



Watkins, Holly. "Music Between Reaction and Response."
Evental Aesthetics 2, no. 2 (2013): 78-97.

ABSTRACT

Two Greek myths attest to the power of music to blur distinctions between humans and nonhumans: Orpheus made music that inspired human-like attention in animals, trees, and stones, while the Sirens reduced passing sailors to the level of animals incapable of resisting their song. Recast in terms employed by Lacan, these myths portray music as calling forth a *response* in creatures thought merely able to *react* and, contrariwise, stripping away the capacity for *response* in humans, leaving nothing but *reaction* in its place. Critiquing Lacan's dogmatic distinction between human and animal behavior, Derrida questioned the "purity and indivisibility" of reaction and response and recommended that critics explore the involvement of both in "the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms." In this essay, I take up Derrida's challenge with regard to music as it has been understood in the European aesthetic tradition. While music has long been considered capable of provoking highly refined cognitive and emotional responses, it also acts upon the body in a wide variety of ways, many of them involuntary – a fact that has struck music's advocates as alternately promising and disturbing. Revisiting eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commentaries by the philosophers and critics Johann Georg Sulzer, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Eduard Hanslick, I first illuminate persistent anxieties over the admixture of reaction and response in musical listening. I then turn to recent ethological studies in order to argue against any decisive separation of the human from the nonhuman in the arena of musical aesthetics.

KEYWORDS

music, animals, affect, Jacques Derrida, Eduard Hanslick, Johann Georg Sulzer, Friedrich Nietzsche

Music Between Reaction and Response

Holly Watkins



In league with the melodiousness of birds and the periodicity of ocean waves, music stands at the crossroads where human and nonhuman sound-making meet. Humans fabricate wind chimes and Aeolian harps for nonhuman players, while imitations of bird calls and rushing streams in pieces of music lure the natural world into the cultural space of the living room or concert hall. Yet music also blurs distinctions between humans and nonhumans, as two familiar myths attest. Orpheus was said to make music that inspired human-like attention in animals, trees, and even stones. The Sirens, by contrast, reduced passing sailors to the level of animals powerless to resist their enchanting song.

Recast in the terms which called Derrida's deconstructive ire down on Lacan, these myths portray music as calling forth a *response* in creatures thought merely able to *react* and, contrariwise, stripping away the capacity for *response* in humans, leaving nothing but *reaction* in its place.¹ For Lacan, giving a response depends on the presence of the Other as witness to truth, something he presumed to be absent for animals because they lack language (or, more precisely, access to the symbolic order). Responding thus involves what Derrida calls a "second-degree reflexive power" reserved for humans, a power that suffuses such tactics as pretending to pretend.² Derrida questions the "purity and indivisibility" of reaction and response in Lacan's thought, a purity which strikes him as untenable given that, among other things, the psychoanalytic hypothesis of the unconscious complicates any claim that human responses can be fully transparent to themselves.³ The unconscious, posits Derrida, injects "some automaticity of the reaction in every response," no matter how free that response may seem.⁴ Indeed, the current interest in preconscious, biologically rooted affects lends further significance to Derrida's investigation of "the reactionality in the response."⁵ Viewing the problem from another angle, recent studies of animals, especially primates, suggest that their cognitive abilities go far beyond the passivity implied by the concept of reaction. The apes that primatologist Frans de Waal describes in moving detail in his book *Our Inner Ape*, for example, appear to treat him, as well as fellow apes, as others to whom, in non-linguistic fashion, questions are posed and responses owed.⁶

In challenging Lacan's dogmatism, Derrida recommends that, rather than dispense with any and all distinctions between reaction and response, critics should explore the workings of the two "within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms."⁷ Music would seem to be an apt locus for such inquiry. At first glance, responding to music in something resembling Lacan's sense would seem to demand a hermeneutic practice – that is, an interpretative or analytical attempt to divine "what it means" or "how it works." Both approaches overlap with *Problemsgeschichte*, a methodology that conceives artworks as solutions (or answers) to particular creative problems (or questions). In either case, music sets in motion that "second-degree reflexive power" which pushes back at immediate reactions as it weighs plausible responses. But while music can be the occasion for such reflexive and highly refined cognitive responses, it also acts upon the body in multiple ways, many of them involuntary.⁸ When music is playing, feet and fingers may begin tapping without conscious instruction. Someone within earshot of music may

begin to sing along, and, worst of all, end up with the tune stuck in her head. That intrusive tune, or “earworm” (borrowed from the German *Ohrwurm*), thumbs its nose at the notion of free will, its unbidden repetitions triggered by some hidden impulse. And yet, such experiences manifest enough of a cognitive dimension to forestall classification of them as reactions to stimuli on the order of jerking one’s hand away from a hot burner.

