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Music, the Pythagoreans, and the Body

Stanley Cavell has observed that "the absence of humane music criticism . . . seems particularly striking against the fact that music has, among the arts, the most, perhaps the only, systematic and precise vocabulary for the description and analysis of its objects. Somehow that possession itself must be a liability."¹

The situation Cavell describes has dominated discussions about music throughout most of Western history—at least as far back as Pythagoras (sixth century B.C.), who grounded his metaphysics on correspondences between harmonic intervals and mathematical proportions. Plato transmitted this understanding of music in his description of the "music of the spheres" in the *Timaeus*; Gioseffo Zarlino used it to justify the compositional preferences of Renaissance Venice (although he had to expand the mystically potent numbers from Pythagoras's four to six in order to accommodate the thirds and sixths to which sixteenth-century ears were addicted);² and Jean-Philippe Rameau updated it in eighteenth-century France to legitimate the newly domesticated procedures of tonality:

It is to music that nature seems to have assigned the physical principle of those purely mathematical principles about which all the sciences revolve. I mean the harmonic, arithmetic and geometrical proportions from which related proportions derive and which manifest themselves the moment a resounding body is made to vibrate.³

Today's music theorists operate under similar premises, but with a mathematical palette that now includes set theory.⁴

If we were to judge from the writings of theorists alone, music would seem to be an airtight medium—the manifestation, as Rameau claimed, of "purely mathematical principles." The body apparently has no place in this schema: Rameau's "resounding body" might be a string or a trumpet, but it certainly is not a sentient being with arms and legs.

However, another strand of documentation concerning music can likewise be traced back to Greek antiquity: namely, music as a social practice. This tradi-

tion lacks music theory's beautiful systems; more often than not, it surfaces in the form of diatribes against what are perceived as abuses of music's sensual dimension. And it is here that a wide variety of relationships between the body and music may be glimpsed—usually as infractions that ought not to occur, but that do, in fact, happen, regardless of how stringently the Pythagoreans try to restrict music to mathematical meanings.

Thus Plato sought to exclude from the republic those practices that appealed to the body—the music of women, slaves, youths, the "effeminate" Lydians—and to privilege Dorian practices—the music that enhanced the regimented order of Spartan troops.⁵ So great was Saint Augustine's vulnerability to the sensual pleasures of music—pleasures that incited his unruly body—that he contemplated banishing it from worship.⁶ John of Salisbury attacked the new polyphonic techniques of the twelfth century by claiming they were calculated to produce a "titillation between the legs." And Adorno argued that the rhythmic impulses of jazz induce a desire for self-castration—a desire to surrender the rational faculties that had guaranteed Western domination over the body (and everything else associated with the "nature" side of the usual stack of binarisms).⁸

In other words, however airtight the speculative systems of music theory might be, in real life the body constantly intrudes into this domain—and it always has. More and more it seems to me that what truly organizes music in the West is the tension between the inescapable body and the West's deep-seated need to control or transcend that body through intellectual idealism. In this, music resembles many other Western cultural enterprises, except that—as Cavell points out—it has seemed more successful than most, owing largely to our ability to generate perfect fifths from 3/2 proportions and ill-tuned triads from the overtone series.

Yet as soon as musicians begin assembling those "mathematically pure" elements into music, they enter into a discursive field, much of which (rhythmic patterning, qualities of motion, representations of affect or desire) is grounded in experiences of the body. And the impact of music on the listener's body can be profound. As Raymond Williams has written:

We are only beginning to investigate this on any scientific basis, but it seems clear from what we already know that rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of experience, in such a way that the experience is re-created in the person receiving it, not merely as an "abstraction" or an emotion but as a physical effect on the organism—on the blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain. . . . It is more than a metaphor; it is a physical experience as real as any other.⁹

Given the interdisciplinary activity now focused on the body, the time would seem ripe for examining music from this perspective. And it would be convenient if our task were simply to follow a single, stable entity—the body—as it has been represented through various musical styles. But historians have come to realize that the body itself has always been a contested category, that its experiences differ radically according to time, place, social class, gender, ethnicity,

age, and much else. In other words, we cannot appeal to the idea of a trans-historical body. Moreover, music does not just reflect: It also shapes. It serves as one of the principal media by means of which we come to know our bodies (available kinetic vocabularies, cultural modes of erotic pleasure, and so on). Consequently, there is no immutable bedrock—either the body or music—upon which to base a clear linear history. Yet the very interactive relationship between music and the body only raises the stakes, making it all the more pressing that we start addressing this medium and its influence on social identity.

Let us begin with an example that is relatively easy to document. On May 12, 1965, producer Jerry Wexler approached some studio musicians during a recording session and said, "Why don't you pick up on this thing here?" He then executed a brief physical gesture for the musicians. Guitarist Steve Cropper later explained:

[Wexler] said this was the way the kids were dancing; they were putting the accent on two. Basically, we'd been one-beat-accenters with an afterbeat, it was like "boom dah," but here this was a thing that went "un-chaw," just the reverse as far as the accent goes. The backbeat was somewhat delayed, and it just put it in that rhythm, and [drummer] Al [Jackson] and I have been using that as a natural thing now, ever since we did it. We play a downbeat and then two is almost on but a little bit behind, only with a complete impact. It turned us on to a heck of a thing.¹⁰

The resulting tune, Wilson Pickett's "In the Midnight Hour," is significant for several reasons. As Cropper's testimony indicates, it gave rise to a new style of soul music and provided Stax Records with the boost it needed to make it a viable presence within the industry. Thus, whatever it was that was invented during that session quickly became a hot commodity that was exploited for all it was worth. But "Midnight Hour" also introduced into the broader public sphere a new way of experiencing the body, and it quickly became part of a widely shared vocabulary of physical gestures and expressions. If you know this recording, its rhythms are indelibly engraved in your kinetic memory. At the mere mention of its title, your muscles coil up in Pavlovian anticipation of its groove.

