Affect Theory and the Politics of Ambiguity: Liminality, Disembodiment, and Relationality in Music

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Music in the Graduate School of Duke University

2014
ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

Affect as the unpredictable sensation of cultural sound and music has risen to the attention of musicology. However, there has yet to be a full-length musicological study on the subject, and extant work has not always convincingly demonstrated how affect theory can bring new light to a close hearing of music. This dissertation develops an analytical method that supports an ontology of ambiguity, which can be read as the site of politics—that is to say, politics need not always be based on distinct articulations of identity, stereotype, or context. A “politics of ambiguity” is exemplified in case studies of affect in contemporary works by European, American and Singaporean composers. Against studies of intercultural music that have focused on narratives of power relations (e.g. orientalism, postcolonial ambivalence), a new method of interpretation can be based on the affective ambiguity that arises from intercultural encounters, indicating a less than totalitarian power and thus forming a basis for political struggle. The focus is on three pieces of music by American-born John Sharpley, Belgium-born Robert Casteels, and Singaporean Joyce Koh, who hail from across the globe and incorporate Asian musics, arts, and philosophies into a variety of modernist, neo-romantic, and postmodern musical idioms. Modalities of ambiguity include: perceptual focus on musicalized Chinese calligraphy strokes, versus perceptual liminality arising from modernist technique; the musical embodiment of Buddhist disembodiment; and, ambiguous relationality of intercultural sounds. Liminality, disembodiment, and relationality mark the cessation of identity politics in favor of a form of cultural studies that pays heed to the complex interaction between society, sonic media and the neurophysiology of listening.
DEDICATION

To my family, friends, colleagues, mentors, and everyone in my life who have shown me the promise and perils of affect and ambiguity.
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INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first century scholarship has witnessed the ignition of scientific curiosity in the humanities, leading to a so-called “posthumanism” that disrupts the boundaries of human subjectivity by embracing a continuum of matter across organic and inorganic, human and animal.¹ For musicology, this refers to the perhaps mundane fact that listeners, performers and other participants are affected perceptually, emotionally, kinesthetically, and neurophysiologically by music. The heterogeneity of musically-involved, sonic and bodily matter can be captured in the term “movement”—both visible to the naked eye and also on the level of microscopic particles identified in the neurophysiology of perception and feeling. That macroscopic musical movement exists seems fairly obvious from watching musical performers and listeners, while the movement of microscopic particles can be grasped by consciousness as impressions of perception and feeling. The primary achievement of a posthumanist perspective is obviously not in the invention of sound, body, or consciousness. However, by attending to ways of articulating reality in other than traditional humanist terms, posthumanism does offer new crucial insights. Affect theory as the more feeling-oriented study of both living and non-living matter is hospitable to posthumanism, and music is the domain to which affect is applied in this dissertation.²

¹ The dominant strand of posthumanism is called “new materialisms.” See Diana Coole and
² Not all studies of affect are posthumanist, but the field does embrace posthumanism. See e.g. the analysis of bodies as bio-information for organ harvesting in Patricia Clough, “The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies,” in Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth eds., The Affect Theory Reader (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 206-228. On movement
It is common sense that music somehow comprises an intimate relation between sound and body—a relation which marks none other than musical “affect,” defined (for now) as the perception-based feeling of changing sonic and bodily matter. But the problematic therein lies in the conjunction of musical sound and body. The bodily or embodied nature of musical “movement”—a broad term encompassing modulation in performance, listening, perception, and feeling—is not a new discovery. As a focal point of study, the body has often implied its various performativities in social context. The vagaries of bodily experience has been described in feminist, queer, and performance studies of music. In spite of variegated studies of the body as both a node in the larger sociocultural fabric and/or as an expression of inner experience, however, the particularity of musical sound has not been adequately described. The majority of authors have proceeded using other than the terms of sonority, relying instead on the visuality, sexuality, sociality, and phenomenology of the body, often drawing on metaphors and/or aspects of psychoanalysis. The methodological problematic that has to be dealt with is the limitations of the “all too human” nature of the body. Or, to adopt a more political stance, what is the body’s potential, especially from the post-humanist perspective of affect theory?

in relation to affect, see Brian Massumi, Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
One answer to this may be found in the new field of sound studies, a sonic complement to the multifaceted analyses in visual studies of cultures beyond what may be called “high art.”\(^5\) The posthuman body is now located in a vast network of sonic technologies and environments, and machines and noises. Yet this expanded purview leaves us still with the question of the sound of that which is conventionally recognized as “music.”\(^6\) To be clear, our problem is not a lack of studies on musical sound; music theory and perception are established fields with copious literature. Rather, the lacuna consists in posthumanist, affective studies of musical sound in terms of feelings. Posthumanist affect is poised against the humanist lens of identity politics, for material music is more than the identity imposed on it. Although affects may encompass those already well described by the literature on musical emotion, the various chapters of this dissertation pose questions of affects that dissolve the human subject as a discrete unit, in the spirit of a posthumanism which exceeds the traditional boundaries of the human. Instead, I ask questions about relationality, disembodiment, and liminality. In other words, subject position is made indistinct, irrelevant, and ambiguous. The politics of ambiguity consists in the articulation of a way of moving in the world not by assuming this or that identity, but by complexifying identity into myriad relations, processes of coming into or emerging out of identities, and even making the question of what to call oneself irrelevant by focusing instead on the ontologically liminal—that which has yet to come or yet to be known. The onus of ambiguous affect is that of political survival.

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We live in times when human existence appears to be determined by forces beyond the control of any one individual—instrumental reason, neoliberalism, postmodernism, and materiality. In many theories, these forces are deemed to have universal implication, overpowering the puny human, who is most often represented as a well-defined “identity”—as if empirical humans do nothing but express that form. While musical affect is not the Messiah, I hope that the following pages offer an alternative politics of ambiguity that reminds us that we do have some measure of agency within the complex web of changing relations that make up the material world in which musical sound and listening bodies are found. Somewhere between affect and sound waves, the promise of the future may be discerned.
1) Politics of Ambiguity: Against Narratives
Politics of Ambiguity: Against Narratives

Ambiguity is perhaps a strange political strategy. For those committed to rational discourse, clarity and logical coherence will seem to be the only way forward. Ambiguity about what course of action to take is deemed time-wasting and unproductive. Evasive answers, one suspects, are due to ignorance. Being other than fully known in all its particularity, ambiguity provokes cultural resistance perhaps because of the intimation that the unknown could be dangerous, immoral, embarrassing, or criminal. The efficacy of being unknown has been proven in crime, military strategy, guerilla warfare, and terrorism. The private place of the unknown is also the repository of sexual experiences in relation to which shame is felt.

Despite the normative cultural evaluation of the unknown or uncertain as negative, however, it is also valued as a poststructural epistemological corrective to assertions about the stability or universality of knowledge. On a more quotidian level, uncertainty is experienced in the indecision over a menu, split allegiances to family members and friends, and multiple strategic racial, gender, and sexual identifications. My aim in this dissertation is to re-evaluate ambiguity as a modality of politics that is afforded by musical affect.

As a start, the most intuitive definition of ambiguity is the ontological mixture of the known and the unknown. The unknown is uncertain and therefore usually provokes unease. However, it is our ability to discern unknowability which points the way out of the box of what is politically possible. Against the heterogeneity of the known and unknown in ambiguity stands homogeneous paradigms of isomorphism between music
and other cultural forms (i.e. music has the same structure as language, discourse, or context), which I object to for three reasons. First, in homogenous epistemologies, which usually privilege the extra-musical as the arbiter of what music “is,” the particularity of music cannot be discerned. On the one hand, this leads to an amplification of musicology’s reliance on external disciplines, while contributing minimally to interdisciplinary conversations. On the other hand, homogeneity may lead to a reduction of the heterogeneity of musical form and musical experience. My second objection is that the insistence on homogeneity could be read as normative in nature and hostile to valid skepticism about the stability and universality of knowledge. Most importantly, the insistence on homogeneity forecloses any possibility of historical change or the emergence of the new. Orientalist critique, for example, is unable to provide an account of cultural references as anything other than awful stereotypes.

Stereotype is a premise for deconstructive musicological work, which may therefore have the unintended effect of reinforcing essentialization by reiterating stereotype (albeit to later undo it), directing attention away from the ambiguity of the negotiation of identity. Musicians, composers, and audiences are affected by conflicting sociopolitical forces that shape identity, and it is the ambiguity of this scenario which allows for some limited escape from imposed stereotype, perhaps by temporarily aligning oneself with others, and also through parody, flat denial, or a poker face. While identity and even stereotype can be adopted for pragmatic ends, they also have the side effect of creating the impression of permanence, leading to a mismatch between the fixed label and the ambiguous substance of identity.
I am intrigued by the fact that those who are daily confronted with stereotypes seem to be more interested in actively escaping identity than in evangelizing in the vein of anti-stereotype critique, which I have personally observed in informal contexts to be the tendency of whites. The logic drawn from this is that those who are most likely to view others as others may also be the ones most committed to ethical anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic speeches, all of which necessarily articulate stereotypes as a premise for critique. A critique based on the primacy of heterogeneity, on the other hand, would be aimed at strictures of homogeneity that have been imposed in the form of musical unity, or music’s isomorphism or sameness with stereotype, identity, language and context, as if music has no particularity beyond these cultural markers. Rather than the certainty of knowledge, knowing that you don’t know could be a political stance that opens up uniformly imposed oppression to a different future.

Admittedly, ambiguity is a distinctly First World form of politics premised on identity, but it does have purchase both in the West and other parts of the world for which the ravages of war and poverty are largely a matter of history. Ambiguity, understood politically, is a means of loosening one’s footholds in social identity, thereby disrupting the entire social order. Because the musical ambiguity—whether in terms of perception or feeling—is aesthetic in nature, it reaches the very heart of musical experience. This is a dissertation about the ambiguity of affect in intercultural new music, pursued through music analysis and affect theory. The methodological thrust in each of my three main chapters is to elucidate how perception and feeling negotiate cultural narratives, where “narrative” is conceived in the broadest possible sense of “conceptual language,” encompassing stories, philosophies, identities, and stereotypes. Ambiguity in musical
perception and feeling generates new intercultural narratives that contradict pre-existing ones.

The study of ambiguity is focused on three pieces of music by American-born John Sharpley (*Emptiness*, based on the Buddhist tenet), Belgium-born Robert Casteels (*L’autre fille aux cheveux de Bali*, incorporating gamelan and Chinese musics), and Singaporean and IRCAM alumnus Joyce Koh (*TAI*, musicalizing Chinese calligraphy strokes), who hail from across the globe and incorporate Asian musics, arts, and philosophies into their distinctive neo-romantic, postmodern, and modernist musical idioms (respectively). These works, all premiered in 2002 in Singapore and London (*TAI*’s UK premiere), exceed most Western works in the escalation of hybridity, and in the understanding of Asian aesthetics and philosophies. The oeuvres of all three composers reflect their involvement in multiple global sites in Asia, Australia, North America, and Europe.

The methodological concept of ambiguity in this dissertation is derived from a consideration of affect theory, which emphasizes the incremental modulation of bodily states (perception, feeling) in relation to the (sonic) environment, as outlined in chapter 2. I explore ambiguity as both multivalence (undefined valency of defined alternatives) and *indistinction* (non-definition). The paradox of “narrative of indistinction” elucidates the split nature of affect that, in spite of its material existence as a state of the organic body, has to be articulated in narrative. That is to say, affect has to cross the divide between two independently existing spheres: a bodily state that is not necessarily tied fully to consciousness and hence is “indistinct” (e.g. numbness), and consciousness itself, which sustains conceptual language.
Following a brief account of musical interculturalism in new music since 1900, this introduction will proceed to an analysis of non-Western modernity, before reviewing narrative-types used in the academic study of music. “New music,” broadly defined, will refer to any aspect of high art music since 1900, since the music I discuss will range from modernism to postmodernism (with quotation and/or irony), and from avant-gardism to pastiche and neo-romanticism; “avant-garde” is taken to mean any form of vanguard fringe practice that subverts normative expectations of tonality or convention.

Interculturalism’s list of illustrious adherents stretch from Debussy to Boulez, John Cage, Kaija Saariaho and Tan Dun, covering myriad musical movements of the twentieth and now twenty-first century. Interpretation is, of course, a part of the reception of this repertoire, but my first order of business here is to outline its musical features, leaving cultural critique to the subsequent sections of this introduction. Rather than a chronological approach, which will demonstrate the expected increase of expertise in non-Western musics in subsequent generations of composers, the following history of musical interculturalism will proceed via three categories: philosophy, aesthetics, and musical syncretism. This approach has the advantage of allowing the reader to situate the works discussed in this dissertation—three works performed in Singapore and London in 2002—in terms of musical-artistic, rather than chronological or geographical position.

Early to mid-twentieth century incidences of interculturalism in Debussy, Ravel, Colin McPhee, Michael Tippett, Britten, and others have been described in detail elsewhere, and so the present survey will focus on music composed since then. Of note 1 The most detailed historical account of interculturalism in music can be found in Mervyn Cooke, Britten and the Far East: Asian Influences in the Music of Benjamin Britten (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 1-22. See also Yayoi Uno Everett, “Intercultural Synthesis in
at the midcentury was John Cage’s conceptualization of 4’33” (1952) in accordance with the Buddhist principle of disembodiment, a theme which runs through his output and serves as the cornerstone of understanding for his practice of indeterminacy. This philosophical outlook influenced later works such as Ryoanji (1983), which departs from the pure ideal of emptiness and instead incorporates the musical sound of instruments.

Another strand of influence comes from the Taoist text I-Ching, which formalist aspect is displayed in the matching of patterns formed by the throwing of either three coins or fifty yarrow sticks with the sixty-four hexagrams that comprise the text. Whereas the I-Ching was used in chance procedures by Cage in Ryoanji, it was also the basis for the derivation of a serial system in the music of Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung in pieces such as Metaphors (1960). The impact of ancient Asian philosophical systems can be traced in the development of varied abstract musical processes and musical works that are only indirectly analogous to the source of inspiration—chance and serialism are distinct methods with characteristic musical results that do not match with the traditional interpretations of Asian philosophical texts.

Alongside philosophical influences, concepts from non-Western aesthetics can be discerned in the intercultural repertoire. It could be argued that ma, the silent interval between sounds, is a concept relevant to Takemitsu’s November Steps (1967), and that gi or flow is discerned in Isang Yun’s Clarinet Quintet No. 1 (1983). Kaija Saariaho’s Six Japanese Gardens (1994) evokes the finely tuned visual aesthetics of gardens through

Postwar Western Art Music,” in idem. and Frederick Lau eds., Locating East Asia in Western Art Music (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 1-21.
post-spectralist technique. Beyond actual borrowings from non-Western philosophy or aesthetics, the idea of the other has also inspired musical renderings. Tan Dun’s *Paper Concerto* (2003) utilizes sounds emanating from the tearing of large scrolls of paper suspended midair, placing cultural focus on the Chinese invention of paper and the paper-based arts of painting and calligraphy. There are many ways in which aspects of traditional visual, performing, and musical art forms can translate into intercultural new music.

More musically-focused borrowings have drawn on the timbre, pitch systems, or general impression of non-Western music. Jon Hassell’s world music album *Dream Theory of Malaya* (1981) uses electronic sounds to create a pan-Asian portrayal of gongs and winds. The shimmering timbre of gamelan gongs (with its characteristic beating) has inspired Steve Reich’s *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (1976), while the percussive aspects of timbres found in non-Western music generally influenced Boulez’s *Le marteau sans maître* (1955). More extensive borrowings include the embedding of non-Western musics within the chromatic meta-language of Kagel’s *Die Stücke der Windrose* (1988-94) as well as the inverse in Lou Harrison’s *Double Concerto* (1981-2), where the Western instruments violin and cello are embedded in Javanese gamelan orchestra. The latter’s *Pacifika Rondo* (1963) shares with other early postwar works the compositional method of imitating non-Western musics, e.g. Henry Cowell’s arrangements in *Persian Set* (1957) and Britten’s gamelan pastiche in *Prince of the Pagodas*.4

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Within a modernist-driven academic framework, philosophical, aesthetic, and musical abstraction has generally been more highly valued than musical imitation or quotation of non-Western musics. Moreover, the more obvious examples of musical borrowing are more susceptible to accusations of imperialist appropriation and exoticism because of the clarity of reference. Abstraction, on the other hand, earns the amnesty dispensed by apparent cultural neutrality. These and other issues of cultural criticism will be explored later—important as they are, it is also necessary to pay heed to the musical-artistic features of the repertoire in question, which has drawn on the philosophy, aesthetics, and musics of other cultures.

As the present survey has shown, interculturalism is a distinct and vibrant thread of musical history. The next section will cleave out a non-Western modernity from Western modernity, elucidating the cultural backdrop for intercultural new music of the non-West through the case of Singapore.

I. Non-Western Modernity

It is no coincidence that East Asia, which is the subject of the vast majority of the relevant publications on intercultural music in the non-West (see chapter 3 part 1), is also the region which has embarked on the most pervasive and perhaps invasive forms of state-sponsored Westernization programs in economics, politics and culture, dating from

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the nineteenth century to the present. Though Singapore has a unique history, it has in a circuitous manner arrived—in perhaps unacceptably broad terms—at the same general cultural state as East Asia. Contextualization is paramount, of course, but there is also a need to recognize comparative similarities where they arise. Broadly speaking, then, the history of the countries under discussion is characterized by the strategic, state-sponsored embrace of Western culture, politics, and technology, which has resulted in massive changes in the material and affective lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Apart from broad similarities, Singapore does differ from its East Asian counterparts in two crucial ways. Firstly, it is obviously located in the middle of the Malay Archipelago. Together with massive Chinese influx since the nineteenth century, there has also been sizable migration from surrounding countries and from India, with the result that state rhetoric has been tailored to the fact of a population comprising approximately three-quarters Chinese citizens, with Malay and Indian minorities of at least 13 and 6 percent respectively for the last four decades. A second difference from East Asia is that Singapore at the time of British colonization in the early nineteenth century was still a fishing village with a population of around one thousand. Singapore’s ideal location at the southern tip of the landmass of the Asian continent meant that it would flourish as a port serving trade routes between Europe and East Asia, a development which brought hundreds of thousands of merchants and laborers over the course of more than a century, but not an entire class of literati. The Singapore Symphony Orchestra was established only in 1979, and new music is a phenomenon that

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arose in the 1980s. In contrast, Western and Westernized musical practices in East Asia emerged much earlier with the Meiji Restoration in Japan (1868-1912)—which effect was felt in Korea through Japanese occupation (1876-1945)—and the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Both Japanese and Chinese revolutions involved national self-examination in relation to the aggressive colonialism of the West, prompting modernization movements. I am brought to the topic at hand because of my own life history, having been a participant in the musical life of Singapore through many years as both student and teacher in high schools. But I am also drawn to what I discern as a deep-seated, clandestine ambiguity that exists in intercultural new music, which incorporates aspects of usually one traditional musical genre. (Some composers explore two or more traditional musics, and/or Asian arts and philosophies.) The rhetoric surrounding artistic hybridity in interculturalism ranges from critiques of stereotypes of the timeless Orient to narratives of liberation from such stereotyping through avant-gardism, from colonial hegemony to postcolonial resistance, and from Westernization to localization. But I have an inkling that these hermeneutics, narratives, and discourses—often situated primarily on one pole of the rhetorical spectrum—are too distinct and too sure of themselves to be an accurate reflection of what music does to us. My argument is that an ambiguity of intercultural affect coheres with and can even subvert the relatively limited ambiguity of

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the broader social scene in which Westernization is refracted through multiple exigencies of nation, race, and diaspora.

Intercultural new music is uniquely poised to answer the question of the continuing cultural influence of the West, a question which has often been evaded in studies of the non-West that focus on more or less “indigenous” musics. There are three principle reasons why new music remains emblematic of the West. Firstly, new music remains marginal wherever it is practiced and thus cannot be said to enter global commodity circuits governed by the lowest common denominator of the taste of the masses. Secondly, new music clearly still enjoys the greatest institutional support in the West and thus cannot be described as a truly “global” phenomenon, in contrast with the international success of pop rock, which today encompasses production and reception in a multitude of world languages. Third, the modernist branch of new music, assuming the position of the vanguard (defined perennially and dialectically in relation to popular mass music movements that expanded in tandem with the spread of capitalism), articulates a distinctively Boulezian, distinctively Western-developmentalist discourse encapsulated in the composer’s iconoclastic slogan “Schoenberg is Dead.”⁸ (Although this dissertation deals with new music rather than modernism specifically, it will become apparent that the latter is crucial to the formulation of the non-West’s image, and the vast majority of Singaporean composers of repute can be described in some sense or other as modernists.)

⁸ See Pierre Boulez, “Schoenberg Is Dead” (1952), in Bryan Simms ed., Composers on Modern Musical Culture: An Anthology of Readings on Twentieth-Century Music (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999), 145-151. Beyond the musical specifics of Boulez’s essay and Schoenberg’s reception history, the crux of the matter here is that Boulez’s intention in writing the article is to ignite musical progress by slaying new music’s purported Laius.
Relentless development in both its economic and musical forms historically originated in the West, but the global spread of this cultural mode has also been observed in East Asian countries that were quick to latch onto and implement development in a hurry. (In contrast, other parts of the world were and are markedly less enthusiastic about it.) While contemporary globalized identity both in and outside East Asia is undeniably veering towards a hybridity of “modernity” and “tradition,” there is a tendency for the elements of the hybrid to separate out like oil and water. This identity is commonly formulated in the vernacular imagination as a dialectic of implicitly Western, dynamic elements of development—signified by such terms such as “globalization” and “modernization”—and explicitly non-Western, static elements of race, ethnicity and tradition. For instance, the notion of Western-derived innovation as a critique or defilement of tradition in the experimental Balinese genre of *music kontemporer* for gamelan implicitly reflects the static/dynamic logic.\(^9\) In certain domains, it is arguably more logical to maintain that development is an anonymous, local, or non-Western factor, e.g. in relation to liberal democracy or capitalism as “neutral” phenomena. But even in those latter examples, Western countries are generally still regarded as paradigmatic models, having incubated these practices for the longest period of time. More to the point, the question of authorship is not at play in socioeconomic trends, as it is with new music, which is very clearly predicated on the musical practices and conceptual apparatuses of canonic Euro-American composers.

The conceptual framework of East versus West has fallen out of use because of objections against the simplistic oppositional dualism. Indeed, the dynamic/static

differentiation of the two terms smacks of classic orientalist thought, which was theorized as a pervasive Western practice by Edward Said.\textsuperscript{10} Contemporary scholarly opinion, in contrast, is driven towards paradigms that emphasize non-Western agency, the dynamic quality of morphing cultures,\textsuperscript{11} and \textit{modernities} in the plural.\textsuperscript{12} Narratives of empowerment and transformation have replaced the old-fashioned model of a frozen East versus progressing West, and Bruno Latour’s \textit{We Have Never Been Modern} is especially instructive in undeceiving us of that hoary dichotomy. Modernity, Latour argues, is an elaborate discursive hoax premised on the purity of science, nature, and God, when each of these terms is also hybridized with social ends when an utilitarian need arises.\textsuperscript{13} (Some examples that come to mind include the uninhibited pursuit of nuclear technology as a “purely” scientific venture, the devastating despoilation of nature as if it were an alien element that has no impact whatsoever on human existence, and appropriation of God by politicians to pragmatically and cynically consolidate their campaign platforms.)

Bringing Latour’s theory to bear on music in Latin America, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier demonstrates the discursive purification of traditional music, versus its strategic hybridization with avant-garde practices in the attempt to cleave out a space in the high prestige stage of Western high art;\textsuperscript{14} pure tradition and hybridizing high art express a dichotomy which evinces what I would describe as the dialectically related stereotypes of unchanging tradition versus vanguardist dynamism.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Arjun Appadurai, \textit{Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization} (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
If Latour were right—if we have, in fact, “never been modern”—static tradition and progressive modernity, and the concomitant genres of traditional and modernist musics, would then be part of some elaborate, operational hoax. It is necessary for us to address both terms of the dichotomies, which means that there is a pedagogical value in de-hybridizing intercultural new music into the developmentalist, vanguardist, Western component, and the stationary, traditional, non-Western component, in order to observe the underlying structure of ideology. Simultaneously, the evident hybridity of both components causes a degree of ambiguity to enter into the ideological narrative.  

This dissertation, with its focus on Singaporean music, departs from prior studies of non-Western composers domiciled in the West or symbolically Westernized through association with canonic figures. Two relatively known composers, Isang Yun and Tan Dun, have been residents in Germany and the United States respectively. Toru Takemitsu was based in Japan, but he was “discovered” by John Cage, who was instrumental in the dissemination of the former’s music in the West. By focusing on composers in non-Western countries who remain outside the Western new music circuit, I wish to draw out non-Western exigencies. For example, the multicultural Singaporean context is a local microcosm of globalization in the twenty-first century as cultural paradigms cease to be modeled purely along the East/West axis, are increasingly intra-Asian in character, or simply escape cultural pigeon-holing. As a result, traditional music comes to play a role larger than that of mere tradition.

15 See e.g. the notion of “new” Chinese music as essentially Chinese in spite of its Western garb, and modern in spite of its incorporation of tradition in Barbara Mittler, Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), passim 126-387.
In spite of the continued impact of Western culture, studies of non-Western art forms should not focus solely on Westernization. With an influx of Western-trained composers returning to postcolonies to build their careers, there has now been for some time a material trace of scores and recordings from which a concert music history that “provincializes” the presumptive universality of West may be written. The significance of a history of postcolonial composition lies in the special nature of new music, which has a flexibility of work-length, performing forces, and musical form that facilitates the imagination of identities and sociocultural orders. New music has a unique voice because in spite of relative insulation from the music industry, it is nevertheless enmeshed ambiguously within globally distributed narratives on race and culture, replicating, resisting, and even erasing them. Musical identities and cultural orders are significant because they are not merely fictional but the progeny of the “global imaginary,” the ubiquitous imagining of selves and others across the globe. My goal in this dissertation is to rethink the imagination of the modern and traditional, dynamic and static, local and global, and Western and non-Western, through affect. Before diverting from narrative to affect, however, there remains the task of fully elaborating on the three dominant causality-, autonomy-, and ambiguity-narratives of interculturalism. The next few sections will necessarily range far and wide out of non-Western modernity, since there is limited literature on the latter.

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17 Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 31, 139-200.
II. Narratives of Causality

Narratives of causality assume that sociocultural structure as expressed in the discourse of e.g. orientalism determines the available subject positions in reality. Discursive figures such as stereotypes are therefore taken to be intimately related to imperialist military practice. This is an exemplary poststructuralist position, in which literary text exceeds itself and becomes context. Musical texts (scores, recordings) are understood in the same way—as exceeding the boundaries of the work of art and becoming congruent with reality by “causing” it. This body of literature is perhaps exemplified in Matthew Head’s work on Turkish figures in Mozart’s music. He discerns an Enlightenment form of orientalism, grounded in rationality (rather than racial ideology), which informs Austro-Hungarian attitudes towards the Ottoman empire. Because of the purported power of musical figures of the Other, Head has found it necessary to take Jonathan Bellman (editor) and other writers in The Exotic in Western Music to task for not recognizing the causal relation between the realms of “the musical” and “culture and ideology.”

Head’s methodological trajectory is shared by other authors. Timothy Taylor argues that the emergence of diatonic tonality afforded a way of mapping modal others, who had become the subject of intense musical scrutiny ever since the imperial period of

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19 Said, Orientalism, 138.
21 Matthew Head, Orientalism, Masquerade and Mozart's Turkish Music (London: Royal Music Association, 2000), 8.
radical global expansion (around 1875-1914). A volume of essays edited by Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon finds a balance between examining British representations of India, and actual encounters with Indian musicians and artistes that informed the construction of those representations. Of special relevance to the topic of intercultural new music is John Corbett’s study of a wide range of composers including John Cage, Steve Reich, Jon Hassell, Henry Cowell, and Tan Dun, the last of whom (in Corbett’s view) subscribes to orientalist stereotypes in spite of his ethnicity. Examining other forms of stereotypes of the Other than orientalist ones, Gary Tomlinson and Olivia Bloechl reconstruct respectively the lost music of Aztec and Native American song from the written European record of colonial encounters.

The anti-orientalist critique of music, pursued in the above studies, has been explicitly or implicitly rejected by other writers, who subscribe to a different form of causality-narrative. In the latter, music retains its strictly fictive nature so that it cannot “cause” reality, i.e. reality has no causal relation with music. Perhaps the exemplary articulation of this position is made by Bellman, who argues that exoticism is to be

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valued for allowing us access to the “elemental” passions of sexuality or violence etc.\textsuperscript{27} Several chapters in \textit{The Exotic in Western Music} describe exotic representations without pointed critique. Miriam Whaples’ study of early exoticism (primarily 1600-1800), for instance, examines exotic figures of the operatic stage in detail without referring to imperialist aggression, and thus appears to be implicitly supportive of exoticism.\textsuperscript{28} In both anti-orientalist and aestheticist narratives, the Other is, by and large, the mere effect of a Western cause.\textsuperscript{29}

\section*{III. Narratives of Autonomy}

Dissatisfied with the petrified version of the Other found in casuality-narratives, scholars in the emancipatory tradition of academia have endowed her with the autonomy to resist, embrace, or even flourish in the face of power. Writing against essentialist notions of authenticity, Deborah Wong examines Asian-American music-making across several genres, emphasizing how a history of marginalization and political self-assertion constitute resistance against the majority race.\textsuperscript{30} African-American music and dance is also understood to bespeak agency and resistance in the face of oppression.\textsuperscript{31} Through the notion of liveness in South African music, Louise Meintjes assesses how dominant stereotypes of African corporeal vitality are (unknowingly) embraced by studio

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\textsuperscript{28} Miriam Whaples, “Early Exoticism Revisited,” in Bellman, \textit{The Exotic in Western Music}, 3-25.
\textsuperscript{29} It has been argued that Mozart subverted orientalism while invoking it. See Lawrence Kramer, “Music, Cultural Mixture, and the Aesthetic,” in \textit{The World of Music} 45 (2003), 17.
\textsuperscript{31} See e.g. essays by Hunter and Smith et. al. in Philip Bohlman and Ronald Michael Radano eds., \textit{Music and the Racial Imagination} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Tera Hunter, “‘Sexual Pantomimes,’ the Blues Aesthetic, and Black Women in the New South,” 145-166; Christopher Holmes Smith and John Fiske, “Naming the Illuminati,” 605-621.
\end{flushleft}
musicians, who have appropriated this discourse to resist white producers and engineers.\textsuperscript{32} Also adopting the concept of embracing the dictates of power, Amanda Weidman writes about the appropriation of the Western conservatory system for Carnatic music in South India, while Andrew Jones focuses on the incorporation of jazz and Hollywood idioms in Chinese popular music in the interwar years.\textsuperscript{33} Focusing largely on local exigencies, such that the relation with the West is no longer the organizing methodological principle, Barbara Mittler has studied new music in mainland China, as well as in the differentiated contexts of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau.\textsuperscript{34} There is a progression in cited studies, where the figure of white or Western power incrementally diminishes in size, until we reach perhaps the epitome of autonomy-narratives in a volume of essays edited by Kip Lornell and Anne Rasmussen. These essays adopt the rhetoric of laudatory diversity, wherein each minority is understood to be flourishing under the benign eye of the American nation.\textsuperscript{35}

The evaporation of power is also observed in globalist and formalist discourses. Marcus Cheng studies sound and music in intercultural theater, arguing that orientalist stereotypes have been disrupted by the proliferation of specific, differentiated Asian cultural references (by ethnicity, by nationality) in recent productions in Singapore.\textsuperscript{36} A similar globalist, anti-orientalist rhetoric is employed by Amy Bauer, who argues that

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\textsuperscript{34} Mittler, \textit{Dangerous Tunes}.
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György Ligeti’s incorporation of Balinese gamelan music in the piano piece *Galamb Borong* (from *Études* Bk 2, 1988-94) is indicative of a “cosmopolitanist” world view, in which tradition is detached from its origins and absorbed into a global arena, rather than fetishized as Other.37

From a formalist perspective, Yayoi Uno Everett discerns three categories of intercultural avant-gardism: transference (imaginary impressions of traditional music, associated with exoticism), syncretism (incorporation of traditional musical elements, resulting in multivalence), and synthesis (resolution of musical multivalence into “a distinctive Western idiom”).38 Traversing the three categories, one departs exotic approximation and advances towards greater knowledge of the music and culture of the non-Western tradition, culminating in a distillation of the essential aesthetic principles of that tradition into a unified Western idiom—the implication is that true knowledge and integration of the non-West into a “Western idiom” are intrinsic values.39 True “synthesis” implies the disappearance of intercultural multivalence, in what I would argue is the ultimate act of capitulation to the West. No longer imprisoned as exotic figure, the authentic Other, having been emancipated through the composer’s real knowledge, is now free to autonomously disappear.

