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Author(s): Leo Treitler

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# Postmodern Signs in Musical Studies

LEO TREITLER

*For Joseph Kerman at Seventy*

**T**his essay comprises four sections, of which the third is focal. It is left to the reader to consider relations among them.

## I

On January 11, 1991, the English newspaper *The Guardian* ran on a single page (p. 25) two brief articles offering interpretations of the current state of the negotiations, the posturing, threats and counterthreats, the name-calling, and the speculating that had the world holding its breath about the situation in the Persian Gulf region. Four days later the ultimatum of the United Nations would expire, under which Iraq was to withdraw its forces from Kuwait or be compelled to do so by "all possible measures." Six days later the aerial bombardment of Iraq would begin.

The first of the articles, under the headline "The Reality Gulf," was written by Jean Baudrillard, a fashionable sociologist/philosopher of the French Post-Structuralist school; the second, under the headline "Iraq Marches to the Precipice," is by Josef Joffe, a German political analyst, and was reproduced from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The editors did well to juxtapose them, for each exposes a view, not only of the realities of that situation, but of the conception of reality that gives events meaning altogether. They represent current alternative styles of perceiving, interpreting, and responding to the world around us, and the contrast has some relevance to discussions now under way in many fields, even the fields of musical studies.

Joffe took certain realities on the ground as givens, beyond interpretation: the presence of 400,000 heavily armed American troops encamped in the Saudi desert, supported by massive tank and air

forces; the possession by those troops of electronic sensing, computing, and communications devices that would render the Iraqi soldiers “dumb and blind—victims of an electronic war”; and President Bush’s determination to launch a war.

“But President Saddam does not seem to have correctly judged either the military or political *realities*. . . . This speaks of a terrible *loss of grip on reality* in Baghdad or of pure cynicism. Behind this stands the *delusion* that in a duel against the rest of the world, Iraq can somehow win. . . . The world has to wish that President Saddam is *bluffing*.” But “George Bush . . . is not *bluffing*” [emphases added].

This reveals a more-or-less straightforward objectivist view of how we perceive and understand things, and a rationalist view of how we behave in accordance with our understanding. Both views might nowadays be identified as “modernist.” An analysis of the relevant data ought to yield a clear understanding of the way things are, according to this view, and that defines the conditions for rational behavior. Contrary behavior would call for an explanation of what has gone wrong in the chain from perception through understanding to behavior. Thus throughout those weeks of speculating, the question of President Saddam’s rationality was foregrounded by Western journalists and pundits, whether as a question about a personal pathology or as an instance of the question about the mysterious nature of the non-Western mind. That parallel questions were not raised about the Western mind or the rationality of President Bush, despite repeated proclamations about “kicking the Vietnam syndrome,” and the blossoming everywhere of yellow ribbons, gives hint of an ideology that casts some doubt on the purity of the objectivist ideal, doubt that is the beginning of what, in Baudrillard’s case, grows to a position of total skepticism and relativism. Even Joffe’s rather straightforward presentation, grounded in ontology, veers at moments toward epistemology (with the words I have highlighted).

In his own words, Baudrillard set out—six days before it began—“to demonstrate the reasons for the impossibility” of the Gulf war. “The Gulf war will not happen,” he proclaimed, and that simply follows from his proclamation of “the death of war” (one has to think of “the death of the author.”) The effect of the cold war was to replace war with deterrence, which is the idea of war distilled into a threat, a kind of rhetorical discourse. The United Nations’s ultimatum was in effect the emplacement of such a cheapened “non-war,” and it was backed by strength so immense that it cowed the West’s own power. “That is why the Gulf war will not happen. . . . The United Nations has given the green light to a kind of diluted war, . . . a contraceptive against the act of war. . . . First safe sex, now safe war. . . . It is unreal,

war without the symptoms of war, a form of war which means never needing to face war at all." To start, there was "the disappearance of the declaration of war. Then the ending of war disappears, too. The distinction between victors and vanquished ceases." (In the pundits' analyses of President Saddam's motives, the theme of winning by losing was prominent; Joffe, in his article, considered it as one among the hypothetical strategies that might explain President Saddam's behavior.) "Everything transfers itself into a virtual form and so we are confronted with a virtual apocalypse."