While music’s capacity to elicit reactions involving both body and mind is currently valued not only for its invigorating or soothing results but also for its therapeutic potential, musical aesthetics historically has had a hard time finding the good in the situation. From Eduard Hanslick’s consternation over “pathological,” feeling-centered listening in the mid-nineteenth century to Theodor Adorno’s comparison of the jitterbug’s dance moves to “the reflexes of mutilated animals,” music has served as an unsettling reminder of the difficulty attending any decisive separation of the human from the nonhuman.⁹ This essay attempts to erode that boundary even further by using recent ethological insights to disturb key suppositions of European musical aesthetics. To prepare the ground for this endeavor, I revisit two influential treatises dealing with music – Johann Georg Sulzer’s *General Theory of the Fine Arts* (1771–74) and Hanslick’s *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854) – in order to illuminate persistent anxieties over the admixture of reaction and response in musical listening, an admixture that carries with it the further threat of confusion between animal and human modes of apprehension. This threat became all the more urgent as humanity’s “second trauma” – Derrida’s name for Darwin’s post-Copernican blow to human self-esteem – began to sink in (*On the Origin of Species* was published only five years after Hanslick’s book, in 1859).¹⁰ If humans had in fact descended from apes, then indulging physicality via aesthetic experience might be a sure way to devolve to that distant origin.

II.

By suggesting that music occupies a particularly tendentious position with respect to the categories of reaction and response, I do not mean to imply that the other arts simply engage one or the other in uncomplicated fashion. Ever since its inauguration by Alexander Baumgarten, the discipline of aesthetics has been dogged by the problem of art's sensuousness, which had to be synthesized with cognition in order to neutralize its capacity to stimulate inappropriate reactions (especially that of desire). But the principles of Kantian disinterestedness or Hegelian sublation are more difficult to maintain in the face of music, which often invites direct physical engagement. In his remarks on music, Sulzer pointed to the ancient lineage of work songs and dance, remarking that "musical sounds themselves always imply an idea of movement," an insight backed up by recent research on music and the brain.¹¹ Later commentators continued to grapple with music's ability to grip the body like no other art. For Friedrich Nietzsche, the orgiastic revelries orchestrated by Dionysius, flute in hand, challenged the serene order of Apollo and his lyre.¹² Adorno framed the problem in more physiological terms, writing that "music represents at once the immediate manifestation of impulse and the locus of its taming."¹³ Adorno's phrasing suggests that reaction itself calls for a response — the response of taming, or, more literally, softening (*Sänftigung*).¹⁴ In one stroke, music illustrates the dialectical nature of the civilizing process.

What was it about music that made it so troublesome? First of all, aestheticians had long realized that music's sensory medium — sound — wielded great physical power and thus could stimulate strong reactions in listeners. "An out-of-tune note," Sulzer mused, "is incomparably more disagreeable and disturbing than is a clashing color." "The ear," he continued, "can be so smitten by inharmonious sounds as to drive one almost to despair."¹⁵ Such remarks call up scenarios of fingernails on chalkboard or metal on glass, in which the immediacy of one's physical reaction to sound crowds out the possibility of reasoned response. Yet the immediate impact of sound, its ability to inspire involuntary reactions, also contributed to music's superior expressive force. "Nature," wrote Sulzer, "has established a direct connection between the ear and heart."¹⁶ The mystery of this connection, marveled at by so many writers on aesthetics,

could be traced in Sulzer's view to an even greater conundrum – namely, the relationship between the body and the soul, between the seat of reaction, so to speak, and the seat of response. "The aural nerves," Sulzer explained, "transmit to the entire body the impact of the shock they receive ... Hence it is understandable how the body, and consequently the soul, can be intensely affected by sounds."¹⁷ Stimulation of the nerves residing in the ear appears to lead seamlessly to the humanizing responses of sentiment.

Elsewhere in the *General Theory*, however, Sulzer singled out disruptive effects very much like the "shock" described above as belonging to the lesser category of "accidental" versus "essential" aspects of aesthetic experience. Such effects compel rather than persuade, stun or surprise rather than move listeners, thus violating music's mission to touch the heart by way of the body instead of the body alone. The contradiction becomes acute when Sulzer speculates on behalf of music's beneficial influence on the "savage." He posited that music, because of its physical efficacy and direct connection to feeling, could succeed better than the other arts in civilizing the uncivilized. Swayed by accounts of Orpheus which described him as not only animating nonhumans but also taming wild men, Sulzer believed that music, alone among the arts, could awaken finer sentiments in the beast-like savage heart, sentiments which could then serve as the foundation of morality. But, as Matthew Riley points out, Sulzer never quite managed to distinguish that ability from the compulsive aesthetic forces which short-circuit the faculty of reason – forces with which music was well endowed and that work more by inciting reactions than inspiring responses.¹⁸ Although music appeared ideally equipped to elicit moral or sentimental responses from uncultivated listeners, it did so paradoxically through its very capacity to bring about involuntary reactions.

