IRASM 50 (2019) 1-2: 221-253

Paratactic Performance: Toward an Adornian Theory of Musical Interpretation

Jeffrey Swinkin
University of Oklahoma
006C Catlett Music Center
500 W. Boyd St.,
NORMAN, OK 73019, U.S.A.
Email: jswinkin@ou.edu

UDC: 78.01:78.091 ADORNO
Original Scholarly Paper
Izvorni znanstveni rad
Received: February 21, 2019
Primljeno: 21. veljače 2019.
Accepted: April15, 2019
Prihvaćeno: 15. travnja 2019.

Résumé – Abstract
Can one cull from Adorno's oeuvre a single coherent theory of musical performance? One wonders, since the main work he devoted to the topic, *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*, is incomplete and often enigmatic. However, one especially suggestive desideratum for performance is evident in Adorno's praise for musical amateurs: "Lively music-making, by children, amateurs . . . supplies the theory with *the* most important exemplary material. Firstly, because here the music appears with all its cracks and holes, so to speak . . . through [which] one can observe, as with broken toys, how it 'works'." These and other remarks point to *parataxis* being a crucial performative criterion for Adorno. This essay substantiates that thesis by, first, reviewing Adorno's theory of musical performance; second, placing it in the wider context of his philosophical thought; third, rehearsing his remarks on Schubert, for him a paratactic composer *par excellence*; fourth, proposing some performative equivalents to hypotaxis and parataxis and pondering the repertoire for which each performance style may be suitable; finally, exposing deficiencies in Adorno's approach while at the same time trying to salvage it.
Keywords: Adorno • aura • Beethoven • Benjamin • constellation • Hölderlin • hypotaxis • interpretation • nature • parataxis • performance • Schubert

Can one cull from Adorno's oeuvre a single coherent theory of musical performance? One wonders, since the main work he devoted to the topic, *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*[1] (1) is fragmentary and incomplete; (2) is often abstruse, both because the ideas are not fully worked out and because Adorno, generally speaking, intentionally inoculated his thought against easy apprehension; (3) is handicapped by a dearth of music-analytic detail; while Adorno alludes to many works and recorded performances thereof, he rarely reads them closely. Even after carefully perusing *Musical Reproduction*, one might come away asking: what exactly does Adorno want from performers?

There is probably no single answer, no unified theory of musical interpretation to be recovered.

[1] Theodor W. ADORNO, *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction: Notes, a Draft and Two Schemata*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2006). Hereafter, I will refer to this work as *Musical Reproduction*. I should like to thank Bryan Parkhurst for his insightful and generous feedback on an earlier draft of this essay, and also Hayley Grigg for her scrupulous fact-checking.

However, this unfinished opus certainly poses various desiderata, one of which I find especially intriguing. Consider the following declarations:

> Lively music-making, by children, amateurs, entertainers and such like, supplies the theory with the most important exemplary material. Firstly, because here the music appears with all its cracks and holes, so to speak, deconstructed into the elements of every dimension of which it is constituted, and through it one can observe, as with broken toys, how it »works.« The tears are so many windows onto the problems of interpretation that proficient execution normally conceals.[2]

> [T]he true danger of the virtuoso: his perfect control. Through being above the works . . . he no longer journeys all the way into them or takes their immanent demands quite so seriously any more. . . . – Preferable to work with young, unfinished musicians who are not yet fully in control.[3]

> One can learn from *poor* orchestral performances . . . how every orchestral work is analytical, i.e. how it timbrally *deconstructs* the whole into its formal elements.[4]

These and other remarks, in my estimation, point to *parataxis* being a critical criterion for Adorno where performance is concerned.

Most narrowly defined, parataxis (from the Greek *para* [beside] and *taxis* [arrangement]) entails placing words or short phrases side by side with no (or few) connective words in-between them: »I came, I saw, I conquered.« Its antinomy, hypotaxis (from the Greek *hupo* [under] and *taxis*) uses copulas that engender not only syntactical relations but, in creating subordinate clauses, hierarchical ones as well. Paratactic text thus lacks an abundance of these two relations, laying linguistic cells bare. In addition to juxtaposing elements, the paratactic author might deviate from their expected order and also insert »artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax.«[5] More broadly, parataxis, in eschewing linear grammar, also eschews linear logic and teleology—it does not lead the reader step by step from premise to consequent. Instead, it arranges items around an implicit center, yielding a »constellation« in which all points are equally close to that center, to adapt a common Adornian locution. Its geometry, so to speak, is circular rather than linear. Finally, parataxis is unconducive to transparent mimesis. Paratactic text, of which poetic verse is paradigmatic, is self-reflexive, foregrounding itself and its problematic relation to the extra-textual world.

---

[2] *Musical Reproduction*, 127 (all emphases are original unless otherwise stated).

[3] *Ibid.*, 158.

[4] *Ibid.*, 90.

[5] Th. W. ADORNO, Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, in: *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 131. Originally published as Parataxis: Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins, in: *Noten zur Literatur* (1958–74), *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 11, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).

The above quotations, to my mind, evince a paratactic ideal in that, first, they point to musical works (at least certain ones) being pockmarked by syntactical fissures, and they praise the amateur performer who, lacking technical finesse, cannot help but bring those fissures to the fore. Second, the quotations suggest that such disintegration, far from producing incoherence, produces a special kind of sense, affording the listener a unique glimpse into how musical works *work*, into their truth content (which I discuss below). Put another way, Adorno evidently extols a technical and interpretive approach that aims not to explain the piece—or worse, impose coherence on it—but rather to allow the piece, as it were, to speak for itself.

Naturally, my hunch requires much substantiation, which I will provide, first, by surveying Adorno's avowed performative ideals; second, by rehearsing his ideas about poetic parataxis and affiliated aesthetic principles; third, by relaying his thoughts about musical parataxis, about why Beethoven (in his late period), Schubert, and Schönberg were paratactic composers *par excellence*. With that context in hand, I will then proffer some performative equivalents to hypotaxis and parataxis and ponder the repertoire for which each style is suitable. I conclude by exposing deficiencies in Adorno's approach without jettisoning it entirely.

This essay is neither an apologia for Adorno's various theories nor an endorsement of a certain music-interpretive approach. It is solely an attempt to clarify and crystallize what Adorno favored in performance. Of course, in attempting to explicate and systematize Adorno's complex, fluid thought, one risks distorting or betraying the very nature of that thought. Nonetheless, in the words of Alison Stone, »we need to do more than reproduce Adorno's opaque, anti-systematic style if we want to engage with his ideas.« Like Stone, I »will try to reconstruct Adorno's ideas with enough precision to permit engagement, but not so much precision as to eradicate their rich suggestiveness.«[6]

1.

It is easier to discern what Adorno dislikes in performance than what he desires. He derides what he calls »culinary« performance. Such performance valorizes beautiful sound, sound for sound's sake, and, most of all, a moderate sound—a default mezzo forte: »against mf as the norm. . . . If there is a standard level, then it would be the one lacking all force, namely p. The basic mf stems from the misguided culinary notion of the full, rich sound.«[7]

---

[6] Alison STONE, Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 32, no. 2 (2006), 234.

[7] *Musical Reproduction,* 105.

Adorno's injunction issues from at least two broader and related concerns. First, Adorno cherishes the tensions and antagonisms within musical structure, since they reflect those of social reality; he charges the performer with bringing them out. To do so, the performer requires an ample dynamic range, for »the wider the scale, the greater the possibilities of modelling the structure through dynamic degrees, of constructing it dynamically. And in conjunction with this the possibility of attaining extreme *characters*. This applies not only to ppp, but also to fff.«[8] If the latter yields 'ugly' sounds, so be it—those might be precisely what is needed to reflect ugly realities and to declare »war on the culinary ideal.«[9] Second, his distaste (pun intended) for culinary sound is at one with his distaste for middle-class materialism and middle-ground consensus. He bemoans dynamic extremes having become »taboo,« for »sensitivity to noise in music is the musicality of the unmusical, and at the same time a way to ward off expressions of pain and to attune music to a moderation that belongs to the sphere of cheerful and refreshing subjects, to the sphere of bourgeois vulgar materialism. The public musical ideal frequently becomes entwined with that of comfort.«[10]

For Adorno, it was not just a gustatory approach that downplays structural/social tensions and unpalatable feelings. It was also the taut, tightly-controlled performance style that was emerging during Adorno's lifetime—a style he links, at least in part, with the recording technology that was also emerging. Writing in 1938, Adorno laments that

> The new fetish is the flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus as such, in which all the cogwheels mesh so perfectly that not the slightest hole remains open for the meaning of the whole. Perfect, immaculate performance in the latest style preserves the work at the price of its definitive reification. It presents it as already complete from the very first note. The performance sounds like its own phonograph record. The dynamic is so predetermined that there are no longer any tensions at all. The contradictions of the musical material are so inexorably resolved in the moment of sound that it never arrives at the synthesis . . . which reveals the meaning of every Beethoven symphony.[11]

---

[8] *Ibid.*, 146.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] Th. W. ADORNO, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* [1962], trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1988), 143.

[11] Th. W. ADORNO, On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening [1938], in: *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 301. Adorno's remarks were evidently rather prescient, for the performance style he disparaged only became more pronounced as the century marched onward, as Robert Philip has empirically documented. Philip avers, »the changes in recording and the recording studio have in turn fed back into the concert-hall. If pre-war recordings are remarkably like live performances, many late twentieth-century live performances are remarkably like recordings.« Robert PHILIP, *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 231.

Elsewhere, he offers the example of Arturo Toscanini's recording of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, which suffers »from an absence of internal tension—as if with the first note everything had been decided in advance, as with a gramophone record, instead of gradually coming into being. It was as if the interpretation had already turned into its mechanical transmission.«[12] Hence, it is not just sensuous sound but also the seamless continuity of sound that diffuses musico-social conflicts and contradictions (of Beethoven's music in particular), such that no genuine resolution can ever occur. Technical mastery conduces to performance that unfolds as inevitably and unproblematically as when played on a record; the performance becomes its own techno-essentialized imago, the music a foregone conclusion. What is more, the virtuoso erases her own labor, kicking dirt over the traces of arduous effort that led to, and is part of, the performance. Official music education trains musicians to conceal their own work in order to manufacture a glossy product for bourgeois consumption; musicians are taught to dehumanize themselves.[13]

So much for what Adorno disavows. What does he propose as an alternative to such hedonistic and homogenizing practices, which are anathema to socially meritorious performance? In a word, depth. In a »subcutaneous« approach, the performer takes an »x-ray« of the music's structure. Adorno avowedly values the »truth content« of musical works and encourages performers and listeners to cultivate a cognitive rather than primarily sensuous relationship with such works.[14] Some might take the x-ray metaphor to imply that Adorno thinks the musical work entombs a single static truth or set of truths that the performer is duty-bound to disinter. The matter, however, is not nearly so simple.

To start, what exactly constitutes musical truth content for Adorno? Consider the three elements Adorno locates in the musical text: the »mensural«—basically pitches and rhythms; the »neumic«—gesture and sense; and the »idiomatic.« The last concept is somewhat ill-defined, but I take it to denote the social/subjective processes and dynamics built into musical styles and genres. Different musics

[12] Th. W. ADORNO, The Mastery of the Maestro, in: *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 43.