Writing also on intercultural avant-gardism in East Asia, Christian Utz argues that the abstraction of traditional music elements result in musical autonomy—a “sound-

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38 Everett, “Intercultural Synthesis in Postwar Western Art Music,” 19.
39 There is an element of “regressive” movement across the categories in that the incorporation of an extensive knowledge of traditional music and philosophical concepts into a Western musical idiom (synthesis) versus the musical or programmatic evocation of Asia without such knowledge (transference) may not be distinguishable, as Everett recognized. Ibid., 20.
Therefore, interpretive paradigms such as exoticism, appropriation, and nationalism are inappropriate. Mervyn Cooke also avoids the interpretive framework of exoticism (although he summarizes the history of the exotic repertoire), focusing instead on how Britten incorporated his knowledge of traditional musics, acquired on trips to Bali and Japan, into compositional practice.\footnote{Utz, “Listening Attentively to Cultural Fragmentation,” 15.}

One final category of autonomy-narratives casts the academic as endower of autonomy, through methodological maneuvers. Kofi Agawu’s examination of ethnomusicological approaches to African music leads him to argue against the paradigm of difference implied by the imperative of cultural diversity, because the concept of difference has paradoxically \textit{supported} the stereotype of African music as rhythmic vitalism. Agawu is in favor of a paradigm of \textit{similarity}, which affords direct analytical activity without the supposed “red herring” of cultural appropriation.\footnote{Cooke, \textit{Britten and the Far East}. In contrast, Philip Brett interprets Britten’s exotic practice as a trope of homosexual desire. Philip Brett, “Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas,” in idem., Gary Thomas, and Elizabeth Wood eds., \textit{Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology} (New York: Routledge, 1994), 235-256.}

The figure of power varies in its size and influence in autonomy-narratives, yet the latter cohere as a group because of the central focus on the Other’s autonomous act of self-making. In addition to narratives, there are \textit{meta}-narratives of ontology in stories of formalism and hermeneutic heroism. All autonomy-narratives pursue the worthy goal of freedom for the Other, but without acknowledging that the road to utopia is showered with ambiguity.

\footnote{Kofi Agawu, \textit{Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 151-172.}
IV. Narratives of Ambiguity

The final category of ambiguity-narratives is named as such because of the multivalence that arises from a partial emancipation of the Other from power structures, such that she has begun to unravel as object of power, and yet has not achieved the full autonomy of self-making. Common to ambiguous scenarios is an acknowledgement that ambiguity arises from the contradiction between private versus public spheres, personal belief versus state ideology, power versus resistance, own-group versus Other-group, and authorial intent versus subversive listening. In other words, the focus is both on self-making and how the self is made, recognizing the persistence of both power and agency.

I will begin with generalized narratives. The psychologist Young-Min Baek has proposed that “ambivalence” arises from the split between inner belief and outer self-presentation, between competing social groups, and between competing positive and negative evaluations of different attributes of the same object.\(^43\) Homi Bhabha’s theory of “ambivalence” concerns the hybridity that emerges when the colonized embrace the dictates of colonizers, never fully complying with the latter’s command.\(^44\) Essentially adapting Bhabha’s work for a theory of listening, Paul Carter finds “ambiguous traces” in scenarios of mimicry, whereby something new emerges as one party mimetically echoes the other, but with only partial understanding.\(^45\)

In relation to social embodiment, an implicit ambiguity can be discerned in Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of a dialectic between body and social structure—bodies are

\(^{44}\) Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 102-122.
socialized into inhabiting a certain position called “habitus,” which comprises codified social behaviors of the body.\textsuperscript{46} Making that strand of ambiguity explicit, Michel de Certeau writes of how the bodily “practice of everyday life” disrupts extant social structures through “tactics.”\textsuperscript{47} De Certeau’s brand of ambiguity is musically refracted in John Shepherd’s emphasis on the creative individual negotiation of social structures.\textsuperscript{48} Theorizing on a broader scale, Mark Slobin argues for the interpenetration of local “subcultural” and large-scale “supercultural,” as well as “intercultural” forces—a scenario which I would describe as a proliferation of forces that produces ambiguity.\textsuperscript{49} I shall divide the following literature survey into ambiguity-narratives of minority, colonial, world and intercultural new musics.

In place of the paradigm of multicultural harmony between minority and majority races, Charles Garett focuses on inter-racial and inter-ethnic antagonisms, debunking facile assimilationist narratives in his revision of American national identity.\textsuperscript{50} Peter Wade describes the discursive duality of national homogeneity in Columbia—professing democratic equality—which strategically occludes and is undercut by a parallel discourse of racial heterogeneity between black coastal regions and the inland area, which reinforces racial inequality.\textsuperscript{51} Ronald Radano has written on the importance of both preserving the empowerment afforded by essentialist black identities in music, and

\textsuperscript{47} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 29-42.  
\textsuperscript{49} Mark Slobin, \textit{Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West} (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), passim 27-60.  
\textsuperscript{51} See Peter Wade, \textit{Music, Race, and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
dissolving the black/white divide in order to deconstruct stereotypes that reinforce that very division.\textsuperscript{52}

Historical studies of the colonial era include Frederic Lau’s examination of the vagaries of contextual forces on music in China, noting the early impact of Westernization followed by communism, and also the more complex interlocking factors of recent decades, which include the institution of avant-garde composition, commodity culture, orientalism, initial PRC censorship, multiculturalism, and ethnic essentialism.\textsuperscript{53} Judith Herd examines the confluence of Western and nationalist forces on avant-garde Japanese composers in the years leading up to World War II.\textsuperscript{54}

A prominent voice in the study of “world” music, Veit Erlmann argues that cultural particularity has been homogenized through the presentation of cultures as just so many flavors in the diverse palate of world music, thereby reflecting the logic of capitalist commodity production, in which difference is quantized (equalized and homogenized) into the dollar amount of exchange value.\textsuperscript{55} Yet he also examines how hybrid (“Westernized”) South African music is a local means of imagining the encounter with the West in an age of radical global contact, rather than merely an effect of a Western cause.\textsuperscript{56} John Hutnyk navigates a morass of issues including essentialist notions of authenticity, profiteering through stereotypes, and the depoliticization of race through

\textsuperscript{52} Ronald Radano, Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), passim 1-48.
\textsuperscript{53} See Frederick Lau, “Fusion or Fission: The Paradox and Politics of Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Music,” in Everett and Lau eds., Locating East Asia in Western Art Music, 22-39.
\textsuperscript{54} See Judith Herd, “The Cultural Politics of Japan’s Modern Music,” in Everett and Lau eds., Locating East Asia in Western Art Music, 40-56.
the representation of multicultural equity, arguing for a politics embedded in the incontrovertible fact of the global commoditization of race and ethnicity in world music.57 George Lipsitz and Timothy Taylor both acknowledge that world music provides opportunities for political agency while simultaneously serving capitalist interests.58

Ambiguity is also observed in narratives of the focal genre in this dissertation—intercultural new music. Björn Heile has studied how Mauricio Kagel plays on the ambiguity between the composer’s authorial voice and the voices of Others in Die Stücke der Windrose (1989-95), allowing the two strands to become musically indistinguishable, such that identity becomes a question mark.59 Samson Young has examined how ethnic composers’ authorial authority is pitted uncertainly against audiences’ expectations of ethnic stylizations. This issue is borne out in the vagaries of Tan Dun’s stated, “modernizing” intention of melding technology and ethnic tradition—thus playing into the dominance of ethnicity in intercultural discourse—coupled with his failure to execute the stated goal, presenting tradition as frozen in time instead.60 Neil Sorrell discusses the cultural significance of audience reception that arises with gamelan compositions, in relation to which the question of appropriation is raised even where great care has been

59 See Heile, “‘Transcending Quotation.’”
exercised in the study of the traditional music, and where the inaccurate use of gamelan-specific terminology has been studiously avoided.\textsuperscript{61}

Acknowledging the multivalence of complex topics, authors of ambiguity-narratives tease out divisions between inside/outside, positive/negative, powerful/powerless, self/other, individual/social, local/global, non/Western, majority/minority race, intention/reception, and subject/object.

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Having elucidated the three causality-, autonomy-, and ambiguity-narratives, I shall devote the rest of this dissertation to the exploration of how affect evinces a higher level of complexity and ambiguity. Chapter 2 examines the nature and significance of musical affect, which encompasses the bodily capacities for perception and narrative formation as well as feeling. Affect has three logics. 1) Affect is \textit{incommensurate} with narratives which either distort or are distorted by affect, and the relation between affect and narrative is one of \textit{dialectical negation} (rather than a monist interwoven-ness of affect-narrative presumed by new materialisms thinkers). Incommensurability between feeling and perception, perception and score, and narrative and perception is also observed. 2) Affect is feelingfully and perceptually \textit{multivalent} and can be measured in phenomenological terms (dis/affinity, dis/affiliation, proximity) rather than the

\footnote{Sorrell, “Issues of Pastiche and Illusions of Authenticity in Gamelan-Inspired Composition,” 40-42.}
mathematical terms (intervals) of relationality.\textsuperscript{62} 3) Affect has \textit{material} existence in the form of neurophysiological states, which are the foundation of sentient feeling.

While postcolonial ambivalence is not exactly news anymore in musicology, I will extend the examination of the topic through an understanding of affect as the incremental modulation of musical embodiment away from the identity-polarities that constitute ambivalence in chapter 3. A focus on identity-essences (materialized in gamelan and Chinese instruments, and quotations from Debussy and Bartók) in Belgium-born Robert Casteels’ \textit{L’(autre) fille aux cheveux de Bali} (2002) reveals that ambivalence is dissolved into a soup of ambiguity that can at most be articulated as incremental shifts in relations of dis/affiliation, dis/affinity, and a/proximity. The beginning of this chapter consists of an extended exegesis of the historical and critical contexts of intercultural new music in Singapore.

Beyond the absolute negation of the composerly self in \textit{4’33”}, I examine American-born John Sharpley’s \textit{Emptiness} (2002, Singapore) in relation to the embodiment of \textit{dis}embodiment in chapter 4. Paradoxically, the negation of self, exhorted in Buddhist and Taoist texts that are set by Sharpley, is accompanied by the persistence of one’s embodied musical capacities. \textit{Emptiness or Kong} shows that disembodiment involves not the absence of embodiment, but its ambiguous transformation, tracked in the first instance through musical perception. The entwinement of perception and feeling is demonstrated through the use of the shared analytics of dis/affiliation, dis/affinity, and a/proximity. Negation through disembodiment takes the form of feeling-based narratives

\textsuperscript{62} An example of a study which uses these phenomenological terms is Sara Ahmed, \textit{The Promise of Happiness} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
of transcendence of the body and apotheosis, deconstruction of subject position, the disruptive Lacanian *jouissance*, and the ungraspable sublime.

Sublimity, understood to consist in the perception that there is something *unperceived*, can also be studied in the register of feeling, as we shall see in chapter 5. An exemplary instance of the modernist sublime, Singaporean composer Joyce Koh’s post-spectralist orchestral piece *TAI* (1998/2002) evinces sublimity in the interplay of perceptual focus in musicalized calligraphy strokes versus the perceptual liminality arising from modernist complexity; the modulating relative weight of harmonic and timbral functions; and the incomplete submergence of both functions into indistinction.

Relationality. Disembodiment. Liminality. How do these terms express affect? And what kind of ontology do they issue from? I will explore these questions in the next chapter.
2) Music and Affect Theory: From Monism to Dialectics
What is affect?

This question is hard for musicologists to answer because musical affect is so pervasive and intuitive and even embarrassing. Feelings are not always readily shared. Feelings may be inhibited or intensely negative. Expression of the feeling of sexual desire is frowned upon in the public realm. Shame is humiliating. Feelings seem to be private, and it is conventional wisdom that suppression of anti-social feelings of hate or envy is required for successful social integration. Feelings also seem to be intense and distinct, like happiness, sadness, fear or anger. Yet feelings can be mixed, mutable, confused, or ambiguous—“I’m not sure how I feel about this”; “I have mixed feelings about this.” And the expression of feelings infect others by inducing the same feelings in them, reaching billions in the age of global media. Feelings can thus hardly be exclusively private.

The aim of this chapter is to extract a politics of ambiguity out of musical affect. Because affect is infectious, it lends itself to politics by changing hearts and minds in a complex, interrelated world of media and people and their material living conditions. Because affect can be ambiguous, it can intimate as-yet-unknown possibilities for the future, rather than always being distinct, preparing the body for certain action (e.g. the fight-or-flight of fear). These two facets of affect are what distinguishes affect from feeling—affect is imbricated through and through with social context and the future of society. Musical affect is distinguished from Affektenlehre and from musical “emotion”
(the physiological state that corresponds to the mental impression called “feeling”) through an explicit sociopolitical embeddedness.¹

Musical affect is also different from its related cousins Affekt and emotion in the emphasis on the “posthuman,” by which is meant the cessation of the human as a theoretical concept. Rather than being a discrete well-defined unit with a human “identity,” posthumanity is a complex web of relations in which humans are embedded. The key term in posthumanities is thus not identity but affect. Affect connects bodies and things through perception, feeling, expression, and intersubjective transmission. Affect is posthuman because bodies are nodes in a complex material world of both organic (ears) and inorganic things (sound waves) in interaction. Bypassing the human as an autonomous unit, affect becomes a marker of the complexity of existence. Underlying the concept of affect is the development of twenty-first century ontologies in what has been called “new materialisms,” which is opposed to theories of the construction of racial, gender, sexual, class and other identities in so far as “construction” presumes human agency only. In contrast, new materialists focus on the co-constitution of human and object, concept and thing, language and matter. In so far as sound waves and listening bodies co-constitute “music,” sonic matter, too, can be said to “have” agency.² This is not to imply that sound waves possess consciousness, but that sound can tell us as much about the sociopolitical force of music as much as human intention can. This seems like a fairly obvious point, but as I will show below, the affect of sound often eclipses or is eclipsed by human intention in musicology.

² On the vital or living materialism of things, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
Musical affect as posthuman materiality should focus not on human affect as constituting human identity, but should proceed via a close examination of the vagaries of musical sound waves in conjunction with the *dissolution* of identity. What if musical affect was constantly changing and contradictory, rather than expressing a stable state of mind as with *Affekt*? What if instead of expressing an identity, music were a marker of the *loss* of identity—the unraveling of a tightly bound subject position into myriad relationalities with proliferating others (peoples, things), the unraveling or disembodiment of the affinities and affiliations that define a particular embodied identity, the eclipse of identity which leaves only liminal traces of cultural things? What if ambiguous musical affect as the marker of sonic matter turns out to have little or nothing to with the narratives of music that musicology has created?

This last question has crucial implications for the way we conceptualize the politics of affect, and, for our purposes, the politics of ambiguity. The key debate, to reduce it to the core argument, is whether there is one, or two. New materialists are opposed to ideal-material dualism, arguing instead for the interwoven nature of words and things. Words are prone to translate into material state of things; the word “hard” can cause stiffness of the neck; words expressing sadness translate into a feeling of sadness, which exists as a bodily state in conjunction with thoughts. This one continuum of word-thing is the basis on which the concept of an identity forged by arranging cultural things around oneself can be superceded. Rather, there is only the nature-culture or word-thing continuum of materiality, in which agency is relocated from an ideal identity exerting control over inert matter, to bodily existence in a material web of agential things and people. In the terms of the present study, agency is removed from identity-based
narratives of causality, autonomy, or even ambiguity (see chapter 1), and relocated in posthuman embodiment: relationality, disembodiment, and liminality.

Simple narratives of causality or autonomy belong to a class of rationality termed as “simple” objectivity, which ignores the fundamental complexity of the world. An objectivity-imbricated-with-materiality (especially media, which comprises the conjunction of audiovisual and affective-bodily matter), on the other hand, would consist in a response to the complexity of a world in which large chunks of life are officially or unofficially administered by legislation or ideology. This response is one of *disengagement* or *disembodiment* from a particular reality through paranoia about the simple objectivities or narratives of race, class, gender or sexuality presented to us. For William Connolly, this disengagement occurs within the ontology of *one* imbricated ideal-material, word-thing, narrative-body, objectivity-subjectivity continuum. Within this continuum, it is logical to assume that affect both capitulates to and resists simple objectivity or ideology. For the present study, it should be noted that affect can either conform to or resist simple narratives of causality or autonomy; these narratives are directed by ideologies of colonial or postcolonial power.

Connolly is resistant to the dualist ontology of ideal and material as there is no accounting for the mutual effect words and things have on one another. However, the political act of disengagement presumes the possibility of twoness at least on the descriptive level (from engagement to disengagement), even if this is subsumed within the one continuum. It is thus at least arguable whether a monist ontology is preferable to a dualist one, especially if the point of all this theorizing is to effect the emergence of

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new political outcomes—in a sense, to split the one into the two. In monist terms, emergence is conceptualized as the congealing of new states within the one complex continuum of matter-narrative. But would not a dualist ontology of old and new place more emphasis on political struggle, even as it is recognized that the new emerges from the interactivity of matter-narrative? How about a dualist ontology that privileges the continual cessation of simple narratives of human causality or autonomy (the one) in favor of complex affects of relationality, disembodiment, and liminality (the two)? In addition to the duality of narrative-affect, the postulation of the duality of both the known and the unknown (see chapter 1) opens up political space simply through the ontological status of being less-than-fully-determined. While a monist continuum accounts for this partial indeterminacy through the concept of multivalent potential, out of which a concrete path is actualized, I would argue that the politics of known-unknown—the “politics of ambiguity”—articulates a point of political pressure more clearly, in the struggle to intimate and shape the as-yet-unknown (see especially chapter 5). Consider, conversely, the attempt to formulate a direct political message from the many possible paths out of which only one is actualized as the cumulative effect of multifaceted factors within the continuum of matter and culture. The elegant concept of the as-yet-unknown can be expressed in the variability of engagement versus disengagement, the indecideability of multiple valences, and the lack of full definition in indistinction.

This dissertation proceeds from the ontological basis of dualism, which departs from latter day new materialisms and instead returns to the dialectical negation implicit in

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4 For a dialectical reading of Deleuze according to the duality of the material and ideal (the new that is continually unleashed), see Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
Brian Massumi’s 1995 piece, which defines affect as “autonomous” or having an agency differentiated from that of narrative. It was the *sonority* of Ronald Reagan’s voice, Massumi argues, which provided an arresting tonality of confidence that smoothed over the jerky (discontinuous, incoherent) nature of the former president’s gestures and thoughts.  

Grounded in the concrete materiality of the body which is capable of perception and feeling, affect is autonomous in that it operates according to a different logic from narrative, which is why Reagan managed to seduce the nation with the *sound* of his voice alone. For us, the example of Reagan illustrates the three logics of affect: 1) affect is a material logic of the body; 2) affect is multiple, like Reagan’s jerks; and 3) affect is incommensurate with narrative.

As to be expected, musical affect is not without precedents in the study of music—namely, musical emotion in philosophical aesthetics, musical perception in music psychology, and sociocultural interpretations that gesture at affect without making it the central focus (more below). The literature on musical emotion is breathtakingly vast, and can even extend back to Plato, but what will be of special relevance to the materialist conception of affect is recent research into the psychology and neurophysiology of musical emotion. Michael Spitzer’s approach, for instance, is instructive because his study of emotion incorporates the measurement of the electrical conductivity of the skin (which is an indicator of emotional arousal). Furthermore, the complex modulation of emotion, tracked through music analysis, is emphasized. However, there are also tendencies towards the reduction of complexity into simple

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narratives. Standing out from a mixture of emotions that constitute the sublime, anger “epitomises” the latter and thereby renders it internally commensurable, at least partially. There is also commensurability between the structures of music and of fear (orienting-freeze-flight), which are taken to be homologous, although the more or less instantaneous nature of emotional response would seem to contradict a long drawn musical representation of its structure. Moreover, emotion appears to be socially free-floating, negating nothing. The main point to be grasped here is that insulated, causally and structurally well-defined emotion is to be distinguished from Deleuzian affect, which evinces a contrarian logic from simple narrative.

Of more recent vintage, the literature on musical perception is equally impressive in its breath and depth. For the purposes of affect, however, this prolific production remains under-utilized. It is with the recent interest in musical ambiguity, discerned decades earlier (Leonard Meyer) but left relatively untouched until a few years ago, that the intersection of perception and emotion is now observed.

In the following, my first order of business will be to demonstrate affect’s materiality, before going on to elucidate its complex, multivalent nature, and finally concluding with a demonstration of affect’s incommensurability with narratives. An expansive concept, affect refers to any and all kinds of bodily capacities measured in

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finely tuned increments, but the focus here will be on feeling and auditory perception. In poising the body for action, affect connects the past to the future, and hence affect’s multivalent incommensurability speaks to an obstinate seed of political dissent that cleaves out an open future which is less than fully determined.

I. Materiality

In a famous experiment cited by Massumi, where participants were asked to lift their finger and were monitored for brain activity, it was revealed that consciousness of the decision to perform the finger-lift was delayed by over half a second after the electrical conductance of the skin had started changing. The startling implication here is that consciousness lags behind the body rather than directing it. Alarmingly, we appear to be automatons with no will power, and consciousness appears to provide merely a posthoc account generated by the brain portion of the body, rather than being the decision-maker.

A gentler induction to the logic of the body’s material priority might begin with the observations that you are hardly conscious of bodily events on the molecular level, and that it is not necessary for you to keep thinking “breath,” or “heart beating” to stay alive. In relation to the arena of consciousness, however, the logic of materiality may encounter a fair amount of resistance. Is it your body that experiences emotion in

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10 On the “cruel optimism” afforded by this openness, see Lauren Berlant, Cruel Optimism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

listening to Bach? Or your mind that judges musical structure and derives conclusions about emotions?

Jenefer Robinson argues that an involuntary “affective appraisal” precedes “cognitive appraisal” in emotional response—body over mind.\(^\text{12}\) This is in line with studies which have shown that emotions are pre-programmed, involuntary responses to stimuli. Antonio Damasio, for example, discovered in the course of treatment for a Parkinsons patient, quite by accident, that the onset of physiological signs (tears) and verbal report of sadness coincides with stimulation to a very specific portion of the brain stem in an on-off switch pattern.\(^\text{13}\) According to Damasio, emotions are purely intense, involuntary physiological responses, while feelings arise in part from the sentience of emotional physiology afforded by mental maps of the body. Feelings arise from the combination of bodily sentience and modes of thought triggered by the latter (e.g. fast rate of cycling through different thoughts in happiness).\(^\text{14}\)

In line with the logic of materiality, Robinson’s research draws on physiological data from psychological music experiments which measure heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, skin electrical conductance, and finger temperature. David Huron’s work is similar in that it draws on the materiality of evolutionary biology to explain involuntary bodily responses that result in feelings of surprise or tension.\(^\text{15}\) As mentioned earlier,

\(^{13}\) Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 67.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 85.  
Spitzer goes to the extent of having the modulations in his skin electrical conductance measured and compared those of non-expert test subjects.  

Standing in contrast with the logic of bodily priority, however, Eduard Hanslick famously asserted that musical feelings are “pathological,” indicating that he considers them to be properties of listening bodies and not of the most highly prized art form, music. Implicitly adopting the same value judgement, Jean-Jacques Nattiez recognizes the existence of feeling as “extrinsic” meaning (albeit “in” the music), which, however, is implicitly less central than formalist, absolute “intrinsic” meaning (deriving from e.g. musical expectation regarding structural unfolding). Also evincing an implicit logic of mental priority, other modern writers dampen the possibility or degree of emotional-physiological arousal in selective arousal, weak arousal, and non-arousal theories. Peter Kivy considers “being moved” by the beauty of music to be the only possible type of feeling which can be aroused, as opposed to a variety of feelings which, in his view, are apprehended primarily through relatively disembodied mental processes, such as the memory and recognition of perceived musical patterns. Charles Nussbaum argues that musical feeling arises exclusively from imagined motor movement (in line with musical movement) that is inhibited in the stationary listener, and thus there is only a “weak” arousal of emotion. Robert Hatten considers arousal of feeling to be entirely optional,

16 Spitzer, “Mapping the Human Heart,” 177-179.
and the key to a mental grasp of expression is “Composed Expressive Trajectories.”\(^{21}\) The logic of materiality debunks the implicit value judgement as well as the stated emotional arousal mechanisms in most of these theories (only Nussbaum’s weak-arousal mechanism is not precluded from credibility), because we have a physiological feeling response to almost anything in the world.\(^{22}\)

II. Multivalence

In contrast with the dominant thrust of psychological research into musical emotion, which is to identify fixed cause-effect relations between musical features and emotional arousal,\(^ {23}\) affect is the potential of bodies to respond in unscripted ways to people, media, and the environment. Think of the potential for repulsion to pleasure (e.g. a surfeit of pentatonic consonance), and attraction to fear, disgust, anger and sadness (“just to feel something”). Affect is multivalent also because feelings are ever modulating, and encompass not only distinct, intense emotions but also low-intensity states like moods, and indistinct states such as transformations, blends, conflicts, and indeterminacy of feeling—Robinson argues that feeling states develop and thus are processual.\(^ {24}\) Her work is in line with Damasio’s argument that “the transient patterns of body state do change rapidly under the mutual, reverberative influences of brain and body during the unfolding of an occasion of feeling.”\(^ {25}\) What Damasio means is that feelings

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unfold in a series of interactions between neural activity that direct the execution of bodily states, bodily states that are represented mentally as feelings, thoughts that condition and are conditioned by feelings, and memories of feelings that lead to the simulation or execution of bodily states.

Aside from the unscripted nature of affective response, multivalence is also found in the intentional presence of negative valences in music, which contradicts the commonsensical principle of “maximal pleasure.” To explain the presence of negativity, Huron refers to contrastive valence, wherein the positive is amplified in relation to its obverse.\(^{26}\) Resolution of tensive, dissonant ornaments in accordance with conventions results in a positive prediction response when the expected resolution arrives, while the negative valence of the reaction response (brain stem reflex) to musical surprise is ameliorated by an awareness of the relative safety of the performance context.\(^{27}\)

In music perception, multivalence is discerned in ambiguous passages. The music may not afford clear expectations with regards to temporal unfolding, thereby resulting in a tension response.\(^{28}\) More specifically, multivalence can be harmonic or rhythmic in nature. Peter Smith discusses the bivalence of “weak-strong” versus “strong-weak” metrical interpretations, and V-I versus I-IV harmonic interpretations of motives in Brahms’s music.\(^{29}\) Kenneth Smith discusses the multivalent implications of harmonic progression in Skryabin’s post-tonal, dominant-seventh based chords (e.g. B-F could be

\(^{26}\) Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 21-25.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 288, 308-310.
part of G7, or D♭7 [with B respelled as C♭]; and French sixth on G [with F respelled as E♯], or on B). David Temperly has produced statistic measurements of the degree of ambiguity of pitch class sets in terms of implied keys; a pitch class set that has equal chances of belonging to multiple keys (e.g. the whole tone scale) has a high degree of multivalence.

From the perspective of intercultural musical perception and feeling, Neil Sorrell has discussed the bivalent discrepancy between Western and gamelan tunings, exploited in his Missa Gongso. Because of this bivalence, the composer discerns a “beautiful chasm,” which is presumably a sublime feeling of wonder, awe, transcendence, mystery, and/or delight. Ambiguity may be “sweet,” as Daniel Pressnitzer et. al. argues, as when music provokes the human perceptual capacity to solve the puzzle of the complex auditory scene of e.g. micropolyphony (many instruments sounding like one morphing whole). In short, instead of provoking negative valences because of the element of uncertainty, musical ambiguity is enjoyable. Psychological experiments show that enjoyment of music decreases with movement away from the optimal level of moderate complexity, which we can read as multivalence.

The very logic of multivalence has been vigorously debated by Robert P. Morgan and his interlocutors. Morgan takes several analysts to task for asserting the presence of unexpected departures from established harmonic and formal conventions. In every case, Morgan demonstrates that “[w]hat seems disunified at one level turns out to be unified at another [underlying level].” The cases Morgan examines include: divergence from a global harmonic plan, digression from a compact thematic statement, “unexpected” modulation, liquidation as opposed to synthetic growth in a main theme, and disintegration of a motive through wide registration. Each of Morgan’s case studies merits individual analysis, but for the purposes of affect, it will suffice for me to point out that the crux of the matter is whether multivalence is an intrinsic value. In contrast with the various authors, Morgan insists that surface multivalence must resolve into the deeper certainty of univalence.

Morgan’s insistence on the normative value of univalence leads us to the question of what univalence comprises exactly. According to Joseph Dubiel, “unity” for Morgan comprises relations of similarity or resemblance. To begin our departure from univalence, we can invert similarity to produce difference—as in bivalence, multivalence, departure from convention, or the propensity of the next musical moment to differentiate itself from the prior one. Multivalence understood as an umbrella term, then, is basically a “difference analytic.” It could be argued that the analysis of difference is already

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incorporated into current practice as similarity and difference must necessarily exist in a dialectic (e.g. transposition involves a statement of the *same* melody at a *different* starting pitch). However, dominant theoretical methods are *primarily* based on the similarity analytic in so far as they are premised on a “positive” identity, a *same-self* musical essence which undergoes transformation, e.g. leitmotivs in different contexts, voice leading patterns, generalized intervals systems, or pitch class sets in the standard procedures of transposition, inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion.

As explained, the dialectic of similarity and difference comprises an *object* and a *relation*, say, a motive and a transposition (the *difference* in interval between two instances of the same motive). In applying the difference analytic, we can omit similarity (motive) and focus exclusively on difference (interval of transposition). Difference is always a difference *between* two entities; difference is *relational*. A difference analytic, then, would comprise relations *exclusively*, leaving the musical objects (motive) to play to be discerned in actual analyses, so that there is *a priori* a much larger potential for the *interplay* between a plethora of musical objects. We can expand the range of possible relations by discarding mathematically calculable, quantized relations (e.g. intervals) in favor of intuitive first person relations, such as affiliation and disaffiliation, affinity and disaffinity, and proximity and approximity (remoteness). Instead of discussing Sorrell’s intervals, we can focus on the affinity arising from the proximity of disaffiliated musics.

Dis/affiliation, a/proximity, and dis/affinity in concert afford a direct way of monitoring what Damasio has called the “*unfolding* of an occasion of feeling” (as mentioned earlier; emphasis added), since these terms make sense intuitively from a first person perspective. Affinity and disaffinity have distinct valences and are related to the
positive emotion of happiness versus the negative ones of disgust, fear, anger, sadness or surprise. Yet this seemingly commonsensical matching of emotion to dis/affinity is disrupted by the potential for disaffinity to Disneyland happiness. Proximity and aproximity are also multivalent in that they could either be positive or negative; nearness to an object may arouse any of the primary emotions and related feelings, while remoteness may arouse relief from a threat, anxiety of separation, resentment over abandonment, or melancholy over loss. As you may expect, affiliation and disaffiliation are similarly multivalent: the identification with your own group and/or the other group can be highly unpredictable. If feeling and perception are shown to be multivalent, there is no reason why any narrative account of human activity, musical or otherwise, must be univalent.

III. Incommensurability

That affect is incommensurate with narrative can be seen in the work of a diverse array of musicologists. Perhaps the prime example of this incommensurability is John Deathridge’s conclusion on Wagner’s anti-semitism:

[T]here is no evidence at all that Wagner considered genocide to be the logical conclusion of his ideas… But that may be just wishful thinking; a more exact insight into the relationship between Parsifal and race is perhaps unlikely to diminish audiences’ love for its sublime music… [H]owever, [Parsifal’s] final unity and intensity of utterance is a conciliatory resolution of often-misunderstood ideas about racial identity and decay that are equally unlikely to persuade us to stop worrying entirely.38

38 John Deathridge, Wagner Beyond Good and Evil (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 177.
That is quite a lot of twisting and turning within one paragraph, as perhaps befits the topic at hand. We can be taught a lesson in the logic of affect through the humble semi-colon. The second statement in the quoted text elides the “wishful thinking” (that Wagner’s hypothetical “logical conclusion” of genocide can be rejected as a possibility) with “sublime music.” Through that simple semi-colon, we observe the writer’s desire to transform the obverse relation between the two clauses into a contiguous one. Sublimity and genocide must necessarily be opposed from an ethical perspective, but joining them with a semi-colon implies a logical sequence of ideas. Following the structure of that sentence, the sequence of thoughts is: “Genocide will not stop you from worrying; everyone still loves Parsifal.” What should have been a relation of negation (“but everyone still loves Parsifal”) is transformed into a list of ideas (item A; item B…). In the non-negation of the first clause, the stated aim expressed in the title of the article—to learn how to “stop worrying and love Parsifal”—is achieved; one stops worrying when one removes the incommensurability between love and genocide.