Despite music's evident impact on the reactive, animal body – or perhaps because of it – Sulzer took great pains to separate the art from the realm of nature in general. Dispensing with the idea that humans learned to sing by imitating birds, Sulzer linked the rhythmic regularity of music to human activities like walking and physical labor, and he located the origin of melody in the expression of "passionate emotions."¹⁹ But Sulzer's categories of humanity and nature begin to blur when it comes to the origin of such passions: "The individual sounds that comprise song are the expressions of animated sentiments ... and the sentiments aroused demand to be expressed, even if against one's will, by the sounds of song, not speech. Thus the elements of song are not so much the invention of

man as of nature herself.”²⁰ At times involuntary and authored by nature, music has its origin in the physiological and affective conditions of human existence, and it evidently carries the trace of that origin no matter how refined the sentimental responses it inspires.

Further complicating matters, Sulzer suggested that human music can devolve to the status of nonhuman nature. Overdeveloping the technical side of music, for instance, threatens to lead back to the animal realm from which Sulzer had detached it. Virtuoso compositions demanding great physical skill, he observed, too often come off “like a horse running in full gallop.”²¹ Yet Sulzer concluded that such compositions are “no more natural than Agesilaus’s mimicking the song of a real nightingale.”²² The naturalness of art derives from the second nature of human creativity rather than mimetic accuracy. But when the physical capacities of the performer are pushed to their limits, music becomes no more than an animal, a body devoid of soul. In a similar vein, Sulzer noted that one can write a piece of music that conforms to “mechanical rules” but lacks expression, a notion entirely consistent with lingering views of the animal body as more like a reactive machine than a responsive being.²³ Well-crafted but inexpressive music darkly insinuated that humans were perpetually in danger of reverting to the same.

Just before Sulzer began work on the *General Theory*, the critic and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder was also pondering the relationship between human and animal modes of expression, but with a surprising twist. In contrast to Sulzer, Herder explained the mysterious connection between ear and heart in explicitly animalistic terms. The *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1770) opens with the unforgettable sentence, “While still an animal, man already has language.”²⁴ Herder means not specifically human language, but the natural language of expression — the “screams” and “wild inarticulate tones” of early humans. These sounds, which arise automatically from the “mechanics of sentient bodies,” emerge in reaction to bodily sensations and affects such as pain or fear. But it soon becomes clear that such reactions constitute the phylogenic prerequisite for response. “Even the most delicate chords of animal feeling,” Herder remarked, “are aligned in their entire performance for a going out toward other creatures. The plucked chord performs its natural duty: it sounds! It calls for an echo from one that feels alike, even if none is there, even if it does not hope or expect that such another might answer.”²⁵ This is a language “meant to sound, not to depict,” a phrase that echoes Sulzer’s injunction against trying to represent objects or ideas in music.²⁶ Animal sounds, in short, are both grounded in involuntary reactions and expressive

calls awaiting a response. Although Herder argued that such sounds do not account for the origin of human verbal language, the close bond between reaction and response lived on for him in music, a situation that, as we will see, offers another means of dismantling the opposition between Lacan's two categories.²⁷

III.

By 1854, the Viennese music critic and aspiring academic Eduard Hanslick was no longer convinced that music's moral influence was wholly positive. Whereas Sulzer had been comfortable with the notion that "music is written not for the mind or imagination, but for the heart," Hanslick, appalled by the behavior of Richard Wagner's enthusiasts, was disturbed by how Sulzer's position (and others like it) left the body at the mercy of music.²⁸ Believing that music amounted to an "intelligible language of sentiment," Sulzer had charted a path from the physical impact of sound to the stirring of sentiment to the cultivation of morality.²⁹ Hanslick, on the other hand, envisioned a quite different trajectory for music, one that necessitated the suppression of its physical and emotional impact. Seeking to establish a "scientific" idiom of music aesthetics true to the values of the post-1848 academy, Hanslick elaborated a mode of engagement with music that placed the dispassionate mind rather than the feeling body at the center of reception, thus disqualifying the body's animal reactivity from the sphere of aesthetic legitimacy.³⁰

To promote his mind-centered reception, Hanslick distinguished between music's "material moment," which he considered to reside in the "natural power of tones," and its purely intellectual "artistic moment."³¹ Like Sulzer before him, Hanslick recognized music's peculiar power all too clearly. "The other arts persuade," he wrote, "but music invades us."³² And with invasion comes surrender, as music proceeds to overpower the nervous system, especially that of the psychologically abnormal listener.