As Cropper says, it soon turned into "a natural thing" for him and other musicians; it became virtually transparent. Yet Cropper's own account of how it came into being indicates how very constructed this "natural thing" was. He reveals with stunning clarity the historicity of musical grooves and, consequently, the historicity of the body. Moreover, he bears witness to the circularity between physical gestures and musical imagery, as the band seized a motion already practiced by one set of kids, figured out how to simulate that motion in their rhythms, and sent it out through the mass media to millions of others who responded enthusiastically in their turn. Music depends on our experiences as embodied beings for its constructions and its impact, but our experiences of our own bodies—our repository of proper or even possible motions and their meanings—are themselves often constituted (to a much greater extent than we usually realize) through musical imagery.

The classic response of fans to a tune like this is: "It's got a good beat. You can dance to it." Critics often dismiss such statements as evidence of the mindlessness, the lamentable absence of discrimination in pop music reception. However, if you watch fans dance to "Midnight Hour," you will find that they have (in Wexler's words) "picked up on this thing here": Those microsecond delays translate—as though without mediation or consultation with the higher faculties—into a very specific set of gestures highlighting the butt. For the duration of the song at least, the body and even subjectivity itself are organized by its rhythmic impulses.

The fact that music can so influence the body accounts for much of music's power. But its power is not restricted to the activity of dance: The ability of music to mold physical motion often has ramifications that extend much further. As Plato wrote, "For the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions."¹¹

Of course, "Midnight Hour" does not address social issues at all. Yet its success on the U.S. pop charts counts as a triumph of African-American counter-memory. For what got unleashed with "Midnight Hour" is a form of physicality that is indispensable to African-American dance and music, but that mainstream America in 1965 still regarded as shameful. Under the influence of its groove, many white listeners started experiencing their own bodies in terms of an African-American sensibility. The impact of this and similar tunes on white Americans contributed to the political climate of cultural crossover in the sixties, the Civil Rights Movement, as well as what came to be called "sexual liberation."¹²

This is not to deny the commodity dimension of "Midnight Hour": The lure of commercial success obviously motivated Wexler, as it no doubt inspired Cropper, Jackson, and Pickett. Yet the fact that a tune is constructed to maximize its ability to make money (as this one clearly was) does not mean that its social effects are negligible. Indeed, if we started eliminating from consideration all music designed for profit we would be left with precious little to hear; the debates concerning music and commercial mediation go back to the twelfth century, when the problem was how to regulate urban minstrels who peddled their wares.¹³

More often than not, it is those in positions of authority, those who want to maintain the status quo, who have waged war on music that is bought and sold. Some of the most profound changes in musical style have come from those who do not have access to official means of support (such as patronage or grants), those who necessarily rely on the market and popular acclaim. And their music frequently appeals unapologetically to the body (to the "baser instincts," as detractors say), making the intersection between sensuality and money always a hotly contested terrain.

Yet it is that scandalous open market, where consumers pay to have professional musicians push their buttons, that has produced the music we care about, whether the myriad genres of African-American music that have influenced bodies all over the globe since the advent of recording (Adorno's dreaded mechanical reproduction) or, as we shall see, the sixteenth-century madrigal, opera, and even tonality itself.¹⁴ Without question, we need to attend closely to how those who profit manipulate our reactions. But students of popular culture who

hasten to trash all commercial music betray how little they know about Western music history.

The small revolution initiated by "Midnight Hour" is one that I can recall myself, for mine was one of the many bodies transformed to some degree by that song. Pickett's recording—complete with precisely those grooves laid down that day in 1965, as well as the inimitable grain of his voice—remains available for us to experience firsthand, although the moment of its initial impact has left only traces in reviews, accounts such as Cropper's, and memories such as mine. To bodies accustomed to this groove and its spin-offs, "Midnight Hour" no longer sounds novel; it is part of a now-natural set of gestures, and it may even invoke nostalgia for what seems today a more innocent time. The fact that we have a recording of "Midnight Hour," in other words, does not guarantee that we know how to write its history or gauge its impact.

The task facing a historian attempting to reconstruct the influence of such songs on bodies during the 1960s is rendered immeasurably more daunting as we proceed back in time and into musics that have been canonized precisely because they appear to have transcended the body. We possess few theoretical documents that deal affirmatively with relationships between the body and music, especially in comparison with the heaps of Pythagorean-based accounts available. Given the lack of prestige (not to say the hysteria) usually attached to the body, musicians rarely explain what they do in those terms. The effects of the body thus slip through under the guise of proper idealist syntax and are difficult to ferret out again—especially if the music is deliberately performed, as it often is today, in such a way as to eliminate gesture.¹⁵

In place of sound recordings, scholars studying earlier music must rely on notated scores—scores that provide only a schematic impression of the pitches and metric relationships within a composition. Moreover, we are inevitably influenced in our readings of that notation by our twentieth-century sensibilities.¹⁶ And even if we realize in the abstract that our experiences are historically constituted, we can never fully grasp how and in what respects they differ from those of other moments.

Yet it is possible to recover some of the bodily basis of music, as well as its influence on and by means of the body, in earlier periods. As we have already seen, historical documents of various sorts (policy statements, polemics, etc.) often suggest how the body was understood with respect to particular musical repertoires.¹⁷ Furthermore, some of the research done in other disciplines sheds light on music. For instance, the notion of erotic "friction to heat" in the late Renaissance, as developed by Thomas Laqueur and Stephen Greenblatt, can help us account for some of the most basic procedures of early seventeenth-century music.¹⁸ Most important, the music itself presents a wealth of evidence. To be sure, we must learn how to read the historically specific codes of each style in order to make use of this information. But much of it is quite obvious, if we permit ourselves to hear it.

Let us remain for a while with pieces designed specifically to engage the body in dance. The early 1600s actually yielded a close parallel with Wilson

Pickett's later transformation of the Western body through non-Western practices. For among the trophies acquired through the plunder of the New World was a style of dance music called the *ciaccona*.

Historical sources differ a bit with respect to the origin of the *ciaccona*; some attribute it to Peruvian Indians, while others suggest the input of African slaves.¹⁹ Both possibilities seem musically plausible: The tunes played by Peruvian street musicians today still resemble the *ciaccona*, and the genre's characteristic cross-rhythms survive in African-based dance music throughout the Americas. (Of course, a cultural fusion of this sort could not have taken place without the violent displacement and forced commingling of these two populations by the same colonial taskmasters who also exported the *ciaccona* back to Spain. Thus, while admiring the power of this music and its impact on Western culture, we should not forget the vast human suffering and injustice it represents by virtue of its very existence.)