Here Baudrillard draws a contrast with Aristotle's chain of logic, which "passes from the virtual to the actual. . . . An accumulation of troops in the desert of Saudi Arabia can only lead to a violent solution." It was argued by Bush's critics that in amassing that immense army on the scene he left the U.S. Congress and the United Nations no choice but to validate the action, and thereby he made the war virtually inevitable. But "this is a realist Aristotelian logic to which we no longer subscribe. We must now be satisfied with virtual reality, which deters from the passage to the deed." Here Baudrillard has brought us to the brink of the "virtual reality" that we are told is soon to be made available to us through machines that we will wear on our heads and that will give us the appearance of a race of giant grasshoppers. "In our fear of the real . . . we have created a giant simulator. We prefer the virtual to the catastrophe of the real."

This has to be read—if there is to be consistency in our reading of Baudrillard—not in the sense that we keep our eye on the real and prefer the virtual, but that the real has been displaced and there isn't any sense in talking about it. The whole story has been fictionalized. Baudrillard is positing a solipsistic epistemology that children sometimes entertain—with all its attendant anxiety and arrogance—when they consider that everything they experience as the outer world may be cooked in their own imaginations. But instead of imagination, it is to "media intoxication" that Baudrillard attributes our virtual reality. The belief in the "pretend war" is induced by it, as a dream may be induced by drugs. Those who are so manipulated, in either case, react with indifference. "Television is no longer a mirror. It is the ground itself." Joffe, by contrast, has no hesitation about accepting "the real" as the ground for assessing Saddam's behavior, or anyone else's, one supposes.

When it comes to indifference, it is worth looking for signs of Baudrillard's own feelings, in his tone if not more explicitly in his language. And what feeling he displays is not at all fear and compassion for the prospect of broken bodies and lives to come but, on the contrary, disgust for Saddam's "grotesque charade, for the

debasement and cheapening of a discourse and its tokens—he singles out particularly the hostage, a “phantom player” who perfectly “embodies this non-war.” “What makes President Saddam so despicable is his vulgarization of everything.” These are aesthetic judgements, such as would be rendered about a fictive text or a performance of it, perhaps more about their style than their substance. The intervention of aesthetics in politics, and especially as in this case, the priority of aesthetics over ethics, are prominent in postmodern ways of reacting. Joffe’s language, by contrast, betrays an anxiety about the outcome, barely restrained, and only through great effort.

The most cold-blooded part of Baudrillard’s article is the last paragraph:

It is perhaps rash to demonstrate the reasons for the impossibility of a war just at the very moment when it is supposed to happen and when the signs of its outbreak are accumulating. But wouldn’t it have been even more stupid not to seize the opportunity.

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We must take him exactly at his word. His purpose was to demonstrate—in terms of the rhetorical discourse through which the war’s foreplay was being conducted—the reasons for the impossibility of its consummation. That is different than predicting that a war would not happen as a real event. We would be mistaken to imagine him saying, on January 17, “since the war is now happening I withdraw my analysis as erroneous.” Perhaps he would say “someone has broken the rules of the game, but my analysis of it remains correct.” But perhaps he would say “we do not know that the war is now happening any more than we could know whether it was happening before January 17, because we lack the means for distinguishing an actual Gulf war from a fictive enactment of such a thing in the media.” Recalling the manipulation and control of the news about whatever it was by the pentagon spokesmen, the cooperation in that by all branches of the media, and the display of the war to Western television audiences as a series of video games, it is tempting to go along with him. But if we were to yield to that temptation we would validate the revisionist claims that the estimates of casualties have been grossly exaggerated, just as we might validate the current revisionist claim that the holocaust had not taken place—parallel attitudes for which Baudrillard presents suave pseudo-philosophical rationalization. But most of us believe that there *was* a war and that it killed at least 100,000 inhabitants of Iraq. And it can make one’s skin crawl to read Baudrillard’s textualization of that war.