The "unfathomable affinity" Hanslick posited between the physicality of music and the human body resembles Sulzer's "direct

relationship between ear and heart," but the heart in this case has shed its broader metaphorical significance and collapsed into the all-too-material body.³³ In Hanslick's view, the body reacts to music's "elemental" components — sound and impressions of motion that mimic the "dynamics of feeling" — while the mind responds to its intellectual content, including the construction of themes, phrase structure, harmony, and other formal properties.³⁴ When insufficient attention is paid to such content, the elemental in music "shackles the defenseless feelings" of listeners, lulling them into the "passive receptivity" of "pathological" listening.³⁵ "Slouched dozing in their chairs," Hanslick jibed, these enthusiasts "brood and sway in response to the vibrations of tones, instead of contemplating tones attentively."³⁶ Their needy bodies guzzle down arias like champagne and consider music little more than a fine *digestif* or an intoxicating drug.³⁷ Highlighting the body's unthinking reactivity to music, Hanslick recommended ether and chloroform as alternatives to the "effortless suppression of awareness" afforded by music.³⁸ Abusing music in such fashion puts the art in the (for Hanslick, degraded) category of natural entities and substances that take advantage of the body's receptivity but do not "make us think."³⁹ Pleasant reactions are no substitute for the rewards of "pure contemplation," which consist in the measured responses of aesthetic evaluation.⁴⁰

"Pure" is the operative word here, because — and this is a point on which Hanslick differs substantially from Sulzer — being moved to moral action by music constitutes a reaction just as automatic as succumbing to music's drug-like effects. If music makes us want to *do* anything, whether perform a kind act or get up and dance, then we have not acted out of "free self-determination."⁴¹ While Hanslick conceded that it would be "pedantic" to deny the animating effect of dance music and marches, it seems that the cultivated listener is obliged to resist such invitations.⁴² Comparing someone moved by a musician's performance to forgive a debt to a "sluggard" motivated to dance by a waltz, Hanslick found "neural stimulation" rather than a love of beauty at the root of both actions.⁴³ In a classic expression of the humanist devotion to rationality, he concluded, "To undergo unmotivated, aimless, and casual emotional disturbances through a power that is not *en rapport* with our willing and thinking is unworthy of the human spirit."⁴⁴

So much, then, for Sulzer's Orphic scenario of cultivation by way of music. Even moral uplift falls under Hanslick's axe as an essentially unwilling byproduct of music's wiles. Arguing that music makes the greatest moral impact on those possessing "coarseness of mind," Hanslick

remarked that “music exercises the strongest effect upon savages,” an achievement that does the art no credit.⁴⁵ Ancient accounts of the power of music can be explained by the fact that humanity in its more primitive stages was “more at the mercy of the elemental.”⁴⁶ In this respect, humans used to be more like animals. After repeating decades-old (and rather questionable) reports of the music-inspired feats of animals, Hanslick asked, “is it really so commendable to be a music lover in such company?” In contrast to animals and savages, modern Western humans “cherish a contemplative kind of pleasure in the products of music art which paralyzes [*paralysirt*] music’s elemental influence.”⁴⁷

Paralyzes music’s elemental influence. Put away the ether, listeners, and grab the Novocain (synthesized by a German chemist in 1905, one year after Hanslick’s death). If you wish to be civilized, turn off your body when listening to music, shut down the affective mechanisms responsible for transforming musical sound into subjective feeling. Such an achievement, if that is what it is, depends on strictly channeling sensations into the safer territory of the mind. Midway through his treatise, Hanslick promised not to devalue the sensuous, as had “older systems” (such as Hegel’s) which emphasized art’s moral import or the ideas it conveyed.⁴⁸ Hanslick even claimed to see no problem in taking “naïve” pleasure in music’s “merely sensuous aspect,” as long as one did not engage in the unseemly translation of sensations into feelings.⁴⁹ But what Hanslick really wanted to establish was a direct path leading from sensation to the “auditory imagination,” where the mind contemplates the “rich variety of the succession of sounds in itself.”⁵⁰ Music’s “tonally moving forms,” as the art’s only content and the source of its beauty, may indeed resemble the dynamics of feeling, but they must not be taken as representations of particular feelings.⁵¹ Such powers of depiction elude music, or at least, as Sulzer felt, tempt it down an alien path. From the standpoint of reception, any straying from the conduit joining sensation and mind to the realm of feeling ends up, for Hanslick, in the dead end of pathological listening. In sum, Hanslick’s treatise constructs an imaginary body for whom objective sensations lead directly to equally objective cognitions without stirring up any subjective feelings along the way.