We are able to reconstruct something about this music by means of the many seventeenth-century attempts to capture it in Western notation, which functioned both to preserve it and to domesticate it for purposes of European appropriation. The process of the *ciaccona* is a relatively simple one. It involves a very short pattern, sometimes as brief as four seconds, that is merely repeated as long as the dance goes on. What compels the repetitions is a groove of jazzy cross-rhythms that engages the entire body—especially the lower torso, which jerks in response to the strong off-beat accent right after the beginning of each bar.

Once the *ciaccona*'s infectious rhythms hit Europe, it sparked a dance craze that inspired a familiar set of reactions. On the one hand, it was celebrated as liberating bodies that had been stifled by the constraints of Western civilization; on the other, it was condemned as obscene, as a threat to Christian mores. But most sources concurred that its rhythms—once experienced—were irresistible; it was banned temporarily in 1615 on grounds of its "irredeemably infectious lasciviousness."²⁰ Nor was social pedigree a sure defense against contamination; even noble ladies were said to succumb to its call. Like soul music at a later historical moment, the *ciaccona* crossed over cautiously guarded class and racial boundaries. Whatever the *ciaccona* signified in its original contexts, it quickly came to be associated in Europe (by friends and foes alike) with forbidden bodily pleasures and potential social havoc.

Many literary sources bear witness to the effects of the new dance. For instance, the lyrics for one extended *ciaccona* describe a funeral at which the priest slips and sings out "vida bona"—the signal for the *ciaccona* to begin. The officiating clergy, the nuns, and even the corpse respond by wiggling and leaping with uninhibited glee. When they go afterwards to beg forgiveness, the bishop asks (strictly as a point of legal information) to hear one refrain and spends the next hour gyrating with his skirts raised; his congregation shakes the house for another six. At the conclusion of this carnivalesque fantasy, the bishop forgives his flock.²¹

Not surprisingly, settings of the *ciaccona* quickly flooded the market, helping to expand the emerging industry of commercial music publication.²² Even high art composers scrambled to get in on the action (a sure way of defusing the trickle-up effect of lower-class fads), and *ciaccona* patterns and rhythms resounded

Ex. 1a

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI (1567-1643)
Zefiro torna (1632)

Ciaccona

Tenore primo

Tenore secondo

Basso Continuo

Ze - fi - ro ze - fi ro ze - fi - ro ze - fi ro tor - na ze - fi - ro tor - na ze - fi - ro tor - na

through both secular and sacred repertories during the first half of the seventeenth century. Its energies, in fact, contributed to the on-rushing quality of motion that characterizes early tonality. One could argue, in other words, that the procedures later described by Rameau in terms of “purely mathematical principles”—the procedures we like to regard as proof of Western musical supremacy—bear witness to the West’s encounter with the Native American/African body and its rhythms.

The most famous *ciaccona* setting to come down to us is Claudio Monteverdi’s *Zefiro torna* (1632), an accompanied duet for two tenors. The poetic text hails the return of spring and spins out verse after verse enumerating the season’s delights, but toward the end the anguish and alienation of the poet’s inner self suddenly erupt into the text, setting up a stark Petrarchan contrast with the splendor of the natural world. For most of the duet, the *ciaccona* proliferates its dance pattern with reckless abandon, each temporary conclusion breeding only the

Ex. 1b

115

- to Sol

- to P Sol i - o per sel - ve - ab - ban - do - na - te - c so - le l'ar -

i - o per sel - ve - ab - ban - do - na - te - c so - le l'ar -

dor di due be - gli - oc - chi - el mio tor - men - to

129

dor di due be - gli - oc - chi - el mio tor - men - to

desire for yet another repetition (see figure 1a). As the lines concerning the poet’s emotional state appear, however, the music swerves into a concentrated passage featuring some of the most chromatic, dissonant writing available to the mannerist avant-garde (see figure 1b). The duet ends pivoting between the overwrought agony that guarantees the “authenticity” of the subject’s interiority and the care-free, seductive *ciaccona* rhythms of “nature,” of the body. Note that this “body” is no longer the body of color from which the *ciaccona* was taken; it now stands for the “universal” (that is, white) body—albeit a body yoked explicitly in binary opposition with the tortured, deeply feeling mind.²³

Performance decisions matter enormously for compositions like this one. One of the earliest available recordings was a lugubrious rendition conducted in 1937 by Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger appears to have taken as her cue the “true” (that is, anguished) feelings of the poet as they are revealed near the end, and she

Ex. 2

JEAN-BAPTISTE LULLY (1632-1687)
Alceste (1674), Prologue
La Nymphé de la Seine—Récit

Musical score for the song "Le Héros" by Georges Bizet. The score is written for voice and piano. The tempo is marked "Modère". The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are in French.

Lyrics:
 Le Hé - ros que j'ai - tens ne re - vien - dra - t'il
 pas? Sc - rai - je tou - jours lan - guis - san - te Dans u - ne si cru - elle m.
 ten - te? Le Hé - ros que j'ai - tens ne re - vien - dra - t'il pas?

The score includes fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) and breath marks (v, ^, +, 10^, 15v) for the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features chords and single notes, with some measures marked with "b" and "6".

read the entire duet accordingly. One listens in vain for any trace of African or Native American influence—or, indeed, of dance and the body—in this performance. But more recent musicians have understood the semiotic implications of the *ciaccona* and have produced versions closer to the above description. The performance by Nigel Rogers and Ian Partridge, for instance, infuses the opening sections with a physicality that makes it quite obvious what the fuss over the *ciaccona* was about: One truly does not want that groove to stop, even if civilization itself is at risk.²⁴

Dance is not always associated with carnival or subversion, however. As part of his absolutist agenda, for instance, Louis XIV employed dance and its supporting music to regulate—indeed, literally to *synchronize*—the bodies and behaviors of his courtiers.²³ In accordance with Louis's priorities (motivated at least as much by political as aesthetic considerations), French musicians maintained dance at the center of their activities. Even vocal pieces usually conformed to the rhythmic impulses of dance-types. Thus, the first task in composition or performance was to provide the kinetic base for the dances that were so central to court life.²⁴

Let us take as an example a brief *récit* from the prologue to Jean-Baptiste Lully's opera *Alceste* (1674) (figure 2). As with most of the spectacles designed for

Louis's court, this prologue presents an allegory in praise of the Sun King, commemorating an earlier triumph over Franche-Comté. A figure identified as a "Nymph of the Seine" bemoans the absence of her "hero" and languishes while awaiting his return. Eventually, the hero's victory is announced with suitable fanfare, and Louis himself is fêted—honored both as the principal spectator of the drama about to unfold and also as the principal spectacle around whose glory all else revolved.