[13] If the virtuoso instrumentalist or vocalist dominates himself, the conductor dominates those who play under him. The conductor revels in his authority over the ensemble, wielding a baton like a ringmaster wielding a whip. The orchestra concert, says Tia DeNora, »represents in miniature, according to Adorno, the relation between individuals and their political leaders in the modern social world.« In this process, the conductor also exerts power over the audience: »the conductor–orchestra production relation, provides a means . . . for rendering listening subjects amenable to authoritarian rule.« Tia DeNORA, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 52. For a similar assessment of the implicit politics of the symphony-orchestra concert, see Christopher SMALL, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

[14] See Adorno's value-laden typology of musical listeners in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 4–14.

reflect different social dynamics and some musics are more conspicuously social than others. Nationalistic and popular styles, for example, are overtly social or political; by contrast, in certain pieces by Bach, Beethoven, and Schönberg, the idiomatic »recedes entirely.« However, that does not mean the music has no social/subjective content, only that such content is sublimated by structure rather than manifested as stylistic traits. Adorno intended the thesis of *Musical Reproduction* in its final form to be: »The task of musical interpretation is to transform the idiomatic element into the neumic by means of the mensural.«[15] The performer, by astutely construing musical notation (the mensural), divines social/subjective content (the idiomatic), which she then recreates in how she dispatches musical gestures and phrases (the neumic). The performer's job, in short, is to resuscitate the sentience that is sedimented in notation, to translate discrete, static symbols into liquid images of human gesture.

Crucially, recovering the experiential states embedded in notation is no radiologist's errand; such states cannot be summarily photographed, so to speak—and for at least three reasons. First, as stated above, these states must be arduously reconstructed in the act of playing, partly by exploiting dynamic extremes. »Interpretation is the imitation of that process which takes place in the composition itself.«[16] More elaborately,

> The problems of interpretation are always . . . the problems of the composition. . . . [Interpretation] must deal with the *problems* that lie within the composition. It must not cover them up, as is done almost everywhere, but rather grasp their *sense* and obey it. [By presenting] the problems, not by playing over them, interpretation can contribute to solving them. It aims for the *extremes* of the compositional content, not the compromise that lies between them. . . . Interpreting means: composing the composition in the way that it wishes to be composed itself.[17]

Second, while this mission places more weight on the object—the musical work as represented by the score—than on the subject, the performer must still mobilize the full extent of her subjective capacities: »Where subjectivity [and] sense . . . are essential to the matter itself, yet at the same time congealed, 'encoded' within it, that aspect requires an equal, namely the subject, in order to be salvaged—precisely for the sake of factual content.«[18] For the performance to be 'true' to the work (*Werktreue*), the performer must be true to herself. Finally, content, once consigned to notation, is indelibly imprinted by it; the two coexist in a state of tension, a tension the performer must somehow express. Indeed, the performer cannot simply reverse

[15] *Musical Reproduction*, 67.
[16] *Ibid.*, 70.
[17] *Ibid.*, 129–30.
[18] *Ibid.*, 142. Shierry Weber Nicholsen affirms, »the primacy of the object is inseparable from reliance on genuine subjective experience.« Shierry Weber NICHOLSEN, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 5.

such reification, as the x-ray metaphor implies. For, »this reification through notation . . . is not *merely* external to the composition . . . but rather seeps into it as an aspect in itself. . . . And interpreting therefore means not simply allowing the idea to crystallize, but rather making this force field visible.«[19] And, »it would be much too crude to say that reproduction must 'awaken' the sedimented content. For one thing, the substance of music is not that content, but far more the process of its sedimentation.«[20] For, to notate content is irrevocably to alter and alienate it, to render it Other. Notation is no aid to memory but verily a symptom of the *failure* of memory: »Musical notation therefore cannot have come about as a mere aide-memoire, as the harmless preservation of an elusive substance. It rather points to precisely the *disturbance* of that organic state in which the memory is at home.«[21] Also, »'all reification is a forgetting'—making available what has passed at once makes it irretrievable. Therein lies the desperate utopia of all musical reproduction: to retrieve the irretrievable through availability.«[22]

Another mediating mechanism, one similar to the score, is the phonograph record, on which Adorno commented not only in *Musical Reproduction* but also in a triptych of essays. The second of these voices admiration for the phonographic medium on the basis of its being a material entity in its own right—not a transparent photograph, as it were, of preexistent music. Recorded performance (in contrast to live performance) is itself a kind of writing, a text, as evident in its grooves, which have a »hieroglyphic« aspect. Just as score-notation presupposes the (notionally) original content to be inaccessible, so the abstruse materiality of a record presupposes the (notionally) original performance to be inaccessible.[23]

The performer, then, is no archeologist, one who digs beneath or decodes notation in order to recuperate a pristine artifact. Nor, relatedly, can listeners pretend away the persistence with which culinary tendencies nag at them, continually detracting from (putatively) pure content. In fact, as Anthony Gritten remarks, »The culinary quality of sound . . . must sometimes be embraced in order to be overcome.«[24]

Let us take stock, in the fragmentary style in which much of *Musical Reproduction* was composed. –A cognitive rather than culinary relation to music. –Against

---

[19] *Musical Reproduction*, 140.

[20] *Ibid.*, 90.

[21] *Ibid.*, 52.

[22] *Ibid.*, 53 (Adorno places the first clause in quotes because he lifted it from a letter he wrote to Walter Benjamin [see *Musical Reproduction*, 245, n.60]). For a thoughtful discussion of the above, see Andrew BOWIE, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 318–20.

[23] Th. W. ADORNO, The Form of the Phonograph Record [1934], trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 55 (1990): 56–61. For commentary on this essay and its companions, consult Thomas Y. LEVIN, For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, *October* 55 (1990): 23–47.

[24] Anthony GRITTEN, Cooking up a Theory of Performing, in: *Adorno and Performance*, ed. Will Daddario and Karoline Gritzner, 82–97 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 92. Also see *Musical Reproduction*, 5.

meretricious mastery; no sailing over the bumps of musical structure but recreating them (partially) through dynamic extremes. –The truth content: structural/social tensions as recreated by an empathic performing subject; equally, the quixotry of trying to retrieve that which notation has banished to oblivion. Thus, Adorno's »x-ray,« the cure for the culinary, is no snapshot of static, objective content but rather a reconstruction of structural/social relations and also of the very difficulty—indeed, impossibility—of recovering those relations in their original state.

We are now in a better position to understand why Adorno celebrated non-professional performances. First, their fissures are true to, or analogous with, structural/social problems. Second, they telegraph the ineluctable otherness of the musical object. Put another way, their imperfections lay bare the essentially self-reflexive nature of the interpretive enterprise, dispelling any illusion of a complete communion between interpretive subject and musical object. Adorno admired the amateur's less-than-seamless stylings because they open windows not only onto structural/social antagonisms but also onto the relative opacity of the musical work to interpretation (and vice versa).

To be clear, I do not take Adorno literally to mean that amateur musicianship is the ideal. After all, he surely realizes that the avocational player does not typically calculate the placement and execution of hesitations and hiccups in order to maximize their effect; mistakes in and of themselves do not perforce illuminate structure or the »problems of interpretation« in any meaningful sense. An artist, however—one uncorrupted by »bad *official* music-making«[25]—could sublimate and strategically deploy such tactics for precisely such illumination. Had Adorno seen his manuscript to completion, he might have offered this clarification. However, he hints at this idea in his comment that Chopin's music requires unevenness of fingering: »the strength of the fingers can hardly ever be entirely uniform, so that single notes will stand out involuntarily and *randomly* [note his emphasis]. . . . The compositional element of contingency, which forms a central part of Romanticism, fulfils itself through the inalienable fallibility of performance.«[26] This perspicacious remark is borne out by Chopin's quip, »as many different sounds as there are fingers.«[27] Chopin-the-pedagogue evidently fostered in his charges a capacity for *controlled* unevenness—even randomness, says Adorno—much as Schubert (as we will soon see) arguably imbued his musical structures with carefully calibrated non-sense.

»Non-sense« is no pejorative, because, paradoxically, it entails a peculiar and particularly liberating kind of sense. Adorno is clearly after a kind of intelligibility in performance that comes not from overt connections—read: long, legato

[25] *Musical Reproduction*, 127.

[26] *Ibid.*, 115.

[27] Documented in Jean-Jacques EIGELDINGER's indispensable *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by His Pupils*, trans. Naomi Shohet, et al., ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 33.

lines—but from willful and skillful disconnections and demarcations: »Musical coherence arises not from simply carrying on, but rather from the *inner* flow, i.e., the dialectical tension-field between *different* parts.«[28] I contend that this aesthetic is essentially a paratactic one, closely analogous with the parataxis Adorno detects in Hölderlin, late-period Beethoven, Schubert, Schönberg, and others. Such illumination-by-separation occurs not merely on the level of performative 'syntax' (dynamics, articulation, phrasing) but on an epistemological level as well: for Adorno, interpretive efficacy depends on a fundamental separation between interpretation and musical work, where each enjoys relative autonomy. Adorno's paradigm for this kind of relationship involves concepts (reason) and nature. Indeed, to understand how performative interpretation can illumine a musical work in other than an oppressive, hegemonic way, one needs to understand how, for Adorno, reason can illumine natural objects in such a way. Here, Walter Benjamin's concepts of constellation and aura will prove indispensable.[29]

With the ultimate aim, then, to theorize paratactic performance, let us review Adorno's theory of parataxis more generally, as well as his appropriation of related Benjaminian notions.

2.

Adorno places considerable philosophical stock in parataxis and the constellations it entails. The reasons are well known but worth rehearsing.[30] In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer contend that humankind is marked by a compulsion toward self-preservation, in the name of which it has sought to squash or contain nature, to subjugate »everything natural to the sovereign subject.«[31] Its main weapon is none other than reason, which thwarts the innate tendencies of natural phenomena (both living and non-living) and effaces their particularities, subsuming them under universal types.[32] Reason has also fueled

[28] *Musical Reproduction*, 126.

[29] I will not linger over the precise consonances and dissonances between Adorno's and Benjamin's use of these terms and concepts. For that—and for commentary on the so-called »Adorno-Benjamin dispute« more broadly—see S. W. NICHOLSEN, *Exact Imagination*, 137–80.

[30] The next few paragraphs roughly retrace the narrative thread Alison Stone weaves across three seminal works by Adorno (see citations below). A. STONE, Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature, *op. cit.*, 231–53.

[31] Max HORKHEIMER and Th. W. ADORNO, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* [1947], ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xviii.

[32] Needless to say, this premise is arguable. Hegel, for one, indicates otherwise in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As explained by Slavoj Žižek, »one really reconciles oneself with some objective content not when one still has to strive to master . . . it, but when one can afford the supreme sovereign gesture of releasing this content from oneself, of setting it free.« Slavoj ŽIŽEK, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New

spurious 'progress' in the form of industrialization and mass production whose dehumanizing tendencies eventuated in totalitarian, fascist regimes.