The aesthetic position endorsed by this imaginary paralyzed body is formalism. That music is seriously limited when it comes to the representation of specific feelings or ideas, as Hanslick claimed, is not especially controversial. The troublesome issue is that Hanslick’s imaginary body arises not out of convincing aesthetic or physiological realities but out of objectivist disavowal of the reactive, affective body’s

contribution to musical experience. Hanslick knew full well that nearly everyone experiences some sort of feeling when listening to music. The searching questions his treatise asks about how “the sensation of tone becomes feeling or mood” show that this is indeed one of his primary concerns.⁵² But he did not believe that physiology was prepared to answer such questions, which again boil down to the single burning question of “how the body is connected to the soul.”⁵³ Musical formalism, then, arises out of an injunction. What one cannot know the causes of, Hanslick’s argument goes, one should not talk about. Better simply to describe (if description is ever simple). But this does not change the fact that formalist descriptions of music are discursive constructs sitting atop an abyss – the abyss of bodily reaction.

IV.

After giving modern musical formalism its decisive impetus, Hanslick abandoned his objectivist project in disillusionment, returning instead to the more journalistic idiom of music criticism.⁵⁴ Yet Hanslick’s about-face does not mean that all tenets of formalism should be discarded, particularly not its objection to representational aesthetics. Music, for Hanslick, did not represent anything; rather, its kaleidoscopic mobility transposed the dynamics of feeling into an artistic medium. But Hanslick then drew the unfortunate conclusion that music at its most cultivated should serve exclusively as an object of contemplation rather than a stimulus to feeling or action, a position just as limiting as the theory of representation he tried to refute. Complementing a formalist understanding of what music *is* with a physiological and existential conception of what it *does* helps to clear a path beyond the intellectual biases of Hanslick’s treatise and its scholarly descendents.⁵⁵ This path converges with Nietzsche’s recasting of the “subject as multiplicity,” a subject for whom art excites manifold regions of the body susceptible to pleasure.⁵⁶ *The Will to Power* describes art as stimulating the “feeling of life,” as a form of intoxication that respects no distinctions between mind and body.⁵⁷ Scorning the “absurd overestimation of consciousness” that underwrites human exceptionalism, Nietzsche cast aside the prejudice according to which any embrace of unconscious or involuntary dimensions

of existence is viewed as equivalent to “becoming animal.”⁵⁸ In contrast, the philosopher portrayed the reception of art as an explicitly animalistic affair, and art itself as a reminder of “states of animal vigor.”⁵⁹

What would it mean to “respond” to music in a manner consistent with Nietzsche’s animalization of the aesthetic? For Nietzsche, music inspires an upwelling of affect that invigorates the entire organism. As a “doctrine of intoxication,” music has very little to do with calling forth the kind of linguistic responses that interested Lacan and very much to do with channeling bodily reactions toward a state of power-drenched “perfection.”⁶⁰ In opposition to Hanslick, Nietzsche viewed the body’s reactivity as an active rather than a passive force, one that generates the feelings of intensity, plenitude, and overflowing sensuality inspired by aesthetic experience. Yet something is missing from this one-sided self-aggrandizement, and that is the position of music as other. Consider once again Herder’s account of animal sounds as both the product of bodily reactions and bids for a sympathetic response. Revisiting this theme thirty years after the origin of language essay, Herder argued that a human being is able to “lend his sympathy to every aroused being whose voice reaches him,” while animals respond primarily to the sounds of their own species.⁶¹ Music, as the sonic arousal of resonant bodies, is one such voice — “the *answering voice* of the one who is feeling.”⁶² Herder’s alternative to Nietzsche’s solipsism construes human affect as a silent call to which music is primed to respond. When listeners “answer” music with yet another round of feeling, they both react to music’s sonic power and respond to it as the voice of an other. *Sympathy* is Herder’s name for the fusion of reaction and response that underpins the aesthetics of sound.

An embodied conception of musical experience in which reaction and response flow into one another opens out onto the wider field of animal sound production in a manner suggestive for aesthetics after humanism. Herder’s notion of music as a special kind of voice implies that the technique of call and response not only infuses many different styles of music but is also embedded in music’s very reception. In this respect, music shares an affinity with activities deeply rooted in animal behavior. Like humans, many animals engage in vocalizations meant to be recognized and responded to by others, although these others do not occupy the position of Lacan’s Other. Numerous species deploy “contact calls” whose unique character serves to keep a group or family together. Some animals, such as elephants and meerkats, use different calls to indicate current location versus the intention to move, while disc-winged bats native to Costa Rica emit separate “inquiry” and “response” calls during roosting.⁶³

