Disorientation, and Loss as Responses to Musical Structure', p. 173.

⁶⁴ Le Guin.

my real-time listening concentration, unmoored from the visual referents of score or performers, proves shockingly ill-trained in following any single ‘promising’ feature consistently, systematically, through a single listening session. Invariably I get ‘distracted.’ I can ‘hear what I ought to hear,’ or rather, what I as a musicologist think I ought to hear—that is, interesting and subtle features of the music, my stock in trade—quite immediately, but I have immense difficulty maintaining them as an auditional stance.⁶⁵

These observations are telling. Despite being ‘immersed’ in the work on a purely acoustic level, Le Guin decides to take on an analytic stance. This stance immediately starts revealing to her the use of various musical elements—she hears what she ‘ought’ to hear as a musicologist. Yet the overwhelming quantity of information that each hearing supplies cannot be retained without a recording medium, a score. The ephemerality of lived musical experience has often been acknowledged, but in this context, it is only in comparison to score-assisted listening that the one experienced by Le Guin seems hard to maintain in memory. Listening becomes especially salient in contrast to score-assisted seeing, and in her inability to pin down some of the impressions she is having, or would like to have, she says: ‘The desire for something to look at is acute’⁶⁶.

Analysis works more seamlessly with a score, because in building a theoretical construct of the heard, it needs to accumulate a vast amount of information and allow it to be perceived without the pressure of a relentless moving-forward in time. The score and the written analytic paper allow us to pace ourselves when confronted with new perspectives of the work. And although nothing can truly substitute for a hearing as an experiential given, the visual counterpart of that hearing allows it to be mentally sustained and communicated. On the other hand, it is clear, based on Le Guin’s experience, my own, and perhaps the reader’s, that the traditional analytic approach entails a reification of hearing that may depart from its origin in listening. I can investigate the score without having heard anything in the music, let alone having resonated with it. And while analysis entails, for the most part, the reflective stance that Le Guin tries to maintain, resonant listening provides a visceral backbone for what analysis pursues.

⁶⁵ Le Guin, p. 239.

⁶⁶ Le Guin, p. 240.

DISCOURSE AND THE INEFFABLE

The sense that is listened to in resonance is not signifiable. For this reason, it is not a discursive unit *as such*, although obviously, as in this text, it can be made into a topic of discussion. There is no doubt we can speak about music, not only because we do so all the time, but because there doesn't seem to be any serious reason to believe otherwise. The question is, rather, *how*? Speaking about signification is simple, because we speak *with* signification. But how do we speak about unsignifiable, experiential musical sense? (Its unsignifiability does not mean it is hermetic or hidden, but, rather, that it belongs to a different order than signification altogether.)

The question of music's 'ineffability', which has been extensively debated in recent decades and became a source of some polarization in musicology⁶⁷, addresses related concerns. It has often been concerned with whether immediate, non-verbal musical experience is more authentically musical than reflexive experience—whether the 'drastic' is preferable to the 'gnostic'. Carolyn Abbate, interpreting Jankélévitch's dichotomy, explains that

drastic connotes physicality, but also desperation and peril, involving a category of knowledge that flows from drastic actions or experiences and not from verbally mediated reasoning. Gnostic as its antithesis implies not just knowledge per se but making the opaque transparent, knowledge based on semiosis and disclosed secrets, reserved for the elite and hidden from others.⁶⁸

For one side of the debate, music's proper domain is the 'drastic', the immediate, the Dionysian, the one belonging to the Muses and transcending language. It upholds the view that there is a 'befuddling, vague, and untranslatable specificity'⁶⁹ to musical experience that requires scholarly attention, potentially beneficial for all music studies. The other side of the debate refutes the entire dichotomy of drastic and gnostic, with the firm belief that *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*⁷⁰. Because everything is discursive or significative, it is meaningless to speak of ineffability—if something is spoken or written, it is effable. According to Lawrence Kramer, 'the ineffable

⁶⁷ See e.g., Abbate; Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting music* (University of California Press, 2011); Karol Berger, 'Musicology According to Don Giovanni, or: Should We Get Drastic?', *Journal of Musicology*, 22.3 (2005), 490–501.

⁶⁸ Abbate, p. 510.

⁶⁹ Michael Gallope, *Deep Refrains* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 16.

⁷⁰ Derrida, p. 158.

only happens within language itself⁷¹, i.e. (the question of) ineffability is the product of discourse.