Yet, simply returning nature to a de-rationalized state, re-enchanting it, is no solution because doing so conceals the oppression that inevitably occurs. Moreover, re-enchanting nature is deleterious because we then use such a model to naturalize the very cultural practices by which we expropriate nature; that is, we see in nature prefigurations, and thus justifications, of our coercive social institutions. For example, Adorno observes that when Marx declares that economic development rests on the basis of natural law, Marx is referring to »the law of capitalist accumulation that has been mystified into a law of nature.«[33] And considering capitalism »second nature« obfuscates and alienates material, »first nature.« In short, as Stone states, »experiences of enchanted nature . . . conceal and perpetuate human domination over nature.«[34]

If divesting ourselves of concepts is not desirable (nor viable), how can we use them, given their orientation toward the general, to capture the »non-identical«? In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno maintains that it is possible to use conceptual thought to critique itself—to use, in Max Paddison's felicitous phrase, »the power of the concept to undermine the concept and thereby enable the non-conceptual to speak.«[35] One proceeds by concocting constellations of ideas. A constellation *emulates* rather than purports to *explicate* an object: the relations between concepts outweigh the determinate meaning of any one concept; and in those relations we experience, in non-conceptual form, the relations that constitute the object in its exquisite uniqueness. As Stone explains, interpolating Adorno's words, »a constellation 'illuminates' . . . what is 'specific' in the object, by the way in which its component concepts 'gather' or 'centre' around that object in definite relations to one another.«[36] Hence, where a single concept quashes the particular, a constellation of concepts captures the particular by forming a homology with it. In this way, we become closely acquainted with the object without treading on its precious opacity. Moreover, part of what makes an object unique is its history, which includes the history of that object having suffered under the tyranny of reason. Hence, to grasp an object in its specificity is to thaw its frozen history; it is also to recognize that object as a ruin, a mere vestige of its former self. *Negative*

York and London: Verso, 1989), xxi. Contrary to the totalizing tendencies with which Adorno and others have associated Hegel, subjective synthesis for Hegel entails a remainder—the »non-identical,« in Adornian parlance.

[33] Th. W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics* [1966], trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum Books, 1973), 354.

[34] A. STONE, Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature, 237.

[35] Max PADDISON, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15. Or, in Raymond Geuss's words, »one can only 'get beyond' given, inert conceptual structures *by using concepts*.« Raymond GEUSS, Suffering and Knowledge in Adorno, *Constellations* 12, no. 1 (2005), 15.

[36] A. STONE, Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature, 241.

Dialectics, then, proposes a socially critical re-enchantment of nature, one that does not conceal and perpetuate domination. Through constellations, a natural object speaks—and speaks in part of having been dominated and of being self-alienated.

A problem remains, however: the above leaves in its wake another abstract conception—that of the object's domination. *Aesthetic Theory* addresses that dilemma by inserting art between people and nature as an essential interlocutor;[37] art ensures that our apprehension of nature is not an abstraction. Also, by mediating our perception of natural beauty, art ensures that we do not erroneously take such perception to be direct, or the beauty to be uncorrupted. For, nature is beautiful partly by virtue of its vulnerability, its backstory of suppression. Art, rather than imitating nature, more generally simulates the dynamics of its suffering; paratactic art—modernist art especially—does so by sundering the parts from a formal whole, no longer supposing that traditional schemata can control and lend coherence to those parts. Such a supposition would amount to being complicit with continued domination. More precisely, says Stone, artworks tend to oscillate »between fragmentation and forced coherence,« thus imbuing its »materials with reference to a history of being constricted and damaged, and when we sense this, we also, indirectly, sense the analogous suffering of nature.«[38] Constellations of artistic material are thus analogous to natural elements. In short, only art, and especially paratactic art, permits a re-enchantment of nature that does not also entail the enchantment of our own oppressive tendencies.[39]

Hölderlin's late poems, per Adorno, are exemplars of art that is non-hegemonic toward the nature it often thematizes. Hölderlin is an expert practitioner of parataxis, relinquishing (if not entirely) linear language. »The logic of tightly bounded periods [sentences], each moving rigorously on to the next, is characterized by precisely that compulsive and violent quality for which poetry is to provide healing and which Hölderlin's poetry unambiguously negates.«[40] He also evades logical synthesis, wherein the subject sublates nature by casting out the particulars that would resist such synthesis. Finally, he suspends the significative function of language, loosening its grip on nature. Hölderlin problematizes syntax, synthesis, and mimesis in one fell swoop.

---

[37] Th. W. ADORNO, *Aesthetic Theory* [1970], trans. Christian Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

[38] A. STONE, Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature, 248.

[39] Deborah Cook dissents with the notion, implied by Stone, that non-identity thinking is truly found only within the rarefied realm of the aesthetic. »Adorno explicitly rejects the equation of non-identity thinking with a nondiscursive, nonrepresentational aesthetic absorption in objects when he argues that negative dialectics must not break its link with language.« Deborah COOK, From the Actual to the Possible: Nonidentity Thinking, *Constellations* 12, no. 1 (2005), 27.

[40] Th. W. ADORNO, Parataxis, 135.

One of Adorno's central examples is Hölderlin's poem, »Der Winkel von Hahrdt« (»The Shelter at Hahrdt«).[41] It alludes to the legend of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, who, after being exiled by Charles V in 1519 and while fleeing from enemies, holed up in a shelter near the titular town. That shelter was apparently comprised of two large blocks of sandstone resting against each other. Here nature, the poet proclaims, is »far from mute« (Richard Sieburth's translation of *nicht gar unmündig*, which more literally translates to »not at all immature«) in that the natural shelter and its environs bear witness to the protagonist having been there. As Camilla Flodin explains, »The place speaks of this event. History has here turned into nature: the traces of Ulrich's stay at this shelter are long since covered with vegetation. But the poem's rendering of this, [*sic*] is also a way in which nature is allowed to express itself, a way in which nature becomes eloquent.«[42] History becomes nature, which in turn conceals that history; the poem, in making that history explicit, helps nature to speak, gently liberating its voice.[43] As Adorno muses, »while nature's language is mute, art tries to make this muteness speak.«[44] I would add that Hölderlin's text does not merely denote (or connote) that theme but *embodies* it in its paratactic construction: the poetry largely abstains from syntactical and subjective synthesis; consequently, its linguistic fragments dot the page like so many natural objects dotting a landscape. The words, names, and unusually constructed phrases acquire the materiality of natural phenomena, unmastered by *Geist*.[45] In short, nature speaks through both the form and content of the poem.

---

[41] This poem is from the collection *Nachtgesänge*, which was composed *circa* 1803 but not published until 1805.

[42] Camilla FLODIN, »The eloquence of something that has no language«: Adorno on Hölderlin's Late Poetry, *Adorno Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018), 6.

[43] Adorno's notion that nature and history are intertwined can be traced back to his early essay, The Idea of Natural History [1932], trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Telos* 60 (1984): 111–24.

[44] Th. W. ADORNO, *Aesthetic Theory*, 115.

[45] The above accords with Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor and of poetic language generally: he submits that, once language is released from its primary referential function—once it is no longer transparent to its signified—it becomes palpable matter: »In poetic language, the sign is looked *at*, not *through*. In other words, instead of being a medium or route crossed on the way to reality, language itself becomes 'stuff,' like the sculptor's marble.« Paul RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* [1975], trans. Robert Czerny, et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 247 (my emphases). Note, language may call attention to itself without thereby calling attention to its author's artifice and craft. Indeed, an ideal of early Romantic lyric poetry, especially of folk poetry, was directness and simplicity of expression. This, according to Wilhelm Müller, as paraphrased by Susan Youens, »necessitates the removal, as much as possible, of the poet's perceived presence from the reader's consciousness. The more one is aware of a mediating mind outside the poem itself and the more one notices artful poetic technique, the less truly folklike the poem is.« Susan YOUENS, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's* Winterreise (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 18.

Returning to the issue of interpretation, an art object, like a natural one, has its own voice the interpreter should help actualize, its own sedimented history the interpreter should uncongeal. This idea is evident in Adorno's appropriation of Benjamin's notion of the aura.[46] Paratactic works, in eluding conventional sense, are auratic, or have an auratic component. The aura, according to Adorno, helps liberate the aesthetic (or natural) object from subjectivo-linguistic domination. Briefly, aura is that which exceeds the literal and determinate features of the work, features to which concepts are roughly adequate. Auratic artworks, or the auratic aspects of artworks, thus resist interpretation, since the latter, says Adorno, is essentially a conceptual endeavor. As with the Kantian object of beauty, the auratic object relays the *impression* of having sense and meaning but is ultimately opaque toward the definite concepts by which meaning is parsed. Also as with Kant, this process by which meaning is intimated but withheld sparks a free play of our cognitive faculties.[47] In short, whatever artworks communicate they simultaneously conceal; they roundly refuse to offer messages for the plucking.

The aura thus countermands interpretation, which, by Adorno's count, is one of two modalities of aesthetic experience. But, what auratic art loses in interpretability it gains in receptivity, the other modality. Receptivity is not, as the term might connote, a state of passivity or disengagement; it is a longing gaze rather than a vacant one, as when we stare at a distant object that we want to grasp but cannot. Auratic receptivity is a loss of self, the better to become immersed in the artwork. In brief, when an artwork occludes interpretation, it nourishes receptivity and greater intimacy. If the artwork is remote in one sense, it is closer in another—or better, it is close precisely in its remoteness. Since auratic and paratactic objects and artworks dwell beyond the realm of reductive concepts, we must be sensitive to their own language, the »language of objects,«[48] and respect their own voice, their non-cognitive dimension.

Hence, returning to Hölderlin, the dignity his poems afford nature is the selfsame dignity we ought to afford those poems (and works of art generally). If his language, rather than writing over nature, allows nature to speak on its own terms, then our reception of that language should do likewise. To restate, Hölder-

---

[46] Benjamin postulates this concept in his famous, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [1936], in: Walter BENJAMIN, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, 217–52 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968). Some of the following draws upon Yvonne Sherratt, Adorno's Aesthetic Concept of Aura, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33, no. 2 (2007): 155–77.

[47] In Kant's own words, »in the case of a relation that is not grounded in any concept . . . no other consciousness of it is possible except through sensation of the effect that consists in the facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding), enlivened through mutual agreement.« Immanuel KANT, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [1790], ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104.

[48] Th. W. ADORNO, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 275. (Note, I rely on a different translation here than I did above.)

lin dispensed with the delusion that the particular and general are fundamentally compatible. »By shattering the symbolic unity of the work of art, he pointed up the untruth in any reconciliation of the general and the particular. . . . classicism . . . clings in vain to the physical proximity of something that has been estranged.«[49] Just so, we should not approach his poems, and art as a whole, with subjective solicitousness, collapsing their auratic distance. The interpreter ought not impose wholeness on those poems any more than they impose wholeness on nature. In fact, it is paradoxically by embracing a work's enigmatic remoteness that we get close to it.