On February 27, 1991, President Bush announced the suspension of offensive combat operations, and on March 29 Baudrillard pub-

lished in the French journal *Liberation* a second article on the subject with the title “La guerre du Golfe n’a pas eu lieu” (“The War in the Gulf Has not Taken Place.”) And although he acknowledged there the extent of the destruction and slaughter he nevertheless explicitly reaffirmed the line he had taken in the *Guardian* article.

The true belligerents are those who thrive on the ideology of this war, despite the fact that the war itself exerts its ravages on another level, through faking, through hyperreality, the simulacrum, through all those strategies of psychological deterrence that make play with facts and images, with the precession of the virtual over the real, of virtual time over real time, and the inexorable confusion between the two. If we have no practical knowledge of this war—and such knowledge is out of the question—then let us at least have the skeptical intelligence to reject the probability of all information, of all images whatever their source. To be more ‘virtual’ than the events themselves, not to reestablish some criterion of truth—for this we lack the means. But at least we can reimmerge (*replonger*) all that information and the war itself into the element of virtuality from which they took rise.<sup>1</sup>

## II

Twenty years ago if you were shopping for new clothes at Stockholm’s elegant *Nordiska Kompaniet* department store (always called NK, pronounced “Enko”) you would likely have moved up a decision tree from natural classes (child/adult, female/male), through genre (sweater, jacket, blouse/shirt), through functional categories (leisure/dress-up), and at the top to decisions about style, color, and so on. The physical layout of the clothing departments in the store pretty much corresponded to these classifications; it was the very idea of the department store.

Today at NK style is at the base of the decision tree. Clothing departments are laid out as individual boutiques in an arcade. Each stocks clothes in the several genres (sweaters, jackets, shirts, slacks). Distinctions of gender and function (leisure, dress-up) are blurred. The principle of identity in each boutique is style. Each is a taste

<sup>1</sup> The translation is from Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War* (Amherst, MA, 1992), 195–96. This book develops from a response to Baudrillard’s two articles to a critique of the “postmodernist scene” in which the author identifies Baudrillard as a cult figure. It was written, he tells us, “during a period (January to June 1991) when world events and the political climate in this country [England] were hardly conducive to sustained intellectual effort” (p. 9). Even the date of this writing (January, 1994) is not so distant from those events as to obscure just that feeling of the impossibility of work that I remember sharing with many of my friends.

culture. The boutique called "Marlboro" will serve well as an example. It stocks shirts, jerseys, sweaters, jackets, jeans and other slacks and trousers, hats and gloves. The most prominent materials are corduroy, denim, and leather; the most prominent colors beige and a sort of smokey blue, like the color of cigarette smoke. Each item bears a leather tag with the word "Marlboro." The style-signification of the clothing is amplified in the decor of the boutique: rope, unfinished wood, saddles (not for sale), and large photographs of horses on vast plains with majestic mountain backdrops. The boutique constitutes a signifying practice that defines a reality as a focus for identity formation, but with only phantom referents that have been assimilated from TV film images—in Baudrillard's language, a hyperreality or simulacrum. It is identity formation from the outside in, not from the inside out, and the fictiveness—or as it might now be put, "textuality"—goes all the way down. All is appearance. Never has the cliché "clothes make the man" been more rich with meaning.

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The spirit of NK's arcade has lately been carried over to exhibitions in two of Stockholm's museums that have been receiving a lot of attention. They are both said to be about Swedish history, and they respond to a widely discussed concern that young people, especially, no longer know their own country's history. They represent an enormous investment of state funds, and have been highly controversial for that reason, but also because of the way in which they represent history: through highly sophisticated audio-visual shows that are fragmentary and collage-like, that treat the distant past as an archive of images instantly ready for retrieval and recombining, sometimes at the push of a button, but mostly on an automatized schedule that is out of the viewer's control. The more recent past—the age of modernism, in fact—is presented as a series of scenes at once foreign and nostalgic (grandmother's kitchen, the 1930 sedan, news bites from here and there). There is little stimulus for thought about history in depth and little evidence of a critical discourse of history in this succession of little costume scenarios.