The nymph's utterance adopts the rhythmic impulses of the sarabande, which (like the *ciaccona*) was rumored to have descended from a New World ritual noted for its wild sensuality, but which had long since been tamed into the most stately of the courtly dances. Its principal identifying mark was a slow triple meter in which the second beat received unexpected emphasis, associated in dance practice with a lift onto the toes that was sustained for the remainder of the measure (not an easy feat, given the tendency of ankles to wobble). It is the resulting contrast between motion and suspended animation that characterizes the sarabande and that informs the nymph's discourse, even if she only sings it. A set of conventions designed for regulating the body pervades the *récit* from its note-to-note sequences to its periodic phrases that correspond to groupings of dance steps. And although Lully sprinkles his tune with graces (indicated by the marks above the staff), these ornaments serve as much to reinforce the crucial gestures of the dance as to adorn the melody.²⁷

The nymph's *récit* follows the formal plan of a *rondeau*, in which a refrain returns between slightly contrasting sections (ABACA). In this particular *rondeau*, the refrain itself operates recursively as an ABA structure. The first line, "Le Héros que j'attens ne reviendra-t'il pas?" divides symmetrically, each half contained within two measures, thus setting the pace, the norms against which the rest of the *récit* unfolds. With the second phrase, "Seraï-je toujours languissante / Dans une si cruelle attente," the nymph begins to resist the established rhythm. As she works toward continuous motion and delays accents to the third beat, she threatens (as much as was allowed within this style) to overflow the bounds of the expected phrasing. But reason saves the day: Her increased animation leads back safely to the opening line, which recontains and seals the refrain with a gesture of closure.

Lully's strategy recalls one of the instances of *bon goût* recorded so admirably by Madame de Sévigné. A young woman of the court had been jilted by the Chevalier de Lorraine. When she encountered him one day, she launched into a tirade against him. He—ever mindful of her best interests—deflected attention to the pet she had with her: "That's a pretty little dog you've got there. Where did you get it?" As Madame explained it, the Chevalier thereby preserved the lady's dignity, restraining her from a display of passion that would have proved distasteful to the community.²⁸ This extraordinary disciplining of both body and feelings was accomplished through the internalization of rules of rational order. That Louis succeeded in seducing the French nobility into this ideology is nothing short of astounding, and it is in part the product of the strict regimen of dance and its music to which his courtiers were subjected.

To be sure, the nymph's *écrit* does contain conventional signs of sorrow: the minor key, the halting motion, the drooping melodic lines, the yearning appog-

giaturas (ornaments that delay expected arrivals but that also enhance by "leaning" into them), or the depressed altered pitch on "cruelle" and in the harmony of m. 3. But these are subordinated to the exigencies of the dance rhythms and groupings. And this turns out to be typical also of French performance treatises; whether the issue is violin bowing, text declamation, or ornament placement, the metrical impulses always constitute the deciding factors.²⁹ Emotional expression is rarely addressed; formal precision presides.

Modern scholars and performers have tended to ignore French seventeenth-century music, for these pieces only work if a bodily sense of weight-shifts or lifts-onto-the-toes can be perceived in the music, and such gestures depend on details of timing as minute as those described above by Cropper. But our problem is not only the difficulty of reconstituting nuances in the absence of any heard experience of the music. Far more daunting is a conceptual barrier, grounded in the mind/body metaphysics that have dominated thought about music since the nineteenth century: Most modern performers actively resist having to factor in the body when studying "purely musical" phenomena. If French music relies on the body, then it would seem to be trivial as *music*; if it works as *music*, then the body ought to be irrelevant.

Fortunately, the emergence of historical dance has done a great deal to ameliorate this situation.³⁰ The better early-music performers now learn the steps of the courante or sarabande; like Cropper in the "Midnight Hour" session, they try to make their music "pick up on this thing here." Needless to say, these processes are circular: Musicians reconstruct their performances by watching reconstructed dance, and dancers modify their gestures in accordance with the rhythms they hear the musicians play. But at least these two fields have begun to reestablish the crucial interdependence of music and the body at this moment in French history.

To return to Lully: If the criteria of expression or formal innovation were brought to the nymph's *récit*, the piece would scarcely even count as competent. As we have seen, the affective devices Lully employed are quite minimal; this clearly is not his principal concern, nor would we expect it to be, given French taste. Moreover, the *récit* remains within the most restricted of harmonic and structural conventions. What it *does* offer, however, is a subtle series of nuances made up of varying degrees of motion, hesitation, and stability. If we are sensitive to the kinetic impulses of the sarabande, then the constant pulses that emerge with the words "dans une si cruelle attente" is exquisitely tense: a detail that breaks momentarily with the regularity of the surrounding context and makes the return to the refrain and its lifts all the more gratifying.

The listener's body can vicariously experience those tentative hoverings, the unanticipated sequence of continuous steps, the reestablishment of equilibrium, but only if the performers articulate with the physical precision of French dance the delicate nuances indicated by Lully's ornaments and placement of harmonies. Performed well, the *récit* gives the illusion of presenting the aural equivalent of a geometrical pattern or a theorem in the physics of motion; human expression seems almost trivial in comparison with this embodiment of Pythagorean order.