Does this mean that would-be interpreters of art must throw in the towel? Not quite. Near the beginning of »Parataxis« Adorno insists that the obstinacy of paratactic works »does not prohibit interpretation so much as demand[s] it.«[50] Near the end we find out why: in Hölderlin, »domination of the Logos is not negated abstractly but instead recognized in its connection with what it has overthrown; the domination of nature [is] itself a part of nature.«[51] The self-preservation that motivates our conceptual containment of natural plentitude is itself a natural instinct.[52] We must not belie the extent to which concepts continue, almost inevitably, to inform the creation of artworks. If even paratactic artworks are unable to entirely avoid subjecting nature to logicality, so interpreters must acknowledge their inability to entirely avoid subjecting such works to understanding. It is not as though a pristine work awaits us if only we suspend our concepts, no more than a »pristine inner nature await[s] release from repression.«[53] Indeed, not everything in an artwork is auratic; as Adorno asserts of Hölderlin,

[49] Th. W. ADORNO, Parataxis, 127.
[50] *Ibid*., 109.
[51] *Ibid*., 141.
[52] D. COOK, Adorno's Critical Materialism, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 32, no. 6 (2006), 726.
[53] J. M. BERNSTEIN, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 200. Nor is external nature virginal, innocent of signification. Holly Watkins drives this point home in redressing John Cage's and other musical modernists' fetishizing of natural sounds, »sounds themselves,« sounds supposedly impervious to human-imposed meaning. She explains that »the rhetoric of 'sounds themselves' continues to be attractive because it allows us to imagine getting beyond the claustrophobic realm of human purposes. It lures us into thinking that we are delving into the essence of sound. . . . In straining to hear sounds themselves, we try not to decipher, to interpret . . . to subjectify but to revel, presumably, in the sensuous immediacy of vibrations impinging upon ears and body.« Holly WATKINS, On Not Letting Sounds Be Themselves, *The New Centennial Review* 18, no. 2 (2018), 83. In point of fact, natural sounds hardly want for significance; if they do not encode meaning in the manner of a symbol, they function as icons and indices. As an instance of the latter, consider an animal's call, one incited by an approaching predator; such a call does not carry semantic content by dint of convention, content other animals must decode; rather, it directly alerts them to said predator. Even inanimate natural phenomena such as wind and water »may not make sounds for the purposes of communication . . . [but] can still function as signs for sentient observers—as indices, say, of an oncoming storm or a source of refreshment.« *Ibid.*, 80. We err, therefore, in presupposing the existence of a nature uncontaminated, as it were, by meanings.

even paratactic works are hardly devoid of hypotaxis—most art features a dialectic between the two. It would thus seem that the interpreter's task is to render conceptual judgments about the work to the extent possible, acknowledging when the conceptual limit has been reached and then surrendering to the auratic and the non-conceptual intimacy it affords. In fact, I submit that only by attempting to apply concepts can one become cognizant of what lies beyond them.[54] Receptivity and the coveted closeness it fosters might well fail to materialize if not for interpretive activity—and its frustration.

Another reason why the aura does not obviate interpretation is that, however much we interpreters wish to grant the artwork autonomy, it cannot be autonomous if we are not also—just as in society, one cannot truly be free if others are enslaved. And such subjective autonomy includes the freedom to render conceptual judgments, such as those entailed by interpretation. It is our collective birthright to attempt to make sense of the world, art and nature included. In fact, such attempts are not only desirable and justifiable but even inevitable. As James Wierzbicki submits, it is a fundamentally human capacity to impose sense on phenomena—even, or *especially*, where sense would seem to be absent. We cannot help but mentally insert connections between asyntactic cells, to generate gestalts, to relate sounds no matter how randomly juxtaposed.[55] Conceptual interpretation is thus both a moral and a cognitive imperative.

---

[54] In a similar vein, the metaphysical aura that various German Idealists ascribed to absolute music is not incompatible with text and concrete ideas, even though absolute music is paradigmatically instrumental music. In fact, such text—whether the words of a song, of a symphonic program, or of a hermeneutic interpretation—can be viewed as a vehicle by which to access and also transmit otherwise elusive content. Hegel, for one, deemed the true content of music pure inwardness or *Geist* as expressed through tones. However, only musical *Kenner* could apprehend such exalted content directly in those tones; the vast majority must rely on the concreteness of words and ideas, on programmatic analogies. As Hegel comments, »even if the content [of art] is of a spiritual kind, it can only be seized and fixed by representing the spiritual fact . . . in the shape of phenomena with external reality.« Georg W. F. HEGEL, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* [1820–1829], trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin, 1993), 46. Also see Jee-Weon CHA, *Ton* Versus *Dichtung*: Two Aesthetic Theories of the Symphonic Poem and Their Sources, *Journal of Musicological Research* 26 (2007): 377–403. This idea forms a veritable motif in nineteenth-century musical thought, extending all the way to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner (in his later writings). The last, for instance, characterizes drama as »deeds of music which have become visible.« In Carl Dahlhaus's paraphrase, »Music is the 'essence' . . . to which drama stands in the relationship of 'material appearance' . . . in Hegelian terminology.« Richard WAGNER, On the Term »Music Drama« [1872] in *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 9, 306; cited in Carl DAHLHAUS, The Twofold Truth in Wagner's Aesthetics: Nietzsche's Fragment 'On Music and Words', in: *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century* [1974], trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 35.

[55] James WIERZBICKI, Inventive Listening: The Aesthetics of Parataxis, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 45, no. 1 (2014): 21–46. Apropos here are Wierzbicki's remarks on 'apperception,' a term Adorno apparently favored over 'perception.' If perception entails both receiving data and rendering them intelligible, apperception entails »not an end result of comprehension but only a process that might—or might not—lead to comprehension« (37). We more apperceive than

3.

Turning now to musical composition, if Hölderlin is Adorno's champion of poetic parataxis, Schubert is Adorno's champion of musical parataxis, if implicitly. But to understand this Schubertian aesthetic, we need to go back to late-period Beethoven, and to understand that, in turn, we need to go back, if briefly, to middle-period Beethoven.

It is widely known that Adorno detects in Beethoven's heroic works, and in the high-Classical style generally, a rare utopian condition by which subject and social totality are happily reconciled. If such rapprochement was not fully actualized, Beethoven evidently recognized the propitious potential for it and saw fit to musicalize it.[56] How did he do so? Most of all, by creating organic works in which form and content are well-nigh inextricable, in which external conventions (read: society) arise (or seem to) from the exigencies of each work's motivic unfolding (read: subject). The recapitulation in his sonata forms, for instance, arises not from formal obligation but from an overarching thematic process, and vice versa: »This is why the *prima vista* most striking formalistic residue in Beethoven—the reprise . . . is not just external and conventional. Its purpose is to confirm the process as its own result. . . . Not by chance are some of Beethoven's most pregnant [thematic] conceptions designed for the instant of the reprise.«[57] However, this putatively utopian condition has a dark underbelly, one that follows from our preceding discussion: the unfettered subject has a tendency to overwhelm the social structures it would benevolently wed, just as it has a tendency to run roughshod over nature. This tendency is evident in the aggressiveness not uncommon in Beethoven's heroic music. As Rose Subotnik explains, in »the exaggerated assertiveness of [Beethoven's] development and recapitulation procedures . . . Adorno discerns . . . the incipient transformation of freedom into force.«[58]

---

perceive paratactic discourse, because the fissured text, rather than guaranteeing sense, merely lends itself to the process by which we *try* to make it make sense.

[56] In a similar vein, Jürgen Habermas attests to equality during the Enlightenment being more notional than actual: »Not that this idea of the public was actually realized in earnest in the coffee houses, the *salons*, and the societies; but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realized, it was at least consequential.« Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* [1962], trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 36.

[57] Th. W. ADORNO, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 44.

[58] Rose Rosengard SUBOTNIK, Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition, in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1991), 22. An apt example of a middle-period work in which the thematic-*cum*-subjective process subverts rather than reconciles with recapitulatory convention is the first movement of Beethoven's 'Tempest' Sonata, Op. 31, No. 2. Of the primary theme's recapitulation, Julian Horton states,

Politically, that transformation came to pass in The Terror, to which a disillusioned Beethoven responded with late works that are demonstrably less organic than the middle ones. No longer is the particular an integral part of an inviolable whole; it is now an isolated fragment: »[t]he emancipated phrase, released from the dynamic flow, speaks for itself.«[59] If the societal subject no longer possesses the power to generate external reality on its own terms, neither can the musical subject generate external forms: »the conventions [are] no longer imbued and mastered by subjectivity, but left standing.«[60] In the piano sonatas of the late period—Ops. 101, 109, and 110, for example—the opening themes are more distinctive and lyrical and thus more self-enclosed than are the themes of the middle period; as a consequence, the late-style themes are less able to engender the larger form. Indeed, the late works often give the impression of laying bare various forms and techniques, such as variation and fugue, as if surveying them from a distance. In all this, Adorno sees the subject having absented itself, having »violently vacated« the form it had previously permeated and bent to its will.[61]

Adorno draws an association between Beethoven's late style and parataxis in the Hölderlin essay (the composer and poet were roughly contemporaneous): »Great music is aconceptual synthesis; this is the prototype for Hölderlin's late poetry, just as Hölderlin's idea of song [*Gesang*] holds strictly for music: an abandoned, flowing nature that transcends itself precisely through having escaped from the spell of [domination].«[62] Late Beethoven releases musical materials (phrases, forms) from a subjectivo-motivic grip just as Hölderlin releases natural materials from a subjectivo-linguistic grip. »Mediation of the vulgar kind, a middle element standing outside the moments it is to connect, is eliminated as being external and inessential, something that occurs frequently in Beethoven's late style; this not least of all gives Hölderlin's late poetry its [anticlassical] quality, its rebellion against harmony. What is lined up in sequence, unconnected, is as harsh as it is flowing.«[63]

---

thematic specificities . . . are not reconciled with the dictates of formal convention. Instead, the recapitulation sacrifices convention to subjectivity. . . . The first-theme reprise is essentially a region of subjectification, which temporarily dissolves the . . . main subject into a fantasia on its motivic content, an event from which the recapitulation's synthetic function never fully recovers. . . . the failure to contain the music's subjectivity within sonata conventions parallels the failure to generate social and political order from rational individuality. In musical as well as political terms, the resolution of this conflict is deferred as an aspiration.

Julian HORTON, Dialectics and Musical Analysis, in: *Aesthetics of Music: Musicological Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Downes, 111–43 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 127.

[59] Th. W. ADORNO, *Beethoven*, 125.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Adorno's richly suggestive theory of Beethoven, on which I have scarcely touched here, enjoys a plethora of secondary literature. See, just for instance, Daniel K. L. CHUA's Adorno's Metaphysics of Mourning: Beethoven's Farewell to Adorno, *The Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2004): 523–45; The Promise of Nothing: The Dialectic of Freedom in Adorno's Beethoven, *Beethoven Forum* 12, no. 1 (2005): 13–35; Beethoven's Other Humanism, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62, no. 3 (2009): 571–645.

[62] Th. W. ADORNO, Parataxis, 130.

[63] *Ibid.*, 132–33.

The difference is that the poet finds himself at odds with his own medium of language, which »is chained to the form of judgment and proposition and thereby to the synthetic form of the concept. In poetry, unlike music, aconceptual synthesis turns against its medium. . . . Hence Hölderlin merely *gently* suspends the traditional logic of synthesis.«[64] The dissociation of form and content is necessarily more tentative in Hölderlin than in late Beethoven.