The clash between affect and ethics is also found in Ralph Locke’s argument for the preservation of orientalist works as historical artifacts of imperialism. The fear here, it seems, is that ethical considerations may lead to the purging of aesthetically valuable works (that are “worthy enough”) from the repertoire, thus leading to Locke’s pragmatist defense of historical validity. Presumably, such a defense would not even be considered if the works were aesthetically worthless. In this conceptual framework, three dimensions of valuation coincide, submerging each other strategically: History validates Aesthetics clandestinely, while deflecting Ethical considerations, which are redirected.

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from *negatively* valenced postcolonial critique which arouses guilt, to *positively* valenced historical preservation that arouses morally justified pride.

A more adventurous approach that implicitly proclaims the “autonomy” of affect is Lawrence Kramer’s study of the *Ring* cycle. Kramer’s goal is to “denationalize” *Siegfried*, countering Wagner’s assertion that the ending love duet of the opera between the title hero and Brünnhilde is German “race” music.\(^\text{40}\) Kramer’s argument is that the *music* points to different meanings. In his analysis of the final immolation scene at the end of the entire *Ring* cycle in *Götterdämmerung*, Kramer discerns that the reprisal there of earlier music, from when Siegfried passed through the magic fire to meet Brünnhilde, points to the heroine’s *sexual* force—Brünnhilde sings of being wedded *anew* to the now already dead Siegfried. Through her force of sexuality, Brünnhilde redeems the corrupt cosmos, conflagrating the entire universe through her own fiery death. Kramer’s analytical notes dwell on how Brünnhilde’s sexual force passes from her last sung breath onto the orchestra via a deceptive cadence that propels momentum forward. It is the *affect* of Brünnhilde’s music which supports Kramer’s argument that there is now a “denationalized polity” of sacrificial sexual love.\(^\text{41}\) Affect operates according to a different logic from that of racial ideology.

As we have seen, incommensurable affect has the power to reshape critical narratives of anti-Semitism and orientalism. In each case, the love of music causes narrative to morph into a form that renders the music less than completely unacceptable: in Deathridge, love and genocide come to co-exist; in Kramer, sexuality overcomes anti-

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\(^{40}\) Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 76.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 106
Semitism; in Locke, historical preservation trumps orientalism. The love-effect remains operational in the next few examples, rendering narrative more palatable. This is Jonathan Bellman’s defense of exoticism: “whether or not we imagine an alien culture to be more sexual, violent, haughty, ancient, pure, or noble than our own, music with that particular tint of exoticism reminds us not merely of a geographic locale or ethnic group but more powerfully of an elemental sexuality, violence, haughtiness, and so on…”42 Philip Hayward also emphasizes affect, albeit negatively as the “guilt-free consumption” (emphasis added) of the “exotica” genre, basing his argument on the fictiveness of representations of the Other (Pacific Islanders).43 Michael Pisani describes Samuel Coleridge-Taylor’s rendition of a Native American ritual in the cantata The Death of Minehaha (1899) as the “evocation of a primitive world of strange gods…through the elemental qualities of the open fifths,” elucidating the affective quality of the work without popping the orientalist fallacy.44 Although sections of his chapter discuss the persecution of Native Americans, these discussions are not tied to specific musical works.

Pursuing a formalist path, Michael Tenzer analyzes two Balinese compositions, Tabuh Gari and Lokarya, and the first movement from Schumann’s Piano Trio in E-flat, Op. 47, with the aim of rationalizing his affective attachments (possibly out of a feeling of guilt for preferring Schumann). Tenzer reveals musical commonalities between the two musical genres in terms of intensity, gesture, and dynamism, and differences in terms

of temporality. The crux of Tenzer’s argument for preferring Schumann is that the latter’s music evinces “democratic” possibility in its dynamism, and that he has been enculturated in the ways of the West. I would argue that Tenzer’s musical love is first and foremost the affect of dynamism (“capable… of bending and warping [the Piano Trio’s own] dimensions and time structure”).

Like Tenzer, who has a thorough knowledge of gamelan music, Steven Feld could have employed the expert knowledge defense. The logic of the “expert defense” is that true exoticism must involve a hazy impression of a distal Other, pure and untouched by modernity, reclining in the shade of tropical rainforests. Rather than using this tactic directly, however, Feld goes further and implies that a close encounter with the Other is what guarantees their survival. In response to the criticism that he has misrepresented the Other through the exclusion of the sounds of neocolonial industrialization in this album, Feld argues that the stereotyping effects of the commoditization of his *Voices of the Rainforest* is related to Kaluli activism through “complementary schizogenesis,” a co-dependent relation of mutual escalation which implies that without profitable stereotypes, the oppositional force of Kaluli empowerment (through the receipt of album royalties) would also not exist. But the logic of affect insists that the purity of sentiment in those Kaluli voices seduces us into a fantasy of intimacy with nature.

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In some of the cases above, affect’s effect is to complexify narrative (Tenzer’s democratic inclinations; Feld’s schizogenesis), and thus affect’s incommensurability does not relate to simple narratives alone. Affect’s incommensurability is observed even in relation to narratives based on musical analysis (the next few examples), even though close musical examination could potentially have led to more attention to affect and a more integrated interpretation. On the surface, Scott Burnham’s chapter-long analyses of heroic urgency in Beethoven’s symphonies evince commensurability between affect and narrative. However, there is a tendency for the macro narrative to occlude micro affect. For example, the oboe solo inserted near the beginning of the recapitulation of the opening movement of Symphony No. 5 is interpreted as a “sigh of resignation… [T]he important arrival of the home key and first theme is made retroactively to feel like the goal of a struggle whose intensity has made such a reprieve necessary and highly deserved.”48 In other words, the meaning of “reprieve” (as opposed to e.g. capitulation to Fate) is retroactively conferred by the fixed narrative of heroic struggle. Burnham’s conclusion is plausible, but there is a sense that the destabilizing force of the emergent affect of the oboe line is lost.

Timothy Taylor’s analytical exposition on “Asie” from Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* addresses affect only in the tautological assertion that “the song has a particularly dreamy quality… evoking [Rosalind] Williams’ conception of the “dream world” of mass consumption [in Paris]” (emphasis mine).49 His discussion of the signifier of the Orient, the augmented second, does not incorporate the ambiguous tonal context of the

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augmented hexatonic scale (F - F#/G♭ - A - B♭ - C# - D) from which the interval derives. Dreaminess could have been elaborated as the affect which is engendered by the perceptual hovering over three possibilities for pitch centers in the scale (F#/B♭/D; based on three points of symmetry). Without elaborating on perception-based affect, the incommensurability between the logic of musical affect and postcolonial criticism (of exotic dreaminess) is not fully explicated.

It is often the case that affect is not examined at all, as in Heile’s analysis of Kagel’s “Osten” from Die Stücke der Windrose. Heile focuses on the ways in the music resembles either the represented klezmer and salon musics (falling rhythmic motive with augmented seconds on the “klezmer” clarinet, versus oompah salon accompaniment), or Kagel’s own voice (post-tonality, irregular phrases). For Heile, the musical hybridity of “Osten” is in line with the cosmopolitanist identity of a self through which others can speak. By envoicing the klezmer other, to the point of occluding the authorial, post-tonal voice, Kagel supposedly opens a dialogue that presumably excludes orientalist monologue as a viable interpretation. Furthermore, Heile argues, the presence of the salon orchestra indicates that “Osten” is not so much a representation in itself, as the representation of the salon orchestra’s own repertoire of exotic representations. The preceding discussion of the exchangeability of self and other leads to the conclusion that because “stereotypical klezmerisms [in ‘Osten’]… actually sound more other to Western ears [than actual klezmer music],” the self/other dichotomy is subverted. Nevertheless, I would argue that the klezmerisms and oompah accompaniment evoke a sense of exotic

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51 Ibid., 71.
wonder through the ambiguity between klezmer modes, the Romantic tonality of the salon orchestra, and Kagel’s chromaticism. One is caught in what has been called “sweet” ambiguity and a “beautiful chasm.” While it is possible to conceptually discern an alternation of voice between self and other, and a difference between representation versus “representation of a representation,” these mental maneuvers are neither audible nor felt. The logics of affect and postcolonial narrative are incommensurate.

Coming from the perspective of neurophysiology, Jenefer Robinson argues that music can arouse feeling without being commensurable with reason—i.e. I may involuntarily feel fear in listening to music, without there being a “real world” object such as a snake which I may reasonably judge to be dangerous. Not surprisingly, Robinson is critical of the so-called “judgement” theorists, such as Peter Kivy, for whom music cannot be the repository of feeling because it has absolutely no content. For Kivy, music has the effect of arousal only because it is discerned by the listener to have a similarity of energetic profile (e.g. high or low) as feeling. Ostensibly, Robinson and Kivy are in opposition by virtue of their positions regarding whether emotion is physiologically aroused, or merely mentally grasped (“this musical pattern signifies that emotion”). Yet they both agree that music is incommensurate with feeling. Whereas Robinson’s argument evinces an implicit contradiction between music and feeling because the latter is an involuntary musical effect (i.e. independent of conscious judgement), Kivy explicitly argues the same point because a feeling is aroused which does not exist as musical content. Indeed, both agree that feeling and music have distinct

53 Robinson, Deeper Than Reason, 300-305.
54 Ibid., 398-5.
logics, for Robinson explicitly argues that it can be appropriate for feeling aroused in the listener (e.g. sympathy) to differ from feeling expressed (e.g. resignation); we feel sympathy for the imagined musical persona expressing resignation.55

The different logics of affect and musical score also evince from perception studies. In order to demonstrate the two logics, an experiment was performed to test whether compositional design (in terms of interval vectors, Z-relations, and Tn and TnI relations) is different from perceptual capacity. It was found that professional music theorists were unable to discern relations of transposition, inversion, or complementarity etc.56 Arguments about what is or is not audible aside, consider that the point here is to discern two logics of musical affect versus musical score, by testing the hypothesized limits of perception.

For a less polemical demonstration of the different logics of affect and score, we can turn to perceptual ambiguity. Ordinarily, auditory perception appears to be fairly stable, to the extent that we may be led to think that our perception is perfectly commensurate with sound in the world. However, neuroscience has shown that perceptions are built mostly out of neurally pre-programmed expectations based on past experience, combined with violations of set expectations in the present scenario.57 “Auditory scene analysis” refers to our remarkable ability to confidently parse out sound into discrete sources (e.g. in a noisy marketplace) in accordance with expectation-violation, but intentionally ambiguous music affords bivalent perceptions, even though there is only one version of the score. Examples of bivalence include: plain chant (many

55 Ibid., 349.
56 Huron, Sweet Anticipation, 121.
voices sounding like one), spectral music (many parts sounding like one tone), and micropolyphony (multiple small modulations imply one stable source “object”).\(^{58}\)

I have referred to the different logics of affect and narrative, but there is a sense in which narrative is also an affective—i.e. bodily—capacity. Rather than being a transparent presentation of mental and bodily processes, narrative is a way of re-presentating what has already taken place, and is neurologically predisposed to be secure and unified. In an experiment where participants were asked to choose repeatedly between cards A and B on a computer, each choice giving a reward between a penny and a dollar as calculated according to an arcane formula based on the player’s previous forty choices, the gamblers came out surprisingly with narratives: “The computer liked it when I switched back and forth,” or “The computer was trying to punish me, so I switched my game plan.” These narratives matched neither what the gamblers had actually done, which was highly predictable, nor the computer’s behavior, which was highly formulaic and too complex for the brain to detect.\(^{59}\) In line with the fallacy of narrative, Robinson argues that labels of intense emotion used by listeners to describe their musical experience are posthoc explanations for aroused physiological states that may merely be low intensity moods – that is to say, an incommensurate narrative of musical emotion is invented to account for whatever vague affective response we have to music.\(^{60}\) The lesson here is that whatever narrative we form is always already incommensurate with affect, even before we are able to articulate their different logics.

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\(^{60}\) Robinson, *Deeper than Reason*, 398-405.
Because of incommensurability, affect resists narrative, even the most well-crafted ones. In a strongly worded article, Matthew Head takes Bellman and other writers in *The Exotic in Western Music* to task for not being able to surmount affect: “A tone of defensiveness, a lack of explicitness about critical framework and a recourse to the ‘musical’ as apparently furnishing some realm free of culture and ideology, amount to an unscholarly *resistance* to, rather than explicit engagement with, postcolonial and, more broadly, cultural theory” (emphasis added). Thus our task is not to *blindly* celebrate incommensurability but to identify politically productive uses of affect, when the latter can act as a corrective to the love-effect (Deathridge et al.), macro narratives (Burnham), an understatement of affect’s power (Taylor), or overly optimistic narratives (Heile). The aim is to attend to the particularity of affect within the framework of its ineluctable co-existence with narrative, maintaining a balance so that neither one nor the other comes to dominate interpretation. Even as affect and narrative exist side by side, as clearly displayed in the various case studies examined, they need to be placed in the position of being each other’s corrective so that distortions may be detected. This means that co-existence would reflect the *two in dialectical negation*, rather than the one continuum in its interwoven-ness. The following chapters elucidate this co-existence.

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61 Matthew Head, “Musicology on Safari: Orientalism and the Spectre of Postcolonial Theory,” in *Music Analysis* 22 (2003), 218. In response, Bellman characterizes Head’s work as “doctrinaire postcolonialism,” arguing instead for interpretive paradigms are more positive, such as genuine curiosity and exchange. Bellman, “Musical Voyages and Their Baggage,” 428.
3) Ambiguous Relationality, Or Postcolonial Affect in Robert Casteels’ *L’autre fille aux cheveux de Bali*
Ambiguous Relationality, Or Postcolonial Affect in Robert Casteels’ L’(autre) fille aux cheveux de Bali

At the end of an elevated highway connecting Singapore’s premier arts complex to the financial district stands the statue of a hybrid creature, part mermaid (or mer-man; who knows?) and part lion—a “merlion.” This queer animal sits there unmoved, day and night, relentlessly spouting a stream of water that falls into an artificial reservoir created by damming the Singapore River. Hybrid confections such as the merlion are dime a dozen in postcolonies such as Singapore, which has transformed from a fishing village in the early 19th century into one of the wealthiest countries in the world by per capita GDP in the twenty-first century. The country is ridden with modernization, both materially (e.g. the continual construction of new buildings)¹ and rhetorically (e.g. in the Renaissance City Report, a government arts policy study which features cosmopolitanist discourse).² In the shadows of modernity, traditional ways of life have become liminal as wet markets give way to supermarkets, and the last of the villagers move into high rise apartments. In the midst of this barrage of cultural forces, modern and traditional, local and global, Western and non-Western and hybrid, Singaporeans and the 40% of non-citizens are collectively greeted with state articulations of what it means to be “Singaporean.”³

¹ Recent re-housing projects have included the Parliament House, the National Stadium, and the National Library.
The musical life of the country exists mainly in mass media, with imports from America, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Bollywood, Malaysia, and Indonesia, catering to the Chinese majority and Malay and Indian minorities, as well as the 40% of non-residents. At the periphery of mass media are canonical Western classical music, traditional musics, indie rock bands, and “new music” (modernist, experimental, and pastiche compositions in the high art genre). New music in Singapore often partakes of hybridization with traditional musics, extending a practice already well established in the twentieth century from Debussy to Kaija Saariaho, but responding to the different cultural conditions of a globalized, non-Western milieu in the twentieth-first century. In an essay on the postcolonial condition, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Homi Bhabha famously articulated the duplicity within a single cultural phenomenon (the “sign”), the dissemination of the Christian Bible in British India. While the Christian evangelical effort may appear to be successful (the “wonder”), the high volume dissemination of the Bible was really sparked by its commodity value as paper, rather than its message. A similar duplicity can be observed in Singaporean new music, which can be understood as affiliated with either the West or the non-West. Ranging from Romantic tonality to pentatonicism to high dissonance, from Western orchestra to gamelan, and from musical modernism to traditional musical modes, Singaporean new music contains myriad vacillations, exhibiting the condition of postcolonial ambivalence. The existence of this latter is not exactly news, but this chapter will take the unprecedented step of focusing on ambivalence on the level of the sensation of hybrid Singaporean sounds (as opposed to

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5 On postcolonial ambivalence as instrumental in the emergence of the other as the other (rather than as Western stereotype), see Olivia Bloechl, Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
ambivalence as applied to sociopolitical context), in connection with the global imaginary.

While ethnomusicology has amassed voluminous documentation relating to diverse musics across the world, its turn towards the musical imaginary is fairly recent. As is well known, the musical imaginary has been practiced in the form of Western orientalist exoticism for several centuries. Exotic works are criticized for their stereotyping effects, homogenizing complex musical cultures into a few simple features, such as pentatonic “Chinese” music, or a uniform “gamelan” (where gamelans would be reflective of localized differences within Indonesia and in other countries). Instead of focusing on exotic works, ethnomusicology’s emphasis has mainly been on empirically based studies of music, with careful consideration of informant perspective. However, this approach may not be suitable for the genre at hand—intercultural new music—for the reasons outlined below.

In relation to the rationale for my chosen methodology of musical analysis and hermeneutics, it is important to note that while informant perspective may assist in the reconstruction of the space and place of a particular work’s premiere, my focus is not on the reception history of intercultural new music, but on the potential of this little heard repertoire to shed light on new ways of imagining the globe. A major departure from conventional ethnomusicological praxis that will be found in the ensuing pages is the shift of focus away from anti-orientalist critique towards the globalized musical imaginary. My aim will be to show that global interaction, both musically imagined and

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sonorously experienced, is ambiguous in nature. This ambiguity will evince largely from
the interaction between different imagined cultures, although there will clearly also be
alternation between the experience of the imagined homogeneity of musical culture
versus knowledge of real world complexity. It is the former ambiguity which will be my
focus, for the classic anti-orientalist critique of homogenizing stereotype is increasingly
becoming outmoded in relation to the Singaporean milieu, where traditional musics are
now little more than museum artifacts preserved by specialized cultural organizations,
and the musical imaginary is situated instead in non-Western forms of popular music
which do not carry the mandate of diversity preservation. “Chinese” music, for instance,
is usually widely heard in Singapore only during Chinese New Year, in syncretic form
with harmonic accompaniment, and is often pentatonic rather than heptatonic or
chromatic, as is the case with music for Chinese solo instruments or instrumental
ensemble.  

Structurally, the relation between musical imaginary and socio-musical practices
that afford this imaginary can be compared with Arjun Appadurai’s distinction between
“global imaginary,” on the one hand, and the uneven global flows of media, ideology,
finance, technology, and ethnic groups which are formative for the imaginary, on the
other. The global imaginary refers to the ubiquitous imagining of cultures in the world.
For Veit Erlmann, the global imagination has become detached from socioeconomic

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8 More historical research needs to be undertaken to trace the pentatonicization of Chinese music. Given the propensity of mass media forms towards homogenization, however, an interpretation which assumes that non-Westerns are composing in conformance with Western expectations (“neo-orientalism”) would be hasty. Indeed, critique in this vein may well be rooted in an orientalism of authencity, where non-Western musics are defined solely through non-syncretic forms. For a critique of the discourse of authenticity, see John Hutnyk, Critique of Exotica: Music, Politics and the Culture Industry (London: Pluto London, 2000), 124.

processes driven by capitalism, which has achieved near universal penetration, and the resultant separation between artistic imagination and capitalist reality is reflected in the random hybridity of unrelated cultures in world music.\(^{10}\) In this chapter, the West, China or Chinese music, and Indonesia or gamelan are imaginary entities that are impacted by global flows (including the media flow of traditional and other musics) without being entirely congruent with them.

Let us consider the *title* of a piece which the reader has probably not heard of before, so perhaps we could leave some of the reader’s pre-conceptions about the other behind, at least temporarily. *L’(autre) fille aux cheveux de Bali*. The Other girl with the hair of Bali? Leaving aside the question of authorship and historical context for now, consider the representation of the other from a purely semiotic perspective. *L’(autre) fille* is a play on Debussy’s famous piano piece *La fille aux cheveux de lin*. Between the pieces, hair changes hue from blond to Bali, and the model of origination changes from named composer (Debussy) to anonymous collectivity (tradition of “Bali”). To top it off, the sonority of “Bali” on gamelan instruments is destabilized by the presence of mostly Javanese instruments—and Chinese instruments—in alternation.

*L’(autre) fille* could be read as resisting the exoticizing gaze on Bali by the autonomous act of casting the gaze back onto the exoticizer: playing the music of *La fille*, gamelan gazes back at Debussy, who is popularly imagined as exoticizer, based on his “gamelan”-infused pieces such as *Pagodes*. In this scenario, the timbral split of Javanese and Chinese instruments weakens the unity of the object Bali. Alternatively, *L’(autre) fille* could also be read as the mere perpetuation of exoticism, except instead of

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approaching Bali from afar, the composer has gone to the extent of recreating a (Javanese) sound that is practically like that of Bali. Is this not, from the perspective of materializing “local flavor,” the epitome of exoticism—an act reflecting no real comprehension or even intentional miscomprehension? In this interpretation, we see that Bali is merely a puppet on strings, whose movements are “caused” by the exoticizer. Finally, there is a third narrative featuring ambiguity arising from the persistence of exoticism—even in the form of hubris—that is inevitable in any postcolonial act of autonomy in deconstructing the representational practice of orientalism.

Perhaps narrative is not going to bring us any closer to an answer regarding the “truth” of the situation, posited sardonically earlier. Try a different approach, and actually listen to the opening of La fille on gamelan. The familiar intervals from the original melody are mangled to the point of unrecognizability in the rendition on gamelan scale, which clashes microtonally with a Westernized ear’s expectation of equal temperament. Whatever narrative one may desire, the body will respond in a concrete manner. The ears detect an alien factor, and the listener feels something—could be delight, could be disgust, or anything in between. In this radically new situation, perceptions and feelings are unscripted, and if we pay close attention to them, the narratives we eventually articulate will be much closer to the ones already clandestinely formed in the mind. This is the power of affect, which is Deleuze’s term for new forms of politically enabling sensation.

11 The score and recording of L’autre fille aux cheveux de Bali is available at http://www.robertcasteels.com/composition/show/25 (retrieved on 20 March 2012). A biography of Casteels can be found on his website as well.
In “The Autonomy of Affect,” literary theorist Brian Massumi famously argued that affect has a different “logic” from narrative-language-reason-consciousness. Affect has a concrete _materiality_—your feelings and perceptions objectively exist as neurophysiological states of bodily matter and cannot be overwritten by preexisting narratives. Whether one is delighted or disgusted at the perception of the yawning gap between Western and gamelan tonalities is a fact that conditions narrative. Exotically delighted, or delighted at Debussy’s dethroning, or delighted with the gamelan? Disgusted at the gamelan, or at exoticism, or—again—at Debussy’s dethroning? Or some ambiguous mixture? This is a personal question which each individual listener can answer, but I suggest that there will be mixed feelings. Affect is _multivalent_.

The logic of multivalent affect can be directed against pre-existing narratives, especially those that are not _quite_ right. Too idealistic. As we march forward from 2002, when _L’autre fille_ was written, we can expect ambiguity to become the order of every global day. I am not suggesting that there is a complete dislocation of cultural identity, but a determined proliferation of contradiction, conflict, disunity, and fragmentation _in relation_ to fixed identity-essences. This dialectic of determinacy and indeterminacy is perhaps the _ultimate_ ambiguity-narrative—the self in transition from coherence to incoherence, and back, and again. Consider “self” in the moment of _L’autre fille_’s opening. Did one not have to become incoherent—spaced somewhere between France and Indonesia—before coming back to oneself? Did the feeling of delight or disgust not

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13 Ibid., 91. There is a slight confusion of terminology as there appears to be an affect as embodiment itself (ibid.), and affect as a _facet_ of sensorial embodiment, wherein affect as new forms of feeling is combined with perception; the latter meaning of affect is found in Gilles Deleuze, _Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation_ (London: Continuum, 2003). Yet there is no real contradiction in so far as perception is handmaiden to the privileged term affect, which is the _body_’s modulation in the process of harnessing new, “invisible” forces through the perceived object’s modulation. (Ibid., 56.)
forcibly move self to one pole or another, before the regaining of composure through sheer psychical persistence?

Robert Casteels’ *L’(autre) fille aux cheveux de Bali* arguably epitomizes postcolonialism by inverting *La fille aux cheveux de lin*. While the pentatonic mode is so pervasive in Debussy’s music that it is difficult to sustain the argument that “gamelan” is the exoticized referent, Debussy’s pentatonicism after 1889 is widely imagined to be the result of his encounter with the gamelan at the World Exposition. More crucially, it is clear that in Casteels’ piece, an intertextual relation is established between the two imagined entities “Debussy” and “gamelan.” *L’(autre) fille* begins with a statement of Debussy on a composite gamelan (of Balinese, Burmese, and mainly Javanese instruments)—in a quick twist, Debussy’s Westernization of the gamelan (if not in *La fille*, then most certainly in *Pagodes*) has turned into the *gamelanization* of the West.

Casteels is part of a small cadre of new music composers in Singapore, all of whom were trained in the West. Casteels himself was initially focused on an international conducting career, leading performances of both common practice era and new music. When he arrived in 1995 to assume the position of the Dean of Performing Arts (LaSalle School of the Arts), Casteels had reached a saturation point as far as the new music repertoire is concerned.14 It was at this time that he came into contact with the gamelan ensemble owned by the conservatory, and also with traditional Chinese instruments found in Singapore. Casteels’ compositional approach, for which the combined circumstance of new music fatigue and exposure to traditional musics was formative, is wonderfully captured in his CD liner notes for *L’(autre) fille*: “Composers play with time. Hidden in

14 The insights into Casteel’s life and work is gleaned from an interview conducted on 20 September 2007.
Casteels’ secret garden, Bali is the ‘isle joyeuse’ where he dares to meet Claude-Achille and Béla. “L’autre fille is a note-for-note translation of Claude-Achille Debussy’s La fille for Chinese string trio, and Béla Bartók’s Báli Szigetén for gamelan; one of the few exceptions to this instrumentation is found at the opening, with Debussy on gamelan. L’autre fille is constructed by fragmenting the entirety of the originals into short segments, and then juxtaposing the segments such that the linear ordering within each piece is preserved. In the use of pedagogical piano miniatures by canonical composers, Casteels signals a skeptical attitude towards the high-minded concept of the “masterpiece,” opting instead to “play with time.” (Table 3.1 is a schematic chart of L’autre fille. Table 3.2 is a list of instruments and terms from traditional music.)

15 CD liner notes for Kreisleriana (Singapore: NUS Center for the Arts, 2004).
Table 3.1 Schematic chart of *L*(‘autre) *fille aux cheveux de Bali*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASTEELS (mm.)</th>
<th>DEBUSSY (mm., on Gamelan [G] or Chinese trio [C])</th>
<th>BARTÓK (mm., always in gamelan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 4</td>
<td>1 - 4 (G)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 - 11</td>
<td>5 - 7 (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 - 13</td>
<td>8 - 9 (G)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 - 16</td>
<td>10 - 12 (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 - 23</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 - 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 - 27</td>
<td>13 - 16 (C)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28 - 32</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 - 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>33 - 37</td>
<td>17 - 21 (C)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38 - 39</td>
<td></td>
<td>17 - 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>22 (C)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41 - 45</td>
<td></td>
<td>19 - 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>23 (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 - 49</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 - 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>24 - 25&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt; (C and G)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 52</td>
<td>Casteels’ imitation of m. 25 (G)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 - 59</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt; - 31 (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 70</td>
<td></td>
<td>29 - 39 (27 - 28 is absent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 - 82</td>
<td>32 - 39 (C)</td>
<td>mm. 40-43 of Bartók is superimposed on mm. 38-39 of Debussy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Traditional Music</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>二胡 (erhu)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>High 2-string fiddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中胡 (zhonghu)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Middle 2-string fiddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大革胡 (dagehu)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Low 2-string fiddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jegog</td>
<td>Balinese</td>
<td>Low-pitched mallet percussion 8 bamboo keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saron</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Mallet percussion, 7 bronze keys (highest in pitch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Mallet percussion, 10-14 bronze keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slentem</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Mallet percussion e, 6-7 bronze keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonang</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>A set of tuned bronze pots (interlocking melodic function in traditional music)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenong</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>A set of tuned bronze pots (rhythmic function in traditional music)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kempul</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Suspended gong tuned to a particular scale pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suwuk</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Suspended gong tuned to a particular scale pitch (larger than kempul)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendang</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kecer, Ceng-ceng</td>
<td>Solonese (Java)</td>
<td>Small cymbals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mong</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Suspended gong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gamelan terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gamelan terms</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panerus</td>
<td>Small sized instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barung</td>
<td>Medium sized instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demung</td>
<td>Large sized instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slendro</td>
<td>Scale with 5 pitches (anhemitonic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelog</td>
<td>Scale with 7 pitches (hemitonic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cipher notation</td>
<td>A relative pitch system with numbers as notational symbols.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If *L’(autre) fille* sounds nothing like what we normally think of as new music, this is probably because of the exceptional liberties Casteels felt he could take with three rather regimented items: the “Western canon,” “Asian” instruments, and “new music.” In *L’(autre) fille*, each of these entities received an invigorating shower that left them glistening with threads of new relations to one another. Debussy’s original Westernization of the gamelan through the abstraction and incorporation of the pentatonic scale into tonality is deftly inverted by Casteels’ arrangement of Debussy in mm. 1-4. (See Example 3.1. Measure numbers in the main body of the chapter refer to Casteels’ *L’(autre) fille* and not the original pieces.) The next fragment of Debussy’s *La fille* (mm. 9-11) is tossed to the Chinese string instrumentalists. Between the two Debussy fragments, Bartók’s original incorporation of Balinese-sounding scales [two interlocking (0167) pitch class sets] into his modernist chromatic language is countered by the “ex-corporation” of Bartók’s *Báli Szigetén* onto actual gamelan instruments (mm. 5-8). It is as if some barrier had been broken and Indonesia now appears in the flesh, in the living, *sounding* body of the gamelan ensemble. Where can these curious relations be formed other than on Casteels’ *isle joyeuse*? (Not to be a kill joy, but the gamelan set Casteels uses is composed primarily of Javanese instruments, and hence “Bali,” as you might have guessed, is the product of the imagination.)
Example 3.1 Derivation of the opening (mm. 1-11) of Robert Casteels’ L’(autre) fille aux cheveux de Bali (C-type measures in upper stave, mm. C1-11) from original piano pieces, Debussy’s La fille aux cheveux de lin (D-type measures, lower stave) and Bartók’s Báli Szigetén (B-type measures, lower stave), performed on gamelan metallophones bonang panerus, bonang barung and sarun barung, and Chinese strings erhu, zhonghu, and dagehu. Numerals above or below gamelan parts refer to scale pitches.
“I was isolated from the world, no one in my vicinity could make me lose confidence in myself or bother me, and so I had to become original.” These famous words, uttered over two centuries ago, will sound equally convincing from the mouth of Casteels, who explicitly compares himself with Haydn. We must necessarily be a little skeptical about exactly how isolated Haydn was in his patron’s estate at Esterházy, seeing as royal patrons tend to bring their musical servants with them to the imperial capital Vienna and host distinguished artist visitors at their country estates. But the point of the comparison is clear. Casteels feels that he has been freed from his bonds to the Western establishment, and is answerable to only local musicians and critics in a Singaporean milieu that does not fully subscribe to Western ideologies of new music. While Casteels’ relative freedom from the Western cultural order is enabling as far as his creative life is concerned, it can also be viewed as a barrier to professional recognition on an international level. Non-Western new music tends to slip in the cracks between genres without identity issues, such as “Western classical music,” “Asian traditional musics,” and “American pop music.” But these interstitial, subcultural musics, such as the repertoire in question, give direct expression to the supercultural global condition of postcolonial ambivalence towards Western cultural power, and will be the subject of this chapter.