Like any repertory that influences the body, French seventeenth-century music went far beyond simply facilitating social dance. The fact that French

courtiers were encouraged—indeed, required—to participate in dance does not indicate any particular liberality in the *ancien régime*, since Louis used dance self-consciously as a means of social control. Proper attitudes were inscribed on each body, which was expected to behave in perfect unison with all the others. Through dance and its music, the Sun King could watch the social world moving with one accord to the tunes he called. Dance music at the French court thus filled functions similar to those Plato had designated for Dorian music in his republic. If French music exhibited extraordinary grace, this grace was to signify the joy of submitting to authority; ornaments made these moments seem like the voluntary surrender to *bon goût*.

These ideological relationships among dance, music, the body, and the state apparently had to be carefully protected from alternatives. At least this seems to be the issue in the many polemical wars that sought to ward off the influence of foreign musics. For instance, in his account of the hysteria over music generated during the *guerre des bouffons*, d'Alembert presented the following satirical version of the argument he opposed:

All liberties are interrelated and are equally dangerous. Freedom in music entails freedom to feel, freedom to feel means freedom to act, and freedom to act means the ruin of states. So let us keep French opera as it is if we wish to preserve the kingdom and let us put a brake on singing if we do not want to have liberty in speaking to follow soon afterwards.³¹

D'Alembert here parodies a kind of slippery-slope logic, whereby we slide rapidly from music to feeling to action to collapse of the state, exactly as in Plato, whom this passage deliberately echoes in its apparent horror of liberty. The assumed culprit here is neither the luxury-loving Lydians so despised by Plato nor the purveyors of soul music condemned by evangelists in the 1960s, but rather the usual demonized Other of the French establishment: Namely, the Italian music that had swept through and conquered the rest of Europe precisely because it offered "freedom to feel."

At first glance, Italian genres seem far less grounded in the body. Although dances occasionally appear, they certainly do not constitute the core of the repertoires' premises, as they do in France. Indeed, the regimented patterns required by the dance are quite antithetical to the impulses of the Italian imagination.

The Italians sought primarily to invent a musical vocabulary for simulating—and stimulating—the passions. Although they seemed more concerned with the experiences of the interior self, their images were understood fundamentally in terms of the body and its movements. Thus, sadness was represented by musical analogues to the body as it suffers grief, with slow, drooping motions; anger was recognized by its angular, aggressive gestures; anguish (as in *Zefiro torna*) by its painful dissonances; happiness by rising, ebullient qualities; and so forth.³² It is within the context of the sixteenth-century madrigal that composers first began to develop this musical vocabulary for denoting human feelings. Along with its other constructs, the madrigal produced the earliest explicit musical representations in the West of desire and pleasure, all spelled out in lavish detail.

One of the first international hits of this repertory was Jacques Arcadelt's *Il bianco e dolce cigno* (1539), in which the lyrics compare the swan who sings while dying to the lover who likewise "dies," but does so happy (if "weeping"), in keeping with the cliché of orgasm as a little death. Throughout most of his setting, Arcadelt maintains an extraordinary degree of decorum—the four polyphonic voices (which represent, by convention, a single subjectivity) usually sing the text simultaneously, almost as in a hymn. Occasionally, a word with special affective weight, such as "*piangendo*" (weeping), leads the composer to indulge in a harmony that slips away temporarily from the rationality-defining mode, but then he quickly pulls the process back to orderly behavior (figure 3a). The effect is one of barely managed restraint, for those few "slips" imply the presence of an immense tide of subjective excess just beneath the surface. In other words, the music creates the illusion of public speech and, at the same time, the subject's private *frissons*, his interiority (which are, of course, publicly constructed through the codes Arcadelt is here helping to invent).

At last, with the lines, "If in dying I feel no other pain / I would be content to die a thousand times a day," the dam breaks. The voices that had been held together so tensely up until this point suddenly split apart; each in turn peaks, then cascades downward (figure 3b). Parts enter at spaced time intervals, such that the centered subject now dissolves into multiple, overlapping attempts at climax and closure. Each line seeks desperately the sweetness of the cadence, yet their phased superimposition causes them to cancel each other out. Every moment of would-be conclusion is swept along in the delicious flood of release, until gradually they all subside—rocking to a point of repose under what sounds like a sustained and pious "amen."

Not surprisingly, *Il bianco e dolce cigno* was copied, arranged, and republished all over the continent, for it featured an extraordinarily graphic simulation of the phenomenological state of orgasm. It also gave rise to a large number of imitations, many of which tried to surpass the power of Arcadelt's original.² (One of the reasons composers were so reluctant to abandon the artificial convention of representing a single subjectivity with multiple voices is that such imagery can only be constructed with a polyphonic ensemble. The extensive duet repertory in the 1600s was designed to accommodate both the speech-like declamation deemed necessary for dramatic realism and the simulations of interiority in which the Italians remained invested.)

Without question Arcadelt's imagery is highly stylized—it does not, in other words, represent an unmediated experience of sixteenth-century sexuality. Moreover, Arcadelt did not invent this image *ex nihilo*: Such patterns abound in, say, the masses of Josquin, in which the swirling imitative counterpoint at the climax of a Kyrie invites the surrender to religious ecstasy. But Arcadelt evidently perceived a similarity between the effect of such moments in Josquin and the experience of sexual release, and his madrigal permitted the imagery to cross over into the secular realm of bodily representation.

By around 1660, Italian music had produced not only the means for delineating affect and specific subjective images, but also the glue that held everything

Ex. 3a

JACQUES ARCADELT (c. 1505–1568)
Il bianco e dolce cigno (1539)

Il bian - co e dol - ce ci - gno can - tan - do mo - re. Et

io pian - gen - do giung' al fin del vi - ver mi - o, et

io pian - gen - do giung' al fin del vi - ver mi - o.

Ex. 3b

The musical score consists of three systems, each with four staves (two vocal staves and two instrumental staves). The lyrics are in Italian and are written below the staves.