At Macy's Department Store in New York most of the clothing is sold in an arcade called "Concepts" (next to it is a smaller one called "Mentalities"; the idea of mental constructs that they share is important). In "Concepts" the taste cultures are clearly signalled by such names as "Marité and François Girbaud," "Martinique," "Studio Tokyo," "Galuricci." The match for NK's "Marlboro" boutique as far as vividness is concerned is Macy's "Compagnie Générale Aéropostale": a virtual stage set with photographs of begoggled aviators carrying mail pouches on board, and a pepsi-cola sign bearing the price tag "5c" to make certain the time-gap comes through.

There is an interesting throwback in this postmodern boutique layout to early modern department stores in nineteenth-century England, of which one can still see a survival in Madras, India, a beautiful red brick colonial building called Spencer's. It is essentially a market-place brought into one red-brick and iron structure, with individual merchants occupying separate stalls reached by exposed iron stairways and catwalks. It simply pre-dates, as the boutique arrangement post-dates, the more efficient, integrated hierarchical structure ("meta-structure," one would say now) that became the modernist preference. A defining difference between the two, however, is that the postmodern arcade arrangement is meant to offer for sale potentially all of history and geography at once. It is an emporium, or museum, or encyclopedia of styles, whereas the arrangement of the early modern department store was a matter of practicality—especially protection from the elements.

As for the signifying function of clothes, was it not always so? Did Brooks Brothers really simply sell correct, elegant and tasteful clothing? Were those suits and ties not meant to signify eligibility for the law office, the board room, and the faculty club? And were the snobbish operators of Brooks Brothers elevators, superior in their own Brooks Brothers suits, not engaging in a bit of counterfeit identity formation about those signifiers? The difference is in the explicit and conspicuous, even celebratory character of the signification now, in the implication of a rotation of styles and the further implication of a fragmented, protean identity, and in the fact of style-change as a potency. The Brooks Brothers style was usually a lifetime commitment, whether one was born into it or adopted it later in life. If one gave it up, it meant a change of life-style. Postmodernism is out to reverse modernism at every turn, but it may do so by picking up modernist traits and magnifying them beyond recognizability.

### III

If these attitudes, interpretive styles, and practices are postmodern, then what links and resemblances do they have to the "postmodern musicology" that is now in the workshop and the copy room? What gains and losses can be expected by accepting the increasingly explicit invitation to coax musicology into postmodernism that starts with this self-conscious act of labelling? Labelling is itself already a quintessential postmodern habit, whereas the subordination under the "meta-structure" that is connoted by the qualifier "*postmodern* musicology" is a quintessentially *modernist* habit, whose

reform is high on postmodernism's list of priorities. Such are the paradoxes with which the postmodernist line confronts us.

Are music historians and ethnologists now meant to stage our reconstructions as fictive virtual realities drawing their casts of characters and stage sets from historical and geographical worlds construed as vast archives of instantly retrievable moments and localities, to work out of identities that are themselves fictive, to elevate rhetorical seductiveness and consumer consensus to a level where they are indistinguishable from standards of truth or ethics? Are we content to yield the decisions about what is interesting and beautiful and the formulation of our discourses about those things to the dynamics of commerce, technology, and politics? Do we now propose to transpose musicological texts into a key whose chief virtue is to be in tune with the argot of other postmodern discourses?

I do not mean to suggest with this list of rhetorical questions that those who now seek to advance a postmodern musicology necessarily stand openly for affirmative answers to them. I do mean to ask what is compelling about the enthusiastic drive to fold musicology into the condition of postmodernity and under the doctrines of postmodernism, which have those implications.