Flying bats of this species can distinguish between calls belonging to members of their own or another group, an ability that helps them to choose where to roost for the day. Such behavior far exceeds the narrow scope of involuntary reactions and may even resemble practices that were essential to the origins of human music. Thomas Geissmann's work on gibbon songs proposes that apes and humans shared an "ancestral form of loud call" that served to define territory, intimidate others, broadcast location or announce danger, and promote group cohesion. "Probably the most likely function of early hominid music," Geissmann asserts, was to "reinforce the unity of a social group toward other groups," a purpose still discernible in hymns, military marches, sporting songs, and allegiances to particular musical styles.⁶⁴

That's all well and good, a Hanslick-style formalist might retort, but functional music, with its baggage of vestigial animality, does not represent the most cultivated form of music, which is predicated on autonomy. Yet the points of contact between human and animal music-making are not exhausted by their social functions. Ethologist Peter Marler has proposed the term "phonocoding" to describe the recombinant vocalizations of certain birds and whales, whose calls are ripe for the kind of formal analysis so far reserved for human music. Unlike calls that transmit information such as location or impending danger, phonocoding involves stringing together sound patterns in differing orders by learning from the songs of others. As Marler explains, "animal songs that are learned and that depend on phonocoding for signal diversity are, like human music, primarily nonsymbolic and affective."⁶⁵ Given Hanslick's recognition that music regularly inspires feelings in listeners (although he did not believe such feelings should be a matter for learned discourse), music under his formalist description could very well be deemed nonsymbolic and affective. Marler's conclusions confirm that formal manipulation of sound patterns, the *sine qua non* of autonomous music, is not an exclusively human ability. Indeed, Marler's description of the songs of male winter wrens stirs thoughts of the recurring melodic and rhythmic motifs of human music:

Each song in the repertoire contains phrases drawn from a large pool that recur again and again, but in each song type they are arranged in a different sequence. Evidently what happens when a young male learns to sing is that he acquires a set of songs from the adults he hears and breaks them down into phrases or segments. He then creates variety and enlarges his repertoire by rearranging these phrases or segments in different patterns.⁶⁶

While such songs serve to identify the singer and may benefit the animals in other ways, they do not appear to serve functions typical of “lexicoded” vocalizations, which encode meaning into individual vocal units. The wealth of birdsong repertoires, Marler writes, generates “sensory diversity” rather than “enrich[ing] meaning.”⁶⁷

The growing body of work on animals suggests that Derrida’s skepticism regarding Lacan’s separation of human response from animal reaction should also be directed to the distinction between human music and animal sound, especially when that distinction turns on specious conjectures concerning autonomy versus functionality. In one of the bolder passages of his essay, Marler encourages readers to hear the repertoires of phonocoding birds “as providing aesthetic enjoyment or as alleviating boredom in singer and listener.”⁶⁸ Perhaps Hegel was not entirely wrong, then, to imagine that birds sing for the “immediate enjoyment of self,” just as humans noodle around on instruments or hum snippets of song while they work.⁶⁹ Hegel’s and Marler’s thoughts are speculative, to be sure. But for those who envision more harmonious relations between humans and nonhumans, a speculative aesthetics that folds human music-making into the broader sphere of animal physiology while admitting animal sounds into an expanded notion of the aesthetic may represent a vital step forward.

• Notes •

¹ Jacques Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe, 121-46 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

² *Ibid.*, 130.

³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 128. Affect theory has its roots in the physiologically oriented work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins (see the four volumes of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* [New York: Springer, 1962-92]). Much of what is currently pursued under the rubric of affect theory in the humanities, however, makes little reference to empirical studies in physiology or psychology; it more often takes its bearings from certain strains of cultural studies (say, the work of Raymond Williams) or philosophy (especially Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987]). See, for example, the diverse set of approaches collected in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). For a critical perspective on affect theory, see Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 434-72, and responses by Adam Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson, Charles Altieri, and Leys in *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 4 (2012): 870-91.

⁶ Frans de Waal, *Our Inner Ape* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005). In a meditation on Derrida’s essay, Donna Haraway suggests that animals can “engage one another’s gaze responsively,” an ability that in her view demands more searching responses from philosophers than Derrida’s own. See *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22, emphasis original.

⁷ Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” 128.

⁸ For example, music has been shown to affect the autonomic nervous system by inducing changes in such vital measures as heart and breathing rates, although these effects are little understood. See Robert J. Ellis and Julian F. Thayer, “Music and Autonomic Nervous System (Dys)Function,” *Music Perception* 27, no. 4 (2010): 317-26. Ellis and Thayer note that “Humans interact with music, both consciously and unconsciously, at behavioral, emotional, and physiological levels” (323); research into music’s origins tends to focus on the mechanisms supporting this interaction. See Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); David Huron, “Is Music an Evolutionary Adaptation?” in *The Biological Foundations of Music*, ed. Robert J. Zatorre and Isabelle Peretz (New York: The New York Academy of Science, 2001); and the collection *The Origins of Music*, ed. Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker, and Steven Brown (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000).