Another composer Adorno might have had in mind here is Schubert. In a renowned 1928 essay, Adorno contends that Schubert's sonata-form themes (like many of late Beethoven's) are self-contained, material entities in their own right—»cells of existent objectivity,« on the basis of which they are »truth characters.«[65] Themes are no longer simulacra of subjective vitality, as they were in middle Beethoven, no longer forces that subsume and synthesize everything in their path. Rather, they are singularities and as such, can only be repeated, often with variation, not developed or transformed. These (varied) repetitions, in their loosely tethered, asyntactic state, themselves accrue a modicum of materiality.[66] These cells populate a figurative landscape which the Schubertian wanderer circumambulates, taking it in from different vantages, not unlike rotating a crystal in order to enjoy the various ways it refracts light. Indeed, the thematic reiterations radiate various colors and moods while being ontologically unaltered; there is no genuine change, only »perspectival circulation: »all . . . changes are changes of light« and »mood is the changing aspect of the eternally self-identical.«[67] Again, such sameness and timelessness have much to do with the lack of musico-subjective mediation. In a discursive process, each thematic incarnation, though similar to others, is distinguished by its unique temporal location; it is stamped by the time-point in the theme's history at which it occurs. A recursive (variational) process knows no such history; thematic iterations are not firmly fixed to the time-point at which they happen to appear; the iterations are more or less interchangeable. »The complete interchangeability of all individual thematic elements points to the simultaneity of all events which move alongside one another without

[64] *Ibid*., 130 (my emphasis).

[65] Th. W. ADORNO, Schubert [1928], trans. Wieland Hoban, in: *Night Music: Essays on Music*: *1928–1962*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (London: Seagull, 2009), 22, 21.

[66] Schubert, Scott Burnham affirms, »invest[s] the surface of his music with a compellingly opaque materiality, such that we attend *to* it and not *through* it.« Scott BURNHAM, Schubert and the Sound of Memory, *The Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (2000), 662–63. This remark resonates with Ricoeur's about the materiality of poetic language (review n.45). Similarly, see Scott BURNHAM, Beethoven, Schubert and the Movement of Phenomena, in: *Schubert's Late Music: History, Theory, Style*, ed. Lorraine Byrne Bodley and J. Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), where he states, »Both [late] Beethoven and Schubert keep the underlying syntax of the classical style in play, but encourage a new opacity of the musical surface, one that commands the attention in a different way, inviting us not so much to listen *through* it into the future but to listen *to* it« (41).

[67] Th. W. ADORNO, Schubert, 32 and 34.

histories.«[68] Schubert's thematic terrain is thus synchronic and constellational, with »every point equidistant from the centre.«[69]

Such stasis, Adorno remarks, is right at home in the song cycle, but when such song-like themes are transplanted into the discursive framework of a sonata, tension is bound to ensue—tension between the »fragmentary character of [Schubert's] music«[70] and the larger cohesive environment of the sonata. Such tension is perhaps most patent in Schubert's development sections, which, rather than decompose and recompose themes, tend to rehearse them in their entirety. Indeed, Felix Salzer posits that it was Schubert who innovated the technique of transposing themes wholesale in sonata-form developments. By such lyrical expansion, Schubert obstructs the dramatic flow.[71] This music thus poses a unique challenge to the music analyst: to square schematic sonata form with Schubert's »second, crystalline form«[72]—to come to grips with the dialectic between themes and the form to which they are recalcitrant. Salzer does not look favorably upon such tension and decries Schubert's lyrical excursions. He much prefers the sonata-form practices of C.P.E. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven; their improvisatory impulse ensures the continual transformation of motives and the continual generation of new ideas, which are better suited to the teleological trajectory of sonata form. Yet, what Salzer denigrates on compositional grounds, Adorno celebrates on philosophical grounds. By Adorno's lights, Schubert's music (like late Beethoven's) is beneficent in being truthful, in not pretending that the subject and object, theme and form, are more unified than they really are. This music is true to the segregation of subject and object that is endemic to the modern human condition.[73] Schu-

[68] *Ibid.*, 28–29.

[69] *Ibid.*, 32.

[70] *Ibid.*, 37.

[71] Note that such distended lyricism is as much a part of parataxis as are strident juxtaposition and caesurae; the two are not at odds, as one might assume. Salzer explains that Schubert's »desire to hold on to a [single] emotion means that each lyrically determined idea has the tendency to expand and develop itself, especially by repeating the same group of motives. . . . The abundant use of one and the same group of motives also results in many subdivisions within such a construction. Caesuras are therefore an important feature of lyrically shaped ideas.« Felix SALZER, Die Sonatenform bei Franz Schubert, *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 15 (1928), trans. Su Yin Mak in: Felix Salzer's »Sonata Form in Franz Schubert« (1928): An English Translation and Edition with Critical Commentary, *Theory and Practice* 40 (2015), 14.

[72] Th. W. ADORNO, Schubert, 35. Carl Dahlhaus undertakes precisely such an analysis (though without acknowledging its Adornian debt) in Carl DAHLHAUS, Sonata Form in Schubert: The First Movement of the G-Major String Quartet, op. 161 (D. 887), trans. Thilo Reinhard, in: *Schubert: Critical and Analytical Studies*, ed. Walter Frisch, 1–12 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

[73] William Kinderman says that Schubert's wanderer (such as the peripatetic protagonist of *Winterrreise*) »peers into the unknown and unfathomable. He lacks control over his environment,« and »few artists have probed so deeply into the tragic aspects of the human condition.« This condition, he opines, is most forcefully embodied in second movement of Schubert's Piano Sonata in A major, D. 959, whose opening lyrical reverie is catastrophically curtailed by a middle section that »seems to unleash not just turbulence and foreboding, but chaotic violence.« The contrast is so stark that there is

bert's refusal to reconcile themes and sonata form was, in Richard Leppert's words, »a mark of saving grace to the extent that failure revealed truths that an untrue modernity strove relentlessly to shove under the carpet.«[74]

That reason also underlies Adorno's sunny assessment of Schönberg's atonal music. Such music is admirably brazen in expelling organic unity. In fact, atonal Schönberg does Schubert one better in jettisoning traditional forms such as sonata altogether, so there is no longer even a question of integrating particular motives or themes and the larger structure; the motivic process is unapologetically all-consuming. Atonality is paratactic in that, on one pole, it is replete with paroxysms; on the other pole, it evinces »the brittle immobility of a person paralyzed by anxiety.«[75] Such polarization precludes any sort of mediation, and with it »the steadiness of the harmonic flow, and the unbroken melodic line.«[76] Such anti-organic music, in Bryan Parkhurst's words, »proclaims a strident, ungovernable resistance to reconciliation, and stubbornly contravenes 'universality', which, though abeyant, is nevertheless negatively present in the continual threat of a tyrannical reinstitution of the domination of the whole.«[77] Twelve-tone music makes good on that threat by systematizing the atonality that had been blessedly free-wheeling; it imposes a spurious unity onto what are fundamentally incommensurate sounds.[78]

---

scant chance of reconciliation or resolution. William KINDERMAN, Wandering Archetypes in Schubert's Instrumental Music, *19th-Century Music* 21, no. 2 (1997), 209, 219, and 218. In this respect, incidentally, I think S. Burnham errs in asserting that the truth value of landscapes resides in their supposedly being the projection of an all-encompassing subjectivity, being »the inward landscapes of a nascent existential consciousness, one that recognizes subjectivity as all there is.« S. Burnham, Landscape as Music, Landscape as Truth: Schubert and the Burden of Repetition, *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005), 36–37. Adorno emphatically embraces »existent objectivity,« and values subjectivity mainly to the extent that it serves to emancipate and illuminate the objective realm.

[74] Richard LEPPERT, On Reading Adorno Hearing Schubert, *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005), 60.

[75] Th. W. ADORNO, *Philosophy of New Music* [1949], translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 37.

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] Bryan PARKHURST, Formal Arguments and Symbolic Gestures: Thoughts on Langer and Adorno, with a Postscript on Marxism, *Theory and Practice* 42 (2017), 174–75.

[78] Many composers other than the three just discussed have their paratactic moments, in Adorno's estimation and otherwise. In Mahler, for example, Adorno detects »isolated notes . . . in which the flow of the music comes to a halt or rather is suspended in mid-air.« Th. W. ADORNO, Mahler, in: *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 1992), 104–5. W. Kinderman affirms, »There is a deep affinity between Schubert and Mahler in their appropriation of the wanderer archetype and in their related employment of heightened contrasts.« W. KINDERMAN, Wandering Archetypes, *Op. cit.*, 213, n.16. To my knowledge, Adorno does not recognize parataxis in music before late Beethoven, but it exists. For instance, Haydn's *The Creation*, in Michael Spitzer's account, is cyclical and paratactic in its construction, and is even »a *locus classicus* for what Beethoven achieves in his late sonatas and quartets. . . . [It] blasted a path for Beethoven's late style to become possible . . .« Michael Spitzer, Haydn's *Creation* as Late Style: Parataxis, Pastoral, and the Retreat from Humanism, *Journal of Musicological Research* 28 (2009), 246. Much music after Schoenberg—that of Ives and Berio, for example—partakes of parataxis by juxtaposing disparate styles

If such paratactic art and music let nature speak its truth, perhaps the Adornian, emancipatory performer should let music speak its truth and by the same means—by approaching it paratactically. The first section of this essay already furnished some evidence that Adorno valued such playing, even if he did not explicitly term it 'paratactic.' Beyond the dynamic extremes and discontinuities he mentioned, of what would paratactic performance consist? How might the performer play in a largely »non-explanatory« way, a constellational way, so as to preserve the work's auratic autonomy, thus achieving intimacy with it through its Otherness? A secondary question is, to what music is paratactic playing most appropriate? Only to music that is itself paratactic, or to more hypotactic, developmental music as well? Answering both sets of questions will require looking for clues in Adorno's writings and reading between the lines.

4.

As a non-verbal medium, instrumental music cannot assert propositions or deliver linear arguments in any literal sense. Nor can the performance of such music. Yet, even in the absence of fixed denotations, music can be language-*like* and so can its performance—one can play in ways more or less *analogous* with reason. How might one perform in such a quasi-hypotactic manner?

Take, first, the default-mezzo forte (and the more general dynamic moderation of which it is synecdochal). I suspect Adorno dreads it precisely because it is *the performative counterpart of the concept*. It is generic, intimating vapid universality; it downplays musical particularities, attenuating their sheer materiality (or substituting a palatable sound for a more unsettling one).[79] Although Adorno was somewhat tentative regarding extremes of tempo, I see no reason why tempo moderation is any less deleterious than is dynamic moderation: just like mezzo forte—and just like the concept with which it is analogous—a relatively moderate tempo would snuff out particulars.[80] (Incidentally, moderation, in my view, need not equate with a middle-ground dynamic or tempo; it might also take the form of a relatively uniform dynamic or tempo of *any* quantity—a minimally perturbed

---

within a single piece. See Peter DICKINSON, Style-Modulation: An Approach to Stylistic Pluralism, *The Musical Times* 130, no. 1754 (1989): 208–11.