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17 Personal communication in interview on 20 September 2007.
18 See e.g. Chang’s review of a new music concert: “The stereotype of the unapologetic Schoenbergian or Boulez-wannabe seems to be in the minority these days, with more composers re-embracing tonality and its aural comforts.” Chang Tou-Liang, “The Music, Our Works: A Review,” [http://pianofortephilia.blogspot.com/2012/05/music-our-works-review.html](http://pianofortephilia.blogspot.com/2012/05/music-our-works-review.html) (retrieved on 1 October 2012).
In the following sections, I will situate *L'(autre) fille* through discussions of postcolonialism (part 1), ambiguous relationality (part 2), and affect (part 3). Musical affect is an embodied capacity—a capacity of the body—which comprises feeling and perception of musical material. Because of the emphasis on perception, musical analysis will feature prominently in my exegesis of ambiguous relationality in Casteels’ work (part 2). I also explore how musical perception and feeling leads to *embodied narratives of the global imaginary*. Embodied narrative, rather than deriving more or less exclusively from historical context in a narrative of sociocultural influence (recall Deleuze and Massumi’s critique), also takes into account intuition, perception and “feelings,” defined as the conjunction of thoughts and mental maps of bodily states. I will elucidate the neurophysiological basis of feeling, perception, and embodied narrative in part 3, citing scientific studies. In the application of my three-pronged method of perception, feeling, and narrative, the notion of *incremental* modulation of the former three embodied capacities will be crucial.  

While *L'(autre) fille* may appear to be a straightforward, postmodern mash-up of two pre-existing works from the perspective of juxtapositional musical form—perhaps nothing more than an expression of anti-modernism, I have shown that feeling and perception of the piece are anything but obvious, and it is through micrological affect that I will articulate a *politics* of ambiguity that chips away at stereotype. I conclude this chapter by elucidating the place of affect among the scholarly trajectories of musicology, postcolonial or otherwise.

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21 For an introduction to affect, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
I. Postcolonial Context and Critique

Let us return to the register of narrative for now, since this is where most of the academic action has been taking place. This section will explicate the cultural position of the postcolony in relation to the imagined West.

A recent exchange with an eminent musicologist about music in China produced this response: “That’s ethnomusicology, isn’t it?” My correspondent’s narrative is borne out of particular disciplinary structures. 22 There are in fact extensive studies into the new music of East Asia by Barbara Mittler and Christian Utz. 23 In spite of their work, however, we can almost forgive a musicologist working today in the Anglo-American circuit for misrepresenting the musical world map. Mittler and Utz are after all only two amongst many musicologists, and both are based in Germany. 24 A smattering of articles on the subject of non-Western new music has appeared in journals, but almost exclusively in ones with an ethnomusicological focus, including Asian Music, The World of Music, and Ethnomusicology. 25 In this academic landscape, the publication of Locating

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22 The division between musicology and ethnomusicology is not absolute, but it is clear from journal publications that there is a differentiation of genre and geography between the two terms: high art and avant-garde music from the West, versus other musics from other places. There is the isolated case of the canonized non-Western composer Tan Dun—who is in fact based in the West—and who is also the subject of an article in a musicological journal, but this proves the general point. Samson Young, “Reconsidering Cultural Politics in the Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Music: The Case of Ghost Opera,” Contemporary Music Review 26 (2007): 605.


24 Isang Yun is the subject of a few publications in German. See e.g. Hanns-Werner Heister and Walter-Wolfgang Sparrer eds., Der Komponist Isang Yun (München: Edition Text & Kritik, 1987).

East Asia in Western Art Music is remarkable,\(^2\) and, aside from composer-centered monographs on Toru Takemitsu, remains singular within the world of Anglo-American academia within the last two decades.\(^3\)

Just as non-Western new music falls in the gap between regimented genres with clear identities, so do they slip through the cracks between sub-disciplines in the academic study of music. In spite of recent methodological reviews in both ethnomusicology and musicology,\(^4\) there remains a clear geographical or genre referent for each field. Musicology has expanded outward from the Western canon to include less canonical composers, and also to Western popular music, but remains largely entrenched within the West. Ethnomusicology has not generally broached high art music—the most elitist and identifiably “Western” genre—and thus inadvertently retains its association with the tradition of gamelan music based in Indonesia. Ann Warde, "Contemporary Indonesian Composition: Elastic-Edged Experimentalism," in Asian Music 34 (2002): 111; Andrew McGraw, "Radical Tradition: Balinese Musik Kontemporer," in Ethnomusicology 53 (2009): 115. See also, Dieter Mack, Zeitgenössische Musik in Indonesien: Zwischen lokalen Traditionen, nationalen Verpflichtungen und internationalen Einflüssen (Hildesheim ; New York: G. Olms, 2004); Michael Tenzer, Gamelan Gong Kebyar: The Art of Twentieth-Century Balinese Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); David Wong, Music of the Chinese in Sabah: The Keyboard Culture (Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: Opus, 2009).

\(^2\) Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau eds., Locating East Asia in Western Art Music (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).


with the Other.\textsuperscript{29} As a result, two areas of music-making in the non-Western sphere fall largely by the wayside: performance of Western classical music, and the composition of new music. Highlights in the development of Western music in Singapore include the institution of special music programs in high schools in the 1980s, and two official government policy papers for arts development (1989 and 2000),\textsuperscript{30} which led inexorably (big government style) to the creation of the brand new Yoh Siew Toh Conservatory (2001) and the opening of the new premier arts complex (2002), the iconic Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay (Figure 3.1), new home of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} For an exception, see e.g. Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

Figure 3.1 Esplanade – Theaters on the Bay
The institutionalization of Western art forms in postcolonies may seem to offer nothing more than a demonstration of “Western impact,” a scholarly paradigm that has been discredited in postcolonial circles for its purported myopia with regards to empowered social agents in the non-West. Against the former framework, Achille Mbembe famously argued that postcolonial power is decentered rather than held by the nominally powerful. In his case study of Cameroon, power is circulated through the appropriation of the lifestyle of the powerful by ordinary citizens, leading to the diffusion of the “aesthetics of vulgarity” (binging, genitality, and crude laughter). Transposing Mbembe’s insights to the global musical scenario, Western musical practices and ideologies are understood to be locally appropriated as opposed to—or at least, in addition to being—external impositions. In this interpretive framework, the institutionalization of Western music in Singapore points not to the impress of Western ideology, but to local power. From the state’s perspective, the development of the arts serves an economic purpose. According to the then Minister for Information and the Arts, George Yeo, “[w]e should see the arts not as luxury or mere consumption but as investment in people and the environment… We… need the arts to help us produce goods and services which are competitive in the world market… With taste, we will be able to produce goods and services of far greater value” (emphasis mine).

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Singapore’s stunning economic success stems from the willingness of the political elite to play the game of global capitalism, “investing” in people as a labor source for economic production. Reductionism of humanity aside (a monumental aside) there is surely nothing wrong with choosing to act in consort with global forces if this leads to beneficial outcomes. But a story telling us only of free choice is not a complete one. In the literature on world music, global culture is understood to be both the imposition of a music industry centered on the West in terms of marketing, music ownership and corporate profits—i.e. capital, on the one hand, and an opportunity for the exercise of political or cultural agency by non-Westerns through music-making, on the other. While the Westernization of Singaporean music creates symbolic and economic value, it also has the effect of inculcating generations of minds inflected towards the West. Performance and composition of Western music in the postcolony is understood through an original/copy logic which elevates the West and casts a benign but judgmental eye on non-Westerns, who are deemed to be mimicking the West. On the level of cultural prejudice, local popular music in the English language is greeted with a self-directed

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36 On authoritarianism and the economy, see e.g. Christopher Lingle, Singapore’s Authoritarian Capitalism: Asian Values, Free Market Illusions, and Political Dependency (Fairfax, VA: Locke Institute, 1996).


“cultural cringe” because of the perceived inferiority of the Singaporean dialect called “Singlish.”

Anyone who audaciously uses terms such as “East” and “West” should retreat at some point from the general argument to explain what they mean. Surely the “West” is not an unchanging, homogenous entity. But this assertion is true of any cultural object, however particularized. I contend that the notion of the imagined West is relevant in social milieus which seek to emulate cultural forms for which Euro-American examples constitute the epitome, either because of the historical origination or contemporary cultivation and sponsorship of those forms: Western classical and new music, visual arts, literature in European languages, art cinema, and American mass media. The milieu associated with these art forms is often referred to using such euphemistic terms as “global” and “world class,” intimating a general attraction to that changing and heterogenous but nevertheless existing entity known as “the West.” In other words, the West often appears in the disguise of discourses on globalization or universal (“world”) standards of excellence. The Renaissance City Report, which uses various forms of the root word “global” eighteen times, and the phrase “world class” five times, compares Singapore with five other cities—Melbourne, Glasgow, London, New York, and Hong Kong—i.e. four Western cities and one Asian city, decolonized as recently as 1997..


40 “The Renaissance City Report,” 25. The fact that all of these cities had been ruled by Britain for over a century speak to the former colonial power’s dominance in the past and its continued influence in the present through legislative, political, economic, and cultural institutions that survived former colonies’ independence. In the light of the polysemy of “cosmopolitanism,” we should rethink the use of the concept as an antidote to the imperialist overtones of Western
There exists a group of unchanging features which constitute the core—i.e. the essence—of any imagined identity. Concrete evidence of the persistence of essentialism can be found in mundane sources, such as the Singaporean Census. Ostensibly, the Singaporean census crafts a definition of ethnicity that is designed to allow persons of mixed racial parentage to choose an ethnic affiliation: “Ethnic group refers to a person's race. It is as declared by the person.” However, the bizarre implication of this definition is that in an extreme case of constructionism, a Chinese guy could theoretically declare himself to be Indian. Thus the operating assumption must be that individuals of single race parentage would not randomly betray their “true” ethnicity.\(^{41}\) In essentialism, we observe a two-fold logic. First, the essence of an identity is constituted by the biology of physical appearance or “race,”\(^ {42}\) a process which has not been disrupted by discourses of anti-racism.\(^ {43}\) Second, ethnicity is essentialized by the “really existing” register of biology. Given the “social fact” of imaginary identities, it is imperative that they are part of any postcolonial study.\(^ {44}\) The process by which individuals are forced into adopting essentialized identities is what Rey Chow calls “coercive mimeticism.”\(^ {45}\)


\(^{43}\) For a critique of anti-racist, multiculturalist discourse as perpetuating a false image of equality, see Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). See also, Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica*.

\(^{44}\) Appadurai, “Disjuncture,” 5.

A consideration of essentialized identities can reveal the ways in which subjects both conform to or deviate from a given cultural order. In this framework, a substantive difference from Western priority may emerge. Beginning with the notion of a substantive even if self-imagined non-Western difference, we can depart from the purportedly total permeation of Western power throughout discourse, such that any non-Western entity is merely a Western invention. This latter paradigm is in accordance with Edward Said’s concept of orientalism.\textsuperscript{46} Said famously argued that Western academic discourse on the Middle East, far from representing reality, in fact conjures up an imaginary entity—the Orient, which, for the musicologist, is a figure evincing from a multitude of exotic musical pieces ranging from Mozart to John Cage. In order to examine agents in non-Western spheres, however, there is a necessity for intercultural studies to bring itself into proximity with cases such as Singapore, departing from the status quo of focusing on composers in Western milieus. Unlike with earlier centuries, there is a strong possibility of working with non-Western art created since imperialism. From a conceptual viewpoint, the goal is to allow for the emergence of a substantive difference, as opposed to one invented by the West.\textsuperscript{47}

In summary, postcolonial studies must: 1) acknowledge the existence of “the West”; 2) focus on the ambivalent vacillation between “East and West” resulting from the constitutive contradiction between the two spheres; and, 3) work with music

\textsuperscript{47} See Bloechl, \textit{Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music}. 
composed in the non-West. These principles inform my choice of Casteels’ *L’(autre) fille* and the tone of the discussion of the piece below.

II. Ambiguous Relationality

In *L’(autre) fille*, the ambivalence between East and West evinces from the unstable hybridity of four identities—Indonesia, China, Bartók and Debussy. When hybrids emerge, old relations are disrupted while new relations are formed. By tracing the fission and fusion of musical sounds as presented to an imagined audience, we are able to form a narrative about hybrid identity which destabilizes pre-existing identity-essences. I propose to analyze hybrid relations in terms of proximity (nearness) and aproximity (remoteness), affinity (attraction) and disaffinity (repulsion), and affiliation (belonging) and disaffiliation (not belonging).

1) Proximity. Exoticism can be described as the delicate dialectic between the proximate aesthetic representation of e.g. Bali, on the one hand, and its remote reality, on the other. This play of far and near creates yearning for that unattainable Other, as in Debussy’s “East,” which is really the placeholder for the inaccessible girl with flaxen hair in *La fille*. The first four measures of *L’(autre) fille* present the musical sound of the gamelan and thus renders the East proximate, while the specificity of the note-for-note arrangement of Debussy’s original *La fille* renders the West also proximate. Yet *La fille* appears only remotely as a carbon copy of its Western self, reproduced in slendro coloring (five-tone gamelan scale). Perhaps indeterminacy is a better description of the a/proximity of cultural identities in *L’(autre) fille*.
While the opening gamelanization of the originary Debussy retains both East and
West in a delicate dialectic, the “ex-corporation” of Bartók onto gamelan in mm. 5-8 has
the effect of disappearing him altogether, resulting in the elimination of the relation of
distance in a/proximity. This is because Bartók’s original piece imitates gamelan music,
and contains passages which might actually have been transcribed from it (e.g. the unison
section in mm. 47-49 in L’(autre) fille might be heard in the explosive Balinese gong
kebyar style; see Example 3.2 below). A performance of Bali Szigetén on the gamelan
diminishes Bartók into a whisper, especially because the composer’s pitches can only be
reproduced inexactely on gamelan scales. In comparison, Debussy’s La fille retains a
quality of unassimilable otherness in its rendition both on gamelan and on Chinese string
trio because its opening arpeggio figure is foreign to gamelan music (mm. 1-4), while its
diatonic matrix sits oddly with the pentatonic definition of “Chinese” music derived from
Chinese New Year songs.

48 Bartók’s use of imitation at the opening of his piece is probably meant to suggest the texture of
gamelan music. However, the gamelan texture referenced by Bartók (“polyphonic stratification”)
actually consists of the elaboration of a slow-moving core melody on instrumental parts with
smaller rhythmic units. For an introduction to Balinese music, see Lisa Gold, Music in Bali:
49 On the integration of pentatonicism and tonality in La fille, see Jeremy Day-O’Connell,
Example 3.2 Robert Casteels, *L'(autre) fille aux cheveux de Bali* (mm. 38-50). Melodic material alternates between gamelan (*bonang* and *sarun*) for Bartók fragments and *erhu* for Debussy fragments.
2) Affiliation. For a Westernized listener, the “East” in Debussy’s *La fille* is incorporated into a familiar tonal language, while Debussy in *L’(autre) fille* is translated into an unfamiliar gamelan scale (mm. 1-4). In this respect, the Westernized listener is affiliated with *La fille*, but disaffiliated with *L’(autre) fille*. Conversely, the gamelan performer may be affiliated only with gamelan and not Debussy. Interestingly, Casteels tells me that his performers are dedicatees of new music and do not participate in traditional gamelan ensembles. They are mainly Chinese players who are disaffiliated with gamelan by ethnicity but become affiliated with it through the new music ethos of dissolving boundaries, including, apparently, that of ethnic differentiation.\(^5^0\)

On the level of relations “in” the music, the Debussy and Bartók fragment types are disaffiliated in melodic and rhythmic content, instrumentation, and musical scale. In terms of modality, the Chinese instruments are disaffiliated from Debussy’s G♭ major (rarely used in music for Chinese instruments, if at all), while the gamelan instruments are disaffiliated from Bartók’s chromatic pitches. This last relation turns out to be very intricate, as a close examination of the first Bartók fragment (mm. 5-8) will reveal. The limit pitches of the oscillating *bonang* part are approximately a semitone above the original part in *Bali Szigetén*. To derive this relation, we can begin by observing the rendition of the limit pitches on the Chinese strings in sustained notes—the mid-sized *zhonghu* plays an A that corresponds to *pelog* 5 (the lower limit) in m. 7; the smallest *erhu* plays a sharpened E that corresponds to *pelog* 2 (the higher limit) in m. 5. Bartók’s own limit pitches are G♯-E♭ (see Example 3.1). (The pitch correspondence between Chinese and gamelan instruments is indicated by Casteels in his score.) In a similar

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\(^5^0\) Personal communication during an interview on 11 May 2013.
fashion to the *bonang*, and in dialogue with it, the oscillating *sarun* part in *slendro* scale also approximates the original part in *Bali Szigetén*. We know that the *sarun*’s higher limit pitch of *slendro*-3 (m. 6) is $G\flat$, as in the original Bartók phrase, because of what we have heard in the opening Debussy fragment (mm. 1-4): the largest Chinese string *dagehu* had entered in m. 3 with the Debussyan tonic of $G\flat$, coinciding pitch-wise with the simultaneously sounded *slendro*-3 in the *bonang*. Returning to the Bartók fragment (mm. 5-8), we observe that despite the $G\flat$/*slendro*-3 correspondence, the *sarun* ultimately cannot reproduce Bartók’s original semitones, B-C and F-$G\flat$.

Analysis of micro relations within a mere four bars (mm. 5-8) has revealed several intricacies of affiliations combined with disaffiliations: 1) although the contour of the original Bartók phrases is retained, the former’s chromatic pitches cannot be reproduced on gamelan scales; 2) the same focal pitch $G\flat$ is shared by the disaffiliated Debussy and Bartók fragments, thus reflecting a pitch affiliation found in the original pieces; 3) sustained notes on Chinese strings are tuned to gamelan tones even as their timbres clash.

3) Affinity. Although the jagged juxtaposition of the Debussy and Bartók fragments suggests antagonistic interruption, the two fragment types are functionally associated. Because Casteels preserved the linear flow of *La fille* and *Báli Szigetén* even while dicing and mixing them, each truncated musical fragment is linked both to the preceding and subsequent music from the original composition by affinity. This is especially prominent in mm. 38-50 (Example 3.3), where the brevity of the one-bar Debussy interjections (mm. 40, 46) from the climax of *La fille* escalates their attractional pull towards a future release of musical tension. Heightened affinity is also found
between the Bartók segments (mm. 38-9, 41-5, 47-9), which are translated from the climatic point in the original Báli Szigetén. The heightened momentum of this climatic passage is further amplified by the obstruction of energetic flow through the abrupt truncation of each fragment. Thus the Debussy and Bartók fragment types are affiliated in that they both contribute to the global linear momentum in L’(autre) fille, while being disaffiliated in identity.

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From the opening kernel of both Debussy and Bartók on gamelan in mm. 1-8, L’(autre) fille proceeds to differentiate in large part into Bartók on gamelan and Debussy on Chinese string trio. The Chinese translation of Debussy in mm. 9-11 involves several relational shifts. First, an imagined “China” is newly proximate through the use of Chinese instruments, but is also rendered remote by Debussy’s G♭ major. Conversely, Debussy is made indeterminate through timbral sinicization. In addition, different ideal type listeners may be affiliated with Chinese music only, Debussy only, or both, and be unpredictably attracted to or repulsed by either one of them.

As we have observed, relationality in L’(autre) fille is a shifting target. For instance, Debussy’s relationality is at a high degree of volatility at the cusp of m. 9. In L’(autre) fille, none of the sonic identities are clearly oriented towards any other in a relation of pure identification (proximity, affiliation and affinity), or in a pure relation of opposition (aproximity, disaffiliation, and disaffinity). Cultural relationality in L’(autre) fille is “ambiguous,” by which I mean that the relation is blurry and indistinct, as if a pair of aural “spectacles” may be needed to hear clearly. I shall use “ambivalence” to refer to an external opposition between two identities, such as the bare knuckle opposition
between Western composers and Asian instruments in *L’(autre) fille*. On the other hand, “ambiguity” will refer to an *internal blurriness within a more or less hybridized relation*, such as both affiliation and disaffiliation between Debussy and Bartók. Ambivalence is *polarized* (“divide[d] into two sharply contrasting groups”) while ambiguity is *indistinct* (“not sharp or clearly defined”). The ambiguous morphing of relationality in terms of a/proximity, dis/affiliation, and dis/affinity is characterized by three features:

1) Modulation. Rather than being fixed, relations change as the music progresses. Relations are *always modulating*. For example, the entry of the Chinese string trio in *L’(autre) fille* in mm. 9-11 precipitates several shifts in relations involving Debussy’s *La fille*, traditional Chinese and Indonesian musics, “Bali,” and the audience.

2) Incrementalism. Three types of relations can give rise to multiple combinatorial *relationalities*, ranging from pure identification to pure opposition as represented in the top and bottommost rows of Table 3.3 respectively. Each intervallic step from one pole to the other is an increment. Relations can be measured incrementally, and they certainly can modulate incrementally, even if that is clearly not always the case. The micro register of ambiguous relations is opposed to the macro register of pure identification or opposition, and assimilation or resistance. For example, the Debussy and Bartók fragments in *L’(autre) fille* are related by both affiliation and disaffiliation, and both affinity and disaffinity. Micro relationality is revealed only upon close examination of the music.

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Table 3.3  Combinatorial Relationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIONALITY</th>
<th>Dis/affiliation</th>
<th>Dis/affinity</th>
<th>A/proximity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Pure Unity</td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pianist identified with Debussy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Western pianist and liminal Bartók</td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>Remoteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Piano student bored of Debussy</td>
<td>Affiliation (Unravelling)</td>
<td>Disaffinity</td>
<td>Remoteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Debussy-China and Bartók-gamelan</td>
<td>Affiliation (by global linear momentum) &amp; Disaffiliation by identity</td>
<td>Disaffinity (between fragment types), cf. Affinity (between same-type fragments)</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Pianist and gamelanized Debussy (split allegiance)</td>
<td>Affiliation (to Debussy) &amp; Disaffiliation (to gamelan)</td>
<td>Affinity (to Debussy) &amp; Disaffinity (to gamelan)</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Debussy and his gamelanized pieces (exotism)</td>
<td>Disaffiliation (by prior identity) &amp; Affiliation (by new identification)</td>
<td>Affinity (to invented gamelan) &amp; possible Disaffinity (to actual gamelan)</td>
<td>Proximity (of invented gamelan) &amp; Remoteness (of actual gamelan music)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Multicultural harmony</td>
<td>Disaffiliation (by ethnicity) &amp; Affiliation (by nation)</td>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Pianist’s indeterminate taste for gamelan</td>
<td>Disaffiliation</td>
<td>Affinity/Disaffinity?</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Robert Casteels’ study and incorporation of gamelan</td>
<td>Disaffiliation</td>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>Proximity (of gamelanized Debussy and gamelan set)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Conservative pianist and gamelan (reactionary response)</td>
<td>Disaffiliation</td>
<td>Disaffinity</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Macro view of Debussy-China and Bartók-gamelan.</td>
<td>Disaffiliation</td>
<td>Disaffinity</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Racial conflict</td>
<td>Disaffiliation</td>
<td>Disaffinity</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Pure Opposition</td>
<td>Disaffiliation</td>
<td>Disaffinity</td>
<td>Remoteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginary negative stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) Open-endedness. The incremental modulation of music gives rise to never-ending shifts in relationality, for every musical moment is poised before an unknown future and inherently open-ended.

As explained, Table 3.3 is a representation of incremental changes in combinatorial relationality, leading from the top extreme of pure identification or perfect assimilation of self-identity with cultural order, to the bottom extreme of pure opposition or the complete rejection of a cultural order. Note that the spectrum between the two extremes is not necessary a smooth progression from most unified to most opposed, although I have organized the rows according to the relation-type dis/affiliation, in order to evince a measure of change towards opposition as we move down the table.

The table should first be read from left to right, such that a particular relationality between two entities is explained in terms of the three relation types. Identify yourself with the first term, e.g. pianist in Relationality 1, and consider: whether the second term (Debussy) would belong with you (dis/affiliation); whether you would like the term (dis/affinity); and your distance to it (a/proximity). While Relationality 4 has already been discussed in great detail, other relationalities have been mentioned or implied in passing. These relationalities expand beyond the music of L’autre fille to include consideration of composers, traditional musical genres, listeners and performers, and sociocultural forms.

In the construction of this model of relationality, I had chosen the three relation types as analytic terms through a process of phenomenological reflection. These relation types are experiential and can be easily grasped as narrative elements, but as we have seen, the language of relationality translates into detailed observations regarding musical
perception as well. Delving into relationality, we have approached the micro level of observation, where changes are incremental.

With the perceptual study of \(L’(autre) fille\) through music analysis, we have already covered a lot of affective ground. (Recall that perception is a component of affect.) By emphasizing the role of affect in the study of \(L’(autre) fille\), I have shown that there is a logic of ambiguous relationality that cannot be discerned from a critical analysis of the historical context (part 1 of this chapter). As we shall see in part 3, ambiguity is evinced not only in an intuitive discussion of relationality centered on the musical score, but also in focused discussions on each of the embodied capacities of feeling, perception, and narrative, understood through the analytics of neurophysiology and the imaginary.

III. Affect

Perhaps unsurprisingly, musical feeling in \(L’(autre) fille\) is ambiguous. When the listener inhabits the flow of musical sound without conscious reflection on the unfolding of the juxtapositional form, the abrupt juxtaposition of fragment types causes surprise. Each interruptive alternation is experienced as a relatively unexpected, playful change. Or, does the intensity of the surprise feel a little stressful? When focus is placed on anticipating the next alternation, anxiety arises because the musical elements in one fragment only allows the listener to predict how that fragment will continue, and not when the next alternation will occur. There is a high degree of net uncertainty and
anticipation becomes apprehensive.\textsuperscript{52} Surprise or anxiety arises because of differences between the fragment types, which are highlighted at each juxtaposition. At the cusp of m. 9, for instance, several changes are imminent in the transition between the Bartók and Debussy fragments: gamelan scales to $G\#_\#$ major; the striking timbral shift from metallophones (bonang, sarun) to strings; an increase in pitch definition (relatively poor on gamelan metallophones); uniform quavers to varied rhythmic values; and sparse melodic lines to three-part harmony. These increments accumulate into a macro impression of opposition.

The impact of the synchronized changes at each juxtaposition can be observed in that micro relations which ameliorate the difference between the two fragment types are truncated or occluded in our macro impression of \textit{L'(autre) fille} as juxtapositional. These micro relations include: 1) Chinese instruments playing sustained gamelan pitches during Bartók fragments (e.g. mm. 5-8), 2) the disaffiliated fragment types being related by the function of contributing to the global linear momentum, and 3) both fragment types having either a direct (Bartók) or indirect (Debussy) relation with gamelan scales and the idea of Bali. Micro relations of affiliation which could potentially have accumulated into some kind of happiness are swept away by the tide of difference.\textsuperscript{53}

Musical feeling in \textit{L'(autre) fille} helps us to understand narratives of imagined identity in multicultural societies. Such narratives are predominantly organized around

\textsuperscript{52} On the relation between musical ambiguity and feelings of anxiety and surprise, see Meyer, \textit{Emotion and Meaning}, 27-30. The two modes of listening I have described correspond loosely to Ihde’s embodied (listening as myself) versus objectified (listening to myself) modes of auditory imagination. Don Ihde, \textit{Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 120-1.

\textsuperscript{53} Sara Ahmed’s analysis of happiness shows that the emotion arises from affiliation, affinity and proximity. Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in Gregg et al., \textit{The Affect Theory Reader}, 29-51.
the rhetoric of happiness, and articulated in implicit and/or explicit relations of proximity, affiliation and affinity, as in the national pledge: “We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves to be one united people, regardless of race, language, or religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity, and progress for our nation.” (emphasis mine) Happiness, in short, is dependent on a synthesis of multiple cultures into one national self. Now, a reading of \textit{L'(autre) fille} could adopt this discursive frame and map it onto music. After taking musical feeling into account, however, it appears that the multiculturalist rhetoric of harmony is ideologically motivated by the need to \textit{occlude} everyday emotions of surprise and anxiety in the encounter with otherness. \textit{L'(autre) fille} suggests that multicultural societies are far from homogenous, and are in fact best described by narratives of differentiation, ambivalence, and ambiguity, rather than synthesis. The ethical course of action is to recognize and ameliorate the reality of intercultural surprise and anxiety, as opposed to the occlusion of unhappiness with happy rhetoric.

The reason why we must pay heed to surprise and anxiety is that there is a growing body of scientific research on music which proves the commonly accepted conception of emotion as irreducibly embodied, where emotion is defined as an intense bodily state that is involuntarily aroused by the perception or even memory of stimuli. \cite{damasio2007looking} Recent studies in neuroscience and psychology suggest that musical emotion is involuntary and has a crucial social function, in contrast to the view of emotion as being


\footnote{Damasio, \textit{Looking for Spinoza}, passim 27-82.}
merely complementary or secondary to the mental act of grasping musical expectations.\textsuperscript{56} I shall cite two studies which focus on scenarios in which the evidence of musical emotion has minimal possibility of originating from stylistic learning and conscientious appreciation. In a neuroscience study, it was shown that heart rate is increased by music that is either liked or disliked. This means that signs of physiological arousal are observed even at the basal level of musical preference.\textsuperscript{57} In a separate study on infants, it was found that the musical game of coos between mothers and babies is related to emotional bonding. An elementary form of narrative is constituted in emotional terms, and an emergent self-identity is observed in the infant’s growing sense of confidence.\textsuperscript{58}

Emotion is clearly embodied in that it consists in physiological arousal, which is the basis of feelings as the combination of emotional bodily states with modes of thought. But how can meaning and narrative be embodied too? In what way can the body be said to have the capacity to “understand” meaning? I will explain how narratives of the global imaginary are not only processed rationally by the conscious mind in a referential framework. Rather, “truth” is sensed \textit{tacitly} before we have had the chance to evaluate a truth claim conceptually.

To begin, we can finish constructing the identity-narrative begun earlier. Having identified the theme of ambiguity, we can proceed to sketch out a narrative structure for \textit{L ’(autre) fille}. The piece is perhaps ultimately about the ambiguity of whether the

\textsuperscript{56} See e.g. Robert Hatten, “Aesthetically Warranted Emotion and Composed Expressive Trajectories in Music,” \textit{Music Analysis} 29 (2010), 89-91.
primary relation in the narrative is between Malays and Chinese in an antagonistic multiracial context, or Westerners and Asians in the self-effacing throes of ambiguous contact. Now, consider an alternate narrative of L’(autre) fille which takes the form of a transcontinental case of art sales, with a multicultural team of Singaporean executives operating two projects, one involving Chinese-themed art from France, the other involving Hungarian-themed art from Indonesia. I personally find this latter narrative less convincing than the previous narrative of competing relations. First of all, the blandness of feeling contributes to the narrative’s weakness and points to fact that great narratives are always feeling-narratives, such as the story of connection weaved by mother and infant. In relation to the evaluation of the two narratives, I could rationally surmise that I chose the first narrative because identity-narratives appeal more to musical feeling and the imaginary, both of which are disrupted by the specifics of plot and characters in the art sales interpretation. But this logical point was grasped only after I had tacitly decided which interpretation was more appropriate.