⁹ Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” trans. Maurice Goldbloom, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 292.

¹⁰ Derrida, “And Say the Animal Responded?” 139, emphasis original.

¹¹ *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch*, ed. Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 82. For a current perspective on music’s close ties to movement, see Jessica Phillips-Silver, “On the Meaning of Movement in Music, Development and the Brain,” *Contemporary Music Review* 28, no. 3 (2009): 293-314.

¹² In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche wrote, “The music of Apollo was Doric architectonics in tones ... The very element which forms the essence of Dionysian music (and hence of music in general) is carefully excluded as un-Apollinian – namely, the emotional power of the tone...” See *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 40.

¹³ Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” 270.

¹⁴ Theodor Adorno, “Über den fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 14.

¹⁵ Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 81.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 82.

¹⁸ Matthew Riley, *Musical Listening in the German Enlightenment: Attention, Wonder and Astonishment* (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 2004), chapter 3 (“Sulzer and the Aesthetic Force of Music”).

¹⁹ Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 91. Taking the opposite view, the English music historian Thomas Busby wrote in 1819, “The notes of birds, as a living melody, a melody not subject to chance, but no less constantly than agreeably saluting the sense, could not but excite human imagination.” He quotes Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* as the source of the idea: “Then with their liquid lays the birds began / To teach the ear of imitative man.” See Thomas Busby, *A General History of Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 4.

²⁰ Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 93.

²¹ Ibid., 85.

²² Ibid. Agesilaus II was a Spartan King whose exploits were described by Plutarch; see *ibid.*, n. 1.

²³ Ibid. Derrida places much of the blame for this view on Descartes (“And Say the Animal Responded?” 121, 143). A century later, the influential Swiss physiologist Albrecht von Haller limited “sensibility” in animals (“in whom the existence of a soul is not so clear”) to their capacity to experience pain, ascribing the rest of their seeming responsiveness to mere “irritability.” See Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 21.

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder, *On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 87.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 91.

²⁷ Herder thought that human language originated in the power of reason or “reflectiveness” (*Besonnenheit*), which he believed to be unique to mankind. Yet he remained remarkably attuned to the kinship of all animals. In the article “On Image, Poetry, and Fable” (1787), Herder proposed that “metaphysics, that prideful ignoramus, ought to give up the arrogant delusion that the humblest animal is *wholly* unlike man in its activities and aptitudes, for this notion has been amply disproven by natural history. In their whole *disposition of life* animals are organizations just like man is; they merely lack human organization and the prodigious instrument of our abstract, symbolic memories: speech.” See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Gregory Moore (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 368, emphasis original.

²⁸ Baker and Christensen, *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition*, 90.

²⁹ Ibid., 85.

³⁰ Nina Noeske has emphasized the gender bias evident in Hanslick’s endeavor to subordinate the body to the mind; see her essay “Body and Soul, Content and Form: On Hanslick’s Use of the Organism Metaphor,” in *Rethinking Hanslick: Music, Formalism, and Expression*, ed. Nicole Grimes, Siobhán Donovan, and Wolfgang Marx, 236-58 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013).

³¹ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 58.

³² Ibid., 50.

³³ Ibid., 58.

³⁴ Ibid., 58, 20.

³⁵ Ibid., 58.

³⁶ Ibid., 59.

³⁷ Ibid., 60.

³⁸ Ibid., 59.

³⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁴¹ Ibid., 61.

⁴² Ibid., 54.

⁴³ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 62.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 63. For the original German passage, see Dietmar Strauss, *Eduard Hanslick: Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, vol. 1 (Mainz: Schott, 1990), 136.
- ⁴⁸ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 29.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 60.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 29.
- ⁵² Ibid., 54.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 56.
- ⁵⁴ See Kevin Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Part I. In an essay titled “Aesthetic Amputations: Absolute Music and the Deleted Endings of Hanslick’s *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*” (*19th-Century Music* 36, no. 1 [2012]: 3-23), Mark Evan Bonds explores the tension between Hanslick’s stated objectivism and the Idealist overtones of his treatise.
- ⁵⁵ Christopher Small recommends a similar approach in his thought-provoking book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).
- ⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 270, 422.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 422, 434.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 285 - 86. I take the notion of human exceptionalism from Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 32. Deleuze and Guattari develop Nietzsche’s trope of “becoming animal” – and associate it intimately with music – in chapter 10 of *A Thousand Plateaus*.
- ⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 422.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 439 n. 145, 422.
- ⁶¹ The quotation comes from Herder’s *Kalligone* (1800); see Edward A. Lippman, *Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader*, vol. 2 (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1988), 34.
- ⁶² Ibid., 36, emphasis original.
- ⁶³ See Gloriana Chaverri, Erin H. Gillam, and Thomas H. Kunz, “A Call-and-Response System Facilitates Group Cohesion Among Disc-Winged Bats,” *Behavioral Ecology* 24, no. 2 (2013): 481-87.
- ⁶⁴ Thomas Geissmann, “Gibbon Songs and Human Music from an Evolutionary Perspective,” in *The Origins of Music*, 119.
- ⁶⁵ Peter Marler, “Origins of Music and Speech: Insights from Animals,” in *The Origins of Music*, 31.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 39.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 409. Some birds also appear to dance for the immediate enjoyment of self. See the study of Snowball, the sulphur-crested cockatoo, by Aniruddh D. Patel et al.: “Experimental Evidence for Synchronization to a Musical Beat in a Nonhuman Animal,” *Current Biology* 19 (2009): 827-30.