[79] There are perhaps some instances in which homogeneity in one domain might allow for greater heterogeneity in another; a relatively uniform dynamic might serve as a foil for salient articulations or, to take a structural parameter, for salient harmonic changes. I owe this observation to Bryan Parkhurst (personal communication).

[80] In some places in *Musical Reproduction* Adorno advocates rubato, in others he advocates a uniform tempo as a means by which to unify a performance. At one point he goes as far to equate tempo with totality and dynamics with particularity, but that does not hold water—both dynamics and tempi operate on multiple structural levels simultaneously. If an overarching tempo profile helps generate unity, more local tempo fluctuations help generate diversity within that unity.

pianissimo or fortissimo, for instance.) Second, judiciously modulated changes of dynamic and tempo, I contend, are the performative counterpart of syntactical copulas, which tend to mediate disparate elements, diminishing their disparity. Gradual changes form connective tissue where there would otherwise be jarring juxtaposition. Finally, long, continuous, goal-directed lines are the performative counterpart of logical synthesis. Such phrasing produces unity where discomfiting discontinuity might be truer; it runs the risk of foisting coherence onto musical material. Moreover, the technical mastery and fine-tuned fluency that makes such phrasing possible smack of the automaticity of technology, a late-capitalist precipitate of instrumental reason. The streamlined, hypotactic approach I have been describing is not merely hypothetical; it is a musical reality. As Robert Philip has shown, this style of playing became more pronounced and pervasive over the course of the twentieth century, to a degree Adorno could scarcely have imagined.[81]

It follows that paratactic playing, in contradistinction, would eschew the universal concept—hence its exploitation of dynamic and tempo extremes, which amplify the particularity and sometimes strident materiality of phrases and thematic ideas. It would eschew syntagmatic connection—hence its unmediated, unapologetic contrasts.[82] And it would eschew logical synthesis—hence its preference for localized rhetoric over sweeping trajectories. The paratactic pianist is thus more likely than her hypotactic counterpart, for example, to heed Beethoven's precise slurrings, which tend to break off *prior* to metric points of arrival;[83] she is also more likely to heed Chopin's own fingerings, which beget discrete micro-gestures. Both engender a kind of sense that is not top-down and pre-given but bottom-up and spontaneous—a kind of sense stemming from the disjunction and tensional interrelation of parts (recall Adorno's desideratum of an »inner« flow arising from the dialectical friction among components).[84]

More broadly, the paratactic player honors the auratic otherness of the work—its enigmatic demeanor—and does not presume to speak for it any more than Hölderlin presumes to speak for nature (he, in Adorno's view, allows nature *itself* to speak). At the same time, this approach, while unabashedly object-oriented,

---

[81] Again, see R. PHILIP, *Early Recordings and Musical Style*, *op. cit.*, and also Nicholas Cook's critique of the »structuralist« style of performance, which is akin to what I am calling the »hypotactic« style. Nicholas COOK, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[82] To wit, the pianist Igor Levit evidently played a certain performance with »meditative quiet or cathartic outcry, with *virtually nothing in between*.« Joshua BARONE, A Pianist's Profound Vision of »Life,« in Just 2 Hours. *The New York Times* (October 21, 2018) (my emphases).

[83] George BARTH, *The Pianist as Orator: Beethoven and the Transformation of Keyboard Style* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 113.

[84] Chopin's fingerings, as well as those by Beethoven and Schenker in his edition of Beethoven's 32 Piano Sonatas, are not necessarily the easiest or smoothest, but that is appropriate for content that is itself not easy. Heinrich Schenker, referring to a tricky passage in the fourth movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 101, states in words that just as easily could have come from Adorno,

entails no slavish obedience to the score, since, as already mentioned, the score is merely a representation of the work, and a reified one at that. Revitalizing that work—the social and emotive content for which the notation stands—requires sensitive subjects, each of whom will empathize with the content differently.

> The theory must be guarded against the progressive education-misunderstanding that true interpretation can be developed purely and immediately from the work, without the performer making any intellectual or technical contributions himself. . . . Just as composition in fact increases its demands on interpretation the more it grows apart from it, so also will the performer, the more perfect and differentiated his performance becomes, and the better he controls his natural material, become increasingly able to do justice to the composition. . . . the self-reflection of interpretation as something that exists *for itself*.[85]

Put more succinctly, both the piece and performer enjoy autonomy; only with such auratic distance can the two ultimately find affinity, where each gazes at and reflects the other without a wit of domination. The work is not in thrall to the interpreter, because the interpreter does not explicate; the interpreter is not in thrall to the work, because the work does not dictate. The paratactic model radically separates out performing subject and musical object, both to allow for their non-hegemonic communion and to mirror the subject-object chasm that, for Adorno, is an ineluctable aspect of the modern human condition.

Having at least adumbrated hypotactic and paratactic performative approaches, I now consider the kinds of music to which they are applicable. Does Adorno think, quite simply, that one should play hypotactic pieces hypotactically and paratactic pieces paratactically? (I defer until the next section cases where the two coexist within a single work.) His x-ray metaphor would seem to suggest as much; if a *sine qua non* of performance is recreating a work's internal or subcutaneous processes, then, most fundamentally, one would need to recreate a work's (a)syntactic style. Here, for example, is what Adorno says about performing the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2, a discursive, middle-period work: »making music *thematically*: that means representing

---

Since the burden of technical difficulty is doubtless great in [measures] 307–310, any fingering would be welcome that *honestly* attempts to overcome this burden; it is only that every facilitation . . . which attempts to belie these difficulties away should keep its distance. The technical difficulty here is also a psychological constituent part of the content.

Heinrich SCHENKER, *Erläuterungsausgabe* of Beethoven's Op. 101, trans. David P. Goldman, Master's Thesis, Queens College (1990), 193–94. Fingerings may be chosen to mitigate difficulties but must stop short of creating a false picture of facility, especially when the physical challenges (and, Schenker adds, the psychological challenges of which they are symbolic) are integral to the passage. For more on the aesthetic-ideological dimension of keyboard fingering, see Chapter 5 of J. SWINKIN, *Teaching Performance: A Philosophy of Piano Pedagogy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015).

[85] Th. W. ADORNO, *Musical Reproduction*, 113.

the *history* of a theme, and not simply: clarifying the themes. Such clarification can (e.g. in the course of Bach's fugues) be precisely the *wrong* thing. There is such a thing as a clarity of a higher order . . . namely that of the thematic history, and it takes priority over the positivistic clarity of each thematic situation.«[86] In such assertively developmental music—in diametric opposition to Schubert's—themes are bound to a »history,« a narrative from which they cannot be extracted. The performer must undertake that diachronic journey, contingencies and all, rather than volunteering a synchronic, synoptic perspective from on high—say, playing a theme at its first appearance on the basis of how she knows that theme will turn out in the end. The performer is no external exegete or narrator but a veritable actor in the drama. She will play linear, hypotactic music in a hypotactic way—getting swept up in the moment-to-moment connections, refusing to telegraph the larger structure. Note, as Adorno does, that such playing, while not (quasi-) explanatory in a »positivistic« sense, still renders the music intelligible by attending to its diachronic unfolding; such »higher order« clarity is consistent with hypotaxis.

As for paratactic music, one abiding by the x-ray model would play a late-Beethoven piano sonata with sufficient disruption, embracing and even exaggerating caesurae (for instance, the one preceding the onset of the recapitulation in the second movement of Op. 109), and amplifying the differences among the genres that late Beethoven lays bare (for instance, imbuing the virtually self-contained fugue that is the development section of the finale of Op. 101 with an air of self-enclosure, perhaps playing it in somewhat stilted fashion as to make apparent its reified treatment). Put the other way around, it would be unconscionable from an Adornian perspective to play these late sonatas with a uniformly beautiful tone and long-lined coherence, glazing over the disjunctions and enigmas with facility and self-certainty.

Schubert's parataxis is a bit different from late Beethoven's. As mentioned (n.71), expansive lyricism and abrupt disconnection are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin; still, Schubert places a higher premium on the former, Beethoven on the latter. The Schubertian player would thus luxuriate in introspection, circumambulating the material with little or no goal-orientation, bathing the various iterations of a theme in different colors, but without sacrificing its

[86] *Ibid.*, 108. In a similar vein, Schenker admonishes the performer »primarily to express the special rhythmic characteristics of a composition, as they sometimes coincide with the meter, sometimes *oppose* it.« H. SCHENKER, *Der freie Satz*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1935). Translated by Ernst Oster as *Free Composition* (New York: Longman, 1979), 126 (my emphasis). Cited in Edward KLORMAN, *Mozart's Music of Friends: Social Interplay in the Chamber Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 220. Klorman emphasizes the agency of individual parts within an ensemble and encourages players to embrace their individual actions, even (or especially) where they know those actions to be ultimately at odds with the synoptic harmonic, formal, or metric framework. He likens this strategy to that of an actor or opera singer who »maintains his omniscient vantage point« while his character »experiences the opera in the present tense as the action unscrolls« (128).

unchanging core. (Such a coloristic approach might smack of the gustatory values Adorno ardently opposes; here, however, sensuousness exists not for its own sake but in order to correlate with and delineate a variational constellation around a thematic locus.) For example, in the first movement of the posthumous Piano Sonata in B-flat major, the primary theme, Salzer observes, is a three-part Lied form: the theme is initially in the home-key of B-flat major, then in G-flat major, and then again in B-flat major, but over a dominant pedal. For Salzer, the second key lacks forward motion and the return to the original key lacks necessity.[87] Formally, then, this thematic area is lyrically static. Tonally, the foray into G-flat major and especially, for Adorno, that into F-sharp minor later on indicate »a perspectival drop into harmonic depths. . . . the vivid impression of a step into the dark.«[88] The tonal succession is not logical but erratic and epiphanic. The theme knows no historical progression here, only kaleidoscopic shifts. From Salzer's and Adorno's remarks, one might infer that an appropriate rendering of this section would favor abrupt changes of dynamic color and eschew goal-oriented phrasing. The performer would play spatially, with all changes being »changes of light.« – Modifications of perspective, not the successive stages of an unfolding drama.

That Adorno likely condones congruence between an interpretive approach and a work's (a)syntactic style is corroborated not just by what he says but by *how* he says it. We can glean Adorno's stance toward performance from the performative dimension of his very prose. As several scholars have noted, Adorno's writings on Beethoven and Schubert exemplify the qualities, as Adorno sees them, of the music he describes. Michael Spitzer, for one, in referring to Adorno's remarks on Beethoven's String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, insists, »This . . . synergy between the content and medium of representation, whereby criticism mimics qualities of its object, is absolutely typical of Adorno's philosophical aesthetics. Here Adorno's procedure is most pronounced in the late-Beethovenian fragmentation of his argument, which unfolds as cryptically as the actual quartet.«[89] About the Schubert essay, Leppert avers that Adorno's genre of choice (the essay),

> is not predetermined by a philosophical first principle; the thought it reflects arises more directly from the material it studies, and less from the concepts that precede the material and always threaten to overwhelm it. The essay . . . formally constitutes itself less as a magnifying-glass, more as a splinter in the eye. . . . The trick Adorno manages here, and honed throughout his writing life, is that the essay textually reenacts what it recognizes in Schubert's music. Like the music, the essay repeats itself but with subtle differences, as though Adorno were holding up a cut gem to light and turning

[87] F. SALZER, Die Sonatenform bei Franz Schubert, *op. cit.*, 47–48.