Grasping musical meaning tacitly is like grappling with a problem that we intuitively know how to solve before the solution (in our case, the narrative of the imaginary) is known. Tacit meaning is grasped on a pre-conscious level, as demonstrated in recent research into brain science of the mind. In tandem with introspection, biochemistry can provide a perspective on the meaning of life, as embodied in “reward, desire, reputation, avarice, friendship, trust, [and] hunger.” Why do we desire particular musics, or trust particular truths? The emergence of the meaning of life

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from neural circuitry lies beyond the full control of our conscious understanding and volition.\textsuperscript{61}

Tacit meaning exists because humans have a capacity to acquire knowledge about the world by doing and experiencing things. In other words, tacit meaning cannot exist in the hypothetical scenario where the mind exists independently without a socially situated body that affords us perception and feeling. Since meaning is tacitly grasped in an embodied way, we might ask if referential meaning derived from discourses of the imaginary alone (rather than in conjunction with affect) is thereby excluded from consideration. Are there any boundaries to meaning? I would argue that there is every reason for us to consider how tacit meaning is related to counter-intuitive postcolonial, feminist, neo-Marxist, or anti-racist narratives (e.g. antagonism in \textit{L'(autre) fille} versus multicultural harmony). The complexity of meaning should not faze us since higher levels of complexity spontaneously emerge in the world conceived as a natural-cultural continuum. All that is required is a large number of connections on a certain level, in order for a new layer of higher complexity to emerge. This applies in the emergence of life, in the form of micro-organisms, from inorganic material.\textsuperscript{62} If we view cultural feats such as the invention of language as evolutionarily shaped forms of complexity, we may be more accepting of the complex connections between sound and a plethora of social, psychical, affective and other concepts. The natural behavior of humans is to use our powers of imaginative and linguistic representation to “inscribe and re-inscribe, and to

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 199-200.  
\textsuperscript{62} Wheeler, \textit{The Whole Creature}, 74.
venture more deeply into (mythologically, artistically, scientifically), the patterns of the
world.\textsuperscript{63}

A final point I wish to make in relation to \textit{L’(autre) fille} is with regards to the
bivalence of pitch perception,\textsuperscript{64} which serves nicely as an illustration of the way in which
affect is—as Massumi argues—autonomous, evincing a logic of the body that is not
notated in the score. As a Western-trained listener hears the opening Debussy fragment
on \textit{bonang} (mm. 1-4), the listener spontaneously recalls the original version in equal
temperament on the piano and intuitively try to map the heard pitches onto Western
solfège. However, the \textit{bonang} comprises a set of gongs which produce impure tones,
making pitches imprecise. More importantly, gamelan scales cannot be mapped onto
equal temperament. The \textit{slendro} scale of the \textit{sarun} in mm. 5-8, for instance, comprises
five roughly equidistant pitches, whereas the piano octave can only be divided into four
minor thirds or six whole tones. The \textit{slendro} scale is commonly said to sound like the
Chinese pentatonic scale (\textit{do re mi so la}), which comprises a mixture of major seconds
and minor thirds that represent the nearest approximation to a five-part division of the
octave. However, the instinctively attempted approximation of \textit{slendro} pitches in terms of
solfège yields predictably ambiguous results. In Example 3.1, \textit{slendro}-2 in the \textit{sarun}
sounds like \textit{me} in m. 6 and \textit{fa} in the continuation after the rest in m. 7. The ambiguity of
\textit{slendro}-2 arises from the different local melodic ambits—(6123) or (\textit{do re me so}) before
the rest; (612) or (\textit{do re fa}) after the rest. This ambiguity is significant because it is a
perceptual fact of \textit{trans}culturalism and cannot be written off as mere ignorance.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{64} On the perception of musical ambiguity, see Daniel Pressnitzer, Clara Suied, and Shihab
Ambiguity arises here because of the nature of perception, which consists in the massive generation of expectation (of solfège), against which novel sensory inputs are highlighted.65

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In order to fully appreciate the significance of affect, it will be necessary for me to devote a few pages to describing the academic trajectories both within and beyond musicology that has led me to this study. Over the past few decades, musical autonomy has come to be viewed as a bankrupt concept that blinkers us to the study of music’s historical contextualization. Yet this latter model of musicology is not quite satisfactory, for as we have seen, music’s affect does indeed have a different logic from its context. Signs of dissatisfaction with the contextual model can be discerned in recent articles which have revisited the notion of autonomy, although writers have been careful to distance themselves from that polemical term, preferring discussions of the “drastic” or of music as “dance.” Currie proposes that music is a force of negation acting against subjective identity, causing that very identity to dissolve, a process which translates into the metaphor of the reluctant boyfriend letting loose on the dance floor.66 For Abbate, the live performance of music has a “drastic” dimension which negates interpretation. Music as real-time event disrupts the decoding of abstruse hermeneutic meaning (including contextual meaning, of course). Complex meaning-making is purportedly executed as a ruse to camouflage music’s seductive powers over an embarrassed musicologist.67

65 Eagleman, Incognito, 20-54.
If there is something qualitatively distinct about music, the latter cannot possibly be fully described through a consideration of history, context, discourse, ideology, identity, cultural order, emotion, narrative, subjectivity, listener, or even the body, without also paying heed to musical sound. While attention has been paid to socially situated, embodied listeners, musical sound has not often been analyzed in terms of embodiment, and never in the micrological terms of affect.68

Aside from specific issues of methodology, there are also broader ontological ramifications if we acknowledge that musical affect is autonomous and has a different logic from context. An appropriate model for the relation between music and context is one of collision with mutual impact. Contextual factors condition musical sound, and vice versa: Music ↔ Context. It could be argued that this mutual conditioning is assumed in most musicological studies, but because of the prevailing emphasis on history and general culture, the model becomes: Context → Music.

To trace the origins of affective autonomy beyond musicology, we have to refer to the post-war trend of regarding language as a tool of imprisonment in literary theory. The concept of affect had taken root in the last decade as a foil against the dominance of theories such as Foucault’s discursive formation, wherein reality is strait-jacketed into regularities as constituted in language (e.g. the Orient).69 Interrogating the significance of language therefore implies revising the basic theory of how social forms are produced, and challenging the power of language to condition reality. Scholars of affect have

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68 A notable exception to the study of embodiment in other than musical terms is Elisabeth Le Guin, _Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Bruce Holsinger’s _Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer_ (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), for instance, relies primarily on texts and images.

examined a variety of alternatives to texts as primary objects, including film, sound and painting. As the antithesis of language, affect is the opposite of referentiality, wherein a word (“music”) refers to something other than itself (the music you hear), and a discursive formation (orientalism) refers to an underlying reality (imperialism). In the affective paradigm, the focus is the body’s subversion of language.

Because affect is defined in opposition to referentiality, the whole notion of musical “meaning” or “narrative” becomes problematic. However, academics—including Massumi—necessarily engage language to produce new narratives based on new sensations. Furthermore, narratives can be used to productively negate ideologically induced sensations such as an unsullied multicultural happiness.

As it has been fashionable to say for some time, we need to move “beyond orientalism,” and affect presents us with a concrete way forward. What is novel about affect is that embodied sound is now understood to disrupt ideologies and identity-essences. Taking affect seriously means introducing feeling back into our musicological lives; paying heed to musical sound; juggling myriad embodied and referential narratives; and collapsing the distinction between musical essence and interpretation through a common logic of ambiguous relationality, which traverses sound, body and language. Through its ambiguity, music in general and intercultural avant-gardism in particular point to a politics of possiblity. Through affect, intercultural new music impacts us by partially lifting the oppressive anchor of neocolonial power over the global imaginary. Our task to incrementally modulate into the new.

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4) Embodied Disembodiment: Buddhist Negation in John Sharpley’s *Emptiness* (空)
Embodied Disembodiment: Buddhist Negation in John Sharpley’s *Emptiness* (空)

A piece of music about emptiness is somewhat quixotic. Our famous reference point is, of course, John Cage’s 4’33”, a Buddhist-inspired *anti*-piece that has no *planned* music. Emptiness is expressed in the absence of musical organization and authorial authority, allowing a negatively existing cosmic order to emerge. Emptiness, as it turns out, is a deeply dialectical concept, for submergence into nothingness is accompanied by the inevitable *emergence* of human constructs, such as the construct of “no-music,” which is nevertheless still a music that emerges, only without human manipulation.¹ In the Buddhistic 4’33”, the abdication of the composer-subject affords the sonic *materialization* of the natural cosmic state of “no-music.”² Rather than pure absence, however, the negation of subjectivity leads to a sonorous *positivization* of the cosmos. Musical emptiness thus consists not in 4’33” of silence, but 4’33” of *transformation* of embodiment through negation of self, leading to an emergence or becoming of the cosmos accompanied by the submergence of subjectivity.

What is curious about 4’33” is the absolute submergence of subjectivity, which is not necessarily reflected in the Buddhist literature. From one perspective, the multiple, interconnected ways of understanding emptiness in myriad texts reflect the abstruseness of the concept as well as the difficulty of attaining such a state of emptiness. I argue the concept of a process of a *continual* disembodiment is crucial. In connection with the

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notion of an embodied self or subject, the understanding that we should have is not that a subject is a free-floating consciousness, but that it consists in the embodied, “affective” capacities for perception, feeling, and narrative, capacities that can be mapped onto neurophysiological structures of the brain and body.\(^3\)

Rather than expressing a complete negation of subjectivity, the one-hour long, sixteen-movement work for narrators, chorus, and ensemble, *Kong* (or “Emptiness,” 2002) by the American-born John Sharpley (b. 1955) focuses on the process of disembodiment, which we can tease out through the analytic of embodied capacities. From a perceptual point of view, *Kong* evinces synthesis and bifurcation in relation to: modes and dissonance or chromatic harmony; textural continuity (synthesized) and discontinuity (bifurcated); and, harmonic- (spectrally sparse) and formant-based (spectrally rich) timbre. These perceptions feed into feeling-narratives of disembodiment, arousing feelings which serve as the foundation for the narrativizing function of conceptual language (“narrative” for short), which will venture into Buddhist texts, syncretizing it with deconstruction and psychoanalysis. Because of the vagaries of disembodiment, the interpretation of the piece will comprise alternative, sometimes simultaneous perceptions, feelings, and narratives, which are irreducibly multiple and therefore ambiguous.

Although I will draw on the scientific literature in my study of musical perception and feeling in *Kong*, my approach will be based on personal reflection on my own

\(^3\) On the concept of embodiment as bodily capacity—or affect—employed here, see e.g. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Narrative is usually considered to be opposed to the body. However, I will be concentrating on feeling-based narrative, rather than purely on discourses. In any case, it is impossible to avoid the narrativizing structures of conceptual language if one wishes to publish.
listening experience. From a methodological point of view, the focus on the musical analysis of feeling furthers the project begun in *Music and Emotion*, a special issue of *Music Analysis* edited by Michael Spitzer. My aim is to innovate an intuitively-grasped language of feeling, even as the reliance of feeling on music leads to the use of musical terms. I craft a technique of analyzing feeling-based narrative, describing it using a fixed set of relational terms—affiliation and disaffiliation, affinity and disaffinity, proximity and aproximity (remoteness).

Beyond the analysis of feeling, I bring the latter to bear on narratology. The salience of musical feeling to narratology has been recognized in what can be called the “semiotics of feeling,” in which musical material is understood as a signifier to feeling as signified. A problem that arises is the incommensurability between the specificity of musical language as opposed to the amorphousness of the language of feeling. Feeling is defined by conventional association (“topic”) and condensed into a label and its homonyms (e.g. “gentleness” or “serenity” or “spirituality”) before being elaborated in an abstract narrative of feeling (“hymnlike vision… subtly undermined by obsessive echoes of grief”). Alternatively, feeling is “warranted” by the shape of musical form itself (“Composed Expressive Trajectories”) and described metaphorically (e.g. “a kind of thrilling, inward reverberation of the climax”). In contrast, I examine musical feeling and perception using the analytic of the same relational terms, without rhapsodizing on feeling, so that any potential distinction between musical essence and feelingful effect

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(famously posed by Hanslick) is collapsed. Instead of an abstract narrative of feeling, I weave perception-based feeling into a concrete narrative, albeit of disembodiment.

In what follows, I will engage in an extended analysis of Kong using a range of apparatuses including Schenkerian theory (adapted for post-tonal harmony) and spectral analysis of timbre (specifically the conjunction of narrators’ speech with musical tones), in order to elucidate the nature of embodied, perception-based feeling, as well as the latter’s incommensurability with the textual injunction to disembody oneself. This paradox of embodied disembodiment perhaps has no resolution, but I will proceed to examine it using affect and Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. On the one hand, embodiment in the form of perception-based feeling is explored with finely tuned analyses of several movements of Kong. On the other hand, disembodiment in the form of textual narrative is explored using the negative logics of deconstruction, especially the Lacanian notion that the sociosymbolic order is ultimately fictive. In other words, I position affect and psychoanalysis as the dialectics of embodiment versus disembodiment.

My dialectical approach is suited for Kong, which is a rare find in that it engages substantially with Buddhist thought rather than skating onto its exotic surface, which 4’33 arguably does. Orientalism is thus not a foregrounded issue, nor is the East-West exchange of primary interest. As mentioned earlier, bifurcation and synthesis will be discussed in relation to a plethora of culturally neutral musical phenomena. By jettisoning the dominant paradigm of viewing the Other as an imperial object, whether guiltily or appreciatively, we open room to discuss the more substantive issue of what the Other is
really all about. This concern for the Other as other than stereotype evinces from the postcolonial work of Olivia Bloechl on the Native American in the early modern era, as well as from Danial Chua’s searching examination of how the Other emerges in Beethoven’s music through self-negation. My chapter makes the unprecedented move of examining the Other through neither European texts nor music, but from a more fluid scenario of an American-born Singaporean resident engaging ancient Asian philosophy through Western art music.

The central idea of Kong, reiterated through sixteen movements, is the attainment of enlightened emptiness by transcending the materiality of embodied life. Objects, body, perception, suffering, feeling, and narrativizing thoughts, are to evaporate into a disembodied state.

Therefore, in emptiness, there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination [thought], no compositional factors [will], no consciousness. There is no eye, no ear, no tongue, no body, no mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no tactile object, no phenomenon. There is no eye element and so forth up to no mind element and also up to no element of mental consciousness. There is no ignorance and exhaustion of ignorance, and so forth up to no aging and death and no exhaustion of aging and death. Likewise, there is no suffering, origin, cessation or path; no exalted wisdom, no attainment, also no non-attainment. Therefore, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas reply on and abide in the perfection of wisdom; their minds shall have no destruction and no fear. Passing utterly beyond perversity

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they attain the final state beyond sorrow.” — Heart of Wisdom sutra

The quotation, excerpted from the full text for movement 11, the Heart sutra, articulates the core concept of emptiness in Kong. The Heart sūtra is found in one of the collections of scriptures (Prajñāpāramitā or Perfection of Wisdom sūtras) of the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism, which is originated from India, and has devolved into the Zen or Chán sub-branch in China, wherefrom the sub-branch spread to the rest of East Asia. Originally written in the Indo-Aryan language of Sanskrit over two millennia ago, the Heart sūtra pithily captures the central teaching of emptiness in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras—i.e. emptiness of form, feeling, thought, will, and consciousness (lines 1-2 in the translation), transforming the subject into a body without capacity, into a state of disembodiment. Western audiences will be minimally familiar with the notion of the elimination of the “sorrow” (from the sutra) of suffering through the relinquishment of the will-to-live in Schopenhauer’s Orient-inspired philosophy.¹⁰

Emptiness is the negation of the body’s capacity for perception, feeling, and narrative. But taking the meaning of emptiness literally is to forgo a more searching examination of how emptiness is contemplated upon, meditated upon, lived, practiced, and experienced—ultimately in an irreducibly embodied way since the body persists.

There is a fundamental component of embodiment implied by the basic fact of being

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alive; for the hour-long Kong, musical embodiment comprises perception and feeling. Paradoxically, disembodiment is revealed only because of the inevitability of the embodiment of emptiness—the subject’s acceptance of self-negation and the consequent transformation of embodiment. Across the movements of Kong, embodied disembodiment manifests as feelings of tenderness, glory, transcendence, and humor.

Crucially, disembodiment via the new embodiment of emptiness is explored as an implication of deconstruction. When exotic, orientalist, or racial stereotypes or identities are deconstructed, i.e. revealed to be constructions in discourse, there emerges an empty lacunae where the “fictive,” enunciated subject position and the discourse-generating, enunciating subject used to live. Someone who wishes to resist an embodied identity-narrative (of the alluring, artificial, vital, equitable, or resilient other; or of the objectifying, orientalist, racist, or privileged self) needs to disembodify herself—to give up the perception, feeling, and narrative of that particular variety of socialized body. This form of deconstructive disembodiment is cognate with the Buddhist notion of achieving enlightenment through the relinquishment of embodied capacity in general (rather than particular embodied subject positions). While Kong does afford insights into the experience of Buddhist deconstructive disembodiment in vital bodies—insights into what it might be like to relinquish identity and cultural order altogether, the process of relinquishment is ultimately impossible to complete, at least in a secular world. Instead, we get a brief glimpse of the Lacanian jouissance or “enjoyment” that keeps us tethered to our subject positions. By revealing the psychical foundations of subject positions, this

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fleeting glance of *jouissance* harkens both to desire as the hidden support of social reality, and to the potential for embodiment of cultural identity to *transform*.

Movement 11, which is set to the *Heart sūtra*, constitutes the center piece of *Kong*; all text is presented by narrators or “reciters” throughout the work. Movement 11 is preceded by another structural landmark: movement 5, which is set to the second section of the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching*. Intervening movements are set to other chapters from *Tao Te Ching* and Zen poems. Together, the various texts of *Kong* offer multiple views of emptiness, a concept that is central to the syncretic religions of Buddhism and Taoism in China. Movement 5, the first structural landmark, is noteworthy because it contains the largest degree of ambiguity of feeling which is emblematic of the initial stages of disembodiment. The music evinces the pain of disillusionment as embodied capacity is progressively relinquished. Movement 11, on the other hand, is about the *reward* that one has attained after embodiment has been relinquished. The intervening movements between movement 11 and the final postlude are about both the possibility and impossibility of completely relinquishing embodiment.

Sharpley explains his cultural adventures as a search for “humanity,” a search which has involved time spent in the Buddhist homeland India, and a repudiation of “modern ideology.”¹² His transcontinental migration to Singapore in 1986 comprised the concomitant processes of disembodiment from his American identity and embodiment of a new Asian spirituality that is encapsulated in expression markings, e.g. “loving” (movement 5 opening). From the milieu of his teachers Leonard Bernstein and David del Tredici, and an assistant professorship at Boston University, Sharpley became a collector

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¹² From an interview conducted on 10 September 2007.
in Singapore of around three hundred traditional Asian instruments. Through Kong, Sharpley proffers a deep engagement with emptiness, which, even if not explicitly acknowledged, gestures towards the potential for an intercultural ambiguity of dis/embodying East or West, ideology or spirituality, and modernity or tradition. While Kong is not primarily concerned with transitions between two positively existing cultures, its illumination of disembodied emptiness as negation speaks to the extrication from one’s original culture in the process of acculturation.

I. Transcending Embodiment

We commence from the near the beginning. The text to movement 5, section 2 of Tao Te Ching, reads like a pithy poem on the deconstruction of embodied reality:

“Under Heaven all can see beauty as beauty because there is ugliness.
All know good as good only because there is evil.
Therefore, having and not having arise together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other.
High and low rest upon each other.
Voice and sound harmonize each other.
Front and back follow one another.
Therefore, the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking.
The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease, working, yet not taking credit.
Work is done, then forgotten, therefore, it lasts forever.”

It appears that deconstruction was already discovered in the sixth century BC when Lao Tsu penned the Tao Te Ching in China. The theme of emptiness through

disembodiment (discovered anew with the emergence of Chan Buddhism in the sixth century AD) is captured here in the skepticism towards the manifest appearance of dichotomous terms such as beauty and ugliness, good and evil, having and not having, versus the essence of emptiness, which can only be achieved by relinquishing the perceptions, feelings, and narratives constituting the dichotomous terms. The complexity of feeling in movement 5 will be explicated through an analysis of the innate quality of feeling, i.e. dis/affiliation, dis/affinity, and a/proximity towards: musical features, sections, objects, and perceptions; other feelings; and, narrativized objects, events, memories and psychical structures.

1.1 Painful Synthesis: Disaffinity from Proximity of Disaffiliated Elements

Movement 5 opens with an extremely dissonant passage that produces a negatively valenced, unpleasant feeling (Example 4.1). The feeling of “unpleasantness” is aroused by sensory dissonance, in combination with the enculturated feeling of dissonance stemming from transgressions of tonality. Sensory dissonance is commonly found in the threat and warning calls of animals, and is triggered by a brain stem reflex.\(^{14}\)

From an evolutionary perspective, pleasure and pain (an umbrella term incorporating unpleasantness) are primitive feelings that are only one step up from immune responses (e.g. inflammation), basic reflexes (e.g. knee jerk), and metabolic

\(^{14}\) Patrik Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll, “Emotional Responses to Music: The Need to Consider Underlying Mechanisms,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31 (2008), 564. Dissonance is most intense when the difference between the fundamental frequencies of two tones is 25 Hz, or a quarter of the critical bandwidth of 100 Hz (for pitches up to 1000 Hz or approximately B\(_5\) [988 Hz], about two octaves above middle C). A critical band is a band of frequencies as perceived by the inner ear (cochlea), within which a second tone will make it more difficult to perceive the first tone. See Reinier Plomp and Willem Levelt, “Tonal Consonance and Critical Bandwidth,” *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 38 (1965): 548.
regulation (e.g. cell renewal). Above pain and pleasure are biological drives for food, water, shelter, and warmth, and then emotions as automatic bodily responses, and finally feelings as mental impressions of bodily states in combination with thoughts. Based on the principle of “nesting,” higher evolutionary levels contain features of some but not all of the lower levels. This means that pain is the basis for negatively valenced emotions (sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise) and feelings (suicidal thoughts, insecurity about the future, dreams of revenge, contempt towards people). The reaction to dissonance is associated with but not equivalent to this diverse pain-aggregate.

At the opening of movement 5, the feeling of unpleasantness or disaffinity arises from the initial proximity of two disaffiliated elements in segment A (m. 1-7): (1) pentatonic melody in violin 1 and gaohu (two-string Chinese fiddle), over (2) dissonant harmony (Example 4.1). These two elements bifurcate in segment B (mm. 8-19) into (1) sustained, pentatonic-derived open fifths supporting modal melodies, and (2) an overarching semitonal voice leading pattern governing the successive descent of the sustained fifths. The two segments constitute section 1 and are analyzed in Example 4.2, which condenses the eight instrumental parts comprising Western and Chinese string quartet (comprised of two-stringed fiddles: in descending pitch range—gaohu, erhu, zhonghu, and dagehu). Segment A begins with solo narrator reciting the text in Chinese in m. 1. From m. 2, the music evinces synthesis of pentatonicism and painful dissonance, each conventionally associated with Chinese and Western cultures respectively. In the first of the three “grating” gestures in section 1, labeled X, friction occurs between held notes and parallel augmented fourths. Grating in this segment is created by having a

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linear sequence of descending semitones *around* held notes. For example, in X, E♭-D-D♭ in the upper part of the parallel augmented fourths grate against the same three sustained notes. The second grating gesture Y (mm. 4-5) also comprises parallel movement—now a perfect fifth apart—over the same held notes as X. With the third grating gesture Z (mm. 6-7), the sustained notes are replaced by parallel fifths in low register, moving more slowly than the upper parallel augmented fourths.
Example 4.1 Movement 5, section 1 to opening of section 2, mm. 1-23.
Example 4.2  Movement 5, reduction of section 1 and beginning of section 2, mm. 1-23.
Segment A derives maximal dissonance out of the pitches in use through grating. Given the use of sustained and parallel perfect fifths, which are emblematic of the consonant pentatonic scale, the harmonic result of synthesis is perhaps a little unexpected if we consider the combination of pentatonicism and dissonance in abstract—one could have expected a \textit{moderation} rather than \textit{amplification} of dissonance. Instead, the amplified dissonance effaces the impact of the perfect 5ths almost completely.

1.2 \textit{Interesting Bifurcation: Affinity towards Disaffiliated Elements}

In contrast with synthesis in segment A, segment B (mm. 8-19) is much more consonant, evincing bifurcation between \textit{consonant} sustained fifths and \textit{semitonal} shifts of the fifths (at mm. 13 and 17, and twice in m. 19; see Example 4.2)—by “bifurcation” is meant the splitting of a hybrid unit into two or more elements. Our main impression of segment B is formed from the five sustained fifths “plateaus” (labeled O to S). Within the first three plateaus, an undulating melody unfurls within the confines of Mixolydian (plateau O) or pentatonic modes (plateaus P and Q; plateaus R and S are half-note chords without any melody). In spite of some inharmonic elements (such as the undulating semitonal shifts around the sustained fifths in O), the relative consonance arising from the combination of melody and harmony gives rise to a feeling of security, safety and pleasure. In segment B, a pleasant self-synthesis of consonance is evinced in the relations of affiliation between the two proximal plateau-parts (melody and harmony) that add up to a positively valenced whole. Semitonal shifts are discerned at the transition points between plateaus Q, R, and S, these are but fleeting moments of surprise, as the next plateau immediately reaffirms intra-plateau relations of affiliation. Although surprises are
generally negatively valenced, there is enough stability within plateaus for the semitonal shifts to be experienced as positively valenced, *interesting* phenomena that are *mildly* surprising.\(^\text{16}\) Thus we feel an affinity towards the total impression of the bifurcated elements.

1.3 *Happy Self-Synthesis: Affinity towards Self-Affiliated Elements*

Section 2 of the movement (mm. 20-53) is strikingly contrasted with section 1 in the complete absence of dissonance, leaving only the sonorous simultaneities of the pentatonic mode (see Example 4.1, mm. 20-23).\(^\text{17}\) There is much textural interest, but the harmony can be briefly summarized as comprising (1) a synthesis between proliferating pentatonic melodies in all the parts, excepting ceremonial strikes on the *bianzhong*, a pitched metallophone, and (2) F\#-C\# as structural notes indicating the minor inflection of the F\#-A-B-C\#-E pentatonic scale. (The *bianzhong*, or *piang zong*, is an ancient Chinese instrument consisting of suspended bells with an unusual lens shape. See Figure 4.1.) Affiliation between elements is amplified by the one-bar canon between two groups (m. 27 ff., not shown): (1) chorus (singing “ah” throughout), violin II, and *gehu*; and (2) *gaohu* and cello. Once the regular pattern of canonic statement-repetition has been formed, a positive prediction response derived from musical expectation is triggered at every occurrence of the predicted echo.\(^\text{18}\) In addition to the positive prediction response,


\(^{17}\) There are many instances of simultaneities between pentatonic notes that exceed a triadic definition of consonance, but the overall effect is still one of consonant relief.

our affinity towards this music also arises from the fast motion of the running sixteenth notes, which are reinforced at different pulse levels by slower moving parts in triplets, eight notes, triplet quarter notes, quarter notes, triplet half notes, dotted half notes, and longer sustained notes. A fast pulse evinces the rapid speed of thought triggered by the emotion of happiness,\textsuperscript{19} which is aroused through the neurophysiological mechanism of “mirroring” emotions.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Damasio, \textit{Looking for Spinoza}, 85.
Figure 4.1  Bianzhong (permission granted under GNU Free Documentation License, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bianzhong.jpg)
1.4 *Disgusting Synthesis: Disaffinity towards “Extreme” Affiliation*

In my presentation to a mixed audience of graduate students in musicology and composition, a composer considered section 2 of movement 5 to be “cheesy” because it is “so pentatonic.”\(^{21}\) I have also been told by another student composer that the passage in question is “almost racist.”\(^{22}\) From these comments, I gather that pentatonicism unmolested by dissonance is redolent (for those commentators) of essentialist stereotypes familiar from art and film music. Thus feeling is perverted from a straightforward course from music to listener, by a detour through conventionalized cultural associations.

Another form of conventional association that can be discerned from these remarks pertains to the imperatives of originality and complexity in new music.\(^{23}\) There appears to be an aversion among composers towards the ease of perception facilitated by metrical consonance, as opposed to the challenge of ametric dissonance.

1.5 *Bifurcation*

In section 3 (mm. 54-60) of movement 5, the opening material returns, expressing painful synthesis again, amplified this time by contrastive valence with the euphony of section 2.\(^{24}\) The next turn of the formal wheel in section 4 (mm. 61-89) brings back the pentatonic melody from section 2. By this point, painful synthesis in alternation with

\(^{21}\) This was held at Duke University on 19 October 2012.
\(^{22}\) Personal correspondence in a discussion session on Singaporean intercultural avant gardism on 20 February 2013.
\(^{24}\) On contrastive valence, see Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 21-25.
pleasurable pentatonicism has been established as a pattern in musical expectation. It is now clear that the pentatonic elements of painful synthesis (of dissonance and pentatonicism) bifurcate away into entire sections which alternate with the synthesis. The effect of bifurcation is to create a feeling of remembrance, whereby later sections recall earlier ones. However, the potential memory-effect arising from the recurring dissonant section is disrupted by the urgency of painful synthesis, marked “menacing” and executed with harsh accents (indicated in m. 2, Example 4.1).

1.6  

_Nostalgic Ambiguity: A Feeling Blend_

In contrast with the urgency of painful synthesis in section 3, the pentatonicism of section 4 (Example 4.3) is infused with a feeling of nostalgia, captured in part by the _pianissimo_ marking, which suggests the relatively faint color of memory rather than the intensity of an unfolding event. Of the first two sections (2 and 4) with the recurring pentatonic melody, the former is based entirely on one minor pentatonic scale on F#. The return of the pentatonic melody in section 4, however, is accompanied by distinct diatonic and chromatic progressions, with a general rate of change of one chord per measure. (Example 4.4 shows the most audible voice leading patterns). Harmonic ambiguity pervades section 4 in the uncertainty between Phrygian or Aeolian mode on F#—the crucial determining second degree of the scale fluctuates between G♮ and G# (mm. 73-4, 80-89), sometimes occurring simultaneously (mm. 73, 83).

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25 Chords are generally shown in “root” position in the treble staff for ease of recognition, unless voice leading needs to be indicated. Following the audible rate of harmonic change at one chord per bar up to m. 79, voice leading changes within measures are usually treated as passing or neighbor tones.
Example 4.3  Movement 5, section 4 opening, mm. 62-7.
Example 4.4  Movement 5, reduction of section 4, mm. 62-89.
The harmonic ambiguity of G♯/G# results in a tension that could arouse both apprehension and pleasure, which speaks to the contrastive valence of nostalgia, the painful yearning aroused by the memory of a lost happiness. G♯ is highlighted twice as an unexpected subdominant of subdominant within the context of major keys, indicated by brackets X and Y (mm. 80-1, 83-5) in Example 4.4. X has an implied but absent tonic of A major, and the G major chord as IV of IV immediately follows a parallel fifth progression III-IV-V in mm. 80-81, thereby negating G# in chords III and V. G major is then immediately re-tooled as a Neapolitan chord and leads to C# minor (m. 82) as an implied (minor) dominant, with G♯ becoming G# in the latter chord; this instance of the G-C# progression carries additional import through a prior occurrence in mm. 74, where it actually resolves to the tierce de Picardie tonic, F# major. Y is similar to X, but with an implied tonic of D major, and C major (containing the marked pitch G) as IV of IV is re-tooled as a Neapolitan chord resolving onto F# minor as “modal” dominant to an implied B tonic.

G♯ and G# are also marked in progression Z at the end of section 4 (mm. 87-9). As with X, G major functions here as a Neapolitan chord in F# minor (which is also the first chord of the progression), alternating with the modified “dominant” C# diminished, which transforms into C# minor when G♯ becomes G# in the very last chord of the progression.

G♯/G# occurs as a fluctuating second degree of F# as global tonic in progressions X, Y and Z, with X modulating locally to the relative major key of A major, and Y

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modulating to the submediant D major. The fluidity of the second degree creates an ambiguity of dis/affiliation (to either Phrygian or Aeolian on F#) and dis/affinity (triggered by the partial, positively valenced prediction of chord progressions that are tonal but fluctuate between modes), resulting in a tension that arouses both apprehension and pleasure.

Aside from the fluctuating second degree, ambiguity also arises from the alternation of major and minor triads and seventh chords, absent from section 2, which arouses conventionalized positive and negative valences respectively (e.g. D⁶, D maj⁷, and B min⁷ at the beginning of section 4). In addition, positive valence is intensified in chromatic major chords that expand beyond the gamut of Aeolian/Phrygian on F#, because of the lower level of chromatic chords’ functional implications, in comparison with modally affiliated chords. Examples include the F# major tierce de Picardie in m. 75, which feels especially brilliant in comparison with the subsequent D major, and B major in m. 78, which is highlighted by the immediately consequent B minor. The IV of IV chromatic major chords in progressions X and Y also protrude coloristically. Chromatic chords punctuate the overall melancholic feeling evincing from (1) the melody in minor-pentatonic mode on F#, (2) the slow moving accompaniment, and (3) the “minor-ish” Aeolian/Phrygian mode. The brilliance of chromatic major chords slices through the nostalgic atmosphere periodically, accumulating on top of the tension arising from G♭/G# ambiguity, bringing tension to a level bordering on unpleasantness in the synthesis of pentatonic melody and chromatic harmony. The beauty of the memory of section 2—that strong feeling of affiliation and affinity to that remote, non-conjunct

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27 Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 274.
section—is countered by the loss of pentatonic purity, as the presence of chromatic ambiguity introduces disaffiliation and disaffinity in section 4. The object of desire is lodged in the past, yet resurrected in the present as a proximal memory, stirring an ambiguous blend of feelings that constitute nostalgia.