Since the idea of resonant sense is clearly related to the idea of ineffability, this discussion requires attention, and particularly the somewhat more sophisticated second, critical view. From its Derridean perspective—which shares the following implication with Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s model of discourse and music⁷²—music is a text, Nancy’s book on listening is also a text, and these signify and have meaning, and thus are either ‘contingent cultural practices’⁷³, or products of such practices—a sufficient argument against any professed ‘immediacy’ of musical listening. Both music and the listening subject are embedded in a discursive fabric that prohibits them from relating to one another without participating in discourse, without being a function of it. The self and music cannot resonate with one another directly: resonance is fiction, and it is only worth exploring (if it is at all worth it) as a rhetorical topic, a discursive event.

This point of view has its reasons but it is incomplete. Lawrence Kramer, one of its most noteworthy proponents, actually acknowledges this in his argument: ‘How is listening to music ineffable in any way that these are not: hearing the wind as it rustles in the trees, recognizing a voice and feeling the texture and play of its speech melody, contemplating the evening as it gathers’⁷⁴. He makes the following thoughtful point:

Music is ineffable in exactly the way everything else is—and isn’t. What raises the problem, rather, is music’s characteristic lack of the referential automatism of language and images, a lack that has traditionally been confused with the lack of meaning. But that very lack is also what raises the solution to the problem or, rather, dissolves the problem. It does so by making apparent that the source of meaning and participation in any circumstance is precisely the surplus over and above referential automatism. Music does not demand more of that surplus than anything else. But it makes the surplus explicit [...] ⁷⁵

Indeed, *everything* is, to some extent, ineffable, because our experience as human beings or subjects carries with it a stratum that is pre-reflective and pre-verbal. This is part of who we are. Kramer is exactly right when saying that music ‘does not demand’ the beyond-of-reference any more than

⁷¹ Lawrence Kramer, ‘Oracular Musicology; or, Faking the Ineffable’, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 69.2 (2012), 101–09 (p. 101).

⁷² Nattiez.

⁷³ James Hepokoski, ‘Ineffable Immersion: Contextualizing the Call for Silence’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65 (2012), 223–30 (p. 230).

⁷⁴ Lawrence Kramer, *The thought of music* (University of California Press, 2016), p. 46.

⁷⁵ Kramer, *The thought of music*, p. 29.

anything else. But it *does* seem to imply something very significant about that beyond, the surplus that, unlike Kramer, who still imagines it imbued with significative meaning, Nancy, for example, treats as unsignifiable sense.

What is often misunderstood in this debate is that it is ultimately not about music or musicology, but about epistemology. For the statement, ‘the ineffable only happens within language itself’, clearly concerns all experience, as its author implies. And while the nature of music is indeed a very interesting and potentially insightful context in which to ask these questions, their implications are much broader, and posing the question on such a level risks losing the ability to provide a convincing answer. If we stay with music, however, the idea of ‘pandiscursivity’ does not convince: clearly so many have, in various ways, implied that there are things within music and musical experience, which cannot be said. And so dismissing the problem in one go seems premature.

Kramer’s view that ineffability is ‘a relic of a certain nineteenth-century vogue for sentimental metaphysics’⁷⁶, which he shares with James Hepokoski⁷⁷, also seems half-true. Indeed, the explicit philosophical and aesthetic discussion of musical immediacy and its ineffability became a major theme in Romantic philosophy. Yet it was an implicit premise of discourse on music at least a century before that. According to Mark Evan Bonds, resonant listening, the ‘type of listening in which we forget that what we are hearing is an object’⁷⁸, was *the* prevalent type of listening up to the late eighteenth century. It is between the 1750s and 1850s that a new type of listening was introduced to lay audiences: *reflective listening*, which, in Bonds’ terms, is ‘an awareness that what we are hearing is an object, an event or a phenomenon outside of and apart from ourselves’⁷⁹. Based on a close reading of various eighteenth-century sources, he undermines the narrative that resonant listening is a product of Romantic aesthetics, and argues that it is significantly older. The idea of ineffability neither originated in, nor ended with the nineteenth century. According to Bonds, resonant and reflective listening are mutually exclusive: we may oscillate ‘between being lost in the music’

and being aware of its existence as an object. But it is not possible to listen in both ways at the same time, for if we are truly lost in the

⁷⁶ Kramer, *The thought of music*, p. 46.

⁷⁷ Hepokoski, p. 224.

⁷⁸ Mark E. Bonds, *Music’s Fourth Wall and the Rise of Reflective Listening* (Oxford University Press, 2025), p. 2.