System 1 (Measures 35-38):

Vocal 1: di mil - le
 Vocal 2: di mil - le mort' il di, di mil - le
 Instrumental 1: di mil - le mort' il di, di mil - le
 Instrumental 2: di mil - le mort' il di,

System 2 (Measures 40-43):

Vocal 1: mort' il di sa rei con-ten to, di mil - le mort' il di sa
 Vocal 2: mort' il di, di mil - le mort' il di, di mil - le mort' il di,
 Instrumental 1: mort' il di sa rei con-ten-to, di mil - le mort' il di, di mil - le mort' il di sa
 Instrumental 2: sa - rei con-ten - to, di mil - le mort' il di sa -

System 3 (Measures 45-48):

Vocal 1: rei con-ten to.
 Vocal 2: di mil - le mort' il di sa - rei con-ten to.
 Instrumental 1: rei con-ten to, di mil - le mort' il di sa rei con-ten to.
 Instrumental 2: rei con-ten-to, di mil - le mort' il di, sa - rei con-ten - to.

together: a set of procedures later known as tonality. From the moment tonality was "naturalized" in eighteenth-century France as the product of mathematics and physical acoustics, it has been accepted as having nothing to do with social

construction or passionate expression. It is simply "the way music goes." Yet an examination of the emergence of these procedures reveals that this too, the most powerful of the devices produced by the seventeenth century, was largely grounded in the body.

Tonality involves instilling in the listener the expectation that closure is at hand and then manipulating the resultant expectation by delaying its gratification. Sometimes this process is tied to verbal rhetorical skill (closure awaits the conclusion of the argument), and in such cases it may seem to have escaped the body. But because it developed primarily in the context of lyrics concerning desire, it also operates effectively and self-consciously as an erotic trope.³⁴

Let us take as an example Cleopatra's aria "V'adaro pupille" from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* (1724), for although Handel was a German working in England, he was one of the foremost composers of Italian opera at its peak. Cleopatra sings this aria at the beginning of Act II as a way of seducing Julius Caesar, whom she needs for political purposes. She has Caesar brought to a mysterious place where she choreographs their encounter with utmost calculation. First, she has a harp-infested orchestra play the sensuous ritornello to her aria. Caesar (good creature of *opera seria* that he is) knows that someone is *supposed* to sing following a ritornello—but nobody does. He is intrigued by this proffering and frustrating of standard conventional behavior, inquires urgently about what is happening, and is virtually beside himself before she even appears. After two trick starts, Cleopatra makes her entrance.

The words she sings are standard stuff: "I adore you, eyes, arrows of love; your sparks are welcome to my breast." Thus it is largely up to Handel to work whatever magic can be generated for this critical scene. Interestingly, he has Cleopatra sing a sarabande, as did Lully's nymph. The prescribed dance impulses shape her rhythmic flow too, especially at the beginning, establishing immediately that the unknown woman is a lady of cultivated courtly habits. But Handel's sense of the body extends far beyond the metric patterns required by the dance; in fact, once the sarabande is established as the foundation for the aria, it is overlaid with several other levels that compel the listener's attention.

Just as Cleopatra aroused and manipulated Caesar's expectations before her entrance, so her melodic line provokes and enacts trajectories of desire (figure 4). She begins brazenly, decisively announcing "V'adaro" in the high part of her range. But having thrown down that gauntlet, she retreats to middle range where she modestly, even haltingly (in keeping with her sarabande rhythms) presents the remainder of her invocation. Nothing remains of that exhibitionistic opening except its ornament, which gets duplicated in each successive unit as her line advances toward tonal closure. Handel has her offer herself right off the bat—then act as though it never happened. We don't need a music theorist to tell us that the high note cannot just be abandoned; as she draws her line ever further away from the opening gambit, our desire to hear that note again—to have it fulfill its promise—becomes more and more pressing.

We get part of our wish with the second line, "le vostre. . . ." As Cleopatra continues her process toward securing closure, she twice arches up suggestively to caress that isolated high note. She hasn't forgotten it and certainly

Ex. 4

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Giulio Cesare (1724), Act 1, Scene 2

Largo

Cleopatra

V'a - do - ro, pu - pil - le, sa - et - te d'a - mo - re, Le

Orchestral Reduction

vo - stre fa - vil - le son gra - te nel sen, V'a - do - ro, pu - pil - le, le

vo - stre fa - vil - le son gra - te, son gra - te ne sen...

V'a - do - ro, pu - pil - le, sa - et - te d'a - mo - re, Le vo - stre fa

doesn't want us to, even though she hasn't let us know quite yet what it means. With the next phrase (beginning again with "V'adoro") she makes her metaphors explicit. Her melodic motion begins to surge past the silences that had parsed

Ex. 4

vil - le son gra - te nel sen, Le vo - stre fa - vil - le son

gra - te nel sen.

Fine

out the first phrase, and she rises—through a sequence that spells growing desire—from one end of the scale to the other, thus consolidating union between the two vocal registers she had opened up. The high note no longer stands as a distant object of desire; her melodic line advances step by rational step until it bends to embrace the high note from on top, thus absorbing it into her orbit. A more dazzling example of suturing would be difficult to come by, as Caesar's imperial body (along with the listener) is hooked into her fantasy of erotic intermingling.

Ah, but perhaps Cleopatra has given away too much too quickly. After a roulade that crowns the moment of imagined consummation (and incidentally, the conquest of the secondary key area), she reverses her strategy and separates the two lines again. It would almost seem as though the union never had taken place, except that she seems ever more reluctant to leave that again-distant high note alone. Each time she approaches closure, she reaches out to re-embrace the higher register, thus converting what ought to have been a regular four-bar grouping into an eight-bar series of desire-motivated transgressions that postpone the anticipated arrival and stretch willfully out of proportion the phrasing implied by the well-behaved dance.

Her cadence, when it finally arrives, is back in the lower part of the range. The startlingly abject quality of this conclusion opens up a kind of vacuum into which the orchestral ritornello spills. Her taunts leave an energized gap that invites Caesar to act out physically what she has implied through notes alone. Nor

is this the end, for "V'adoro pupille" (as Caesar well knows) is a da Capo aria, in which the opening A section is succeeded by a contrasting B section, followed by a reprise of A ["da Capo" = from the head]. In keeping with performance practices of the day, the repeat of A was the opportunity for the singer to demonstrate the extent of his or her virtuosity through improvised ornamentation. In other words, the performer was called upon to enhance the affect and imagery of the aria, bringing it to a suitable climax and conclusion. By the end of "V'adoro pupille," we have to be convinced that the emperor of the known world has been brought to his knees and enslaved by artificially produced desires. Handel's audacious display is made possible by his body-based tropes of carnal passion and the blurring of identity that occurs with sexual contact.³⁵

As Foucault has taught us, "sexuality" was not just waiting there in 1600 for a musical analogue.³⁶ Again, the power of music resides in its ability to construct subjective experiences that we then embrace as our own most private feelings. In an important sense, Italian composers of the Baroque took the erotic body as its playground and devised a vast array of ways of experiencing desire and pleasure, as well as gender. That their images were not universal is clear from the fulminations of French polemicists, who often found them repugnant and perverse.³⁷ If many of the inventions of Italian music of this time sound "natural" to us, it is because we have been so profoundly, so intimately shaped by their discursive practices.