1.7 **The Trauma of Painful Synthesis: Extreme Disaffinity and Disaffiliation towards Suddenly Proximal Elements**

With the third occurrence of painful synthesis in the first two measures of section 5 (mm. 90-95), the musical material can no longer be heard as a mere memory as with section 3 (that is, if one discounts the urgency of feeling), but is confirmed as the visceral, *recurring* nightmare of a traumatic event. The feeling is one of extreme disaffinity and disaffiliation towards repressed elements that suddenly become proximal without warning. Despite conscious efforts not to think of traumatic incidents, psychiatric patients often have recurring nightmares.\(^{28}\)

1.8 **Tenderness: Affinity and Affiliation to Aproximal Elements**

In spite of its traumatic opening, section 5 unexpectedly transmogrifies from painful synthesis into Mixolydian mode on F#, which, together with C#, is sustained in the bass from the beginning of the section (Example 4.5). This transformation is amplified by the contrast of valence between the opening dissonance and the subsequent, sprightly melodic lines in Mixolydian that evince an overall rise in register, floating

upwards and finally perching on distal pitches C#₆ and E₆ (part of F# minor ⁷th). Over the span of the sustained bass fifth, chromaticism bifurcates away and disappears from the movement, allowing a plateau evincing synthesis of affiliated elements to emerge.

Movement 5 closes with section 6 (mm. 96-108, Example 4.5 shows the first few measures), in which the string parts have all vaporized into emptiness, leaving only the chorus singing the same pentatonic melody from sections 2 and 4 in canon at one-measure distance, and the bianzhong sounding every half a measure. Here, as before, the echo of the canon arouses a positive prediction response, which is also triggered by familiarity with the pentatonic melody itself, tenderly unfolding with low intensity.²⁹ The excess weight of the strings seems to have lifted, allowing the voices affiliated by canon to transcend the earth and float remotely without any harmonic grounding. The body feels light and evanescent, tenderly receding into the sky.

Example 4.5  Movement 5, section 5 and opening of section 6, mm. 90-100.
1.9  *A Language of Feelings*

Table 4.1 contains a summary of the variety of feelings discussed above, which uses the language of relationality: dis-affiliation, dis-affinity, and a/proximity. The three relation types do not add up to a complete or definitive description of each feeling, but they provide important clues for thinking about particular instances of feelings in terms of valence (affinity or disaffinity), identity or belonging (affiliation or disaffiliation), distance (proximity or aproximity), intensity (“extreme” relations), contrast (e.g. affinity *and* disaffinity), and “perversity” (disgust towards “pleasurable” pentatonic consonance).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Relation 1: Dis/affinity</th>
<th>Relation 2: Dis/affiliation</th>
<th>Relation 3: A/proximity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Painful Synthesis (segment 1)</td>
<td>Disaffinity to dissonance</td>
<td>Disaffiliation between pentatonicism and chromaticism</td>
<td>Proximity between pentatonicism and chromaticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interesting Bifurcation (segment 2)</td>
<td>Affinity to semitonal shifts</td>
<td>Disaffiliation with semitonal shifts</td>
<td>Proximity to semitonal shifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Happy Self-Synthesis</td>
<td>Affinity between parts</td>
<td>Affiliation between parts</td>
<td>Proximity between parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disgusting Synthesis</td>
<td>Disaffinity to happy synthesis</td>
<td>Perception of “extreme” affiliation between parts</td>
<td>Proximity between parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Painful Synthesis</td>
<td>Disaffinity to dissonance</td>
<td>Disaffiliation between pentatonicism and chromaticism</td>
<td>Proximity between pentatonicism and chromaticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nostalgic Ambiguity</td>
<td>Affinity to happy object/event/memory; disaffinity to loss</td>
<td>Affiliation to happy object/event/memory; disaffiliation between happiness and loss</td>
<td>Aproximity to happy object/event; proximity to memory and loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trauma of Painful Synthesis</td>
<td>Extreme Disaffinity to traumatic element</td>
<td>Extreme Disaffiliation to traumatic element</td>
<td>Sudden Proximity to traumatic element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tenderness</td>
<td>Affinity to tender element</td>
<td>Affiliation with tender element</td>
<td>A/proximity to transcending element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Formally Bifurcating Away</td>
<td>Disaffinity between bifurcated pentatonic and chromatic sections</td>
<td>Disaffiliation between bifurcated pentatonic and chromatic sections</td>
<td>Proximity between juxtaposed pentatonic and chromatic sections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ambiguity is observed not just within and between relation types, but also between varieties of feelings. Nostalgia involves the blend of happiness and sadness. The indeterminate reaction to section 2 could be either happiness or disgust depending on the listener. A conflict of feelings is evinced between the bifurcated sections of consonance and dissonance, and relatively positive (happiness, nostalgia, tenderness) or negative valences (pain) respectively. Transformation of feeling is observed in the pentatonic melody in sections 2, 4, and 6, from happiness to nostalgia to tenderness. Blending, indeterminacy, conflict, and transformation of feeling are all varieties of ambiguity.\(^{30}\) In movement 5, conflict and transformation of feeling arise from global synthesis and bifurcation on the level of sections, while the nature of feeling arise from synthesis and bifurcation on a more localized level (synthesis of pentatonicism and chromatic chords in nostalgia; or the unity of modally identical parts in happiness or disgust).

1.10 Interpretation

In movement 5, the modulation of feeling affords the nuanced interpretation of both narratives rooted in the text and a more speculative hermeneutics of disembodiment. The goal of emptiness as articulated in the text is achieved through the dawning awareness of the dichotomous constructedness of the world and leads to the transcendence of worldly embodiment. This reading is elaborated with the incorporation of musical perception and feeling, which suggest that the process of disembodiment is painful—the music of painful synthesis in section 1 is immediately consequent to the

\(^{30}\) The ambiguity of musical feeling has been noted in Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 293.
opening lines about the polar pairs beauty/ugliness and good/evil. The process of disembodiment is shown to be filled with the pain of disillusionment, discipline, and asceticism. Although pain is ameliorated in segment B of section 1, as the meditation on “having” and “not having,” “difficult”/“easy,” “long”/“short,” “high”/“low” continues, it recurs even as enlightenment is glimpsed in sections 2, 4 and 6. The latter display progressive morphing from happiness, to nostalgia from the reluctant relinquishing of happiness, to tenderness from the acceptance of the transcendence of embodiment.

Enlightenment first emerges and is grasped as happiness in section 2, which musically translates lines 7-8 of the text: the “voice” of the chorus is in “harmony” with the “sound” of the instruments, and “front and back follow one another” in the canon. This euphonious harmony contrasts with the recurrence of pain subsequently in section 3, which translates the asceticism of negating action and speech (line 9). Following lines 10-11 about the ephemerality of “ten thousand things” (at the end of section 3), a feeling of nostalgia indicates the transition from the fullness of happiness to the beginning of the process of negating that illusory form of enlightenment. Lines 10-11 mark the end of the text, so that the recurrence of pain in section 5 occurs purely on the level of feeling; in spite of the completion of the recitation of the text, emptiness has not come to fruition, and we are still haunted by the traumatic process of relinquishing perception, feeling, narrative, action and speech. Yet, within section 5, a transformation begins which eventually turns into the tender acceptance of the transcendence of embodiment in section 6. An analysis of the relation between musical feeling and the recited text reveals that the narrative of movement 5 encompasses not only the textual meaning of emptiness, but also
the process of paradoxically embodying emptiness through perceptions, feelings, and feeling-based narratives.

Taking a more speculative approach to narrative, the embodiment of emptiness can be used to shed light not just on Sharpley’s take on Buddhism, but also (as I have argued) on the process of relinquishing general subject positions, following the ethical imperative implied in deconstructive thought which reveals underlying inequities. Deconstructive thought can unearth suffering from resilience, antagonism from multicultural harmony, oppression from the neutrality of capital, orientalist stereotypes from global cosmopolitanism, and a politics of resistance from the apparently voluntary embrace of the West. In every case, the positive valence of narratives that celebrate the freedom or agency of the powerless becomes colored by the negative valence of oppression, introducing an uncomfortable ambiguity. Giving up emancipatory or laudatory identity-narratives of intercultural music and musical practices means gaining new troubling insights, and accepting the insecurity, anxiety, fear, shame, and/or guilt that arises from being either the perpetrator or the victim of oppression. The process of disembodiment cannot be purely cerebral and must instead involve feelings that may be similar to the ones evinced in movement 5—pain, interest, disgust, nostalgia, trauma, and tenderness.

31 Many studies in interculturalism do not sustain the ambiguity of conflicting sociocultural forces and narratives, opting instead for a purity of methodology. For a critique of noncritical studies of orientalism, see Head, “Musicology on Safari: Orientalism and the Spectre of Postcolonial Theory.” For a non-cultural, formalist view of interculturalism, see e.g. Yayoi Uno Everett, “Intercultural Synthesis in Postwar Western Art Music,” in Locating East Asia in Western Art Music, eds. idem. and Frederick Lau (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 19. Studies that emphasize local agency over global, national or colonial forces include e.g. Kip Lornell and Anne Rasmussen eds., Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997). For a cosmopolitanist study that excludes the influence of exoticism, see e.g. Amy Bauer, "The Other of the Exotic: Balinese Music as Grammatical Paradigm in Ligeti’s Galamb Borong," Music Analysis 27 (2008): 337.
In movement 5 of *Kong*, deconstructive disembodiment involves an encounter with identities of modernity and tradition, and with Buddhist, transformative disembodiment. In conjunction, static pentatonicism and dynamic dissonance cohere with Bruno Latour’s concept of the hoax of purification (of pentatonic tradition) and hybridization (with dissonance). The idea of a pure and static tradition is strikingly congruent with especially sections 2 and 6, which are harmonically pure and static, and thus vulnerable to orientalist appropriation. In contrast, the dynamism of the rapidly modulating dissonant harmonies in sections 1, 3, and 5 encapsulates the temporality of modernity, which is ever progressing. While chromaticism is marked by its association with the canon of “Western musical modernism,” pentatonicism is marked by association with “Chinese traditional music.” However, in evaluating the interculturalism of movement 5, there is a need to acknowledge both the identities of modernity and tradition, and the ambiguity of transformative disembodiment. On the one hand, the music strongly evinces stereotypes of the ancient, pure, static Orient versus dynamic Western modernity. On the other hand, pentatonicism does gradually evolve along a trajectory of disembodiment (in sections 2, 4, and 6), and dissonance transforms into the Mixolydian mode in section 5. Thus ambiguity exists in the incremental modulation of elements that are neither as permanent nor as cleanly bifurcated as they may have appeared on first hearing.

II. Apotheosis: After Transcending Embodiment

Whereas movement 5 is about the process of transcending embodiment, movement 11 (discussed earlier and based on the Heart Sūtra) is about the “reward” that comes after the body has been transcended—i.e. apotheosis. Movement 11 begins with a section (mm. 1-35) featuring the synthesis of modes and chromaticism. Modality then bifurcates away to become a plateau that remains within Mixolydian on C in section 2 (mm. 36-49). Sections 3 and 4 (mm. 50-89, 90-110) repeat the synthesis-bifurcation process. The subsequent two parts (3 and 4) of this chapter will explore the inevitability of the embodiment of emptiness—the persistence of the embodied capacities of perception, feeling and narrative even in the process of negation—in relation to psychical enjoyment and sublimity. But first, apotheosis.

2.1 Happy Glory

The glory which evinces from the plateaus in sections 2 and 4 of movement 2 is reached after the ambiguity of sections 1 and 3 has been transcended. We can begin from the end of the movement. Section 4 concludes movement 11 with a full texture of strings unfurling in undulating lines that gradually ascend to the stratosphere over a sustained fifth B-F#, which grounds a Mixolydian mode on B (Example 4.6). The flurry of contrapuntal movement across various parts promote a rapid mode of perception which translates into a happy feeling. The latter is amplified by the positive prediction response that arises from the fulfillment of the expectation of such a passage, predicated on the earlier encounter with the previous plateau on Mixolydian on C (section 2). The positive valence of this music is intensified by the use of the major submediant (E major) as the
basis of the pentatonic scale, relative to the G-centricity in sections 1 and 3. Happiness
and expectation fulfillment confirm the exalted feeling of glorious apotheosis,
characterized by an intense affinity arising from the extreme affiliation of proximal
elements. (In contrast, movement 5 ends with a more placid feeling of tenderness as the
process of transcending embodiment approaches completion.)
Example 4.6  Movement 11, section 4 opening, mm. 90-2.
2.2 *Interestingly Suspenseful Synthesis*

The material in sections 1 and 3 leading up to apotheosis in sections 2 and 4 comprises various elements linked by a constant tension stemming from the synthesis of modes and chromaticism. Section 1 comprises the following segments: a pulsing motif (A), a sustained fifth with unfurling melodies (B), an imitative motif (C), and a progression of pure parallel fifths without other harmonic or melodic parts (D). The score and reduction are found in Examples 4.7 and 4.8 respectively. (As with Example 4.4, only the most aurally striking voice leading patterns are indicated in the reduction.)
Example 4.7  Movement 11, section 1, ABA‘B’CA”D form (A—mm. 1-8; B—mm. 9-15; A’—
mm. 16-17; B’—mm. 18-22; C—mm. 23-28; A”—mm. 29-32; D—mm. 33-36 [last measure not
shown]).
Example 4.8  Movement 11, reduction of section 1, mm. 1-35.
Segment A, which appears three times, comprises progressions in which each chord is repeated once, evincing a strong-weak pattern. The variation in intensity of dynamics in the legato strong-weak pattern has a soothing, touch-like quality that speaks to a feeling of what Charles Nussbaum describes as “loving.” Here, love feels like the gentle modulation of bow pressure and of voice leading. The incremental modulation of the gamut from cluster to cluster can be observed although voice leading patterns are not shown in Example 4.7—registrally spaced out notes in each chord in the score are condensed into a cluster in the treble staff for easy recognition. This figuration gives rise to intra-segment affiliation by voice leading proximity as well as disaffiliation in the alternation between B♮/B♭ (indicated with + and −) in the first appearance of segment A (mm. 1-8). The alternation of B♮/B♭ occurs within a context of G-centricity, giving rise to a sequence of contrastive valences between bright/dark (or major/minor) colors, arousing both an ambiguous blend of interest in the evolving valences, and suspense stemming from uncertain alternations. This feeling-blend is found throughout section 1, which is characterized by the combination of core components that evinces modal affiliation and deviating components that evinces disaffiliation.

The sudden transitions of the G-centricity of segment A to the B-centricity of segment B, and of the G-centricity of segment A’ to the E-centricity of segment B’, arouse “interesting suspense” through the unexpected modulation which is tempered by the stability of the sustained fifths throughout the two instances of segment B (B-F# in mm. 9-14 and E-B in mm. 18-22). Both instances of the initiation of the stable fifths over

35 For a reading of musical expression (dynamics etc.) achieved through physical contact with the instrument (the performer’s “touch”) as loving in nature, see Charles Nussbaum, The Musical Representation: Meaning, Ontology, and Emotion (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 211.
fermatas are rendered suspenseful through the sudden drop of dynamics and the expectation of the unfolding of events yet to come.

Segment B, like segment A, is marked by incremental modulation through chromatic voice leading. In the first instance of segment B, the voice leading and pcs transforms from the first unfurling of melody to the second—i.e. D♮ (implied) to D#, or Phrygian mode to E harmonic minor, both over sustained B-F#. This transformation gives rise to an intensification of negative valence due to the diminished intervals formed by the raised seventh degree in the latter mode. The intensification of negative valence is also found in the second instance of segment B, in which the initial “Arabic” mode (D# and G#) with prevalent augmented 2nds transforms into Aeolian mode on B (D♮ and implied G♮), which is conventionally understood to be melancholic.

Segment C features a lively dialogue between violins I and II in pentatonic mode on D that implicitly and incrementally modulates to D major with the addition of G (m. 25) and C# (m. 26). The accompaniment features parallel fifths moving in the most part by step, creating a gentle undulation. In contrast, the shifts of the bare, “self-affiliated” sustained parallel 5ths in segment D (mm. 33-5) are emphasized by leaps of a major third and a tritone, intensifying the feeling blend of interesting suspense through the shock effect of sudden centricity shift, especially in the latter leap (F#-C# to C-G), which exceeds the diatonic gamut.

2.3 Interpretation

In contrast with movement 5, movement 11 does not contain any pain arising from disillusionment or disenchantment. Instead, there is a blend of interest and anxiety,
both of which are feelings that pertain to expectation, which carries the prospect of a future when embodiment has been completely transcended—a state intimated in sections 2 and 4. In the global narrative structure of Kong, movement 11 ostensibly presents a completion of the process initiated in movement 5. Logically, the full-textured plateaus in movement 11 should be evincing the enlightenment of emptiness following the transcendence of embodiment in movement 5. But limited as we are by the bodily basis of knowledge, the empty state after embodiment is grasped paradoxically in the fullness of glorious apotheosis, wherein a rich texture of affiliated, active, and rising imitative parts give rise to a distinct positive valence. As with the transcendence of embodiment which fails to transcend the feeling of tenderness, apotheosis turns out not to be the achievement of emptiness, but a way of embodying it. Not only is the process of disembodiment filled with a plethora of feelings of pain and loss, interest in and anxiety about the future, optimistic happiness, nostalgia for the body, and tender acceptance of disembodiment, it is also apparently an unending process that never reaches the goal of an emptiness emancipated from subjectivity. Rather, disembodiment can perhaps only ever be a process of becoming another kind of socialized body via incremental modulation, one that finds happiness through self-negation.

Apotheosis is a kind of happiness that, when understood in terms of embodiment, folds back from the heavens onto earthly pleasure. The body, instead of fading away, becomes the locus of happiness. Although happiness may seem banal in relation to the relatively elevated feeling of glorious apotheosis, the latter has a basis— or is “nested”—in the primary emotion of happiness.\(^{36}\) It is the combination of the bodily state of

happiness with *thoughts* of enlightened emptiness that gives rise to the *feeling* of 
apotheosis.  

**III. The *Jouissance* of Disembodiment**

Aside from somber negation in the Taoist and Buddhist texts of the previous 
movement, emptiness is also discerned through humor’s psychical resonance. Based in 
the primary emotion of surprise, humor evinces from whimsical Zen poems, which are 
set in two of the movements (12 and 14) in the last third of *Kong* (movements 11-16).  

3.1 *Bifurcation into Happy Movement*

Compared with the texts explored so far, Zen poems are relatively realistic in so 
far as they retain references to objects in the world, and wry humor often arises from the 
unlikely juxtaposition of nature and literature or philosophy. In movement 12, a Zen 
poem (c. 1200s) by Masso contains ruminations about how the beauty of the literary 
classic *Books of Songs* does not exceed the clarity of mind achieved from contemplating 
the croaking of frogs at a pond.

Lichen-crusted frogs croak at moonlit mountain tops. 
Awakened, mind’s clear at last. 
Refreshing pinewoods of the *Book of Songs* can’t match that!

37 Feeling arise from the combination of bodily states, and thoughts conditioned by and 
38 For an elucidation of musical humor, which is a variety of the emotion surprise, see Huron, 
*Sweet Anticipation*, 283-8.  
39 The first line (蛙鸣池沼月明山巅) has probably been mistranslated. “池沼” is a word unit 
meaning “pond,” but the commonly accepted translation used by Sharpely and cited here 
substitutes “lichen,” probably because the two logograms respectively mean “pond” and “lichen.” 
The rest of the text reads: “心灵被唤醒净化，甚至松风也不能媲美.” Lucien Stryk, Takashi
Characterized by a mixture of relative stasis and motion, movement 12 comprises measures of text recitation (without the instruments cello and *gehu*) and slow musical “croaking” (mm. 1-4, 30-1), on the one hand, and bursts of rapid, imitative passages, on the other (Example 4.9). The pitch and dynamics modulation indicated respectively by the undulating and conventional slurs evoke the sound of croaking frogs, except brought down several octaves and slowed down several times over. Inhabiting a frog’s body involves the experience of a feeling of lowness and of being squat, as if tied to the ground by gravity, but a real frog, of course, is extremely agile. There is thus a bidirectional movement of differentiation whereby music sounds like the squatness of frog, which croak, in turn, sounds like the undulating musical pitch—except that frogs’ croaks are rapid rather than lazy. Rather than a sharp distinction between music and croak—which is the premise for the interpretation of music “imitating” frog—the process-ontology of “becoming-frog” would emphasize how attributes of music (instrumental timbre) and croak (undulation) intermingle. It is this ambiguity of becoming, rather than the stability of the identities of music and frog, which gives rise to humor (more later).  

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Example 4.9  Movement 12.
In movement 12, a feeling of happiness which is afforded by the fast tempo of the rapid passages combines with a positive prediction response induced by imitation, and with interest sustained by changes in mode (from pentatonic on A♭ to C in m. 7), rhythm (interruption of running sixteenth notes in m. 6), articulation (staccato in m. 16), and musical patterns (mixture of sixteenth and eight notes in m. 16). After an appearance at the opening of the movement, the croaking motif is heard a second and final time near the end of the movement (mm. 30-1), preceding a final burst of uninterrupted, frenetic activity: there emerges an energetic plateau in which dual *streams* of sixteenth notes in cello and *gehu* remain within a pentatonic mode on D, as the reciter compares the clarity of a frog’s croak at a pond on a moonlit night to the classic elegance of the *Book of Songs*. The plateau *bifurcates* away from the previous synthesis of stasis and motion. Energetic happiness in the plateau contrasts with the feeling-blend evincing from the synthesis of stasis and motion, which gives rise to ambiguity in terms of expectation (stasis or motion?), thus creating interest and suspense. From a study of the text, it can be adduced that the energetic happiness of the plateau evinces from the joke structure; during the plateau, the final punch line of the poem is recited, wherein the cultural elevation of the *Book of Songs* is dismissed in favor of croaking frogs.

Although it is “refreshing” to stand at a pond in the cool, still night to appreciate the sounds of nature, this contemplative stance is disrupted by a happy, humorous feeling of being-frog or, better, becoming-frog. At the same time that the Zen ideal of clarity is achieved by emptying the body of worldly content (“Awakened, mind’s clear at last”), leaving only the serene beauty of nature, there is the emergence of the embodiment of humorous frogness. As before, disembodiment is really a process of becoming another
kind of body, one which is arguably layered by the composer onto the original poem: in contrast with the physicality of frogness, Zen humor in the poem arises from the shock of the instructive inversion of cultural values, wherein nature effortlessly trumps culture in the form of the Book of Songs, thereby revealing the superiority of equanimity over worldly striving, artistic or otherwise.

3.2 Bifurcation into Whimsical Continuity

Another chuckle is afforded in movement 14. The poem (c. 7th century) by the Buddhist monk Huineng ruminates on the indecipherable meaning of the “soundlessness” of wind and bird. Rather than having the meaning of “equanimity” be derived from serene nature, the poem reveals that meaning-making is itself redundant.

The wind blows, the bird sings.
The sound is soundless.
If you ask me what this means,
I would say that I do not know.41

At the beginning of movement 14, segments of sixteenth notes (with occasional deviation from this pulse) are separated by rests and commence at largely unpredictable junctures, sounding like wisps of wind (Example 4.10). Although temporally separated, varying in length, and distributed among the eight string parts, these segments initially form a single melodic line. Thus any suspense stemming from the unexpectedness of temporal placement, segment length, and timbre (of alternating Western or Chinese instruments) is ameliorated with the relation of affiliation between the various aproximal segments

41 “风吹鸟鸣一片寂静，此为何意不得而知.” From the concert program notes for Kong, translator not listed. It is probable that the presence of first and second person voices in the translation is intended to express the whimsical nature of the poem, but this dialogic aspect is not found in the original Chinese text.
separated by rests, and by the relation of affinity between the material in one inconclusive segment and its elaboration in the next. Further surprises include the registral separation of the repetition of two-note segments in m. 7, the tremolo which sounds like bird warbling in m. 10, the emergence of two-part counterpoint from a single voice (m. 12 ff.), and the harmonic interplay of B♮/B♭ and E♮/E♭ throughout the movement, alternating between pentatonic mode on G, on one the one hand, and bluesy implications with two possible centric interpretations (G blues with B♭, or C blues with E♭), on the other. The cumulative effect of this string of interesting surprises is a feeling of whimsy.
Example 4.10  Movement 14, opening, mm. 1-22.
Wisps of wind at the opening gradually build into a constant breeze. From m. 12, different segments begin to elide more frequently such that moments of complete silence are less frequent. Segments are thrown around different instruments, and two linear voices eventually emerge from this texture (m. 12 ff.). The texture becomes progressively thicker and more continuous until m. 19, where five distinct voices (discerned through registral separation) contain segments which elide in time such that there are no silent moments. With the bifurcation of the plateau of continuity away from the previous synthesis of continuity (within segments) and discontinuity (between segments), a new feeling of happiness emerges, tinged with the whimsical infusion of bluesiness. After the plateau (section 2), the music reverts to a more discontinuous texture (section 3, mm. 31-44), and then leads to another continuous plateau (section 4, m. 45-50) before a codetta flourish (mm. 51-57).

While whimsical wind and bird song unfolds in sections 1 and 2 (which are interspersed with divided portions of line 1 during the fermatas in mm. 7 and 11), further twists await us in the putative meaning of “soundless” silence (line 2), which is further inverted into the absence of knowledge in “I do not know” (line 4). These twists are accentuated in mm. 40 and 52 (in sections 3 and 4) with surprise tutti chords that depart radically from the prevailing linear organization of texture and from pentatonic mode on G. In the first chord, the pitch gamut is expanded by adding the subdominant and secondary subdominant (C and F) to pentatonic mode on G to produce a plagal effect. In the second instance, there is a vertical stacking of perfect fifths (C, G, D, A, E, B, F#, C#) with a semitonal slide up and back (Example 4.11).
Example 4.11  Movement 14, surprise tutti chords
(a) m. 20 (section 3)  
(b) m. 50 (section 4)
3.3 Interpretation

In the narrative twists that invert the normative valuation of culture over nature, man over frog, perception over no-perception (“soundlessness”), and meaning over no-meaning, Zen poetry points to emptiness, but in a manner suffused with the positive valences of whimsy, humor and happiness. Emptiness is thus sought not just through the unpleasant, ascetic disembodiment of the Heart sūtra or Tao Te Ching, but through playful humor. The joy of humor evinces from the interesting suspense created by musical surprises and the high energy of plateaus which intensify the positive valence of humor through happy feeling.

While austere philosophical reflection and deconstructive disembodiment may seem to be the paths to emptiness, could laughter be equally efficacious? For Žižek, the path to emptiness, which is the paradoxical site of truth, is indeed reached through the enjoyment of jokes. To understand his position, we can start from the impossibility of emptiness in deconstruction. According to Žižek, the problem with deconstructive practice by post-structuralists (i.e. excluding Lacan) is that it takes the form of an endless production of stylistic variation on the basic proposition that there is no way to discern an antecedent authorial meaning from the reader’s act of meaning-making. Put in another way, meaning is always the reader’s—and not the writer’s—meaning.42 Because of the endless shifting of style—paralleling the continual transformation away from some subject position, there is no way to determine a site of truth. Conversely, Lacanian thought guarantees a fixed point of emptiness or “lack” where truth is paradoxically produced. Rather than being a positively existing entity defined by particular

characteristics, a subject is really a negatively existing “lack” which can be filled only by paralyzing the chain of pre-existing signifiers, such that a particular configuration of signifieds—an identity—can be produced, e.g. a Buddhist identity would confer particular meanings on to such signifiers as “emptiness,” “disembodiment,” and “transcendence.” (All this takes place, of course, in the unconscious register.) In other words, the subject is inducted into an identity defined by a particular configuration of extant ideas—an ideology. (Note that in this world view, all subjects subscribe to some ideology or other)

Crucially, the induction of a subject into a subject position is afforded only by the antecedent lack that is the subject. To dissipate identity-effect, Žižek likes to use offensive jokes which tell the truth of this antecedent emptiness. In one of these jokes, a Pole asks a Jew how it is that Jews can swindle money successfully. The Jew asks for money before spinning a tale of a ritual involving the burying of fish entrails, and then pauses for more money, at which point the Pole suddenly recognizes “exactly” how it is that Jews swindle money successfully. Žižek’s point is that underlying the Pole’s conception of Jewish identity is a fundamental emptiness where there is no real “positively” existing identity (negatively marked by the confabulated ritual) but only the truth of the Pole’s own “desire” for Jews to be swindlers (marked by the meta-narration of the racist joke). Desire is a negatively existing, empty space that comes to be filled with the “positively” existing self-identity of the honest Pole and the stereotype of Jews-as-swindler. By pointing out the empty space of desire, the joke provokes the dissipation of the entire fantasy of self, other, and cultural order.

43 Ibid., 96-7.
44 Ibid., 68-9.
Although the range of references in Zen poetry is much more modest than psychoanalysis (with its language of phallus, breast, and excrement), the core of each Zen poem is in the twist which makes a connection between the social fantasy of cultural elevation (*Book of Songs*) or the concreteness of sensorial reality (wind and bird) with what lies behind that fantasy—emptiness, the brutal fact that strictly speaking, your reality in its full particularity is a fantasy that exists only because of your desire. Put at its simplest, reality is fantasy, or fantasy is a *reality-effect*. The nature of fantasy can also be adducted from the texts of movements 5 and 11, in which disembodiment occurs through the deconstruction of conceptual dichotomies and the quelling of speech and action. From a Lacanian perspective, the “fantasy” of sight and sound, will and consciousness, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and even long and short is shown to originate from the empty position of desire.

Given our investments in our realities, we could have been less amused by the humor evincing from attempts to invert positively existing reality-effect into negatively existing desire. But there is a reason why the dissipation of reality is funny. In Lacanian theory, *jouissance* or “enjoyment” is not a positively existing thing but defined by its negation of social fantasy. Enjoyment is understood firstly as the original fullness of the carnal body’s *jouissance*, which is sacrificed when the subject is induced into a particular social fantasy. Once embodiment becomes constrained by a particular configuration of signifieds, *jouissance* becomes a mere remnant. This latter excess *jouissance* is glimpsed in the attempt to “traverse” social fantasy or reality-effect in order

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to reach desire.\footnote{Ibid., 141.} Traversal sounds simple enough on paper, but as we have seen in *Kong*, the actual attempt to dissociate one’s body from social fantasy can be torturous and thus practically impossible to achieve. What we can glean from the attempted traversal is the enjoyment of objects of desire in our social fantasy: the frog which we construe, through our desire, to be low and squat; the sound of wind which we construe, through our desire, to be concrete reality. Note that enjoyment in this sense is embodied only as a feeling of security about frog and wind (and “Jew”) existing in the way that they “ought” to exist. There is, however, another kind of enjoyment which is more obtusely embodied in the emotional form of joyous *humor*. As particular objects sustaining social fantasy, frog and wind, when approached too closely, shed their particularity for us and instead become just organic or inorganic matter.\footnote{Ibid., 212.} This surprising twist, akin to stock moves in slapstick, is both funny because the unexpected has happened, and shocking because we suddenly catch a glimpse of the negatively existing space of *our* desire (to be cultured and physically poised [unlike the frog]; to be able to grasp sensorial reality). Through the mechanism of shock, jokes provoke laughter, which is based in the “flight” response of fear and works only because we quickly shore up our psychical defenses against the possibility of actually becoming frog or losing a sensorial grip on reality.\footnote{Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 281.} In threatening the dissipation of social fantasy, humorous *jouissance* brings us perilously close to the negatively existing, socially void place of desire.

In an unexpected way, Buddhist enlightenment coheres with the psychoanalytic process, the final stage of which is “subjective destitution.”
What is at stake in this ‘destitution’ is… the fact that the subject no longer presupposes himself as [desiring] subject; by accomplishing this he annuls, so to speak, the effects of the act of formal conversion [the assumption of a mandate assigned by social fantasy]. In other words, he assumes not the existence but the non-existence of the big Other [social fantasy], he accepts the Real [the carnal body before induction into social fantasy] in its utter, meaningless idiocy; he keeps open the gap between Real and its symbolization [into social fantasy]. The price to be paid for this is that by the same act he also annuls himself as subject… (emphases original)⁴⁹

Because of his commitment to a theory of radical politics, Žižek’s version of Lacan is permeated with a “can-do” theoretical orientation that may not be something everyone can accomplish. To “annul” oneself as subject is to negate not only positively existing social fantasy, but also desire in its negatively existing space. That this latter may not be possible is discerned throughout the movements of Kong which have attempted the negation of an ever persistent embodiment. Kong suggests that enlightenment consists not in an impossible emptiness, but in a transformative disembodiment (c.f. deconstruction) that relinquishes perception, feeling, narrative, and desire, thereby releasing a plethora of feelings, progressing from the mixed bag of movement 5, to happy apotheosis and happy humor. The body has persisted not just in embodied feeling and perception, but also through narratives of transcendence, apotheosis, and jouissance. In the next section, we finally encounter texts which no longer refer to perception, feeling, and narrative, even if only in the sense of negating them. It is as if the process of becoming empty will be completed at last.