⁷⁹ Bonds, p. 3.

music, we cannot at the same instant be conscious of it as an object,
and if we are aware of it as an object, we cannot be lost in it.⁸⁰

Now, speaking or writing in language may have reflective and non-reflective aspects. But what we usually call meaning is reflective by origin. So, it would make sense, in following Bonds, to say that resonance and meaning-making cannot coincide.

The limitations of the ineffability debate, however, have not allowed the idea of hearings to develop, in the sense in which it was introduced by Guck and has been advanced in this paper. Because if one adopts the view that the pre-linguistic or the non-textual either don't exist, or that they are irrelevant to research and maybe even to thought in general, then one has no incentive to find that which may bridge the resonant and the reflective. A radical separation between these areas, the drastic and the gnostic, finds itself in a similar situation. Indeed, even in Nancy's terms, while listening and hearing are mutually exclusive as modes of being, they are not entirely disconnected. And the idea of hearings (and feelings) as emerging from resonant listening could not develop if this radical separation is maintained throughout.

That some connection exists between resonance and reflection, the drastic and the gnostic, or a term that mediates between them, seems to me undeniable not just based on music theory, but also musical practice. To hear-as is just as fundamental to performance as resonant listening. Yet the difference between them is just as apparent. And so, it would require a consistent and focused effort, perhaps with the help of perspectives from various disciplines and traditions of thinking (about) music, to secure a rigorous account of this relationship.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing exploration has illuminated the interplay between listening and hearing in musical study, arguing that musicology must account for both the resonance of lived musical experience and the interpretative frameworks of analysis. Building on Marion Guck's notion of *hearings* as significative units, and their corresponding feelings within the listening subject, as well as Jean-Luc Nancy's phenomenology of listening as *resonant openness*, the paper argues for a musical understanding that is fundamentally relational. In this view, *musical sense* does not rest in the

⁸⁰ Bonds, p. 4.

music alone or the listener alone, but in a resonant relation between them—a moment of ‘fundamental resonance’ where subject and object participate equally in sense.

Crucially, this resonant sense cannot be fully captured in the language of analysis; it is, in Nancy’s terms, unsignifiable in itself. And yet, as musicologists, we traffic in signification—identifying motifs, harmonic functions, formal structures, topical meanings, and social contexts. The seeming paradox is that analysis requires distance, an objectification of music, whereas *resonant listening* collapses distance, embedding the self in sound. This tension is not a flaw to be resolved so much as a condition to be understood. Throughout musicological history, analysts have often been inspired by an intuitive, felt encounter with music. They then strive to translate that encounter into discourse, bending existing concepts or inventing new ones to communicate what was heard as meaningful. In doing so, they inevitably create a new construct—an analysis or interpretation—that lives its own life, somewhat apart from the ephemeral experience that seeded it. The ‘other reality’ we create in analysis can never fully replicate the experiential moment of listening, as Gernot Gruber eloquently observes. This gap, however, is exactly where musicology can focus its critical attention.

Rather than treating resonance as methodologically irrelevant, we can recognize it as the background of musical meaning—the core of experience from which hearings emerge. The task, then, is not to make resonance into a criterion of validity, but to develop a musicological practice more self-aware about its epistemological modes. In practical terms, this means acknowledging whether a given analysis stems from lived musical intuition, from a reflective construct, or—as is often the case—from a mixture of both. Such reflexivity may clarify the different ways in which analyses are made. Multiple readings of the same work may diverge not only because they operate within different paradigms of signification, but because they originate in different relations to listening itself. Both resonantly grounded and more detached interpretations can yield insight, but they are constructed differently—and being conscious of that difference enriches analytic discourse.

By bridging resonance and reflection, we also find a way past unfruitfully antagonistic debates on the nature of music and interpretation, that quite often carry significant epistemological baggage that transcends the discussion at hand. The phenomenology of musical listening outlined here suggests that these are distinct domains, that may nonetheless be linked in certain interpretative frameworks. Musical insight often germinates from

the drastic immediacy of lived experience and maintains a mnemonic closeness to it, while developing into a more gnostic articulation and eventually theory. The article promotes the acknowledgement that in certain cases both have a role to play in musicological research.

Musical resonance is not supposed to be an object of study of musicology *per se*, but it is a prerequisite for making sense of musical 'hearings', the significative units that make up a large part of music analysis. It accounts for our involvement in music and articulates the constitutive role of this involvement for musical sense. Far from intending to impose perplexing philosophical antinomies on musicology, I have tried to show how an account of listening, inspired by Nancy's philosophy, may help us bridge the seemingly incommensurable opposition between resonance and reflection, drastic and gnostic.