[88] Th. W. ADORNO, Schubert, 40. Also see Esteban BUCH, Adorno's »Schubert«: From the Critique of the Garden Gnome to the Defense of Atonalism, *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 1 (2005): 25–30.

[89] M. SPITZER, *Music as Philosophy: Adorno and Beethoven's Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 39.

> it to see the differences manifested in its facets. . . . Adorno's ideas about this music, like so many things in Schubert's music itself, are less developed than juxtaposed, often paratactically. . . . Adorno's essay is evidently inorganic.[90]

Susan Gillespie, musing on the peculiarities of translating Adorno, affirms that his prose is musical and »begs to be translated, much as music begs to be performed.«[91] She then observes that at times this musicality is acoustical, with strong rhythmic elements, and that »variation, within these regular rhythmic units, creates tensions that play themselves out against the semantic content.«[92] But, more than that, »this true musicality consists . . . in 'integral composition' that 'divests itself of the familiar idiom' in order to achieve a changed form of the expressive and create a 'radically emancipated music' that embodies new forms of human freedom.«[93] In other words, Adorno's prose ensconces itself in a defamiliarizing aura both to reflect the aesthetic values to which it refers and to shield *itself* from rational expropriation. Indeed, the Schubert essay recreates rather than rationally exhausts the music it parses; in so doing, it becomes yet another example of art that cannot be adequately explicated and must be simulated by another artistic act. (Anyone who has tried penning a précis of this rhapsodic essay has likely found oneself penning yet another rhapsodic essay!) In this way, work and interpretation/reception mirror each other in life-affirming autonomy.

Crucially, however, Gillespie's is a *general* characterization of Adorno's literary style; indeed, Adorno seldom approaches his subject matter in conventional ways; his prose is typically gnostic, gnomic, and self-referential (especially, but not only, in those works he left unfinished, such as *Beethoven*, *Musical Reproduction*, and his valedictory *Aesthetic Theory*[94]). In other words, Adorno, like his beloved Schubert, has an overarching auratic and paratactic style, one not custom-fit to every topic or composer he treats.[95] Perhaps that style, intentionally or

---

[90] R. LEPPERT, On Reading Adorno, *op. cit*., 57. For a similar appraisal of Adorno's prose, see Barbara BARRY, In Adorno's Broken Mirror: Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 40, no. 1 (2009): 81–98. Also see J. HORTON, Dialectics and Musical Analysis, *op. cit*. After affirming that, in Adorno's assessment, modernity is burdened by a gulf between subject and social order, Horton implicitly links that assessment with the structure of *Philosophy of New Music*, which »progress[es] paratactically through the elaboration of dialectically argued concepts . . . which form a constellation of ideas rather than a ramified, teleological thesis« (117–18).

[91] Susan GILLESPIE, Translating Adorno: Language, Music, and Performance, *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1995), 55.

[92] *Ibid*., 56.

[93] *Ibid*., 55. The interpolated quotes are from Th. W. ADORNO, On Some Relationships between Music and Painting [1965], trans. S. Gillespie in *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1995), 66–79.

[94] See S. W. Nicholsen's very effective rumination on the material, artistic features of Adorno's discourse in S. W. NICHOLSEN, *Aesthetic Theory. Exact Imagination*, *op. cit*., 175–80.

[95] Commenting on Baudelaire's presence in Benjamin's writings, Jonathan Monroe states that the former's prose poems »make their influence felt [less] through direct commentary . . . [than] as models for the innovative formal strategies that characterize Benjamin's richly varied oeuvre.« Jonathan MON-

not, mirrors the essential condition, as Adorno saw it, of the age in which he lived—a condition by which subject and object are mutually alienated. Does that imply that the performer of Adorno's age is justified in adopting an overall paratactic approach even when it does not precisely mirror the music at hand, because it is just as, if not more, imperative to mirror the social ethos of the performer's time? Possibly. Perhaps performing music—no matter its style—with seamless, integrative élan after Auschwitz is barbaric.

For supporting evidence, consider Adorno's avowed »stand against . . . historicism.«[96] As we have seen, he attributes much of the uniqueness of a natural—and, by extension, aesthetic—object to its history, which lies latent in that object. Yet, as we have also seen, he does not believe that one can trace such history back to an originary state; the very presence of a score presupposes its original object to have been irretrievably lost. Perhaps on that basis, Adorno projects a musical work into the future as much as into the past: since a score's mensural notations are polysemous, the work it represents must unfold over historical time, its potential meanings unveiled in historical stages. Indeed, a musical work, enigmatic by nature, depends for its realization on compositional and aesthetic paradigms that postdate the piece. In particular, the Classical ethos of unity-in-diversity can be fruitfully applied to the music of Bach and Händel, highlighting its perhaps unintended and unsuspected elements of contrast: »the multifarious formal structure of music since Haydn and Mozart unlocks a cognitive dimension in all music, whether earlier or later, that necessarily determines interpretation.«[97] The interpreter, then, need not aspire toward historical authenticity, which is illusory to begin with. By extension, the interpreter need not feel compelled to play hypotactic music hypotactically if playing it paratactically at once actualizes some hitherto unrecognized potential of the notation and also reflects the social climate in which the performer lives.

In summary, from Adorno's favored x-ray metaphor (and from his infatuation with homology generally), one can extrapolate an ideal by which performance mirrors the predominant style of the work, whether hypotactic or paratactic. Yet, from his own overwhelmingly paratactic and constellational literary style and also his express anti-historicism, one can extrapolate a competing ideal: what

---

ROE, Philosophy, Poetry, Parataxis, *The European Legacy* 14, no. 5 (2009), 600. Benjamin absorbs Baudelaire's style even into the philosophical texts that do not directly comment on that poet, just as Adorno absorbs Schubert's and Hölderlin's styles even into the texts that do not directly comment on them.

[96] Th. W. ADORNO, *Musical Reproduction*, 14.

[97] *Ibid.*, 191–92. For a more rigorously argued conception of Bach as forward- rather than backward-looking, see Adorno's polemic, Bach Defended Against His Devotees [1955], in: *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, 133–46 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983). The most sophisticated and celebrated anti-authenticity manifesto is still Richard TARUSKIN's *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), in particular its The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past, 90–154.

needs to be reflected is less the structure of the work than the structure of modernity, the fissure of subject and object that characterizes Adorno's age, as he saw it. The competing ideal, in other words, is that the modern performer adopt parataxis as a default style because that promotes consciousness of the current social ethos. And, while such a style may not exactly mirror that of the work, it may nonetheless pay splendid interpretive dividends.

5.

Of course, »Adorno's age« is not precisely our own, his historical reality not necessarily ours (although, to restate, many of his misgivings about culture, music, and technology were so prescient as to be uncanny). Determining the degree to which paratactic playing is called for, or even justified, requires a careful sociological analysis of each time and place in which music is performed (as well as criteria for delimiting meaningful historical and geographical spans). That Adorno was not disposed toward such sociological empiricism does not mean we can't be. Tia DeNora, most notably, has done an admirable job of 'empiricizing' Adorno, proceeding from the contention that music, *pace* Adorno, is less social homology than social *actor*—it less reflects meaning than creates it in its day-to-day use.

> Contra Adorno . . . music's affordances cannot be regarded as residing 'in' musical texts, and it is for this reason that socio-musical analysis cannot proceed on a general level. Rather, what music 'does' is dependent upon the ways in which music is heard and perceived. . . . It is the job of the socio-musical analyst, therefore, to examine this process of . . . musical engagement. Music comes to afford things when it is perceived as incorporating into itself and/or its performance some property of the extra-musical, so as to be perceived as »doing« the thing to which it points.[98]

Nicholas Cook concurs: »it is wrong to speak of music *having* particular meanings; rather it has the potential for specific meanings to emerge under specific circumstances.«[99] Thus, any Adornian directives for performance would have to consider the particular music, players, and audiences involved, not to mention

[98] T. DeNORA, *After Adorno*, *op. cit*., 57. B. Parkhurst offers another, more technical objection to Adorno's idea that music signifies society on the basis of formal homology (Formal Arguments and Symbolic Gestures, 182–89). Say *a* and *b* share a similar structure, that they are isomorphic; that does not entail that *a means b*, because that same structure might be shared by *c*, *d*, and *e* as well. Musical structure is homologous with all kinds of phenomena but does not automatically signify those phenomena; the conditions under which it would do so have to be rigorously established. Those conditions have to do with the attitudes and practices of empirical subjects—a point with which DeNora would agree.

[99] N. COOK, Theorizing Musical Meaning, *Music Theory Spectrum* 23 (2001), 180.

the presuppositions that inform the actors as well as the anticipated effect of the event, the uses to which it is put.

Such empiricism, or attention to particularity, must also extend to the music-analytic realm. It is lamentable that Adorno did not often substantiate his suggestive claims with analytic rigor. That lack does not merely compromise the validity or efficacy of those claims. It is more fundamentally problematic, given Adorno's contention that instrumental reason has deleteriously dominated nature. Adorno's own generalizing tendencies—his propensity to shy away from musical particulars that, as an Alban Berg-trained composer, he was eminently equipped to handle—given the oppression with which he himself connects such generalizing, is unsettling to say the least. What DeNora says of Adorno's sociological analysis of the conductor and orchestra (see n.13) might extend to his sociological and musical analyses more broadly: they trade in very »*general* tendencies—ideal types. In every respect, we must 'take Adorno's word' for what he has . . . reveal[ed] to us. . . . Adorno's style of presentation risks being labelled 'authoritarian'.«[100] To the extent that Adorno paints with broad strokes, he risks succumbing to the very hegemonic practices of which he was tirelessly critical.

Since scrutinizing musical structure with any specificity entails accounting, at least to some extent, for events lying beneath the musical surface, neo-Adornian readings would do well to plunge these depths.[101] Adorno's own unwillingness to do so leads him, for instance, to assert too strong a dichotomy between middle Beethoven and late Beethoven/Schubert, which he essentially views as organic and inorganic respectively.[102] Schubert's music may not be organic in the

---

[100] T. DeNORA, *After Adorno*, 53. In a similar spirit, one might question, as Roger Scruton does, the veracity of Adorno's assertion that the culture industry heaps on its hapless members conformism-inducing popular music. Scruton counters that

> this music was not imposed upon the American people by an unscrupulous »culture industry« eager to exploit the most degenerate aspects of popular taste. It arose . . . from spontaneous music-making, with a large input from Afro-American music. . . . When that music later spread around the world it was not by some imperial venture of a conquering civilization but by the same process whereby it arose—the spontaneous taste of ordinary people.

Roger SCRUTON, Why Read Adorno?, in *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 216. What is authoritarian in this case is not jazz but Adorno's assessment of it, as borne out by the fact that he agreed with the ban on this music by the Third Reich, along with other of its cultural policies. For a diagnosis of why »Adorno did not merely defend himself in the Third Reich, but also tried to adapt to it,« see Dragana JEREMIĆ MOLNAR and Aleksandar MOLNAR, Adorno, Schubert, and Mimesis, *19th-Century Music* 38, no. 1 (2014), 76.