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Primary among the postmodern traits of some recent musicology is its self-proclaimed mission to wrench the discipline free of the habits and beliefs, no, the constraints—the “discipline” (Foucault)—of modernism. To make itself *post-* i.e. anti-modern is the very *raison d'être* of postmodernism. For musicology the struggle must become agonistic and apocalyptic. Fear of failure is a dominant affect of postmodern theorizing, as is evident from the spectacle of debates in which opponents trade charges of falling back into modernist maneuvers.

We have had sufficient reason, when we have been engaged in the pursuit of the desire to understand distant musics and musical cultures, to distance ourselves from the grand schemes of style history (“meta-narratives,” they must now be called) that were once settled onto our field for reasons that seemed then sound. But suddenly to fold that distancing into “postmodernism” is to disclaim the virtue of greater clarity of scholarly vision only to claim the lesser virtue of radical legitimacy. We have had cause enough, in our efforts at understanding some musical traditions—early medieval European traditions are the ones that have worried me—to abandon their interpretation through such conceptual prisms (now “prisons”), as “work,” “structure,” “hierarchy,” “unity.” The evidence is not only that their fit to the musical ideas of those traditions is not good, but that they can arise as translations into the aesthetic domain of

nationalist, racist, and sexist ideologies held—consciously or otherwise—by the observers.

We are not alone in having made such discoveries, of course; we were aided in finding our way to them by scholars in other fields who learned them long ago, most of whom would not now be identified as postmodernists.

In the course of recent discussions (too polite a word for some of them) about “history and post-modernism,” the historian Lawrence Stone reminisced:

When I was very young, now forty or fifty years ago, I was taught the following things, none of which bore much relation to the crude positivism of the late nineteenth century:

- 1, that one should always try to write plain English, avoiding jargon and obfuscation, and making one’s meaning as clear as possible to the reader;
- 2, that historical truth is unattainable, and that any conclusions are provisional and hypothetical, always liable to be overturned by new data or better theories;
- 3, that we are all subject to bias and prejudice because of our race, class and culture; and that in consequence we should follow the advice of E. H. Carr and before we read the history, examine the background of the historian;
- 4, that documents—we did not call them texts in those days—were written by fallible human beings who made mistakes, asserted false claims, and had their own ideological agenda which guided their compilation; they should therefore be scrutinized with care, taking into account authorial intent, the nature of the document, and the context in which it was written;
- 5, that perceptions and representations of reality are often very different from, and sometimes just as historically important as, reality itself[.]<sup>2</sup>

11

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It is on this last point that choices now confronting us mainly turn: whether, despite the recognitions of the preceding three points, we shall, with Stone, nevertheless recognize a difference between historical “reality” and its linguistic representations—in short whether or not we shall now proceed as though there were nothing outside the text. If we act on that new dogma we shall not only have failed to learn from the histories of other disciplines (historians have, in the main,

<sup>2</sup> “History and Post-Modernism III,” in *Past & Present: a journal of historical studies* CXXXV (May, 1992) 189–90.

retreated from such an extreme version of the “linguistic turn”), we shall have done them and ourselves the disservice of withholding what by wide agreement may claim to be as strong evidence as there can be for a reality before and after its description: music. It is music, after all, that has been declared at least since Medieval European writing about it, to be indescribable.

One of the root points of contention in the current discussions, judging from the amount of play that it receives, concerns the conception of the autonomous and epistemologically self-contained character of the musical experience. Cling to that and you will never extricate yourself from the web of modernism. You will make the false leap from belief in the autonomous character of the experience to the idea of the autonomy of music itself. You will be committed to the aestheticist, transcendentalist, internalist, essentialist, and, yes, formalist (for formalism thrives on and sustains the autonomy of music) beliefs that raged under modernism (I leave out “absolutist” because nothing can be gained by dragging in this most corrupted of terms). The contention has a binary character—autonomy, yes or no—mimicking the stifling dualism of modernism/postmodernism itself.