At least it was usually apparent when these practices emerged that the erotic was at issue. But the eighteenth century witnessed a crackdown on the excesses of the *seicento*, and the devices that had been invented during the reign of Italian opera increasingly came to be subjected to rules.³⁸ When *Giulio Cesare* was revived in 1787, the printed libretto reported that it had been altered "to suit it to the refinement of a modern audience."³⁹ And the tonal dynamic of delayed gratification, which continued to fuel most Italian and German music, became so standardized that Rameau could theorize it as the latest manifestation of Pythagorean number.

The early German Romantics—while they still held music to be the abstract manifestation of desire itself—tried to erase all traces of the social realm from their medium.⁴⁰ Thus, the defenders of "Absolute" music denied the relevance of affective conventions to this repertory, even though the music (including the symphonies of Brahms, the darling of the Absolutists) continued to depend for its effectiveness upon those analogues with the body that had been established over two hundred years before.⁴¹ And occasionally the submerged body was acknowledged, providing evidence that it still formed the basis for musical communication.

Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, for instance, relies on our understanding of cadence as sexual consummation (as in both the Arcadelt and Handel examples above) and derives its overwhelming power by delaying for hours its long-awaited closure. Nineteenth-century French exoticism highlighted the body,

albeit the colonized body of the Orientalist femme fatale (Carmen, Delilah), who infused exhausted conventions with motion and sensuality before being purged for the sake of order.⁴² And the emergence of modern music at the turn of the century depended on the questioning of then-conventional images of the body or sexuality: Debussy's faun opts for sustained pleasure rather than climax, and Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* threatens to overthrow civilization and its discontents by enacting what we are invited to hear as the primitive body and its yet-unrepressed violent impulses.

Serialism recaptured the twentieth century for Pythagoras—or at least it did in the academy. But the invention of sound recording opened the door to the worldwide dissemination of musics overtly and unapologetically grounded in the body, and the battle between idealist and body-based conceptions of music has been fierce ever since. At certain moments in the battle, advocates of popular music have tried to demonstrate that their music, too, fulfills the criteria of disinterestedness and aphysicality so central to mainstream aesthetics: Schenker graphs of Beatles songs, pitch-class analyses of Coltrane, or anti-disco campaigns by rock critics all bear witness to attempts at liberating popular music from the body in order to redeem it.

I would prefer to settle the dispute in the direction of the body, to hear music—whether Lully, Brahms, or Wilson Pickett—always as grounded in the body, albeit in radically different ways of experiencing that body. Of course, those who value music because it transcends the body are not likely to concede easily to this position. Many continue to regard the body with loathing, and for them, acknowledging an erotic component in a composition means degrading it.

Yet I would like to see the history of music reconstructed from the point of view of the body, in part because it is such an important issue among today's musicians. A number of women artists, including Pauline Oliveros, Laurie Anderson, Diamanda Galas, Meredith Monk, and Madonna, foreground the body in their work, producing images that reconfigure ideas of both music and the body.⁴³ Our current concerns with the body in music—by the women just mentioned, as well as Prince or John Zorn—make better sense if we understand them not as aberrant, but as part of a struggle that has been going on at least since Plato.

But I also want to relocate music in the body because it is the best way I know for understanding music history in general. The histories transmitted in leading textbooks and journals tend to offer a succession of perfect, orderly artifacts that cannot be permitted to signify lest they signify the body. Controversies of the past disappear, along with any notion of why styles change, for music can only maintain its Pythagorean purity if we erase the bodies it shapes and that shape it. To be sure, studies based on contingencies such as the highly mutable body are bound to seem messy in comparison with the mathematical charts we like to flaunt. But they also promise to make visible and audible the power music has exercised in the social world. And because of the extraordinary specificity of musical artifacts, such work also can contribute heavily to projects seeking to reconstruct the history of the body.

NOTES

1. Cavell, "Music Discomposed," p. 186.
2. Zarlino, *Istitutioni harmoniche* I, chap. 14.
3. Rameau, *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie*, p. 103. The domestication of tonality is discussed later in this chapter.
4. For example, see Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music*.
5. Plato, *Republic*, 424b–c and 398d–99c. References to women occur in *Protagoras*, 347c–d; to youth and the challenging of authority for the sake of pleasure in *Laws*, 700–701.
6. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 238–39.
7. John of Salisbury, *Policratus*, p. 7.
8. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," p. 129: "The aim of jazz is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism. 'Give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated,' the eunuchlike sound of the jazz band both mocks and proclaims, 'and you will be rewarded, accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you, a mystery revealed at the moment of the initiation rite.'"
9. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 66–69. For a sustained account of the bodily basis of epistemology in general, see Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*. The discipline of music therapy has long focused on the effects of music on both mind and body, but its findings have largely been dismissed as "applied" research. While therapists tend not to address historical issues, their findings could contribute invaluable empirical information to all studies concerned with music and the body.
10. Cropper, quoted in Stokes, Tucker, and Ward, *Rock of Ages*, pp. 293–94.
11. Plato, *Republic*, 424c.
12. For more on how popular music contributes to social formation, see Lipsitz, *Time Passages* and "Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens" in his *Class and Culture in Cold War America*, pp. 195–225. See also McClary and Walser, "Start Making Sense," pp. 277–92; and Walser, *Running with the Devil*.
13. For a fascinating study of the early history of commercial music in the West, see Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*. In the Middle Ages the genre most often condemned as both lascivious and commercial was, of all things, the carol.
14. For an excellent account of early Italian opera as an openly commercial enterprise, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*. Rosand demonstrates how standard formal and tonal procedures developed as ways of accommodating the rapid rate of production demanded by entrepreneurs and audiences.
15. Professional music training drills students in how to minimize the body in their performing activities: All "extraneous" motions, such as foot-tapping or dramatic gestures, are discouraged—often through physical punishment. Such suppression of bodily activity and its attendant tensions often results in severe, permanent injuries. But the phenomenon of "playing hurt" is only now being studied seriously; ideological denial of the body's participation in music has long made such injuries literally unspeakable and, consequently, invisible—even (or particularly) in conservatories where cases occur with alarming frequency.
16. Richard Taruskin has been particularly insightful in his linking of present-day practices for early-music performance and the priorities of mid-century modernist aesthetics. See, for instance, his "The Pastness of the Present," pp. 137–207.
17. See, for instance, Leppert, *The Sight of Sound*.
18. See the discussion in "Constructions . . . Dramatic Music," in my *Feminine Endings*, p. 37. I draw in this account on Laqueur, "Politics of Reproductive Biology," pp. 1–41, and on the application of Laqueur's idea to literature in Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 66–93.