• Bibliography •

- Adorno, Theodor. "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." Translated by Maurice Goldbloom. In *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, 270–99. New York: Continuum, 1998.
- . "Über den fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens." In *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 14–50. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997.
- Altieri, Charles. "Critical Response II. Affect, Intentionality, and Cognition: A Response to Ruth Leys." *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 4 (2012): 878–81.
- Baker, Nancy Kovaleff and Thomas Christensen, ed. *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Becker, Judith. *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Bonds, Mark Evan. "Aesthetic Amputations: Absolute Music and the Deleted Endings of Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*." *19th-Century Music* 36, no. 1 (2012): 3–23.
- Busby, Thomas. *A General History of Music*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1968.
- Chaverri, Gloriana, Erin H. Gillam, and Thomas H. Kunz. "A Call-and-Response System Facilitates Group Cohesion Among Disc-Winged Bats." *Behavioral Ecology* 24, no. 2 (2013): 481–87.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. "And Say the Animal Responded?" In *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, edited by Cary Wolfe, 121–46. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Ellis, Robert J. and Julian F. Thayer. "Music and Autonomic Nervous System (Dys)Function." *Music Perception* 27, no. 4 (2010): 317–26.

- Frank, Adam and Elizabeth A. Wilson. "Critical Response I. Like-Minded." *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 4 (2012): 870–77.
- Geissmann, Thomas. "Gibbon Songs and Human Music from an Evolutionary Perspective." In *The Origins of Music*, edited by Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker, and Steven Brown, 103–23. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000.
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, ed. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Hanslick, Eduard. *On the Musically Beautiful*. Edited and translated by Geoffrey Payzant. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.
- Haraway, Donna. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Philosophy of Nature*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. "On Image, Poetry, and Fable." In *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, edited and translated by Gregory Moore, 357–82. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- . *Kalligone* (excerpt). In vol. 2 of *Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader*, edited by Edward A. Lippman, 33–43. Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1988.
- Huron, David. "Is Music an Evolutionary Adaptation?" In *The Biological Foundations of Music*, edited by Robert J. Zatorre and Isabelle Peretz, 43–61. New York: The New York Academy of Science, 2001.
- Karnes, Kevin. *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Leys, Ruth. "The Turn to Affect: A Critique." *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 434–72.
- . "Critical Response III. Facts and Moods: Reply to My Critics." *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 4 (2012): 882–91.
- Marler, Peter. "Origins of Music and Speech: Insights from Animals." In *The Origins of Music*, edited by Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker, and Steven Brown, 31–48. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- . *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Noeske, Nina. "Body and Soul, Content and Form: On Hanslick's Use of the Organism Metaphor." In *Rethinking Hanslick: Music, Formalism, and Expression*, edited by Nicole Grimes, Siobhán Donovan, and Wolfgang Marx. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013, 236–58.
- Patel, Aniruddh D. et al. "Experimental Evidence for Synchronization to a Musical Beat in a Nonhuman Animal." *Current Biology* 19 (2009): 827–30.
- Phillips-Silver, Jessica. "On the Meaning of Movement in Music, Development and the Brain." *Contemporary Music Review* 28, no. 3 (2009): 293–314.
- Riley, Matthew. *Musical Listening in the German Enlightenment: Attention, Wonder and Astonishment*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques and Johann Gottfried Herder. *On the Origin of Language*. Translated by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998.
- Strauss, Dietmar. *Eduard Hanslick: Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*. Vol. 1. Mainz: Schott, 1990.
- Tomkins, Silvan. *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*. 4 vols. New York: Springer, 1962–92.
- Vila, Anne C. *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Waal, Frans de. *Our Inner Ape*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.
- Wallin, Nils L., Björn Merker, and Steven Brown, ed. *The Origins of Music*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000.