⁴⁹ Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 263.
IV. The Sublimity of Emptiness

So far the texts of the previous movements have cast doubt on the reality of concepts, aesthetics (beautiful and ugly), morality (good and evil), feeling and perception, and will and consciousness. But how exactly does one achieve emptiness, beyond deconstructive disembodiment, which is the transformation rather than relinquishment of embodiment? How, in other words, does one “annul” oneself as a desiring subject in the very first place, and is that possible? The path to emptiness is showered with sublimity, as we shall see.

4.1 Transcendence I: Global Synthesis

In movement 13, we find a text that articulates a roadmap to emptiness—chapter 4 of *Tao Te Ching*. The text describes the original void of Tao, the “source” from which all things spring, and simultaneously the emptiness to which all things return when tense worldliness (“sharpness,” “knot,” and “glare”) is released, thereby “merg[ing] with the dust.”

The Tao is an empty vessel;
it is used but never filled.
Oh, unfathomable source of ten thousand things,
blunt the sharpness,
untangle the knot,
soften the glare,
merge with the dust.
Oh hidden deep but ever present!
I don’t know from whence it comes.
It is the forefather of the emperors.50

Whereas the global process of the movements previously discussed ends in bifurcation, movement 13 ends with global synthesis. The movement comprises three elements that are presented individually at the opening: bianzhong, two reciters who alternate in the course of the movement, and chorus on sustained notes (Table 4.2; Example 4.12). The spectral profile of each element is observed in phrases 1 to 3, as shown in the spectrogram (Figure 4.2, showing the amplitude [brightness] at various frequencies [vertical dimension] over time [horizontal dimension]). In phrase 1, the characteristic decay pattern of the bianzhong is visualized as short horizontal dashes that fade away. In phrase 2, the sustained A in women’s voices is visualized as two bright horizontal lines, indicating a second harmonic A (880 Hz) over the fundamental A (440 Hz) an octave below; these are superimposed onto the decay shapes of the bianzhong. In phrase 3, the rich spectral profile of the reciter is visualized as three vertical columns, also superimposed onto the decay shapes of the bianzhong. Phrase 4 shows the first instance of all three elements (bianzhong, chorus, reciters) in combination. This synthesis is intensified in phrase 5 with the introduction of a rapid quaver pulse in the bianzhong and men’s voices singing in unison G or A with the women. Men’s voices constitute an additional, fainter band below the two bright bands in phrase 4 (women’s voice plus second harmonic an octave above) which are also present in phrase 5; another faint band, located between the two bright bands, represents the third harmonic (D or E) a perfect twelfth above the men’s fundamental (G or A). This spectral intensity returns in phrase 7 after a brief lull in phrase 6, where the elements bifurcate (bianzhong is followed by reciter).
Table 4.2  Structure of movement 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Bianzhong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>Bianzhong, women on sustained A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>Bianzhong, reciter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13-18</td>
<td>Bianzhong, reciter, women on sustained G and A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19-29</td>
<td>Bianzhong, reciter, chorus on alternating sustained, unison G and A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30-32</td>
<td>Bianzhong, then reciter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>33-42</td>
<td>Bianzhong, reciter, chorus on sustained unison: E♭ - D♭ - A - G.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2  Spectrogram of movement 13
Example 4.12  Movement 13
In movement 13, a feeling of transcendence arises from the moments of spectral intensity, which present challenges to perception through timbral juxtaposition of the rich overtones of the reciter with the relatively few overtones of the bianzhong and chorus.\textsuperscript{51} Whereas harmonically-structured timbres can be based on as little as two harmonics (two harmonics for the chorus; one or two main harmonics for the bianzhong), formant-structured timbres comprise high intensity harmonics (visualized as vertical bands in Figure 4.2). Formant-based versus harmonically-based timbres are cues for the perceived versus acoustic worlds respectively, since formant-based timbres involve a relatively large degree of unconscious brain processing—or “perceptualization”\textsuperscript{52}—of the actual acoustic properties of the sound source. Despite the subterranean nature of perceptualization, juxtaposition of the two types of timbres creates in the perceiver a subliminal awareness of a distinction between a “fictional” perceived and “real” acoustic world. This ambiguity between sound worlds is enjoyable\textsuperscript{53} and at the same time unfathomable. Here, we are not merely dealing with perceived musical phenomena such as bifurcation or synthesis, modal mixture, dis/continuity, or stasis/motion, but a rupturing of the phenomenal world through an intimation of a real acoustic world beyond.

What timbral juxtaposition affords is both the feeling and narrative of transcendence. In contrast, transcendence, apotheosis, and jouissance in the previous movements are narratives that are accompanied by feelings of pain, nostalgia, tenderness, happiness, and humor. The component of awe in the feeling of transcendence

\textsuperscript{51} For an elaboration of timbral juxtaposition, see Cornelia Fales, “The Paradox of Timbre,” Ethnomusicology 46 (2002), 71-5.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{53} Pressnitzer et. al., "Auditory Scene Analysis," 10.
derives from the apprehension of something that exceeds our ability to grasp it—this feeling has been described as having the quality of “mystery”\textsuperscript{54} as well as “otherworldliness.”\textsuperscript{55} From the perspective of timbral juxtaposition, the feeling of transcendence derives from the effect of grasping the perceived and acoustic sound worlds at once,\textsuperscript{56} which results in a destabilization of the unity of perception, normally protected by cognitive processes designed to hide the fact of perceptualization.

In addition to timbral juxtaposition, dissonance also contributes to the feeling of not being able to grasp the music, as dissonance interrupts our ability to discern source objects in the world, which tend towards harmonicity.\textsuperscript{57} In phrase 7, for example, the \textit{bianzhong} plays a large gamut of notes (C, D♭, E♭, E, F#, A♭, A, B♭), many of which form dissonant intervals with the sustained A in the chorus (Example 4.12). Dissonance also arises from the undampened \textit{bianzhong} tones which build up into clusters, and from the microtonal difference between the tuning of the non-Western instrument and the Westernized ear’s expectation of equal temperament. Furthermore, pitch modulation in the recitation of the tonal Chinese language, which contains four standard pitch profiles for each syllable (high and low pitch, ascending and descending pitch), creates momentary clashes with the sustained choral A. Dissonance in tandem with the effects of timbral juxtaposition produce a challenge to perception, painting a complicated auditory scene that precipitates a feeling of unease in the attempted identification of “source objects” in music (e.g. a part, an instrument, a chord). This perceptual ambiguity is what gives rise to the feeling of transcendence.

\textsuperscript{54} Huron, \textit{Sweet Anticipation}, 288.
\textsuperscript{55} Zentner, “Homer’s Prophecy,” 107.
\textsuperscript{56} Fales, “The Paradox of Timbre,” 78.
\textsuperscript{57} Huron, \textit{Sweet Anticipation}, 324-5.
4.2  **Transcendence II: Global Bifurcation**

Like movement 13, movement 15 presents a roadmap to emptiness, and evinces a feeling of transcendence arising from the perceptual ambiguity of timbral juxtaposition. Since timbral juxtaposition pervades the entire movement, transcendence in movement 15 can be viewed as something which has bifurcated globally out of phrases 4, 5, and 7 in movement 13, in which the other phrases do not evince the same level of timbral juxtaposition.

The text to movement 15 (*Tao Te Ching*, chapter 76) bespeaks of the superiority of “yielding” over being “hard and strong,” reiterating the message of movement 13, which is about releasing tense worldliness in order to achieve emptiness. Although reference is made to the “gentle and weak” body, there are no specific references to embodied capacities. Rather the “gentle and weak” body-object is a metaphor for the relinquishment of embodied capacities, releasing the positively existing contents of perception, feeling, and narrative, all of which contribute to tension.

A man is born gentle and weak.
At his death, he is hard and stiff.
Green plants are tender and filled with sap.
At their death, they are withered and dry.
Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death.
The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.
Thus an army without flexibility never wins a battle.
A tree that is unbending is easily broken.
The hard and strong will fall.
The soft and weak will overcome.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{58}\)“人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強。萬物草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。是以兵強則不勝，木強則共。強大處下，柔弱處上。” Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, 79.
Movement 15 displays enriched spectra throughout its arch form (ABCBA). From the perspective of instrumental playing, any departure from bowed notes will produce richer harmonics, since the purest tone (with least harmonics) is produced from bowing. In section A (mm. 1-29), the music comprises micropolyphony of sustained tones (Example 4.13a), with later addition of sul ponte cello, sul C on viola, and jete. In section B (mm. 30-41), there is a predominance of pizzicato notes, with addition of ricochet glissandi (e.g. m. 35, Example 4.13b). In section C (mm. 42-56), the semitonal ascent and descent of two stacked fifths is combined periodically with chords in pentatonic mode on E♭ (Example 4.13b). In section A’ (mm. 69-77), there is vertical juxtaposition of modes—pentatonic on G with: (1) Aeolian on G (m. 73), and (2) a tetrachord from pentatonic on either B or F# (mm. 76-7; Example 4.13c).
Example 4.13  Movement 15, sections A-D.
(a) Section A opening, mm. 1-9.
(b) Section B, mm. 30-41; section C opening, mm. 42-49.
(c) Section D ending, mm. 73-77.
Throughout movement 15, there is constant perceptual ambiguity between sparse spectra (harmonically-structured tones from individual bowed notes) and richer spectra (formant-structured sound from extended instrumental technique as well as non-triadic harmony that “emulates” formant-structured timbres). Transcendence, which pervades the movement, is an ambiguous feeling that has been conceptualized in several ways, and resonates with a plethora of other feelings. Marcel Zentner categorizes transcendence as a “primary” music-specific emotion which falls under a cluster labeled “sublimity.” A related feeling, also under the sublimity cluster, that is salient for explicating transcendence is “wonder,” a “peak experience” characterized by “awe.”59 There is quite a large degree of overlap between these various and other feelings in that: the peak experience of wonder comprises awe in tandem with feelings of “humility” and “surrender”; transcendence combines awe with a sense of “otherworldliness”; and, sublimity as a cluster also includes more grounded emotions like tenderness, nostalgia, and peacefulness. Thus the feeling of sublimity can be understood in terms of subtle modulation from awe to wonder to transcendence, and to more earthly emotions like tenderness, peacefulness, and nostalgia. Like this notion of sublimity, Michael Spitzer’s concept of the Kantian sublime involves a concatenation of several “general” primary emotions (not specific to music)—fear, tenderness, sadness, happiness, anger—and is epitomized in the last of these.60 David Huron considers “awe” to be the submissive “freeze” response of fear (which is considered under the umbrella term of surprise), combined with positive valences of interest and admiration (which is based in the

60 Michael Spitzer, “Mapping the Human Heart: A Holistic Analysis of Fear in Schubert,” Music Analysis 29 (2010), 183. Of the five emotions invoked by Spitzer, tenderness is not a generally considered to be a primary emotion.
primary emotion of happiness). In each conception of sublimity, ambiguity is inherent in the blending of a variety of feelings.

4.3 Interpretation

Unlike movement 13, which displays a process of synthesis, movement 15 is structurally static in that there is a permanent state of synthesis between harmonically structured tones and rich spectra from extended technique and non-triadic harmony. In a sense, the modulation created by continual synthesizing and bifurcating in the other movements has come to a halt, although it is clear that modulation continues in terms of conventional musical dimensions (e.g. micropolyphonic pitch movement). The texts of movements 13 and 15 no longer refer to the specifics of embodiment (perception, feeling, narrative) except in the vague sense of vitalism in the form of tension and yielding. Transcendence in this context begins from a point after embodiment, and transitions into a state of disembodiment. What we have here is the transcendence not merely of embodiment, but of the remnants of apotheosis or jouissance into terminal emptiness. Yet, as before, the path of emptiness does not lead to emptiness, but instead becomes redirected to the embodied feeling of transcendence, which stems from perceptual ambiguity. Thus even where a positively existing path to emptiness through the principle of yielding is specified, in contrast to the negatively existing paths of deconstructive disembodiment or traversing social fantasy; even where incremental modulation and formal process come to a rest in the static state of synthesis in movement 15; and even

61 Huron, Sweet Anticipation, 288. Admiration can be understood as what Damasio calls “elevation,” which is based in the primary emotion of happiness. Damasio, Looking for Spinoza, 156.
where there is a *complete* absence of specific references to embodied capacity, emptiness is still manifested corporeally.

**V. Suspicious Embodiment**

Although Buddhist emptiness seems to be diametrically opposed to the notion of subjectivity which has recently become important in musicology, emptiness, or more accurately, *becoming* empty is an irrevocably embodied process. This paradox is congruent with the logic of presence and absence in Lacanian theory (see part 3): negatively existing desire is an empty space that comes to be filled with positively existing identity and fantasy. Also following the absence/presence logic, the sacrificed *jouissance* of the carnal body exists negatively in relation to social fantasy. Traversing the fantasy, moving from positive existence to negative existence, realizing that fantasy is *empty*, is almost impossible. It is this impossibility which informs the underlying frightfulness of humorous attempts to give up the fantasy of being an enculturated subject and instead become more like a frog, which is simultaneously positively existing organic matter and our negatively existing desire for the frog to be low and squat.

The presence/absence logic also sheds light into the relation between psyche and embodied capacity: positively existing contents (perception, feeling, narrative) arise from the various psychical facets of identity, fantasy, desire, and *jouissance*. Note that *jouissance* is significant not for giving rise to pleasurable embodiment but to the negation of social identity and fantasy. Rather than being positively existing psychical *contents*, identity and other components of the psyche have no spacio-temporal existence. It is only the positively existing *effects* of these psychical facets as embodiment which can be
observed. As explanations for positively existing embodiment, the psyche exists only negatively as the potential or capacity for particular embodiments.

In Kong, the embodiment of emptiness is expressed as the narrative of transcendence, apotheosis, jouissance, and sublimity. On the literal level of the text, embodiment is meant to give way to emptiness. However, a holistic understanding of the work reveals that every textual narrative of negatively existing emptiness is grounded in positively existing, embodied, musically afforded perception, feeling, and narrative. A plethora of feelings in movement 5 indicate an antecedent, positively existing embodiment that is to be transcended, yet tenderness at the end of the movement as well as glorious apotheosis in movement 11 evince a remnant of embodiment. Movements 13 and 15 open a path to emptiness, but it is a positively existing path which can be only be glimpsed in the form of the embodied feeling of transcendence, and not a negatively existing state of emptiness. Similarly, it is the positively existing path of deconstructive, transformative embodiment which is glimpsed in the embodied feeling of frightful humor in movements 12 and 14—not emptiness per se.

Aside from shedding light on dis/embodiment, which pertains to the ambiguity of narrative, I have also illuminated ambiguities of perception and feeling. Variegated feelings come in blends, conflicts, indeterminacies or transformations, all of which are present in movement 5. From feelingful ambiguity, a distinctly valenced feeling of happiness sometimes emerges, corresponding with formal bifurcation in movements 5, 11, 12, and 14. In many movements, the bifurcated element takes the form of an internally consistent plateau which remains in the same mode, with a pulse that is relatively fast (at least at the level of the smallest rhythmic unit). These plateaus bifurcate
away from ambiguities of synthesis between pentatonicism and chromaticism (movements 5 and 11), stasis and motion (movement 12), and continuity and discontinuity (movement 14).

The feelingful processes of bifurcation and synthesis are tracked by relationality, which provides us with a language for feelings, describing them in terms of valence (dis/affinity), composition (affiliated elements in happiness and disgust; disaffiliated elements in interest, anxiety, and sublimity), and distance (mixture of remote object and proximal memory in nostalgia, and of lost memory and proximal fear in trauma). Aside from the ambiguity of modulating relations, perceptual ambiguity can also be framed in terms of modal mixture (movements 5, 11, and 14), microtonal tuning (bianzhong) versus expectation of equal tempered tuning, the clouding effect of dissonance, and the interchangeability of Chinese and Western strings (especially movement 14). Perceptual ambiguity gives rise to tension, which may take the form of positively valenced interest or negatively valenced suspense, or a contrastively valenced blend of both (movements 5, 11, 12, 14). Other forms of contrastive valence include the blend of happiness and sadness in nostalgia (stemming from the appearance and alternation of major and minor chords in section 4 of movement 5), and the varying conception of a sublimity that (in the Kantian sense) evinces the attempt to grasp something that is impossible to grasp (movements 13 and 15).

By conceiving of narrative in the broadest sense, relating it to perception and feeling on the one hand, and Buddhist deconstruction, Lacan, and Kant, on the other, I have shown how Kong can exceed its textual basis. The encounter with the work has provoked a fundamental examination of the subject in terms of embodiment and psyche.
While the various traditions of philosophical thought invoked are ultimately divergent, surprising points of convergence have emerged. For some reason, there seems to be a shared concerned in how reality may be negated, whether through Buddhist deconstruction, traversing the fantasy, or transforming embodiment. Reality appears to be suspicious, for the sound is soundless, and croaking trumps poetry. For those who would pay heed, there is a lesson here for all varieties of distinct narrative in intercultural studies, whether one enthusiastically celebrates the empowerment of the powerless, courageously faces hegemonic oppression, or selfishly defends aesthetically valued misrepresentations of others—all these might only be your desire. The challenge, then, is to go through disembodiment and embrace the uncomfortable ambiguity of affect.
5) Sublime Liminality: Modernist Molecularity in Joyce Koh’s 

TAI (泰)
Sublime Liminality: Modernist Molecularity in Joyce Koh’s TAI (泰)

In the study of modernism, aesthetics does not typically play a significant role, and so the phrase “modernist sublime” will be rather novel. Recent discussions of musical sublimity have defined it as emotional multivalence (comprising the juxtaposition of fear, anger, tenderness, happiness, sadness) or as a vaguely defined umbrella term (awe, tenderness, wonder, humility, surrender, otherworldliness, nostalgia, peacefulness), and the incorporation of modernist music into the discussion will raise even more problems of definition that this chapter will respond to.¹ Conventionally associated with the Romantic era, musical sublimity calls to mind especially the behemoth works of Wagner, Bruckner, and Mahler, although the intensification of musical emotion from at least the early nineteenth century onwards would support a claim that the long nineteenth century in its entirety was an era of the sublime.² Sublime music famously offers an emotionally embodied listening experience that is profound and rewarding, rather merely fun or pleasurable. It offers a way out of quotidian life.

As a multivalent emotional experience arising from the perception of behemoth structure, the sublime equips us—perhaps surprisingly—for the aesthetics of the modernist sublime. Consider the following descriptions: “cataclysmic power… the

gradual build-up of ‘poisonous gas clouds’ of chords, as David Schiff calls them” (Elliott Carter’s Piano Concerto); “chthonic catharsis” (Harrison Birtwistle’s *Earth Dances*). These metaphors of apocalypse and dark transformation seem to gesture at the emotional intensity of perceptual overload caused by behemoth sound (“cataclysmic”) and multivalent harmony (“gas clouds” of chords). In this chapter, I argue that the modernist sublime is specifically defined by a dialectic of distinct perception and lower level perceptual awareness, or perceptual liminality, as means of a modelling perceptual overload. My thesis is that sublimity is a central aesthetic principle of musical modernism, which is characterized by the immense proliferation of harmonic, timbral, textural and other details. Sublimity arises from the enjoyment of perceptual liminality.

In the classical Kantian sense, the sublime is famously the perception that there is something which cannot be perceived. Because of the intimation of something else—perhaps something better—the sublime as been inducted into various kinds of politics. From a Lacanian perspective, Slavoj Žižek argues that a sublime object is a psychical object that indicates a weakness of the scaffolding in our construction of acceptable social reality. The politics of the sublime consists in the identification of chinks in constructions of the world, such as racial stereotypes which critically reveal that all is not as it seems—i.e. society is not cohesive just because one has identified the racial other as the source of all evil. Comprising perceptual liminality, the modernist sublime can gesture in a politicized way to margins or even what is the beyond the margins; these margins correspond with what Babbitt described as “ever heavier demands upon the

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3 CD reviews in *Tempo* 58 (2004), 74, 76; *BBC Music*, October 2004, 57.
training of the listener's perceptual capacities.”5 Perceptual liminality is brought into conversation with Gilles Deleuze’s notion of “molecularity,” which is inspired in part by Varèse’s micro-musicality of proliferating details.6 Varèse’s predilection for scientific language is well known (Hyperprism, Density 21.5; also “planes” and “sound-masses” in “The Liberation of Sound”) and Ionisation in particular is a cognate equivalent to molecularity. (Ions are particles of matter on the same scale as molecules.) In musical modernism, molecularity evinces from the proliferation of detail that form a liminal layer around the central—or, in Deleuzian terms, “molar”—perception of music’s kinetic, timbral, and textural profile. (“Molar” is the adjective of “mole,” which is a macro unit of measurement for an amount of particles, such as molecules.).

The definition of the modernist sublime as the interplay of perceptual focus and liminality holds for a large body of modernist works, but in my work of choice, a nineteen-minute orchestral piece TAI (premiered in Singapore in 1998, revised 2002 for BBC, unpublished) by Joyce Koh (b. 1968, Singapore), musical molecularity and molarity is to be defined specifically in relation to calligraphic gesture. Synthesizing Varèsiain kinetic motion, post-spectralist orchestral technique, and micropolyphony, TAI (based on the logogram 泰; definition—“peace”; see Figure 5.1) evinces the vertical,

horizontal, and diagonal motion of calligraphic strokes even as a proliferation of variegated (numerous, differentiated) modernist-molecular detail splinters away from unified or molar calligraphic motion in one direction. While my exegesis on the modernist sublime in TAI will proceed via extensive music analysis, my primary conceptual scaffold will be constructed with literary theory, for reasons to be explicated later.
Figure 5.1  The logogram tâi, shown in calligraphy and as computer typeface.
The broad conceptual frame of this chapter consists in the curious compatibility between Deleuze’s dialectic of molecularity and molarity (musicalized in *TAI*), and Žižek’s dialectic of sublimity (social cohesion, supported by stereotyped others—“if only they did not exist…”—versus the liminal awareness of something other than cohesion), in spite of Žižek’s famous critique of Deleuze for an erroneous ontology of the pure flowering of potential without external constraint. One instance of this kind of unbridled optimism in Deleuzian work, Žižek argues, is found in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude*, in which molecular politics of the “grassroots” triumphs over the molar constraint of forces of capitalism. In this chapter, I adopt a Žižekian critique of Deleuze, which was aimed particularly at the latter’s collaborations with Guattari. The politics of the modernist sublime consists in gesturing towards something other than what is (directly perceived) through a process whereby molecular detail (perhaps as in *Multitude*) prevents the full flowering of macro molar shape, and yet molarity persists as a relevant optic. When one of the optics are excluded, descriptions of the political state of affairs tend towards one or the other pole of pure molecular-revolution or molar-totalitarianism. In *TAI*’s intercultural terms, the modernist sublime pits cultural definition in the form of musicalized calligraphy against the erasure of definition effected by a profusion of molecular detail. The dialectical relation between the two registers comprises what I call a politics of indistinction, which gestures towards escape from

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8 An awareness of the dialectics of possibility and limit is evinced in numerous articles in Deleuze-inspired affect theory, famously so in the case of Laurent Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 93-117. Writings in musicology tend to have a looser grip on the limitation of possibility. See chapters in Hulse et al. eds., *Sounding the Virtual*. 
ossified definitions such as exotic stereotype. Molarity and molecularity are to be understood respectively as the presence of definition (as in distinct shape or traits) and lack thereof, rather than big and small; although the variegation of molecularity will comprise differentiation of micro detail, molarity does not necessarily imply size. I explore the modernist sublime as an escape route from definition to a specifically molecular-liminal form of indistinction. In what follows, I will introduce Koh and her music, elucidating the meaning of modernist molecular-liminality in musicalized calligraphy, and construct a more detailed framework of the sublime against which TAI can be read, before returning to a full examination of the piece.

Koh honed her modernist aesthetic during years of study with David Lumsdaine at King’s College London (MMus 1991) and Nicola LeFanu at York (PhD 1997), as well as through exposure to the post-spectralist school during her years in Paris (1996-2008). Previously the recipient of the Nadia Boulanger International Foundation Scholarship, fellow at IRCAM, and Composer-in-Residence at Herrenhaus Edenkoben and Ecole Nationale de Musique de Montbéliard, Koh’s modernist aesthetic is shared with her other composition mentors, which include Henri Dutilleux, Franco Donatoni, and Brian Ferneyhough. Koh’s post-spectralist approach is influenced by Tristan Murail (also a mentor), and she identifies Kaija Saariaho and Michael Jarrell as stylistic references for her own music. She also told me that the spatial explorations of Varèse is a point of departure for her sonic rendition of calligraphy.⁹

According to the composer, TAI comprises four sections (mm. 1-93, 94-174, 175-328, 329-379; or 93, 81, 154, and 51 measures in length) lasting approximately three,  

⁹ Interview with the composer (September 07, 2007). A biography and program notes of works can be found at http://jbtkoh.net (accessed on August 15, 2013; currently under construction).
four, six, and six minutes respectively. (The last section is significantly slower than the rest.) While section 2 lays out the calligraphy strokes in the logogram in sequence, with measures intervening between strokes, the rest of the sections display the general kinesthetic features of musicalized calligraphic motion without following any specific stroke pattern or sequence. Section 1 is scored for percussion only, with instrumental families surreptitiously joining in, while section 3 is loosely based on section 1, but scored for full orchestra. Section 4 evinces what the composer describes as the “transcendence” of the earlier principle of musicalized calligraphic motion (kinetic energy in general, as well as specific directionality as evinced in the strokes of the logogram).

Some preliminary notes on Chinese calligraphy will be useful for understanding TAI. Chinese calligraphy is executed with ink brushes of various sizes on scrolls of paper. As can be observed in Figure 5.1, the two ends of each stroke are either tapered or augmented. This variation is achieved by modulating the speed and pressure of stroke execution; slower speed and higher pressure creates a larger ink imprint, and vice versa. Because of the water-like consistency of ink, each calligraphic stroke needs to be executed quickly and smoothly in a single motion, which takes years of practice to perfect. In TAI, the strokes encapsulate unified movement, while molecular musical details splinter away, resulting in a sublime feeling of perceptual liminality. Particular challenges are involved in the translation of calligraphy into the diachronic pitch-time space of Western music: because of the compulsory temporal motion from left to right in the score, vertical strokes are “pulled” horizontally into diagonal form, while right-to-left strokes can only be presented in mirror image, left-to-right form. Figure 5.2a shows how
the ten strokes of TAI aggregate into the logogram, while Figure 5.2b shows how each of
strokes 6-10 (discussed in detail in this chapter) is musicalized; the final stroke 10 is
musicalized not in terms of motion of the stroke on paper, but the upward lift of the brush
away from the paper as the logogram is completed.
Figure 5.2a  The ten strokes of tài
Figure 5.2b  Musicalization of Calligraphy

(8) (9)

(pulled horizontally)

(left tick at end of stroke is reflected as the increased intensity of rhythmic acceleration)

(8) (9)

(unchanged) (mirror image)

(8) (9)

(unchanged)

(represented lifting of brush from paper in final stroke)
A brief analytical excursus will clarify the relation between musicalized calligraphy, molecular-liminality, and modernist sublimity. According to Koh, section 2 of *TAI* comprises a musical rendition of every stroke in the logogram, and my analysis will draw on information she provided me with regarding the correspondence between measure numbers and particular strokes.

Measures 146-7 (Example 5.1a) musicalizes stroke 6, which comprises two contiguous parts. It is initiated with a long vertical downward stroke and ends with an upward tick to the left. In terms of force, the vertical stroke evinces a tensile strength in the downward movement of the brush, which is resisted by the paper. The paper resistance is directionally opposite (i.e. upwards) to the downward force of the brush. (Classroom physics teaches us that each force is countered by an equal force in the reverse direction, a principle known as Newton’s third law of motion.) Musically, this up-down tension is evinced in the opposed glissandi movement of high and low pitches towards the center, as shown in column A of Example 5.1b. Rather than contradicting each other, the two opposed movements are actually mutually enhancing: the rising pitches make the falling pitches seem to move more dramatically than they actually do by “artificially” narrowing the distance between them. Because the higher pitches collectively have a more perceptible registral movement than the lower ones (low instruments are not especially audible), the overall effect is one of descent; as can be seen in column A of Example 5.1b, the component motions of ascent and descent are both “pulled” horizontally by pitch-time space to form diagonals. More details about pitch movement are given in column B, which splits the ascent-descent graph in column A into the three woodwind, brass, and string families.
Example 5.1a  Joyce Koh, TAI, stroke 6, mm. 146-7, 6:03-6:09.
Example 5.1b  Perceptually salient and liminal features of Joyce Koh, *TAI*, Stroke 6, mm 146-7, 6:03-6:09. Column A presents a summary of contrary motion that amplifies the effect of overall downward movement (upward movement is less pronounced). Perceptually salient features in Column B are expanded from the summary in Column A. Column C shows the perceptually liminal feature of rhythmic acceleration.
Details which are not perceptually salient have been omitted from column B.\textsuperscript{10} The omission of certain details in order to present the most perceptually salient musical features is, of course, not a scientific exercise, but I believe the main perception of contrary motion is clearly conveyed. Rather than being merely procedural, however, the editing process here is also indicative of what I will argue (in the next section) is the central aesthetic of musical modernism. I understand what Babbitt referred to as “ever heavier demands upon the training of the listener's perceptual capacities” to arise from a vast proliferation of details beyond what is perceptually central. An example of such liminal detail, perpetually sinking into and rising out of focus on different hearings, comprises the accelerating rhythmic figures in m. 147 which are shown in column C. These figures move by small-interval glissandi that are barely discernible over the dramatic ascent and descent of pitches, even as the figures contribute, however minimally and unpredictably from a perceptual viewpoint, to the overall increase of kinetic energy as the musicalized stroke 6 comes to an end. The increase in energy reflects the augmentation of the ink imprint at the bottom end of the downward vertical calligraphic stroke, before the stroke is concluded with a flick of the brush to the left to create the tick.

\textsuperscript{10} I will explain my reduction procedure for Example 1b in some detail as it relates to the concept of perceptual liminality. Details which have been omitted are not perceptually salient and their inclusion would only have occluded the clarity of the example. My editorial considerations are as follows. 1) Some instruments appear twice in the “before” and/or “after” pitches because of a variety of reasons: a) two or more ascents and descents are made within the same part, in which case, the initiating and arrival pitches are shown on the left and right side of the up or down arrows respectively, i.e. without indicating the precise pitches of each individual glissandi, or their sequence; b) the parts could begin and/or end in divisi; and c) for the strings, in particular, their separation into Groups I and II on the left and right front side of the stage is not indicated, and instead all the strings are presented in the same staff. 2) A minority of parts which contradict the general movement of instruments in the same register is not shown. 3) Glissandi movements that fail to conclude within mm. 146-7 or by the downbeat in m. 148, which marks the beginning of stroke 7, are not shown.
(Identify stroke 6 from Figure 5.2a before locating it in the calligraphic rendition in Figure 5.1.)

Despite the finely wrought scoring for the musicalized stroke 6, the effect of the material in column C is unpredictable because the numerous differentiated rhythmic figures conveying this energetic variation are overlaid onto the perceptual focal point of column B, itself already molecularly variegated in terms of pitch distribution and different rates of glissandi. There is a constant interplay between Column C as both focal and liminal points, of which the latter is intuited as “some detail I did not quite catch,” except that music theorists can always listen to the passage again with the expressed intention of catching that detail.¹¹ I make this observation not merely to remark on the common sense notion that modernist scores require repeated listening, but, more crucially, also to point out that this is the common core of the experience of listening to a variety of modernist music ranging from atonality, to dodecaphony, total serialism, experimentalism, and spectralism. Liminality in TAI comprises the molecular variegation of musical material in both columns B and C, as well as the marginality of rhythmic acceleration in the latter column in relation to the main perception of overall downward glissandi movement in the former column.