[101] One such study is Karen M. BOTTGE, Reading Adorno's Reading of the Rachmaninov Prelude in C-sharp Minor: Metaphors of Destruction, Gestures of Power, *Music Theory Online* 17, no. 4 (2011). http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.4/mto.11.17.4.bottge.html. Adorno expresses antipathy toward the Schenkerian method in: Th. W. ADORNO, On the Problem of Musical Analysis [1969], trans. Max Paddison, *Music Analysis* 1, no. 2 (1982): 169–87.

[102] I deconstruct Adorno's dubious binarism in: J. SWINKIN, The Middle-Style/Late-Style Dialectic: Problematizing Adorno's Theory of Beethoven, *The Journal of Musicology* 30, no. 3 (2013): 287–329.

same way as Beethoven's middle-period music is, with its commanding connectivity and developmental fervor, where each event seems to lead inexorably to the next. However, as Dahlhaus has argued, in more lyrical and paratactic sonata-form pieces, development retreats to the subcutaneous realm; the organic connections are still present but in more latent form.[103] Moreover, Dahlhaus is diligent in distinguishing between the »logical« and »pathetic« aspects of thematic development. Beethoven's heroic pieces boast *both*—both the tight-knit motivic connections and derivations (via developing variation, for instance) and the outward teleological thrust (via »contracted phrases, accelerated harmonic rhythm, and concentrated accents«) with which those connections are associated but not inextricably linked.[104] Schubert, by contrast, often features motivic connectivity sans the headlong sweep of Beethoven's heroic works. Hence, for Dahlhaus, it is erroneous to claim »that a logic spinning its web inconspicuously, instead of by inexorable syllogisms, cannot be counted as 'logic' but only as mere motivic 'association'.«[105] Deep structural analysis would reveal not only connections among composers and styles that Adorno is too quick to dichotomize, but also the dialectic of hypotaxis and parataxis that permeates a given work—in fact, that probably permeates most musical works. Indeed, even in works of which para-

---

[103] See C. DAHLHAUS's essay entitled Subthematicism, in: *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music* [1987], trans. Mary Witthall, 202–218 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). If the hypotaxis were not latent, did not reside at a deeper structural level than the parataxis—if, in other words, hypotactic and paratactic discourses were merely appositional—that, in my view, would fail to generate a genuine dialectic between the two because, on a higher plane, such apposition would *itself* be essentially paratactic. An apt example is the first movement of Schubert's String Quartet in G major, D. 887. Its second-theme group, as Anne M. Hyland points out, alternates between recursive variation and discursive development; this abutment of paratactic and hypotactic modules is paratactic at a higher level. The development section, too, is »founded on the paratactic juxtaposition of presentational [variational] and . . . developmental material.« Anne M. HYLAND, In Search of Liberated Time, or Schubert's Quartet in G Major, D. 887: Once More Between Sonata and Variation, *Music Theory Spectrum* 38, no. 1 (2016), 98. S. Y. Mak offers a similar appraisal of the exposition of Schubert's Piano Trio in E-flat major, K. 929: »The formal design as a whole alternates between forward-driving sections and static ones, thereby suggesting parataxis on a large scale.« S. Y. MAK, Schubert's Sonata Forms and the Poetics of the Lyric, *The Journal of Musicology* 23, no. 2 (2006), 302.

[104] C. DAHLHAUS, Sonata Form in Schubert, *op. cit.*, 7.

[105] *Ibid*. In a similar vein, Poundie Burstein remarks on Schubert's treatment of the tetrachordal motive in the first movement of D. 887: that motive begins on the surface (cello, measures 15–20) and subsequently retreats to the subcutaneous realm—which is to say, it is expanded. Burstein states,

> The procedure seen here is unlike those in typical motivic developments, in which themes tend to shorten. Motivic development through thematic fragmentation forms the prototype of that associated with masters of the classical era—especially Beethoven. . . . Yet there is no reason why fragmentation should be considered essential to development. Schubert's lyrical method of exploring the inner workings of themes by developing them through expansion is no less logical a procedure.

Poundie BURSTEIN, Lyricism, Structure, and Gender in Schubert's G Major String Quartet, *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (1997), 53.

taxis is a characteristic, physiognomic feature, hypotaxis might well lurk beneath the surface. Showing as much would support Adorno's claim that reason relinquishes its throne only reluctantly, that a work's »force-field« is in part the antagonism between hypotactic logic and the paratactic particulars that would elude its grasp.

The performer partial to the x-ray model would mirror that admixture and tension, possibly playing with directional continuity where a subterranean process lurks beneath foreground fragmentation.[106] The performer more concerned to reflect her current zeitgeist (in this scenario, one marked by subject/object alienation) would lean toward paratactic playing, no matter the side toward which the music itself leaned. There is yet a third option, one concordant with DeNora's contention that music and performance more create social meaning than mirror it. One could play even the most disjointed or asyntactic music with hypotactic, organicist gusto, belying (in this scenario) the disenchantment of the current zeitgeist. One would do so out of a belief that the most crucial social function of music is not to the reflect the social circumstances in which a piece was composed or in which it is now performed but to place new (or long-dormant) prospects in our sights—to adumbrate a utopian state toward which we could or should strive.[107] In that utopian state, the subject and object would find perfect harmony—reconciliation without domination. Granted, such interpretation might teeter precariously on the fine line separating a life-affirming gesture from a dissemblance of misanthropic conditions. How would the player ensure he was projecting genuine hope and not culinary complacency? Or, from the vantage of the perceiver, »how does one decide when art is doing its best to prefigure a utopian totality in the face of despair and when it is trying to conceal inhumanity? Adorno offers no general guide.«[108] Nor can we, not in the abstract. We must take performances case by case, dirtying our hands with all the inconvenient details.

---

[106] A case in point, from J. Horton, is the coda of the first movement of Schubert's D. 959. That section might seem an introspective appendage. However, the preceding section does not achieve the expected structural closure, which process thus spills into the coda. »Both the character of the coda's material and the caesura that precedes it reinforce the music's lyric isolation; but its syntactic and structural features insist on a processual continuity.« J. HORTON, The First Movement of Schubert's Piano Sonata D. 959 and the Performance of Analysis, in: *Schubert's Late Music: History, Theory, Style*, *op. cit*., 187. The ramification of this analysis for performance is that the coda be played with incisive energy and cohesiveness rather than as an innocuous afterthought.

[107] Iain MacDONALD, Adorno's Modal Utopianism: Possibility and Actuality in Adorno and Hegel, *Adorno Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017), 11.

[108] R. R. SUBOTNIK, Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style, *Op. cit.,* 38.

Sažetak

Parataksička izvedba: prema adornovskoj teoriji glazbene interpretacije

Može li se iz Adornova opusa izlučiti jedinstvena koherentna teorija glazbene izvedbe? To je upitno, jer njegovo glavno djelo posvećeno toj temi, *Prema teoriji glazbene reprodukcije*, nekompletno je i često zagonetno. Međutim, ono što je naročito poželjno za izvedbu razvidno je iz Adornove pohvale glazbenim amaterima: »Živo izvođenje glazbe od strane djece, amatera … podupire teoriju s najvažnijim primjerima. Prvo, zato što se tu glazba pojavljuje sa svim svojim pukotinama i rupama, pa se takoreći … u [tomu] može promatrati, kao kod slomljenih igračaka, kako ona 'radi'. Suze su mnogi prozori u probleme interpretacije što ih vješta izvedba normalno skriva«. Prema autorovoj procjeni, ove i druge primjedbe upućuju na *parataksu* kao ključni kriterij za Adorna glede izvedbe.

Najuže definirana, parataksa ima za nužnu posljedicu stavljanje riječi ili kratkih fraza jednu do druge bez ikakvih veznika među njima: »Dođoh, vidjeh, pobijedih«. Njezina antinomija hipotaksa rabi riječi koje stvaraju sintaktičke i hijerarhijske odnose. Parataktičkom tekstu tako općenito manjkaju ti odnosi, ostavljajući lingvističke ćelije ogoljelima. Šire uzeto, parataksa izbjegavajući linearnu gramatiku, a također izbjegava i linearnu logiku i teleologiju. Napokon, parataksa je beskorisna za transparentno oponašanje. Parataktički tekst, za koji je pjesnički stih paradigmatičan, je autorefleksivan.

Adorno smješta u tu osnovu puno filozofskog kapitala. Kao što on i Horkheimer raspravljaju u *Dijalektici prosvjetiteljstva*, razum i pojmovi povijesno su služili za dominaciju nad prirodom, potiskujući inherentne tendencije prirodnih predmeta. Parataktički jezik djelomice izbjegava tu štetnu tendenciju i zahvaća više nego što guši posebnosti pojava. Tome je tako jer takav jezik tvori pojmovne konstelacije. Konstelacija prije *oponaša* nego što namjerava *objasniti* predmet: odnosi među pojmovima pretežu nad određenim značenjem bilo kojeg pojma, a u tim odnosima doživljavamo u ne-pojmovnom obliku odnose koji tvore predmet u njegovoj istančanoj jedinstvenosti.

Hölderlin je Adornov heroj pjesničke paratakse, a Schubert Adornov heroj glazbene paratakse. Schubert predstavlja teme sonatnih forma koje za razliku od Beethovenovih ne sintetiziraju sve što im je na putu. Umjesto toga, njih se ponavlja s varijacijom kao što kristal različito prelama svjetlo iz različitih uglova. Schubertova glazba, sa svojim konstelacijama bezvremenskih i nepovezanih elemenata, istinita je u tome što se ne pretvara da su tema i forma, subjekt i objekt, kompatibilniji nego što to uistinu jesu.

Što bi to značilo izvoditi parataktički? Poput amatera, sviralo bi se na iskidan način, strateškom uporabom dinamičkih krajnosti, promjenljivim prstometom, nepovezanom artikulacijom koja proizvodi suprotne kretnje. Na taj način izvođač bio izbjegao izražavanje dojma sinteze i nametanje cjelovitosti i koherentnosti na glazbeni materijal. Kakva bi se to glazba mogla svirati na taj način? S obzirom da Adorno izjavljuje da izvođač mora rekreirati unutarnju dinamiku djela, čini se da, sasvim jednostavno rečeno, on mora svirati parataktičku glazbu parataktički poput Schubertove glazbe (i hipotaktičku glazbu poput Beethovenove hipotaktički, s dugim, logičnim nitima). Međutim, valja u razmatranje uzeti ne samo što je Adorno rekao nego i *kako* je to rekao: njegova je proza pretežno parataktička, auratička (gnomička) i autoreferencijalna, bez obzira na temu kojom se bavi. Možda taj stil

odražava ethos njegova doba kako ga je on vidio, doba subjektno/objektnog otuđenja. Vođeni njime, svirati u pravom adornovskom duhu moglo bi biti svirati *svu* glazbu bez obzira na stil s parataktičkom samosviješću kako bi se promicala autentična svijest našeg sadašnjeg ljudskog stanja.