19. See Hudson, *Passacaglia and Ciaccona*, p. 4.
20. Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 101.
21. These anonymous lyrics appear in Hudson, *Passacaglia*, pp. 7–8. Marino wrote an extensive account as well. See also the excerpts in Cervantes's *La ilustre fregona*, in Bianconi, pp. 101–102.
22. For more on the subsequent history of the *ciaccona*, see Hudson, *Passacaglia*, p. 11, and Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, 103–104.
23. Eventually the *ciaccona* lost its rowdy qualities altogether. Its French spin-off, the *chaconne*, was used for static (that is, "timeless") formal rituals at ends of ballets. Even in Italy and Germany, it came to serve merely as a technique whose repetitive qualities made it ideal for depicting obsessive states of mind, as in Bach's anguished *chaconne* for solo violin.
24. *Virtuoso Madrigals*, Archiv 2533 087, under the direction of Jürgen Jürgens.
25. See Little, "Dance under Louis XIV and XV," pp. 331–40. For more on the political dimensions of dance and music at Louis's court, see Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King*. For more on the links between culture and politics at Versailles, see Marin, *Portrait of the King*, and Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*.
26. See, for instance, Cooper and Zsako, "Georg Muffat's Observations," pp. 220–45.
27. Lully began his career as a fourteen-year-old dancer in an Italian opera troupe visiting Paris. When the troupe returned home, Lully remained, insinuated himself into Louis's favor through his abilities in dance, and eventually was granted a monopoly over most musical production at court. It is, therefore, not surprising that he bent official style so as to spotlight his own talents.
28. As recounted in Mellors, *François Couperin*, p. 32.
29. Cooper and Zsako, "George Muffat"; Bacilly, *Art of Proper Singing*; Couperin, *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*; Mather, *Interpretation of French Music*.
30. For a summary, see Little, "Recent Research in European Dance," pp. 4–14. For examples of dance applied directly to musical performance, see Little, "The Contribution of Dance Steps," pp. 112–24, and Hilton, "A Dance for Kings," pp. 161–72.
31. d'Alembert, *La Liberté de la Musique*, p. 48.
32. See, for instance, Zarlino, *Istitutioni harmoniche*, IV, chap. 32, pp. 177–78. Subsequent theorists were influenced by Descartes's *The Passions of the Soul*. For an eighteenth-century account of musical affect, see Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*. For a philosophical discussion of these issues, see Kivy, *The Corded Shell*.
33. For instance, Giaches de Wert's madrigal "Tirsi morir volea" ("Tirsi wanted to die")—which involves a shepherd who must delay orgasm until his partner is ready to "die" with him—pushes the tension of yoked declamation almost to the breaking point, as Tirsi seems to be virtually grinding his teeth in anticipation and frustration, before the explosive simultaneous orgasm finally occurs. These are among the first compositions self-consciously modeled on the experience of sustained sexual tension, climax, and release. Needless to say, this remains an extremely popular pattern in later music, even when it is not acknowledged. See my *Feminine Endings*, especially chapter 5.
34. See my "Constructions of Gender." I am at present writing a book, *Power and Desire in Seventeenth-Century Music*, which will deal with this issue in greater detail.
35. Handel was unusual for his time in creating sympathetic depictions of powerful, desiring women in his operas and oratorios. Gary Thomas has made an excellent case for understanding Handel as having been affiliated with a same-sex subculture. See Thomas, "Was George Frideric Handel Gay?" While it has not yet been generally accepted, Thomas's thesis might help explain Handel's subversions of accepted gender roles in his music: his displacement onto female characters of qualities usually reserved for men and his critiques of patriarchal privilege in, for instance, *Jephtha*.
36. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. See also Abelove, "History of Sexual Intercourse," pp. 125–30, on how social configurations of desire may have altered material conditions such as population growth.

37. See, for instance, Le Cerf de La Viéville, *Comparison de la musique italienne et de la musique française*, in *Music History*, pp. 489–507.

Among the bodily effects of *opera seria* most disturbing to the French was the featured display of castrati (Caesar had been sung originally by Senesino, a famous male alto). Nowhere in Western culture has musical taste imposed its priorities so directly on the body as with this custom, in which mutilation produced males who could dominate in the high registers "naturally" reserved for women. Perhaps the most compelling (certainly the most entertaining) source concerning the castrati is in Rice, *Cry to Heaven*.

38. See again Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*.

39. Lang, *George Frideric Handel*, p. 148.

40. For instance, Ludwig Tieck heard in the symphony "insatiate desire forever hieing forth and turning back into itself," and E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote of the "infinite longing" in Beethoven. See Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*.

41. See my "Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute' Music."

42. See my *Georges Bizet: Carmen*, and the chapters on Carmen and Salome in my *Feminine Endings*. See also Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, and Kramer, "Culture and Musical Hermeneutics," pp. 269–94.

43. See my chapters on Anderson and Madonna and the section on Galas in *Feminine Endings*.

IN CHOREOGRAPHING HISTORY