¹¹ My argument here is to be differentiated from the idea that liminal details can be brought into perceptual focus through analytical effort. See David Lewin, “Behind the Beyond: A Response to Edward T. Cone,” Perspectives of New Music 7 (1969): 59-69; Edward T. Cone, “Beyond Analysis,” in the same journal 6 (1968): 33-51. The point here, rather, is that the vast proliferation of molecular detail makes such a transformation of listening experience contrarian to the experience of the sublime, on which the intimation of “something other than what exists” depends. Other than being politically disenabling, such a transformation is arguably not afforded by modernist musical material. I encourage the reader to access the audio recording of TAI to verify the work’s molecular-liminality.
In the rest of this chapter, I will contextualize *TAI* within discussions of the sublime especially in musicology, and examine the piece in greater detail using both musical and political lenses. I shall argue that *TAI*’s musical sublimity presents a challenge to the politics of knowledge. The cultural other may be resisting, co-opting, or even flourishing in spite of oppressive forces, but in most cases, the other is known—presented as an object of knowledge; in media presentations, the other is literally seen and heard. Later on, we shall observe how Koh departs from specific calligraphic motion and then dissipates kinetic energy altogether by transposing musical modulation from the register of pitch to alternating timbral groups, thereby slowing down the rate of change (section 3); motion eventually becomes micropolyphonic in section 4 when the amplitude of variegated micro changes is so small as to fall into molecular liminality. Which is to say that not only is the cultural “content” of *TAI*—its calligraphic motion—not given complete molar definition from the start, this content morphs into culturally non-specific timbral modulation (after the last stroke of *TAI* has been sonorously rendered), and eventually becomes virtually non-motion at the end. In *TAI*, liminality arises from: 1) the vast proliferation of detail characteristic of modernism, 2) the multitude of small increments of change in micropolyphony, and 3) the variegation of the illusory molar tone that arises from spectralist orchestration (more on this later).

*TAI* is the site of a politics of indistinction, wherein the other as calligraphy escapes definition through modernist sublimity, but not quite. To begin, the assertion of cultural indistinction is consonant with Koh’s own opinion that the meaning of *泰* is irrelevant to an understanding of her piece, which the composer insists is primarily concerned with Varèse-inspired spatial movements, on the one hand, and post-spectralist
principles (harmonicity and inharmonicity, harmony as timbre), on the other. In spite of this resistance to cultural specificity, however, we may question why the capitalized title of TAI is congruent with an orientalist spectacularization of the Other, and with the arguably grandiloquent largesse of the nineteen-minute orchestral piece. Furthermore, the virtual non-motion at the end of the piece, especially coming after the prior calligraphic action, seems to be highly congruent with the logogram’s meaning—“peace.” Both the title and the music of TAI thus retain cultural connotations, even as Koh forges an intercultural path guided by the beacon of the purportedly semantically empty European canon of absolute music. Perhaps indistinction has to be dialectically related to a distinct object for the former to be recognized as such? This question will be explored in relation to concepts of the sublime in the next section.

I. Modernist Sublimity

Before proceeding further with the analysis of TAI, I will establish a particular intellectual frame of the sublime that is relevant to my aims in this chapter. As mentioned earlier, Žižek is concerned with a politics of the sublime, consisting in the intimation of something other than what exists. As a Lacanian, the philosopher conceives of the sublime in a psychoanalytic register comprising acceptable social reality (social cohesion, “if only there were no racial others”) and its disruption. This disruption is effected by disorganized bodily sensation or jouissance—in Lacanian theory, both the social order (Symbolic) and its site of disruption (Real) are evacuated of embodiment, corresponding to the concept of rationalist culture. Sublimity could be encapsulated in a number of

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12 Interview on September 07, 2007.
objects of desire (indicating what is lacking), exchange (establishing social relations), and jouissance or enjoyment (harkening to banished sensation). Since I have been discussing sublimity in terms of perception and emotion, the last type of sublime object is of direct relevance to my project.

With respect to theories of emotion/perception/sensation, Žižek’s formulation of the sublime object of jouissance is particularly suggestive because it provokes an examination of the ontological framework of affect theory. Rather than considering the capacities of bodies from the perspective of bodily powers/potential alone, a horizon of dialectical negation is introduced by the concept of sublimity, which in terms of jouissance could be understood as the disruptive, disorganized, but bodily perception that there is something unperceived—i.e. within the disembodied rationalist social order, a presentiment of “something other than” is induced by disorganized bodily matter. The key inflection of the molar-molecular framework, which is provoked by an examination of the sublime, is that liminal-molecularity exists only in relation to calligraphic-cultural-molar definition, or perhaps stereotype. Rather than viewing TAI as one evolving unit, we should interpret the work through the lens of duality—not in the trivial sense that there is both molecularity and molarity, but that the politics of the work is revealed only by considering how one term defines the other. Not only is molecularity is nothing but the impossibility of full molar definition, and molarity nothing but the impossibility of infinite variegation, these two terms are optics for describing one and the same state of affairs—perceptual liminality is the inverse twin of the “impossible” molarity. The

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14 For an introduction to affect theory, see Gregg et al. eds., *The Affect Theory Reader*. 

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definition of molecular-liminality as (the negation of) molar perceptual focus is the key conceptual point of departure which differentiates this chapter from other music-theoretical work on e.g. micro-macro registers, which generally share the goal of producing or positivising musical features through analytical insight (as noted earlier).

The principle of negation—though not necessarily dialectical negation—is central to recent work on the musical sublime by Kiene Wurth, albeit implicitly. In previous studies of the sublime, Wurth notes, the sublime has been defined through a horizon of extraordinary otherness—musical massiveness (Handelian oratorio performances in Britain), complexity (the contrapuntal opening of the finale of Mozart’s Jupiter), and disorder (the opening chaos in Haydn’s The Creation).\(^\text{15}\) In contrast, and extending the applicability of the musical sublime into the nineteenth century, Wurth formulates a notion of the sublime in Schubert that is premised on the negation of subjectivity. She argues that the “dynamical” sublime of excessive power is intuited in the middle section of Schubert’s F# minor Andantino from Sonata in A minor, D. 959 (1828), where the logic of formal development gives way to seemingly random scales and arpeggios, portraying the traumatic dissolution of subjectivity in the face of terror. Wurth then proceeds to argue that the musical sublime in Terry Riley’s postmodern In C (1964) is also marked by negation, evincing here from the contradiction of life and death instincts. The “mathematical” sublime of (seemingly) infinite repetition is intuited in the minimalist piece, in which micrological variation reduces the possibility of tension arising from change to a minimum (death instinct), combining with the vitalism of the potential for an infinity of sameness (life instinct). Wurth describes both the Andantino

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and In C as “form-contrary” in the sense that musical form is negated through formal dissolution or the presence of conflicting forces.\textsuperscript{16}

With the above studies as backdrop, we find a lacuna for an elaboration of the modernist sublime. For a point of departure, we can refer to Jean-François Lyotard’s “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” which can be fruitfully read in conjunction with Babbitt’s modernist manifesto “The Composer as Specialist.” I will quote Lyotard’s gloss on Kant at length, since it is the foundation of what I consider to be the modernist sublime, before teasing out the passage’s somewhat convoluted logic:

The aesthetics of the sublime is... indeterminate: a pleasure mixed with pain, a pleasure that comes from pain. In the event of an absolutely large object – the desert, a mountain, a pyramid – or one that is absolutely powerful – a storm at sea, an erupting volcano – which like all absolutes can only be thought, without any sensible/sensory intuition, as an Idea of reason, the faculty of presentation, the imagination, fails to provide a representation corresponding to this Idea. This failure of expression gives rise to a pain, a kind of cleavage within the subject between what can be conceived and what can be imagined or presented. But this pain in turn engenders a pleasure, in fact a double pleasure: the impotence of the imagination attests \textit{a contrario} to an imagination striving to figure even that which cannot be figured, and that imagination thus aims to harmonize its object with that of reason – and that furthermore the inadequacy of the images is a negative sign of the immense power of ideas. This dislocation of the faculties among themselves gives rise to the extreme tension (Kant calls it agitation) that characterizes the pathos of the sublime, as opposed to the calm feeling of beauty.\textsuperscript{17}

A storm at sea, an erupting volcano. These entities of immense power and size cannot be presented to perception in the fullness of their scale, except through some aesthetic diminution, as in a photograph or a film. The sublime intimates the vital capacities of our living bodies by activating the vigorous exercise of “imagination,”

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 139.
thereby stretching one’s *perceptual* capacities, leading to the *negated* perception that there is something which *cannot* be perceived, and thereby revealing the immense scope of our “reason” or *conceptual* power. While perceptual liminality may cause “pain,” this latter is laced with pleasure in the exploration of perception and the recognition of the power of our ability to conceptualize. As Arved Ashby puts it, the pleasure of modernist music is not simple pleasure, but the *painful* pleasure of “jouissance.”  

18 This definition of modernist *jouissance*, which I am calling the sublime, is at odds with the sublime as the multivalence of emotions (fear, anger, happiness, sadness, tenderness) or as a vaguely defined, positively valenced emotion group (awe, tenderness, transcendence, wonder etc.) presented at the beginning of this chapter. Modernist sublimity comprises the dialectical complication of basal feelings of pain and pleasure, arising from the conceptual rewards of perceptual liminality. From the perspective of the neurophysiology of emotion, the painful-pleasure of sublimity could be understood as the feeling of uncertainty that arises from perceptual liminality—such uncertainty generates a mixture of interest and anxiety.  

19 As we have established, one definition of the musical sublime consists in an association between mega-phenomena and perceptual-conceptual capacity—reading Lyotard/Kant against Handel seems particularly suggestive. In relation specifically to modernism, consider again “cataclysmic power… the gradual build-up of ‘poisonous gas clouds’ of chords” and “chthonic catharsis” (cited earlier). The stormy eruption of music

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is, of course, not limited to musical modernism, and cannot said to be universal within the latter, but I would argue that it is an unmistakable trope within Euro-American avant-garde works, loosely comprising the following schools: the Second Viennese school, Darmstadt, American experimentalism (excluding practices of indeterminacy perhaps), and French post/spectralism. Because of perceptual overload in musical modernism, the listener’s capacity is painfully strained and pleasurably expanded. Milton Babbitt famously explained that

> [t]his music employs a tonal vocabulary which is more ‘efficient’ than that of the music of the past, or its derivatives. This is not necessarily a virtue in itself, but it does make possible a greatly increased number or pitch simultaneities, successions, and relationships. This increase in efficiency necessarily reduces the ‘redundancy’ of the language, and as a result the intelligible communication of the work demands increased accuracy from the transmitter (the performer) and activity from the receiver (the listener)... [I]t makes ever heavier demands upon the training of the listener's perceptual capacities.\(^{20}\) (emphasis mine)

Unlike “the music of the past, or its derivatives,” original, “efficient” music arouses a sublime pain-pleasure through the “heavier demands” on the listener’s perceptual capacity, which at the same time reveals the listener’s powerful conceptual ability. I argue that what Babbitt calls musical efficiency results in perceptual overload, which translates into the modernist musical dialectic of perceptual molar focal point versus molecularity-liminality. This modernist dialectic is elaborated in the musical analysis presented in the next section of this chapter.

\(^{20}\) Babbitt, “The Composer as Specialist,” 162.
II. Calligraphic Strokes: Section 2

Because of the length and complexity of TAI, I will only be discussing selected passages in order to elucidate the central features of each of the four sections of the work. I will start with section 2 since it affords an elucidation of the central concept of kinetic motion, defined through the molar-molecular dialectic.

Within section 2, strokes 6-10 present a majority of the stroke types within the logogram, excepting the three initiating horizontal strokes, which can be intuitively imagined. Stroke 6 has been examined in detail, and as explained earlier, the overall diagonal downward movement of the stroke is a result of the horizontal pull of pitch-time space on the vertical calligraphic stroke. In contrast with stroke 6, stroke 7 is actually a diagonal calligraphy stroke to begin with. The overall descent in the pitch space of the musicalized stroke 7 is shown at the upper left corner of Example 5.2. Four diagonal lines represent the repeated descent motions in the music, which is driven by the two high and low pitched Chinese drums, shown at the top of the example, with the arrival point of the four downward leaps marked by asterisks. Orchestral instruments generally follow this fourfold contour, displaying a sense of downward punctuation (also asterisked) that characterizes the calligraphic stroke 7, which is a short “point”-stroke—in the artistic rendition of the stroke in Figure 5.1, the “point”-stroke is asymmetrically shaped, with an ending emphasis reflected in the larger size of the ink imprint at the lower right side of the stroke. While an overall direction is established, the downward motion is colored by the variegation of heterophony, evincing molecular-liminality, especially in m. 148\(^2\) and m. 149\(^3\).
Example 5.2  Downward diagonal point-stroke 7 in Joyce Koh, *TAI*, mm. 148-150, 6:09-6:14. Musicalized as 4 repeated downward motions.
Stroke 8 is an upward diagonal stroke which commences after a two-measure interlude in which the rhythmic density is reduced, and the orchestral texture builds upwards layer by layer in sustained tones, culminating in the upward unfolding of pitches over three and a half octaves, which ascending motion is represented in the upper left corner of Example 5.3. Group 1 strings initiate motion, beginning with the cellos and spreading upwards to violin I, with significant dovetailing; the latter is a feature shared by all the three instrumental groups in the example. Notes marked with an open ended slur denote the first sounding of pitches that are sustained at that register (unless otherwise indicated) at some point in the course of the three measures, and not necessarily on the same instrument that first sounded the pitch. After the initiation by Group 1, motion is passed to a smaller upward unfolding gesture in Group 2 strings, and then back to Group 1. The wind family doubles both string groups. As before, the overall diagonal upward direction is musicalized with variegation in the three upward motions (Groups 1 to 2 to 1) that are interwoven like a rope. The last note of motion 1, D quarter sharp\(_6\), is sustained through motion 2’s rise and eventual unison on the same pitch, while the registral differentiation at the commencement of motion 3—between the lowest note of motion 3 and the sustained D quarter sharp\(_6\)—is resolved through the termination of D quarter sharp\(_6\) when motion 3 nears its own high end point. The degree of molecularity in the three interwoven motions is not intense enough to be described as perceptually liminal, as in previous passages, but the principle of variegation can still be observed. Rather molecular-liminality arises from post-spectralist technique, as explained below.
An interplay between harmonicity and inharmonicity can be observed in Example 5.3. For G#\(_2\) (m. 153), the first twelve harmonics are:

1. G#\(_2\) (fundamental)
2. G#\(_3\)
3. D#\(_4\)(+2)
4. G#\(_4\)
5. C\(_4\)(+14)
6. D#\(_5\)(+2)
7. F#\(_5\)(-31)
8. G#\(_5\)
9. A#\(_5\)(+4)
10. C\(_6\)(-14)
11. D\(_6\)(-49)
12. D#\(_6\)(+2)

* Plus or minus signs indicate variance from equal temperament in terms of cents (out of 100).

As is well known, harmonicity comprises the illusory perception that there is only one molar tone G#\(_2\)—all sounding pitches seem to fuse into one harmonically-structured tone or “timbre,” since the unique configuration of “harmonics” (actually sustained pitches) imitate the spectral profile of that fictional molar tone.\(^{21}\) Inharmonicity comprises the molecular-liminal variegation of multiple tones, each with a unique harmonic series, and tones are also registrally misplaced or deviant from the precise frequency of a particular harmonic of the molar tone. Most perceptibly, the high sustained D quarter-sharp\(_6\) (asterisked) is at 27 cents variance from the twelfth harmonic D#\(_6\)(+2), and sounds like a “flat” compound perfect fifth. The sustained F#s are ostensibly from the harmonic series, but are actually inharmonic in the sense that the lower F#\(_3\) is registrally incorrect, while the higher F#\(_5\) deviates from the seventh harmonic, which is 31 cents flatter than F#\(_5\). The sustained C#\(_4\) is related to the conventional notation of the eleventh harmonic D\(_6\)(-49) as

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“C#,” i.e. the fourth degree of the major scale starting from the fundamental G#.
However, C#₄ is registrally misplaced and deviant by 51 cents from the eleventh harmonic.

Stroke 9 is a downward diagonal stroke, which unlike the previous two diagonal strokes, proceeds right to left. It is therefore impossible to represent the stroke literally within Western pitch-time space, since pitch descent cannot possibly occur in reverse time (right to left in a pitch-time graph). Thus what is sonorously represented is in principle the same as with stroke 7, the diagonal descending “point”-stroke, but elongated. Stroke 9 commences in measure 157 with high tremolo pitches begun in the previous intervening measure between strokes 8 and 9. (These pitches represent the peak of another upward stacking of sustained pitches as with the intervening measures between strokes 7 and 8, and we will examine this figure in more detail in stroke 10.) As with stroke 8, the main action is executed by the strings, but perceptually focused on the highest violin parts which are doubled by winds (not shown). Because of the molecular-liminality of independent figures in all of the string parts in mm. 158-9 (Example 5.4a), what comes across is a general impression of rapid activity in the high register rather than the precise counterpoint suggested in Example 5.4b, in which only the highest parts are shown.
Example 5.4a Joyce Koh, *TAI*, mm. 158-9, strings.
The rest of section 2 comprises a series of upward stacking of sustained notes, with two gestures occurring in the intervening measures between stroke 9 and 10 (mm. 161-167), and two occurring within the latter. What sets the two gestures of stroke 10 (mm. 168-174) apart from the prior two is the higher degree of rhythmic activity and higher register. The two gestures comprising stroke 10 are the least literal of all the musicalized strokes in that they do not display the diagonal downward direction of the stroke. Rather, the two gestures render the vertical direction (away from the paper) of the final stroke’s physical execution and the intensity which evinces from the high tension during the diagonal downward motion—observe that the ink imprint near the end of stroke 10 in Figure 5.1 is the largest in the logogram. The intensity of execution is matched by the dramatic upward swop of release at the end of the entire character as the brush leaves the paper for the final time. Musically, tension is expressed in the relatively long gestation period of sustained notes (the third, fifth and eight harmonic of an implied A₁ fundamental) in mm. 168-9 of gesture A in Example 5.5, which leads to a rapid upward efflorescence of notes in violins and piccolo. The opening of the piccolo phrase mostly doubles the violins in a heterophonic way, and unlike the latter, is notated at pitch without downward octave transposition to indicate the registral height. Gesture A ends with a flourish on the piccolo after a brief respite from frenetic activity in m. 170. Gesture B exhibits the same tension-release pattern, but comprises a significant harmonic shift, an increase in textural-harmonic density and hence molecular-liminality, and continuity in the high register figuration, with glockenspiel and celeste filling in moments of rhythmic lull in violins and piccolo. The curved upward arrow in gesture B,
which is also relevant for understanding A, is a musicalized representation of the lifting gesture of the brush away from the paper.
Example 5.5  Stroke 10 musicalized in terms of brush motion (2x) away from paper in Joyce Koh, TAI, mm. 168-174, 7:01-7:19
Across strokes 6-10, it can be observed that the music modulates in accordance with the direction or intensity of the stroke, by turns incrementally and dramatically, and always perceptibly. Yet, because of molecular-liminality at every turn, there is always something which appears to perception only negatively—a perceived “something” that we cannot perceptually define because of the vast proliferation of micro detail. Molecular-liminality comes in the form of: numerous glissandi commencing and ending at different times and on different pitches (stroke 6), the marginality of rhythmic acceleration in relation to the focal point of contrary glissandi motion (stroke 6), heterophonic variation (stroke 7), in/harmonicity (stroke 8), multiplicity of individuated string figuration (stroke 9), and harmonic-textural density (stroke 10).

III. Timbral Groups: Sections 1 and 3

After section 2, the quality of kinetic motion is altered in that it no longer relates directly to the logogram, and is now driven by modulation of timbre through the alternation and juxtaposition of four instrumental groups defined in the score, each of which has a distinctive timbral definition. Molecular-liminality in this section comprises the variegated “deformation” of the illusory spectralist molar tone (see my discussion of Example 5.3 earlier) that is salient in the middle to later part of the section when sustained simultaneities replace the active figuration of the beginning of the section. Unlike section 2, in which musical momentum is driven by the vertical ascent or descent of pitches, either through modulating instrumental lines or sustained stacking (stroke 10), section 3 is composed of parts which largely remain in the same register, and is driven by the interweaving of four timbral groups along the horizontal, temporal dimension. Thus
in addition to their harmonic quality, tones are equally important for their timbre, contributing to an overall effect of timbral mutation as the four groups are interweaved—i.e. continually juxtaposed and separated in varying configurations. That is to say, tones are important not only for their vertical pitch position but also for their horizontal position in timbral interweaving. Because of the dual function of tones, harmony and timbre create to some extent one and the same aesthetic effect, even as modulation in both respects cause the two to become distinct. To account for the horizontal persistence of harmonic/timbral “mass” or “density,” Koh refers to her timbral groups as “sound complexes” consisting of internally moving parts. In section 3, the energetic momentum of calligraphic strokes is transposed from the parameter of pitch-registral imitation of visual movement to that of timbral modulation as the four timbral groups synthesize and bifurcate.

Section 3 begins as the culmination of the final upward sweep of stroke 10, in which the highest instruments sustain their final pitches for what is marked as 22-seconds in the score (m. 175). Piccolo, violins, glockenspiel, and celeste are especially prominent here; these instruments emerge as part of Group 3 of the four timbral groups. Whereas Groups 1 and 2 are mellower in tone, Groups 3 and 4 are shriller. The instrument which exemplifies the sound of each timbral group is highlighted in Table 5.1. For group 3, the brilliance of the key instrument glockenspiel is complemented by celeste and piccolo. Group 3 is timbrally matched by Group 4, which is characterized by violins 1. For much of the beginning of section 3, Groups 3 and 4 are sounded simultaneously (Example 5.6a,

22 Personal communication on August 15, 2013. “I like the word ‘complex’ because for me, it connotes the idea of mass, gives a sense of density, as well as evokes movement of its parts.”

23 Information about the key instrument in each group was established in personal communication with Koh on May 20, 2013.
m. 176-216). Contrasting with Groups 3 and 4 is Group 1, which is characterized by the mellow tone and percussive attack of the piano; the piano is usually accompanied by the rounded sound of Chinese drums and the growl of the bass drum, which amplifies the noise aspect of the piano’s percussiveness. Group 1 is sounded more sparingly than Groups 3 and 4, while Group 2, which is mellow in tone like Group 1, appears only at the end of the Example 5.6a. Group 2’s appearance at the quieter passage at the end of Example 5.6a allows the richness of the bass clarinet to be heard, complemented by low and middle range winds such as cor anglais, horns, and tenor trombone.
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Example 5.6
(a) Beginning of Section 3, mm. 176-216, interweaving of four timbral groups

(b) mm. 207-223, 8:39-9:01, timbral and harmonic motion
Example 5.6b is an expansion of the end measures (207-216) of Example 5.6a, showing the interweaving of the four timbral groups. While the passage is explicitly driven by timbral color, the initiation of each group also coincides with harmonic motion, which perceptually diminishes in importance in relation to timbral color as each group continues to be sustained, while rising again in perceptual salience with the commencement of the next group. The play of molar harmonicity and molecular inharmonicity can be observed both within each group’s harmony and in the motion of bass notes A-D-E♭, which materialize or grate against the tonic and implied fifth of the final G# (m. 216), which was also locally important in stroke 8. The relative brevity of each timbral groups’ sounding augments perceptual liminality as the ear is shifted from one in/harmonic complex to another.

In Table 5.1, we can observe the centrality of the percussion within each timbral group. The four percussion groups are managed by four players, and we can now return to the opening section of TAI, which begins with purely percussion (Example 5.7). Here, the percussion has yet to assume the critical role of helping to define the four timbral groups of section 3, where Group 1, in particular, is crucially defined by Chinese and bass drums. With hindsight, it is possible to see in the opening, beyond the exotic hue of “world music percussion,” the nascence of timbre’s later centrality, for percussion is the most spectrally rich instrumental family. Rather than marking meter or pulse, the percussion in TAI is often pure timbre and rhythmic intensity. Example 5.7 shows the chain of characteristic rhythmic bursts from each percussionist’s mini-ensemble, beginning with player 3 and followed by player 1 (m. 1), who is subsequently joined by player 2 (m. 2). This rhythmic figuration comes to feature prominently later in the piece, as we have seen,
in the instrumental transfer of rhythmic intensity in stroke 8 (upward transfer) and stroke 9 (downward transfer). The overall effect in Example 5.7 is the ebb and flow of rhythmic intensity and timbral modulation, arising from a molecular-liminal sea of individual details.
Example 5.7  Opening of TAI: percussion 1—high and low Chinese drums, bass drum; percussion 2—timpani (inverted cymbal balancing on dome placed on top), 3 timpanis; percussion 3—snare drum, 5 toms; percussion 4—high Chinese drum, 2 bongos, 2 congos, tam-tam)
IV. Transcendence: Section 4

As explained earlier, section 4 evinces transcendence of earlier principles. By section 3, the calligraphic inspiration of kinetic motion, defined in terms of vertical pitch registration, has given way to timbrally driven modulation, defined in terms of horizontal timbral interweaving. In the course of section 4, even timbral modulation is virtually halted; molecular-liminality is observed in the micropolyphonic texture consisting of a proliferation of micro changes.

The definition of timbral groups is still observed after the opening passage of section 3, discussed earlier, but with less precision. As the music progresses towards and imperceptibly becomes section 4 with no distinctive caesura, the differentiated instrumental groupings are gradually abandoned, leading to a smooth incrementalism of timbral modulation. Whereas differentiated timbral groups are defined by vertical timbral composition in section 3, the continuity of timbre in section 4 means that analytical effort is exerted horizontally in measuring micro changes. This latter horizontal impetus is already important in section 3 because of the discernible persistence of timbral groups, as noted earlier, but becomes the governing principle in section 4 (mm. 329 – 379). Modulation in harmony is also incrementalized because pitch movement is minimized, such that the vertical perceptual analysis of harmonic composition gives way to the

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24 Schoenberg’s *Farben* comes to mind. A related topic is emergent quality (in the passage from *TAI* in question—continuity) in molar, temporal dynamic form. See Joshua Mailman, “Temporal Dynamic Form in Music: Atonal, Tonal, and Other,” PhD thesis (University of Rochester, 2010). My main point of inquiry in this article, however, is what might be called the *submergence* of form into molecular indistinction, although the transition from section 3 to 4 does evince the emergence of formal-molar continuity from molecular changes that lead to the de-differentiation of the four timbral groups.
horizontal perceptual analysis of changes within harmonic *continuity*. As before, there is a constant interplay of illusory molar tone versus multiple molecular tones.

Example 5.8 shows the final arrival at the fundamental C# of *TAI*, last observed in stroke 6 of section 2 (see Example 5.1, column A), and never secured again until now; in connection with C#, recall the local importance of the third harmonic G# in stroke 8. Example 5.8 contains a three-part gesture, comprising initiation (m. 342), culmination (m. 348), and eruption (m. 350 ff.); the three corresponding simultaneities (“chord” for short) are labeled A, B, and C, each of which expresses one of the defining features of *TAI*—respectively, incrementalized modulation in micropolyphony (section 4), directed motion (section 2), and rhythmic profile (important for the registrally static timbral groups in section 3). Chord A is launched with a sharp tutti attack and the volcanic rumbling of the thunder sheet and lion’s roar (percussion). Over a sustained bass foundation of C#s, the individual higher parts continually weave in and out of the orchestral texture in crescendos and/or diminuendos (*ppp* to *fff*) over four measures, either stealing in unnoticed before a frisson of sudden efflorescence, or assertively launching with full tone. What we hear is a shimmering density of sound that sparkles with a brass here and a woodwind there. Chord B is the culmination of a registral buildup starting from a bass-heavy tutti chord two measures earlier, with the shrill, stratospheric notes in the highest octave appearing only at the end (F#₆ and G₆ in violin harmonics, topped by C₇ in flute). With chord C, the gesture erupts from the lull of micropolyphonic subtlety and resumes violent tutti attacks (numbered 1-5), with an energetic flourish of rhythmic acceleration at the end.
Example 5.8  Final arrival at C# fundamental in section 4, mm. 342-353, 14:48-15:58.
While chords B and C display the directed motion and rhythmic profile respectively of earlier sections, chord A is a time-compressed version of the incremental micropolyphonic modulation that characterizes section 4. Chord B is the final “literal,” directional calligraphic gesture of its kind, and thus marks the beginning of the end. Subsequently, the brief resumption in chord C of rhythmic density—which has colored sections 3 and 4—leads to dissipation. As we progress towards the end of the piece, the time-compression of chord A gives way to the expansiveness of the passage that had led up to it in that the incrementalized changes are spaced out temporally. Overall, section 4 exhibits what the composer calls the “transcendence” of earlier principles encapsulated in the three chords.

V. “Not Without Ambiguity”

TAI serves as an expression of the modernist sublime not just because of its behemoth length and orchestral volume, or a multivalence of emotion (which it does arouse in the differentiated sections), or a positively valenced feeling of transcendence. The modernist sublime consists not in the mere duality of molarity versus molecularity but in their dialectical negation. Every case of the molecular proliferation of detail is defined against a molar entity such as calligraphic motion, the illusory spectralist tone, or continuity of timbre/harmony. Molecularity and molarity do not exist as such, but are silhouettes of each other.

Much as Deleuze is known for his monist ontology of bodily capacity, power and potential, a dialectical strand emerges in his discussion of musical molecularity. Deleuze actually pauses to take stock of the implication of infinite molecularity and acknowledges
that molecularity is “not without ambiguity,” and that the result could very well be pure “effacing” or indistinction.\(^{25}\) Rather than pure nothingness, he seems to argue, there must be a minimal organization of a fuzzy aggregate, “defined only by a consistency [arguably, molarity] that makes it possible to distinguish the separate elements constituting that aggregate.” Interestingly, what guarantees the presence of this fuzzy aggregate is “sobriety,” as if molecularity is a form of drunkenness.\(^{26}\)

What Deleuze’s own stocktaking achieves, countering in some small way Žižek’s critique, is no less than dialectical negation in the form of a fuzzy aggregate, which can be applied to an understanding of the modernist sublimity of \textit{TAI}. A fuzzy aggregate is a mathematical term describing the combining or aggregation of several fuzzy sets, in which membership of particular terms to a set can be defined in differentiated degrees. In \textit{TAI}, we have observed how molecular details have varying degrees of fuzzy relation to molar definition, and different aspects of Varesian, postspectralist, and micropolyphonic molecular-liminality are indeed aggregated or assembled into what Koh calls sound-complexes. As an “assemblage” that organizes musical molecules into kinetic, timbral, harmonic, or textural profiles, \textit{TAI} offers insight into how micro details collectively constitute and also elude the systemic or molar level. The exploration of music as assemblage has elsewhere been conducted in more detail, and exceeds the goals of this chapter, which is primarily to discover the \textit{opacity} of unperceived parts of the assemblage.

\(^{25}\) Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 343.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 344.
through perceptual liminality, but a few final ontological remarks on what I interpret as the dialectics of negation within a fuzzy aggregate are in order.\textsuperscript{27}

It is possible to view a fuzzy aggregate solely from the monist perspective of pure bodily or systemic potential, meaning that there is only interconnection within the singular substance that differentiates into myriads parts of the world. In contrast, what a dialectical definition of fuzzy aggregate offers is a dualistic perspective of internality versus externality on one and the same thing, say \textit{TAI}, that is not as easy—perhaps impossible—to grasp from within a purely Deleuzian framework. A dialectical inversion from internal to an external perspective comprises the shift from a view of an assemblage of molecules with their capacity and potential, to a consideration of how that same molecularity is in one sense only the impossibility of full molarity—which is to say that there is molarity, however ill-formed. Musically, perceptual liminality is an inverse, “negative” formulation of this “impossible” and ill-formed but nevertheless existing molarity. This simple truth is not always grasped, e.g. in narratives of minoritarian autonomy that celebrate constricted subalterns as if there is only agency, and oppression is no longer a possible site for developing historical and sociocultural understanding.\textsuperscript{28}

Such an approach risks trivializing the real sufferings of the multitude, and in celebrating the “autonomy of affect” of a body that does indeed possess capacity and potential, we must also remember that this autonomy is at most a dialectical fuzzy aggregate, like the modernist sublime, which consists in both bodily perception and the intimation of


\textsuperscript{28} See Kip Lornell and Anne Rasmussen eds., \textit{Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities} (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997).
something as yet disembodied, external.\textsuperscript{29} I argue that autonomy is afforded by the strategic, dialectical, negational deployment of molarity and molecularity. As a case in point, Koh considers that \textit{TAI} is perhaps something that could only be written by an Asian composer, and yet she refuses to be captured by this molarity, replete with “slitty eyes,” as she sarcastically suggested.\textsuperscript{30} In attending to the modernist sublime, perhaps one can extract an ethics of the sublime modernist.

\textsuperscript{30} Personal communication on September 07, 2007 and May 20, 2013.
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