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Here is a place where postmodernism’s proclaimed self-questioning stance (“interrogating” is now the obligatory word) needs to come into play, and in particular by breaking down the binary formulation of this question. Belief in the absolute autonomy of music and in the permanently closed-off character of the experience of music has given us some bad history, indeed, but that is not sufficient cause to abandon the belief that a provisional personal engagement with a musical utterance for the moment unrelated to anything else is not only a possible but a necessary condition of eventual understanding of it in its most dense connections. The distrust of such a moment that is now radiating from the dogmatic, totalizing postmodern direction has nothing to recommend it over the declaration of its irrelevance under modernist positive dogma. On the other hand—and I know this will seem harsh—it is worth just considering whether the proposal to turn away from “the music itself” and our feeling about it is not something like Baudrillard’s turning away from the event of the war itself and our feeling about that.

This avoidance now follows two avenues of interpretation: the hermeneutics that is based on the conception of music as a text, and the semiotics that is based on the conception of music as a play of signs.

One sign of both is the gradual tendency to collapse all terms about the individual’s reception of music—“hearing,” “listening,”

“interpreting,” “understanding”—into “reading.” Why, suddenly, “reading?” Certainly not in the sense of reading scores. It is a sign of the distancing from “music itself,” of the evasion of direct engagement, of the deciphering of signifying actions that has suddenly become the obligatory route from the event to its reception. And so, indeed, do recent “readings” of music from some quarters increasingly read.

Other tendencies contribute to this effect of channelling the flow of language through narrower and narrower passages. I shall just mention two very briefly (I discuss them more fully elsewhere): the tendency to classify every interpretation of music that crosses into the domain of the “extramusical” (however, that may be defined or left undefined) as metaphorical, and the tendency to effectively collapse the meanings of the entire vocabulary of terms for describing music’s relations to other aspects of experience (“express,” “refer,” “represent,” etc.) into the sense of “signify.”

Through *these* linguistic turns, which have the effect of impoverishing language, music is left unable to draw attention to its peculiar character or quality, or to *be* a particular way; it is assigned the function of an icon, standing for something else, or of a directional sign, pointing away from itself.

In Italo Calvino’s story “A King Listens,” a narrating voice in the second person reflects to the monarch, who has stolen the throne and sealed his predecessor into a dungeon deep in his fortress, how his life has been given over to two purposes only: self-indulgence, and the retention of his power. Calvino turns to music to convey how, paradoxically, this self-preoccupation has destroyed the king’s sense of self along with the cultural life of his city.

Among the sounds of the city you recognize every now and then a chord, a sequence of notes, a tune: blasts of fanfare, chanting of processions, choruses of schoolchildren, funeral marches, revolutionary songs intoned by a parade of demonstrators, anthems in your honor sung by the troops who break up the demonstration, trying to drown out the voices of your opponents, dance tunes that the loudspeaker of a nightclub plays at top volume to convince everyone that the city continues its happy life, dirges of women mourning someone killed in the riots. This is the music you hear; but can it be called music? From every shard of sound you continue to gather signals, information, clues, as if in this city all those who play or sing or put on disks wanted only to transmit precise, unequivocal messages to you. Since you mounted the throne, it is not music you listen to, but only the confirmation of

how music is used: in the rites of high society, or to entertain the populace, to safeguard traditions, culture, fashion. Now you ask yourself what listening used to mean to you, when you listened to music for the sole pleasure of penetrating the design of the notes.<sup>3</sup>

IV

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meanings of those rude, and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle, so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones, loud, long and deep, breathing the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirits, and filled my heart with ineffable sadness. The mere recurrence, even now, afflicts my spirit, and while I am writing these lines, my tears are falling. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conceptions of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with a sense of the soul-killing power of slavery, let him go to Col. Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance day, place himself in the deep, pine woods, and there let him, in silence, thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul, and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because 'there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.'<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

I cannot listen to Mahler's Ninth Symphony with anything like the old melancholy mixed with the high pleasure I used to take from this music. There was a time, not long ago, when what I heard, especially in the final movement, was an open acknowledgement of death and at the same time a quiet celebration of the tranquility connected to the process. . . . The long passages on all the strings at the end, as close as music can come to expressing silence itself,

<sup>3</sup> Italo Calvino, *Under the Jaguar Sun*, translated by William Weaver (New York, 1988) 51-52.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Douglass, on the singing of slaves. From *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York and Auburn, 1855), 99. New edition: *Douglass* (New York, 1994).

I used to hear as Mahler's idea of leave-taking at its best. But always, I have heard this music as a solitary, private listener, thinking about death.

Now I hear it differently. I cannot listen to the last movement of the Mahler Ninth without the door-smashing intrusion of a new thought: death everywhere, the dying of everything, the end of humanity. The easy sadness expressed with such gentleness and delicacy by that repeated phrase on faded strings, over and over again, no longer comes to me as old, familiar news of the cycle of living and dying. All through the last notes my mind swarms with images of a world in which the thermonuclear bombs have begun to explode, in New York and San Francisco, in Moscow and Leningrad, in Paris, in Paris, in Paris. In Oxford and Cambridge, in Edinburgh. I cannot push away the thought of a cloud of radioactivity drifting along the Engadine, from the Moloja Pass to Ftan, killing off the part of the earth I love more than any other part. . . .

There is a short passage near the end of the Mahler in which the almost vanishing violins, all engaged in a sustained backward glance, are edged aside for a few bars by the cellos. Those lower notes pick up fragments from the first movement, as though prepared to begin everything all over again, and the cellos subside and disappear, like an exhalation. I used to hear this as a wonderful few seconds of encouragement: we'll be back, we're still here, keep going, keep going.

Now, with a pamphlet in front of me on a corner of my desk, published by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, entitled *MX Basing*, an analysis of all the alternative strategies for placement and protection of hundreds of these missiles, each capable of creating artificial suns to vaporize a hundred Hiroshimas, collectively capable of destroying the life of any continent, I cannot hear the same Mahler. Now, those cellos sound in my mind like the opening of all the hatches and the instant before ignition.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

Just as my fingers on these keys  
Make music, so the selfsame sounds  
On my spirit make a music too.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Thomas, "Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony," in the volume of essays under the same title (New York, 1980) 164-68.

Music is feeling, then, not sound;  
And thus it is that what I feel  
Here in this room, desiring you,  
Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk  
Is music.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

“Emotion” is specific, individual, and conscious; music goes deeper than this, to the energies which animate our psychic life, and out of these creates a pattern which has an existence, laws, and human significance of its own. It reproduces for us the most intimate essence, the tempo and the energy, of our spiritual being; our tranquility and our restlessness, our animation and our discouragement, our vitality and our weakness—all, in fact, of the fine shades of dynamic variation of our inner life. It reproduces these far more directly and more specifically than is possible through any other medium of human communication.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

With my wife to the King's House to see *Virgin Martyr* the first time it hath been acted a great while, and it is mighty pleasant; not that the play is worth much, but it is finely acted by Beck Marshall. But that which did please me beyond anything in the whole world, was the wind-musique when the angel comes down; which is so sweet that it ravished me; and indeed, in a word, did wrap up my soul so that it made me really sick, just as I have formerly been when in love with my wife; that neither then, nor all the evening going home, and at home, was I able to think of anything, but remained all the night transported, so as I could not believe that ever any musique hath that real command over the soul of man as this did upon me; and makes me resolve to practice wind-musique, and to make my wife do the like.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wallace Stevens (1879–1955), from “Peter Quince at the Clavier,” *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York, 1982), 89–90.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Sessions, “The Composer and his Message,” in *The Intent of the Artist*, ed. Augusto Centeno (Princeton, 1941), 123–24.

<sup>8</sup> From *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews. (London, 1976): vol. IX, 93–94 (entry for 27 February, 1668).

How greatly did I weep in Thy hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the voices of Thy sweet-speaking church! The voices flowed into mine ears, and the truth was poured forth into my heart, whence the agitation of my piety overflowed, and my tears ran over, and blessed was I therein.<sup>9</sup>

*Graduate Center,  
City University of New York*

<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX, chapter 6.